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**Many heroes have lived
And many heroes have died
Telling others of Jesus
With Him close by their side
Facing loneliness and danger
Facing misery and fear
Jesus hears every prayer
And Jesus sees every tear**

—Alvin Fisher—

— Writer, Singer, “Heroes for Christ,” music CD. (280 Rigsby Road, Dayton TN 37321.)

Author's Preface

Whether fortunate¹ or not, I am not one who has experienced great persecution. However, one incident looms large in my memory of the sort to which much of this volume pertains—when someone expressed genuine animosity toward me because of my beliefs.

I was working for a South American fellow I'll call "Squirt". He contracted with Weyerhaeuser to groom timberland for the paper-making corporation. We employed the "hack-and-squirt" method of killing trees that competed with the desired species. This involved making a gouge in the trunk with a machete and squirting a measured dose of herbicide into the gash. The poison was carried in a hard plastic backpack from which a tube was connected to the syringe we carried with one hand; swinging the blade with the other.

The trouble started when I began reading a wonderful little paperback called "Open Secrets," by Don and Marjorie Gray. One lunch break, Squirt asked about the literature. I invited him to examine the book for himself, which he did.

Squirt was a gregarious ecumenical Christian. I thoroughly enjoyed our first meeting at a backyard barbecue, where he played guitar and sang, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"² Squirt often spoke of his desire to see all denominations unite in

¹ "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt 5:10-12.)

² Ps 133:1.

Christ, putting aside their differences in order to combine their strength and conquer the unbelieving world. The chapter of my book he was looking at, however, stated that unity was only possible through uncompromising adherence to the Word of God. This information changed our relationship. Squirt lost his sunny disposition, and talked to me less.

We started on a new territory the next morning. From a large tank in back of the truck, I filled Squirt's pack and lifted it to his back. He trudged off while I began filling another. As I wrestled my own pack into position, some of its contents spilled on me. Fearing contamination, I gingerly slipped off the shoulder straps, (supposing that the lid was loose), disposed of the plastic apron I was wearing, donned a new one, and began wiping the wet pack. When I finally headed for the trees, Squirt intercepted me.

"You're taking too long," he said. "Go back to the truck. I don't need your help." Soon I discovered that Squirt intended to have me sit there all day without pay. Trying to avoid harsh words, I made it clear to Squirt that this was not acceptable for me. There was a clatter of steel, as Squirt quickly grabbed something from the tailgate. I found myself staring at the tip of a machete Squirt was shaking in my face.

"Some Christian you are!" ...It was all I could think to say. Apparently, that was enough. Squirt awakened to the incongruity of his actions, and put the weapon down.

What kind of Christian are you? I ask myself this. If the stakes were higher, would I withhold my witness? Under the "right" circumstances, could *I* become a persecutor? I pray not. (That is one case, I believe, where it is more blessed to receive, than to give).

Introduction

Gwyneth is a student of Southern Adventist University and a baptized Christian. Her parents are missionaries in Africa. I asked Gwyneth how she felt about the possibility of being threatened with death because of her beliefs. “I don’t really want to think about it,” was her reply. “Hopefully, God will be there.”¹

Seventh-day Adventists understand the Bible to foretell grave persecution for Sabbath-keeping Christians such as ourselves, just before Jesus returns.² It’s not something many of us like to think about, but it seems inevitable. Gwyneth’s feelings are not uncommon.³ Can we have hope? Will God be there?

This book proposes to answer those questions. Whether you already belong to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or

¹ Gwyneth Largosa, Student Dean at Southern Adventist University in Tennessee, interview by author, Collegedale, 15 April 2003.

² “In our prophetic interpretation of the end time, a Sunday law will be passed, the Constitution will be amended, and Sabbath keepers will be persecuted. The end will knock at the door and Christ’s return will become a reality.” B. B. Beach and John Graz, *101 Questions Adventists Ask* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 129.

³ “Gary Burns, a former youth pastor at the Pioneer Memorial church at Andrews University, reported to our staff one day that all the youth groups from seventh grade and up that he has worked with over the years, when asked to identify their major concerns, have always included the same two issues at the top of their lists: How to know if they are ready for Jesus to return, and fear over whether or not they will be able to stand through the time of trouble they’ve heard is coming.” Skip MacCarty, *Things We Don’t Talk About: Help for the Private Struggles of Ordinary Adventists* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1997), 113.

are a potential member, it is this writer's intention to bolster the faith of those who ponder the prospect of keeping the Saturday Sabbath during an hour of great unpopularity; even capital punishment.⁴ The purpose of this study is to impart—by the grace of God—a greater measure of peace until that time, and the assurance of victory when it comes.

