

The Good News

A Magazine of Understanding



*Where
Have All the
Leaders
Gone?*

Could Jesus Christ Be Elected to the White House? • A Halloween Story
The Feast of Peace • A Kinder, Gentler Hell? • The Olympic Ideal

What Makes a Good Leader?

Several thousand years ago a people faced great challenges. Having overcome enormous obstacles, members of this group of exiles were poised to establish themselves as a new nation. It would not be easy. Neighboring countries were universally hostile to the newcomers. The people themselves were physically ill equipped to carve out a homeland for themselves.

The nation was ancient Israel. They had wandered the wilderness for 40 years after gaining their freedom. Now a different set of trials and opportunities awaited. The quality of their leadership could make or break them.

When God gave the Israelites His law—a national constitution, as it were, that would ensure peace and prosperity for any who embraced it—He knew their success and survival hinged on adherence to the moral foundation He had given them.

He also knew that leaders play a crucial role in the success or failure of nations. He gave the Israelites His law, then specific instructions the head of government was to follow to keep the nation on the right path.

“... When he has taken his place on the seat of his kingdom,” God instructed Israel concerning its head of state, “he is to make in a book a copy of this law . . . And it is to be with him for his reading all the days of his life, so that he may be trained in the fear of the Lord his God to keep and do all the words of this teaching and these laws: so that his heart may not be lifted up over his countrymen, and he may not be turned away from the orders, to one side or the other: but that his life and the lives of his children may be long in his kingdom . . .” (Deuteronomy 17:18-20, Bible in Basic English).

Simply stated, the nation’s chief executive was to write out, by his own hand, a personal copy of the law God had given. He was to read, study and rule by that law as long as he held office. Obedience to God’s instructions, He promised, would result in leaders who would not exalt themselves—who would not have their hearts “lifted up” over their people. It would produce men who would honor and respect their Maker and lead in righteousness and truth by example.

What a refreshing concept! Imagine a nation nowadays whose leaders relied on the timeless principles and standards of the Bible rather than the whims of special interests, focus groups, polls and political sloganeering. What would it be like?

Consider also how different any nation would be if its leaders applied the words of one who truly understood what it means to be a public servant.

“You see that the rulers of the Gentiles are lords over them, and their great ones have authority over them,” said Jesus Christ to some who were eager to rule over others. “*Let it not be so among you*: but if anyone has a desire to become great among you, *let him be your servant*; and whoever has a desire to be first among you, let him take the lowest place: even as the Son of man did not come to have servants, but to be a servant, and to give his life for the salvation of men” (Matthew 20:25-28, BBE, emphasis added).

Christ said upstanding, principled leadership has one purpose: to serve others rather than wrongly exercising authority to gain more power and prestige.

Jesus exemplified the kind of true leadership every nation needs. He taught people the solid foundation of God’s law, which can help them avoid reaping the painful consequences of sin. He encouraged them to surrender to God, no longer to live only for their selfish desires. He exemplified what it means to dedicate one’s life to serving others.

As people in many nations reflect on the imminent leadership choices facing the American republic, we do well to reflect on the biblical guidelines for leadership and ask ourselves how they—and we—measure up.

—Scott Ashley

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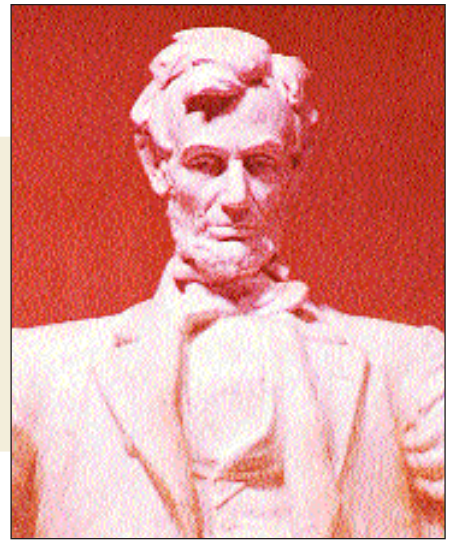
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Where Have All the

by Howard Davis

“Where have all the leaders gone?” a talk-show host recently asked his guests. His question concerned the race for the office of president of the United States, a process of choosing the most powerful leader on earth. From the discussion that followed it became apparent that most people are confused about what makes a good leader and what a competent leader is and does.

In an ocean of six billion people, humanity is awash with a surplus of sinners and a shortage of saints. What the world needs now are leaders who rise above the tide to improve human conditions.

By the people

Much of humanity accepts the idea, forged in recent centuries, that the best form of government is that in which leaders are selected by their followers. In so doing much of the world believes we can make progress only when we select leaders with vision to overcome conflicting self-interests and personal prejudices.

Leaders operate from a vision that influences others—either for good or bad. The truly great can shape events that will

As Americans prepare to choose who will occupy the most powerful office on the planet, now is a good time to consider some crucial questions: What is a leader? What makes a leader great? Why don't we see great leaders more often?

permanently change the course of history.

When we look around where do we see the leaders who can measure up? Where are leaders like those whose courage and conviction literally saved their nations, whose determination changed the course of history? Where are the George Washingtons, Abraham Lincolns and Winston Churchills?

Consider the example of the first president of the United States, sometimes called the father of the nation.

George Washington led what appeared to be a broken army, defeated in New York the previous summer, to a crucial victory on Christmas eve 1776. His bold leadership had an electrifying effect on the new nation. Even though morale was low, with his army dwindling daily from desertions, Washington ferried his remaining soldiers across the ice-clogged Delaware River before dawn, attacked the unsuspecting Hessian soldiers at Trenton, New Jersey, and demonstrated to the world that the Declaration of Independence signed the previous July 4 was far more than simply an idealistic dream.

A year later Washington's perseverance, loyalty to principle and irrefragable personal example of diligent service to army and country influenced his poorly clothed, freezing and half-starved soldiers to carry on for months in desperate winter conditions at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

For five years events and circumstances tested Washington again



and again. Many times he could have been killed or defeated and executed for treason against the king and British Empire.

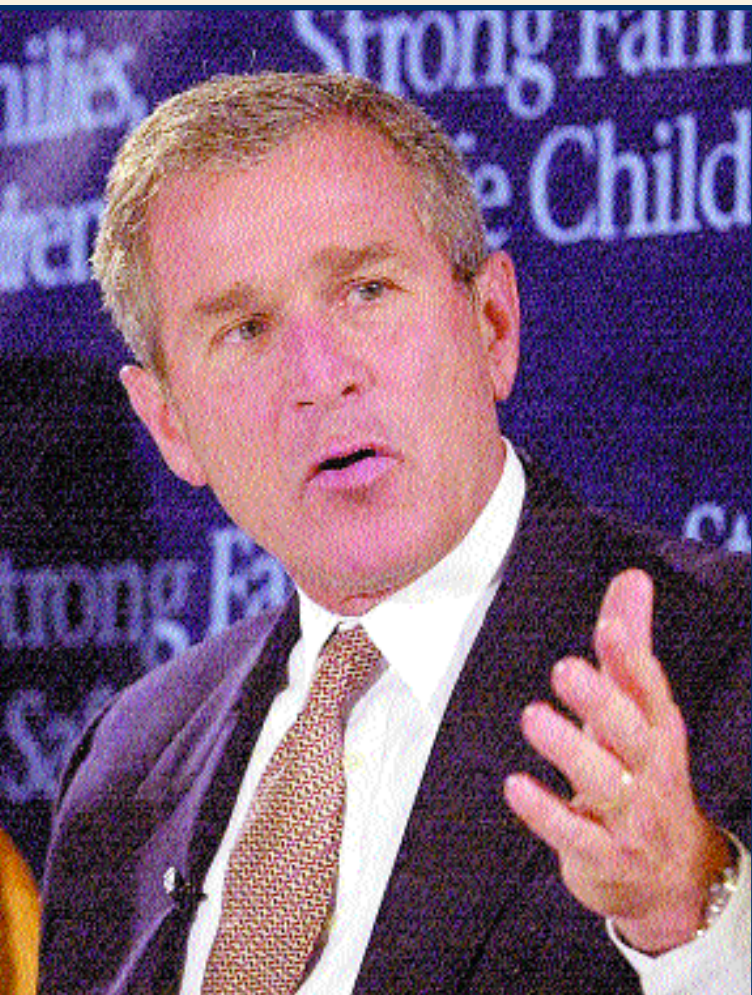
When he emerged victorious, the traits that had made him a great military leader made him an outstanding first president. His principled leadership established the American presidency as an elected office without historical precedent at a time when many were calling for him to become a king.

A God-given responsibility

Washington believed the responsibility of high office must be considered a responsibility from God. The duties of the president, he thought, had to be carried out with the highest honor. Like many other practices he originated, Washington established the tradition of taking the oath of office with his hand on the Bible, appealing “so help me God” to uphold the laws of the United States and the public trust.

Instead of seeking to control power until his death, he stepped aside to become the nation's first retired president. In his last will and testament he stipulated that his slaves were to be freed from the bondage he had come to believe was against the will of God and the inalienable rights among men. Like so many leaders ahead of their

ne Leaders Gone?



time, Washington's legacy is as strong today as it was more than 200 years ago.

Great leaders—good and evil—can profoundly affect the course of history.

Adolf Hitler, perhaps the dominant leader of the 20th century, was the antithesis of Washington. Hitler rode a wave of German despair to manipulate his way into national leadership. With mesmerizing theatrics he pioneered use of the new technological tools of radio, amplified sound and theatrical lighting to create mass-media politics.

Through clever manipulation, the German people's perception of Hitler was transformed through the Nazi Party's absolute control of news and information sources, incessant lying, orchestrated public appearances (skillfully crafted for psychological impact), party politics, rigged elections, backroom deal-making and other political chicanery.

Hitler seized the soul of a nation by promising 1,000 years of German domination of the world, unprecedented prosperity and elimination of Germany's enemies. What he brought was mass murder and warfare on a scale never seen before in history. Hitler devastated not only his nation but much of Europe in attempting to carry out his mad dreams.

What does a true leader do?

The contrast between Washington and Hitler can help us better understand the qualities that distinguish good from bad leaders. A good leader will focus on what is best for the people he leads. What will build a secure and prosperous future for them? Leaders should be willing to sacrifice themselves for a cause greater than themselves—the needs of others.

Leadership is not an isolated human trait. Life requires that each of us become a leader in various ways. Parents are leaders. Husbands are leaders. Mothers and wives are leaders. Teachers are leaders. Employers are leaders. Lifeguards, police, pastors, coaches, committee chairmen, scoutmasters, legislators, supervisors, managers, presidents, vice presidents and officers of all kinds are leaders.

In our relationships in the working world, each of us leads and follows. It is normal both to lead and be led.

Good leaders are followed for important reasons. They provide people with a vision. They articulate that vision and show how others may reach it. The leader is the symbol and embodiment of worthy shared goals and how to achieve them. Leaders help

“Leadership matters especially when great changes are bearing down upon humankind and people look for guidance; when old structures and assumptions are crumbling and newer social, economic and political trends are emerging.”

Paul Kennedy, author and university professor

a group find solutions, solve problems, move forward.

Good leaders are not dictators. They do not derive their power from commanding people to obey their will or use coercive methods to manipulate others. Good leaders gain respect because of their character, commitment and concern for others. They are respected because they value and uphold the truth. They are committed to making life work for those they lead.

Good leaders inspire others to achieve their potential. People everywhere want to have faith in their leaders and to look to them for strength, direction and support in time of need. People don't want their leaders to lie to them, manipulate them or be unprincipled.

Leadership isn't always popular

Sometimes, however, people won't tolerate the kind of leaders they truly need.

People can become so corrupt they don't want the truth. The Bible talks about those times. A blinded and deceived people killed Jesus Christ. We are living in a world that is much the same in too many ways.

Good leadership is agonizingly difficult and lonely. It requires acting on principles for the ultimate common good, based on what is *right*, not what is *expedient*. It requires courage and conviction and sometimes demands action opposed by entrenched forces



How Significant Is the Race for the White House?

The actions of the U.S. president are important to the welfare of many nations. Some observers consider the current contest for top American leadership to be uninspiring and lackluster. Yet the stakes are high when we consider the domestic and international implications.

The next president of the United States will make some momentous decisions. The Supreme Court is a case in point. It is highly probable that either George Bush or Al Gore will have the opportunity to choose three or four new justices for the nine-member court as current justices take long-awaited retirements. The constitutional status of such important issues as abortion and religious freedoms could alter significantly depending on whether the next president appoints conservative or liberal justices.

On the international scene the next president will have to decide how to approach China with regard to the security of Taiwan and other important issues such as trade relations. Increasing globalism is another significant world trend. How far will the next president want to push a reluctant American electorate down the road of global economic integration and more free trade?

National security is another compelling issue. Will the United States choose to go ahead with a comprehensive missile defense, potentially shielding America from would-be aggressors but alienating European allies and creating deep suspicion from potential enemy nations such as Russia and China?

Paul Kennedy sums up the state of affairs as Americans contemplate their choice in the November elections: “. . . The currents which seem to threaten international turbulence and batter even the well-founded American ship of state are likely to be an unpredictable combination of both old and new security threats . . . Currency crises are at least as likely as a Chinese move on Taiwan or India-Pakistan hostilities.

“Until the presidential contenders show more signs of knowing how to navigate in rough and uncharted waters, it is hard to be confident that the wayward American flagship will lead us smoothly and safely into safe harbours. The next few years could be stormy ones in world affairs. And the lack of sustained and wise American leadership could easily produce a shipwreck or two” (*The Independent on Sunday*, “Danger: Giant Countries Are in Hands of Small Men,” May 14).

America’s statehood responsibilities mushroomed during the 20th century—and there is no sign of a letup as we move toward the latter months of the year 2000 and into the next presidency. The job of the chief of state will not get any easier.

Of course the president does not act alone, but in concert with the Congress. He also has advisers on many levels. However, when the chips are down, and sudden, risky decisions have to be made, it is to the man in the Oval Office to whom the United States and the world in general look for wise and beneficent leadership.

No wonder the apostle Paul asks us to pray for rulers and all those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Do we fulfill this important obligation?

—John Ross Schroeder

controlling greater power. Exercising good leadership is risky. Leaders can be ostracized and even assassinated for it—as happened to Jesus, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King.

