

The Good News

January-February 2001

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

When Will the Middle East Find Peace?

Jerusalem: Focus of Biblical Prophecy • What Lies Ahead for U.S. Leadership?
Will a New Leader Solve Our Problems? • The Tiny Pill That Changed the World

“Behind the Headlines” is one of our popular features in *The Good News*. In the column we regularly take a look at personalities and trends that make the headlines around the world. Our goal in that column is to help readers understand the events that shape our world, that will determine its direction in the coming years.

Another regular feature, “World News and Trends,” serves a similar purpose—to keep you informed about where the world is headed, but from a biblical viewpoint.

In a larger sense these are the goals of every issue of *The Good News*—to increase your understanding of what’s going on in the world around you.

William Rees-Mogg, columnist and former editor of *The Times* (of London), observed, “To those who do not wish to understand, all news is a surprise.” His words are profound. As an experienced analyst of world events, he finds little that surprises him.

His comment reminds me of a favorite saying of a longtime journalist friend of mine. Whenever I ask him what’s going on, he predictably responds: “The same old thing. Just different people doing it.”

Both these comments cut to the heart of the matter of making sense of the news. If we don’t have a proper framework of understanding through which we view the world, nearly everything will come as a surprise to us. Most events and trends will be unexpected. They will regularly catch us off guard.

At the same time if we *do* see through a proper framework of understanding, we see many patterns repeating themselves, maybe with different personalities and circumstances—different people doing it, as my friend would say—but with a remarkable consistency throughout history. We’ll know what to look for, where and maybe even when.

Through the pages of *The Good News* we try to help you build that proper framework of understanding. We dig behind the headlines, searching for the deeper significance of world events so you can see where our world is headed and how these things will affect your life. We also want to help you understand them from a biblical viewpoint.

The primary source *Good News* writers use for understanding news of the world is the Bible. It’s the true foundation of a proper understanding of world events and trends. We write our articles from the perspective of God’s plan and purpose for mankind as revealed in the Scriptures.

Far from being a book that is only about ancient history, the Bible remains one of the world’s most up-to-date books. Between a fourth and a third of its content is prophetic. Although many of its prophecies have already come to pass, the overwhelming majority speak of events that will unfold in the days ahead. Many of them are intertwined with developments in world affairs taking place every day.

In that sense no book is more pertinent to our world than the Bible. Its defenders have described its prophecies, quite rightly, as *history written in advance*. Its predictions reveal the map of where world trends are taking us—and, in some cases, specific events that are sure to happen.

The prophetic understanding you’ll receive from reading the pages of *The Good News* will help you build a proper framework for understanding world conditions and events. You’ll learn to separate the meaningful from the trivial, discover what the Bible predicts for the days ahead and what you should do to prepare for them.

A good place to start in understanding where events are taking us is to read our first two articles in this issue, those on the Middle East and Jerusalem. Learn why peace is such a scarce commodity in this troubled region and what the Bible reveals about peace finally coming to pass for its inhabitants. Like so many of the prophetic messages of the Scriptures, it truly is *good news*.

—Scott Ashley

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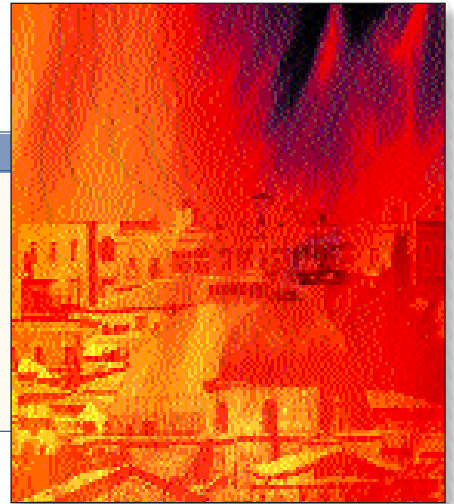
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When Will the Middle East Find Peace?

Why does it seem that the Middle East is always in turmoil, perpetually on the brink of another war? Will this troubled region ever see lasting peace?

by John Ross Schroeder

“**P**ray for the peace of Jerusalem,” urged Israel’s King David 3,000 years ago (Psalm 122:6). Seeking a peaceful solution to the Mideast problem is the concern, if not the prayer, of many world leaders. But peace in the Holy Land has, over the centuries, been in remarkably short supply.

The area remains plagued by stubborn antagonisms that baffle and dispirit virtually anyone who hopes for satisfactory solutions to age-old problems.

Events over recent months dramatize the problem. Just when it seemed that Israelis and Palestinians might reach an agreement that would let the two sides live in peace, talks broke down over issues of control over Jerusalem (see “Jerusalem: Focus of Biblical Prophecy,” page 8). Violence and bloodshed leaped into the headlines. Hundreds were killed and thousands injured by bullets, stones and Molotov cocktails.

In one of many tragic incidents, several Israeli schoolchildren were muti-

lated and two of their teachers killed when their armored school bus was shattered by a remote-controlled roadside bomb. Some Palestinian young people have also been killed in the most heartbreaking of

circumstances, bystanders caught in the wrong place at the wrong time in bloody crossfires.

Ancient antagonisms are so great that political leaders are sometimes straitjacketed by their constituents. After Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak offered groundbreaking concessions on control over the West Bank and Jerusalem, many Israelis thought he had gone too far. After losing so much support, Barak called for early elections, hoping to salvage a way to remain in power. Prospects weren’t promising, however, since polls immediately showed he would lose to virtually any other potential candidate.

Meanwhile, rumors circulated that Palestine National Authority leader Yasir Arafat feared assassination by Palestinian hard-liners if he accepted anything less than complete Muslim control over disputed areas of Jerusalem. Prospects for peace remain dim in an area in which disputes have long been settled by sword, bullet and bomb.

Terrorism and other violence are not the only threat to peace in the Middle East.

Wars fought with traditional methods have abounded in the blood-stained 20th century. Battles in the streets between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian activists are only the latest in a long line of conflicts. The foibles and follies of human nature transcend time, geography and political borders.

Oil and age-old antagonisms

Why is peace so elusive in this troubled region? Let’s begin an assessment of the region’s problems by surveying the background behind the present situation.

Oil is the fuel of choice of the civilized world. Fifty percent of known crude-oil reserves lie buried beneath the sands of the





Just when it seemed that Israelis and Palestinians might reach an agreement that would let the two sides live in peace, talks broke down over issues of control over Jerusalem.

Middle East. Iraq and Kuwait possess oil reserves of nearly 200 billion barrels between them. Such is the strategic importance of those Mideast countries that compel the attention of the world.

Oil is the real king (or all-powerful sheikh) in the Middle East. One of the reasons the Western powers fought in the 1991 Gulf War was to prevent an Iraqi monopoly from

controlling precious black-liquid reserves. Oil is invariably the unseen player in the Persian Gulf region.

But far more fundamental than precious petroleum reserves are the area's age-old antagonisms. Ancient territorial ambitions continue to assail the region. Iraq and Kuwait have long-standing disputes that have alternately smoldered and cooled along with

the prevailing political climate.

So have Iraq and Iran. The two fought an eight-year war, killing millions of people, only to settle their border dispute in a supposedly amicable manner under the pressure of Western presence in the Gulf.

The mere existence of Israel remains an issue in many quarters. Although the threat has receded somewhat in more recent times, over the years Arab leaders and groups have repeatedly called for forcible elimination of the tiny nation. Even in recent months some Islamic leaders called for the armed "liberation" of Jerusalem from Israeli control. Since its founding in 1948, Israel has fought five wars—in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982.

Does war ever make sense in the long run? Does it permanently solve these dilemmas?

Where it all began

Perhaps more than any other spot on the globe, in the Middle East the past meets the future. No other human conflict is so firmly rooted in antiquity.

The Bible shows that the Middle East is where mankind consciously began to make its spiritual way in the world. It is where man was first given the understanding that he is not just a physical creature but one with abstract and intangible longings, emotions and needs. As the early chapters of Genesis show, religion—true and false—began in that fabled area.

The Middle East is the home of three major belief systems that have significantly influenced the way we understand life and death, good and evil, right and wrong. The roots of

Searching for a Mideast Peace

The Balfour Declaration (1917), the British document that formed the basis for an upsurge of Jewish immigration to Palestine, stated that nothing should be done with regard to a (potential) Jewish national home that might be detrimental to ethnic communities in the area.

Though often scarred by violence and bloodshed, words of peace have periodically been uttered during the 20th century. British historian Sir Martin Gilbert summed up the undergirding thoughts: "At its heart Zionism had striven for a hundred years for the recognition of its legitimacy by the Palestinians. The many conflicts before and after 1948, often marked by harsh and cruel actions, could not hide the basic imperative, that a way had to be found for the Jews and Arabs of the small strip of land running between the Mediterranean area and the River Jordan to find a way for each other's right to live and prosper" (*Israel: A History*, 1998, p. 560).

Not long before falling to an assassin's bullet, Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin appealed to the Palestinians at the White House: "We are destined to live together, on the same soil in the same land . . . We harbor no hatred towards you. We have no desire for revenge. We, like you, are people who want to build a home, plant a tree, love, live side by side with you—in dignity, in empathy, as human beings, as free men . . . Let's pray that a day will come when we all will say, 'Farewell to arms.'"

This clarion call for peace will be answered only by the arrival of God's Kingdom on earth. Then, in the words of the prophet Micah, "He [Jesus, the Messiah] 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 . . ." (Micah 4:3-4).

three world religions—Islam, Judaism and Christianity—reside there.

Yet those three faiths have their profound disagreements and divisions. Fundamentalist revolutionaries lobby for extremist solutions to territorial problems. Modern Israel has periodically claimed the biblical boundaries of Judea and Samaria. Jihad—holy war—is a recurring Arab cry. Indeed a holy war is not out of character for the Christian tradition, either, when we remember the Crusades, in which untold thousands of Muslims and Jews, as well as some Christians, were slaughtered. For many, their last sight of their mortal life was of the sword and cross-emblazoned shield of their executioner.

In today's chaotic and confused world, the Middle East is not the source of spiritual enlightenment God intended it to be. Instead, the atmosphere there has been marked by armed conflict, hostility and, most of all, misunderstanding—not the things the Creator wanted it to provide.

Serious physical and spiritual problems will last into the foreseeable future. With unbridled killing permeating the Mideast landscape, breaking the Sixth Commandment remains all too common. Arms proliferation is the dominant tendency in the region. No one knows when the buildup of weapons will explode into the next war.

Israel to be an example

As recorded in the Bible, God told ancient

Israel that its people were to serve as a good example to other nations. He presented them with an unparalleled system of laws that, if adhered to, would have provided peace and justice for all its citizens.

God meant for other nations to see for themselves the blessings and wisdom that would naturally stem from Israel's way of life and voluntarily choose it for themselves.

Notice Moses' words concerning the laws God gave to Israel: "I have taught you statutes and laws, as the LORD my God commanded me; see that you keep them . . . Observe them carefully, for thereby you will display your wisdom and understanding to other peoples. When they hear about all these statutes and laws, they will say, 'What a wise and understanding people this great nation is!' What great nation has a god close at hand as the LORD our God is close to us whenever we call to him? What great nation is there whose statutes and laws are so just, as is all this code of laws which I am setting before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4:5-8, Revised English Bible).

Those laws, if studied and applied, would lead to greater peace in the Middle East. The region desperately needs such genuine biblical and spiritual solutions.

Conflict in the cradle of civilization

Meanwhile we need to understand the area's history. Since antiquity the Middle East has been a center of the world's attention. All nations are tethered to its geopolitical swings

because it encompasses the fundamental story of man. To comprehend the present we must, as always, examine the past.

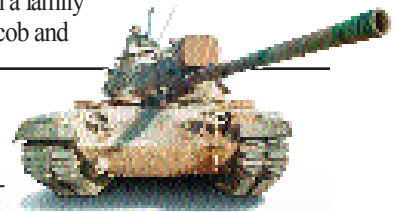
We should not forget that the Bible, in its geographic origins, springs from the Middle East. The Garden of Eden lay somewhere near the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Genesis 2:10-14, New International Version). God called Abraham in lower Mesopotamia, the land between these two ancient watercourses.

How ironic that the cradle of civilization should often be the site of hatred, hostility and conflict. Yet it is not so ironic in the light of the history recorded in Genesis. How many realize that today's Middle Eastern antagonisms are rooted in events described in the Bible's first book?

After all, nations are nothing more than families grown great. For instance, much of the Arab world stems from Terah, the father of Abraham.

An ancient passage of biblical wisdom advises us to "look unto Abraham your father" (Isaiah 51:2). Three major faiths trace their ancestry back to this patriarch. Yet historically the offspring of Abraham have split into bitterly feuding family factions.

This legacy of broken families has led indirectly to today's problems in the Middle East. Battles between brothers are a recurring theme: Cain murdered Abel; Ishmael was banished in a family dispute; Jacob and



What Prevents Peace in the Middle East?

Israel's former prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, draws attention to a major cause of the conflict in the Mideast in his book *A Place Among the Nations*. He wrote: "Here, in a nutshell, is the main problem of achieving peace in the Middle East: Except for Israel, *there are no democracies*. None of the Arab regimes is based on free elections, a free press, civil rights and the rule of law" (1993, p. 248, emphasis in original).

Humanly speaking, Mr. Netanyahu is right. Many Arab regimes border on being outright dictatorships, subject to assassinations and changes of power by coups d'état. Fear of assassination may have been one of the main reasons Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat rejected Ehud Barak's last peace proposal just before a wholesale return to street violence in several areas of the West Bank and Gaza. According to some reports, Mr. Arafat is said to have told President Clinton that if he accepted that offer he would be killed.

Historical reasons are evident for the lack of democracy in the Arab world. Chief among them is the disorderly demise of the Turkish Ottoman Empire immediately after World War I. The end of that empire left scattered remnants of Arab peoples ruled by various European colonial powers, primarily the British. Then, a quarter-century later in the aftermath of World War II, the withdrawal of the Europeans did not help matters. Few Middle Easterners were properly prepared to rule themselves.

Regrettably, the Western powers have done little in the past half century to encourage democratic reforms in the Arab world. Calls for legitimate civil rights have been muted. Why? One simple explanation is that Arab regimes possess a good portion of the world's oil supply, and few outsiders are willing to run the risk of antagonizing the suppliers.

