

The Good News

November-December 2000

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

AIDS

How a Killer Plague
Can Be Stopped

AIDS Orphans: A Disaster for Africa • Russia's Time of Troubles
Why 'A Magazine of Understanding'? • Christmas Before Christ?

We Reap What We Sow

You've probably heard that experience is the best teacher. That's not necessarily true. Experience is the *most effective* teacher, but not always the *best* one. Once you have experienced something, it's not possible to go back and *unexperience* it. When you've tried something and found it harmful, you can't undo that experience. The damage is done, and you'll end up suffering the consequences of your actions.

That's not a popular notion in a world obsessed with quick fixes. Ours is a shallow world, not prone to giving much thought to the link between problems and their causes.

When it comes to problems, few can equal AIDS. It's estimated to have cut down 19 million lives already, with another 35 million infected and given what amounts to a death sentence.

We can learn a great lesson from the AIDS plague. Many tragedies and much suffering can be traced to their source: our own actions and decisions. In a world of freedom of choice, some choices inevitably lead to bad results.

Actions yield consequences. We've heard the saying "You reap what you sow," but most don't realize the source of that saying—the Bible (Galatians 6:6-7; compare Job 4:8).

Many centuries ago the Hebrew prophet Hosea looked at the sad spiritual condition of the kingdom of Israel. Idolatry, violence and immorality were commonplace (Hosea 2, 4). Within a few years the mighty Assyrian Empire would sweep in and lay the kingdom waste, slaughtering its citizens and enslaving the survivors. God revealed to Hosea what was coming—and *why*. "They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind," He said (Hosea 8:7). "You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies . . ." (Hosea 10:13). God warned them that they were simply reaping what they had sown. It was inevitable that the people's sins would catch up with them.

When thousands die in great disasters—epidemics, famines, hurricanes, floods—many blame God. Yet, as God told the ancient Israelites, He would bless them with health, favorable weather and abundant crops if only they would obey Him (Leviticus 26:3-12; Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

Most chose not to obey. That decision affected not only their own lives but also the lives of their children, who fell victim to their parents' foolish choices. The innocent often suffer for the sins of others. That is one of the tragic consequences of wrong choices.

When we analyze suffering, we can learn a great deal if only we will trace the circumstances back to their cause. Proverbs 22:3 warns us to consider the long-term consequences of our choices: "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished."

When we look for the major causes of suffering, we often need look no further than ourselves. In one way or another *sin* is the underlying cause of most suffering. God has a better way: *Learn from the experiences of others*. He tells us many of the events described in the Bible were recorded as examples for us (1 Corinthians 10:11), so we can learn the lessons without the painful consequences.

God's laws—which many dismiss as hopelessly out of date or infringements on their personal freedom—define a path of life that will help us avoid pain and suffering. He gave those laws "that it might *be well*" with those who keep them (Deuteronomy 5:16, 29, 33; 6:3, 18). God told the ancient Israelites that if they would obey Him, neighboring nations would admire them for their wisdom and understanding and want to follow their example (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

We have a choice. We can obey our Creator and it will "be well" with us, or we can disobey and, as is pointed out in our lead article, reap the consequences.

Either way, we reap what we sow.

—Scott Ashley

Good News

November/December 2000 Volume 5, Number 6

Circulation: 310,000

The Good News (ISSN: 1086-9514) is published bimonthly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 5405 DuPont Circle, Suite A, Milford, OH 45150. © 2000 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Milford, Ohio 45150, and at additional mailing offices.

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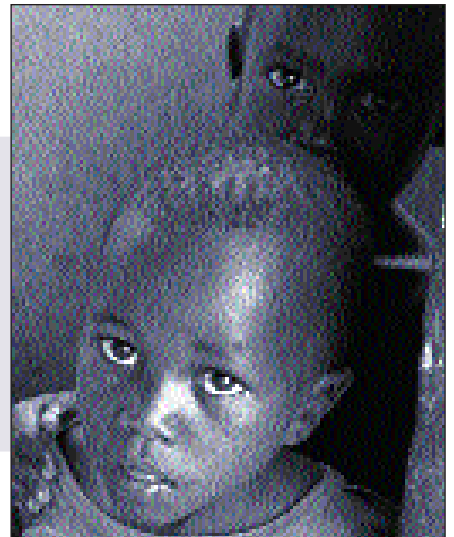
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Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 1487140.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to *The Good News*, Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

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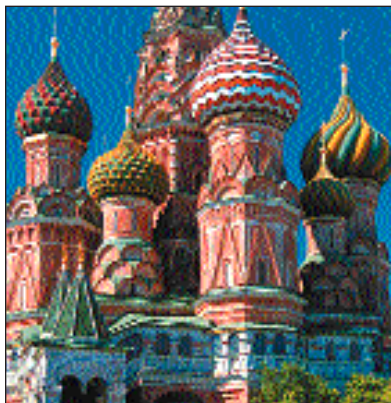
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AIDS: How a Killer Plague Can Be Stopped

The AIDS plague will soon become the most deadly killer epidemic of all time, taking more victims than the dreaded black death of the 1300s. The saddest fact, however, is that neither plague had to happen. The measures that would have prevented so much suffering and saved so many lives have been readily available for thousands of years—in the pages of the Bible. 4

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AIDS

How a Killer Plague Can Be Stopped

by Melvin Rhodes

The AIDS epidemic, increasingly compared to the dreaded black death of the 1300s, has taken millions of lives and promises to take millions more. Yet, tragically, we ignore the only real solution to this deadly plague.

The facts about AIDS are overwhelming. The disease is spreading rapidly from country to country. Morgues are working round the clock to keep up with the demand. Millions of orphans are left behind by their dead parents. Cemeteries are filled and overflowing. Coffin makers are running out of wood. Ignorance, superstition and fear abound. Governments are paralyzed by the sheer enormity of the death toll. Medical services are swamped and unable to cope.

And the problem is growing worse. Much worse.

We've seen the images on television and heard the news reports from countries devastated by AIDS. But they don't begin to do justice to the magnitude of the problem.

How bad is it? The president of one country in southern Africa told the recent international AIDS conference in Durban, South Africa, that in 10 years his country *will not exist*. With a third of its citizens infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), it's only a matter of time before virtually his entire country is wiped out by this modern plague.

This is not the first plague the world has experienced. Although the opening paragraph of this article describes the situation in Africa, it is also a vivid description of the black death, the plague that devastated many European countries in the middle of the 14th century. England's population was

six million when the plague arrived in 1348. By 1500 it had plummeted to 1.6 million. Because that decline occurred over seven generations, it involved far more than 4.4 million deaths. Depression, pessimism, a loss of faith in religious institutions, change in land tenure and major alterations in trade and commerce ensued as a result of the massive die-off.

Now we see a similar pattern threatening not just one but at least several nations. History has a way of repeating itself.

Remarkably, both the black death and AIDS *easily could have been prevented*. Measures that would have prevented the widespread suffering and death from both plagues were written down thousands of years ago—in the pages of the world's best-selling book, the Bible.

The black death strikes

In 1346 the Mongol army besieged the Genoese trading center at Caffa, now Feodosia, on the Crimean peninsula. The Mongols were forced to withdraw because of heavy losses. Their losses, surprisingly, were not attributable to fighting but to a mysterious and devastating malady that became known as the plague. The disease was spread by fleas that lived on the backs of the Asiatic black rat. When the rats died of plague, the fleas would find a new home—often the closest human being.

At the time no one knew how the deadly

disease was transmitted. They were in the dark as to its cause or how to prevent its spread.

The Mongols fled, but not before the disease had spread into the city of Caffa. From there it rode aboard ships through the Black Sea out into the Eastern Mediterranean and to Sicily, then on to the Italian mainland and the countries beyond.

Within two years it had reached England. Horrible, inexplicable deaths ensued within a year for about a fourth of the population. Commerce and travel slowed, then ground to a halt.

In the ignorance and superstition of the late Middle Ages, many people thought the disease was spread through the air. There was some logic in this assumption. The plague would arrive in a community suddenly and without warning, then depart a few days later as mysteriously as it had come, leaving death and a few stunned, shaken survivors in its wake.

To protect themselves from what they supposed was contaminated air, people would lock themselves in latrines and breathe the foul-smelling air into their lungs to keep from breathing the air outside.

Some people looked for scapegoats, blaming others for their misfortune and killing them by the thousands even as they sought to be spared from the deadly invader. Many grew suspicious of Jews, who to a large extent had gone unscathed by the plague.

Made scapegoats for the horrendous suffering, many Jews who had escaped the plague died at the hands of their neighbors. Ironically, plague victims could have learned much from the Jews that could have spared many of them from the disease. (Later we will consider in greater depth why Jews didn't contract this disease in the same numbers as others.)

A preventable plague

Perhaps this background helps us better understand the ignorance and superstition that contributes to the spread of AIDS in less-developed parts of the world.

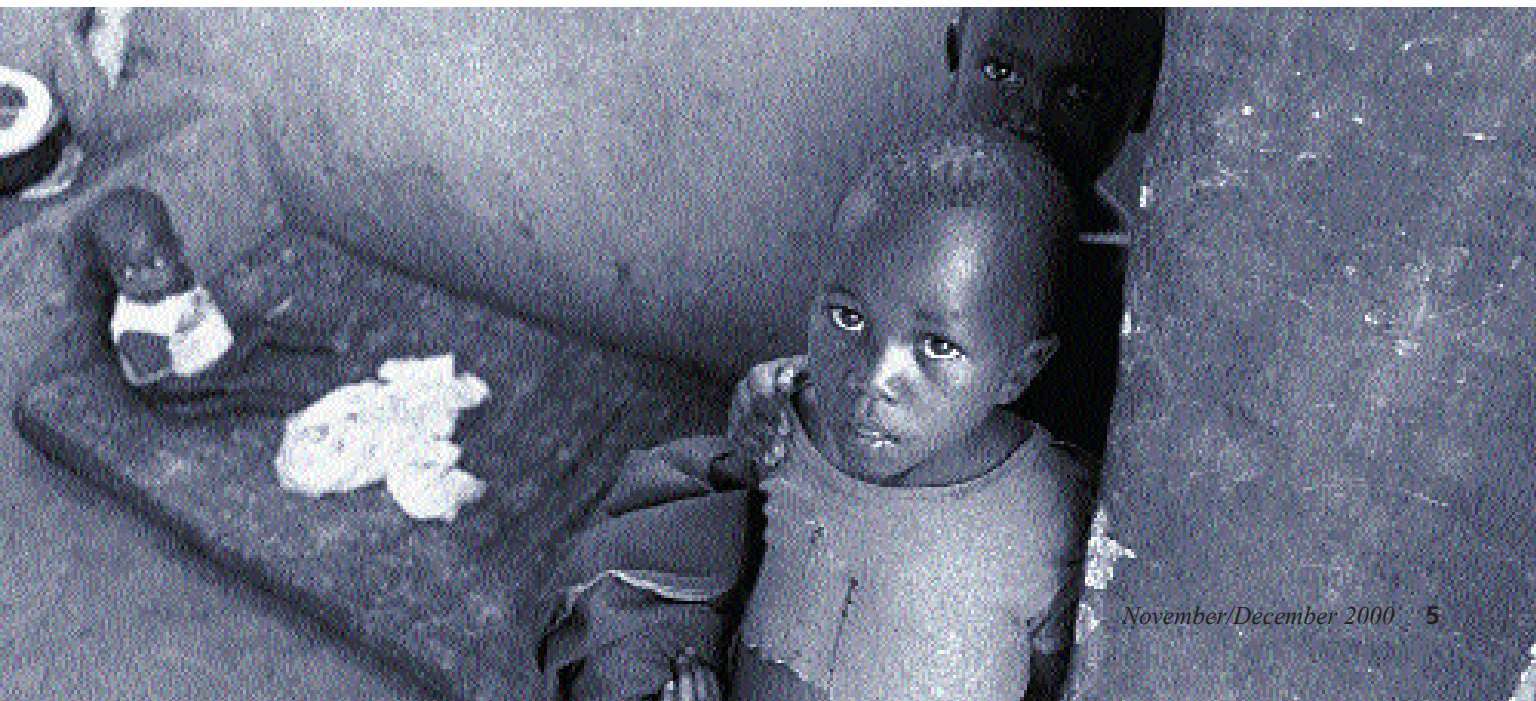
The black death was a disease of filth. If people had followed simple biblical laws of hygiene, many could have avoided infection and death. But people didn't make the connection. The plague finally came to an end only when the more-aggressive European brown rat drove out the plague-infested black rat.

Today's plague, AIDS, is also a disease of filth—the filth of the mind that dominates contemporary culture and leads to rampant sexual immorality. Like the black death before it, the solution to the modern plague is revealed in Scriptures.

AIDS: A plague begins

No one knows for sure how or when AIDS started. The many theories come down to the fact that the African green monkey carries the HIV naturally in its bloodstream. Somehow, several decades ago, the virus in the blood of the green monkey was transmitted to people, probably when hunters killed and butchered HIV-carrying monkeys or consumed meat from infected monkeys. Once in the human bloodstream,

The president of one country in southern Africa told the recent international AIDS conference in Durban, South Africa, that in 10 years his country *will not exist*.



the virus proved to be a deadly killer.

It could have ended there, in the jungles of tropical Africa. But it didn't. Once the virus made the jump to man, it spread quickly around the world. Whereas trade in the Middle Ages was slow, modern transportation is fast. The result was that people all over the world were dying from AIDS before the disease even had a name.

In fact, the name reflects the mystery and sudden urgency of the disease. AIDS is an acronym for *acquired immunodeficiency syndrome*, reflecting the reality of a disease that came from nowhere and resulted in the deaths of thousands of people whose immune systems suddenly failed to work. Death itself for AIDS victims is attributed to various causes, but they all come back to the fact that the immune system has failed to act normally.

In the United States the problem was first seen among homosexuals. It was soon established that certain homosexual practices were particularly effective means of spreading the disease.

However, it would be wrong to describe the disease as only a "gay plague." Well more than half the people with AIDS are in Africa, where it is a heterosexually transmitted disease.

For many years it was thought that education would help stop the spread of AIDS. The experts advised people not to practice "unprotected sex" and that if they used condoms they would reduce the risk of contamination. In the last few years, however, people have been increasingly inclined not to bother protecting themselves because new drugs have become available that help those infected with HIV live longer.

However, it is important to understand that *these drugs are not a cure*. They can only delay and alleviate the symptoms, and some have severe side effects. The sad fact remains that *there is no cure*; there are only steps we can take to prevent the disease from spreading in the hope that science can find a cure or that it may eventually die out.

God's definition of high risk

Some reports on the recent AIDS conference in Africa noted that people in "high-risk groups" were engaging in unprotected sex again. Of itself that is not surprising. Shocking is how "high-risk" was defined—as having sex with *six or more partners per year*.

