

^{The} Good News

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



Right and Wrong Who Decides?

Lead Us Not Onto Temptation Island • The Perfect Prophetic Storm
Who Killed Jesus Christ? • One Nation—Under God? • Would Jesus Keep Easter?

We prize our freedom of choice. We want freedom to choose what we do and where we'll live. We want the liberty to decide how we'll spend our time and money. We'll decide how to entertain ourselves—what we'll listen to, what we'll watch, what we'll read.

We'll decide how we want to live and what standards we'll live by. After all, we know what's best for ourselves, don't we?

Maybe not. Freedom of choice, you see, also involves freedom to make *bad decisions*: decisions that are shortsighted and uninformed; decisions that will come back to haunt us; decisions that look good on the surface but have unforeseen, unintended consequences.

We humans are notoriously shortsighted. We're used to thinking in the here and now, not considering where we'll be and what we'll have to deal with out into the future. That kind of shortsightedness gets us into serious trouble.

A generation ago many Americans demanded greater freedom. They wanted more freedom of speech and expression, so obscenity and pornography laws were struck down. Standards in television, movies and music were relaxed to the point that today virtually anything goes.

They demanded a right to privacy and freedom of choice that encompassed all things sexual, including various sex acts, the number and sex of partners and the means for prevention and even termination of unwanted pregnancies. Judges and lawmakers relaxed laws to accommodate their demands.

People also demanded religious freedom—not freedom *of* religion, but freedom *from* religion. Religious authority and influence had to go lest they might infringe on other freedoms. So school prayer was banned. God was evicted from classrooms and government corridors and forbidden to show up in public. Over time, even history books were rewritten to remove most references to the strong Christian convictions and beliefs of America's founding fathers.

Now we wonder why rape, murder, robbery, assault, venereal disease, divorce, illegitimate births, mental illness and a whole host of other social problems have grown dramatically.

Regrettably, other nations have followed the United States' example. They, too, are experiencing the sad consequences of their choices.

Why have so many presumably enlightened choices turned out so badly? Quite simply, we didn't consider the consequences. We didn't appreciate *why* certain standards had passed down from generation to generation. Nor did we appreciate the original *source* of many of those standards.

The American founding fathers were clear about what they believed and why. George Washington, the nation's first president, stated that "it is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible." John Adams, the nation's second president, said: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

In the same speech Adams noted that the government had no power "capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion." He recognized that freedoms must be tempered by self-control, wisdom and sound judgment rooted in biblical standards and values. Without them, freedom is little more than license to gratify our baser instincts and selfish desires.

Right and wrong ultimately come down to their long-term consequences. Are the consequences good? Then the choices are likely right. Are the consequences bad? They're almost always the result of wrong decisions we've made.

The right choice reaps widespread and lasting benefits. The choice that ultimately makes things worse—that produces suffering and problems—is wrong.

When it comes to choosing right and wrong, we should remember the words of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 30:19 when he presented his countrymen a choice regarding right and wrong: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live."

—Scott Ashley

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Right & Wrong

Who Decides?

by Roger Foster

Are we equipped to decide right and wrong for ourselves? The record of history isn't encouraging, so is it time we looked somewhere else?

The recent U.S. presidential election focused attention on bitter divisions in society over moral behavior and ethical values. The winner of the election, President George W. Bush, has promised to change the tone of politics in Washington and institute a new civility in government. The scandals of the Clinton years played a major role in heightening passions over issues of moral and ethical standards.

At the heart of the current debate over morality lies a crucial question: Who has the right to decide right from wrong?

The issues that so divided the United States during the recent election cycle are real and dishearteningly deep. They routinely dominate newspaper headlines and television news. For many, the issues have become personal crusades. They have increasingly become litmus tests for those who would hold public office or those who would vote for them.

In many cases these issues have divided families and even generations. They define on the one hand what is politically correct and on the other what is deemed intolerant or close-minded. They increasingly affect the lives of people all over the world.

Issues that dominate

What are some of the issues—matters of right and wrong—that divide us?

Abortion, homosexuality and homosexual rights usually top the lists. Other issues relating to sex are always hot topics. Is adultery really wrong? Is promiscuity harmful? What's the harm in lying about sex? After all, doesn't everybody do it? Surely a person's private life has no bearing on his performance in public office or other positions of trust—or so we are told.

Not far behind are drug use—including decriminalization or reduced penalties for use, possession and distribution of illegal drugs.

Other distasteful matters regularly make the news. What exactly is pornography? What's wrong with producing movies and television shows that glorify violence and illicit sex,

since that's what people pay to see?

What about music? Isn't most popular music simply a harmless way to let off steam or a matter of freedom of speech? Is that still the case when music includes obscene lyrics that promote shooting policemen, killing one's parents, suicide, drug use, rape, sexual relations with minors, perverted sex and violence in general? (If you think this sounds far-fetched, a music recording recently nominated as the album of the year in the United States included many such elements among its obscenity-laced lyrics.)

We hear arguments that laws have to change with the times. We're more enlightened now, the reasoning goes, so we understand that things that used to be taboo—like many of those listed above—really aren't so bad after all. We're regularly told that such issues are simply a matter of personal choice, and no one has a right to impose his standards and values on others.

Drawing lines on right and wrong

Those who believe that human beings should have almost unlimited freedom to do as they please are on one side of the debate. Those who believe in absolute standards that define right from wrong are on the other. In between are many who accept, to varying degrees, arguments from both viewpoints.

What is the solution to our dilemmas? The scope of the issues—and what makes something right vs. what makes it wrong—can be daunting. Discerning right from wrong is a challenge that reaches far beyond the realm of the physical sciences. The issues involved cannot be measured in meters and millimeters or in tons and pounds. *Spiritual* qualities—such as honor, respect and love—are the true standards vital to this critical evaluation process.

We must consider the impact of our actions. All our actions have consequences, good or bad. What are the long-term effects on our lives? How do consequences affect others? How do they influence our relationships with family, friends, community and society as a whole?

Virtually everyone recognizes that the needs of the individual must be tempered by the needs



of the larger community. Any effective judgment about what is right or wrong needs to thoroughly balance the long-term value and consequences of our actions against their value in satisfying our short-term needs, pleasures and desires.

We are capable of recognizing many of these critical issues and seeing the need to address them. But are we able to effectively evaluate them so we reach conclusions that will consistently benefit *all* people both now and for generations to come? The evidence suggests we are not.

What guidelines should we use?

Our disagreements are vast. Our conclusions and solutions consistently fall short of the ideal for several reasons. Our primary weakness is our tendency to emphasize *short-term personal gains* over long-term benefits. Our overriding desire is to satisfy our needs and wants as quickly as possible. Understandably, this greatly clouds our judgment.

Compounding the problem is our tendency to view experiences—both personal and historical—from vastly different perspectives. These different perspectives toward problems and solutions underscore our need for a different reference point, for unbiased and comprehensive guidance in finding long-term solutions.

Who is qualified to give guidance about right and wrong? Unless a Supreme Being exists who reveals the true answers to questions of right and wrong, we have nowhere to turn for such guidance. So let's consider the alternative.

If there is no *eternal truth*, then all questions of right and wrong are merely a matter of preference. Nothing is intrinsically evil. We are free to choose the standards we prefer and decide which ones should be

optional. We are free to determine our own rules and systems for enforcing them, and we can change the rules and systems however and whenever we please to fit our current desires and preferences.

Therefore, if we disagree with any aspect of the established order we could, with no pangs of conscience, challenge it—even with force—should we have the conviction, power and means to do so. If we can recruit enough supporters we can establish our own system of law—or lawlessness—as we please. After all, if we can decide for ourselves what is right or wrong, who would have the right to judge our decisions and actions?

Should we become really ambitious, we can attempt to confront all who have differing views and impose our preferences on them. Obviously, if nothing is inherently wrong, there would exist no actual limits, no real restraints that we would be obligated to recognize. We would determine what is right and whether to impose it on those who are weaker and, in our view, less perceptive. We would be the sole judges of good and evil. The will of the strongest would prevail.

If this scenario seems hauntingly familiar, it's no wonder. It was just such reasoning that led Adolf Hitler to launch World War II. He convinced himself and his followers that he knew what was best for mankind. He believed he should decide which humans were superior and worthy of life and who, being inferior, should be exterminated for the good of the race. He believed he should determine right from wrong. His goal was to impose his perceptions of an ideal world, a 1,000-year *reich*, on all of humanity—or at least on all he deemed fit to survive.

If you were the judge of right and wrong for the world, would your values and standards be superior to those of Hitler? If so,

why? On what authority? What would give you the right to lift your beliefs above his?

Facing an uncomfortable reality

Those who reject the belief that God exists and that He reveals standards of behavior generally refuse to face up to the sobering implications of the view that man is the sole arbiter of right and wrong. They hold the opinion that humans are progressively evolving into naturally more ethical beings. They contend that human nature is fundamentally good. Therefore, according to them, we have valid reason to trust our collective judgment.

But there's a problem with this view: *It doesn't correspond to reality.*

In the last century humanity has been repeatedly threatened by the likes of Hitler in Europe, Pol Pot in Asia, Saddam Hussein in the Middle East and Slobodan Milosevic in the Balkans, to name only a few. Force, not reason, was required to prevent these despots from imposing their disastrous views of right and wrong on even more victims.

The number of armed conflicts and their corresponding butchery in the supposedly progressive 20th century alone were staggering. Plenty of strongmen and would-be dictators remain on the scene. The truth is that clever tyrants gain power and wreak havoc even in our enlightened world. The evidence suggests no end is in sight.

The only societies that last for a significant time are those that *require* accountability by a system of law (or traditions that have the effect of law). Such societies expect everyone to meet common standards of behavior or face punishment.

Law defines obligations (what is right) and unacceptable behavior (what is wrong) for civilized societies. The majority of human beings have proved unable to resolve

their differences and conflicts with each other without a clearly defined and enforceable system based on basic standards. So this brings us back to our original question: Who should determine standards of what is acceptable and unacceptable?

Although the situation is rapidly changing, for years the foundation of many Western nations' legal code was the Bible (see "One Nation—Under God?," page 8). In its pages one claiming to be the Creator of mankind asserts that *He alone* has the right to establish the rules for our behavior. He alone understands man's spectrum of needs and problems. He alone can set the standards and establish the laws that define right and wrong, that help us understand long-term consequences of our actions.

God's view, according to the Scriptures, is that truth can be defined, that eternal truth *does* exist. Only He fully comprehends that truth and can accurately communicate it to us. Only He understands the distinctions between right and wrong and where our choices lead. Only He clearly reveals the distinctions to us.

Let's compare what He has to say to some of the current trends in our supposedly enlightened human thinking.

The secular view of right and wrong

The human perspective is that we can discover all things for ourselves. Through trial and error, discussion and compromise, we will eventually be able to agree on a just and fair set of principles that define moral behavior and right and wrong.

That this has never happened, and we are no closer together in our views today than in the past, doesn't seem to diminish our high opinion of our own abilities. Some among us are always eager to assure us that a breakthrough is just around the corner, that humanity is on the brink of an era of understanding and cooperation.

So let's examine the reality of where we are. Since the biblical perspective is represented as *divine truth*, let's consider how leading academic and philosophical thinkers view the very idea of truth.

In *The Vanished Truth: Truth Telling and Deceiving in Ordinary Life* (1993), David Nyberg, professor of philosophy of education at the State University of New York, Buffalo, promotes the view that all truth is relative. He believes it is essential that we accept and regularly practice alternatives to being fully truthful. He makes statements such as: "Sometimes the truth does not set you free; it destroys the sense of freedom

that hope provides" and "To live decently with one another, we do not need moral purity, we need discretion."

Professor Nyberg views deceit and self-deception, if discreetly used, as valuable contributors to social stability. He favors creative omissions of truth over blatant lies to achieve his notion of beneficial deception. But he has no objection to "white lies" if they achieve what he would consider a compassionate or noble result.

In *Truth in Context: An Essay on Pluralism and Objectivity* (1998), Michael Lynch,

Is truth definable? What is the basis for standards that would distinguish right from wrong? Our best thinkers and scholars cannot agree. So where do we find the answers?

assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Mississippi, promotes a middle-of-the-road approach to truth. His argument is that truths may be relative, but our concept of truth doesn't have to be. Mr. Lynch, however, finds little support for his moderate views among his peers.

Sissela Bok, in *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (1989), examines the growing debate over public and private morality and addresses the prevalence of lying and deception in law, family, medicine and government. She courageously takes our modern society to task for allowing "little white lies" to be accepted as normal behavior, challenging us to examine *the effects* of lying on individuals, relationships and society.

These views reflect the division and diversity in philosophical circles over fundamental issues of right and wrong. But they don't answer the big questions: Is truth definable? What is the basis for standards that would distinguish right from wrong?

Our best thinkers and scholars cannot agree. So where do we find the answers?

The biblical perspective

The Bible presents the view that *truth is definable, and basic truths are eternal*. The authors of all the books of the Bible wrote that judgments about right and wrong should all be based on the *true* and *accurate* judgments of God. David, king and prophet in ancient Israel, well expressed this biblical point of view: "The *entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever*" (Psalm 119:160, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus Christ expressed the same conviction. Shortly before He was crucified He prayed for those who would faithfully follow Him: "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them [set them apart from the rest of the world] by *Your truth. Your word is truth*. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth" (John 17:16-19).

When Jesus was on trial for His life, Roman governor Pontius Pilate asked Him

if He were indeed a king as was rumored. Jesus responded: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, *to testify to the truth*. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice." Pilate's jaded response was, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38, New Revised Standard Version).

Modern cynicism about whether it is possible for truth to be both defined and eternally consistent is not new. Those who have lacked faith in the Scriptures have long struggled with the impossibility of human beings arriving at consistent and useful views of right and wrong. Our perpetually conflicting perspectives are enough to cause any thinking person—except one fully trusting the Creator God—to despair of humanity's ability to discover standards and values that are just and applicable to all human beings.

Like it or not, we need God as the arbiter of the controversy. Unless God exists and reveals the basis for our standards and values, we have nowhere to turn for guidance. There simply exists no credible evidence that humanity as a whole is any better now than in the past. Even though our knowledge has dramatically increased in relation to past centuries, our inhumanity toward our fellowman also has markedly increased in the past century.

It is time we faced the facts and quit hiding behind a vain hope that we are on the brink of enlightenment through our own efforts.

A book of principles

The Bible claims to be God's revelation

to mankind. But what is the Bible? What does it teach about God's expectations of human beings?

More than on anything else, the Bible is built on *principles*. Jesus explained that everything God's prophets wrote as His revelation falls under two great, overriding principles. "Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question . . . , 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets'" (Matthew 22:35-40).

All questions about relationship standards and values fall into these two categories. They reflect our attitudes and actions toward God and each other.

