

# <sup>The</sup> Good News

March-April 2004

A M A G A Z I N E O F U N D E R S T A N D I N G

## The Story of Jesus Christ: **Where Do You Fit?**



What Did Jesus Look Like? • Will Democracy Work in the Middle East?  
The Red Horse of War • Good Friday–Easter Sunday: It Didn't Happen That Way



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In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, the patriotic song “Some Gave All” dominated the U.S. airwaves. In it the singer reflects on a soldier returned from war: “I can’t forget the look in his eyes, or the tears he cries, as he said these words to me: ‘All gave some and some gave all . . .’”

The lyrics are a powerful reminder of the high cost of war. In war, as he says, all give some, but *some give all*. They pay the ultimate price.

Yesterday I saw a profound reminder of something else—the *high cost of sin*. The lesson is graphically brought home in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. You see, to pay the high cost of sin, *One—Jesus Christ—gave all*.

Do we grasp what it means to say that Jesus gave all? What exactly did He give up when He gave His life for the sins of mankind?

Many fail to realize, even though it is spelled out clearly in the Scriptures, that *Jesus was the divine Being who created the universe* according to the will of God the Father. Ephesians 3:9 speaks of “God who

**If ever there were a time when the world needed to be reminded of the terrible cost of sin, it is now. It seems the world, and American culture in particular, is going insane.**

created all things *through Jesus Christ . . .*” (emphasis added throughout). Colossians 1:16 says of Jesus: “For *by Him all things were created* that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible . . . *All things were created through Him and for Him.*”

Think about that—the One who spoke for the Father and the universe was created, who formed the sun, moon and stars out of nothing and filled the earth with oceans, streams, flowers, trees, animals and birds by His word (see Genesis 1-2), came to earth to live not as the divine and almighty God, but rather as a mortal human being (John 1:1-3, 14).

In Philippians 2:6-8 Paul tells us that Christ left all this behind to live and die for us. “He, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his privileges as God’s equal, *but stripped himself* of every advantage . . . *he humbled himself* by living a life of utter obedience, *to the point of death*, and the death he died *was the death of a common criminal*” (New Testament in Modern English).

If ever there were a time when the world needed to be reminded of the terrible cost of sin, it is now. It seems the world, and American culture in particular, is going insane.

Unelected judges defy the will of the people to legalize homosexual behavior and marriage while removing mention of God from public life. Sexual immorality dominates popular entertainment, which is then reflected in real life by skyrocketing rates of venereal diseases, unwanted pregnancies and broken homes.

Legalized abortion snuffs out the lives of millions of babies dismembered before they can even draw their first breath. Millions seek escape in chemical concoctions. Meanwhile, war—much of it motivated by religious hatred—traumatizes country after country.

This world believes sin is fun and exciting. But in reality *sin is hideous*. Sin kills. Sin carries an enormously high price. It kills not only us, but it also killed *the One who made us*.

It took the dying of mankind’s Creator in a terrible death to pay the terrible price for the sins of all mankind. In this issue, and in our new free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* (mentioned on the back cover), we hope to help you better understand the One who paid that price for you and me—the *One who truly gave all*.

—Scott Ashley, Managing Editor

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**Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 1487140.**

**Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to**

**The Good News, Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.**

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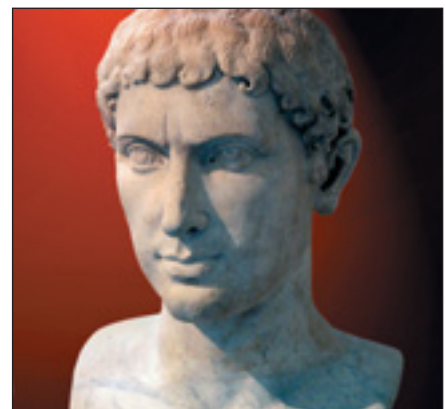
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# The Story of Jesus Christ: Where Do You Fit?

*The making, content and release of the new movie The Passion of the Christ has been surrounded by controversy. Regrettably, this takes away from a central question—which is, where do we personally fit in the story?*

by Scott Ashley

For months now, dating back long before its release, *The Passion of the Christ* (the word *passion* meaning *suffering*) has been attacked from several sides.

Some Bible scholars have attacked it for what they feel are inaccuracies, director Mel Gibson's Catholic slant evident in some aspects of the film, and his taking a certain amount of creative license in telling the story (all of which I thought detracted from the story in the preview screening I saw).

Many Jews have condemned the movie for supposed anti-Semitism, fearful that it could ignite another wave of persecution. Their fears are understandable, considering the history of Christendom and rising hatred toward the Jewish people around the world, but anyone who walks away from this movie harboring feelings of anti-Semitism has missed its point entirely.

Other attacks have been more subtle and far-reaching. Mel Gibson has been targeted with personal criticism; major movie distributors, in spite of the fact that his films are generally solid moneymakers, declined to have anything to do with this venture.

It's ironic that the Hollywood movie machine can crank out the worst kinds of degeneracy—murder, mayhem and misogyny coming soon to a theater near you!—with hardly a peep of protest, but a reverential treatment of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for our sins is criticized from virtually every quarter. The hypocrisy is even more evident considering the fact that the truly perverse 1988 film *The Last Temptation of Christ* was heartily hailed by Hollywood for its supposed "artistic vision" (which included a blasphemous sex scene between Jesus and Mary Magdalene).

## A Christianity that doesn't know Christ

In some ways these different criticisms of the current movie reflect the different minds people have toward Jesus. Some reject Him because they think they know better. Others reject Christ out of fear of the unknown, or fear that they would have to make unwanted

changes in their lives if they dug a little deeper into the story. And others, like the Hollywood antireligion establishment, simply abhor the idea of anyone who would have a say concerning what they're allowed to think and do.

It would be nice to say that those who accept the reality of Jesus have a much healthier view—but, sadly, that's not always the case.

A 2003 poll of American adults found that while 91 percent "absolutely believe" or "mostly believe" Jesus Christ was a real historical person, they are much fuzzier on the implications of that belief. Of those surveyed, far smaller percentages actually believe He was born to a virgin, was resurrected from the dead, was the Son of God or was divine (Scripps Howard News Service report, Dec. 26, 2003).

When it comes to actual Bible knowledge and understanding, the numbers drop even further. A 1990 Gallup Poll found that only half of American adults interviewed could name a single one of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and only 37 percent could name all four! And while 70 percent could name the town in which Jesus was born (Bethlehem), barely one person in four could name even half of the Ten Commandments or identify Jesus as the person who gave the Sermon on the Mount (George Gallup, Jr., *The Role of the Bible in American Society*, 1990, p. 17).

Sadly, these numbers are no doubt considerably worse in other Western countries where people don't even make much of a pretense of going to church.

What such shocking trends lead to is the result discovered in a 2003 survey by the Barna Research Group. It found that among professing Christians, *half* considered cohabitation and "enjoying sexual thoughts and fantasies about someone" to be morally acceptable; roughly *a third* considered adultery, pornography, drunkenness and having an abortion to be morally acceptable; and *one in five* thought the same of homosexual behavior (Barna Research Online, Nov. 3, 2003, report).

Keep in mind that these percentages aren't for the population as a whole, but for people who claim to be Christian! What we have, then, is a Christianity in which millions accept Christ, but know little about Him, what He did and what He taught. Or, worse yet, perhaps they do know what He taught—but choose to ignore or reject it!

## What is your reaction?

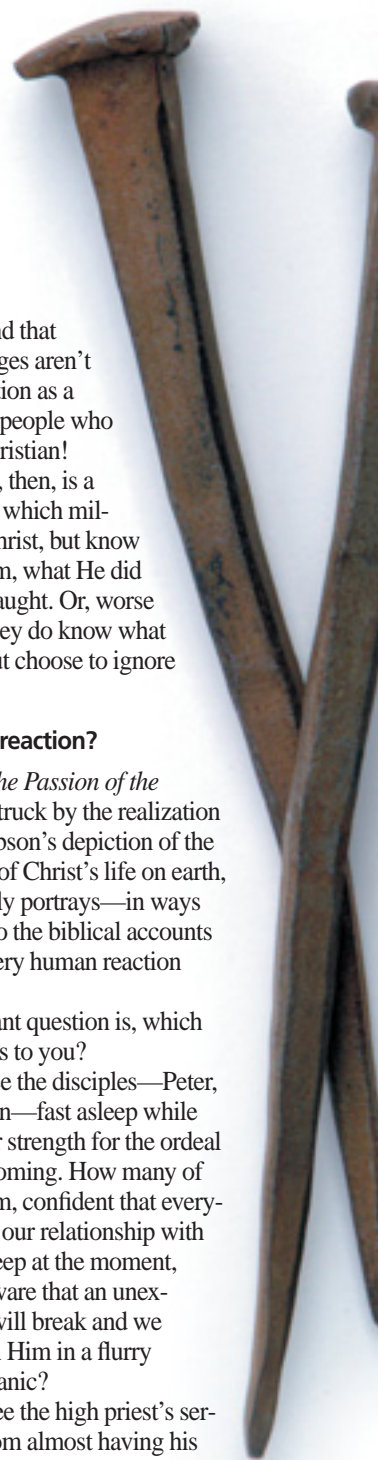
Watching *The Passion of the Christ*, I was struck by the realization that in Mel Gibson's depiction of the final 12 hours of Christ's life on earth, he inadvertently portrays—in ways quite faithful to the biblical accounts—virtually every human reaction to Jesus.

The important question is, which of these applies to you?

- First we see the disciples—Peter, James and John—fast asleep while Jesus prays for strength for the ordeal He knows is coming. How many of us are like them, confident that everything is fine in our relationship with Christ, but asleep at the moment, blissfully unaware that an unexpected storm will break and we could abandon Him in a flurry of terror and panic?

- Next we see the high priest's servant, dazed from almost having his head split open by Peter's sword, grimacing in pain as the Man they'd come to arrest reaches out to him, picks up his severed ear and makes the bloodied man whole again. Bewildered, he doesn't know what to make of this sudden turn of events. Could we be like him, knowing there must be something to this Jesus-the-Son-of-God story, but unsure what to do?

- Soon we come to Peter—bold, brash Peter, proud to proclaim his allegiance to



Jesus, even to the point of dying for Him. Yet when his beliefs are challenged, when things don't turn out as expected, when the threat of persecution comes, he runs like a frightened rabbit. How many of us have such a faith, strong in fair weather but gone with the wind when put to the test?

- Judas, tormented by guilt, refuses to seek the forgiveness and healing Christ can offer. Haunted by what he has done, he descends into madness and the ultimate act of running away—taking his own life. Are we tormented by our own demons and guilt, incapable of accepting the forgiveness Christ made available as our ultimate Healer, unable to forgive ourselves?

- We see many an onlooker in the crowds, curiosity piqued by the thought-provoking words and strange events, but in the end choosing to be uninvolved. How well this fits so much of humanity! As Winston Churchill once said, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened." The claim that a Man performed great miracles, had details of His life foretold hundreds of years in advance, was murdered out of jealousy and rose from the dead should surely demand our attention! Will we seriously investigate the facts or pass on as if nothing happened?

- In the film *Mary*, Jesus' mother, though in indescribable grief and turmoil at this shocking turn of events, for the most part stays relatively calm, trusting in the perfect will of the God who had touched her life many years earlier and never left her alone. Does this describe our relationship with God, fully trusting in Him even though not understanding or comprehending the trials that overwhelm us, but knowing He will never leave or forsake us?

- The Roman soldiers—cruel, hard and brutal—enjoy their sadistic entertainment, caring nothing for God or human beings made in His image. How many today are absorbed in a heartless, soulless pursuit of pleasure regardless of its terrible toll? How many mock their Creator in their minds and by their actions?

- John, perhaps the youngest of the disciples, is stunned and uncomprehending as these events unfold and his world crumbles. Yet, in spite of his youth, he is the lone disciple recorded in the Gospels as remaining in his Master's presence at the end. Perhaps we are young and inexperienced too, but will we let that stand in the way of a trusting and faithful relationship with Christ?

- Simon of Cyrene, forced out of a crowd and, in the film, torn from his son to help carry Jesus' cross, protests that he can't leave his son and makes it clear that he is innocent and wants nothing to do with this condemned

man. Will we let our attachments, even to something as priceless as family, keep us from Christ? Or could we think we're good enough as we are and have no need to be associated with Him?

- Then we come to the two criminals crucified with Jesus. One lashes out at Christ in his anger and pain. Life has not been kind to him; he rages against the perceived injustice of it

## In Mel Gibson's depiction of the final 12 hours of Christ's life on earth, he inadvertently portrays—in ways quite faithful to the biblical accounts—virtually every human reaction to Jesus. The important question is, which of these applies to you?

all. Rather than accept the penalty for his actions now come due, he mocks the innocent Man dying alongside him. Could this be us, blaming everyone and everything around us, raging against God to our dying breath?

- Finally we come to the last of the condemned men. He recognizes his guilt, but he also recognizes the enormous injustice inflicted on a Man who had done no wrong. He admits that death is what he deserves, and he has no one to blame but himself for his hopeless, doomed situation. In his own pain and misery, he also cries out—yet not in anger like the other, but in a plea for mercy to the One he recognizes as Lord and Master. Is this our reaction to Jesus Christ, recognizing that our own choices have brought us to a dead end from which we can see no way out other than total surrender to Him?

### Where do you fit?

Again, which of these reactions applies to you?

Mel Gibson has openly stated that the movie is the result of a dark period in his own life when he, like the last of the condemned men, reached a point where he saw no way out. He turned to the story from the Gospels that he remembered from years before. In spite of its flaws, *The Passion of the Christ* is a powerful and compelling retelling of a story of great significance to him.

While he is one of the world's most respected actors and a popular box-office draw, Mel Gibson chose not to take an acting part in his film. However, he left no doubt as to where he saw himself in this story. As a close-up shot shows Jesus' hand being nailed to the beam, the hand that is *holding* the nail as it is pounded in is none other than Mr. Gibson's own.

When asked about it, he explained that this was his way of acknowledging that his own personal sins played a part in putting Jesus Christ to death. And pondering the part we all played in this long-ago drama, it occurred

to me where all of us were at one point. Our sins put *all of us* in the crowd crying out, "Crucify Him!"

This is the starting point for realizing where we all fit in God's great plan for us.

Peter, addressing a crowd in Jerusalem several weeks after these tragic events took place, stressed our collective guilt for the death of the Son of God. "When the people heard this,

they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, *what shall we do?*'" (Acts 2:37, New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

That is the crucial question: *What shall we do?*

Peter answered: "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (verse 38).

To *repent* means to change our heart, thinking and conduct—to totally surrender our lives to God. *Baptism* is a symbol of that surrender, representing the death of the person we have been and a resurrection to a new life patterned after Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-13). The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us to empower us to live a truly transformed life.

The rest of the story is amazing, almost beyond comprehension. Hebrews 2:10 (NIV) gives us a glimpse of the purpose of the passion: "*In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.*"

Jesus suffered and died to bring "many sons to glory." Are you willing to act on His awesome purpose for you? **GN**

## Recommended Reading

Are you willing to settle for being part of a Christianity that knows next to nothing about who Jesus is, why He came and what He taught, or do you want to know more? Be sure to request the free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* to learn more about God's purpose and plan for you. The truth about both is far greater than you can imagine! And to learn more about what God expects us to do to attain that future, request *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, also free.



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# Jesus Christ: Do We Have the Real Story?

*Do we have the complete story of Jesus Christ's life and death? For centuries alternative ideas have circulated as to whether Jesus was who the Gospels say He was. The Da Vinci Code, a hugely popular best-selling book, dramatizes one of these stories. What is the truth? Can we know for sure?*

by Darris McNeely

**F**or a Christian, there is no more central tenet of faith than the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. On that point hangs the hope of eternal life in the Kingdom of God through the resurrection of the dead.