Six or more partners per year? The Bible defines "high risk" as having *any* partners, even one, outside of marriage—either before or after committing to a partner for life.

Statements like this show us just how far man has drifted from God. They also illustrate that man cannot find a solution to the AIDS problem without God.

Three thousand years ago King Solomon wrote: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). His inspired proverbs were intended "to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion" (verse 4).

Solomon, like millions today, was not inexperienced in sexual matters. He had "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (1 Kings 11:3). Toward the end of his life his mistakes led him to conclude: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). We would do well to heed Solomon's words.

A plague of broken laws

When we get to the root of the problem, we find that AIDS is the natural consequence of breaking God's laws. When HIV infections first jumped from monkeys to man, they could not have spread like they did, and taken millions of lives, without the gross immorality that brought the worldwide plague we see today.

At the beginning, when God created the first man and woman, He knew they needed instruction. They did not know right from wrong. They could not learn everything themselves. In Genesis 2:16-17 we find God instructing Adam on what he could eat and what he should avoid eating.

Later in the same chapter we read that God created Eve as a companion for Adam. We then find words that were intended for future generations. They talked of the cycle of life as it was to be: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (verse 24).

Here God instituted marriage. The marriage covenant between a husband and wife is not a humanly devised arrangement. It goes back to God in the Garden of Eden. Succeeding generations were to follow this instruction. The institution of marriage did not pertain only to Adam and Eve.

A man and woman were to "become one flesh" permanently. Only death was to have ended the relationship.

Sexual laws revealed in the Bible

In the next chapter we find that Adam and

Eve disobeyed God. Men and women have been rejecting God's instructions and paying a high price for it ever since. Part of the price includes both AIDS and the black death—along with many other plagues throughout history that have devastated mankind.

Thousands of years later, when He brought the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, God revealed to them the foundation of His laws, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). Given time, they might have come up with some of them on their own, since almost everyone recognizes that such acts as murder and stealing are wrong.

But some of the laws He revealed they would not have realized on their own. They are *divine* laws given by a loving God to His people, laws that were intended to govern their nation for all time. God's revelation, above and beyond mere human intuition and understanding, was needed for the Israelites to learn to live happy and healthy lives.

Why did God give His laws?

In the book of Leviticus we see God instructing the Israelites concerning which animals were suitable to eat. Without this instruction they could have eaten creatures that would have endangered their health.

As noted earlier, HIV apparently spread from animals to humans when African hunters killed monkeys for food and came in contact with their infected blood. Eating the flesh of monkeys and apes is forbidden in Leviticus 11, where God says: "Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They are unclean to you" (verse 8).

Leviticus gives many other laws that relate to health. Chapter 20 lists a series of laws governing sexual activity. These relate to adultery, incest, homosexual practices and other acts. Without instruction the people could have committed such acts in ignorance of the consequences until it was too late and the damage had been done.

On the surface some of these acts may seem harmless. But God repeatedly told Israel the laws He had given them were *for their good* (Deuteronomy 6:17-25; 10:12-13; 12:28; 28:1-15; 30:15-16). Many centuries would pass before medical researchers would demonstrate the benefits of these laws—that promiscuous relationships are the prime conduit for dozens of debilitating and fatal venereal diseases and that the offspring of sexual unions between close relatives are much more prone to have genetic defects and other physical and mental handicaps.

As with the forbidden fruit in Genesis

3:6, such acts might feel good. God had to clearly tell His people that sex—*any* sex—outside of the union between husband and wife was wrong. And it still is. God and His eternal law do not change (Malachi 3:6). Read the strong warning against immorality He gave to Israel in Leviticus 18:24-30. His laws still apply whether we choose to heed them or not.

Obedying the laws God gave regarding marriage and sex would mean AIDS would die out with our present generation. There would be no danger of repeating the experience of the black death, which affected Europe in wave after wave of indescribable suffering and countless fatalities for more

city and throwing refuse out of windows” proved ineffective (ibid.).

“Woe to those who join house to house . . . till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land,” warned the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 5:8).

Houses in medieval towns were so close together that they were a major health hazard, allowing rapid spread of disease. The practice of not burying waste matter was another contributing factor. Rats thrived in such conditions.

In Deuteronomy 23:12-13 God had instructed the Israelites to deposit human waste outside their living areas, being careful to bury it. Not until recent centuries did

25:10), which would have ended the oppressive feudal system and returned land to its original owners for the benefit of all.

Biblical laws: Arbitrary or for all time?

Does this all sound too simple? That’s only because man has had to devise convoluted responses to deal with the effects of his actions rather than dealing with the *original cause*. God’s ancient answers to our modern, seemingly complex problems are straightforward—with the added benefit that they do not require massive budgets, bureaucracies and government intervention. God’s solutions deal with underlying behaviors that *create* the problems in the first place.

The AIDS crisis threatens to virtually wipe out several African nations within the next two decades. Other countries will likely follow.

In the prosperous Western world the problem will require increasing amounts of money, raised by higher taxes and ever-increasing insurance premiums, as more and more people grow sick and succumb to the disease. A medical cure remains elusive, made difficult by constant mutations of the virus. No matter how much money is spent on research, no one can guarantee that science can find a cure or develop a successful vaccine. AIDS remains an always-fatal disease.

The only solution that *will* work for certain is prescribed in the Bible. It’s time for people to hear that the solution is already known and that the only way forward is for people to obey the moral laws of God He revealed thousands of years ago. **GN**

No matter how much money is spent on research, no one can guarantee that science can find a cure. AIDS remains an always-fatal disease.



The AIDS quilt, here on display in Washington, D.C., bears the names of more than 80,000 AIDS victims. The 50-ton traveling memorial is a sobering reminder of the deadly epidemic.

than 300 years. In England it wasn’t until the Great Fire of London in 1666 that the plague ended—more than 300 years after it began.

Laws governing hygiene and health

The Bible shows how that plague, too, could have been avoided. Then, as now, most people were not familiar with the Word of God and did not live by it.

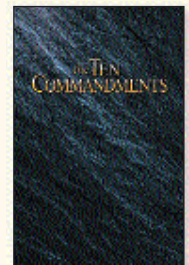
“Dirt and malnutrition were the two great allies of the plague,” wrote Philip Ziegler in *The Black Death* (1971, p. 57). “. . . The state of public hygiene was deplorable. Constantly reiterated laws against rearing pigs and goats in the street, tanning skins in mid-

scientists learn that many diseases are spread through contact with human waste—yet God had revealed this preventive measure some 3,500 years ago. Jews who obeyed these godly instructions during the time of the black plague were not affected in the same way as others. Their obedience to God gave them a degree of immunity in a way no one at the time understood.

Malnutrition was yet another problem in the Middle Ages, caused in part by the inequitable distribution of land. But this problem, too, could have been resolved by the introduction of the biblical Jubilee, the year of liberation in ancient Israel (Leviticus

Recommended Reading

Why did God reveal the laws found in the Bible? Are they simply an arbitrary list of dos and don’ts given on a whim? Are they designed to keep us from having any fun? Do they apply in our modern world? The answers to these questions affect your life every day, regardless of whether you realize it or not. Be sure to read *The Ten Commandments*, our 80-page guidebook to the fundamental principles of God’s laws. It’s free from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can access it on our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



10 Million AIDS Orphans: *A Disaster for Africa*

AIDS has taken a horrible toll, and the plague is far from over. What will stop the horror?

by Mario Seiglie

More than 10 million orphans. It took a while for the headline in *Newsweek* magazine to sink in. More than 10 million African children have lost one or both parents because of the AIDS plague. “A full-blown crisis is upon us, and it’s worse than expected,” reported *Newsweek*. “By the end of this year an astonishing 10.4 million African children under 15 will have lost their mothers or both parents to AIDS—90 percent of the global total of AIDS orphans” (Jan. 17, 2000, p. 12).

Now, as the year draws to a close, estimates of the number of AIDS orphans run as high as 13.5 million. They are expected to grow to a staggering 44 million over the next decade—children who have grown up with virtually no social structure, guaranteeing a future wave of lawlessness and chaos in already devastated countries. In some countries fully half of teenagers and young adults are infected and will die of the disease.

In any other part of the world the news would be scandalous, but in Africa, a continent largely disconnected from the rest of the planet, AIDS is still mostly a silent epidemic. The cover of the Sept. 9 issue of *World* said, simply and starkly, “AIDS: Africa Is Dying Slowly.”

At least it has been finally recognized for what it is—a worldwide plague. The facts are slowly sinking in about how terrible and widespread this plague has become. It has already killed close to half a million Americans, almost 10 times the number who died in the Vietnam War. No nation is immune. China and India, where the epidemic is just beginning to break out, together already have more than seven million cases.

According to figures from the United Nations, with each passing minute 11

persons become infected with the AIDS virus, or 16,000 a day. This totals an appalling 5.6 million people stricken with the plague last year. The number of people who have AIDS worldwide is around 35 million. More than 23 million are infected in Africa alone (compared with 1.5 million in the United States).

How many have died from AIDS? A million? Five million? Ten million? No, it is far worse. UNAIDS, an umbrella group for United Nations agencies, estimates the figure at 19 million. Nearly four million of them have been children under age 15.

In 1999, 2.6 million died of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which is equivalent to the population of Jamaica. Perhaps because two million of those died in Africa (total AIDS deaths in Africa so far total 13.7 million), the wails of grief are seldom heard beyond the villages of the dead. Yet they are all people made in God’s image, but whose dreams and aspirations have been shattered in slow, lingering deaths.

The figures have grown to such astronomical proportions that they are finally causing worldwide alarm. “The spread of this disease,” said U.S. ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke, “could not be contained in Africa, and the destruction of Africa from AIDS will not be limited to the continent. If we don’t work with the Africans themselves to address these problems . . . we will have to deal with them later when they will get more dangerous and more expensive.”

Factors that cause AIDS to spread

Why has the AIDS virus been particularly virulent in Africa? In Africa AIDS is primarily a heterosexual disease. Much of the spread is because of social structures and instability. Many migrant men leave their

rural homes and spend months working in mines, on construction projects or at jobs in the cities. While away from home, many visit prostitutes, of whom up to 90 percent in some areas carry the virus (in some cities, up to 50 percent of the population has AIDS). After becoming infected the men carry the virus back to their wives and others in their home villages.

Civil unrest and war have also played a part. Widespread numbers of rapes committed in some of Africa’s 14 ongoing military conflicts have also spread the disease. Even UN and regional peacekeeping troops have contributed to the problem, fathering illegitimate children and contracting the infection, which they carry to their own homelands and homes.

Cultural factors play a role. In some areas the superstition has spread that the best way for an HIV-infected man to be cured is to have sexual relations with a virgin.

Politically correct reporting ignores causes

The caution with which some of the Western news media deal with the AIDS epidemic is mostly because of the political issues involved. Prostitution, promiscuity and homosexuality are all major causes for the spread of AIDS but are considered “politically incorrect” subjects by many journalists. In a world where sexual morals are being increasingly relaxed, it is difficult for the news media to deal with the main culprit of the AIDS outbreak—the breaking of the seventh of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

It’s revealing to note that, as one insightful *Newsweek* reader later commented about the special edition dedicated to AIDS mentioned earlier: “In 14 pages of text, the

words ‘casual sex’ or ‘promiscuity’ were not mentioned once, even though this is the direct or indirect cause of 98 percent of all new infections in Africa. Nor was the fact that HIV is a sexually transmitted infection alluded to.”

To be sure, many in Africa are innocent victims. Tainted blood used in transfusions is one cause. Lack of sterilization in hospitals and clinics contributes to its spread. Mates unknowingly contract AIDS from a spouse who is a carrier. Then there are the children who inherit it from birth from infected mothers.

A warning from God

God has repeatedly warned mankind in the past that He will not tolerate rampant sexual immorality forever. We read that He turned “the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them *an example* to those who afterward would live ungodly . . .” (2 Peter 2:6, emphasis added throughout).

God’s prophesied intervention in world affairs is linked in Daniel 8 to growing degeneracy and an increase in ungodly practices and lifestyles, of which the AIDS plague is both a symptom and a part. It is prophesied: “And in the latter time of their kingdom, *when the transgressors have reached their fullness*, a king shall arise . . . against the Prince of princes [at Christ’s second coming]; but he shall be broken without

human means” (verses 23-25).

Like the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, it seems sin has to rise to a certain level in our time before God decides to initiate the prophesied intervention of His Kingdom.

A past plague

So far the death toll from AIDS has not equaled that of plagues in the past. The 1918 influenza virus was estimated to have killed more than 20 million people. It spread quickly and then died out. But a real plague is known for its lasting deadliness. So far the AIDS epidemic has lasted some 20 years.

There are no known cures for AIDS. Expensive and powerful drugs can hold it somewhat in check—albeit with unpleasant side effects—but not eliminate it. Enormous efforts and resources have been directed at finding a cure, and some scientists believe they are on the right track to a lasting solution. This would be good news, for no one wants AIDS to continue, and there are too many innocent victims.

Fear of contracting HIV has slowed the rampant immorality in some countries. One wonders if a cure for AIDS would free people from their fears and actually lead to increased promiscuity. Other sexually transmissible diseases continue to multiply in spite of their devastating consequences.

Long-term solution to AIDS

The long-term solution to the AIDS

problem includes more than eliminating the virus. People must choose to *stop the sexual misconduct* that spreads this killer disease.

There is good news for the future in the fight against AIDS. God promises that people will choose this solution under His government, which Christ will establish at His return to earth.

Jesus prophesied the dire world conditions before His promised return: “And because *lawlessness* will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:12-13). He also foretold that “pestilences [disease epidemics] . . . in various places” would be another sign before His coming (verse 7).

Today, as in the past, children suffer for the sins of their parents. Lamentations 5:1-7 recounts that, many centuries ago, some were orphaned because of their fathers’ sins. The misery brought by sin can spread its suffering and heartache over several generations (Exodus 34:7).

But Christ has promised He will return to save this sin-stricken world from itself. He will usher in a kingdom in which diseases such as AIDS will no longer exist, because the world’s inhabitants will choose a better way of life. We read about this in Isaiah 11:9: “For the earth shall be *full* of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” With true knowledge, people will not choose damaging, self-destructive lifestyles.

A change of heart

For that to occur, though, man’s heart must be changed. God’s laws must be

Continued on page 27

Estimates of the number of AIDS orphans run as high as 13.5 million. They are expected to grow to a staggering 44 million over the next decade.



Why 'A Magazine of Understanding'?

Printed as a subtitle on the cover of each issue of *The Good News* are the words "A Magazine of Understanding." What does *The Good News* help you understand?

by John Ross Schroeder

We are drowning in information, but starved for knowledge." Trend spotter John Naisbitt made this observation in his 1984 bestseller *Megatrends* (p. 24).