Sometimes great leaders are seemingly without substantial support, like a voice crying in the wilderness. Only later are they called on to exercise leadership.

For years before Hitler invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939, Winston Churchill warned that the European nations’ policy of giving in to Hitler’s demands would lead to disaster. He shouted that the world needed to stand up to Hitler before it was too late.

But few listened, and unimaginable horrors followed.

Long before America entered the war against Germany and Japan, it was Churchill’s determined leadership as the wartime prime minister that saved Great Britain and paved the way for eventual Allied victory.

Guidebook for leadership

Over the course of their lives, Washington and Lincoln faced challenges and setbacks. Both found inspiration and a framework for successful leadership in the pages of the Bible.

It was Sir Winston Churchill who summed up Lincoln’s growing belief in God during the difficult days of the American Civil War. Churchill had gone through a similar experience in 1940. He wrote: “His [Lincoln’s] spirit was sustained by a deepening belief in Providence. When the toll of the war rose steeply and plans went wrong, he appealed in his inmost thoughts to a power higher than man’s. Strength was certainly given him” (*The History of the English-Speaking Peoples: Volume 4, The Great Democracies*, 1958, p. 169).

History abounds with accounts of the great conquerors of the world—Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Genghis Khan, Charlemagne, Napoleon Bonaparte. Volumes have been written about their exploits. Yet we often overlook another chronicle that is the best book on leadership ever written. The Bible chronicles almost 1,000 years of the national leadership—both good and bad—of a race of people. It reveals the character of right leadership. A central focus of the book is its message that the world can be, and will be, transformed by the right kind of leadership.

It offers many examples of leaders who stood out in their generation. Noah was the only “preacher of righteousness” of his day (2 Peter 2:5). He courageously resisted evil in a world of corruption, built the ark as a witness to a coming judgment and served as a warning sign to the world for 120 years.

Joseph was an uncommonly capable young man who overcame adversity—including being sold into slavery and being imprisoned on trumped-up charges—to become second in command of Egypt, the superpower of his day.

The Bible describes the context, trials, triumphs, faith and failure of an astonishing array of leaders. Abraham, Moses and King David demonstrated standards of righteous leadership for all time.

Wicked leaders also are profiled in the Bible. Ahab
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Could Jesus Christ Be Elected to the White House?

Jesus Christ remains one of the most respected leaders—as well as one of the most controversial—the world has ever known. Most people acknowledge He was good; many believe He was a great man. If He were on earth today, a fascinating question to ponder is whether the American people would ever elect Him to be president of the United States.

The question isn't that far-fetched. After all, He said He was destined to rule the Kingdom of God, bearing authority over the earth. The Bible calls Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So could He be a successful president?

The short—and possibly surprising answer—is *no*. Americans would not tolerate Jesus of Nazareth in the White House.

We can reach no other conclusion when we examine the electoral process and the priorities the American people use in selecting their president and contrast that to the platform Jesus would advocate. Americans want religious freedom (or freedom *from* religion), freedom of choice to select abortion for unwanted pregnancies and freedom to enjoy entertainment—including films, music, books and television drenched with violence and sex—for its pleasurable diversions. Many Americans demand unrestrained sexual freedom between consenting adults. They want and fully expect unhindered and total freedom of speech.

How would His platform be received?

What Christ's platform would be, and how that would impact the American voter, is easily discernible from His teachings. After all, the Bible says Jesus is "the same, yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Read the Bible and you will know His platform.

For example, Jesus advocated that the Ten Commandments be universally taught and kept as the standard for human behavior. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill . . . Whoever does and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17, 19).

There go the atheist vote, agnostic vote and, oddly enough, much of the Christian vote—at least from those who believe the Ten Commandments are too invasive when it comes to their personal freedoms.

After all, the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me," would be considered a major violation of religious freedom. A large percentage of the electorate would believe the commandments and law of God force a breakdown of the separation of church and state. "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17)—Christ's position on the Ten Commandments—would be an affront to those who believe that grace does away with the binding nature of the Commandments.

Another factor is that Jesus was Jewish, a member of an ethnic minority against which there is still considerable prejudice in America. Jesus' customs and teachings would appear far too Jewish for most voters, including most Christian voters. For example, He kept the Passover (and told His followers to follow His example) and never observed Christmas, Easter or any other nonbiblical practices condemned by the law of God, which He upheld.

Jesus also kept the biblical Sabbath (from Friday evening

until Saturday evening) by abstaining from physical work during that period. He even said, "I am Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). His faithful Sabbath observance would offend many of those who choose to observe Sunday instead.

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, so He would offend the vast majority of Jewish voters who would consider this claim blasphemous. Many others would say he was mentally ill, egomaniacal and too emotionally or psychologically unstable to trust with governing the nation.

What kind of leader would He be?

Ironically, Jesus' teachings and practices are the same factors that would make Him a perfect leader. His perfect integrity, compassion, miraculous powers of healing, love for all and willingness to die for the sins of mankind—including people of every race, religion and economic status—set Him apart.

Jesus is the ultimate model of leadership, uncompromising but compassionate. With perfect ethics, Jesus taught equality of opportunity, fairness and concern for the well-being of all, demonstrating virtue and truthfulness in every action. He taught the value of the family, said marriage was inviolable and directed that we should honor and care for our elderly and the disadvantaged.

Jesus—though perfect in His leadership—would never be elected to the White House.

Christ, you see, would never run for the office. He would never attack others for self-promotion. He would not compromise the truth or His ethics and values. He would not curry the favor of special interests in exchange for campaign donations. We must remember that He said He is not interested in exercising worldly political power in this age: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, . . . but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

Destined for a higher office

We should have no regrets that Jesus of Nazareth will never be elected president of the United States or any other nation of this world.

He has, after all, already been selected for an infinitely *higher* office.

He serves in heaven as the High Priest for truly converted Christians. He promises to return as earth's ruler, under His Father, who will take the reins of all authority when mankind needs God's intervention to save us from the corruption and collapse of human leadership.

As Jesus told the Roman governor Pontius Pilate: "You say rightly that I am a King. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37).

The message of the Bible is that we cannot rightly rule ourselves. We need a perfect ruler who has demonstrated ultimate love and concern for others. Jesus Christ has perfectly qualified. He is alive. He will be that ruler. He said that all who are of the truth will hear what He says.

Are you listening? Does He get your support?

A Kinder, Gentler Hell?

As opinions about hell have changed over the years, so have the teachings of many churches. But what does the Bible say?

by David Treybig

Syncretism—the combination of differing beliefs and practices—has long been a hallmark of mainstream Christianity. Centuries ago church leaders set aside biblically assigned days of worship in favor of Sunday, Christmas and Easter. Similarly, popular tradition long ago replaced the biblical teaching about hell.

Beliefs about hell are changing again. A recent poll revealed a dramatic shift in opinion among Americans regarding concepts of hell. True to historical form, major religious organizations are adjusting their teachings accordingly. The latest beliefs and teachings concerning the fate of sinners could be called a “kinder, gentler” hell.

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, in 1997 the majority belief among U.S. citizens was that “hell is a real place where people suffer eternal fiery torments.” Now 53 percent believe “hell is an anguished state of existence eternally separated from God” (“Hell Hath No Fury,” Jeffrey Sheler, Jan. 31, 2000, p. 47).

This shift in thinking can be attributed to several factors. “Lampooned by modern intellectuals and increasingly sidelined by preachers preferring to dwell on more uplifting themes, the threat of post-mortem punishment of the impenitent in an eternal lake of fire all but disappeared from the religious mainstream by the 1960s. Theological discourse on the subject at the nation’s divinity schools almost evaporated. And while polls showed that the majority of Americans professed to believe in hell’s existence, almost no one thought he would go there” (ibid.).

The reasoning behind the shift often paints punishment as a childish fear tactic that is no longer valid or needed by mature adults. Others reason that a good God couldn’t possibly punish people forever, as that would be against His very nature. “‘Once we discovered we could create hell on Earth,’ says John Dominic Crossan, professor emeritus at DePaul University in Chicago, ‘it became silly to talk about it in a literal sense’” (ibid., p. 50).

Authenticating this modern interpretation for Roman Catholics, Pope John Paul II stated last summer that, “rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitely separate themselves from God.” In so doing he described hell as something figuratively portrayed in the Bible as a “pool of fire” or a “second death” (ibid., p. 45).

Catholic funeral masses have changed to reflect this view. White priestly garments have replaced black ones, and prayers such as *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath), which describe the torture of the wicked, have been set aside in favor of ones dealing with hope and the resurrection.

In concert with this socially driven change, “the doctrine commission of the Church of England recently recommended a hell of ‘final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God’ instead of medieval fire and torment. And the newest Presbyterian catechism hardly mentions the subject at all . . . Even among evangelicals, hell as a subject from the pulpit is less ubiquitous than before” (*USA Today*, “Churches Give Hell a Make-over,” Gerald Zelizer, Feb. 21, 2000, p. 15A).

The modern religious consumer

In an effort to explain recent changes in teachings about hell, Gerald Zelizer, rabbi of a Conservative congregation serving

Jewish residents of Metuchen and Edison, New Jersey, offers three reasons he believes hell is being refashioned. First is the religious consumer’s view that he needs positive things, including love, hope, peace and marriage enrichment, more than being saved from hell. Second is the American psyche, which thinks people are entitled to be happy and successful. Third is ambiguity within Christianity over what Matthew meant when he said that evildoers would be “cast into a furnace of fire.”

In an age of consumer-driven markets, churches are not only striving to meet the individual where he stands emotionally and intellectually but are adjusting doctrines to attract and retain people. Like a technician who can’t resist the urge to tweak the knobs of an already perfectly operating system, theologians and parishioners regularly adjust doctrinal positions to fit their changing perspectives. Jesus Christ’s first-century condemnation of substituting “the commandments of men” for the teachings of God (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7) has gone unheeded.

Yet, strangely, some theologians paint their revisions as honorable, carefully thought-out methods of taking the gospel to contemporary culture. Thomas Reese, editor of the Jesuit journal *America*, reasons that today’s gentler hell, based on relationships and psychological experiences such as loneliness, wouldn’t have made sense to earlier generations.

U.S. News & World Report’s religion writer Jeffrey Sheler notes that this most recent change in the view of hell is similar to other changes in Christian teaching. But not everyone agrees with such humanly

devised changes of biblical teachings.

The history of change

Evangelical Protestants and conservative Catholics (who comprise much of the 34 percent of Americans who hold to the traditional view that hell is a literal place of eternal punishment) do not accept the kinder, gentler hell.

Yet, ironically, many of those resistant to the recent change are unaware that their traditional beliefs are nothing more than revisions of the true biblical teaching. The major difference lies in the fact that their revisions were made many centuries ago.

Surprising as it may sound, the idea of hell as a literal place where evildoers are punished for eternity did not arise until centuries after Jesus' life on earth and subsequent crucifixion. As Rabbi Zelizer explained: "In the Hebrew Bible, there is no mention of hell at all, but only a deep ravine of rocky earth outside the Old City of Jerusalem, where the Israelites burned garbage and emptied sewage, and Sheol, a non-descript underworld into which both the good and the bad descended after death."

So where did the idea of hell as a place of eternal punishment come from?

In Mark 9:43-48 Jesus spoke of hell as a place where "the fire is not quenched." Did He mean evildoers would be punished forever? Or did He mean no one would quench the fire, that it would not go out until the wicked were consumed? This question has left many confused, as have disagreements among third- and fourth-century theologians over whether the punishment would be sensory or only symbolic of separation from God.

Origen, another early church theologian, offered this theory: Hell is remedial in nature, a place where sinners could be rehabilitated. The Council of Constantinople in 543 rejected Origen's view. From that time forward, people were divided between two perspectives, the majority believing in a never-ending punishment of the wicked (who would necessarily be immortal), the minority believing in a one-time annihilation of the wicked (who by definition would be mortals, capable of dying and being destroyed).

Little changed until the 14th century when Dante presented a fictional description of hell in his work the *Divine*

Comedy. Using vivid imagery of the horrors associated with a multileveled subterranean chamber, Dante galvanized popular opinion about sensory punishment.

However, the doctrinal evolution did not end there.

"Two hundred years later, leaders of the Protestant Reformation rejected the terrifying depictions of hell in art and literature," wrote Jeffrey Sheler. "While Martin Luther and John Calvin regarded hell as a real place, they believed its fiery torments were figurative. Hell's worst agonies, they said, were the terror and utter despair of spending eternity cut off from God."

Given the options, what should one believe? Is there no definitive, biblically based answer?

Yes, there is. An often-overlooked passage sheds a brilliant light on the entire debate.

The Bible's explanation

Although many have noted Christ's references to punishment for evildoers in Mark 9:43-48 and Revelation 20:15, few have made the connection between this subject and Malachi 4. Written 400 years before the birth of Christ, Malachi's book has been assumed by many to be simply a historical record of the time. Yet its last two chapters (3 and 4) focus on Jesus' second coming.

Malachi 4:1-3 explains what will happen to the wicked: "'For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' says the LORD of hosts, 'that will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,' says the LORD of hosts."

As their punishment, says Malachi, evildoers will be *burned up*. This is not a case of divinely administered eternal torture but of a mercifully quick capital punishment—the annihilation and eternal elimination of the wicked. The wicked will not burn forever. Indeed, they will be *reduced to ashes*.

This is the "everlasting punishment"—a death after which there is no hope of a resurrection—Jesus speaks of in Matthew 25:46. This punishment is eternal in the sense

that it has eternal consequences: No one will return to life once punished in this manner. The punishing is instantaneous, but its effect is eternal.

The idea that one can work his way out of this punishment is also a mistaken concept.

Understanding annihilationism

The understanding that the wicked will be destroyed is called annihilationism.

Addressing this concept, Sheler reports: "A small but growing number of conservative theologians are promoting a third position: that the end of the wicked is destruction, not eternal suffering. Evangelical scholars such as Clark H. Pinnock, theology professor at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario; John R.W. Stott, founder of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity; and Philip E. Hughes, a noted Anglican clergyman and author, contend that those who ultimately reject God will simply be put out of existence in the 'consuming fire' of hell," Sheler wrote.

