

PROOF JESUS EXISTED

Answers  
From Genesis

Heart of Stone

April June 2010

# verticalthought®

*a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders*

## Identity Theft Victim: Jesus Christ



Countering  
Media Influence

Serving in the  
Middle East

Life on Campus:  
Godly Service

Coping With Cliques

## How Will Jesus Impact You?

**O**ne measure of greatness is the impact a person makes on the world. In our studies most of us have been introduced to the contributions of the Greek thinker Pythagoras to mathematics, of Galileo Galilei to astronomy, of Sir Isaac Newton to physics, of Florence Nightingale to nursing and of Louis Pasteur to medicine.

Although all of these distinguished people have long since died, their scientific work and service ensures that they will not be forgotten. This is their legacy.

Jesus of Nazareth also has a legacy. From His eternal, divine preexistence and His miraculous virgin birth to the miracles He performed, the teachings He proclaimed, the immense sacrifice He made and His death-defying resurrection to life again as a divine spirit Being, He has no human equal. His brief, 33-year stint as a man has affected the world in profound ways.

Jesus is credited with changing the status of women in the Western world from that of inferior nonpersons to respected members of society. His ideals have been cited by nations in their foundational documents of government. His teaching that every person is to be respected was an influential underpinning in the abolition of slavery in Britain and the United States.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus advocated loving our enemies and doing good to those who mistreat us. His influence was so strong that today approximately 2 billion people describe themselves as Christians—followers of Him.

Yet for all His influence, there is a surprising amount of confusion regarding His life and how He would have us live. Many don't know how to deal with the fact that Jesus was a Jew and that He lived accordingly. Reflecting this confusion, it has been estimated that there are more than 38,000 Christian denominations in the world today, each with its own understanding of Jesus' life and teaching.

Some see no problem with all these competing versions of Christianity. "As long as we all believe in Jesus, it doesn't really matter what we think or do" is a common belief. But that isn't what Jesus taught. In Matthew 7:21 the Man Himself said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Jesus' point is that He isn't just interested in being remembered for His social impact on the world. He also wants people to enter God's Kingdom through

**Jesus advocated loving our enemies and doing good to those who mistreat us. His influence was so strong that today approximately 2 billion people describe themselves as His followers.**

obedience to God's instructions. As the Bible explains, Jesus is seeking children of God who will live forever in the Kingdom (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26). Now that's a legacy!

In this issue we address the important matters of the real, authentic Jesus and His expectations of you. Don't believe in a counterfeit Jesus. Don't accept an altered gospel. Live like Jesus lived, and you'll become part of the enduring legacy He is still passing on to mankind.



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# Jesus Christ:

## Victim of Stolen Identity

by David Treybig

**Most people understand that Jesus died for our sins, and the details of His illegal crucifixion are well known. But few know that after Jesus' death His identity was stolen! Many well-intentioned believers have fallen for the deception. Are you also a victim?**



**O**n that fateful day when Jesus' physical life hung in the balance, the people of Jerusalem had an opportunity to ask for the release of either Jesus or Barabbas, a convicted felon. On the surface, there was an appearance of fairness. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, was going to let the people of Jerusalem decide who should receive a pardon.

Tragically, both Jesus and the citizens of that ancient city were the victims of an effective and deadly campaign. The religious leaders had skillfully devised their plan to eliminate the One who was exposing their hypocrisy and undermining their privileged position in the minds of the populace. They were angry, and from their perspective they were justified in taking action.

Earlier, one of them had suggested that it might be necessary for one man to die for the good of the nation (John 11:50-51). It sounded so noble and patriotic.

But most of the people had no idea what was really going on and what was coming.

Then, after Jesus' arrest and illegal trial, which they held at night so the populace wouldn't see or hear what transpired, the efforts of the chief priests and elders took on increased intensity. They "persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus" (Matthew 27:20).

At the end of the day, the religious leaders had won. The crowd had been manipulated, and Jesus had been put to death by crucifixion. But eventually, the truth came out.

Today, people know that Jesus of Nazareth was put to death over jealousy and false charges. But what most don't know is that Jesus' human life wasn't the only thing lost. Over time, *Jesus was also robbed of His identity*. The result is that many now unknowingly worship a counterfeit Jesus and believe an altered gospel.

The same campaign to distort Jesus and His message continues today, and it is quite possible that you—like the citizens of first-century



## Over time, Jesus received a total makeover that altered **His look**, changed **His birthday** and blurred **His cultural background**.

Jerusalem—are also a victim of this deception. You need to know the rest of the story!

### A total makeover of His identity

Modern identity theft has become a worldwide problem affecting an estimated 3 percent of citizens in the United States every year, plus similarly large numbers of people in other countries. Thieves know no national boundaries.

Today when a thief steals a person's private information, it is quite common for him to use this data to get a driver's license and/or additional documentation with his own picture and address. This gives the thief the appearance of legitimacy for all kinds of additional theft, which can even include taking out loans in the victim's name.

Those who stole Jesus' identity followed a similar process. Over time, Jesus received a total makeover that altered His look, changed His birthday and blurred His cultural background.

Consider Jesus' appearance. When people think of Jesus today, many picture a long-haired, effeminate-looking man walking around with a halo over His head. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. The real Jesus had no halo—these are simply artists' inventions—and He looked like the other Jewish men of the first century.

History tells us that the men at that time had short, cropped hair. The Jews of the first century considered it a shameful practice for a man to have long hair. Reflecting this perspective, Paul reasoned with members of the church in Corinth saying, "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?" (1 Corinthians 11:14).

Of course, short hair on men was also quite common in the other leading cultures of the first century. Statues and coins from that time show Greek and Roman men with similar haircuts. The fact that Jesus had short hair like the other Jewish men made it possible for Him on two different occasions to disappear into the crowd (Luke 4:28-30; John 8:59).

Even though people were trying to kill Him, Jesus got away because He looked like everyone else. Long hair, a halo around His head or a soft, feminine appearance would have been a dead giveaway.

The Bible tells us that Jesus was known to be a "carpenter" (Mark 6:3), the Greek word *tekton* here actually meaning a builder or artisan involved in major construction (such as stone masonry), and that He hung out with commercial fishermen. As such, He undoubtedly spent a lot of time in the outdoors and was a man's man. He simply didn't appear as so many artists have mistakenly presented Him.

### A new birthday that conflicts with the Bible record

In addition to a new look, Jesus was also given a new birthday. December 25 was selected to match up with the day pagans celebrated as the birthday of the sun god. Religious leaders thought this date would help people leave paganism for Christianity. After the transition, it was assumed that the celebration would be dropped.

Of course, this never occurred. Christmas is now one of the biggest celebrations of the year. To many, celebrating Christmas is now a critically important part of worshipping God. They simply can't imagine a Christian not honoring Jesus' birth.

But the facts show that Jesus couldn't have been born on December 25 because of two key events recorded in Luke 2. First, a Roman census was taking place (verses 1-6), and this would never have been conducted in the winter when it was difficult to travel. Second, the shepherds were in the fields watching their flocks by night at the time of Jesus' birth (verses 7-8). Since December is cold and rainy in Judea, the shepherds wouldn't have wanted to stay with their flocks in the open fields but would likely have kept them in shelters at this time of year.

Scholars who carefully consider all the evidence of Luke's account realize that it is most likely that Jesus was born in the autumn. A careful study of the birth of John the Baptist and the account showing that John was born six months before Christ (Luke 1:26, 36) indicates that Jesus was likely born in September or early October. The popular idea that Jesus was born on December 25 is simply a compromise with paganism, says William Walsh in his book *The Story of Santa Klaus*.

*Continued on page 19*



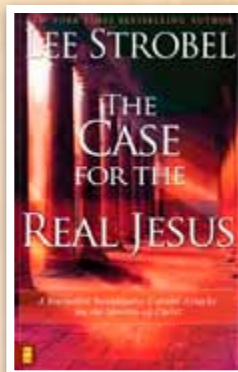
***The central teaching of Christianity is being challenged as more skeptics question Jesus' existence and choose their own destiny apart from God and the Bible. But proving Jesus' existence isn't difficult.***

by Larry Greider

**O**ur modern culture is replete with new ideas about the Bible—especially about its main character, Jesus of Nazareth. Popular movies and vocal detractors gush out the latest historical relativism, spawned by the widely popular theory of evolution that dominates science curricula. Historical relativism says we can't know for sure what happened in the past, so we're merely left with differing opinions or interpretations of these events. Some have expressed this kind of thinking as "You've got your truth, and I've got mine."

advance of actually happening—prove that the writing of the Bible was guided by One who was supreme in power and intelligence, able to bring to pass what He foretold. On another front, archaeological discoveries have repeatedly verified portions of the Bible that were previously considered fables by unbelievers.

Still another powerful testimony of Jesus' existence and ministry is the fact that the apostles were eyewitness-



Addressing the challenges of modern revisionist history such as those offered by the liberal scholars of the Jesus Seminar (who question the authenticity of Jesus' sayings and even the authors of the Gospel

# Proof Jesus Actually

## **A trustworthy source**

A good place to start when it comes to proving that Jesus really existed is to prove that the Bible can be trusted. Written by about 40 different authors over a span of some 1,500 years, this work consistently reflects the mind of God. As time marches across its pages, its themes of love, law, mercy, obedience and a God who wants every human being to be saved remain constant. The harmony of all these principles through multiple authors over a span of 1,500 years makes it unique in the world's literary history.