We live in a dynamic information age driven by technological innovations such as E-mail, endless Web sites and the digital revolution. Hundreds of radio and television stations are beamed or wired into our homes daily.

The appetite for information seems insatiable. Magazines routinely run articles on how to deal with a continuous barrage of detailed information.

Richard Saul Wurman, in his book *Information Anxiety*, summed up the situation: "The information explosion has backfired,

we see on television reflect only the symptoms and consequences of a problem . . . When we see world events described by commentators this does not lead to understanding, but only to an emotional reaction and the acquisition of casual knowledge" (*The Politics of Consent*, 1984, pp. 25-26).

In spite of the proliferation of information, we are left with a massive void in our *understanding*. American writer Saul Bellow articulated the problem in his book *To Jerusalem and Back*: "Information is to be found in daily papers. We are *informed about everything*. We *know nothing*" (1976, p. 34, emphasis added).

Even if slightly exaggerating, Bellow has a point. We lack a suitable standard for

understanding. The Bible provides the framework of essential knowledge through which we can understand all other information. Without the foundational knowledge of Scripture, we exist in a confused muddle, inundated with an incomprehensible avalanche of facts and figures.

If you want true understanding, God's Word tells you where to find it: "The LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6). Here in one short proverb from the Bible we find three great tools for truth: knowledge, understanding and wisdom. The three are different, but they overlap.

One can easily possess knowledge without understanding, and a person can have a certain amount of understanding without wisdom. But the truly wise have learned how to tap the source of true understanding and knowledge.

Notice the three traits interacting in Scripture: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). Solomon continues: "Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding" (Proverbs 14:33).

A few generations after Solomon wrote, the prophet Daniel noted that God "gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those

The answer is that what matters in a troubled world is not more knowledge, but deeper thought. —Rushworth M. Kidder

leaving us inundated with facts, but starved for understanding" (1991, cover note).

Could it be that the *more* information we *have access to* the *less* knowledge we *absorb*?

Understanding and information are not the same thing. Wrote former British foreign secretary Francis Pym: "The images

framing the information we have access to. We find ourselves floundering in an ocean of information.

The essential biblical perspective

This is where the Bible enters the picture. The inspired Word of God stands as the solid source of knowledge and

Helps in Understanding the Bible

American professor E.D. Hirsch Jr. grasped the nature of our knowledge problem. He wrote in the preface to his book *Cultural Literacy*: "To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world."

But beyond knowing how to survive in a material sense, we yearn for *spiritual* understanding and insight into the understanding only God Himself can impart (Colossians 1:9). Without a spiritual foundation, our natural understanding falls short of showing us how to live fulfilled, abundant lives now—and forever in the Kingdom of God.

To help our readers in their search for the spiritual understanding contained in the Bible, the United Church of God has published the booklet *How to Understand the Bible*. Also, for those who would like to study God's Word in an organized, structured manner, we publish a 12-lesson monthly *Bible Study Course* designed to cover the major themes and teachings of Scripture.

All of our publications are free of charge from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can find them on our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

A Magazine of Understanding

The goal of *The Good News* is to provide understanding. Many other magazines report the news, whether current events, social trends or the lighter fare of sports or personalities. 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? Where are we going? What lies ahead for our families, loved ones and friends?

Why, in spite of astounding technological progress, can we not solve our long-standing, basic problems? Why is the world tormented with war, crime, violence and misery? Why are so many marriages, families and other relationships—and ultimately even whole societies—breaking down? Why can't the 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 understanding of what it all means. We ache for answers to questions we can't quite put into words.

To bridge the gap in understanding, we seek out the source of information so many ignore—the Bible. 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 and its many prophecies. *The Good News* fills that crucial gap in understanding.

The Good News is a magazine of understanding only because our primary source is a *book* of understanding. We encourage you to study its pages, and the pages of *The Good News*, to gain the insight so sadly lacking in our world.

—Scott Ashley, managing editor



who have understanding" (Daniel 2:21).

Knowledge with understanding

The minute one begins to read the Bible, he starts to take on a small measure of scriptural knowledge. Knowledge predominates at first. But understanding soon follows as the reader contemplates the knowledge he initially gains. Wisdom comes as he spends more time in the pages of the Bible, as he carefully considers God's Word and sees it at work in real life.

The writer of Psalm 119 requests of God,

"Give me *understanding according to Your word*" (verse 169, emphasis added throughout). Understanding of spiritual matters is based on the foundation of right knowledge contained in the Bible.

These three traits ultimately come to us as gifts from God. The apostle Paul told Timothy: "Consider what I say, and *may the Lord give you understanding* in all things" (2 Timothy 2:7). Paul also prayed that the brethren at Colosse "be filled with the knowledge of His [God's] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9).

James wrote that, if any "lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). But a person must be receptive to that God-given gift, willing to apply the benefits it offers.

The necessity of understanding

The late Isaiah Berlin observed: "If we are to hope to understand the often violent world in which we live (and unless we try to understand, we cannot expect to be able to act rationally in it or on it), we cannot confine our attention to the great impersonal forces, natural and man-made, which act upon us" (*The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 1990, p. 2).

He grasped the necessity of understanding based on a realm that lies *beyond* the world of man and nature. He sought basic knowledge, but more than that he sought *purpose*: "Only barbarians are not curious about where they came from, how they came to be where they are, where they appear to be going . . ." (ibid.)

This is where *The Good News* comes in. This magazine, our many free booklets and our *Bible Study Course* seek to fill the gaping hole in understanding our world and the reasons human beings exist (see "A Magazine of Understanding").

The Good News transmits *understanding*, not only of world events, trends and movements, but of the *very purpose for human*

The greatest crisis facing modern civilization is going to be how to transform information into structured knowledge. —Carlos Fuentes

life itself. Such understanding is rare, and seldom found in any publication. The difference is that we write our articles first and foremost from the perspective of the Scriptures. God's Word is the source where you can find the real answers, the lasting solutions to our problems.

"Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:3-5).

Keep reading *The Good News* to better gain this crucial foundation of discernment, understanding and the fear and knowledge of God. **GN**



An Overview of Condi

European Union plans armed force

The European Union plans a 5,000-strong armed force capable of carrying out "preventative and repressive" actions in support of global peacekeeping, to be operational by 2003. The small army has tentatively been labeled the European Security and Intelligence Force.

Although apparently intended for trouble spots like Kosovo, some observers are apprehensive about the ultimate intentions for such a force. A prominent member of the British Conservative Party reacted to the news:

"Although they say this police force would only be in places like Kosovo, once the structure is in place, there is an implied threat of deploying it anywhere, including the home soil." (Source: *The Sunday Times* [London].)

Divorce's affects felt well into adulthood

Each year more than a million children under age 18 are impacted by new divorces in the United States. According to psychoanalyst Judith Wallerstein, founder of the Center for the Family in Transition in Corte Madera, Calif., the impact of broken homes lasts well into adulthood.

Dr. Wallerstein recently wrote her third book on the effects of divorce on children. In *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25-Year Landmark Study*, she asserts that destroyed marriages affect children for life. Continuing her long-term study of the lives of 130 people who were 3 to 18 when their parents divorced, she concludes that divorce abruptly ends childhood, makes children depressingly lonely and can prematurely hurtle them into a tumultuous adolescence.

"But it's in adulthood that children of divorce suffer the

"... It's in adulthood that children of divorce suffer the most," she says. By their 30s, only half have stable, productive personal lives.

most," she says. By the time they reach their 30s, only half have stable, productive personal lives.

What sort of problems do they face? Repeated failure and heartbreak in adult relationships are common, she says. Not knowing what kind of person they are looking for and having a pessimistic outlook from the start, they are likely to enter into relationships that are doomed as soon as they begin. Even when relationships are good, many expect

disaster and find it impossible to handle inevitable conflicts.

When we better understand the long-term consequences on society and children, the innocent victims of divorce, we can better understand why God tells us He hates divorce. (Sources: *USA Weekend*, Malachi 2:16.)

Marriage, traditional roles in trouble

A recent report from The Hague does nothing to support the sanctity of marriage. It said: "Long in the vanguard of gay rights, the Netherlands enacted a bill converting the country's registered same-sex partnerships into full fledged marriages, complete with divorce guidelines and wider adoption rights." The vote of 107 to 33 was not even close.

A vocal political opponent fears for the future of the country. He talked of "a world without foundations, where the historical understanding of marriage is torn from its roots."

Across the Channel in Britain the news emerges that the breakup of families costs the taxpayer 30 billion British pounds a year. Britain has the highest divorce rate in Europe, with twice as many marriage breakups in 1998 as in 1971.

Meanwhile, in the United States, groups advocating the rights of homosexuals held rallies in 21 states against the Boy Scouts of America's exclusion of avowed homosexuals as scout leaders.

If you would like to understand the divine basis for the marriage institution, please request our free booklet *Making Life Work*. (Sources: *The Daily Telegraph* [London], *International Herald Tribune*, *The Washington Times*.)

Europe's fuel shortage

Conditions are virtually back to normal, but just a short while ago newspapers devoted page after page to the fuel shortage in Britain and several other European nations. The problem began in France and spread from there to other countries.

Pictures of empty gasoline stations appeared everywhere in the news. With protesters blockading fuel movements, countries were fast grinding to a halt, and food shortages threatened.

What should we learn from this? One of the disturbing realities is how fast things can grind to a halt when a resource as important as petroleum stops flowing. If nothing is done to remedy the situation, a nation soon runs out of its vital supplies, and monetary costs quickly mount into the millions.

The protest problem may not be over—not only because of restricted market supplies of oil, but perhaps because of the exorbitant taxes on gasoline, particularly in Europe. People whose lives depend at least in part on the free flow of liquid black gold are fed up with high prices at the pump. Increasing environmental regulations that restrict petroleum-related exploration, development, refinement and transportation compound the problem.

Blizzard of catastrophes ahead for Russia?

A series of disasters—the sinking of a nuclear submarine, a fire in a Moscow television tower and nuclear-plant





Albania

Zimbabwe

Bahrain

Cyprus

Burkina Faso

New Zealand

Jordan

Belgium

Argentina

Czech Republic

ions Around the World

shutdowns—may be a harbinger of greater catastrophes, warns a Russian parliamentary commission. "Russia is afflicted by three fundamental destructive trends, which will converge in 2003 to accelerate and magnify all our problems," said commission member Viktor Opekunov.

Of immediate concern is the nation's infrastructure, said to be literally crumbling. Roads, bridges, railways, oil pipelines,

"The point of massive, self-sustaining breakdown is approaching within three years."

the electric-power grid, houses and even the once-vaunted military are collapsing. Power blackouts in recent months led to emergency shutdowns at several military bases and nuclear-power plants.

A study found that in the last decade investment in basic infrastructure was only a fourth that of 1989. "We live amid the functioning relics of the Soviet age as if in a museum, and no one is building anything new," observed Alexander Yashin, deputy chairman of the Russian parliament's industry-and-construction committee. "The point of massive, self-sustaining breakdown is approaching within three years."

If that isn't bad enough, in 2003 Russia's foreign debt is expected to balloon, potentially leaving the government with even less money to address critical problems.

Beyond that is a predicted major demographic crisis caused by shrinking birth rates and increasingly early deaths. Currently there are three working-age adults for every pensioner; that ratio is expected by some to reverse in less than 20 years. For more about Russia's problems see "Russia's Time of Troubles" on page 14. (Source: *The Independent on Sunday* [London].)

Locusts plague Australia

Journalist Mark Chipperfield filed a report from Sydney saying that "Australia is facing a plague of locusts on an unprecedented scale which threatens to destroy vast swathes of the country's richest farmland and devastate lucrative vineyards."

The troublesome pests have struck simultaneously in four Australian states on both sides of the island continent. Field workers expect the plague to be twice as bad as the one in 1990. (Source: *The Sunday Telegraph*.)

Instability returns to currency markets, world economy

Halfway through the 3½-year transition planned for the adoption of the euro by 11 of the 15 member nations, the European single currency appears to be in trouble.

Since its launch at the beginning of last year, the euro has lost almost a third of its value against the U.S. dollar. This means Europeans are spending considerably more on imported items, including fuel for their vehicles. It also

means Americans are finding it harder to sell their products to the European market, the biggest single marketplace in the world.

International economists and bankers agree that the European countries' economies overall are fairly strong so there is no logical reason for the euro to fall. That the currency is new and unknown may be one reason for the lack of confidence in it, but the main reason, according to those who supposedly know, is that European investors continue to buy into the lucrative American market, where returns on their investment are higher than back home.

The continuing U.S. trade deficit would normally cause the dollar to decline in value, making it easier for America to sell its products around the world. The deficit reached an all-time high this summer. By the end of the year it will be about \$400 billion. That's the biggest trade deficit any country has ever had. The deficit appears set to continue as Americans continue to buy more from overseas than they sell to other countries.

Under normal circumstances this would be a cause for grave concern, but the rest of the world seems content for now to reinvest that \$400 billion into the American economy. Many American companies are being bought out by foreign companies.

Currency fluctuations are caused mainly by perceptions and resulting speculation. When people in various countries perceive that the U.S. economy is doing well they want to buy into it and reap the rewards of their investment. If their perception should change, "things could turn nasty very quickly," as a commentator on National Public Radio put it recently.

If the rest of the world suddenly decided it was no longer willing to finance America's trade deficit, the dollar would plummet in value around the world, and other nations would start looking for an alternative international trading currency. We could then see the euro rising in value against the dollar.

A repeated lesson for Christians in times of uncertainty is

If the rest of the world suddenly decided it was no longer willing to finance America's trade deficit, the dollar would plummet.

not to put their trust in money. Repeatedly, throughout history, people have lost substantial amounts through periods of financial instability and economic upheaval. Just two years ago many fortunes were lost during the last major crisis in the world's financial system when the Russian currency collapsed, followed by similar falls in currency values across Asia.

Jesus Christ taught Christians to put their trust and confidence elsewhere: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19-20).

—John Ross Schroeder, Scott Ashley, Melvin Rhodes



Mauritania

Slovenia

Barbados

Angola

Malta

Jamaica

Lebanon

Djibouti

Greenland

Cambodia

Russia's Time of Troubles

Russia's troubles underscore long-standing weaknesses in how it has governed itself. Will Russians demand stronger leadership?

by Melvin Rhodes

The late Andrei Sakharov was the nuclear physicist who gave the Soviets the hydrogen bomb. He and his wife, Yelena Bonner, later became prominent dissidents, critical of the Soviet regime, which collapsed in 1991. Yelena Bonner summed up the Soviet government this way: “The Bolsheviks are like a bunch of squatters who have taken over a house and are waiting for the police to arrive.”

Having taken over the Russian house in 1917 without the consent of the people, the Bolsheviks (communists) attempted to fill a vacuum left by the collapse of a dynasty that had ruled for more than three centuries. The communists, wedded as they were to a system that couldn't work, consequently made a big mess of everything.

