

SPECIAL ISSUE: THE PASSION OF JESUS

LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES, INC

Proclamation!

VOLUME 7
ISSUE 2
MARCH
APRIL
2006

FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED EVANGELICALS



HE IS RISEN!

CONTENTS

He Intends Victory GALEN AND JOAN YORBA-GRAY 3

The New Covenant in My Blood R.K. MCGREGOR WRIGHT 5

Drama of the Cross CLAY PECK 9

The Darkest Sabbath THOMAS FRANCIS 12

The Tomb is Empty J. MARK MARTIN 14



He is risen, indeed! COLLEEN TINKER

I grew up thinking of Easter almost as a non-event. When I was very young my sister and I colored a few eggs which my parents hid for us on Sunday morning, but that small excitement faded as we grew older. Not until I was in college did I experience a Sabbath church service that, on the day before Easter, acknowledged the resurrection.

In an inexpressible irony, Easter egg

ty of what had happened on that day, letting me experience the grief and glory of Jesus' passion.

Now on the day before Easter I reflect on the despair and anxiety Jesus' disciples must have felt that desolate Sabbath as they mourned Jesus, not realizing they would be with Him again.

I have a private ritual of going into the backyard after night falls while the earth waits for the light of Easter. I look at the moon and the scudding clouds and imagine what was happening at the same time that night in heaven. Jesus was still dead—but heaven knew a miracle that would change time was about to happen. I feel the paradoxical stillness of His death and the whisper of excitement that was about to explode in life, opening a way to eternity for all who believe.

And Sunday—Resurrection Sunday is now the most important event of the year. Jesus is alive! With Easter lilies scenting the house we celebrate Jesus with a houseful of brothers and sisters in Christ. We rejoice in our sure salvation; we praise Him for choosing us from before the creation of the world and for making us alive through His blood.

In this issue of *Proclamation!* we explore the four days that marked the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. R.K. McGregor Wright examines the significance of Jesus' inaugurating the Lord's Supper and of His subsequent trials. Clay Peck discusses why Jesus died. Thomas Francis takes us into Peter's heart as he agonizes over Jesus' death on Sabbath, and Mark Martin presents the miraculous glory of the resurrection.

We also announce that we are now offering a Spanish translation of *Proclamation!* available as PDF files by email. (If you know people who would benefit from receiving a Spanish version of *Proclamation!*, please send their email addresses to proclamation@gmail.com). Galen and Joan Yorba-Gray are doing the Spanish translation for us. Richard and I have known Joan for nearly 15 years, and we continue to praise God for her godly influence in our family. She and Galen share their story on page 3.

Our prayer is that you will profoundly experience the passion of Jesus this year. He suffered; He died and was buried. He rose on the third day—He is risen!

He is risen indeed.

THE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE OF JESUS' ACTUALLY BEING DEAD AND INACCESSIBLE TO US ON "HIS" DAY WAS NEVER ADDRESSED. SABBATH SACREDNESS TRANSCENDED THE PRESENCE OF JESUS.

hunts were considered faintly pagan among the Adventists I knew—but not nearly as offensive as those Easter Sunday celebrations marked by new dresses, fresh flowers, ham, and sunrise services.

Among many Adventists, Resurrection Sunday was dismissed as "Catholic" and pagan, an affront to God emphasized by celebrating on "the venerable day of the sun" instead of properly honoring His day. On Sabbath, we were taught, Jesus gave us the ultimate demonstration of honoring the Sabbath: He rested in the tomb. Quietly Jesus kept the Sabbath in His death, doing the work of dying on Friday and the work of resurrecting on Sunday.

The cognitive dissonance of Jesus' actually being dead and inaccessible to us on "His" day was never addressed. Sabbath sacredness transcended the presence of Jesus.

Richard's and my departure from Adventism and our awakening in Jesus transformed Easter. For the first time I pondered on Friday what Jesus experienced as He hung on the cross and felt the Father draw away from Him as darkness descended over the land. As the day waned on the evening of our first Good Friday, clouds darkened the sky as we prepared to attend our first Good Friday service. As the sun set, flaming color lit the western horizon, crimson and still. I remember feeling as if God was pulling me into the enormi-

Proclamation!

Founding Editor
Dale Ratzlaff

Editor
Colleen Tinker

Copy Editor
Cristine Cole

Design Editor
Richard Tinker

**Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.
Board of Directors**

Richard Tinker, President, CFO
Colleen Tinker, Secretary
Bruce Heinrich
Carolyn Ratzlaff
Dale Ratzlaff

Published by Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.
PO Box 11587, Glendale, AZ 85318
©2006 Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.
All rights reserved.
Phone (909) 794-9804
Toll Free (877) 349-6984

www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org
www.FormerAdventist.com
E-mail: proclamation@gmail.com

"I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done" (Psalm 118:17).

He Intends Victory

GALEN AND JOAN YORBA-GRAY

Joan: I was raised in California with four sisters. Our roots included Spanish immigrants who came to California with the early explorers as well as French, Dutch, and German ancestry. Our family was Catholic, and we were regular churchgoers until my parents divorced when I was 14. As a child I loved God and loved the stories of the Bible and of the saints. After my parents' divorce, however, I was a depressed and alienated teenager, and I turned my back on my faith.

I met my future husband Ray in college in 1973, and I was attracted to his fun-loving, light-hearted spirit. He was older, having graduated from high school and worked for several years before returning to college. We had many compatible interests and goals, and we married in 1976. Our marriage was good in many ways, but from time to time he expressed restlessness, depression, and discontent which seemed to increase as the years passed.

Our wonderful son Daniel was born in 1980, and our beautiful daughter Sevanne came two years later. When Daniel was born, I began to pay more attention to things my sister was telling me. She had developed a walk with Jesus and told me about her experience of accepting Him into her heart and of being "born again." I had held back from pursuing any relationship with Jesus, but as I looked at my new baby, I could really

understand that the Bible was true, that we were fearfully and wonderfully made by a loving Creator, and that I could believe the Bible and what it taught. This awakening led to my commitment to Jesus a year later.

I noticed a gradual strengthening in myself as I grew spiritually, but this spiritual deepening caused more of a rift with Ray. Later I was to find out that Ray had rationalized that because I had betrayed him by becoming committed to Christ, he had a right to betray me by sexual infidelity.

Ray was not a partier, so I really didn't believe that he was having any extramarital relationships. In fact, he was a homebody. He traveled a little with his work, but when he wasn't traveling on business, he was home.

Galen and Joan Yorba-Gray are translating *Proclamation!* into Spanish. Galen has a PhD in Spanish and is on the Spanish faculty at Point Loma University in San Diego, California. Joan used to work as a licensed clinical social worker. The two of them oversee the Hispanic area of **He Intends Victory**, a ministry for people who are HIV positive. Between them they have five grown children.



All of a sudden I had a sensation of a comforting warmth, like a blanket, slowly spreading over me from my head to my feet.

In 1987 his health began to fail, and he had bouts of tonsillitis, bronchitis and upper respiratory infections. One day in February, 1988, he became so ill that he could hardly breathe, and he could not walk even five steps without stopping to rest. He was hospitalized that night. After many tests and several days in the hospital, we received the crushing blow, a diagnosis of pneumocystic pneumonia carinii, which was associated with AIDS. He had AIDS!

I remember that when I heard the diagnosis I felt like a hammer had hit me. I was shocked, hurt and furious. It was then I knew that Ray had betrayed me, and the puzzle pieces began to fit into place. His distance, the barrier between us, his midlife crisis all pointed to his sexual infidelity, which he finally admitted had occurred. He had been living a lie. I went home from the hospital that night prepared to leave him.

That night as I lay in bed, I was terrified. Ray had betrayed us. I was devastated, our family torn apart, our children's lives ruptured, and I would probably develop AIDS. I had never been so terrified in my life.

As I struggled with my overpowering emotions, the phone rang. It was Ray. He was also terrified and realized that he was close to death. I said that I hoped he would make his peace with God in the event that he died from this life-threatening illness. He said he was very sorry for his betrayal of our marriage and that he wanted to make things right. I led him in a prayer of accepting Christ as his Savior, repenting of his sins and committing to change.

We talked a lot that night. The experience for me was similar to the story of Jonah and the Ninevites. Jonah wanted them to be judged immediately and blasted into kingdom come, but God had different plans. On one hand, Jonah wanted to obey God, but on the other hand, he wanted God's wrath on the sinners. I felt powerful, contradictory feelings at the same time: anger and hatred combined with joy at Ray's repentance.