That He would rise from the dead, thus signifying that He was the Son of God, was the one sign He gave to a skeptical generation. The four Gospels testify with convincing evidence that He did rise from the dead and that He was the divine Son of God, the Messiah promised through the biblical prophets.

Almost from the beginning of the Church, this central fact was attacked as a falsehood. The Church carefully gathered eyewitness

accounts. The apostles wrote and told what they saw. Paul went into considerable detail on the matter when he wrote to the Corinthian church about the resurrection and its vital importance to the Christian faith.

And yet the attacks continued. For some, Christ was no more than a good moral teacher, a rabbi who broke out of the pack. They believed that His frustrated followers did nothing more than fabricate a fantastic tale of an empty tomb and new faith.

The attempt to deny Christ's resurrection has continued into modern times. The 1967 book *The Passover Plot* offered purported "rational" and "logical" alternative explanations to the biblical account. The book's title sums up a view that many still hold—that the story told in the New

Testament is at best incomplete and at worst a complete fraud.

The latest popular theory is told in a book that has been on the best-seller list

for the better part of a year and will appear in 2005 as a Hollywood motion picture. *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown, is a work of fiction that uses actual events, characters and places to draw readers into offbeat speculations about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Mr. Brown spins fact and fiction together in a way that makes for a fast-paced, intriguing story, long on action and excitement—but woefully short on actual truth.

In a nutshell, *The Da Vinci Code* puts forth the idea that Jesus Christ was married to Mary Magdalene, leaving her pregnant with His child when He died. The mother and child were secreted off to southern France and the lineage of that union exists to this day. The male-dominated church supposedly suppressed this "knowledge" and saw to it that any writing containing this information was purged from the official record.

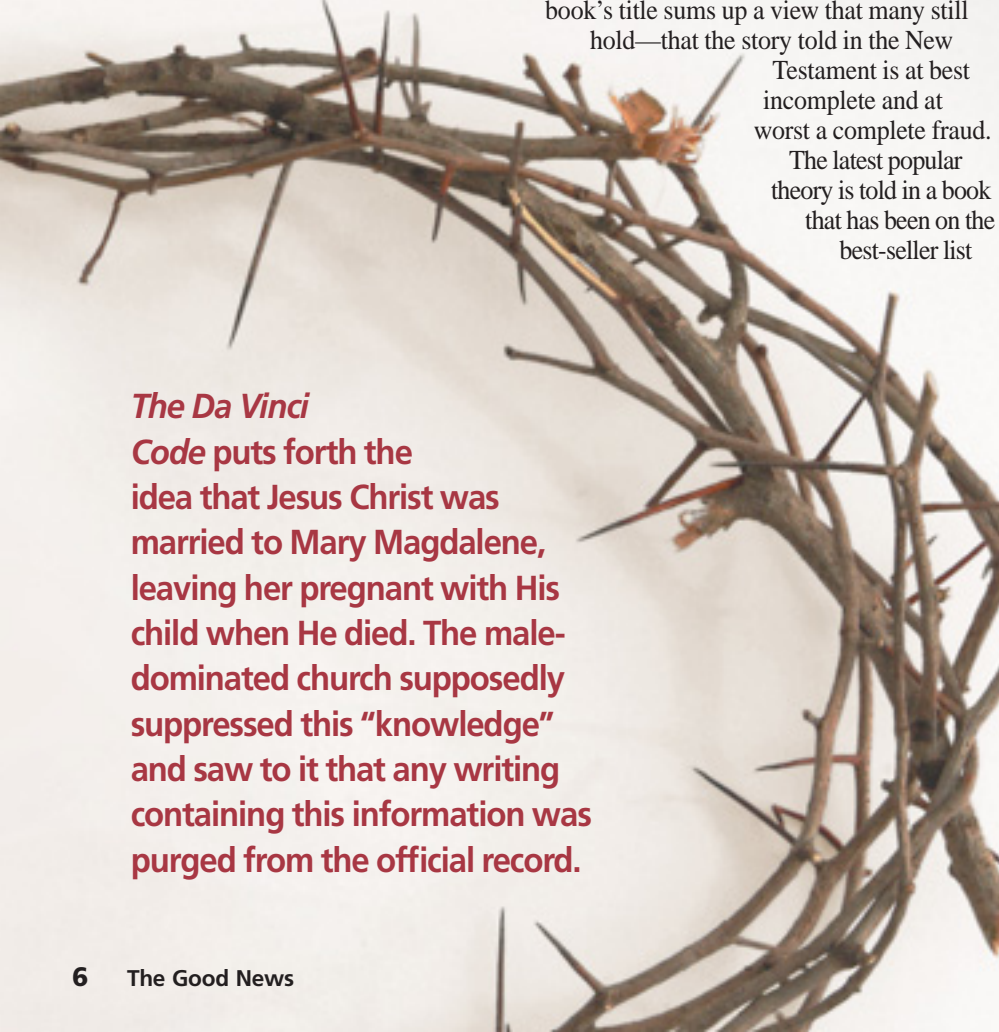
According to Mr. Brown's plot, those who knew the "truth" managed to keep it alive and pass it down through the ages. Leonardo da Vinci was supposedly one such keeper of the secret, and his famous painting *The Last Supper* purportedly shows Mary Magdalene to the right of Jesus. Of course this contradicts the biblical account, which tells us it was the disciple John who sat at the Lord's right on His final evening.

Brown's book inspired an examination by the ABC news program *Primetime*.

Interviewed on the program, Mr. Brown said, "I began as a skeptic. As I started researching *The Da Vinci Code*, I really thought I would disprove a lot of this theory about Mary Magdalene and holy blood and all of that.

[Instead] I became a believer."

The program's hostess, Elizabeth Vargas, sent a mixed message to viewers with this conclusion: "What we found is that some of the claims the book makes are simply not credible and some of the claims have been made before. But there are some surprising truths behind the story of



***The Da Vinci Code* puts forth the idea that Jesus Christ was married to Mary Magdalene, leaving her pregnant with His child when He died. The male-dominated church supposedly suppressed this "knowledge" and saw to it that any writing containing this information was purged from the official record.**

Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Leonardo da Vinci” (*Primetime*, airdate Nov. 3, 2003).

### **Fiction disguised as history**

What “truths”? What exactly does the book claim is the true story of Christ and the Church? Here are some excerpts from the book purporting to be the real story:

“At this gathering [the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325] many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon—the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments, and, of course, the divinity of Jesus . . . Until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet . . . Jesus’ establishment as the ‘Son of God’ was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea . . . A relatively close vote at that” (p. 233).

“From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history. Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made him godlike. The other gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned” (p. 234).

“Behold, the greatest cover-up in human history. Not only was Jesus Christ married, but also He was a father . . . Mary Magdalene was the Holy Vessel. She was the chalice that bore the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ. She was the womb that bore the lineage, and the vine from which the sacred fruit sprang forth” (p. 249).

“Mary Magdalene was pregnant at the time of the crucifixion . . . With the help of Jesus’ trusted uncle, Joseph of Arimathea [she] secretly traveled to France, then known as Gaul. There she found safe refuge in the Jewish community. It was here in France that she gave birth to a daughter . . .” (p. 255).

Many other wild ideas are floated in the book, but these few passages show the principal storyline.

Mr. Brown suggests that secret documents were interred with Mary Magdalene’s remains, documents whose contents would wreck Christianity. These documents supposedly contain the “true” gospel—one whose foundation is in goddess worship. If revealed to the world, these recovered “truths” would pave the way for mankind to return to a more enlightened spirituality centered on this feminine deity.

What is most troubling about this book, and the movie to come from it, is that so much fiction and misinformation is mingled and passed off as truth. Anyone reading it without an adequate background in the basics of the Bible, much less history, could read it and come away with a lot of doubt and many

questions. That borders on blasphemy.

Christ spoke to this when He said of any who would cause offense and stumbling, “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones” (Luke 17:2).

### **What is the biblical evidence?**

Mr. Brown’s imaginative rewrite of history conflicts with the Bible in many points. First of all, Jesus was not married. No reference of any sort in the Bible suggests the possibility. It just isn’t there. There have been past attempts by scholars suggesting that the scene in John 2 of a wedding in Cana where Jesus turned the water into wine was actually His own wedding, but the Bible indicates nothing of the sort.

## **Fiction and misinformation is mingled and passed off as truth. Anyone reading it without an adequate background in the basics of the Bible could read it and come away with a lot of doubt.**

There isn’t any biblical evidence that Christ was married to Mary Magdalene or anyone else. The idea reflects gnostic teaching extolling the feminine side of spirit beings and was popular in the second century after Christ.

Neither is there anything in the Bible to support the deprecating and oft-floated idea that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute who followed Christ and His disciples around.

Another part of the misconception about Christ is the idea that there were other legitimate gospel accounts, which were either lost or purged from the accepted record and labeled as heretical. This raises doubts as to whether we have the whole story about Christ and the early Church.

It is true that other letters and accounts circulated during and after the first century, claiming to be authentic accounts of Christ’s life. Spurious letters purported to be from Paul also circulated (2 Thessalonians 2:2).

The story of how the books of the New Testament were put together in a form that people could accept as authentic is too long to be told in this article. However, scriptural evidence points to Peter and Paul’s personal involvement in preserving selected works and letters that bore the true and reliable record of the events of Christ’s life and the gospel of salvation in the Kingdom of God.

These scriptures, indicating how the Bible is put together, preclude any possibility that other so-called “lost gospels” could be valid for understanding true doctrine and teaching.

### **Mary, a proof of the Gospels’ accuracy**

Let’s look at one example that demon-

strates the reliability of the Gospel accounts that we have. Mary Magdalene’s presence among the followers of Christ and as a bearer of the news of His resurrection actually serves as proof of the authenticity of the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Women did not enjoy honored status in the world at that time. Luke and John tell of women serving and participating in ways that would have been quite radical by standards of the time.

Among some cultures of the region, the status of women was near that of slaves. Wives were not allowed to eat with their husbands’ guests nor to leave their houses unescorted. Women were viewed as inferior and impure compared to men. In Rome, a man had complete authority over his wife. Adultery could be punished by death. Going

without a veil could lead to divorce. Some conditions then remind one of today’s strict Islamic codes for women.

The point is, if the Gospels had been a total fabrication, the authors would have written accounts that reflected the existing cultural norms. What they did was tell a true story of the coming of the Messiah and His life.

They told it accurately, as it happened. And they told it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul powerfully asserted, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). God has left mankind with assurance that the essential aspects of His gospel of salvation have been preserved accurately.

### **Looking for enlightenment in all the wrong places**

Many people in the Western world have an innate desire to understand the spiritual side of life. Periodically a major weekly news-magazine will run an article about the Bible, Christianity or a major Christian teaching such as heaven or hell. *Time* magazine, for example, recently ran a story on “The Lost Gospels” (Dec. 22, 2003).

Publishers and editors know people have a fascination with the Bible even if they don’t really know much about it. Publications like *Time* are responding to ideas in the current American culture that offer alternative views of traditional Christian teachings.

The ideas run the gamut from theology to pop culture. A recent issue of *Time* ran a story about the popular movie trilogy *The*

*Matrix*. This science-fiction story pivots on the idea that the world we see is not the ultimate reality. One of its characters, Morpheus, tells another, Neo, that “the Matrix is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you to the truth.”

The good guys in the movie are a band of enlightened ones staying one step ahead of

## Some say this is just another way of being a Christian. However, when you adopt non-Christian ideas, instead of getting closer to the truth you only end up further from true spirituality.

those from the “matrix,” who seek to seal this leak and bring everyone under control. The ideas of the movie can be found in ancient ideas that predate Christianity and later found expression in gnostic thought.

For decades the traditional ideas of religion have been challenged and questioned by liberal theologians. Along with a growing skepticism of virtually all institutions, this has led people to search in other areas for spiritual fulfillment. The article in *Time* also dealt with the fascination for what is called “New Age” religious ritual. These supposedly “suppressed” gospels are providing people with ideas for modern rituals from ancient non-Christian belief systems.

Even some of today’s theological intelligentsia give credence to alternative gospel accounts of the early Church. The controversial Princeton theologian Elaine Pagels, for example, has written of her acceptance of the Gospel of Thomas, one of the many ancient texts discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945.

Dr. Pagels’ study of the Nag Hammadi texts has shaped her view that the biblical texts don’t tell the full story. She cannot accept “Christianity with a single, authorized set of beliefs . . .” To her and other scholars, the Nag Hammadi texts are “like newly discovered pieces of a complex puzzle, next to what we have long known from tradition, we find that these remarkable texts, only now becoming widely known, are transforming what we know as Christianity” (*Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, 2003, p. 29).

### Why the interest in these myths?

People are looking for some sort of spiritual foundation to give meaning to daily existence. This is a normal human desire that’s been with us for ages.

And because Westerners live in a Judeo-Christian culture, based on both the Old and New Testament Scriptures, many people who have grown up in this culture think of themselves as “Christian”—in spite of the fact that they fail to practice the way of life the New

Testament Church of God followed. Instead, they mix and match their beliefs with all sorts of non-Christian ideas.

Some say this is just another way of being a Christian. However, when you adopt non-Christian ideas, instead of getting closer to the truth you only end up further from true spirituality.

Such practices, as described in ancient nonbiblical texts, may seem to answer basic questions of life. People look to them to explain the reason for evil and suffering in the world, and how to achieve closeness to God. In reality, however, the very truths they are seeking are explained in the Holy Bible.

That people turn to such a hodgepodge of ideas to answer these major questions of life shows the confusion that continues to reign in modern religion. But this religious confusion does not provide the answers our modern world so desperately needs.

### Turning aside to fables

In a comment for his own time and as a prophecy for today, Paul said to his fellow minister Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Today, just as when Jesus came among men, there is a need to look at what He said and to decide whether we will follow His plain teachings. Ironically, it’s much simpler to believe in what the Bible says about Christ than to believe the myths that have been perpetuated over the years. Yet many from each generation seem to thumb their noses at the Bible and embrace ideas that deconstruct the story of salvation through the Lamb of God.

The true story of Christ has been cheapened and hidden through lawless, godless tales that have turned the truth as taught by Christ and His apostles inside out. This has been true with every part of the message of their gospel. What we are seeing in these recent stories is the same distortions of the person of Christ and the message He brought that have been around for centuries, only taken to greater extremes.

The idea that Jesus married and fathered a child makes Him into just another man. Such teaching devalues and suppresses the truth that God is building a spiritual family, and

that by His timetable everyone who has ever lived will have opportunity to join that family (Ephesians 3:14-15).

And if Jesus was simply another man, then God is not a Father and therefore we are not His children. This would mean that the plan of God revealed in the Scriptures is a fraud.

But the apostle Paul rebutted this heretical idea in his letter to the Corinthians. Some there denied Christ’s resurrection and His divinity. They found it hard to believe that such an event could happen. It fell to Paul to set them straight, leaving us with one of the most powerful chapters of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15.

### “Follow Me”

Jesus Christ—the Son of God—was also the greatest of the prophets God sent to Israel (Deuteronomy 18:18). His life and death were a fulfillment of hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. His message was a prophecy of the coming Kingdom of God to this earth, a dramatic fulfillment of Daniel 2:44-45.

The apostle Peter was an eyewitness of Christ’s glory and resurrection. Years afterward, Peter wrote that he and his fellow apostles knew with certainty that Christ was the Son of God. Responding to the same charges that we see today, Peter wrote, “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

After His resurrection, the glorified Christ said to Peter, “Follow Me” (John 21:19). There was no doubt in Peter’s mind that he was following the Son of God, the coming King of Kings.

The same call goes out today: “*Follow Me.*” Can you evade the doubt and distractions and discover the real Christ of the Gospels and follow Him to the Kingdom of God? The choice is yours. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

Perhaps no figure in history has been as misunderstood and mythologized as Jesus of Nazareth. Hundreds of books, thousands of articles and billions of words have been written about Him—but who is He, really? How much do you know about the real Jesus Christ of the Bible? We’ve prepared a new booklet to introduce you to the real Jesus of the Bible. Request your free copy of *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. A free copy is waiting for you. You should also request *How to Understand the Bible*, also free. Request or download them today!



