

The Good News

May-June 2004

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



The Rising European Superpower: **Prophesied in the Bible?**

Has the Third World War Already Begun? • Who Will Lead the New Europe?
What Is a True Christian? • The Story of Jesus Christ: Why Can't They Get It Right?

The Rise and Fall of Empires

Empires. It's a word we don't hear often these days. On occasions we'll hear of individual nations rising and falling, but rarely do we hear of the rise and fall of empires anymore.

Yet it does happen. Within the lifetime of most of you reading this, we've seen the fall of the Soviet empire. In 1991 the Soviet Union ceased to exist, splintering into 15 separate republics (many of which afterward reintegrated as the loose-knit Commonwealth of Independent States). The U.S.S.R. had lost its Eastern European client states beginning in 1989.

A number of our readers have lived through the dissolution of the greatest empire the world has ever seen, the British Empire. For years it was said that "the sun never sets on the British Empire." And this was true. Its member nations spanned the globe so that, at all times, the sun was shining somewhere on that empire. It controlled enormous wealth and territory.

Yet it, too, was not to last. The burden of policing and protecting

Are we witnessing a slow, deliberate gathering of economic and political muscle that will see a new giant take the world stage?

the world was too great, and after the staggering cost of World War II, the British Empire dissolved within a few decades.

Going back further, we see the rise and fall of other empires: Napoleon's French Empire. The Ottoman Empire. The Islamic Empire. The Roman Empire. The Hellenistic Empire of Alexander the Great. The Persian Empire. Babylon. Assyria. Egypt of the pharaohs.

With few exceptions, such as the meteoric rise of Alexander, the rise of empires is a gradual process, often one of conquest. It takes time to build strength, to assimilate, to unify people.

Are we now seeing the rise of a new empire in Europe? Are we witnessing a slow, deliberate gathering of economic and political muscle that will see a new giant take the world stage? Could it be that this new giant has *already* ascended the stage when most of the world wasn't paying attention?

Europe has witnessed staggering changes in recent years. From the devastation of World War II, the European Union has risen from the rubble to become a superpower that's already flexing its muscles. Politically, it's challenged the United States on Iraq and Israel. Economically, it's challenging the entire rest of the world.

For years Europeans have worked toward a united Europe, wealthy and free of the scourge of division and war. These dreams go back 2,000 years to the Roman Empire, and regular efforts have been made to revive that empire along with its might and glory.

The current effort may be the most ambitious. With its May 1 addition of 10 new members, the European Union has 450 million citizens and territory stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to Russia. Its members will soon resume work on a common European constitution. They are also laying the groundwork for a common European military force.

Where will these efforts lead? Surprisingly, the answers are already spelled out in the pages of the Bible. They've been there—somewhat obscured by mysterious signs and symbols—for centuries. But with God's guidance, some digging and knowledge of history and Bible prophecy, the answers soon become much clearer. They reveal a future of both horror and hope. You'll find a brief summary of the rise and fall of tomorrow's empires in this eye-opening issue.

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor



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It's been more than 12 centuries since the names of the pope and Charlemagne were linked, but 2004 saw them both linked again.

On Christmas Day, in the year 800, Charlemagne [Charles the Great] was bent in prayer in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome when Pope Leo III placed a crown of gold on his head. The congregation then proclaimed: "To Carolus Augustus [Charles the venerable or exalted], crowned by God, mighty and pacific emperor, be life and victory."

Charlemagne was the leader of a revived Roman Empire, the first Western emperor of the postclassical world. This *Holy Roman Empire*, after a brief hiatus, lasted a thousand years—finally giving way to the French Emperor Napoleon less than 200 years ago, in 1806.

Today, more than 12 centuries after Charlemagne's crowning by Pope Leo III, the citizens of the German city of Aachen, Charlemagne's medieval capital (known in French as Aix-la-Chapelle), award the annual Charlemagne prize to the individual they feel has contributed the most to the goal of European unification, as exemplified by the ideals and accomplishments of the Emperor Charlemagne.

This year's prize was awarded on March 24 to Pope John Paul II, once again reaffirming the special link between church and state that has been a constant theme in European affairs since the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century. Separately, earlier in the same month, the outgoing German president Johannes Rau visited the Vatican and thanked the pope personally for his contribution to German reunification and European integration.

The board of directors of the Charlemagne prize, in giving their reasons for granting the award to the pope, stated that "Pope John Paul II demonstrates in his approach to life that the values and traditions for which Europe has struggled can be of decisive importance in building a new political world order, and that Europe should exert its influence in this direction."

Building a new Europe, a new world

Note in that statement that Europe is "*building a new political world order*."

Just a few days before the award was announced, the British magazine *The Economist* ran an article emphasizing the growing divide between Europe and the United States. The article, titled "America Is From Mars, Europe Is From Venus," noted that "there is strong and growing support across Europe for the European Union becoming a

powerful counterweight to America" (March 20, pp. 29-30).

