

# The Good News

May-June 2003

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

?

**Do Good People  
Really Go  
to Heaven  
When They Die?**

Why Are Dictatorships So Common? • Predestination: Are You Only a Pawn?  
Did Noah's Flood Really Happen? • What's Going Into Your Mind?

## Will God Forget the Dead?



Comfort and encouragement are not easy to accept when a loved one dies. How often have we attended a funeral and listened to a sermon extolling the virtues of going to heaven? Yet in many cases the family doesn't seem to be comforted by these remarks. Their anguish and sorrow is evident by the emotions on display. Choruses of grief, weeping and crying are expressed over the departure of a beloved parent, grandparent, husband, wife, child, relative or dear friend.

If a person goes directly to heaven when he dies, why isn't a celebration or party thrown for the deceased? Supposedly he or she is in heaven with God. So why isn't everybody happy? Is being with God bad?

Most ministers preach about the glories of heaven in trying to comfort and encourage the family and friends. Christian missionaries traverse the globe touting the merits and pleasure of heaven. Yet few people seem anxious to go there. People will do almost anything to extend their physical lives. They'll spend everything they have on pills, vitamins and medical procedures that have as their aim extending people's lives—in other words, keeping them from their ultimate reward.

Is there any hope for the dead? Do the dead simply cease to exist? Do they go to heaven, or, as Muslims believe, to paradise?

One of the fastest-growing trends in the Western world is the "New Age" movement. Under the New Age umbrella you'll find a potpourri of religious ideas, many of them influenced by ancient Eastern religions. One of the cardinal beliefs held by many in this movement is the belief in reincarnation—that, after death, a person is reborn to live another life as a human being (or as something else).

But do the Holy Scriptures support any of these concepts? Let's take a look at what the Bible says about the hope of the dead.

When the apostle Paul was on trial for his life before the Jewish Sanhedrin, he made the following declaration: "Concerning *the hope and resurrection of the dead* I am being judged!" (Acts 23:6, emphasis added throughout). Later, when Paul defended himself before the Roman governor Felix, he boldly stated: "I have *hope in God*, . . . *that there will be a resurrection of the dead*, both of the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15).

Paul was echoing Jesus Christ's own words from John 5:28-29: "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which *all who are in the graves* will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to *the resurrection of life*, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

All who have died will be resurrected back to life, said Jesus. This is the hope of the dead.

Last August my 86-year-old mother died soon after she suffered a stroke. I miss my mother dearly—as do all of my sisters and brothers.

Yet even though we sorrow over her death because there is a great void in our lives, we have hope. When my mother was lying in a hospital bed facing her own mortality, she never deviated from the hope of the resurrection. Forty-four years ago my mother learned the fundamental truth of the Bible that the resurrection of the dead is the hope of all mankind. When she died, it was with the quiet confidence that she would live again—that God would not forget her.

Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, states that we all can have that same confidence: "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, *lest you sorrow as others who have no hope*." He then describes the resurrection of the righteous at Christ's second coming and finishes with this instruction: "Therefore *comfort* one another with these words" (verse 18).

Real comfort comes from understanding the truth of God—that He will not forget the dead, but will resurrect *all* who are in their graves.

—Roy Holladay (president, United Church of God)

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# Do Good People Really Go to Heaven When They Die?

Most churchgoers believe that when they die they will go to heaven. But will they? The Bible reveals some astounding truths about the mystery of life beyond the grave.

by Jerold Aust

**W**illiam was a teenager when his father died. He was devastated because he loved his dad. He remembered the times when he walked beside his dad with his little fingers clutching his father's much larger hand.

He couldn't help but wonder why a loving God, if indeed there were such a Being, would allow his father to die prematurely, before his time. It just didn't make sense. His anger turned him away from the God that he had learned about in Sunday school. "If God works this way, I want nothing to do with him," he lamented.

He sought answers from his pastor, but the minister said he didn't understand it either, that God worked in mysterious ways. This didn't help young William get over his anger. After a few years, he simply gave up in frustration with the thought that there was no answer as to why or where God took his father.

Sometimes, thinking his father was up in heaven and could somehow hear him, William would try to talk to his dad—but, as always, there was no response. Little did he know that what the Bible revealed about where his father went and his father's future were quite different from what he had been taught.

## Are good people promised heaven?

When good people die, do they go directly to heaven as so many believe? Since life here is so short and eternity is so very long, shouldn't we want to clearly understand the truth on this crucial subject?

To comprehend what the Bible teaches about heaven, we first need to understand that there is *more than one* heaven. Often the Bible refers to *heavens*, plural. In fact, *three* distinct "heavens" are mentioned in the Bible.

The first of these is simply the sky above us—earth's atmosphere, containing the air we breathe. It is in this heaven that birds fly and clouds give rain and snow (2 Samuel 21:10; Job 35:11; Isaiah 55:10).

The second biblical heaven is the realm beyond earth's atmosphere, what we commonly call *outer space*. Here we find the



"stars of heaven"—the planets, stars, constellations and galaxies of this awesome physical universe (Genesis 22:17; 26:4; Deuteronomy 1:10; Isaiah 13:10).

The "third heaven" is different still—it is the location of God's majestic throne (2 Corinthians 12:2).

Obviously the deceased, Christian or not, are not floating around unnoticed in the first two heavens. No one seriously believes they can be found drifting about the sky or in outer space. Therefore they must be in the third of these heavens, right?

Many people assume so, but the whole argument about heaven being the reward of deceased Christians runs into a brick wall with these words from the apostle Peter's first sermon: "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day . . . *For David did not ascend to heaven . . .*" (Acts 2:29, 34,

New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

God called this same King David "a man after My own heart," one who would "do all My will" (Acts 13:22). Surely, if anyone had a right to heaven, wouldn't it be a person such as David? Yet Peter tells us God *did not* carry David off to heaven. The only one who had ascended to heaven, said Peter, was Jesus Christ (Acts 2:29-35).

Was Peter mistaken? Did he simply misspeak?

We might assume so, but notice what the Gospel of John says: "*No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man [Jesus Christ]*" (John 3:13, NIV).

Jesus never promised Christians heaven after they died. The New Testament plainly says that of the faithful men and women who had gone before—such spiritual giants as

Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, to name some of those listed in Hebrews 11—not one has ascended to heaven. In fact, says verse 39 of Hebrews 11, “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised” (NIV).

If they aren’t in heaven, where are they? And what was it they were promised, if it wasn’t heaven?

### No consciousness in the grave

Many people are surprised to discover what

have an immortal soul that goes on living somewhere else. In Ezekiel 18, verses 4 and 20, God plainly tells us that “the soul who sins *shall die*”—not continue living apart from the body.

The patriarch Job echoes Solomon’s words. He writes: “. . . Man dies and is laid away; indeed he breathes his last and where is he? As water disappears from the sea, and a river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep” (Job 14:10-12).

## The key to the mystery of life after death is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is because Christ was resurrected from the grave that we can be assured **we, too, will be resurrected.**

the Bible *really* says about what happens to us when we die. Yet, when we remove our preconceived notions, the answer becomes quite clear from the Scriptures—and it is immensely encouraging to all.

Notice what God inspired King Solomon to write about the state of the dead: “For the living know that they will die; *but the dead know nothing*, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten” (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Scripture clearly tells us that at death *we cease to know anything*. The dead are unconscious and unaware. All our emotions, thoughts, knowledge and feelings go to the grave with us. No consciousness continues living in another place or state. We do not

Job goes on to ask the most crucial question about life after death: “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (verse 14). His answer is found in Jesus Christ’s own words.

### Death’s mystery solved

The key to the mystery of life after death is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

It is because Christ was resurrected from the grave that we can be assured *we, too, will be resurrected* (1 Corinthians 15:12-21). Throughout the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul eloquently argues this impor-

tant fact—that since Jesus was resurrected from the grave, He will resurrect all those who have been faithful to Him.

Job, as we saw above, raised the question of life after death. Notice how he answered it: “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest *appoint me a set time* [the time of the resurrection], *and remember me!* If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, *till my change come*. Thou shalt call, and *I will answer thee . . .*” (Job 14:13-15, King James Version).

Job understood that life after death comes about by God’s divine power. Speaking of each person whom the Father would call to understand His truth, Jesus explains, “I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

The promise of life after death hinges on Jesus Christ’s resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). The fact that Jesus Christ was resurrected to become “the *firstborn* from the dead” (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5) means that He has opened the way for others to follow in a resurrection from the grave. The raising of the dead is a mighty and magnificent part of God’s great master plan. Through it, mankind has the opportunity to live again, as faithful Job knew and confirmed.

The doctrine of the resurrection is listed among the fundamental doctrines of the Bible (Hebrews 6:1-2). It is the hope of all true Christians, for it nullifies and makes void death itself (1 Corinthians 15:54).

### The resurrection voids death

Paul confirms that many people were

## People Believed in ‘Going to Heaven’ Long Before Christianity

The idea that “souls” go to heaven at death long predates Christianity. A brief look at ancient history reveals that the people of Babylon and Egypt, as well as subjects of other ancient kingdoms, held similar beliefs. According to *This Believing World*, by Lewis Brown, the Egyptian god Osiris was killed and reputed to be taken to heaven: “Osiris came to life again. He was miraculously resurrected from death and taken up to heaven; and there in heaven, so the myth declared, he lived on eternally” (1946, p. 83).

Brown explains: “The Egyptians reasoned that if it was the fate of the god Osiris to be resurrected after death, then a way could be found to make it the fate of man, too . . . The bliss of immortality that had formerly been reserved only for kings was then promised to all men . . . The heavenly existence of the dead was carried on in the realm of Osiris, and it was described in considerable detail by the Egyptian theologians. It was believed that on death the soul of a man set out at once to reach a Judgment Hall on high . . . and stood before the celestial throne of Osiris, the Judge. There it gave account of itself to Osiris and his forty-two associate gods” (p. 84).

If the soul could satisfy the gods, “the soul was straightway gathered into the fold of Osiris. But if it could not, if it was found wanting when weighed in the heavenly balances, then it was cast into a hell, to be rent to shreds of the ‘Devouress.’ For only the righteous souls, only the guiltless, were thought to be deserving of life everlasting” (pp. 86-87).

Brown continues: “Mankind everywhere, in Mexico and Iceland, in Zululand and China, makes more or less the same wild guesses in its convulsive effort to solve the riddle of existence. And that is why we find this complex idea of a slain and

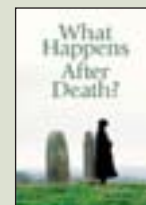
resurrected god common in many parts of the world.

“In very early times that idea flourished not alone among the Babylonians and Egyptians, but also among the barbaric tribes in and around Greece . . . These mysteries [came] down from Thrace or across the sea from Egypt and Asia Minor . . . They declared that for every man, no matter how poor or vicious, there was a place in heaven. All one had to do was to be ‘initiated’ into the secrets of the cult . . . then salvation was assured him, and no excess of vice and moral turpitude could close the gates of paradise in his face. He was saved forevermore” (pp. 96-99).

Man has always wanted to live without ever dying. This world and all it offers has never been able to satisfy humanity. For centuries mankind has searched for security and happiness in the hope of going to heaven at death. Sadly, he has embraced beliefs that he cannot prove true.

God alone knows the answers to the mysteries of life and death and reveals them in His Word, the Holy Bible. Contrary to what so many think, God does not promise heaven as the reward of the saved. Instead, He has something far greater and more meaningful in mind—eternal rulership in the Kingdom of God, to be established on earth at Christ’s return (Revelation 5:10; 11:15).

(Adapted from the booklet *What Happens After Death?* Download or request your free copy at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org) or from any of our offices listed on page 2.)



eyewitnesses to the fact that Jesus Christ had indeed risen from the grave:

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas [Peter], then by the twelve [apostles]. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep [in death]. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

Too many credible witnesses saw and interacted with Christ Jesus after He was raised from the dead for His resurrection to be denied.

Paul also offers a simple but incontestable logic about how our resurrection from the dead is directly tied to Jesus’ resurrection: “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

“More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [in death]. For since death came through a man [Adam], the resurrection of

the dead comes also through a man [Jesus Christ]” (1 Corinthians 15:12-21, NIV).

The mystery of what happens to human beings after they die is incontrovertibly solved in the vibrant life of the resurrected Christ. Our future life beyond the grave is directly connected to the resurrected Jesus Christ and the fact that He is the One who will raise us



**The dead in Christ will be resurrected to immortal life at Jesus Christ’s return to earth, along with those faithful servants who are still alive at that time.**

from the dead. When this happens—and it surely will—the Bible reveals it will *not* be so that we can go to live in heaven forever.

#### Death likened to sleep

When Christians—or any others—die, they do not go directly to heaven or to any equivalent of heaven. Their bodies simply decay in the grave, returning to the dust from which they were made (Genesis 3:19).

Solomon confirmed the fact that the dead are unconscious, knowing nothing. He illustrated the superiority of life over death with an interesting analogy: “Anyone who is

among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing . . .” (Ecclesiastes 9:4-5, NIV).

The writers of the Bible describe our experience after death not as going to heaven or hell, but simply as *sleep*. Notice, for example, how Daniel refers to the state of the dead in this prophecy of the resurrection: “And many of those who *sleep* in the dust of the earth *shall awake*, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). When an individual is in a deep sleep, he has absolutely no conscious awareness of the passing of time nor any knowledge of events that are occurring while he is asleep.

Paul repeatedly compared death to sleep (1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15). Peter similarly writes of the patriarchs who “*fell asleep*” in death (2 Peter 3:4).

Jesus Himself also spoke of death as sleep. Speaking of a deceased girl whom He intended to raise from the dead, He told the mourn-

ers, “Do not weep; she is not dead, but *sleeping*” (Luke 8:52; compare Matthew 9:24).

Before He resurrected Lazarus, He told the disciples, “Our friend Lazarus *sleeps*, but I go that I may wake him up.” The disciples misunderstood, thinking Lazarus was sleeping because he was ill. “However, *Jesus spoke of his death*, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep” (John 11:11, 13).

#### When will the dead be resurrected?

We can see that the Bible clearly teaches that good people don’t go to heaven at death;

## God’s Awesome Purpose for Those in the First Resurrection

As spirit beings in God’s family, those resurrected to immortality in the first resurrection will live and work at the highest possible level and environment. Jesus said, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). We will spend eternity with God in His environment—the world of spirit and all power. We will not sit idle in our new life. We will be positively occupied. Jesus said, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17).

When Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, those in the first resurrection will serve as judges (Revelation 20:4) and priests (verse 6) and will “reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10). We will not go to heaven to live passively and idly.

Jesus will return to a world that has largely destroyed itself by living in opposition to the commands of its Creator. He will teach people to obey God’s laws. He will begin a massive reeducation process to help people unlearn their old ways of doing things and for the first time learn to do things God’s way.

Notice Isaiah’s prophecy of this future rule of Jesus as Messiah and King over the

earth: “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD . . . He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

“He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:2-4). At that time Christ will reeducate all people who have never known God’s way. He will be assisted by all who are changed into glorified children of God in the resurrection at His return (Luke 20:36).

(Adapted from the booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Download or request your free copy at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org) or from any of our offices listed on page 2.)



instead they sleep in the grave awaiting the resurrection of the dead. All of the dead—good and not so good alike—will eventually be resurrected, each in his own time (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

The dead in Christ will be resurrected to immortal life at Jesus Christ's return to earth, and those faithful servants who are still alive at that time will be changed from mortal to immortal. Specifically, this happens at the sounding of "the trumpet of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17), called "the last trumpet" in 1 Corinthians 15:52 and corresponding to the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15.