These theologians correctly point out, as Sheler writes, that "the traditional belief in unending torment is based more on pagan philosophy than on a correct understanding of Scripture. They base their belief on New Testament passages that warn of 'eternal destruction' (2 Thessalonians 1:9) and 'the second death' (Revelation 20:14) for those who reject God, and on the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel's admonition that 'the soul that sins shall die' (Ezekiel 18:4).

"They also raise ethical arguments. 'How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness' as to inflict 'everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been?' asks Pinnock in the *Criswell Theological Review*. A God who would do such a thing, Pinnock argues, is 'more nearly like Satan than like God.'"

There is much more to the story. For a thorough explanation of what happens to people when they die, request our eye-opening booklets *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* and *What Happens After Death?* Both are free from any of our offices listed on page 2, or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org. **GN**

The Feast of Peace

God instructed the ancient Israelites to leave their homes every year to observe a festival in a location He chose. What is the significance of this feast, and what does it mean for you?

by Jerold Aust

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.

What is the meaning of this feast, and why don't we hear more about it?

Of those who have heard of it, most think of it as Jewish, if they think of it at all. The notion that the Feast of Tabernacles was only for Old Testament Jews is not only wrong, it is dead wrong.

Answers to big questions

You and I live in a world largely devoid of the knowledge of God's plans for mankind. Most don't know why human life exists. We don't understand what lies ahead for us.

Although the answers to these questions have long been available, most people haven't known where to look for them, or they've ignored the source where they could find the answers. God's festivals, including the Feast of Tabernacles, can help answer such timeless questions.

God set in place His carefully designed system of feasts in Old Testament times. He commanded the Israelites to keep His days even though they didn't grasp their deep spiritual symbolism and significance at the time. Among the many reasons to observe them is their depiction of God's plan to save mankind.

On the surface this might sound odd. But God has a reason and design behind everything He does. The feast days He spelled out for ancient Israel represent aspects of His

master plan for mankind's redemption. They reveal not only our potential but how we can attain it.

The Feast of Tabernacles depicts how a major piece of the puzzle—how man will finally find peace—will fall into place.

God's promise of peace

At the time of Jesus' birth God sent an angel to announce it to shepherds. While the angel was conveying the divine message, God revealed a heavenly host praising God: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:14). This verse is often spoken or sung during the Christmas season, but it wasn't intended for that man-made holiday. In truth, God's peace on earth will be realized only with the ultimate fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Jesus' birth set in motion a series of events that eventually will lead to true peace on earth. That peace didn't come in Christ's lifetime. As He told the Roman governor Pontius Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world . . . You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world . . ." (John 18:36-37).

He knew He would come again—the second time to transform the world and establish the kingdom over which He will reign (Isaiah 11:1-5; Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 20:4). Only then will mankind enjoy God's blessing of peace.

To understand how that peace will come, we first need to understand why the world suffers from so much anger and violence.

From the beginning God instructed Adam and Eve in His way of truth and peace. But

an interloper appeared on the scene—Satan the devil, the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). He deceived Eve, who in turn convinced her husband that he and she should disregard God's instructions not to take of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17).


This event changed the course of human history. From this point on every human being has relied on his own judgment rather than God's instructions. This situation strikes at the heart of man's lack of godly peace, his continual conflict and wars.

What is behind humanity's endless wars? In a word, Satan, the god of this world, is the unseen but powerful instigator behind war.

He is also the original sinner and rebel against God. The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel make it clear that Satan, once a powerful angel at God's throne, was the first to rebel against his Creator and Maker (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:13-17). This powerful spirit being was so industrious and effective in his deception that a third of the angels bought into his perverted notions and became demons (Revelation 12:3-4, 9).

Later, when God created Adam, Satan was lurking about, hoping to instill his evil notions of pride and arrogance into Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-5). He succeeded. They accepted his subtle and persuasive arguments, and the results were disastrous. They disobeyed their Creator, who then expelled them from Eden. Later Cain, their firstborn son, murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-12).

These events show the deceptive and deadly fruits of Satan's frame of mind.



Christ identified Satan as “a murderer from the beginning” and “a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Satan is the author of war and indeed all anger and hostility. In his arrogance he attempted to overthrow his Maker. Isaiah records his misguided thinking: “. . . You have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’” (Isaiah 14:13-14). But God defeated him and consigned him to earth, where he reigns as “the ruler of this world” (John 16:11). He will remain in control until Christ incarcerates him at His second coming (Revelation 20:1-3).

With this source of bitterness, hostility and deception removed from influencing humanity, the world will at last begin to experience peace, contentment and joy.

The meanings of God’s feasts

This is where the meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles comes to light.

It’s important to briefly preview all of God’s feasts to better understand the significance of the Feast of Tabernacles. God’s seven festivals are laid out in Leviticus 23: the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks or Firstfruits (Pentecost), the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day of the feast. These feasts show how God works to bring about the salvation of mankind.

The Passover represents Jesus’ sacrifice for mankind (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7). The seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread represents the unleavened life of Christ and shows the need for His disciples to “be holy, for [He is] holy,” by ceasing to sin (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 1 Peter 1:16). Pentecost shows the need for us to receive God’s Spirit to empower us to become like God the Father and His Son, Jesus (Acts 2:1-4; Romans 8:9-19).

The Feast of Trumpets depicts Christ’s

return to earth “at the last trumpet,” at which time God will resurrect His faithful followers to immortality in the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; Revelation 11:15). The symbolism of the Day of Atonement represents Satan being shackled for 1,000 years, allowing mankind to at last be reconciled—at one—with God (Revelation 20:1-3).

We then come to the symbolism of the Feast of Tabernacles. Next in God’s plan is 1,000 years of unprecedented peace and unparalleled prosperity (Revelation 20:4-6; Zechariah 14:3-4, 8-9).

Finally, the Last Great Day signifies the second resurrection, when all who have lived and died without ever knowing God and His plan will have their opportunity to be saved. God will resurrect them from their graves and give them temporary physical life along with revelatory knowledge of God, His truths and their part in His master plan (Revelation 20:11-12; Ezekiel 37:1-14).

These feasts—*God’s feasts* (Leviticus 23:2, 4)—represent the steps in His plan for salvation.

The feast of peace

If one thing is sadly lacking in the world, it is peace. In several thousand years of history our planet has experienced only a few isolated years of peace between wars raging somewhere on the globe.

The Feast of Tabernacles, however, shows how history will change. It symbolizes 1,000 years of uninterrupted peace and prosperity when people will learn cooperation rather than confrontation.

God has in store for mankind a millennium of unbroken, unbridled and unpolluted peace. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, He says of this time: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

Jeremiah also helps us understand how mankind will at last find peace. People will at last learn God’s ways. “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every

man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).

God’s instruction will include the imparting of understanding of His feast days, including the Feast of Tabernacles. “And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts [Jesus the Messiah], and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16, emphasis added).

For the first time in history, peace will break out over the earth. There will be no more locked doors or windows, no more muggings, no more crimes, no more murders, no more wars.

The prophet Micah tells us that “out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:2-4). This is the world Almighty God has in store for mankind—including you.

You can have a foretaste of the coming time of peace. The members of the United Church of God, publisher of *The Good News*, will gather in dozens of locations around the world in October in obedience to God’s command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. There they will observe this Feast, worshipping God and hearing more about the meaning of His plan explained from the Scriptures. Visitors are always welcome.

If you’d like to learn more about God’s feast days, request your free copy of *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. To learn more about the coming Feast of Tabernacles, visit our Web site, www.ucg.org/feast.html. **GN**



An Overview of Condi

Watch Jerusalem



The pressure is on in the Middle East. President Bill Clinton is pushing for a peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis before he leaves office in January.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is under pressure from his followers to declare an independent Palestinian state with its capital in Jerusalem.

Israel's prime minister, under pressure from his own party to enter a peace agreement, is under intense

pressure from others in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, not to yield one inch to the hostile nations around them.

Meanwhile, the pope has called for Jerusalem to be an "international city" with free and open access for all.

Jerusalem has become the focus of the debate. Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians have stalled mainly over this issue. Other territorial disputes can probably be settled given time, but the conflict over Jerusalem is seemingly insoluble. Israelis and Palestinians both lay claim to the same small area, the Old City of Jerusalem. The Temple Mount, of biblical importance to devout Jews, is also the site of two of the Islamic world's most important mosques, the Dome of the Rock, from which the prophet Muhammad is said to have ascended to heaven upon his horse, and the El-Aqsa.

Christians also want unhindered access to *their* holy places in Jerusalem's Old City. Frequently cut off from them over the last 2,000 years, they do not want to return to a situation where they are denied access.

Calls for the internationalization of the city are likely to grow because it appears to be the only possible acceptable compromise. In theory, adherents of all three religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) would have equal access to all their respective

Calls for the internationalization of Jerusalem are likely to grow because it appears to be the only possible acceptable compromise.

holy sites. Under such a solution Jerusalem would probably be administered by international peacekeepers.

Prospects for a peace agreement may be more likely in the near future because of an intriguing combination of factors and personalities. Israel's left-leaning prime minister, Ehud Barak, wants to continue the peace process started by assassinated prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. Mr. Barak's opposite number, Yasser Arafat, suffers from ill health and seems anxious to deliver on his

promises before he dies. President Clinton is anxious to be remembered for solving the insoluble Mideast problem.

We may be headed for the time when two biblical prophecies could soon be fulfilled. Jesus Christ warned His disciples: "... When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near ... For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20-22).

The apostle Paul added these words about the situation before Christ's return: "For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

From these verses we can see that, when a peace agreement is reached, then will be the time to be most concerned about where events are taking us.

Watch Jerusalem. It's going to be a central focus for world leaders in the time ahead.

Britain's military preparedness under review

"Weapons Out of Date by the Time They Arrive." "British Army Apaches Grounded After Faults." "New Attack Helicopter Cannot Fly." "Soldier's Rifle Failed in Battle." "£80 Million to Build Army's Useless Rifles."

These newspaper headlines underscore British troubles since June of this year. British weaponry may be in its sorriest state since the 1930s, and at a high cost to the taxpayer.

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) wrote affectionately of the British-built Martini-Henry rifle, which played an important role in helping establish British imperialism and the winning of international respect. But now some 200,000 infantry rifles will have to be rebuilt at a factory in Germany.

The declining state of British armory reminds one of the words of Ezekiel 7:14: "They have blown the trumpet and made everyone ready, but no one goes to battle; for [God's] wrath is on all their multitude." (Sources: *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *Sunday Telegraph* [all London].)

A new chapter in Sino-Russian relations

Russian-Chinese relations have blown hot and cold since the end of World War II. At one point during the Nixon administration things got so bad between the two giants that, according to some sources, one even contemplated a preemptive nuclear strike against the other. No more.

Russian president Vladimir Putin's recent visit to China "set a new course for Sino-Russian relations after 50 years of sharp twists and turns" (*The Guardian*). There is broad agreement on many important issues, including a united front against the United States' proposed new missile-defense shield.

In fact, a renewed military alliance is being forged as confirmed by the news that Russia is readying cruise-missile ships for delivery to China. "The SS-N-22 is the most dangerous anti-ship missile in the Russian, and now the Chinese fleet," said Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, a California Republican (*The Washington Times*). He continued with the assessment that "our Navy admittedly has scant ability to defend against





ions Around the World

this 200-kiloton nuclear-capable weapon.” American officials are concerned about Russian arms deliveries as a part of China’s military-modernization program. Russian technicians have been detected by American intelligence agencies assisting Chinese efforts to build land-attack cruise missiles similar to the U.S.S. *Tomahawk*. Watch Russia and China, not only as individual nations, but

“The SS-N-22 is the most dangerous anti-ship missile in the Russian, and now the Chinese fleet.”

together as a potentially powerful alliance. (Sources: *The Guardian*, *The Times* [London], *The Washington Times*.)

Threat to Australian security

Australians are nervous about defending their north shore for the first time since the Vietnam War and the days of Indonesian leader Sukarno (1901-1970). Sukarno is reputed to have vowed to kill every Australian. But lately intensive sectarian and ethnic conflicts are affecting many of the small Pacific islands around Australia’s northeastern border.

Recently the decision was finally made to build a new 1,200-mile railway in the Australian outback from Alice Springs to the northern port of Darwin, which is closer to Singapore and Djakarta than to Sydney and Melbourne. The emphasis has been on the economic advantages, but one wonders whether military considerations such as much easier troop and weaponry movements might be a serious background consideration.

Though many of the nation’s soldiers are engaged in peacekeeping operations in places like East Timor and Papua New Guinea, troop numbers are likely to fall below 50,000—the lowest in modern history. This is a small force indeed for a nation nearly as large geographically as the United States. Also, Australia’s defensive equipment has been allowed to seriously run down during the past 10 years. Defense spending is at its lowest level since 1938. (Sources: *The International Herald Tribune*, *Sunday Telegraph* [London].)

A global inferno?

Blazing forests are a serious threat to timber resources, the earth’s ecology and endangered species including orangutans. The United States suffered one of its worst wildfire seasons this summer. The year 2000 could be a near-record year for serious forest fires worldwide.

Greece lost more than 180,000 acres of forest to fires during only a few weeks. Indonesia and Sumatra are two hot spots among several others around the world. Fears are that further droughts will produce what has been called “a global bonfire” perhaps within 18 months.

World leaders are being urged to set aside more money for fire prevention rather than just fighting the flames. (Source: *The Daily Express*.)

Britain sees steep decline in Sunday-school attendance

For more than 200 years Sunday school has been an important part of the early life of British children. A century ago more than half of the nation’s young people attended Sunday school. But, as *The Independent on Sunday* observed, “the traditional Sunday school is in a state of terminal decline, and the Anglican Church is pleading with other Christian denominations to join a last-ditch mission to save it.” Some predict that in a few years worship will be all but dead if the march of children away from church congregations is not halted.

One reason for the decline is that few people below 40 take their children to church. Many adults do not attend themselves.

The above-referenced article states that “modern children prefer to spend Sabbath morning at football practice rather than with a teacher and a Bible.” Note the use of the word *Sabbath* when the writer really means Sunday. This is common in Europe. The biblical Sabbath is on the seventh day of the week, Saturday, not the first.