Even a democracy, however, can be a hindrance to peace under certain circumstances. Consider the nation of Israel as an example.

In the words of Bernard Lewis, professor emeritus of Near Eastern studies at Princeton University, "the Israelis saddled themselves from the start with what must be one of the worst electoral systems in the free world, and then, by the direct election of the Prime Minister, found a way to make it even worse" (*The Future of the Middle East*, 1997, p. 15).

In spite of the obvious advantages of their flourishing democracy, Israel sometimes has changed prime ministers at a critical time in the peace process or been intimidated by one or more of its small political parties threatening to bring down the government at a moment's notice. Israel's proportional representation system, in which the power of minor political powers is magnified in coalition governments, is a serious structural problem in Israel's democracy and can be an obstacle to peace in the Middle East.

Esau struggled for their father's blessings; 10 of Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. On it goes, even to the present.

The saga that began in Genesis is spilling over into the 21st century. In the 1991 Gulf War an Egyptian woman's three sons were engaged in battle—one in the Egyptian army, one in the Saudi forces and another as an Iraqi soldier. Her greatest fear was that one son might kill his brother. How little has changed in the world.

The Bible and cycles of war

No war brings permanent peace. Fighting typically only helps assure another war—and much suffering en route. Real peace is something that must be built when the

God has not left humankind without solutions. Long-neglected spiritual tools are still available that men and women ignore at their peril.

Christians, Muslims and Jews share in some elements of their spiritual inheritance. Although that commonality is neither complete nor perfectly expressed, all three religions agree on some of the principles and truths of the Bible and highly esteem such figures as Abraham and Moses.

Spiritual principles in common

Bible principles could act as a bridge of understanding between the three great Mediterranean religions. Consider just three major spiritual precepts: We are instructed to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5), love our

Religion must once again become the principal communicator to bridge divisions."

Hope in a fresh biblical perspective

The Middle East has the potential to serve as a positive example. The apostle Paul crisscrossed this area several times, spreading a way of life that embraces the tenets of two major religions, though he saw the two as one. Problems can sometimes emerge in the context of commonality. What do we share and how do we make the most of our common ground?

Humanly speaking, the only other option is catastrophe. Armageddon would soon be at our door. Weapons are deadlier by the day. The ancient words of Moses ring in our ears: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). This should be an anthem for humanity.

An even broader perspective than different people's common religious ground compels our consideration. We are all of the same species. We were made "of one blood," as Paul reminded the men of Athens (Acts 17:26). The breathtaking view of our planet from space reminds us that we have a common home. Clumsy border disputes must seem bizarre from God's vantage point.

Somehow we have to turn our genetic and geographic intimacy to our advantage. Selflessness—the key to everything from



How ironic that the cradle of civilization should often be the site of hatred, hostility and conflict. Yet it is not so ironic in the light of the history recorded in Genesis.

battles have stopped and the participants can pause to comprehend the futility of their combative conduct.

But spilled blood begs for vengeance from the bereaved, and on we go again. World War I (supposedly the war to end all wars) begot World War II, which led to the Cold War.

Not surprisingly, the Gulf conflict also grew in the soil of continuing aggression. The eight-year Iran-Iraqi war helped spawn the invasion of Kuwait and the predictable Allied response.

War stands discredited as a permanent solution to conflict. As Basil O'Conner said in his address to the National Conference of Christians and Jews: "The world cannot continue to wage war like physical giants and to seek peace like intellectual pygmies."

Yet there could be real hope based on our common ground. True understanding of the roots of a problem is a step towards a solution.

neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) and treat others as we would have them treat us. These three spiritual principles are enjoined in scriptures held sacred by Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

But in the Middle East the highest ideals of three faiths are largely awash in secular struggles for power, land and oil. Idealism is lost in the compromises wrought by greed and expediency. The same old desires for expansion and revenge submerge the lofty heights of a potentially devout life. However, if we are ever to work out our differences, we must implement the basic principles on which these three major religions agree.

The chief rabbi of Great Britain and the Commonwealth succinctly illustrated what is desperately needed in an article in *The Times* (London). "The message is clear," he wrote. "You cannot have peace without communicating, without dialogue between faiths, between nations and races . . .

the welfare of the planet to solving the blood-stained conflicts of the Middle East—is an art that must be learned.

As many concerned observers agree, certain essential priorities must be put before selfish interests. We desperately need a new vision, a new way of thinking based on biblical principles.

Promise of peace to be fulfilled

Whatever happens in the meantime, our only permanent hope lies in the pages of the Bible. According to its words, what began in the Middle East will also end there. Scripture prophesies a great end-time conflict involving Arabs, Jews and Europeans (see Daniel 11 and 12). The final conflagration will finish only with the return of the King of all kings, Jesus Christ, to earth (Revelation 19:11-21).

Then, the Holy Scriptures assure us, human

Continued on page 28

Jerusalem: Focus of Biblical Prophecy

“Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples . . . I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:2-3).

by Darris McNeely



A tiled street sign in Jerusalem—in Hebrew, Arabic and English—reminds us of the city’s competing cultures as well as its turbulent history.

The Bible characterizes the ancient capital city of Jerusalem as a holy city as well as a type of Sodom and Egypt, two ancient cities that typified sin. This is quite a contrast for a city that three major religions revere.

Talks that seemed to promise peace suddenly broke down in 2000, leading to weeks of bloody violence in the last months of the year. The central contentious issue was Israeli and Palestinian disagreement on who should control Jerusalem.

An article in *The New York Times* during negotiations summarizes the problem: “Jerusalem is rarely publicly discussed by Israeli or Palestinian leaders in anything but black-and-white terms. It is the ‘eternal, undivided capital’ of Israel, on the one hand, and the future capital of the Palestinian state on the other: seemingly irreconcilable concepts that have led many intelligent politicians to recommend that the issue be left unresolved in the current, supposedly final, peace talks” (May 21, 2000).

The most hotly contested part of the city is the area called the Temple Mount, the site of two Islamic mosques as well as the Western Wall of the temple precincts destroyed by the Romans almost 2,000 years ago, which is important to the Jews. The Palestinians hope to claim permanent sovereignty over the site and gain a significant victory in the long-standing struggle between Arab and Jew.

Indeed, Jerusalem’s status remains unresolved and a huge stumbling block in any effort to reach a meaningful accord.

The prophet Zechariah predicted the politically central position and troublesome nature of the city in the end time: “Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples . . . I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:2-3).

A history of continuing conflict

We have been there before. Jerusalem has seen a succession of revolutions, sieges, surrenders and famines—followed by restorations and rebuilding. Its time of greatest glory was under Solomon, son of Israel’s famous King David. Solomon built the fabulous temple described in 1 and 2 Kings.

Over the centuries Jerusalem has inspired much contention. Christians and Muslims have alternately slaughtered each other to wrest control of the “city of peace.” Many thousands have died under the banner of the cross and the crescent within its walls and gates. Aldous Huxley once called her the “great slaughterhouse of religions.”

From 1948 to 1967 the city was divided between Jews and Arabs. Author and lecturer Amos Oz observed: “The years 1948 through 1967 saw Jerusalem divided by trenches and barbed wire. The frontier between Jordanian-controlled East Jerusalem and Israeli-controlled West Jerusalem ran erratically through gutted houses and deserted streets; great scars of no-man’s-land marred the city centre” (*Jerusalem: City of Mirrors*, 1990, p. 39).

In 1967 Israel gained control and united the holy city during the Six Day War. Since then Israelis have guaranteed the major religions access to all holy sites. The push to achieve a settlement of the Palestinian-homeland issue has again highlighted Jerusalem’s emotional pull.

Tension remains high over the Temple Mount area, which is sure to continue to spark hostilities.

Calm before the storm

Bible prophecy shows Jerusalem to be the focal point of important events before the return of Christ to inaugurate His rule over the earth. Notice what Jesus revealed: “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the



Jerusalem is a fascinating mixture of the ancient and modern, with a history dating back at least 3,000 years. The huge walls in the foreground are the remains of the enormous platform

for the temple complex constructed by Herod the Great more than 2,000 years ago. Today two Islamic mosques rest on the site revered by Jews and Muslims alike.

prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matthew 24:15-16).

Jesus was referring to a prophecy in Daniel 9, a detailed prediction of the coming of the Messiah. Daniel described “one who makes desolate” (verse 27). Here God reveals a conflict that will involve a sacrifice and a covenant (treaty or other legal agreement). Apparently Jerusalem will see a respite from conflict when outside powers become involved and lead—or

Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:20-24).

Revelation 11:2 tells us that this period of gentile (non-Israelite) control over Jerusalem will last 42 months. During this same 3½-year period a powerful person will lead a military, economic and religious power that will arise in the end time to rule over much of the world (Revelation 13). This great power will diametrically oppose God and persecute and even murder those who are faithful to God (verses 5-8).

At the same time, God will raise up two

dian knot that prevents a peace settlement?

In July 2000, while Israeli and Palestinian leaders met at Camp David with President Clinton, the pope urged that Jerusalem be governed under international protection. “. . . I want to ask all the parties not to neglect the importance of the spiritual dimension of the city of Jerusalem, with its sacred places and the community of three monotheistic religions that surround them,” he said.

In September he reiterated his desire for international intervention in Jerusalem: “The history and present reality of inter-religious relations in the Holy Land is such that no just and lasting peace is foreseeable without some form of support from the international community.”

Since then spokesmen for the Palestinians and Israelis, as well as other national leaders, have called for intervention not only from the Vatican but from the European Union and United Nations. Growing numbers are calling for exactly the kind of solution prophesied in the Bible: the passing of Jerusalem to gentile or Vatican control—or both.

Of the climactic circumstances that will overwhelm Jerusalem at the time of the end, Jesus says: “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28).

At Christ’s return He will rescue the then-downtrodden city. It will regain its status as a font of light, truth and glory. Ruling from Jerusalem, Jesus Christ will liberate mankind and bring peace to this war-torn world. **GN**

Growing numbers are calling for exactly the kind of solution prophesied in the Bible: the passing of Jerusalem to gentile or Vatican control—or both.

force—the combatants into a brief peace. But such a peace will only be the calm before the final storm.

Notice these additional details from Jesus’ Olivet prophecy: “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her.

“For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by

prophets in Jerusalem who will proclaim His truth to a world growing ever more ensnared in religious deception (Revelation 11:3-6). The world will celebrate when they are martyred, but then be stunned when God raises them to life again (verses 7-13).

Jerusalem again will be the site of a great battle. God says that at the time of the end He will “gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled . . .” (Zechariah 14:1-2). Christ will return at that point and battle the armies gathered around Jerusalem (verses 3-4; Revelation 19:11-19).

Coming: Gentile control of Jerusalem?

In the meantime, the issue of Jerusalem’s status awaits a resolution. Will the Vatican offer its services to break through the Gor-

The U.S. Election: The Value of Political Stability

by Melvin Rhodes

We awoke to the sound of gunfire. It was a Monday morning. I turned on the radio. Handel's *Water Music* was playing, an unusual selection in the West African nation of Ghana. A friend rushed into the house. "A coup! A coup! A coup!" was his excited cry.

Many countries in Africa, South America and Asia and island nations have experienced violent changes of government. These sudden, often unforeseen, upheavals make for more interesting politics than what we have in the Western democracies. But they take an enormous toll—not only in lives but also in terms of economic progress and stability.

A seldom-stated fact of life is that without political stability it is impossible to have economic progress. Until a nation has a stable political system in place, it is impossible for people to plan their lives, conduct business successfully and go about their daily routines with any hope for the future.

It is remarkable how few nations have had

Political uncertainty over the presidency is to be expected in some of the poorer, less politically stable nations. People do not expect to see the same in the richest nation in the world.

political stability during the last century. If the longevity of a government, together with the repeated peaceful transfer of power without civil war or other internal upheaval, is an indicator of political stability, then the success stories in today's world are few.

Stability essential but elusive

The nations that shine in this regard are the English-speaking countries. Britain itself has enjoyed a high degree of political stability since the Glorious Revolution of 1688. After the death of Queen Anne, in 1714, the same dynasty (with a few name changes) has sat on the throne for almost 300 years, with peaceful transfers of elected governments taking place during that time.

Through ties with the British crown, other nations have enjoyed the same stability,

notably Canada, Australia and New Zealand. A system of checks and balances has generally ensured that no one person has too much power, thereby guaranteeing peaceful, stable government. When nations have severed the tie with the crown, political instability has often been the result.

The American system of government is built on similar checks and balances. The United States has enjoyed 135 years of political stability since the end of the Civil War.

No other modern nations can boast of such longevity. Whereas Germany, France, Italy, Russia and China have cultures that go back thousands of years, their political systems are relatively new and follow periods of great political upheaval.

The German Federal Republic is less than 50 years old. France's Fifth Republic dates back to 1958 and is the latest of many constitutional arrangements attempted since the Revolution of 1789. Italy's republic is also post-World War II and has seen more changes

of government than any other Western nation, while Russia and China have suffered through a century of revolutions, civil wars and other political problems.

Political instability has been the norm for most of the new nations of the world given birth since World War II as the European powers dismantled their colonial empires. Most of these countries are republics with their own presidents, but few have been able to manage successfully the peaceful transition from one leader to another. Even when democratic structures are in place, endemic corruption can erode any government's claim of legitimacy.

Ironically, many former colonies that benefited from political stability in colonial times have experienced a great deal of chaos since independence. British colonies shared the benefits of the stable British political system while

under colonial rule, sometimes for centuries.

The blessing of stability

The United States and the older members of the British Commonwealth have been politically stable for so long that few of their citizens fully understand or appreciate what they have. But demands for constitutional changes that could seriously rupture that stability are increasingly heard.

"God save the king" (or queen) is an old cry, dating to Old Testament times (1 Samuel 10:24; Daniel 2:4; 5:10). A king's subjects have good reason for wanting him to live a long time. A reigning monarch is a known entity. His style of rulership is usually predictable. That means stability. For that stability to continue, he must have a proper heir.

Even today church bells ring out across the land in some European countries to announce the birth of a royal heir, assuring the people of another generation of political stability. Russian czars once held their naked newborn sons up in the air on the palace balcony so the people could see that a newborn male heir was alive and well. They could go home safe and secure with the hope that stability would continue at least for the remainder of their lives.