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# Will Democracy Work in the Middle East?

*President Bush recently declared America's commitment to democracy in the Middle East. But democracy there and in other regions has not had much success. There are solid reasons for this failure.*

by Melvin Rhodes

The words “democracy” and “democratic” have been much abused. During all the years that I lived with my family in Ghana, there were two German embassies in our neighborhood. One was the embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, which is still there. But, on the corner of a busy junction in the capital city of Accra, lay the heavily protected embassy of the German Democratic Republic.

This building represented the communist state of East Germany. Perhaps the bars on the windows and the barbed wire at the top of high walls were as much to keep the employees in as to keep intruders out. It was often said that the GDR wasn't “German” or “democratic,” nor was it a “republic,” but countries can call themselves what they want. North Korea's official name, for example, is the “Democratic Peoples' Republic of North Korea.”

## What is a democracy?

Highlighting this important distinction was the recent Commonwealth meeting in Nigeria, where sharp differences emerged over how to handle the behavior of Zimbabwe's president. By any Western definition, Zimbabwe is a dictatorship. The president can do what he likes. The country does have a parliament, but so did Iraq under Saddam Hussein. A year ago, Iraq's parliament backed him 100 percent.

Zimbabwe's neighbor is Zambia. The Zambian president's comment on the Commonwealth dispute was rather interesting. He said Western democracies should remember that their democratic systems took centuries to evolve, so they should be more patient with Africa. Well, maybe, but if a country is going to call itself a democracy, it should *be* one, if only to avoid confusion.

Democracy is defined in my 1982 *Collins Standard Reference Dictionary* as “government in which the people hold the ruling power either directly or through elected representatives; a country, state,



*Ethnic divisions have long been a factor in preventing democracy from taking root in Africa and the Middle East. Religious divisions among Iraq's Muslims run particularly deep.*

etc. with such government; majority rule; the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, etc., or the practice of this principle.”

The phrase, “majority rule,” brought back my own memories of Zimbabwe. We lived there in the 1970s at a time when there was much talk of “majority rule.”

At the time the country was the break-away British colony of Southern Rhodesia. Northern Rhodesia had been given its independence as the Republic of Zambia in 1964. But following independence, corruption and dictatorship soon became the norm, with the resultant rapid economic slide backwards.

Faced with such a bleak future, Southern Rhodesia's white population declared itself independent of Britain the following year, 1965. The world wanted to see “majority rule,” so economic and political sanctions were imposed to try to enforce this.

Less than 15 years later the Republic of Zimbabwe was born following a bitter civil war that lasted seven years. It wasn't simply a black-and-white issue—78 percent of the Rhodesian military was black. Many Africans were just as concerned about a future African government as most whites were—the record elsewhere in Africa had not been a good one. Sadly, it remains that way still.

## Britain's legacy of parliaments

All Britain's former colonies (except for

Hong Kong, which was leased from China, and Somaliland, which was British for only a brief period of time) had a parliament. Britain is often called “the mother of parliaments.” The British parliament has been meeting for almost 800 years.

Before the Normans invaded England in 1066 and imposed a more dictatorial form of monarchy, the old English kingdom had an advisory council of nobles known as the Witan. The ideal is also expressed in stories of the sixth-century British King Arthur and his “Knights of the Round Table,” which signified that no one person seated there was more important than any of the others.

Interestingly, emphasizing the difference between Britain and its continental neighbors, “the Roman Church strongly and repeatedly condemned Round Tables” (Paul Johnson, *The Offshore Islanders*, 1972, p. 51). The church believed that the king was appointed by God and could do what he wanted.

A long tradition of democracy has existed in Great Britain, and the British took their parliamentary democratic system with them wherever they went. As each colony was settled, almost immediately a parliament was established so that the settlers could debate issues of common concern and make any necessary decisions. In time, members of the native population were also admitted to the parliament.

In Rhodesia there were five qualifications for voting and participating in the national parliamentary system at the time I lived there. Although I was white, I did not qualify—but many of my African friends did.

The five qualifications were: citizenship, literacy (one must be able to read and write English, the national language), military service (for males), property ownership and payment of income tax. There was no racial qualification. Both Africans and Europeans sat in parliament, the latter being in the majority.

African nationalist politicians campaigned on the slogan of “one man, one vote,” meaning that everyone should be able to vote regardless of education or income. The fear of those *already* voting was that this would lead to tribal conflict and mob rule—which is exactly what it did lead to in much of the continent.

Too often “one man, one vote” led to just that—one man with a vote, that man being the new post-independence president who soon became president-for-life. Under this “democratic” system, no other votes count.

## Too often “one man, one vote” led to just that—one man with a vote, that man being the new post-independence president who soon became president-for-life. Under this “democratic” system, no other votes count.

Elections may be held, but all too frequently they are rigged.

### Ghana’s slide into dictatorship

Ghana, to which I frequently travel, is typical of political developments immediately following independence.

The richest and most successful of Britain’s African colonies, the Colony of the Gold Coast became the independent nation of Ghana on March 6, 1957. There had been a functioning parliament in the country since the 19th century. As more and more Africans were educated and prospered, the voting base widened and the colony’s parliament had a black majority. For six years prior to independence the country had an indigenous chief executive, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, whose dream was total independence.

When the new constitution was being worked out with the colonial authorities in London, the British and Gold Coast (Ghanaian) representatives wanted to ensure that parliamentary government (democracy) would continue after independence. The British system of checks and balances had worked well for centuries, longer than any other. It had been successfully exported to

other countries, notably Canada, Australia and New Zealand. So a similar system was designed for Ghana.

Of significance, during the discussions on the new constitution, Nkrumah made the comment that “I can ride a coach and horses through this constitution if I want to.”

That’s exactly what happened. In less than two years the tie with the Crown had been severed, followed a year later by a parliamentary vote that proclaimed the new leader “president for life.” One more year and parliament was abolished. In four years, a parliamentary system that had lasted for a century was gone. One man with his one vote now ruled the country.

### Zimbabwe follows the same pattern

In Zimbabwe a parliament still exists, but it simply rubberstamps the decisions of the president. However, having a parliament does at least give the appearance of being a democracy. There are dozens of such “democracies” around the world, democracies that no Western visitor would recognize as such.

Before “majority rule” in Zimbabwe, Rhodesia had a free press. The two main daily newspapers constantly criticized the government, which the rest of the world had condemned as “racist” and even “fascist” (even though free elections were still held right up until the end of Rhodesia).

When an election was held, under British supervision with international observers, to choose a government for the new “majority-rule” Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe led his ZANU-PF party to victory. It was to be the country’s last truly free election.

Tribalism was a major factor in the election, with the majority Shona gaining power. Soon tens of thousands of the minority Ndebele tribe would be massacred by Zimbabwean troops trained in the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea.

Corruption became a problem overnight. Within two weeks of “majority rule,” policemen were wanting bribes. Government officials were soon diverting funds. Eventually, leading members of the government were given prosperous farms seized from their former white owners.

As the new owners were not interested in agricultural production, food supplies fell

and people were left starving. Food aid contributed from Western donor nations enables the government to continue in power, as the food is only distributed to the president’s loyal supporters.

### Will Iraq be different?

The big question now is: Will Iraq and other nations of the Middle East be different? President Bush recently said that “in the long run stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty,” going on to declare that America would help spread democracy throughout the Middle East. Right now, not one of the 22 Arab states in the region is a Western-style democracy.

When the former Ottoman Empire was carved up following World War I, the British were given responsibility for Iraq under the League of Nations. Britain established a constitutional monarchy in Iraq, British style. It lasted until it was violently overthrown in 1958 in a bloodthirsty revolution that eventually led to Saddam Hussein’s reign of terror.

An interesting observation was made recently about Iraq’s democratic period. A Dec. 20 article in London’s *Financial Times*, titled “Man with a Mission,” profiled Ahmed Chalabi, Iraq’s most prominent face at this time. He is the spokesman for the Iraqi National Council on which he sits. After 45 years in exile following the 1958 coup, he is now back in Iraq.

“Tamara Daghistani, a close friend,” was asked “what she thinks has kept Chalabi committed to Iraq for all those years of exile and she says her generation yearns to recapture a golden age for Iraq in the more liberal and tolerant 1940s and 1950s.”

Chalabi himself spent those exile years in both Britain and the United States. His observations on America are interesting. In the same article he states: “It’s easy to be an American . . . it’s a welcoming place and people are generally straightforward and open. I saw the good sides of being free, and I saw the idiotic sides. You can make stupid decisions but . . . it’s better than anything else . . . There are winners and losers. *But the losers don’t get killed and the winners don’t own everything*” (emphasis added).

Here we begin to see why some countries cannot prosper. In many countries political opponents are arrested, tortured and shot, often along with their wives and children, thereby removing all possible future opposition. Their property is then seized. Even when this doesn’t happen, leaders will often take everything for themselves.

In Africa, elected officials often divert national funds to their own (foreign) bank

accounts. They may also rig the next election, thereby making it impossible for them to be removed from office through peaceful means. Removal by violence can only be done by the military, with resultant years of military dictatorship.

### Divided interests, divided nations

It's not just Africa and the Middle East

## Each of these three groups—the Sunnis, the Shia and the Kurds—wants to control the country and its oil wealth. Yet none of them have the cultural ideals that have helped preserve democracy in the Anglo-Saxon world.

that have these problems. Recent developments in Russia show that the country's president, Vladimir Putin, is becoming more dictatorial. Recently he ordered the arrest of the country's richest business tycoon, an arrest that caused an immediate 10 percent plunge of the country's stock exchange amid fears the government would seize more people and property.

The challenge for coalition forces in Iraq is this: After imposing a democratic system on the nation, will it hold?

The failure of most new nations lies in the reality that they cannot successfully transition peacefully from one administration to another.

Some cultures seem to need a strong man to maintain order. This is problematic in many ways. Naturally, as in Russia, this leads to a more dictatorial form of government. But in most countries it will also lead to tribal or religious conflict.

A strong man in Africa, for example, must come from one tribe, which alienates all the other tribes. Tribal custom demands that he grant favors to his own tribe over others. This then leads to resentment, which in turn leads to rebellion. One third of all the countries in Africa right now are embroiled in civil wars, disputes that often have their origins in the tribal divisions within each nation. Add corruption to this, and it's a recipe for disaster.

Iraq will likely be no exception. It has three dominant groups in the country, the majority Shia or Shiite Muslims, the Sunni Muslims and the Kurds, an ethnically different people. Saddam was a Sunni Muslim who persecuted the majority Shias.

Under a system of "one man, one vote," the Shias will inevitably dominate the next government and a Shia likely will be president. This could lead to a theocratic government as in neighboring Iran. Saddam Hussein, in contrast, was antireligious most of the time (finding religion towards the end,

as so many do, partly because he needed support). It will be a sad irony if the new elected government of Iraq ultimately becomes an Iranian-style theocracy, America's worst nightmare come true.

The Kurds are another complicating factor. Each of these three main groups wants to control the country and its oil wealth. Yet none of them have the same cultural ideals

that have helped preserve democracy in the Anglo-Saxon world.

### Will democracy lead to chaos?

It appears likely that the presence of coalition forces will guarantee a constitutional government for a while—as did Britain's earlier presence in Iraq and in its colonies. For as long as a British governor was present, parliamentary government worked. But as soon as that governor was gone, along with British troops, democracy was threatened.

The reason for this is inherent cultural differences. For democracy to succeed, effective checks and balances must exist. There must also be a free press and an independent judiciary—for if the government controls the courts, then political opponents can be imprisoned simply for disagreeing. In the British and American systems, as the Zambian president pointed out, these things evolved over centuries.

Often overlooked today is the influence of the Bible in the gradual emergence of the Anglo-American democratic model (although Western democracy is not necessarily the biblical ideal). The publication of the King James Version of the Bible four centuries ago revolutionized political thinking.

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, the established Roman Church taught that people could only go to God through a priest—who was also the only one authorized to read the Scriptures. Once people could read their Bibles themselves, they learned that they should "work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

This was a revolutionary concept with unexpected political consequences. In less than a century after the publication of the King James Bible, England's politics went through major turmoil, including a civil war, the execution of a king, a period of dictatorship and a bloodless revolution. But a more democratic system was the end result.

### The foundation for right governing

A right knowledge and understanding of the Word of God should be required for all leaders. Notice God's requirement for leaders as spelled out in His Word: "When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, . . . and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' . . . 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" (Deuteronomy 17:14-19).

Israel's King Solomon asked God for wisdom and discernment when he ascended the throne. "You have made Your servant king . . . , but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in . . . Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:7-9).

Jesus Christ, soon to return as the world's first perfect leader, taught a different approach to governance: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—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).

Self-seeking, tyrannical, despotic and authoritarian rule, with its consistent proclivity for abusing people, is wrong. Leaders should rather emulate Christ's example of service, serving people rather than abusing them and serving themselves. This is the kind of leadership the world will experience under Christ's loving reign in the world tomorrow. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

How will the world of tomorrow differ from the world of today? How will the world be transformed under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ? Why did He promise to return, and what will happen when He does? In the answers to these questions lies a tremendous hope for humankind, the good news that Jesus Christ proclaimed.

To discover those answers, request your free copy of the booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.



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# World News and Trends

## An Overview of Conditions Around the World

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

### British armed forces in serious straits

Britain's armed forces are facing an unprecedented financial crisis, with the prospect of across-the-board cuts that could threaten future military operations. This was the assessment of *The Guardian* (Oct. 28, 2003). A further report by *The Sunday Telegraph* revealed that "the Army's armoured regiments had been left crippled by the Iraqi war with only half its battle tanks capable of operational service" (Nov. 30, 2003).

Soon afterwards, in mid-December, the British government, seeking to solve these knotty problems, published a strategic white paper. The government's aim is to restructure the military with one third of British

Challenger II tanks to be mothballed along with the jettisoning of certain types of aircraft. Royal Navy vessels also faced curtailment.

But according to noted author/editor Max Hastings, the main troubles do not revolve around Iraq or some notorious equipment distribution problems during the Iraqi campaign and its aftermath. He recently wrote: "The real issues—which amount to a major scandal—concern the continuing funding of the armed forces, amid a grievous current spending gap which the treasury has no intention of filling; and weapons programmes for

the next generation, costing tens of billions of pounds.

"The National Audit Office revealed last month that the biggest projects are over £3 billion over budget. Some of these contracts are for systems as relevant as a fleet of dreadnoughts [battleships]. Foremost is the Eurofighter . . . This aircraft is a cold war interceptor for which no conceivable rationale any longer exists" (*The Spectator*, Feb. 7, emphasis added). (Sources: *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *The Spectator* [all London].)



### Britain's solution: an EU defense force?

In an underreported but very important declaration, journalist Stephen Castle, filing his report from Brussels, succinctly stated: "Britain, France and Germany finally overcame U.S. objections last night and struck a deal on European Union Defence, ending months of wrangling over whether Europe's new military co-operation will rival NATO. Under the agreement, the EU will be able to have an autonomous military planning capability, but [it] will not become a standing headquarters" (*The Independent*, Dec. 2, 2003).

Veteran *Times* columnist Peter Riddell titled his similar piece: "Let's take a risk and let Brussels play with our soldiers." He began the text of his article: "The European Defence Plan is good news for Europe, the United States and for NATO" (Dec. 4, 2003). But is it really? Not if you truly understand how biblical prophecy will ultimately unfold in Central Europe.

EUObserver.com both paraphrased and quoted the EU's military chief Gustav Hägglund, speaking Jan. 18 at a defense conference in Sweden. In urging Europe to carry its defense burden separately from America, he specifically said: "My prediction is that this will happen within the next ten years."