In addition to the way the Bible was written, there is much more proof that what the Bible says is true. Fulfilled prophecy—accurate news about people and nations far in

nesses of Jesus' death and resurrection. These men wrote of their experiences and gave their lives in service to Jesus and the ministry He instructed them to fulfill—all suffering persecution and most, in the end, dying as martyrs for what they obviously knew to be true. Would they have shown such devotion to a lie?

Details of these proofs and more verification can be found in our free booklet *Is the Bible True?*

## **Examine the evidence**

In addition to the Bible's internal proof of its authenticity, Lee Strobel provides further evidence in his book *The Case for the Real Jesus* (2007) that the Jesus of the Bible did indeed exist.

accounts), Strobel quotes one of the most prolific Bible scholars, Dr. Craig Evans (author or editor of more than 50 books about the Bible).

When asked about the conclusions of the Jesus Seminar and the claim of 16 additional gospels not included in the Bible, Evans states: "This is a product of a modern agenda—a politically correct, multicultural agenda motivated by sympathy for a marginalized group. It's the attitude that says diversity is always good, truth is negotiable and every opinion is equally valid. The question is 'What really did happen in the first century? What is the evidence? What are the facts?'" (p. 34).

Strobel then convincingly answers six challenges to the real Jesus in his well-documented book as he brings



credible scholars to the table to challenge the detractors.

In one instance, Strobel quotes Daniel Wallace, Ph.D., a renowned expert on textual criticism, who states: "Quite simply, we have more witnesses to the text of the New Testament than to any other ancient Greek or Latin literature. It's really an embarrassment of riches!" (pp. 82-83). In several languages, including Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian and so on, we have 25,000 to 30,000 early handwritten copies of the New Testament attesting to its authenticity.

To prove to yourself the validity of the Bible, I suggest that you pick up a Bible and read what it says instead of just reading what others say it says. You will find some startling claims and learn about the meaning and purpose of life. (To help you understand what you read, we offer many free booklets at [ucg.org/booklets](http://ucg.org/booklets) and an online Bible reading program at [ucg.org/brp](http://ucg.org/brp).)

We live in a world growing increasingly more cynical about truth. Almost 2,000 years ago, the Bible revealed an amazing challenge from a Roman leader to a

# Existed

Carpenter from Galilee. "Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?' And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no fault in Him at all'" (John 18:37-38).

The proof that Jesus is real is readily available for those willing to look. Why not prove for yourself that what the Bible says is true and start building a relationship with this King?

**Larry Greider** is the pastor of the Los Angeles, California, congregation of the United Church of God and the director of the UCG Good Works Program.

## Extrabiblical Evidence of Jesus Christ

***References to Christ appear in more than just the Bible—secular historians of his era talked about Him as well. The following is from our free booklet Jesus Christ: The Real Story:***

Cornelius Tacitus (ca. 56-120) was a Roman senator, consul and governor of the Roman province of Anatolia (covering most of modern-day Turkey) as well as one of ancient Rome's greatest historians. Late in his life he wrote a 16-volume history of the Roman emperors, the *Annals*.

No friend to either Nero or Christians, Tacitus writes that Nero blamed "a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace." He goes on to explain that "Christus [Christ], from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty [crucifixion] during the reign of Tiberius at the hand of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome..." (*Annals*, 15:44, quoted by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 1998, p. 82).

A contemporary of Tacitus, Caius Suetonius Tranquillus (ca. 69-140), overseer of Rome's libraries and court official to several emperors, writes that the emperor Claudius "banished the Jews from Rome, who were continually making disturbances, Chrestus [Christ] being their leader" (*Lives of the First Twelve Caesars: Life of Claudius*, quoted by Grant Jeffrey, *Jesus: The Great Debate*, 1999, p. 163). This banishment of Jews from Rome is mentioned in Acts 18:2.



Pliny the younger

Also, "Pliny the younger, the Roman legate of Bithynia-Pontus (what is now north-central Turkey) in the early second century, wrote to the emperor Trajan, requesting advice on how to deal with Christians who refused to reverence Caesar's image. Pliny noted that these Christians met regularly and sang hymns 'to Christ as if to a god' (*Letters* 10:96.7). The phrase 'as if to a God' suggests that Pliny knew Jesus had been a person who had lived on earth but was reluctant to call

him divine" (Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 1987, p. 196).

From these historical sources, none connected in any way with the Bible, we see references to these facts:

- A group called "Christians" derived its name from "Christus" (Christ).
- This "Christus" was executed during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of Pontius Pilate (Tiberius reigned A.D. 14-37; Pilate held office from 26 to 36 or 37).
- This new movement involved "a most mischievous superstition," quite possibly a reference to Christians' belief that Jesus rose from the dead after His crucifixion.
- This new movement begun by Christians started in Judea and spread to Rome.
- Early Christians considered Christ to be a divine Being.

For more information, request or download your free copy of *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* at [ucg.org/booklets](http://ucg.org/booklets).





by Jeremy Lallier

# Countering Media Influence

The pressure to conform is relentless. Everything seems to be against those who want to live in obedience to God. How can we resist?

**T**he mission was complete. The 12 men had returned from their undercover surveillance of enemy territory, and their last remaining task was straightforward. After almost six weeks of spying out a foreign country, they now stood before their fellow countrymen, who were all eager for this long-anticipated report.

“It’s impossible,” the men said. “The land is good, but its people are too strong and its cities too well defended. They could crush us like grasshoppers—we don’t stand a chance.”

The people were swayed. They abandoned their invasion plans and elected to return to the cruel enslavement from which they had escaped. When two of the spies spoke in favor of invading the land, the people responded with violent shouts, calling for their immediate execution.

## Ancient media

While far from a modern-day newscast or YouTube video, the 12 spies sent to spy out the land of Canaan (see

Numbers 13) were a vital part of ancient Israel’s media. We may think of television sets and Internet sites when we hear the word, but “media” is nothing more than the collection of ways we receive information. Today we look to CNN, FOX News and the like for that information; ancient Israel had spies, foreign emissaries and prophets.

The story of the 12 spies is a prime example of the influence the media can have on us. God had called the Israelites out of their enslavement under harsh taskmasters in Egypt, led them faithfully to the very doorstep of the Promised Land and then told them to go up and take it. But Israel’s media, in the form of 10 skeptical spies, convinced them that what they had set out to do (with the help of an all-powerful God who had paved their way with incomparable miracles) was not possible.

And they accepted the false report. This was despite having seen with their own eyes the capabilities of their God: Egypt devastated by 10 terrible plagues, a pillar of cloud and fire to lead them, the

sea parted to make a road of escape and a great army drowned, the miraculous provision of food and water in the middle of an inhospitable desert, and a mountain ablaze with tempest and fire as the booming voice of God proclaimed His Ten Commandments. Despite all this, they believed 10 frightened men who told them, “We can’t do it.”

What should we learn from this? It’s rather easy now to criticize the Israelites for their foolishness, but what about you and me? God called us out of slavery to sin (Romans 6:16-18), is leading us faithfully to the very doorstep of a promised Kingdom (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12) and is telling us to go up and take it (Matthew 6:33; 25:34). But our media, in the form of music and movies and books and news and even educators, so often tells us that there’s a better way than the one God instructs us to follow.

Few people will come right out and say those exact words, but the message remains. We see premarital and extramarital sex glorified. We see lying,



cheating and even stealing condoned. We are encouraged to experiment and determine our own personal definitions of right and wrong. “If it feels good, do it!” may have been the rallying cry of the ’70s, but it’s not difficult to see that the concept has survived unscathed through four decades of moral and philosophical wanderings apart from God.

As God’s people and seekers of His Kingdom, what should we be doing about all the garbage in today’s media?

### Out with the bad

Instead of trying to stone Joshua and Caleb (the only two spies to remain faithful to God), the congregation of Israel should have instead been furious at the 10 spies who dissuaded them from taking the land.

Instead of crying and complaining (Numbers 14:1-3), Israel should have told the 10, “How *dare* you tell us to forfeit what God has promised us? How *dare* you stand there and tell us that anything is too great for God?” They should never have listened to those who contradicted God; they should have thrown them out of their midst and their minds.

We face the same choice Israel faced. Ungodly media bombards us from every angle, trumpeting sin and abominations before God. That assessment may sound harsh, but we cannot afford to see the transgression of God’s law as anything less. If we choose to let these things into our lives, if we choose to even *tolerate* them, they will begin the slow but inevitable process of corrupting our views

and poisoning our thoughts.

If we truly wish to enter God’s Kingdom, we have only one choice when confronted with various media intent on contradicting God’s way—throw them out! It could be a TV show or movie that casts adultery in an acceptable light; it could be a song promoting irresponsible drinking; it could be a foul-mouthed comedian or radio host. Whatever it is, if it goes against the teachings of God, we must not allow it to have a place in our lives.