This event is called "the *first* resurrection" in Revelation 20:5. In John's vision of the future, those in this resurrection came to life and "reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (verse 4), during the period commonly known as the Millennium. Notice that they *do not go to dwell in heaven*—they live and reign with Jesus *on earth*, to which He has returned to establish God's Kingdom!

Verse 6 goes on to explain: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power [because they will then be the resurrected, immortal children of God], but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Revelation 5:10 confirms that they will be "a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and *they will reign on the earth*" (NIV). (For more details, see "God's Awesome Purpose for Those in the First Resurrection," page 6.)

Since Christ is coming back to earth (Zechariah 14:3-4), it makes good sense that that's where we will be. After all, Jesus said that we would be with Him: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*" (John 14:3; compare Isaiah 11:1-9). Clearly, Jesus is coming back to earth and we will reign with Him *here*, not in or from heaven.

### Another resurrection follows

So if there is a *first* resurrection in which God's faithful servants are raised to immortality to reign with Jesus Christ, will there be other resurrections? And what happens to those who lived and died without ever knowing or hearing the name of Jesus, the only name by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12)?

Those who died without knowing Christ will be resurrected to physical life and given their time to repent and receive salvation 1,000 years later (Revelation 20:11-13). Verse 5 tells us clearly that "*the rest of the dead* did not live again until the thousand years were finished."

Ezekiel 37 vividly describes a second

resurrection to a temporary physical existence, when human beings who have never understood God's truth in this life will be raised from the dust of the earth to learn God's way for the first time. God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" and "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4). He will not unjustly condemn those who never had an opportunity to come to that knowledge, repent and receive His gift of eternal life.

Each person raised to life again in this great resurrection will be given sufficient time to learn God's way of life (see Ezekiel 37:12-14, 23-24), during which they will be judged or evaluated according to their works, by the standards and values "which were written in the books" (Revelation 20:12).

These "books" (*biblion* in Greek, from which we get the word *Bible*) are the Scriptures, the only source of the knowledge of eternal life and the basic standard by which *all* are ultimately judged. Most, probably the vast majority, will go on to receive eternal life because the Bible tells us that "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26)—and by extension most of the gentile world likely will be saved as well. (To learn more about this resurrection, see "All Those in the Tombs Will Hear His Voice," page 24.)

Some individuals, regrettably, will stubbornly choose to reject this marvelous opportunity for eternal life. But rather than suffer torment for eternity in hell (as many people incorrectly assume the Bible teaches), Scripture shows their fate will be to be consumed in the lake of fire, "the second death." As Malachi 4:3 states, they will be burned to ashes and simply cease to exist.

### You can take something with you

People of many ancient cultures, such as the Egyptians, buried items of physical worth with their dead. They believed that the deceased would be able to use those important things in the next life. Yet the patriarch Job refuted this idea: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (Job 1:21). This may be where we get the oft-repeated saying, "You can't take it with you."

However, this old cliché is not entirely true. In a sense, God will allow you to take something with you when you die—*godly character*. A true Christian is one who builds God's character for the duration of his Christian life (1 Corinthians 3:9-15). When raised to life again in the resurrection, that same character will be a part of us in our new life. For the true Christian, that godly character will be with him forever (1 John 2:15-17).

The Egyptians and many other long-dead peoples didn't know this, or they would not have buried valuable physical objects with their dead. But a young teen learned this truth from God's Word, the Bible.

### A teen learns the truth

Do you remember William, whose father died prematurely while he was a teenager? That youngster is the author of this article; William is my middle name. Eventually I came to understand the purpose of life and the fact that the dead are not lost in the grave, that all men, women, children and babies who have ever lived will be resurrected, each in his or her own time. All will eventually have the opportunity to learn God's truth.

In time I came to comprehend that the common denominator to all human death was and is the resurrection of Jesus Christ to eternal life, and that His resurrection guarantees our resurrection, too. Although death is a great enemy of human beings—and it has hurt and stung me deeply three separate times—we can take great comfort in God's truth. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, the resurrection from the dead removes this great enemy and its sting!

Jesus Christ reveals that in time God the Father will come to the earth (Revelation 21:1-3, 10). Listen to Jesus Christ's description of this time: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Knowing God's ultimate plan for mankind—that human death doesn't end it all—gives us a great and wonderful comfort and sets us free from the myth of a passive eternity in heaven or eternal torment in hell. Finally, the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 urges us to share this holy truth with others: "Therefore comfort one another with these words." **GN**

## Recommended Reading

The Bible has much more to teach us about the resurrection of the dead, heaven, hell and the incredible future God has in store for us. For more information about the scriptural truth about life after death, be sure to request the free booklets *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Both are yours free for the asking.



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# Predestination: Are You Just a Pawn?

Is every detail of your life already mapped out in advance? Are you just a preprogrammed figure in a cosmic game of chess, being moved from square to square by irresistible destiny? The truth may surprise you.

by Tom Robinson

**M**any individuals and groups think that everything that happens in life is inevitable and unavoidable. They believe that fate—the supposed force, principle or power that predetermines events—rules throughout the universe. A number even hold that a Supreme Being, the Creator God, is the author and controller of such fate. On the other hand, there are others who maintain that even God Himself is *subject* to this all-powerful force. What is the truth?

Is there really such a thing as fate, a set destiny reaching even beyond the grave? Are some people foreordained to succeed and others fail? Are only a few destined to be saved and the rest lost, as some religious groups teach? Or is this idea a *distortion* of what the Bible really teaches about “predestination”?

## God and predestination

During World War II, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain told the U.S. Congress, “He must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some great purpose and design is being worked out here below” (Dec. 26, 1941). Many others throughout the centuries have certainly recognized this fact.

But who or what is “working out” this “great purpose and design”? Logic and reason would dictate that it must be an infinite Intelligence. And indeed, the Holy Bible *names* that Intelligence—God. Within its pages, the Eternal God is declared to be supreme in existence, for there is “no one greater” (Hebrews 6:13). Thus, if fate exists, God has dominion over it. For one who is *supreme* cannot, by definition, be subject to anything but himself!

The same great and infinite God tells us: “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, *declaring the end from the beginning*, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘*My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure*’” (Isaiah 46:9-10, emphasis added throughout). This, then, should remove all doubt. God is supreme and nothing can prohibit Him from doing whatever He wants.

Perhaps even more interesting, though, is that from the beginning of history God has declared the *end* of it. But how can this be? Does the future already exist, so that God can

merely look into a crystal ball and see it? Not at all! Rather, He explains how in the very next verse: “Indeed, I have spoken it; *I will also bring it to pass*. I have purposed it; *I will also do it*.” In other words, God, who sits at the controls of the universe, so to speak, steers events and circumstances to bring about His plan and purpose.

And that brings us to predestination. Does the Bible directly mention this subject? Yes, it does. In fact, the word “predestined” occurs four times in the New King James Version. First in Romans, the apostle Paul wrote: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He *foreknew*, He also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of His son . . . Moreover whom He *predestined*, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified” (8:28-30).

And then in Ephesians, the same apostle said that God “*chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

**This would mean that God created certain people—indeed, billions of them—just to torture them forever in unending flames! What a cruel God that would be!**

having *predestined* us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself . . . In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being *predestined* according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:4-5, 11).

Notice that those who are foreknown and predestined are referred to as having been “called.” In other places, the Bible refers to them as the “elect” (Matthew 24:24; Romans 8:33)—in fact, “elect according to the *foreknowledge* of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:2).

All of this, then, begs the question: Is an individual’s eternal salvation a fait accompli—a done deal—before he is even born? And more disturbing still, if salvation is predestined for only some, does that mean the rest are already foreordained by God to eternal condemnation—having been doomed to a hopeless fate before even coming into existence?

## Fate vs. free will

A major branch of Protestantism teaches

that God, from the beginning, predetermined everyone who would be eternally saved as well as everyone who would be eternally condemned. Those who profess this religious view maintain that there is *no choice* in the matter whatsoever. According to them, whether a person ever follows God or not is based solely on what God decided in advance. It gets worse when you realize that these people also believe in an eternally burning hellfire for those He has already decided would remain unrepentant. This would mean that God created certain people—indeed, *billions* of them, as *most* who have ever lived have not even *professed* Christianity—just to torture them forever in unending flames! What a horrendously cruel God that would be!

Thankfully, the true God is far different. He is a God of infinite love and mercy, and the Bible reveals truths far different from these misguided human ideas!

For one, the real hellfire doesn’t torture sinners forever, but rather *incinerates* the relatively few who ultimately refuse to repent and

choose God’s way of life (to learn more, download or send for our free booklet *Heaven & Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*).

Furthermore, it is actually quite easy to show from the Bible that God has not predestined any individuals to condemnation. Paul states that “God our Savior . . . *desires all men to be saved* and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). And Peter says essentially the same thing: “The Lord is . . . not willing that *any* should perish but that *all* should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Peter also explained that “God shows *no partiality*” (Acts 10:34)—and Paul echoes this thought (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9). So God is eminently fair. Moreover, as we’ve just seen, it is His expressly revealed will and desire that every person ultimately be saved.

Yet according to Revelation 21:8, some will indeed perish forever—be annihilated—in “the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

*But these other scriptures make it absolutely*

clear that it is not God's predetermination that puts them there!

Rather, as God told ancient Israel through Moses, "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19; compare Joshua 24:15; Proverbs 1:29). Thus, the Israelites of old had a choice. For God had made them free moral agents, having the free will to make their own decisions. And so it is with us today.

But as clear as that may be, there are still some important questions to be answered. For, based on what we've already seen, weren't some people foreknown and predestined to certain actions? Yes. In some cases, specific individuals were ordained beforehand for certain roles and actions: the appearance of Christ as the Messiah (Daniel 9:25-26; Isaiah 7:14; 53:1-2); Jacob's ascendancy over Esau (Genesis 25:20-26); the triumph of King Cyrus of Persia over Babylon and his decree to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple before he was born (Isaiah 45:1; 44:28). The roles of certain other people—including John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-57), the apostle Paul (Galatians 1:15), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-10), Josiah (1 Kings 13:1-2; 2 Kings 23:15-16) and Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-20)—likewise were determined before their births.

Of course, these were all positive roles. There are some who were preappointed to play negative roles. Examples include the pharaoh at the time of the Exodus, whose heart God hardened (Exodus 9:12; 10:1-2; Romans 9:14-18), and Judas Iscariot, Christ's betrayer (John 6:70; 17:12; Acts 1:16-20). Consider also that God has prophesied in Revelation of the coming of a great evil dictator called the Beast and his accomplice known as the False prophet—both of whom will be destroyed at Christ's return.

Here, then, is where many become confused. And this is quite understandable. For how can it be that God has predetermined such unenviable roles that seem to end in condemnation while saying, as we've seen, that it is His will that none should perish?

Moreover, the Bible emphatically states that only through the name of Jesus Christ can anyone be saved (Acts 4:12). Yet two thirds of the world's population does not profess a belief in Him as the Messiah. And, lest anyone jump to the notion that these 4 billion people are entirely responsible for their blindness to the truth, notice the words of Jesus Christ: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44; see verse 65).

But has the entire world been drawn to

God? No! Remember that only some are specifically referred to as the "called" and even fewer as the "elect"—that is, "chosen" by God.

Though much of the world may learn about salvation by hearing or reading the gospel that Christ and His apostles preached, not all can comprehend it at this time. Jesus told His followers, "It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the rest of humanity] it has not been given" (Matthew 13:11). How then can the Bible be true in saying God shows no partiality and wills that none be condemned? And how can it really be that we have free will? For the answer we need to know the rest of the story.

### The divine plan

The difficulty in understanding this subject is based on a mistaken notion common to mainstream Christianity—that God is in a great soul-winning contest with Satan and trying desperately to save the world now. That, it must be understood, is simply not the case. Rather, God is merely allowing this world to be deceived by Satan—for the time being.

Notice how the apostle Paul put it: "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ . . . should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). The omnipotent God allows Satan to preside over this present age, deceiving those who would otherwise understand the truth!

As recounted in Genesis 1-3, mankind got off to a bad start in the Garden of Eden. Because of their wrong choice, God has cut off mankind in general from understanding the knowledge of salvation—letting human beings go their own way to learn the lesson that any way of life other than what God has revealed to us to be the right way ultimately brings only misery, heartache and death.

Since that time, every human being except Jesus has sinned—that is, broken God's law—and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23; 1 John 3:4, King James Version). We all, therefore, deserve the death penalty (Romans 6:23). In that sense, the vast majority of the world is "perishing," as the verse quoted above describes. For unless they ultimately are redeemed, they are doomed.

But remember that it is God's will that none should perish! And so Jesus Christ, the One through whom the Father created us (Ephesians 3:9), gave His life as an atoning sacrifice to pay the death penalty for the entire world—whoever would accept it (John 3:16).

Yet in the face of such widespread lack of

*Continued on page 26*

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# World News and Trends

## An Overview of Conditions Around the World

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

### EU draft constitution: a dangerous document

In the words of noted *Times'* political columnist William Rees-Mogg, "The draft constitution which is being prepared by the European Convention . . . would be totally destructive of self-government throughout Europe. It would transfer responsibility for foreign and defence policy from the nations to the European Union [EU]."

Mr. Rees-Mogg's initial reaction to the first draft was even more scornful. He described it as "a shameful document, destructive of democracy, disastrous for Europe, disastrous for Britain and for all the other present and prospective members of the European Union" and as being "drafted in a disorderly and undemocratic way."

There is no mistaking the constitution's plans for a single Europe. Michael Barnier, a European commissioner, asked the bottom-line question: "The hour of truth is coming for Europe: Do we want to be only an economic and financial community or do we want to become an independent political power?"

The main feature editorial in *The Sunday Telegraph* commented: "The proposed European constitution would, if ratified in anything like its present form, mark the moment at which the EU ceased to be an association of states and became a state in its own right"

(emphasis added throughout). This would be Britain's worst nightmare.

Paul Eastham, deputy political editor of the *Daily Mail*, underscores the dangers for Britain. He says that if the draft constitution were to be adopted in its present form, Britain's "freedom to decide foreign policy and support the U.S. in facing down dictators such as Saddam Hussein would also be removed"—a frightening thought!

Conservative British observers have already branded the proposed constitution "a blueprint for a European superstate." The United Kingdom is, however, still considered a serious obstacle to Franco-German plans for a federal union of Europe. The *Daily Mail* reported that, not so long ago, "Gerhard Schroeder threatened the future of the EU by demanding a new 'hard core' of countries, excluding Britain. The German Chancellor . . . wants an elite group, led by anti-war countries Germany, France and Belgium to head a 'two-tier' EU."

Of course, Britain angrily rejected certain key sections of the EU draft document almost before the ink was dry on the final text—demanding significant revisions. But will that really happen?

It is always possible that some sort of compromise will be reached, moderating some of the document's worst sections. But whatever the eventual outcome, the Channel gap between Britain and the Continent clearly remains and shows no sign of narrowing. U.K. thinking is miles away from Central European thought on many key issues. How much more America's!

(Sources: *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, *The Sunday Telegraph* [all London].)

### American media disdainful of the European Union

Much of the U.S. media generally focuses on three European countries—the United Kingdom, France and Germany. According to *Foreign Affairs* journal: "There is very little media interest in the European Union, which *The Washington Post* described as 'a baroque collection of institutions, regulations and formalism.' *The New York Times*, which has five correspondents in Paris, does not have a bureau in Brussels."

Such shortsightedness is a mistake. It allows changes of great importance to occur in Europe without much public notice. *The Good News* staff certainly strives to do what it can to counteract such lack of coverage.