It appears little has changed. The new democratic Russia is led by a former KGB official who seemed bewildered during the country's latest crisis, the sinking of the nuclear submarine *Kursk*.

Officially, it didn't sink; it simply “descended to the bottom of the sea.” Officially, no lives were lost, and contact with the sub was maintained at all times.

This was the official stance until the lies were no longer credible and the extent of the disaster was revealed. By then it was too late for foreign technology, sent on request by Britain and Norway, to attempt a rescue.

A feeling is evident that the present system is only temporary, that the country is waiting for something better to come along.

Officially, foreigners are still to blame for the incident, the *Kursk* supposedly having been in a collision with an American or British submarine during naval exercises. Most outsiders, however, acknowledge that torpedoes in the submarine exploded, killing most of the men immediately, with others dying in the days that followed.

Newspapers reported that President Vladimir Putin's first concern when hearing

of the loss was of the financial consequences; his second worry was the impact on the navy. Only then was any thought expressed for the men.

After 70 years of communism, during which Russians and other Soviets had no rights and no recourse to settle injustices, it is understandable that Russian leaders lack experience and don't know how to react in a crisis like this. A pervasive feeling persists that squatters have taken over the house and are waiting for the police to arrive. A feeling is evident that the present system is only temporary, that the country is waiting for something better to come along—a system that will usher in another 300 years of stability.

Fascination with Czarist past

Fascination with the czars continues. Perhaps it's the ubiquitous Imperial architecture of the Romanov period that still dominates the skyline of Russia's second city, St. Petersburg. Or maybe it's the pre-Romanov architecture of the Kremlin in Moscow and other kremlins in other ancient cities. Or it could be the restored fortunes of the ancient Orthodox Church, again at the center of Russian life after wandering 70 years in the communist wilderness.

Centuries-old Russian Orthodox churches are being restored, their onion domes dominating ancient communities in stark contrast

to the hideous massive concrete blocks that were communism's architectural gift to the Russian people. The new architecture, like modern technology, seems to be letting the people down while the magnificent palatial buildings of the 18th century remain securely standing and fully functional.

Russians' sense of longing for their glorious past was summed up recently in Russian historian Edvard Radzinsky's book

The Rasputin File, based on material about the last days of the Romanovs that has only recently become available.

Radzinsky, host of a popular history program on Russian television, was a member of the recent Government Commission for the Funeral of the Royal Family—the family (the Romanovs) the Bolsheviks murdered in July 1918.

The Romanovs' bodies had been hastily disposed of in the city of Ekaterinburg. The commission's task was to recover the remains, identify them through DNA and arrange for a suitable funeral. It was decided that the czars should be buried along with most of their ancestors in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg. Here is part of Radzinsky's account of the day of the funeral:

“Then the funeral march burst forth. The cortege of buses with the royal coffins began to move. And the miracle was extended. The quarrels all vanished. And the entire city came out to meet them. People stood in an unbroken line, extending for many kilometers, from the airport all the way to the Peter and Paul Fortress. And there were people in the open windows of the buildings. And others were waiting on their knees. And the President [Boris Yeltsin], who the day before had refused to attend the funeral, had that day suddenly flown to Petersburg to repent before their coffins for all our evil deeds in the departing century.

“They found their resting places in the Peter and Paul Cathedral—across the Neva River from their palace and among the tombs of their ancestors. And all Russia buried them that day. And in the country, there was a long forgotten sense of joyful union, of a moved, happy ease. As if a stone had fallen away from the soul. As if some terrible spirit had at last released the ‘czars’ and flown away from Russia for good. Or was it only for a moment? And an illusion, after all?” (Edvard Radzinsky, *The Rasputin File*, 2000, pp. 502-503).

It is as if Russia has not come to terms with its history. Again, this can be understood when we realize that the Soviets essentially froze history. It is as if nothing of any great significance happened before they came to power, and everything that took place during their 70 years was perfect. No other interpretation was allowed.

Now Russians are free to discover and think about their past and compare themselves with other European countries they knew little about under communism.

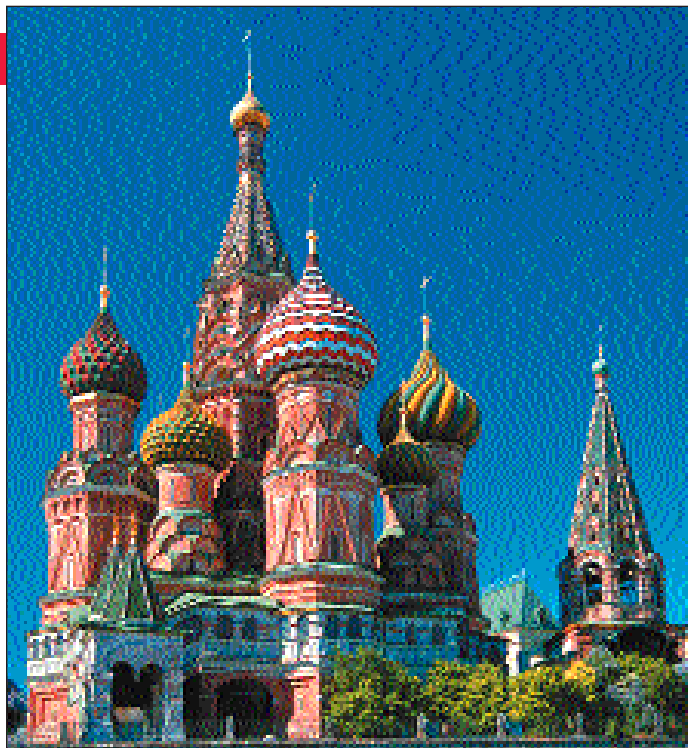
A new book, *Nicholas II: The Interrupted Transition*, by French historian Helene Carrere d'Encausse, shows the reformist nature of the last czar's regime. Russia was slowly moving toward a constitutional monarchy, which was the model for the more successful European nations at that time. Communism interrupted this evolution. Now the country tries to make up for lost time and build on those early reforms.

There has been no talk of a restoration of autocracy. The European experience has been that constitutional monarchy is the best way to ensure democracy. Under that system the head of state is a hereditary position with limited political powers. This severely restricts the probability of a politician becoming a dictator. It doesn't always work, but historically it has worked well in many countries.

On the other hand, most republics have too easily succumbed to dictatorship. Russia under communism and Hitler's Germany are two of the worst examples.

Formula for dictatorship

The present Russian system makes it too likely for a dictator to arise. Repeated crises like those in recent months will likely lead to stronger central government and eventually could lead to one man becoming a dictator. Fears of this possibility were increased recently when the Russian president's powers increased at the expense of regional governors and Russia's fledgling free press came under attack with the arrest of a major independent media mogul who had been critical of the government.



The onion domes and spires of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow are a reminder of Russia's former greatness and rich religious heritage.

Recent months have brought a catalog of disasters for the new Russian president. An explosion in a Moscow subway killed several people. Speculation is rife that Chechens were behind the blast in retaliation for Russia's continued disastrous presence in Chechnya, where countless young Russian men have been slaughtered in a never-ending bloody conflict.

Then came the submarine disaster. Before the month was over, a fire in Moscow's 33-year-old television tower—the pride of the Soviet system when it was built—left several firemen dead. Now the tower, taller than the Empire State Building, is a dangerous monument to disaster that could collapse at any moment. It is “symbolic of the state of the nation as a whole,” acknowledged President Putin.

The last decade has seemed like a replay of Russia's Time of Troubles, the period between the two dynasties that ruled Russia for more than 1,000 years. Comparisons were drawn between Boris Yeltsin, president of Russia until a few months ago, and Boris Godunov, the interim czar who dominated Russia until the beginning of the 17th century.

Then a new dynasty began in 1613 with the coronation of 16-year-old Mikhail Romanov. Ironically, the first and last Romanov czars were named Michael. Nicholas abdicated in favor of his brother Michael, who was to be a constitutional monarch. The Bolshevik Revolution ended

his reign before it began.

A further irony is that the first Michael was at the Ipatiev monastery when asked to be czar. The last Romanovs were slaughtered in the basement of the Ipatiev house. Ironies like this are not lost on the Russian people.

With no nobility to speak of and a Romanov family divided, it is unlikely that Russia will introduce a constitutional monarchy. This increases the likelihood of dictatorship—unless Russia can move fast to improve its economy.

Catch-22 hinders progress

Here's Russia's catch-22: Economic progress depends on political stability. But political stability is not likely until there is some economic progress.

This would give a government legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

The perception in Russia that people in government are like squatters waiting for the police to arrive has a ring of truth to it. People at the highest levels in many countries are corrupt; they line their pockets at the expense of the people they are supposedly serving. It was Lord Acton, the British ambassador to St. Petersburg at the time of Peter the Great, three centuries ago, who observed that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Russian leaders are no longer autocratic, but an all-pervasive bureaucracy perpetuates corruption. One reason the search for survivors of the *Kursk* took so long was the need for rescuers to obtain permits from various government departments before being given permission to act.

Another Russian irony is that many Russians would like to see a return to autocracy. They look at their history and see that the leaders who accomplished the most for the country had absolute power. Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great and Joseph Stalin are the three most often mentioned. Catherine the Great is another.

In the midst of all the present confusion, religion has made a comeback among the Russian people. Radzinsky's book shows the role religion played in the nation before the revolution. The state church was the Russian Orthodox, as it is again. Moscow

was the “Third Rome” after Rome and Constantinople. The country’s official name was the Holy Russian Empire.

After seven decades of religious persecution by the communists, Russia celebrated 1,000 years of Christianity in 1988 during the Gorbachev thaw. The people remembered Vladimir, the Grand Prince of Kiev, who ordered the forced baptisms of his subjects when he himself decided to convert. Naturally, under such conditions, many of the old pagan beliefs and practices survived and have continued to modern times. At the time of the last czar the Orthodox Church struggled with a rival spiritual power—a mystical amalgam of orthodoxy and

U.S.S.R.—only a decade ago.

Although Jesus Himself condemned tax evasion, the Scriptures highlight a major factor contributing to this problem—the incredible ability and appetite of government to take too much for itself.

When the Israelites rejected God and said they wanted to be ruled by a human leader, like all the nations around them, God warned them of the natural tendency of government to take more and more from the people. This warning is recorded in 1 Samuel 8:

“This will be the behavior of the king [any human leader] who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his

has ensured that criminal activity, from tax evasion to trafficking in human beings and drug smuggling, is the quickest way to make money. This also means that money has accumulated in foreign banks outside the country, depriving Russian companies of much-needed investment. Russia’s problems are compounded by the fact that many old-guard communists, even former KGB officials like Vladimir Putin, have managed to hold onto power in one way or another.

A major weakness of many nations today is that the rights of ordinary people are not acknowledged or accommodated. This includes property rights. Any accumulation of assets means nothing—everything can be taken away at the whim of government.

The book of Micah addresses this problem. Speaking of a time in our future after the return of the Messiah and the establishment of righteous government over the earth, we read that “everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4).

Russia urgently needs a law giving the people the right to private property protected from government confiscation. It needs a system of checks and balances to stop the excesses of government. There is still no law in place granting farmers the right to their own land in perpetuity—land on which they can work hard, develop and hand down to their children. Such a law would boost agricultural production, ensuring greater prosperity for all.

Perhaps all this is too much for Russia’s new leader, Vladimir Putin. Being the leader of a great nation was similarly overwhelming to ancient Israel’s newly chosen King Solomon. Realizing his own limitations, he asked God for “an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Kings 3:9). Verse 10 shows that his request pleased God. Because of his humble attitude when he inherited the mantle of power, God gave Solomon great wisdom in ruling the nation of Israel.

Such humility today on the part of world leaders would also be blessed by the Creator of the world.

Russia is going through a major era of change. Change can be negative or positive. Russia has a historic opportunity to break away from its past and move toward a better political and economic system than it has had before, either under the communists or the czars. It’s a historic opportunity that Russia’s leaders would do well not to miss. **GN**

One irony is inescapable: The solution to Russia’s present crisis lies in the pages of the Bible. The Scriptures contain a great deal of advice for governments, both ancient and modern.

paganism that, through the monk Rasputin, influenced the royal court.

Now religion is back at center stage, and the Orthodox Church again dominates the religious life of the nation. Under pressure from the church, the government has made it more difficult for Western religions to practice there.

Biblical solutions to Russia’s problems

One irony is inescapable: The solution to Russia’s present crisis lies in the pages of the Bible. The Scriptures contain a great deal of advice for governments, both ancient and modern. Advice is included, too, for the ruled as well as for rulers.

Perhaps the most famous passage in the Scriptures regarding government contains Christ’s instruction to “render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

Tax evasion is a major Russian problem. Without revenue, government cannot function. Teachers, military personnel and others on the government’s payroll go unpaid for months. Even when they are paid, their wages are so low they hardly cover the monthly food bill. The commander of the *Kursk* received the equivalent of \$250 per month. Conscripts on the submarine received only \$30 per month when they were paid at all.

The revenue shortage also meant that only three submarines could be in service at any time—this in a nation that played a key role in the second-most-powerful military force on earth—the former

horsemen . . . [and] will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers.

“And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day” (verses 11-18).

Here we see God’s warning against government—the tendency of governments to start small and become big. Under the communists the government controlled everything. Under the czars, before the liberation of the serfs under Czar Alexander II as recently as 1861, the people were mere possessions of their rulers. With such a history the heavy hand of government is still a major problem in Russia. Some would make it even heavier as a solution to current problems.

When the people have no rights the economy will not flourish. For a nation to thrive its people must have the prospect of bettering themselves. As individuals prosper so the nation itself becomes richer.

Russia has made halfhearted attempts during the last decade to encourage individual initiative, but government’s heavy role

Christmas Before Christ? The Surprising Story

Most people know the Bible doesn't mention—much less sanctify—Christmas. Does it make any difference as long as it's intended to honor God and bring families together?

by Jerold Aust

Several months ago the popular American comedic actor Drew Carey was interviewed on an equally popular television talk show, *The View*. Mr. Carey surprised the audience when he addressed the value of telling children the truth about Santa Claus.

"I don't think you should tell kids that there is a Santa Claus," he said. "That's the first lie you tell your children." Instead, "tell kids that Santa's a character we made up to celebrate a time of the season." Otherwise "when kids get to be 5 . . . they realize their parents have been lying to them their whole life."

Earlier in the year the Arts & Entertainment cable television channel aired a program about Christmas titled *Christmas Unwrapped: The History of Christmas*. The promo for this program read:

"People all over the world celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th. But why is the Savior's nativity marked by gift-giving, and was He really born on that day? And just where did the Christmas tree come from?"

"Take an enchanting journey through the history of the world's favorite holiday to learn the origins of some of the Western world's most enduring traditions. Trace the emergence of Christmas from pagan festivals like the Roman Saturnalia, which celebrated the winter solstice."