The author of the book of Hebrews explained to the early Christians: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again *the first principles of the oracles of God*; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is *unskilled* in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to *discern* both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Discernment comes from understanding how to wisely and appropriately apply the timeless laws and principles God has revealed. The Bible contains many commands and sample judgments, all revealed to us through God's prophets. Those commands and judgments reveal *how God thinks*. They teach us His perspective, His point of view. Those who trust God *respect and emulate* His thinking and perspective. In so doing they gain wisdom and learn to apply biblical principles wisely.

Misunderstanding the Bible

It's important that we grasp the concept of biblical revelation. Many objections to the Bible as man's standard for determining right from wrong are based on a misunderstanding of the purpose of the Scriptures. Arguments about the Bible's "absolute standards" are often misleading. The Bible does set certain absolute guidelines. But that is not the whole story.

For example, many Jewish people have long believed that the perspective of law

adopted by Western nations does not do justice to the part of the Bible that is called the Law—the Torah (especially the first five books of the Bible written by Moses). Torah means "teachings" in Hebrew. It implies *guidelines* for the right way to live. It was written as the basis for *righteous discernment*.

Many of the laws of the Bible fall into the category of what can be called "case law"; that is, they are *examples* of how God judged particular cases or situations so appointed judges could rightly *discern the principles* that should be applied to similar cases.

Since the Scriptures reveal *many principles* pertaining to righteousness, godly judgments are supposed to take into consideration all principles applicable to the situation. This calls for wisdom based on *thorough* knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures.

Therefore, wisely applying the Scriptures requires much more than merely checking a list of absolute or inflexible statutes, as some have incorrectly perceived. It requires those who would be skilled in discerning right from wrong to "grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ"—whose understanding and judgment in righteousness serve as our example (Ephesians 4:15). That is why the apostle Paul wrote, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who *correctly handles* the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, New International Version).

The book of Proverbs tells us where and how to seek out the kind of wisdom that will help us live a way of life beneficial to all: "My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

"For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path. When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil . . ." (Proverbs 2:1-12).

The ultimate question

None of this advice from the Bible makes any sense, however, unless God exists. If we are to believe that God is the final determiner of right and wrong, we need to be assured that His existence is not just a figment of religious people's imagination.

But how can we know? Where can we find the answer to this supreme question? We obviously could use some solid evidence that God is real, that His existence is certain.

The Good News' writers have carefully examined and compiled just such evidence in one of our newest booklets. This challenging volume carefully examines the flaws in the arguments against God's existence. It shows that the real evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of His existence—especially startling new evidence from recent scientific discoveries. You need to read, for example, how scientific advances are demonstrating the utter impossibility of the spontaneous generation of life from nonliving substances.

We have prepared another booklet, *The Ten Commandments*, to explain clearly—in plain language—the foundational principles behind God's laws that define right from wrong. For an in-depth explanation of why we should think, feel and behave according to God's principles, be sure to request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments* along with the booklet *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*

You'll then be on your way to understanding why God has determined right from wrong and wants to share that priceless knowledge with you. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Does God exist? Can you know for sure? Be sure to request your free copy of *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*



Also be sure to request your copy of *The Ten Commandments*, which explains how God's laws reveal His thinking and the solutions to so many of our problems. For your free copies, contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

One Nation—Under God?

The Pledge of Allegiance, long recited by U.S. schoolchildren, acknowledges the United States as “one nation under God.” But does God have a place in America today?

by James Capó

The January inauguration of a new president marked the 42nd time Americans had witnessed an orderly, peaceful and voluntary transfer of power and authority from one leader to another.

In the history of nations that is a remarkable and unprecedented accomplishment. It is a testimony to the wisdom of the nation's forefathers that the United States has enjoyed such a long, peaceful, prosperous history.

What principles were in the minds of the forefathers that allowed them to institute such a remarkably stable, farsighted system of government? On what values did they build their new nation?

An unbiased study of American history shows those principles and values are based squarely on the book on which President George W. Bush in January placed his left hand as he took the oath of office—the Bible.

The United States was founded on Christian ideals and values by men who were, for the most part, strongly and deeply religious.

The official oath of office, as written by the founding fathers, states: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

When George Washington was sworn in as the nation's first president in 1789, he spontaneously added “I swear, so help me God,” and kissed the Bible. As near as historians can tell, every president since has followed Washington's example in adding “so help me God” at the end of the presidential oath.

Growing American disunity

Though you rarely read about it in modern history books, the religious faith of the founding fathers guided the deliberations that formed the foundation of the United States' legal system and established the standard by which they expected the nation to operate.

But today, rather than being the glue that in past years bound the country and its leaders together, religion—specifically religion based on the Bible—has become



a point of contention.

The Cabinet nominee for the new president's administration who drew the sharpest criticism in Senate hearings, former Missouri governor and senator John Ashcroft, was denounced by a broad range of special-interest groups (and some senators) who argued that his Bible-based beliefs rendered him unfit for a position as the nation's chief law-enforcement officer.

Although many great things have taken place in the United States, and it remains the undisputed leader of the free world, we see many disturbing trends within its borders. The very factors that contributed to making America great are seldom stressed by its leaders and often are hotly criticized. What does this mean? Has the United States lost its way? Where is the country headed?

Guided by the Bible

The greatness of the nation was once inseparably linked in its citizens' minds with the nation's respect for God and the principles of morality and character taught in the pages of the Bible.

As delegates from the states met to craft a national constitution in the summer of 1787, Benjamin Franklin, governor of Pennsylva-

nia, addressed the group: “If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His [God's] notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings, that ‘except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it.’”

Franklin then called on the group to offer regular, daily prayer to ask for God's assistance and blessings in their deliberations (William Federer, *America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations*, 1996, pp. 248-249).

Presidents and politicians routinely made mention of God and biblical principles in their public statements. In 1778 James Madison, a primary architect of the Constitution and a future president, remarked: “We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions . . . upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves . . . according to the *Ten Commandments of God*” (Federer, p. 411, emphasis added).

You can almost hear these ancient words of Moses echoing in the words of the founding fathers: “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deuteronomy 4:5-6).

The founders of the United States wanted God's blessing on their endeavor and generally recognized His laws as their guiding principles. They knew the nation's success and greatness would come in proportion to the favor God granted it.

Regrettably, we seldom find such statements by the founding fathers in modern history books. Most have been deliberately expunged. But, when you do find them, they clearly reveal the thoughts and beliefs that motivated these men. Let's notice a few such comments:

Patrick Henry, member of the Continental

Congress and five-time governor of Virginia, declared: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded . . . by Christians; not on religions [denominations], but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Federer, p. 289).

John Adams, member of the Continental Congress and second president of the United States, remarked: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and a religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other" (Federer, pp. 10-11).

His son, John Quincy Adams, the sixth president, stated: ". . . The Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on

the foundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth . . . *It laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity . . .*" (Federer, p. 18, emphasis added).

These bold men were outspoken in declaring that they had founded the United States and its government on Christian principles.

Political-science professors at the University of Houston assembled 15,000 writings from the founding fathers as a research project that lasted 10 years. They isolated 3,154 direct quotes cited by the founding fathers. They discovered that these men quoted from the Bible *four times more often* than any other source.

More than a third of their quotes came directly from the Scriptures. They took another 60 percent from writers such as William Blackstone (who wrote the then-standard text on law) who relied on the Bible in forming their conclusions. All told, the professors found that 94 percent of their quotations had some biblical foundation.

Government modeled on Scriptures

The Bible, moral principles and a constant looking to God for guidance were so integral to the thinking and acting of the majority of the founding fathers that they influenced even

Continued on page 15

Separation of Church and State?

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution directs that Congress "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ."

The first U.S. Congress adopted the first 10 amendments, known as the Bill of Rights, in 1791. The First Amendment went through extensive discussions and nearly a dozen drafts. They show the clear intent of the founding fathers—that they didn't want one Christian denomination running the nation. They did, however, firmly believe Christianity and biblical principles should be a part of American life.

The courts recognized this. For example, in a unanimous 1799 decision the Maryland Supreme Court declared: "By our form of government, the Christian religion is the established religion; and all sects and denominations of Christians are placed on the same equal footing, and are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty" (William Federer, *America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations*, 1996, p. 422).

In 1801 a Danbury, Conn., Baptist church wrote to President Thomas Jefferson after hearing a rumor that Congregationalism was to be made the national religion. Jefferson wrote back assuring members of the church that the First Amendment built "a wall of separation between church and state."

For a century and a half the common understanding of the First Amendment was that it prohibited establishing or sanctioning a single national Christian denomination. It was to keep government out of religion, not the other way around. Policies and rulings reflected that understanding.

For example, in 1854 a report of the U.S. House of Representatives' judiciary committee stated: "At the time of the adoption of the Constitution and its amendments, the universal sentiment was that Christianity should be encouraged, but not any one sect [denomination] . . . In this age, there is no substitute for Christianity . . . That was the religion of the founders of the republic and they expected it to remain the religion of their descendants" (David Barton, *America's Godly Heritage* video presentation, 1993).

The same committee later stated that "the great vital and conservative element in our system [the component that conserves and holds the system together] is the belief of our people in the pure doctrines and the divine truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Barton).

In the 1870s a group lobbied to have specific Christian principles removed from government. The courts cited Jefferson's letter not to support that removal, but to prove that it was permissible to maintain Christian values, practices and principles in official policy. For the next 15 years during that controversy, the courts used Jefferson's letter to insure that Christian principles remained a part of government.

Jefferson's letter was then largely ignored until 1947, when, in the case of *Everson vs. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court quoted it. However, the justices quoted only his phrase about separation of church and state, not the context. They wrote: "The first amendment has erected a wall between church and state. That wall must be kept high and impregnable."

This was a new philosophy for the courts. The phrase began to be used repeatedly as an indication of the wishes and intent of the founding fathers. In 1962 the Supreme Court made its first ruling (*Engel vs. Vitale*) that completely separated Christian principles from public education when it struck down school prayer. The case was over the use of a voluntary, 22-word nondenominational prayer in public schools. The prayer acknowledged God only once, while the Declaration of Independence acknowledges God four times. But somehow this prayer was unconstitutional.

In the 1962 case the court redefined the meaning and application of the word *church*. Before 1962 the court had defined a church as being an established denomination. Observes David Barton: "Now the word was redefined to mean any religious activity performed in public. Now the first amendment would not simply prohibit establishing a federal denomination, it would prohibit religious activities in public settings."

School prayer was the first casualty of the new definition. *Engel vs. Vitale* was the first case in Supreme Court history to cite *no* court precedents. Within 12 months, in two more cases, the Supreme Court justices removed Bible classes and religious instruction from public schools. In explaining their reasoning, the majority opinion stated: "If portions of the New Testament were read without explanation, they could be . . . psychologically harmful to the child . . ." (Barton). This was the second time in a year that the court had issued a ruling without citing a legal precedent for its decision. No precedent could be found.

The courts have continued to expand the "separation" doctrine over the years. In 1967 the Supreme Court even declared a four-line nursery rhyme unconstitutional in a kindergarten class. Why? Because, though the word *God* was not mentioned, if someone were to hear the rhyme he might think it was talking about God. So out it went.

Subsequent court rulings have gone as far as to declare it unconstitutional for a copy of the Ten Commandments to hang in a school hallway and for teachers to have a Bible visible on their desks. Increasingly, Americans no longer enjoy freedom of religion; we are saddled with freedom *from* religion.

Prophecy reveals that the consequences of this new direction will be disastrous. God holds not only individuals but nations accountable for their choices.



World News and Trends

An Overview of Conditions Around the World

The specter of bioterrorism

According to *Foreign Affairs* magazine, several nations besides the United States possess biological weapons: Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, China, North Korea, Russia, Israel, Taiwan and possibly Sudan, India, Pakistan and Kazakhstan. Potentially more serious is that militant political groups around the world seek either to develop or buy biological weapons for possible terrorist use.

Smallpox would be particularly deadly as a weapon in the bioterrorism arsenal. It kills one in three of its victims and blinds and disfigures many others. In 1980 the disease was declared extinct by the World Health Organization. Yet the virus lives on, legitimately, in hundreds of vials stored in heavily secured laboratories in Russia and America.

The Times reported that “the threat of a smallpox epidemic caused by bioterrorism is so serious that the U.S. is pouring money [\$177 million a year] into developing an antidote” (emphasis added). A fresh outbreak would be particularly devastating because the vast majority of people have no immunity to the virus, since routine vaccinations have not been available for decades.

That such a threat could even exist in a supposedly civilized world and that some few could actually contemplate using this and even more horrendous weapons on other human beings is mute testimony that something is drastically wrong somewhere. No wonder Jesus Christ urged us to pray “Thy Kingdom come.” (Sources: *The Times* [London], *Foreign Affairs* magazine.)

Decline of Christianity in Britain and Europe

The Scotsman recently observed that “Christianity is clinging on in Britain—but perhaps for not too much longer.” What’s behind this grim assessment?

Churches grew in Britain up to the beginning of the 20th century. From then, although the trend was a decline in growth for 50 years, the statistics occasionally fluctuated upwards, and church membership rose in the early 1950s.

“Christianity is clinging on in Britain—but perhaps for not too much longer.”

Then the ‘60s marked the beginning of a long free fall in church membership and attendance.

Two plausible reasons have been suggested for the decline: the loss of so many British men during two world wars and the growth of secularism. The archbishop of York, David Hope, recently said: “There are deep spiritual yearnings, longings. Large numbers of people say they pray. But they are not into religion.” Dr. Hope blamed the church for not addressing the problem and helping people who find themselves spiritually adrift.

Of course, the decline is not confined to the British Isles.

For example, the phenomenon is common to Western Europe and Scandinavia. As *Newsweek* magazine recently reported: “Modern Europe is a postreligious society. More accurately, what was once the heartland of Christendom is a post-Christian society. Throughout the Continent churches stand empty.”

To gain a perspective on why Christianity has declined in effectiveness on a global scale, please request our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*. (Sources: *Newsweek* magazine [Atlantic edition], *The Times* [London].)

Understanding the Bible in America

According to an article in *The Washington Times*, “most Americans believe the Bible is more factual than newspapers, but find their daily newspaper easier to read.” A recent survey suggests that many Americans would be more willing to study the Bible if it could be more palatably packaged and easier to understand.

Many readers found that the most difficult part of the Bible to read and understand is the creation account in Genesis. Their confidence in its narrative and teaching is not backed by personal knowledge and understanding.

The United Church of God has always been concerned about the growing gap between general belief in the Bible and real knowledge and understanding of its contents. That is why we have prepared and published two free booklets that will help make God’s Word more plain and user-friendly. Please request *Is the Bible True?*, which addresses and explains the creation account, and *How to Understand the Bible*. (Source: *The Washington Times*.)

