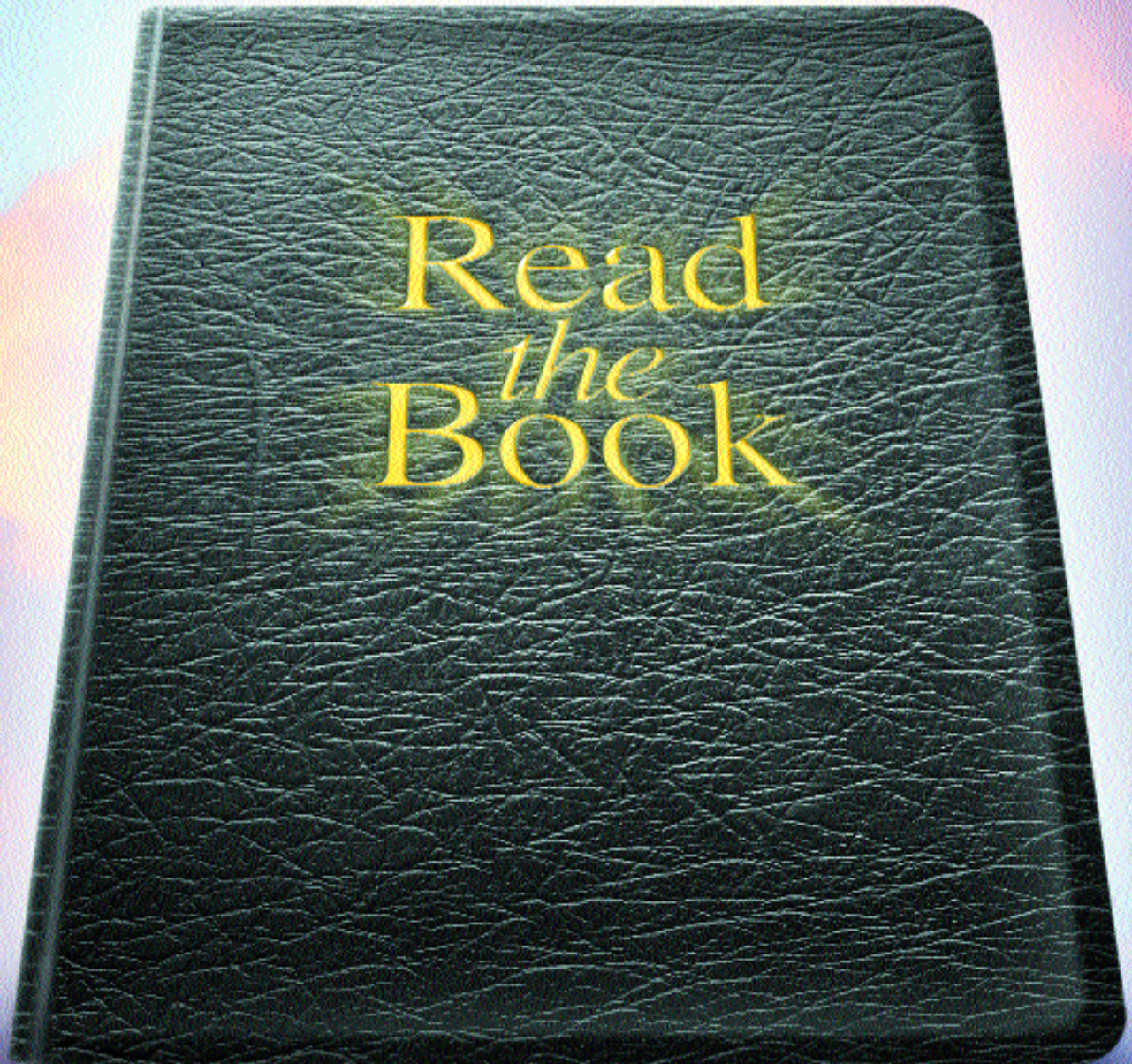


March/April 2000

# *The* Good News

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



What's "Left Behind" in the Rapture Theory? • Disbelief in the Bible  
The Rewards of Reading Together • The Good Friday–Easter Sunday Question

**Y**ou may have noticed something a little different on the cover of *The Good News*. We've added a subtitle that we think captures the essence of what *The Good News* is all about: *A Magazine of Understanding*.

The goal of *The Good News* is to provide just that: understanding. Other magazines report the news, whether it's current events, social trends or lighter fare like sports or personality news and tidbits. They provide *information*, but not *answers*. They don't address the really big, really important questions: Why are we here? What is our purpose in life? Why, in spite of astounding technological progress, can we not solve many of our most basic, longstanding problems? Why must the world be plagued with war, crime, violence and misery? Why are so many families, marriages and relationships—and ultimately even whole societies—breaking down? Why can't the world's best and brightest find solutions?

What other magazines don't tell you is *why* these events and trends take place, nor *where they are leading us*. It's a paradox that in this information age, a time characterized by an unprecedented explosion of knowledge, communication and data, we are still so lacking in the understanding of *what it all means*. We ache for answers to questions we can't quite put into words.

All good writers and editors have their sources to help them report and explain the news. The same is true of those who bring you *The Good News*. We, too, have a primary source. Although our source is eminently credible, many people are suspicious of it or flatly reject it. Most writers, editors and publishers completely disregard this source of true, lasting knowledge. Although they can report what's happening—the who, what, when, where and how—they cannot explain *why*.

It's one thing to report the news. It's quite a different matter to dissect and explain world trends and events in light of the Bible. That's where *The Good News* comes in.

Few of our writers are trained journalists. Their focus instead has been the world stage, the human condition and, most important, the Bible. That is our primary source, the only one that explains the *reason* for the events and trends we see around us.

Can you believe this source? Should you believe it? Those are the major questions we address in this issue.

If you want understanding, this source tells you where to begin: “. . . The LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

His words are preserved for us in the pages of the Bible, and the answers can come when you approach the questions from the right perspective and in the proper frame of mind. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding,” He tells us (Proverbs 9:10).

Read this issue carefully. Seek out the source of knowledge that so many ignore. *The Good News* is “a magazine of understanding” only because our primary source is a *book* of understanding. Study its pages, and the pages of *The Good News*, to gain the insight so many lack.

While we're on the subject of changes, we've made some additions—“Questions and Answers” and “Letters From Our Readers”—to make *The Good News* more helpful to you.

We get many letters on topics discussed in *The Good News* and on other biblical subjects. Often different people will raise the same questions. Sometimes we may address those questions in an article or booklet, but often they can be addressed briefly in a few paragraphs. We'll often address such topics in the new question-and-answer feature.

Other questions can be addressed in only a sentence or two. When appropriate, we'll respond in our new letters column. We'd like your feedback on what you find in *The Good News*. We think you'll find the thoughts of our international family of readers quite interesting. We look forward to hearing from you.

—Scott Ashley

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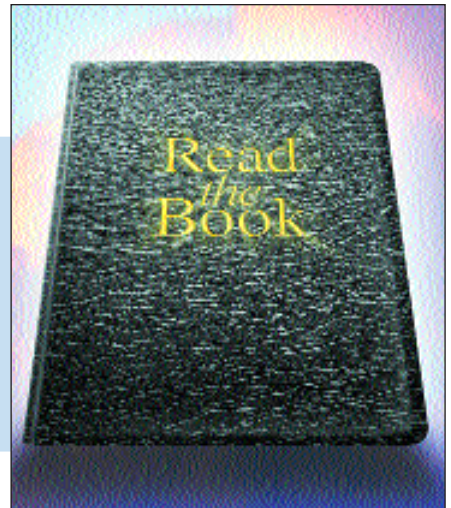
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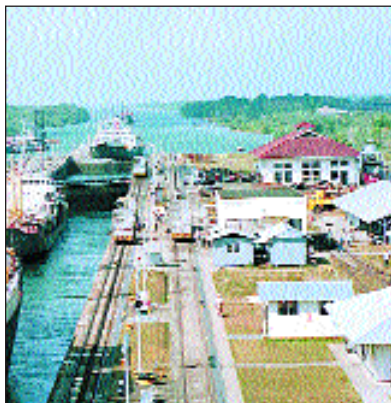
George Washington thought "it is impossible to rightly govern the world" without it. Queen Victoria exclaimed that it "accounts for the supremacy of England." Abraham Lincoln believed it is "the best gift God has ever given to man." Dwight Eisenhower said, "Our civilization is built upon its words." They were all discussing the same book, the Bible. They all read it. Isn't about time the rest of us did? . . . . . 4



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# Read *the* Book

*Advertising executive and writer Bruce Barton called it The Book Nobody Knows. No other book is more important to you and your future.*

by Scott Ashley

*"We reject with scorn all these learned and labored myths that Moses was but a legendary figure. We believe that the most scientific view, the most up-to-date and rationalistic conception, will find its fullest satisfaction in taking the Bible story literally."*

Sir Winston Churchill

**P**residents, monarchs and judges place their hands on it when they swear into office. Witnesses in trials place one hand on it while they swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Many brides carry it at their weddings.

It sits unobtrusively in desk and dresser drawers of many hotels and motels. Most residences have at least one, and often it occupies a place of honor on the mantel, coffee table or nightstand, where it gives the impression of being read daily.

If it were listed by booksellers, it would perpetually make the best-seller lists, with millions of copies sold and given away year after year. It has been translated into more than 2,000 languages and dialects.

This book is, of course, the Bible.

But, popular though it is, how many people ever take the time to read it?

Last year a survey by the Barna Research Group, a research firm specializing in religious issues, found that only one in three Americans read the Bible regularly or could name the writers of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Not even half of those surveyed could name even five of the Ten Commandments. Most indicated they find the Bible irrelevant.

Although Bible sales in recent years have surged among some publishers, and dozens of varying versions and translations line the shelves of religious and secular bookstores alike, surveys like this show that relatively few take the time to actually read the Scriptures. Even fewer understand them.

What a remarkable turnaround from earlier generations!

## **Bible-believing leaders**

Ronald Reagan, U.S. president from 1981 to 1989, said of the Scriptures: "Within the covers of the Bible are all the answers for all the problems men face. The Bible can touch hearts, order minds, and refresh souls."

Only a generation ago Dwight D. Eisen-

hower, president from 1953 to 1961, extolled the Scriptures with these words: "The Bible is endorsed by the ages. Our civilization is built upon its words. In no other Book is there such a collection of inspired wisdom, fealty and hope."

The legendary Winston Churchill firmly believed in the accuracy and integrity of the Bible. "We reject with scorn all these learned and labored myths that Moses was but a legendary figure," the British statesman wrote. "We believe that the most scientific view, the most up-to-date and rationalistic conception, will find its fullest satisfaction in taking the Bible story literally."

Many other great leaders have likewise believed in and tried to order their lives according to the Bible's instructions.

Queen Victoria, who ruled Great Britain at the height of its power, exclaimed, "That book [the Bible] accounts for the supremacy of England!"

Abraham Lincoln, who led the United States through the Civil War as its 16th president, perhaps summed it up best when he said: "I believe that the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man."

George Washington, Revolutionary War commander and first president of the United States, said: "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

## **Substance or show?**

What about you? How much attention do you pay to the Bible?

Of the world's six billion inhabitants, about a third claim to be followers of the Bible. But how many follow Jesus Christ's advice to *read* that Book? (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Mark 2:25; 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3).

Notice God's view of those who outwardly adhere to His words but neglect to live by them: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, *but their hearts are far from me*. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isaiah 29:13, New International



Version, emphasis added throughout).

God is neither impressed nor pleased with empty outward appearances of religion. He is pleased, though, with those who deeply respect His Word: "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and *trembles at my word*" (Isaiah 66:2, NIV).

### The choice is up to you

How does God view our choice of whether to live by His Word or not?

When He revealed His instructions to ancient Israel, formerly a slave people in Egypt, He wanted the Israelites to serve as a model nation to the other peoples around them. Through His servant Moses God told them: "See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for *this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations*, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What other nation is so great as to have . . . such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4:5-8, NIV).

God intends that His way of life be a shining example. When we live by them, His laws are a model of wisdom and understanding to those around us. Christ Himself made it clear that we are to live not only by physical food "but by every word of God" (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

But it is up to us whether we will take the initiative to study and live by those words. When God revealed His instruction to the Israelites, He set before them a choice: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death

and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply;

## What God's Word Says *About God's Word*

How does God expect us to view and use His Word, the Bible? Consider some of these examples from the Scriptures:

- Kings of Israel were commanded to write out a copy of God's law and read it throughout the days of their lives, using it as the basis for ruling the people (Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

- Almighty God commanded Moses to read His Word publicly before all Israel, including men and women, children and strangers (Deuteronomy 31:11-13).

- Joshua also read to all Israel—its elders, officers and judges—the words of God's law (Joshua 8:32-35).

- Psalm 119:105 tells us that God's Word is "a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path."

- God says He esteems the person "who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

- Ezra and Nehemiah read from the law to the people as part of their religious reforms after Judah returned from captivity in Babylon (Nehemiah 8).

- Jesus Christ said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4; quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3).

- Luke recorded Jesus' words when He said, ". . . Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28).

- Paul described the Old Testament Scriptures as "inspired by God" and "useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, New Revised Standard Version).

God is clear on this: Eventually all human beings will know Him (Hebrews 8:11). You can begin to know God by reading His Word.

—Jerald Aust

# The Bible Is Like . . .

**A jigsaw puzzle.** Typically, most pieces of a large jigsaw puzzle cannot be identified when they are apart from their adjoining pieces. When the pieces are finally joined together, a clear picture emerges. Solving a jigsaw puzzle is much easier when the top of the box the puzzle came in illustrates the completed puzzle. Likewise, many verses and truths in the Bible are not clear when first studied alone and out of context. But, by patiently studying and fitting the pieces together, we can come to understand the larger truths as well as each individual piece. Once we comprehend God's overall plan, it is like having the box top. We understand the big picture, and each point of truth is more quickly understood.

**A quilt.** Each patch on a quilt has its own design, and all the patches together make an overall design. Each patch is securely sewn to the adjoining patches to create unity and strength in the whole. The same is true of the Bible. Each part has its own message, but each part complements the others without clash or contradiction. They join together and combine into the overall message of God's beautiful plan for mankind.

**A bird's feather.** A feather is a work of art when seen from afar or close up. From a distance a feather looks simple yet graceful, but, when examined under a microscope, it is amazingly complex. Long rows of barbs protrude from the quill, and overlapping barbules protrude from the barbs. The barbules are held in place by hooklike structures known as barbicels. Barbs can be separated from each other and smoothed back into place because barbules and barbicels act somewhat like a zipper. Similarly, the Bible has an overall comfortable simplicity; its messages can be understood and enjoyed by even those with little education. At the same time, God's Word is composed of myriad patterns and details that interface and interlock with perfect harmony. The Scriptures offer endless challenges to the serious student who wants to examine it under a microscope. Those who study the Bible more closely are rewarded with fascinating and edifying discoveries.

**The ocean.** Although different types of marine life live at different depths in the ocean, they all contribute to one harmonious ecosystem. As a diver goes deeper and deeper, one new world of wonder after another opens up to view. Likewise, casual Bible readers enjoy the familiar messages near the surface. Those who delve deeper discover new wonders that, while not as familiar, are perfectly designed and delightful.