Biblical prophecy strongly indicates that what happens in Central Europe is going to greatly affect the future of the United States. You need to know what the Bible says about an emerging final revival of the ancient Roman Empire. To learn more, please request our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Source: *Foreign Affairs*.)

### Sex explosion in U.K.

Jeremy Laurance, health editor for *The Independent*, reported that "soaring rates of sexually transmitted infections are overwhelming the NHS [National Health Service] and threatening the health of a generation of young people, according to a committee of MPs [Members of Parliament]."

Mushrooming sexual activity among British youth has seen cases of gonorrhea rise about 85 percent in some five years, the doubling of chlamydia, syphilis making an unwanted comeback and also an increase in the rate of HIV infection. The resulting pressure on the NHS means that those infected often have to wait some two weeks for treatment. Speed of medication in such cases is crucial, because these types of infections are often transmitted to others in the intervening time through further promiscuous behavior.

Young people do not generally understand the principle of cause and effect as well as their elders. The late historians Will and Ariel Durant commented: "A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; and if he is unchecked by custom, morals or laws, he may ruin his life before he matures sufficiently to

understand that sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group" (*The Lessons of History*, 1968, pp. 35-36).

This makes educating young people about sex absolutely essential, especially in our sex-obsessed age. However, many government efforts clearly do more harm than good, such as current experiments in more than 150 British schools. A shocking report in the *Daily Mail* revealed that "schoolchildren under 16 are being encouraged to experiment with oral sex as a part of a government drive to cut the rates of teenage pregnancy." The U.K. rate tops all nations in Western Europe.

A spokesperson for the Department of Health recently stated: "Our Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, the first of its kind, is based on the best available research evidence. That shows that the key to success is an approach involving education, health, social services, the media, parents and young people themselves."

Notice, however, that religion is not even mentioned. Clearly the Church of England is not providing much help. The Anglican Church is seriously considering changing its traditional position on sex before marriage. Clergy are currently studying a new in-house report called *Cohabitation: a Christian Reflection*, in

which living together is termed "a new path from the single state to the married one."

This report indicated that the church must come to terms with a world in which "since 1999 more than half of religious marriages have started with cohabitation, as well as more than 85 per cent of civil marriages."

This controversial report argues that the church needs "to provide a new and what some may consider radical, even heretical understanding of sexual relationships for the 21st century." Actually, this "new" approach to sex education and practice is not new at all—it's ancient. This approach advocates breaking God's spiritual laws concerning sex, as men and women have done since the days of Sodom and Gomorrah and even before. Sadly, the end result will bring much greater unhappiness and suffering, leaving in its wake uncounted broken lives and miserable relationships.

If you would like to understand how we should be educating our children, please write for our free booklet *Making Life Work*. This publication teaches the real truth about human relationships like child rearing, dating and marriage—using God's Word as the standard. (Sources: *The Times*, *Evening Standard*, *Daily Mail* [all London].)



## America's cultural trends threaten further decline

In relating American cultural trends in his book *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators* (1993), former U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett cautioned Americans that "unless these trends were reversed, they would lead to the inevitable decline of the American republic." This is a pretty chilling prediction for the futures of the nation's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Since then, Mr. Bennett says there have been positive improvements in some areas, such as reductions in welfare, violent crime and abortion and an upswing in SAT scores. Still, social regression continues in the areas of illegitimacy, single-parent households and cohabitation. Divorce rates have increased 115 percent from 1960-1997.

Mr. Bennett also notes that even during a time of record prosperity, the United States is becoming a more violent, vulgar, cynical, remorseless and depressed nation. The entertainment media's presentations of brutal, gruesome deaths rob children of their innocence early on. Men and women abandon each other and their children more readily. Marriage

and the family are weaker and less stable.

He does, however, think there is hope for America's future. But restoring a society is no simple task. "Our capacity for self-renewal is unique and real. We have relied upon it in the past and must call on it again." That's the conventional wisdom—but the uncomfortable fact is that human nature can't change itself, and with time and no outside help societies generally tend to only get worse. Nevertheless, there's great hope for your future and the future of all societies. Write for our free booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. (Source: *New Jersey Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*.)

## Is America turning to religion?

The current war effort and geopolitical tensions in general have apparently boosted the demand for Bibles, hymnals and prayer books. Sales were up by nearly 40 percent for the month of January. Publishers are cautiously attributing this trend to the current national and world scene. Bibles are now selling very well in America. One research analyst said that "in the U.S., you would think that religion was on the downturn, but the growth has been in inspirational books and in international sales."

A recent Harris Poll, published under the title "Good Rules Over Evil" in *USA Today*, reported that

90 percent of Americans believe in God, 68 percent in the devil, 82 percent in heaven and 69 percent in hell. (We should mention that the United Church of God offers free publications on all of these subjects. You may want to request *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?, Is There Really a Devil?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

However, the true test is not whether the United States may be returning to religion, but whether the country is getting back to and really finding God. One key reference point is the state of Americans' moral behavior. Is the nation both teaching and observing God's spiritual law, summed up by the Ten Commandments? We have an 80-page booklet on the Ten Commandments, freely available on request. (Sources: *The Financial Times*, *USA Today*.)

## Is Russia a U.S. ally?

Vladimir Putin's Russia has covertly and systematically undermined U.S. interests, particularly in the Middle East, yet continues to purport to be America's ally in the war against terrorism.

Russian companies provided Iraq with high-tech military equipment, including advanced antitank missiles, night goggles and GPS jamming equipment, putting coalition soldiers' lives at risk. Russia denied that they were responsible for such sales, claiming that they might have been sold to the Iraqis through third countries. Yet they can't explain why Russian specialists were discovered in Iraq training Saddam's troops to use the high-tech weaponry.

Even worse, coalition forces discovered documents showing that in recent months Russia had provided the Iraqi regime with secret information on Western leaders and had helped train Iraqi agents.

This kind of political underhandedness is not new to Russia. Throughout the 1980s, while the Cold War was at its hottest, U.S. President Ronald Reagan often called the Soviets' bluffs. He went on the attack and labeled them as the "evil empire,"

thereby keeping their feet to the fire.

Consider this: Russia is building a nuclear reactor in oil-rich Iran, thereby supplying Iran with technology that can be used to produce nuclear weapons. They also continue to arm North Korea in spite of the fact that North Korea has threatened the United States with nuclear attack.

It appears that Russia is pursuing an agenda of seeking to deprive America of its leading role in world politics. Apparently the Cold War is heating up. How can America respond? A temporary answer might be to follow Ronald Reagan's lead. After all, didn't the Soviet Union break up at the end of President Reagan's eight-year term? Obviously, Russia can't aid and abet America's enemies and say it is an ally.

Scripture has the best answer to political intrigue and man's inhumanity to man. One day there will be only one government on earth, and that government will have as its goal the welfare, security and peace for all of mankind (Daniel 2:44). To better understand these trends, request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Sources: *The Washington Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Telegraph* [London].)

## SARS: When germs have no enemies

As of late April, more than 200 people were known to have died from the fatal disease called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

The World Health Organization (WHO) strongly warned world travelers to avoid Hong Kong and China's Guangdong province due to the flu-like sickness. Dr. David Heymann, executive director of the organization's Communicable Disease Program, offered this precaution: "This is the first time that we have recommended people avoid an area and this is because we do not understand the disease completely, because there is no vaccine and there's no drug."

The disease seems to spread easily and quickly, in part because of international travel. Although the mere idea of a runaway germ without any known natural enemies is frightening, those who have died constitute about 6 percent of the 3,400 who have been diagnosed with SARS in 27 nations. Remarkably, 90 percent of patients recover within a week. The United States has reported 35 cases of SARS illness that fit the WHO definition of the disease, but as of this writing none have proved fatal.

SARS is very difficult to isolate; the sickness does not appear to be transmitted by intimate contact alone. Those infected are being quarantined. Surgical masks are seen on Hong Kong streets, and commercial airlines are disinfecting their planes. Symptoms include coughing, shortness of breath and fevers of more than 100 degrees.

The Bible speaks of pestilences that follow on the heels of war, but like the scourge of the bubonic plague in the Middle Ages, diseases can crop up unexpectedly. Apparently more will come in the troubling years ahead. Write for our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* (Source: *The Washington Times*, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.)

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# Dictatorships: Why Are They So Common?

As the United States and Britain defied much of world opinion to overthrow an entrenched dictator in Iraq, a question logically arose: Why is it that so many countries seem to naturally embrace dictatorship?

by Melvin Rhodes

Imagine having to tune in to the radio at 6 a.m. every morning to listen for your own name. That's how my wife and I began each day when we lived in a West African nation during a time of revolution and turmoil.

When we first arrived in the country, it was under a military dictatorship. Six weeks after our arrival a palace coup removed the head of state and replaced him with another military leader. Shortly afterwards, another branch of the military overthrew the former leaders in a bloody self-proclaimed revolution that promised sweeping changes for everyone's benefit.

Reinforcing the message that there was no turning back, all previous presidents were arrested and publicly shot.

This revolution inspired others throughout the region, some even bloodier.

A few weeks after the revolution, the 6 a.m. morning news bulletin announced that all foreign nationals had to report to the Ministry of the Interior. Once there, we stood in line with our two young children in oppressive heat along with hundreds of others. There were no toilet facilities in the building and the officials were neither cooperative nor friendly.

It came as a relief when our passports were stamped with the words: "Deported within 48 hours." The new revolutionary government, allied with radical Islamic and socialist countries, had no time for niceties like freedom of religion.

Our deportation order came around noon on Friday. Our instructions were to go immediately to another government department to apply for an exit visa, without which we could not leave the country we had just been told to leave! Making life even more difficult, there was a national shortage of gasoline, which made it difficult to go anywhere.

Eventually we did arrive at the government building where the required exit visas



Dictators often are surrounded by sycophants, underlings afraid to criticize or even to make any suggestions. When the man in charge has absolute power over life and death, it's natural that nobody wants to upset him.

were to be issued, only to learn that it was closed until Monday. This meant that we would overstay our 48 hours and be in contravention of a government that in its revolutionary fervor didn't hesitate to rid the world of its enemies, both real and imagined.

A solitary soldier stood outside the building. For a small sum he offered to stamp our passports with the required exit visa. This he duly did and we departed the country two days later, on a Sunday. The relief we felt as we left was palpable. Our nerves were shattered.

We had been struggling to survive for three months in a country that had suddenly turned extremely violent and whose people were now frequently hostile to foreigners. An angry mob had tried to stab my wife

through our vehicle window and then attempted to overturn the vehicle with us in it. The mob was a demonstration against American and British "imperialism," the two primary Western powers blamed, as always, for all ills.

We had also been shot at during the revolution itself. A helicopter had fired at us as it flew over our home. My car had been forced to stop at gunpoint where soldiers were taking the opportunity to confiscate people's property for themselves. But God was with us. We had waited six months for a car in a nation where vehicles were difficult to obtain. I silently prayed, asking God for help at that moment. My prayer was answered. Seeing my 2-year-old daughter asleep in the rear seat, the soldier hesitated. At that moment, another car approached

along the deserted road. He seized that one instead.

Our water and electricity were cut off for days during the period of fighting that engulfed the capital. The food we had in our freezer rotted, the very food we would so desperately need during the coming months as the new government's crazy economic policies caused an immediate famine. A few days after the coup, even the government-controlled newspaper could not avoid running the truthful headline: NO FOOD.

In a sincere but misguided attempt to help the poor, the new administration had introduced strict but unrealistic price controls that led to immediate shortages of everything. People lived on coconuts and oranges those first few weeks.

It was quite a relief to arrive in England.

Five weeks later there was yet another change of government in the small African nation and we were able to return to continue the work we had been doing. We were granted two years of relative peace before going through similar experiences again.

### Why the difference?

It's difficult for people in stable Western democracies to understand the nature of dictatorships. Those who have been brought up in countries like the United States, Britain, Australia and Canada have little appreciation for their own political systems, which have contributed greatly to the peace and economic progress of their peoples. Without political stability there cannot be economic progress.

This has been a major problem in Africa and other parts of the world. Many in the West feel that poverty is the root cause of political instability. But the reality is more the opposite—political instability is a major cause of poverty.

Few nations have developed a political system that allows for peaceful change from one administration to another. As a group of African Christian pastors said to me recently: "The only way to remove an African president is to shoot him." They weren't advocating this; they were simply lamenting the fact that this has been the case in post-colonial Africa.

### Lessons from Ghana

Ghana was the first sub-Saharan British colony to be given independence. On March 6, 1957, the former colony of the Gold Coast became the new nation of Ghana.

Blessed with the best-educated citizenry in the region and with ample reserves of foreign currency in its central bank, Ghanaians had enjoyed a standard of living higher than that of some of the peoples of Europe. They had benefited greatly from a long period of political stability. With a new democratically elected government, it seemed Ghana had a great future and would pave the way for the whole of Africa.

Sadly, it did—but not in the right way. Only two years after independence, fundamental changes were made to the constitution that led to a dictatorship. In turn, the dictatorship bankrupted the country. Forty years later it still hasn't fully recovered. In the interim the nation has often experienced dictatorship—different factions seizing power at the barrel of a gun.

Today Ghana is a functioning democracy

once again. Its economy is improving and its citizens hope it will last. The test will come when the electorate votes for a change of government. Will it be a peaceful transition, or will there be another power struggle?

### A radical idea on government from Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ came proclaiming a dramatically different vision of leadership and government. Though born to be a king, He never sought self-exaltation at the expense of others. Indeed, His approach was just the opposite. Unusual as it may sound, though, even Christ's disciples weren't immune to political power struggles like those endemic in today's world. We read of an incident involving an attempt to seek preeminence at the expense of the others in Matthew 20.

"Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him [Jesus] with her sons [James and John], kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to Him, 'Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your Kingdom'" (verses 20-21). This was a clear request that her two sons would have the top two governing positions under Him in His Kingdom.

The other disciples were naturally indignant at this—perhaps because they hadn't thought of it first. "And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers" (verse 24). The implication is that the brothers had put their mother up to making this request on their behalf.

Jesus, sensing a power struggle going on, took the opportunity to explain a fundamental leadership principle to them. Calling them to Himself, He said: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them" (verse 25).

The disciples certainly understood what He meant. At the time, the province of Judea was under Roman rule and had been for almost a century. The only government the disciples had seen was a despotic gentile government that could be cruel and oppressive. Looking at Rome, or even at their own puppet king in Judea, they constantly witnessed the kinds of power struggles that accompanied gentile government. The Roman emperors of the first century were some of the most paranoid and despotic rulers in history, even down to having their closest relatives killed so as

to remove the threat of a coup.

Jesus added: "Yet *it shall not be so among you*; but whoever desires to become great among you, *let him be your servant*. And whoever desires to be first among you, *let him be your slave*—just as the Son of Man did not come *to be served*, but *to serve*, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28, emphasis added throughout).

Here Jesus Christ took the opportunity to teach a *new concept* of governance—one built on a solid foundation of *servicing others*. Rather than trying to get the top position to benefit one's self, the approach that is all too common in the world today, Jesus' emphasis was the opposite: Realize that the higher your position in society, the greater the opportunity you have *to serve and help others*. He emphasized that true leadership was based on *giving* rather than on *getting*.

One of the lessons learned living in a dictatorship is that absolute rulers are generally corrupt. When they assume power, they typically have had little or no governmental or administrative experience and are often from the lower ranks of society. Then when they seize office, they put on the pounds very quickly as they begin to enjoy the advantages of their newfound power.