Are these developments intended to be the long-term solution for the decline in British armed forces—to integrate the U.K. army into Europe? If so, the perils that may be ahead could pale even the sufferings of World War II into insignificance. To understand more fully, please request our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* (Sources: *The Independent*, *The Times* [both London], *EUObserver.com*.)



German and British Eurofighters in the skies over England.

### United States pulling troops and tanks out of Germany

The American military is planning a major restructuring to better meet 21st-century terrorist threats with flexible rapid reaction units. Included in the implementation of this major reassessment, "the United States plans to withdraw its heavy armoured formations [tanks] from Germany next year [2005], in the largest reshaping of the European military landscape since the end of the Cold War" (*The Daily Telegraph*, Jan. 10).

EUObserver.com adds: "The U.S. is preparing to cut the number of troops stationed in Europe [the vast majority in Germany] by up to a third." American military specialists are scouting sites in Poland, Bulgaria and Romania as potential locations for new land, sea and air bases—which are greatly opposed by Russia.

This American move would leave Britain alone as a foreign power with heavy armor in Germany. And, of course, the United Kingdom still has 23,000 troops in the Fatherland. It might be asked what good will British forces and armament do if eventually integrated into a European Union Army? (Sources: *The Daily Telegraph* [London], *International Herald Tribune*, *EUObserver.com*.)

### America and Canada: A potential division?

In terms of dress, conversation, books, TV programs and movies, foreigners would be hard pressed to tell Americans and Canadians apart. And yet on certain issues like gay marriage, drug use and abuse and even church attendance, according to an *International Herald Tribune* feature article, "a chasm has opened up on social issues that go to the heart of fundamental values" (Dec. 3, 2003).

Many Canadians are apparently adopting the more liberalized European approach to many current societal problems. Two Canadian provinces have given approval to gay marriage, and the central government in Ottawa is

moving in the direction of legalizing marijuana use.

Despite incidents like Canadian refusal to send combat troops to Iraq, political differences between the two countries tend to fade with the passing of administrations in Washington D.C. and Ottawa, but cultural divergence can easily become much more entrenched.

The *Tribune* article added that "weekly church attendance among Canadians has plummeted since the 1950s while American church attendance has remained virtually constant." Whether these divisive trends will become a permanent fixture or are merely a temporary blip on the graph bears watching.

What many Americans and Canadians do not understand is their common heritage and future legacy. To understand more, please write for our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: *International Herald Tribune*.)



## Islam versus American democracy: The bigger picture

**B**ernard Lewis, a Princeton University historian who has written more than 20 books on Islam and the Middle East, has a blueprint for America's war against terrorism: confront, defeat and transform. The plan for America and the West is to confront, not retreat from Islamic threats, defeat such threatening forces and transform such societies into fledgling democracies.

In Western societies, it is generally accepted that an adversary respects a nation out of fear, if for no other

reason. Such was the case in the Cold War between the Soviets and America. The Soviets not only contained their aggressive designs of world conquest through destabilization because of America's intractable stand (led by former U.S. President Ronald Reagan), but they became demoralized and irretrievably

**"We have time, we can wait. We got rid of the Crusaders. We got rid of the Turks. We'll get rid of the Jews."**

weakened to the point of collapse. Seventy-two years of posturing as unconquerable bullies collapsed almost overnight.

In stark contrast, Arabic Islamic societies appear

to neither fear nor respect the West, and America in particular. To them, whether real or perceived, America is the infidel, deserving extinction from the face of the earth. Some Arabs—like the Wahabis in particular—are obsessed with the destruction of the West and America.

Bernard Lewis recounted chatting with some Arab friends in Amman, Jordan, when one of them unthinkingly trotted out a familiar argument common to that corner of the world. "We have time, we can wait. We got rid of the Crusaders. We got rid of the Turks. We'll get rid of the Jews."

Lewis wasn't impressed and decided to clarify his Arabic friend's misunderstanding: "Excuse me, but you've got your history wrong. The Turks got rid of the Crusaders. The British got rid of the Turks. The Jews got rid of the British. I wonder who is coming here next" (*The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 3). Mr. Lewis' point indicated that most Islamic countries fail to modernize their societies, which of itself beckons outsiders—most recently the United States and the coalition forces—to intervene. (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)

## Hitler is dead; Hitlerism isn't

**A**lmost six decades after Hitler's death by suicide in a Berlin bunker, the seeds of Hitlerism continue to grow around the world. Why? How?

Omer Bartov, professor of history at Brown University wrote an incisive, soul-searching article on Adolf Hitler entitled "He Meant What He Said" (*The New Republic*, Feb. 2, p. 25). His analysis is fueled by a major postscript to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, written in 1928, *Hitler's Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf* (published by Enigma Books, October 2003).

**"Hitler taught humanity an important lesson. It is that when you see a Nazi, a fascist, a bigot, or an anti-Semite, say what you see . . . The absence of clarity is the beginning of complicity."**

Dr. Bartov addresses the importance of using hindsight to improve modern foresight: Adolf Hitler said what he meant and meant what he said.

Around the world there exist many groups who teach and preach their hatred of the Jews, as well as those who harbor such groups. Bartov warns in his *New Republic* article that when fanatics say what they mean, they also mean what they say.

"They belong to the right and the left, to the religious and the secular, to the West and the East, to the rabble and the leaders, to terrorists and intellectuals, students and peasants, pacifists and militants,

expansionists and anti-globalization activists. The diplomacy advocated by Hitler is no longer relevant, but his reason for it, his legitimization of his 'world-view,' is alive and kicking, and it may still kick us."

Hitler is dead, but Hitlerism is not. Some liberals, politicians and intellectuals promote the notion that if the state of Israel were removed, that would also remove anti-Semitism. Don't believe it. The language of the fanatics tells us the opposite: They believe that the Jews are everywhere so they must be uprooted everywhere.

Bartov's conclusion is instructive: "Hitler taught humanity an important lesson. It is that when you see a Nazi, a fascist, a bigot, or an anti-Semite, say what you see. If a self-proclaimed liberation organi-



zation calls for the extermination of the Jewish state, do not pretend that it is calling for anything else. The absence of clarity is the beginning of complicity."

The Bible has much to say about the Jewish people—that they would be a byword, that they would battle for their lives throughout history and that they would be leaders in the world to come. To learn more, request your free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: *The New Republic*.)

## Saudi oil and future geopolitics

**P**resently Saudi Arabia is home to the largest oil reserves in the world. Yet Matt Simmons, an energy expert from Houston, Texas (who rightly predicted North America's dwindling natural-gas supplies in the late 1990s), questions whether the Saudis will be able to maintain their role as the global market's greatest oil producer. Simmons thinks that Saudi Arabia's current oil production is fragile at best.

Mr. Simmons bases his concerns on a review of more than 200 analytical papers written by engineers of Aramco, the Saudi state-owned oil company. Mr. Simmons discovered that some of the country's largest oil fields are declining much faster than the world might believe.

Mr. Simmons admits that it's impossible to prove whether it will be a major problem in the future, but he cautioned that it would be catastrophic if the Saudis' oil production declined unexpectedly.

Since World War II, a number of national powers have become dependent on Middle East oil. To be sure, there are other oil reserves throughout the world, but none compare to the rich fields of Saudi Arabia—with Kuwait and Iraq close behind. If the Saudi oil reserves begin to run out, look for even more turmoil in the ever-troubled Middle East. To learn more about the history and future of this region, request your free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: *The Washington Post*.)

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# The Horsemen of Revelation

## The Red Horse of War

Approximately 180 million men, women and children were slaughtered in 20th-century wars. The new millennium has continued the trend, with the addition of mass-murder terrorism. What do history and the Bible tell us about the second horseman of Revelation? We continue with our second article in a series about the horsemen of Revelation.

by Darris McNeely

In the mid-1980s, at the height of the Cold War and nuclear arms race, President Ronald Reagan once openly pondered the potential for an age-ending world war in our time.

“... I turn back to [the] ancient prophets in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon,” he mused, “and I find myself wondering if—if we’re the generation that’s going to see that come about . . .

There have been times in the past when we thought the world was coming to an end, but never anything like this.”

Those who lived through World War I felt the same way. They called it “the Great War” and “the war to end all wars.” If only that were true, and warfare had ended almost a century ago! More than 150 million people wouldn’t have had their lives snuffed out prematurely by bullets and bombs, stones and spears in the decades since. But it was not to be.

### A coming war to end all wars

The war to end all wars *is* coming, but it will follow a time of global conflict and turmoil unlike anything ever seen (Matthew 24:21). That age-ending period will be so bloody, so dangerous and deadly, that Jesus Christ warned us that “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” (verse 22, Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

In the last issue we saw that the first of the four horsemen of Revelation 6 represents a massive Satan-inspired religious deception. The ride of the second of the four horsemen unleashes the malignant forces of evil and removes the last vestiges of peace from the earth. However, Jesus Christ cuts short this horseman’s ride, *preventing human extinction*, with His appearance and the establishment of His world-ruling Kingdom.

Notice what the apostle John saw with the breaking of the second seal: “When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, ‘Come and see.’ Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it *to take peace from the earth*, and that people *should kill one another*; and there was given to him *a great sword*” (Revelation 6:3-4).

This vision corresponds with Christ’s prophecy of the end time recorded in Matthew 24: “And you will hear of *wars and rumors of wars*. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For *nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom*” (verses 6-7).

The record of history shows a pattern of the red horse of war often following the white horse of false religion. An example is the Thirty Years War in Europe during the mid-17th century. Following the Protestant Reformation, the resultant shift in power among European states led to 30 years of carnage from 1618 to 1648.

Religion, the newly emerged Protestant versus Roman Catholic theology, was the ideology that fueled the winds of war. It led to strange alliances: Catholic France aligned with Protestant Holland to offset the powerful Catholic Hapsburg dynasty. This resulted



in prolonging the conflict. By the time “peace” (a euphemism for balance of power) was restored in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia, 8 million people had lost their lives—a staggering toll, especially at that time.

What can we expect to see as this red horse of war rides across the landscape in the last days, unleashing the fury of nations on the world?

A look at the history of war will give us a clue. Let’s first look at what the Bible reveals about the roots of war.

### The beginning of war

Those who understand man’s nature know he is on a course toward destruction—and has been since the beginning.

In Genesis 4 we read of the first human “war,” the conflict between Cain and Abel, the sons of the first human beings, Adam and Eve. When God refused to accept the offering of Cain, reading his sinful heart, Cain’s self-interest was threatened. He did not control his anger and aggression and subsequently “rose up against Abel his brother and killed him” (Genesis 4:8).

Expelled from the family environs, Cain went to the land of Nod on the east of Eden (verse 16). Some biblical scholars say he built on the ancient site of Jericho.

God’s purpose and plan. This is made clearer in the story of the Tower of Babel in chapter 11. The cities associated with Nimrod war back and forth for centuries. Babylon becomes a city, then an empire.

Eventually it becomes the symbol of the system that opposes God, His people and His plan throughout the Bible story. It is that city, described in Revelation 17:5 as a “MYSTERY . . . THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH,” which in the time of the end provides the cultural and religious inspiration to a political-religious empire called “the beast.”

The roots of this end-time system

reach back to the pattern started by Nimrod at Babel, thus bridging the intervening centuries. This system will form the backdrop for the final conflict of the age brought on by the red horse of war.



**The war to end all wars is coming, it will follow a time of global conflict and turmoil unlike anything ever seen. It will be so bloody, so dangerous and deadly, that Jesus Christ warned that “if that time . . . were not cut short, no living thing could survive . . .”**

Regardless of the accuracy of those speculations, excavations at the earliest levels of this site, one of the oldest inhabited settlements on earth, reveal a fortress city with walls 12 feet high and 6 ½ feet thick.

The remains of a large tower, 30 feet across at the base and 30 feet high, tell a story of people living in a fortress city, protecting what they had—probably food—from those who would take it by force. Clearly Jericho was a site of conflict long before Joshua and the Israelites encircled its walls.

In Genesis 10, God provides a narrative of the sons of Noah and the cities that grew from their dynasties. One descendant, Nimrod, and the city he built, Babel, are inserted into the story.

Nimrod was “a mighty hunter before the LORD” (verse 9). The “before” here denotes “in the face of” or “against,” indicating an adversarial relationship with

No war has brought peace. Wars waged in the name of religion have not achieved religious harmony. No war waged for national interest has brought lasting security for any city, state or empire. The peace sought by man is all too often a peace that only suits nationalistic interests and lays the groundwork for subsequent conflict.

### The terrifying nuclear genie

As a result of the breakup of the Soviet empire in the early 1990s, its nuclear stockpiles and those of the United States have been dramatically reduced. However, the nuclear genie has not been put back into its bottle. Through various means some of that nuclear technology and know-how has migrated to other nations or been independently developed.

Today long-time enemies India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons, and although currently talking again, twice in

## What’s at the Root of War?

Volumes have been written describing the root causes of war. It has been studied, no doubt, since the first conflict erupted among human beings. The ancient Greeks felt human behavior was guided by fear, self-interest and honor—characteristics that cause war and instability. When these aspects of human nature create a crisis, the normal course of events leads to a breakdown in order, and anarchy or war is the result.

Relations among nations are likewise generally guided by self-interest. When nations’ interests are jeopardized, the natural instinct for self-preservation takes over. War is often the result.

The apostle James wrote quite pointedly on this subject: “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war” (James 4:1-2).

James identifies *lust, desire and covetousness* as the primary sources of strife among people who cannot focus on the right relationship with God. He goes on to say: “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (verse 4). Again we see that self-interest plays a dominant role in human aggression.

Left to itself, without a spiritual relationship with God, *the human heart* is the seat of conflict. Jeremiah the prophet observed that “the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick . . .” (Jeremiah 17:9, New American Standard Bible).

Jesus Christ confirms that “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19). The apostle Paul tells us that the natural, human way of thinking “is hostile to God” and “does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:7, New International Version).

But the Bible reveals that the real source of this hostility within human beings is Satan the devil. In a heated discussion with the Pharisees who were challenging Him, Christ labeled Satan as the source of human hostility. “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Paul describes Satan as controlling the “power of the air,” swaying people to disobedience without their conscious awareness. Until man’s nature undergoes a fundamental change, he follows after the natural “lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” He is a child “of wrath” caught up with the rest of humanity in a spirit of conflict (Ephesians 2:2-3).

It will take a change of heart along with the addition of God’s Spirit to turn the human mind from pursuing pure self-interest to following the lead of God. We find this solution alluded to in a quote from Russian author Leo Tolstoy’s famous novel *War and Peace*: “Drain the blood from men’s veins and put in water instead, then there will be no more war!”

When the world comes under the covenant in which God writes His law of love on the human heart through His Spirit, we will see the end of war. Until then, we will see wars continue—and escalate in ferocity and devastation as mankind uses technological advancements to introduce ever-more-deadly means of killing other human beings.

recent years they have rattled their sabers to threaten a holocaust on the South Asian subcontinent.

Last year North Korea, in violation of signed agreements, announced it had developed several nuclear warheads and stated its intention to produce more in short order. U.S. intelligence sources acknowledged the North Koreans' claim was credible. The renegade country also has an aggressive missile program, steadily increasing their range to the point that last February CIA director George Tenet admitted Korean ICBMs were now capable of hitting the western United States.

U.S. analysts also fear that cash-starved North Korea, which markets its Scud-class missiles throughout the Arab sphere, may up the ante by adding nuclear warheads to the weaponry it offers for sale around the world—possibly making them available to terrorist groups for the right price.

Libya, whose leader Muammar Gadhafi in December renounced efforts to develop and deploy weapons of mass destruction, was quickly found to have a nuclear program “much further advanced” than Western intelligence agencies had believed—one that had existed secretly for more than a decade.

Iran, identified by President George W. Bush as part of the “axis of evil” (along with Iraq and North Korea), has come under suspicion of using its Russian-built nuclear reactor—supposedly built for peaceful power-generation purposes—as a cover for a secret nuclear weapons program.