**A huge castle or mansion, with many fascinating rooms.** Although the rooms are decorated differently, they have enough similarity to point to one owner and decorator. Each room is full of beautiful, perfect specimens of furnishings and decor, all with rich history and meaning. Likewise, every book and section of the Bible is like another room to be experienced, examined and enjoyed. We can linger comfortably in each room for as long as we like, learning what that room has to offer before moving on. Similarly, the Bible is like a subterranean cavern with its many chambers, all connected with winding passages. Each room has its marvelous stalactites, stalagmites and other unique formations. A Bible student wants to explore each part of God's Word.

**A gold mine.** Mining gold usually requires the hard work of digging. When the gold is far underground, miners must dig deep. The Bible has unlimited treasures of knowledge, understanding and wisdom. God offers it to all without charge, but each person must dig to find and obtain it. Even after we have acquired some of the gold, God expects us to keep digging for more. Just as a miner can continue to increase his prosperity, God wants His people to continue to grow spiritually.

**An operation manual.** Many people make serious mistakes trying to operate a machine without reading the manual. God provided an instruction manual for the humans He created. (He also offers service and repairs for when we are broken or dysfunctional, but that's another story.) People should realize that the Creator knows better than anyone else how we are supposed to live. But people try to operate their lives without reading the manual. Imagine a machine telling its maker it didn't want anyone telling it what to do. But foolish people tend to neglect or reject God's instructions. As a result, they make endless and often tragic mistakes. Let's read and follow the manual.

—Don Hooser

and the LORD your God will bless you . . .

“But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, . . . I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; . . . I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

In other words, God promises great blessings for those willing to study His Word and put it into practice. Failing to live by it will bring its own punishments in the sorrow and suffering that inevitably follow breaking God's laws.

## More reasons to read the Book

Besides these reasons straight from our Creator, there are many other reasons we should read the Book:

- It is the basis for Western civilization and Jewish and Christian culture and society.
- It is a unique historical document spanning some 4,000 years of history.
- It is a remarkable literary work, studied in thousands of college and university classes for its value as literature alone.
- It offers straightforward, practical advice on every aspect of life.
- It is a consistent best-seller year after year.

The early-American patriot Patrick Henry, famous for his stirring cry of “Give me liberty or give me death!” said that the Bible “is worth all other books which have ever been printed.”

## Where to begin

If by now you see the value in discovering the treasures of the Bible for yourself, you may wonder where to begin. The answer is to begin at the beginning, with the first chapter of Genesis.

Some Bibles contain only what is called the New Testament, plus perhaps Psalms and Proverbs. By omitting the Old Testament, such Bibles leave out about three quarters of the material God inspired to be written and preserved through the ages for us.

Be sure you have a Bible that contains both the Old and New Testaments. After all, the Old Testament writings were the “Holy Scriptures” to which the apostle Paul referred when he wrote to Timothy: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The writers of the New Testament understood the Hebrew Scriptures to be inspired by God. They included about 300 quotations from the Old Testament in their writings as well as hundreds of allusions to it.

## Read and learn

If you spend only 10 to 15 minutes a day reading the Bible, you can complete it in about a year. Initially you need not be so concerned with studying the Bible or solving problems as much as simply reading through it. At other times you can sit down with *The Good News*, some of our booklets or our *Bible Study Course* and study the Scriptures in much greater depth as you examine various topics.

As you read you'll discover many fascinating stories involving history, romance, danger, violence, intrigue and even prophecy. You'll quickly encounter men and women such as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, Joseph, Moses, Miriam, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Peter and Paul—along with the biographies and teachings of Jesus Christ. Their stories were written down as examples for us, preserved so we could learn from their many and varied experiences (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6-11).

The Bible explains things as they really are—the good, the bad and the ugly. It presents a clear picture of human failings and gives the solutions.

If some passages are unclear, you may want to compare one or more Bible versions to clear things up. Used-book stores are a good place to find inexpensive Bible translations. (To understand the differences in approach among various translations, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet

*How to Understand the Bible*.)

Try to read with an open mind and fresh approach, as though you were reading every scripture for the first time. You'll be surprised what you'll discover. Some scriptures, for example, may directly contradict what you always believed the Bible said (for some examples, see "What Does the Bible Really Say?," below; "What's Left Behind in the Rapture Theory?," page 10; and "The Good Friday–Easter Sunday Question," page 17). Be sure to rely on what the Bible says, not what someone *says* it says.

Questions may come to mind as you read along. Jot them down before you forget. Feel free to write us with any questions you may have. In many cases your question will be covered in detail in one of our booklets or an earlier *Good News* article. Or you may find the answer later as you continue to read the Scriptures.

### First things first

If you apply its words, reading the Bible can be the most rewarding thing you ever do. Woodrow Wilson, U.S. president from 1913 to 1921, compared his success to the application of God's Word. "There are a good many problems before the American people today, and before me as President, but I expect to find the solution of those problems just in the proportion that I am faithful in the study of the Word of God." No doubt much of the success of the American experience can be attributed

to its leaders' familiarity with God's Word.

By studying the Bible you'll gain wonderful insights into your relationships with family, friends and others. You'll far better understand why our world is in the condition it's in. You'll come to understand yourself far better than you ever did.

The Bible records a lasting compliment to citizens of Berea who, on hearing the apostle Paul's teaching, "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). They wanted to be sure that what they were learning was really what the Scriptures said. They set a commendable example for us.

How about you? Where do you fit in? Do you search the Scriptures to discover whether the words written there are true? If you do, you can share the joy of discovery experienced by the writer of Psalm 119, who praised God and His eternal Word:

"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies . . . I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (verses 97-103). **GN**

## What Does the Bible *Really Say*?

### *The Bible Does Not Say:*

- Man has or is an immortal soul (the words *immortal* and *soul* appear together nowhere in the Bible).
- Heaven is the reward of the saved.
- The Sabbath day is abolished, or Christians should regard Sunday as the Sabbath.
- Sunday is "the Lord's day."
- God will punish the wicked forever in an ever-burning hellfire.
- God's law is abolished or annulled under the New Covenant.

If you would like to learn more about what the Bible teaches on these subjects, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *What Happens After Death?* and *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*.

### *The Bible Does Say:*

- "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20).
- "No one has ascended to heaven" (John 3:13).
- Both Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul customarily taught on the Sabbath day (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2).
- Jesus Christ is "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28).
- The fate of the wicked is to be burned to ashes (Malachi 4:3).
- Under the New Covenant, God writes His law on human hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:10).

### RECOMMENDED READING

Where should you begin in your study of the Bible? We recommend that you first read *Is the Bible True?* This free booklet examines the Bible from the perspectives of science, history, archaeology and prophecy, showing that the Bible is indeed trustworthy. Also request *How to Understand the Bible*, a helpful guide that shows you keys for increasing your biblical understanding.

Be sure to enroll in our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*. It will take you through the major themes of the Bible, addressing your ultimate destiny, why God allows suffering, and much more.

All these publications are free for the asking from any of our offices listed on page 2 or from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).



# A Tragic and Increasing Trend: Disbelief in the Bible

*The Bible is losing its once-held prominence in the Western world.  
Even professing Christians seldom read God's Word.*

by Don Hooser

**T**he last decade has revealed a trend in Americans' approach to the Bible. According to national surveys conducted by Barna Research, in 1992 nearly half of all adults (47 percent) read from the Bible during the week. That figure plummeted to just 31 percent by 1995, then rose slightly to 36 percent in 1999. The proportion of adults who read from the Bible during the course of a week, other than when they are in church services, has declined dramatically since the early '90s.

Pollster George Gallup and Michael Lindsay cowrote a book that documents the shallowness of American Christianity. Two of the underlying themes suggested by their findings are "the glaring lack of knowledge about the Bible, basic doctrines, and the traditions of one's church . . . [and] the superficiality of faith, with many people not knowing what they believe, or why" (George Gallup Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay, *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs*, 1999, p. 4).

About 93 percent of Americans have a Bible or portion of the Bible (the New Testament) in their homes. However, the number of Americans who view the Bible as infallible and having authority over their lives is decreasing sharply (*ibid.*, pp. 34-35, 50).

"Most Americans consider the Bible to be a collection of inspired writings, but 'not everything in it should be taken literally.' This move toward understanding the Bible as the inspired, and not necessarily as the actual, word of God, is one of the most dramatic shifts in religious beliefs since the 1960s. As recently as 1963, two persons in three viewed the Bible as the actual word of God, to be taken literally, word for word. Today, only one person in three still holds to that interpretation" (*ibid.*, pp. 35-36).

Surveys reveal how little the average American knows about the Bible. The religion section of *The Dallas Morning News*

on Nov. 27, 1999, featured an article on the declining readership of the Bible. The headline reads: "Who Reads It? Fewer and Fewer, Say Those Bemoaning Bible Illiteracy." The article noted that, when quizzed on simple basic questions about the Bible, most people score poorly, even though most of them own Bibles.

Unbelief in Europe has been growing for decades. Northern Europe has long been known as the "North German Plain of Irreligion." Serious Bible reading is definitely on the wane—likewise living by its values.

Christianity is increasingly disconnected from the book on which it was founded, while forces hostile to Christianity grow ever stronger. As a result, scholars have described the late 20th century as the post-Christian era, and some say we are entering an *anti-Christian* era.

## Brief upturn in Bible interest

In spite of these trends, 1999 saw an upsurge in interest in the Bible. What sparked it? Largely the fears and hopes associated with the approaching year 2000. People expressed a mix of secular and spiritual fears—apprehension about possible Y2K computer malfunctions, terrorism, a possible stock-market slump with major financial losses, conspiracies, apocalyptic events climaxing in Armageddon, and the fear of many that they weren't ready to meet their Maker.

There were hopes too. Many hoped for a large-scale spiritual revival. Many hoped the dawn of the year 2000 would see the second coming of Christ and the ushering in of the messianic millennium.

These fears and hopes were stirred up by what preachers and authors were saying *about* the Bible rather than what the Bible *actually says*. Listeners and readers were led to believe messages that were a mixture of truth and error. This eventually led to disappointment and disillusionment. Tragically, as people lose trust in sermons

and books that are misrepresented as being firmly rooted in the Bible, they tend to lose trust in the Bible itself.

But Bible teachers are not the only ones to blame for biblical illiteracy. Christ wants us to be His disciples, and a disciple is a student. Bible students need to read the textbook for themselves.

Paul's and Silas's audience in Berea had the ideal attitude and approach: "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

## Why apathy toward the Bible?

Why have we seen an overall decline in respect for and readership of the Bible?

Several factors are at work. First, our very nature—our tendency to self-centeredness and to act as if we were independent of God's authority over us—is a constant pull away from God's law and way of life (Romans 8:7).

Second, we are heavily influenced by an increasingly secular society and the perception that the Bible is irrelevant—a perception craftily encouraged by a powerful spirit being, Satan the devil, who "deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). He is always at work to discredit the Bible and the concept of absolute truth.

Third, when people prosper they tend to forget God and His purpose for mankind. An easy life makes it easy to forget the Bible. As financial confidence increases, reliance on God wanes. The year 2000 started with a booming economy and great optimism for continued prosperity. But devotion to materialism is a mortal enemy of true spirituality.

God warned the Israelites that once they were in the Promised Land they would be inclined to forget God and not give Him credit for their prosperity. God warned them not to forget the true source of their prosperity, lest

“you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth’” (see Deuteronomy 8:11-18).

Christ said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread [material things] alone, but by every word of God’” (Luke 4:4). But self-reliant and materialistic man foolishly tries to live by bread alone.

What can we expect for the near future? Should we anticipate further disinterest in the Bible? Most likely. Based on the present spiritual disillusionment and the renewed faith in our technological society, it seems almost certain that reading, believing and obeying the Bible will continue to decline.

### End-time secular society

What does the Bible itself reveal about the spiritual conditions and attitude toward God and the Bible in the end time? What will be the consequences, and what can we do to prepare for Christ’s return?

Jesus tells us: “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

Jesus predicted that many people would live rather normally, actively and comfortably until only a short time before He would suddenly intervene. The scene He describes is one of prosperity, with no apparent sense of alarm, no wake-up call to search the Scriptures.

We know that in the days of Noah “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” (Genesis 6:5). So Christ was warning that the way of life of many in the end time would be wicked as well. Many would be contemptuous of the Word of God.

Jesus asked, “When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8, RSV). His question implies that doubt will outweigh faith, with relatively few exceptions.

### Prophecies of spiritual apathy

Paul describes people’s focus in the last days: “. . . For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God . . .” (2 Timothy 3:1-4). The list doesn’t indicate many will be lovers of God’s Word.

Verse 5 tells us that many will have “a form of godliness but denying its power.” Gallup polls show that, although Americans

want “spirituality,” they don’t necessarily want it to be Bible-based. According to recent surveys, “the percentage of Americans who say they feel the need in their lives to experience spiritual growth has surged 24 points in just four years—from 58 percent in 1994 to 82 percent in 1998” (Gallup and Lindsay, p. 1).

But people seek spirituality through various forms and methods, through countless Christian and non-Christian religions and customized combinations of beliefs and practices. “The United States is brimming with . . . myriad religious faiths [and] . . . diverse foreign ideologies and philosophies . . . The options for those religious convictions will become even more manifold than they are today” (ibid., p. 23).

It is sad that the true religion God reveals in His Word—the one with real power—is losing favor and growing rare.

In 2 Timothy 3:7 Paul adds that some will be “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Compare this with Jesus’ definition of truth in His prayer to His Father: “Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

Many people have inquiring minds, but much of their inquiry is the pursuit of the trivial and the tantalizing. Those who seriously search for truth and the meaning of life often fail to look for it in the right place—the Holy Scriptures.

But this, too, was prophesied. “For the time will come when . . . they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Paul warned the church at Thessalonica about conditions in “that Day”—the time at which Jesus Christ would decisively intervene in human affairs. He said many would be deceived “because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 9-10).

### Be the exception!

The good news is that we can be exceptions, different from the complacent, uncaring masses in these last days. We have the wonderful opportunity to develop “the love of the truth”—a love of God’s Word—that will keep us from being deceived as we approach the end of the age.

But how?

Significantly, the longest chapter in the Bible—Psalm 119—is devoted to praising God for His Word and His laws. Its writer exults, “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (verse 97). Each of us can develop this same love and

reverence for God’s Word.

The world is falling asleep spiritually, but we can choose to stay awake and alert and aware of trends. As Paul says, “let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6). To “watch” means to be spiritually alert and attentive, like a sentry or watchman.

Paul tells us to “put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). Then Paul lists the pieces of God’s armor, including “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (verses 14-18). God’s Word is our chief weapon in our spiritual warfare against the forces of evil.

God gave us His Word to serve as the foundation for all knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Those who are wise will replace aversion to study with an earnest desire to study. Jesus said that “blessed are those who hear [read and understand] the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28).

### How to be ready

At the right time Jesus Christ will suddenly intervene with apocalyptic judgments and actions. People are skeptical, thinking such will never happen. They think: I’ve heard that too many times before, and it never happened.