The biblical book of Ecclesiastes warns of this: "Woe to you, O land, when your king is [like] a child, and your princes feast in the morning! Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles [educated, well brought up], and your princes feast at the proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness!" (10:16-17).

### Ancient lessons on leadership

The prophet Daniel is one of the most interesting personalities in the Bible. The son of Jewish nobles (Daniel 1:3-4), he was taken captive by the conquering Babylonians and spent the last 70 years of his life under two different gentile empires. His experiences contain valuable lessons on leadership for us today.

Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar was the foremost leader in the world of his day, with absolute power over the greatest empire of the time. Nebuchadnezzar is a classic example of what the 19th-century British historian Lord Acton wrote of rulers: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Note Nebuchadnezzar's expression of his own self-importance: "Is not this great

Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30). The king had no excuse for boasting—the prophet Daniel had earlier showed him that he owed his mighty position to God (2:37-38).

Dictators are used to giving orders. They often are surrounded by sycophants, underlings afraid to criticize or even to make any suggestions. When the man in charge has absolute power over life and death, it's natural that nobody wants to upset him. (Analysts have speculated that in the recent Iraq war, a major contributing factor in the Iraqi military's collapse, particularly around Baghdad, was that commanders were afraid to tell Saddam Hussein the truth about their precarious situation lest they be tortured or shot.)

Of course, this means that dictators are often out of touch with reality. In turn, this can lead to greater oppression because the only way to maintain power is to lord it over everyone (Matthew 20:25). Afraid of being overthrown, they then start diverting the contents of the national treasury into foreign bank accounts, planning an escape route in the case of a coup or popular uprising.

Yelena Bonner, wife of the late Soviet physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov, put it well when she said of the communist leadership of the former Soviet Union: "The Bolsheviks [communists] are like a bunch of squatters who have taken over a house and are waiting for the police to arrive." By this she meant that, having seized power violently, those in charge had a constant fear of being overthrown in the same manner. The problem, though, is that they *controlled* the police!

In such circumstances, the only hope for many people is an international force being sent in to remove their oppressor. Dictators yield only to a force stronger than themselves. The unrealized difficulty here is that most of the nations that might be a part of such a force are themselves dictatorships. They certainly don't want to encourage international intervention to remove a despot, as they themselves might be next.

Today many nations giving lip service to democracy are far from being democratic. Having a parliament does not make a country a democracy. Often elected parliamentary delegates have little or no power, with the president or king having the say in all matters of importance. These countries are dictatorships in all but name.

### Abuses of power by leaders

Nebuchadnezzar's vanity led to the kind of incredible abuses of power that we regularly read about to this day. In Daniel 2 we read

that the Babylonian monarch had a dream that left him deeply troubled. In a society that attached a great deal of importance to dreams, Nebuchadnezzar sent for his magicians, astrologers and sorcerers (verse 2).

He demanded that the interpreters tell him not only the meaning of his dream, but its *content*—which he refused to reveal. He then gave them an incentive: ". . . If you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap" (verse 5).

Later we read that Daniel was able to describe the dream and give its interpretation, both of which were divinely revealed

*The author (center) with family and friends during more peaceful and prosperous post-dictator days in Africa.*



**One of the lessons learned living in a dictatorship is that absolute rulers are generally corrupt. When they assume power, they typically have had little or no governmental or administrative experience.**

to him by Almighty God (verse 28).

Absolute power even affected the nation's religious observance.

In Daniel 3 we read that Nebuchadnezzar made a golden image "whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits" (verse 1), some 90 feet high and nine feet wide. The people were instructed to "fall down and worship the gold image" that the king had set up, and any who refused to do so would "be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" (verses 5-6). The remainder of the chapter relates how three young Jewish men refused to participate in such idolatry and were punished as the king had commanded—only to be miraculously delivered by God.

Babylon was later overthrown by Persia,

another gentile empire with a similar form of government. In Daniel 6 we read of Daniel's success as a governor under the Persian king Darius. Other officials were jealous of Daniel but could find no fault in him, except that his religion was different from that of the majority. They finally concluded, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God" (Daniel 6:5).

Without mentioning Daniel, they deceived the king by appealing to his vanity. They persuaded the monarch to issue a decree effectively banning all religious devotions for a period of 30 days, during which time the king alone could be worshiped. The punishment for offenders was to be cast into a den of lions (verse 7). As had happened earlier, the punishment was indeed carried out—and again God miraculously delivered His servant.

Absolute power certainly does corrupt. Leaders can start to see themselves as gods whose actions and words are beyond question.

### God's preventative solution for arrogant rule

To avert such problems among the Israelites, God instructed all the kings of Israel to write with their own hands their own personal copy of the Scriptures, to read them daily and to base their rule on the laws and principles they found there.

"When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around

me,' . . . it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book . . . And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, *that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren . . .*" (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

Interestingly, the most successful democracies in the world are those that were greatly influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition in their formative years. We see, for example, that the King James Version of the Bible, translated and first published in Britain in 1611 by order of the king, contributed greatly to the development of constitutional government in Britain in subsequent

years. Parliamentary institutions were set up throughout the colonies, including the original 13 American ones that later became the United States.

### Why democracy doesn't work in some countries

African nations have had a tumultuous history in the four or five decades since independence from the colonial powers. This has left them poorer than under colonialism.

Many have tried democracy but have experienced the overthrow of constitutional government as a result of corruption and abuse of power. Typically, military governments attempt to end the corruption but continue the abuse. In a short time, corruption itself is back as the new leaders simply continue the tradition of the old. When the peoples' hostility to military rulers becomes too great, often a new constitution is drawn up and an election held, repeating the cycle again and again.

This is true not only of Africa. The British introduced parliamentary democracy to Iraq in the years following World War I. When they left, the country was not able to maintain its democratic institutions.

America now hopes to establish another democratic system in Iraq. A constitution will likely be agreed to by the various parties involved, an election held and a new government given power. Washington's hope is that the success of a democratic Iraqi government will lead to the spread of democracy throughout the Middle East. Because democracies are less likely than dictatorships to fight and invade their neighbors, the hope is that this development will lead to stability and peace in the region.

However, this view overlooks the cultural differences that limit the potential for any democratic system set up in the Mideast, Africa or Asia, areas of the world with little or no democratic traditions.

Those Western nations that were heavily influenced by the Protestant Reformation have a tradition of individualism. John Wycliffe, one of the fathers of the Reformation and, in the 14th century, the first man to translate the Bible into English, emphasized the responsibility of each individual to "work out [his] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). This was in total contrast to the religious teachings of the time, which taught submission to the church and the state, no matter how corrupt or morally decadent their leaders might be.

The established church had failed to appreciate Jeremiah's words: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick . . ." (Jeremiah 17:9, New

American Standard Bible). Without restraints on power, all human beings can fall into this trap.

A solid foundation of individualism was built on an increased understanding of the Scriptures. The religious reformers emphasized the importance of Scripture as the final authority in every person's life. This influence continued right up until the end of the Victorian era at the beginning of the 20th century. Since then it has waned. One consequence of this is a lack of awareness of the differences in cultures due to different religious and political traditions.

### Cultural differences inhibit democracy

While the Western democracies were built on individualism, most other societies are communal in nature. In these societies people are taught to follow the decisions of the elders without question. There is a long tradition of submission to authority, of unquestioning obedience to the individual at the top.

This might suggest that there would be no revolutions or coups. However, a major contributory cause of these upheavals is tribalism or clan loyalty. The primary loyalty of the peoples of Africa is to their tribes, not to the political entities within which they live, typically countries artificially created by the colonial powers.

Each African president comes from a particular tribe. Usually he will surround himself with other members of the same tribe, thereby causing resentment to grow among those who feel left out. Generally the pattern is that tensions build until eventually there is a violent overthrow of the national leader. In most cases, a man from a different tribe becomes president, surrounds himself with *his* family members and cronies, and the cycle repeats itself.

This helps explain why millions of people will take to the streets to celebrate the overthrow of one dictator, only to return to the streets months later in enthusiastic support of the next one, always hopeful that the next strongman will usher in a utopia.

Perhaps these factors help us now see why so much of the world naturally tends toward dictatorship and why the efforts of the major Western powers to instill democracy ultimately prove futile.

Of course, democracy isn't perfect, either. When other cultures look at the United States and Britain, they see many aspects of culture they certainly would not want to emulate. Criticisms leveled against the two dominant Western nations include the feeling that there is *too much* freedom today, which has led to widespread immorality,

epidemics of sexually transmissible diseases, pornography, filthy entertainment and millions upon millions of abortions, divorces and ruined lives. Quite sensibly, they do not want to copy that.

### Jesus Christ's good news: Good government will come

Good government on earth will not come until the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Odd as it may sound, good government was at the heart of Jesus Christ's gospel, His message of the coming Kingdom of God to be established on earth (Mark 1:14-15).

Daniel was repeatedly encouraged during his captivity by the promise of this coming world-ruling Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. In Daniel 7 we read of his vision of a series of gentile empires, pictured as wild beasts, that would dominate much of the world up to the return of Jesus Christ.

But in the days of the last of these kingdoms—of a renewed Roman Empire that even now is coalescing in Europe—Daniel saw "One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! . . . Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14). With Jesus Christ at its head, this divinely instituted Kingdom—the Kingdom of God—will at last bring good, godly government to the entire world.

Isaiah 9:6-7 describes so well this joyful time of Christ's rule: ". . . And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end . . . to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever." **GN**

## Recommended Reading

How will the world be transformed from misguided, self-serving human rule that seeks to benefit a few to divine, godly rule that will benefit all and at last bring an end to human misery, poverty and oppression? God has spelled out the story throughout the Bible. Request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to discover how this worldwide transformation will come about!



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# Iraq's Liberation: A Foretaste for the Entire World

Does the struggle for freedom for Iraq have implications for all of humanity?

by Scott Ashley

**M**any reports have confirmed that Saddam Hussein maintained his reign of terror through torture, murder and even the use of chemical weapons against Iraqi citizens.

In a startling piece in the April 11 *New York Times*, a CNN news executive admitted that he knew of a number of brutal murders of innocent Iraqis and the torture of others, and even the planned assassination of a neighboring head of state, but his network had refrained from reporting on them.

The coalition forces' destruction of many of Saddam's presidential palaces and compounds—lavish edifices constructed even as thousands of Iraqi citizens went hungry or died for lack of needed medicines—emphasized how much he had put his own interests ahead of those of his country.

Shortly before the war, *Forbes* magazine estimated his personal fortune at \$2 billion, most of it amassed through illegal sales of Iraqi oil and kickbacks on legal transactions. Other estimates put it even higher. As one of a number of the world's dictators-for-life, he considered himself accountable to no one.

The brutality through which Saddam Hussein maintained power is legendary. A pre-war report by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office titled "Saddam Hussein: Crimes and Human Rights Abuses" described Iraq as "a terrifying place to live," noting that 3 to 4 million Iraqis, some 15 percent of the population, had "fled their homeland rather than live under Saddam Hussein's regime."

The report recounted testimony from Iraqi exiles of many forms of punishment without trial—including systematic torture, rape and beheadings. It also noted that the penalty for "slander or abusive remarks" about Saddam Hussein or his family was amputation of the offender's tongue, with the punishment broadcast on TV as a warning to others.

One eyewitness account of government-sanctioned murders, relayed by a member of the British parliament in *The Times* (London) shortly before the war, described how people were fed into a machine used for shredding plastic. "Sometimes they went in head first and died quickly," said the witness.

"Sometimes they went in feet first and died screaming . . . I saw 30 people die like this."

Sadly, these are but a few of the tens of millions of men, women and children who have lost their lives at the hands of such despots as Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Mao Tse-tung, and now Saddam Hussein.

## A new dictator to arise

What is it about the human lust for power that brings out such indescribable brutality? What does this tell us about the human condition and what might lie ahead?

The Bible reveals that the time of human dictatorships is far from over. In fact, *it will get worse*. Bible prophecy foretells the rise to power of a coming dictator who will plunge the world into a crisis that will make the Iraqi conflict pale by comparison. This threat will be so great that humanity will be faced with extinction!

We find this end-time dictator described in Revelation 17, where he is called "the beast." We also see here that an alliance of 10 rulers, apparently in the territory of the former Roman Empire, will cede to him their power and authority, making him the most powerful human being on the planet.

"The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. *They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast* . . . For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled" (verses 12-13, 17, New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

It's not coincidental that in recent years many European countries in the heart of



the ancient Roman Empire (symbolized by another "beast" in Daniel 7:7 and Revelation 13:1-3) have made great strides at unity—first economic, and now being followed by political and military unification. It appears that this end-time alliance will have its roots in the current European Union (to learn more, request or download our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*).

Daniel 11:40-45 tells us more about this coming evil ruler, that he will eventually invade North Africa and the Middle East, setting up his headquarters in Israel. "He shall enter also into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown . . . And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain [Jerusalem] . . ." (King James Version).

The next verse, Daniel 12:1, tells us that the world will then experience "a time

of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time.”

### The power behind the throne

One reason that this end-time dictator will be able to consolidate power is his *unseen allies*—spirit beings the Bible calls demons (Revelation 16:13-14). This end-time dictator will be extra-powerful and persuasive because he will have supernatural, demonic help!

He will be assisted in his manipulation and deception of the world by an individual the Bible calls “the false prophet” (Revelation 19:20). In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul refers to this individual as “the man of sin” and “the lawless one” (verses 3, 9). Paul reveals that the power behind him is none other than *Satan himself*: “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing” (verses 9-10, NIV).

Here we see a crucial factor in world affairs that few can understand: The entire world is in the grip of an evil force every bit as dangerous, cruel and remorseless as Saddam Hussein, Adolf Hitler or any other tyrant you might name—*only worse*.

Our secularly oriented society and educational system has convinced most people that there is no spirit world, no God and no devil. And even among those who believe God exists, most naively assume this is *His* world. But the Bible reveals something very different: The present world isn’t *God’s* world—it’s *Satan’s*. The devil is the one running the show for the time being, as God has allowed the world to choose its own ways and do its own thing apart from Him.

Notice that Paul refers to this era not as God’s, but as “this present *evil age*” (Galatians 1:4). Paul even calls Satan “the *god* of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). This evil spirit being is the one most people unknowingly worship and follow! Of course, he isn’t worshiped as Satan. Instead, presenting himself as “an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14), he

deceives people with “another Jesus” and “a different gospel” (verse 4) proclaimed by his own ministers who *appear* to represent Christ (verses 13-15; compare Matthew 24:24).

The apostle John tells us that “the *whole world is under the control of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19, NIV). But how is this possible? In fact, it’s quite easy. Like any effective dictator, Satan knows that he must manipulate all the information that goes out to those under his control.

And this he has done quite masterfully. Revelation 12:9 tells us that the “serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan . . . *deceives the whole world.*” He does it by controlling and manipulating most of the information we receive while at the same time suppressing God’s truth. As Paul put it, God’s truth “*is veiled* to those who are perishing, whose minds *the god of this age has blinded* . . .” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

In its place Satan pushes people to adopt his evil, selfish and self-serving ways and attitudes—attitudes that are cruelly exemplified in brutal despots like Saddam Hussein, North Korea’s Kim Jong Il and others. It’s little wonder the Bible refers to the coming end-time dictator as “the *beast*”—his true nature will be more like an animal than a human being.

Just as dictators care little for their subjects, Satan cares little for the human beings trapped in his domain, the earth. Jesus Christ describes him as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31), but a ruler who lies to and murders his subjects (John 8:44). Because of his lies, deceptions and attitudes, our world is filled with violence, hatred, misery and suffering of every kind.