Those suspicions were heightened last year when International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors found traces of enriched uranium—a crucial component in developing nuclear weapons—on Iranian nuclear equipment. Tehran responded that the equipment was already contaminated when the Iranians purchased it from a third country and, after first refusing, finally agreed in December to open its nuclear facilities to more stringent IAEA inspections.

Just about the time Gadhafi renounced his pursuit of nuclear weapons, Pakistan's government denied that it had helped spread its nuclear technology to countries such as Libya, Iran and North Korea—but later confessed that Pakistani scientists had done so on their own.

Taken together, these many troubling developments point to unstable dictatorships and paranoid regimes scrambling to develop or acquire nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction so they can become the biggest bully on the block.

### Present world scene ready for war

Of course, such weapons would be the

ultimate tool in a terrorist arsenal should some groups get the funds or other resources needed to acquire them.

The great fear is that nuclear weapons, or other weapons of mass destruction, would fall into the hands of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and be used against Western nations. The end of the Cold War did not bring us any closer to the end of possible nuclear war. The grim reality is that it simply shifted the power into the hands of more players—some of whom view themselves as having nothing to lose by unleashing such weapons against the West.

Those who study war understand the persistent danger. In a comprehensive look at the subject, author Gwynne Dyer made



## One unmistakable message of the book of Revelation is God's control of seemingly uncontrollable events. The only hope of human survival is the reality of Christ's intervention to prevent the total destruction of the earth and its inhabitants.

this chilling, sober and almost hopeless observation: “To begin quite close to the end: we may inhabit the Indian summer of human history, with nothing to look forward to but the ‘nuclear winter’ that closes the account. The war for which the great powers hold themselves in readiness every day may come, as hundreds of others have in the past.

“The megatons will fall, the dust will rise, the sun's light will fail, and the race may perish. Nothing is inevitable until it has actually happened, but the final war is undeniably a possibility, and there is one statistical certainty. Any event that has a definite probability, however small, that does not decrease with time will eventually occur—next year, next decade, next century, but it will come.

Including nuclear war” (*War*, 1985, p. xi).

### One world government

This bleak prospect has led many to conclude that a supranational world government is the only hope for universal peace. The medieval writer Dante Alighieri, in his work *De Monarchia*, speaks of the inevitable contentions between two governments which require arbitration by a third power with the authority to settle the dispute.

“This third power is either the world-government, or it is not. So, we must arrive at a first and supreme judge for whom all contentions are judicable . . . Therefore, world-government is necessary for the world” (quoted in *The Great Ideas: A Synopticon of Great Books of the Western World*, Volume II, William Gorman, general editor, “War and Peace,” 1952, p. 1018).

At the end of the age, war will bring the nations to the point where a system will be created with the capability, and perhaps even the stated purpose, of bringing peace to the earth. Revelation 13 describes this system rising up out of the sea and calls it “the beast.”

By a series of apparent miracles, a world in crisis is persuaded to accept this system. Nations surrender their sovereignty and the world worships this “beast,” asking, “Who is able to make war with [the beast]?” (verse 4).

To enforce this type of “peace,” this system has authority “over every tribe, tongue and nation”—a worldwide power (verse 7). But in enforcing its rule it makes war on the true servants of God, who recognize the true

nature of this power and system as satanic.

Revelation 17 describes this “beast” receiving power from 10 “kings”—leaders of nations or groups of nations allied together to support this system and its human leader. And apparently it will bring a temporary peace to the world (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3). Yet the “peace” that is brought ultimately leads to war against God. This system and its leader will make war with the Lamb (Jesus Christ) but in the end will be overcome by Him.

Throughout the ages man has sought to organize a universal government. What began thousands of years ago at Babylon as an attempt to reach to the heavens and defy God will be resurrected in an age-ending attempt to unify the nations into a global

## In Our Next Issue

What is the meaning of the third horseman—the black horse and its rider? Don't miss part three of this eye-opening series in the next issue!

political and economic system.

The intended goal of this system will be to bring order, peace and prosperity among the warring factions of humanity. But once "peace" is attained, the attractive mask will

## The final war of this age will serve to humble mankind to the point that people finally will obey God and become willing to live the way that will produce peace.

be removed to reveal a hideous beast of a system that will tear and destroy any opposition to its rule and authority. The desire of the ages—peace—will prove elusive one more time, when left in the hands of man.

The stage will be set for the climactic battle at the end.

### Christ's intervention to save humanity

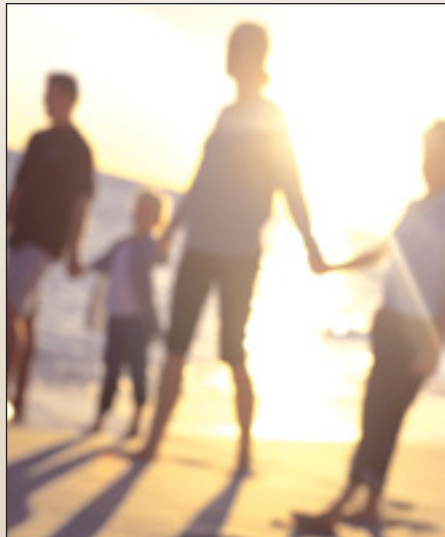
Peace, when left to human beings, has little chance of permanence. The rise of this end-time Babylonian system will be a major factor in a time of world calamity unlike any experienced in history. The prophet Daniel was told that this period will be "a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then" (Daniel 12:1, New International Version).

Christ spoke of this time as well: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved . . ." He offered the light at the end of the tunnel when He added, "but for the elect's sake those days will be

shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22).

This final time of war will ultimately rest in the hands of God. Remember that Revelation 5 shows us that it is the Lamb, Jesus Christ, who unlocks the seals. Christ is in charge of history, and He will bring this trial to a conclusion that will at long last result in peace for all peoples. But genuine peace will not come without a terrible cost in human suffering.

The final war of this age will serve to humble mankind to the point that people finally will obey God and become willing



to live the way that will produce peace.

Look at the description of this time of world conflict. It begins in Revelation 8 with the opening of the seventh seal, containing seven trumpet plagues of unimaginable destruction to come on the earth.

The next chapter describes what happens when the sixth trumpet sounds: "Then the

sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released *to kill a third of mankind*. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million" (Revelation 9:13-16).

This 200-million-person army is fearsome to contemplate. Verse 18 tells us that a third of mankind—more than 2 billion lives at our planet's current population level—will be snuffed out in this age-ending wave of warfare.

One unmistakable message of the book of Revelation is God's control of seemingly uncontrollable events. The only hope of human survival is the reality of Christ's intervention to prevent the total destruction of the earth and its inhabitants.

As this crisis at the close of man's age reaches its crescendo, the heavens will open and Christ will appear on a white horse. Here, in God's message of hope, appears a fifth horseman whose ride will be decisive and final. Revelation 19:11 says He is "called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war."

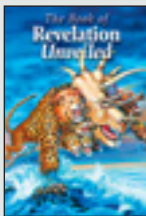
Christ will wage this battle in righteousness because He alone holds the keys to death and the grave (Revelation 1:18). No other person waging battle or war in history, no matter how "just" the cause may seem, can make this claim. God's judgment on the nations has been building over the millennia and will be executed at precisely the right time.

Christ's victory in this ultimate battle will result in the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Finally the world will see lasting peace.

But before this takes place two other horsemen must ride. In our next installment we'll look at the ride of the third horse, famine. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

What other factors play into the terrifying ride of the blood-red horse of war at the time of the end? What's behind the rise of the systems called "Babylon" and "the beast" foretold in the book of Revelation? From where does the terrifying 200-million-man army arise? To better understand these prophesied events, be sure to request or download our free booklets



*The Book of Revelation Unveiled, You Can Understand Bible Prophecy, Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

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# Good Friday–Easter Sunday: It Didn't Happen That Way!

*Do you remember when you learned that Santa Claus wasn't real? Guess what? Good Friday and a Sunday resurrection aren't either. Discover the real story from the pages of the Bible itself!*

by Bruce Gore

**A**t the beginning of the first century, hope for a Messiah burned in the hearts of many Jews. Prophecies in Deuteronomy, the Psalms and the writings of the Prophets all had proclaimed the coming of this promised Deliverer.

Divergent views about what the Messiah would be and do were common. Some thought he would be a great prophet, others another Elijah. Many expected Him to be a warrior king like David who would overthrow their Roman overlords and reestablish the glory of Israel. Basing their belief on prophecies from the book of Daniel, many were convinced the time was near.

**The One we worship as the Christ and Son of God said that the only outward visible sign of His genuineness as the Messiah was that as Jonah was three days and three nights inside the fish, He would be entombed for three days and three nights in the earth.**

It was during this time of great expectation that larger and larger crowds began gathering to hear a young preacher cry out to his countrymen to repent and return to God. His message was so powerful that it prompted some to wonder if he were the One to come. They asked, “Who are you?” He answered that he was not the Christ (“Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*), but was sent to prepare the way for Him (John 1:19-23).

The brief ministry of John the Baptist pointed to one who was born of humble origins, one called Jesus. Jesus’ ministry was supported by signs and wonders. His divinity was accepted by some and rejected by others. Some came only to eat (John 6:26-27), others to be entertained by the healings and other miracles. None had seen such miracles nor heard one speak as this teacher from Nazareth.

## Sign of the true Messiah

Speculation as to the real identity of Jesus

was a popular topic of conversation. But most of the religious leaders viewed Him as a threat to their position. One day a group of them tossed a challenge out to Him: “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You” (Matthew 12:38).

Were they asking for proof of His divinity, or were they just asking for more miracles to titillate their senses? The godly are more impressed by truth than by signs.

“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man

be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’” (Matthew 12:39-40).

How many who profess to follow Christ today have really thought about what these two verses say? Have you? Why was this one sign so important?

The One we worship as the Christ, the Savior, and Son of God said that the only outward visible sign of His genuineness as the Messiah was that as Jonah was three days and three nights inside the fish, He would be entombed for three days and three nights in the earth.

It was Jesus’ way of saying that he would die, yet remain dead for only a short time—and these two facts together would prove that He is the true Messiah. And, as a part of the only sign that He gave to prove His identity as the Christ, He precisely specified *the length of time* He would remain dead.

Three days and three nights comprise a total of 72 hours. Yet today it is almost universally believed that Jesus died and was

buried on late Friday afternoon and was resurrected early Sunday morning. If that belief is really true, then, based on His own words, the only sign of His Messiahship has utterly failed—for there are not three days and three nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning, but only one day and two nights!

## Prophecies of time in the tomb

Over and over, Christ had told His disciples of His upcoming burial and resurrection. “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised *the third day*” (Matthew 16:21, emphasis added throughout).

“... Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and *the third day* He will be raised up’” (Matthew 17:22-23).

“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and *after three days* rise again” (Mark 8:31).

Mark records Christ stating here that His resurrection would occur *after* or at the *end* of *three days*—not after one day, or one and a half days, or two days, but *after three days*. So Jesus must have been resurrected *just as the third day was ending*, three days and three nights after He was placed in the tomb.

This is the only way Jesus’ statements can be consistent. And consistent they are. When some of His followers came to the tomb looking for Him early Sunday morning, the angels told them He wasn’t there; He was already risen *as He said* (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:5-7).

Interestingly, when Peter was teaching the first gentiles called into the Church, he taught them that Jesus was the Christ (the Messiah), that He was put to death and was raised out of the grave “the third day.”

“That word you know, which was pro-

claimed throughout all Judea . . . : how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on *the third day*, and showed Him openly” (Acts 10:37-40).

Why was it necessary that Peter add “the third day”? Peter was confirming that Christ indeed had fulfilled the sign of Jonah! Years later, the apostle Paul affirmed not only the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also that it was on the third day:

“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]” (1 Corinthians 15:3-5).

Does “three days” or “the third day” mean *parts* of three days—Friday night, all day Saturday and Saturday night, and Sunday morning?

The Companion Bible answers: “The fact that ‘three days’ is used by Hebrew idiom for any part of three days and three nights is not disputed; because that was the common way of reckoning, just as it was when used of years . . . But, when the number of ‘nights’ is stated as well as the number of ‘days’, then the expression ceases to be an idiom, and becomes a literal statement of fact” (1990, appendix 144).

Since it is impossible to fit three days and three nights between late Friday afternoon

and Sunday morning, we have a serious timing problem. The traditional view of a “Good Friday” burial and an “Easter Sunday” resurrection cannot be reconciled with Jesus Christ’s own statements about how long He would be in the tomb. They cannot both be right.

### “The preparation day”

Why do most churches assume and teach that Christ died and was buried on Good Friday? Tradition, for one thing! That’s what most people have always been taught.

Also, they assume this is what the Bible teaches. The Scriptures do say that He was buried on “the preparation day,” the day before a Sabbath.

Heavy cooking and housecleaning were done on the day before a Sabbath in preparation for it. And the weekly Sabbath falls on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. Also, according to Bible reckoning days begin at sunset (Leviticus 23:32; compare Genesis 1:5, 8, 13), so all weekly Sabbaths start Friday evening at sunset.

Mark 15:42-46 does tell us plainly that Jesus was entombed late in the afternoon on the “preparation day,” just before the Sabbath began at sunset: “Now when evening had come, *because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath*, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

“Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he

[Joseph] bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.”

### Two kinds of Sabbaths—weekly and “high day”

What few people realize is that the Sabbath spoken of here was not the *weekly* Sabbath day, which begins on Friday at sunset and lasts until Saturday sunset.

The apostle John specifically tells us that the day on which Jesus was crucified was a *special* Sabbath, not the regular weekly Sabbath. “Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (*for that Sabbath was a high day*), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away” (John 19:31).

That Sabbath, we see from Scripture, was “a *high day*.” In addition to the weekly Sabbaths, God also commanded seven Holy Days or annual Sabbaths (see Leviticus 23), most of which could fall on different days of the week. A number of commentaries and Bible helps will tell you that John is here referring to one of these annual Sabbaths rather than the weekly Sabbath.

Jesus Christ, like the Passover lamb that was killed to spare the ancient Israelites from the death angel, was slain on Passover day (read John 19). The Passover is observed on the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar. The next day begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first day of Unleavened Bread, the 15th of Abib, is an annual Sabbath.

“On the fourteenth day of the first month

## ‘The Third Day’

Later on that first day of the week after the women discovered the empty tomb, two of the disciples were walking together and discussing the events of the past several days when the resurrected Christ joined them. At the time they did not know that it was Him. He asked what they were talking about and why were they so sad.

“Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of *all these things* which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

“And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’ Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, ‘Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?’

“And He said to them, ‘What things?’ So they said to Him, ‘The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is *the third day*

since these things happened” (Luke 24:13-21).

Here, the two disciples referred to Sunday as being the third day since “all these things” happened. There were other things the Jews and Romans did after Christ was buried. Notice what Matthew included about their actions:

“On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, ‘Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.’ Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the tomb secure, *sealing the stone and setting the guard*” (Matthew 27:62-66).

Christ had already been buried nearly one whole day when these things were done.

The last things the Romans and Jewish leaders did were to seal the tomb and place soldiers on guard around it. This was on Thursday, the day following that Day of Preparation. Apparently the disciples were including these events in their reference to the things that had taken place. Counting from the securing of the tomb and the setting of the guard, Sunday would have been the ‘third day’ since “all these things” happened.