If you would like to learn more about proper Sabbath observance, please request our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*. While you’re at it, you may wish to send for *The Church Jesus Built*. These two booklets identify the root of the Sabbath problem. (Source: *The Independent on Sunday*.)

Record number of Americans on probation or parole

Four and one-half million Americans were on probation or parole in 1999, with 1.86 million more behind bars, according to the U.S. Justice Department. The 6.3 million under some form of correctional supervision set another all-time high in a decade of steadily climbing numbers.

In 1980 slightly more than 1 percent of the American adult

The 6.3 million Americans under correctional supervision set another all-time high in a decade of steadily climbing numbers.

population was under correctional supervision. The figure has since tripled to more than 3 percent, or one of every 32 American adults.

Although violent crime decreased during the 1990s, assault arrests increased by 28 percent, and drug-related arrests rose 34 percent. Arrests for embezzlement, forgery and fraud grew by 37 percent.

The largest increase came in the number of people placed on probation. Those convicted of drug-related offenses and such crimes as embezzlement, forgery and fraud are often given probation rather than incarcerated, meaning that the flow of inmates into prisons has largely stabilized.

—John Ross Schroeder and Melvin Rhodes



A Lesson in Leadership From a Much-Loved Lady

We can learn a lesson in leadership from a highly respected lady—Britain’s queen mother.

by Melvin Rhodes

It was one of those small incidents I will always remember, a fleeting moment that left a lasting impression.

The date: July 29, 1981. Many of you will remember it too. That was the day Prince Charles married Lady Diana Spencer. So much hope for the future was in the air that day. No one could have foreseen the tragic events—marital problems and the princess’s death—that were to follow.

My lasting impression of the day had little or nothing to do with the wedding itself.

My wife and I were in England attending a church conference. The day of the wedding was the day before we were due to return to our church pastorates in Africa. I had just purchased a video recorder so I could record the royal wedding to show to church members in West

The queen mother has always been noted for her courtesy and expressions of appreciation for others, for her incredible ability to make everyone around her feel he was the center of attention.

Africa, none of whom had television.

That lasting memory was to come after the wedding itself, when the members of the British royal family returned to Buckingham Palace in their fairy-tale, horse-drawn carriages. As the queen mother stepped down from her carriage, helped by the traditional footman, she thanked him for his help. She then walked to the front of the carriage and noticeably thanked the drivers for their work.

Here was, in terms of protocol, one of the most important and respected persons in the land pausing to thank people who, in previous ages, would have been dismissed as mere servants.

The television commentator commented that the queen mother had always been noted for her courtesy and expressions of appreciation for others, for her incredible ability to make everyone around her feel he was the center of attention.

A classic lesson about leadership

An instructive account of Jesus Christ and His disciples is recorded for us in Matthew 20. It shows us the disciples were not immune to the ambitions that plague many leaders today.



The queen mother was honored by thousands who turned out July 19 for her centennial-birthday tribute at London’s Horse Guards Parade. During the festivities she was presented with this giant birthday card. She turned 100 years old Aug. 4.

Perhaps the most highly regarded person in the land, the mother of Queen Elizabeth II (both she and her daughter are named Elizabeth) turned 100 Aug. 4.

Her formal title throughout the Commonwealth is Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. Millions of people refer to her affectionately as the queen mum.

What has made her so popular? The answer is quite simple: *her attitude of service*—not always exemplified in Britain’s long history of kings and queens.

The mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, made a request of Jesus. She asked that her two sons be given the top two places in His Kingdom (verses 20-21).

Try for a moment to imagine the reaction of the other disciples. What arrogance! What gall! What an outrageous request! (Perhaps some of the others had had the same thoughts or wished they had asked first.)

In verse 24 we learn that “when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with

the two brothers.” From their reaction it is clear they perceived that the two brothers themselves had initiated their request, using their mother for their own selfish ends.

Jesus was faced with discord among the disciples and quickly dealt with it.

His words of response convey a lesson I have often reflected upon. My wife and I have lived in various countries and have observed several approaches to government. We have lived under the American and British forms of democracy as well as dictatorships in underdeveloped nations. These words of Jesus are as applicable to our world as they were 2,000 years ago.

In verse 25 He said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.”

Here Jesus reminded His followers of the order of government they were all too familiar with, the Roman system of despotic and tyrannical emperors who abused their authority, often badly treating the people. Sadly, this was the only government the disciples had known, so it was not surprising they knew little about how to govern and coveted the loftiest positions.

Jesus continued in verse 26: “Yet *it shall not be so among you*; but whoever desires to become great among you, *let him be your servant*” (emphasis added).

Here Jesus taught a new concept in rulership—*servicing*. Whoever desired positions of power and authority, He said, should first learn to *serve others*. Leadership positions, according to this Jewish Teacher, are opportunities to serve others.

Ironically, many leaders begin this way—whether they are royal personages, elected officials or military men who have overthrown a corrupt government. They may have the best intentions in the world, but frequently their desire to serve soon changes into a self-serving wielding of power.

King Solomon, who reigned as king of Israel for 40 years, observed in Ecclesiastes 10:16: “Woe to you, O land, when your king is a slave and your princes feast in the morning!”

Solomon noticed that when people unused to rulership suddenly become powerful the power went to their heads—and their stomachs. After decades of deprivation they would spend much time eating and drinking, making up for the years of going without. I do not exaggerate when I say that

Republican Dynasties: A Growing Trend

Man’s general dissatisfaction with human rulership along with his eternal quest for the perfect system of government has led to a new phenomenon on the world stage—what can be called republican dynasties.

These are not to be confused with the hereditary monarchies that sound almost medieval to our ears. Most countries are republics, in stark contrast to a century ago when most were monarchies.

However, just because a country is a republic doesn’t mean it is a democracy. A great number are dictatorships, not democracies. Many have settled down to following a long-term dictator after decades of instability. Fearful of what might happen after the strongman dies and seeking to avoid possible anarchy, what better solution than to let power pass to the son?

Syria is the latest nation to opt for this solution. When President Hafez al-Assad died earlier this year his nominated successor was his son, Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian constitution, which specified that the president must be at least age 40 to hold that office, was immediately changed to allow the 34-year-old to ascend to power. The result was a foregone conclusion; his father had made it clear that his son should succeed him.

Before the change in Syria, North Korea saw the beginnings of a republican dynasty. Even a communist dynasty such as North Korea still rigidly follows in the path of Joseph Stalin.

However, in spite of the assured successions, change is still very much in the air. North Korea’s “Dear Leader” Kim Jong Il may have grown up in the most closed society on earth, but he was an avid viewer of Western movies, which only he was allowed to watch. He seems less fearful of the West than his father and surprised everyone earlier this year when he turned out to greet South Korea’s Kim Dae Jung, who had been invited to the North to discuss improving relations.

Bashar al-Assad, too, is not averse to the West or Western ideas. Trained as an optometrist in London, he has acquired many Western traits and seems fairly open to the West.

Other republican dynasties seem set to follow, Iraq being one of them when strongman Saddam Hussein leaves the scene.

Recent history, however, raises warnings that such successions may not always go according to plan.

Romania’s Nicolae Ceausescu wanted his son to be the first hereditary president in the communist world. Ceausescu was overthrown and executed before his dream could be realized. Papa Doc Duvalier was a dictator of Haiti whose son, “Baby Doc,” took over after he died. The son lives in France, exiled from his homeland.

Perhaps the best-known republican dynasty was that of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty in India. India’s first prime minister after independence was Jawaharlal Nehru, who was succeeded not long after his death by his daughter Indira Gandhi. Indira groomed her son Sanjay to take over from her, but he was killed in a car crash. When she was assassinated, her second son Rajiv became prime minister. In turn he, too, was assassinated. His Italian-born wife has since been the focal point for Gandhi supporters, but for now the dynasty seems to have died. The same can be said for the Bhuttos in neighboring Pakistan.

Historically, hereditary monarchies have most often provided a clear successor. Democracies, in contrast, enable the people to vote for their leaders. Republics that are dictatorships are at a considerable disadvantage in that often there is no clear successor. A son coming to power does not mean stability is assured. Often the son lacks the charisma and leadership qualities of the father. If other contenders for power perceive weakness, there may be attempts to overthrow the government. Ironically, this is the same means by which many of the fathers themselves assumed power in the first place.

Then we see the description of Christ in Matthew 20:25 come to pass: “. . . The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over [their subjects], and those who are great exercise authority over them.” Constant power struggles result, with various factions aiming to seize power—each for its own ends.

often my wife and I saw new leaders take power and add substantially to their weight during their first six months in office.

Solomon records an advantage of leaders who are trained from birth: “Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes feast at the proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness!” (verse 17).

A true leader, including a real Christian leader, will remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 20: “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave [servant]—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (verses 27-28). Christ set all leaders an example of sacrifice, a willingness to die for those He served.

100 years of service

In a much smaller way the queen mother, deeply religious, was willing to sacrifice herself for the British people.

During what has become known as Britain’s finest hour, when the country was faced with the seemingly imminent invasion by Hitler’s forces, the British government recommended she and her husband, King George VI, together with their two daughters, go to Canada. Other monarchs and political leaders had opted to flee their countries as the Führer’s blitzkrieg overwhelmed their nations in just a few days.

When the king insisted on staying with his people, advisers suggested the children go while so many other British children were leaving. The queen’s response: “They could not go without me, and I could not possibly leave the king.”

So they stayed and endured the horror of the blitz. When their royal residence was bombed by the German Luftwaffe, her response was, “I’m glad . . . It makes me feel I can look the East End in the face.”

The people in London’s lower-class East End had taken the brunt of the bombing because London’s port facilities and industries were concentrated there. Daily the king and queen would meet and encourage the people during the most difficult time in their history. Realizing the intense bombing was a prelude to invasion, the queen practiced the use of firearms on the grounds of Buckingham Palace, prepared to fight and possibly die like anyone else if the invader should come.

Even their clothes and food were rationed the same as they were for everyone else. After the war, when the royal family embarked on a thank-you tour of southern

Africa, they asked for smaller portions at the official banquets. After years of rationing they could not eat the big meals set before them.

The queen mother’s devotion to service began in World War I when she was a teenager at home in Scotland. With her brothers away at the front, the young Elizabeth and her mother turned part of their home into a hospital for wounded soldiers, running it themselves. There she met many soldiers from distant parts of the empire and for many years kept up a lively correspondence with some of them. Here, too, her parents entertained officers from Australia and New Zealand, giving them a break from the harshness of war.

In 1923, five years after the war was over, she married into the royal family when she wed the duke of York, the second son of King George V. She had turned down his proposals twice, not wanting to be in the limelight as a member of the royal family. She eventually accepted, consoling herself with the knowledge that his older brother David would be king when their father died.

A reluctant king and queen

But in 1936 their lives changed dramatically. In January, on the death of his father, David became king with the title of Edward VIII. By the end of the year, before his coronation, he had abdicated in favor of marrying the woman he loved (the twice-divorced Wallis Simpson) rather than accepting the awesome responsibility of kingship.

Before the end of that same year the duke of York had ascended the throne as King George VI. He and his wife were crowned, in May of 1937, king and queen of the various countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth and emperor and empress of India, a title they were to lose when India became independent 10 years later. Her role was not to rule but to be a consort to her husband. She soon realized that the best role for a queen consort was defined as “the power of doing good.”

Her husband, George VI, became known as “the reluctant king.” He grew up in the shadow of his elder brother and lacked confidence. He was reserved and had a stammer, making it difficult for him to speak in public.

The only way he could take up the heavy task of kingship that befell him was “with my wife and help meet by my side.” Throughout his reign, his wife, Elizabeth, helped him with his speech impediment, listening to him practicing his addressees and

accompanying him to official functions. Her encouragement and constant presence enabled him to fulfill his responsibilities. Even so, the stress of his role and the pressures of war aged him greatly, and he died in 1952 at age 56.

At his death the firstborn of his two daughters assumed the throne as Queen Elizabeth II, and his widow stepped into her role as queen mother.

A lesson for future monarchs

A respectful country honored the queen mother during the days and weeks leading up to her 100th birthday last month. Her example of steady and humble leadership is all too lacking in today’s world, just as the kind of leadership Jesus advocated was sadly missing in His day.

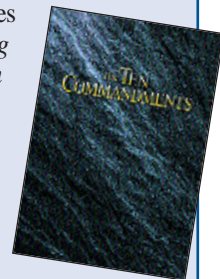
But this kind of servant leadership is destined to become the rule rather than the exception. The Bible foretells a time when a group of people who have been trained in the leadership Christ described will receive positions of divine authority. Revelation 5:10 tells us they will be “kings and priests to our God, and [they] will reign on the earth.”

Revelation 20:4 further describes this as a time when the true followers of God will sit on thrones, reigning with Christ over the nations for 1,000 years.

This same Jesus, our elder brother, has revealed right principles of ruling—not as tyrannical, authoritarian dictators, nor as corrupt politicians striving for the preeminence, but as *servants*, helping the people we are given authority over, just as He served us. **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

To learn more about the kind of leadership Jesus Christ advocated, and the principles on which it is based, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *Making Life Work* and *The Ten Commandments*. To understand how the prophesied time of godly leadership will become a reality, ask for *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, also free for the asking. Simply contact our office nearest you listed on page 2, or access our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



A Halloween Story

Following is an imaginary dialogue on the reasons responsible people might wonder whether they should participate in the customs, and don the costumes, of Halloween.

by Cecil Maranville

It's Oct. 31. Daylight begins to surrender to dusky darkness. A biting wind blusters at windows. The doorbell rings in the home of a widowed grandmother. She swings open the door to two young children costumed as cheerful cartoon characters, each carrying a large paper shopping bag.

"Trick or treat!" they call out in unison with sweet voices through happy smiles as they extend their bags in eager anticipation. Their weary mother, standing several steps away, shivers against the wind and chill of the approaching darkness.

The neighborhood grandmother has nothing to contribute to the already-bulging bags, but she offers the trio some hot chocolate and a comfortable place to rest from the cold for a few minutes. They are puzzled by her lack of Halloween treats, but they gladly accept her offer to come inside and warm up.

Neighborhood Grandmother: "Oh, you look so cold! This hot chocolate should warm you right up. I have to compliment you [she says to the children's mother] on how responsible you seem about the children's safety. It's a good idea to accompany them. You can never know what dangers lurk even in this neighborhood."