### The end of tyranny

The incredible scene that aired worldwide of Iraqis trying to topple a statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad is a hopeful foretaste of what the entirety of humanity will eventually experience. Why? Because Bible prophecy reveals very good news about a coming liberation of the entire world!

The coming end-time dictator described earlier will meet his match—and much more (Revelation 19:20). The armies that support him will meet their end, too, vanquished by overwhelming divine power (verses 11-21; Zechariah 14:12).

Mankind will never experience true freedom until its spiritual oppressor, Satan the devil, is removed from power. In Revelation 20:1-3 Christ revealed to John how this will come about: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and *bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more* . . .”

Only when this world’s true ruler, Satan the devil, is removed will men, women, boys and girls everywhere learn what true freedom really means.

Many prophecies describe this time. Micah 4:3-5 is one of the most striking: “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken . . . [and] we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.” **GN**

## Recommended Reading

Why is our world plagued with so many tragedies, so much sorrow and suffering? Why doesn't God put a stop to it? Why does evil exist, and will it ever end? If you'd like to learn more, request your free copies of the booklets *Is There Really a Devil?*, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at

[www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org)

## A Contrast in Leadership

The contrast between the abuse of power that characterizes the rule of human despots like Saddam Hussein and the motives Jesus Christ said should define true leadership are as different as night and day. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them,” He said to His disciples. “*Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:25-28, emphasis added throughout).

True leadership isn’t a matter of emphasizing authority and abusing power over others, He pointed out. No, far from it. The one who is a true leader is not the one who gets the most, amassing power and wealth for himself, his family and his cronies, but

the one who *gives* the most of himself to serve his people and to better their lives.

To Jesus, these weren’t empty words or catchy slogans. He put His life on the line—literally—to back up His words. He gave His time in serving, sharing, encouraging and miraculously healing the sick and feeding the hungry.

He defined His mission on earth in Luke 4:18 (quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2): “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

When He at last returns to earth, this will be the kind of godly leadership and example that will characterize His rule. What a stark contrast to so many of today’s rulers!

# Noah's Flood: Did It Really Happen?

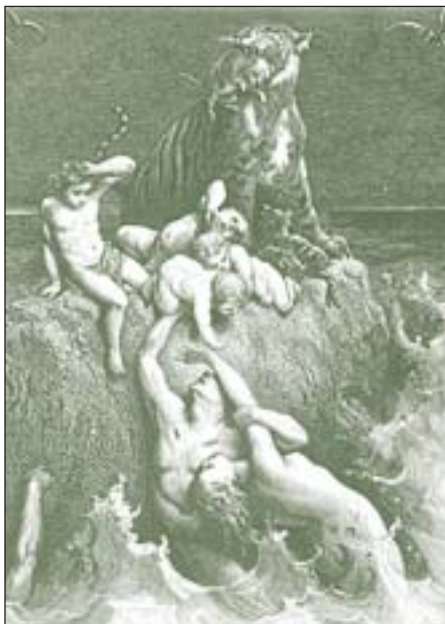
The story of Noah's Flood in the book of Genesis is astounding. Can we find evidence that it happened?

by Bill Jahns

According to the Bible, Noah's Flood was both universal and catastrophic, resulting in the wholesale destruction of both human and animal life on the earth. But is it possible that it really happened? Can we find evidence?

In considering this question, let's begin with the Bible itself and briefly review the account of the Flood: "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened" (Genesis 7:11). Notice this important fact: The source of the water was both the atmosphere ("windows of heaven") and subterranean water ("fountains of the great deep").

The Genesis account, then, indicates that much of the water came from *inside* the



1993-1997, Microsoft Corporation).

Also, according to *The Dynamic Earth: An Introduction to Physical Geology*, 75 percent of the rocks seen on the earth's surface are sedimentary in origin and the remainder are igneous or volcanic (Brian Skinner and Stephen Porter, 1989, p. 20). In some areas, sedimentary deposits cover the earth to a depth of some five miles.

This water-deposited strata offers abundant evidence of massive floods unlike anything seen in human history outside the Bible. We understand, of course, that everything in the geologic record cannot be explained by one flood. In fact, the Bible begins with a description of our planet covered with water (Genesis 1:2, 9-10), so much of Earth's sedimentary strata must date to this time or even before this time. However, the massive scale of the Flood of Noah's time no doubt caused other, later formations (for more details, download or request our free booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*).

Notice, for example, this description of one outcropping at Agate Springs in northwestern Nebraska: "What remains of the hill covers about ten acres. This bone bed was accidentally discovered in 1876. It contains the bones of rhinoceroses, camels, giant wild boars, and other animals, buried together in a confused mass *as only water would deposit them*."

"It is estimated that the bones of about nine thousand complete animals are buried on this one hill . . . Hence, it is likely that many times that number of animals were brought together at this hill and buried there *by the action of water* . . . This is a fact that is most important. *Animals of every kind died in great numbers and were buried almost instantly*" (Alfred Rehwinkel, *The Flood*, 1951, p. 183, emphasis added). The important fact is that this massive deposit of many kinds of animals was obviously made by a huge amount of water.

In addition, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* provides evidence of the Noachian Flood: "Among these

## The geologic history of the earth shows periods in which tremendous upheaval has occurred.

earth. Even today large underground reservoirs of water and a surprising number of underground streams exist throughout the earth. But in the pre-Flood world these were likely even more common.

What is meant by the terminology, "the fountains of the great deep were broken up"? *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* states regarding Genesis 7:11: ". . . There were corresponding gigantic upheavals and shiftings of the earth's crust which caused the oceans' floors to rise and break up their reservoirs of subterranean waters."

This comment about the "fountains of the deep" being broken up indicates that there were tremendous movements of land—possibly even continents—likely causing massive volcanic eruptions, too.

The geologic history of the earth shows periods in which tremendous upheaval has occurred. The "fountains of the deep" being opened probably included the sudden releasing of this underground water accompanied by erupting volcanoes—causing

at least some new geologic strata to be formed on the earth.

### Formations made by water

Can we find geologic formations that appear to have been made under water? Most certainly yes! There are many such formations. Most of our planet's surface is covered with sedimentary rocks—those that are often deposited under water or associated with water.

Let's consult a modern source for a clear definition: "Sedimentary Rock: in geology, rock composed of geologically reworked materials, formed by the accumulation and consolidation of mineral and particulate matter deposited by the action of water or, less frequently, wind or glacial ice. Most sedimentary rocks are characterized by parallel or discordant bedding that reflects variations in either the rate of deposition of the material or the nature of the matter that is deposited" ("Sedimentary Rock," *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*,

evidences one of the most convincing is to be found in the cave of San Ciro at the base of the mountains surrounding the plain of Palermo in Sicily. In this cave there was found an immense mass of the bones of hippopotami of all ages down to the fetus, mingled with a few of the deer, ox and elephant.

“These were so fresh when discovered that they were cut into ornaments and polished and still retained a considerable amount of their nitrogenous matter. Twenty tons of these bones were shipped for commercial purposes in the first six months after their discovery. Evidently the animals furnishing these bones had taken refuge in this cave to escape the rising water which had driven them in from the surrounding plains and cooped them up in the amphitheater of mountains during

a gradual depression of the land.

“Similar collections of bones are found in various ossiferous fissures, in England and Western Europe, notably in the Rock of Gibraltar and at Santenay, a few miles South of Chalons in central France, where there is an accumulation of bones in fissures 1,000 ft. above the sea, similar in many respects to that in the cave described at San Ciro, though the bones of hippopotami did not appear in these places; but the bones of wolves, bears, horses and oxen, none of which had been gnawed by carnivora, were indiscriminately commingled as though swept in by all-pervading currents of water” (1915, “Deluge of Noah”).

Many people have had the experience of hiking into the mountains and finding fossilized seashells, fish and other aquatic creatures. This proves that these strata were

under water at one time in the past.

### Why the biblical Flood isn't accepted

In light of such obvious evidence, why don't modern geologists and scientists readily accept the validity of the Flood? One reason is that these relatively recent formations are dated by geologists as occurring (in most cases) millions of years before the biblical Flood. The theory of evolution has had such a strong influence on the thinking of the intelligentsia of this world that the truths of the Bible have largely been forgotten or dismissed.

Modern geologists have almost universally accepted what is called the “geologic column.” The geologic column supposedly reflects the history of life in periodic epochs or eras, each of very long duration, that geologists believe occurred on the earth.

## Serious Problems With Dating Methods

**W**hy do geologists so frequently fail to understand that the biblical Flood was the force that created some geologic formations? One important answer lies in the way they date these formations.

The theory of evolution has become so ubiquitous in the scientific world today that it even distorts the way geological formations are dated. However, these dating methods have significant problems that can lead to serious errors of interpretation.

One of the most popular dating methods, carbon-14 (<sup>14</sup>C), is used for dating plant or animal remains. The book *The Dynamic Earth* explains the basis for this method: “Radiocarbon is continuously created in the atmosphere through bombardment of nitrogen-14 (<sup>14</sup>N) by neutrons created by cosmic radiation. <sup>14</sup>C, with a half-life of 5730 years, decays back to <sup>14</sup>N. . . As long as the production rate remains constant, the radioactivity of natural carbon remains constant because [the] rate of production balances the rate of decay.

“While an organism is alive and is taking in carbon from the atmosphere, it contains this balanced proportion of <sup>14</sup>C. However, at death the balance is upset, because replenishment by life processes such as feeding, breathing and photosynthesis ceases. The <sup>14</sup>C in dead tissues continually decreases by radioactive decay” (Brian Skinner and Stephen Porter, 1989, pp. 138-139). By measuring the amount of carbon-14 and comparing that amount to the original, scientists can obtain a date for the death of the organism.

However, there are many problems with the dates obtained through this method. For example, dating *living* mollusks by the carbon-14 method often yields clearly errant results—for instance, finding the mollusks to be up to 2,300 years old (“Radiocarbon Dating: Fictitious Results With Mollusk Shells,” *Science*, Vol. 141, p. 634). Carbon-14 dating methods are obviously affected by the environment.

Archaeologist John McRay notes: “Unfortunately, several recent discoveries combine to indicate that carbon 14 is not as valuable as was once hoped: (1) radioactive carbon atoms may not have existed in the earth's atmosphere before 2000 B.C.; (2) the natural concentration of carbon 14 in the atmosphere has varied in certain periods, and (3) there is a high probability of sample contamination” (*Archaeology and the New Testament*, 1991, p. 34).

Recently a new method—accelerator mass spectrometry—has been used to date ancient items. This method has given a different date than previously accepted for the earliest Mayan civilization.

“The oldest known Maya turns out to be younger than archaeologists originally believed. The remains of a woman found below a layered platform at a site called Cuello in northern Belize had been thought to be more than 4,000 years old. . . As a result of new dating methods, about a thousand years have been trimmed from the chronology. Norman Hammond of Boston University, who began digging at Cuello in the 1970s, says the remains now are believed to be from about 1200 B.C., still earlier than any other known Maya settlement.

“The accelerator mass spectrometer allows scientists to analyze the bones of the ancient Maya without severely damaging them. The new technique can date carbon samples weighing only a few milligrams; a specimen the size of a match head will do” (“Oldest Known Maya: Not Quite So Old,” *National Geographic*, November 1990). Here a new dating method has changed by 1,000 years the earliest accepted date of Mayan civilization.

Consider then. Radiometric dating methods (those measuring geologic time by rate of radioactive decay) have been used to date formations that could be associated with Noah's Flood. These dates supposedly prove these formations are millions of years old rather than thousands. Yet we find that different methods can yield radically different results.

As *The Science of Evolution* explains: “Several methods have been devised for estimating the age of the earth and its layers of rocks. These methods rely heavily on the assumption of uniformitarianism, i.e., natural processes have proceeded at relatively constant rates throughout the earth's history. . . It is obvious that radiometric techniques may not be the absolute dating methods that they are claimed to be. Age estimates on a given geological stratum by different radiometric methods are often quite different (sometimes by hundreds of millions of years). There is no absolutely reliable long-term radiological ‘clock’” (William Stansfield, 1977, pp. 80, 84).

The potassium-argon [K-Ar] dating method, used to date lava flows, also has problems—as shown by studies of Mount St. Helens. “The conventional K-Ar dating method was applied to the 1986 dacite flow from the new lava dome at Mount St. Helens, Washington. Porphyritic dacite which solidified on the surface of the lava dome in 1986 gives a whole rock K-Ar ‘age’ of 0.35 + OR - 0.05 million years (Ma). Mineral concentrates from this same dacite give K-Ar ‘ages’ from 0.35 + OR - .06 Ma to 2.8 + OR - 0.6 Ma. These ‘ages’ are, of course, preposterous [since we know the rock formed recently]. The fundamental dating assumption (‘no radiogenic argon was present when the rock formed’) is questioned by these data.

“Instead, data from this Mount St. Helens dacite argue that significant ‘excess argon’ was present when the lava solidified in 1986. . . This study of Mount St. Helens dacite causes the more fundamental question to be asked—how accurate are K-Ar ‘ages’ from the many other phenocryst-containing lava flows worldwide?” (Stephen Austin, “Excess Argon within Mineral Concentrates from the New Dacite Lava Dome at Mount St. Helens Volcano,” *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1996, pp. 335-344).

In layman's terms, these volcanic rocks that we know were formed in 1986—less than 20 years ago—were “scientifically” dated to between 290,000 and 3.4 million years old!

Such examples serve to illustrate the fallibility of the dating methods on which many modern scientists rely so heavily.

Thus, much of the earth's strata are believed to have been extant millions of years ago and are dated by the column to that time.

But what most people don't realize is that this "geologic column" doesn't exist in most places on earth. A good example of this can be found in Arizona's Grand Canyon. On the top of the Grand Canyon is a formation called the Kaibab Formation, which is dated as a Permian period formation (about 250 million years old). Not only that, but in the middle of the Grand Canyon strata is a *gap* of more than 100 million years in the column between the Temple Butte formation and Muav Limestone (see Stanley Beus and Michael Morales, editors, *Grand Canyon Geology*, 1990, p. 9).

The bottom line is that geologists' dating of strata is not through objective, scientifically verifiable dating methods, but rather is heavily influenced by belief in the theory of evolution, which demands eons of time. Many instances exist where the dates obtained in a laboratory do not match the modern idea of how old certain formations are *supposed* to be according to a predetermined, *theoretical* geologic column (see "Serious Problems With Dating Methods," page 19).

### Pervasive influence of evolutionary bias

Many formations appear to be dated far too old by geologists because they have allowed themselves to be prejudiced by the theory of evolution. For example, evolutionists commonly accept as fact that certain species existed on the earth only to become

extinct. For instance, in the state of Wyoming are fossils of millions of fish believed to have died during the Eocene



## This thinking foolishly denies the existence of the Creator or that He brought a global deluge on the earth because men and women were immersed in sin.

epoch, dated at approximately 50 million years ago. Geologists don't know exactly why they died, but it is very obvious that some type of catastrophe killed all these fish.

When properly understood and correctly interpreted, the geologic formations of the earth clearly point to past catastrophes. It's easy to understand that many of these

formations were the result of one or more catastrophic floods when true scientific facts are considered *without* the bias of modern interpretations of the geologic record.

Regrettably, far too many of our leading intellectuals have accepted the prejudices of an educational system built around the theory of evolution. This thinking foolishly denies the existence of the Creator or that He brought a global deluge on the earth because men and women were immersed in violence and other sins.