Unfortunately, Ray became no more open with me after that night. It was as if a door that had opened a crack had shut. I cannot judge his heart; only God knows it. Nevertheless, Ray continued to be closed and distant to the children and me. I decided, however, to stay with him as a housemate, not as his wife. One reason I remained was that he was terminally ill, and it did not feel right to leave him when he was already suffering the consequences of his behavior. Additionally, it seemed too much to put the children through losing their dad twice—first through divorce, then through his inevitable death.

HIV Positive

In the fall of 1988, I finally summoned the courage to take an HIV test, and the results showed that I was positive for the virus. Again I suffered many sleepless, terrified nights. How could I hold it together? I feared that my children would become orphans. I felt such grief and pain for the trauma that had entered into their innocent lives. I struggled with my mortality. How long would I live? In those days there were no protease inhibitors, and a diagnosis of HIV infection was a death sentence.

Our family members were in shock and became distant. Because of the shame and stigma of HIV, I couldn't tell many other people about my condition. I was a Christian, married, heterosexual woman who didn't use drugs. There weren't very many people like me who had HIV in those days. I was isolated and very lonely.

Many times the Lord met me in those dark, terrifying nights. He comforted me and gave me strength and courage. One particular night when I was extremely anxious and upset, I was praying fervently for a rescue. All of a sudden I had a sensation of a comforting warmth, like a blanket, slowly spreading over me from my head to my feet. The spiritual blanket from the Lord brought me an exceeding calmness that took away my fear and anxiety. I remember basking in the sensation of warmth, comfort and peace that the Lord had physically laid on my tortured body and spirit.

Somehow the Lord gave me the strength to continue through all the stress and work of caring for Ray as he became weaker. I worked, cared for the children and ran the household. I believe that God gives us the strength that we lack when we need it.

Ray succumbed to his illness in August, 1989. My hope is that he went to be with the Lord.

There is plenty more to the story, including a wonderful husband and a miracle of God saving my life when I almost died. My life continues to be a challenge, but God has been very close to me. My Guiding Light has never let me down.

Galen: I met Joan in the fall of 1989 at a church social. She was an "AIDS widow" with two young children, and I was a single father of three. Between the two of us, our five children made a perfect chronological Brady Bunch stair step (a fact which turned out to be even scarier than the virus)! At that time practical information about how to protect oneself from infection was not widely available. So, in spite of a semi-secret mutual attraction, we felt obligated to postpone indefinitely any romantic notions.

Nevertheless, we became fast friends anyway since we shared so many common goals and areas of interest. In retrospect this time of friendship was for the best since we both needed time to grieve and process our losses: Joan's heart-breaking loss of her husband to the virus followed by her own diagnosis of HIV infection, and my devastating divorce that

The Passion of Jesus T H U R S D A Y

Proclamation!

MARCH
APRIL
2006



The New Covenant In My Blood

R. K. MCGREGOR WRIGHT

Preamble

All four Gospels record the last few days of Christ's life in unusual detail because his death and resurrection were the primary reasons he came to earth. All four Gospels make the account of the "Passion Week" much fuller than any other period in Jesus' life and record important details about it, including the events of the Thursday before the Friday on which he was crucified. We will concentrate here on the significance of Jesus' last Passover meal which He celebrated on Thursday (and which we celebrate today as the "Lord's Supper" [1 Cor 11:23-34]), and will also consider some implications of the "trial" of Christ.

The Passover Meal

The family celebration of Passover could be kept at any time during the week of Passover, but most people met for

this feast on the evening of the day before the "Sabbath preparation" (or Friday) when the Passover lambs were ritually slain. After a day of teaching in the Temple area, Jesus greatly wished to have this last meal with the disciples as His earthly family. God provided for them to celebrate Passover in the home of an unknown disciple with "an upper room" (Lk 22:7-16). It is important to remember that even this late in Jesus' ministry, the disciples had not made any conscious connection between the Baptist's "Lamb of God" and the impending death of Christ, which they certainly should have realized could happen. In fact, they were in the same zone of denial that the whole of first century Judaism was in—denial about the Old Testament predictions of a dying Messiah. There is a real sense that Jesus, as the ideal Elect One of Israel, stands at this time before God representing the whole people of Israel. Now, after fulfilling the work of the nation pre-

scribed in the Torah which was so signally unfulfilled by the Jews, Jesus was about to return to the Father. He was about to perform the last earthly steps of obedience to the Law by offering Himself as “the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). The people of the Old Covenant had been unable to offer such a sacrifice for themselves.

All areas of Christianity recognize that this final Passover meal looked back to the Jews’ leaving Egypt and forward to events to follow the Second Coming. “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom,” promises the Lord as He inaugurates the New Covenant “in [His] blood” (Lk 22:18, 20). Paul understood these promises of Jesus to refer to the Second Advent (1 Cor 11:26 in view of 4:5).

The first Passover was held on the last evening before the Exodus, and “exodus” is the very term the Gospel uses (exodus: KJV, decease; NASB, departure) in the account of the discussion on the mount of transfiguration, to describe Jesus’ own leaving of the world (Lk 9:31). In Moses’ day, as he introduced the first Passover to Israel, the “exodus” of Jesus was still the “far-off divine event” towards which the whole creation was even then moving.

To this very day, the Jews continue to celebrate the Passover in their homes in the form of the annual “Seder” meal. In the old European tradition, an empty chair was left at the table “for Elijah, or the Messiah, should he come.” But the coming of the Messiah for which they look has already occurred. The next time Jesus will drink the fruit of the vine will be at the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Ps 22:29a, Isa 25:6, Lk 12:37, Rev 19:7-9) inaugurating that blessed time when “the Lord shall be King over all the earth” following

the Second Coming (Zech 14). The New Covenant would become the moral foundation of the coming Kingdom of God in all its future stages; it would be the link between the King and his Kingdom.

The New Covenant Announced

Announced that Thursday night, the New Covenant would be ratified within twenty-four hours by the death of Jesus. The Mosaic Covenant with the Nation of Israel, “because of its weakness and uselessness” and inability to bring anything to “perfection,” was done away forever, to be wholly replaced by “a new and better covenant” (Heb 7:18 and 19). Jesus’ Melchizedekian high-priesthood, as described in Hebrews chapters 3-8, forever and untransmissably (*aparataton*, 7:24) replaces the Levitical priesthood. Our great High Priest never needs to hand on His priesthood to a successor, because “he ever lives to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:25). With this transition from the Law of “this do and thou shalt live” in Lev 18:5 (cf. Lk 10:28), to the risen Christ as our source of life received by faith (Heb 7:16, Col 3:4), the curse of the Mosaic Law was lifted. Now, on this Passover weekend, the Law was forever “obsolete, and growing old [was] ready to disappear” (Heb 8:13). In 70 AD it did disappear in the most literal manner imaginable, with its destruction under Titus’ direction. God Himself signaled the end of the Law at 3:00 on the following afternoon when Jesus gave up His spirit. God Himself tore the massive curtain-veil before the Holy of Holies open from top to bottom (Mat 27:50-51). The Jews, of course, sewed it up again and offered lambs for another forty years until God had apparently had enough, and the Temple was at last destroyed.

One cannot speak of the New Covenant that Jesus introduced to his disciples that night without jumping ahead to the next day, when the Old Covenant was abolished and the new relationship between God and his people was established. While the Temple altar ran with the blood of the sacrificial lambs, outside the gate of the city (Heb 13:11-13), the true and final Lamb of God was dying as the true and final satisfaction of the pattern of holiness set forth by the Mosaic ceremonies. Nothing less would do, for “there was no other good enough” to meet Justice with Mercy. Only in this way could the Judge be both “just and [at the same instant] the Justifier,” of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26). From Heaven, God the Father “saw the anguish of his soul and was satisfied” with the sacrifice (Isa 53:11). The Law had now been perfectly fulfilled in the living and dying of Christ as the incarnate Torah. Jesus took a perfectly lawful life to the cross “in his body on the tree” according to Peter (1 Pet 2:24). In this way “the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us,” was nailed to the cross (Col 2:14, Eph 2:15-16). The “handwriting of ordinances” as the KJV has it, is the very ten ordinances (*dogmata*, or the published decrees of a King, as in Luke 2:1

God himself signaled the end of the Law at 3:00 on the following afternoon when Jesus gave up his spirit. God himself tore the massive curtain-veil before the Holy of Holies open from top to bottom.

[cf. Eph 2:15]) written with the finger of God on the tablets of stone.