## The Chronology of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection

Tuesday:	Wednesday:	Thursday:	Friday:	Saturday:	Sunday:
Jesus Christ ate an evening Passover meal with His disciples (at the beginning of Nisan 14, Jewish reckoning) and instituted the New Covenant symbols (Matthew 26:26-28). Jesus was then betrayed by Judas, arrested and during the night brought before the high priest.	Jesus was crucified and died around 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50). This was the preparation day for the <i>annual</i> , not weekly, Sabbath, which began at sunset (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). Jesus' body was placed in the tomb just before sunset (Matthew 27:57-60).	This was the high-day Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:4-7). It is described as the day after the "Day of Preparation" (Matthew 27:62).	The high-day Sabbath now past, the women bought and prepared spices for anointing Jesus' body before resting on the weekly Sabbath day, which began at sunset (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56).	The women rested on the weekly Sabbath, according to the Fourth Commandment (Luke 23:56; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus rose near sunset, <i>exactly three days and three nights</i> after burial, fulfilling the sign of Jonah and authenticating Jesus' Messiahship.	The women brought the prepared spices early in the morning <i>while it was still dark</i> (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Jesus <i>had already risen</i> (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:2-3; John 20:1). He did not rise on Sunday morning, but near sunset the day before.

at twilight is the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a *holy convocation*; you shall do no customary work on it" (Leviticus 23:5-7).

The Jews were rushing to finish the burials of the condemned men before the *annual* Sabbath began at sunset. This preparation day was the day before the first day of Unleavened Bread, a high day or annual Sabbath. The "Preparation Day" referred to in Mark 15:42 and John 19:31 was the day before the Holy Day that began the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

*Paraskeue*, the Greek word translated "Preparation Day," is "used in reference to the day or hours spent in preparation for the

chased the necessary spices "when the Sabbath was past"—clearly after it was over. But then in Luke 23, we are told that they prepared the spices and fragrant oils and then *rested* on the Sabbath, which means they had to have acquired the spices *before* that Sabbath on which they rested.

"That day was the Preparation [Day], and the Sabbath drew near. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment" (Luke 23:54-56).

Since it was unlawful to buy, sell or work on the Sabbath, the women had to wait until the annual Sabbath was past before they could purchase the spices. They did this

day by day, see the chart above.)

### The true chronology of events

In the year A.D. 31, the year Jesus was crucified, the Passover fell on a Wednesday, April 25, with the first day of Unleavened Bread following on the next day, Thursday. He died shortly after 3:00 p.m. on Passover day, Wednesday afternoon.

"Now it was about the sixth hour [of

**When Mary went to the tomb on Sunday morning, "while it was still dark" (John 20:1), Christ's body was not there. He wasn't resurrected at sunrise on Sunday morning. Before sunrise His body was already gone!**

Jewish Sabbath or festivals . . ." (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 1993, p. 1113).

### Proof of two Sabbaths in the Gospels

There were actually *two* Sabbaths that week—an *annual* Sabbath "high day" and a regular *weekly* Sabbath day. This is proven by the Gospels' statements regarding Mary Magdalene and the other women, who planned to put more spices and ointments on Christ's body, having been unable to do so because He had been so hurriedly entombed.

In Mark 16:1, we read that they pur-

on Thursday evening or early Friday. There was not enough time to both buy *and* prepare the spices plus put them on Christ's body. So they rested on the weekly Sabbath after purchasing and preparing them, intending to put them on His body early Sunday morning.

When we compare the different Gospel accounts, the true sequence of events becomes clear. The women purchased and prepared the spices when the first Sabbath (the annual high day) was past, then rested on the following day, which was another Sabbath—the regular weekly Sabbath day. (To see these events spelled out

## Does the Bible Say Jesus Rose on the First Day?

Doesn't Mark 16:9 clearly state that Christ rose on the first day of the week? "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons."

The meaning of this verse is determined by where the punctuation is placed. The original Greek had no punctuation. It was added hundreds of years later, in the ninth century, and then entirely based on human interpretation.

If we read this verse as it is punctuated, then it contradicts what verses 1-8 have already stated: Mary Magdalene had visited the tomb looking for Jesus' body and had left "when the sun had risen" without seeing Him.

Human translators simply placed the comma in the wrong place here. To agree with the context and the other Gospel accounts, it should follow the word "rose"—thus informing us that the *first* person to see the risen Christ was Mary Magdalene. "Now when He rose, early on the first day of the week He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons." Later that morning, He appeared to Mary before appearing to anyone else.

There is not a single scripture that says that Christ died on a Friday, nor is there one that says He was raised from the dead on Sunday morning.

daylight, corresponding to 12 noon], and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last" (Luke 23:44-46).

Between the ninth hour (3 p.m.) and sunset on Wednesday, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus asked for permission to remove His body to wrap and put it in a tomb which was close by.

"After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

"Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby" (John 19:38-42; compare Luke 23:50-55).

That Wednesday evening began the "high day," or annual Sabbath beginning the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This annual Sabbath ended Thursday evening at sunset.

The next day, Friday, the two Marys went out and purchased more spices to add to the body of Christ and spent the rest of the day preparing them. "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 16:1).

They then rested on Saturday, the weekly Sabbath, before getting up early Sunday morning to go to the tomb to put the spices on His body. "And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

"Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus" (Luke 23:55-24:3).

When Mary went to the tomb on Sunday morning, "while it was still dark" (John 20:1), Christ's body was *not there*. He wasn't resurrected at sunrise on Sunday morning. Before sunrise His body was already gone!

### The truth of the matter

Jesus Christ said He would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). If He were buried in the late afternoon, then He must have been resurrected at around the same time three days and nights later.

He was placed in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea in the late afternoon just before the sun went down. Three days and three nights later would have been at approximately the same time of day, just as the sun went down and evening came.

This places Christ's resurrection on Saturday around sunset—not on Sunday morning! As we have already seen, when Mary went to the tomb "while it was still dark" on Sunday morning, He was already risen!

Christ was buried on Wednesday afternoon, very late, and raised from His grave around sunset three days and nights later. This perfectly fits with the three nights—Wednesday night, Thursday night and Friday night—and the three days—Thursday, Friday and Saturday. This is the *only* time that fits Jesus' own prediction of how long He would be in the tomb. And, as we have seen, it fits perfectly with *all* the details recorded in the Gospels.

The sign was fulfilled, just as He said!

The tradition of a "Good Friday" crucifixion and an "Easter Sunday" resurrection are proven from the Bible to be only a tradition—and one without basis in fact. So which will you believe—a man-made myth, or the only sign that Jesus announced would be proof that He was who He said He was? **GN**

## Who's Behind The Good News?



**W**ho's behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by people—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people have a common goal: **To proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought: the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43, 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News* and various booklets (also free) we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, write or call us at the appropriate address on page 2. Visitors are always welcome.



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### Recommended Reading

If Jesus was neither crucified on a Friday nor resurrected on a Sunday, where does that leave us with Easter? It simply has no biblical support. Where did Easter originate, anyway? Its bizarre customs involving rabbits and eggs—ancient fertility symbols used in pagan religions—should give us a clue. If you'd like to dig deeper into how ancient pre-Christian fertility rites were transformed into one of the world's major modern religious festivals, request or download your free copy of our eye-opening booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*



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Phoenix ch. 24, 98, Sundays 5:30 p.m.  
 Prescott ch. 13, Tuesdays 1 p.m.;  
 Wednesdays 6 p.m.  
 Prescott Valley ch. 13, Sundays 9 a.m. & 3 p.m.; Mondays  
 9 a.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m. & 3 p.m.  
 Tucson ch. 73, 74, Saturdays, Sundays 8 a.m.

### Arkansas

Mena ch. 19, Sundays 2 & 2:30 p.m.

### California

Concord ch. 24, 25, Thursdays 9:30 p.m.  
 Fremont ch. 6, Mondays 11:30 a.m.  
 Lafayette ch. 3, Thursdays 9:30 a.m.  
 Livermore ch. 26, Fridays 4 p.m.  
 Marin County ch. 26, Tuesdays 10:30 p.m.  
 Menlo Park ch. 77, Mondays 10 p.m.  
 Newark ch. 3, Mondays 11:30 a.m.  
 Novato ch. 71, Tuesdays 7:30 p.m.  
 Orange County ch. 3A, Sundays 11 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.;  
 ch. 6, Sundays 11:30 a.m. & 8:30 p.m.  
 Palo Alto ch. 77, Mondays 6 p.m.  
 Richmond ch. 26, Mondays 10 a.m.  
 San Francisco ch. 29, Sundays 11 a.m.  
 San Jose ch. 15A, Wednesdays 4:30 p.m.  
 Santa Clara ch. 15A, Wednesdays 4:30 p.m.  
 Santa Rosa ch. 72, Sundays 6 p.m.; Saturdays 3 p.m.  
 S. Pasadena ch. 6, Thursdays 4 p.m.  
 Walnut Creek ch. 6, Thursdays 9:30 a.m.

### Colorado

Denver ch. 28, Tuesdays 12 noon; Fridays 11 a.m.

### Hawaii

Lanai ch. 13, Fridays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 7 a.m.  
 Maui ch. 52, Fridays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 7 a.m.  
 Molokai ch. 13, Fridays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 7 a.m.

### Illinois

Arlington Heights ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
 Aurora ch. 10, Tuesdays 10:30 p.m.  
 Bartlett ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
 Buffalo Grove ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
 Chicago ch. 36, times vary  
 Des Plaines ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
 Elk Grove Village ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
 Glenview ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
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 Hoffman Estates ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
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 Northbrook ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
 Palatine ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
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 Streamwood ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.  
 Romeoville ch. 6, weekdays 6 p.m.  
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 Wilmette ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.

### Indiana

Bloomington ch. 3, Sundays 9:30 p.m.  
 Ft. Wayne ch. 57, Sundays 12:30 p.m.

### Iowa

Iowa City ch. 18, Tuesdays 12:30 p.m.;  
 Fridays 5:30 p.m.

### Kentucky

Hopkinsville ch. 23, Thursdays 12 noon;  
 Saturdays 10 a.m.

### Paducah

ch. 2, Tuesdays 4 p.m.; Thursdays 10 a.m.

### Maryland

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 George's Creek ch. 19, Tuesdays 2 p.m.  
 Keyser ch. 19, Tuesdays 2 p.m.



### Massachusetts

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 Shrewsbury ch. 33, Wednesdays 10 p.m.;  
 Thursdays 7 a.m.

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 Grand Rapids ch. 25, Tuesdays or Wednesdays 11 a.m.  
 Kalamazoo ch. 20, Sundays 9 p.m.  
 Midland ch. 3, Thursdays 12:30 p.m.  
 Traverse City ch. 2, Sundays 11:30 a.m.

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 Willmar ch. 18, Wednesdays 9:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.

### Missouri

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### North Carolina

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### North Dakota

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### New Mexico

Albuquerque ch. 27, Saturdays 3 p.m.

### Ohio

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 Enon ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.  
 Fairborn ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.  
 Trotwood ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.  
 Vandalia ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.  
 Xenia ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.

### Oregon

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 Eugene ch. 11, Mondays 6 p.m.; Tuesdays 6 a.m.;  
 Thursdays 12 midnight; Fridays 12 noon  
 McMinnville ch. 11, Tuesdays 8 p.m.;  
 Wednesdays 12 noon  
 Oregon City ch. 11, Mondays 9 p.m.  
 Portland ch. 21, Sundays 9 p.m.; Fridays 9 p.m.  
 ch. 11, Mondays 8 p.m.

Salem ch. 23, Sundays 11 a.m. & 9 p.m.;  
 Mondays 7:30 p.m.; Tuesdays 6 p.m.;  
 Wednesdays 3:30 p.m.; Thursdays  
 12 noon; Fridays 6:30 p.m.  
 Woodburn ch. 11, Sundays 9 a.m.

### Texas

Austin ch. 11, Mondays 6 p.m.  
 Corpus Christi ch. 10, Sundays 8 p.m.  
 Dallas ch. 14b, Sundays 10:30 p.m.;  
 Tuesdays 9:30 p.m.  
 Del Rio ch. 19, Sundays 9 a.m.; Wednesdays 5 p.m.  
 El Paso ch. 15, Sundays 9 a.m.;  
 Wednesdays 5 p.m.; Thursdays 3 p.m.  
 Houston ch. 17, Thursdays 12:30 p.m.

### Washington

Bellevue ch. 29, 77, Tuesdays 4 p.m.  
 Olympia ch. 22, 29, Sundays 9:30 a.m.; Mondays 12  
 noon; Wednesdays 3 p.m.; Fridays 8:30 a.m.  
 Seattle ch. 29, 77, Tuesdays 4 p.m.  
 Spokane ch. 25, Sundays 7 p.m.  
 Vancouver ch. 11, Sundays 1 p.m.; Tuesdays 3:30 p.m.;  
 Thursdays 12 noon; Fridays 8 p.m.

### West Virginia

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### Wisconsin

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 Eau Claire ch. 11, Sundays 2 p.m.  
 Madison ch. 4, Sundays 10:30 a.m.  
 Stevens Point ch. 3, Mondays 10:30 p.m.;  
 Tuesdays 10 a.m. & 3:30 p.m.

### Wyoming

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# What Did Jesus Look Like?

Can forensic scientists discover what Jesus looked like 2,000 years later? Their conclusions, and what the Bible says, might be surprising.

by Gary Petty

The title proclaims “The Real Face of Jesus” followed by “Advances in forensic science reveal the most famous face in history.” This article, challenging the popular view of Jesus, didn’t appear in a religious magazine, but was the lead story in the December 2002 issue of *Popular Mechanics*.

The article begins: “From the time Christian children settle into Sunday school classrooms, an image of Jesus Christ is etched into their minds. In North America he is most often depicted as being taller than his disciples, lean, with flowing, light brown hair, fair skin with light-colored eyes.

“Familiar though this image may be, it is inherently flawed. A person with these features and physical bearing would have looked very different from everyone else in the region where Jesus lived and ministered.”

Can we know what Jesus really looked like? Classical European painters usually portray Him as tall and thin and with delicate, almost effeminate features. The Original African Heritage Edition of the King James Bible has a picture of Jesus looking like a man from Central Africa.

The image of Jesus in *Popular Mechanics* was based on information gathered by experts in forensic anthropology. Author Mike Fillon writes: “Using methods similar to those police have developed to solve crimes, British scientists, assisted by Israeli archeologists, have recreated what they believe is the most accurate image of the most famous face in history.”

The summary of these men of science surprised many religious people. They concluded: “From analysis of skeletal remains, archeologists had firmly established that the average build of a Semite male at the time of Jesus was 5 ft. 1 in., with an average weight of 110 pounds. Since Jesus worked outdoors as a carpenter until he was about 30 years old, it is reasonable to assume he was more muscular and physically fit than westernized portraits suggest.”

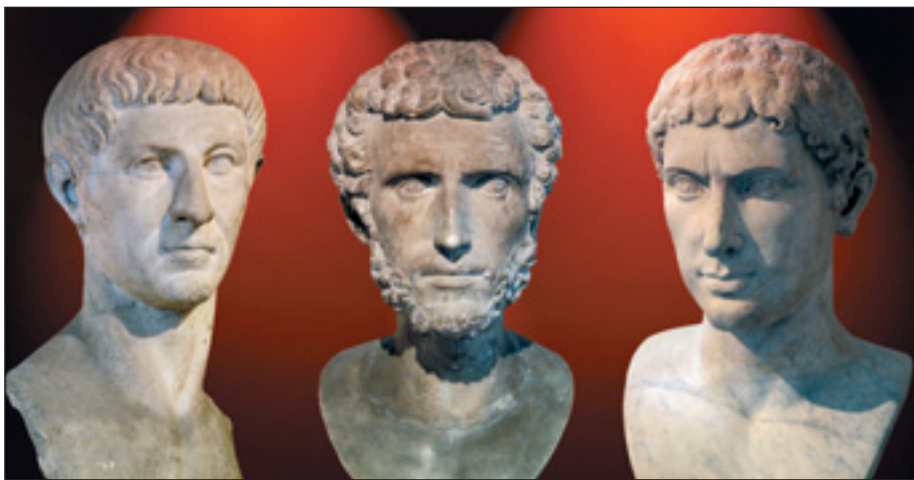
The Gospel writers record an account when Jesus avoided violence by an angry mob simply by mingling with the crowd. Judas had to identify Him with a kiss of betrayal. Obviously, these incidents show us that Jesus looked like any other Jew of His day.