In considering the matter, we would do well to reflect on the words of the eighth-century-B.C. Hebrew prophet Amos. He reminds us of God's absolute power over this planet in Amos 9:5-6: "The Lord GOD of hosts, He who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell there mourn; all of it shall swell like the River, and subside like the River of Egypt. He who builds His layers in the sky, and has founded His strata in the earth; who calls for the waters of the

sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth—the LORD is His name." **GN**

### Coming in our next issue

Two more articles about Noah and the Flood:

- Was the Flood Universal?
- Misconceptions About Noah's Ark

## Did the Noachian Flood Cause Global Catastrophe?

Uniformitarianism is the foundational basis of evolutionary geology. This belief holds that the present is the key to the past. As nonsensical as it may seem, the bottom line of this view is that since a global flood is not now occurring in the present, it never happened in the past either. This teaching holds that sedimentary layers of strata covering most of the planet have been laid down at a uniform rate over billions of years.

Pioneer geologist James Hutton taught uniformitarianism as an article of faith. Author Carl Dunbar sums up this belief in his book *Historical Geology*: "... Given sufficient time, processes now at work could account for all the geologic features of the Globe" (1969, p. 22).

Other authors state regarding uniformitarianism: "... The great thickness of the sediments... [is] the inevitable result of the long-continued operation of the slow erosion that we observe today" (*Principles of Geology*, 1968, p. 18).

But when the geologic strata and the fossil record are interpreted in light of what the Bible reveals, it becomes plain that many of the layered sedimentary rocks were in fact deposited *in rapid succession* rather than over eons of time (as evolutionists have long claimed). The natural history of the earth is in harmony with the biblical account in Genesis.

Noah's Flood must have unleashed natural forces that have not been experienced since that time. Wind, rain and water raged over this planet during the great Flood. Winds of hurricane force and mountainous tidal waves must have roared over the earth. The fountains of the great deep would have sent streams of water gushing out of fissures in the ground.

Of course, this is far from the uniformitarian concept maintained by many geologists. In fact, globe-altering havoc was everywhere present. The earth and its geological features would never be the same again.

Gargantuan whirlpools would have thrown huge masses of flora and fauna together and buried both under massive amounts of silt and mud. And this is exactly what we see in the fossil record. This real evidence also shows us that much of the fossil record was in fact laid down in a relatively short time.

Windswept waters, propelled by the gravitational pulls of the moon, must have raged over landmasses, covering the continents with layers of sand and mud and burying animals and plant life—again, exactly as we see in the fossil record. Rock formations were undoubtedly twisted, bent and folded, just as geologic strata reveal. This is the reality of catastrophism.

Only the massive wave action of a flood of global proportions could have deposited these sedimentary layers as they are now found all over this planet. Undoubtedly many of the most recent layers consist of flood deposits.

God is not only the Creator of the earth, but also the Cause of this great deluge. Psalm 104:6-9 amply testifies about the true Author of this global upheaval of floodwaters. Quoting here from the New International Version, the passage says of God: "You covered it [the earth] with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight; they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them. You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth."

# Noah

## *An Example of Righteousness*

by Jerold Aust

**A**s the sun rose on the horizon every day, large crowds gathered around the skeleton of a gigantic ship resting on the dry ground. Immediately they were struck by its enormous size and shape: a flat keel with giant bowed ribs shooting out and upward more than 40 feet. How strange this was. The man Noah must have taken leave of his senses!

As the crowds gathered to observe this landlocked monstrosity, they likely jeered, perhaps asking, “What’s your problem, Noah? Why do you need such a giant boat? And how are you ever going to get this thing to the water?” He surely told them, as God does not bring such judgment as was coming without revealing it through His servants. But the onlookers refused to believe.

Days turned to weeks, weeks to months, and months to years. Would it ever come to an end? Would God follow through with His decree?

Being human, Noah could have become disheartened at times from having to listen to the local blowhards. What probably hurt him most, however, was to hear his relatives and friends scorn him. To them he was building a monument to stupidity; to God he was building a monument to faith and obedience.

As time passed, Noah may have had moments when he wondered whether his scorners were right. After all, he suffered their relentless ridicule day after day, year after year. Yet clearly he remembered and followed the words of God, who had told him of His great purpose in an incredible prophecy. Those words must have greatly strengthened,

comforted and encouraged him to be true to his original mission and never quit.

After many decades of labor, the ark was nearing completion. There it stood, a colossal structure some 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high (137 by 23 by 14 meters). The ark was gargantuan.

Finally, after all the animals were loaded on board, Noah and his family entered the ark and God, not Noah himself as many assume, closed the door behind them.

A week passed and still nothing happened.

*Being human, Noah could have become disheartened at times from having to listen to the local blowhards. What probably hurt him most, however, was to hear his relatives and friends scorn him.*

The mocking of those outside was likely incessant and growing. But then, in the distance, they saw a flash of lightning, followed shortly by the thunder roll. The laughter and jeers dropped markedly.

And then it happened. The rains fell—and fell, and fell. With the waters rising, some people around the ark probably scampered to the highest hills while others may have tried in vain to cling to the ark. But the time had finally come for God to fulfill His warning to wipe the earth clean of evil men and to start the human race over again through faithful Noah and his family.

For a short time outside the ark, while the waters reached ever higher, Noah’s faith was vindicated in the eyes of the now-fearful naysayers and scorners. As darkness covered

the ark, righteous and faithful Noah probably privately shed tears for an unbelieving and doomed mankind.

### Noah and his family

Noah was the grandson of Methuselah, the oldest man who ever lived. Noah’s life may be divided into three parts: For hundreds of years nothing was recorded about him. During this time, Noah apparently was busy maturing spiritually. Then, as Genesis 5:32 tells us, “After he was 500 years old, he became the

father of Shem, Ham and Japheth” (New International Version).

God spoke to Noah and commissioned him to build an ark to spare himself, his wife and his sons and their wives and pairs of the various land animals. God had determined to drown wicked mankind in a universal flood (Genesis 6:17-21).

With his three sons, Noah undertook this gigantic project. They continued to build the ark as the years stretched by, until Noah’s 600th year (Genesis 7:6).

At the end of that extended period of probation for mankind, God gathered the animals of the earth to the ark, instructed Noah and his family to enter the ark, and God Himself

closed the door behind them.

“Then the LORD said to Noah, ‘Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation. You shall take with you seven [pairs] each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and his female; also seven [pairs] each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth. For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made’” (verses 1-4).

Noah did what God commanded him. He, his wife, his sons and his sons’ wives, went into the ark. They were accompanied by an amazing menagerie—seven pairs of “clean” animals—those the Bible designates as being suitable for human consumption—and two each of the “unclean” animals, those that aren’t to be eaten (see verse 2, Tanakh: New Jewish Publication Society Translation).

After seven days “all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights” (verses 11-12). The waters beneath the earth’s surface broke through and flooded the land even as it rained incessantly for 40 days and nights. Except for those on the ark, all of mankind perished under the rising waters.

The lesson of Noah is the lesson of God to mankind: Righteousness and faithfulness saves, but sin destroys.

### A rampant pandemic of evil

Since Noah’s personal life is not depicted by a colorful story, we can only deduce what he was like from the little the Bible says about him. God does clearly identify Noah’s character in a couple of verses, and a further description of what Noah was like can be inferred by contrasting him to the surrounding evil world.

The apostle Peter called Noah “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). To what should we contrast that?

In Noah’s day, men were heaping evil upon evil, leaving nothing to the imagination (Genesis 6:5). There were giants on the earth in Noah’s day (verse 4). The word “giants” in Hebrew is *nephilim* from *naphal*, a word that connotes giant men who “fall on” or violently overthrow others (see *NASB Key Word Study Bible*, 1990, p. 10).

These giant men were legendary, “men of renown” (verse 4).



**Noah and his sons continued their work on the ark, faithfully and consistently. Railing and ridicule didn’t cause them to lose heart and quit.**

(We might note that the “sons of God” in verses 2 and 4 aren’t angels as some suppose since Jesus said that angels do not marry, which is to say they do not cohabit with women, Mark 12:25.)

The context of Genesis 6:1-5 directs our attention to the wickedness of mankind as they did what they considered right in their own eyes—not unlike most people do today. The general population was arrogant and hedonistic, refusing to honor God or His laws.

God looked around and saw that there was only one righteous man on earth: Noah. The future of mankind hung by a thread, and at the end of that thread was faithful Noah. He didn’t just believe in the existence of God, He believed what God said and that His way was right.

Since God loves righteousness and hates evil, and since He doesn’t want mankind to destroy itself, He was compelled to stop the growing mayhem and carnage. He would wash away the evil of mankind through a worldwide deluge.

### God’s warning ignored

It’s been said that amateurs built the ark while professionals built the *Titanic*. What irony! God—hardly an amateur—was involved in the design of the ark (Genesis 6:14-16). He gave explicit instructions for its design and waterproofing.

Picture this ongoing scenario: Businessmen, farmers, woodsmen, shepherds and their families talked about and mocked Noah and his sons for building an enormous boat on dry land. Even if a great body of water was nearby, there was no way to move this massive construction to put it in the water. As a matter of record, no other ship of this size is known to have been built until A.D. 1858 (*Halley’s Bible Handbook*, 2000, p. 96).

And perhaps Noah built the ark nowhere near a significant body of water. No matter. He knew that when the ark was completed, there would be no need to haul it somewhere. Instead, the floodwaters would simply buoy the ark up; its design would guarantee its stability.

As was earlier noted, onlookers must have jeered and joked, and some of the more enterprising ones may have set up shops to accommodate the hungry sightseers and passersby. Meanwhile, Noah and his sons continued their work on the ark, faithfully and consistently. Railing and ridicule didn’t cause them to lose heart and quit.

Consider all the mornings Noah and his family came to work, over and over again. For all those years, from morning to evening and sometimes on into the night, Noah’s ark represented a vibrant, living and growing testimony to God’s prophetic

judgment against mankind's evil deeds. You might think that the people who watched this growing spectacle would somehow stumble onto a sliver of the vision of things to come, would begin to think that perhaps Noah was not crazy—that maybe He was telling the truth.

But they never got the point until it was too late. If some began to see the light, they didn't follow through in repenting of their sinful ways. They ignored the obvious warnings or decided just to go along with the crowd. But when the floodwaters came, there was no escape—for the Flood covered the entire earth.

There is ample evidence that the Flood during Noah's time did indeed cover the surface of the whole earth. Those who don't believe the biblical account claim that this event was, at most, only local or regional. But the apostle Peter makes it clear that the Flood was indeed universal: ". . . The world that then existed perished, being flooded with water" (2 Peter 3:6).

### Terms of endearment

Noah's character is described in a pair of verses: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD . . . Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:8-9). We can analyze these two verses to gain insights into the character of Noah.

The word *grace* here is better translated as *favor*; a broader but similar meaning for grace. The next verse tells us *how* he found favor in God's eyes.

Noah was a just man, perfect or upright in his generations (Genesis 6:9). The word *just* means made right in a moral sense—lawful, righteous. Since God's commands define righteousness (Psalm 119:172), Noah must have kept God's laws sincerely and in a wholehearted manner, becoming a mature follower of God. To say that Noah was "perfect" or upright in his generations is

to say that Noah's integrity emanated from keeping God's holy truth and commandments. He was wholehearted toward God. Not that he never sinned—but that when he did, he repented.

Again, Noah "walked" with God, which is to say that he lived by God's ways and stayed close to Him.

These terms—*favor, just, perfect* and *walked*—all describe characteristics that endeared Noah to God and reveal to us what Noah was really like. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). And using the Bible as our reference, we can know what Noah's life was like, how he thought and how he acted.

### Putting faith into action

The book of Hebrews presents Noah as a faithful follower of God. "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7). This chapter is often affectionately referred to as the "faith chapter" of the Bible. Here we find concise thumbnail sketches of past paragons of faith—men and women who stood out in their exercise of faith toward God.

The word *faith* in this verse means constant trust and confidence in God and reliance on Him for salvation. This kind of faith persuades one to follow through with his deepest convictions. After God warned Noah of the coming universal Flood, Noah moved with godly fear to build the ark and to save his family.

The example of building the ark served to condemn the world. But let us all understand: Noah didn't directly condemn the world himself or even have any such desire; rather, the people of the world brought judgment on themselves by dishonoring and disbelieving the warning message Noah

delivered to them from the God who made them. They could have repented and started putting God's laws into practice in their lives, but they didn't. In contrast, Noah did. And his faithfulness and obedience stood as further indictment against the faithlessness and disobedience of the rest of the world.

### Noah: a preacher of righteousness

Strange as it may sound, the example of Noah is being played out on earth today by thousands of others. Noah was, by example and word, a preacher or teacher of righteousness. While Noah was only one person, today there are thousands of living examples of God's way of life who are committed to living righteously as Noah did. They know the difference between good and evil and have consciously and conscientiously chosen the ways that are good.

You can be like Noah. You can set a right example, too. You also can participate in a great work that is, like Noah, properly and appropriately warning this decaying world of its evil ways and urging it to turn to God in real repentance.

The time to act—to get your own life in order—is *now*. Jesus Christ Himself spoke of a time of worldwide catastrophe still ahead of us in which humanity would again face extinction if not for God's intervention: "It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible).

Make a conscious choice today to turn your life around. Choose the humble and obedient path of life, as Noah did. Like him, you can help save your life and the lives of your loved ones—beginning today. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

What is faith? How can you experience a loving, trusting relationship with God? To see how you can develop such a relationship with your Creator, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*. Learn from the pages of your Bible the keys to true, living faith! Also, to see some of the evidence that the Bible is indeed accurate and the Word of God, please request your free copy of the booklet *Is the Bible True?*



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## A colossal testimony to God

For many decades Noah witnessed to the world by building his huge ship away from the water. Many Bible scholars estimate the cubit at approximately 18 inches. At 300 cubits long, 50 cubits across and 30 cubits high (Genesis 6:15), the ark would have measured some 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet—three stories—high. By some estimates the cubit was a bit longer, which would have made the ark even larger.

"For a wooden vessel, the size of the ark was enormous by ancient as well as modern standards. It would have been about two and a half times the size of the large 'Byblos-boats' used by the Egyptians during the Early Dynastic Period and would even have been larger than the largest wooden ships in the modern period of sailing. The Cutty Sark, a three-masted clipper ship launched in 1869, was just over 212 feet" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1990, note on Genesis 6:15).

## 'All Those in the Tombs Will Hear His Voice'

Jesus made a number of puzzling references to a future resurrection—puzzling, that is, if we try to reconcile them with the traditional view of heaven and hell.

by Scott Ashley

**F**ew questions are more important than what happens to us after death. For religious believers the question is particularly important, because most religions promise their adherents some kind of life beyond the grave.

What did Jesus Christ teach about life after death? Most people would find the answer surprising, because statements in the Gospels about life beyond the grave differ considerably from what traditional Christianity has long taught.

For example, John 3:13 plainly says that “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man” (New International Version, emphasis added throughout). Statements like this show that Jesus and His disciples did *not* teach that heaven was the reward of the saved (to learn more, read “Do Good People Really Go to Heaven When They Die?,” beginning on page 4).

Instead Christ repeatedly spoke of a future *resurrection of the dead*, a fact most of His hearers understood and accepted. After all, they were familiar with biblical passages showing that such notable figures as Job (Job 14:14-15), David (Psalm 16:9-10) and Isaiah (Isaiah 26:19) clearly expected to be raised from the grave. Jesus’ close friend Martha, for example, told Jesus that she knew that her dead brother Lazarus would “rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24).

So what did Jesus teach about the resurrection? Who will be in it? When will it take place? Will there be more than one resurrection? Let’s examine His words to be sure we understand.