This is what Jesus meant when He told us, “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown

(Doing that alone creates a void—and the nature of a void is to fill itself with whatever happens to be nearby.) We must fill in the newfound space with positive influences, in keeping with the principle set forward in Ephesians 4:28 and Romans 12:21 to replace evil conduct with good.

This doesn’t mean we have to spend all our spare time listening to sermons. We just have to be careful in choosing what we let into our minds. And remember, “positive” and “uplifting” doesn’t mean it has to be *boring*, though Satan would like us to think so. If you’re willing to look for them, there are media choices out there that have remained largely untainted by our adversary.

## Ungodly media bombards us from every angle, trumpeting sin and abominations before God.

into Gehenna [a reference to final destruction]. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna” (Matthew 5:29-30, New American Bible).

God is serious about sin. If we willingly allow anything into our lives that could cause us to sin, we jeopardize our salvation. We must instead cut those things out of our lives and throw them away.

### In with the good

Removing the bad influences in our lives is a start, but it’s not enough.

In the end, resisting negative influences comes down to just one verse: “Finally, my friends, keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper. Don’t ever stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise” (Philippians 4:8, Contemporary English Version).

So, as you stand at the threshold of the promised Kingdom, what will you be thinking on and giving a place to in your life?

**Jeremy Lallier** recently graduated from Ambassador Bible Center in Milford, Ohio, and is currently working as a staff writer at the United Church of God home office.

## The “Is It Worth It?” Media Filter Test

Ask yourself this:

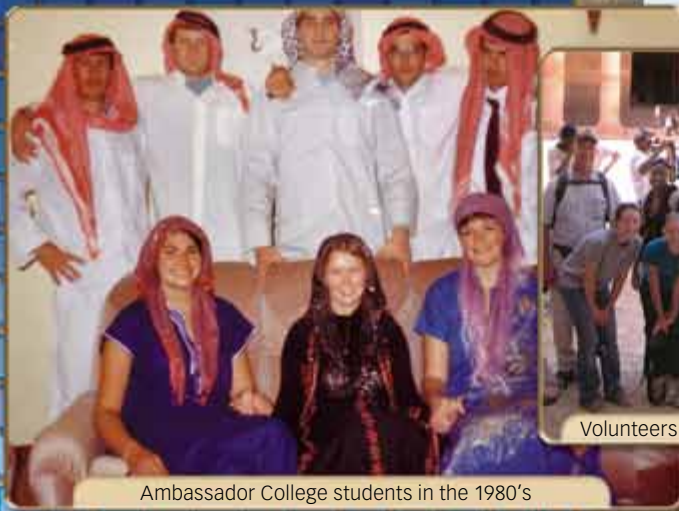
- What does this media choice promote? Is it in line with God’s way? **If yes, keep going.**
- Is my conscience bothered by this media choice—do I think it might be wrong? (compare Acts 24:16; Romans 14:23). **If no, keep going.**
- Would I be embarrassed to watch/listen to/read this if God were in the room with me? (Because, well—He is.) **If no, keep going.**
- Does this media choice pass the Philippians

4:8 test? **If yes, keep going.**

If you’ve made it all the way through this filter, then whatever media choice you are considering should be fine.

If you had to stop at any of the previous questions, then you need to ask yourself if that particular form of media is something you really want to have in your life—and take an honest look at why. We can’t afford to give Satan a foothold in our lives, even in the area of seemingly harmless entertainment.

# Serving in the



Ambassador College students in the 1980's



Volunteers visit Petra



Back: Audry Bauer, Kelley Schreiber, & Jamie Franks; Front: Eduardo & Stephanie Elizondo



The author w

by Doug Horchak

**T**he road to peace in the world must be built on trust. Without trust, there can be no peace! That axiom is true between people, families and, of course, between nations. The fractured relationships between countries and cultures in our world attest to that. Five young people are volunteering in the Middle East to do what's needed in this regard—build trust!

Young adults with the United Youth Corps volunteer to serve in interesting parts of the world to gain a unique and meaningful worldview. One of the outcomes we strive for is a better understanding of the culture in other parts of the world.

We currently have five young adults serving and teaching for a year in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. These young people are serving at three schools and institutions in this Arab nation. But why? It has to do with serving people, appreciating their culture, building relationships and creating trust—the very things that make lasting peace.

## A legacy of service and friendship

At present, our United Youth Corps volunteers are serving in three institutions: the Amman Baccalaureate School, the Young Muslim Women's Association (YMWA) Bunayyat Centre for Special Education, and the Regional Human Security Centre.

The modern-day presence of the Church of God in Jordan goes back to the early 1980s when a number of Ambassador College students were chosen to serve at either the YMWA Centre for Special Education, the American Center for Oriental Research, the Al Hussein Society Centre for the Physically Challenged or the Amman Baccalaureate School.

For 16 years these volunteers, representing the Ambassador Foundation, demonstrated a commitment to dedicated service, whether helping the Jordanian people in serving those among them with disabilities or student teaching at their foremost baccalaureate school. This committed example of service resulted in building some wonderful personal relationships—relationships that have lasted for years. It also established a reputation of trust, honesty and integrity

**God's intent is to have His people live what they believe and not merely preach it.**

that has long been remembered by members of the royal family in Jordan. In particular, a trusting relationship has been established with Princess Sarvath El Hassan (wife of His Royal Highness Prince Hassan of Jordan).

## Current project in Jordan

At the invitation of Jordan's royal family three years ago, the United Youth Corps resumed the Church's service to these various Jordanian institutions.

In the early 1980s, Princess Sarvath began the Young Muslim Women's Association Centre for Special Education in an effort to serve the needs of the many children in Jordan with disabilities. Since that time, the center has been staffed with personnel who have the training to assist and teach those with learning disabilities. United Youth Corps participants are able to assist these teachers in select classes working with the children and the staff. Needless to say, their presence and service is greatly appreciated.

The Youth Corps also serves at the Amman Baccalaureate



# e Middle East



with Matt & Mary Ann Bates



Jamie Franks in YMWA music class



Kelley Schreiber in YMWA art class

School where our volunteers work as student teachers. During their year at the school, in addition to teaching and working with the students, our volunteers gain insight into the cultural variations in teaching in this Middle Eastern country. And while these young people do not verbally preach Christianity, the fact that Christians from the West are willing to spend the better part of a year helping, serving, learning and building friendships in this Muslim country speaks volumes.

The third institution where our volunteers serve is the Regional Human Security Centre (RHSC). This organization is a unique research body started by His Royal Highness Prince Hassan bin Talal nine years ago to explore and recommend policies on both regional and international levels that deal with all aspects of human security, safety and care. The work of the RHSC is accomplished in the shadow of the many issues of poverty, war, conflict and ethnic disputes that exist throughout the Middle East.

These efforts are a close match with the desire of the United Church of God to abate the causes of human suffering and to teach and model the causes of peace. Youth Corps volunteers have the opportunity to contribute to this Arab country's secular efforts to seek solutions to human care and security challenges during some very troubled times in this region of the world.

## To serve a people

Again, United Youth Corps volunteers are in Jordan to serve, not to proselytize or preach. They prepare for this unique opportunity by learning about the culture and the issues that have led to the conflicts that exist in this part of the world. They understand that they are there to represent something bigger than themselves and a cause more important than the few people they are able to meet and serve

while there for a year.

So many in the world today will flaunt their brand of religion in the face of others, which often causes the recipient to turn his head and go the other way! The United Youth Corps program in Jordan is based on spiritual principles that, if followed, can ultimately lead to that elusive goal mankind has sought for millennia: peace.

We all know that trust cannot be demanded. It must be earned. In a world where trust has been broken between individuals and between nations for thousands of years, the trust that is built will only develop over a period of time. It can only happen when people know that they are valued, that they are loved and that they are important. Youth Corps volunteers understand that every person they meet and serve is important to our Creator, as is every teacher they assist or are supervised by.

We remind our volunteers that in this unique part of the world they must still continue to practice the godly values outlined in God's Word, even though the people they serve may not understand their values now. As we read in 1 Peter 2:12, this involves "having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation."

It has always been the intent of God to have His people live what they believe even more than merely saying or preaching it. United Youth Corps volunteers in Jordan are striving to do this as they pave the way for peace through their love for a people and through serving the needs of others.

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# Answers for Gen

**T**his series has focused on beginnings questions about creation and the earliest history of mankind as relayed in the first 11 chapters of Genesis. With chapter 12, the narrative changes and the focus turns to the life of the Hebrew patriarch Abraham, then of his son Isaac and then of his son Jacob, giving the origins and the history of the Israelite people. Consequently, the end of chapter 11 provides us with a natural break in the Genesis account.

So with this installment we will end the series, wrapping up with some final questions about the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

## 1. Who wrote the book of Genesis?

The Bible itself reveals that it was Moses, in the 1400s B.C., who wrote the first five books of the Bible (except for the last chapter of Deuteronomy about Moses' death, which was probably added by Joshua, Moses' successor and author of the following book Joshua).