Europe is well on the way to becoming exactly that.

The greatest single step to date toward challenging American global supremacy was the launch of the euro, Europe's currency, a few years ago. After an initial decline following its introduction, from late 2000 lows the value of the euro has surged more than 50 percent against the U.S. dollar. The euro is increasingly the preferred currency of peoples around the world.

Although most commodities are still priced in dollars, the U.S. currency is no longer considered the rock-solid investment it once was. America's trade deficit and increasing budget woes are seen as further threats to the value of the greenback, with the euro increasingly seen as a more secure alternative.

Defying the United States

Rising confidence in the euro has encouraged some European leaders to defy the United States. Even before the launch of the euro, with the collapse of communism and the removal of the Soviet threat to the nations of Western Europe, Europeans were slowly changing their attitudes toward the United States. No longer in need of American



protection against a heavily armed Soviet Union, clearly a change was coming in the dynamics between the two continents.

The success of the euro has emboldened the European Union (EU) to flex its economic muscles. It recently forced the Bush administration to back down over tariffs on steel, then took on Microsoft, one of the world's biggest and most powerful companies, levying fines of more than \$600 million for alleged anticompetitive practices.

Criticism of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq has similarly emboldened European nations, who found their stance was far more popular around the world than was the U.S. position against the regime of Saddam Hussein. Increasing disagreements led the French and Germans last year to lay the groundwork for a new European military force outside the control of the U.S.-led NATO alliance. While still not a powerful military force, Europe is embarking on a foreign policy, backed by mil-

itary power, separate from the United States.

Spain signals a shift in direction

Determined to become a European superpower, the 25 nations of the new EU met in December to agree on a new federal constitution for the organization. They did not succeed, but the setback was only temporary. They plan to meet again and hammer out a European constitution within the next few months.

The drive for European unification was given a boost by the March 11 Madrid terrorist attacks, described as "Europe's 9/11." Three days before an election in Spain was expected to return to power the ruling Popular Party, led up to then by pro-American Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, 10 bombs blew up trains in the Spanish capital during the morning rush hour. Almost 200 were killed and more than 1,800 were injured.

The government was quick to blame ETA, the domestic Basque separatist movement. But it soon became clear that the carnage was caused by Islamic fundamentalists in retaliation for Spanish involvement in Iraq, where Spain has 1,300 troops supporting coalition forces.

Three days later, the Popular Party was out of power and the socialists were voted in. Within hours, the new prime minister

The Rising European Superpower Prophecy

announced that Spain would withdraw its forces from Iraq by June 30, the date set for a handover to a national Iraqi government.

The number of troops being withdrawn from Iraq is minimal, but the symbolism is considerable. And the ripple effect of the bombings will be felt across the European continent for a very long time.

"An ever closer union"

The war in Iraq divided Europe between those nations that supported the U.S. position and those that did not. Britain, Spain, Italy and Poland were the four most notable supporters of military action against Iraq's former regime.

Asked about the European-U.S. divide 10 days after the Madrid bombings, Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission, told U.S. viewers on a Sunday morning television program that Europe was fully committed to fighting the war on terror.

However, he added that in his view—and presumably that of most Europeans—the war in Iraq was separate from the war on terror.

Spain's withdrawal from Iraq not only *lessens* support for the United States, it also *increases* support for the anti-American faction in the European Union. Spain's new leader has promised to return his country to the European mainstream, altering the European balance of power in favor of greater integration—in particular, for support of the proposed new European constitution intended to establish a federal united Europe.

Exactly two weeks after the Madrid bombings, European ministers came together and set up an EU-wide counterterrorism unit. They also resolved to agree on a new European constitution by mid-June. When crisis necessitates, European nations can respond quickly.

It was less than 50 years ago when six nations in Western Europe came together to form the European Economic Community (EEC). The six—West Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium—became nine in 1973 with the entry of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark. Later other nations were added—Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden and Finland—making the total 15. In 1992, the more closely integrating Maastricht Treaty gave the supranational entity a new

name—the European Union (EU). Another 10 countries just joined on May 1, making the European Union the biggest single trading power on earth.

All 25 nations pledged to form “an ever closer union.” Their union, though slow to come together, is poised to emerge as a global superpower to rival the United States.

As if to emphasize continuity with the ancient Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire, it was the 1957 Treaty of Rome, signed in what was once the capital city of the Roman Empire (and the spiritual home of one of the world's major religions), that first established the EEC, now EU. Henri Spaak, former secretary-general of NATO, later remarked on that signing in a BBC documentary: “We felt like Romans on that day . . . *we were consciously recreating the Roman Empire once more*” (emphasis added).