### Coming resurrection “at the last day”

In John 6:40 Jesus gives an encouraging promise to His followers: “. . . This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and *I will raise him up at the last day.*” Christ explains that He is the very power behind that coming resurrection, that He will raise those who believe in Him.

Note that He also tells us the *timing* of the resurrection—that the dead will rise again “*at the last day.*” In biblical terminology, “last day” generally refers to the time surrounding Christ’s second coming or beyond.

The apostle Paul discusses the resurrection at length in 1 Corinthians 15. He tells us that the dead are resurrected in a specific order—first Jesus Himself, then “afterward those who are Christ’s *at His coming*” (verse 23).

In verses 51-52 he is even more specific: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*”

When is this “last trumpet”? Revelation 8-11 describes a series of seven trumpet blasts and associated plagues that precede Christ’s return. At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, loud voices proclaim: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15). This trumpet, then, announces Christ’s return to earth.

### “The dead in Christ” are raised

At this seventh trumpet Jesus returns to earth and “those who are Christ’s” rise from their graves to meet Him. Paul spells out more details in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the *trumpet* of God. *And the dead in Christ will rise first.* Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

As Paul describes it, both the faithful who have died in centuries past as well as the faithful still living at that time will be part of this resurrection. They are a *specific group* of people. In the verses quoted above, Paul calls them “*the dead in*

*Christ*” and “*those who are Christ’s.*” Jesus Himself refers to this as “*the resurrection of the righteous*” (Luke 14:14, New International Version).

Those in this resurrection, Christ tells us, “can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are *God’s children*, since they are children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36, NIV). In other words, the family of God, currently composed of God the Father and Jesus the Son, will expand dramatically to include many more immortal spirit members. This is why Scripture calls Jesus “the *firstborn among many brothers*” (Romans 8:29, NIV).

What will those who are given immortality in God’s family in this resurrection be like? Paul asks and answers this question in 1 Corinthians 15: “But, you may ask, how are the dead raised? In what kind of body? . . . There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; and the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one thing, the splendour of the earthly another. The sun has a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour, and the stars yet another; and one star differs from another in brightness.

“So it is with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown as a perishable thing is *raised imperishable*. Sown in humiliation, it is *raised in glory*; sown in weakness, it is *raised in power*; sown a physical body, it is *raised a spiritual body*. . . As we have worn the likeness of the man made of dust, so we shall wear the likeness of the heavenly man . . . This perishable body must be clothed *with the imperishable*, and what is mortal *with immortality*” (verses 35-53, Revised English Bible).

In other words, says Paul, we will be raised with a glorified, immortal, powerful *spirit* body! In fact, Daniel 12:3 (NIV) tells us that those in this resurrection “*will shine like the brightness of the heavens . . . like the stars for ever and ever!*” What an incredible transformation!

### Reigning with Christ

But what will those who are raised to

glorified, powerful spirit immortality *do*? They will not be raised to a life of endless leisure and idleness in heaven. No, God has something far more important in mind!

Jesus reveals the future of His faithful servants to His friend and disciple John in the book of Revelation. Revelation 20:4 tells us what happens to those who are given immortality in this resurrection: “And I saw *thrones*, and they sat on them, and *judgment was committed to them* . . . And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

Where do they reign? At that time Jesus Christ will have returned to earth to establish His Kingdom—so they will live and reign with Him *on earth*, rebuilding and reeducating the entire world in God’s way of life. They will be the leaders and overseers of this new and transformed civilization to be built under Christ’s rule. Revelation 5:10 tells us these resurrected saints are “a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (NIV).

This 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ and His saints is commonly known as the Millennium (after the Latin for “thousand years”). Describing this time, Isaiah 2:3 says: “Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

## Another resurrection to follow

Continuing in Revelation 20, verse 5 makes a startling parenthetical statement: “But *the rest of the dead* did not live again until the thousand years were finished.” It also explains that the resurrection of Christ’s faithful followers at His return is “the *first* resurrection.”

John’s vision then fast-forwards 1,000 years to the incredible time when “the rest of the dead” of verse 5 are raised. Notice verse 12: “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”

What is this resurrection all about? How does this differ from the first resurrection?

We first need to recognize that many billions of people have lived and died having never heard the name of Jesus Christ, the

only name by which they could be saved (Acts 4:12). They never had the opportunity to learn of God and His way of life. So what happens to *them*?

Not understanding this second resurrection, theologians and religious teachers have wrestled with this question for centuries. Some think those in this category get a free pass into heaven; others think they burn forever in hell. Neither is remotely close to the truth, for God is eminently fair and just in all His dealings with *all* of humanity.

## First opportunity to learn the truth

God will neither condemn nor reward those who have never heard or learned of His truth. However, He will, in His own time, give every man, woman and child who has ever lived an opportunity to learn and accept that truth, repent and receive His gift of eternal life. And *that* is what this great resurrection is all about.

When we remove our preconceived notions, we see that Revelation 20:12 is describing a *period of judgment* extending over some time, not a one-time *sentencing*. People in this resurrection will have *time* to learn God’s truth—a truth they’ve never heard before—and to either accept or reject God’s way of life.

Jesus himself draws the distinction between these resurrections in John 5:28-29. “Do not marvel at this,” He says, “for an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a *resurrection of life*; and the ones having practiced evil into a *resurrection of judgment*” (Green’s Literal Translation).

Those who have lived righteously come up in what Jesus calls “a resurrection of life.” As noted earlier, this is the first resurrection, to divine spirit immortality. The other resurrection, of those who have lived a life apart from knowledge of God and His ways, will be “a resurrection of judgment”—the time when they will have their opportunity to learn God’s truth and accept or reject it, and they will be judged on that basis.

With this background we can properly understand one of Jesus Christ’s most puzzling statements, found in Matthew 12:41-42 (NIV): “The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation

and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.”

Jesus here describes an astounding time when the long-dead people of the ancient Assyrian capital of Nineveh (of Jonah’s day) and the Queen of Sheba (from Solomon’s era) will live again alongside those from Christ’s generation. And while they had lived and died many centuries before Jesus was even born, they will point out that those of Christ’s time had no excuse for rejecting the very Son of God.

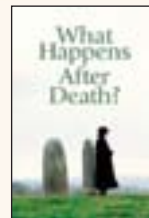
In Matthew 11:20-24 Jesus similarly points out that “it will be more tolerable . . . in the day of judgment” for the people of the long-destroyed cities of Sodom, Tyre and Sidon than it would be for those who had lived in cities like Capernaum in which He had performed miracles that proved His divine identity.

Ezekiel 37 includes a remarkable description of this resurrection in which people are raised to a temporary flesh-and-blood existence. Unlike those who are given immortality in the first resurrection, those in this second resurrection are fully human and subject to death. Those who choose God’s way of living will receive eternal life as glorified members of God’s family. Those who don’t—as well as those in previous ages who have utterly rejected God’s offer of salvation while alive—are destined to perish in the lake of fire, to be utterly burned up and forgotten (Hebrews 10:26-27; Revelation 20:14-15; Malachi 4:1).

These amazing prophecies show that God does not show partiality (Romans 2:11). He will offer his gift of salvation to *all* who have ever lived. This is the surprising—and profoundly encouraging—truth Jesus taught about the resurrection. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

Jesus Christ’s many statements about the resurrection cannot be reconciled with the traditional view of people going to heaven or hell. The Bible reveals much more about the resurrection that you need to understand. Be sure to request your free copies of *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*



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# Predestination

Continued from page 9

understanding even in professing Christianity, how is the world at large to be saved? The wonderful answer—shocking to the majority who have never heard this biblical truth—is that this is not the *only* day of salvation!

God is calling just a few now. In fact, the Greek word translated “church” in the New Testament—*ekklesia*—means “the called-out ones.” And those now in God’s Church are referred to as His “*firstfruits*” (James 1:18, compare Romans 8:23). This clearly implies that there will be *later* fruits to come! And so there will be.

When Jesus Christ returns, He will put down all resistance and establish a Kingdom that will rule mankind for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4; compare Isaiah 2:2-4). Reigning with Him will be the saints—those who are called in this age and remain faithful to the end—who are raised to immortal life in what is called the “first resurrection” (Revelation 20:5-6). During that period, known as the Millennium (meaning 1,000 years), the earth will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the oceans are full of water (Isaiah 11:9), and the vast majority of mankind will be saved.

But what about the billions who have lived and died throughout the previous ages without understanding God’s truth? A parenthetical sentence in Revelation 20:5 answers: “*The rest of the dead* did not come to life until the thousand years were ended” (New Revised Standard Version).

At that time, 1,000 years after Jesus returns, these people will be resurrected to a temporary physical life (see Ezekiel 37) and given God’s Spirit (see verses 12-14). They will then go through a *judgment*—not *sentencing*—period (Revelation 20:11-12), just as God’s Church is being judged today (1 Peter 4:17). And most will repent at that time, as they *would* have, according to Christ, if His work had been done among them when they first lived (see Matthew 11:21-24; 12:41).

It should be noted, however, that this does *not* mean they are given a “second chance” to be saved. Although it will be their *second life in human flesh*, it will be their *first* opportunity to really understand and live by the truth of Almighty God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Amazingly, then, God has foreordained three judgment periods: this present age, the Millennium and the Last Judgment. Therefore, to answer one of the major questions of this article, predestination does not concern *whether* or not individuals will be ultimately saved or condemned. Instead, it refers to *when* people are *offered* salvation!

Some—in fact, *most*—will not be offered it until the Millennium or the Last Judgment.

But God predestined that a few would be called in this age and given the opportunity before Christ returns. Yet these people—as in all ages—still have free will. The decision of whether to truly repent and accept Christ is each person’s choice to make individually. And even then, whether or not that person *remains* in God’s grace or chooses to reject Him is also ultimately up to that individual (see Hebrews 2:1-3; 10:26-27, 35-36).

## God’s guiding hand

Of course, some will claim that even this is not fair. And they still wonder how a just God could preappoint individuals to negative actions. Notice how Paul explains this in Romans 9:17-24 (New Living Translation):

“For the Scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, ‘I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you, and so that my fame might spread throughout the earth.’ So you see, God shows mercy to some just because he wants to, and he chooses to make some people refuse to listen. Well then, you might say, ‘Why does God blame people for not listening? Haven’t they simply done what he made them do?’ No, don’t say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to criticize God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who made it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’

“When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn’t he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into? God has every right to exercise his judgment and his power, but he also has the right to be very patient with those who are the objects of his judgment and are fit only for destruction. He also has the right to pour out the riches of his glory upon those he prepared to be the objects of his mercy—even upon us, whom he selected . . .”

In other words, God had every right to shape and mold Pharaoh to be the way he was. After all, God created him and Pharaoh was, like everyone else, a sinner worthy of death—so God hardening a heart that already was sinful and blinded by Satan did not worsen his predicament in the overall scheme of things.

However, the Lord, it must be noted, did not directly make Pharaoh sin, for God does not tempt *anyone* to sin (James 1:13). Rather, it was part of Pharaoh’s rebellious nature all along, as he had at first hardened his *own* heart (Exodus 8:15, 32). In *further* hardening the Egyptian ruler’s heart, the omniscient God merely knew how to “push his buttons” as it were—that is, how to direct circumstances to provoke him to a particular reaction.

For example, by letting Pharaoh get away with his retractions of his promises for a time, Pharaoh became more set in his ways. And the

longer Pharaoh could make a promise and then rescind it with no unfavorable consequences, the harder his heart became. Finally God used circumstances to destroy the entire Egyptian chariot force that had gone out to re-enslave the Israelites—turning the hubris of Pharaoh to utter humiliation (Exodus 14).

Pharaoh will, of course, be given his opportunity to repent and receive salvation during the Last Judgment. Ultimately, God’s fairness will be extended to him just as much as to any other human being.

God, then, sometimes steers events and circumstances—even seeing to it that certain people are influenced into particular actions—to make sure His overall plan and purpose is fulfilled. But He clearly doesn’t directly bring about all that occurs at any given moment with all people. For, as His Word tells us, “*time and chance happen to them all!*” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Most of the time, God simply allows people to become ensnared by their own wrong inclinations and choices. Thus God has *not* mapped out every detail of a person’s life.

As to why God calls a particular individual—perhaps even you if you are beginning to really understand what you are reading in the pages of your Bible and *The Good News* magazine—God alone knows that answer. And He, as the Creator, has the prerogative to call a person at whatever time He chooses.

We should trust that whatever time He decides to call a person is the best time for that individual. And though being called now is a wonderful privilege, it does not make one better than those called later (compare 1 Corinthians 1:26-29). After all, even if we *are* being called now, all of us still have free will—and therefore we can still fall away if we don’t continue to repent and obey the truth. For we are not just pawns on a chessboard.

So let’s take hold of the wonderful salvation offered to us now by our Creator, allowing the awesome future that He wants for us to become a reality. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

Is God trying to save the world now? Are some destined for a lifetime of heavenly bliss and others condemned to eternal torment in hell? You need to know the truth—and our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* contains the answers. To better understand how God works with those He is calling, be sure to also request or download *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.



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# Letters From Our Readers

## Two views of America

The United States has suffered many tragedies over the past two years and they always grow stronger as a nation. The world can only look on in shock and awe at the tragedies they endure and the strength they show. Their faith never wavers. Reacting to many tragedies, you hear mankind saying, "Why? How could God do this?" They, however, turn to God for guidance, comfort and support, enabling them to grow stronger and closer and without any doubt, a nation to be proud of. They are living proof that God exists because only He has the power to reach inside and soothe the devastation caused by tragedy. Why do so many people doubt Him?

J.D.C., England

*With so much anti-Americanism extant in the world, your praise of America is timely and refreshing. However, as the next letter affirms, not all of its people have turned to God and His righteous ways. Our free booklet Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? and Why Does God Allow Suffering? may help those who still have doubts about our Creator.*

Life takes its twists and turns. Just like our beautiful nation which has been up for our entire lifetime and now clearly appears to be headed down, as we look at decaying foundations incapable of supporting it. Thank you for all the literature you produce, so well-researched and well-written.

L.A., Fairfield, California

## Publications gauge world trends

I am renewing my subscription to your *Bible Study Course* as well as sending you a contribution to aid in your efforts towards God's work. I must admit that years ago I put your literature down. I stopped reading it because I said to myself that what was written in *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* would never happen; it is too far-fetched. Then with the World Trade Center bombings on Sept. 11, it all began to come together and make sense.

K.S., San Francisco, California

I would like to express my thanks for *The Good News*. In this area of the world (the Middle East) where we see the fires of a huge war and humans are killing each other

without any reason, reading your nice magazine gives me a relaxed view that there are some other human beings that are helping and thinking about others.

Dr. J.A., Middle East

## World News & Prophecy

I want to thank you again for sending me your fine newsletter *World News & Prophecy* [a sister publication to *The Good News*]. These are scary times for everyone and this publication is most enlightening. I know you people are blessed by God with knowledge that others don't have.

C.L.K., Bruce Crossing, Michigan

## Bible Study Course

I would be delighted to receive your *Bible Study Course*. Thank you so much for caring about those of us who are floundering in confusion about what the Bible really means, and for the privilege of being able to receive this information free of charge—which is unheard of in the world we live in. I enclose a donation which isn't much, but at least it will help towards postage.

A.N., South Africa

## A positive approach to *The Good News*

I happened upon your January/February issue of *The Good News*. Usually I am hesitant to read any religious material other than the Holy Bible, but I am writing to tell you that I was highly impressed with your magazine. I began reading it because of the cover. It seemed to draw me because of all that's going on in the world around us. I'll admit I was extremely leery on beginning, but found myself comparing what your magazine said with the Bible. Once again I was impressed with the accuracy with which *The Good News* approached the Bible, and the clarity of the issues astounded me.