Importance of the Subject

Undue anxiety over this matter not only lowers the quality of one's life today, but risks the loss of life eternal. Consider the following words of Jesus: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."⁵ "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried...be thou faithful until death, and I shall give thee a crown of life."⁶ "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell...Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny."⁷ "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."⁸

⁴ "A decree will finally be issued against those who hallow the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, denouncing them as deserving of the severest punishment, and giving the people liberty, after a certain time, to put them to death." Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 616. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 12:17).

⁵ Matt 16:25.

⁶ Rev 2:10.

⁷ Matt 10:28 & 33.

⁸ Rev 21:7-8.

Seeing that it is of vital importance, just how then does one “overcome” the persecutor? The Bible has the answer: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony.”⁹ This book contains testimony regarding many Sabbath-keeping Christians who endured and overcame persecution. May their stories foster an abiding faith in Jesus, and give you the courage to say, “though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”¹⁰

Definitions

The American Heritage Dictionary has as its chief definition of *Christian*: “Professing belief in Jesus as Christ or following the religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus.”¹¹ Patterning their lives after that of the Master, Christians obey the command of Christ: “follow Me.”¹² By “Sabbath-keeping” Christians, we mean those who follow Jesus in observing the original day of rest and worship, “as His custom was.”¹³ This day is now called “Saturday” on the English calendar. In other languages, however, this same day is called “sabbat, sabbado, sabota,” or some similar rendering of the Hebrew word, “Shabbath.” (See Appendix A.)

Can we be certain that this Saturday Sabbath is the same seventh day as in Christ’s time? “We have had occasion to investigate the results of the works of specialists in chronology,” says the U.S. Naval Observatory, “and we have never found one of them that has ever had the slightest doubt about the continuity of the weekly cycle since long before the

⁹ Rev 12:11.

¹⁰ Job 13:15.

¹¹ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed., s.v. “Christian.”

¹² Matt 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 10:38, 16:24; 19:28.

¹³ Luke 4:16.

Christian era.”¹⁴ Granted, the calendar has changed (from Julian to Gregorian in 1582 and in England in 1752).¹⁵ But these changes only affected the numbering system corresponding to a month; never altering the names or order of any week day. In other words, Saturday has always directly followed Friday; Friday has always directly followed Thursday, etcetera. By whatever names the days were called prior to these, the pattern remains true.

Amazingly, among Christian scholars who do not keep the original Sabbath, their own research substantiates its validity; even undoing arguments for the adoption of Sunday. (See Appendix B.) The mere fact the day has not technically changed, however, by no means accounts for the great devotion of our martyrs¹⁶ in keeping the Sabbath of the Lord Jesus. The issues stem far beyond a mere desire to be historically accurate, as the continuing reader shall discover. Suffice it to say for now that the Christian day of worship “presents a point of disagreement, with some groups continuing to adhere to...Saturday.”¹⁷ This disagreement “has *plagued* Christianity and is still a debated topic.”¹⁸ Because no Scripture can be found authorizing the change of

¹⁴ James Robertson, Director of the American Ephemeris, Navy Department, U.S. Naval Observatory, Washington, D.C., personal letter, dated March 12, 1932, as reproduced in S. A. Kaplan, *Can Persecution Arise in America?* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1966), 58.

¹⁵ Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th ed., s.v. “calendar.” Copyright (c) 2003.

¹⁶ “One who chooses to suffer death rather than renounce religious principles. ...from Greek *martus*, *martur-*, *witness*.” (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed., s.v. “martyr.”) This same Greek word denoting death in the cause of Christ is often simply translated “witness” in the Bible, as when Jesus told his disciples, “ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8). This linguistic relationship shows us that witnessing for Christ often involves the ultimate sacrifice on man’s part.

¹⁷ Ann Coble, “Sabbath,” *Eerdmans’ Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans’, 2000), 1146 (italics supplied).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, (italics supplied).

the Sabbath day, other means have been employed in attempt to end the “plague.”

So we come to our next definition. The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics tells us that “*persecution* carries the connotation of unjust injury or harassment, usually because the victim espouses values or beliefs contrary to those dominant in a society.”¹⁹ Because Sabbath-keeping Christians have always been a minority, they have received a corresponding degree of abuse.

“This calls for *patient endurance* on the part of the saints—those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.”²⁰ That text (from the book of Revelation) renders an excellent definition of *perseverance* for the purpose of our study. Those who cling to their biblical convictions, in spite of persecution, are in good company (with the Revelator). “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and *patience* of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God.”²¹ Why was the apostle John banished to that lonely isle? What called for his patient endurance in being thus persecuted? The above text tells us, it was his unyielding stand “for the word of God.”

Limitations, Parameters

¹⁹ J. Philip Wogaman, “Persecution and Toleration,” *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 464.