Stable constitutional government

The British system of constitutional monarchy evolved over centuries. Angry and frustrated at the excesses of some medieval kings, nobles gradually increased the powers of the Parliament until the English Civil War in the 1640s involved both king and Parliament in a struggle for dominance. Parliament won. King Charles I lost his head, and England was a republic for a few years.

Even though it set in motion certain reforms, by today's standards the republic ended up with rigid autocratic rule under Oliver Cromwell. Some of his followers even wanted to make him king, but to his credit he refused. Yet the country was determined that no other politician should ever have absolute powers, and it soon restored the monarchy. Additionally, the monarch's powers were

limited, with ultimate power residing in the Parliament. More than a century later, when the United States formed, America's founding fathers had a challenge—to establish a lasting democratic republic that would not degenerate into a dictatorship. Historically, republics have not lasted long.

The United States is the oldest democratic republic. This is an incredible accomplishment. It is amazing that no other country has



been able to copy the American system of government successfully. It is as if that system is uniquely suited to that single country.

America has worked well—until recent months. The presidential election of November 2000 left the world bewildered, with people wondering whether the United States might be starting down the road of succession problems other nations frequently experience.

If this is to be the case, then political stability will be a casualty, and America's economic progress will suffer, harming other nations as well as itself. If America is perceived as politically unstable, other nations will lose confidence in her. If the president is seen as lacking legitimacy, world leaders will find it more difficult to look to the president of the United States as the leader of the free world.

What the future holds

We need to understand that no man-made political system administered by fallible human beings is perfect. The British and U.S. systems have worked better for longer than any other political systems, but they are still man-made. Although some see divine favor behind their relative success, neither country comes close to the righteous leadership and promised peace and stability of

the coming Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ made it clear in John 18:36 that His "kingdom is not of this world." His Kingdom isn't based on political parties or platforms and policies that will appeal to the most supporters. His Kingdom, to be established at His return, will be a perfect one. "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end . . . to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever" (Isaiah 9:7). Government stability is promised "forever."

Meanwhile, nations have to do their best to work out their own systems. On a human level the British and American systems have worked better than others and for longer periods. The two institutions on which their stability has been built, the British monarchy and the U.S. presidency, have endured a battering during the last decade, mostly thanks to scandals that could easily have been avoided. At the same

This election will long be remembered as the first when the rules themselves were openly criticized and the results constantly questioned and challenged.

time, the greater openness of recent decades has dissolved much of the awe and respect many once held for these institutions.

Further weakening of these institutions can be only a negative development for the American and British peoples. It is of utmost importance that the residents of the White House and Britain's Buckingham Palace (along with No. 10 Downing Street) recognize the responsibility they have in contributing to the stability of the nations over which they preside.

When politicians squabble over who holds the supreme office, it is understandable that fears of American political instability abound at home and overseas. Political uncertainty is to be expected in some of the poorer, less politically stable nations. People do not expect to see the same in the richest nation in the world, a nation that has been politically sound longer than anybody can remember.

A nation divided

The recent election brought out how deeply divided America has become. In a November syndicated column, ABC-TV news correspondent Cokie Roberts and her husband, Steven, wrote: "As the election returns show, the voters are as divided as the politicians. Even though [Al] Gore and [George] Bush both ran as centrists, exit polls demonstrate

they were appealing to two very different constituencies. Start with geography. The Democratic states are grouped mainly in three clusters: the Northeast, the upper Middle West and the Pacific coast. The rest is [Republican] country, with almost no regional overlap.

"Then there is race. Whites and nonwhites are living on different planets. Six in 10 Latinos voted Democratic nationwide, and so did nine of 10 blacks. Whites favored Bush by 12 points. Gender [sex] differences were almost as striking. Men voted Republican by 11 points; women favored the Democrats by the same margin. That figures out to a 22-point gender gap, the largest since exit polling started and five points larger than the difference four years ago."

Two thousand years ago Jesus warned that a "house divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25).

Other factors also cause concern. For

a democratic system to work, the vast majority must be willing to play by the rules, to accept the result and unite behind whoever wins. This election will long be remembered as the first when the rules themselves were openly criticized and the results questioned and challenged. It remains to be seen whether the supporters of the losing candidate will unite behind the new president.

Many have expressed concern at the major role played by the news media and the legal profession in this election. The media announced predicted results, based on their own analyses, before polls had closed, thereby affecting voter turnout in some areas. After the election the close election result led to lawyers and courts playing a major role in determining the outcome, thereby setting precedents that may long influence future elections.

Whatever the consequences, it is obvious that the world has been jolted into a realization that America's political stability cannot be taken for granted. This is something new for the United States and for her friends around the world—and for enemies who someday may take advantage of the new situation.

One thing is certain: American presidential elections have crossed an important threshold, and they—and possibly the country—will never be the same. **GN**

What Lies Ahead for U.S. Leadership?

The next four years could bring thorny problems for America's leadership role in the world. The next president will face the consequences of missed opportunities in the 1990s.

by Darris McNeely

Every farmer understands the importance of seed corn. It is the best of the seed, cultivated to provide future crops. The quality of seed corn determines the quality—or lack thereof—of future harvests. Without good seed, prepared in advance, succeeding harvests will yield diminished crops.

This agricultural concept can help us understand where America stands in international relations. As Americans move into a new century and the reins of power transfer from one political party to the other, this is an apt time to assess the previous decade and consider the events of the next few years. What happened in recent years to America's seed corn, so to speak?

A decade squandered?

Ten years ago the United States led a coalition of military forces from many nations in an air and land attack to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces. Although they were successful in this goal, the allied forces stopped short of ousting the Iraqi leader from his position. Saddam Hussein still sits in power in Baghdad, with a firm grip that still threatens the stability of the region.

Ten years ago the Berlin Wall had recently crumbled, and the Soviet Union was in its last months. The Cold War ended with the United States the victor and brought the opportunity to shape a new order in the world. Yet peace still has not come to the Middle East, and Russia's experiment with economic reform and democratic government still leaves much to be desired.

During the '90s America rode the wave of its biggest economic expansion. With domestic prosperity, the country had time to focus on foreign-policy issues that cried out for wise leadership. The country had plenty of time, it seemed, to at least lay the groundwork for renewed progress.

One of the strengths of the American

presidency is its inherent power to shape and conduct foreign policy. Each administration understands this duty and uses it, at least ostensibly, to benefit American interests and world stability.

A president may lack skill in domestic policy. Such a weakness can often be

leader Yasir Arafat broke down, leading to months of violence and growing bitterness on both sides.

Growing threat from China?

China poses a major problem for American interests. Its desire to "reunite" with (read



U.S. military forces face considerable challenges. Frequent deployments around the world have sapped morale. Fighting strength—as measured by army divisions, ships and combat-ready aircraft groups—has been cut in half in the last decade.

covered by Congress. But the world looks to the leader of the country as the embodiment of American policy and values. Therefore it is critical that an administration pursue coherent goals in its relations with the other major powers.

The past eight years of American foreign policy appeared unfocused and uncertain. In hot spots around the globe U.S. military forces were committed to peacekeeping efforts that focused on no obvious goals or any graceful exit strategies.

Only in recent months did America focus on a concerted effort to achieve a peace settlement between Israel and Palestine. Even then it was carried out in the shadow of, in the words of the outgoing president, "leaving a legacy." In July Camp David talks between Israeli leader Ehud Barak and Palestinian

absorb) Taiwan is a relentless threat to peace in the region. China is determined to play a more influential role in Asia, which may again bring it into conflict with its historic rival, Russia.

China's strategic objectives will play a role in the balance of power. Add to this China's possession of ballistic missiles—capable of striking the U.S. mainland—and its proclivity to export nuclear-missile technology to poor but aggressive nations, and you have a volatile mix.

Instead of achieving positions of strength in relation to China during the past eight years, the outgoing administration is left with two clouded legacies. One is China's effort to influence the 1996 presidential campaign by making cash contributions to the Democratic Party. The second is the disappearance of

sensitive nuclear secrets from the Los Alamos nuclear-weapons labs that may have wound up in Chinese hands. Satisfactory answers to questions about these issues have yet to be given.

China is not the only nation able to launch a nuclear attack on the United States. Russia and other nations of the former Soviet Union retain that ability, and hostile nations such as North Korea, Iran and Iraq are developing ballistic technology.

Meanwhile America's options regarding how or even whether to develop a system to defend itself against nuclear attack are still debated. Some advocate a space-based, "star wars" type of system, while others prefer a ship-based approach that would allow more mobility in deployment.

Russia, however, continues to oppose American efforts to upgrade its missile-defense system. Again, years of opportunity

America could mount another Desert Storm-type operation such as the one that drove Iraq from Kuwait.

Between 1990 and 2000 the number of U.S. Army divisions was reduced from 18 to nine. The Navy shrank from 600 ships to 300. Air Force wings declined from 36 to 18. America's defensive forces have effectively been cut in half even while deployments have expanded all over the globe.

When a nation relies on its armed forces for defense, the military must be kept in peak condition and at sufficient numbers to deter aggressors. Without that ability, and the threat it carries, the world would be a much different place. Historically, America's military role has meant more to the stability of the world than any other nation's in recent history.

What lies ahead?

What other challenges could President George W. Bush face? Economists believe the United States, 18 years into the biggest period of economic stability the modern world has seen, is overdue for an economic "correction." Recent months brought steep stock-market plunges and strong hints of a coming recession. The current budget surplus overshadows the overspending of the past eight years, but flawed management would become obvious during an economic downturn.

The next president could see the first nuclear war since 1945. Analysts suspect the most likely spot for such a confrontation would be the India-Pakistan border.

killing hundreds. Many experts think it is only a matter of time before America will suffer a major attack within its borders larger and more deadly than any previous effort.

What sort of dangers might that include?

Former Clinton national-security adviser Anthony Lake recently authored *6 Nightmares: Real Threats in a Dangerous World and How America Can Meet Them*. In one of the book's scenarios, terrorists release anthrax bacteria into a stadium full of sports fans. Days later, after suffering fever, chest pain and vomiting, 17,000 spectators die. With anthrax, no smell, taste or sight warns its victims of an attack. The first signs show up days later, when it is too late.

Are such dangers too far-fetched to happen? Emergency-preparedness authorities have already run a drill of such a scenario in preparation for a possible real-life attack. Between 1993 and 1995 several people were arrested trying to sell or buy or cross international borders with deadly biological or chemical weapons.

Mr. Lake believes the United States has lived prosperously with the mistaken impression that the Cold War is over and that it faces no serious threats. "We're not using these good times to prepare for the threats that are very clearly coming or are already upon us in this new century," he said. "I wrote the book as a warning that I hope could in some small way stimulate action in our society and our government"

Continued on page 28



The United States faces other potential problems such as a serious economic downturn and the threat of deadly terrorist attacks in the next few years.

have been wasted in this area.

Shrinking military defense

Although the United States still fields the world's most powerful military force, the past 10 years have seen a marked decline in its resources and abilities. Given its state of preparedness, some question whether

The region continues as a hot spot of military activity, and both India and Pakistan have demonstrated to the world their nuclear abilities.

In October terrorist suicide bombers attacked the U.S.S. *Cole* while it docked in Oman. Two years ago terrorists bombed American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania,

Recommended Reading

Where does the United States of America appear in Bible prophecy? Does Bible prophecy neglect to mention major nations such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom?



In fact, many prophecies do mention these nations. But, without an understanding of history and the Scriptures, few can identify them and understand what lies ahead for them. The publishers of *The Good News* have just produced an astounding, eye-opening book, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. You can request your free copy from any of our offices listed on page 2, or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



World News and Trends

An Overview of Conditions Around the World

Neo-Nazi terrorism in Germany

Stockpiles of arms and bomb-making equipment are stirring fears that neo-Nazi groups will mount a large-scale terrorist campaign. Neo-Nazis and others of the far right are responsible for 130 race-related murders in Germany since the reunification of East and West Germany about a decade ago. Since March 1998 German police have discovered weapons centers, and terrorists have sparked incidents, in Berlin, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf and elsewhere.

Says Hajo Funke, professor of politics at a Berlin university and an expert on far-right extremism: "The findings of weapons by police have been getting more and more frequent . . . We can expect victims in the near future to be companies, democratic organizations and left-wing groups."

Grame Atkinson, European editor of *Searchlight*, recently said: "What we are seeing is a very worrying trend in the organization of far-right groups with a view to committing terrorism. They are talking about creating terrorist cells . . . with foreigners [being] driven out from rural areas and smaller towns."

Europe has vivid memories of antigovernment groups trying to destabilize German democracy in the 1920s and early '30s, which ultimately devastated the entire continent. (Source: *The Observer* [London].)

Back to the Cold War?

While Americans focused their attention on two men's struggle for the presidency, an old problem resurfaced. The same day Gov. George W. Bush of Texas became U.S. president-elect, Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Havana, capital of communist Cuba. For more than 30 years Cuba and the former Soviet Union nurtured a close relationship that almost led to a nuclear holocaust in the '60s. President John Kennedy faced down Soviet Communist Party

Less than a year after succeeding Russian president Boris Yeltsin in March, Mr. Putin has quietly challenged America's claim to be the world's only remaining superpower.

chairman Nikita Khrushchev while the world held its breath. Moscow blinked and withdrew its nuclear weapons from Cuban soil.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, it seemed the old alliance was over. But Russia's new president is busy rebuilding traditional ties with Havana. Elsewhere, too, Russia is rekindling old Soviet alliances. Less than a year after succeeding Russian president Boris Yeltsin in March, Mr. Putin has quietly challenged America's claim to be the world's only remaining superpower.

Said a British newspaper: "[Putin] has intervened directly in

the US-led Middle East peace process, given succor to Iraq, and resumed arms sales to Iran and Libya. He visited North Korea, that most roguish of US-designated 'rogue states,' and cheekily claimed to have curbed its menacing missiles. He went to India, bidding to revive Soviet-era ties in direct competition with Bill Clinton's efforts to woo Delhi last spring; and has increased military and political cooperation with China—identified by Mr Bush as a potential 21st century antagonist. Mr Putin regularly stresses Russia's national interests in the Balkans, its opposition to NATO expansion and its deep dislike of Mr Bush's plans for a treaty-busting national missile defense system. Now here he is in Havana, getting chummy with America's chief bogeyman, Fidel Castro."