## Jesus and long hair

The scientists quoted in *Popular Mechanics* assert that the prevalent view of Jesus with

which means He would have broken a Nazirite vow had He been under one.

The misconception is based in part on scriptures where He is called Jesus of Nazareth or a Nazarene. Nazareth is a region in Galilee where Jesus spent time as a child. We find an account of Jesus’ early life recorded in Matthew 2:23: “And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the



**Did Jesus Christ have long hair?** Paul wrote that it is shameful for a man to have long hair, and biblical evidence shows that Jesus looked like any other average Jewish man of His day. These busts of Roman citizens show the kinds of hairstyles typical of the time.

flowing locks is also an inaccurate portrayal. It’s also hard to understand why the apostle Paul would write in 1 Corinthians 11:14 that it’s a shame for a man to have long hair if His Savior wore His hair long. Where did the idea of Jesus with long hair originate?

For centuries some have believed that Jesus was under a Nazirite vow. According to Numbers 6:1-6 the person taking a Nazirite vow pledged to abstain from wine and grapes, to avoid touching a dead body and to not cut his or her hair until the end of the vow’s duration, when the hair had to be cut. But the Gospels record occasions when Jesus drank wine,

prophets, “He shall be called a Nazarene.” Jesus was a *Nazarene*, not a *Nazirite*. He was never under a vow to abstain from wine or to wear His hair long.

The scientists and archaeologists who created the portrait of Jesus that appeared in *Popular Mechanics* may have been right in some details, but no one really knows the exact physical features of Jesus. The New Testament emphasizes His sinless life and moral teachings, but has almost nothing to say about what He looked like.

The apostle John was given a vision of

*Continued on page 25*

## A Right Example Heard Around the World

*Jesus Christ surprised His disciples—and possibly many of us as well—by praising a seemingly wasteful act. Why did He put such emphasis on it?*

by Mike Bennett

**D**id you know Christ prophesied that one specific act by one specific woman would be proclaimed everywhere the gospel is preached in all the world?

It was near the end of Christ's ministry, and though He had become more specific and serious about His impending sacrifice, it seems His disciples still did not "get it." This was not what they expected of the promised Messiah—the conquering King prophesied in the Old Testament.

But at a dinner at Simon the leper's house, something extraordinary happened. Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (the one whom Christ had recently raised from the dead), did a surprising, extravagant and even seemingly foolish thing. We find the story in Matthew 26:6-13, one of three Gospel accounts that record this memorable incident.

"And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table" (Matthew 26:6-7).

If we read the parallel scriptures in Mark 14 and John 12 we see that the oil wasn't just poured on His head, but also on His feet. It was a very rare and expensive perfume—some sources say it may have come from India. We don't normally think of honoring someone this way, but the *NIV Bible Commentary* points out that in those days, "A distinguished rabbi might have been so honored."

Continuing the story, Matthew wrote, "But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor'" (Matthew 26:8-9).

All the disciples were saying this, but John 12:4 makes clear that the leading voice was that of Judas Iscariot, who carried the money box. His concern wasn't genuine, as he actually *stole* from the box. But still, the rest of the disciples joined in rebuking

Mary for this perceived waste. After all, Mark 14:5 says it was worth more than 300 denarii—a year's wages for a laborer!

### Rebuking Mary

What would I have thought if I had been



**Mary's example reminds us that God deserves our very best. It shows us that there are times when even a balanced, sound-minded Christian will see the need to honor God by doing something extraordinary.**

there? I can't imagine owning a container of perfume worth about a year's wages! I'm the kind of person who uses a little stub of a pencil rather than throwing it out. One thing that bothers me about restaurants is how much food gets thrown out. Waste not, want not—that's my motto.

I probably would have been picking on Mary like the rest of them. And hadn't Jesus

just told His disciples about the importance of serving the poor in Matthew 25—the parable of the sheep and the goats? "I was hungry and you gave Me food," Christ had said. Couldn't a year's wages be put to better use than just being poured out and wasted?

But surprisingly, Christ didn't agree.

"When Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me'" (Matthew 26:10-11).

Once again the disciples had been so sure they were right, and Jesus surprised them, rebuking them for criticizing Mary. For Judas Iscariot, this was the last straw, and he soon set out to betray his Master and Friend for just 30 pieces of silver.

Many experts believe that these silver coins were tetradrachmas, worth four denarii. If this is true, Judas received 120 denarii, or less than half of what the perfume cost! Mary's freely given devotion to Jesus was worth far more than what it took to buy Judas' betrayal.

Christ said, "For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her'" (Matthew 26:12-13).

Why did Mary do this, and why did Christ say it would be used as an example throughout the world?

The lesson here certainly was not that the poor weren't important, or that waste is permissible. But the story does have a powerful way of making us reexamine what is truly important.

### What was in Mary's mind?

Let's consider it from Mary's perspective. This was not long after her beloved brother Lazarus had been raised from the dead. What's an incredible miracle like that worth?

She believed that Jesus was the Christ, our Creator and Ruler! What's it worth to

be treated as a friend by the Son of God?

And here at dinner, just days before His sacrifice, it seems Mary was beginning to understand that Christ was willing to die for us and to give us eternal life. Again, what's that worth?

*Halley's Bible Handbook* (2000) puts it this way on page 702: "Jesus probably had spoken of His coming crucifixion. Mary—kindhearted, compassionate, thoughtful, lovely Mary—perhaps noticing a look of pain in His eyes, said to herself, 'This is no parable. He means it.'

"And she went and got the rarest treasure of her household and poured it on His head and feet, and wiped them with her hair. Perhaps not a word was said. But He understood. He knew that she was trying to tell Him how her heart ached."

### Offering our very best

Mary's example reminds us that God deserves our very best. It shows us that there are times when even a balanced, sound-minded Christian will see the need to honor God by doing something extraordinary. Of course, many today do such things for trivial pursuits. Some give their all for fashion or football or some other pursuit. But we are called to give our all to God.

God's people have always been called to give their all—their very best—to Him. Noah risked his reputation and a large portion of his life in building a huge vessel away from the sea. The widow gave her last two mites to God. Of course, we would receive much more attention if we could give a one-time, memorable sacrifice rather than small, minute-by-minute sacrifices that make up the real living sacrifice God calls us to be (Romans 12:1).

Putting God first—giving our best to Him—really isn't about being unbalanced but about being truly balanced. We can't truly put God first and neglect our families or our health. Taking care of all of the priorities is part of the sacrifice.

Of course we should remember balance, remember wisdom and remember the poor. But we can also remember Mary, and her example that Christ said would be preached throughout the world.

Remember Mary who set us the example of giving the best she had for her Master and Savior—and ours. **GN**

## Look Like

*Continued from page 23*

what Jesus looks like today in His glorified form. In Revelation 1 Jesus is said to have hair "white like wool," "eyes like a flame of fire" and to appear "like the sun shining in its strength" (verses 4, 16).

### What did Jesus teach?

We find Jesus portrayed by Europeans as European, by Africans as African, by Hispanics as Hispanic and by Asians as Asian. Does it really matter how a person visualizes Jesus? Does how you perceive Him affect the way you interpret His gospel?

Just as it is a proclivity of people to create Jesus in their own image, they tend to interpret His teachings by the standards of their culture. Statements like "take up your cross and follow Me" had penetrating impact on an audience of first-century Jews who often saw prisoners carrying crosses to their place of execution. Many of Jesus' teachings become profoundly clear when read in the context of the Jewish culture of almost 2,000 years ago.

Some people say that Jesus came to erase the law of God. Did you know that Jesus said, ". . . till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled?" (Matthew 5:18).

Others claim that all you have to do is accept Jesus as Savior to receive salvation. Yet Jesus taught, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

By creating Jesus in our own image, have we misinterpreted what He taught? Do you really know the truth of Jesus' message, or has it become a caricature like the pictures in our Bibles based more on the appearance of the people making the picture or errant tradition than on Jesus Himself? And does He even want us to have representations of Himself anyway (Exodus 20:4-6)?

Maybe it's time to dust off the Gospels and discover the real Jesus. You may find that not only did Jesus look different than many have believed, but His gospel contains truths from God most have never heard. **GN**



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All materials are provided free in the public interest.

## What Religious Days Did Jesus Observe?

*Every year millions celebrate major religious holidays that are found nowhere in the Bible. If we are to truly follow Christ, shouldn't we consider which religious days He observed?*

by Roger Foster

**T**he last activity Jesus Christ shared with His disciples, only hours before He was crucified, was the biblically commanded Passover celebration. He had observed this festival annually since His birth (Luke 2:41).

Accompanied by His 12 apostles for their final Passover meal together, “He said to them, ‘*With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*’” (Luke 22:15, emphasis added throughout). His intense longing to observe this Passover service reveals His deep devotion to celebrating it.

Not only does Jesus—merely hours before His crucifixion—still regard keeping the Passover as important, but also, as He explained to His disciples that evening, He fully intends to observe it with them again when “it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (verse 16).

Why did Jesus set such a committed example of observing this festival if He intended soon afterward—as is commonly believed today—to abolish this festival? Does that really make any sense?

Most people claiming to follow Christ’s example today know little or nothing about the Passover or the other biblically commanded festivals. Nor do they understand why He considered them important. And most of them certainly have never thought of these days as meaningful to them personally. But should they?

### Walking in Christ’s footsteps

After instituting important symbols in that last Passover observance before His crucifixion, Jesus told those gathered with Him: “*For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you . . . If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them*” (John 13:15-17).

This is direct instruction to them to continue observing “these things”—that is, the elements of the Passover service—in exactly the same manner as He had done with them. Years later it becomes even

clearer that Christ’s instruction is applicable to all Christians. The apostle Paul plainly tells even the non-Jewish Christians in the Greek city of Corinth to follow the example Jesus Christ set on that Passover evening.

“For I received from the Lord,” wrote Paul, “that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’”

“In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often [meaning year after year according to God’s command] as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Yes, Christ’s apostles believed and taught that we must follow the example He set and live as He lived. As the apostle John wrote, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

### Festivals in the biblical context

The religious days observed by Jesus and His countrymen during His physical lifetime included the weekly Sabbath day as well as a series of annual festivals, all commanded directly by God (see Leviticus 23). These days are biblically consecrated as *holy convocations* in the Scriptures (verse 2).

Since the festivals first appear in the Old Testament, let’s briefly consider Jesus’ attitude toward those ancient Scriptures. How highly did He regard them? Even more importantly, how does He want *us* to regard them today?

The Hebrew Scriptures made up the only “Bible” available to Jesus and the early Church. The New Testament was written years after His crucifixion. To Jesus the “Word of God” and the Old Testament Scriptures were one and the same.

Jesus’ loyalty to these Scriptures is plain. He explains, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He tells us that “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17). And He points out, “It is written [in Deuteronomy 8:3], ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but *by every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4).

He also forcefully exclaims that anyone who “breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least [by those] in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever *does and teaches* them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).

Jesus expects those who would follow His example both to *practice and teach* the clear commands of God written in the Old Testament Scriptures. Of course, He expects this obedience to be fully compliant with His example and teachings recorded in the New Testament. But there is no conflict between the two. One is not pitted against the other.

Consider, for example, the principle that the sacrificial shedding of blood is necessary before sins can be forgiven. That is just as valid in the teaching of the New Testament as it was in the Old. The difference is that under the Old Testament administrative system animals were sacrificed to represent the *better* sacrifice that would be made in the future—the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:12).

Yet the law requiring this spilling of blood for the forgiveness of sin was not abolished (Hebrews 9:22-26). Only by being justified *through Christ’s shed blood* can we be saved (Romans 5:9).

### Jesus and the Passover

This brings us back to why Jesus was so committed to keeping the Passover with His apostles just before He was crucified. For centuries the keeping of the Passover had represented the fact that Jesus, as mankind’s Redeemer, would be sacrificed by the shed-

ding of His blood for the remission of sins.

Jesus was crucified on Passover day, on the 14th day of the first month in the sacred calendar followed by the Jews. Anciently it was observed by the slaying of an unblemished lamb or kid goat (Exodus 12:5-11). But its real focus was on a *different* sacrifice. We find this explained in the New Testament when “John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29).

As the apostle Paul also explains: “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Here Paul is instructing Christians to keep both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as *Christian* observances (compare Leviticus 23:5-6).

Therefore, we now have *direct* New Testament evidence that at least two of the seven annual festivals—the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread—are also *Christian* festivals. Logically then the other five would be also. But before we consider any other festivals, let’s understand what the overall significance of all of these sacred occasions is to Christians today.

## The meaning of God’s sacred festivals

All of the sacred biblical festivals are closely linked to the harvest seasons of the Holy Land. And Jesus often compared what God was doing through Him to a harvest.

For example, He said: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white [ripe] for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and *gathers fruit for eternal life*, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together” (John 4:34-36).

Here Jesus links the idea of a harvest to His work of bringing humanity into a relationship with God the Father that leads to eternal life. On another occasion “He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’” (Matthew 9:37).

God’s annual festivals depict the work of Jesus Christ in “harvesting” human beings into the Kingdom of God. They are God-given annual reminders of Christ’s role

in securing redemption and salvation for all humanity.

## God’s master plan of salvation

God began revealing parts of His plan of salvation when He evicted Adam and Eve from the garden in Eden. Because they had succumbed to the serpent’s influence and sinned, God spoke to the serpent, saying, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you [the serpent] shall bruise His [Christ’s] heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Here God revealed that, at a future time, a very special descendant of Eve would crush the head of “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan” (Revelation 12:9)—bringing Satan’s control over mankind to an end.

God began revealing more details of His plan through Moses—by instituting His annual festivals at the same time He selected the ancient Israelites to be His servants. Some of these festivals even had an immediate meaning and application within the history of ancient Israel.

But the long-term, primary reason that God established them was to depict the relationship of all human beings to *the mission of the Messiah*. As mentioned earlier, Paul pointed out: “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast . . .” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). The relationship of the Passover festival to the death of Christ, and our redemption through that death, has always been its primary purpose.

## The Feast of Pentecost

In addition to Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Pentecost likewise is clearly a Christian festival. According to Jewish tradition, the Israelites received the Ten Commandments at the time of the festival of Pentecost. It was then that God made a covenant with them and they became the “congregation of God.”

Yet a far more important relationship would be established on a later Day of Pentecost—through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:4-5 tells us: “And being assembled together with them [Jesus’ disciples], He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’”

Then, “when the Day of Pentecost had

fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . .” (Acts 2:1-4).

Since Paul tells us, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Romans 8:9), there can be no doubt that this festival sets an important milestone for all Christians for all time. It is a *Christian* festival. And Paul observed it as such (Acts 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8).

The other four biblical festivals listed in Leviticus 23 occur around the time of the fall harvest season (in the northern hemisphere).

All depict the main events to occur at or following Christ’s return. For example, the Feast of Trumpets points to His second coming. Seven trumpet blasts are to announce the seven major events leading up to and including Christ’s return (Revelation 8-11). At that time, “He will send His angels *with a great sound of a trumpet*, and they will gather together His elect . . .” (Matthew 24:31; compare 1 Corinthians 15:52).

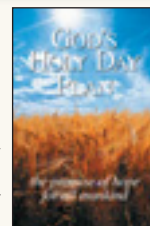
How much more “Christian” could these festivals be? Their focus is primarily on all that Jesus Christ *has done, is doing and will do* to ensure our salvation.

When Christ returns, not only will He keep the Passover, along with His resurrected apostles, but He also will require all nations to join Him in keeping the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16).

Therefore, should not all Christians today acknowledge the example Christ has set for them? Then all can join the apostle Paul in declaring, as recorded in Acts 18:21: “*I must by all means keep this coming feast*” (compare Acts 20:16). **GN**

## Recommended Reading

Do the biblical festivals and weekly Sabbath hold significance for Christians? For a detailed look at why Christians should observe these biblical festivals, be sure to request your free copy of *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind and Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*.