**In recent centuries critics have questioned Moses' authorship and developed complicated theories about the works of multiple authors being meshed together centuries later.**

Many passages in these first five books of the Bible actually mention that Moses wrote down what was thereby recorded in the Scriptures. For example, God told Moses, *Write this* for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua (Exodus 17:14, emphasis added throughout). Also notice Exodus 24:4: *And Moses wrote* all the words of the LORD. There are many other passages where Moses writes down God's words (Exodus 34:27; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 31:9, 22).

Furthermore, Jesus Himself testified that Moses wrote part of the Bible. He said: *Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed*

*Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?* (John 5:45-47).

Christ later explained, *These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me* (Luke 24:44). He was referring to the three main sections of the Old Testament. The Law of Moses is the first section, the first five books of the Bible, also known as the Pentateuch or Torah.

*The New Bible Dictionary* explains, *For centuries both Judaism and Christianity accepted without question the biblical tradition that Moses wrote the Pentateuch* (1982, p. 904). In recent centuries, however, critics have questioned Moses' authorship and developed complicated theories about the works of multiple authors being meshed together centuries later.

Yet writing existed long before Moses. Indeed, it appears likely that earlier documents or oral traditions were compiled by Moses in producing Genesis. Several sections begin with the generations of , each serving to advance the narrative (see Genesis 2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2 King James Version). These may well have been ancestral records passed down, which Moses would have put together with editing under God's inspiration.

The Bible does not specifically mention individuals creating written records before Moses, though archaeological discoveries confirm that several writing systems existed in the Middle East well before Moses' time that would have made it possible. However, it is not *necessary* that Moses had such records at his disposal. Those who believe in God's inspiration understand that God could well have revealed everything necessary to him had He wanted to.

For more on this, refer to the introduction to the book of Genesis in *The Good News Bible Reading Program* (at [www.ucg.org/brp/brparchive.htm](http://www.ucg.org/brp/brparchive.htm)).



# Genesis

## Part 8

Here are more frequently asked questions about Genesis, the book of origins.

by Mario Seiglie

**2. Many accounts in the first 11 chapters of Genesis are similar to the mythical narratives of ancient Mesopotamia, and some of these were written down well before Moses' writing of Genesis. Did the Bible borrow from these other accounts?**

It's important to note that just because one account of a distant historical event was written before another, it does not necessarily follow that the second account was taken from the first. Nations had histories that were transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation until they were finally put down in writing in different periods. How accurately historical events were transmitted in different cultures is the question.

The creation and Flood stories of the Babylonians and the Assyrians, for instance, do have many similarities with the biblical account but are laced with absurd myths. The Bible, on the other hand, presents the events in a strictly historical manner, leaving out the outlandish embellishments found in the accounts of other nations.

*Halley's Bible Handbook* explains: Epics of Creation, in various forms, on tablets which were in circulation before the time of Abraham, have been found in recent years in the ruins of Babylon, Nineveh, Nippur and Ashur, which are strikingly similar to the Creation Hymn of Genesis. These Babylonian and Assyrian Creation stories are all grossly Polytheistic. But with so many points of similarity to the Genesis account, it would seem that they must have had a common origin. Are not these corrupted traditions a testimony to the fact of a divine original?

The Bible represents the human race as starting with a belief in One God, and that Polytheistic Idolatry was a later development. This is directly contrary to the present day theory [of] a gradual development upward from Animism. The Bible view has received recent confirmation from Archaeology. Dr. Stephen Langdon, of Oxford University, has found that the earliest Babylonian inscriptions suggest that man's first religion was a belief in One God, and from that there was a rapid decline into Polytheism and Idolatry (1965, p. 62).

Experts attest that the Bible gives the most accurate and factual account, while other accounts have been distorted through legend and myth.

As the respected biblical scholar Dr. Gleason Archer notes about the Flood account: Some comparative religionists have suggested that the Babylonian myth was earlier than the Hebrew, and that the compilers of Genesis 7 and 8 borrowed from it. But this is rendered most unlikely in view of the significant contrast between the two. Thus, the ark built by Utnapishtim [in the Babylonian account] was completely cubic, equipped with six decks for all the animals to be quartered in. A more impractical and unseaworthy craft could hardly be imagined. But Noah's ark was three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits deep — an ideal set of measurements for an ocean liner.

Moreover, the stark contrast between the quarrelsome and greedy gods of the Babylonian pantheon and the majestic holiness of [the God of the Bible], the absolute Sovereign over the universe, furnishes the strongest basis for classifying the Gilgamesh account as a garbled, polytheistic *derivative* from the same original episode as that contained in Genesis 7-8. The Hebrew account is couched in terms of *sober history* and *accurate recording* that reflect a source derived from the persons who were actually involved in this adventure. The Gilgamesh Epic is far more mythical and vague (*New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 1982, p. 84).

We see, then, that it was not the biblical writer who did the borrowing from the Babylonian or the Assyrian sources of the creation and the Flood. The biblical account faithfully recorded the events from the beginning of mankind's history, while other nations with their different languages, cultures and corrupted religions blended their myths and legends into what had actually transpired.

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# Coping With Cliques

by Becky Sweat

*No one likes to be excluded, but it happens often in our society. Here is valuable information to help you know how to respond to the problem of cliques.*

**Y**ou know the feeling. You walk into the school cafeteria and see four cheerleaders sitting together at a table and know you're not welcome to join them. Every Friday, you hear a certain group of students talking about their "big plans" for Saturday night and wish that just once you'd be invited. At church services, you can't help but notice the same group of guys who are always talking with each other and wonder why they've never tried to get to know you. Somehow there are certain groups of people you just don't "clique" with.

A clique is a tightly knit group of friends who hang out together. Often these groups are based on common interests and pursuits. Jocks, cheerleaders, skateboarders, band members, drama students and so on have a high degree of interaction and time spent together already because of their shared involvement in activities. Cliques may also form based on similarity of personality, behavior, social status or income level. For instance, teens who come from families deemed upper class or who dress in similar ways may gravitate toward each other.

Certainly, it's wonderful to have pals who have similar interests, viewpoints, personalities and backgrounds. You can't help but feel a special connection with those who have the same perspectives and are going through similar experiences as you. God designed us to need and want close relationships with others. Truly, friendship is a very positive thing—that is, as long as it doesn't turn into a clique.

One problem with cliques is that they tend to be exclusive and hinder wider social interaction. Family counselor Joshua Straub, Ph.D., of Lynchburg, Virginia, explains: "If you've simply got a group of good friends, it may not always be the same people hanging out together. Sometimes new people might do things with your group, or you may get

together with someone who isn't part of your normal circle of friends. Cliques, on the other hand, don't usually mix with people outside their social circle."

Another problem is that cliques promote caste mentality. Straub continues: "Typically cliques look down on people who are outside their group. This sets up a superiority mind-set of 'I'm better than you because I'm hanging with the popular crowd.' Once you get that mind-set, the focus becomes you and your circle of friends, and you don't show concern for other people like you should."

Cliques go against everything the Bible talks about in regard to reaching out to others and holding them in high esteem. For starters, Romans 12:16 says, "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position" (New International Version). Philippians 2:3-4 states, "In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

Too often cliques create misery for outsiders they've determined to be unworthy of association. "Those who are excluded from a **clique** may suffer painful emotional feelings of rejection," says Katherine Klehr, Ph.D., an adolescent counselor in Northfield, Illinois. "This can lead to feelings of depression, loneliness and anxiety." That is especially true if the clique mocks or bullies outsiders, which often is the case.

Trying to fit into a **clique** can have negative consequences for clique members as well. Usually there are a couple "ringleaders" in a clique who determine the rules of the group, including deciding who's in the group and how to treat outsiders. These ringleaders may pressure members of the clique to start behaving badly. "You might be pushed to say and do mean or nasty things to others that your conscience tells you are hurtful and wrong," Klehr says.



Not only does this tarnish your character, but if you once had friends outside the clique, you may be pressured to completely sever these relationships. You may also miss out on making *new* friends. There may very well be people outside your clique whom you could connect with, but you'll never know because you aren't "allowed" to associate with them.

Whether you're on the outside or inside, cliques can cause a lot of damage to you and others. But there are ways to deal with this challenge.

### If you're excluded from a clique:

You may be upset because a clique won't accept you, but if you give it more thought, maybe you wouldn't be. "If a clique doesn't treat other people well—they're a very closed group, they're unkind or stuck-up—you need to ask yourself, is that something you really want to be a part of? Remember, if you were in that clique, you would have to do the same things," Straub says.

Instead of trying to gain acceptance with a clique, focus your attention on people who seem interested in getting to know you and who will be a positive influence. "Sometimes teens are intent on being part of what's perceived as the 'cool crowd,' but really, there are a lot of other places to look for friends," Klehr says.

She suggests you explore new friendship opportunities. Join a club. Volunteer in your community. Get involved in different church and school social activities and sports programs. Show a genuine interest in the people you meet. "The more you reach out, the wider your circle of friends will be," Klehr says.

Be open to building friendships with people you never considered before. Perhaps there are other teens at school or church whom you've never really tried to get to know. Maybe you've had some preconceived notions about them being "different" or having nothing in common with you. Now is the time to talk with them! You might find out you have a lot of similarities to connect on after all.