Not only in foreign policy is Russia returning to the bad old days. At President Putin's suggestion the Duma voted overwhelmingly to restore the Soviet national anthem, though the words are to be rewritten to reflect Russia's new democratic age. The government postponed a decision on finally burying Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin's embalmed body after opposition from the Communist Party. Anti-Western sentiment remains. Months after the sinking of the Russian submarine *Kursk*, officials still blame the incident on a collision with a NATO vessel rather than admit to a failure of Russian technology.

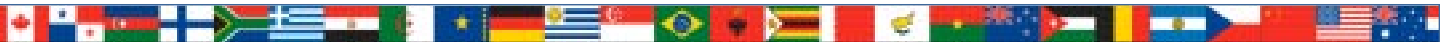
Perhaps the explanation for these developments lies in Russia's complex internal problems. As a Russian newspaper observed: "Apparently some of Putin's close advisers believe that a certain degree of tension with the West is a good thing since it helps the Kremlin maintain a broad base of support in the country and within the elite." Putin "publicly praised the virtues of the growing political consensus in Russia when the 'left' forces increasingly support 'market reform,' while 'rightist' forces support a strong state."

One year after taking office President Putin has succeeded in strengthening central control and apparently has a clear vision of where he wants Russia to go. (Sources: *The Guardian* [London], *The Moscow Times*.)

BSE hits Western Europe

A disease that peaked as a minor British epidemic in 1992 and 1993 recently spread to France, then to Germany. Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or mad-cow disease, is nearly always fatal and has no known medical cure. The human form, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD), affects young people in particular. It is a neurodegenerative malady of the brain that incapacitates the central nervous system. It apparently originated when beef suppliers fed cattle the ground-up remains of animal carcasses.

The Times (London) explains: "Over the past month [October] it has belatedly dawned on France that people have long been eating meat from cattle infected with BSE." By December BSE was confirmed in five German cows with one possible case of CJD, the first human victim in Germany.



This disease is a political football in Western Europe. Until recently the European Union virtually banned British beef on the Continent. Some in Britain are calling for the United Kingdom to ban French beef. (Sources: *The Daily Mail* [London], *The Times* [London].)

Pornography gaining respectability

Sales of illicit sex in the form of pornography are a \$10 billion industry in the United States, according to Forrester Research of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Among porn profiteers are major corporations that are household names in

General Motors and AT&T sell far more pornography than Playboy Enterprises and Larry Flynt's Hustler empire combined. One primary outlet is a special television box in many of the nation's hotels.

America. Writes Timothy Egan of the New York Times News Service: "The financial rewards are so great that some of the biggest distributors of explicit sex on film and online include the country's most recognizable names."

The story says General Motors and AT&T sell far more pornography than Playboy Enterprises and Larry Flynt's *Hustler* empire combined. One primary outlet is a special television box in many of the nation's hotels, 40 percent of which are equipped to show pornographic movies.

Mr. Egan's account includes the assertion that 21 million Americans visit at least one of the 60,000 pornographic Internet Web sites once a month or more. (Source: *The Corpus Christi Caller-Times*.)

Euthanasia to become law in Netherlands

The Netherlands' parliament approved a bill legalizing mercy killing and doctor-assisted suicide in some circumstances. The vote in the lower house of the Dutch parliament was 104-40, overriding the objections of small Christian political parties and the Roman Catholic Church. The Dutch senate must approve the bill, but under the system in the Netherlands approval is a mere formality.

A poll in 1998 showed a large proportion of the country's population approves of euthanasia, which has been a long-standing practice in the Netherlands. A newspaper report said doctors "now are virtually never prosecuted for performing thousands of assisted suicides for terminally ill patients each year."

Whether a medical practitioner snuffs out a life before birth (abortion) or near the end of its normal span (euthanasia), the taking of life is still a violation of the Sixth Commandment. Nothing in God's Word sanctions such practices. For further understanding of the principles undergirding respect for one's neighbors and their right to life, please request a free copy of *The Ten Commandments*. (Source: *International Herald Tribune*.)

Britain becoming a society of atheists?

The archbishop of Canterbury, leader of the Anglican Church, describes British religious leanings as "tacit atheism."

"Death is assumed to be the end of life," lamented Dr. George Carey, the archbishop. British people look to medicine for eternal life rather than religion, he said, and have abandoned the Christian teaching of eternal life. People are living as if "doctors can cure all ills and even postpone death forever."

The archbishop connects the trend with a general loss of morality in an increasingly secularized society. He called for clerics and laypeople to restore "authentic" Christianity to Britain.

What lies at the heart of the problem? According to the Scriptures, the clergy is responsible for the loss of true religion. In the words of the Creator: "Her priests have violated my law and profaned my holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the clean and the unclean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them" (Ezekiel 22:26; see also Ezekiel 44:23-24).

This stunning indictment applies to the whole of the Western world, not just the British Isles. (Source: *The Daily Telegraph* [London].)

Missile threat greater than during Cold War

"The risk of a missile attack against the United States involving chemical, biological or nuclear warheads is greater today than during most of the Cold War and will continue to grow in the next 15 years, says a new global threat assessment by the National Intelligence Council," writes Vernon Loeb in a *Washington Post* article.

The council, composed of experts from U.S. security agencies, academia and business interests, predicts that, while the outlook for the United States is generally optimistic, terrorist attacks directed against the United States "will become increasingly sophisticated and designed to achieve mass casualties."

Looking to possible threats to the United States in the next few years, the report warns of disturbing possibilities:

"A 'de facto geo-strategic alliance' among China, Russia and India to counterbalance U.S. influence.

"The risk of a missile attack against the United States involving chemical, biological or nuclear warheads is greater today than during most of the Cold War . . ."

"A collapse in the U.S.-European alliance due to trade disputes, political differences and conflict over global security.

"Formation of an international terrorist coalition with 'diverse anti-Western objectives' and access to chemical, biological and even nuclear weapons.

"Serious Mideast upheaval, caused by eroding living standards in major Arab nations and a failure by Israel and the Palestinians to reach a peace accord."

With the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the United States and its Western allies have enjoyed a decade of peace and prosperity minus serious threats. It seems that other dangers are looming. As Franklin Roosevelt put it when talking of a previous threat: "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." (Source: *The Washington Post*.)

—John Ross Schroeder and Melvin Rhodes

Will a New Leader Solve Our Problems?



Democratic countries throughout the world elect leaders to run their governments. Winds of change bring the promise of brighter futures to people everywhere. At least that's what the stream of promises from political candidates would lead people to believe.

Changes for the better are welcomed by nearly everyone. Knowing this, candidates on every side strive to highlight what's wrong with their political adversaries and contrast it with the good that will come if only they are elected. After all, a candidate must convincingly make the case that he can make things better.

In a world of difficulty and danger, people want their lives to get better. Yet, in spite of so many promised improvements, citizens face obstacles that do nothing but escalate—whether the dilemmas are local or global or somewhere in between. Complex problems confound governments, economies, politicians and the physical environment. Conflicts and sorrows are so pervasive that writer Aldous Huxley observed that maybe our world is “another planet’s hell.”

Trial and error

Do solutions to our problems exist? If so, where are they?

Many people have put forward ideas that were supposed to end everybody's difficulties and usher in a utopian age of one kind or another. The roots of big government hark back to the Sumerian kingdom of Mesopotamia of around 3,000 B.C. An early Sumerian ruler, Nimrod—whose name happens to appear in Genesis 10:8-12—became one of the planet's first tyrants. Eventually the Babylonian domination of the region, the cradle of civilization, spawned a governmental system that has ultimately involved many of the great empires of the world.

Successive empires devised ingenious tactics and philosophies to address humanity's problems. The attempted fixes continue and proliferate. They have included

Why, after political leaders' perennial promises to fix all our problems, are the obstacles still with us? Why, when so many hope and labor for positive change, does it remain tantalizingly out of reach?

by John Elliott

education, greater mechanization, bigger cities, more sports and entertainment, greater wealth and trade, and massive ruling empires.

Modern cultures are the result of thousands of years of attempts at improving the world. Yet the problems remain.

What if?

What if it were your responsibility to lead a nation? Where would you take it? How would you address its challenges and problems?

Consider the promises the major

candidates recently made in their run for the U.S. presidency. Between them they pledged to:

- Improve the nation's educational system.
- Strengthen the national retirement program.
- Provide adequate, affordable health care.
- Strengthen national security.
- Lower taxes.

Besides these kinds of problems, national leaders perennially promise to solve other difficulties. They say they will:

- Eliminate crime and the drug trade.
- Reduce poverty.
- Promote a just judicial system.
- End discrimination.
- Promote international peace and cooperation.
- Strengthen moral and family values and the work ethic.
- Reduce government bureaucracy.
- Wipe out pollution and promote proper ecology.

Do these proposed programs sound familiar? They should. Politicians have been promising to solve the same problems for decades. Yet they remain, some worse than ever.

The lesson is this: The right government, the correct plan and the perfect person in a crucial position of leadership aren't what we have now, nor has any human government ever had such a person. Although many have tried, no humanly devised government in any country in any age has managed to make much progress down the road to creating a perfect civilization.

Good news is coming

But we shouldn't despair. Incredibly good news waits on the horizon. A perfect leader with a perfect plan exists, and He is carefully assembling a government fully able to do all the things that need to be done.

The human mind laughs at such a utopian prospect, even while leaders work to concoct their own new world order. But an appointed person and His staff are preparing to step in and put the world on its feet. The Israelite prophet Isaiah outlined the plan:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign . . . over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever” (Isaiah 9:6, New International Version).

We humans are far too recent on the historical timeline, too eager, immature and impetuous. We think solutions are far less complex and deep-rooted than they are. That so many of our problems and dilemmas have remained with us—not only for a few presidential administrations but for *thousands of years*—should sober us.

Fixing the ills of mankind is not simple, even for God. He and His Son, Jesus Christ, haven’t simply been killing time while waiting for the right moment to intervene in people’s affairs. They have worked diligently to prepare for a major overhaul of the planet. Quite a few aspects of the solution—which will necessarily be a divine solution—are much more complex than we can imagine.

Points in God’s master plan

Biblical history and prophecy reveal strategies God has implemented and will carry out to bring about a just, peaceful and prosperous world. They include:

- Establishing righteous laws that can guide human behavior and build just societies (Deuteronomy 4:5-8; 5:29).
- Providing a way for people to understand and incorporate His laws and keep the spirit of them, not just the letter (Jeremiah 31:33-34).
- Recording examples from which man can learn so he can avoid others’ mistakes (1 Corinthians 10:6; Romans 15:4)
- Establishing a worldwide educational system to train people in His way of life (Isaiah 2:2-3).
- Transforming the world so that suffering and sorrow will be eliminated (Revelation 21:4).
- Devising a means for people to escape the finality of death (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).
- Arranging for the perfect King to rule the nations (Revelation 1:5-6; 19:11-16).
- Ending all rebellion against Him and His ways (Revelation 19:15).
- Establishing universal peace and freeing humanity from crime, war and other violence (Micah 4:3-4).
- Selecting and training assistants to

administer proper government throughout the world (Revelation 20:4; 5:10; 1:6; Daniel 7:27).

This list covers some of the most important aspects of the massive preparations God has had underway for longer than human beings have existed.

Another change needed

Could you or I implement any of the above points? We have to admit that most of the items are far beyond our abilities. Yet they are necessary to solve the problems that plague mankind.

Even so, yet another vital step is missing. Without it many of the dramatic changes

What if it were your responsibility to lead a nation? Where would you take it? How would you address its challenges and problems?

represented by the items on the list could never come about, and we could never see a peaceful, fulfilling world.

The culprit for humanity’s ills is within us—our very nature. While Christian movements have reached much of the world, they have not tamed the inner man. British historian Paul Johnson observed that, in spite of Christianity’s civilizing influence, “there is a cruel and pitiless nature in man which is sometimes impervious to Christian restraints and encouragements” (*A History of Christianity*, 1976, p. 517).

God alone can solve our problems. Ultimately He will remove humanity’s greedy, selfish nature along with the wicked influence of the devil (John 8:44; Revelation 20:1-3). Only by removing the *sources* of man’s problems can we begin to eradicate those problems. God will replace our self-centeredness with an attitude of service and love oriented toward the well-being of others. Of that day God says, “I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds” (Hebrews 10:16, NIV).

It is through the administration of the perfect government of God, in the coming Kingdom of God, that humanity will ultimately find happiness.

God’s strategic solution

The Bible defines sin as “the transgression of [God’s] law” (1 John 3:4, King James Version). Sin lies at the root of every

human difficulty. No man can heal the countless wounds that result from sin. We can’t, on our own, erase its mental and emotional agony. We can’t undo the dreadful toll of warfare, slavery and persecution. It is not in us to change the greed and selfishness that motivate so many.

Sometimes we can’t even differentiate between villains and victims in a world where people are too often both. We can’t restructure the world and pay for the wrongs our fellow human beings have endured. The human race, from one end to the other, needs to repent, to change its ways and start afresh with a new spirit leading the way, the Spirit of God. Only with repentance, forgiveness and a change of nature can God remove and right the wrongs.

This is what it will take to do away with wars, crime, abuse, discrimination and a whole host of problems. If you wonder what you would do if you could be president, remember what real solutions entail. None of us has the intelligence, influence or stamina to fix what’s wrong with the world. The solutions lie in the hands of God Himself. Let’s be glad He works tirelessly to prepare to handle them when Christ returns.

You can play a part

There’s an old saying: If you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.

What can you do to avoid being a part of the problem? Should you run for government office?

When Jesus lived on earth, setting us a perfect example, He said: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). He didn’t abolish disease, although He healed many. He didn’t stop crime, yet He had

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Recommended Reading

How will the world see its problems solved? The essentials are carefully laid out in four booklets:

The Gospel of the Kingdom; What Is Your Destiny?;

The Road to Eternal Life; and Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion. They are all free for the asking from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



First the End of Empire— Now the End of Britain?