Rome through the ages

To most people, the Roman Empire seems like ancient history. Yet the Bible shows that the Roman political and religious system would be a recurring theme throughout the history of Europe from the time of Jesus Christ until His return. And not only is its *future* resurrection foretold, the original rise of the Roman Empire was accurately prophesied *centuries before it came to pass*.

In the Old Testament book of Daniel, chapter 2, we find an account of a dream of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and of the subsequent interpretation that God revealed to the Hebrew prophet Daniel (verse 28). This dream took place in or about 603 B.C. at the height of the Babylonian Empire's power.

In his dream the king saw a “great image” (verse 31)—apparently a giant statue—composed of different materials. God revealed to Daniel not only the dream, but also its meaning.

“This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay,” Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar. “You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces . . . And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (verses 32-35).

Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar the significance of this unusual image (verse 36). “You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory . . . you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom

European Superpower: Predicted in the Bible?

Events in Europe are reshaping the world. The European Union has now expanded from 15 to 25 members. Most of Europe already shares a common currency and plans within months to have a European constitution to further unify the continent. Military and intelligence cooperation is increasing. Why are these developments taking place? Where are they heading and how will they affect you? The shocking truth was foretold centuries ago in the pages of your Bible!

by Melvin Rhodes

inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth” (verses 37-39).

We know from history that after Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon came the Medo-Persian Empire (the “chest and arms of silver”). This, in turn, was followed by the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great (the “belly and thighs of bronze,” the two thighs apparently representing the two strongest successor empires after Alexander’s death, the Syrian-based Seleucid Empire and the Egyptian-based Ptolemaic Empire).

Now we come to the fourth kingdom: “And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that

to the end of man’s rule at Christ’s return to establish God’s Kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14).

As the different parts of the image in the earlier dream represented different empires, here the empires are depicted as different kinds of animals, arising in order. The first three empires, depicted as being like a lion, a bear and a leopard, were the Babylonian, Persian and Greek Empires. The “fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong,” is described as “different from all the beasts that were before it” and as having 10 horns (Daniel 7:7).

A religious dimension, represented by a little horn, is added in verse 8 and mentioned again in verses 24-25. This religious institution would “change times and law” (verse

“You, O King . . . are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom . . . then another, a third kingdom of bronze . . .”

crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others” (verse 40).

History shows that the fourth kingdom, the next major dominant power, was the *Roman Empire*. The two legs of the image may represent its Western and Eastern branches (centered at Rome and Constantinople respectively). But what is particularly interesting here is that *the Roman Empire was to continue in one form or another right down until the second coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God*.

Notice verse 35 again: “And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (emphasis added throughout). The Kingdom of God will begin small, like a stone, but then grow to become a great mountain. In biblical symbolism a mountain is a great nation or kingdom.

Notice in verse 44 the explanation given for this part of the vision: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed”—a reference to the coming Kingdom of God, which Jesus Christ will establish at His return. Unlike the other great kingdoms and empires of human history, it will not be short-lived. Rather, it “shall never be destroyed” and “it shall stand forever.” It will be utterly unlike all human empires and kingdoms (to learn more, request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*).

A religious system opposed to God

A parallel prophecy about these kingdoms found in Daniel 7 gives us an added dimension in understanding this fourth empire.

Here we see four beasts, representing gentile powers that would have a major impact on God’s people, that would arise and continue

25)—for instance, changing the time of the Sabbath from the God-ordained seventh day of the week to the first day of the week and replacing the biblical Holy Days commanded by God with dressed-up ancient pagan holidays.

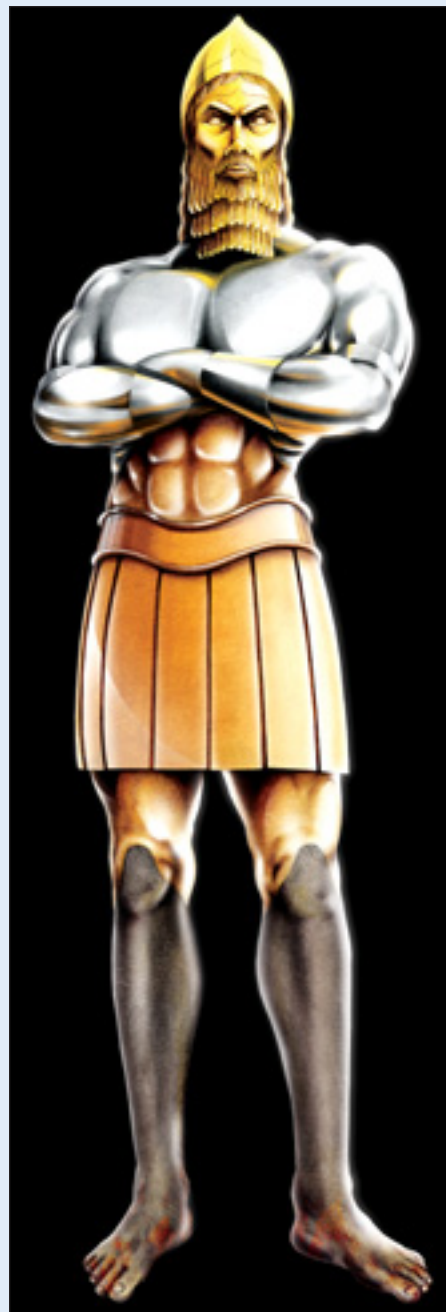
As prophesied, this power would also “persecute the saints of the Most High,” denying religious freedom for centuries to those committed to keeping the commandments of God and at times literally murdering them in waves of persecution. It would also establish a religious system that would change the laws of God, substituting its own religious teachings, practices and traditions in their place.