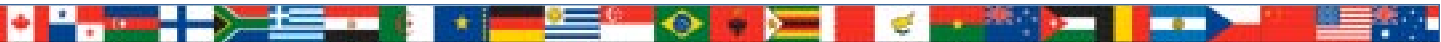
Indonesia plagued by corruption and vigilantes

Indonesia is a far-flung nation of 17,000 islands. It began as a modern state in 1949, emerging from the Dutch colonial regime. It has a long history of violence. The English expression “to run amok” comes from an Indonesian term, *amuk*, meaning to attack furiously.

Arnold Beichman, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and a newspaper columnist, writes that Indonesia is listed by “the World Bank as the most crooked state in the world.” Its citizens claim that people must carry out their own justice because the police and courts do not.

Death penalties are meted out for such crimes as stealing motorcycles, Nike sandals and even ducks. Punishment is often immediate and on the spot, carried out by street mobs. Mere accusation is sometimes enough proof. Undoubtedly people have been executed for petty crimes they didn’t commit.

Indonesia sits on the edge of anarchy. Part of the problem lies in the modern roots of the country. There is no common language, no common culture, no compelling national identity and apparently no real will for its residents to



live together as a nation. Those privileged to live under the rule of law and at least a modicum of political stability should thank God. (Sources: *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Times*.)

The tenacious grip of syphilis

Los Angeles Times health writer Julie Marquis tells us that "syphilis, a centuries-old human scourge, sustains itself these days on a noxious brew of poverty, racial inequality and hopelessness." Yet some people think the disease died with Al Capone.

Unlike the epidemic of AIDS, syphilis is easily prevented and easily cured when discovered early. Officials are particularly

"Syphilis, a centuries-old human scourge, sustains itself these days on a noxious brew of poverty, racial inequality and hopelessness."

concerned because the persistence of syphilis reflects a glaring example of racial disparity in rates of infection. Wrote Marquis: "African Americans accounted for 75 percent of cases in 1999, with rates 30 times higher than for whites."

Although high concentrations of syphilis are rare in the United States, they do occur in certain countries where diabetes, tuberculosis, infant mortality, drug infestation, prostitution, unemployment and a host of other societal ills happen in frightening numbers. Today syphilis is a disease that is primarily found in areas of unmitigated poverty and general ill health. (Source: *The Los Angeles Times*.)

Prussian revival?

Prussia—a nation that was part of what is today eastern Germany—was dissolved by the Allies as a country shortly after World War II because it was viewed as a militaristic and reactionary power contributing to the rise of Adolf Hitler. Yet this year is labeled "Prussian Year 2001" as Germany suddenly rediscovers a passion for all things Prussian. Exhibitions and events describing Prussian themes are planned in museums and other cultural institutions across Germany.

Three centuries ago Frederick III of Brandenburg (near Berlin) had himself crowned Frederick I, king of Prussia. The state is historically regarded as the dominant force in the creation of a united Germany in 1871. Today Eberhard Diepgen, mayor of Berlin (the capital city of old Prussia), is a prime supporter of a plan to reconstruct the former Imperial Palace of East Berlin, a baroque castle razed by the Communists in 1953.

Prussian efficiency and military effectiveness are seen as sadly lacking in modern Germany. But the world cannot afford to ignore any significant movement in Germany in 2001. (Sources: *The Sunday Telegraph* [London], *Independent on Sunday* [London], *The Scotsman*.)

AIDS safe-sex campaigns ineffective

"... HIV infections are disturbingly common among gay men of all races in their 20s, especially considering that they grew up knowing how AIDS spreads," says an Associated Press report on the recent eighth annual Retrovirus Conference in Chicago.

One possible reason for this trend is that "homosexual men have grown complacent about catching HIV because effective

treatments can hold the disease in check. Some of these gay men may be more likely to have risky sex." There is no known cure for AIDS. Drugs developed over the last few years, though, have proved effective in prolonging life with HIV, the AIDS virus.

The study, which surveyed 2,401 homosexuals 23 to 29 years old between 1998 and 2000, found remarkable differences in HIV infections among different racial groups. In large cities almost a third of homosexual black men were found to be infected, along with 15 percent of Hispanics, 7 percent of whites and 3 percent of Asians.

When the AIDS epidemic started 20 years ago, most of those with AIDS were homosexual white men. Now just over half of the 40,000 new HIV infections in the United States each year occur among blacks. Among women, infected blacks outnumber whites by almost four to one.

Although African-Americans and other blacks view these statistics with alarm, thousands of miles away the AIDS epidemic continues to affect large areas of Africa. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa more than a quarter of adults are infected. In some villages virtually all adults in the peak sexually active years (15-45) have died, leaving grandparents to bring up children, many of whom were born with HIV.

Campaigns to promote safe sex do not seem to be working. The only real answer is the often-criticized but thoroughly effective biblical solution: no sexual activity outside of the marital relationship. (Source: Associate Press.)

TV ups dosage of sexual content

According to a study conducted for the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, "sexual content on television has risen sharply since 1997, showing up in two of every three programs last season." Researchers found "sexual content in 68 percent of the 1999-2000 [television] shows studied, compared with 56 percent in 1997-98."

An Associated Press report adds: "Such content includes talk about sex, flirting, kissing, intimate touching and depictions of intercourse."

Although shows in which teens talk about or have sex "are

"Sexual content on television has risen sharply since 1997, showing up in two of every three programs last season."

twice as likely to include discussion of the risks or responsibilities compared with all other programs with sexual content," researchers found that "more teen characters are being depicted engaging in intercourse. In 1997-98, teenagers represented 3 percent of all characters having sex; in the new study, the figure had tripled to 9 percent."

Christian parents need to be vigilant in helping their children and teenagers make wise viewing choices. The Bible warns us to "be sober, be vigilant" in guarding against our "adversary the devil" (1 Peter 5:8). Ephesians 2:2 describes Satan as "the prince of the power of the air." Television, movies and music are ways he negatively influences our youngsters (see "Lead Us Not Onto Temptation Island," page 12). (Source: Associated Press.)

—John Ross Schroeder and Melvin Rhodes

Lead Us Not Onto Temptation Island

A titillating television show pushes the bounds of accepted morality even further while presenting only the seamy—and steamy—side of the story.

by Melvin Rhodes

The premise is simple. Four “committed” couples are flown to a tropical island and immediately separated, sent to opposite ends of the island. There they mix with attractive members of the opposite sex especially chosen for their temptation value.

During the following two weeks, each of the original eight people must go on five dates with the hired tempters. Cameras are there to record it all in weekly episodes. Adding to the voyeuristic interest is the producer’s use of videotapes sent back from the other end of the island so each islander can see his or her partner’s behavior, in some cases provoking anger and jealousy.

Temptation Island is the latest hit television series in the United States, boosting its network’s ratings to a record high for a single show. Many people probably watch it just to see the scantily clad sexy young adults who are the stars of the program. Most viewers are soon hooked on the series, watching to see which couples stay faithful and which do not.

New twist on selling sex

The series is controversial, condemned by parents, profamily organizations and religious groups. Seldom mentioned is that the couples participating in the series are not married but were living together before they journeyed to “Temptation Island,” which is

really Ambergris Caye, off the coast of Belize in Central America.

Whatever the intentions, the effect of the show is to encourage promiscuity. Soap operas have done this for years. The difference is that most people realize soaps are fiction, but this show is fact. It portrays a promiscuous way of life as exciting and fun. It legitimizes the destruction of relationships purely for sex.

The irony is that the participants are obviously searching for meaningful long-term relationships, just like everyone else.

The program does great harm in this area, not just for those on the show but for its viewers. With a constant emphasis on physical appearance and pleasure at the expense of everything else that’s involved when two people commit themselves to each other for life, loving relationships are made far more difficult if not impossible.

This is the point we have come to at the beginning of the 21st century: All too many people in Western countries seem *incapable of remaining in a committed lifelong and loving relationship*, even though *most people profess to want one*. They have little idea how to achieve their desired goal. Shows such as *Temptation Island* only make it more difficult.

Propheesied obsession

The constant emphasis on sexual adven-

ture that is a daily feature of television programs and movies is a startling reflection of the apostle Paul’s prophecy about society “in the last days.” “For men will be lovers of themselves,” he wrote. They will be “boasters,” “proud,” “unloving,” “without self-control,” “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

Of course, people have always broken God’s laws that define morality, but the rampant pursuit of sensual pleasures with so little regard for the consequences seems to have reached unprecedented levels in the modern West.

No recent precedent points to where these trends may lead. Almost all cultures down through history have had marriage customs and laws to protect the unique relationship of marriage. Although divorce under certain circumstances was permitted in ancient Israel, Jesus said this was anything but the ideal (Matthew 19:8). This had not been God’s intention, although He permitted Moses to allow divorce “because of the hardness of [their] hearts.”

Few have a concept of fidelity, defined in *Collins Standard Reference Dictionary* as “faithful devotion to duty, obligations or vows.” This includes the marriage vows. The Bible, God’s instruction book for mankind, gives us the Ten Commandments, which include the Seventh Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery.”

Yes, Television Is Getting Sleazier

A just-published study from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation shows that, yes, sexual content in television programs has risen sharply in the last two years.

An analysis of 1,114 prime-time shows aired on the major television networks and cable channels in 1999 and 2000 shows that 68 percent contained talk about sex or depictions of sexual activity ranging from flirting and kissing to intercourse.

A similar study only two years ago tabulated sexual content in

56 percent of prime-time programs.

Researchers found that sexual content was highest in movies, with almost nine of 10 containing references to sex. Comedies and soap operas weren’t far behind, with sexual references in 84 percent and 80 percent of such programs, respectively.

Meanwhile, only one in 10 shows discussed personal responsibility or risks associated with inappropriate sexual behavior. Sadly, the dominant message is coming through loud and clear.

Adultery is sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse. While the Seventh Commandment specifically prohibits a married person from having sex with someone who is not the person's spouse, in principle it covers all forms of sexual sin.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Flee fornication" (King James Version). He comments that "he who commits sexual immorality *sins against his own body*"—a warning of the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases and of the anguish of broken relationships.

A contestant in the *Temptation Island* show cried when he saw pictures of his partner's intimate involvement with another man on the other side of the island. Why

undistinguished . . . ; common; indiscriminate; not restricted to an individual; as promiscuous love or intercourse . . ."

The Collins dictionary (1982) emphasizes the sexual application of the word: "showing little or no taste or care in choosing; specifically engaging in sexual intercourse with many persons casually; without plan or purpose; casual."

A new definition was cited by the Centers for Disease Control in announcing AIDS figures on World AIDS Day in December 2000. According to CNN television news, the CDC defined promiscuous as "having six or more sexual partners a year." The 1828 definition was "not restricted to an individual," meaning that having even one

cable or telephone lines. As with many other inventions, we can find good and evil in each of them. Christians must choose the good and turn from evil (Psalm 34:14).

Shows like *Temptation Island* should be the furthest thing from our thinking. Instead, we should be asking God to help us focus on the good things of life and avoid temptation.

Watching such moral and mental sewage violates the instructions of Scripture. Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:8 that we should let our minds dwell only on "whatever things are pure." He ends the verse by saying: ". . . If there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." Watching shows such as *Temptation Island* only makes such behavior seem more acceptable and normal rather than ungodly.

Regrettably, the show's economic success no doubt will encourage other television producers to produce more programs like it or exacerbate the downward moral spiral by producing shows that are even worse. We already have plenty of mental pollution; we don't need any more.

Particularly sad are people whose lives are so empty and devoid of meaning that they seek one titillation after another. It is even sadder, in many cases, that they don't

According to CNN, the Centers for Disease Control defined *promiscuous* as "having six or more sexual partners a year."



would anyone want to hurt the one he loves? When this kind of sin is repeatedly indulged in with various partners, eventually people are devoid of feelings and find it almost impossible to form a lasting relationship.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:22 Paul tells us to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (King James Version). This includes the popular practice of living together, even if not sexually active. It gives the *appearance* of fornication, which is condemned in the Scriptures.

Changing times and definitions

With the rapid decline in morality that has affected Western countries since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, even definitions of words have changed. An 1828 dictionary barely mentions sexual activity in its definition of *promiscuous*: "Mingled; consisting of individuals united in a body or mass without order; confused;

partner outside of the marital relationship meant one was promiscuous. Now, according to some, one must have at least *six* partners a year to be defined as promiscuous.

Lead us not into temptation

In Matthew 6 Christ gave us a model prayer that includes the words "Lead us not into temptation" [or "Put us not to the test"; Revised English Bible] and "deliver us from the evil one" (verse 13).

Satan is the evil one Scripture describes as "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). That's significant terminology. When Paul wrote those words 2,000 years ago he understood that Satan can powerfully influence our attitudes, moods and emotions.

Today we can understand a completely different, additional significance of Paul's description of Satan as the prince of the power of the air. Television, radio and the Internet come to us through the air or via

know any better. This is the world they have grown up in, often without any spiritual instruction. Jesus taught us to "mourn" for this spiritually diseased and sin-sick world (Matthew 5:4) and the suffering, including hurt feelings, that people are subjected to through disobedience to or ignorance of God's laws of true love.

Jesus also taught us to pray to the Father "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). When God's Kingdom comes, the world will be "full of the knowledge of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:9).

That time is still ahead of us, but you can learn how to have a happy, lasting, loving marriage now—and how to avoid the emotional pain of casual relationships such as those depicted on *Temptation Island*. For sound biblical advice on how to have a successful marriage and family life, please write for our free booklets *Making Life Work* and *The Ten Commandments*. **GN**

Chaotic Start to a New Century: What Does It Mean?

by John Ross Schroeder

As 1999 wound down to its final days, observers around the world kept a close eye on air traffic, the stock markets, the Internet, in fact everything governed by electronics. Would the millennium bug strike after all and grind the world to a halt? Thankfully, it did not.

Yet as 2000 drew to a close and another year began, most of us were glad to see 2000 pass from the scene.

Good years and bad years affect the salaries of professional baseball players. Two or three bad ones in succession spell a salary cut or, worse, a trip down to the minor leagues. Someone asked Babe Ruth why he made more money than the president of the United States. "I had a better year than he did," quipped the legendary baseball star.

Britons found 2000 disappointing in more ways than one. In the United Kingdom, where I live, 2000 was a period of frustrating and expensive railway and motorway gridlock for parts of England, Scotland and Wales. Rail transport had its worst year in living memory. Serious accidents spotlighted structural problems in the nation's network of railroad tracks. Protesters staged massive demonstrations over skyrocketing fuel prices.

Elsewhere, 2000 focused us on a range of dispiriting images: the lingering uncertainty of the U.S. presidential election, the Mideast peace process in tatters, the rising presence in Austria of Joerg Haider and his Freedom Party, mayhem in Zimbabwe, even a threat to democracy in fabled Fiji. Many other cumulative problems similarly plagued the world in 2000.

A world of chaos

As a newspaper columnist put it: "World 2000 is a misshapen creation demographically, economically, culturally." Planet earth must feed more than six billion people while 800 million suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition. We probably have enough food to feed the world, but politics and greed prevent its proper distribution.