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



# Letters From Our Readers

## Material on the Middle East

I wanted to take the time to express how grateful I am for Melvin Rhodes' article "The New (Anti-Semitic) World Order" [January-February 2004]. I have never read a better article concerning what is happening in the Middle East. The mystery of why these conflicts exist has finally been answered for me. I am in awe of how God reveals the history of mankind through His humble servants.

*J.C.T., Houston, Texas*

I am working in a guesthouse in the Old City of Jerusalem. The reason I am writing is that I found the article "The 'Road Map' to Peace" [November-December 2003] very interesting and it paralleled my own views.

The news is usually the same and usually bad. It involves one peace treaty or the other. The treaties may have different names: the Oslo Accord, the Road Map and now the Geneva Initiative, but they all say between the lines that there will be peace if Israel surrenders all her defenses. It is the exactly the same as in 1938—there would be peace in Europe if [former] Czechoslovakia surrendered the Sudetenland.

*B.H., Jerusalem, Israel*

My heartfelt congratulations and sincere thanks for the booklet *The Middle East in Prophecy*. It is informative and well written. My brother and I were born in that area and went to school in Persia [now Iran] and Iraq.

*Mrs. K.F.L.C., Malaga, Spain*

## Same-sex partnerships

I agree that God loves everyone. He doesn't judge anyone and neither should we. If a couple of the same sex wants to be together, they should be. Through the years they have adopted children and given them love and a home. A married man and woman give this to children. Same-sex partners do too. I have no qualms about same-sex partners living their lives as we do. They have rights too!

*M.L.D., Port Matilda, Pennsylvania*

*It is certainly true that God loves everyone, but the Bible clearly states that He will judge unrepentant sinners, including those who persist in aberrant sexual behavior (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; etc.).*

I am one of many troubled and confused

Episcopalians. As you are probably aware, the leaders of the Episcopal Church, USA are trying to "adapt" God's Word to please man rather than instructing man with God's Word. Your publications are helping me fill a void. For this reason I feel called to financially support your cause.

*L.T., College Park, Georgia*

## Letters and comments from readers

I have been reading the letters and comments that are found in *The Good News* magazines. I was impressed to find that letters that were not flattering were also printed. I believe that an organization, to be credible in preaching the gospel and credible in its claims to preach the truth, must be honest.

Part of being honest is not hiding the fact that people will have a different view of what you say, and some will not like it. I encourage those responsible for the contents not to censor that opposing view. An organization that hides information written about it is one that people are less likely to trust.

*B.W., Internet*

Please cancel my subscription. I am tired of "Christian" magazines who print all the correct scriptures with their message, then "adorn" the articles with indecent pictures. Your last magazine infuriated me with the article on marriage [November-December 2003]. Surely you can find models who are decently dressed.

*K.L.Y., Walkerville, Michigan*

*The difficulty might be in the eye of the beholder. Please see the next letter.*

I am 24 and have grown up in the Church, and thus have seen countless magazines and other publications produced by the Church. The pictures have never been as good as the ones in the Nov.-Dec. 2003 issue. The pictures for the marriage article as well as the ones for the article about the weekly rest day are excellent. The entire spread on page 18 is eye-catching and well put-together.

It serves the articles so well to have such updated pictures. Pictures from the 1980s can give the impression that the contents of the articles are out of date as well. I really enjoyed the four horseman article from the new issue too. Just thought I would share some of my friends' and my comments.

Thank you so much for your work.

*T.F., Austin, Texas*

## Dating, marriage and sex

Thank you again for your excellent publications. The article in *The Good News* on dating errors was superb. I enclose a contribution towards your expenses.

*M.C.D., Cambridge, England*

I have read some of your articles, especially on marriage and sex. I am now 26 and quite interested in both topics. I'd like to get married soon and am trying very hard to "wait" for my husband.

*Miss M.B., Barbados*

## Convicted about the Sabbath Day

I have been convicted about the Sabbath for many years. I just recently quit my position as a Sunday School teacher over a difference of opinion about what I taught concerning the Sabbath and the plan of salvation as outlined in God's Holy Days.

*J.C., Internet*

My husband and I were driving for a trucking company when we came upon one of your articles in a magazine concerning the Sabbath. We have been Christians for many years, observing Sunday as the Sabbath day. We were perplexed by the "news" that we were observing the wrong day, so we continued to study the Bible.

After much intense study and prayer, we were strongly convicted of our error and did address this issue with our pastor. He told us that there is no proof for Sunday worship, but then turned around and excommunicated us, saying that we were a threat to the Church. That was a year ago. We have continued our study and stand firmer than ever on Saturday being the true Sabbath.

*T.&W.T., Springfield, Ohio*

*Our booklet Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest, freely available on request, may be of further help.*

*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: Some people say that drinking alcoholic beverages is not a sin, but that the overuse, i.e., drunkenness, is what the Scriptures condemn. I have consistently opposed the consumption of alcohol either in small or large amounts. Is wine an alcoholic drink? Please let me know the biblical standards.**

*O.O., Norway*

A: Both wine and beer are drinks that contain alcohol. The act of drinking too much wine (drunkenness) is continually condemned in God's Word while wine in itself is spoken of as a good thing when used responsibly in moderation. The same principle may be applied to beer and stronger alcoholic drinks.

The apostle Paul told Timothy to drink a *little* wine for medicinal purposes (1 Timothy 5:23). Also it is obvious from several scriptures in the Old Testament that wine moderately consumed on the proper occasions during God's festivals has our Creator's blessing (Deuteronomy 14:26).

Jesus Christ's first recorded miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding celebration in Cana (John 2:1-11). Christ never sinned, and He would not create something that was a sin in itself. The use of a little wine in the annual observance of the New Testament Passover is clear from the instructions Christ left for His followers (Matthew 26:27-29).

In this case it is not the substance itself (alcoholic drink) that is a sin, it is the wrong use of the thing. Proper application of God's Word is very important. We are to "rightly divide" or correctly comprehend God's truths (2 Timothy 2:15).

The Creator wants us to exercise character by rightly using the minds He gave us in applying biblical principles to specific situations. For instance, if a person is an alcoholic or a recovering alcoholic, almost all counselors would advise him or her not to drink alcoholic substances. Also if we know we are going to be driving our cars afterwards, it is wise to abstain at social occasions to safeguard our own lives and those of others.

God wants us to build His character into our lives by exercising righteous judgment. Some things are intrinsically wrong in themselves and others are not. Alcoholic drinks are a blessing from God if used rightly in the appropriate circumstances (Psalm 104:14-15).

On the other hand, the wrong use of alcoholic substances that results in drunkenness is a sin against God. It has caused untold misery and countless premature deaths. The apostle Paul wrote: "Do not give way to drunkenness and the ruin that goes with it" (Ephesians 5:18, Revised English Bible). But the moderate, sensible use of alcohol is perfectly acceptable and nowhere condemned in the Bible.

Of course, if one chooses not to consume alcoholic beverages, this is certainly his individual prerogative. There is no biblical requirement that he do so (other than in the proper observance of the annual Passover service).

**Q: Where can I find what the Bible says about communion? Is the frequency left up to each individual?**

*L.W., Internet*

A: What most Christian denominations call "communion" is a *substantially altered* version of the original New Testament Passover service, in method, custom and especially frequency. In most cases it has become a humanly devised *substitute* for the Passover service the Bible commands.

When originally introduced to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, the Passover was clearly a once-a-year observance (Exodus 12:1-2). When God again listed His worship festivals (including the Passover) in Leviticus 23, each except for the weekly Sabbath was solely an annual event. The Passover plainly prefigures the sacrifice of Christ for our sins (John 1:29). So likewise Jesus and His disciples kept the Passover every year at the appointed time (see Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7-13).

Notice that Jesus had observed the Passover *annually* from very early youth. "His parents went to Jerusalem *every year* at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the Feast. When they had finished the days [plural] . . ." (Luke 2:41-43, emphasis added throughout). The entire annual spring festival period included the biblically commanded Days of Unleavened Bread as well.

From these and other scriptures we can rightly conclude that the Passover service is an *annual* observance. Following Christ's example and instruction, it is to be kept with mutual

footwashing by brethren (John 13:1-17) and the partaking of a small amount of unleavened bread and a sip of wine as symbols of His body and blood (Matthew 26:26-30).

Scripture gives no hint of the early Church adding to or changing the dates originally ordained for God's festivals. The phrase concerning the Passover in 1 Corinthians 11:26—"for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup"—simply points out that by observing the Passover each year on the appropriate day, members of the Church "*proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*" Memorials such as this are held once a year—certainly the custom of most of mankind in commemorating most events.

Some scholars have understood that Jesus did not authorize the altering of the frequency of the Passover observance. Notice the following admission: "1 Cor. 11:24; Luke 22:19: 'Do this in remembrance of me' . . . They [these words of Christ] express the wish of Jesus that *the annual Passover* should be observed in His memory until the rendezvous in the Kingdom.

"The fact that the Church came to remember the Lord in the weekly breaking of bread and not at the annual Passover should not be brought against *the strong probability that what Jesus expected was the latter* [i.e., annual observance]" (*Studies in Biblical Theology*, No. 6: *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament*, A.J.B. Higgins, 1956, p. 55).

In summary, the Bible specifies the yearly observance of the Passover, and history records its annual celebration as the practice of the early Church. Passover, as a memorial of Jesus' death, is to be observed annually on the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar—just as all of God's other festivals (except the weekly Sabbath) are to be kept once a year. No biblical precedent, practice or instructions sanction doing otherwise.

Regrettably, one of the "hidden" effects for insisting on multiple observances of communion in place of the Passover is that it encourages unsuspecting people to ignore the other true biblical festivals and view them as unnecessary. But observing them is essential if we wish to obey God and truly understand the meaning of His plan for humanity! To better understand the significance of these biblical festivals, request or download our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.



# How Do You Recover From a Costly Mistake?

*When a broken bone heals, the body creates an area of increased density and strength at the site of the break. Godly repentance from sexual sins can strengthen your life.*

by **Bonnie Greider**

In a Christian living class at a summer camp in Missouri last year, campers and staff were discussing the topic of morality and dating. There was a great deal of conversation regarding the need to remain pure and chaste while dating. Most agreed that young men and women should enter marriage without having engaged in premarital sex.

But what if you already have? What if you've already had sexual relationships in the past? Maybe you have fathered or borne a child out of wedlock, or had an abortion. Are you no longer capable of a happy, healthy marriage relationship? How does God see you? How do you see yourself?

No one can argue that our age is not filled with promiscuity. Sexual activity and conversation punctuate virtually every prime-time television show. Movies, music and even video games are filled with the subject. It's no wonder that premarital sex is so widespread.

## Right and wrong choices

God allows us to make choices. Sometimes we make good ones, sometimes we don't. Some decisions have ramifications that last for a few seconds, while others last a lifetime. If God loves us so much, why doesn't He stop

us from making decisions that could jeopardize our future happiness? Why doesn't He intervene and keep us from engaging in activities that will affect the rest of our lives?

As a mother of four children, I realize how difficult being a parent can be. Children learn things in different ways and stages. I vividly recall one adventuresome child who was determined that she could jump off of the top bunk bed and not get hurt. After several admonitions, I left the room knowing exactly what would occur within the next few seconds. *Thump*. Then came the yelp of pain that I was expecting.

I quickly reentered the room, comforted her and reminded her that sometimes it is better to listen to the voice of experience than to experiment on her own. However, it took two more attempts before she got the point. Sometimes we learn from a soft voice of admonition, but when we refuse to hear it we pay a penalty. The lesson learned from firsthand experience may be a great teacher, but it is also the one that causes the most pain.

Not all of us are willing to take admonition from a cautionary word of correction. Some do, but many don't. When we look at the world around us, we see unmarried people holding hands, kissing and engaging in sexual

activity. These people appear to be happy. They have somebody who makes them feel wanted and needed.

Why wouldn't this be a good thing? Why would God not allow us to engage in something that feels so good? If He loves us so much, why does He forbid us from taking part in some activities that seem to be so enjoyable?

Have you ever babysat a small child, maybe a four- or five-year-old? If you opened the cupboard or refrigerator and asked the child what he would like to eat for dinner, would he choose steamed broccoli with a side of sautéed carrots? Or would he zero in on the ice cream?

Little children don't know what is good for them. They know what they want and what they like. Older children, and even adults, are often the same. God allows things that are good or okay for us. He forbids things that are ultimately harmful even if we can't see why. Some things are good in the right context but harmful in the wrong one.

In the case of sex, He has ordained that its use in the right context of a proper relationship is a beautiful blessing. When engaged in outside of that context, sexual activity causes problems and difficulties—sometimes with

results that last for a lifetime. AIDS, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are only a few of those effects. When marriage is finally entered into, likely with someone else, there may be emotional and psychological strains on that relationship due to past mistakes.

### A painful but effective teacher

So what if you have already engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage? What does the future hold for you? How can you have a right relationship with a future spouse and with God?

One of my children broke a bone in her hand playing sports. When the doctor was putting the cast on her hand, he told me that the bone would heal in about six weeks or so and that the place where the break had occurred would become the strongest part of her hand.

When a bone heals, the body creates an area of increased density and strength at the site of the break. However, if an X-ray of the location is taken, there will always be a deformity in that spot. In other words, there will always be a scar.

When we break God's laws, there are always scars. Sometimes they are not visible to those around us and sometimes they may not show up for some time, but they are still

## What if you've already had sexual relationships, a child out of wedlock or an abortion? Are you no longer capable of a happy, healthy marriage relationship?

there. They may be physical, but, as already noted, they could also be emotional or psychological. However, as with a healed bone, areas that previously suffered damage can become areas of strength.

Learning lessons the hard way is painful but often very effective. The humble repentance that ensues when a critical lesson is learned can be lifelong and profound.

Once this type of true, godly repentance is reached, the action that led to it is seldom repeated. Not only that, but one who has had to learn this way and has actually turned from past mistakes is often a very effective teacher helping others avoid the same sin.

### How does God view us after repentance?

But how does God view us after we have made such a mistake and repented of it? The Bible shows us some examples of how God, the ultimate loving Parent, receives one of His children who comes to Him in a humble and

repentant attitude. The story of the "prodigal" son, found in Luke 15, is a sterling example of how a loving father welcomed back his repentant son.

Another beautiful example of a love story is found in Ezekiel 16. In this account, God speaks of finding His bride. She was cast away to die as an infant. Yet He took her in and protected her, providing everything she needed to grow into a beautiful woman, whereupon He married her. But her pride and vanity caused her to defile herself with other lovers, committing fornication.

However, in time she became ashamed of her actions and repented. God then took her back and renewed His covenant with her. We know that this is speaking about His people, Israel, who rejected His laws and became involved in the political and religious systems of the world. God was foretelling their repentance and His loving forgiveness.

The marriage union is called a great mystery that symbolizes the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church, the *spiritual* Israel. Christ will come to marry His Bride at His return. The Bride has not always been faithful to Him and has had to repent. The blood of Christ was shed for our sins, and those whom He has called are cleansed by that miracle.

Why is this so important? Because every single human being has sinned. Every one of us has had a need to repent and must do so on a daily basis. But when we do, our loving Father hears our prayers and is quick to forgive and remove our sins. Our sins, once scarlet, become white as snow. Every sin brings a penalty, but thankfully the ultimate penalty—death—was paid by Jesus Christ. No matter what the sin, once true godly repentance has occurred, God forgives it totally.

Does that mean it is better or just fine to make mistakes? Not at all. Life is made so much harder that way. And because of the power of habit, wrong lifestyles can be difficult to forsake. If you can take advice and admonition from parents, family, friends and from God's Word to start with, life will be much easier. But when painful mistakes *are* made, real repentance, striving with God's help to break free of sin, can lead to a happy and rewarding life—with a powerful lesson learned. **GN**



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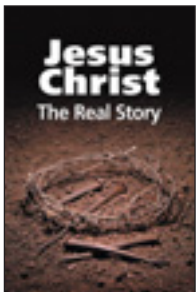
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