The mystery of the missing empire

If the Roman Empire was prophesied to exist from ancient times until the return of Jesus Christ, *where is it now?* The book of Revelation helps us understand this more clearly.

The book of Revelation, Jesus Christ’s prophetic revelation to the apostle John given toward the end of the first century A.D., describes this religious institution as one “with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication” (Revelation 17:2). Politics and religion have been inseparable through almost 1,700 years of European history following the conversion of the Emperor Constantine to Roman Catholicism in the early years of the fourth century.

When the apostle John saw the future of this religious and political system, represented by a fallen woman riding a beast, he “marveled with great amazement” (verse 6). An angel then explained to him that “the beast that you saw *was, and is not, and will*



Through a dream God revealed to Daniel the future empires that would dominate the Middle East. The image’s head of gold represented the Babylonian Empire. It was followed by the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire.

ascend out of the bottomless pit . . .” Others “will marvel . . . when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is” (verse 8).

What is the meaning of such strange wording? When we compare the characteristics of this beast with the beast Daniel saw, which clearly represented the Roman Empire, we see that they represent the same thing. And the fact that this beast “was, and is not, and yet is” tells us that *the Roman Empire, which*



The prophet Daniel foretold the rise of mighty empires such as Greece and Rome hundreds of years before these events took place.



The Parthenon in Athens, left, stands as a reminder of Greece's power much as the Colosseum in Rome represented Rome's might.

does not exist at this time, will be restored.

It “was,” meaning it existed at one time, it currently “is not,” meaning it doesn’t exist at this moment, and it “yet is” and “will ascend out of the bottomless pit”—meaning it will rise yet again.

In verse 11 we again read of “the beast that was, and is not . . .” We then read of a union of “ten kings [leaders] who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour [a short time] as kings with the beast. *These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast*” (verses 12-13).

Then in verse 14 we see the clear time setting for this prophecy: “*These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them . . .*” The Lamb is none other than *Jesus Christ*. He has not returned yet, so the fulfillment of this prophecy of 10 leaders or rulers who are part of this end-time empire is still in the future. But, clearly, at the time of the end of man’s rule, *there is to be a revived Roman Empire*. It will oppose the true Jesus Christ, and its armies will literally *fight* Him at His return!

Believe it or not, this is what Bible prophecy reveals about where events in Europe are ultimately heading!

Historical revivals of the Roman Empire

Students of history may recognize that this end-time revival of the Roman Empire will not be the first one in history. Many other attempts have been made over the centuries.

The original Western Roman Empire ended in A.D. 476 with the demise of its last emperor. The eastern branch of the Roman Empire, later known as the Byzantine Empire, continued to be ruled from Constantinople until 1453, almost a thousand years later. During this period, the eastern Emperor

Justinian tried to revive the Western Empire in the middle of the sixth century.

Charlemagne was crowned emperor of the Roman Empire by the pope in the year 800. In 962 Otto the Great was crowned Holy Roman emperor. In the 1500s there was an attempt by the Hapsburgs under Emperor Charles V and his son Philip II of Spain to create a universal, Catholic empire. Later Napoleon’s empire temporarily united Europe.

In the 20th century, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini announced the restoration of the Roman Empire in 1922, but it was his ally Adolf Hitler who forcibly united Europe for a time in his Third Reich. The name *Third Reich* was chosen to indicate a continuity from the Holy Roman Empire, which was considered the First Reich. The second was the empire of the German kaisers (from the ancient Roman title *Caesar*), which came to an end in World War I.

History shows an uneasy relationship between the church and the state during these successive Roman revivals—aptly described as “fornication” in God’s Word.

Now the 1957 Treaty of Rome has laid the foundation for the final resurrection of the Roman Empire, different from all the others in that this time Europe is uniting without any one nation or leader conquering others, but rather through consent and mutual cooperation. The history of Europe during the last

five decades has been one of different nations striving hard to build “an ever closer union,” one of the stated aims of the Treaty of Rome.