Part of our problem is that we live on the edge of chaos. Periodic threats such as the

millennium computer glitch emerge out of the global woodwork. Our lives revolve around computers, mobile phones and other technology. The more complex our world becomes, the greater our uncertainty. When things go wrong, such as a computer virus or a glitch in the stock market, a damaging chain reaction can begin.

Usually when a problem occurs we know about it. Thanks to 24-hour news coverage, the Internet and mobile phones, we can react

In many ways 2000 was not a good year. What does that tell us about where the world is headed?

instantly. A corporation's chief executive officer is almost never out of touch with the head office, whatever his location.

Yet sometimes when you try to fix a problem two or three others emerge unexpectedly. Minor hiccups can quickly turn into major problems. This is the way our world works.

We lurch from crisis to crisis. One problem fosters another, and the potential for planetwide meltdown seems always to lurk around the corner. Ours is an age of perpetual uncertainty. No wonder our medicine cabinets are full of pain relievers, tranquilizers and other drugs.

Order out of chaos

Of course, some degree of order and stability constantly corrects and counteracts the changing levels of chaos. The Bible reveals that God created human beings in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27). Though Satan struck at God's original creation, resulting in massive chaos, God restored a degree of light and order to an earth of perpetual darkness. (For details please request our free booklet *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*)

Given this wondrous legacy by our Maker, we know, to a certain extent, how to restore order and restrain chaos. The Scriptures tell us "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33), and God tells the Church to do all things decently and in order (verse 40). Yet, to fulfill His great purpose for human life, God has temporarily allowed a

surprising amount of chaos to stalk the earth.

An unseen influence

Satan is the prince of the power of the air, the unseen ruler of the world (Ephesians 2:2; John 12:31; 1 John 5:19). In due time Christ will depose him, and the restitution of God's government will soon follow.

But for now the devil influences people to produce all types of destructive chaos, not only in the world at large but in their personal lives.

For instance, members of warring, dysfunctional families attack each other, both verbally and physically, in front of mass audiences on television shows. Their lives are in disarray.

Yet God is the Sovereign Ruler over heaven and earth (Matthew 11:25). He inspired one of His servants, the apostle Paul, to write: "The whole created world is waiting with eager expectation for the Sons of God to be revealed . . . The created world itself would be freed from its enslavement to decay and receive the glorious freedom which belongs to the Children of God . . . The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed . . . The universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and is to enter upon the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:19-21, Revised English Bible).

This means the Creator masterminds and fashions something undeniably worthwhile out of the chaotic behavior of mankind. God promises to bring us a peaceful and prosperous new world, ending the present confusing chaos (Acts 3:19-21). God knows what our era is like. Jesus told His disciples that "in the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33).

The world awaits major change

Few chapters in the Bible explain the human condition better than Romans 8. Read verse 22 with the chaos of our age firmly in mind: "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."

How much more applicable are these words now than when Paul wrote them!

A new world is being formed out of the old. The Jerusalem Bible grasps the meaning of verse 22: “From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know it, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth.”

In a sense civilization is experiencing the pangs of childbirth. Ultimately God will liberate our planet from every disaster, every act of irrational violence, every contrary force that harms and holds humanity hostage.

However, for the present the twists and turns of our torturous, chaotic age affect even those who understand God’s purpose. God’s people are not immune from the stresses and strains of a deceptive society.

The J.B. Phillips Modern English translation expresses the point well: “It is plain for anyone with eyes to see that at the present time all created life groans in a sort of universal travail. And it is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the spirit are in a state of painful tension” (verses 22-23).

Yet a few brave souls continue to proclaim the true gospel Jesus Christ taught. Seeing the world around them struggling for survival, they are moved to do something to help.

Nothing can be more urgent than actively warning mankind of the world crisis that is coming on this entire globe, and helping all who are willing discover the right and sure path through these coming troubles.

The new year may be a good year, or it may be another bad one. It’s the general direction that counts. The potential for disaster in many quarters is always with us. We need to find and maintain a balanced biblical perspective. God assures His people that everything will turn out all right in the end (Luke 21:28). **GN**

Recommended Reading

What does the Bible reveal about the condition of the world and its future? Request the eye-opening booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom, Are*



We Living in the Time of the End? and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. For your free copies, contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

Under God

Continued from page 9

the structure of the government.

For example, historical sources show that these men’s concept of three branches of government was inspired by Isaiah 33:22: “For the LORD is our *Judge*, the LORD is our *Lawgiver*; the LORD is our *King* . . .” (emphasis added throughout). From this they derived the idea for the judicial, legislative and executive branches of government.

Their rationale for separation of powers into three branches of government came from Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (New International Version). Recognizing what the Bible said about the condition of the human heart, they did not want to vest too much power in the hands of one man or a small group.

They even decreed that government should exempt churches and other religious organizations from taxation based largely on Ezra 7:24: “. . . You have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants or other workers at this house of God” (NIV). The Congressional Record of Sept. 25, 1789, shows that a discussion of 2 Chronicles 6—Solomon’s dedication of the temple—led to declaring the first Thanksgiving holiday.

John Quincy Adams said in 1821 that “the highest glory of the American Revolution was this; *it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity*” (Federer, p. 18, emphasis added).

The Supreme Court, in a decision in an 1892 case, declared: “Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody *the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind*. It is impossible that it should be otherwise; and in this sense and to this extent *our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian*” (Federer, p. 599, emphasis added).

The court’s decision quoted 87 precedents, including quotations from and acts of the founding fathers and congressmen and officials of state governments. At the end of the list the justices said they could cite many more but that 87 should be sufficient to show that the nation’s laws are based on and include the teachings of the Bible.

Separation of church and state?

Today, however, we’re subjected to the mantra that the founding fathers advocated

separation of religious principles from the laws and the operation of the government. As we have seen, nothing could be further from the truth. These farsighted men knew that taking God out of the picture—separating biblical principles from government and society—leads to disaster.

President Washington, in his 1796 farewell address, reminded Americans of the source of their success and how to continue it. Several of his warnings—points he considered essential for the nation’s success—were overtly religious. He noted that the two foundations of political prosperity in America were religion and morality, and no one could be called a patriot “who should labor to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens” (Federer, p. 661).

That statement alone makes it hard to reconcile the modern concept of the separation of church and state with the belief and practice of the “father” of the country.

The state of the union

Washington repeatedly mentioned God and the need for His blessing as he left office and bade farewell to the new nation. A little more than 200 years later President Bill Clinton, in his farewell address, reflected on the condition of the nation. But he gave credit not to God, but to the American people, telling them:

“You have made our social fabric stronger, our families healthier and safer, our people more prosperous . . . Our families and communities are stronger . . . Our economy is breaking records . . . Incomes are rising across the board . . . America is in a strong position to meet the challenges of the future . . . [I’m] confident that America’s best days lie ahead.”

No doubt the United States is a more prosperous nation than it was a decade ago. The nation in recent years has seen its greatest economic growth. Although the economy slowed beginning in 2000, it remains an enormous and powerful economic engine.

But what of the nation’s social fabric? What about its families? Are they indeed healthier, as Mr. Clinton claimed? Although it is expedient for a leader to assume a positive and hopeful tone, we should also ask on what is such helpfulness based.

Without God, mere hope is built on sand. God is no longer welcomed as a part of society. He is relegated to the churches and not even allowed out in public.

As recently as 1957 an act of Congress

made “In God we trust” the United States’ national motto. Today such an act surely could not reach the floor of Congress, much less be accepted. A similar motto adopted by the State of Ohio, “With God all things are possible,” was declared unconstitutional last year because, said one of the ruling judges, it was “an endorsement of the Christian religion.” (See “Separation of Church and State?,” page 9.)

What has happened? How have we moved so far from a time when debates on the floor of the Congress, and even arguments before the Supreme Court, were settled by references to Scripture? Now even alluding to the Bible is cause for a case being thrown out of court.

Have courts’ decisions to alter national policy and separate God’s principles from their rulings had any effect on the fabric of America?

One of George Washington’s farewell warnings encourages eternal vigilance: “. . . Let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle” (Federer, p. 661).

Did Washington’s prediction come to pass? When we look at the 1963 Supreme Court decision that removed Bible classes and religious instruction from public schools as the point at which religious principles were effectively separated from public and educational policy, what do we see?

Statistics cited by David Barton in the 1993 video presentation *America’s Godly Heritage* show that pregnancies among girls ages 10-14 increased 553 percent from 1963 to 1987, and births to unwed mothers ages 15-19 have increased every year since 1963. Rates for both had been stable for decades before 1963. Infections of sexually transmitted diseases among high-school students shot up 226 percent in only 10 years.

Among American families, divorce rates, which had been declining before 1963, began to skyrocket, climbing 117 percent in 15 years. Single-parent families are up 140 percent, and unmarried but cohabiting couples are up 536 percent. Violent crimes rose an astounding 794 percent.

Which way is better?

Jeremiah 6:16 has good advice: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said,

‘We will not walk in it.’”

The constitution of the State of Delaware in 1776 stated: “Every person who shall be chosen a member of either house, or appointed to public office or place of trust . . . shall make and subscribe the following declaration . . . : ‘I, _____, do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore; I do acknowledge the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration’” (Federer, p. 203).

Other state constitutions made similar statements. This was consistent with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution because it did not require membership in a specific denomination.

The Pennsylvania and Vermont constitutions contained identical provisions that “each member [of the legislatures], before he takes his seat, shall make and subscribe the following declaration . . . : ‘I do believe in one God, the Creator and Governor of the universe, the rewarder of the good, and punisher of the wicked . . .’” (Federer, p. 504, 623). In other words, it was a public proclamation by a politician acknowledging that he would answer not only to voters but would be accountable to God for his performance in office.

Nations and citizens accountable to God

It was obvious to the founding fathers that an individual answers to God. But they believed that a *nation* also answers to God.

On the floor of the constitutional convention in 1787, the difference between individual and national accountability was explained. An individual answers to God in the future, in the resurrection. But, when a nation dies, it is *forever* dead.

So when does *it* answer to God? Virginia delegate George Mason, known as the father of the Bill of Rights, explained: “As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, so they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins, by national calamities” (Federer, p. 423). The founders believed a nation would directly answer to God for its sins and its rejection of Him.

As students of the Scriptures, they understood many of its lessons. They knew God was patient with the kingdom of Israel for more than 200 years. They understood He was long-suffering with the nation of Judah even longer. But eventually the day of reckoning for Israel and Judah arrived. The founding fathers wanted the United States to be a Christian nation—in substance, not just name—to

forestall a similar day of reckoning.

The prophet Daniel was no stranger to the rise and fall of kingdoms. He lived through the fall of Judah and the downfall of mighty Babylon. God prophesied through him that, at the end of our age, “there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time” (Daniel 12:1).

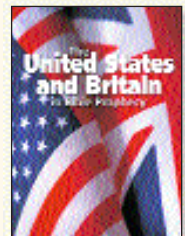
Other prophecies detail the rise of new international powers—and predict the calamitous fall of existing powers, including the United States, Britain and other British-descended nations.

Jesus Christ similarly predicted that the time of the end would be marked by “great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again.” He explained what He meant: Unless that time of world upheaval and terror is cut short, “*no living thing will survive . . .*” (Matthew 24:21-22, New International Version, Revised English Version). At that time the world’s problems will have grown so great that no power on earth could resolve them, not even a superpower.

God is patient both with individuals and nations. He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). When Americans consider whether they are still one nation under God, they would do well to heed not only the warnings of the founding fathers and biblical prophets but the lessons of history. Without a drastic change of direction to seek the One who has blessed the United States so greatly, the country will go the way of former powers. **GN**

Recommended Reading

What lies ahead for the United States, Britain and the other British-descended peoples? How do they measure up to the biblical values and standards they once professed? Does Bible prophecy tell us anything about where they are headed?



Be sure to request your free copy of our new book *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to discover the surprising answers. It’s available free for the asking from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can request or download it from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Who Killed Jesus Christ?

Why does anyone commit the ultimate act of violence against another human being? What have been the consequences of one of history's most unjust killings?

by Howard Davis

Many people, particularly in North America, accept that putting an incorrigibly wicked person to death is a justifiable act. Killing innocents, however, is universally condemned. Only a madman or someone saturated by evil would kill his own brother or friend. Crazy people do that sort of thing, not normal people like us.

History is full of stories of fascinating murders. Some are fictitious, such as the myth of Oedipus Rex, the ancient Greek tragedy in which Oedipus, king of Thebes, kills his father, Laius, unknowingly and marries his own mother. She in turn commits suicide when she discovers his identity.

Many murders are stranger and more fascinating than any fictional scenario. Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 B.C., assassinated by his close friend and ally, Brutus, on the steps of the Roman senate. That slaying ended a career that had changed the course of history. Henry VIII beheaded his second wife, Anne Boleyn, mother of Queen Elizabeth I. The hapless Anne was executed because, as the story goes, she did not bear Henry a male heir. He likewise had his fifth wife, Catherine Howard, put to death.

Some medieval and Renaissance popes had political and religious rivals murdered supposedly to preserve the peace of God—or, more likely, to assert political and religious control. One pope hired a hit man to try to assassinate Queen Elizabeth I to bring England back into the Catholic fold—for the peace of God, of course.

Then there is the profound account of the first murder in history. Cain, unable to control his jealousy, killed his brother, Abel, because God said Abel was right and Cain was wrong. Cain established an often-followed pattern for dealing with disagreements.

But no tragedy really compares with the miscarriage of justice that resulted in the

murder and execution of Jesus of Nazareth in A.D. 31. From the betrayal by a kiss from a trusted friend to Peter's denial of even knowing Him in His greatest hour of need, the facts of Jesus' death transcend any other in meaning and consequence.

Why did Jesus have to die? Why was He accused as a criminal? Who was responsible for His death? What does His 2,000-year-old murder—disguised as an execution—have to do with us?

A tragic death's tragic aftermath

The story of Jesus' murder is dramatic enough in itself. But an attempt to affix the blame for His death leads to an account of what has to be humanity's greatest spiritual depravity of all time.

According to the Scriptures, Jesus was both divine and human. He was both the Son of God and the Son of Man. His mother was Jewish, but His message of love was universal. Jesus loved His people, the Jews for whom he wept. He also loved the gentiles with whom He dealt, breaking the taboos of some rabbis of the day. As He told Nicodemus: "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).

An outrage of history is the justification the Nazis cited for the genocide of six million Jews less than 60 years ago. With no real respect for the teachings of Christ, Hitler and his followers declared that the Jewish race was solely and collectively responsible, in all generations, for killing the Son of God. This poisonous doctrine brainwashed the Führer's followers into believing the Jews should themselves be exterminated for murdering the Savior of mankind.

The idea of unique and total Jewish responsibility for Christ's death is not supported by the Bible. But, sadly, this concept did not originate

with the Nazis. For almost 2,000 years mainstream Christianity, Catholic and Protestant, took this same position—often accompanied by lethal brutality.