These Ten Commandments were themselves the Old Covenant, according to Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 9:9-11. The rest of the Pentateuch expands them into the over 600 specific commands identified in the Talmud. Paul and James agreed that they were all against us, for to break one of these laws is to break the lot according to James 2:10. The Apostle Paul's own experience with covetousness, that the tenth commandment is equivalent to "idolatry," the first commandment (Col 3:5, cf. Rom 7:7), signally confirms this unity of the Law.

This change in covenants would be ratified in act the next day when the Old Covenant would self-terminate forever in the death of Jesus and be replaced by the New. The death of Jesus represented the ultimate moment when the Jews climactically disobeyed the Law in the judicial murder of an innocent man, the promised Messiah. This was the ultimate act of breaking the Mosaic covenant, "which covenant they had broken" so often before (Jer 31:32, KJV). Any covenant conditional on human obedience could be nothing but temporary because of sin. The expressions of the letter to the Hebrews, obsolete, feeble, useless, imperfect, about to be done away, impermanent, faulty, and about to disappear, are not the language of someone who thought that the Law of the Ten Commandments was of eternal application to God's people!

Rather, they show how clear it was to the writer of Hebrews that the New Covenant was not just an upgrading or deepening of the Law, but a complete abolition of it as a means of life or sanctification.

The Arrest

Judas Iscariot left Jesus' Passover meal just before the Lord's Supper was instituted and confirmed his arrangement with the Jewish leaders to identify Jesus by the kiss of a friend, so He could be arrested (Mat 26:14). After the Supper, Jesus and the 11 disciples sang a hymn and went across the Kidron valley to a garden called Gethsemane. There, Jesus struggled at the human level with the sheer necessity of His death; He knew it was not avoidable, although He humanly feared what was to come. His prayer, "Nevertheless, not my will but yours" (Mat 26:39), resounds down the years as the Last Adam's answer to the First Adam's apostasy. To the very last hours of His earthly life, Jesus lived moment by moment by revelation, by "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" His heavenly Father, and not just a by convenient selection of His words (Deut 8:3 and Mat 4:4). This obedience to God's Word is the life-model for all of us and had been Jesus' personal conviction ever since the start of His ministry. One key reason the victory of Gethsemane was humanly possible was that Jesus as Son of Man had had thirty-three years of consistent practice withstanding evil by trusting His Father and living by His Word.

The arrest of Jesus that night begins that part of Jesus' submission to the predestinating Sovereignty of God that the theologians call his "passive obedience," as distinguished from his

**To the very last hours of his earthly life,
Jesus lived moment by moment by
revelation, by "every word that proceeds
out of the mouth of God" his heavenly
Father, and not just a by convenient
selection of his words.**

"active obedience." As a believing Jew, He willingly did what the Law required of Him—His "active obedience." This overlapping active and passive obedience of Jesus is the "righteousness of Christ" which is imputed to the believer as the moral basis of free justification by faith (Rom 3:21-28, 4:3-5, 5:6-11, 17-19). He satisfied the requirements of the entire law, and He hands that perfect righteousness on to us as "the gift of righteousness" (Rom 5:17). It was this perfect passive obedience, the "travail of his soul," that the Father saw on the cross "and was satisfied" (Isa 53:11).

The arresting guards were as afraid of Jesus as His disciples were of them, and the Jewish leadership were afraid of the common people who had "heard him gladly" for three years (Mk 12:37). Among the crowd were no doubt some of those who would call for His death a few hours later. It is remarkable that Jesus was arrested against the original intention of the leadership. Their caution "lest there be a riot of the people" at the festival (Mk 14:1-2), was probably overcome by the opportunity Judas offered of an arrest away from the crowds. But Jesus was "our Passover, sacrificed for us" (1 Cor 5:7), and no other moment would do.

There is no question that the disciples, including the Twelve, were quite unprepared for the death of Jesus, even though He had repeatedly warned them that this was indeed the Father's plan. The popular view was that the Messiah would "bring in the Kingdom." They were fully justified in this belief, for the Old Testament made that very clear (see for example, Zechariah 14). They still had this idea in mind when Jesus was about to ascend into heaven after forty days of post-resurrection ministry, and Jesus never denied it (Acts 1:6). But He knew that an extended ministry of the Holy Spirit would come first,

The picture of Jesus, rightful heir of the throne of David, refusing to speak to Herod, an Edomite sitting on a Roman throne ruling over Judah, is very sobering. The eternal Logos Incarnate stood before him, and all he wanted was for the magician to perform a miracle for him.

something they never understood, despite His promises in John 7:38-39, 14:16-17, 26 and 16:12-15.

The "Trials"

The rest of that night was taken up with the disgusting display of vacillating injustices by the various authorities involved in Jesus' "trials," which were nothing better than hostile arraignments before various uncomprehending officials. First to Annas, father-in-law of the High Priest, then to Caiaphas, then to Pontius Pilatus, then to Herod and back to Pilate, who had the final jurisdiction in Jerusalem. Pilate's gesture to Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, because the prisoner was "a Galilean" (Lk 23:7-12), may have made them friends, but it gave no satisfaction to Herod, because Jesus would not answer his questions. The picture of Jesus, rightful heir of the throne of David, refusing to speak to Herod, an Edomite sitting on a Roman throne ruling over Judah, is very sobering. The eternal Logos Incarnate stood before him, and all he wanted was for the magician to perform a miracle for him. This silence of the Logos before the trivializing king is an excellent example of that frightening phrase of Paul's, "...and whom he will, he hardens" in Romans 9:18. Apparently Herod's formal conversion to Judaism had not given him any interest in theology, much less in messianic prophecy. Where Pilate had said, "What is truth?" Herod would have said, "Who cares?"

McGregor Wright is an Australian born in 1940. After teaching in high schools in Adelaide, he left to study in England. He came to America in 1970 to do a ThM at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Apologetics. There he met his wife Julia from Tennessee. While involved in a ministry to International Students in Denver, he completed a PhD in historical theology. He has published *No Place For Sovereignty* (IVP, 1996). At present he is writing and developing a Bible-teaching ministry in East Tennessee.

If Truth does not matter, neither does Justice. Convenience, political and moral, is all that remains. When it became clear that the Roman governor had decided that Jesus had, in fact, done nothing wrong by Roman law and would just release Him and send Him home, the Jewish leaders cried, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar." When the chief priests cried out "We have no king but Caesar" (Jn 19:12-16), they were repeating the call for a secular King instead of the theocracy of revelation prescribed by Moses in the Law. God told Samuel, "They have not rejected you [Samuel], but they have rejected Me from being king over them" (1 Samuel 8:4-9). Political safety always trumps honesty when power is separated from truth, and this was never clearer than on that dreadful weekend.

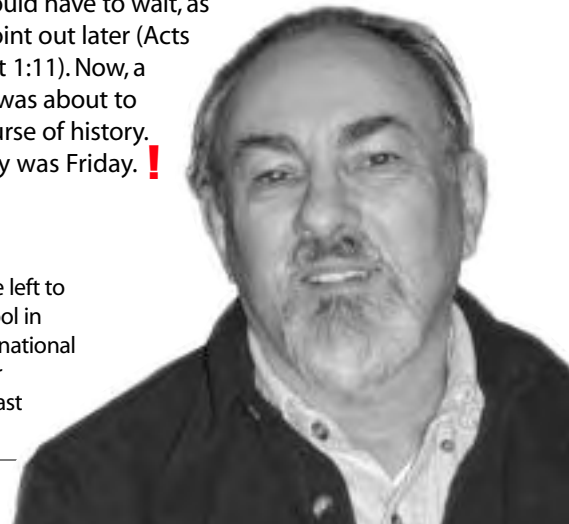
Various scholars during the last 150 years have examined the question of the legality of Jesus' trial(s), and while estimates vary, there were at least five to as many as twenty-seven separate violations of Jewish and Roman law. One thing is clear: the death of Christ was the most repulsive exhibition of a judicial murder that ancient history has recorded. It forms a classic model for the evaluation of later similar cases, of which the trial of Socrates is perhaps the most famous from the classical period.