And don't neglect to pray about the situation. Ask God to bring friends into your life who will be a positive influence. God cares about you and about whom you spend your time with. He knows you need companionship.

### If you're inside a clique

Take an honest assessment of how your group of friends functions. When all of you get together, are you free to invite others to join in? Would you be hassled if you socialized with someone the group doesn't like? Do members of your group treat others badly? Probably all groups of friends have some

cliquish tendencies that can be improved. But what if you are in a full-blown clique?

If you believe your group of friends is a destructive clique, be willing to take a stand. Refuse to go along with bad behavior. Figure out the best way to tell others in your group how you feel. While there's the very real possibility they'll turn their backs on you, you can have a clear conscience knowing you did the right thing. Of course, there's a chance that at least some of them will take your words to heart and change their ways.

Just as the person who's excluded from a clique should look outside that group for friends, so should you. Now is the time to widen your friendship circle.

Get to know some new people—newcomers to your church or school, people who seem shy or lonely or individuals you've seen at school for years but never talked to much before. Instead of only chatting with your pals at church, spend some time talking to people you don't know really well. When you go out with your buddies, invite someone different to come along every now and then. You're bound to make some new friends.

Even if it becomes clear you don't have a lot in common with some of these other people, getting to know them is still worthwhile.

"It's important to not just surround yourself with one set or group of people, but with the rich, the poor, the quiet, the strong, the weak, the bright, the not-so-bright, the popular, the unpopular, the jock, the non-jock—many different types of people," Straub says. "This will help you understand and value the diversity and the uniqueness of other individuals, so that you're then able to open up to them and care about them."

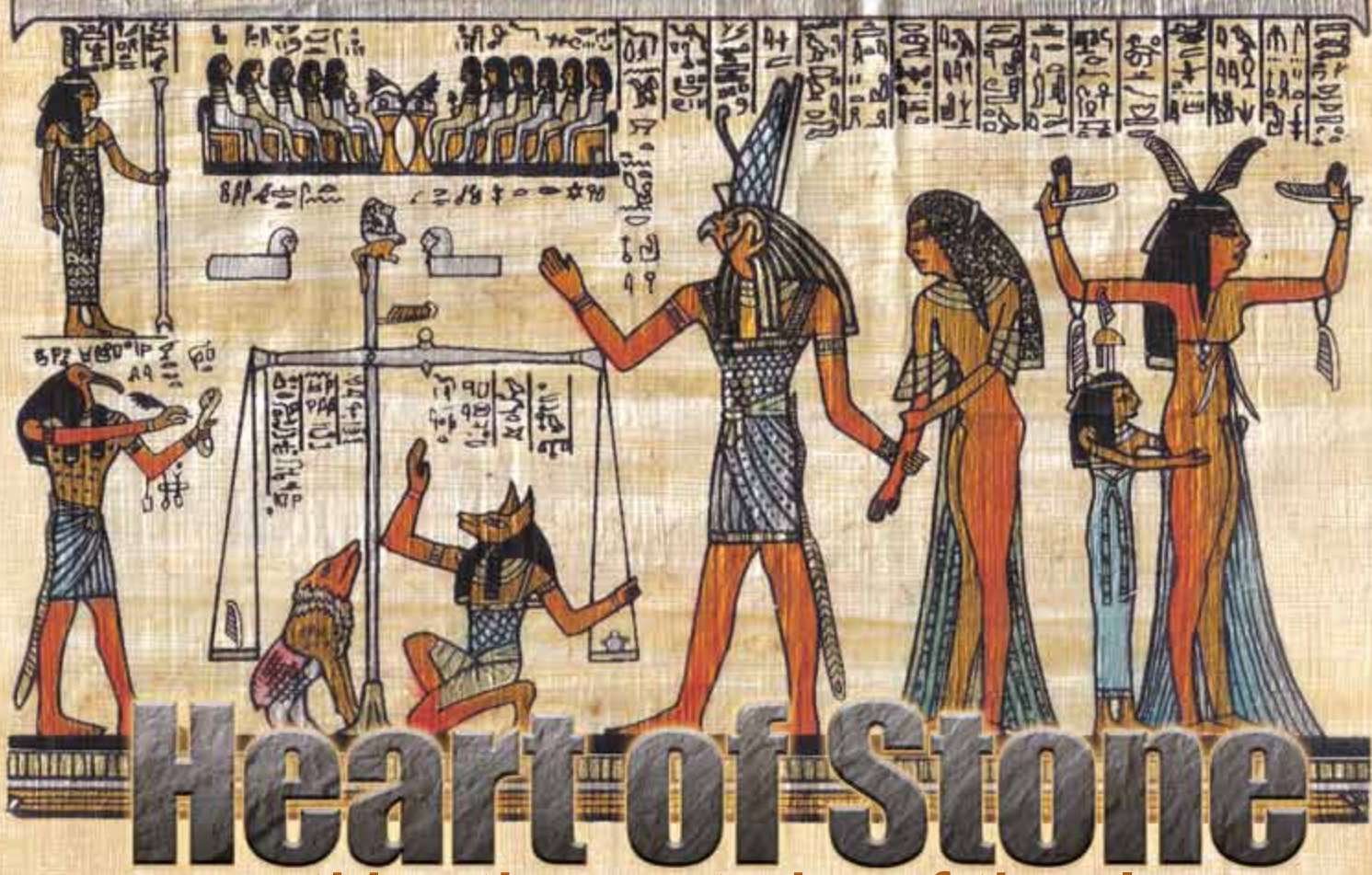
This isn't to say that you can't have best friends you're with most of the time. You may very well feel closest to those with similar personalities and backgrounds. Even Jesus was closer to some friends than others. But you, like Him, should always be open to getting to know new people.

Now that you're more aware of what cliques are and why they're a problem, strive to notice the people around you who are in need of friends. God wants us to develop an outgoing concern for others. Breaking free from cliques is a step in the right direction.

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# Heart of Stone

## Unearthing the Mysteries of the Plagues

by Jim Springer and Heather Bennett

**L**ike swirling mist, the heavy blackness gripping the palace begins to vaporize and melt into radiance. But even in the filtered light, Pharaoh's face is transformed. His jaw sets. His eyes narrow. A smirk creeps across his lips. Somehow, impossibly, he lies to himself again: *I am still in control...*

What is *wrong* with this guy? After all the blood, bugs and blisters he suffers through—powerful proofs that the God of Israel means business!—he still wants to wear his crown that looks like a bowling pin and spit in God's face? Unbelievably, yes.

God explains again and again that Pharaoh refused to free Israel in the Exodus because *Pharaoh's heart was hardened* (see Exodus 8:15 for example). But what does *that* mean? A little digging into archaeology reveals a depth to this story we might never have imagined. Better hold on tight—we're going into the tomb!

### A heart of stone

The torchlight scatters across the cool corridor walls, illuminating cracked murals of stiff-looking gods and goddesses as we brush past. Ancient Egyptians looked to this ethereal multitude for guidance, rain, health, fertility, light, hope for life after death, you name it. Of course, all these jobs might overwhelm one god, so they conjured up dozens of deities and divided the duties. But when the true God set about rescuing the children of Israel, He would also prove once and for all His supremacy over those so-

called gods (Exodus 12:12; 18:10-11).

Pharaoh himself was considered a god in the flesh. In fact, he was called an incarnation of Ra (the sun god) and Osiris (the life-giver), the two most important gods in Egypt! In the last two plagues, however, the God of Israel showed his power over both the sun and life itself (Exodus 10:21-22; 12:29-30). To the Israelites and Egyptians who were watching, there could be no question that Israel's God was the One who was *really* in control.

But Pharaoh hardened his heart, stubbornly denying his people compassion and refusing to let the children of Israel go. This opened the door for God to show all His wonders (Exodus 11:9).

In the tomb, our steps echo hollowly against the limestone as we approach the heart of the chamber. Before us, the sarcophagus rises out of the gloom like some sort of alien futon. It's plastered all over with scenes from the Book of the Dead, but one in particular catches our eyes. The heart of the deceased sits in a jar on one pan of a giant scale, balancing against the feather of truth on the other. Below, an absurd-looking creature crouches, ready to gobble up the heart should it dip within reach.

Egyptians believed that after death, the deceased had to enter the hall of judgment and reply to a long list of charges: "I have not spoken lies. I have not uttered evil words. I have not caused pain..." If he said he was innocent of all these sins, he would live forever.



The catch was that his heart would be taken out and placed on the scale to serve as a lie detector! The human heart, the Egyptians reasoned, would always reveal the truth, weighing down the scale if the dead person was really guilty—and deservedly placing it in range to be the wacky creature’s mid-morning snack.

As this was a rather dismal state of affairs, the ingenious Egyptians cooked up a plot to make it so the heart would not “tell on” the dead person. They carved a charm shaped like a heart as well as a scarab (the fancy name for their sacred dung beetle) out of solid rock. They then tied this heart of stone close over the mummy’s heart or put it in his chest cavity. Incantations supposedly made the heart take on the qualities of the heart scarab, *hardening* it so that it could be dishonest and not weigh down the scale (Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, 1997, pp. 127-128).