²⁰ Rev 14:12, NIV.

²¹ Rev 1:9.

The limitations of this study include time constraints²² and an incomplete historical record. It should be noted that concerted efforts have been made to erase history²³ pertaining to the integrity of minority church groups as well as the criminal activities of certain majorities, presumably in order to strengthen the image of authority among dominant sects. But God has not permitted all to be lost. On the other hand, many more readily available accounts are rife with bias, so that the reader must take care to look beyond the bigotry, with an eye which apprehends the animosity toward those perceived as a threat to established institutions.

Not intending any slight to those of the Jewish faith, the scope of our study is limited to Sabbath-keepers within the *Christian* religion. A larger demographic would be

²² During this writing I pastored two churches in North Florida while caring for my wife and children. The book is an outgrowth of a project assigned and due within a six-month period, along with other class assignments pursuant to a master's degree. Examination of early periods borrows largely from the excellent work of Dr. B. G. Wilkinson (cited below). In most cases, Wilkinson himself refers to a separate, original source. Much further testimony exists to bolster our witness and I solicit your stories for a second volume: *More Patience*. Given the apparent urgency of the hour, I have decided not to tarry longer in the publication of this initial installment.

²³ "Persecution was not the only way of waging war against the evangelicals. Their records were systematically destroyed. In the empires of antiquity a new conqueror often followed up his purging of the preceding dynasty by the destruction of all writings telling of its past even to the extent of chiseling annals from stone monuments. In like manner the noble and voluminous literature of the Waldenses, whether of the Italian, French, or Spanish branches, was almost completely obliterated by the rage of the papacy." Benjamin George Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant* (Brushton, NY: TEACH Services, 1994), 247.

"Much of the past relative to this has been removed from our History Books and the present generation, for a definite reason, know very little how Rome controlled Western Europe for over 1000 years and why our forefathers sought religious and political freedom by fleeing from Europe." Chester A. Murray, *The Authorized King James Bible Defended*, (Ava, MO: Chester A. Murray, 1983), 54.

unmanageable for this writer. Finally, it is assumed the reader is familiar with some basic tenets of Christianity.

Methodology

Our approach will be to examine certain occurrences of said persecution as broken into three basic timeframes: distant past, recent past, and anticipated future. Within each period, we shall analyze some dynamics of the conflicts and draw from them lessons of faith. The hand of God will be seen in sometimes astonishing intervention for His people.

Chapter One:

Early Persecution

Christ's Own Day

The first Sabbath-keeping “Christian” to be persecuted was, if you will, Christ Himself. It is significant to note His case, as we may gain some insight into the nature of those that follow.

The Bible portrays Satan’s antipathy toward Jesus even before His birth. “And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”¹ Yet before Christ’s ascension, God sent an angel to snatch His man child from the hungry jaws of the devil: “Behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.”² From these passages we make three observations: 1) Just as our Maker anticipates the arrival of godly seed³, so does our enemy. 2) God makes provision for the preservation of his people.⁴ 3) The empire of Rome felt

¹ Rev 12:4-5.

² Matt 2:13.

³ “You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed” (Ps 139:15-15, NLT). “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee” (Jer 1:5).

⁴ As the famous preacher George Whitfield said, “I am immortal until my work is finished.” When one’s work *is* finished, God may allow the individual to pass; even at the hands of an enemy. In such a case, we

threatened by the influence of Christ (a point upon which we shall later expand).

One might argue that the death warrant against Christ pertained to His importance as man's sacrificial substitute; not His Sabbath practices. Yet consider this reasoning: If Christ had sinned, He could not be Savior.⁵ Sin is defined as "transgression of the Law."⁶ The Sabbath is part of God's Law.⁷ Christ's Sabbath-keeping was therefore necessary to man's salvation (which Satan despises); so the enemy sought to destroy Him whose *life of obedience* would mend the rift between earth and heaven.⁸

Furthermore, as Jesus came "to save his people from their sins,"⁹ His intent is that His people should not transgress the Law either.¹⁰ That His people should obey God's Law is also

may still be assured of God's love. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps 116:15). "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds" (Isa 57:1-2). For those who are sanctified, the tragedy of their continued living may outweigh the tragedy of their death. On the other hand, God may allow the unregenerate to live through long periods of tragedy, if perchance they might repent and be saved at last.

⁵ For Patrick of Ireland, a Sabbath-keeper, "opposition to the Ten Commandments failed to recognize that the culminating reason for the death of Christ upon the cross was that while becoming man's substitute He was to uphold the moral law. The papal church denies the death of Christ on the cross as man's substitute and surety." Wilkinson, 114.

⁶ 1 John 3:4.

⁷ Ex 20:8.