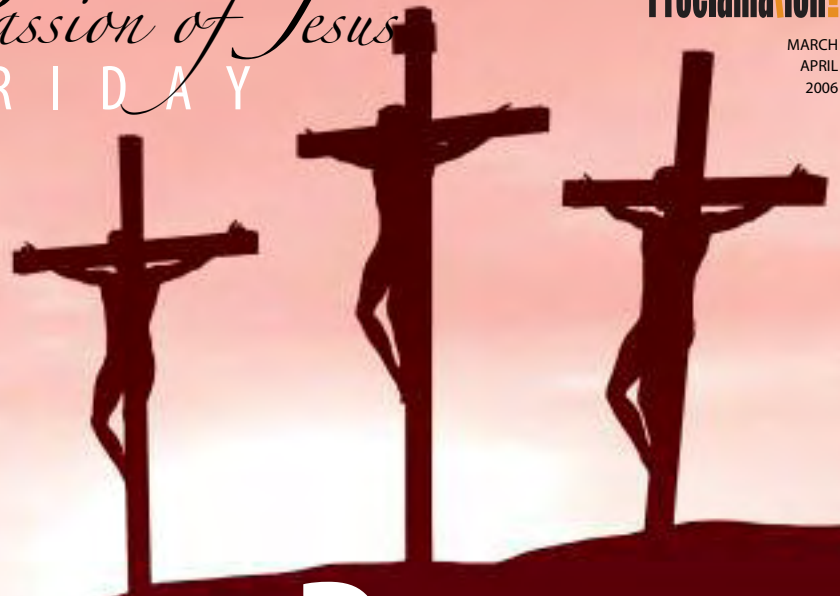
At last, everyone today who neglects or rejects him stands under the historic curse, "His blood be on us and our children" (Mat 27:25). Jesus' own words are clear enough, "He who rejects me, and does not receive my sayings, has one who judges him: the Word I have spoken, the same will judge him at the last day" (Jn 12:48).

Finally

Aside from the later forty days of resurrection ministry, that fateful Thursday was Jesus' last free day on earth. At last those disturbing chapters, Genesis 22, Psalm 22, and Isaiah 53, which He had heard being read in the synagogue all His life, were going to be fulfilled. The Serpent was about to crush the heel of the promised seed of the woman (Gen 3:15), and those "fools and slow of heart to believe" were about to see all that the Prophets have spoken be fulfilled, and not just the happy bits about a victorious Kingdom (Lk 24:25). That would have to wait, as Peter was to point out later (Acts 3:18-21, cf. 1 Pet 1:11). Now, a singular event was about to change the course of history.

The next day was Friday. **!**





Drama of the Cross

CLAY PECK

It was Passover Friday, but it was different from any other Passover the Jews in Jerusalem had ever known. From the moment Judas had covertly accepted 30 pieces of silver from the priests the evening before in exchange for leading them to Jesus for arrest, tumult had reigned. There had been a hurried nighttime hearing in which Jesus had appeared before Annas and Caiaphas, the past and acting high priests, followed by interrogations by Pilate, Herod, and again by Pilate. Jesus had been beaten, scorned, scourged, mocked, and finally had been forced to carry His own cross to Golgotha where He was to die.

The crowds were angry. People who had heralded Jesus as a King the Sunday before now became part of the mob demanding His death. Roman soldiers carrying out the crucifixion taunted Him while His mother and disciples watched in agony.

At 12:00 noon unnatural darkness shrouded "all the land" (Matthew 27:45). For three hours the people were bound in horrifying blackness they could not explain while Jesus suffered in private agony no one could share. About 3:00 Jesus uttered the words which hinted at what He had been suffering: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

"And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people" (Matthew 27:50-53).

All of life changed in that instant. Jesus' death marked a

moment in time when an eternal reality occurred: Jesus' blood of the New Covenant was shed into eternity, "that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant" (Hebrews 9:15).

How important is the cross?

There is no Christianity, salvation, or hope for the human race without the cross. The cross is all-important. To understand this importance, however, we must know why Christ died and what His death accomplished.

First, Jesus was not a martyr. A martyr is someone who is killed for his or her faith. The pain and suffering of the cross, as hideous as it was, is not what makes Jesus' death unique or central to the Christian faith. Jesus went to the cross voluntarily, even deliberately. From the beginning of His public ministry He consecrated himself to this destiny.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:11, 17, 18).

Second, in spite of what some say, the death of Jesus was not an unfortunate accident. Proponents of this view insist that Jesus was a supreme example but not our substitute and sin-bearer. Jesus' death, however, was both planned and prophesied; it was not an accident.

After Peter's famous confession of Christ as the Son of God in Matthew 16, the Bible says,

"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priest and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." (Matt. 16:21)

After His resurrection He met with His disciples who were slow to believe and said:

"Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:26,27)

The death of Jesus was no accident. Who, then, is responsible for His death?

The Roman soldiers, Pilate, the crowd in Jerusalem, and Judas Iscariot all bear some responsibility for Jesus' death, but let's face this thing honestly. None of these people could have killed Jesus if He hadn't gone to the cross willingly. Remember, He was not a martyr. He said, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down on my own accord" (John 10:18).

Hebrews 9:26 explains why Jesus died: "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

If Jesus died to do away with sin, then our sin took Him to the cross.

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3).

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..." (1 Peter 2:24).

"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

We are responsible for Christ's death.

Yet there is one more level to this investigation. Because the cross is a result of His loving initiative, God Himself is responsible as well for the death of Christ. The same Greek word (*paradidomi*) that is used to indicate that Christ was "handed over" by Judas, the priests, and Pilate, is also used in connection with the Son and the Father.

"...I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave (paradontos) himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)

"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up (paredoken) for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31,32)

As we face the cross, we can say to ourselves, "I did it; my sins sent Him there," and "He did it; His love took Him there."

Why the cross?

As guilty sinners we stood like slaves on the auction block. Jesus paid the highest price for us, purchasing us by His blood, buying us not to be his slaves, but in order to set us free forever. But why was this blood purchase necessary? In Romans 3:25-26 we find a key word that describes and clarifies the meaning of the cross—*atonement*:

"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

We find this same concept of atonement in 1 John:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 1:1-2).

This kind of language sounds primitive. Some people don't like to think of God being offended and needing some kind of propitiation or sacrifice of atonement to appease Him.

There are some who are trying to remove this kind of language from theology today. Their teaching is called the "Moral Influence Theory." According to this theory, the cross was not necessary. Atonement is pagan and primitive. God doesn't require any propitiation; Jesus could have saved us without the cross. Since He ended up on a cross due to the cruelty of humans, they argue, it provided an example of His love—that He would be willing to die. When we see His love, it influences us to do good—thus the title: Moral Influence Theory.

This theory is heresy, but it is attractive to some who feel like their own wisdom is superior to the Scriptures. People who hold this view don't like Paul. They think he corrupted the pure teaching of Jesus. Jesus himself, however, talked about giving His life as a ransom.

We cannot take the Scriptures seriously as the inspired word of God and try to avoid the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.

Neither can we leave out the idea of Christ's shed blood being necessary for our forgiveness.

Rom 5:9—"we have now been *justified by his blood*..."

Eph 1:7—"In him we have *redemption through his blood*..."

Col 1:20—"to *reconcile* to himself all things...by making peace *through his blood*, shed on the cross."

Rom. 3:25—"God presented him as a sacrifice of *atonement*, *through faith in his blood*..."

No matter how offensive it might be to our so-called educated and sophisticated minds, we must deal with this concept. We can't just tear all these passages out of the Bible. These verses (and others) are not saying that Christ's death was an unfortunate tragedy. NO! They are saying we are justified *by* His blood, redeemed *through* His blood, reconciled *through* His blood, and atonement is offered *through faith* in His blood. Jesus laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16).

Different from paganism

Those uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus' blood being necessary for forgiveness compare His sacrifice with pagan blood rituals. The atonement that Jesus made at the cross,

however, is very different from the pagan views of atonement or propitiation.

Let me show you the difference between paganism and the atonement of Calvary by answering three questions.

1. Why was it necessary?

Atonement was necessary because of God's wrath against sin.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness (Romans 1:18).

God's wrath, however, must be distinguished from the anger of the pagan gods or from human anger. God's wrath is a holy wrath. He does not lose his temper and fly off the handle. His rather is not irrational, arbitrary, or vindictive.

His wrath is a steady, measured, uncompromising response to all that is evil and wicked. He loves sinners but hates sin. To be consistent with His nature, He cannot tolerate wickedness.

2. Who offered it?

In paganism, humans must do something to placate the offended gods, perhaps offering sacrifices or performing rituals. Humans must do something to appease the divine.

The gospel, however, is completely the opposite of paganism. In fact, the gospel declares that there is nothing we can do to compensate for our sins or to turn away God's holy wrath. We can't beg or bribe Him to change His mind. We deserve nothing but judgment.

God, based on his sheer mercy and grace, has taken the initiative to make things right. He himself is the One who offers to give what is required.

"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement..." (Rom. 3:25).