Major changes in store for the world

Today’s enlarged European Union is not likely to be the exact boundaries of the final configuration involving 10 leaders who come together to form the militaristic end-time revival of the Roman Empire described in the Bible as “the beast.” However, the close ties that all 25 are developing will likely spur 10 leaders (whether of nations or groups of nations) to form the prophesied closer union where all turn their power and authority to a common cause that will ultimately prove devastating to the world—and to the future of the United States and other Western powers in particular.

You need to be alert and watching as these long-prophesied events unfold before us. Just as God’s Word foretold the rise of the Roman Empire centuries before it actually happened, it also tells us that, shocking as it may sound, a new configuration of the Roman Empire will rise again and astound the world in becoming the next global superpower. It will set in motion events that will climax with the return of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

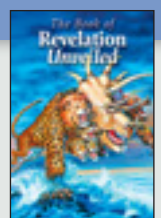
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Has the Third World War Already Begun?

A provocative new book by a French journalist says today's clash of civilizations constitutes the opening phases of a devastating global conflict—a conflict that is foretold in the Bible.

by Joel Meeker

Has the Third World War already begun? According to French journalist and geopolitical thinker Laurent Artur du Plessis, the answer is “Oui!” In his recent book, *La Troisième Guerre mondiale a commencé* (*The Third World War Has Begun*), published by Godefroy and not yet available in English, he details the reasons he believes the world is already in the opening phases of what will eventually become a war that will devastate the world with nuclear and biological weapons.

Though he bases his analysis on simple observation of the current world situation, many of his conclusions bear a striking similarity to elements of Bible prophecy contained in Daniel 11 and Revelation 13, among other chapters.

Mr. du Plessis' thesis is that the dominant geopolitical event now and in the near future will be the confrontation of the world's two main civilizations: the Western democracies and radical Wahhabist Islam. In the first section of the book, he explains why this war of civilizations will continue.

One reason is quite simple: The opposing civilizations have underlying motivations that inexorably lead to conflict. The dominant value identifying Western civilization is individualism and liberty (p. 35). The opposing Islamic civilization, however, is based on a religion. He maintains that all religions have a “spirit” (in the sense of an “attitude”) about them, and the spirit of Islam is violence (p. 62), a violence used to expand its own domination by force.

The resulting tension and violence are already being felt around the world, in obvious places like the Middle East but also between India and Pakistan, in Indonesia and multiple nations in Africa. Pakistan recently revealed itself as a nuclear power; if it fell to Islamic extremists, as Mr. du Plessis believes it will, those extremists would have their fingers on the nuclear trigger.

The confrontation between these two

civilizations, he continues in the book's second section, will be exacerbated by a worldwide economic crash brought about by gross misuse of borrowing (what he calls in one chapter title the “crash by overdose of credit”), especially national budget deficits, oppressive taxation and financial policies that squelch productivity and impede



businesses from prospering.

While this global economic meltdown would make life very difficult in the West, it will make life in the “developing world,” including almost all Muslim countries, absolutely miserable—if not impossible. As sources of financial aid dry up in the economic famine, health infrastructures in the third world, already poor in many areas, would deteriorate even further, leading to a sharp rise in disease epidemics.

Indeed, in scriptures such as Revelation 6:5-8 and Matthew 24:7, the Bible does

foretell that before the return of Jesus Christ, there will be a calamitous rise in famine and disease epidemics.

A modern caliph predicted to come to power

The economic crisis, continues Mr. du Plessis in the book's third section, will propel radical Islamic groups to power in all countries of the Arab and non-Arab Islamic world. Mr. du Plessis believes that out of the weak nation states of the Arab world will come one united Islamic movement, encompassing Arab and non-Arab Muslim nations.

He foresees a restoration of the caliphate, probably under a Turk. In Islam, a caliph is a leader having both supreme religious and civil power over all Muslim nations. Having one such recognized supreme leader would allow for coordination of efforts by the whole of the Islamic world. He points to several Islamic extremist organizations rising in Muslim Central Asia, groups such as the

Uzbekistan Islamic Movement and the Hizb ul-Tahir “Liberation Party” that are actively seeking to build support in the Islamic world to reestablish the caliphate.

Mr. du Plessis believes that it is not far-fetched to believe this could occur since “the alchemy of history suddenly propels out of anonymity exceptional people at exceptional times” (p. 235).

This rising tension between Islam and the West will also have an interesting side effect in Europe, he believes. He foresees a fervent renewal of religious sentiment and

practice (p. 44). This shock of civilizations will, he thinks, propel Europe back to the Christianity of its roots.