Religions bear responsibility

Thomas Lederer, a Roman Catholic scholar, wrote in 1998 that, "whether Hitler's unspeakably in-human acts against Jews were inspired by ethnic hatred, religious prejudice, and/or by a heinous economic system, Catholics around the world today are being called by Pope John Paul II to accept some accountability for the religious pretense used by Nazi hatemongers. According to the Pope, it was much easier for Christians to turn away from the reality of gas chambers and death camps with pre-conceptions of Jewish responsibility for Christ's death coursing through the veins of those transfused with early childhood Christian religious education.

"In the Christian world . . . the wrong and unjust interpretations of the New Testament relating to the Jewish people and their presumed guilt circulated for too long, contributing to feelings of hostility toward these people," said Pope John Paul II in an October 1997 address to theologians taking part in a Vatican symposium on the roots of anti-Semitism in Christian teachings. "This contributed to soothing consciences to the point that, when a wave of persecutions swept Europe fueled by pagan anti-Semitism . . . , the spiritual resistance of many was not that which humanity expected" ("2000 Years: Relations Between Catholics and Jews Before and After Vatican II," www.arthurstreet.com/2000YEARS.htm).

Race hate and violence against Jews or any other ethnic group were contrary to the doctrine of Jesus and His apostles. Far from being anti-Semitic, Jesus taught that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Furthermore, all over the ancient world Jesus' disciples taught their

Master's doctrine of love toward all.

They were themselves witnesses of the horrendous effects of violence. They had seen the Messiah brutalized and killed. They remembered Jesus' teaching about fighting. "My kingdom is not of this world," He said before the Roman governor Pilate. "If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

Deadly prejudice takes root

Within 50 years of the death of the last of the apostles, anti-Semitism had settled comfortably into the Christianity of Rome. Many of the traditions and teachings of Roman Christians differed from those of Jesus and the apostles. A major shift was taking place. Early theologians set in motion the ostensible justification for nearly 2,000 years of violence toward the Jewish people.

Around 150 the theologian Justin (ca. 100-165) said of the Jews: "The tribulations were justly imposed upon you, for you have murdered the Just One."

Sister Pista of Darmstadt, Germany, writes that "third-century Christian theologians, including Hippolytus and Origen, elaborated on this theory" of the Jews' unique responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ. By the fourth century "it was to dominate Christian thinking" ("The Guilt of Christianity Towards the Jewish People," www.kanaan.org/israel1.htm).

The proponents of virulent anti-Semitism were the intellectuals of postbiblical Roman Catholic, and subsequently Protestant, forms of Christianity.

Theologian Lederer again writes that "what seemed to exacerbate the rift between the Jews of the first century and Christians to a point of no return was the accusation of 'deicide,' that by conspiring with the Romans to crucify Jesus, the Jews who did not embrace the prophesied Messiah had actually killed God on earth" (Lederer).

The charge of killing God wasn't levied solely against those Jews who were alive in Christ's time, but against the entire Jewish race for all time. Sister Pista quotes the early Catholic theologian Chrysostom (344-407) as setting up the most murderous rationale for genocide. For their alleged deicide, the Jewish people's fate in being butchered was forever justified. For this crime there is "no expiation possible, no

indulgence, no pardon"; their "odious assassination of Christ" had brought this fate on them.

The torch passes

Protestants, by assuming the same perspective that guilt for Christ's murder lay exclusively in Jewish hands, often were as anti-Semitic as their Catholic predecessors. Martin Luther (1483-1546) initially defended the Jewish people, but later stated: "All the blood kindred of Christ burn in hell, and they are rightly served, even according to their own words they spoke to Pilate . . . Verily a hopeless, wicked, venomous and devilish thing is the existence of these Jews, who for fourteen hundred years have been, and still are, our pest, torment and misfortune. They are just devils and nothing more" (Sister Pista).

In 1542 Luther wrote: "Firstly, their synagogues should be set on fire . . . Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed . . . Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer-books and Talmuds . . . Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more . . .

"Fifthly, passport and travelling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews . . . Sixthly, they ought to be stopped from usury . . . Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the axe, the hoe, the spade, the distaff, and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses . . . We ought to drive the rascally lazy bones out of our system . . . Therefore away with them . . ." (Sister Pista).

Sister Pista observes: "Hitler and the Nazis found in medieval Catholic anti-Jewish legislation a model for their own, and they read and reprinted Martin Luther's virulently anti-Semitic writings. It is instructive that the Holocaust was unleashed by the only major country in Europe having approximately equal numbers of Catholics and Protestants. Both traditions were saturated with Jew-hatred."

The true Church and the Jews

Can any such views be found in the early record of the Church? Scripture records no hint of anti-Semitism in the biblical Church of God. On the contrary, the early Church identified deeply with Jews. The apostle Paul wrote: "I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed

from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (Romans 9:2-4).

If it were possible, Paul said, he would give up his eternal life if his death could somehow convert the Israelites. Anti-Semitism was abhorrent to Paul and the opposite of his faith and teaching.

Jesus said the law itself would not be done away "until heaven and earth pass away" (Matthew 5:18). An anti-Semitic hatred of "Jewish" elements of God's law came into focus only later as a new and popular form of Christianity moved away from its biblical roots.

Paul's instructions to the gentile church in Rome ran counter to the anti-Semitic teaching that later developed against the law God had given through Israel. Roman bishops later hatefully labeled as "Judaizers" those who followed the approach Paul had taken toward the law of God. Paul had written that we should keep the law because it "is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 2:13; 7:12).

But, far from any hint of anti-Semitism, the teaching of the biblical Church regarding responsibility for the death of Jesus was not focused on the Jewish people.

Notice what the Church said on this question "with one accord": "The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ. For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done" (Acts 4:26-28).

Those "gathered together" against Jesus included Judean King Herod (who was not Jewish by birth) and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, representative of the greatest power on the civilized earth, along with gentiles and "the people of Israel." The early Church understood that gentiles were responsible for Jesus' death as much as Jews.

In his writings Paul acknowledged that his countrymen "killed the Lord Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 2:14-15). At the same time we see he also held others responsible for Christ's death: ". . . We speak the



wisdom of God in a mystery, . . . which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

To Paul, the spiritual ignorance and blindness of rulers were responsible for the crucifixion. He referred primarily to gentile and Jewish political authorities, although Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem also bore responsibility.

Yet he knew that others, too, shared the guilt for the murder of the Son of God.

The biblical story

A few weeks before the Passover in 31 Jesus supernaturally resurrected his friend Lazarus at Bethany, a few miles from Jerusalem. Word of the miracle quickly reached the religious establishment of Jerusalem. The leaders there considered Jesus a threat. He had often criticized them for hypocrisy, and He had a huge number of followers, some of whom already considered Him the promised Messiah, who would save Israel.

“Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation’ . . . Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death” (John 11:47-53).

One of Christ’s disciples, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Him around midnight. The mob the chief priests had assembled took Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

In a series of manipulated trials in search of a crime, Jesus’ accusers trumped up charges of blasphemy against Him based on His statement that He was the Son of God. The Jewish leaders handed Jesus to Pilate, who, after sending Him to Herod, sought to have Him released because he could find no grounds for punishment.

But the Jewish authorities kept up the pressure. They manipulated another mob to pressure Pilate not to release Jesus—Pilate traditionally released a prisoner each Passover—but to have Him executed.

Pilate finally consented. He had his prisoner mercilessly scourged with whips, then condemned to death by crucifixion, a death reserved for the lowest criminals and enemies of Rome.

Around 9 in the morning the Roman soldiers drove spikes into Jesus’ hands

and feet and raised Him upright.

The people watched, many horrified, others in shock about this turn of events. Some mocked Him as He hung for six hours in the hot sun.

Then, “about the ninth hour” (3 p.m.), as the high priest began sacrificing the lambs for the Passover observance that evening, “Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matthew 27:46).

A final surge of pain wracked Jesus’ body. His heartbeat slowed, then stilled. A spectacular storm erupted, with lightning and thunder accompanied by an earthquake so great that, in the temple only a few thousand feet away, it tore the huge curtain separating the Holy of Holies from its court. The murder of the Son of God was the ultimate crime against humanity, by humanity and for humanity.

Why did He have to die?

The meaning of the events surrounding the death of Jesus Christ is revealed elsewhere in the Scriptures. We all, regardless of our race or religion, share in the blame for the death of the perfect, righteous Son of God, one who did not deserve to die.

Since all humanity shares the blame for Christ’s death, anti-Semitism is entirely unjustified. The beauty of His sacrifice is that all of the crimes of humanity are paid for by this spectacular act of selflessness.

It is by Christ’s sacrifice that the sins of every man, woman and child who has ever lived are paid for. The only Man who ever lived a perfect life surrendered that life for Pontius Pilate, Herod, the gentiles and all the Israelites, the Jewish people included. He died because of every sin and for every sinner before His generation and since. He died for Judas, who betrayed Him, Peter, who denied Him, the false witnesses who testified against Him, the priests who condemned Him and the Romans who tormented and executed Him. He died for all the violence, lying and hatred of the children of Israel and gentiles alike.

All the disciples fled from Him that day. Virtually all the others who earlier had followed Him also rejected Him that day. Most people today still reject Him. Although the world remains ignorant and unbelieving, we should understand His sacrifice and be moved to understanding and faith.

Who killed Jesus Christ?

In one of the most sublime prophecies of the Bible, the prophet Isaiah foretold who is responsible for the murder of Jesus Christ—and what that ultimately means for every human being.

“He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all . . . He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth . . .

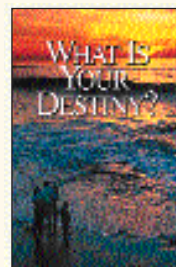
“By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, . . . because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:3-12).

Who killed Jesus Christ? You did. I did. We all did.

By the will of God, when we accept this fact, the way opens for us to share with Him His eternal Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. Are you interested? **GN**

Recommended Reading

To better understand Jesus’ sacrifice and what it means for us, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *The Gospel of the Kingdom and Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. All are free for the asking from any of our offices listed on page 2. You can also request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Lessons From Two Resurrections

John's Gospel details two instances in which individuals were resurrected from the dead. The first astonished its witnesses, but the second transformed Jesus' disciples' lives, giving them power and conviction to face trials, persecution and even martyrdom for an astounding truth.

by Bruce Gore

Lazarus lived with his two sisters in the little village of Bethany. They were close friends of Jesus of Nazareth, who often stayed with them when He visited Jerusalem.

But one day Lazarus became ill. "Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha . . . Therefore the sisters sent to [Jesus], saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick'" (John 11:1-3).

John describes this family as close, filled with love and peace. No doubt Christ enjoyed visiting these friends' home and relaxing after arduous journeys. Notice the sisters didn't even ask for Him to come. They knew that once He heard of Lazarus' illness He would journey to see His sick friend.

But Jesus didn't do what they expected. He deliberately waited (verses 6-7). In the meantime, the illness claimed Lazarus' life. By the time Jesus arrived Lazarus had been dead at least four days. Martha, in her anguish, met Christ as He arrived.

"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Christ responded to her in her grief by urging her to have faith and believe in Him. He even told her, "Your brother will rise again" (verses 21, 23).

Martha responded that she knew Lazarus would "rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (verse 24). She was aware of God's promises of a resurrection at the end of this age. (To better understand the promised resurrections, request your free booklets *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

However, she did not understand that God would use her brother's death to glorify

His Son, Jesus the Messiah. She did not believe she would ever see her brother again in this life.

Jesus again offered her encouragement. "I am the resurrection and the life" He told her. "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (verses 25-26).

Martha responded positively to some of what Jesus said: "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is

covered the mouth of the cave. Martha objected that Lazarus' body would have already begun to decay.

Jesus persisted, so "they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying" (verse 41). After a short prayer to His Father, Christ, in a loud voice, shouted, "Lazarus, come forth!" (verse 43).

From within the dark cave came the sounds of movement, and shortly the figure of a man struggling to walk appeared at the entrance. He was struggling because his

body was still wrapped in the strips of linen cloths in which he had been interred! "And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go.' Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him" (verses 44-45).

Word of this remarkable event quickly reached the religious authorities in Jerusalem. Perceiving Jesus

to be a threat to their positions and the stability of the Roman-dominated province, they plotted to do away with Him. Little did anyone realize the stage was being set for another death and resurrection, one far more significant than that of Lazarus.

An innocent man crucified

Around 3 o'clock on the afternoon of Passover day, the demands of the hostile crowd were fulfilled. Shortly after Jesus breathed His last, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two less-well-known followers of Jesus, quickly went into action. Both men believed Jesus' teachings, yet they kept their



Many believe the Garden Tomb is the site of Jesus Christ's entombment.

to come into the world" (verse 27). She may have been unsure about the rest of His meaning or what He was driving at. Regardless, she summoned her sister Mary, who was still mourning in their house.

When Mary came, "Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping." He "groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, 'Where have you laid him?'" (verses 33-34).

As was a common practice at the time, Lazarus' friends and family interred him in a cave. Then they covered its entrance with a large rock to keep out predators. Christ told those present to remove the stone that

belief secret out of fear of what their fellow Jews might do to them.

Perhaps they were ashamed of their earlier reticence. But now they showed the courage to step forward and claim Jesus' body and begin preparing it for proper, but hasty, entombment. It was Joseph of Arimathea who went to Pilate and asked for Christ's body and offered his own new tomb as a place of burial. Nicodemus assisted Joseph and contributed a vast amount of costly spices for His burial.

Since it was already around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, there was not much time before the "high day" (John 19:31), one of seven biblical annual sabbaths (Leviticus 23), began. They had much to do before sunset, at which time they would cease work to honor that Sabbath.

"Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day [for the Sabbath], for the tomb was nearby" (John 19:40-42).

Jewish burial practices

Because of the hot climate and religious customs, the Jews of that day would bury their dead quickly. They practiced neither cremation nor the Egyptian custom of embalming.

The poor would simply bury their dead in the ground, covering the grave with earth and stones. Others would use caves as a place of entombment, as happened with Lazarus. Those who could afford to would carve tombs in the sides of some of the many hills and mountains of the area. Such tombs would typically have several shelves carved in the stone on which the bodies of family members would be laid.

A body would normally be washed and then wrapped in a clean linen cloth or strips of cloth, similar to the way Egyptians wrapped their mummies. Families that were better off financially would put perfumes, ointment and spices on the body and between the wrappings of cloth. In some cases the spices and ointments would be thick enough to cause the outer cloths in time to harden somewhat like a cocoon.

Myrrh is specifically mentioned as used in the preparation of Christ's body. Myrrh is a pleasant-smelling resinous substance from several types of trees in Arabia and North

Africa. Usually a separate piece of cloth would be wrapped around the head of the deceased. If the death occurred just before a Sabbath, it was especially important that the body be taken to its resting place before the Sabbath began. The dead were not to be buried on the Sabbath.