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10).

This divine initiative is the opposite of paganism. God doesn't give grace because of the atonement, but He provides the atonement because of grace. God doesn't love us because Jesus died, but Jesus died because God loves us.

3. What was the offering?

The pagans offer vegetables, fruit, minerals, or animals, but God offered a person—and not just any person. He gave Himself.

2 Corinthians 5:19 says that at the cross, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ."

The Biblical idea of atonement is completely different from pagan notions. God Himself is at the heart of the atoning sacrifice.

The atonement was necessary! We humans were alienated from God by our sin, and God was alienated from us by His holy

wrath. Through Christ's substitutionary atonement at the cross, however, sin was overcome and God's wrath was averted.

Proponents of the Moral Influence Theory say that Christ's death wasn't necessary. At the cross we see only a demonstration of love, they say, not a sacrifice of atonement. That theory, though, is not only unbiblical, it is also logically flawed.

If I said to you, "Hey I want to prove that I love you, so watch this!" I then jump off a curb in front of a moving semi-truck and die. You would not think that act was a demonstration of love; rather, you'd think I was an idiot.

If, on the other hand, you were about to be run over by that truck, and at the last second I jumped out and pushed you out of the way to save your life while being killed myself, then you would be forever grateful for my love. My love would have been revealed by my giving my life, an act necessary to save you.

Christ revealed His love on the cross when He did what was necessary to save us! The cross was indispensable.

The singular event

As we reflect on the significance of Jesus' death during this Easter season, we remember that the cross was absolutely necessary in order to atone for our sin and to save us for eternity. Our sin put Jesus on that cross. God could not have pardoned us and given us eternal life without Jesus' shed blood propitiating for our sin.

On that Friday afternoon nearly 2,000 years ago, our Creator hung humiliated on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem. As the sky grew black, Jesus experienced the crushing isolation of being separated from His Father. Bearing the sin of humanity from Adam to the end of time, He took the punishment that legally was ours and died instead of us.

He became sin for us so we could become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). As He died, He forgave our sin, canceled the written code that was opposed to us, disarmed the powers and authorities, and triumphed over them by the cross (Colossians 2:13-15).

On that day on Golgotha Jesus changed the course of history. By His death He opened a way for us to know God as our Father. He identified Himself with our sin so we could become one with Him. He made it possible for us to be born of the Spirit and to inherit the New Covenant.

May we be filled with gratitude this season as we rejoice anew in the eternal gift of the cross! **!**

Clay Peck is Senior Pastor of Grace Place Church in Berthoud, Colorado. Clay planted the church ten years ago as an "evangelical Adventist experiment." When the group was forced to part company with the Adventist denomination during the first year, Clay helped lead about 150 former Adventists into the freedom and joy of the New Covenant of grace. Grace Place is now a growing nondenominational church with more than 1000 in attendance.



The Passion of Jesus SATURDAY

A glimpse of Peter's grief:

The Darkest Sabbath

"And they rested on the Sabbath day, according to the commandment." Luke 23:56

THOMAS FRANCIS

There has never been a Sabbath like this Sabbath. Since the beginning of our people, God has given us the Sabbath as a sign of His covenant with us. It has been a day of rest and refreshment, peace and communion with God. But there is no rest on THIS day! How can we be refreshed? In place of rest, there is terror. In place of refreshment, there is fear. In place of peace, there is shock and confusion and panic.

For three years, I followed Him. We all did. He called us His Apostles, the "sent out ones"—the witnesses of Him. Why did He call us from our lives and jobs, only to leave us like this? Couldn't the one who brought the dead to life have prevented it? Couldn't the One who gave the blind the power of sight have chosen a different ending? Just a few short days ago, He brought a man, dead four days, back to the living. Couldn't He have lived? Why!

SSH! Listen, there is sound in the street! Isn't that one of the Temple police? Are they coming for us? Rumors are everywhere. We have been told that even today, this most holy Sabbath of the year, Passover Sabbath, the leaders of our people have gone to Pilate and met in secret with him. Are they plotting against us, too? After everything is over and the crowds have gone home, will they come looking for us? I will run. They will not find me! Oh, coward that I am! Wasn't I the one who said to Him, "Even if I should die or be in prison, I will not leave you"?

Why did He call me that day by the sea? I had a good life. I was making a good living with my boats and nets. I had a good home and a good wife. "I will make you a fisher of men; follow me," He said. I did follow. The eleven and I listened as He spoke wonderful and powerful words. It was almost as if we were listening to God himself. Such claims He made. "One with the Father"—God Himself, that's what he claimed. It was shocking, yet it all seemed so real, so true. We believed Him. We believed IN Him. We put our faith and trust in Him.

Oh, this horrid night. Has night ever been so dark or black as THIS night? It's as though the powers of the dark are everywhere, laughing over a great victory. Soon the day will come—yet will the night ever go away? Will this horrible blackness ever depart from us? My heart feels as though the Angel of Death approaches and there is no blood over my doorpost. If only we could see His face and hear His voice again. But that can't be. Not now. Not ever. He is gone, and we are so alone.

Think, you slow and sluggish mind. Remember His words. At that last supper with Him, He said He was going away and we could not go with Him. We wanted to go. We wanted always to be with Him. What a special time! What a peaceful time, filled with such love and fellowship. How could one of us betray Him? Curse you, Judas! You rejected Him and betrayed Him. How could you? You saw the miracles, heard the words of life.

How could you deny Him and betray Him? How could you!

How could I? What a coward I am, so weak, so miserable, so proud and boastful! Oh, my mouth is quick to speak, but I have such fear. I am so weak! The others ran with me, but they didn't betray Him. Curse me! Was my miserable life more valuable than being with Him, standing with Him, defending Him? Three times I denied that I even knew Him. Three times! With cursing and swearing, I denied Him. I shocked even myself. As a coward, the words of the sailor and fisherman came so freely to my lips. He heard me! He turned and looked at me, as the words were still fresh on my lips. Can I ever forget that look? That was the last time I will ever look into His eyes, and at that most special time I denied Him with a curse. Curse yourself, you sinful and miserable soul! You deserve the curse, not Him. Now I feel the depths of despair and defeat, known only by the lost. Jesus, my soul cries out for you! Yet I know, even if He could live again, He would never trust me, never love me, or forgive me. Not now, not after this.

It's not the first time my faith has failed me. I remember a stormy night on the sea. We were afraid then, too. We were seasoned in the ways of the sea, yet the storm had us tested to the full. We thought all was lost when He came, walking on the water! Again my big mouth! "May I come to you?" I asked. He said, "Come." It was insane, yet I got out of the boat and walked on the water! Then I thought about how important I was and how impressed the others must be, and just like that, down I went into the sea. "Jesus, save me!" It was all I could think of, and with a touch, he did. Oh Jesus, if you could only save me now!

Light is beginning to dawn. Surely they will not kill us today. Not on Passover. Not on the Sabbath—or will they? Look, there are Roman soldiers in the street! I long to go to Him, even if only to the tomb, yet we have been told that the soldiers are posted there. If we go, they will arrest us. Is even the peace of grieving to be denied us? Some of the others come to the upper room. They drift in with news, rumor really. Yet each report seems more terrible and fearsome.

What is the purpose of all this? Was He really the Messiah? Wasn't He to be the one who saved His people from the Romans? We were so sure of it. We gave up everything for Him. If He was the Messiah, how could the leaders of our people have rejected Him? Wouldn't they have known? Shouldn't they have known? With my own eyes I watched them slap Him, pull out handfuls of His beard, spit on Him, even punch Him in the face. Our own leaders, the holy ones of our people, took Him to the Romans and demanded crucifixion. Why? If He was the Messiah, shouldn't he now be king? Just a week ago, large crowds of people had welcomed Him with loud cries of

"HOSANNA!" They had called Him the Son of David, the acknowledgement given to Israel's kings. Yet only two nights ago they were demanding His death by crucifixion, calling down the curse of His blood on themselves and their children.

In the last several months, it's almost as though He knew this would happen. He alluded to His death as He spoke to us. I remember rebuking Him for such talk. "Get behind me, Satan," He said directly to me. Today, on this blackest of Sabbaths, I feel more cursed than I did at that moment. I am lost! My sin and my pride have damned me forever! Jesus, oh that you were here now to reach out and rescue me from the sea, as you did before. If only you could give me sight as you gave the beggar who had never seen. Jesus, if you could only cleanse me as you did the lepers so many times. If only I could see you and fall at your feet and pour out my heart to you as the horrible failure that I am.