Finally the stage will be set for a sudden outbreak of violence and warfare. The author foresees terror attacks against the Western democracies: chemical, biological or nuclear attacks on major ports (perhaps hiding weapons in cargo containers, whose security is very hard to guarantee); commercial airliners shot down with portable missiles; radioactive “dirty bombs” detonated in large cities; surprise attacks on nuclear power stations; suitcase nuclear weapons. All are within the realm of possibility and could be used by kamikazes seeking martyrdom.

Mr. du Plessis concludes that the Western countries will finally use their nuclear arms as the only way to make the terrorism stop. Entire cities and even nations will be leveled. Virtually all nations in the world will be forced to take sides in this conflict. It will be the final act of a world war more devastating



Jerusalem. But part of the prophecy remains to be fulfilled at the end time.

Other prophecies show that at this same time there will be a final resurrection of the Roman Empire in Europe (for more details, see our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*). This latter-day “king of the North” is also the powerful politico-military leader at the head of an end-time restored Roman Empire. He is called “the beast” in Revelation 17:11-18.

Daniel 11:40 says: “At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him [the king of the North]; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind . . .” This tells us that, in the end time, there will be a powerful military leader to the north—centered in Europe—and another to the south of the Holy Land.

The countries generally to the south of present-day Israel include Islamic countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, Libya and Ethiopia (Ethiopia has a large Christian population, but the largest religion is still Islam). So it is very likely that the domain of the king of the South would include these areas.

In fact, Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia are specifically mentioned in Daniel 11:43 as countries conquered by the king of the

The March 11 train bombings in Madrid that killed almost 200 and injured another 1,800 have been called “Europe’s 9/11.” Several Muslim fundamentalists have been arrested in connection with the attack.

The author foresees Russia siding with the Islamists, against Europe, setting the stage for a military conflict between Europe and Russia at the same time that Europe would be confronting the united Islamic world.

and horrible than any other conflagration in world history.

Interestingly, he foresees the possibility that Russia might not side with Europe, but rather with the Islamists in exchange for the possibility of some acquisitions in Europe. This would set the stage for a military conflict between Europe and Russia during the same time that Europe would be confronting the united Islamic world.

To students of Bible prophecy, much of this scenario sounds familiar.

Biblical parallels with this scenario

Daniel 11 is a detailed prophecy about two major powers called “the king of the North” and “the king of the South.” Most of the prophecy was accurately fulfilled in ancient times by the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties, located to the north and south of

North after his military attack on the king of the South.

A caliph could be just the kind of leader described as the king of the South, and as we have seen, Mr. du Plessis believes that a united Arab world will indeed attack Europe, using weapons of mass destruction, and that Europe will respond militarily, eventually resorting to nuclear weapons.

A nuclear or biological attack on European soil would certainly motivate a European military leader to retaliate. This is indeed what God told Daniel would happen next—that the king of the North will “come against him [the king of the South] like a whirlwind” (verse 40).

After the northern king’s conquest of much of the Middle East, “news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy

and annihilate many” (Daniel 11:44). As Mr. du Plessis foresees, if Russia (to “the east and the north” of the Holy Land) did indeed side with a terrorist Islamic power, it would lead to conflict between Russia and Europe.

World religion and world politics combine

Revelation 17 shows the imagery of a prostitute sitting on the blasphemous “Beast” that has seven heads and 10 horns. The animals or beasts in Revelation represent governments, nations or rulers, and women represent religions (see our booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*).

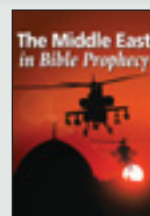
This prostitute represents a false religion that will, for a time, dominate the government of the Beast, which will fight against the Lamb (Jesus Christ) at His return. Again, as Mr. du Plessis foresees, religion will play an important role in establishing the cohesion of the coming European power.

It must be stated that Mr. du Plessis’ scenario does not completely follow the future foretold by the Bible. He believes, for example, that Europe and the United States will work together during the coming world conflagration and that the United States will come out of the future war the big winner. This is not what the Bible says (to learn more about this, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*).

Ultimately, Artur du Plessis does not base his perceptions on what God has revealed through Daniel, Jesus and John. It is striking, however, that informed people who study the current geopolitical scene reach conclusions comparable to what the Scriptures foretold thousands of years ago. This is just another chilling indication that we are in what the Bible calls “the time of the end.” **GN**

Recommended Reading

The troubled Middle East has certainly seen its share of violence and bloodshed over the centuries. Yet Bible prophecy indicates that its previous wars will pale into insignificance compared to a final end-time conflagration that will stun the entire world. To better understand today’s Middle East and how the stage is being set for Jesus Christ’s return, request or download your free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. To better understand how other nations will be affected by end-time events, also request *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.



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Who Will Lead the New Europe?