Mother of the children: "Oh, yes, I would never let them go out alone. The children don't necessarily appreciate Mom's watchful eye, but there are too many dangers to ignore. Children are harder for drivers to spot at this time of night,

and there is also the worry of tampered candy and fruit. Even without those fears, it's always a challenge to keep them from eating so many sweets that they get sick the next day."

Grandmother: "Why, may I ask, did you choose those cartoon-character costumes instead of ghosts, goblins and such?"

Mother: "We don't like the emphasis on death and violence, so we purposefully avoid those types of costumes. And we don't want the children to remember this holiday as one in which acts of vandalism are considered fun. I have unpleasant childhood memories of children throwing rocks at cars and windows of houses, setting fires and deliberately terrorizing senior citizens."

Grandmother: "It sounds like you've obviously given some thought to this."

Mother: "Well, we go out of our way to make this a fun holiday for our children. Our goal is to fill their memories with good experiences. We are parents with high standards.

"May I ask you a question? You're such a kind neighbor, always greeting my children cheerfully as they walk by your house on their way to and from school. I don't know if you realize it, but you have a reputation as the neighborhood grandma.

"But you obviously haven't decorated your home for Halloween, and

you don't have candy or treats for the children who come trick-or-treating. That seems out of character for you. Is there a reason?"



Where did the strange customs of Halloween originate? How did such symbols as witches, ghosts, devils and monsters become associated with a supposedly religious holiday?

Are You Tricked Into Treating at Halloween?

Commercial advertising has successfully turned Halloween into big business. Few realize the magnitude of the impact of Halloween on society and the powerful economic forces at work designed to influence your behavior.

"Halloween has become the second most important holiday for advertising agencies and marketers, having surpassed Thanksgiving, Easter and Labor Day. Information Resources Inc. estimates that \$2.4 billion will be spent for Halloween snacks, candies, beer and soft drinks. Brand name product

manufacturers spent almost \$157 million in advertising during the Sept. 1 to Nov. 1, 1994, period . . ." (*Advertising Age*, October 16, 1995, p. 1, "Monster Event for Marketeers").

"Halloween is now considered the second-largest retail season in the nation, trailing only behind Christmas. It ranks as the third biggest party day of the year—behind only New Year's Eve and Super Bowl Sunday" (Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service, Oct. 28, 1994, "Halloween Is Big Business and Growing Bigger").



Halloween's Dark Roots

In recent years eye-opening materials have been published about the questionable background of Halloween. Consider these excerpts:

"Halloween—a holiday that mixes generic religious beliefs with ancient folk customs—is supposed to be fun. But for many conservative Christians, it has become a dark and spiritually dangerous celebration . . . Many are boycotting the bats, witches, goblins and ghouls that symbolize the holiday because they consider such things to be lures in the satanic struggle for human souls . . .

"Halloween's pagan roots are real, as are those of Christmas and Easter. Santa Claus comes from an ancient woodland spirit honored by pagans, and Easter's non-Christian ancestry is derived from a Germanic fertility goddess, thus the Easter eggs and Easter bunny . . . Halloween was called *samhain* in the pagan world—part harvest festival, partly a day to honor the dead" (Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service, Oct. 28, 1993, "Conservative Christians Urge Halloween Alternative").

"The ancient Celtic [Irish, Scottish, Welsh] festival called Samhain is considered by many to be a predecessor of our contemporary Halloween. Samhain was the New Year's Day of the Celts, celebrated on 1 November. It was also a day of the dead, a time when it was believed that the souls of those who had died during the year were allowed access to the land of the dead. It was related to the season: by Samhain, the crops should be harvested and the animals brought in from the distant fields.

"Many traditional beliefs and customs associated with Samhain, most notable that night was the time of the wandering dead, the practice of leaving offerings of food and drink to masked and costumed revelers, and the lighting of bonfires, continued to be practiced on 31 October, known as the Eve of All Saints, the Eve of All Hallows, or Hallow Even. It is the glossing of the name Hallow Even that has given us the name Hallowe'en.

". . . The customs associated with Halloween included representations of ghosts and human skeletons—symbols of the dead—and of the devil and other malevolent, evil creatures, such as witches.

"The first week of November is marked in many countries, especially those with a strong Catholic influence, with festivals concerned with death, in a playful but serious way. In Catholic countries we often find some cognate of Halloween associated with All Saints' or All Souls' days.

". . . Unlike the American Halloween, in Mexico people build home altars, adorned with religious icons and special breads and other food for the dead. The Day of the Dead incorporates recognition of death as a concept with rituals that remember the deaths of individuals" (Jack Santino, *Halloween and Other Festivals of Death and Life*, 1994).

Grandmother: "I guess I must seem a bit different by not getting into the spirit of things on Halloween. I'd be happy to explain why.

"My thinking is actually quite similar to yours. Like you, I'm troubled by the vandalism and violence associated with Halloween. More than once I have seen some of those acts aimed at senior citizens. Then there is the awful emphasis on death and dying and disembodied spirits."

Mother: "Oh, I know. Some of the costumes I see, along with the horror movies aired on television this time of year, are downright repulsive. I don't know why Halloween seems to give people an excuse to set aside their normal values and to revel in things they really don't care for at other times. That's why our family stays clear of the horror costumes and any association with death. We make Halloween a fun time."

Grandmother: "I am all for making life fun for the children. But, even so, some years ago I made a decision to withdraw from Halloween activities. My personal conviction is that I could not dress up—pardon the pun—the traditions of something so truly wicked in its origins to make it into a children's holiday.

"I thought long and hard about it, and it just doesn't make sense. People who want to teach their children values like honesty, respect for others, kindness and generosity, and who want to instill in their children a positive outlook on life, take those same children and have them disguise themselves as the dead or as evil monsters or beings so they can go from house to house to ask for treats.

"I know that 'trick or treat' has a real catchy sound to it, but it doesn't come from pleasant roots. It's based on the idea that a mean trick will be played on you if you don't give treats to any stranger who approaches you. Is it too harsh to say that taking treats with threats makes me think of a kind of extortion?"

"I'm not trying to criticize you or hurt your feelings. You're obviously a responsible mother. But this is a personal choice. I cannot in good conscience participate in something that runs so completely contrary to what I really would like to see for our children."

Mother: "There's no need to apologize. We've discussed these same things. Those are the very reasons we avoid the horrible costumes. But we chose to continue with the holiday because of its *religious* roots. You are so well informed that you must know the religious background of Halloween. Since it is closely allied with religion, we felt we could, as you put it, dress up this holiday in a way that would be in line with the values we want to instill in our children."

Grandmother: "Yes, I'm aware that *Halloween* comes from 'All Saints' Eve' and that the word itself is an abbreviation of 'hallowed evening.' That fact also caused me to hang onto the holiday longer than I would have otherwise. I suspect that long ago religious people attempted to dress up an ugly,

uncivilized and unchristian holiday, perhaps for the same reasons that we have been discussing—to try to make it acceptable.

“That rationale hasn’t been enough to convince me that Halloween was healthy for my family and community for two reasons. First, I learned that the word *saint* is used in the Bible simply to mean a believer, or member of the Church. There is no biblical example of celebrating one saint or believer above another and certainly no precedent for a holiday in honor of any supposed saint.

“The second reason—and I’ve really looked into this because I believe God and sincerely want His guidance—is that I’ve researched the history of people who honored God who were challenged with similar questions. When they came in contact with different cultures, they were confronted with unholy customs and holidays.

“How did they react? Did they dress up those offensive customs with customs of worship given them by God? I found the clearest possible answer in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 12. It’s found in the last four verses. In essence, God told the people *not* to attempt to make the unacceptable acceptable. Rather, they were to avoid evil and build their customs on a clean foundation.

“Once I read that, my mind was settled. From then on I determined to provide fun for my children and grandchildren—and the neighborhood children—in positive ways, steering clear of Halloween.”

Mother: “Well, you’ve really piqued my curiosity. Thanks for your kind hospitality and especially for your insight. It’s time for us to be on our way. It looks like I have some reading and thinking to do.” **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

Does it matter which holidays we keep? Does God care one way or another about the days and customs we celebrate? Why do so many of our holidays—including many religious observances—have strange and unusual customs found 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.

Does it matter to God? Be sure to request your free copy of *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* It’s available from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can download this intriguing, eye-opening booklet from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Can Halloween Be Christianized?

Finding the shadows of the evil customs of Halloween abhorrent, many Christians have sought to sanitize the holiday by integrating religious symbols with which they are more familiar and comfortable (this process is called syncretism). Some, for example, carve the name *Jesus* onto pumpkins and add religious phrases in the hopes of evangelizing those who go trick-or-treating.

Others have undertaken a more elaborate revision of the holiday, attempting to turn it into a harvest festival interwoven with Christian themes and devoid of its more obvious pagan overtones. Church basements are turned into carnivals featuring games, contests and, of course, candy.

What should *you* do in deciding how you will approach this hotly debated issue?

The fundamental argument in favor of mixing ancient pagan customs and practices with the worship of God is that some believe it is an effective way to gradually win people over to Christian understanding. (Of course, in the present world we should ask ourselves why people who already see themselves as Christian would find *any* need to continue associations with pagan religious customs.)

This is sometimes a hotly disputed subject, and sincere people have concluded it indeed is useful to integrate the practices of ancient religious customs with the worship of God.

But perhaps we should address a fundamental question: What does *God* advise?

There is a scriptural precedent that offers guidance and direction for those who accept the Bible’s instruction. The Israelites were confronted with these issues as they settled and built a new nation in the Promised Land. They encountered many worshipers of pagan deities as they entered the land and for centuries faced the problem as they dealt with neighboring peoples.

Even before they entered the land, God revealed His thinking and told them how to handle this challenge. His directions were explicit: “When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed that you are not ensnared to follow them . . . *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 12:29-32).*

God’s instructions are crystal clear. He refuses to accept worship that is compromised and tainted by customs used in the worship of fraudulent religion. He expects His worshipers to revere Him in accordance with *His* commands, not their own imaginings.

Many centuries later the apostle Paul expressed a similar thought when correcting some in the church in Corinth for their poor judgment. “What partnership can righteousness have with wickedness?” he asked. “Can light associate with darkness? Can Christ agree with [the devil] . . . ? Can there be a compact between the temple of God and idols? And the temple of the living God is what we are” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16, Revised English Bible).

The modern debate over Christianizing pagan worship customs could be resolved simply by reading and heeding God’s plainly expressed will.

The Olympic Ideal

*Sports seem to bring out the highest aspirations and the worst attitudes.
Many of its lessons apply equally well to other aspects of life.*

by Graemme Marshall

The Olympic Games are the greatest sporting event in the world. No matter how many championship titles an athlete racks up, to win at the Olympics is often considered to be the ultimate athletic achievement. In the intense pursuit of sporting excellence, stories of true sportsmanship shine.

The good side of the Olympics

One of the greatest examples is Emil Zatopek, the great Czech distance runner who gave away one of his prized gold medals.

Zatopek won gold at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics on the same day his wife won in the javelin competition. Husband and wife became the first and only married couple ever to win Olympic gold medals on the same day in separate events. He was already the hero of the '52 games, with victories in the 10,000- and 5,000-meter events, when he decided to run the marathon, a race he had never run. During the marathon he asked another runner if the pace were too fast. The reply? It was too slow. So Zatopek upped his speed and won another gold!

Olympic gold had consistently eluded athlete Ron Clarke. Though he had set 18 world records, in his trips to the Olympics he had collected only a single bronze medal. One day while visiting with the Zatopeks, somebody gave Clarke a small box and told him not to open it until he was on his way home.

When Clarke finally opened the package, he found one of Zatopek's gold medals. Attached was a card that read: "Dear Ron, I have won four gold medals. It is only right that you should have one of them. Your friend, Emil." This exemplifies the spirit of sportsmanship—winning, with a willingness to share.

The dark side

Perhaps the shadowy, manipulative side of sports was worst reflected in the 1936



Olympics. Those first-ever summer games held in Germany were used by the Nazi Party as a gigantic propaganda exercise. The attempt to prove the superiority of the "Aryan race" over athletes from other parts of the world was, however, undermined by the success of Jesse Owens, a black American who was the undisputed star of the Olympics.

At the 1972 Olympics the dark side of sports again emerged. The expectant joy of those games was shattered when 11 athletes, five terrorists and a policeman were killed during the kidnapping of some Israeli athletes and the subsequent attempt to rescue them. The day after memorial services took place, competition continued, but with the Olympic flag at half-mast.

Olympic ideals are often in sharp contrast to reality. The Olympic motto, *Citius, altius, fortius*—swifter, higher, stronger—is all too often marred by nationalism's dark side and the drive for accumulation of team medals. Commercialism has all but overwhelmed the intent of the modern Olympics as expressed by its founder, Frenchman Baron Pierre de Coubertin. He said something in 1908 that has become the

modern Olympic Creed, displayed on the scoreboard at opening ceremonies:

"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph, but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well."

Tragically, the Olympics have become too much a reflection of man's society and the evils that dog his good intentions.

Is sportsmanship losing ground?

How long has it been since you have seen a golfer fling his club after a bad stroke? Or witnessed a highly paid tennis player throw his racket to the ground, angrily hit a ball into the stands or challenge the referee? Or heard of an athlete accused of using performance-enhancing drugs or players fighting on the field? Sadly, we see these things all too often. Have we lost sight of de Coubertin's ideals?

Positive examples give us heart. One of the great Golden Milers had an attitude toward athletics that made him a symbol of all that was good in sports. John Landy dominated Australian middle-distance running from 1952 to 1956 and was a central figure in the much-publicized quest to break the four-minute mile, along with Englishman Roger Bannister and American Wes Santee. Landy broke the world mile record in 1954.

In a race leading up to the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, distance runner Ron Clarke fell. Landy, considering himself to be at fault, immediately stopped running to check on Clarke's condition and to apologize. He resumed running to chase the field, regained the lead and went on to win. The delay probably cost him another world record.

This is what makes for excellence in sports: great athletes who are also great in character and humanity. We still see these traits exhibited occasionally, but all too rarely.

Is winning everything?