But it is too late. Dead men can't forgive. Dead men can't reach out and save. Dead men can't bring peace to a troubled heart or a guilty mind. Even from my hiding place of shame I could hear the sound of steel maul on nails. I saw the sky darkened and felt the earth shake. It was as if God himself was crying out in anguish and pain. The whole day was one of anger and loss. I may not be a learned man, yet I believe that Almighty God poured out all of his wrath and anger on this one man, Jesus. What did He do that deserved such horror? How could God have allowed Him to be so crushed and bruised, afflicted and then killed? Is this what the prophet Isaiah was talking about? I have never seen a prisoner so beaten; yet there was no cry of anger or pain, just a plea for forgiveness for those who persecuted Him.

He called us to tell others of Him. He called us to be his "church." He said He was sending us out into the world to be His witnesses. Witness to what? His death? His horrible end of life?

There is no rest on this Sabbath day. There is no peace on this Sabbath day. There is no joy on this Sabbath day. Is this all there is? Is all lost? Is there no future, no hope? Nothing will ever be the same. Not now. Not ever again. This Sabbath is the blackest day in the history of the universe, even of heaven itself. The Son of God lies in a borrowed tomb!

My Lord! My God! What's to become of us?

What's to become of us, now that Jesus is dead?

Thomas Francis lived most of his life in the Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana areas. After careers in radio broadcasting, insurance, and law enforcement, he was forced to take disability retirement because of the complications of diabetes. Raised a second generation Adventist, he is currently a member of College Road Baptist Church in Ocala, Florida, where he serves as an adult Sunday School class teacher. He has two grown children, three grandchildren, and a great-granddaughter. He and his wife Carol live in Ocala.



The Passion of Jesus SUNDAY

OUR FOUNDATION OF FAITH AND HOPE:

The tomb is empty!

J. MARK MARTIN

Imagine the headlines in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago in the days immediately following Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Maybe they read something like this: "Galileans Claim That Itinerant Preacher Raised From The Dead!" or "Emotionally Distraught Disciples Claim Their Executed Teacher Is Alive And Well!" From the moment that the women rushed from the empty tomb of Jesus to proclaim that their Master had risen from the grave, people have been trying to understand and even explain away the greatest miracle in the history of humanity. The earliest champions of the faith boldly proclaimed that their Lord had conquered death and made it possible for all people to be saved from their sins. The earliest opponents of the Gospel tried to cover up a miracle that they couldn't refute. Matthew records their lame attempt to stifle the greatest news of history with a bribe to the Roman soldiers commissioned to guard Jesus' tomb. Their explanation? "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'" (Matthew 28:13). It's clear that some have found in the empty tomb the foundation of faith and hope, while others believe the resurrection of Jesus to be a fanciful fable and hoax.

Over the centuries a handful of natural explanations have been offered in an effort to convince people that Jesus' physical resurrection from a garden tomb in first century Palestine was really nothing more than a fraud perpetrated on the spiritually gullible. Is it possible that the resurrection of Jesus was just a hoax? Is there a natural explanation for the spiritual passion that Jesus' followers felt in the days following His crucifixion other than the truth that He had in fact risen from the dead? Let's take a moment to consider the possible natural explanations that people have raised over the centuries to account for Jesus' empty tomb.

Natural Explanation #1 - Jesus' tomb wasn't really empty. The Disciples just made up the story about His resurrection.

As far as attempts to explain away the truth of Jesus' resurrection go, this explanation seems to be the most unbelievable. First of all, we need to remember that when Jesus did rise from the dead, His disciples were as surprised as anyone by this turn of events. Luke 24 reveals several times that Jesus' followers had to be convinced that He had in fact risen. Think about it: the women came to Jesus' tomb to finish his burial preparations (Luke 24:1-12). They were obviously expecting Him to be dead! On the walk to Emmaus, Jesus had to show from the Scriptures how the things He had experienced at the hands of His executioners were part of God's great plan of salvation for humanity (Luke 24:13-35). In reality, it wasn't until Jesus physically appeared to His disciples that they became convinced that He was really alive again (Luke 24:36-49).

Jesus' followers would never make up the story that He had risen from the grave. That possibility was the furthest thing from their imaginations. Beyond that, to suggest that Jesus' followers would ultimately die martyrs' deaths to protect a hoax they themselves made up and knew to be a lie is absurd. People just don't do that! Someone would have confessed the lie. Instead, the apostles faced martyrdom, boldly knowing that the One who rose from the dead would raise them up as well.

Natural Explanation #2 - Jesus' tomb was empty because His disciples stole His body.

This explanation suggests that Jesus' resurrection was nothing more than a big fraud. This theory tries to convince people that Jesus' body was not in the tomb because the disciples had stolen it. To accomplish this they would have been forced to sneak past a Roman guard unit consisting of 16 seasoned

legionnaires, roll a massive stone weighing two tons out of the way, grab Jesus' body, and run off without being noticed.

A Roman guard was stationed in front of Jesus' tomb, and Caesar's seal was stamped on the stone sealing Jesus' grave. The soldiers knew that if that seal was broken, they would be executed. All the power of Rome stood behind the seal on Jesus' tomb, and the Roman guards were well-trained fighting machines who would have been able to hold their ground (Matthew 27:57-66).

But this explanation asks us to believe that these seasoned veterans—with their lives on the line—all fell asleep, and not one of them stirred while Jesus' rag-tag band of disciples noiselessly moved a two ton stone and made away with His body. This just doesn't stand to reason. Jesus' disciples didn't steal His body. In fact, they ran and hid when their master was tortured and killed at the hands of His opponents (Matthew 26:56).

Natural Explanation #3 - Jesus' tomb was empty because He didn't really die; He only fainted.

This is an old theory. It was made popular by a man named Hugh Schonfield in his book, *The Passover Plot*. This theory proposes that Jesus' followers drugged Him before He was placed on the cross. He only appeared to be dead when the time of His crucifixion was over. Those who hold to this explanation say that once Jesus' body was laid in the cold tomb, He revived, rolled away the stone, and made His escape.

Anyone who knows anything about Roman scourging and Roman crucifixion will quickly see that this explanation is ludicrous. Jesus was so brutally tortured by a Roman beating that He was left completely disfigured and battered. He was then forced to carry a heavy Roman cross up a steep hill, nailed to it for six hours in an effort to suffocate Him to death, and then pierced through His heart by a Roman spear. Someone who had been this tortured and abused never could have revived and rolled away a two ton stone on his own strength. Add to this the fact that a Roman centurion, a man well acquainted with death and a trained executioner, certified Jesus' death—and this theory becomes even more unbelievable.

These three natural theories ask us to believe things that don't make any sense. No matter what Jesus' critics say, His followers didn't make up the story about the empty tomb. Jesus' tomb wasn't empty because His disciples stole His body. Our Lord didn't fake death and then revive from a slumber to roll away the stone that sealed His grave. The fact of the matter is that Jesus' tomb is empty because He did what He said He would do! In Matthew 17:22-23 Jesus told His disciples that He would be killed and then raised on the third day: Jesus said to them, 'The Son of

Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.' That is exactly what happened. This is the only explanation for the empty tomb that doesn't insult human intelligence. It's the only possible explanation that would send eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection to martyrs' deaths without flinching. Jesus did rise from the dead!

Saved by His life

Because Jesus did rise from the dead, there are certain things that we can count on. His resurrection is the promise that we, too, will rise again from the grave. We don't grieve like people grieve who don't know Jesus. Because He rose from the dead, we know that we who know Him will also rise from the dead when He comes again. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

Not only does His resurrection mean that the dead who belong to Him will rise from the grave when Jesus comes again, but His resurrected life is the guarantee that we who know Him have eternal life. When we trust Jesus with saving faith, He saves us at that moment. In God's eyes, we are seated from then on "in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). This miracle of eternal life occurs in us by the same Power that raised Jesus from death. Even more, this same Power—the Holy Spirit—is at work in us when we believe in Him, equipping us to live holy lives according to His plan for us (Ephesians 1:18-20; 2:10; 3:20-21). Therefore, we can know that when we accept Jesus, the rest of our lives on earth will be filled with the same Power that raised Jesus from death, and we can also know that this Holy Spirit will also bring our bodies to eternal life one day (Romans 8:9-11).

There's also one more thing we know because of Jesus' resurrection. We know that, because He rose from death and ascended to His Father, He is always at work for us, helping us when we are tempted (Hebrews 2:18). Because He lives in heaven interceding for us, we can freely come before our Father and receive mercy and grace in our times of need (Hebrews 4:14-16; Ephesians 3:12).