Are we witnessing the end of the nation whose people, “relative to their numbers, contributed more to civilization than any other people since the ancient Greeks and Romans”?

by Melvin Rhodes

I can still remember when the news came over the radio. It was a Sunday morning in late January 1965. Sir Winston Churchill had died.

His funeral was the following Saturday. He was only the second commoner in the history of Great Britain accorded a state funeral, normally reserved for royalty. The first had been for the duke of Wellington, the military genius who thwarted Napoleon’s plans for world conquest at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, thereby ushering in a century of Pax Britannica.

Sir Winston had defeated an even greater evil, Hitler’s Third Reich. He didn’t do it single-handedly, of course, but without him the outcome could have been entirely different.

I remember the silence after the funeral. It was the only time I can remember all the television and radio stations closing down in honor of the great old man to whom Britons owed so much.

People were truly thankful that Winston Churchill had led them to victory in World War II—at a time when everybody else seemed inclined to compromise with Nazi Germany.

Churchill rejected the honor of a dukedom and turned down the opportunity to be buried in Westminster Abbey along with many other famous Britons.

Churchill’s funeral was, for Britain, the end of an age.

Ironically, his death came at the end of a 20-year period that had seen the nation reject just about everything he stood for.

Postwar Britain

It had started 20 years earlier, shortly after VE Day. With the European war ended, Churchill called an election. Almost everyone thought his Conservative Party would win. People the world over were shocked when the results came in: The Labour (socialist) Party won by a landslide. Although grateful for Churchill’s role as

a wartime leader, people had decided they wanted change; they longed for a different world. They didn’t want their young men fighting wars in far-off places they had never heard of, nor did they want them coming home to low-paying jobs or unemployment.

After universal acclamation as the British lion that roared in defiance of Hitler and the man who had led Great Britain to victory, Churchill appeared to be headed for a win. But, seemingly, it was time for Britain’s rapid decline to begin. The prophet Daniel reminds us that it is God who “removes kings and raises up kings” (Daniel 2:21). The same God who had given Britons its victory took away the empire He had given them, the multitude of nations promised to Joseph’s son Ephraim (Genesis 48:19).

empire that had built up over the course of 400 years. Britain granted India and Pakistan independence in 1947. By the time of Churchill’s death the major colonies were gone. Britain had, to quote American statesman Adlai Stevenson, “lost an empire and not yet found a role.”

It might have been different if Churchill had won that pivotal election. He was an empire loyalist. His love of history taught him that Britain’s security lay with its multitude of nations it had built up gradually since the time of Queen Elizabeth I. Later, after he won the 1951 election as prime minister at the time of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II, he talked of a “new Elizabethan age” that might surpass the first in greatness. But it was not to be.

Britain had embarked on a new course that continues to this day. With the British



Buckingham Palace, London residence of the queen, symbolizes the former greatness of the British Empire. Questions abound about the future of Britain.

The next few years saw massive changes, including the nationalization of industries (steel, railways, coal mines) and the institution of a government-run medical system. To concentrate on these radical reforms, the country turned its back on an

Empire gone, it was Britain’s turn to be dismantled. The present Labour government has set the course.

The abolition of Britain

A thought-provoking book on the

subject by British writer Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain*, contrasts the country at the time of Churchill's funeral with the nation 32 years later at the funeral of Princess Diana. By his own account it is as if he is looking at two different countries.

Outside the British Isles people are confused at what constitutes Britain and where England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland fit into the equation. At one time all four nations were separate entities. Their eventual union came about over a long period.

England conquered Wales during the time of Edward I in the 13th century. Edward proclaimed his son the prince of Wales, emphasizing that Wales is a separate principality but was to be administered as a part of England. For 700 years the heirs to the British throne were given the title "prince of Wales."

Scotland and England (with Wales) united later. When Elizabeth I died, in 1603, she left no heirs. Historically, Scotland had often allied itself with France against England. It was time for the two countries to unite so this could never happen again. Upon her death her cousin's son, James VI of Scotland, became King James I of England. James gave the country its new name, Great Britain (and was instrumental in giving the world the King James Version of the Bible). The new flag

was nicknamed the Union Jack.

The two kingdoms were administered separately, but they had the same monarch. A century later (1707) they fully united under one parliament, giving Scots a share in the benefits of the growing empire.

Another century later the Irish parliament was abolished, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland formed (1801).

Reversal of direction

The dismantling of the kingdom began 80 years ago when most of Ireland was given its independence as the Irish Free State, theoretically still subject to the crown. In 1949 the Free State became the Irish Republic, severing its tie with the United Kingdom.

The six counties of Northern Ireland that have remained within the United Kingdom (U.K.) have been strife-torn for more than three decades. Although in recent years strenuous efforts have been made to negotiate a permanent peace, the problem remains virtually insoluble. At some point it is likely that another "reform" government in London will force a change on the province because British governments since Churchill's time have eventually given in to terrorists in every disputed territory.

With increasing support for Scottish and Welsh nationalists, the present British government, led by Prime Minister Tony Blair, came to power in 1997 promising "devolution." The two ancient Celtic peoples would acquire their own parliaments and be responsible for their own internal affairs. London would still conduct foreign policy. Both Scotland and Wales now have their own assemblies and are increasingly calling for full independence.

Some of the English, meanwhile, are resentful that they do not have their own parliament. Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish members still sit in the House of Commons in London and can vote on legislation that affects the English people, but the English people do not have a say in the internal affairs of the Celtic nations around them.

Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) is busy fulfilling its dream of an ever-tighter union. The Irish Republic has benefited from its membership in the EU, ironically partly subsidized through Brussels by U.K. taxpayers. This has reduced some fears of Irish unity in the North. The South has always been poor, the North far wealthier, so even Catholics are somewhat

apprehensive of unity with the South—but not any more.

Polls show the English as increasingly weary of the EU. Scottish nationalists, however, see the EU as increasing the likelihood of Scottish independence. No longer would the five million people of an independent Scotland not make it economically on their own. Within the EU they would prosper, just like Ireland and other small countries. Similar sentiments are evident in Wales.

In coming years the English could find themselves outside of a politically unified EU, with the Scots, Welsh and Irish inside. Queen Elizabeth I's worst nightmare would have come true, four centuries later, of an England surrounded by hostile nations in alliance with the continental powers.

Historians such as Norman Davies think that none of this matters. In his recent book *The Isles* he reminds readers that England at one time was physically a part of the European landmass. At other times it was a part of Europe. It was the westernmost province of the Roman Empire from A.D. 43 to 410, a span of almost four centuries. The English church was a part of the Roman church for almost 1,000 years. The Plantagenets in the Middle Ages ruled England as well as parts of France, spending most of their time in the bigger and warmer part of their territories.

But Paul Johnson, another British historian, sounded a warning in the pivotal year 1972 (between the British Parliament's vote to join Europe and Britain's accession the next January): "Disunity has always proved fatal to the offshore islanders." (*The Offshore Islanders* was the title of his book dealing with Britain's relationship with Europe throughout history.) In other words, the disuniting of the United Kingdom has always proved fatal, enabling hostile powers to invade the country. Why should it be different this time?

Biblical wisdom holds true: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25).

New generation, new outlook

A new generation is in power now. Mr. Blair, British prime minister, prefers to identify with a new age. He is the first prime minister who does not remember Winston Churchill. In a speech just before

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Recommended Reading

What's behind the remarkably rapid dissolution of the British Empire? How—and why—did the world's greatest empire disappear in only a few short decades? Does Bible prophecy give us any indication? Strange as it may sound, this remarkable turnaround was written well before it happened—in the pages of the Bible almost 3,500 years ago.

The publishers of *The Good News* have just produced an astounding, eye-opening new book, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. You'll be amazed to learn the truth about where these nations appear in Bible prophecy—and what Scripture says will happen to them in the end time. You can request your free copy from any of our offices listed on page 2 or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



The Tiny Pill That Changed the World



Forty years ago few could have foreseen how a medical innovation would so dramatically reshape society.

by Melvin Rhodes

If you had to name which of the technological innovations of the 20th century changed our world the most, what would your answer be?

The automobile? Radio? Television? The green revolution? The atomic bomb? Younger people might say computers or the Internet.

All of these have had an immeasurable influence on our way of life, especially in the West. But one invention is often overlooked, even though it has had a profound effect. Now 40 years old, the full consequences of its introduction have not been realized as it takes us further and further into uncharted territory.

The birth-control pill was first given to

Two world wars had already had a profound effect. The role of women had changed considerably. Suddenly compelled by the thousands into jobs when the men mobilized for the military, women began to work more outside the home and to fill roles that had been reserved for men during peacetime. They had also been given the right to vote.

Moral standards were already changing. Other forms of birth control were already available. But the pill went much further. Now women could have sex, supposedly risk free, anytime, anywhere, anyplace and with anybody. Rather than cherishing their virginity, some now boasted to their friends about how many men they'd had. Women

drove themselves to work hard to prepare for marriage and family responsibilities.

The sex drive had always motivated men. But, before the pill, the risks meant that sexual relations were out of the question for most people until marriage. When people took that risk, an unwanted pregnancy and illegitimate child were often the result. With these went a social stigma that could last a lifetime. Girls were particularly afraid that the new father would run away from his responsibilities, jeopardizing future marital prospects. Thus couples observed elaborate courtship rules to handle the difficult transition into marriage.

The pill changed everything. Now men and women could have sex seemingly without responsibility. Fear of consequences began to fade.

The kind of hedonistic society the apostle Paul predicted would prevail "in the last days" became a reality. He warned that "people will be lovers of themselves," no longer needing a stable, loving relationship. They would be "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-4, New International Version).

Other consequences

Although the pill removed some of the most obvious unintended outcomes of premarital sex—unwanted pregnancies—many far-reaching consequences remain.

Although the birth-control pill prevented countless pregnancies, the number of unwanted teen pregnancies continues to climb. Both the number and proportion

The pill changed everything. Now men and women could have sex seemingly without responsibility. Fear of consequences began to fade.

women in Illinois in the summer of 1960. No one could have foreseen how it would revolutionize the world's morals, change the marriage customs of thousands of years, alter the roles of the sexes and contribute to a major decline in many nations' birth rates.

Societal changes

The pill didn't start the '60s revolution. Society is always changing, perhaps never more so than throughout the 20th century, and the pill has been a dramatic part of that change. It followed on the heels of other significant developments.

were free to aggressively pursue men.

The pill changed women's attitudes, but it changed men's as well—perhaps even more so.

Traditions turned upside down

For thousands of years, in most cultures men had always pursued women. Various cultures had developed their own rules of courtship, but marriage was a universal custom common to most religions. Before a father would allow his daughter to marry, the prospective husband had to prove he could provide for his new wife and any children they might have. Men

of illegitimate teen births are far higher than before the introduction of the pill. Teenagers are far more sexually active, and at far younger ages.

Many remain woefully ignorant of the dangers and spread of sexually transmissible diseases (STDs), which afflict an estimated 25 percent of American youths. Sex can even prove deadly; the human immunodeficiency virus, which leads to AIDS, is increasingly common among heterosexuals in the West and is devastating whole nations in Africa.

It takes time for people's perceptions to change. After the pill, the '60s revolution transformed Western societies. One after another, nations in the West liberalized their morality laws, the fear of negative consequences largely removed by the pill. The result is the *destruction of the*

In the age of the pill often the first sexual experience is with a casual acquaintance—as are many subsequent sexual relationships. The prospect of a long-lasting, loving relationship is made much more difficult.

traditional family, with consequences that continue to mount.

The entertainment industry—television, movies and music—is enormously influential in breaking down values and taboos, in portraying illicit sexual bliss without consequences and promoting alternative lifestyles to replace the traditional family.

The media have not yet come to terms with the serious implications of the explosion of sexually transmissible diseases such

as AIDS or the emotional consequences of the kind of wholesale immorality they advocate. Not surprisingly, nor have people who are inordinately influenced by the entertainment industry rather than by God's Word, the Bible.

Biblical instruction about sexual relationships

The ancient Greek city of Corinth, a major port in apostolic times, was similar to many of our Western cities today. The people were cosmopolitan and sophisticated and showed little restraint in sexual matters. The apostle Paul, aware of that prevailing attitude, wrote in his first epistle to the church there: "*Flee sexual immorality*. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality *sins against his*

own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Sexual sins, said Paul, were different from other sins such as lying and stealing or even murder. Sexual sin, in particular, *harms oneself*. He did not refer simply to venereal disease, which is a serious danger when sexual relations take place outside of a faithful marital relationship. Paul was also warning of the *damage to the mind*.

God intended that men and women should marry. He said: "It is not good that man should be alone . . . Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:18, 24). God intended that marriage be for life, a lifelong and loving relationship. Jesus said plainly that changing partners was never part of God's plan (Matthew 19:8).

Traditionally a man had to work for his wife. Even today in some cultures men must pay a dowry to the family of the intended bride. In other cultures it is sometimes the other way around; a woman's family must provide a dowry to the husband-to-be. Either practice illustrates that in marriage two people come together to form one economic unit. Both should contribute to the financial stability of the marriage.

Waiting and planning were historically much a part of marriage customs. In

designing human beings God in His wisdom ensured that a child did not follow until nine months after the marriage, giving parents time to prepare and adjust to each other before children came along.

Sound reasons for cultural taboos

In many cultures members of the opposite sex cannot be alone together until their wedding night. Even in the West chaperons were common until fairly recently. Their responsibility was to watch over the young couple and ensure there was no sexual contact. People understood the value of keeping young men and women pure until marriage.

Why was this so important?

Many factors were involved. It was partly to protect reputations. It also ensured that the parentage of any offspring could not be in doubt, which in turn could affect inheritances of property in later years. Sex outside of marriage could also limit marital prospects later.

But, most important, many people recognized that extramarital sex was sinful and against the will of God. They also understood that avoiding sexual contact until marriage was one of the best ways in which parents could contribute to the future happiness and well-being of their children.

Sex is powerful. The first sexual experience is intended, in marriage, to bond two people together.

Yet all too often the pill has ensured that it drives them apart. In the age of the pill often the first sexual experience is with a casual acquaintance—as are many subsequent sexual relationships. Sometimes feelings are damaged, sometimes no feeling is evident at all. Either way the prospect of a long-lasting, loving relationship, which God intended as a gift to men and women, is made much more difficult.