Sports fans love a winner. We feel exhilarated when our team plays in the Super Bowl, World Series or Stanley Cup. Winning teams are in the media's spotlight. Champagne and backslapping are the victor's spoils.

Yet winning is often only the difference of a stroke, point, second or goal. Many believe winning is everything. Winning often takes precedence over a player's health and injuries. Seeking to intimidate the opposition or deliberately trying to injure an opponent is becoming an accepted part of the game.

Defeat is often quiet and depressing. Heads are lowered. Feet dejectedly kick the turf. Some losers are not too graceful in defeat. Clubs and rackets are thrown in disgust. Knowing they can't win, some resort to rough play to injure opponents.

Why do so many athletes exhibit such bad manners?

Well, the media don't help by describing teams in terms of the battlefield: crushed, blitzed, demoralized, flattened, devastated. Add to this a growing disrespect for rules and authority. Players argue with umpires and referees. Melees involving whole teams are commonplace. It's little wonder that children emulate adult stars and that violence plagues youth sporting events as well.

Thankfully, some do take a stand against obnoxious players. Administrators, officials and the majority of athletes are concerned about violence but don't know how to stop the mayhem. The motivation to win at any cost is too strong for most sports to change.

Many players lose more often than they win. Defeat is a frequent visitor in life, and we must come to terms with it. Humble in victory, gracious in defeat is a nice ideal, but one we rarely see in sports—or in life, for that matter.

The intertwined character traits involved in sports and life have not altered since the apostle Paul reflected on athletic training more than 1,900 years ago. He drew analogies from running and boxing, probably referring to the Isthmian Games of the city of Corinth.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will

not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, New International Version).

Paul considered the runner's strict training, self-denial and focus on the finish line as requirements for spiritual endeavors as well. He saw that, although a runner's discipline gained him only a wreath of wild celery that soon withered, the dedicated

"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph, but the struggle."

Christian strives for an imperishable crown.

Paul taught that we should strive to win the race of life. But he knew there would be setbacks and short-term defeats along the way. He was a disciplinarian who could gracefully accept defeat or humbly savor the euphoria of a win. "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound," he said (Philippians 4:12). Defeat highlights the character of the players. Some give of their best, even shine, in a losing battle.

We face defeat more often than we enjoy the triumph of victory. In the voyage of life, humility is a struggle because virtue isn't financially rewarded, nor does it receive public acclaim. People would far sooner have the trophy, take the money and drink the champagne. We prefer heady glory to consoling words about bearing up in defeat.

Sportsmanship in the game of life

Many of these principles apply to everyday life. Whether we're a participant or spectator, we can apply them by refusing to give in to temper, anger and the human desire to punch or strike back at another.

Develop greater skills to avoid conflict and win by talent and ability. Some athletes are known for their fair play and self-control. Like them, be a good sport. Winning is a goal to strive for. But winning is laudable only if you can hold your head up in defeat.

Can we expect the trends toward more obnoxious behavior and increased disrespect for authority to continue? Biblical prophecy doesn't suggest otherwise. Until man's heart, mind and attitude change, his actions will not. Keeping a tight rein on your emotions takes character when you

are provoked. It takes character to hold your head high when you've tasted setbacks and defeat.

Winning is fun, and being challenged by other skilled players helps bring out our best. The desire to win motivates us to work, run, row, bike or swim faster and longer than we have done before. Winning is also competing with yourself against the elements, the mountain or the sea.

Striving to win doesn't have to mean animosity between opponents. The pregame psych-out too often leads to grudges that are settled on the playing field.

If winning requires you to cheat, lose your temper, aggravate an injury, abuse the umpire or intimidate your opponent, what is the quality of your victory?

A better way

Although Olympic teams enter the stadium at the opening ceremony carrying their national flags, the closing ceremony is designed to highlight unity as if all the athletes belonged to one unified world. This concept came about because of 17-year-old John Ian Wing during the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. During the days just before those games, the world was in turmoil. As teams made their way to Australia, Soviet tanks and troops entered Budapest to put down the Hungarian uprising.

A few days after the opening ceremony John Wing wrote a letter to the organizing committee. He suggested a different kind of march for the closing ceremony: "During the march there will be only one nation . . . What more could anybody want if the whole world could be made as one nation?"

So it was done, and this march with a different attitude has become a tradition that has lasted for all Olympic Games—athletes from many nations saying farewell as one body, instead of marching separately under their own national flags. What an inspiring thought about how sports could be in the prophesied world of tomorrow!

Most sporting careers are brief, but the game of life is both longer and far more important. That's why we need to learn humility in victory and grace in defeat.

If you can play fairly and in a good spirit, then you'll have a good start in playing the more important game of life. **GN**

The Book of Acts: The Church Begins

by Mario Seiglie

As discussed in recent issues of *The Good News*, archaeologists have made many discoveries that verify and illuminate our understanding of the four Gospels. After the Gospels, the next section in the New Testament we will survey is the books of the Acts of the Apostles, or simply Acts.

The book of Acts is simply a continuation of one of the Gospel accounts. Luke compiled his Gospel about Jesus Christ as the first volume of a two-part work. In his first manuscript he covered the life of Jesus; in the second he described the early history of the Church Jesus founded.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary notes: "The Acts of the Apostles is the name given to the second part of a two-volume work traditionally identified as having been written by Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul. Originally the two volumes circulated together as two parts of one complete writing" (Richard Longenecker, 1981, Vol. 9, p. 207).

Luke explains to Theophilus, to whom he dedicated this work, the purpose of his first tome: "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up . . ." (Acts 1:1-2). The phrase *former account* in this first verse is *proton logos* in Greek. It refers to the first papyrus roll of a larger work, called in Greek *tomos*, from which we get our English word *tome*.

In the second scroll Luke relates events that took place after Jesus "was parted from them [the disciples] and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:51). It covers about the first 30 years of Church history.

A scholar attacks Acts

About a century ago British scholar William Ramsay focused on the book of Acts to try to show it was rife with geographical and archaeological errors. After all, many scholars of his day, equipped with the tools of textual criticism and archaeology, had exposed many errors in other classic writings. This eminent humanity professor diligently prepared himself by studying archaeology and geography

before departing for the Middle East and Asia Minor in his quest to prove Luke's history of the early Church was mostly myth.

His quest didn't turn out as he expected. After a quarter century of research in what is today Israel and Turkey, where he carefully retraced the steps of the apostles as described in the book of Acts, this famous unbeliever shook the intellectual world when he announced he had converted to Christianity. He confessed this radical change of mind and heart was thanks in great part to his surprise at the accuracy he found in Luke's narrative in Acts.

After decades of examining the historical and geographical details mentioned in the book, Ramsay concluded: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense . . . In short this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians" (*The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, 1953, p. 80).

He went on to write many books about Acts and the epistles of Paul. Ultimately Ramsay was knighted for his contributions to the study of archaeology and geography.

The tomb of King David

When the Christian Church began on the Day of Pentecost, when its first 120 members received God's Spirit, thousands of Jewish pilgrims were visiting Jerusalem worshipping at the time of that holy festival (Acts 2:1-5).

That day the apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, delivered an inspired sermon to the Jewish crowd. Thousands heard and repented of their sins. Speaking of the recent resurrection of Jesus, he quoted from one of King David's prophetic psalms: "For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27; Psalm 16:10).

Peter continued: "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and *his tomb is with us to*

After decades of examining the details mentioned in Acts, Sir William Ramsay concluded: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense . . . In short this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."



Some archaeologists think this area at the southern end of the City of David contains the remains of the tombs of the kings of Judah who reigned in Jerusalem. The tomb at the top center may be the remains of King David's tomb mentioned by Peter in Acts 2:29. Regrettably, much of the area has been hacked away over the centuries from quarrying the limestone there.

this day” (Acts 2:29, emphasis added). Peter, speaking in the temple area in Jerusalem, could point to the nearby tombs of the kings of Israel—specifically David’s burial site.

Although it was not an Israelite or Jewish custom to bury the dead in towns or cities, royalty was an exception. The Bible records that “David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David” (1 Kings 2:10). Many later Israelite kings were also buried in Jerusalem, although not all in the designated tombs of the kings. For instance, evil King Jehoram was buried “in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings” (2 Chronicles 21:20).

Several hundred years later, during the restoration of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, the area around the tombs of the kings was repaired. “After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk . . . made repairs as far as the place in front of the tombs of David . . .” (Nehemiah 3:16).

Josephus, a Jewish historian born shortly after Peter gave his Pentecost sermon, wrote that a few decades earlier Herod the Great had broken into David’s tomb at night to plunder its riches, only to discover a previous king had already looted it (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVI, Chapter VII, Section 1). David’s

tomb was widely known even when Josephus wrote his account decades after Peter’s sermon.

A.T. Robertson notes: “His [David’s] tomb was on Mt. Zion where most of the kings were buried. The tomb was said to have fallen into ruins in the reign of the Emperor Hadrian [A.D. 117-138]” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Bible Explorer software).

Although archaeologists don’t agree on whether the extensive tomb area discovered almost a century ago in the southern end of Jerusalem is the location of the tombs of the kings of Israel, the location agrees with accounts mentioned in the Bible and does have the backing of some prominent scholars.

Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, writes: “The proposed site of David’s tomb, and of others adjacent to it, is precisely where one would expect to find the burial site mentioned in the Bible—in the southern part of the City of David, an area that would normally be forbidden to burials.

“In 1913 to 1914 a Frenchman named Raymond Weill excavated this area and found several tombs that he numbered T1 to T8 . . . The most magnificent of these tombs is T1. It is a kind of long tunnel or

artificially excavated cave 52½ feet long, over 8 feet wide and over 13 feet high . . . The fact that some extravagant, even ostentatious tombs were located precisely where the Bible says the kings of Judah, including King David, were buried certainly suggests to a reasonable mind that the fanciest of these tombs (T1) may well have belonged to King David” (*Biblical Archaeological Review*, January-February, 1995, p. 64).

Precise identification is difficult because the area was heavily quarried in later centuries and only portions of the tombs remain. Whether more research can confirm this site as David’s tomb or not, we can be confident that during Peter’s sermon given on the Day of Pentecost, when the New Testament Church began, he could point to an area in Jerusalem where everyone knew David’s tomb was located and could attest that his remains were still there.

David obviously had not risen from the dead, but now Peter and many other witnesses could confirm that it had been Jesus’ tomb, not David’s, that had opened and from which Jesus had come back to life, confirming He was the Messiah. Thousands of Jewish listeners could not refute the evidence. This proof, among others, led many to accept Jesus as the Messiah immediately (Acts 2:41).

Gamaliel the wise

During the days and weeks after Peter’s sermon, the apostles faced violent opposition, including being thrown in jail.

During their trial before their incarceration, many Jewish authorities plotted to kill them, but one of the chief religious leaders spoke up in their defense:

“Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people . . . And he said to them: ‘Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men . . . I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.’ And they agreed with him, and when they had called

for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go” (Acts 5:34-40).

This Gamaliel, who opposed the apostles’ execution, was a teacher of Paul (Acts 22:3). He was the grandson of Hillel, the founder of a dominant school of the Pharisees, a major branch of Judaism.

Gamaliel’s family name has been confirmed by archaeological findings. In a tomb in the catacombs of Beth-Shearim, near the Sea of Galilee, in a section called the Tomb of the Patriarchs, one of the graves has an inscription in Hebrew and Greek: “This [tomb] is of the Rabbi Gamaliel.” The Gamaliel of Bible fame was the first of an illustrious rabbinic family bearing his name. This tomb was that of one of his descendants.

The historian Josephus and some Talmudic works also mention Gamaliel, describing him as a benevolent and brilliant man. William Barclay adds: “He was a kindly man with a far wider tolerance than his fellows. He was, for instance, one of the very few Pharisees who did not regard Greek culture as sinful. He was one of the very few to whom the title ‘Rabban’ had been given. Men called him ‘The Beauty of the Law.’ When he died it was said, ‘Since Rabban Gamaliel died there has been no more reverence for the Law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time’” (*The Daily Study Bible Commentary*, Bible Explorer software). So we see another biblical figure mentioned in the Scriptures confirmed by sources outside the Bible.

History confirms still another biblical character

As the gospel spread to the outlying areas of Israel, Peter arrived in Samaria to preach the Word of God. There he met a magician named Simon, who was baptized but was later rejected by Peter and John for trying to bribe his way into a position of power and influence in the Church (Acts 8:18-24).

Nothing else is directly mentioned in the Scriptures about this shady character, known in history as Simon Magus.

However, about a century after Simon’s death, writings appear that describe his activities after the apostles rejected him.

Writing to the Romans, Justin Martyr comments: “There was a Samaritan, Simon, a native of the village called Gitto, who in the reign of Claudius Caesar [A.D. 41-54], and in your royal city of Rome, did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devil’s operating in him. He was considered a god, and as a god was honored by you with a statue, which statue was erected on the river Tiber, between two bridges, and bore this inscription, in the language of Rome: ‘Simoni Deo Sancto’ [To Simon the holy God]. And almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him . . .” (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, “The First Apology of Justin,” p. 171).

In 1574 excavators found a fragment of marble on an island in the Tiber River with the inscription “Semoni Sanco Deu Fidio.” Some interpret this as referring to a Sabine deity, Semo Sancus, but most likely it was part of the statue Justin Martyr described as having been dedicated to Simon Magus.

The editors of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* make this point: “It is very generally supposed that Justin was mistaken in understanding this to have been a statue erected to Simon Magus. This supposition rests on the fact that in the year 1574 there was dug up in the island of the Tiber a fragment of marble, with the inscription ‘Semoni Sanco Deo,’ etc., being probably the base of a statue erected to the Sabine deity Semo Sancus. This inscription Justin is supposed to have mistaken for the one he gives above.

“This has always seemed to us very slight evidence on which to reject so precise a statement as Justin here makes; a statement which he would scarcely have hazarded in an apology addressed to Rome, where every person had the means of ascertaining its accuracy. If, as is supposed, he made a mistake, it must have been at once exposed, and other writers would not have so frequently repeated the story as they have done” (ibid., footnote, p. 171).

Whether the base of the statue was dedicated to Simon Magus or not, the historicity of this biblical personage is also

confirmed in literature of the second and third centuries.