Some of the women who followed Jesus also made plans to buy spices for the preparation of His body. They took note of His burial place and went to their homes to rest on the Sabbath. Again, this Sabbath was a high day (John 19:31), in this case the first day of Unleavened Bread, which fell on a Thursday that year. When the annual Sabbath was over, on the next day, Friday, they went into the city to purchase the spices and oils.

"And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid. Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 15:47; 16:1).

The women spent the remaining time on this Friday preparing the spices for the anointing of Christ's body. "Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56).

Notice that Mark mentions the women buying the spices *after* the Sabbath, and Luke states they prepared the spices *before* the Sabbath. There is no contradiction when we realize that two Sabbaths are involved in this three-day period. After resting on the weekly Sabbath, which ended Saturday at sunset, they went to the tomb the next morning to be there at first light. (To better understand the timing of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection—which were not on Friday and Sunday—request our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*)

An astounding discovery

When the women arrived at the tomb, they discovered the stone cover had been rolled back and the tomb was empty! They rushed to inform the other disciples. When they returned and saw the evidence of what had happened, they realized God had indeed raised Jesus Christ to a new life exactly as He had said would happen.

But what was the evidence? The most astounding discovery was not the empty tomb, nor the announcement of an angelic being proclaiming that "He is not here, He has risen!" It was something else. Among the Gospel writers, only John records what

that was. Let's read it in John 20.

"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the entrance, and ran to Simon Peter, and the other disciple [John], the one whom Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,' she said, 'and we do not know where they have laid him.'

"So Peter and the other disciple set out and made their way to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. He peered in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not enter. Then Simon Peter caught up with him and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the napkin which had been round His head, not with the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed" (verses 1-8, Revised English Bible).

What did the disciples see that made them believe? It wasn't simply an empty tomb. If the body had been stolen, as Mary of Magdala had assumed, all they would have seen was an empty tomb.

But there was more. Christ had told them several times He would die and rise again, but that prophecy hadn't sunk in. What Peter and John saw instantly convinced them not only that His body had not been stolen, but that God the Father had raised Jesus to glory and immortality! (Acts 3:13-15).

Powerful evidence left behind

Christ's wrapped body had lain on a rock shelf in the tomb. Yards of linen cloths had been wrapped around His body. Spices and thick myrrh were placed inside those wrappings, essentially pasting them together. What Peter and John saw as they peered into the dimness of the man-made cave was a neat, collapsed cloth form. If thieves had removed Jesus' body, if grave robbers had been at work, why should they leave these wrappings?

No tomb robber would have taken the time to unwrap the body and leave the burial cloths there, especially since they would have been in danger of being discovered by the guards the Roman authorities had posted there to prevent that very thing from happening (Matthew 27:62-66; 28:11-15).

But there was more. The cloths were not scattered; they were *still wrapped*. This resurrection was not like Lazarus', in which he was restored to live a few more years

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and would eventually die again. This was the resurrection of a *spirit* body (see 1 Corinthians 15:44).

What John saw made a profound impression on him. The grave clothes were not disheveled and disarranged, as would have been the case if someone had removed them or someone had struggled to free himself from the wrappings. The original Greek wording means they were lying there *still in their folds*, the clothes for the body where the body had been and the “napkin,” a smaller, separate piece of cloth, where the head had lain.

The whole point of John's description is that the grave clothes did not look as if they had been discarded or taken off. They were lying in their regular folds as if the body of Jesus *had simply evaporated out of them*.

The sight instantly penetrated John's mind. He realized what had happened—and he believed. It was not what Jesus had said so often that convinced John that Christ had risen. It was what he saw with his own eyes!

John's convincing details

Notice this comment from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* about Jesus' head covering being “wrapped together in a place by itself” there in the tomb (John 20:7, King James Version): “. . . ‘Wrapped together’ might suggest that this cloth had been ‘rolled’ or wrapped up and put in a certain part of the tomb at the Lord's resurrection, whereas, as with the body wrappings, the head cloth was lying as it had been ‘rolled’ round His head, an evidence, to those who looked into the tomb, of the fact of His resurrection without any disturbance of the wrappings either by friend or foe or when the change took place” (W.E. Vine, 1985, “Roll”). Jesus' glorified body had passed right through the cloth!

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, in its article “Resurrection of Jesus Christ,” states: “Significantly, the grave clothes were undisturbed. . . Long ago, Chrysostom pointed out that the grave robbers would not have stolen the body naked because of time restraints and other difficulties (‘it was buried with much myrrh, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead’ [Hom. (homily) 85 on Jn. 4]). The Gospels describe an orderly scene, not one of confusion that would have resulted had the grave clothes been torn from the body. That something extraordinary had taken place is shown by the fact that the beloved disciple ‘saw and

believed’ . . .” (1988, Vol. 4, p. 151).

In a footnote on John 20:7, the Companion Bible explains that John's original wording “implies that the cloth had been folded round the head as a turban is folded, and that it lay still in the form of a turban. The linen clothes also lay exactly as they were when swathed round the body. The Lord had passed out of them, not needing as Lazarus ([John] 11:44), to be loosed. It was this sight that convinced John (v. 8).”

We can share in Christ's resurrection

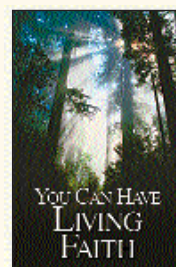
The apostle John recorded significant and crucial differences in these two resurrections. In the first, the stone covering of the tomb was removed so Lazarus could get out. The stone covering of the other was rolled back, not so Jesus could get out, but so the disciples could see inside and then draw the inescapable conclusion that Jesus had already gotten out!

Of the two who were entombed, the first had to have others remove the wrappings so he could walk about. The other did not, for He had *passed through His wrappings* in a body of spirit.

Later John made it clear that Christ's true followers will *likewise* be resurrected, that they will be like Him in a glorious resurrection to immortal spirit life: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! . . . Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3). **GN**

Recommended Reading

Would you like to better understand Jesus Christ's role in our salvation? What about the destiny you can fulfill with Him? Request the booklets *You Can Have Living Faith, What Is Your Destiny?* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. All are free from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Would Jesus Keep Easter?

For millions of people Easter Sunday is the most important religious observance of the year. But, if Jesus walked the dusty roads of Galilee today, would He keep Easter?

by Jerold Aust

Each spring the excitement of Easter fills the air. Many churches prepare special Easter programs about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. At home mothers color Easter eggs, and parents hide the brightly colored holiday symbols around the house and lawn so that, come Easter morning, their children can excitedly hunt for them.

Stuffed Easter bunnies and chocolate rabbits are seen everywhere in the weeks leading up to this major religious observance. Then there are the Easter sunrise services, where churchgoers gather to hear about Jesus' resurrection and honor that miraculous event by watching the sun come up in the east.

But what do colored eggs and the Easter rabbit have to do with Jesus Christ's resurrection? How did these seemingly irreligious symbols come to be associated with that event?

Can we find any historical or biblical record of Jesus or His disciples keeping Easter or teaching parents and children to dye eggs and display bunnies on this holiday? Did Jesus or His apostles instruct any of His followers to meet to honor His resurrection at sunrise on Easter Sunday—or at any other time, for that matter?

If Easter were not sanctioned by Jesus or instituted by His apostles, then where did Easter come from? In other words, if Jesus were living among us as a flesh-and-blood human being, would He keep Easter or encourage others to do so?

Answers to these questions are readily available. Some may take a little research, but they become clear when we look into history and the Bible.

The apostles' record on Easter

As surprising as this may sound, nowhere in the New Testament can you find any reference to Easter. In the King James Version of the Bible (in Acts 12:4) you do



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find the word *Easter*; but it is a blatantly erroneous mistranslation that has been corrected in virtually every other Bible translation. The original Greek word there is *pascha*, correctly translated *Passover* in virtually every modern version of the Bible everywhere it appears in the Scriptures. It refers to the biblical Passover originally instituted when God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-14).

The original apostles, from the inception of the New Testament church to near the end of the first century, when the apostle John died, left absolutely no record of keeping Easter or teaching others to do so. From Jesus to John not one of the apostles gave even the slightest hint of keeping or advocating the observance of what we know today as Easter Sunday.

However, that doesn't mean the early Church did not hold to specific religious observances. The apostle Paul, some 25

years after Jesus' death and resurrection, spoke plainly to members of the church at Corinth that they should continue to keep the *Passover* as Christ commanded. Paul wrote: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:23-27).

Paul was concerned that the Church members in Corinth observe the Passover in the right way, with reverence and proper comprehension of its meaning.

The writings of Paul and Luke, his traveling companion and author of the book of Acts, regularly mention keeping the weekly Sabbath day and the biblical festivals listed in Leviticus 23. But Easter is conspicuously absent (1 Corinthians 5:6-8; 16:8; Acts 2:1-4; 13:42, 44; 17:1-3; 18:4; 20:6, 16).

Since Easter wasn't introduced by Jesus or the apostles, where did it come from, and how did it come to be such an accepted part of traditional Christianity?

The origin of Easter

It's not that difficult to trace the surprising origins of Easter and what it really represents. Many scholarly works show that Easter is a pre-Christian religious holiday, one that was created and developed long before Jesus' time and carried forward to the modern era through such empires as

Babylon, Persia, Greece and finally Rome.

Vine's *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* notes: "The term 'Easter' is not of Christian origin. It is another form of *Astarte*, one of the titles of the Chaldean [Babylonian] goddess, the queen of heaven. The festival of Pasch [Passover] held by Christians in post-apostolic times was a continuation of the Jewish feast . . . From this Pasch the pagan festival of 'Easter' was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt pagan festivals to Christianity" (W.E. Vine, 1985, "Easter").

Alexander Hislop in his book *The Two Babylons* (1959) explores the origins of Easter. He discovered that a form of Easter was kept in many nations, not necessarily only those that professed Christianity. "What means the term Easter itself? . . . It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than *Astarte*, one of the titles of *Beltis*, the queen of heaven, whose name, as pronounced by the people of Nineveh, was . . . *Ishtar*" (p. 103).

Easter and the practices associated with it can be traced back to various pagan rituals. Hislop explains that "the forty days' abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshippers of the Babylonian goddess" (Hislop, p. 104). In Egypt a similar 40-day period of abstinence "was held expressly in commemoration of Adonis or Osiris, the great mediatorial god" (Hislop, p. 105).

A pre-Christian spring festival

How, then, did 40 days' abstinence come to be associated with a resurrection? Hislop continues: "Among the pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz, which was celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing" (Hislop, p. 105).

Tammuz was a chief Babylonian deity and husband of the goddess *Ishtar*. Worship of Tammuz was so widespread in ancient times that it even spread into Jerusalem. In Ezekiel 8:12-18 God describes that worship and calls it an abomination—something

repugnant and disgusting to Him.

The Babylonians held a great festival every spring to celebrate Tammuz's death and supposed resurrection many centuries before Christ walked the earth (see "The Resurrection Connection," below). Hislop comprehensively documents evidence that shows Easter's origins precede the modern Christian holiday by more than 2,000 years!

Hislop cites the fifth-century writings of Cassianus, a Catholic monk of Marseilles, France, on the subject of Easter's being a pagan custom rather than a New Testament observance. "It ought to be known that the observance of the forty days (i.e., the observance of Lent) had no existence, so long as the perfection of that primitive Church remained inviolate" (p. 104).

Sir James Frazer describes Easter ceremonies entering into the established church: "When we reflect how often the Church has skillfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith on the old stock of paganism, we may surmise that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted

The Resurrection Connection

How did worship of an ancient god and goddess come to be associated with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Although the details are lost in time, a closer look at the ancient mythology surrounding their worship will help us understand how pagan practices have survived in popular Easter customs.

Two of the earliest recorded deities were the Babylonian fertility god Tammuz and the goddess *Ishtar*. Every year Tammuz "was believed to die, passing away from the cheerful earth to the gloomy subterranean world . . ." (Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1993, p. 326).

The seasonal cycle came to be connected with Tammuz's supposed annual death and resurrection. "Under the names of Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, and Attis, the peoples of Egypt and Western Asia represented the yearly decay and revival of life . . . which they personified as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead. In name and detail the rites varied from place to place: in substance they were the same" (Frazer, p. 325).

Many of these rites revolved around inducing the return of Tammuz from the dead. One of these ceremonies is recorded in Ezekiel 8:14, where Ezekiel saw in vision an abominable sight: women "weeping for Tammuz" at the very temple of God.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary says regarding this verse: "Tammuz, later linked to Adonis and Aphrodite by name, was a god of fertility and rain . . . In the seasonal mythological cycle, he died early in the fall when vegetation withered. His revival, by the wailing of *Ishtar*, was marked by the buds of spring and the fertility of the land. Such renewal was encouraged and celebrated by licentious fertility festivals . . . The women would have been lamenting Tammuz's death. They perhaps were also following the ritual of *Ishtar*, wailing for the revival of Tammuz" (Ralph Alexander, Vol. 6, 1986, pp. 783-784).

As worship of Tammuz and *Ishtar* spread to the Mediterranean region, including the territory of biblical Israel, the pair came to be

worshiped under other names: Baal and *Astarte* (*Ashtoreth*), *Attis* and *Cybele*, and *Adonis* and *Aphrodite*. God heatedly condemned the sensual, perverted worship of Baal and *Astarte* (Judges 2:11-15; 3:7-8; 10:6-7; 1 Kings 11:4-6, 31, 33; 16:30-33; 22:51-53).

In ancient worship we find the mythology that would ultimately link these ancient customs to Christ's death and resurrection. Says Alan Watts: "It would be tedious to describe in detail all that has been handed down to us about the various rites of Tammuz, Adonis, . . . and many others, . . . But their universal theme—the drama of death and resurrection—makes them the forerunners of the Christian Easter, and thus the first 'Easter services.' As we go on to describe the Christian observance of Easter we shall see how many of its customs and ceremonies resemble these former rites" (*Easter: Its Story and Meaning*, 1950, p. 58).

In its various forms, worship of Tammuz-Adonis-Attis spread around the Roman Empire including to Rome itself. As Christianity spread through the empire, religious leaders apparently merged customs and practices associated with this earlier "resurrected" god and applied them to the resurrected Son of God.

In this respect Easter followed the pattern of Christmas in being officially sanctioned and welcomed into the church. "Motives of the same sort may have led the ecclesiastical authorities to assimilate the Easter festival of the death and resurrection of their Lord to the festival of the death and resurrection of another Asiatic god which fell at the same season. Now the Easter rites still observed in Greece, Sicily and southern Italy bear in some respects a striking resemblance to the rites of Adonis . . . The Church may have consciously adapted the new festival to its heathen predecessor for the sake of winning souls to Christ" (Frazer, p. 359).

(Excerpted from *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* For your free copy, see the box at the end of the main article.)



upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis [the Greek name for Tamuz], which . . . was celebrated in Syria at the same season” (*The Golden Bough*, 1993, p. 345).

Why eggs and rabbits?