The Bible describes God as the One who judges us. People find a way to justify everything they do, “but the LORD weighs the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2). In sharp contrast to Egyptian beliefs, when we come before the true God, we cannot hide what we’ve done. We must admit our mistakes and repent of our sins, for though we may lie even to ourselves, God knows the truth: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:8-9). Pharaoh actually confessed to sin twice (Exodus 9:27; 10:16); but he immediately reverted to his obstinacy both times, remaining deceived about himself and the reality he was facing.

Sadly, the children of Israel also hardened their hearts during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, even after all the miracles God had performed for them (Hebrews 3:8). They allowed themselves to be deceived into believing that God would not protect them, so they refused to obey Him.

### A new heart

On the other hand, we have the example of David, the one God called “a man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22). In the darkest chapter of his life, David had sex with another man’s wife. Things got worse when he tried to cover it up

by having the man killed in battle. However, when God confronted him about the sin, David was horrified by his actions and confessed unreservedly and without retraction, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Samuel 12:13). Admitting the truth, He responded to God’s correction and turned his life around 180 degrees.

This was in contrast to human nature. The natural human heart, we must understand, is not as inclined to reveal the truth as the Egyptians believed. God declares that the “heart is deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17:9). The hardened heart is tricky! It makes us believe we are right, no matter what we do. Thankfully, God can enable us to see the truth and change. But that sometimes requires discipline to help us (Hebrews 12:5-11; Revelation 3:19).

How do we respond to God? Are we like Pharaoh? Do we confess sin only when we are being punished and soon harden our hearts again to disobey Him?

God talks about a time in the future when His people will have a different attitude—they will want to obey Him from the heart! God promises, “I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:33). No longer will we have hearts of stone, because God says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26).

Do we see ourselves as we really are? Do we respond as we should to God’s gentle correction? If we choose a stubborn, self-deceiving hardened heart like Pharaoh, God will have to use stronger discipline to get our attention!

A major lesson of the Exodus is that God is *always* in control. Next time you see a heart scarab or Pharaoh’s goofy crown, remember that God will save us out of “Egypt”—enslavement to the sinful ways of this world—as long as we don’t harden our hearts against Him.

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## God’s showdown with Egypt’s fraudulent gods

On a mission to free the Egyptians from their misplaced faith, God was determined to prove His ultimate power over their false gods. Each of the 10 plagues was a challenge directed at specific Egyptian deities, aimed to completely destroy their reputation (Exodus 12:12; 18:10-11).

Take that, **Khnum!** Your precious Nile River is full of blood!

**Heget**, you have a frog’s head! Why don’t you just tell your millions of

relatives that overstayed their welcome here to hop on home?

What marvelous control you have over your insects, **Khepri!** The lice and flies sure seem to be obeying you!

All the livestock is dying, **Apis!** As the bull god, how does that make you feel?

Come on, **Sekhmet!** All the Egyptians are praying to you to heal their boils! What seems to be the problem?

All hail **Nut** and **Hathor** goddesses of

heaven—except they can’t stop hailing on you!

**Shu**, as the god of the air, how could you just allow all these locusts to come to Egypt and tear the place apart?

Why is it so dark? **Ra? Atum?** Can you shed some light on the situation?

**Osiris**—they say you are the giver of life. Where were you last night when all the firstborn of Egypt died?

(compare with Exodus 7:14–11:9).



# God's Feasts

## Answer the Big Questions

by Ken Treybig

### Part 1

Just as teachers prepare lesson plans for their students, God, through His feasts, provides a lesson plan for humanity.

**W**hat is man's destiny? How do we reach it? What is the future of our planet?

Like a good teacher, God has a lesson plan to answer these big questions in life. The answers are found in a series of special days that most people have left buried in the pages of the Bible—mistakenly believing them to be no longer relevant to life today. You can get your hands on the great Teacher's lesson plan and be way ahead of the rest of the class. Here's how.

### Big questions answered

The answers to these important questions about human life and our future are found in the feast days God laid out in Leviticus 23. Many relegate these festivals of the Old Testament to harvest celebrations and dismiss them as relevant to only agricultural societies of ancient years. Yet the early New Testament Church continued to observe them, and the pages of the New Testament are just the tools needed to unlock the real meaning of the feasts of God.

God's purpose for human beings is to eventually make them part of His family. Notice how it is clearly yet simply put in Hebrews 2:10: "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing *many sons* to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect [or "complete"] through sufferings" (emphasis added).

Elsewhere in the New Testament, God compares the raising up of children and gathering them into His family to the growing and harvesting of crops (see Matthew 9:37-38; 13:30, 39; James 1:18; 5:7). And indeed, the physical harvests around the times of God's Holy Days parallel God's spiritual harvest of people to be His children. Let's look at each of God's feasts in turn.

### Passover

The lesson plan begins with the spring harvest cycle in the land of Israel. God begins by addressing the fact that human beings are cut off from Him and the destiny He offers (Isaiah 59:1-2). We are guilty of sin—violating God's law of righteousness (1 John 3:4)—and indeed cannot be righteous on our own (Romans 8:7). Romans 3:10 says that "there is none righteous, no, not one," and verse 23 of the same chapter says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This has earned for all the penalty of death (Romans 6:23).

Thankfully, God has made a way to satisfy justice and, at the same time, mercifully give people a "pass" on their sins. The festival of Passover explains the process. The slain lamb of this festival foreshadowed Jesus Christ willingly dying in our place. The blood of Jesus "cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), and through His death He "offered one sacrifice for sins forever" (Hebrews 10:12). The apostle Paul explicitly links Christ's offering of Himself with the feast of



Passover, saying, “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Indeed, Jesus was executed on the very day of Passover.

Thus Passover teaches us that the only way we can be cleared of guilt and reconciled to God is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—the divine Son of God—the one perfect life given to pay the penalty for all human sins. Of course, each of us must accept this sacrifice upon repentance of sins—as represented in partaking of the Passover symbols of unleavened bread and wine.

## Unleavened Bread

Once we’re washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ, are we free to go on living as we always have—continuing in a life defined by sin? Paul asked that question in Romans 6:1 and answered in the next verse with a resounding no! Indeed, a condition for forgiveness was repentance—committing to turn away from sin. Paul further explains in Romans 6 that baptism pictures death to our old way of life and that being raised up from the waters of baptism pictures new life—as Jesus was resurrected out of His tomb to spirit life.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread—in which we avoid bread containing leavening (an agent such as yeast that causes bread to rise) and instead eat unleavened bread—pictures living a fresh, new way. Paul described keeping this feast in 1 Corinthians 5:8 as leaving behind the old “leaven of malice and wickedness” and living a life of “sincerity and truth.” God’s lesson plan says that once we’re pardoned through the Passover sacrifice of Christ, our response should be to live a new, clean, “unleavened” life as a Christian. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread occur at the start of Israel’s spring barley harvest.

## Pentecost

The next feast explains that we cannot live that unleavened life on our own strength. We must have the help of God through the power of His Holy Spirit. The physical, fleshly human mind “does not obey God’s law. It can’t” (Romans 8:7, New International Reader’s Version). But when God’s Spirit dwells in us, we’re not “controlled by [our] sinful nature” (Romans 8:9, New Living Translation).

It was on the day of Pentecost that God chose to give the Holy Spirit to all the followers of Jesus Christ shortly after His resurrection from the grave (Acts 2).

In the Old Testament, Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Harvest and the Feast of Weeks, celebrated the firstfruits of the wheat harvest (Exodus 23:16; 34:22). And it represented the harvesting of people to be spiritual firstfruits of God’s family (James 1:18).

Pentecost is the last of the biblical feasts that occur during the spring in the northern hemisphere. In part 2, we’ll consider those feasts that come in late summer and autumn.

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## Stolen Identity

Continued from page 5

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### Jewish lifestyle obscured

The new, revised Jesus known by most today has largely been stripped of His Jewish background and culture. Even though the Bible clearly states, “It is evident that our Lord arose from Judah” (Hebrews 7:14), most claiming to worship Him today are uncomfortable with—if not outright hostile toward—His Jewish background.

Many simply don’t realize that Jesus lived a life that included regularly going to the synagogue on Saturday, the weekly Sabbath (Luke 4:16), observing the biblical Holy Days (Leviticus 23; Luke 2:41; Matthew 26:17; John 7:2, 10) and not eating pork or shellfish (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14).

Those who know of Jesus’ lifestyle commonly think that He deemed it too harsh and demanding and that He lived by it in place of us so no one would ever have to follow its requirements again. But Jesus never indicated that He was now rejecting the culture in which He had lived or that He wanted His followers to reject the biblical instruction regarding these practices.

After Jesus’ death, His disciples continued to follow His lifestyle, and they taught new believers to do the same. Paul said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). When Paul traveled, he continued to worship God on Saturdays (Acts 13:5, 14; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4), just as Jesus had done.

When the gentiles (non-Israelites) of the city of Antioch wanted to hear Paul’s words, they assembled with the Jews the next Sabbath (Acts 13:42-44). Instead of accepting the clear biblical record, many have embraced the false argument that Paul taught the gentiles to meet on Sunday instead of Saturday. It’s commonly assumed that the day of worship was changed to honor the day of Jesus’ resurrection (another falsehood since Jesus rose from the grave on Saturday around sunset).