The apostle Peter predicted that “scorners will come in the last days . . . saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

You may remember how, in the familiar Aesop fable, the townsfolk became skeptical after the shepherd boy repeatedly cried “wolf, wolf!” when there was no wolf. By the time a real wolf threatened, the people would not believe the boy’s cry for help.

There have been countless false teachings and misunderstandings about Bible prophecy. Nevertheless Bible prophecy is true. Jesus promised He will return, and He will. It is a tragedy that many think the true preaching of prophecy is a mere cry of “wolf.”

(For a proper prophetic understanding of events the Bible predicts in connection with the stark realities of world news and trends, be sure to request your free copies of *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.)

The Bible is God’s great gift of divine revelation to mankind. It is His handbook for life. It is the Book of Books. Let’s thank God for inspiring it, preserving it and making it increasingly available and accessible throughout the world. Let’s turn to it, not away from it. **GN**

# What's 'Left Behind' in the Rapture Theory?

Millions of people have read novels structured around the idea of the rapture of Christians. Why do people believe in a rapture? Is there any biblical validity to this teaching?

by Cecil Maranville

**M**any people traveled to Jerusalem to be on the scene Jan. 1, 2000, in anticipation of certain events. Some expected Jesus Christ to return on that date; others thought they would be “raptured” away to meet Him. Yet the day came and went with nothing of the sort happening.

Where did the idea of a rapture—a supernatural, sudden removal of believers—originate? Why do so many people believe that the Bible prophesies a rapture?

The *Left Behind* series of books and videos have variably stirred, frightened or entertained millions. Authors Jim Jenkins and Tim LaHaye popularized in the 1990s the same understanding and expectations about “a secret rapture” that author Hal Lindsey had in the 1970s with *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *Vanished*.

The *Left Behind* novels revolve around the story line that non-Christians are “left behind” when Christ secretly and suddenly removes true believers from earth. Christians who are driving cars, piloting planes and going about their everyday activities abruptly disappear—and those “left behind” are baffled by their mysterious disappearance. Political and sexual intrigue is spliced into the religious theme of the books in the name of spreading the message to as wide an audience as possible.

Mr. Lindsey was the first modern writer to popularize the rapture theory. He still writes and speaks on the theme. The popular American TV program *60 Minutes II* recently caught up with him on a tour he was leading in Israel. He was still preaching that end-time prophecy will begin with the rapture, which is the instant calling to heaven of Christians. “People will actually disappear, Lindsey says” (“Apocalypse Now,” CBS, 1999).

Mr. Jenkins is the writer of the *Left Behind* material. Mr. LaHaye provides him with input from a religious perspective. Their popular works do not offer readers the theology of the

rapture idea in a systematic fashion. That is, the books do not explain the scriptural basis for the dogma or how one might prove it from the Bible.

## The rapture as doctrine

Although the idea of the rapture is accepted as fact by millions, its proponents cite only a few ambiguous biblical passages to teach and define the doctrine.

A dictionary defines *rapture* simply as “ecstatic joy or delight; joyful ecstasy.” Another says *rapture* means “a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to a knowledge of divine things.” How do these meanings relate to the return of Christ?

Explanations are ambiguous. Some point to a single word in the Latin translation of a single word in the Greek text of the Bible (Mike Cady, *The Rapture-Prophecy Bible Study*, 1998, p. 3). The Latin word is *rapere*, meaning “to seize” or “to abduct.” The concept is that Christians are suddenly snatched or seized from the earth by Christ.

So widely held is the belief that the theological definition of the rapture finds its way into another dictionary as “the experience, anticipated by some fundamentalist Christians, of meeting Christ midway in the air upon his return to the earth.”

Even this definition does not accurately reflect the prevalent explanations of the rapture theory; that is, rapture defenders teach that Christ will do the snatching of believers before and separate from His return, not “upon His return.”

Christ, they say, will *approach* the earth, not return to it, to seize believers several years before His actual return—the second coming.

According to the most common version of the rapture:

- Christ revealed the rapture to the Church in the apostle Paul’s epistle of 1 Thessalonians.
- This is a secret coming, evidenced only by the absence of Christians afterward.
- At the rapture Christians will be changed to spirit and transported to the safe haven of

heaven to wait out a seven-year “tribulation” that occurs on earth.

- The rapture’s purpose is not only to protect Christians, but to motivate them to be spiritually ready at all times for their unannounced abduction by Christ.

## Supposed scriptural proof

What is the scriptural basis for this enigmatic doctrine? Credit for development of the rapture theory generally goes to 19th-century theologian John Nelson Darby and his interpretations of the apostle Paul’s statements regarding Christ’s return.

Although some advocates of the rapture occasionally refer to a few other scriptures, all agree that the main argument is based on this passage from Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

It is the Greek for “shall be caught up” that is translated into the Latin *rapere*, the linguistic basis some claim for the word *rapture*. But where is the theological basis for the doctrine? Where does it say here—or anywhere else in the Bible, for that matter—that Christ will come close to the earth to remove Christians years before His prophesied second coming?

What Darby interpreted to mean that Christ would come close but not actually return to the earth are three words: “in the air.” He took license from the fact that the verse doesn’t say that Christ actually returns “to the earth.” (Darby may well have been motivated by noble objectives, as we will note later.)

## A theory based on inaccuracy

Before examining other aspects of the theory, it is necessary to analyze these verses. The entire theory hinges on whether Darby’s

understanding was accurate or not. The Bible tells us that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20). That is, true understanding must come from God alone.

One of the important keys to an accurate understanding of any part of the Bible is to read what it says in context. The near context of these verses in 1 Thessalonians 4 begins in verse 13 and concludes in verse 18.

Paul wrote this section of the letter in answer to concerns of the local Christians. Was he responding to the Thessalonians’ worries about their safety in an end-of-the-age tribulation? No. Was he addressing their worries about whether Christ would return to rescue them? No. Was he writing about their supposed neglect of their spiritual readiness for Christ’s return? No.

Why, then, did Paul write 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18?

As you read verse 13, you discover that

Christians in Thessalonica were grieving over the unexpected deaths of members of their congregation. Like other Christians of that day, they apparently thought Jesus would return in their lifetimes. Thus they were caught unprepared for the death of people in the faith.

Paul wrote that they should not be overwhelmed by grief as though there were no hope for life beyond the grave: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.”

Paul explains his main point in verse 14: God will bring the dead back to life. “For if

we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

Paul doesn’t leave the subject there. He adds a time reference: “with Him.” Did Paul refer to an *approach* by Christ, or was He referring to the second coming? Nothing in this passage justifies an understanding other than the second coming. Neither is there a nuance of a “secret” coming.

Verse 15 amplifies the point about the future of Christians who have died by declaring that those who remain alive at the coming of Christ have no spiritual advantage over those who died. “. . . We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.” Said another way, those who have died are not at any disadvantage.

Paul continues: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the

## The Need for *Spiritual Readiness*

**T**he rapture theory helps a Christian be in readiness for Christ’s unexpected appearance to take him away, or so goes the reasoning of those who adhere to the belief. On the other hand, the need for spiritual readiness is a valid teaching found throughout the New Testament regardless of any supposed rapture teaching. The Scriptures invariably connect it to Christ’s actual return to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, not to a near approach to the earth by Christ years before His final coming.

Christ’s comparison between the time immediately preceding His coming and the time just before the flood of Noah’s day illustrates this fact. “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37). The comparison continues with a description of how some people who lived and worked side by side with Noah were caught off guard by the coming of the flood.

Similarly, in the end of the age people living and working side by side with Christians will be caught off guard by Christ’s return. “Watch therefore [meaning stay alert to one’s spiritual commitment and responsibility], for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (verse 42). There is no intimation, either in Greek or English translations, of any secret aspect to this coming. It is *the* prophesied return of Christ.

Luke records a parable in which Christ went to some length to emphasize the need for Christians to conduct themselves to be ready at all times for His return. “Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning,” He said (Luke 12:35). In other words, be dressed and equipped to move at a moment’s notice. After three separate analogies to illustrate His point, He summarizes it with the plain admonition, “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (verse 40). Notice that He obviously refers here to His *coming*; that is, to His return, not a near approach to earth.

Are there signs by which Christians can recognize the time of the end? Yes, and Paul reminded the Thessalonians to be aware of those signs at the time he repeated Christ’s message that He will come as unexpectedly as a robber visits his victim (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). Jesus inspired John to write it again in Revelation 16:15.

Peter urged his readers to hold to the identical perspective, adding advice concerning what we should do in light of it: “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless [in character and conduct]” (2 Peter 3:11, 14). In other words, be ready at all times.

The Scriptures do not connect the need for spiritual readiness with a rapture of Christians.

voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (verses 16-17).

All Christians, living and dead, will be included in the events described in verses 16-17:

- The return of Christ heralded by a powerful angelic announcement (hardly secret).
- The resurrection—return to life—of deceased Christians (the main subject addressed by Paul, according to the context).
- The simultaneous joining of the returning Jesus with deceased Christians and Christians still living at the time.

Verse 18, the final verse of the section, concludes and reiterates the main thought: "Therefore comfort one another with these words"; that is, with the understanding of the destiny of Christians who died before Christ returns.

### Rapture ideology out of sync

Not only is the reasoning of the rapture theory entirely out of context with the verses used to support it, the theory is also out of synchronization with events revealed in the rest of the Scriptures.

Another letter written by Paul also addresses the Christian hope of the "change" of a Christian from mortal to immortal at Christ's return. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-53 he wrote of the promise of a transformation from physical life to everlasting life. This is

a crucial point: What is the timing of this prophesied change from mortal to immortal?

Verses 22 and 23 are clear on the matter: "... In Christ all shall be made alive [resurrected], ... those who are Christ's [Christians] at His coming." Paul said nothing to the Corinthians of anything like a snatching away before Christ actually comes, and he used no language that might imply a near approach by Christ in lieu of the second coming.

Paul provides more specifics about the timing. The prophesied change to spirit will occur at "the last trumpet" (verse 52), language similar to that used in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. What is the significance of the sounding of a trumpet at Jesus' return and the resurrection of the dead in Christ?

A trumpetlike instrument was used "in early times chiefly, perhaps exclusively, for warlike purposes. It gave the signal 'to arms' ... [and] warned of the approach of the enemy ... [It] was heard throughout a battle ... and sounded the recall ... Afterward it played an important part in connection with religion. It was blown at the proclamation of the Law ... and at the opening of the Year of Jubilee ... heralded the approach of the Ark ... [It] hailed a new king ... and is prophetically associated with the Divine judgment and restoration of the chosen people from captivity" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, electronic database, 1996, "Music").

The trumpet mentioned in Paul's epistles to the Corinthians and Thessalonians is the same as the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15-18—the last trumpet, which announces the

second coming. The dead in Christ are resurrected, living Christians are changed to spirit, and Jesus Christ returns to earth—all at the same time.

Attempting to read into a few words in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 the concept of a near coming before the second coming and a different time line for the resurrection prophesied to occur at the second coming is not "rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

The rapture theory is in conflict with the Scriptures.

### "One will be taken ..."

In their eagerness to uphold belief in the rapture, supporters use various prophecies that speak of Christ's return to bolster their belief in the rapture. They reason that their interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 requires Christians to be in a constant state of readiness for their unannounced removal by Christ.

Prophecies of the second coming are not in doubt. What is in doubt is the application of these messages to their forced interpretation of a precoming.

One such prophecy is Matthew 24:36-44. It starts with "But of that day and hour [of the second coming] no one knows" and ends with "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." The point of this passage is the need for Christians to be prepared for the second coming.

However, some will lift verses 40 and 41

## How Long Is *the Great Tribulation*?

The "great tribulation" refers to the time of crisis at the close of the age of man. Jesus spoke of "great tribulation" in Matthew 24:21 and told John to write of it in Revelation 7:14.

Several events are prophesied to occur during the crucial last days:

- The area outside of the temple in Jerusalem will be controlled by non-Israelite powers (Revelation 11:2).
- The two witnesses of God will fulfill their commission (verse 3).
- The beast power, a counterfeit of the Kingdom of God, will dominate world politics, religion and economics (Revelation 13:5).

An unparalleled "time of great trouble" will come on the people of Israel, affecting also "the holy people" (Daniel 12:1, 7).

Notice that a common time-period is mentioned in conjunction with these events:

- 42 months.
- 1,260 days.
- "A time, times, and half a time."

These are variations of the same period—3½ years (not seven years, as commonly suggested by many rapture-believers for the time of the great tribulation).

Note *Wycliffe Commentary's* notes on Daniel 12:7:

"The consummation is to take place when the three and one-half times (3½ years; 1,260 days; 42 months) so frequently mentioned in Daniel's previous prophecies and in the Revelation are run out."

Rapture theorists base their idea of a seven-year tribulation on a single reference, Daniel 9:27, which tells of a covenant made "for a week" by a "prince who is to come." This prince will cut off sacrifices "in the midst of the week," an act that will herald the beginning of the crisis at the end. A week in prophecy, goes the reasoning, represents a year and hence refers to a seven-year period.

(Some believe the prince to be the Antichrist, while others believe it is Christ. The Messiah was cut off in the midst of a week, or after 3½ years of His earthly ministry, as well as on a Wednesday, the middle of a literal week.)

If this is a prophecy of the Antichrist, the crisis begins "in the middle," or after 3½ years, leaving another 3½ years remaining for the fulfillment of the close-of-the-age events mentioned above. Note as well that the period would also be the same as prophesied in the above references to the main events of the end.

Clearly the Bible does not support the idea of a seven-year tribulation.

out of context and use them to support belief in a rapture. You will probably recognize the verses immediately: “Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other left.” If one ignores that the context of these verses talks about the second coming, they may seem to lend credence to the rapture.

But it is unsound theology to interpret any verses out of context. In addition, the understanding of any reference must agree with the teaching of the rest of the Bible.

In the context of this passage, Christ makes plain the fact that no one will know the exact timing of His coming (notice that Christ repeatedly refers to His *coming*, not a supposed near approach). His warning, in light of that fact, is that Christians should be constantly alert and spiritually prepared (verses 42, 44-51).

Now the understanding of verses 40 and 41 becomes clear. People who are not prepared will be caught off guard by the abruptness of His coming. Some who live or work close to others will be caught off guard while their companions will not be. Some will be “left”—not “left behind” after a secret rapture, but left unprepared.

### Protection promised

Another reason offered by rapture theorists in defense of their interpretation of end-time prophecy is God’s promise of protection. To be sure, God says to His Church through John: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

In Matthew 24:21-22 Jesus spoke of abbreviating the terrible crisis at the close of the age of man to spare His chosen people: “For there shall be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, not ever shall be. And unless these days were shortened, no flesh would be saved alive; but for the elect’s sake, those days will be shortened.”

But nothing in these references or in others concerning the protection of the saints indicates that they will be protected during this time in *heaven*. To the contrary, if there is any indication of a location, it is described in Revelation 12:14, where it is called simply “the wilderness.” Even then, the same prophecy foretells that Satan will assault at least some of the people of God.

“And the dragon [Satan] was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the

rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (verse 17).

The focus of godly men and women needs to be on spiritual preparation and maturity. The faithful are promised that nothing, including tribulation, warfare and Satan’s hostilities, can separate them from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39).