Jesus shed His blood to reconcile us to God. He rose from death to give us life and the promise of eternal hope (Romans 5:8-11).

Jesus is who He claimed to be: God the Son. And since all of this is emphatically true, Jesus has a claim on our lives. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and His empty tomb forms the foundation for our faith in Him and our hope of eternal life. He is the Risen Lord. **!**

J. Mark Martin is senior pastor of Calvary Community Church in Phoenix. It is part of the Calvary Chapel Fellowship of churches, and it has over 10,000 members. Mark pastored in the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the support of his wife Leslie for six years before being forced to resign in 1982 because he persisted in teaching God's grace. Pastor Mark's teaching is extended in an outreach to Seventh-day Adventists as well as being on three radio programs in the Phoenix area. He also has an extensive CD & tape ministry. His sermons and other materials about Adventism are available at www.sdaoutreach.org.



He Intends Victory! CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

had fractured family, ministry, career, and self-esteem. Healing, prayer, and the intervention of a wise and far-sighted matchmaking pastor would, in time, bring a new perspective of hope to our yet-to-be-realized relationship.

I had dated other women, but it always felt contrived. When I began to realize how much I really loved Joan, what a perfect fit and soul mate she was, I finally got a clue and decided to get some information about the risks and discipline of being married to an HIV positive woman.

I had reached the time for a decision. The choice was clear: propose marriage or resign myself to never fully exploring the breadth of Joan's bountiful soul. One morning the lucid realization came that I loved her more than I feared the virus, and that if God gave Joan just two more years to live, I would rather share those two years with her than twenty without her. We were married in 1994.

My instincts about Joan were right. When I first knew her she was conscientiously raising her children with Christian values when she had every right to be bitter and withdrawn. She also worked as a Christian social worker and counselor right up to the eve of a serious hospitalization. She doesn't see herself as entitled to sympathy or pity, but as a debtor privileged to share God's love from her own wounded life.

Joan: In the spring of 1998 I became very seriously ill and hospitalized for five weeks with a gastrointestinal infection and ultimately with pancreatitis and sepsis. I was absolutely helpless and had to utterly rely on others for my every need. At one point my condition became so serious that I suffered a cardiac arrest and almost died. I was unconscious of what was going on around me for several days, but I later found out what happened to me and learned of the amazing love and care that our family received during that time.

When I became ill, Galen quickly sent notice to ask for prayers from many friends and family members. When my health stabilized and I could mentally cope with what had happened, it became all too clear that if not for the prayers and support of God's people and the Lord's intervention in my life, I wouldn't be here today. That realization just overwhelmed me with joy and wonder.

After that initial period of celebration, overwhelming gratitude, and praise, however, I was struck with the nagging question, why did the Lord spare me? Why does God allow some people to die and others to live? Why, Lord?

Of course, I thanked God for the obvious blessings of finishing rearing my high-school-aged children and enjoying life with my husband and friends, but I had a feeling that there was something more. I continued to seek the answer in prayer for months.

Meanwhile, I came to the conclusion that since God had granted me extra time to live in such a miraculous way, the rest of my life was icing on the cake. Previously, I had thought of life as mine, but when I realized the love of His hand reaching out to me and restor-

ing me to life, I learned that I could release my life to Him and trust Him to do with me as He deems fit.

Many months after my coming back to life, the Lord provided the answer to my "Why?" during a time of prayer and Bible study. I read Psalm 118:17, "I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done." It was a revelation. I was expecting that Jesus would want me to work more, harder, longer, but no—He wants me simply to share with others the marvel of my Lord and Savior!

Verse 18 goes on to say, "The Lord has chastened me severely but He has not given me over to death." God puts us all through a process of purification, but in so many ways He allows us to enjoy the riches of life in the process.

Ministry

Since the early 90's Galen and I have been involved with He Intends Victory (H.I.V.). We oversee the Hispanic area of this ministry which was founded in 1990 by Pastor Bruce Sonnenberg and some individuals infected with the virus. H.I.V. provides education, compassionate care, and the hope of Christ to those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. We are now in 13 countries, and we have several homes where we care for HIV orphans in Africa, Thailand, and Malaysia. We fund health care workers in many of these countries as well as the orphanages and many medical outreach programs.

In January, 2006, we had a team of 21 people return from a trip to Kenya and Uganda where, besides educating hundreds of people and sharing testimonies, they provided medical supplies, held clinics in the bush, painted a hospital in a rural town, encouraged staff members, planted trees at a new home site for HIV orphans in Eldoret, Kenya, and hired a new outreach worker who travels throughout the Ruwenzori district to check on AIDS patients throughout the district.

Galen and I also do Spanish translation both as a ministry and as a profession. We are looking forward to translating *Proclamation!* because we believe in the mission of the magazine and its education about Adventism. Many people are unaware of the discrepancy between Adventism and Biblical truth, and we understand that the Spanish-speaking communities need to be served by this valuable ministry. We are happy to be part of this outreach because we want to work for the Kingdom and make our lives count.

Galen: We have now been married nearly 12 years. Growth has come to us in ways that we never could have imagined, moving us to plumb the depths of life's anguish and the pinnacles of love's delight. We have discovered that God not only intends victory, but that he also speaks the creative Word of Christ in our personal and shared voids. As he has forgiven the mistakes of our past and continues to redeem our misfortunes, we find shelter in the mystery of His love. Joan does not live for the virus nor under its gloomy cloud, but in the refuge of God's protective shadow. With "my Joanie" at my side we move confidently toward a hopeful tomorrow—the hope of Christ's calling to serve in love that is greater than life's contradictions and losses.

For a free copy of Joan Yorba-Gray's devotional book *In His Shadow* go to the He Intends Victory website at www.heintendsvictory.com and order online.

Responses to Forgiveness

I appreciated When There's No "I'm Sorry" by Gary Inrig. That was a very balanced article that reflects the Biblical relationship between law and grace and also between justice and mercy, which is so inherent in the character of God.

I have come to very similar conclusions about forgiveness on my own, but I found the article bringing me additional help on the subject as well.

AN ADVENTIST PASTOR

We got the latest *Proclamation!* yesterday and have read almost all of it. This month's is great. The article on forgiveness by Pastor Gary was very helpful for me. I would like to get the book.

A FORMER JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

I've been really enjoying the articles in *Proclamation!* The article "Forgiven to Forgive" was great, especially with the difficulty people have in realizing that we also have sinful consequences from having been sinned against. Your articles are very deep and thought provoking. Keep up the good work.

Prayer is a wonderful tool for forgiveness. Let's all continue to pray. Please remove us from your mailing list.

Thank you very much

I'm an inmate in a state prison serving a life sentence with the possibility of parole. I'm writing you this letter to thank you very much for the great work you are doing. Our Lord Jesus Christ has changed my life through you; now I'm free from the bonds of the law and finally have tasted that freedom Jesus gave me when He died at the cross for our sins.

A brother in Christ was blessed with the book *Sabbath in Christ*. I was a Sabbath keeper, so I

could not resist reading the book. After only twelve chapters, I had to let go of what I had learned over so many years. Just like the apostle Paul said, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ."

Now I have started a new life in Christ, and I'm working on sharing what I have learned with our Adventist brothers. Some already turned their backs on me, but that won't stop me from preaching to others. I spend at least eight hours per day studying the Word of God. I do not now have a Christian denomination. I would love to know where you congregate since you left the Adventist church. Please help me understand the Word of God; I need a lot of help so I can build my faith on a solid foundation.

May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you every minute of your life.

Yours in Christ,
VERNICK PLEITEZ

Response to "Renounce Satan"

I would like to respond to "Renounce Satan" in your Letters to the Editor, January/February, 2006. I am writing this letter in kindness while honestly trying to understand.

Even though I am not a pastor, I was an Adventist for almost fifty years. I was raised in the church, educated in the church and was very active in the church. It is very hard for me to understand "Renounce Satan" when we have volumes and volumes of books and articles plus the internet exposing the church and, in particular, Ellen White. How could any pastor today not see, as I have, that the Adventist church and Ellen White are false? The only thing I can come up with is they don't want to lose their family and friends, status in the community, salaries, and retirement. I suggest the writer of that letter read Dr. Jerry Gladson's book *A Theologian's Journey*. He sacrificed all to follow his beliefs. If he and hundreds of other like pastors and educators discovered the real truth, it is because they were looking for it. Perhaps "Renounce Satan" should do the same.

TRAVIS HULL

To "Satanic Assurance Ministries"

Dear confused brother, read 2 Peter 2:19-22. Please do not send me your confusion any more.