What about other customs associated with Easter? One Catholic writer explains how eggs and rabbits came to be connected with Easter. You will quickly notice an absence of any link or reference to the Holy Bible when it comes to these mythic rituals:

“The egg has become a popular Easter symbol. Creation myths of many ancient peoples center in a cosmogenic egg from which the universe is born. In ancient Egypt and Persia friends exchanged decorated eggs at the spring equinox, the beginning of their New Year. These eggs were a *symbol of fertility* for them because the coming forth of a live creature from an egg was so surprising to people of ancient times. Christians of the Near East adopted this tradition, and the Easter egg became a religious symbol.

Try as some might, there is no way to calculate three days and three nights from late Friday afternoon to Sunday morning.

It represented the tomb from which Jesus came forth to new life” (Greg Dues, *Catholic Customs and Traditions*, 1992, p. 101; emphasis added).

Like eggs, rabbits came to be linked with Easter because they were potent symbols associated with ancient fertility rites. “Little children are usually told that the Easter eggs are brought by the Easter Bunny. Rabbits are part of pre-Christian fertility symbolism because of their reputation to reproduce rapidly. The Easter Bunny has never had a religious meaning” (Dues, p. 102).

Honest Bible scholars freely admit that Jesus never sanctioned this pre-Christian holiday, nor did His apostles. Not until Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicaea in 325—almost three centuries after Jesus was killed and rose again—did Easter replace the Passover, the biblical ceremony Jesus and the apostle Paul told Christians to observe.

Says the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: “A final settlement of the dispute [whether and when to keep Easter or Passover] was one among the other reasons which led Constantine to summon the council of Nicaea in 325 . . . The decision of the council was unanimous that Easter was to be kept on Sunday, and on the same Sunday throughout the

world, and ‘that none should hereafter follow the blindness of the Jews’” (11th edition, pp. 828-829, “Easter”).

Constantine’s decision was a fateful turning point for Christianity. Those who remained faithful to the instruction of Jesus and the apostles would be outcasts, a small and persecuted minority (John 15:18-20). A vastly different set of beliefs and practices—recycled from ancient pre-Christian religions but dressed in a Christian cloak—would take hold among the majority.

Would Jesus keep Easter?

Since the pagan symbols of eggs and rabbits were adopted by the Catholic Church centuries after Christ’s ascension, should Christians keep this holiday or encourage others to observe it?

To answer that question let’s go back to the title of this article, “Would Jesus Keep Easter?”

He certainly could have told us to. So could the apostles, whose teaching and doctrine are preserved for us in the book

of Acts and the epistles written by Paul, Peter, James, Jude and John. But nowhere do we find a hint of support for Easter or anything remotely resembling it. What we do find, as pointed out earlier, is clear instruction from Jesus and Paul to keep the Passover and other biblical—and truly Christian—observances.

Holy Scripture does not support this pre-Christian holiday and in fact condemns such celebrations. Because Scripture condemns pagan practices and the worship of false gods (Deuteronomy 12:29-32), we know that God the Father and Jesus His Son have no interest in Easter and do not approve of it.

Jesus, in fact, is diametrically opposed to religious rituals that supposedly honor Him but in reality are rooted in worship of false gods. He makes clear the difference between pleasing God and pleasing men: “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men . . . All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition’” (Mark 7:6-9, emphasis added throughout).

Easter is a tradition of men, not a com-

mandment of God. But it’s more than that. It is a pagan tradition of men that, like other traditions involved in the worship of false gods, is abhorrent to the true God. Jesus and His apostles would never sanction its observance because it mingles paganism with supposedly Christian symbolism and ritual. It is rooted in ancient pre-Christian fertility rites that have nothing to do with Jesus.

In reality, most of the trappings associated with Easter reveal that the holiday is actually a fraud pawned off on unsuspecting and well-intentioned people. God wants us to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24), not to recycle ancient customs used to worship other gods.

Even the timing of the events used to justify celebrating Jesus’ resurrection on a Sunday morning—that He was crucified on the afternoon of Good Friday and resurrected before dawn on Sunday morning—are demonstrably false, as an examination of the Scriptures shows.

For those who want concrete proof that He was indeed the Messiah and Savior of mankind, Jesus made a promise: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be *three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*” (Matthew 12:39-40).

Try as some might, there is no way to calculate three days and three nights from late Friday afternoon to Sunday morning before daylight. At most this amounts to barely more than a day and a half. Either Jesus was mistaken, or those who say He was crucified on a Friday and resurrected on a Sunday are mistaken. You can’t have it both ways.

Jesus’ instructions remain consistent

If Jesus walked the dusty roads of Galilee today, would He keep Easter? Certainly not. But He would be consistent because He does not change (Hebrews 13:8). For instance, He would keep the annual Passover in the same manner as He instructed His followers to keep it (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:15-17). And Jesus would observe the Days of Unleavened Bread in the way He inspired Paul to instruct early Christians (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Anyone who wants to be right with God, who wants to be a true disciple of Christ, the Master Teacher, will carefully examine his beliefs and practices to see whether they

Continued on page 31

The Perfect Prophetic Storm

The Bible prophesies a time when two earthshaking events will combine to overwhelm humanity. What are these two events, these prophetic storms?

by Mario Seiglie

The *Perfect Storm* is the title of a recent movie based on a true story about a hapless crew on a fishing vessel that sailed into the combined force of a hurricane and another major storm. Not surprisingly, the ship and its crew members perished, disappearing in the storms' fury. Perhaps if they had faced only one of the storms they could have survived, but the power of two massive and deadly forces was simply too much for the crew to handle.

The movie stressed the unusual combination of factors that led to the tragedy. The crewmen had abundant experience, and the ship had weathered many other storms. They thought their well-equipped craft could ride out just about anything nature threw their way. But, when they faced the fury of two storms, their efforts proved futile.

The tragedy is an apt analogy for events the Bible prophesies will occur when a combination of forces is unleashed on the world in the time of the end. Just as the seasoned fishing crew assumed it could handle whatever came its way, many people assume society can handle any crisis the future brings—through scientific achievement, economic growth, military prowess and political cunning.

Political and religious leaders want their followers to believe they are amply equipped to weather any dangers. "We have been through two world wars, epidemics, the Great Depression and social upheavals," they reason, "and we have survived them all. Now that we have even more technological tools at our disposal, we can prevail over any crisis."

Thus society can lull itself into a false sense of security, thinking the world will never face a "perfect storm" of deadly events.

Prophecy enters the scene

Yet biblical prophecy foretells what we might call the perfect prophetic storm. It will come at a time when two great events will converge to overwhelm humanity.

Jesus Christ prophesied that a combination of forces would lead to what He called "great tribulation, *such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be*" (Matthew 24:21, emphasis added throughout).

The apostle Paul described this same future time: "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then *sudden destruction comes upon them*, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. *And they shall not escape*" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

Two incredible events will bring about the coming perfect prophetic storm. What are they? Can we avoid the brunt of their consequences?

We can be thankful that God's Word not only describes what will surely happen but shows us how to spiritually prepare for the onslaught of lethal events.

As Paul explains: "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober . . . For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (verses 4-9).

What are the double prophetic storms destined to unleash the devastating end-time events from which mankind as a whole will not escape?

The first prophetic storm

In Revelation 13:1-3 Christ reveals to John the first of these two storms, the rise of the prophesied "beast":

"Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a *beast* rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion.

The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast" (emphasis added).

Much of the symbolism here is explained in other parts of Revelation. A similar prophetic beast appears in Revelation 17 but is ridden by a woman. "And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns" (verse 3).

What does this beast represent? "Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads [of the beast] are *seven mountains* on which the woman sits, and they are *seven kings*; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while . . . And the ten horns which you saw are *ten kings*, who have not yet received a *kingdom*, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour . . . *These will wage war against the Lamb*, and the Lamb will overcome them" (Revelation 17:9-14, New American Standard Bible).

Here we read that each of the seven heads is a symbol of a king and his kingdom (verses 9-10). Elsewhere in the Bible a mountain is also used as a symbol of a kingdom and its king (Isaiah 2:1-3; Daniel 2:35, 45). The last head, the seventh kingdom, is destined to be of short duration.

As the final, seventh head of the beast power nears, "five [kings will] have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come" (Revelation 17:10). Since the last head of this beast, along with 10 rulers, "will make war with the Lamb [Christ]," the previous six kings must have ruled in former ages (verse 14). As the end time approaches, the seventh head of the 10-horned beast is symbolic of the kingdom that will be headed by a ruler with 10 kings who will "receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast" (verse 12).

This first storm system is prophesied to

astound the world by its power, which comes not so much from human might or cunning as from “the dragon,” another title for Satan (Revelation 12:9). As Revelation 13:2 explains, “the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.”

As the Bible describes, God will allow the final rebellion of mankind to take place before He sends His Son, Jesus the Messiah, to reign on earth: “For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled” (Revelation 17:17).

The second storm

The second storm system foretold for the end time is a second beast system, described in Revelation 13:

“Then I saw *another beast* coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a *dragon*. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived” (verses 11-14).

Just as with the first system, the devil is behind the power of the second beast and gives its leader powers to deceive the world. Impressive miracles by the second beast will help persuade people to support and obey the first beast.

The second beast has horns like a lamb; that is, it seems to be as meek as a lamb but speaks “like a dragon” (verse 11), thus revealing the satanic origin of its power.

The two beasts are “the beast” and “the false prophet,” respectively. They are allies at the end time, with the first governing and warring while the other manipulates the people of the world through religion.

“And I saw *the beast*, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then *the beast* was captured, and with him *the false prophet* who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast . . .” (Revelation 19:19-20).

What kind of a system does the false prophet head? Biblically, the description

false prophet refers to a religious figure deceitfully claiming to represent God (see Deuteronomy 13:1-5 to understand the difference between a true and a false prophet).

Moreover the woman who rides the beast is the symbol of a false religious system based in a great city that governs much of the world. “And the woman whom you saw is that great city which *reigns* over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:18). So the false religious system will carefully orchestrate an alliance to rule with the kings of the earth.

To wield such influence and power, the system must be of enormous size and wealth, since the world’s rulers will permit her to reign with them. This is precisely what the Bible reveals: “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (verse 15). It will truly be an international religious, political and economic system spanning many nations and languages.

Protection and persecution

When these two leaders appear on the world scene, they will astonish the world, and time will be short. Soon after their appearance, persecution against the true followers of Jesus will increase. The Bible reveals through its symbols that some of the faithful will be miraculously protected while others will not.

Christ warns His disciples that some of them will be martyred (Matthew 24:9). So, although there is a promise of protection, some of Christ’s brethren are destined to die as His faithful witnesses.

God gives a clear promise of protection for some in His true Church (Revelation 12:13-14). On the other hand, verse 17 shows us that Satan wars against the woman “and her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ,” an obvious reference to other believers enduring Satan’s wrath.

Christ knows it will be difficult to remain faithful during the end time, so He encourages His Church to hold steady. “Behold, I am coming quickly! *Hold fast* what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11).

Paul also tells us that maintaining “the love of the truth”—holding to the teachings of the Bible as opposed to the false teachings of the coming great religious system—will be crucial in the last days. He warns that some will be lost in the coming storm “because they did not receive *the love of the truth, that they might be*

saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

Another prophecy advises us that when the storm finally arrives *it will be too late to prepare for it*. “And he said to me, ‘Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. *He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still . . .*’ Blessed are those who do *His commandments*, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:10-14).

According to this scripture, eventually the world will divide into two distinct groups: those who are obedient to God and keep His Commandments to the end and those who will remain stubbornly disobedient. Christ wants His people to be spiritually prepared, watching world events so the perfect prophetic storm will not take God’s faithful by surprise.

“ . . . Take heed to yourselves,” Jesus warned, “lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you *unexpectedly*. For it will come *as a snare* on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted *worthy to escape* all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36).

Let’s be sure we heed God’s counsel. Take His warnings to heart. Begin seeking Him and preparing now so you can weather the coming perfect prophetic storm. **GN**

Recommended Reading

To better understand the dramatic events that will shape your world, be sure to request your free copy of *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.



You’ll learn much more about the prophetic storms the Bible tells us are sure to come on all the world.

Also be sure to request *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to see where the major English-speaking nations fit in Bible prophecy. Both booklets are free from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you may request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

Planning for Life

Part
One

Develop a Plan

by Ken Freyberg

Where will you be a year from now? What about two years? What will you be doing? Will you be in high school? Will you be at a college or university by then?

What about in 10 years? What do you want to be doing? How much thought have you given to planning your career? If you will be working by then, what kind of job do you envision? Do you see yourself working for minimum wage in the fast-food industry? Or do you want to do something more meaningful, challenging and fulfilling?

It's natural to assume that the best will happen to us. We like to think that, when it comes our time to get a job, whatever we find ourselves doing will be interesting and productive and give us a satisfying sense of accomplishment. We like to believe we'll have an appreciative boss or that perhaps we'll be our own boss and that our work environment will be one of our own making.

Who's in charge?

But things don't normally turn out that way. Most people *drift* from year to year. Some have goals and work toward them. But, more often than not, people tend to float along, allowing the currents of life to push them in one direction and then the other. Like a leaf bobbing along in a swiftly moving stream, they allow themselves to be at the mercy of outside forces.

It's true that life throws us curves. External forces converge on us, pushing us one direction or the other. At times life demands that we make choices about our future, and sometimes it seems as if we are limited in our options. But we *do* have choices.

A leaf carried along on a stream has no choice. It will go where the currents carry it. But God gave us minds and the ability to make choices. In fact, He tells us we *must* make choices (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Years ago I read a book titled *If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else*. It makes such a simple yet profound statement.

To this day I think of that title often, especially when I read scriptures such as Proverbs 22:3 that address the importance of looking ahead and watching where you're going. That verse tells us that "a prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished."

Only by looking beyond your next step

Unlocking the gates

If you Don't Know Where You're Going talks about the inevitable fact that we come to forks in the road where we must make choices. The forks are like gates. Unless you have the skills, education and developed abilities you need to unlock the gates, you'll be forced to go in a less-desirable direction. Even if you'd really like to explore what lies along the path beyond a particular gate, you might find yourself locked out.