Few qualities in human affairs are more important than competent, capable leadership. With the May 1 addition of 10 nations joining the European Union, which nation or nations will exercise the most control, for good or bad? Who will govern Europe at the close of this age of man?

by John Ross Schroeder

During key periods of the 20th century, ruthless dictators like Hitler and Mussolini dominated substantial regions of Europe. Twice in that troubled century, world wars were centered on European soil, bathing it in blood.

The political, geographical and even religious spin-offs still have their deep effects on the nations of Europe. At least in part, the creation of the European Union (EU) itself has its roots in the deepest desire to prevent German control from ever surfacing on the Continent again.

Yet the implications of troubling newspaper headlines like "The Frontier Moves East, *With Germany at Europe's Center*" send a message to other European nations (*International Herald Tribune*, March 2, emphasis added).

Vying for EU leadership

Julia Harvey-Brewer, political editor of London's *Sunday Express*, minced no words in boldly expressing the paper's editorial point of view. "Now is the time for Britain to muscle in and seize control. The arrival of 10 new member states on May 1 will see the EU grow to a vast empire. Yet their arrival offers Britain a unique opportunity to rip down the existing EU structure and to rebuild it in our own image, and more importantly, in our own national interest" (Feb. 22).

Recently British Prime Minister Tony Blair, French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder met in Berlin for very controversial trilateral talks. Despite some French objections, most observers concluded that the United Kingdom had at last entered the coveted European leadership circle.

This is no small achievement. As veteran British journalist Ambrose Evans-Pritchard put it: "For the past 40 years the Franco-German motor has driven European integration, shaping every policy from farming and fishing to monetary union . . . Yesterday was the moment when the Franco-German duo—rocked by doubts and presiding over

two of Europe's most sickly economies—accepted that they are too weak to keep control of an EU preparing to expand to 25 countries without Britain's clout.

"For Tony Blair it was evidence that



Should the world be concerned about European leadership? In the last century two tyrants, Germany's Adolf Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini, led Europe into a bloodbath. Bible prophecy tells us that another tyrant will arise in the end time.

Britain can play in Europe's top league and perhaps regain its historic role as a balancing power" (*The Daily Telegraph*, Feb. 19). The media language used to describe this major shift in the European power equation has been stark to the point of rudeness. "Blair butts in on old Europe," said *The Telegraph*.

The Polish factor

However, the political editor of *The Sunday Express* considers that "the new [Eastern European] states are our allies against France and Germany." She means if Britain plays its cards right, it can reshape the European Union and rid it of its federalist and

superstate ambitions.

After all, Poland, only a budding new state, has already played a major role in delaying the adoption of a new European constitution, if only temporarily. The plucky Poles have displayed every intention of demanding a significant leadership role in the new Europe. Warsaw is by far the most vocal of the eight Eastern European nations joining the EU, already showing signs of becoming their spokesman. Poland is the largest of the new member states, both in area and population.

Yet as Britain's noted *Times* columnist (and its former editor) William Rees-Mogg observed: "We cannot leave it to Poland to rescue us twice from this Euro monster" (Dec. 15, 2003). He was also thinking of the historic Polish role in helping motivate Britain to finally declare war against Hitler in 1939. But mostly he was writing in reference to the temporary demise of the European draft constitution, which, had it been adopted, "would have destroyed the democracy of Europe."

The stark language Mr. Rees-Mogg used clearly shows his concern about the general direction of the European Union. He titled his *Times* article "Dracula Is in His Coffin, but We're Still Not Safe." He is a realist, aptly concluding his analysis with the declaration: "Bureaucrats never give up; we need a reliable stake to put through Dracula's heart . . . Next time we cannot leave it to the Poles."

What's behind Mr. Rees-Mogg's concern? Perhaps he remembers better than most how two world wars in the last century came perilously close to extinguishing freedom and democracy throughout Europe.

Leadership and the politics of enlargement

Much has been written in the British press about the politics of enlargement of the European Union. Clearly Russia is nervous about having several of the former Soviet Union's satellite nations—especially the

Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—join the European Union. Russia sees them as potential purveyors of German expansion and influence.

The Eastern European nations seek a power shift. Note the following *Time* magazine report on the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland: “Amid a mood of cautious optimism and transatlantic cooperation, many sessions were marked by small signs of tension over the question of who is driving Europe. At one lunch, the leader of an EU member-state-to-be bristled when a panelist referred to Britain, France and Germany as the leaders of European policy” (Feb. 2, emphasis added).

will have a far more fundamental impact, both on the way the union works and on its policy priorities. Expansion eastwards amounts to a final break with the founding fathers’ vision of a homogeneous ‘United States of Europe’” (*The World in 2004*, published by *The Economist*, p. 44).

Set against this view are the so-called core countries of France and Germany. Stephen Castle reported from Brussels for *The Independent*: “A multi-speed Europe with France and Germany at its core appeared possible last night, as Paris and Berlin vowed to press for closer integration despite the collapse of talks on the European Constitution. A group of ‘core’ countries is ready to sign a declara-

Revelation 17:12-13 reveals that **10 kings or leaders** will receive power, and give that power (for a short time) to an end-time leader called “the beast.”