⁸ "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you" (Isa 59:2). "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22, NLT). "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet 1:18-19). "Reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom 5:10).

⁹ Matt 1:21.

¹⁰ Rom 8:4.

evident at the end of the chapter from which we quoted earlier: “The dragon was furious with the woman and went off to fight against the rest of her descendants, all those who obey God’s commandments and are faithful to the truth revealed by Jesus.”¹¹ This “woman” represents not merely the mother of Jesus, but God’s people¹² in general—whose Christian descendants would still keep the Commandments, including the Sabbath. Revelation 14 indicates such Sabbath-keeping Christians will endure until the return of Jesus.¹³

There seems to be something special about the Sabbath commandment that makes it the particular object of Satan’s scorn. It identifies God as having the power to create life—the chief characteristic which distinguishes Him from the gods of the heathen.¹⁴ It is the longest of the Ten Commandments. It is the only one beginning with the word, “Remember”—as though God foresaw Satan’s efforts obliterate the true Sabbath from man’s thinking. The most widely read history of Christ’s life—a book called *The Desire of Ages*—describes the controversy:

Satan was seeking to exalt himself and to draw men away from Christ, and he worked to pervert the Sabbath, because it is the sign of the power of Christ. The Jewish

¹¹ Rev 12:17, TEV.

¹² “I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman” (Jer 6:5). “Say unto Zion, Thou art my people” (Isa 51:6). In his letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul wrote: “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2).

¹³ “Here is the patience of the saints: here *are* they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (verse 12). “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe” (verses 14-15).

¹⁴ “For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens” (Ps 96:4).

leaders accomplished the will of Satan by surrounding God's rest day with burdensome requirements. In the days of Christ the Sabbath had become so perverted that its observance reflected the character of selfish and arbitrary men rather than the character of the loving heavenly Father. The rabbis virtually represented God as giving laws which it was impossible for men to obey. They led the people to look upon God as a tyrant, and to think that the observance of the Sabbath, as He required it, made men hard-hearted and cruel. It was the work of Christ to clear away these misconceptions. Although the rabbis followed Him with merciless hostility, He did not even appear to conform to their requirements, but went straight forward, keeping the Sabbath according to the law of God.¹⁵

Early Centuries

First facing this friction within their own culture, Sabbath-keeping Christians then met the same spirit without. Through much of the Dark Ages, Rome commanded that every Saturday be observed with “a rigorous fast,” specifically intending to create distaste for the sabbath.¹⁶

Many national belief systems showed disdain for the God who made the earth in six days and rested the seventh. In Syria, “Manichaeism dethroned the first chapter of Genesis by rejecting creation and a miracle-working God, by demanding celibacy of its leaders, and by worshipping the sun as the supreme dwelling place of Deity. Imbued with the ancient Persian hatred of the Old Testament, it ridiculed the Sabbath of the fourth commandment and exalted Sunday.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, (Mountainview, CA: Pacific Press, 1940) 283-4.

¹⁶ Wilkinson, 144, 232; 326.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 49.

Meanwhile, “the Gnostic¹⁸ theology of Alexandria which was followed by the Church of Rome, was hostile to anything Jewish, even Jewish Christianity.”¹⁹

Rome and Alexandria had a real problem with the religion of Christ. Fourth-century church historian Socrates observed: “Although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition [sun-worship], have ceased to do this.”²⁰ Another contemporary, Sozomen, concurs: “The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria” (ibid).

Jealous of the unifying effect the weekly Sabbath rest had for Christians, the crumbling empire of Rome thought to transfer it to her pagan holy day. Emperor Constantine decreed in the year 321: “Let all judges and people of the town rest, and the trades of various kinds be suspended on the venerable day of the sun.”²¹ When this did not suffice to maintain her supremacy, Rome went a step further. Emperor Justinian decreed in 532, “by an edict which he issued to unite all men in one faith, whether Jews, Gentiles, or

¹⁸ “Gnosticism held that human beings consist of flesh, soul, and spirit (the divine spark), and that humanity is divided into classes representing each of these elements. The purely corporeal (hylic) lacked spirit and could never be saved; the Gnostics proper (pneumatic) bore knowingly the divine spark and their salvation was certain; and those, like the Christians, who stood in between (psychic), might attain a lesser salvation through faith.” “Some Gnostics taught that the world is ruled by evil archons, among them the deity of the Old Testament, who hold captive the spirit of humanity.” *Columbia Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Gnosticism.”

¹⁹ Wilkinson, 43. The Catholic Encyclopedia admits that “for a long time Jews must have formed the vast majority of the members of the infant church” (ibid., 56). Before Rome’s takeover, Christianity was patterned after the Jewish church. “For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess 2:14).

²⁰ Wilkinson, 57.

²¹ Ibid., 255.

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