Sexual relationships devoid of love can lead to an obsession with searching for pleasurable sex. But unrealistic expectations guarantee frustration and disappointment, and no illicit relationship is ever truly satisfying.

A promiscuous life of multiple sex partners is much the same as smoking cigarettes or using illegal drugs. Such habits can easily become addictive. Should such a person later marry, he or she will likely find the marriage wanting, lacking the excitement of the chase, leading eventually to a return to immorality and a failed marriage.

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Recommended Reading

What is the purpose of the laws and principles laid out in the Bible? Are they simply restrictions on our fun, keeping us from having a good time? Are they hopelessly outdated? Few really understand why God gave the instructions He gave. Be sure to request the eye-opening booklets *Making Life Work* and *The Ten Commandments*. Both are free for the asking from any of our offices or from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



The Book of Acts: Paul's Later Travels

by Mario Seiglie

In the last two installments in this series we covered events from the start of the Christian Church to Paul's first travels through the Mediterranean world. In this article we conclude our discussion of the book of Acts by covering Paul's trips to Ephesus, Jerusalem and Rome.

The Ephesian scripts

After visiting Corinth Paul began his return journey to Jerusalem by way of Ephesus, an important city of Asia Minor.

"And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to *Ephesus* . . . And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their *books* together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (Acts 19:1, 18-20, emphasis added throughout).

The Greek word used here for "books" is *biblos*.

The word originally referred to "the inner part . . . of the stem of the papyrus [plant]" and later "came to denote the paper made from this bark in Egypt, and then a written 'book,' roll, or volume" (W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "Book").

Since the 1870s

archaeologists have made intensive efforts to find ancient papyrus scrolls, especially in Egypt, where

the desert climate can preserve such fragile treasures. They have realized remarkable success, finding scrolls dating back to New Testament times. Among the papyrus scrolls discovered are some containing the wording of magical spells; these scrolls were used as amulets (charms).

"A number of such magical scrolls have survived to our day," notes F.F. Bruce. "There are especially famous examples in the London, Paris and Leyden collections. The special connection of Ephesus with magic is reflected in the use of the term 'Ephesian scripts' for such magical scrolls. The spells which they contain are the merest gibberish, a rigmarole of words and names considered to be unusually potent, arranged sometimes in patterns which were part of the essence of the spell, but they fetched high prices . . . The closest parallel to the Ephesian exorcists' misuse of the name of Jesus appears in the Paris magical papyrus, No. 574, where we find an adjuration beginning on line 3018, 'I adjure thee by Jesus the God of the Hebrews'" (*The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Book of Acts*, 1974, pp. 390-391).

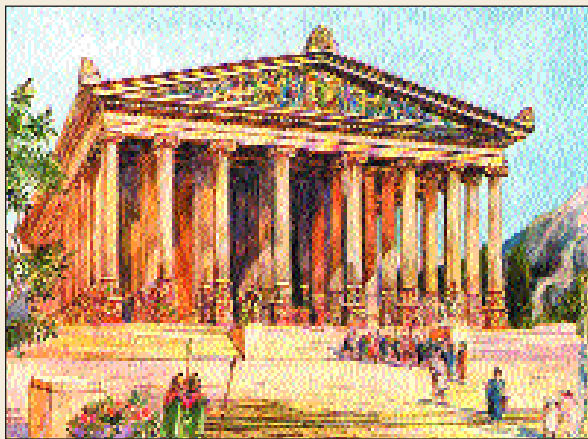
The value of such scrolls that were destroyed is given in the Bible as "fifty thousand pieces of silver" (Acts 19:19), a sum scholars say would be worth around \$48,000 in modern currency.

One of the seven wonders of the ancient world

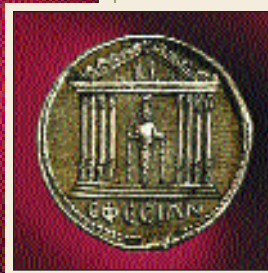
Paul's preaching in Ephesus caused many to turn away from their idols and pagan practices. This led to an uprising among the craftsmen who made their living making statuettes of the goddess Diana and her temple.

"And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said, 'Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost

Luke provides us with a detailed and accurate account of Paul's apostolic missions during the first decades of the Church.



The temple of Diana in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul's preaching brought him into conflict with those who made a living from activities associated with idolatrous worship of the goddess.



Elaborate statues of Diana graced temples dedicated to her worship in many areas of the Roman Empire. Such statues typically depict her with multiple breasts or eggs, emphasizing her attributes as the primary fertility goddess. The coin at right depicts her statue in a temple.

all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.

“So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship. Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians.’ So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into *the theater* with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s travel companions” (Acts 19:23-29).

The temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was *four times* the size of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. Its ruins were brought to light by the British

archaeologist John T. Wood in 1869. Later he found, in remarkably good condition, the huge theater mentioned in Acts 19:29, which could seat more than 24,000 people.

William Barclay comments about the temple of Diana: “It was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide by 60 feet high. There were 127 pillars, each the gift of a king. They were all of glittering marble and 36 were marvelously gilt and inlaid. The great altar had been carved by Praxiteles, the greatest of all Greek sculptors. The image of Diana was not beautiful. It was a black, squat, many-breasted figure, signifying fertility; it was so old that no one knew where it had come from or even of what material it was made.

The story was that it had fallen from heaven” (*Daily Study Bible*, 1975, comment on Acts 19:1-7).

Another reference work adds: “Thousands of pilgrims and tourists came to it from far and near; around it swarmed all sorts of trades-

men and hucksters who made their living by supplying visitors with food and lodging, dedicatory offerings, and souvenirs. The Temple of Artemis [Diana] was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity” (Richard Longenecker, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9, 1981, p. 503).

It is not surprising that a lucrative trade of small statues of Diana and her temple existed in Ephesus. Commenting on verses 24 and 27, A. T. Robertson explains: “These small models of the temple with the statue of Artemis [Diana] inside would be set up in the houses or even worn as amulets . . . Temples of Artemis [Diana] have been found in Spain and Gaul [France]” (Online Bible software, 1995, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*).

Throughout Europe archaeologists have found many statues of the many-breasted goddess Diana (or Artemis, as she was called by the Romans). In 1956 an impressive statue of Diana was discovered in Ephesus; it stands prominently in the museum there.

Into this scene of popular paganism entered the apostle Paul. Demetrius had

accused him of teaching that “man-made gods are no gods at all” (Acts 19:26, New International Version). In other words, Paul had fearlessly taught keeping the Second Commandment and avoiding worship of religious images. Thanks to the help of friendly government officials in Ephesus, Paul was protected and the crowd was finally dispersed.

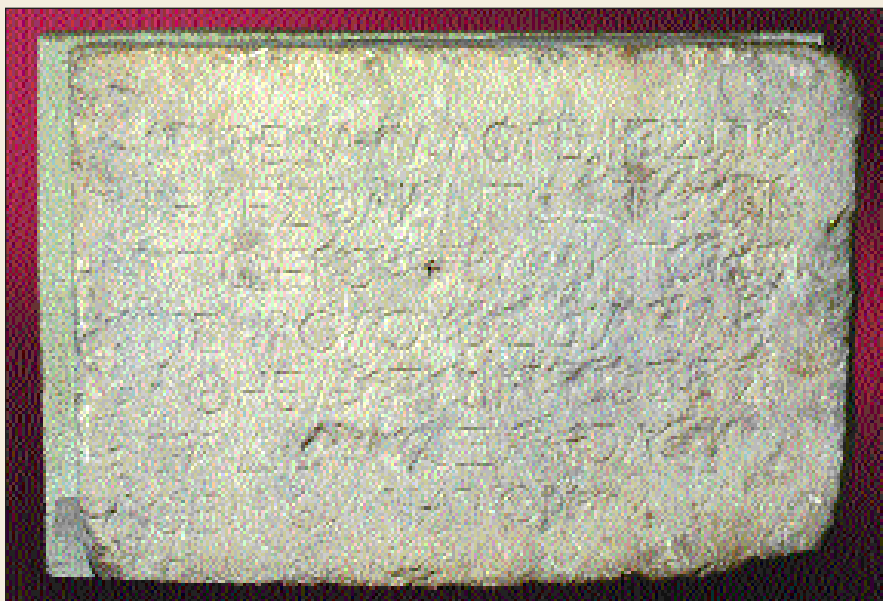
It is a bit ironic that, although the cult of the goddess Diana gradually died down, another cult eventually replaced her in Ephesus. “Christianity,” says historian Marina Warner, “fastened on her [Diana] and added such typical feminine Christian virtues as modesty and shame to her personality . . .” (*Alone of All Her Sex*, 1976, p. 47). Diana, continues Warner, “was associated with the moon . . . as the Virgin Mary is identified with the moon and the stars’ influence as well as with the forces of fertility and generation” (p. 224).

At the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431 the veneration of Mary became an official element of the Roman church. Warner says about Diana: “Memories of her emblem, the girdle, survived in the city [Ephesus] where the Virgin Mary was proclaimed *Theotokos* [Mother of God], three hundred and fifty years after the silversmiths, who lived by making statuettes of Diana, rebelled against the preaching of Paul and shouted, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians’ (Acts 19:23-40). There could be, therefore, a chain of descent from . . . Diana to the Virgin, for one tradition also holds that Mary was assumed into heaven from Ephesus . . .” (*ibid.*, p. 280).

Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem

From Ephesus Paul hurried to Jerusalem to stay there “if possible, on the Day of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16). When he arrived he soon went to the temple to worship and fulfill a vow along with four other Jewish Christians.

“Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ (For they had previously seen



This Greek inscription from the temple in Jerusalem warns that only Israelites are allowed to pass this point and enter the inner courts of the temple.

Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they had supposed that Paul had brought into the temple” (Acts 21:27-29).

Paul was arrested on a false charge of having taken a gentile (a non-Israelite) inside the temple. Next to each temple entrance was an inscription warning everyone that only Israelites were permitted to enter.

Bruce explains: “That no Gentile might unwittingly enter into the forbidden areas, notices in Greek and Latin were fixed to the barrier at the foot of the steps leading up to the inner precincts, warning them that death was the penalty for further ingress. Two of these notices (both in Greek) have been found—one in 1871 and one in 1935—the text of which runs: ‘No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death’” (*The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Book of Acts*, 1974, p. 434).

Paul’s journey to Rome

After Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem, the Roman authorities discovered a plot to kill him and hurriedly sent him to nearby Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea. Since he was a Roman citizen, a rare and prestigious designation in those days, he was entitled to full military protection. In Caesarea he

submitted to several preliminary hearings that left him unsatisfied, so he exercised his right as a Roman to appeal his case to the emperor in Rome.

The voyage to Rome, on a cargo ship, was harrowing. Luke accompanied Paul on the trip. His narrative is a masterpiece of accuracy down to tiniest details. “Luke’s account of Paul’s voyage to Rome,” explains *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, “stands out as one of the most vivid pieces of descriptive writing in the whole Bible. Its details regarding first-century seamanship are so precise and its portrayal of conditions on the eastern Mediterranean so accurate . . . that even the most skeptical have conceded that it probably rests on a journal of some such voyage as Luke describes” (Longenecker, p. 556).

The remains of several ships similar to the one described by Luke have been found on the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. They corroborate the precision of Luke’s account. “These grain ships were not small,” notes Barclay. “They could be as large as 140 feet long and 36 feet wide. But in a storm they had certain grave disadvantages. They were the same at the bow as at the stern, except that the stern was swept up like a goose’s neck. They had no rudder like a modern ship, but were steered with two great paddles coming out from the stern on each

side. They were, therefore, hard to manage. Further, they had only one mast and on that mast one great square sail, made sometimes of linen and sometimes of stitched hides. With a sail like that they could not sail into the wind” (*Daily Study Bible*, comment on Acts 27:21).

On the voyage to Rome, Paul and his company were shipwrecked near the island of Malta and barely made it to the beach without drowning. There they waited several months until another ship took them to Rome.

The Appian Way

Luke’s account continues: “And so we went toward Rome. And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns” (Acts 28:14-15).

According to archaeological and literary evidence, Luke accurately recounts the way stations to enter Rome from the west, the shortest route from the nearest seaport. “At Neapolis, Paul and his contingent turned northwest to travel to Rome on the Via Appia—the oldest, straightest, and most perfectly made of all the Roman roads, named after the censor Appius Claudius who started its construction in 312 B.C. During the seven-day stopover at Puteoli, news of Paul’s arrival in Italy reached Rome. So a number of Christians there set out to meet him and escort him back to Rome. Some of them got as far as the Forum of Appius (Appii Forum), one of the ‘halting stations’ built every ten to fifteen miles along the entire length of the Roman road system . . . Others only got as far as the Three Taverns Inn, another halting station about thirty-three miles from Rome” (ibid., comment on Acts 28:15).

Luke thus provides us with a detailed and accurate account of Paul’s apostolic missions during the first decades of the Church. The book of Acts ends with Paul waiting for his case to be heard by the emperor. From later historians we learn that he was set free and continued his apostolic journeys for several years until he was again arrested, imprisoned and ultimately beheaded in Rome.

We will continue this series with a look at archaeological evidence that illuminates details of some of Paul’s many letters to congregations and members of the early Church. **GN**



Luke

Paul's Beloved Friend and Companion

by Jerold Aust

It wasn't easy being Paul's friend and traveling companion. The apostle lived a hard and sometimes dangerous life. His enemies said he was a rabble-rouser, a troublemaker who slandered the Jews and dishonored the temple and, by extension, disdained the authority of the almighty Roman Empire.

In reality Paul's enemies were the slanderers: "... We have found this man a *plague*," they said, "a *creator of dissension* among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5, emphasis added throughout).

Such charges could get one thrown in prison, and in Paul's case they did. Few dared to accompany or visit Paul under this sort of dangerous and humiliating circumstance.

But Luke dared. Few were as fearless as Paul's friend and trusted companion Luke.

Luke stayed beside Paul, day in and out, for at least two years. Every day he walked past the Roman guards, who must have grown in their respect for him. His constancy commanded respect; he was as faithful as clockwork.

Luke was faithful because he had a job to do: writing a history of the early years of the Church founded by the man he had become convinced was the very Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth.

Only one thing was more important to Luke than being Paul's friend: his dedica-

tion as a servant of his Master, Jesus Christ.