Being swept off to heaven to be sheltered from tribulation is nowhere detailed—or even hinted at—in the Scriptures.

### Partial understanding

What reason did the theologian John Darby and others have for even considering such a doctrine as the rapture? An article on the Millennium in *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* offers a plausible explanation. In the century before Darby, Daniel Whitby promulgated the philosophy of “postmillennialism” in England. “This interpretation maintains that present gospel agencies will root out evils until Christ will have a spiritual reign over the earth, which will continue for 1,000 years. Then the second advent of Christ will initiate judgment and bring to an end the present order” (1988).

It is reasonable to suspect that Darby’s intent was to counter the false teaching that the actions of men could bring about the Kingdom of God—as well as the equally incorrect teaching that prophecies of a kingdom are only symbolic (a view called “amillennialism”). Darby believed, rightly, that Jesus Christ would return to earth to establish and rule over the Kingdom of God (called “premillennialism”).

Regardless of his motivation, Darby departed from the Scriptures himself with his rapture theory. At least he accurately understood that Christ would return to reign on earth, which leads us to an important concluding point.

### Meeting Christ in the air

Seeking to refute the accurate understanding of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, one author asks, “If [Christ] is already headed our way, why would we need to be caught up to meet Him?” (Todd Strandberg, *The Pretribulation Rapture*, 1999, p. 2). That’s an interesting question whose answer reinforces what we have already learned from the Bible about this much-misunderstood topic.

The answer lies in the meaning of the word translated “meet.” *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* says the word “is used in the papyri of a newly arriving magistrate. ‘It seems that the special

idea of the word was the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary’ (Moulton, *Greek Test. Gram.*, Vol. I, p. 14)” (1985, “Meet”). The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* adds in its notes for these verses that “when a king enters his city the loyal go forth to meet him . . .”

How appropriate it is that His followers should rise to meet the King of Kings!

F.F. Bruce’s *International Bible Commentary* adds: “*To meet* is used in the papyri of the official reception given to a visiting governor, whom his citizens escort into the city from which they have come to meet him” (1986, notes on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Another key question to address is “Where will Christ be?” After all, Paul tells us we will “always be with the Lord” after meeting Him (1 Thessalonians 4:17). An Old Testament prophet answers: “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming . . . And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives” (Zechariah 14:1, 4).

Christ will not be in heaven after the second coming, but will be on earth—and so will the resurrected saints who meet Him.

Christians are resurrected from the dead or, if living at the time, changed to spirit at the last trumpet when Christ returns. They will meet Him in the air as an escort of honor as He returns to the Mount of Olives to rule the earth from Jerusalem. They are then destined to reign with Jesus Christ in His glorious kingdom (Revelation 20:6). **GN**

### RECOMMENDED READING

How can you understand what the Bible really says? Request your free copy of *How to Understand the Bible* to discover sound and time-tested principles to help you understand what the Bible teaches.

Many people find Bible prophecy particularly difficult to grasp. To better understand the events prophesied to take place around the time of Jesus’ return, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. All these booklets are available from our office nearest you listed on page 2 or from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).



# Panama: Another Major Sea Gate Relinquished

*The Panama Canal is an engineering marvel and a symbol of “The American Century.” What is the significance of America’s decision to turn it over to Panamanian control?*

by Melvin Rhodes

**G**ibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Suez, Aden, the Maldive Islands, Ceylon, Singapore and Hong Kong are legendary sea gates one encounters en route from the British Isles to the Far East. These gates gave Great Britain mastery of the seas for more than two centuries. These vital passages played an important part in times of military conflict and economic expansion. Without them it is questionable whether the Allies could have won the two world wars.

Travelers west encountered Bermuda, one of the first sea gates to be acquired by the British crown, the first with its own parliament. Bermuda remains a British possession. Further west were Britain’s island properties in the Caribbean. Further south the Falkland Islands enabled the Royal

Philippines and Guam gave America a major Pacific presence, while Puerto Rico and a military base in Cuba extended American influence in the Caribbean.

Hawaii was also annexed in 1898. But the most important events were yet to come.

The Spanish-American War brought home to Americans a major strategic weakness. The weakness was attributable to simple geography: It took a long time for a ship on one of the country’s coasts to travel to the other coast. Ships had to go around Cape Horn at the southern end of South America, one of the most hazardous shipping routes on earth. Even if danger had not been a problem, distance alone meant that any sea travel from coast to coast took months.

The 1898 war demonstrated a military

lengthy and dangerous journeys around Cape Horn.

## Roosevelt’s dream

Modern technology now made possible a dramatic and far-reaching solution. President Theodore Roosevelt became the driving force behind the building of what was to become the Panama Canal. Indeed, it was to be the greatest accomplishment of his administration, the one of which Roosevelt was to be most proud while at the same time the one that caused the most controversy.

Writes historian David McCullough: “Roosevelt was promoting neither a commercial venture nor a universal utility. To him, first, last, and always, the canal was the vital—the indispensable—path to a global destiny for the United States of America. He had a vision of his country as a commanding power on two oceans, and these joined by a canal built, owned, operated, policed, and fortified by his country. The canal was to be the first step to American supremacy at sea” (*The Path Between the Seas*, 1977, p. 250). The same writer adds: “All other benefits resulting, important or admirable as they might be, were to him secondary” (ibid.).

What would Teddy Roosevelt have thought had he known the canal would remain in American hands for less than a century? Would he have built it at all?

On the last day of 1999 the United States ceded control of the canal to the nation of Panama under the terms of a revised treaty agreed to during the Jimmy Carter administration. In turn, Panama had already agreed to hand over much of the administration of the vital sea gate to a private Chinese company, which, like all other companies in China, is subject to control of the

Just as the acquisition of major sea gates gave Britain and the United States worldwide preeminence, so does their loss dramatically illustrate declining power and military might.

Navy to control the area around Cape Horn, the southern tip of South America. St. Helena, Ascension Island, the Cape of Good Hope around South Africa, Mauritius, the Seychelles and Diego Garcia were all strategically located portals that controlled key ocean passages around the globe, granting the British people unrivaled dominance of the seas.

## America becomes an international power

Later, after the Spanish-American War of 1898, America joined Great Britain as a world power. With the peace settlement that followed the war, the United States became a major sea power with the acquisition of its own sea gates in important locations. The

weakness when the United States had to quickly dispatch the battleship *Oregon* to Cuba after the U.S.S. *Maine* was blown up in Havana Harbor. Victory in the Caribbean was said to depend on the *Oregon*.

But first the ship had to travel from San Francisco 12,000 miles around Cape Horn, a journey that was expected to take two months. Long periods elapsed with no news of the ship. Americans followed her journey with mounting concern and excitement. Then, 67 days after leaving the West Coast, she was spotted off the coast of Florida, arriving just in time to play a role in the crucial Battle of Santiago Bay. Those 67 days emphasized the growing need for a so-called path between the seas that would link the Pacific and Atlantic and eliminate

communist Chinese government.

Roosevelt correctly envisioned the Panama Canal as a significant advancement in American power. The building of the canal was to be a major step toward the country's domination of the world, enabling it to replace Great Britain as the major naval power by the end of World War II and usher in a half century of unprecedented prosperity.

Before suddenly assuming office after the assassination of President William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt had been heavily influenced by his own experiences in the 1898 war with Spain and by an influential book written by a member of the faculty at the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island. Roosevelt had met the writer, Alfred Thayer Mahan, when Roosevelt had been invited to lecture there on his specialty as a historian, the War of 1812.

Mahan's book, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, was published in 1890 and became an international best-seller. The writer received honorary degrees at Oxford and Cambridge before being invited to dine with Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace. Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II, anxious to build a navy to rival Britain's, saw to it that copies of Mahan's book went to all of his naval captains and officers.

Japanese military colleges adopted the

book as a text while, at home, Yale and Harvard conferred honorary degrees on Mahan. He was enthusiastically supported by members of Congress. "It is sea power which is essential to every splendid people," Henry Cabot Lodge declared from the Senate floor.

Notes David McCullough: "By tracing the rise and decline of past maritime powers, he [Mahan] had arrived at the extremely simple theory that national greatness and commercial supremacy were directly related to supremacy at sea" (p. 251).



*The 51-mile-long Panama Canal, constructed by the United States from 1904 to 1914, helped transform the country into a major sea power by joining the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. What will be its future now that it is under Panamanian control?*

## Who Benefits?

It is significant that the company Panama chose to run many of the Panama Canal operations is based in Hong Kong. It is, therefore, like all companies operating from the People's Republic of China, subject to the influence and control of the communist Chinese leadership in Beijing. In an armed conflict, this could bode ill for the United States and its allies.

The last few years have seen China make considerable gains at U.S. and British expense. The American withdrawal from Philippine bases early in the 1990s left China in a dominant position in the region. Britain's return of Hong Kong to China in 1997 elevated the country to the status of second-richest country in the world in terms of its gold and foreign-currency reserves. This freed China to spend much more on military projects. The Portuguese turnover of Macao to China on the same day as the Panama Canal handover freed China to concentrate its efforts on taking back Taiwan—a move that, if successful, would make China the richest nation on earth in terms of its monetary reserves.

The possible dismemberment of Indonesia would also leave China stronger. Any decline in the power of Indonesia would naturally result in a comparative strengthening of Chinese power and influence. India is a potential rival, but presently it is too occupied with its rival Pakistan to get too involved in any struggle with China.

China benefits, too, from the commercial domination of many

nations in the region by its Chinese diaspora—Chinese people who have settled throughout the area. Ironically, the former British sea base of Singapore is populated mostly by Chinese people whose ancestors moved there during colonial times. Their nation is a thriving city-state whose people are richer than many in the Western democracies.

Any perceived threat from Beijing is likely to cause Japan and Russia to build up the size of their military forces. Now, with the relinquishing of the Panama Canal, Chinese influence may extend into Central and South America.

Trade agreements that will likely lead to the admission of China into the World Trade Organization (WTO) will probably give another boost to the nation's rapidly growing economy. However, there is also concern that agreements opening China to more foreign competition could lead to internal unrest as hundreds of thousands of Chinese people lose their jobs during the restructuring that will take place. China is an awakening giant. An unstable giant could destabilize the region.

A century ago, at the dawn of the 1900s, Britain's period of domination was drawing to a close, with the United States already on the horizon as the new superpower. We see history repeating itself, this time with the United States dealing with the realities of imperial overreach while China and others seek to expand their influence.

## A dream fulfilled

The building of the Panama Canal was one of the greatest engineering feats of history. Interest in the project began soon after the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869. Suez, the artery of the British Empire, connecting Great Britain with its Indian and other Asian possessions, was built by a French engineer, Ferdinand de Lesseps. The 74-year-old de Lesseps undertook the task of constructing an even greater waterway in Panama, but the effort collapsed in 1889. It was left to the United States to pursue the project in the new century.

The United States waited for the Colombian congress to debate its request to build a canal across Colombian territory. Preoccupied with a civil war between 1899 and 1903, the Colombians hesitated. The people of Panama then revolted against their Colombian rulers, and the United States accepted the rebels' offer of a treaty that granted the United States sovereignty (total control) over a 10-mile-wide Canal Zone in exchange for an annual payment to be made to the new Republic of Panama. Although the United States denied any direct involvement in the rebellion against Colombia, U.S.-Colombian relations suffer to this day. Relations with Panama have not been easy, either.

Work on the canal began in 1904, but little progress was evident before 1906 because of disputes over the type of canal that should be built. Completed in 1914, the canal is 51.2 miles long. Ironically, that same year saw the opening salvos of World War I in Europe and among European colonies around the world. This war was to see America's involvement in world affairs increase and the United States advance as a naval power rivaling Great Britain.

## Prophecies of sea gates

We should not underestimate the importance of sea gates in catapulting Great Britain and the United States into world powers, as well as serving as strategic defense outposts. They are so important, in fact, that the acquisition and loss of such strategic strongholds were prophesied in the Bible thousands of years ago.

Genesis 48 reveals that God's promises to the patriarch Abraham were passed on to his great-great-grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh. Their descendants were prophesied to become a "great" people and "a multitude of nations" (verse 19). The blessings passed down from Abraham included the promise that Ephraim's and Manasseh's descendants were to "possess the gate of

their enemies" (Genesis 22:17; 24:60).

The 19th and 20th centuries have seen a "great" nation and "a multitude of nations" rise to a prominence and prosperity unlike anything the world had seen. The United States and the British Commonwealth dominated the oceans, not only through powerful military and merchant fleets, but through strategic choke points—"gates"—that controlled military and economic traffic worldwide.

Just as the acquisition of the gates gave the two nations worldwide preeminence, so does their loss dramatically illustrate declining power and military might. Major turning points in the decline of Great Britain were the loss of two of the most strategically important sea gates. The United States is following a similar path as it, too, surrenders sea passages that previous generations of Americans recognized as vital to national security.

## Good-bye to sea gates

Two of the turning points in the decline and fall of the British Empire were the loss of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942 and the loss of the Suez Canal to Egypt 14 years later. Singapore, Britain's major naval base in the Far East, was considered impregnable. It easily fell to the Japanese, who invaded through the jungles of British Malaya from the north, a direction from which the British had not anticipated a threat.

Singapore's loss was a major psychological blow to British pride, the biggest defeat the empire had suffered at the hands of an Asian nation. It sent a powerful message to other Asians that it was possible to defeat a seemingly invincible power. Although the British regained control of Singapore after the defeat of Japan in 1945, they voluntarily withdrew from the base a quarter of a century later when they could no longer afford to base troops there.

Suez was the final deathblow to hopes of continued empire. A group of army officers overthrew Egypt's King Farouk in 1952, promising to rid the country of foreign influence. The military men agitated for Egyptian control of the canal and finally seized it in 1956.

British, French and Israeli troops invaded Egypt. International financial pressures against Britain followed, and the Eisenhower administration refused to provide U.S. support, thereby effectively ending British and French control of the Suez Canal. The ripple effect was the collapse of both colonial empires and the proliferation of new states around the world—situations that have complicated international diplomacy in recent years.

## The loss of superpower status

Is America following in Britain's footsteps? In the less than 25 years since the 1977 Panama Canal treaty guaranteed the handover of the channel, the United States has lost its military bases in the Philippines and scaled down its military forces and bases throughout the world. Meanwhile American military commitments have increased, with escalating pledges of support and involvement in minor nations throughout the world, a burden the United States increasingly tries to share with its NATO allies and the United Nations.

This paradox is sometimes referred to as imperial overreach, the same problem that afflicted Great Britain in its decline. A superpower tends to overcommit itself in an effort to try to maintain its leadership role. Eventually global commitments effectively result in no commitment because forces in each area are spread too thin on the ground. Current trends suggest America is following the same path as Great Britain, its predecessor as world superpower.