Paul in Damascus

After the gospel went to Samaria, it spread northward to Damascus, where a dramatic conversion took place—that of Saul, who became the apostle Paul. After his conversion God told him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9:6).

After Paul arrived in Damascus, Jesus spoke in a vision to Ananias, one of the Christians living there: “So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying’” (Acts 9:11).

The street called Straight was one of the main avenues in Damascus. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* explains: “The street called Straight was an east-west street that is still one of the main thoroughfares of Damascus, the *Derb el-Mustaqim*. It had colonnaded halls on either side and imposing gates at each end . . . and presumably was as well known in antiquity as Regent Street in London or Michigan Avenue in Chicago today. The directions included not only the name of the street but also the house where Saul could be found” (Longenecker, p. 373).

When the Jews persecuted Paul in Damascus, his friends lowered him from the city’s walls in a basket (Acts 9:25). Archaeologists have discovered sections of this ancient wall, which the Romans built. John McRay writes: “Part of the Roman wall has been found about 1000 feet south of the East Gate (Bab Sharqi) beneath Saint Paul’s Chapel and Window. Under the present Ottoman gateway, this small chapel was built by Greek Catholics over a gate from the Roman period. Tradition associates the spot with Paul’s escape by a basket that was lowered from a window in the wall (2 Cor. 11:33)” (*Archaeology and the New Testament*, 1991, p. 234).

Magnificent Caesarea

Meanwhile in Jerusalem Peter had been arrested again and this time was sentenced to death by Herod Agrippa, grandson of



The port city of Caesarea Maritima is mentioned several times in the book of Acts. Built by Herod the Great, it was the major port in the region and a Roman administrative center. Its magnificent amphitheater, left, over-

looks the Mediterranean Sea. Partially restored, today it serves as a popular venue for concerts. An equally impressive twin aqueduct, right, supplied the city with fresh drinking water from the nearby hills.

Herod the Great. A few decades ago this ruler, too, was confirmed as a historical figure when Israeli archaeologist Benjamin Mazar found scale weights with Herod Agrippa's name and title that date to the fifth year of his reign.

When Herod Agrippa heard of Peter's miraculous escape (Acts 12:5-9), he flew into a rage. "But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there" (verse 19).

Caesarea was an impressive artificial port built by Herod the Great. Named in honor of Augustus Caesar, it became the Roman headquarters of Judea. Herod also had a magnificent palace there where he would court Roman officials.

"The city included buildings typical of a Hellenistic city, such as a theater, amphitheater, hippodrome, aqueduct, colonnaded street, and an impressive temple dedicated to Caesar" (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962, Vol. 1, p. 480). Most of the remains of these buildings have recently been found by archaeologists, including a stone plaque that mentions Pontius Pilate [see *The Good News*, May-June 2000, p. 25].

"I was on the supervisory staff at Caesarea from the beginning of full-scale excavations in 1972 until 1982," writes John McKay. "Our work has largely confirmed the impression given by Josephus in both his *Wars* and *Antiquities*, of the grand scale on which Herod built to satisfy his own vanity and that of the emperor Augustus" (*Archaeology and the New Testament*, 1991, pp. 139-140).

Herod Agrippa's death

The Bible also records Herod Agrippa's unexpected death at Caesarea. "Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:20-23).

Josephus offers additional details in his independent account of Herod Agrippa's death: "On the second day of which shows

he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner . . . and presently his flatterers cried out . . . 'Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.' Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery . . . A severe pain also arose in his belly . . . And when he had been quite worn by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life . . ." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIX, viii, 2).

The two accounts, the Bible and Josephus, in this complement each other. Josephus does not mention the origin of the stomach pain, but the Bible mentions it was because of "worms." Luke, the physician, used the Greek word *skolekobrotos* in reference to Herod Agrippa's terminal condition. The word refers to tapeworms or other intestinal worms, which can block the intestinal tract and cause great pain and sometimes lead to death, as was the case here.

We will continue our survey through the book of Acts in the next installment. **GN**

Peter

From Fisherman to Fisher of Men

by Jerold Aust

The night sky grew dark and frightening as the boisterous winds whipped up the waves that pounded mercilessly against Peter's fishing boat. The men in the boat, all disciples of Jesus Christ, rowed frantically against the ferocious winds, making little headway. In spite of the dangerous circumstances, they clung to the hope they would make it to shore and safety.

The people who lived around or made their living from the Sea of Galilee knew the capriciousness of this usually tranquil body of water. Strong winds could arise suddenly and without warning. The sailors on the Sea of Galilee had no opportunity to check the latest weather report. But they were accustomed to observing the sky, watching for familiar signs that could foretell the possibility of strong weather.

In the fourth watch of the night Jesus' followers found themselves in a serious situation, fighting a strong headwind and hammering waves. Between the fear of losing their lives at sea—always a possibility in such a storm—and the arduous, painful task of rowing to safety, they were suddenly shocked. Abruptly, and with no warning, they saw the figure of a man walking on the water near them. In surprise and fear they cried out, "It's a ghost!" But the "ghost" was none other than their Master, Jesus. Immediately He reassured them: "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50).

Characteristically, the ever-impulsive

command me to come to You on the water" (Matthew 14:28). Jesus told him to come ahead.

What followed depicts both the weaknesses of human beings and the spiritual strength of God. Much to his credit, Peter showed a willingness to try the humanly impossible—to actually walk on water.

Hearing Jesus' reassuring voice and encouragement, Peter stepped overboard while none of the others dared leave the safety of the boat. He began walking toward his Master, seemingly doing the impossible with ease.

But the howling wind and crashing waves soon diverted his attention. He began

us compare some of our life experiences with Peter's, with the hope that these lessons can help us grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Simon Peter's occupation

Though the Bible reveals little about Peter's life before he met Jesus, we can learn some of his background from anecdotal accounts and factual history. Peter's name was also Simeon—the same as the patriarch of one of the 12 tribes of Israel—which was shortened to Simon. In the Scriptures he is also called Simon bar Jona (meaning Simon the son of Jonah). Apparently he was born in or near Bethsaida-

Though the Bible reveals little about Peter's life before he met Jesus, we can learn some of his background from anecdotal accounts and factual history.

to sink into the raging sea, and panic set in. With fright in his eyes he looked up to Jesus and cried, "Lord, save me!" (verse 30). Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him in a firm grip. Reassuringly, He offered a few words of instruction and comfort: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (verse 31).

This drama, one of many told in a few verses in the Gospels, provides us a powerful lesson in faith. This kind of trusting relationship is a gift from God but a gift that must be nurtured and used.

Peter's life is filled with inspiring lessons; only a few are explored here. In his article we consider several that can help

Julius (John 1:44), which lay on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. The town's name means "house of the fisherman," and it sat just east of the Jordan River. This was just outside the province of Galilee and under the rule of Herod Philip, a son of Herod the Great.

Bethsaida-Julius was a town inhabited by mostly wealthy Jews and Greeks. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew likely traded with both Jews and Greeks and probably spoke Aramaic as well as some Greek.

Before Simon Peter met Jesus, he lived a few miles to the west in the Galilean town of Capernaum and was married (Matthew 8:14). It was here that he and Andrew went

into partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10).

Peter's calling

Andrew and John expected the appearance of the Messiah, for they had traveled down the Jordan River valley to hear the prophet John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus of Nazareth. John the Baptist preached the coming of the Messiah, calling for his countrymen to repent.

Andrew and John had even become disciples of John the Baptist. When their teacher pointed out Jesus to them as the Lamb of God, Andrew told Simon Peter, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, and when Jesus looked at him he said: "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (verse 42).

Cephas is the Aramaic word for "stone"—as is the Greek name *Petros*, translated into English as *Peter*. This is how Simon bar Jona came to be known as Peter.

Some Bible scholars say Peter was called in three stages, the first stage mentioned above when he met Jesus for the first time. The second stage of his calling is identified by scholars as the time when Jesus, walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, saw Peter and Andrew casting a fishing net into the sea. Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19).

The third stage of Peter's calling is said to be when Jesus "called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter . . ." (Luke 6:13-14).

The fisherman surrenders to God

Jesus taught people by the Sea of Galilee. When the crowd increased and pressed closer, He looked around and saw two boats nearby. Stepping into Peter's boat, Jesus then asked him to put out a little from the shore so He could better teach the growing crowd. The water surface would help amplify His voice, making it easier for them to hear Him.

When Jesus finished speaking, He told Simon to go further out into the lake where the water was deeper and to lower his fishing nets (Luke 5:4). At first Simon protested that he had fished all night and caught nothing, but then said, "Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net" (verse 5).

It's a good thing he did. Suddenly the net



"And a servant girl came to Peter, saying, 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee.' But he denied it before them all, saying, 'I do not know what you are saying.'"

was so filled with fish that it was stretched to the point of breaking. Immediately Peter signaled to his partners, James and John, to bring the other boat. Soon both boats were so weighed down with fish that they were in danger of sinking.

Surprised and humbled by this supernatural event, Simon Peter fell at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (verse 8). Jesus reassured the shaken fisherman: "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men" (verse 10). From this point on, the fisherman Peter became Peter, the fisher of men. "So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him" (verse 11).

Peter witnesses the transfiguration

Peter was also a witness, along with his former fishing partners James and John, to another miracle—the apparent transfiguration of Jesus into His glorified state. "Now

after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves, and was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him" (Matthew 17:1-3).

God showed these apostles a preview of things to come. When Jesus returns to earth He will resurrect both the lawgiver Moses and Elijah the prophet, and they will reign forever with Christ in His Kingdom.

Perhaps the most significant lesson here is something that probably had never occurred to the disciples: Their master, the rabbi from Nazareth, was at least equal to Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest teachers in all of Israel's history. Not only that, Jesus was clearly *superior* to Moses and Elijah. "... A bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the



is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (verse 5).

God revealed that Jesus was much greater than Moses or Elijah—He was the very Son of God. After this divine confirmation, the three apostles became aware that now only Jesus was with them. The visionary images of Moses and Elijah were gone, but Jesus was still there. “Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, ‘Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead’” (verse 9). Peter and the other apostles would never forget this great lesson.

This momentous event strengthened the apostle Peter throughout His ministry. Just before his martyrdom, he reminded his readers of the wondrous occasion in his final epistle: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, *but were eyewitnesses of His majesty*. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Peter denies Christ, and a rooster crows

After Jesus and His apostles observed the Passover on the night before His crucifixion, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: “I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered . . .”’

“Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And so said all the disciples” (Matthew 26:31-35).

Jesus understood the weaknesses of our flesh and minds—that we lack the will-power and conviction to do what we know we should. He also well under-

Walking on Water: Faith Over Physics

Remember when Peter walked on water, if for only a few moments? Think about this: Physically speaking, what are the chances that a human being could walk on water?

The laws of physics prohibit such an event. Yet our Creator God miraculously allowed Peter to walk on water, as long as he kept his eyes and focus on Jesus the Savior, the very Son of God. Peter became more closely attached to His Master through this miracle. This is also God’s will for us. God wants each of us to develop a close relationship with Him.

This illustration shows us how important faith is in our lives. Christ said that if someone had enough faith he could move mountains (Matthew 17:20). James tells us that faith without works is dead (James 2:26). Peter stepped out of his boat in faith. But his faith shriveled as he witnessed the power of the elements surrounding him. God wants us to look to Him for strength, peace and security. His design for us is to exercise living, dynamic faith, the kind of faith exhibited by Jesus Himself.

It’s easy to look at Peter’s rambunctious reactions and assume we wouldn’t act as Peter did. We probably see ourselves as more reserved, more in control.

But if that’s true it’s a moot point. Consider that God used Peter’s audacity to get things done. Jesus didn’t have to light a fire under him. The fire, the fortitude, the verve was there. What Peter needed was exactly what Christ patiently taught him: how to govern himself and look to God for direction and help so he could be remade in God’s spiritual image (Ephesians 4:22-24; Genesis 1:26).

Later Peter would help lead the way in spreading the gospel of the Kingdom to the world, enabling others likewise to see the need to surrender to God and become converted.

apostles didn’t have the power of God’s Spirit within them, so they couldn’t as yet understand their weaknesses. They wanted to be perceived as credible, faithful and stalwart, just like we want to be perceived. They wanted to do right, as shown by their promises of loyalty, but Jesus knew better.

Later, through the ability to perceive provided by God’s Spirit, they would understand. They would come to see what Jesus knew: that the fear of other people can overwhelm our best-laid plans and professions of loyalty. All the disciples would flee when their lives were at risk.

Peter would deny Jesus publicly even as his Master was being beaten and humiliated in the high priest’s residence.

“Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, ‘You also were with Jesus of Galilee.’ But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are saying.’ And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, ‘This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ But again he denied with an oath, ‘I do not know the Man!’

“And after a while those who stood by came up and said to Peter, ‘Surely you also are one of them, because your speech betrays you.’ Then he began to curse and

swear, saying, ‘I do not know the Man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So he went out and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:69-75).

Peter’s denial shows the weakness of our human frame. Had we stood in Peter’s sandals at this frightening and tumultuous time, we, too, would have denied Christ. Peter denied Jesus three times, and it wasn’t a seasoned Roman soldier who confronted Peter; his first two denials were to young women who questioned him about his association with Jesus.

No doubt Peter showed some courage by following, at a distance, the arresting party into the courtyard of the high priest. Yet he panicked when bystanders questioned him. Before alarm clocks were invented, roosters faithfully served to signal the crack of dawn. The rooster that crowed at the precise point of Peter’s third denial was a shrill reminder of his professed conviction and loyalty. This piercing signal brought Jesus’ loving and patient words to mind, and Peter wept bitterly because he had betrayed His Master and friend.

Peter’s restoration

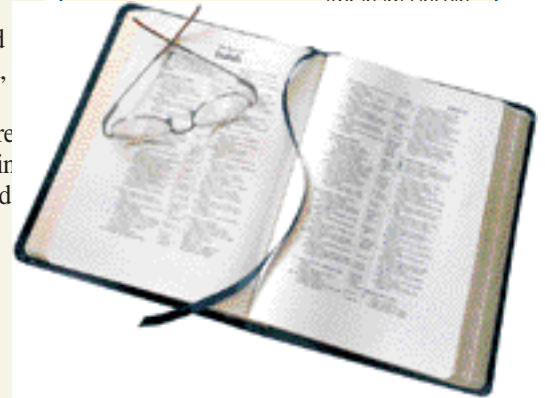
Later, after Jesus was crucified, buried



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"I believe that the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man"

Abraham Lincoln



and resurrected, seven of the apostles went fishing with Peter (John 21). All night long they fished but caught nothing. When the sun rose the next morning they saw a man on the shore. It was Christ, although the disciples didn't know it was He.