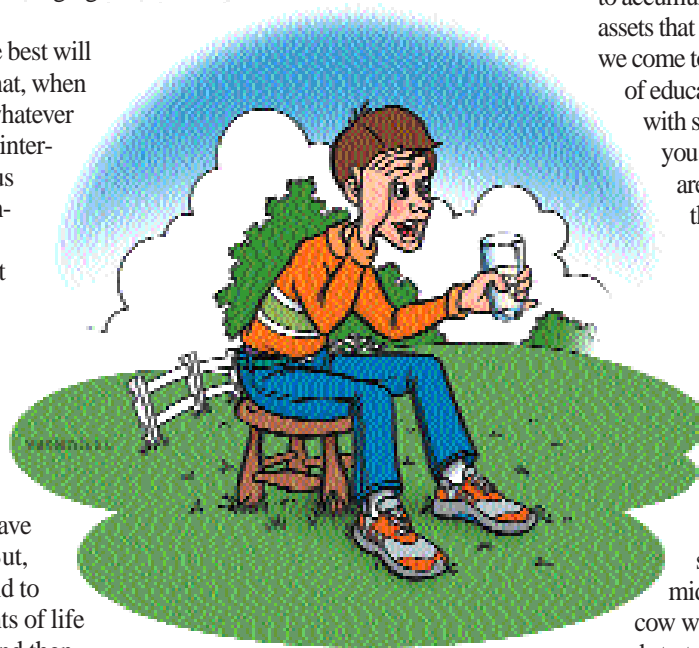
The author's point is that each of us needs to accumulate and cultivate the personal assets that will allow us to open gates when we come to them. Those assets take the form of education and experience combined with skills and aptitudes. As a minimum you need to know what your assets are, what you can do well or have the best possibility of doing well.

Whether you can choose certain paths will depend for the most part on you and your choices. It will depend on whether you have the required personal assets. That means you must take the initiative to discover and develop them. As the book concludes: "People who want milk should not seat themselves on a stool in the middle of a field in hopes that the cow will back up to them." Each person needs to take the initiative to improve his chances for success in life. That's why planning is so important.

Planning or dreaming?

Such planning goes beyond simply dreaming. Dreaming about success is a start, but it does little to bring your dream to reality. It doesn't develop any assets that will help you unlock gates when you're faced with choices.

The critical difference between dreaming and planning is that planning takes you *beyond* the dream. It involves working toward a means of making the dream reality.



"People who want milk should not seat themselves on a stool in the middle of a field in hopes that the cow will back up to them."

can you keep from being washed along by the currents of life. By looking farther ahead you greatly improve your chances of steering away from some of the troubles that could be waiting for you.

To improve your ability to look ahead in the road of life and prepare yourself, you'll have to do some thinking and dreaming about the future.

For example, a young person interested in aviation can dream about flying. He can imagine what it would be like to soar like a bird above the clouds. He can dream of how it would feel to have the freedom to go in any direction. But his dreams will never become reality unless he takes steps to make them come true.

It takes effort to move a dream into the category of a plan. Such a plan calls for research followed by thoughtful action. It involves finding and talking to people in the aviation field. It requires finding what steps need to be taken and how to obtain money for flying lessons



Those who make firm plans and prepare themselves will find they are more like a person with a paddle in a canoe in a stream. They won't find themselves at the mercy of the currents.

or to attend a school of aeronautics.

It's work, but it's worth it

Make no mistake. It takes work to properly prepare yourself. That's one reason so many people find it easier to dream than to create and develop a plan for life.

Proverbs 13:11 sums up the benefit of hard work: "Wealth from gambling quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows" (Living Bible). Other passages also point out the benefit of work and that, in the long run, mere talk without work doesn't help (Proverbs 14:23; 28:19).

Creating a plan for life is well worth the effort. It will help you discover, develop and accumulate the assets that will allow you to gain more control over your future by removing some of the limitations on your prospective choices.

It's easy simply to drift through life. But anyone who chooses that route is like a leaf

at the mercy of the currents in a stream.

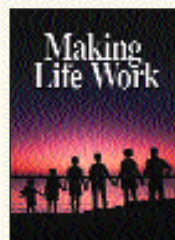
On the other hand, those who make firm plans and prepare themselves will find they are more like a person with a paddle in a canoe in that same stream. They won't find themselves at the mercy of the currents. They'll have the ability to choose the direction they want to go as they travel the river of life. Yes, it takes effort, but it is well worth it in the end.

Where will you be in a few years? The answer to that question is up to you. There's an old saying: You have to take life as it happens, but you should try to make it happen the way you want to take it.

Don't drift. Plan for your life so you can shape it. We'll discuss this some more next time. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Looking for some good advice? You can't do any better than the Bible. It's loaded with practical guidance to help you achieve success in your career, friendships, finances, family and every other aspect of life.



We've prepared this guide, *Making Life Work*, to help you discover the Bible's principles for success. For your free copy contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our Web site at: www.gnmagazine.org.



Want to Learn More?

If you like our "Just for Youth" feature in *The Good News*, take a look at our new E-magazine, *Youth United*, at www.youthmagazine.org.

This magazine is specially written for our younger *Good News* audience. Each issue is packed with helpful, eye-opening articles to help today's teens and young adults get the most out of life—both now and in the future.



You'll uncover lots of fascinating facts, meet many interesting people, discover what's really going on behind the scenes in our world, learn answers to your questions and find practical, down-to-earth guidance on all kinds of subjects.

Check out www.youthmagazine.org today—you'll be amazed at all the fascinating things you'll discover!





Letters From Our Readers

The Bible and archaeology

I would like to thank you for *The Good News*. I am so glad to read such rewarding items. My favorite has to be "The Bible and Archaeology." I am slowly turning into a believer despite all the sadness in my life. There were some dark times in which it was so easy to lose vision and faith.

Reader from New South Wales, Australia

I've enjoyed *The Good News*. Being incarcerated and receiving your magazine brings a certain level of encouragement to me. I always find articles relating to something going on in my life, and that lifts my spirits. My favorite parts of your magazine are "The Bible and Archaeology" and "Profiles in Faith."

J.D., Abilene, Texas

"When Will the Middle East Find Peace?"

I discovered *The Good News* magazine in a doctor's waiting room yesterday and appreciate its tone and content. I especially enjoyed the lead article on the Middle East. As a Muslim, I appreciate non-Muslim perspectives that acknowledge the value of Islam and represent it fairly.

J.K., Internet

"The Tiny Pill that Changed the World"

I'm confused about a paragraph in your article "The Tiny Pill that Changed the World." It reads: "... In marriage two people come together to form one economic unit. Both should contribute to the financial stability of the marriage."

I can't say that I have ever contributed to the financial stability of the marriage. On the other hand, I have a job that requires much more than what any salary could bring. I stay home and take care of my husband. Instead of handing my children over to day-care centers and nannies to raise, I stay home with them too.

I am so tired of church organizations subtly introducing these evil implications that if a woman does not contribute financially to a marriage she is worthless. To tell the truth, this is one organization I would not expect to see this from, however many times I have been disappointed in the past. Unfortunately for our children and

husbands, unfortunately for the family unit in general, I am in the very slim minority in the world we live in.

J.G., Houston, Texas

We regret that this statement left a wrong impression. We did not intend to imply that a wife should always seek employment outside the home. We purposefully did not state that both husband and wife should contribute to the family's income, rather that both should contribute to the family's financial stability. As you so clearly pointed out, there are many other ways to contribute to the financial stability of a marriage. Financial stability is a shared responsibility for both parties.

As we state in our booklet *Managing Your Finances*: "When the extra expenses of child care, transportation, additional clothing, etc., are taken into consideration, some families find there is little difference in their household incomes when one of them remains at home to care for their children. Though some may view this as old-fashioned, it is precisely the approach assumed in the Bible." We encourage readers to write for their free copy of this important booklet.

The traditional home, in which the woman plays the main supportive role in the family as wife and mother, best meets the biblical ideal. We also realize that, in all too many cases, regrettable circumstances have forced reluctant wives into the labor market even while their children are growing up.

I enjoyed your article about the pill. I agree with everything you say, but it seemed just a bit idealistic. No matter what the home life, sometimes outside influences or peer pressure can lead a young girl into sex, even in a Christian home. Even if it's just once she'll likely be burdened with a pregnancy that she is not prepared for mentally and physically. Yes, I know that her sex partner should have used some form of protection for AIDS or pregnancy, but in the heat of the moment a lot of young lovers don't use protection.

Personally I think it would be better for her not to get pregnant at all than to have to deal with an abortion. One is birth control,

the other is murder. In a perfect world (which will come only when Jesus returns) kids will listen to their parents and not have sex until marriage. Today, if some kids are determined to have sex, then it is better not to compound the problem with a baby that a girl is not prepared for. Even an older person who knows the Word by heart can slip into sexual sin. Isn't it easier for a kid to?

R.W., St. Clairsville, Ohio

We agree that in today's climate of pervasive promiscuous immorality it is easy for young people to slip into illicit sexual relations. That's all the more reason for parents to diligently teach their children God's way of life from infancy. Compromising with God's laws regarding sex will never resolve our serious societal problems; they will only get worse.

The only form of birth control 100 percent effective in preventing pregnancy and venereal disease is abstinence. Read some good advice about biblical ideals in the next letter from Africa.

I came into contact with your magazine (November-December) through a friend, and I was compelled to read it through after perusing the table of contents. According to my observation, I believe that AIDS can be stopped only if governments, policy makers and people in general accept that the only way to stop this plague is through total submission to God's Commandments, especially the seventh one, which says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." If this is not done, then greater darkness lies ahead for the human race in subsequent years. I commend you for such a superb magazine.

R.J.C.L., Gambia

Letters from Canada

I have received *The Good News* for some time now and found it to be helpful and informative. I don't always agree with the views expressed but have not found any other publication that enlightens me more.

D.W., Comox, British Columbia

Thank you for the wonderful magazine, booklets and Bible lessons you provide absolutely free of charge. You cannot

imagine how these have helped inmates to whom I write and send these lessons and booklets.

J.R., Etobicoke, Ontario

I surely enjoy and get a lot of help from *The Good News*. I am very thankful for this wonderful magazine. I'm 84 years old and really receive a lot of good teaching and happiness from reading the magazine.

Reader from Winnipeg, Manitoba

Letters from South Africa

Thank you for your outstanding magazine. It has encouraged me to read the Bible more than before and put faith in it as God's Word. I take special interest in your articles of a practical nature and those on world news.

V.V., Durban

I have just finished your booklet *What Happens After Death?* It was a real eye-opener. A person gets so involved in traditional beliefs that you do not realize you are on a wrong path until you read something like this.

B.L., Klerksdorp

For years I have pondered the question of Good Friday–Easter Sunday, and have read articles disagreeing with the short period claimed by the church. Your article on the subject (March–April 2000) has certainly provided the answer that I overlooked in all my Bible readings. To think that it has taken me 84 years to find the truth on this subject really upsets me.

G.E.B., Port Elizabeth

What counts is getting there, not how long it takes. You may also be interested in our article about Easter beginning on page 23 of this issue. For readers who missed the article you mentioned, the same fascinating information is covered in our free booklet Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Really Matter Which Days We Keep?

Letters from Australasia

Thank you for sending *The Good News*. The illustrations are excellent, clear and understandable. Your magazine has helped me a lot in my understanding of the Bible. The magazine always conveys a sense of hope for us all.

Reader from Papua New Guinea

Thank you for sending these wonderful magazines. I have read the Bible through

but could not make much sense of it. But your magazines make it possible to understand.

Reader from Maryborough, Queensland

Please find enclosed a donation for your church work. I was most impressed with the insert *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* in the March–April 2000 issue of *The Good News* and also *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* in the May–June issue.

Reader from St. Albans, Victoria

Both inserts have been reprinted as separate booklets and are available free on request from any of our offices.

Heaven-and-hell booklet

Thank you for sending me the booklet about heaven and hell. The Bible really does teach that God is a merciful and loving God who would never sentence any human being to an eternal punishment of fire, causing sorrow, crying and pain. This truth seems to have eluded the belief of some Christians (Revelation 21:4).

J.F., Bruce, Wisconsin

Where to send financial help

You guys have a great magazine. I really appreciate all the good you are doing and have spread the message to a bunch of people. The only problem is that there's absolutely no information as to where to send tithes. Can you please provide an address giving whom I may make donations to?

T.S., Lake Forest, California

The Good News is informative and inspirational. We would like to send a donation. Please tell us where to send our gift.

Mr. and Mrs. M.G., Gallup, New Mexico

Thank you for your kind comments and your interest in sending a contribution. You may send donations to the United Church of God at the address below (tax-deductible in the U.S.A.), or to any of the international addresses listed on page 2.

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).

Easter

Continued from page 25

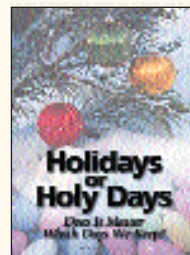
agree with the Bible. Such a person will not try to honor God with ancient idolatrous practices, violating His explicit commands (Deuteronomy 12:29–32; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; 7:1). Easter, as we have seen, is filled with idolatrous trappings.

Simply claiming that something is Christian or is done to honor God doesn't make it acceptable to God. Easter doesn't represent a resurrected Jesus Christ. Rather—difficult as it may be to admit—it merely continues the practices pagans followed thousands of years ago to honor their nonexistent gods. If we are to escape the calamities prophesied to come on those who place the ways of this world ahead of God, then we must repent of following traditions that dishonor Him (Revelation 18:1–5).

God would much rather have us honor and obey Him according to His instructions in His Word. Then He can use us to represent His holy Son, our Savior and the Messiah, who will return to earth. No greater calling can be extended to human beings. May you have the heart to seek understanding and God's perfect will. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Most assume almost any religious practices are acceptable as long as we use them in Christian worship. But what does the Bible say? Be sure to request your



free copy of *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Really Matter Which Days We Keep?* You'll learn much more about the strange customs associated with popular holidays including Easter, Christmas and Halloween. It also proves that Jesus was neither crucified on a Friday nor resurrected on a Sunday.

What about the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, observances the Bible tells us to keep? To learn more, be sure to request *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Both booklets are free from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

How Much Do You Know About the *Real* Easter Story?

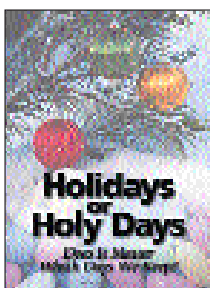
How much do you know about the origin of Easter and its popular customs? Take the following short quiz to assess your knowledge!

POP QUIZ

- 1 **True or False?** Easter didn't originate with Jesus Christ's resurrection, but had been celebrated for many centuries by that time.
- 2 **True or False?** Rabbits and eggs have nothing to do with Christ's resurrection, but are holdovers from ancient spring fertility celebrations.
- 3 **True or False?** *Easter* gets its name from an ancient fertility goddess.
- 4 **True or False?** Pagans celebrated the supposed resurrection of their false gods many centuries before Jesus Christ.
- 5 **True or False?** The word *Easter* appears only once in the Bible—and that one time is a mistranslation of the Greek word for *Passover*.
- 6 **True or False?** Neither the apostles nor members of the early Church celebrated Easter.
- 7 **True or False?** Celebrations such as Easter are condemned in the Bible.



The correct answer to all of the above questions is *true*—and you can verify most of these answers with a quick look through several good encyclopedias. Or, for an in-depth look at the real Easter story as revealed by history and the Bible, request your free copy of our booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*



Too many people go through life thinking they are honoring Jesus Christ through popular celebrations such as Easter. But, before you celebrate Easter again, why not consider what Jesus Himself thinks about this holiday? As a serious Christian, don't you think it's time you considered His view?

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