These two programs addressed the fact that Santa Claus is fictitious and that Christmas and its trappings emanate from pagan Roman festivals. By no means are these the only sources of information about the background of Santa Claus and Christmas.

Is there more to these ancient traditions and practices than meets the eye? And, more important, does it make any difference whether we continue them?

Celebration of the sun god

It may sound odd that any religious celebration with Christ's name attached to it

could predate Christianity. Yet the holiday we know as Christmas long predates Jesus Christ. Elements of the celebration can be traced to ancient Egypt, Babylon and Rome. This fact doesn't cast aspersions on Jesus; it does, however, call into question the understanding and wisdom of those who, over the millennia, have insisted on perpetuating an ancient pagan festival that has devolved through much of the world as Christmas.

Members of the early Church would have been astonished to think that the customs and practices we associate with Christmas would be incorporated into a celebration of Christ's birth. Not until several centuries had passed would Christ's name be attached to this popular Roman holiday.

As Alexander Hislop explains in his book *The Two Babylons*: "It is admitted by the most learned and candid writers of all parties that the day of our Lord's birth cannot be determined, and that within the Christian Church no such festival as Christmas was ever heard of till the third century, and that not till the fourth century was far advanced did it gain much observance" (1959, pp. 92-93).

As for how Dec. 25 became the date for Christmas day, virtually any book on the history of Christmas will explain that this day was celebrated in the Roman Empire as the birthday of the sun god. Explaining how Dec. 25 came to be selected as the supposed birthday of Jesus, the book *4000 Years of Christmas* says: "For that day was sacred, not only to the pagan Romans but to a religion from Persia which, in those days, was one of Christianity's strongest rivals. This Persian religion was Mithraism, whose followers worshiped the sun, and celebrated its return to strength on that day" (Earl and Alice Count, 1997, p. 37).

Not only was Dec. 25 honored as the birthday of the sun, but a festival had long been observed among the heathen to celebrate the growing amount of daylight after the winter solstice, the shortest day of the

year. The precursor of Christmas was in fact an idolatrous midwinter festival characterized by excess and debauchery that predated Christianity by many centuries.

Pre-Christian practices incorporated

This ancient festival went by different names in various cultures. In Rome it was called the Saturnalia, in honor of Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture. The observance was adopted by early Roman church leaders and given the name of Christ ("Christ mass," or Christmas) to conciliate the heathen and swell the number of the nominal adherents of Christianity.

The tendency on the part of third-century Catholic leadership was to meet paganism halfway—a practice made clear in a bitter lament by the Carthaginian philosopher Tertullian.

In 230 he wrote of the inconsistency of professing Christians. He contrasted their lax and political practices with the strict fidelity of the pagans to their own beliefs: "By us who are strangers to Sabbaths, and new moons, and festivals [the biblical festivals spelled out in Leviticus 23], once acceptable to God, the Saturnalia, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronalia, are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year's day presents are made with din, and sports and banquets are celebrated with uproar; oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to their religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians" (Hislop, p. 93).

Failing to make much headway in converting the pagans, the religious leaders of the Roman church began compromising by dressing the heathen customs in Christian-looking garb. But, rather than converting them to the church's beliefs, the church became largely converted to non-Christian customs in its own religious practices.

Although at first the early Catholic Church censured this celebration, "the festival was far too strongly entrenched

in popular favor to be abolished, and the Church finally granted the necessary recognition, believing that if Christmas could not be suppressed, it should be preserved in honor of the Christian God. Once given a Christian basis the festival became fully established in Europe with many of its pagan elements undisturbed” (*Man, Myth & Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion, and the Unknown*, Richard Cavendish, editor, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 480, “Christmas”).

Celebration wins out over Scripture

Some resisted such spiritually poisonous compromises. “Upright men strove to stem the tide, but in spite of all their efforts, the apostasy went on, till the Church, with the exception of a small remnant, was submerged under Pagan superstition. That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival is beyond all doubt. The time of the year, and the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated, prove its origin” (Hislop, p. 93).

The aforementioned Tertullian, for one, disassociated himself from the Roman church in an attempt to draw closer to the teachings of the Bible.

He wasn’t alone in his disagreement

with such trends. “As late as 245 Origen, in his eighth homily on Leviticus, repudiates as sinful the very idea of keeping the birthday of Christ as if he were a king Pharaoh” (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, Vol. 6, p. 293, “Christmas”).

Christmas was not made a Roman holiday until 534 (ibid.). It took 300 years for the new name and symbols of Christmas to replace the old names and meaning of the midwinter festival, a pagan celebration that reaches back so many centuries.

No biblical support for Santa Claus

How did Santa Claus enter the picture? Why is this mythical figure so closely aligned with the Christmas holiday? Here, too, many books are available to shed light on the origins of this popular character.

“Santa Claus” is an American corruption of the Dutch form “San Nicolaas,” a figure brought to America by the early Dutch colonists (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, Vol. 19, p. 649, “Nicholas, St.”). This name, in turn, stems from St. Nicholas, bishop of the city of Myra in southern Asia Minor, a Catholic saint honored by the Greeks and the Latins on Dec. 6.

He was bishop of Myra in the time of the

Roman emperor Diocletian, was persecuted, tortured for the Catholic faith and kept in prison until the more tolerant reign of Constantine (ibid.). Various stories claim a link from Christmas to St. Nicholas, all of them having to do with gift-giving on the eve of St. Nicholas, subsequently transferred to Christmas Day (ibid.).

How, we might ask, did a bishop from the sunny Mediterranean coast of Turkey come to be associated with a red-suited man who lives at the north pole and rides in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer?

Knowing what we have already learned about the ancient pre-Christian origins of Christmas, we shouldn’t be surprised to learn that Santa Claus, too, is nothing but a figure recycled from ancient pagan beliefs.

The trappings associated with Santa Claus—his fur-trimmed wardrobe, sleigh and reindeer—reveal his origin from the cold climates of the far North. Some sources trace him to the ancient Northern European gods Woden and Thor, from which the days of the week Wednesday (Woden’s day) and Thursday (Thor’s day) get their designations (Earl and Alice Count, pp. 56-64). Others trace him even farther back in time to the Roman god Saturn and the Greek god

Where Did Christmas Symbols Originate?

An enormous number of traditions we now associate with Christmas have their roots in pre-Christian pagan religious traditions. Some of these have social, sexual, or cosmological connotations that might lead educated, culturally sensitive moderns to discard the traditions once they have understood their roots more clearly . . .

“The pre-Christian elements of Christmas hail primarily from Europe . . . From southern Europe come such familiar pagan traditions as feasting, fertility rituals, tree worship, and the exchange of gifts. From the harsher lands of northern Europe come the ancient conventions we identify with the term ‘Yule.’ The Yule log tradition, now almost forgotten, rose from this stream. So too are many of the details of holiday feasting, the ritual use of candles, and the earliest forerunners of Santa Claus . . .

“Here is a brief review of the pre-Christian sources from which some of our best-loved holiday traditions sprang.

“Evergreens symbolize immortality and the continuity of life . . . The Romans, too, decorated their homes and public places with evergreens near the time of the winter solstice. Among the forerunners of today’s holiday gifts were *strenae*, tree branches presented to political and military leaders as tokens of loyalty . . .



“The holiday’s most conspicuous smaller plant is *mistletoe* . . . Historically, mistletoe has long been associated with both magic and fertility. Sprigs of mistletoe were once fastened over the conjugal bed on the wedding night. Our modern use of mistletoe as a social aphrodisiac is clearly related.

“Nineteenth-century German immigrants to the United States were among the first to use a recognizable *Christmas tree* in this country, so it is often assumed that the Christmas tree hails from the traditions of northern Europe. In fact, it is more authentically a product of much older southern traditions. Ancient Egyptians viewed the evergreen tree as a fertility symbol. During the winter solstice they decorated their homes with palm fronds, using them as Romans would later use boughs of fir . . .

“*Gift giving* is an inescapable part of Christmas. Christian legend assumes that the tradition began when the Magi presented gifts to the baby Jesus . . . To believe that you have to pitch centuries of history out behind the manger. Long before New Testament times, the Romans were exchanging gifts” (Tom Flynn, *The Trouble With Christmas*, 1993, pp. 19, 37-40, emphasis in original).

Silenus (William Walsh, *The Story of Santa Klaus*, pp. 70-71).

Was Jesus born in December?

Most Bible scholars who have written on the subject of Jesus' birth conclude that, based on evidence in the Bible itself, there is no possible way Christ could have been born anywhere near Dec. 25.

Again we turn to Alexander Hislop: "There is not a word in the Scriptures about the precise day of [Jesus'] birth, or the time of the year when He was born. What is recorded there, implies that at what time soever His birth took place, it *could* not have been on the 25th of December. At the time that the angel announced His birth to the shepherds of Bethlehem, they were feeding their flocks by night in the open fields . . . The climate of Palestine . . . from December to February, is very piercing, and it was *not* the custom for the shepherds of Judea to watch their flocks in the open fields *later* than about the end of October" (Hislop, p. 91, emphasis in original).

He goes on to explain that the autumn rains beginning in September or October in Judea would mean that the events surrounding Christ's birth recorded in the Scriptures could not have taken place later than mid-October, so Jesus' birth likely took place earlier in the fall (Hislop, p. 92).

Further evidence supporting Jesus' birth in the autumn is that the Romans were intelligent enough not to set the time for taxation and travel in the dead of winter, but during more-favorable conditions. Since Joseph's lineage was from Bethlehem, and since he had to travel from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem, and since his expectant wife Mary traveled with him, it would have been nearly impossible for Joseph and Mary to make the trip in the winter. As recorded by Luke, Mary delivered Jesus in Bethlehem during the time of census and taxation—which no rational official would have scheduled for December.

What difference does it make?

The Bible gives us no reason—and certainly no instruction—to support the myths and fables of Christmas and Santa Claus. They are tied to the ways of this world and contrary to the ways of Christ and His holy truth. "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles," God tells us (Jeremiah 10:2).

Professing Christians should examine the background of the Christmas holiday symbols and stop telling their children that

Santa Claus and his elves, reindeer and Christmas gift-giving are connected with Jesus Christ. Emphatically they are not! God hates lying. "These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Christ reveals that Satan the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). Parents should tell their children the truth about God and this world's contrary and confusing ways. If we don't, we only perpetuate the notion that it is acceptable for parents to lie to their children.

Can a professing Christian promote a pagan holiday and its symbols as something that God or Christ has approved? Let's see what God thinks about people using customs and practices rooted in false religion to worship Him and His Son. We find His views clearly expressed in both the Old and New Testament.

God specifically commands His people *not* to do what early church leaders did when they incorporated idolatrous practices and relabeled them Christian. Before they entered the Promised Land, God gave the Israelites a stern warning: "Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them [the inhabitants of the land], . . . 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 . . . 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).

Many centuries later the apostle Paul traveled to and raised up churches in many gentile cities. To the members of the Church of God in Corinth, a city steeped in idolatry, Paul wrote: ". . . What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God . . . Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.' . . . Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves

from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17; 7:1).

Instead of allowing members to rename and celebrate customs associated with false gods, Paul's instructions were clear: They were to have nothing to do with them. He similarly told Athenians who were steeped in idolatry, "Truly, these times of *ignorance* God overlooked, *but now commands all men everywhere to repent*" (Acts 17:30).

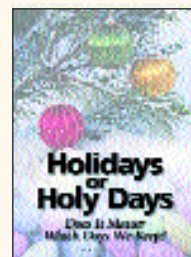
God alone has the right to decide the special days on which we should worship Him. Jesus Christ plainly tells us that "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit *and truth*" (John 4:24). We cannot honor God in truth with false practices adopted from the worship of nonexistent gods.

Jesus said: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:6-7). With God no substitutes are acceptable. It makes no difference that Christians mean well when they observe Christmas. God is not amused or pleased.

The knowledge of how to honor Almighty God, who made us, preserves us and gives us eternal life, has been made available to you. Will you honor God or follow the traditions of mankind? **GN**

Recommended Reading

Does it matter to God which days and customs we celebrate to honor Him? Why do so many of our holidays have strange customs sanctioned nowhere in the Bible?



Many people are shocked to discover the origins of most popular holidays. They're also surprised to find that the feast days God commands in the Bible—the same days kept by Jesus Christ and the apostles—are almost universally ignored.

Be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Contact any of our offices on page 2 or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

Are You Missing Out on

A Blessing From God?

by Gary Petty

Time: It's the one thing that you can never recover. Is your life hectic and out of control? It's time you realized you may be missing out on a special gift from God.

We live in a time-compressed world. Technology is supposed to make our lives easier and create more leisure time. People purchase microwave ovens, home computers and riding lawn mowers to gain more control over their time. Then, of course, they have to work overtime to pay for the time-saving gadgets.

We rush to work, rush through meals, rush through conversations so we can rush to a child's school event. We then tear off to a health club to ride a stationary bike. On weekends many people rush through church services so they can hustle home and spend a few hours trying to relax in front of the television, only to feel vaguely bored and restless.

Marriage and family therapist H. Norman Wright has written more than 60 books on family and related subjects. He calls the results of our fast-paced lives "the hurry sickness."

"It's a response that begins to make our internal clocks run faster . . . and faster . . . and faster. As with any illness, specific symptoms reflect the presence of the illness. In the case of hurry sickness, the symptoms are heart disease, elevated blood pressure, or a depression of the immune system that makes you more susceptible to infections and cancer. These conditions are brought on when we exist in a state of stress, pressure, or constant rushing. Even tension headaches, and ulcers are tied to hurry sickness" (*Simplify Your Life*, 1998, p. 39).

The result of always running full tilt is that sooner or later the days, weeks and months become a blur of activities with no purpose or sense of accomplishment. Many people have forgotten why they're running so fast and don't know how to get off the merry-go-round.

The out-of-control rush to keep up affects our health, peace of mind and relationships. We never seem to get everything done. Organized day care for children was supposed to give women more time to pursue fulfilling careers. Instead, many mothers feel guilty about leaving their children and then not being able to spend "quality" time with them because they're exhausted.

Children don't escape time pressures, either. Preteens hurry through childhood driven by incentives to grow up too quickly. Too many children, including teens, show symptoms of emotional and mental breakdowns attributable to stress.

Has all the activity created a better life for you and your family? Or are you like so many people who rush themselves into high blood pressure, exhaustion, emotional burnout and spiritual bankruptcy? Maybe it's time to take a few minutes to take stock of how you spend your time.

The forgotten blessing

How often have you wished you had more time for the important things, like family and reflection? Bookstore shelves bulge with materials that tell you how to organize your life, but many of these sources miss an important aspect of time management.

There's a lot of talk in the United States about posting the Ten Commandments in schools and government buildings. Few would argue against adhering to the instructions forbidding murder or stealing. Keeping these laws of God surely would bring a blessing to everyone. But in the debate one commandment is almost forgotten. In fact, its relevance is often debated even among those who promote keeping the Ten Commandments.