Toward the end of the first century, Jesus’ disciple John wrote: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6). So he, too, taught believers to live their lives as Jesus had done. How ironic it is that anyone actually following Jesus’ lifestyle today is thought to be *unchristian*. Such thinking simply reflects the profound success of those who designed today’s counterfeit Jesus.

To learn more about the real Jesus of Nazareth, how His message has been distorted and how He wants you to live, see the full version of this article in our sister magazine, *The Good News*. We also suggest that you request our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

Are you going to follow a cleverly designed myth—a fictional character without a biblical basis—or the real Jesus Christ? Choose the real, authentic Jesus for a better life now and in the future.

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**David Treybig** is managing editor of *Vertical Thought* and pastors United Church of God congregations in Tampa and St. Petersburg, Florida.

## Godly Service Is More Than Membership

Looking out of my office window in the Student Union, I can see the University of Illinois quad filled with students passing out flyers for upcoming service projects and selling baked goods to raise money for student organizations as their peers rush to class.

With so many competing demands in college, I have always wondered what motivates certain students to get involved in campus and community causes, while others choose to focus their attention elsewhere. College students today have tremendous opportunities to round out and enhance their education, both inside and outside the classroom, as they serve others.

Feeling a bit nostalgic, I recall my transition to college and the student groups I participated in during my undergraduate years at UCLA. As a freshman entering a new phase of life, all of the possibilities on campus seemed overwhelming! Even though I had been very involved in high school, this new environment was intimidating, with hundreds of student groups to join, thousands of new people to meet and seemingly infinite opportunities in which to invest my time and energy.

On such a large campus, I often felt insignificant and overlooked, not knowing where I fit in or how I could contribute. I later realized that this feeling not only pervades college campuses, but it also affects many individuals in society at large who are searching for meaning and purpose in their lives.

While working to balance my studies and part-time job (along with everything else that comes with transitioning to a new place!), I became aware of service opportunities that existed on campus, and my desire to contribute to something larger than myself began to grow. Over the next few months, I saw many of my friends become members of various campus organizations, and I also began to seek out specific needs in my new community where I could serve and contribute.

During my sophomore year, I joined our residence hall council, through which I had the opportunity to help make decisions that benefited other students living on campus. In this role, I was no longer simply a resident. Now I was serving and advocating for my peers. It was through this experience that I learned first hand the significant impact that can be achieved through a collaborative team effort in which everyone shares a common purpose and a commitment to serving the larger needs of a residential community.



Getting involved in service activities and organizations while in college, in addition to serving in our local church congregations, helps lay the foundation for lifelong service.

As I gained a broader perspective, I began to better see how godly service is so far removed from the typical human motivation of acquiring power and status. It truly only comes from a desire to *serve* others, while developing character and being a positive influence wherever a person finds oneself in life. While I'm still a work in progress, I have learned that when we serve without promoting the *self* and place the emphasis on *others* and meeting *their* needs, we emulate Jesus Christ's supreme example of service (Mark 10:45).

Getting involved in service activities and organizations while in college, in addition to serving in our local church congregations, helps lay the foundation for lifelong service and builds necessary character for future leadership roles in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 5:10). Let's be more than just members of a congregation or an organization. Let's be a part of God's larger solution for everlasting change through giving of our lives in serving others today.

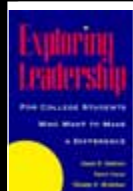
**Leslie Schwartz, M.Ed.**, loves working with college students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to foster their leadership development. She attends the Bloomington, Illinois, United Church of God congregation. Have a question, comment or idea for a future topic for this new column? Contact Leslie at [VTLifeOnCampus@gmail.com](mailto:VTLifeOnCampus@gmail.com).



# Student Voices

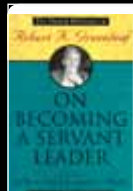
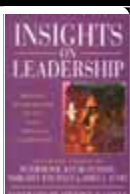
## For Your Bookshelf

Here are some great books and publications that can help you learn more about serving others. The first four can be found in bookstores and libraries; the last two can be found free on the Internet at our Web sites:



**Exploring Leadership: For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference** by Susan Komives, Nancy Lucas and Timothy McMahon (2006).

**Insights on Leadership: Service, Stewardship, Spirit and Servant-Leadership** by Larry Spears (1998).



**On Becoming a Servant Leader** by Robert Greenleaf, Don Frick and Larry Spears (1996).

**Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest** by Peter Block (1993).



**"The Lesson of Foot Washing"** by Jerold Aust (*The Good News*, March/April 1997, online at [GNmagazine.org](http://GNmagazine.org)).

**"Credibility: Vital for Service"** by Stephen Clark (*Vertical Thought*, July-September 2005, online at [VerticalThought.org](http://VerticalThought.org))



**Learn more at [VerticalThought.org](http://VerticalThought.org)**



## Getting Involved in College

Here's what other students and recent college graduates had to say when asked, "What campus/community organizations did you join in college, and what did you learn from your involvement?"

*I got involved heavily with organizations surrounding my major, as I saw it as a good networking opportunity to be with people who have similar career paths. It has proven useful since graduating from college. I also did volunteer work at youth camps outside the college atmosphere. Staying connected with organizations and groups that align with your spiritual beliefs will strengthen and ground you.*

**Male graduate student, Missouri**

*My spiritual beliefs really drove my motivation to be involved in service work. If you really believe that God loves all people and does not play favorites, then there really is no excuse for not helping those who happen to be in less fortunate circumstances than yourself. The*

***If you really believe that God loves all people and does not play favorites, then there's no excuse for not helping those in less fortunate circumstances.***

*Bible is filled with exhortations to help the poor, the vulnerable and the sick. For me, college was an amazing opportunity to channel my energy for helping others through some of the many, many service organizations thriving on my campus.*

**Female graduate student, California**

*Through my participation in service-learning trips to North Carolina and Mississippi, I worked with people of different religious backgrounds to repair hurricane-damaged homes. I found these experiences to be instrumental in helping me develop the attitude and attributes of servant leadership—both through serving where needs exist and being a "light" to others of various backgrounds (Matthew 5:14-16). These projects also forced me to expand my view of service as something to practice outside the Church as well as inside.*

**Female graduate student, North Carolina**

*Through my involvement in the Biomedical Engineering Society in graduate school, I saw the value of working for something for which you aren't necessarily compensated. This experience helped me put Colossians 3:23 into practice, because it doesn't say, "And whatever you do, do it heartily as long as you get paid for it accordingly." The glory of our service goes directly back to God.*

**Male graduate student, California**

## Down on the Farm

FarmVille, a Facebook-based multiplayer game, is an amazing story of rapid growth. When Zynga, the game's parent company, launched the game last June, it grew to 25,000 players in 24 hours and to a million a few days later.

The game is based on farming, planting, growing and harvesting imaginary crops. Players hail from all over the globe and can virtually arrange their farms next to each other. Some players feel they are learning to appreciate the toils of their ancestors who lived off the soil. Others think it's just good, clean fun and has little to do with the realities of actual farming (Kelly Jane Torrance, "FarmVille Turning Hipsters Into Farmers," *The Washington Times*, Oct. 16, 2009).

On a recent episode of his talk show, psychologist Dr. Phil McGraw confronted a mom who was obsessed with the game and neglecting her family, telling her, "You have a ridiculous addiction to a ridiculous computer game that's interfering with your ability to be a mother." His prescription? "Get out of FarmVille—start a garden for real!" (*Dr. Phil*, Jan. 20, 2010).

## 5 hours or fewer

**Regular sleep time that can lead to depression and thoughts of suicide in teenagers, according to a Columbia University study.**

—"Lack of Sleep Might Be Linked to Suicidal Thoughts in Teens," Bloomberg News, Jan. 2, 2010

## Thriving in a Tough Economy

During difficult economic times, employers streamline their businesses and keep only the most valuable employees. So how do they define what's valuable?

According to an editorial by columnist Thomas Friedman, creativity, better service and added skills are the edge employees will need to keep their jobs. He contends that just being average will no longer be enough as the job market gets tougher. Initiative will win out over complacency, so be willing to go the extra mile ("The New

Untouchables," *The New York Times*, Oct. 20, 2009).

Jesus Christ spoke of this quality in Matthew 5:41: "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." In the Roman world at that time, anyone could be involuntarily required to carry burdens or messages for the Roman authorities for one mile. Christ directed His followers to go beyond by doubling that mile requirement. This willingness to voluntarily do just a bit more can be a job-saving edge in a tight economy.

## Healthy Candy?

Even if the package says "all-natural," is it really good for you?

Necco, a 162-year-old candy brand made by a company in Massachusetts, is going "all-natural" with its sweet wafers. Coloring will be derived from natural sources like beet juice, purple cabbage, cocoa powder and turmeric, but the flavors will stay the same. However, the green, lime-flavored wafer will be gone, as green is too difficult to manufacture naturally. The trend for natural candy and an interest in vintage candy brands are fueling Necco's decision ("Necco Goes All-Natural,"



Associated Press, Nov. 3, 2009).