Almighty God, who declares that He can give nations "the gate of [their] enemies," also said that because of national disobedience He can and does remove such blessings. He prophesied to the ancient Israelites that if they and their descendants refused to obey Him He would "break the pride of [their] power" (Leviticus 26:19). This verse is part of a chapter in the Bible that is a powerful prophetic reminder of the consequences of a people's actions—whether they choose to obey or disobey God's commands. A rise to international greatness can be quickly followed by a precipitous decline when a nation forgets God. **GN**

### RECOMMENDED READING

Has God worked with nations and empires to carry out His will for humanity? Is He doing that now? To better understand the biblical and prophetic perspective on past, present and future events, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *You Can*



*Understand Bible Prophecy*. Contact our office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2. This booklet is also available on our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

# The Good Friday–Easter Sunday Question

*How do the biblical three days and three nights after Jesus Christ's crucifixion fit between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning? Or do they?*

by Wilbur Berg

Consider these important facts. First, Easter Sunday is traditionally revered as the day of Jesus' resurrection—although the Bible clearly states that He had *already* risen before Sunday dawned in the city of Jerusalem.

Second, even though Good Friday is generally observed as the traditional day of His crucifixion, Christ Himself told the disciples that He would be in the grave for all of three days and three nights. How can three days and three nights possibly fit between a Friday-afternoon crucifixion and a Sunday-morning resurrection?

Third, the word *Easter* is not found in the Greek New Testament. Nor is there biblical mention of or instruction to observe Lent.

Finally, unlike the specific instruction to commemorate Christ's *death*, there is absolutely no commandment in the New Testament to observe the date of Jesus' *resurrection*. Yet today's religious customs are so ingrained in the church calendar that many would consider it heretical to question them.

Most of the world is scarcely aware that the original apostles did not institute or keep these customs, nor were they observed by the early Christian Church. Try as you might to find them, Lent, Good Friday and Easter are not so much as mentioned in the original Greek wording of the New Testament. (The word *Easter* appears only once in the King James Version of the Bible—in Acts 12:4—where it is flagrantly mistranslated from the Greek word *pascha*, which should be translated "Passover;" as most versions render it.)

The justification for the Lenten 40-day preparation for Easter is traditionally based on Jesus' 40-day wilderness fast before His temptation by Satan (*Harper's Bible Dictionary*, "Lent"; Matthew 4:1-2; Mark 1:13). The problem with this explanation is that this incident is not connected in any way with Jesus' supposed observance of Easter.

The 40-day pre-Easter practice of fasting and penance did not originate in the Bible.

## Pagan practices adopted

Many people still follow such practices, assuming that such activities honor God and are approved by Him. But, we should ask, how does God regard such extrabiblical customs? Consider God's instructions to those who would worship Him:

"Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' *You shall not worship the*

*Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:30-32, emphasis added throughout).*

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes: "The term Easter was derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'Eostre,' the name of the goddess of spring. In her honor sacrifices were offered at the time of the vernal [spring] equinox" (1982, Vol. 2, "Easter").

Many battles were fought over its observance date, but the Council of Nicea finally fixed the date of Easter in A.D. 325 to fall on the first Sunday after the full moon on or after the vernal equinox (March 21).

Not generally known is that "the preparation for Easter season, beginning on Ash Wednesday and continuing for a week after Easter Day, was filled with pagan customs that had been revised in the light

of Christianity. Germanic nations, for example, set bonfires in spring. This custom was frowned on by the Church, which tried to suppress it . . . In the sixth and seventh centuries [monks] came to Germany, [bringing] their earlier pagan rites[,] and would bless bonfires outside the church building on Holy Saturday. The custom spread to France, and eventually it was incorporated into the Easter liturgy of Rome in the ninth century. Even today the blessing of the new fire is part of the Vigil of Easter.

"Medieval celebrations of Easter began at dawn. According to one old legend, the sun dances on Easter morning, or makes three jumps at the moment of its rising, in

honor of Christ's resurrection. The rays of light penetrating the clouds were believed to be angels dancing for joy.

"Some Easter folk traditions that have survived today are the Easter egg, rabbit and lamb. During medieval times it was a tradition to give eggs at Easter to servants. King Edward I of England had 450 eggs boiled before Easter and dyed or covered with gold leaf. He then gave them to members of the royal household on Easter day. The egg was an earlier pagan symbol of rebirth and was presented at the spring equinox, the beginning of the pagan new year.

"The Easter rabbit is mentioned in a German book of 1572 and also was a pagan fertility symbol. The Easter lamb goes back to the Middle Ages; the lamb, holding a flag with a red cross on a white field, represented the resurrected Christ [rather than the sacrifice of His life, as a fulfillment of the Passover lamb, that paid for the sins of the world (John 1:29)]" (Anthony Mercatante, *Facts on File Encyclopedia of World*

*Mythology and Legend*, 1988, “Easter”).

### Passover out, Easter in

Easter traditions are embraced by many who profess Christianity. Yet none of these practices are found in the Bible or the customs of the early Church. Jesus and His apostles did not establish or perpetuate such practices, which obscure the true biblical meanings and observances of this time of year. In fact, a fourth-century church historian, Socrates Scholasticus, wrote in his *Ecclesiastical History* that neither the apostles nor the Gospels taught the observance of Easter, nor did they or Jesus give a law requiring the keeping of this feast. Instead, “the observance originated not by legislation, *but as a custom*” (chapter 22, emphasis added).

Even as early as the close of the second century, the theologian Irenaeus bore witness in his letter to Victor, bishop of Rome, that some early Roman bishops forbade the observance of Passover on the 14th of Nisan. This was the date of the biblical observance practiced each spring by Jesus and the apostles. At the time that the Nisan 14 Passover observance was banned, ecclesiastical authorities introduced Lent and Easter into Christian practice.

### Distorting Jesus’ words

A century later the *Syriac Didascalia* recorded the attempts of teachers in Rome to reconcile Jesus’ words that He would be entombed “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40) with a Friday-afternoon crucifixion and a Sunday-

morning resurrection. According to their reasoning, Jesus’ sufferings were part of the three days and three nights of Scripture. Friday morning from 9 to noon was counted as the first day, and noon to 3 p.m. (which was darkened) was considered the first night. Three in the afternoon to sunset was reckoned as the second day, whereas Friday night to Saturday morning constituted the second night. The daylight part of Saturday was the third day, and the night portion to Sunday morning was the third night.

In other words, the three days and three nights in the grave that Jesus said would be the sign that He was indeed sent from God were transformed into a period of two days and two nights, or a total of no more than 48 hours. This has subsequently been reduced even further in modern times by figuring from late afternoon Friday to early Sunday morning, which takes away another 12 hours or more. Such reasoning has to discount or somehow explain away Jesus’ clear promise that He would be entombed three days and three nights.

Easter and Lent are nonbiblical and were not observed by the apostles or the first-century Church. The biblical record shows, however, that the early Church diligently kept *other* observances, the New Testament Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, just as Jesus and the apostles had done (Matthew 26:17-19; Acts 20:6; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 11:23-26). These were supplanted in later years by the customs and practices of Easter and Lent.

Passover is an annual reminder of Jesus’

sacrificial death to pay the penalty for our sins (Matthew 26:26-28). The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a celebration that focuses on a Christian’s need to live in sincerity, truth and purity (1 Corinthians 5:8). The nonbiblical festivals of Lent and Easter, added decades after the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles, only cloud the true significance of Christ’s life, death and resurrection and the purpose of His coming.

The Passover, instituted in Exodus 12, continues by Jesus Christ’s example and command—but with a change of symbols. Jesus’ death fulfilled the symbolism of the sacrificial Passover lamb (Matthew 26:17-28; John 1:29). However, the New Testament Passover has been improperly replaced as an annual memorial of the *death* of Christ by Easter. We are commanded to commemorate Christ’s *death*, not His resurrection (1 Corinthians 11:23-28).

### Facts about Jesus’ last days

Jesus Christ’s promise was fulfilled exactly as He said, a fact that is made clear when we study and compare the Gospel accounts. These records give a clear, logical explanation that is perfectly consistent with Christ’s words. Let’s focus on Jesus’ last days on earth to gain the proper perspective and understanding of how and when these events occurred.

Jesus said that, like the prophet Jonah, He would be entombed three days and three nights and that He would be raised up the third day after His crucifixion and death (Matthew 12:39-40; 17:23; 20:19). Putting

## The Chronology of Christ’s Crucifixion and Resurrection

Tuesday:	Wednesday:	Thursday:	Friday:	Saturday:	Sunday:
Jesus ate an early-evening Passover meal with His disciples (at the beginning of Nisan 14, Jewish reckoning) and instituted the New Covenant symbols (Matthew 26:26-28). Jesus was then betrayed by Judas, arrested and during the night brought before the high priest.	Jesus was crucified and died around 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50). This was the preparation day for the <i>annual</i> , not weekly, Sabbath, which began that evening (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). Jesus’ body was placed in the tomb at twilight (Matthew 27:57-60).	This was the high-day Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:4-7). It is described as the day after the Day of Preparation (Matthew 27:62).	The high-day Sabbath now past, women bought and prepared spices for anointing Jesus’ body (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56).	The women rested on the weekly Sabbath, according to the Fourth Commandment (Luke 23:56; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus rose around sunset, <i>exactly three days and three nights</i> (72 hours) after burial, to fulfill the sign of Jonah and authenticate His messiahship.	The women brought the prepared spices early in the morning while it was still dark (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Jesus had already risen (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:2-3; John 20:1).

these scriptures together, we see that He was resurrected *at the end of the third day* after His death. Luke 23:44 shows that He died around the ninth hour (Jewish reckoning), or 3 p.m. He would have been buried within the next few hours so that His body could be entombed before the approaching Sabbath (John 19:31).

Jesus' resurrection could not have been on a Sunday morning because John 20:1-2 shows that He had *already risen* before Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early in the morning, arriving "while it was still dark." Therefore, neither could His death have occurred Friday afternoon, since that would not allow for His body to be in the grave three days and three nights. Clearly, the Good Friday–Easter Sunday explanation and tradition is without scriptural foundation.

Notice also that John 19:31 mentions that the Sabbath immediately after Jesus' death was "a high day"—not the weekly seventh-day Sabbath (from Friday evening to Saturday evening), but one of the annual Sabbaths, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see Leviticus 23:6-7), which can fall on any day of the week.

In fact, two Sabbaths—first an annual Holy Day and then the regular weekly Sabbath—are mentioned in the Gospel accounts, a detail overlooked by most people. This can be proven by comparing Mark 16:1 with Luke 23:56.

Mark's account tells us, "Now *when the Sabbath was past*, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 16:1). However, Luke's account describes how the women who followed Jesus saw how His body was laid in the tomb. "Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils" for the final preparation of the body. *And they rested on the Sabbath* according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56).

Mark tells us that the women bought the spices *after* the Sabbath, "when the Sabbath was past." Luke, however, tells us that they prepared the spices and oils, "and they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment." How could the women have bought spices after the Sabbath, yet then prepared them and rested on the same Sabbath?

That is obviously impossible—unless *two* Sabbaths are involved, with a day between them. Once we realize this, the two accounts become clear (see "The Chronology of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection," p. 18). Christ died near 3 p.m. and was placed

in the tomb near sunset that day—a Wednesday in the year 31. That evening began the "high day" Sabbath, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which fell on Thursday that year. The women rested on that day, then on Friday purchased and prepared the spices and oils for Jesus' body, which could not be done on either the Holy Day or the weekly Sabbath. They then rested again on the weekly Sabbath before going to the tomb before daybreak on Sunday morning, at which time they discovered that Christ had already been resurrected.

### Two Sabbaths confirmed in text

The fact that two Sabbaths are involved is confirmed by Matthew 28:1, where the women went to the tomb "after the Sabbath." The Sabbath mentioned here is actually *plural* in the original Greek and should be translated "Sabbaths." Some Bible versions, including Alfred Marshall's Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, Ferrar Fenton's translation, Green's Literal Translation and Young's Literal Translation, make this clear.

Once we realize that two Sabbaths were involved—first an annual Holy Day, which was observed from Wednesday evening until Thursday evening, and the normal weekly Sabbath from Friday evening to Saturday evening, the fulfillment of Christ's words becomes clear.

The Savior of all humanity died near 3 p.m. on Wednesday and was buried shortly before sunset that day. From Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset is one day and one night; from then until Friday sunset is two days and two nights; and from then until Saturday sunset is three days and three nights. Jesus Christ was resurrected at the end of this three-day and three-night period, near sunset on Saturday. Thus He was already risen long before the women came to the tomb before daylight on Sunday morning.

Jesus Christ's words were thus perfectly fulfilled, as verified by the Gospel accounts. He was not crucified on Friday afternoon, nor was He resurrected on a Sunday morning. The biblical evidence shows the Good Friday–Easter Sunday tradition to be a fabrication.

A correct harmonization of all the facts demonstrates that Jesus died near 3 p.m. that Wednesday afternoon, was entombed near sunset and was resurrected near sunset on Saturday, exactly three days and three nights later—just as He had stated. These are the facts, the correct biblical chronology that

verifies the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

The chart on page 18 gives a day-by-day chronology of these events as described in the Gospel accounts.

### The biblical festivals

Actually, the principal festivals and holidays observed by mainstream Christendom are a poor and pale reflection of true biblical teachings. Easter and Lent are a poor substitute for the wondrous truths revealed by keeping God's feasts.

The New Testament Church continued to observe the annual Passover to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ, but used the new symbols of bread and wine that He instituted (1 Corinthians 11:23-28). Today the members of the United Church of God commemorate this eminently important event in the same manner, in accordance with Christ's instructions. Again, the Bible contains no record of the Church observing Easter or Lent during the time of the apostles, nor any biblical command to observe Good Friday or Easter Sunday, especially since Christ did not die on Good Friday and was not resurrected on Easter Sunday. Instead, the apostles faithfully followed Christ's instructions to observe the biblical Passover "in remembrance" of Him (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). **GN**

### Recommended Reading

The marvelous plan of God has been obscured by theologians and religious leaders trying to merge nonbiblical practices with biblical events. Our eye-opening free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* will help you understand the real origins of several popular holidays and religious traditions.

It's also vitally important that we better understand why Jesus instructed His followers to observe Passover along with the other biblically defined festivals. Be sure to request your free copy of *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Please contact us at our office nearest you listed on page 2 or access our Web page at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).





# An Overview of Conditions

## Church attendance declines while interest in God increases



A recent *New Yorker* feature article states that "God and the afterlife still do well in polls, clocking affirmative ratings of around 90 per cent for belief in God and 80 per cent for the afterlife. In fact according to a 1999 study by Mark Chaves, a sociologist at the University of Arizona, belief in the afterlife is going up, even as church attendance drops. Attendance and membership have been drifting lower ever since the baby boomers . . . started to wander away again" (emphasis added).

Statistical information is always subject to manipulation, but Chaves also claims that, on average, only 28 percent of Catholics attend Mass on any given weekend and about one in five Protestants attend church on Sunday. In general these downward trends have been confirmed by other sources.

Wrote *Los Angeles Times* religion writer Margaret Ramirez: "Church attendance is declining in the United States and other industrialized nations . . . At the same time, however, in both the United States and elsewhere, the percentage of people who report that they think about spiritual issues is holding steady or on the rise."

Those polled also showed considerable interest in the meaning and purpose of life itself. One member of the Michigan team "believes that the findings show that while allegiance to religious institutions declines, spiritual concerns remain strong but are displayed in different outlets from the Church."

Dan Wakefield put it this way in his recent book, *How Do We Know When It's God?* He wrote: "I haven't lost faith in God, but I've lost faith in words." The impression given by

*"Church attendance is declining . . . At the same time, . . . the percentage of people who report that they think about spiritual issues is holding steady or on the rise."*

these various lines of thought is that God mainly reveals Himself in other ways than through the Bible and churches.