This makes the biblical introduction to the Fourth Commandment all the more potent: "Remember the Sabbath day . . ." It's as if this commandment is the easiest for humans to trivialize or overlook entirely.

The need for rest

The Fourth Commandment states: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God . . ." (Exodus 20:8-10). Physical, emotional and spiritual rest are human needs. To ignore these is to sow the seeds of anxiety, illness, lethargy and depression.

Imagine a day devoted to rest and worship—no business calls, no painting the house, no lawn chores to attend to. Imagine a day with extra time to share with your family without the deadlines and pressing appointments of the remainder of the week. Even television shows with intense sound tracks and graphic scenes can leave our minds and even bodies exhausted. Imagine a day when you can shut out the noise, the violence, the preoccupation with making money—and experience *peace*.

Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." A little later in the same account He explains, "For the Son of Man is Lord

even of the Sabbath" (Matthew 11:28; 12:8). The Sabbath is a time to experience rest for body and mind and renew our relationship with God and His Son.

For some it may be daunting to think of spiritual rest dedicated to reflection on our need for God and to thinking about what is important in life. Sometimes it's easier to fill each waking moment with career, house, car or entertainment than to deal with our own nature. It's easier, that is, until the results in broken relationships, emotional breakdown and spiritual emptiness take their toll.

A day of renewal

The Sabbath isn't intended to be a day of idleness. God told the ancient Israelites that the Sabbath is a "solemn rest, a holy convocation" (Leviticus 23:3). It's a time for, among other things, gathering with other Christians to worship God.

It's regrettable that in our hectic society even church services often have become a matter of convenience rather than a vital element of life. Some churches broadcast worship services on short-range radio so people can sit in their cars in the parking lot dressed for golf or other activities. Then, as soon as the worshipers hear the last amen, they can rush to the next pursuit.

God, through the prophet Isaiah, reminded Israel of the Sabbath's original intent: "If you turn your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a *delight*, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, *then you shall delight yourself in the LORD*" (Isaiah 58:13-14, emphasis added throughout).

The biblical Sabbath isn't about a ritualistic obligation to participate in a once-a-week hour of worship. It is a day dedicated to revitalizing our relationship with God in both private and congregational worship. It's important to understand that God didn't design the Sabbath to be a day of puritanical restrictions. The Sabbath is to be a time of physical, emotional and spiritual renewal. The Creator says we should recognize this day for what He intended it to be—a *delight*!

Someone questioned Jesus about healing a man on the Sabbath. He answered: "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it, and lift it out? Of how

much more value than is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:11-12).

We can help renew the life of another person by visiting the sick or elderly on the Sabbath. Giving time to others takes our thoughts off our own problems and brings rest to troubled minds. Such actions put God's way of life into action (James 1:27).

Observing the Sabbath sets the tone for the next week. With rested minds and bodies, and a renewed relationship with God and Christ, a person is energized to reflect Christ in the subsequent six days.

The weekly plan

Some time-management gurus of several years ago promoted micromanaging each hour of every day to increase efficiency. But adopting this management style drove many people to nervous breakdowns.

A common approach to time management is to organize blocks of time for specific purposes. This method uses the week as a natural management framework.

The week is the framework God used when He told mankind: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work . . ." (Exodus 20:9-10). By planning our time according to a weekly structure, we can get control of the whirlwind and begin to balance our activities. We can schedule our time throughout the week for work, family meals, exercise, household chores, personal Bible study and recreation.

The weekly schedule also gives us a goal at its completion. Biblical days begin and end at sundown, so, no matter how hectic the week, the goal of Friday at sunset—the beginning of the Sabbath—awaits with its promise of physical, emotional and spiritual renewal. As the Sabbath approaches, it is time to forget the work problems and mortgage payments. It's time to shut out the noise of the daily pressure cooker.

At the creation of the Sabbath "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:3). God set aside the seventh day as holy time. Jesus declares, "The Sabbath was made *for man*, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath was created as a blessing from God to all humanity.

Preparing for the Sabbath

God freed ancient Israel from slavery in

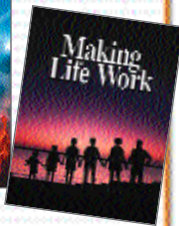
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Egypt. As the Israelites traveled to Mount Sinai, where God would give them the Ten Commandments, the descendants of Jacob's 12 sons faced a food shortage in the barren wilderness. Through Moses God told them He would miraculously supply their daily needs. The Israelites would call the edible and nutritious substance they found every morning *manna*.

God also instructed them to gather extra manna on the sixth day so they wouldn't have to work on the Sabbath. Human nature being what it is, some people went out on the seventh day to gather manna, but it wasn't there.

God responded: "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days" (Exodus 16:28-29). Here God teaches the important concept of preparing for the Sabbath.

It's easy to spend the day before the Sabbath in a frenzy of activity only to collapse as the sun sets. We can avoid this if we start our physical and mental preparation earlier. Begin planning early to make the Sabbath special. Sabbath evening is a great time for a family dinner with favorite recipes and special china. This is a perfect occasion to invite a widow or family to share a Sabbath meal. Be creative in selecting Bible games and crafts for younger children to help them learn more about their Creator.

It is also important to prepare ourselves emotionally for the Sabbath. As you come home from work at the end of the week, take a little time for prayer. Ask God to relieve you of your burdens and help you experience the holy time He created for our renewal.

The Sabbath as a memorial

In addition to the practical blessings of Sabbath-keeping, God teaches us important lessons through our observance of the seventh day as holy time. The Fourth Commandment in its entirety reads:

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.

"For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. There-

fore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11). The Sabbath stands as a weekly testimonial to God as Creator.

Some will ask: But wasn't the Sabbath given only to the Jews?

The Fourth Commandment states that God hallowed the Sabbath *at the beginning of creation*, before there was a distinction between Israelite and gentile. Jesus didn't claim the Sabbath was made only for Jews, but that God made it for "man."

When Jesus declared Himself the Lord of the Sabbath, He showed the Sabbath as a day to focus on what God is doing through His Son. Humanity turned its back on its Creator. The result is sin—the breaking of God's laws and disregard for His will—which causes death. Humanity's only hope is redemption.

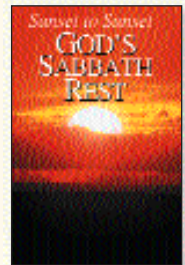
Redemption is God setting us free from the enslavement of sin and death. Since we human beings can't save ourselves from death, God sent His Son to die for us, to take on Himself the penalty of our sins and make eternal life possible. The Sabbath stands as a memorial to the redemptive work God is doing through Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.

Have you been missing out on this special gift from God? Is your life so hectic that you don't have time to experience spiritual rest with Christ? Instead of cramming every day with exhausting activity, it's time to start enjoying the day God set aside for you to rest and renew your relationship with Him. It's time to begin celebrating the Sabbath. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Why did God consider it so important to keep the Sabbath day holy that He included it as one of the Ten Commandments? What's behind this crucial command? This

article has touched on some of the biblical background for the Sabbath day, but there's more. You can discover much more about this command—God's gift to us—in *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*. For your free copy contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or access our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Thanksgiving Day: More Than Just Being Thankful

Americans celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday every November. Perhaps this is the appropriate season to wonder if there is a difference between being thankful and giving thanks.

by Don Hooser

Thank you. Those two words are among the most important and appreciated in any language. He who does a good deed is often satisfied to hear “thank you” as his only reward. It’s too bad the phrase is so underused.

Gratitude is the mother of all virtues. That makes sense. Gratitude—a grateful attitude—inspires other good attitudes. It’s hard to have a bad attitude when you are feeling grateful.

Ingratitude is probably the most prevalent sin. It is easier to know pity than feel appreciation. It seems easier to criticize than compliment. Gripping, grumbling and being grouchy are just doing what comes naturally. They are part of our negative, self-centered nature.

Some people rarely say thank you. You wonder what holds them back. We should have developed the habit of expressing our gratitude by the time we were 3 years old.

Most people probably regard themselves as being properly thankful. If they really are full of thanks, that’s wonderful. But thankfulness must be expressed to others to be worth much. Giving thanks is much better than just being thankful. Giving thanks is good for both parties, the giver and the receiver.

Thankfulness tends to be passive. Thanksgiving is active. Thanks are something that need to be given away—making everyone richer. Note that the national holiday Americans celebrate is called *Thanksgiving Day*, not *Be Thankful Day*.

Many Thanksgiving Day celebrations undoubtedly involve precious little thankfulness, much less giving thanks. For many the holiday has become known as Turkey Day, characterized more by gluttony than gratitude. Meanwhile people in poor, undeveloped countries look on the United States as incredibly rich and self-indulgent instead of thankful for its

abundance, comforts and conveniences.

Thankfulness oriented outward

When people regard themselves as thankful, it is probably more accurate to say they are pleased or happy, rather than thankful. People tend to give themselves the credit for most of the good things they have—even though true thankfulness certainly implies that one is thankful to others.

For example, anyone could say, “I’m thankful I have a good job” and simply mean he is glad to have that job. How much better it would be to think of the many people throughout his life who have helped prepare him and helped make his good job possible. Even better would be for him to thank as many of those people as possible.

Being glad can be self-centered. Being thankful is other-centered. Giving thanks, in contrast to self-centeredness, is oriented outwardly, expressing our gratitude toward others.

We should make it a habit to thank people. When we do we are sure to make people happier.

Are you thankful for your education? Thank your parents and a whole host of teachers. Are you thankful for your freedoms? We owe much to our forefathers and statesmen. Are we thankful for our health? We can thank your parents and a farmer or rancher. Are you thankful you have regular trash pickup? Thank your garbage man.

Wouldn’t it be nice if companies had a bigger need for thank-you departments than they have for complaint departments?

The Bible encourages giving thanks

When it comes to the need to be thankful, the Bible emphasizes action over passivity. In the New King James Version of

the Bible, the word *thankful* appears only three times, and *unthankful* appears only twice. The number of times both words are used is surprisingly small.

However, *thanksgiving* occurs 31 times, and the phrases *give thanks* or *give You [God] thanks* occur 43 times. The words *thank* and *God* occur in the same verse 15 times; *thanks* and *God* are used together 23 times; *thank* or *thanks* and *Lord* appear together 43 times.

The word *praise* implies a big thank-you given with an abundance of admiration and respect. The world would be a better place with more praise and less criticism. If parents praised their children more, they would need far less punishment. If we praised our families and coworkers, the workplace would be far less tense and would experience more peace and productivity. We humans thrive and strive better under the warm sunshine of praise.

The Bible stresses that the greatest praise should go to God. *Praise* and *God* occur in the same verse 57 times, and *praise* and *Lord* occur together 97 times. Are you thankful for a beautiful day, a gorgeous rainbow, a spectacular sunset? Tell God about it! Thank the One who created it all!

We should be thankful for all we’ve been given, and express it. This is what Thanksgiving Day is supposed to be about. Remember to be thankful for your country and its blessings. Do you express it? Tell your family and friends how much you appreciate them, and remember to give the greatest share of credit and praise to the Great Benefactor, the Creator and Giver of all blessings (James 1:17).

Let’s make every day a day of giving thanks—a thanksgiving day. I’m going to try harder, and I hope you’ll join me. Come on. You can say it: *Thank you*.

Thanks for listening. **GN**

Paul

Apostle to the Gentiles

by Jerold Aust

The Roman soldiers brusquely prepared Paul for scourging. This vicious lashing was a fast and effective way to get to the truth of the dispute that had arisen between the apostle and some Jews in Jerusalem.

As the Roman soldiers yanked the clothes from his back, Paul asked the centurion overseeing the punishment, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” (Acts 22:25, New International Version).

Paul’s question about the rights of a Roman citizen immediately thwarted the soldiers’ intentions. The rights of a Roman citizen could open many doors throughout the empire and automatically nullify this kind of abuse of position by petty officials.

The centurion scurried to his commander to warn him of the possibility of illegally mistreating a Roman citizen, a serious offense anywhere in the empire.

The garrison commander approached Paul cautiously. Could this man, who had somehow so provoked the local Jewish leadership, really be a Roman citizen? The officer knew he had better tread carefully.

He asked Paul, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” (verse 27). Paul responded that indeed he was.

The officer had to accept Paul’s answer at face value for several reasons. First, he had already made the mistake of not conducting an inquiry of his prisoner beforehand. Second, if his prisoner were indeed

his position and—in a worst-case scenario—his life.

But then he made an erroneous assumption. Seeing that Paul was a Jew, he assumed Paul was at least in no better position than he was when it came to Roman citizenship. Looking at the manacled prisoner, he said, “I had to pay a big price for my citizenship.”

Paul responded, “But I was born a citizen” (verse 28, NIV).

At the time, Roman citizenship was a valuable privilege conferred on those of high standing, those who had performed exceptional service for the empire or those who had paid for citizenship through what amounted to a bribe. The officer had bought his citizenship at great cost. Paul had been born a citizen, probably because an ancestor had been honored with Roman citizenship for performing valuable service to an administrator or military commander.

Hearing Paul’s response, his questioners immediately withdrew. They already were in enough hot water for their abuse of Paul’s rights as a Roman. The commander realized his dilemma. But what he didn’t know was that the entire scenario lay in the hands of God and that Christ’s apostle, Paul, would serve as a witness for Him not only to the highest levels of government in Rome but to us 2,000 years later.

Profiling Paul

How did Paul come to this point?

We have many ways of approaching a profile of the apostle, and it is difficult to squeeze into one article even the highlights

of a tumultuous life that fills most of the book of Acts and much of the rest of the New Testament.

In this article we concentrate on understanding why and how Paul conducted himself within the diverse cultures of the Roman Empire. We’ll gain an overview of the many cultural, educational and religious factors that shaped a powerful servant of God.

When you read the book of Acts and Paul’s letters, this perspective can serve as a backdrop and perhaps help you better understand why Paul was “all things to all men” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Paul’s formative years

In the New Testament, more of Paul’s writings were preserved than those of any other writer. But who was he? Where did he come from? What was his family background, his education? What did he look like?

Reading a little of the context pertinent to these questions can help us understand God’s work with His disciples in general and Paul in particular.

Paul had been a Pharisee, a member of one of the strictest Jewish sects. He considered himself the most zealous, rigorous and careful of all Pharisees.

His given name was Saul, the same as the name of Israel’s first king more than 1,000 years earlier. Like that Saul, the apostle, too, was from the Israelite tribe of Benjamin. He later became better known by his Roman name, Paul. Many factors in his background—his family, intelligence,

hometown, Roman citizenship, education and zeal—appear to have marked him for God’s use.