Jesus said to them: "Children, have you any food?" (verse 5). They told Him they hadn't caught anything. "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some" (verse 6).

They did as He suggested, and their net was so loaded with fish they couldn't draw it in. Suddenly the apostle John recognized Jesus: "It is the Lord!" (verse 7). Peter, still impulsive, plunged into the water and swam for shore. The other apostles followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. When they came to land they saw a fire bed of coals and fish spread out on it, along with some freshly baked bread. Jesus had prepared a meal for them. "Come and eat breakfast," He invited (verses 7-12).

After they had eaten, Jesus asked Peter a question: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" Peter answered that he did. "Feed My lambs," Jesus replied. Again He asked Peter if he loved Him. Peter again said, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." "Tend My sheep," Jesus responded (verses 15-16).

For the third time Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love Me?" Peter was grieved that Jesus would ask him a similar question three times: "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus again said, "Feed My sheep" (verse 17).

This exchange reminds us of the time when Peter was questioned for his professed loyalty to Jesus. Three times

bystanders questioned Peter's association with the Master. Now Jesus questioned Peter three times about his love for and loyalty to Him. Christ's gentle rebuke no doubt made a huge impression on the disciple.

Jesus then told Peter where his loyalty and faithfulness would lead: "'Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.' This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me'" (verses 18-19).

A tool for God

On that last remarkable morning by the Sea of Galilee, Simon Peter had not yet received the Holy Spirit—that divine power that would transform this take-action apostle into a faithful servant.

Not long after, on the Day of Pentecost, God gave His disciples the promise of the ages—the gift of His Spirit (Acts 2). From that day on the apostles were transformed men, willing to risk their lives for the sake of Jesus the Messiah (2 Corinthians 1:9). Peter would faithfully feed and tend Christ's sheep and lambs, those whom God would call.

Peter delivered his sermon on that Pentecost boldly and with conviction. For the first time Peter realized the power of God's Spirit. That sermon characterized the remainder of Peter's life, a life dedicated to God and mankind.

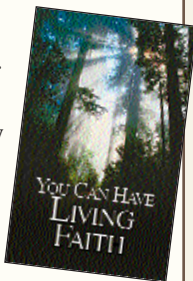
Following Peter's example

What does Peter's example mean for us? Can we see ourselves in Peter's experience on the windswept Sea of Galilee as he stepped out of his boat onto the waves of a roiling sea to walk toward His Master? Do we see a parallel in standing for God and His truths, truths that often go against the grain of our societies, neighbors and families' beliefs?

Peter was a fisherman whom God remade into a fisher of men. Today Jesus encourages us to feed His sheep and tend His lambs. We are called to spread the gospel to the world and help prepare a people for the family of God. We are to become fishers of men and women. There is no greater work or privilege on the face of the earth, as a man called Peter learned. **GN**

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.



Center is a program designed to pass on the precious truths of God to interested, qualified students. It is not a ministerial training school, but a highly concentrated series of classes to thoroughly cover the basic biblical doctrines and to lead students systematically through all the books of the Bible.

The center will provide highly focused study and instruction over a seven-month course Jan. 7 through Aug. 3, 2001. The center is located in Cincinnati, Ohio, at the home office of the United Church of God, publisher of *The Good News* magazine.

You should consider enrolling in the program if you:

- Love God's truth and desire to gain deeper understanding of the Bible.
- Can meet the challenge of a rigorous course of study.
- Have the vision to value a challenging opportunity to dedicate yourself to this intensive, seven-month study of the Bible.

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Leadership

Continued from page 6

debased his kingdom by instituting idolatrous Baal worship—which included child sacrifice—under the incessant manipulation of his pagan wife, Jezebel.

Thrilling accounts of daring, righteous leadership abound in Scripture.

Esther, Jewish queen of the Persian Empire, courageously saved her people from annihilation at the hands of the power-hungry and greedy Haman by laying her own life on the line.

Jesus' concepts and teaching about leadership were revolutionary. In stark contrast to the prevailing ideals of leadership, He proclaimed to His followers: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave" (Matthew 20:25-27).

He condemned prominent men in the ruling class as "blind guides" who "outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside . . . are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:24, 28). He called the leaders hypocrites (verse 27), a Greek term for an actor whose face was hidden behind a mask.

Hypocritical leaders, He said, are people who pose as public servants but really are motivated by greed and public adulation. Behind the mask and outward show they are different. Jesus said those leaders and their followers are the blind leading the blind who will both fall into a ditch (Matthew 15:14).

George Washington and Abraham Lincoln both perceived that the Bible was essential inspiration for a worthy leader. "It is impossible," Washington said, "to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible." Lincoln constantly read the Bible and prayed for divine guidance as he agonized through the Civil War.

Guidelines for leaders from Washington and Moses

At Mount Vernon, the preserved country estate of George Washington across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., a statue stands as a memorial in a secluded garden courtyard. An inscription from the Bible, engraved on the pedestal, gives us a glimpse of Washington's values for leadership.

The quotation—from the book of Exodus—contains a listing of four character traits

for leadership in the tribes of Israel under the administration of Moses 3,500 years ago: "I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee . . . Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens" (Exodus 18:19-21, King James Version).

Why are these characteristics—of "*able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness*"—necessary in righteous leaders? Let's examine why the American founders prized each of these traits in evaluating their leaders.

"Able men"

First, Moses selected *able* people. Men and women of ability, expertise and experience are required for governing and representing others. Some systems of government promote people to positions of leadership because of patronage rather than merit. This has always been a problem, even in the Western democracies.

Too often people are rewarded with offices of political leadership based more on whom they know or how much money they contribute than on their abilities. Inevitably the public and the whole nation suffer as the inexperience, inability and unqualified character of poor leaders are exposed. Their lack of vision, inability to articulate it, bad policy, poor decisions and failure to inspire confidence in those in their sphere of influence lead to mediocre results or failure.

The abilities to listen, tap and apply the knowledge of others, understand the dynamics of a broad array of situations, issues and conflicts and establish order and progress through groups all require a breadth of ability and experience. But merely having such broad abilities does not guarantee the kind of leadership that will benefit everyone.

"Such as fear God"

The second trait in Moses's list is the fear of God. Intelligence and ability must be tempered with a respect for the ultimate ruler of mankind, our Creator. Fear of God means the leader knows his place in the order of things and is willing to acknowledge the will of God for all people. The upright leader must listen to God as his higher authority, ultimate law giver and inspiration and source of spiritual principles underlying sound policy and decisions.

In his first inaugural address, Washington spent a third of the speech expounding

"providence" (God's guidance and blessing) and making "ferveat supplications to that Almighty Being who rules the universe."

Solomon, an Israelite king who started out on the right foot but later fell victim to the perks and power of his office, initially understood that proper respect for God is the foundation for right rulership. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom," he wrote, "and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).

Solomon should have better heeded these wisdom-filled last words of his father, King David: "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Samuel 23:3).

"Men of truth"

The third leadership trait on Moses's list shows that living realistically and dealing in truth are the only way a leader can sustain his effectiveness. Men of truth live in the world of facts, not fictions.

If a person genuinely seeks truth, he has the courage, knowledge and wisdom to deal with it. Mature men and women of truth know how to face the facts even about their own shortcomings, make corrections and move on.

The leader who is dishonest to others or himself, who bends truth and manipulates information to protect himself or delude others, ultimately proves to be untrustworthy and a liar. When such leaders gain prominence and national office, they do great damage to respect for government, undermine authority and weaken the standards and morality of a nation's citizens.

"Hating covetousness"

The fourth leadership trait Moses cited deals with leaders' core motivation. Leaders are to *hate* covetousness—the desire to take what does not belong to us or hold onto what is not ours.

Power and authority intoxicate leaders. Jesus tells His followers they must counteract this corrupting tendency by focusing on *servicing others*, just as He did (Matthew 20:25-28), rather than trying to gain power, authority and wealth for themselves.

Covetousness can take many forms. In the worst cases covetous rulers treat their countries as their personal fiefdoms, plundering the economy for their own gain and living in luxury while their countrymen suffer. Some, after their downfall, have been found to have stashed hundreds of millions of dollars of looted funds in secret overseas bank accounts.

In other cases the corruption is more

subtle. In the United States the process of electioneering for the high offices of the presidency, Congress and state legislatures requires that candidates continually solicit monetary donations from interests who wish to influence the officeholders for preferential treatment on certain issues once they are in office. This is largely an outgrowth of the fact that government agencies and federal and state laws greatly impact the livelihoods of people and businesses, who understandably don't want to be disadvantaged by government actions.

Covetous persons given positions of power can harm good government when they sabotage the development of other able people whom they perceive as rivals for the power they hold. Rather than genuinely trying to serve others, they exercise inordinate control over others for the benefit of themselves.

Timeless standards

These four leadership criteria are

as relevant now as they were when written 3,500 years ago. Godly leadership puts humility, concern for equity and justice under the law ahead of the personal power and interests of the leader.

These principles ensure that public offices are occupied by public *servants* who are purely motivated to do the hard work of public service. Such leaders are not jealous or competitive for their positions.

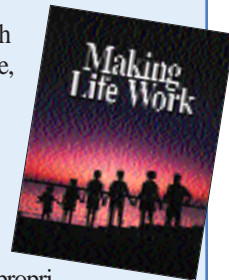
More than ever the world needs true leadership. Its character traits are not hidden and will never die. But they are still hard to come by.

It is the message of this magazine that one day these eternal spiritual standards will be the basis for leadership practiced all over the earth. In contrast to today's world, in that day leaders will be focused on *giving* to others rather than *getting* for themselves. Their aim will be to help everyone reach his full potential in a world of peace, harmony and cooperation free of burdensome governments and oppressive leaders.

And that's good news! **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

You can find many principles of successful leadership—and success in all aspects of life—in the pages of the Bible. The guidebook for humanity is filled with advice about marriage, friendships, family, career, personal finances, health and much more. We've compiled many timeless principles in a booklet titled, appropriately enough, *Making Life Work*. We've prepared another booklet, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, that shows how the world will be transformed under proper leadership. Both are yours free for the asking when you contact any of our offices listed on page 2 or access our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Letters From Our Readers

Comments about *The Good News*

My boss's assistant was sorting the mail, and I happened to walk in as she was going to throw away this life-filled magazine. I know it wasn't by chance that the July-August issue landed in my hands. There must be something I need to know about God and the world around me. I'm a 20-year-old lady from Zimbabwe, and you had an article about my country ["Africa: What's Behind the Zimbabwe Land Crisis?"], which showed your concern about forgotten Africa. I thank and praise God for your diligent work to further the gospel.

D.N., Chicago, Illinois

I noticed your magazine in my wife's doctor's office today and read all the way through it (her doctor is often late when he sees his patients). I almost took it home to read it all over again. I surely would appreciate a free subscription like you offer, and when I get back to work—I'm off on strike—I'll consider a small gift to your magazine. We need more of these around the country.

R.K., St. Louis, Missouri

Thank you for the magazine and other booklets. Your outlook and approach to world affairs are always linked to a religious viewpoint. This helps to see the events around us in a different way.

D.O'C., Mallow, Republic of Ireland

I thoroughly enjoy your magazine and Bible studies. I enjoyed your March-April edition, especially "What's Left Behind in the Rapture Theory?" I don't think there are many Christians who do a thorough investigation of Scripture when studying that doctrine. When it comes to studying any doctrine that comes from the Bible, we should take the whole Bible in its entirety on the subject.

M.D., Chicago Ridge, Illinois

This is excellent advice and perfectly in line with Jesus' declaration that we should live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4). We encourage our readers not to simply accept what we say (or what they have always heard or been taught), but to search the Scriptures to prove the truth for themselves (Acts 17:11).

Archaeology and the Bible

Your magazine has truly been a blessing.

My children (young adults) have commented, on more than one occasion, on some of the articles presented in your publication after seeing it in my apartment. I would also like to thank you for your dedication to the archaeological pursuit of the Bible. Archaeology is a hobby of mine, so I am extremely blessed whenever I can read about the Word of God being verified through the finds that are presented in your magazine.

B.S., Troy, Ohio

We at The Good News firmly believe that the Bible is God's Word and that archaeology is one of many proofs that this is so. For readers who would like to further verify the authenticity of the Bible, we recommend our free booklets Is the Bible True? and Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?

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

How Much Do You Know About Heaven and Hell?

Take this short true-false quiz to find out.

- 1 The Bible clearly teaches that humans have an immortal soul.
- 2 The Bible shows that heaven is the reward of the saved.
- 3 The apostle Peter plainly said that Israel's King David, a man "after God's own heart," went to heaven when he died.
- 4 The Scriptures teach that such faithful men and women as Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses and Rahab went to heaven as their reward.
- 5 The Bible tells us that the wicked will suffer for all eternity in an ever-burning hell.
- 6 The Scriptures teach that Satan and his demons will torture the wicked forever in hell.
- 7 The Bible tells us that our immortal soul will go to either heaven or hell when we die.

The correct answer to all of the above questions is *false*. If you missed some, don't be surprised. After all, most of us have been routinely taught that these teachings are found in the Bible. The Scriptures, however, reveal something far different!

You don't believe us? For the Bible's answer to question 1, read Ezekiel 18:20. To find the answer to question 3, read Acts 2:29, 34. For the answer to question 4, read Hebrews 11:39 and Jesus Christ's words in John 3:13. You'll find the answer to question 5 in Malachi 4:1-3.

You'll discover the answers to the other questions in our eye-opening new booklet *Heaven & Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* You need to understand the truth about what happens after death. Are some of your loved ones writhing in eternal flames? Could a God of love sentence humans to an eternity of agony

in hell? Can we reconcile a loving God with a place of everlasting torment? Discover the encouraging, inspiring truth from the pages of your Bible!

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