However, other observers have expressed serious misgivings about ungoverned spiritual expressions divorced both from the Bible and the church. They point out that this phenomenon reflects a move toward "cafeteria Christianity" in which believers pick and choose for themselves doctrines from different denominations and even New Age groups.

To further understand these important issues, please request our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *The Church Jesus Built* and *How to Understand the Bible*. (Sources: *The New Yorker*, *The Los Angeles Times*.)

## British Christianity in crisis

Over a 10-year period Anglican and Roman Catholic church-attendance figures are down in England and Wales. Baptisms and church marriages are also in decline. The Anglican Church in Hereford is a case in point. Even with some 1,000 parishioners, weekly attendance averages only about 60.

At the same time, adherents of other religions (not including Judaism) have tripled in number. One in four people in Leicester (a city in the British Midlands) is now a Hindu. But, countrywide, Islam is the fastest-growing religion.

The implications are troubling. According to *The Sunday Telegraph*: "Belief in a personal God has declined from 43 per cent in the 1950s to 31 per cent in the 1990s." (Sources: *The Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, TV program *Tempting Faith* [all London].)

## Battling over the Ten Commandments

Conservative American churches and political leaders seek to preserve the primacy of Christianity as well as give children daily reminders of right and wrong. So they are determined to see the Ten Commandments displayed in schools. Proposed laws have been brought before state legislatures and even the U.S. Congress to make it a requirement.

But civil-liberty groups and non-Christians are determined that this practice come to a halt once and for all. Eventually the Supreme Court will probably rule on the question. In the meantime, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has begun legal proceedings in Kentucky against two counties and one school district that already display the Ten Commandments.

However this question is eventually resolved by the courts, God's law should be taught to everyone—beginning in the home. To better understand how and why these laws are the supreme and ideal guide for human behavior, please request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*. (Source: *The Guardian* [London].)

## Media a full-time job for children

It's no secret that American children spend a lot of time with TV, computers, music and video games. But how much time do children tune in to non-school-related electronic-media sources? According to a recent study, it's about 5½ hours a day, totaling more than 38 hours a week.

"Watching TV, playing video games, listening to music and surfing the Internet have become a full-time job for the typical American child," concluded Drew Altman, president of the Kaiser Family Foundation, which conducted the national study of media habits of children ages 2 to 18. "This study really underscores the importance of paying attention to the messages and the information kids are getting from the media, both good and bad."

The amount of time spent using this type of media varied





Albania

Zimbabwe

Bahrain

Cyprus

Burkina Faso

New Zealand

Jordan

Belgium

Argentina

Czech Republic

# ions Around the World

by age. Those in the 2-to-7 age-group averaged 3½ hours daily, and the study found that a third of youngsters of this age have a TV in their bedrooms. For those over 8, media use averaged almost seven hours a day, and two thirds of this group had a TV in their bedroom.

Not surprisingly, the survey found that the bulk of children's daily media time—an average of 3½ hours—was spent watching TV or videos. Listening to music on tapes, CDs or the radio occupied another hour and a half, and playing video games 20 minutes. In comparison, children spend an average of 44 minutes in recreational reading and 21 minutes using a computer for fun. About 60 percent of children said their parents had set no rules about TV viewing.

It's little wonder that families and societies suffer when children are so disconnected from their parents, when youngsters are fed a steady diet of mental junk food from the outside influences that so dominate their lives.

To better understand the principles that produce strong

*“Watching TV, playing video games [and] listening to music . . . have become a full-time job for the typical American child.”*

and stable families, be sure to request your free copy of our booklet *Making Life Work*. It's available from any of our offices listed on page 2, and you can download it from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org). (Sources: Scripps Howard News Service, *The Denver Post*.)

## Signor Prodi prods Europe

Romano Prodi, the new President of the European Commission (an integral arm of the European Union) has recently revealed the scale of his federal ambitions for a European superstate. Wrote David Hughes, political editor of *The Daily Mail*, “The President of the European Commission said Europe was creating its own government with its own military force. And he warned countries such as Britain that if they did not join in they would ‘disappear from the history books.’”

In a recent interview with *The Independent*, Mr. Prodi warned EU members to sign up to his vision of a European superstate or suffer the consequences. He had no hesitation in describing the European Union as a single government.

Also Mr. Prodi also said that a key step in the emerging process of unity is the development of a European army—a development the United States government views with some concern. He added that he was not joking when he mentioned a European army, a proposal that the leaders of Britain's governing Labour Party have tried to minimize and downplay to American observers.

In a sharp reaction to this outburst, the chief Tory leader William Hague, countered that Mr. Prodi “has confirmed our worst fears. The European Commission is intent on creating a single state in Europe with its own army, currency and

foreign policy. Yet despite the mounting evidence of the Commission's grandiose and undemocratic ambitions, [British prime minister] Tony Blair continues to mislead the British people. It is time he woke up to the dangers of a headlong rush to an unaccountable European superstate riding roughshod over the nation state” (Sources: *The Daily Mail*, *The Independent*, *The Times* [all London].)

## AIDS epidemic spreads, orphans 11 million

More than 50 million people have been infected with the AIDS virus, of whom 16.4 million have died, according to a recent United Nations report. In 1999, according to UN estimates, another 5.6 million people were infected with the AIDS virus. The 2.6 million deaths from the disease in 1999 are the highest annual total since the disease was recognized almost two decades ago.

Although drug therapies have slowed AIDS death rates in the United States and Europe, such advances offer little hope in other areas where many such treatments are hopelessly unaffordable. More than 70 percent of those infected with the virus live in sub-Saharan Africa. The percentage of the population in the independent states of the former Soviet Union infected with HIV has doubled in the last two years, primarily from growing intravenous drug use.

“The epidemic is far from over,” noted Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS, the United Nations' AIDS program. “The crisis is actually growing.”

More than 11 million children have been orphaned by the AIDS epidemic since it was first recognized in 1981, with another two million expected to be orphaned by the end of 2000, according to a recent United Nations report.

The UN defines an AIDS orphan as a child of 15 or younger who has lost a mother or both parents to the disease. In some African nations as many as one in 10 children are AIDS orphans. In comparison, before the AIDS epidemic about 2 percent of children in poorer countries were orphans.

*The 2.6 million deaths from AIDS in 1999 are the highest annual total since the disease was recognized almost two decades ago.*

Some 95 percent of AIDS orphans live in sub-Saharan African nations. In pre-AIDS days extended-family networks assumed care for orphaned family members. Now, however, “the traditional African extended family is breaking down under the unprecedented burden of the pandemic,” said the report.

Dr. Piot said that orphans are “the most forgotten aspect of the AIDS epidemic.” Left to themselves, many roam the streets or end up as child laborers, becoming “prime targets for gangs, militia and creating more child armies like those that participated in massacres in Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa.” (Sources: *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*.)

—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley



Ukraine

Mauritania

Slovenia

Barbados

Angola

Malta

Jamaica

Lebanon

Djibouti

Greenland

Cambodia



# Letters from Our Readers

## **The Good News**

I have been thoroughly blessed with the reading materials that I have requested from you. *The Good News* magazine is excellent reading. I am happy to see the Word rightly divided and not have the doctrines of men passed off as truth. I consider it seed well planted to contribute to your ministry.

*B.D., Bloomington, Indiana*

Thank you for the magazines I have received so far. The title *The Good News* is very apt in this day and age. Its contents always convey a sense of hope for the future of us all.

*D.O., Mallow, Republic of Ireland*

We can't thank you enough for the consistently great job you are doing with this magazine. I think it reflects God's Spirit in every way, from its balanced presentation to its quality articles to its overall graphic design.

*C.T., Southern California*

*The preceding three letters are a small representation of a large number of similar letters we regularly receive about the magazine and related literature. However, we should also say that, along with the many orchids, we occasionally get a few onions—and we plan to publish some of these in future issues.*

## **World news and trends**

Your in-depth analysis of world trends from the perspective of the Bible has given me insight and hope for the future. All along I had been very concerned about where mankind is heading, given these grisly harvests of catastrophes that beset us in a world that is becoming increasingly dangerous.

*G.P.U., Surrey, England*

## **Holidays or Holy Days?**

I just received your publication *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* and of course had to read it right away. I have not observed these nonbiblical holidays since my first *Good News* magazine. I remember the date because I had just witnessed my grandson coming into

the world and on the way home stopped to have my car checked out.

While waiting in the waiting room, I looked through the magazines lying there and found your November-December issue with an article about Christians and Christmas. I considered it a godsend as I had been dealing with the Christmas issue for a few years but did not know where to go to get the truth. Thank you for being there, and I thank the Lord that He answers the silent prayers of the heart. I called and requested a subscription and have been so grateful for each issue.

*M.G., Atlantic Beach, Florida*

Do you have any information on Easter? I can't believe God approves of the Easter Bunny and colored eggs. These things seem to me a put-down to Jesus' death and resurrection to save all mankind. That is a serious offense to what Jesus went through—the torture and painful death. I'd appreciate any information.

*M.C., Klamath Falls, Oregon*

*You are certainly right in your assessment. The booklet Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep? covers the specific areas you mentioned. Also, please see the article "The Good Friday–Easter Sunday Question" beginning on page 17 of this issue.*

## **Fundamental beliefs**

I found one of your books in the trash of our dorm cell called *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*, which has intrigued me and has brought so much controversy in my heart as to the way I was taught in the teachings of Christ. I need more information from your teachings and beliefs on the following subjects as I strive to learn and search the truth of the Scriptures for myself. I believe in your teachings and your fundamental beliefs, but Christ said to "search the Scriptures." That's what I intend to do, I earnestly hope, with your help. The subject matter I am referring to is God's food laws and the Sabbath.

*J.M. (prisoner), Huntsville, Texas*

*Our free booklet Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest has been mailed to you. Also,*

*in addition to the brief explanation on pages 30-33 of our Fundamental Beliefs booklet, we are in the final stages of preparing a publication explaining the biblical teaching on clean and unclean meats. When it is printed we will announce its availability in the pages of The Good News.*

## **The Good News' Web site**

I am writing to compliment you on a well-thought-out and -laid-out Web page. It's really nice to see your beliefs laid out so plainly on the Web for everyone to read. It shows you are dedicated to your beliefs and willing to share your knowledge of the Bible with everyone. I wish more churches were as open as yours. Even though I belong to a different church, I was surprised how really similar our beliefs were. Extremely interesting reading. I will pray for you and your evangelism.

*Internet reader*

*Readers who have access to the Internet can gain easy entry to our World Wide Web site. The address [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org) gives you access to issues of The Good News, our Bible Study Course, booklets and more. You can find further information from the United Church of God Web site at [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org).*

## **Bible Study Course**

I would like to enroll in the *Bible Study Course*. I would also like to add that the magazines and other study materials you have sent me are great. I read scriptures every day and have three devotionals, but I feel a study course is more informative. I want to learn what the Word of God has for me, and I have the desire to study and learn all I can. God has helped me so much in the past two years. I will continue to seek Him in all things.

*C.A., Granite, Oklahoma*

I'm 22 and looking forward to receiving the *Bible Study Course*. I really appreciate all the efforts made to create this course.

*L.B., Saint-Medard-en-Jalles, France*

We thank you for being a big help to us, most especially in spiritual matters. We are blessed with all the reading materials you've been sending. We can't express

how thankful we are for extending your help. We use the books in Bible study and to share and use as references with my friends.

J.A., Hong Kong

*The reader from Hong Kong may also benefit by enrolling in our free Bible Study Course. It consists of 12 user-friendly lessons designed to take the reader through*

*a systematic study of the major themes and teachings of the Holy Scriptures.*

#### Reader from Australia

I enjoy reading the articles in *The Good News* and like how you relate current events to biblical prophecy. Please accept my small donation as a token of appreciation. I hope and pray that your organization keeps up the good

work of sharing the good news.

C.B., Kangaroo Point, Queensland

*Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to The Good News, Box 541027, Cincinnati, Ohio 45254, U.S.A., or E-mail [gninfo@ucg.org](mailto:gninfo@ucg.org) (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).*



## Questions & Answers

**Q: How often and when should Christians partake of “the Lord’s Supper” as directed by Jesus to remember His death on the cross for the sins of the world?**

W.S., Northern Ireland

A: The expression “Lord’s Supper” is used only once in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 11:20, where it appears as a substitute term for the Passover. Jesus Christ Himself specifically referred to this observance as the Passover (Luke 22:8, 11, 15). He kept the Passover, with the new symbols of bread and wine, on the date specified in Leviticus 23 for this annual observance, namely the 14th of Nisan (also known as Abib) on the Hebrew calendar.

The Passover is a memorial to Christ’s death (1 Corinthians 5:7; 11:20-27), and memorial ceremonies are observed once a year. This is certainly the custom of observances described in the Bible as well as most of mankind’s secular observances.

The New Testament shows that Christians continued to observe the annual festivals (listed in Leviticus 23) at the times commanded by God. As a youth Christ kept the Passover annually at the specified time (Luke 2:41), and He continued this practice with His disciples (Luke 22:7-15).

After His death and resurrection the early Church continued to observe the other biblical Holy Days at their specified times. For example, Luke records that Jesus’ followers met to observe the Feast of Pentecost: “When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1).

Scripture gives no hint of the early Church adding to or changing the dates God

ordained for His festivals. The phrase in 1 Corinthians 11:26—“for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup”—simply points out that, by observing the New Testament Passover each year on the appropriate day, members were “proclaim[ing] the Lord’s death till He comes.”

The Bible specifies the yearly observance of the Passover, and history records its annual celebration as the practice of the early Church. The New Testament Passover, as a memorial of Jesus’ death, is to be observed annually rather than whenever or however often one chooses, just as all of the other annual festivals are to be kept once a year. Neither Jesus Christ nor the apostles indicated that we should change when or how often we observe any of God’s festivals.

Following the original disciples’ example, we should observe the Passover shortly after sunset at the beginning of the evening of the 14th day of the first month (Abib or Nisan) according to the Hebrew calendar. (Please see the dates given on pages 32-33 of our free booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

Keeping the Passover each year reminds us that God grants us eternal life in His Kingdom through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Passover. This observance is a memorial of our Savior’s continuing role in humanity’s salvation.

For further understanding, please request the booklets *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, *The Road to Eternal Life* and *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*. All are free of charge from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can access them

from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

**Q: Since Eve is the mother of all mankind, am I correct in assuming that all races on the earth are related to each other somewhere in the past?**

W.E.C., Asheville, North Carolina

A: You are correct according to God’s Word. The key passage is found in Acts 17:26: “And He [God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.”

Deuteronomy 32:8 makes the same point. “When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam [the first man; 1 Corinthians 15:45], He set the boundaries of the peoples.”

Anciently, all but eight people perished in Noah’s flood. Genesis 10 preserves a list of the nations comprised of their descendants. The concluding verse of that chapter tells us that “these were the families of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood” (verse 32). The New International Version renders it: “From there the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.”

These biblical facts make it clear that God (“Lord of heaven and earth”; Matthew 11:25) is the Creator of all peoples, races and languages. Each variety has a special beauty, usefulness and contribution to make to the whole of mankind. Prejudice and racial hatred should have no place in the human heart.