The city of Tarsus, where Paul was brought up, was the capital of Cilicia, then a part of the province of Syria. It was a metropolis of its time and in many senses a free city of the Roman Empire. It was situated on both sides of the cold, rushing River Cydnus, built on a spacious, luxuriant plain bounded by rolling hills. Beyond the hills rose the majestic snow-covered Taurus (not Tarsus) Mountains.

Tarsus was one of the great cities of the empire. The Greek geographer Strabo said that, when it came to philosophy and general education, Tarsus was more illustrious than either Athens or Alexandria. At the crossroads where East meets West, Tarsus was home of major gentile communities as well as a considerable Jewish colony.

Family and education

Paul was not merely a resident of the distinguished city of Tarsus, he was a Roman citizen. “To the Roman his citizenship was his passport in distant lands, his talisman in seasons of difficulties and danger. It shielded him alike from the caprice of municipal law and the injustice of local magistrates” (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 1986, Vol. 3, “Paul, the Apostle,” p. 2273).

Paul’s family apparently had not emigrated from Judea to Tarsus a few years before Paul’s birth because his ancestors “had been planted in Tarsus as part of a colony with full municipal rights” (ibid.). The Jews’ dispersion and subsequent migrations dated back some 500 years, through the successive empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and finally Rome.

Apparently Paul’s family had lived in Tarsus for generations before his birth. His cultural environment outside the Jewish colony in Tarsus was awash in Greek thought and education and ruled by the Romans, who themselves incorporated much Greek culture into their own.

Paul was educated. His schooling probably began in a room attached to a synagogue and culminated in Jerusalem, where he sat at the feet of the renowned Jewish teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

The learned Rabban (an eminent title) Gamaliel was Paul’s tutor in the law. Gamaliel had a great reputation among all the people of Jerusalem. He showed the



Paul’s sharp mind caught the attention of many, including rulers and other government officials.

capacity to rise above the bigotry of the Pharisees (Acts 5:34-39). Paul’s training in Jerusalem under Gamaliel helped equip Paul to serve God.

Paul spoke Aramaic, Hebrew and likely Greek and possibly Latin. “The city [Tarsus] gave him a schooling in his social, political, intellectual, moral, and religious life, but in varying degrees. It was because Tarsus was a cosmopolitan city with ‘an amalgamated society’ that it possessed the peculiar suitability to educate and mold [Paul’s] mind” (ibid.).

Paul was in effect a citizen of the world, equipped to mix with Jew or gentile.

Unimpressive in appearance

What did he look like? Indications are that Paul was not a man of impressive size. His Roman name, Paul, means “little.” A secular and unflattering tradition has it that he was bowlegged and short but strongly built, with eyebrows that met over a large nose.

The Bible, however, isn’t clear about Paul’s physical appearance since God focused more on His servants’ spiritual condition, teaching and service. Paul was a giant in those areas.

At Lystra, after Paul’s participation in a miraculous healing, the natives took Barnabas for Zeus and Paul for Hermes, because Paul “was the chief speaker” (Acts 14:12). Apparently Barnabas had the more impressive appearance. In Malta the natives first thought Paul was a murderer, then quickly changed their minds, thinking he was a god since he didn’t die after a serpent bit him (Acts 28:4-6).

Enemies at Corinth sneered at Paul’s bodily presence, which apparently was in contrast to his powerfully written letters (2 Corinthians 10:10). Their reaction to Paul indicates his looks were anything but impressive. Besides his natural appearance, he probably had suffered scars and other disfigurements from his many beatings (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).



In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul mentions his “thorn in the flesh,” referring to an infirmity, mental or physical, that causes a person trouble. Although Paul doesn’t explain what this was, it might have been poor eyesight.

Paul apparently refers to a vision problem in his letter to the Galatians. Perhaps he suffered with deteriorating eyesight: “For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me” (Galatians 4:15).

Later in the same epistle he writes, “See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!” (Galatians 6:11).

Although some argue that “large letters” refers to a long epistle, the original Greek wording denotes sprawling, untidy letters (written by someone who was not a scribe by trade). Also, the letter to the Galatians is not long.

If poor or deteriorating eyesight was the

Peter wrote that Paul’s writings were complex and easy to “twist,” and some people had come to erroneous conclusions because they were unskilled in the truth.

problem Paul alluded to, such a condition must have frustrated him, given his zeal for God and drive to spread the gospel of Christ.

But Paul, with his faith in God and Christ, bore up under his infirmities: “From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Galatians 6:17).

From a spiritual standpoint God was pleased with the way Paul appeared, bruises, scars and all, for God looks on the heart, not the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7). Based on the record we have of Paul’s life, we can safely say his outward scars showed monumental inward faith in God.

Paul’s natural abilities

Paul was known for his zeal. As a young man he was a formidable foe of the early Church. The hard-hitting Pharisee traveled far and wide to bring Christians to Jerusalem for imprisonment, interrogation and even death (Acts 26:10-11).

God, however, had other plans. He channeled Paul’s zeal to His service. In God’s service Paul served as scholar, sage, statesman, seer and saint. He had heart, imagination, sensitivity and a strong

will He was courageous sin-

and tactful. He had vast leadership abilities and a gift of expression.

Paul was a gifted thinker. He examined ideas and opinions logically, often with questions and answers, to determine their validity. He was keenly analytical and an expert expositor of the Scriptures.

His sharp mind caught the attention of many, including rulers and other government officials. Nowhere is this more evident than when he was accused of the Jews while a prisoner in Caesarea (Acts 25-26). During that time he was restrained in bonds, the Jews hoping to have him delivered to their judgment in Jerusalem. Instead, God allowed him a day in court with Felix, the governor, and later with his successor, Festus, as well as King Agrippa and Queen Bernice.

All of these rulers, and especially the latter, were at least partially persuaded to consider the truth of God’s Word through Paul’s inspired explanations of the Scriptures. It was none other than King Agrippa

who replied to Paul’s incisive exposition, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

Paul’s gifts from God

Paul had his share of spiritual gifts, too. He understood prophecy and could explain it well. God granted him visions and other revelations, including a vision of “the third heaven” and God’s throne in “Paradise” (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

God worked miracles by the hands of

Paul (Acts 14:8-10; 16:18; 19:11-12; 28:8-9). The apostle even raised a young man to life after he had died in a fall (Acts 20:9-12). Paul was himself unharmed by the bite of a poisonous snake (Acts 28:3-6).

Among Paul’s spiritual gifts, few were as dear to him as his calling (Acts 9:15). Paul reported that he had seen the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:8).

Paul was also a gifted teacher. He wrote at least 13 epistles that are preserved in the New Testament. His insights give us broad understanding of the rest of the Scriptures and reveal many profound spiritual principles.

When studying Paul’s writings we should consider them in the context of the entire Bible. After all, as Jesus said, we are to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4). Many well-meaning Bible students have difficulty properly understanding Paul’s writings. One of his contemporaries, the apostle Peter, wrote that Paul’s writings were complex and easy to “twist,” and some people had come to erroneous and dangerous conclusions because they were unskilled in the truth (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Apostle to the gentiles

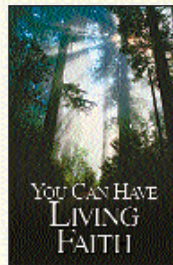
A major part of Paul’s service to God included his calling as an apostle to the gentiles (Romans 11:13; Ephesians 3:8). Although the other apostles carried the gospel primarily to the descendants of the tribes of Israel, Paul was chosen for the huge responsibility of taking God’s truth to gentiles.

Most Bible students know that God’s truth and the gospel first went to the “Jew”—or, more broadly, to the Israelite—and then to the gentile (Romans 1:16). With Paul, God began to carry out His original intention for all peoples to know Him, His truth and His laws and ultimately to experience God’s peace and prosperity. Although relatively few are called and understand His truth now, God’s original intent will not come about until Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom of God on earth—when peace will begin to pervade the world (Isaiah 2:2-4; Hebrews 8:10-12; Zechariah 14:8-9, 11).

God specifically chose Paul to begin the work of making all people into spiritual Israelites (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:15-16). God drafted His great plan before He began the age of man on earth (2 Timothy 1:9). God didn’t send just anyone to the rest of the world, beyond the scattered nation of

Recommended Reading

What is faith? How can you have a loving, trusting relationship with God? To see how you can develop such a relationship with your Creator, be sure to request



your free copy of the booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*. Please contact the office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2, or access our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Israel. He sent a converted Israelite, skilled in the ways of God, who had grown up in the knowledge and understanding of the gentiles' culture as well as his own.

God used Paul as an instrument to help open doors to gentiles in a much broader way. As a result, all peoples have the opportunity and privilege to become spiritual Israelites. God used Paul, although Paul always acknowledged that the credit went to God.

A faithful servant awaits his crown

The disputes that brought Paul into conflict with Jewish religious and Roman civil authorities, mentioned in the introduction to this article, eventually brought Paul to Rome, the heart of the mighty empire. He wrote several of his epistles while a prisoner there. He was first held under house arrest but was free to receive visitors (Acts 28:16-31). Even under those circumstances he could exercise considerable influence, to the point that some in the emperor's household were converted to Christianity through his teaching (Philippians 4:22).

His captors eventually released him, but he was later imprisoned again. His situation grew increasingly grim as Christians began to experience persecution throughout the empire. This time he was held in prison and sentenced to death.

At one point Paul thought Jesus would return in his lifetime (1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17). Later he realized Christ would not return in his day. Yet he was confident that a crown of life was reserved for him, to be given him at his resurrection to eternal life.

Paul's words to Timothy remain a great source of encouragement for Christians of all ages: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8, NIV).

When you read Paul's letters in the Bible, and the account of his ministry as recorded in the book of Acts, remember this thumbnail sketch of Paul's life and background to better understand why Paul could be all things to all men.

Keep in mind why God chose and used Paul. It was because He knew Paul was capable of remaining a faithful servant to the end: "... He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). **GN**

Orphans

Continued from page 9

written in a person's heart. God has prophesied this will occur: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: *I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people*" (Hebrews 8:10; compare Jeremiah 31:33).

Imagine a world in which marriage is respected to the point that no one looks for another sexual partner, where youths are not promiscuous and commit to wait until marriage to have sexual relations. AIDS and other venereal diseases will then be a distant memory.

God, who describes Himself as "a father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5), says that eventually He will wipe away the tears of those who respond to Him (Revelation 7:17; 21:4). These are some of the promises God will bring about when Christ establishes His blessed Kingdom.

The Good News is committed to proclaiming the gospel of God's Kingdom and the marvelous truths that will eventually lead to the elimination of the world's plagues. Then and only then will the terms *AIDS* and *venereal disease* be only a part of man's history. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Why did God give us the Ten Commandments? Some people think they're only a series of restrictive *don'ts* designed to keep us from having any fun or that they're hopelessly obsolete in our modern world. But what does God say? Be sure to request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments* to discover the encouraging, exciting truth about these 10 eternal principles.

If you'd like to learn more about how the world will be transformed by obedience to God's laws, also request *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

Both booklets are yours free of charge when you contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can download or request them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

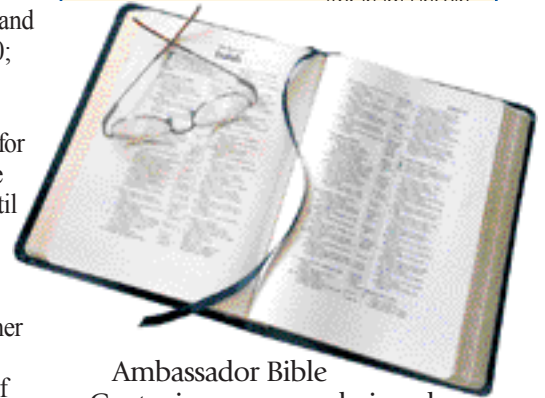


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JAN. 7–AUG. 3, 2001

THE BIBLE AND

The Book of Acts: The Message Spreads

by Mario Seiglie

In this issue of *The Good News* we proceed with our survey of archaeological and historical findings that verify and illuminate the accounts recorded in the Bible. In our last issue we surveyed the first 12 chapters of Acts, in which the focus is on the exploits of the original apostles.

We pick up the story as the emphasis shifts to the travels of the apostle Paul. How accurate are these accounts? Thanks to the modern tools of archaeology, researchers have found much cultural, historical and geographical background material that supports the biblical account of Paul's trips through the Mediterranean world.

Sergius Paulus, governor of Cyprus

"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they [the apostles Paul and Barnabas] went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus . . . Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the *proconsul, Sergius Paulus*, an intelligent man" (Acts 13:4-7, emphasis added throughout).

From Antioch Paul and Barnabas first went to Cyprus, Barnabas's birthplace (Acts 4:36). Historians have confirmed several background details about this account. For example, the Roman orator Cicero mentions in one of his books that Paphos was indeed the Roman headquarters of Cyprus during Roman rule (*Ad Familiares*, XIII.48).

Also, Luke is correct in mentioning that Cyprus was governed by a proconsul when Paul and Barnabas visited the island. Before A.D. 22 Cyprus had been administered by a direct representative of the emperor, called a *propraetor*. But after 22 the island's rule was turned over to the Roman senate, whose representatives were called proconsuls. "Annexed by the Romans in 55 B.C.," notes *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, "Cyprus became a senatorial province in 22 B.C., with a governor bearing the title of *proconsul*, as Acts 13:7 correctly names *Sergius Paulus*, who received Barnabas and Paul" (1962, Vol. 3, p. 648).

The Expositor's Bible Commentary adds: "That Luke distinguishes correctly between senatorial and imperial provinces and has the former governed by a proconsul on behalf of the senate and the latter governed by a *propraetor* representing the emperor says much for his accuracy, for the status of provinces changed with the times" (Richard Longenecker, Vol. 9, 1981, notes on Acts 18:12-13, p. 485).

Archaeologists have also found evidence indicating Sergius Paulus was indeed a Roman governor of Cyprus. In 1877 an inscription was uncovered a short distance north of Paphos bearing Sergius Paulus's name and title of proconsul.

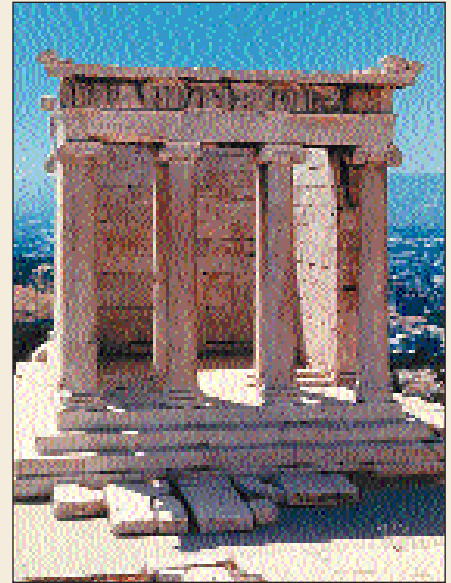
In addition, in 1887 his name was found on a memorial stone in Rome. "On a boundary stone of [Emperor] Claudius, his name [Sergius Paulus] is found among others, as having been appointed (A.D. 47) one of the curators of the banks and the channel of the river Tiber. After serving his three years as proconsul at Cyprus, he returned to Rome, where he held the office referred to" ("*Sergius Paulus*," *Easton's Bible Dictionary*; Bible Explorer software).