G.W., Mount Pleasant, Iowa

## Publishing the gospel worldwide

I noticed the growing number of your readers noted on the editorial page. Also, with your mailing addresses classified into regions of the world, we see the evidence that many are being enlightened. I'm deeply touched by your commitment to reach out through *The Good News* magazine's dissemination worldwide. My outlook on life, my views and my

very self have experienced changes. May God bless you in all your works.

A.S., Internet

*The latest circulation figure noted on page 2 of this issue is 456,000. Of course, the main goal of *The Good News* is reaching our readers' minds with the gospel—the good news—of the Kingdom of God and helping to pave the way for God to effect permanent changes in their lives. Jesus said He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13).*

## Readers from India

I have been a subscriber to the magazine of understanding, *The Good News*, for many years. As a teacher and headmaster, I have found this magazine a great help in preparing my lessons and assembly talks. A large number of staff and boys read it in our library and find it interesting and instructive.

B.S.B., India

Your March/April 2003 issue was wonderful. Thank you for telling the reasons for Christ's death and resurrection. I appreciate your articles on Easter and other pagan festivals like Christmas and Good Friday, which are unbiblical. Thanks for such a wonderful magazine which doesn't simply give us the best but also the latest to keep abreast of the current pathetic situations of the world—that, too, with a biblical perspective.

M.T., India

## Reader from Saudi Arabia

I praise and thank God for the United Church of God during the last two years in providing me with *The Good News* magazine. In spite of the restrictions on religious life, I receive the magazines intact. The articles and information based on the Scriptures help me a lot in my meditation. It encourages, enlightens and uplifts my spirit to depend more on God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

D.Z.B., Saudi Arabia

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



# Questions & Answers

**Q: I love my husband very much and want him to be saved and one day to be in heaven with me. But sometimes our marriage is absolute torture because of his behavior. He has no interest in being saved. Please pray for me and help me.**

**Reader in the south of England**

A: We have read your lengthy letter (summarized above) carefully and truly empathize with your plight. We believe one or two points of essential knowledge about salvation may help you in coping. First of all, God has a much better future in store for us than the common conception of heaven as the reward of the saved. Our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* may prove very enlightening.

Secondly, one of the most important things we should come to realize about spiritual salvation is that God is *not* calling everyone to be a Christian in this present age. Actually only a few, whom the Bible terms “firstfruits” (James 1:18; Romans 8:23; Hebrews 12:22-23), are being called to salvation today.

Although all will eventually have their opportunity, there is a time order built into the Creator’s plan of salvation for humankind. God’s annual Holy Days and festivals teach that vital principle, particularly the Day of Pentecost (or Festival of Firstfruits) and the Last Great Day. (Our free booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* will explain further.)

Jesus Christ said that none could come to Him unless the Father would draw that person (John 6:44, 65). It is *God’s* responsibility, not ours, to call our loved ones to His truth. In His own wisdom and for His own reasons, sometimes God chooses to call a wife and not her husband during this age, or vice versa.

However, you need not worry about your husband’s salvation. God may choose to call him during the great resurrection of most of mankind—depicted by the White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20. This resurrection is *not* one of condemnation, but will be the first opportunity for the vast majority of humankind to obtain salvation. You may be assured that sooner or later your husband’s mind will be opened to God’s truth.

Even so, the apostle Peter gives people in your circumstances some very good advice.

Please read carefully the first six verses of Peter’s first letter, chapter 3. He emphasizes the good *conduct* of a wife rather than her conversation. Usually trying to convert a marriage partner by mere talk or giving him or her religious literature does not work. Most of the time it causes unnecessary friction and tension in the marriage. It is our *actions* that are much more important. Regular prayer to God for divine assistance is also essential.

We have mailed several free booklets to further explain these principles and to assist you in coping with your personal situation: *Making Life Work* (including material about marriage), *You Can Have Living Faith* and *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. We will certainly keep you in our prayers!

**Q: Is smoking a sin?**

**D.R., Elyria, Ohio**

A: There is a growing abundance of scientific and medical evidence that smoking seriously damages human health. In some countries the government requires tobacco companies to include health-warning messages on every cigarette pack.

Since smoking is a relatively modern practice, the Bible does not speak of it directly. Yet God’s Word certainly addresses smoking in principle. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, for example, Paul goes right to the heart of the matter regarding actions that can harm us: “. . . Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [which] is in you, [which] you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

God not only created us, but Jesus Christ paid for our sins with His life’s blood. Since we belong to God, why would we want to defile His property by smoking? This practice breaks the spirit of God’s law and certainly in principle falls into the category of sin. By no stretch of the imagination can smoking be construed as “glorify[ing] God in your body and in your spirit.”

The Ten Commandments express God’s way of love first toward our Creator and secondly our neighbor. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” says both Jesus Christ and the law (Matthew 22:39; Leviticus 19:18). The damaging effect of secondhand smoke is

well-documented. So out of loving concern for our neighbors and family members, we should certainly avoid smoking. The apostle Paul tells us that “love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10).

For many, however, it is not simply a matter of deciding to quit. They face a difficult struggle with a stubborn physical addiction. Indeed, this fact magnifies the wrong of smoking. Some might argue that smoking every long once in a while is not harmful—that regularly eating hamburgers is much more damaging. But smoking can all too quickly become an addiction. It may begin as something done every once in a while—but soon it becomes established as a regular routine that severely damages health.

And while harming oneself is a sin, the root sin here is the addiction itself—an enslaving habit. Paul wrote, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). Addiction is a covetous obsession—a “lust of the flesh” (1 John 2:16). It is frankly idolatrous since it puts something before God in one’s life (compare Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:5). Gluttons are described in Scripture as those “whose god is their belly” (Philippians 3:19). A smoking addiction takes on the same character.

Yet we are to have “self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23)—“bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Knowing this, we should not engage in practices that can easily enslave us—as smoking certainly can.

For those who already smoke, quitting may not be easy—but it is a must. Making a personal commitment is essential to ultimate success. So is praying regularly for God’s help. It may also be necessary to seek advice and/or treatment from those who are professionally competent in dealing with nicotine addiction. No matter what your situation, you *can* quit—people do it all the time, even those who have smoked for decades.

Those struggling with a smoking addiction may wish to request or download our reprint article “Smoking and Health: The Often-Overlooked Key” from our Web site at [www.ucg.org/reprints](http://www.ucg.org/reprints) or from our office nearest you listed on page 2.

# Choosing Movies and Music: What's Going Into Your Mind?

Young people just want to have fun. But how should one decide what music to listen to and which movies to see?

by Larry Greider

“Let’s go to a movie!” These familiar words are repeated countless times on weekend nights around the world. But which movie or film to see? The choices are almost endless. Science fiction, action, westerns, comedies and love stories abound. Does it really matter which forms of entertainment we choose? And if it does, how can we apply biblical standards to our options?

Today there are some 32 million 12- to 19-year-olds in the United States alone—the largest teen generation ever, and with plenty of buying power. In 2000, U.S. teens spent an estimated \$105 billion and influenced their parents to spend an additional \$48 billion. So the choices made by teens are quite relevant to merchants. We’ve never seen a time in which so many young people have had the leisure time plus the money in their pockets to simply have fun.

Choices, choices, choices. What movie, CD or video game should I spend my money on this time? What’s cool and what’s going to be exciting and fun?

## Not all options are good

It’s obvious to those who’ve been watching TV and movies for more than a few years that they contain more violence and sex than ever before—actually, *quite a lot more*. Every major American network has a show, often in prime time, featuring a gay character, not to mention all the shows that glamorize extramarital sex.

Are these shows, which admittedly entertain and stimulate people, really good for you? Are the big screen’s latest features appropriate for Christians to watch? According to one author, “Most television programming is insipid, illicit, and idiotic” (Douglas Groothuis, Ph.D., “How the Bombarding Images of TV Culture Undermine the Power of Words,” *Modern Reformation*, Jan.-Feb. 2001, p. 39).

In 1940, Rhett Butler, talking angrily to Scarlet O’Hara in the cinematic blockbuster *Gone with the Wind*, appeared without his

shirt and used the word “damn.” Audiences across the country were shocked. This epic movie about the Civil War era was considered controversial because of this one word and an actor appearing shirtless. Today, total or partial nudity is normal and the use of expletives is so commonplace that some characters would have almost nothing to



**We live in fascinating and electrifying times in which young people have more free time and money than ever before. What you take into your mind is very important.**

say if you deleted all the foul language.

Today, casual sex, often graphically depicted, is almost expected between the main characters in a majority of movies. Ratings of movies (with restrictions seldom enforced, as most teens know) have been steadily loosening—meaning less and less is being censored. Full frontal nudity, lots of blood and gore and generous quantities of vulgar profanities are not that big a deal anymore.

Media analyst Marshall McLuhan once remarked that “we become what we behold” (ibid., p. 33). And Dr. Groothuis goes on to state, “When we become habituated to a particular form of communication, our mentalities and sensibilities bear its mark” (ibid.).

Communications professor Joshua Meyrowitch complains that his students tend to

have an image-based standard of truth. “If I ask ‘What evidence supports your view or contradicts it?’, they look at me as if I came from another planet” (ibid., p. 35).

Presenting the biblical perspective, the apostle Paul wrote, “Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Corinthians 15:33). Is it any less true of words from a song or an image from the big screen or television? Don’t we also corrupt our minds by taking in words and images that are evil?

## Considerations for choices

Especially from a Christian standpoint, when we consider what we will listen to or watch, we need to ask some important questions:

• **Is this appropriate?** Are the words of the song or the plot of the movie good for me? It’s true that options are often few, even at a major multiplex with multiple theaters. To illustrate, the choices I saw recently at one multiplex included three R-rated movies

(heavily laden with adult language, nudity and violence), two movies dealing with the paranormal (the spirit world, including demon possession) and one thoroughly disgusting movie that was labeled a comedy. That didn’t leave much to view, which is rather sad.

With a powerful combination of surround sound and high-definition, digital technologies allow for stunning imagery. It seems we get addicted to special effects, needing more and more to be thrilled. But what about the mind? We must guard this important gateway to our character and thinking.

• **Will this be uplifting and positive?** It’s great to hear powerful music that lifts your spirit and makes you feel good. Recently I visited Epcot Center in Disney World. Toward the end of the day a colorful parade

with puppets 20 feet high, dancers and rolling drums was accompanied by some of the most intriguing and inspiring music I've ever heard. I was so taken that I had to find the CD for my collection.

Here is the basic principle: Music should fit the mood, but not *create* a negative or destructive one. You can select from a huge variety of music today. Clearly one should make wise choices by choosing music that inspires and uplifts, not music that creates feelings of anger, anxiety, confusion or depression or is filled with inappropriate lyrics.

• **What are the options?** Movie ticket prices are constantly rising. And today's movies increasingly inject ideas in your mind that are not clean and pure. So, if you can't find anything worth watching, consider that it might be more fun and rewarding to do something else instead. Indeed, why not go *do* something rather than passively watching? Or get with a group and talk about ideas, plans and such things. Your imagination is the limit of things to do that are fun and creative and that can help you build friendships.

Simply talking with good friends in a peaceful environment can also be very profitable and stimulating. Learning from others while sharing your concerns and fears can be healthy and helpful in building lasting relationships.

### Watch out for the hook

Commercial companies that see the youth market as a real financial bonanza produce many of the things considered cool by today's youth. They are extremely effective at convincing millions of teens that they need their products to be considered cool and popular. Make no mistake, their main intention is to make money, not to do what's best for you.

MTV (Music Television), the popular cable- and satellite-TV channel that emphasizes popular music and sometimes seems to be one continuous commercial, does not have the purest of motives. In a PBS *Frontline* documentary titled "Merchants of Cool" (first aired in February 2000), media analyst Douglas Rushkoff spoke with teens at a concert by the group Insane Clown Posse, which has popularized a genre of music known as "rage rock."

When they were asked to describe why they found such music appealing, the teens responded that it "belongs to them"; it hadn't yet been taken from them and sold back to them in the shopping malls. Rage rock, full of profanity, violence and vulgarity, was a challenge thrown up to mass-marketers—

let's see you find a way to market this!

But marketers not only accepted the challenge—they won. Rage rock has grown to be big business for them. Insane Clown Posse has become mainstream, and even bigger, equally profane acts like Eminem and Limp Bizkit have broken sales records and won Grammy nominations and other major music awards.

In the documentary, Rushkoff detailed how various teen-oriented commercial outlets orchestrated the rise of Limp Bizkit—despite the foul lyrics of the group's songs—and then relentlessly promoted them to American teenagers.

He raised an important question: Are these outlets merely reflecting the desires of their teenage audiences or are they aggressively promoting a cultural infatuation with videos and music that glorifies illicit sex, violence and antisocial behavior and attitudes?

Rushkoff described the process as "one enclosed feedback loop." He continued, "Kids' culture and media culture are now one and the same, and it becomes impossible to tell which came first—the anger or the marketing of the anger."

In other words, marketers pitch to teens a ready-made identity of what's cool at the moment, and in so doing they often cross the lines of decency and morality. This society often sets up young people to fail. If they aren't a pop, TV or movie star, they're made to feel they've come up short. Too often this is because they don't have the discernment to honestly evaluate the lifestyles of such people. Their parents have neglected to teach them the true values from the Bible. Knowledge of these biblical standards would have enabled them to make better choices.

### Make wise choices

We live in fascinating and electrifying times in which young people have more free time and money than ever before. What you take into your mind is very important. The biblical King David, as a young man, was a musician and his skills were such that he was called on to calm the troubled spirit of King Saul (1 Samuel 16:23).

Many troubled teens today could use friends with such qualities to show them the way to true peace. The frenetic pace of today's world, with so many broken families and shattered lives, cries out for those who can calm troubled spirits.

If you're like most young people (and adults), media entertainment is a powerful influence in your life. Why not choose music and movies that uplift your spirit and draw you closer to God? **GN**



## Want to Learn More?

If you like reading our youth articles in *The Good News*, take a look at our new E-magazine, *Youth United*, at [www.youthmagazine.org](http://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](http://www.youthmagazine.org) today—you may be amazed at the many fascinating things you'll discover!



# How Much Do You Know About **Heaven and Hell?**

*Take this short true-false quiz to find out.*

- 1** The Bible teaches that we have an immortal soul that cannot die.
- 2** The Bible shows that heaven is the reward of the saved.
- 3** The apostle Peter said that Israel's King David, a man "after God's own heart," went to heaven when he died.
- 4** The Scriptures teach that such faithful men and women as Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses and Rahab went to heaven as their reward.
- 5** The Bible tells us that the wicked will suffer for all eternity in an ever-burning hell.
- 6** The Scriptures teach that Satan and his demons will torture the wicked forever in hell.
- 7** The Bible tells us that our immortal soul will go to either heaven or hell when we die.



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Ready to see how you did? The correct answer to all of the above questions is *false*. If you missed some, don't be surprised. After all, most of us have



been routinely taught that these teachings are found in the Bible. The Scriptures, however, reveal something far different!

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

You'll discover the answers to the other questions in

our eye-opening booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* You need to understand the truth about what happens after death. Are some of your loved ones writhing in everlasting flames? Could a God of love sentence people to an eternity of agony in hell? Can we reconcile a loving God with such ideas?

Discover the encouraging truth from the pages of your Bible! For your free copy, contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or visit our Web sites.

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