# Does Jesus Christ Really Understand?

*Our fast-paced world is far removed from the dusty roads Jesus walked in first-century Palestine. Can He really understand our needs and sufferings? Can He empathize with our worries?*

by Graemme Marshall

**T**he Bible tells us Jesus can “sympathize with our weaknesses” and that He was tempted in every way, just as we are (Hebrews 4:15). Yet we know He was not crippled or handicapped. We know He did not live to old age. Nor was He forced into unemployment or retirement. He never had to make ends meet on a pension. He didn’t go to war or face a veteran’s life, nor was He a victim of modern-day pollution, road rage or disease.

How, then, can Jesus understand the difficulties and challenges we face?

Could a 33-year-old single male with “legions of angels” at His command (Matthew 26:53) understand a woman’s needs? What of the trauma of a divorcee or someone facing bankruptcy, paying child support or eking out a living while drawing social security?

What of the myriad temptations and problems we face? Jesus didn’t live in a society quite like ours—with satellite television, video games, movies and smart bombs. If we are to come with confidence to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), how can we be sure Jesus understands what we suffer? After all, He is the glorified Son of God—an immortal spirit being—while we are weak, fleshly humans. If Jesus never experienced the human frailties we experience, how can He understand our personal needs in His role of Intercessor with the Father? (Hebrews 7:25).

Paul’s explanation that we are not alone in our trials can be comforting (1 Corinthians 10:13). If you attend a Christian fellowship, you find others going through similar experiences (2 Corinthians 1:3-6). This is

strengthening. Yet each of us has his own pain, trial and anguish that we may think no one else can properly understand.

We may wonder whether God can feel our pain. Can God appreciate the depth of human despair? Peter wrote that Jesus suffered for us, leaving us an example (1 Peter 2:21). In what ways did Jesus lead the way? What confidence can we have that He understands the personal trauma of every one of His people? Read on to appreciate Jesus’ unique trials and find comfort in them.

## **Weariness and limitations**

Can Jesus understand the limitations of a human body? Isaiah was inspired to write that Christ’s physical appearance didn’t make Him especially attractive or desirable (Isaiah 53:2). He was apparently average looking, and at times His body got just plain tired. He rested at the well of Samaria because He was physically weary and thirsty (John 4:6-7).

Like any other human, He needed time to recuperate from the stress of heavy responsibility, for the weight of the world really was on His shoulders. After periods of hectic activity, He withdrew to areas of solitude to refresh Himself and recuperate (Mark 6:31).

## **Our unjust society**

Can He understand life today? The plagues of government inefficiency and abuse, injustice and violent crime were just as much a part of His world as they are ours. His life was regulated by an oppressive system of at times foolish laws and regulations, just like ours.

Jesus knew the burden of oppressive taxation and the sting of racism. He lived

in Judea under the occupation forces of the mighty Roman Empire, which treated the populace as subjugated peoples and harshly enforced its requirements. One of Rome’s rules was that Jews could be commandeered anytime to carry a Roman soldier’s equipment for a mile. Simon of Cyrene was grabbed out of the crowd and made to carry the wooden beam on which Jesus would be crucified. Jesus was too weakened by a scourging to carry it further Himself (Matthew 27:32).

Jesus encouraged His followers not only to comply with this rule, but to go above and beyond. By carrying a burden for two miles, they would carry the load for some other passerby and fulfill the Golden Rule of doing to others as you would have them do to you (Matthew 5:41; Luke 6:31).

Jesus also spoke of the hypocritical leadership of the religious authorities of His day: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do” (Matthew 23:2-3).

He was personally insulted: accused of being illegitimate, “born of fornication” (John 8:41).

## **Family conflict and people problems**

Many of our problems concern relationships with members of our own family and close friends. We must try to get along with people we are near constantly—fellow workers, employees, neighbors and school officials—even though they sometimes oppose us at every turn. Jesus had to face similar difficulties. His own brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). He had gathered

a group of novice disciples around Him who at times vexed Him with their vanity and visions of grandeur (Luke 9:46).

The established religious community criticized Him for His lack of formal education in the Scriptures (John 7:15). Because He hailed from the small town of Nazareth in Galilee, Jesus endured slurs. Even one of His future disciples, on hearing where Jesus had grown up, asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

In the hour of His greatest distress, His closest friends deserted Him. In the Garden of Gethsemane His disciples fled when they saw Jesus would be arrested, leaving Him alone to face the religious authorities and their soldiers. The next day many of His disciples were still too frightened to be publicly seen as He was beaten and executed. "But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things" (Luke 23:49).

What about other people relationships? Jesus wasn't married, so can He understand marriage problems? How can Jesus understand what it is like to live with an unconverted mate?

Actually, He can. He was symbolically married to the nation of Israel. She was a selfish, unfaithful spouse who caused Him a great deal of grief and unhappiness (Jeremiah 3:6-14). He is not only *prepared* to take her back, He *will* receive her once again—when she repents and wants to be a faithful bride.

### Illness and pain

Can Jesus understand the physical and psychological pain of child abuse, rape, disease or physical infirmities?

Many people suffer from illness or accidents. Christ understands the depths of their suffering. The Gospels reveal that in His last hours as a human being He was falsely accused, mocked, reviled, sworn at, spat upon and slapped in the face. He suffered a brutal beating before His crucifixion, which in itself was an extremely painful and humiliating way to die.

Isaiah tells us of Jesus: "... There were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness" (Isaiah 52:14, New International Version). Apparently Jesus was barely recognizable as a human after the awful beating He suffered. As God in the flesh, did He want to live physically any

less than we do? No. He didn't want to feel the agony of crucifixion and death. But, faithful to the plan of God, He obeyed because of the necessity of His dying on our behalf (Matthew 26:39, 42).

### Grief and anguish

Have you ever been stolen from by your acquaintances, convicted without a hearing, suffered racial slurs, betrayed by a friend or had your money embezzled by a close associate? Jesus had all those things happen to Him.

But someone might say: "Well, Jesus never suffered the things I do." Perhaps the best response would be that what Jesus went through in 33 years of human existence the overwhelming majority of people have never duplicated. He experienced numerous attempts on His life, had a crown of thorns thrust down to gash into His scalp, was scourged and crucified and willingly gave His life to pay for the sins of others.

A few people have endured indignities on a similar level. Many were crucified in those years. None, though, lived without ever sinning. In this Jesus stands head and shoulders above everyone else: a real, flesh-and-blood, 33-year-old thoroughly masculine male who never sinned, not even once.

As Creator of all things, including humanity, God has through eons of time experienced depths of emotion about what humans do to other humans. This was even before Jesus became God in the flesh.

In the same way, He was "grieved in His heart" before the flood (Genesis 6:6), so we can know that Jesus grieves about the state of our world.

If you can sympathize with some of these examples, then rest assured that you can know with certainty that you have a faithful High Priest who walked this physical life ahead of you. He knows what it means to suffer. He is fully qualified on your behalf to express the depth of your personal, private suffering to the Father.

Christ meant it when He told us in His Word: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Approach God boldly and confidently, knowing with every pain you suffer that Jesus is the High Priest who hears, knows and understands how you feel. **GN**

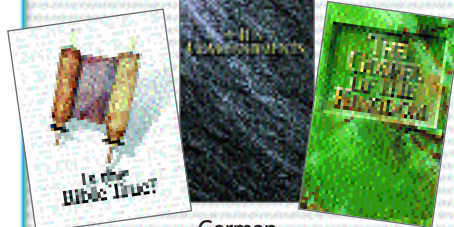
## Make Your Computer More Productive.



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**Virtual Christian**  
MAGAZINE

While you're there, be sure to take a

look at our sister publications, *Virtual Christian Magazine* (available only on the Internet) and *World News and Prophecy*. You'll find them filled with helpful articles much like those you enjoy in *The Good News*.

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**WORLD NEWS**  
**and PROPHECY**  
Biblical Typologies on Current Events



# The Rewards of Reading Together

*When family members read aloud together, lots of good things happen—including learning, laughter and love.*

by Don Hooser

**F**amily members reading together is an ancient tradition that is being rediscovered with delight in many countries. Many families vouch for the importance and pleasure of reading aloud. It is a family activity par excellence.

At the same time, many people lack the ability or desire to read. Thus they read little. The situation can lead to a vicious circle. Lack of skill leads to lack of interest and enjoyment, and lack of enjoyment leads to lack of motivation to improve one's skill.

Most children learn to read well enough to get through school, but many of them stop reading any more than is necessary. Schools have produced school-time readers, but not lifetime readers. While teaching students how to read, they have failed to teach them to want to read.

## Missing motivation

Why don't more people relish reading? The search for the answers to that question began in earnest with the 1955 publication of the book *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Since then much research has confirmed a major conclusion: Reluctant readers were not read to as children.

Since reading is the single most important skill in education, the National Commission of Reading formed in 1983 to study what works and what doesn't work in teaching reading. After two years of intensive research, in 1985 the commission's members published their report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. Note their conclusion: "The single most important activity . . . for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children." If parents want their children to be readers, they

need to read aloud to and with them.

Why is this so? First, success in many endeavors depends most of all on attitude. More than any other single activity, in or out of school, reading aloud has the greatest impact on building positive attitudes about books and reading.

A secondary reason is that regular reading aloud strengthens children's language skills—in reading, writing and speaking. Why is that so? Because it improves children's listening comprehension. Listening comprehension must come before reading comprehension.

In the United States Jim Trelease is the best-known advocate of reading aloud to children. Those who read his book *The New Read-Aloud Handbook* will likely be sold on the value of reading aloud with family members. The book answers the common questions on the subject and teaches parents how to be more effective when reading aloud.

## Overcoming obstacles

Why aren't parents, grandparents, older siblings and teachers reading aloud to children like they used to? It's largely because television, overly busy schedules and modern education that places too much stress on assignments that can be measured and tested. But parents shouldn't rely only on schools to teach their children to read, and we can turn off the TV and give children the full attention they long for and need.

You say you just don't have the time? A mere 15 minutes a day is often sufficient, unless you and your child choose to read longer than that. We all have the same 24 hours in a day. We spend our time doing the things we think are most important. Each of

us must decide: How high on my priority list is the academic, mental, emotional and spiritual development of my child? How important is spending time with him?

Youngsters need to be introduced at a young age to the pleasure, joy and adventure of reading. Parents who tell stories and read to their children and have their children read to them mold them into devoted readers. They instill in them a lasting love of literature, a deep appreciation for the printed word and a fondness for lifelong learning. Adults can ignite the spark of desire in their toddlers and fan its flames throughout their youth.

## Later benefits from reading

Some parents stop reading with their children as soon as the children can read for themselves. This is a mistake. When a child becomes a reader, he can take his turn at reading aloud, and reading with his parents and siblings continues to provide the same benefits and pleasures. We never get too old for a good story.

As a child ages, reading with their siblings and parents is important in a different way. It helps to keep the lines of communication open. Children may open up more about a relationship problem after reading about a similar problem. As children face moral temptations and dilemmas, the situation in a story and the relaxed togetherness with parents may lead to a helpful discussion.

Family members reading together helps bind families together. Reading, unlike TV viewing, is a social experience. Members of the family can stop anytime to talk about the story and laugh or cry together. Reading funny, sad and inspiring stories builds

emotional bridges as members share matters of the mind and heart. Reading together is an ideal activity to draw and keep us together, to snuggle and benefit from the healthful tonic of touch. The whole experience is the making of pleasant memories and warm love.

The benefits of reading are illustrated by a poem by Strickland Gillilan, "The Reading Mother":

*You may have tangible wealth untold:  
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.  
Richer than I you can never be—  
I had a Mother who read to me.*

Fathers, too, need to get involved. When mothers do all the reading, boys get the idea that reading is not masculine and

children's mental and emotional development. Children's TV-viewing time needs parental regulation and rationing.

If mishandled, reading aloud can be monotonous and boring. Here are a few suggestions to keep it interesting:

- Make sensible choices of reading materials—not too difficult and not too easy.
- Read together regularly with your children.
- Choose reading together for short sessions more often than reading together for a few long sessions.
- Don't let a session go longer than a child's attention span.

Be enthusiastic and use expressive tones of voice. Modulate your voice to fit the dialogue. If a story contains words or sections that are boring or too difficult for the child to understand, skip over them or change them. In other words, talk the story. Vary the pace. Don't read too fast. Slow down during a suspenseful part. Take time to discuss what you just read.

### Suggestions for reading

What should you read? A vast variety of valuable literature is readily available: wonderful books, stories, poems and articles. In general, pick subjects that you know will be interesting as well as wholesome and profitable to your children. Choose literature that clearly communicates

right vs. wrong, that glorifies virtue and condemns vice. We can learn so much about how to live and how not to live by the heroes and villains of fiction and non-fiction. If your child's school is neglecting important subjects such as history and the great leaders of the past, include those subjects at home.

*The New Read-Aloud Handbook* gives many suggestions for good read-aloud books (not all good books are good for reading aloud). The author, Jim Trelease, also edited the book *Read All About It!*

Its subtitle is *Great Read-Aloud Stories, Poems, and Newspaper Pieces for Preteens and Teens*. Both books are published by Penguin Books.

### The book no one should be without

The volume we most highly recommend is the Bible, a perennial best-seller around the world and the foundation of all proper knowledge. Even when the Bible is judged only as literature, the scholars of the world consistently rank it among the world's greatest works of literature. Actually, it is a collection of a wonderful variety of types of literature.

Many great men and women of history have appreciated the Bible. Notice what some American presidents have said:

- George Washington: "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."
- Abraham Lincoln: "This book . . . is the best gift God has given to man . . . But for it we could not know right from wrong."
- Theodore Roosevelt: "A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education."
- Franklin D. Roosevelt: "I feel that a comprehensive study of the Bible is a liberal education for anyone. Nearly all of the great men of our country have been well versed in the teachings of the Bible."

To underscore the unique importance of the Bible, including its divine origin and purpose, *The Good News* has produced several accompanying articles about this Book of all books in this issue. Be sure to read them because they explain how the absolute truths of the Bible are relevant and applicable to our everyday lives.

### Family Bible reading

Everything said so far in this article is applicable to reading the Bible aloud. When family members read the Bible together, they draw closer to each other as well as to their Creator, who inspired the Bible.

Everyone love stories, and the Bible is largely a collection of stories. Even most of the instructive parts are presented within a story flow. The Bible has an abundance of action and adventure, heroes and villains, tragedies and triumphs, drama and emotion.

Some parents feel inadequate or even hypocritical in taking the lead in Bible reading. But God doesn't want parents to

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then lose interest. This is a reason most of the children in remedial-reading classes are boys. Fathers need to support and participate in reading aloud.

What about the competition of TV? Spending significant time watching television has many negative effects. Even when a family avoids TV's moral trash, TV viewing can detract from time that could be spent in more-beneficial activities including reading, thinking and communicating. Unlike reading, passive TV viewing stifles imagination and creativity. Intellectual junk food smother

# Jesus Christ's Later Ministry

by Mario Seiglie

**I**n the September-October and November-December 1999 issues of *The Good News*, we considered some of the many archaeological findings that shed light on Judea in the early first century, when Jesus Christ grew to manhood and began His ministry. We continue in this issue with other findings that shed light on and confirm the accuracy of historical details recorded for us in the Gospels.