Fulfillment of Jesus' words

Please remove my name from your mailing list! I think you are proclaiming false teaching. You seem to be a fulfillment of the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 5:19,20.

God's Ten Commandment moral law is an expression of His character of love and stands for all eternity. We are praying that you will return to Jesus. He wrote the commandments!

Quit sending

Please quit sending me your materials. I trash them!

Not in agreement

Please remove our names from your mailing list. We are not in agreement with your philosophy. We pray you will see the light and follow the Lord in His way, not your own.

Appreciate your ministry

I appreciate your ministry! I appreciate it mostly because you promote the gospel of grace so well. Thanks for all your hard work. There are a lot of negative letters that come your way. Don't let that discourage you. You speak the truth in love!

Suffer in my present place

I have only one complaint about your *Proclamation!* magazine—O.K, two. It doesn't come often enough, and it is too small in content. But I forgive you for this.

I belong to an Adventist church. A couple of years ago I was ready to leave, but my wife, who was raised in the church, isn't ready. After much prayer I am still here and teach a Sabbath School class. I have lost some friends, yet others come to me and thank me for teaching out of the Bible and not Adventist doctrine. When anyone quotes Ellen White, I ask them for a Bible text to support her.

Amazingly enough, the pastor knows I disregard all Adventist doctrine, and yet he comes to me in confidence on many issues. Also, the nominating committee continues to ask me to teach even knowing my rejection of Ellen White and Adventist doctrine.

This phenomenon greatly puzzled me until the Holy Spirit convinced me to suffer in my present place.

I attend a morning Bible study group of people from a "Sunday church," and I love it. Thank you once again for feeding my soul with your *Proclamation!* May God go with you always, you and yours.

Mail letters and donations to:

Life Assurance Ministries
P.O. Box 905
Redlands, CA 92373

Life Assurance Ministries, Inc

MISSION

To proclaim the good news of the New Covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

MOTTO

Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

MESSAGE

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

Former Adventist Weekend held in Redlands CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

never Adventists, but they both went to LLU School of Medicine. Assisting them were Sarah and Brooke Schumacher from the high school worship team playing djembe and bass, and Roy Tinker playing piano. The weekend theme song was "All I Once Held Dear" (or "Knowing You, Jesus").

Dale Ratzlaff, Mark Martin, and Greg Taylor all spoke Friday evening. Dale established that Jesus is God's Word (communication) with us (John 1:1-3), Jesus is God's best communication to us (Hebrews 1:1-2), and Jesus surpasses the Law and the Prophets (Mark 2:9-13). Greg Taylor followed with a discussion based on Romans 7 of his previous "spiritual bigamy" of which he was guilty when he tried to be married to both the law and grace at the same time. He had to let the law die so he would

Testament is about the nation of Israel, and the New Testament is, again, about the nations.

She made an interesting point about the inspiration of the words of the Bible. She explained how, based on the fact that "all Scripture is God-breathed," we know that God was in charge of the words of Scripture. She said that just as Jesus is both human and God in a hypostatic union we cannot explain, so God's word is both a human and a divine reality. We cannot explain exactly how it "works," but we know its words are reliable and true.

The rest of Saturday involved breakout discussion sessions. Mark Martin facilitated one on honoring God when faced with persecution. Dale Ratzlaff led "Everything you ever wanted to know about the Sabbath," and Greg Taylor directed discussions on how to know God's will. Leslie Martin talked about healing from parental rejection and told about her father disowning her and her children when she left Adventism and how he apologized on his death bed. Kenneth and Janice Brantley facilitated discussions on living with Adventist family members.

Lunch was turkey wraps, vegetarian submarine sandwiches, fruit, fresh veggies, and ice cream bars and cookies. Dinner was a catered Mexican meal featuring chicken and cheese enchiladas, beans, rice, chips, and salsa—followed by cheesecakes.

The evening meeting had been advertised to the public, and about 250 people attended. Chris Lee, Rick and Sheryl Barker, Patria Rector, and Geoff Drew shared their stories of finding and knowing Jesus. Afterward, Mark Martin, Greg Taylor, and Dale Ratzlaff did an interview-style presentation which allowed them to discuss their unique experiences that led them to leave Adventism and to address the theological issues they faced. They took questions from the audience, and the three pastors handled them graciously and clearly.

One attendee who has been out of Adventism over 10 years spoke to me in the hallway and made an interesting comment. A therapist by profession (and well-versed in human dynamics), she observed that the reason those who have left for the sake of the gospel and find themselves in unresolvable conflicts with those who have stayed is that the conflict is actually "kingdom against kingdom." It is not merely a matter of personal disagreement; it is an issue of light against darkness.

The most memorable thing about the weekend was the palpable presence of the Holy Spirit. There was a warmth, a sense of love, of unity in Jesus, of powerful praise and worship, of God's Word being made clear to us, and of God's power and presence at work in all the presentations and also in our fellowship.

We are grateful to all who prayed for the weekend and who helped in various ways. We praise God for blessing our interactions and for revealing Himself in amazing ways to those who attended.

The most memorable thing about the weekend was the palpable presence of the Holy Spirit. There was a warmth, a sense of love, of unity in Jesus, of powerful praise and worship, of God's Word being made clear to us, and of God's power and presence at work in all the presentations and also in our fellowship.

not be living in spiritual adultery. Mark Martin ended Friday evening with a powerful talk on the security of our salvation. He also stressed we are to rejoice when we are persecuted.

Saturday morning, after a continental breakfast of bagels/cream cheese, granola snacks, fruit salad, and hot drinks, Gary Inrig, Trinity's senior pastor, gave a devotional talk on the revelation and supremacy of Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament symbols using Hebrews as his text. It was moving and insightful, and his talk echoed the insights Dale, Greg, and Mark had presented the night before but from a different "angle." We were asked if we had suggested a topic to him; we had not. He mentioned that as he had been praying about what to say, this Hebrews-based message had been what was impressed in his mind. Besides the uplifting of Jesus, the amazing thing about his talk was his mostly unintentional "unpacking" of all our Adventist "sanctuary language" by showing how Jesus has surpassed and fulfilled it all.

After the devotional, Elizabeth Inrig led a one-hour workshop introducing methods of Bible study. She presented an overview of how the Bible is organized, how it is self-authenticating, that it is historical and must be read in the context of human history that includes nations, events, races, and culture. She also pointed out that the first 11 chapters of the Bible are about the establishment of the nations; the rest of the Old



L to R: Chris Lee, Patria Rector, Sheryl and Rick Barker, and Geoffrey Drew gave their stories of following Jesus at the public meeting on Saturday evening. Over 250 persons attended the meeting which included a question and answer period after the presentations.

Below, L to R: Pastors Mark Martin, Greg Taylor, and Dale Ratzlaff share their memories of discovering the Gospel and leaving the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Below, Colleen and Richard Tinker welcomed the audience to the Saturday evening program.



Worship was led by Sharon Strum (front) accompanied by her husband Scott on the guitar, Sarah and Brooke Schumacher playing bass and percussion, and Roy Tinker (not pictured) on the piano.



Former Adventist Weekend held in Redlands

COLLEEN TINKER

The first Former Adventist Fellowship weekend, held at Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands, California, on February 17-18, 2006, was a remarkable blessing. Entitled "Knowing Jesus the Word," the conference meetings and the worship exalted Jesus and provided spiritual insight and support for the approximately 90 people who attended.

Friday evening began with registration, snacks, and getting acquainted. Elizabeth Inrig, wife of senior pastor Gary, had volunteered to head the hospitality committee. She had decorated the fel-

lowship room with round tables which had blue cloths covered by off-white lace cloths and irises in the center of the tables. She and her team kept snacks, water, and coffee available throughout the entire conference. Many people expressed surprise and pleasure at the warm atmosphere and the delicious food.

Scott and Sharon Strum led worship for the weekend. Scott is a member of the elder board at Trinity church; he and Sharon were

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



Above L to R: Diana Lopez from Nevada and Bob and Anne McLain from Montana enjoy meeting for the first time in the reception area Friday evening.



Top L to R: Raul Lopez from California chats with Leslie and Mark Martin from Phoenix, Arizona.



Bottom L to R: James Chilcote from Arizona enjoys meeting John and Jessie Tulio from California Friday evening.



Right: Trinity Church women Elizabeth Inrig, Donna Stark, and Judy Burson along with others decorated and prepared food and snacks for the weekend.

Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.

Fulfillment and Donation Processing
PO Box 905
Redlands, CA 92373