Paul found himself under house arrest in Rome, although he had committed no crime against either Jew or gentile. But Paul knew—through God's earlier revelation to him—that he would serve as God's witness before Caesar in Rome (Acts 27:24). So here he was.

The times were trying for Paul. He needed encouragement, which God provided through a friendly, sensitive physician, a man named Luke.

Under house arrest and confined to a

Luke stayed beside Paul, day in and day out, for at least two years. Every day he walked past the Roman guards, who must have grown in their respect for him.

rented house for at least two years, Paul was free to teach and preach the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to the curious and to those whom God was calling (Acts 28:16, 30-31). His efforts bore fruit; Paul's teaching converted even members of Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22).

Luke's background

Who was the man who would not only encourage Paul during this trying time but write two books of the New Testament? The Scriptures tell us little, but we can infer quite a bit by examining Luke's work and the times in which he lived.

The early Church was predominantly Jewish. Jesus, the original apostles and later

apostles such as Paul were all Jews. But the book of Acts records that, over time, gentiles (non-Jews) came to accept the message of the apostles and became members of the Church Jesus founded.

Luke appears to have been one of the early gentile converts to Christianity. What are the scriptural indications he was a gentile? In Colossians 4:10-14 Paul names three of his companions and coworkers who were "my only fellow workers . . . who are of the circumcision"—that is, Jewish—and then three other companions,

including Luke. The obvious implication is that the latter three were gentiles.

Luke was a learned man, a linguist. He spoke and wrote classical Greek, but he could also converse and write in Hebrew, Aramaic and Hellenistic Greek. His mastery of Greek indicates he probably was a Greek. His dedication shows us he had a heart of gold.

Luke was educated, creative and talented. Among the Mediterranean people of the day, the Greeks were well educated and trained, especially in philosophy, oratory, writing and mathematics. Even the powerful Roman leaders were





Greeks, who under Alexander the Great had built a mighty empire that preceded the Romans as the dominant power in the Mediterranean region and Middle East.

Greece provided the world with many famous orators, was regarded for its literary skills and genius and was touted for its educational discipline. Some of the works of Greek philosophers and rhetoricians are still cited by modern philosophers and communication scientists today, 2,500 years later.

It should not be surprising, given these circumstances, that God called a Greek to

Paul's deep respect and Christian love for Luke surface when he refers to him as "the beloved physician."

write one of the four Gospels—those brief biographies of Jesus the Messiah that are preserved for us at the beginning of the New Testament. Nor should we be surprised that Luke would write the definitive history of the early decades of the Church—the book of Acts—during which time it crossed languages and cultures to reach out to gentiles.

Luke is the only gentile writer of the New Testament. The Gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts are two parts of one comprehensive work. Notice that Luke concludes his Gospel with a resurrected, immortal Christ and begins the book of Acts with the same Jesus. He addressed both books to the same person, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).

Theophilus, whose name means “friend of God,” appears nowhere else in the Scriptures. He, too, was apparently a gentile believer, since Luke tells Theophilus that he wrote his Gospel “that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed” (Luke 1:4).

Some scholars have concluded that Theophilus was a wealthy patron who helped support Luke while he wrote his Gospel and the book of Acts. Notice also that Luke refers to him not just as Theophilus, but “the *most excellent* Theophilus” (Luke 1:3). This title is typical of those used for officials high in the Roman government (compare Acts 23:26), so perhaps Theophilus held such a position.

Luke, the beloved physician

note that Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14). A physician of Luke’s day was not the same as modern physicians, since the science of medicine was not far advanced. Even so, the Greeks were head and shoulders above other gentiles when it came to science and medicine and the understanding of the workings of the human body.

A physician of Luke’s day could work with body and mind, though not in the sense of a modern surgeon. But Luke was interested in people’s well-being; this is evident in his writings. An old saying fits with Luke’s outlook: “A minister sees men at their best, a lawyer sees men at their worst, and a physician sees men as they are.”

Paul’s deep respect and Christian love for Luke surface when he refers to him as “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). Luke showed interest in the welfare of women and children, as shown in his Gospel.

In Judea, as in other places throughout the known world, women in Luke’s day held a place low in society. For example, some historical accounts of the time report that Jewish men gave thanks to God each morning that they had not been born a gentile, slave or woman.

Luke’s perspective differs from the common portrayal of women of the time. Luke tells his birth narrative of Christ from Mary’s point of view. Luke writes of Elizabeth, of Anna, of the widow at Nain, of the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Luke portrays Martha and Mary and Mary Magdalene.

An invitation for gentiles

Luke appears to have written mainly, though not entirely, for gentiles. Again, Theophilus was probably a gentile. In comparison with the other three Gospels, Luke’s is written to be more easily understood by a gentile.

For example, notice that Luke used Roman dates in his works when he identified the Roman emperor and governor. In his writings Luke used the Greek equivalents of Hebrew words, which would make him more easily understood by Greeks. For example, he didn’t use the Jewish term *rabbi*; instead he used a Greek word that means “master.” Also, when he traces Jesus’ descent, he goes back to Adam, the

progenitor of the human race, rather than going back only as far as Abraham as Matthew had done.

These small differences hint that Luke probably wrote his Gospel account so gentiles could more easily identify with Jesus and His teachings. Many scholars say Luke’s Gospel is the easiest to read of the four and the easiest to understand of all the New Testament narratives and letters.

Luke the careful historian

Luke apparently wrote his Gospel around A.D. 60-61, some 30 years after Jesus’ death. We can arrive at this time by examining the evidence for when he wrote the book of Acts.

Luke begins Acts by referring to “the former account” he had written (Acts 1:1), the Gospel of Luke. The final chapter of Acts concludes with events that preceded Nero’s persecution of Christians (in 65) and Paul’s death. Otherwise Luke surely would have mentioned both. The book ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial for the charges brought against him. No account of a trial or verdict is mentioned anywhere.

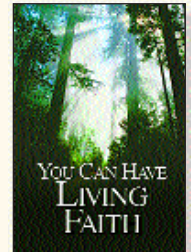
Most Bible scholars thus agree that Acts was written around 63 and reflects events in the Church up until that time. Thus, if Luke wrote Acts then, he must have written his Gospel a few years earlier, ca. 60-61. (As a postscript to the book of Acts, the Romans apparently released Paul from his house arrest shortly thereafter, but Nero later imprisoned him again and had him executed around 66.)

Apparently Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus’ mighty works and teachings but was one who copiously incorporated others’ eyewitness accounts (Luke 1:1-2).

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 visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



When we examine Luke's Gospel we see how careful he was. In the first few verses He claims his work is the product of careful research. He notes that he bases his account on information "handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses" (verse 2). As a seasoned traveler, Luke had opportunities to interview the best sources (that is, Jesus' 12 apostles and Paul), and he listened carefully to their stories and testimonials, taking voluminous notes.

Half of Luke's Gospel consists of material not found in the other three accounts of the life and work of Christ. This demonstrates that Luke searched out and interviewed other witnesses to the events he recorded.

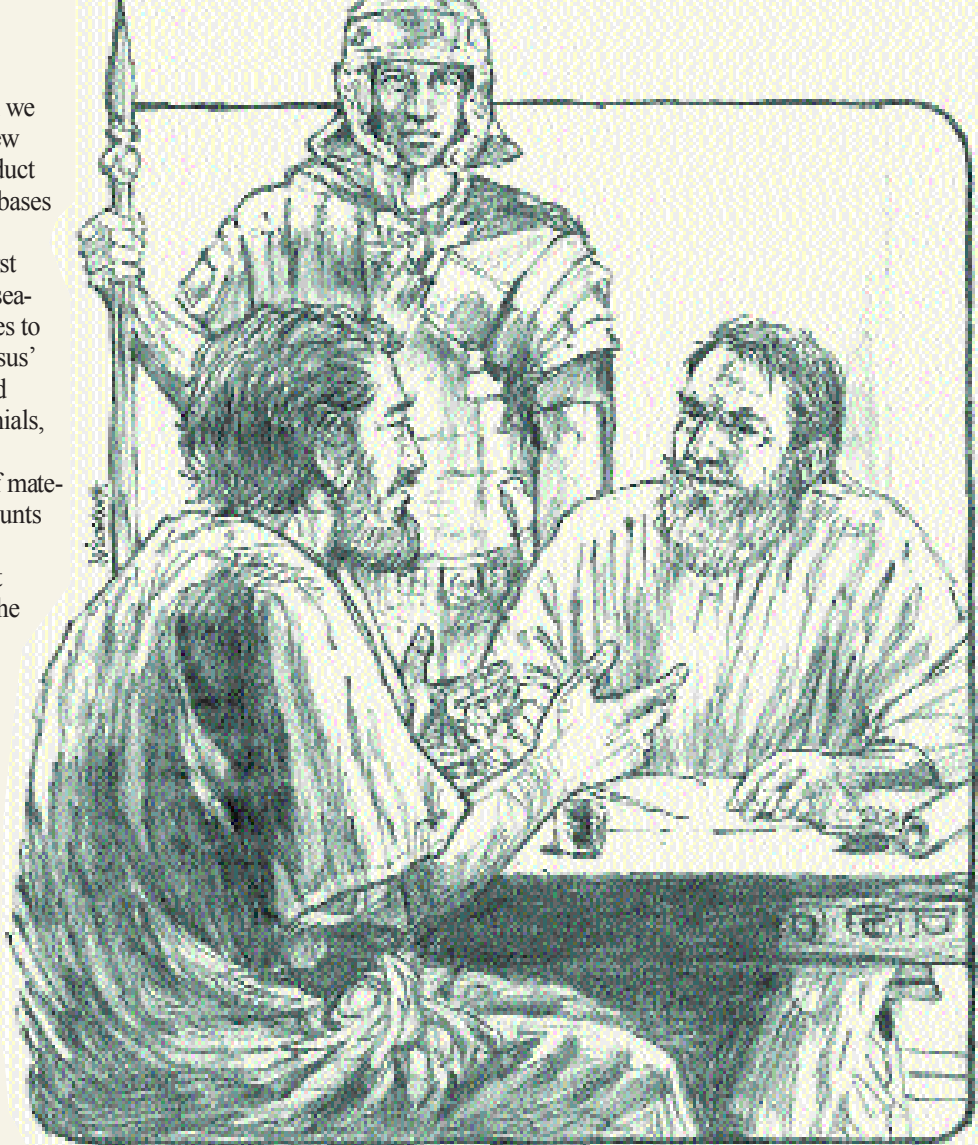
Luke was a meticulous historian. Notice his careful work as he dates the emergence of John the Baptist by cross-checking *six* contemporary datings: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar [1], Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea [2], Herod being tetrarch of Galilee [3], his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis [4], and Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene [5], while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests [6], the word of God came to John . . ." (Luke 3:1-2).

This shows Luke's penchant for accuracy that so characterized his writings. Five of the six chronological checkpoints deal with gentile data. The sixth deals with a point of interest to Jews.

When it came to writing the book of Acts, Luke similarly had opportunity to interview many eyewitnesses. Luke wrote of the acts of the 12 apostles from Acts 1-12, then of Paul and others from Acts 13-28. He demonstrated the transition from the life and teachings of Jesus to the life and teachings of the Church. The book of Acts confirmed that what Jesus taught and practiced was indeed taught and practiced by the apostles and the early Church.

Luke himself was a participant in some of the events he recorded. He traveled with Paul on his second and third missionary journeys. Notice the pronoun *we* beginning in Acts 16:10, where Luke became one of Paul's regular traveling companions throughout the remainder of the book.

Luke journeyed with Paul to Rome and was with him during the two years he was under house arrest (Acts 28:30-31). Again



During those long days while Paul was under house arrest, Luke no doubt took every opportunity to record many earlier stories and personal accounts, setting them down for all time in the book of Acts.

notice the pronoun *we* in Acts 28:10-16. During those long days Luke no doubt took every opportunity to record many earlier stories and personal accounts, setting them down for all time in the book of Acts.

Lessons from Luke

We can learn many lessons from Luke.

Luke was studious and meticulous with his narrative of Christ and the apostles, and especially with Paul. We, too, can exercise care in how we speak to and write about others. We should be careful that we always "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

Luke was thorough and comprehensive, unwavering in his commitment to the truth. He didn't assume things. He carefully

checked things out. Luke himself recorded the fine example of the Bereans, who, having heard Paul, "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). We, too, should be sure that our beliefs are firmly grounded in the Scriptures.

Luke was a learned man, as a physician and author. We as Christ's followers must continue to educate ourselves, never assuming we already know everything.

Most important, Luke was faithful to God, to Jesus, to Their words and to the apostles. He was faithful to Paul as a trusted and loyal friend, standing by him in good times and bad. We, too, can aspire to this kind of faithfulness and loyalty. **GN**

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Middle East

Continued from page 7

values will change for the better. God's great law of love will be practiced in Jerusalem, and nations will flow to the new world capital to learn to live by it (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4). Jerusalem will finally live up to its name as the city of peace.

Oil, land and politics will cease to be the primary focus of interest. One geographic fact will dominate the globe: The spiritual headquarters of the future ruler of earth will be in the Middle East. From there the reigning Christ will look after the best interests of all countries, peoples and races. Representatives of many lands will then flow to Jerusalem, not to wage jihad, but to learn the way to peace.

At that time men, women, boys and girls in the Middle East will surrender their lives to their Creator. *Muslim* means "one who surrenders himself to God." Arabs and Israelis alike will yield their lives to a righteous God, giving up their narrow biases, prejudices and selfish interests.

These former enemies, and many others, eventually will become one with each other and, most important, with God. The Middle East will again be the land of promise, a place that will spread peace and spirituality to the entire globe.

But such a radical transformation will take a new spirit and new heart (Jeremiah 31:31). It will require a fresh burst of spiritual energy directly from God.

This is what Jesus brought us at His first coming. What began at Bethlehem and Nazareth will gradually spread to the entire world when He returns to earth a second time as the Christ, the Messiah. **GN**

Recommended Reading

What does the Bible reveal about the future of the Middle East? Be sure to request the eye-opening booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

Both will help you better understand the meaning behind world events and trends. For your free copies, contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Leadership

Continued from page 13

(*Book* magazine, November-December 2000).