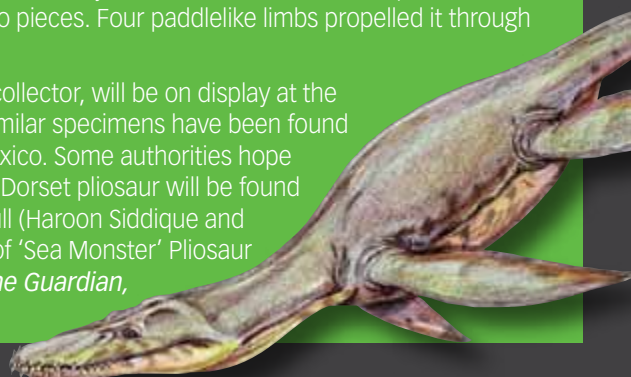
However, too much of any sweet is not good, no matter how natural it is. Proverbs 25:16 clarifies this principle: "Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit." Graphic, but accurate.

## Pliosaur Fossil Found

Found recently on the Dorset coast of southwestern England was the skull of an enormous, prehistoric seagoing reptile measuring nearly 8 feet long (2.4 meters). Experts estimate that the entire creature could have been more than 52 feet long. A *Tyrannosaurus rex* would have been tiny in comparison.

Strong neck muscles and enormous jaws allowed the creature, a pliosaur, to crunch and shake its prey to pieces. Four paddlelike limbs propelled it through the water.

The skull, found by a local collector, will be on display at the Dorset County Museum. Similar specimens have been found in the Arctic Ocean and Mexico. Some authorities hope that further portions of the Dorset pliosaur will be found in the same area as the skull (Haroon Siddique and agencies, "Fossilised Skull of 'Sea Monster' Pliosaur Found on Dorset Coast," *The Guardian*, Oct. 27, 2009).





## Genetic Modification Troubles Crop Up

Around 85 percent of corn grown in America is genetically engineered to resist pests. Much of it has *Bacillus thuringiensis* (or *Bt*) embedded in its genes. *Bt* is also a component of an insecticide considered mild and sprayed on organic crops.

However, growers of genetically modified corn are increasingly flouting regulations designed to keep corn borers and corn rootworms from becoming resistant to the pesticide. "Refuge fields" planted with conventional corn allow the pests to feed on unmodified crops and thus avoid developing resistance. But many farmers are ignoring this federally mandated requirement. This lack of compliance could result in the ineffectiveness of both *Bt*-modified corn and *Bt* spray, leaving crops unprotected (Elizabeth Weise, "Farmers Growing Genetically Engineered Corn Break Rules," *USA Today*, Nov. 5, 2009).

Those who question the ethics of genetically modified crops have predicted such problems, and this disregard of regulations will be added ammunition in the debate. God created some amazing genetic variability that scientists are still learning about. Excessive hybridization and genetic engineering bring with them big risks.



## Wait! There's More ...

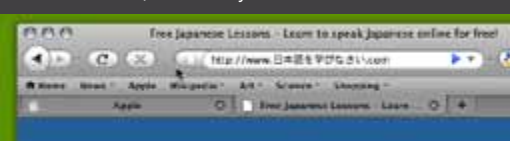
If you'd like to see more articles and our weekly commentaries, jump over to our Web site. There, you'll also have access to all of our back issues and answers to commonly asked questions.

[VerticalThought.org](http://VerticalThought.org)



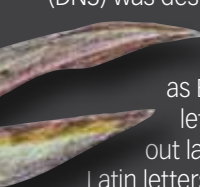
## Name That Domain!

When the concept of computer-to-computer communication was tested in the late 1960s, protocols and rules were based on existing technology—the telegraph, the telephone, etc. As new innovations in Internet science have progressed and users from all parts of the globe participate in growing numbers, a new system of domain



names is needed. Domain names, such as [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org), allow us to use letters rather than numbers to direct our Web browser to the correct site.

However, the Domain Name System (DNS) was designed by Paul Mockapetris in 1983 to be used with languages, such as English, that use Latin letters. Since this leaves out languages that don't use Latin letters, a new system is being created to address this problem. Soon many character systems will be able to be used on the Internet (Bill Thompson, "An Internet That Speaks to You," *BBC News*, Oct. 30, 2009).



## What a Pain!

One in three people feels genuine, physical discomfort when he or she sees another person in pain. Researchers at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom found that when they showed a video of an athlete being injured, most people in the study had a sympathetic emotional reaction. However, one third of the participants actually felt pain in their bodies corresponding to the part injured in the video.



The hypersensitive participants repeated the study while undergoing MRI scans. Researchers discovered that the part of the brain that handles pain exhibited greater activity when the injury video was shown (Richard Alleyne, "Some People Really Feel Your Pain," *The Daily Telegraph*, Dec. 22, 2009).

## Bad Fat, Good Fat, White Fat... Brown Fat?

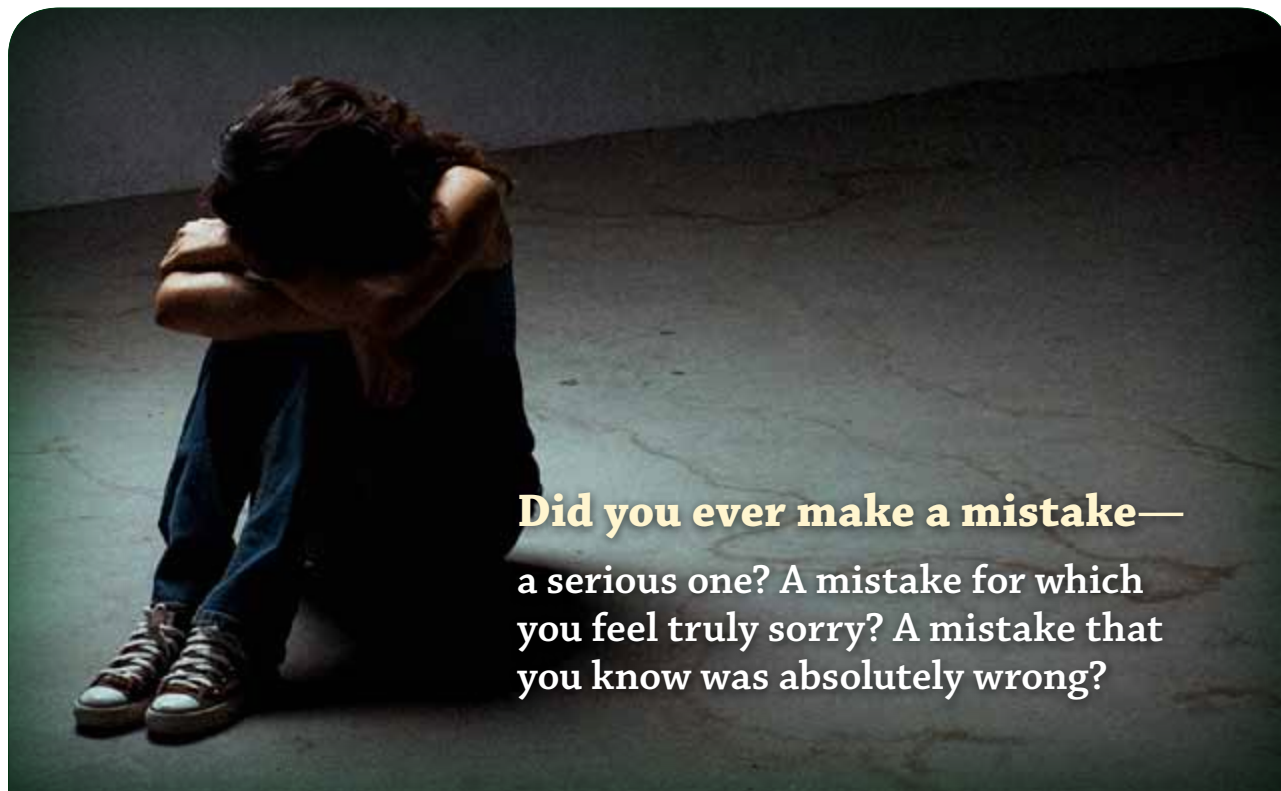
Is all the fat in our bodies exactly the same?

According to recent research, brown fat is a type of metabolically active lipid that helps the human body burn and use calories. All newborns have this type of fat, which helps them stay warm after leaving the womb.

Scientists have found that adults don't replace all of their brown fat with white fat as they age but keep certain stores of the brown variety that can, as experts hope, be reactivated to stimulate increased metabolism of unused



calories. Brown fat is also present at higher levels in healthy people who are not overweight. Researchers have found that it helps the human body cope with cold temperatures (Seda Terzyan, "A Scramble to Harness the Metabolic Power of Brown Fat," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 2, 2009).



**Did you ever make a mistake—**  
a serious one? A mistake for which  
you feel truly sorry? A mistake that  
you know was absolutely wrong?

**Your dilemma now is how to  
make the wrong right.**

What you need to know is that there is  
Someone who can help you do just that.

To get to where He is, you need to  
find the road to redemption.

**The One you seek awaits.**

To learn more about Him and how to  
find Him, please request or download today  
your free copy of the booklet

***Jesus Christ: The Real Story.***