While Christ's early ministry took place primarily in Galilee, His later ministry centered on Jerusalem. In Galilee, in spite of His many miracles and inspired preaching, He was eventually rejected by most of the townspeople.

"Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty

works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day'" (Matthew 11:20-23).

## An unusual pool

The Gospels often note that Jesus and His disciples traveled to Jerusalem for the biblical festivals God commanded in Leviticus 23 (Luke 2:41-42; 22:7-20; John 2:13, 23; 7:1-2, 8, 10, 14, 37-38). John 5 records an event that took place during one of these feasts, although it doesn't specify which (to learn more about these biblical feasts, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*).

"After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water . . .

"Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, 'Do you want

*Archaeological findings shed light on and confirm the accuracy of historical details recorded for us in the Gospels.*



**A pool with five porches?** For years critics of the Bible thought the apostle John's description of the Bethesda Pool to be a fabrication—until the area was excavated a century ago. There excavators found the remains of a large double pool, left, with



a central colonnaded causeway dividing the two parts, as shown on a model of the pool, right, based on the ruins uncovered there. After almost 2,000 years, John's description of a pool "having five porches" was proven to be accurate.

to be made well?' The sick man answered Him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.' Jesus said to him, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk.' And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked . . ." (John 5:1-9).

For years critics questioned John's description of a pool "having five porches," because such an architectural design would be highly unusual. But that changed when excavators began digging in the area about a century ago.

" . . . When Bethesda was cleared of the rubble of centuries and brought once more to the light of day, [archaeologists discovered] a vast double pool covering 5,000 square yards to the north of the Temple area. It in fact had five colonnades. Four of these surrounded the whole place, but the fifth porch, in which the sick folk lay waiting to be healed, stood on a ridge of rock which divided the two pools" (Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, 1982, p. 423).

The fifth "porch," which had led some to question or even dismiss John's account, was this columned walkway separating the two pools. John's description was proven accurate.

John McRay, archaeologist and professor of New Testament at Wheaton College Graduate School in Illinois, adds that in the excavations "many fragments of column bases, capitals and drums [column sections] were found, which probably belonged to the five porches (i.e., porticoes or colonnaded walkways) of the pool John mentions" (*Archaeology & the New Testament*, 1991, p. 187).

### The Pool of Siloam

The apostle John mentioned another pool in connection with another of Jesus Christ's miracles of healing. "Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth . . . He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing" (John 9:1, 6-7).

This pool, too, has been discovered, and

thousands of visitors to Jerusalem visit it each year. Professor McRay explains: "[The pool] was built by King Hezekiah in the eighth century B.C. at the southern end of a long tunnel he cut through solid rock to bring water from Gihon Spring to the pool inside the city walls (2 Kings 20:20) . . .

"The appearance of the pool has changed through the centuries; it has become considerably smaller (50 feet long by 15 feet wide) than originally. In 1897 F.J. Bliss and A.C. Dickie uncovered a court about 75 feet square, in the center of which was the pool. It was probably surrounded by a colonnaded portico . . . After the 1897 excavations, the people of the village of Silwan (an Arabic rendering of Siloam) built a mosque with a minaret over the northwest corner of the pool, and it still stands above the pool" (ibid., p. 188).

Professor McRay notes that "discoveries of the Well of Jacob (John 4:12), the Pool of Bethesda (5:2) [and] the Pool of Siloam (9:7) . . . have lent historical credibility to the text of John . . . These are but a few of the examples that could be produced which put New Testament contexts squarely in the stream of history and geography" (pp. 18-19).

### Conflicts with Pharisaic practices

Of all the human adversaries during His ministry, the Pharisees caused Jesus the most trouble. They had imposed tedious religious regulations on the practicing Jewish population. Jesus described their effect: "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men" (Matthew 23:4-5).

Christ denounced the Pharisees' hypocrisy of enacting many religious laws that

obscured or even contradicted the intent of the laws God had revealed to Israel. He compared them to "whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly,



*The Pool of Siloam is mentioned in connection with one of Jesus Christ's miraculous healings. Although the remains of the pool have since greatly changed, it can still be visited. The pool, in the area of the original City of David, is fed by the Gihon Spring.*

but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (verses 27-28).

Whitewashed tombs were a common sight in Israel. The practice of whitewashing grave sites was based on a ritual established by the Pharisees.

Archaeologists have uncovered many ancient tombs and other burial places in Israel. They range from a simple hole in the ground with a stone covering to elaborate burial chambers for the rich. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says: "For groups without a settled abode, interment must have taken the form of roadside burials . . . Under Greco-Roman influence, Palestine tombs took on the exterior forms and ornamentation of classic architecture . . . Exposed areas were whitewashed to obviate uncleanness through accidental contact at night (Matthew 23:27)" (1979, Vol. 1, pp. 557, 559, "Burial").

William Barclay gives further information that helps us understand burial practices of the time: "Here again is a picture which any Jew would understand. One of the commonest places for tombs was by the

wayside. We have already seen that anyone who touched a dead body became unclean (Numbers 19:16). Therefore, anyone who came into contact with a tomb automatically became unclean. At one time in particular the roads of Palestine were crowded with pilgrims—at the time of the Passover Feast. For a man to become unclean on his way to the Passover Feast would be a disaster, for that meant he would be debarred from sharing in it. It was then Jewish practice in the month of Adar to whitewash all wayside tombs, so that no pilgrims might accidentally come into contact with one of them and be rendered unclean.

“So, as a man journeyed the roads of Palestine on a spring day, these tombs would glint white, and almost lovely, in the sunshine; but within they were full of bones and bodies whose touch would defile. That, said Jesus, was a precise picture of what the Pharisees were. Their outward actions were the actions of intensely religious men; their inward hearts were foul and putrid with sin” (*Daily Bible Study Commentary*, Bible Explorer Software).

Christ used this commonly seen feature of the Israelite countryside to drive home a spiritual point.

### The Corban vow

Another conflict Jesus had with the Pharisees was over their laws and regulations that at times directly negated the Ten Commandments. One such example was the Corban vow.

In a stinging rebuke, Jesus told the Pharisees: “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban’—(that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do’” (Mark 7:9-13).

In the 20th century archaeologists have found dramatic confirmation of this kind of vow. In the 1950s they discovered a stone coffin inside a Jewish tomb in the Kidron Valley southeast of Jerusalem. The lid bore an inscription stating the contents were “corban.” The inscription reads, “All that

a man may find to his profit in this ossuary [is] an offering (corban) to God from him who is within it” (McRay, p. 194).

The vow was inscribed in the hope that it would dissuade any potential thief from taking any valuable contents, such as jewelry, by declaring all had been consecrated to God and that the robber would be committing sacrilege to take it and use it for any other purpose.

But why would Jesus condemn this kind of vow? The passage in Mark points out the kinds of problems that arose. Jesus was condemning a man-made vow that could break God’s commandments. In the example He used, some, He said, were declaring part or all of their possessions “corban,” or dedicated to God. In such circumstances a needy father or mother could not inherit a deceased son’s goods because they had been declared “corban” and thus were consecrated to God.

This vow was based on a nonbiblical belief that a person would receive extra favor from God for such a vow. As time went along, this kind of vow was also used as an excuse to avoid helping a parent in need. As Jesus pointed out, such practices broke the Fifth Commandment, which tells us to honor our parents.

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains: “Jesus showed how these religious leaders had in effect nullified this commandment. They could simply affirm that a particular item had been a gift devoted to God. Then the item could not be used by an individual but was kept separate. This was simply a clever way of keeping things from passing to one’s parents. The person would of course continue to keep those things in his own home where they had been supposedly set aside for God.

“Such action was condemned by Jesus as being hypocritical, for while it appeared to be spiritual, it actually was done to keep one’s possessions for himself. Thus this failure to help one’s parents deliberately violated the fifth commandment . . . Such action had been described by Isaiah centuries before (Isaiah 29:13). Their [the Pharisees’] religion had become a matter of action and man-made rules. Their hearts were far from God and consequently their worship was in vain” (Logos Software).

We will continue this series with the climactic events surrounding Jesus Christ’s arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection. **GN**

# Reading

*Continued from page 27*

wait until they overcome their flaws before they teach the Bible to their children. Ask for God’s help and He will answer. Reading the Bible gives parents increasing strength to overcome their own faults.

Some have made brief attempts at reading the Bible and concluded it is hard to understand and boring. When reading to children, remember the suggestions above for making it interesting. One can skip sections that seem uninteresting, hard to understand or relatively unimportant without distorting the overall message. One can paraphrase and summarize sections in one’s own words.

Children understand much better when a parent chooses a modern version of the Bible rather than the King James Version with its often-outdated language. Though some versions of the Bible are more accurate than others and should be relied on for serious study, almost any version of the Bible conveys the lessons fairly accurately. The Bible quotations in *The Good News* are mostly from the New King James Version, which is similar in wording and accuracy to the King James Version but uses modern English. Or a parent may choose to use the King James Version and substitute a modern synonym each time he encounters an archaic word.

What does the Bible say about itself? The apostle Paul reminded Timothy, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Today’s English Version). Paul knew that reading the Scriptures was and would always be the most profitable reading possible.

Paul told Timothy: “. . . From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation . . .” Timothy was greatly blessed to have been grounded in the Scriptures during his early years. His grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, had taught him God’s Word and had served as his role models in the faith (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15).

### The importance of teaching children

In Matthew 22:36-40 Jesus revealed that

the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our fellowman. The Bible can be summed up as the Instruction Book that teaches us how to love God and how to love our neighbor.

In stating the first great commandment, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." Notice what follows: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (verses 6-7).

Words are "in your heart" after you repeatedly hear them, think about them, believe them and apply them. To "teach them diligently" is accomplished partly by parents reading the Bible to their children and explaining its passages. To "talk of them" shows the importance of encouraging interactive responses, comments and discussion during Bible-reading time. It also indicates parents should daily point out biblical principles and their applications.

Of the New Covenant God said, "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10). Parents can greatly aid the process through family Bible reading.

Another help to absorb God's Word is memorizing key scriptures. Encourage children to learn important verses while they have strong memories.

Why is family Bible reading so important? First, God's Word is the most important subject by far for our children to learn! Second, childhood is the best time to start learning God's Word. Children are naturally more teachable and pliable than adults. As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined.

The Bible verifies that information and lessons taught during childhood can have a lifetime effect. "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6, New American Standard Bible). To put it another way, the knowledge he learns as a child won't depart from him.

### **Provide spiritual nourishment**

Most parents want to be good providers, as we are told to be in 1 Timothy 5:8. But God wants parents to provide not just the physical necessities, but spiritual

nourishment. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

For very young children, select parts of the Bible they can easily understand. Often what works best is for the parent to learn a Bible story well and then tell it in his own words. One can use children's Bible-story books, but be aware that they vary considerably in quality and biblical accuracy.

Some of the most beneficial parts for young children are stories from throughout the Bible (with their lessons) and clear Christian-living teachings. The book of Proverbs is directed especially to children and offers practical advice on all aspects of life.

Family Bible study can include information and material that is related to the Bible as well as the Bible itself. Some books about the Bible are quite accurate and interesting. Nonbiblical stories and articles that teach good lessons and values can be worthy supplements to Bible reading. *The Good News* publishes many booklets and the *Bible Study Course* that can help in understanding the Bible, Christian living and God's purpose for mankind.

Children generally learn more when teaching is interactive. Encourage them to ask questions and make other comments. Bible games can make learning fun, and some games don't require buying anything. Quizzing each other about the Bible can be fun while it reinforces young memories. For those with computers, many Bible-related software packages, including games, are available.

Many Bible stories and other worthwhile stories have been recorded on videotape and audiotape. Listening to recordings with family members can supplement other teaching methods.

### **Parental responsibility to teach**

Regrettably, a strong anti-Bible bias exists in today's educational system. Parents need to support their children by teaching them the basic truths and moral values God's Word offers.

Now a word to fathers in particular: We earlier emphasized the value of fathers reading to their children. Notice that the Bible, too, emphasizes the need for fathers to be fully involved in the spiritual education of their children: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring

them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4, Revised Standard Version).

Family Bible reading and family prayer are two ways to fulfill this admonition. Fathers reading with and talking with their children help "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6).

According to Scripture, teaching children is a top-priority parental responsibility. It is a priceless accomplishment when you teach your children the lifetime habit of reading and studying the Bible. It's even more wonderful if this gratifying family tradition carries on from generation to generation.

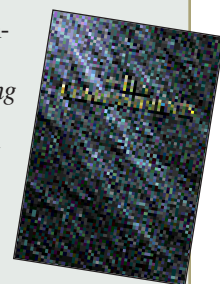
The apostle Paul wrote of the need for people to have "the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Parents can help cultivate in their children a love for the truth of God's Word that, in turn, will lead to wisdom, faith, character and eternal life.

When members of a family read aloud together, and especially when they include reading the Bible, they truly are doing something worthwhile that will last. Their minds are enriched and expanded as they explore great literature. Their personalities and character are molded both by the wonderful words and the way the words are spoken and shared.

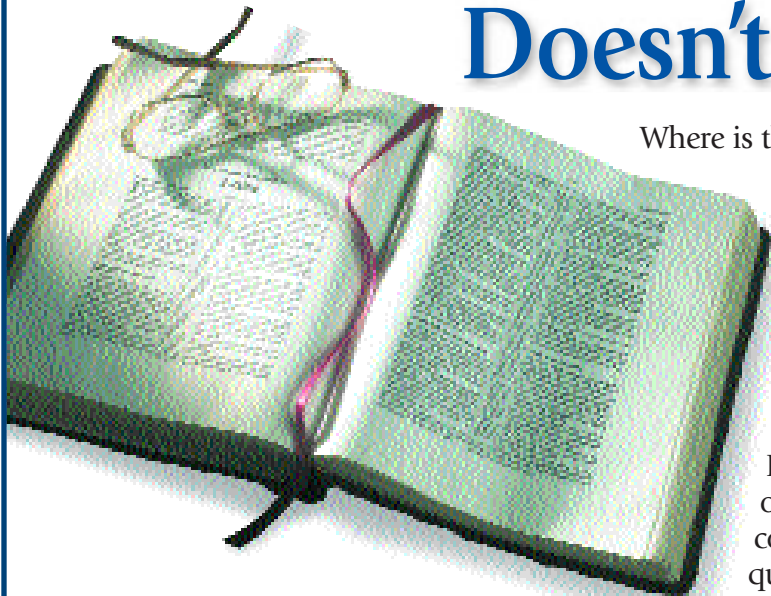
The children will likely become better readers, they will enjoy reading more, and they will become lifetime readers. Someday, when those children have children of their own, they will read to their children. **GN**

### **Recommended Reading**

As a foundation for beginning regular Bible reading with your family, we recommend *The Ten Commandments and Making Life Work*. These free booklets discuss many vital principles that guide human behavior. With this understanding, you'll be much better equipped to understand and explain the many lessons recorded for us in the Bible. Request your free copies of these booklets from any of our offices listed on page 2 or access them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).



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