Unseen factors

Sadly, the results of the recent presidential election show a divided electorate and a potentially crippled executive branch at a time when the United States needs unambiguous and decisive leadership in foreign policy. America needs an able team of leaders who can formulate a credible foreign policy and inspire the confidence of other nations.

Leaders can plan, but unforeseen events can cause chain reactions that change the course of history. Witness the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria by an unknown Serbian anarchist in July 1914. Within weeks events spun out of the control of leaders and diplomats and plunged the world into war.

Someone once asked a British prime minister, Harold MacMillan, what factors most shaped his administration. "Events, my dear boy, events," was his reply.

What could occur that would set in motion a string of events that would radically change the world balance of power? No one can know for sure, but the Bible advises us that the best-laid plans of human leaders don't always work out.

Psalms 2 shows that nations make plans in vain when their will does not fit God's purpose. Treaties and alliances that serve only national interests will ultimately come to nothing. "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision" (Psalm 2:1-4).

From Daniel we learn that God rules over the nations, and He ultimately accomplishes His will. "... He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him" (Daniel 2:21-22).

Events that can shape the future of the world can happen unexpectedly. Specific end-time events can take place without warning. God tells us to watch and to love His truth (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; see also John 17:17). If we do, we'll understand the proper context of the events of coming years. **GN**

New Leader

Continued from page 17

compassion on its victims. He didn't stop oppression, but He taught others not to oppress anyone else. He called Himself and His disciples the light of the world, engaging them as examples of God's way of life (Matthew 5:14-16).

Those God calls today have an invitation to be examples of godly love and concern (Colossians 3:12-15). Jesus needs assistants who are willing to prepare to rule with Him while learning to choose right rather than wrong and govern their lives by the light of God's Word.

Remember Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan and learn to be a good neighbor, helping others as the opportunities arise. That is the mind-set of Christ that will guide His rule over the nations in His coming Kingdom (Matthew 25:36). Another important responsibility for Christians who are concerned about righting wrongs is to pray for the leaders of their nations that God's people can proclaim the gospel of His Kingdom without undue hindrance (1 Timothy 2:1-4; Colossians 4:2-4).

An incredible future

If you have ever wished you could be part of a government that really made a difference, then seek to be an ambassador of Christ's coming government (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador is an official a government appoints to represent it to others. God calls people today to be representatives of His government to all other governments and peoples. You could become one of His ambassadors, a representative to reflect His way of life.

Such a role—as Christ's ambassador—contributes a great deal toward the ultimate solution of society's problems and leads to the opportunity to reign with Him in the administration of the coming Kingdom of God (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26).

In this world aspiring candidates are always making plans to gain political power in hope of advancing themselves or solving particular problems. The masses remain hopeful that some leader someday will make a permanent difference for the better.

Although that rarely happens in the age of man, such changes will be widespread in the world to come. We must awaken to an understanding of the awesome plan God is implementing for mankind. We should also learn how we can play a role in transforming the world in His coming Kingdom. **GN**

Empire

Continued from page 19

the election that brought him to power, he described himself: "I am a modern man. I am a part of the rock and roll generation—the Beatles, colour TV, that's the generation I come from" (Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain*, paperback edition, p. xix).

The current generation is a victim of revisionist history. It's a history with an emphasis on multiculturalism, which downplays Britain's role in frequently leading its empire into conflict against despotic European powers that wanted to conquer the world. At the same time, the revised version of history emphasizes the mistakes Britain made, negatively presenting the empire as a shameful era.

It's also a generation that, as in the United States and other Western countries, has grown up with emphasis on material values, with little concept of morality and often lacking any knowledge of God. Many in the new government reflect these realities.

Writing of "the end of Britain" in *Newsweek* magazine (July 10, 2000), columnist George Will reminded readers of George Orwell's dismissive comment on English intellectuals: "England is perhaps the only great country whose intellectuals are ashamed of their nationality." (Orwell died in 1950 before this disease spread to the United States.)

Mr. Will added, "Many Europhiles are English intellectuals of the sort George Orwell despised because they despised their nation." It's hard to understand the hatred so many people have for the old values Sir Winston Churchill symbolized. "God, king and country" have no place in the minds of many, including many English intellectuals.

Does this matter to Americans and the rest of the world?

Let George Will have the final say: "What is vanishing, and not slowly, is the nation to which the United States traces much of its political and cultural DNA. Unless this disappearance is resisted, and reversed, soon all that will linger . . . will be a mocking memory of the nationhood that was the political incarnation of a people who (as has been said), relative to their numbers, contributed more to civilization than any other people since the ancient Greeks and Romans" (ibid.). **GN**

Pill

Continued from page 21

What does God say?

Many people have bought into the notion that the pill has changed the old laws and customs relating to marriage, sex and the family. But this is not the case. God gave His laws for a purpose. He intended them for all people for all time.

No matter what inventions come along, God instructs all people everywhere—especially Christians—to conduct themselves in a chaste, respectful and respectable manner. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:3 that "among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (NIV).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 he adds, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality" (NIV).

In Proverbs 6:27 God inspired King Solomon of Israel to write: "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?" (NIV). He recognized negative consequences for wrong actions.

In Proverbs 5 he urges others not to make the same mistakes, not to succumb to the temptation of immorality: "For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave" (verses 3-5, NIV).

The pill has altered the age in which we live. Immorality has always been with us, but this is the first time in history in which people have been so able to rampantly indulge in sexual liaisons without fear of consequences and with no sense of responsibility.

Within a loving marriage birth-control methods can help a husband and wife plan their family in a responsible manner. But used outside of marriage the pill opens up a world of immoral sexual opportunities that are ungodly, harmful to others and ultimately self-destructive.

We should heed the instruction given in the Bible by a loving God who wants those who follow Him to have loving, faithful and committed marriages. **GN**



Letters From Our Readers

“Christmas Before Christ?”

I just read your article, “Christmas Before Christ?” I understand your point of view on the problem of celebrating Christmas but would like to make a couple of comments. I wish that Dec. 25 was Christ’s birthday and that all the symbols of Christmas were Christian in origin. But I realize they are not. I would never be in favor of compromising with this world or corrupting our worship of God to please or convert anyone.

When I read your article two passages of Scripture came to mind: 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 and Romans 14. Within my church and family we do use the time of Christmas to celebrate the birth of our Lord. This is a special time for us, a time of remembrance. I think it is better to celebrate the birth of Jesus at this time than never to celebrate it at all.

There are many of us who have never considered that celebrating Christmas was worshiping a false god of any kind, for we know that all other gods are false. We worship God in spirit and in truth; our consciences are clean before Him. I am not trying to convince you that I am right but giving you another side of this. If my rendering of the two scriptures that I mentioned deal with this, I wonder if any young converts were caused to stumble because of this article.

R.T., Internet

We encourage all our readers to study the subject further by requesting and reading our free booklet Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep? The chapter “Does It Matter to God?” addresses many scriptures that unambiguously show whether God allows us to create our own holidays and customs to use in worshiping Him. It also shows the plain instruction of the apostle Paul—author of the passages cited above—regarding such matters.

A key word to consider is “truth.” Can we worship God in truth if our acts of worship are at variance with His instructions for worshiping Him? God tells us in His Word that His law and commandments are the truth (Psalm 119:142, 151). The Bible nowhere commands us to worship Him by celebrating Christ’s birthday, the time of which is apparently purposefully obscured in Scripture. This is not the case with the

biblical festivals God does command us to observe. For instance, He specifically tells us to annually commemorate and remember Christ’s death at a fixed time—not His birth.

The Bible also expressly tells us not to add to or take away from God’s words and instructions (Revelation 22:18; Proverbs 30:5-6; Deuteronomy 12:32). Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 8:4-13 and Romans 14 both refer to leading a brother into practices that may defile his conscience, thereby endangering his salvation. This in no way could include failing to observe a humanly devised holiday, wreathed in pagan practices, that has no basis in the Bible or God’s truth.

Reaction to AIDS articles

As a person living with AIDS, I felt compelled to write in response to your biased, hate-filled article. All I will say is that you people sound like one of the most hate-filled religious groups I have ever heard in my life. I am glad I am not associated with your type of church.

You offer no hope, help or acceptance of persons living with AIDS. All your article did was add to the growing problem of hate crime in this country. Yes, you are using the name of God and the Holy Bible to promote hate. I’m sorry, but in my Bible God was a loving, understanding and caring God. You people are sick and disease-ridden yourselves. Your cure lies within the Bible too.

K.H., Internet

The author of the article you mentioned is editor of Anchor, a magazine published for families of homosexuals and those wanting to leave the “gay” way of life. As such, it is designed to be a source of hope and encouragement for those in such situations. Those wishing a free subscription can write to Anchor, P.O. Box 153, Okemos, Michigan 48805.

The article’s author and the staff and publishers of The Good News advocate hatred for no one. One of the purposes of The Good News is to help people understand what sin is and the dreadful, tragic consequences it brings to humanity. We realize that in today’s world this may not be a politically correct message, but The Good News aims to be biblically correct in its

content rather than politically correct according to this world’s human standards.

I just read your two *Good News* articles on AIDS. I’m thankful that you’re helping to show that there is a cause for every effect and that much of AIDS is caused by improper sexual activity. Sexual sin is playing with fire (Proverbs 6:27). As a “recovering homosexual,” I know many people, once filled with life and laughter, who have died from AIDS. Presently I am HIV positive. What grieves me is that it is all so unnecessary. Like Cher sings, “If I could turn back time . . .”

I read and took some comfort in this Scripture the other day: “Your wound is incurable, your injury past healing. There is not one to care for your sore, no medicine to make you well again. All your lovers have forgotten you; they look for you no more. Yes, I have struck you . . . with harsh punishment (so great is your guilt, so many your sins). Why bother to complain . . . ? Your pain is incurable . . . But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds” (Jeremiah 30:12-17).

We need the hope and comfort that God will heal us (the medicines certainly can’t)—if not in this life, then at least we can have the reassurance that God will shed His sufficient grace upon us to deal with everything we experience.

D.B.-A., Toledo, Ohio

Please see our “Questions and Answers” feature on page 31.

Prisoners appreciate literature

I received *The Good News* magazine yesterday and read it from cover to cover. I could not put it down. The literature of the [United] Church of God is awakening a sense that I have not felt in years. Almost eight years ago I was doing wrong (criminal activity) until my eventual arrest and prison time. Even though I come from a Roman Catholic background, I find that your way is more on track than how I was reared. I just hope I can deliver when I am called upon.

V.W.G., Rahway, New Jersey

I have already read some of the booklets and am starting the *Bible Study Course* this weekend. I lived in that fast-paced world and

never put much into the study of the Bible. When I was put in prison more than four years ago, I decided to give it a shot. Since then I have read the Bible and what it teaches. What I am getting at is that I have been looking, and so far what I have received from the United Church of God is simple and fits the Bible.

R.E., Kenedy, Texas

Readers from around the world

I would like to thank you for *The Good News*. I am so glad to be a reader of such a wonderful magazine and to be reading such

rewarding items. My favorite has to be "The Bible and Archaeology," but *The Good News* is wonderful from the first to the last page. I am slowly turning into a real believer, despite the sadness in my life. There were some dark times when it was so easy to lose vision and faith.

Reader from New South Wales, Australia

Thank you for sending *The Good News*. I have changed a lot in my understanding of the Word of God. I have been a Christian for quite a long time but still lack knowledge. Now my mind is beginning to open to

possible new insights into scriptural knowledge. I am thankful to the Lord for blessing the United Church of God so that it can provide free magazine subscriptions and booklets throughout the world.

M.M., Davao City, Philippines

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).



Questions & Answers

Q: I appreciated your articles on AIDS in *The Good News*, but I wish you could have offered hope in this life for people already infected—especially repentant sinners who honestly want to "go and sin no more." What encouragement does the Bible offer to those in such circumstances?

D.B.-A., Toledo, Ohio

A: God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34). No sin can be committed of which we cannot repent. This includes sexual sin, whether homosexual or heterosexual. The apostle Paul wrote about such sins, prevalent in the ancient Greek port city of Corinth. Many Church members had been guilty of sexual and other sins. He reminded them that these sins were in the past, that they had struggled and overcome. "And such *were some of you*. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

In one verse the apostle fills us all with encouragement. He assures us that *all* our sins can be washed away, forgiven by the shed blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He also reminds us that it is possible to overcome our sins with God's help.

We can find further encouragement in reading of Paul's personal struggle with sin in Romans 7:14-25.

Overcoming sin is never easy. Often we have relapses. The apostle John tells us: "If

we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins [to God], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). From these two verses we learn the importance of recognizing our sin and admitting our guilt. If we repent and ask God for forgiveness, Christ's blood once again cleanses us from our sin.

Although God is quick to forgive, many people aren't. Here Christians should follow Christ's example.

Jesus did not avoid those who were widely known for their sins. In Matthew 9:10-13 we see Him criticized for mixing with "tax collectors [those who collected taxes for the Roman government] and sinners." He did not turn away those who were in spiritual need. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick," He said (verse 12). Christ's hope is "that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

When the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery to Jesus for His judgment, He said: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7). Jesus knew that "all men have sinned" (Romans 3:23). He was and is perfectly forgiving. When her accusers walked away, He said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you." But at the same time He added, "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

Christians should follow Christ's exam-

ple. We should be filled with compassion, actively helping others who are in need. Jesus pointed out that His followers would visit the sick, who today include those with AIDS (Matthew 25:34-40).

It should be possible for repentant people with AIDS to share their struggle with others in a congregation that loves them and will fervently pray for them (James 5:16).

The Scriptures record several examples that show that God heals when doing so is in accordance with His will and purpose. But they also record times when His faithful servants were not healed. Ultimately "it is appointed for men to die once" (Hebrews 9:27).

Regardless of whether God chooses to heal those who are afflicted with disease in this life, He promises His repentant and faithful servants a glorious resurrection to immortal spirit bodies at Jesus' return (1 Corinthians 15:42-54). Once resurrected to eternal life, they will no longer be subject to illness, injury and death. Ultimately they will live in a glorious world in which "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" and when "there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying" (Revelation 21:4).

For a fuller understanding of these subjects, please request the free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *What Happens After Death?* Contact any of our offices on page 2, or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



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