It is also true that in those days proconsuls used seers for advice. "These were intensely superstitious times," writes William Barclay, "and most great men, even an intelligent man like Sergius Paulus, kept private wizards, fortune tellers who dealt in magic and spells" (*Daily Study Bible*, 1975, Bible Explorer software).

To the Unknown God in Athens

From Cyprus Paul eventually made his way to Athens, the capital of Greek philosophy. "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols . . . Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the

Thanks to the modern tools of archaeology, researchers have found much cultural, historical and geographical background material that supports the biblical account of Paul's trips through the Mediterranean world.



The apostle Paul, struck by the rampant idolatry of the Athenians, confronted them on Mars Hill. Nearby stood the Parthenon, above, dedicated to the goddess Athena, and a much smaller temple built to honor the goddess Nike.

One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:16, 22-23).

Why was Paul so incensed with the idols in Athens? Is this an accurate description of the place? A.T. Robertson notes: "Pliny [the Roman writer] states that in the time of Nero [A.D. 54-68], Athens had over 30,000 public statues besides countless private ones in the homes. Petronius [a Roman satirist] sneers that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Every gateway or porch had its protecting god" (*Word Pictures of the New Testament*, notes on Acts 17:16).

What about the altar "to the unknown god"? Has there been any confirmation that such altars existed? Archaeologist John McRay mentions: "Pausanias [the Greek historian], who visited Athens between 143 and 159 A.D. saw such altars. In describing his trip from the harbor to Athens he wrote: 'The Temple of Athene Skiras is also here, and one of Zeus further off, and altars of the 'Unknown gods' . . . Apollonius of Tyana, who died in A.D. 98, spoke of Athens as the place 'where altars are set up in honor even of unknown gods' . . ." (*Archaeology & the New Testament*, 1991, p. 304).

In 1909 an archaeological expedition uncovered an altar with the inscription "To unknown gods" in Pergamum, a Roman province. McRay comments that the idolatry in Athens was so widespread that Athenians built altars to unknown

gods so they would leave no one out.

"The adherents of ancient polytheistic religions," he says, "characterized as they were by superstitious ignorance, may have simply erected altars to unknown gods 'so that no deity might be offended by human neglect'" (ibid.).

Jews expelled from Rome

From Athens Paul traveled a short way to another Greek city, Corinth. "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (*because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome*), and he came to them" (Acts 18:2).

Were Jews expelled from Rome during the reign of Emperor Claudius? The Roman historian Suetonius records such an order: "As the Jews were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of *Chrestus*, he banished them from Rome" (*Life of Claudius*, 25.4). It is estimated some 20,000 Jews eventually were expelled, among them Aquila and Priscilla.

It is worthwhile to note this expulsion decree is a key date for fixing Pauline chronology. "One example of how archaeology has contributed to establishing a Pauline chronology," writes Professor McRay, "is that now we can set the approximate beginning of Paul's work in Corinth on his second journey. The key is

found in Acts 18:2 where we learn that when Paul arrived in Corinth he found Priscilla and Aquila, who had lately come from Italy, having been banished from Rome in a general expulsion of Jews under Claudius, who reigned from 41-54. This event is referred to by Suetonius and others and can be dated to A.D. 49" (McRay, pp. 225-226).

Who was this Chrestus who was responsible for the Jewish riots? The subject has been intensely debated. Since the name Chrestus and Christus are pronounced alike, it is likely that it had to do with the dissension in the Jewish community over the newly established Christianity and the teachings of Christ.

F.F. Bruce mentions that Chrestus could have simply been a Jewish troublemaker, but he adds: "It is more likely that [Suetonius] had the *Founder of Christianity in mind*, but that, writing some seventy years after the event and not being particularly interested in Christian origins, he consulted some record of the riots and imagined wrongly that Chrestus, who was mentioned as the leader of one of the parties concerned, was actually in Rome at the time, taking a prominent part in the strife. In fact, what we have in this statement of Suetonius is the dissension and disorder in the Jewish community at Rome resulting from the introduction of Christianity into one or more of the synagogues of the city" (*The International Commentary of the*



The Roman emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome. This action is recorded in Acts 18:2.

New Testament, 1974, p. 368, “Acts”).

Later Aquila and Priscilla were to become instrumental in Paul’s ministry. They gave him a job in Corinth (Acts 18:3) and traveled with him to Ephesus (verse 19). They then served as hosts for a church group in their home and sent their greetings to their Corinthian friends in one of Paul’s letters (1 Corinthians 16:19). Sometime after Claudius’s death in 54, they returned to Rome and were included in Paul’s greetings to the church members there (Romans 16:3).

Gallio, proconsul of Corinth

During Paul’s long stay in Corinth his preaching eventually led to conflict with the Jews there. “And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. *When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia*, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and *brought him to the judgment seat*” (Acts 18:11-12).

Here Luke mentions another Roman governor of the time. Has any evidence been found to corroborate the existence of Gallio?

It turns out Gallio was prominent in Roman history. He was the brother of the great Stoic writer Seneca, who was

Emperor Nero’s tutor. Gallio came from an illustrious family in Spain that eventually moved to Rome. His real name was Marcus Annaeus Novatus, but he was adopted by the orator Lucius Junius Gallio and afterwards bore his adoptive father’s last name. His brother Seneca, who mentions him in his writings, said, “No mortal is so pleasant to any one person as Gallio is to everybody.”

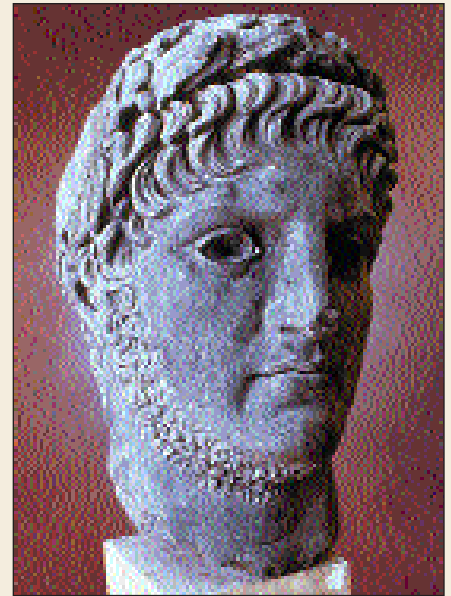
It is striking that Luke also describes Gallio’s stable and affable personality. After Paul’s persecutors trumped up charges against Paul, Gallio quickly saw through their lies and dismissed the false accusations. To prevent such incidents from occurring again, he had the Jewish leaders punished for filing false charges (Acts 18:14-17). This set a legal precedent throughout the Roman Empire concerning Paul’s mission and the Christian religion.

“If Gallio had accepted the Jewish charge,” adds *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, “and found Paul guilty of the alleged offense, provincial governors everywhere would have had a precedent, and Paul’s ministry would have been severely restricted. As it was, Gallio’s refusal to act in the matter was tantamount to the recognition of Christianity as a *religio licita* [an authorized religion]; and the decision of so eminent a Roman proconsul would carry weight wherever the issue arose again and give pause to those who might want to oppose the Christian movement . . . For the coming decade or so, the Christian message could be proclaimed in the provinces of the empire without fear of coming into conflict with Roman law, thanks largely to Gallio’s decision” (Longenecker, p. 486, notes on Acts 18:14-16).

It is remarkable that archaeological evidence has also been found confirming Gallio was the proconsul of Achaia, just as Luke had recorded.

“At Delphi,” writes Professor McRay, “archaeologists found a stone which probably was once attached to the outer wall of the Temple of Apollo. Inscribed in it is a copy of a letter from Claudius to the city of Delphi, naming *Gallio* as the friend of Claudius and *proconsul of Achaia*” (McRay, p. 226).

What happened to Gallio after his encounter with Paul? Regrettably, after Claudius died in 54, Nero became the emperor. For a while Nero governed wisely under the tutorship of Gallio’s brother Seneca. But five years later Nero did an about-face and gave himself to his passions and lusts. He expelled his mentor from his sight. His debauchery eventually caused Nero to become insane, and soon Nero was feeling tormented by Seneca’s and Gallio’s integrity and presence, so he had them both executed in 65.



The emperor Nero greatly persecuted early Christians. Paul was executed during his reign.

F.F. Bruce says about Gallio: “He left Achaia because of a fever and went on a cruise for his health (Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, 14.1) . . . In 65, along with Seneca and other members of his family, he fell victim to Nero’s suspicions” (*The International Commentary of the New Testament*, 1974, p. 374, “Acts”).

Such were the times in Rome. During this same period Nero began his murderous rampage of Christians in Rome after he falsely blamed them for having set the city on fire, which historians generally blame Nero as having started.

We will continue with our survey of Acts in the next article in this series. **GN**



Letters From Our Readers

“Where Have All the Leaders Gone?”

I received the September-October issue. Your articles on what makes a true leader are outstanding. If only we could get a president who is like Jesus in every way. The world needs leaders who fear God and run our countries as Jesus would. How we hunger for this to happen! However, I don't believe Jesus would ever lower Himself to run for president anywhere in the world. There's too much corruption and dishonesty in our campaign system. We need to pray, fear God and hope our leader who gets in will do the same. We've lost our fear of God.

R.F., Sheridan, Missouri

Thank you for your intelligent and provocative magazine. It is invariably a breath of fresh air. Thanks also for the sobering meditation “Could Jesus Be Elected to the White House?” The very question makes us pause to reflect on the spiritual and moral penury of our age. There seems little doubt that in a rematch with Barabbas, Jesus would lose all 50 states.

K.G.L., Arlington, Virginia

The Good News and other literature

I would like to thank you for your magazines and booklets. I am 17 and a junior in high school. I've grown up in a very crazy life and now live with my dad, who does not believe God exists. But, because of your generosity in sending these wonderful magazines, he's coming close to God's promise of salvation. I find him secretly reading my magazines and booklets. Although he denies it all, I know God is slowly getting through to him.

C.C., Jelm, Wyoming

I subscribed to your magazine via the Web and recently received the July-August issue. Truly I have never read a Christian magazine as excellent as yours. It is both intellectually stimulating and spiritually inspiring, and, most important, its content isn't presented in the condescending nature typical of most Christian magazines I have read.

J.D., Internet

The Feast of Tabernacles

I have a question concerning your

September-October issue. In an article titled “The Feast of Peace,” the author opened with these words: “Many people have attended church services all their lives and never heard of the Feast of Tabernacles. The festival is seldom mentioned in churches, although it is mentioned prominently in the Bible. Jesus Christ observed this festival, as did His apostles long after His death and resurrection.” After reading the article I did not see any scriptural evidence for this last statement and was wondering if perhaps I missed it. Could you please clarify and give me scriptural references, if any. I have learned to always accept “Thus saith the Lord” on all matters.

R.R., Internet

Jesus kept the Feast of Tabernacles (see John 7:2, 8, 10, 14) and God's other feast days (Luke 2:41-42; John 2:13, 23; Matthew 26:17-19). The apostles also did, as shown in the book of Acts (2:1-2; 18:20-21; 20:16) and other New Testament writings (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 16:8). Our booklet God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind explains the details, especially in the first chapter; “Are God's Holy Days Relevant Today?” The booklet also contains a chart showing these and other pertinent scriptures. Please request your free copy.

British readers struggle with world of religion

Your booklets are so important to me. My first introduction to *The Good News* was on Percy Island, 17 hours' sailing away from Queensland, Australia. I picked up a copy on this virtually uninhabited island (only two people live there), and my eyes were wide open. I suddenly identified with Christ, God and the universe in your booklet.

R.C., Gloucestershire, England

Your magazine is so inspiring. There's only one truth, and I know you have it. I've had my fingers burned several times from following the teachings of many unscrupulous “false profits.” I am amazed that you can offer your teachings free.

E.R., Dorset, England

I would love to believe in God, but I find it hard to live with the contradictions and hypocrisy connected with religion. I also

fail to see the relevance of the Bible to modern society. Please continue to send your literature.

R.W., West Midlands, England

The Good News uses the Bible as its primary source for understanding what is happening in modern society. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Please see our article “Why a Magazine of Understanding?” on page 10 of this issue.) The Scriptures teach there is a true religion, one that is based on the model revealed in the Bible.

Please write for our free booklet The Church Jesus Built. Also, true ministers of God are available to visit those who would like help (see “Personal Contact” in the staff box on page 2).

Heaven and Hell

Thank you for your offer for a complimentary copy of the booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* I read the article about hell in the September-October issue of *The Good News* and was impressed with the approach of the author. I have been a serious Bible student for more than 60 years and wrestled with the question of eternal punishing many times. I am a retired Baptist pastor and must admit that I never once preached on this theme. I look forward to receiving a copy of the booklet.

H.B.W., Cleveland, Ohio

Reader from Fiji

Thank you so much for the material which you send at this time when our country is in crisis. There are no other materials to give us more understanding of the Bible. It encourages me to try to read as much as possible, so as to put my mind, hope and trust always onto the Lord.

Reader from Fiji Islands

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 ginfo@ucg.org (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).

Do You Know the *Real* Christmas Story?

With the Christmas season fast approaching, do you know the origin of modern Christmas customs and this celebration's connection to Christianity? Take the following short quiz to assess your knowledge.

True or False? The first Christmas was observed by Christians in 4 B.C. at the birth of Jesus Christ.

True or False? The custom of giving gifts for Christmas originated with the exchange of gifts among the wise men.

True or False? The growth of Christmas around the world is one of the best indicators that the world is becoming more Christian in its outlook.

True or False? The Christmas tree and mistletoe come from Christian tradition.

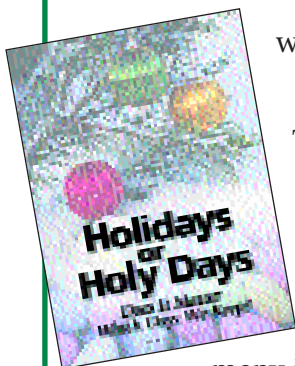
True or False? The Bible gives us permission to adopt any holiday customs we choose so long as they are done to honor Christ.

True or False? Putting Christ back in Christmas is the best way to honor God at this time of year.

True or False? Christmas is God's favorite celebration.

The correct answer to all of the above questions is *false*. If you missed some, you need to understand the real Christmas story as explained by history and the Bible in our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*

Too many people go through life thinking they are honoring their Creator through Christmas celebrations. For many it is the most joyous time of the year. But, before you celebrate another Christmas season, why not consider what God thinks about this holiday? As a serious Christian, don't you think it's time you considered His view?



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