Clearly certain smaller states, mostly but not all in the East, want Germany and France to share power as the European Union moves into the future. Even Daniel Gros, director of the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels, said, “Germany and France no longer have the moral high ground.”

The principal reasons are divisive policies over Iraq and divergent views on state intervention. The *Time* article concluded with this observation: “If Germany and France want to stay at the head of the pack now, they’ll need to turn their idea of a ‘core Europe’ from a menace back into a motor.”

Is a United States of Europe still feasible?

As the European Union’s borders move eastwards, is it now impossible to conceive of a federal, superstate Europe? Some statesmen like Václav Havel, former president of the Czech Republic (a leader who spent time in prison because of his courageous opposition to Russian communist domination of his country), are thinking in that direction.

He wrote: “All earlier expansions brought about a shift in the EU, but the current one

tion supporting the constitutional text drawn by the former French President, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, which failed to win approval at the acrimonious Brussels summit.

“Four of the EU’s six founder members—France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg—have lined up behind the declaration and efforts are under way to bring the other two founders, Italy and the Netherlands, on board” (Dec. 18, 2003).

Although adding 10 new members to the union will inevitably slow down the drive for a federal superstate, an understanding of both history and biblical prophecy tells us that it will eventually happen. Revelation 17:12-13 reveals that 10 kings or leaders will receive power, and give that power (for a short time) to an end-time leader called “the beast.” How many nations will be involved is yet to be seen.

The weight of European history

Not so long ago U.S. President George W. Bush invited Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission, to the White House for lunch. Mr. Prodi pointed out to Mr. Bush

Continued on page 22

Member States of the European Union

State	Population in Millions	Members in Euro Parliament
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Initial countries that joined in 1957

1) Belgium	10.2	24
2) France	59.0	78
3) Germany	82.0	99
4) Italy	57.6	78
5) Luxembourg	0.4	6
6) Netherlands	15.8	27

Joined in 1973

7) Denmark	5.3	14
8) Ireland	3.7	13
9) Britain	58.3	78

Joined in 1981

10) Greece	10.5	24
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Joined in 1986

11) Portugal	10.0	24
12) Spain	39.4	54

Joined in 1995

13) Austria	8.1	18
14) Finland	5.2	14
15) Sweden	8.9	19

Joined in May 2004

16) Cyprus	0.8	6
17) Czech Republic	10.3	24
18) Estonia	1.4	6
19) Hungary	10.1	24
20) Latvia	2.4	9
21) Lithuania	3.7	13
22) Malta	0.4	5
23) Poland	38.7	54
24) Slovak Republic	5.4	14
25) Slovenia	2.0	7

Source: *United Kingdom Office of the European Parliament*

Would You Like to Learn More?

To better understand the vital historical background of many Bible prophecies as well as the events that will reshape the world in the future, request or download our free booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

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World News and Trends

An Overview of Conditions Around the World

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

The European constitution suddenly reemerges

As a *Daily Mail* feature article recently reported: "Suddenly the threat of an all-powerful EU constitution is perilously close . . . How profoundly it will change Britain" (March 26).

The new European constitution had appeared all

but dead after Poland and Spain had caused the negotiations to collapse last December. But then the terrorist carnage in Madrid changed everything. Now there is even a call for the constitution to be signed in the Spanish capital city. (It is, however, interesting to

note that, wherever it is finally signed, the document will be permanently housed in Rome, just as all signed EU treaties are.)

Shortly after the Madrid train bombings, the Spanish left won the national elections and leaders of the new socialist government pledged to support the European constitution—immediately followed by clear indications that Poland was now willing to

TV and your child's brain

Young children who watch television at a very early age may risk later attention deficit problems, according to Dr. Dimitri Christakis (Associated Press report, April 5).

Researcher Christakis indicates that TV might overstimulate and permanently rewire (or miswire) the developing brain. "The truth is there are lots of reasons for children not to watch television. Other studies have shown it to be associated with obesity and aggressiveness" (ibid.). The government-sponsored study can be found in the April 2004 issue of *Pediatrics*.

Dr. Christakis' findings support the American

"The truth is there are lots of reasons for children not to watch television. Other studies have shown it to be associated with obesity and aggressiveness."

Academy of Pediatrics' recommendations that children two and younger should not watch TV. Why? "The newborn brain develops very rapidly during the first two to three years of life. It's really being wired during that time" (ibid.). The fast-paced visual images typical of most TV programming affect the brain and create the potential for serious attention deficit problems.

Electronic media purveyors realize that TV

viewers have become habituated to fast-paced visual images, and to keep the viewer glued to the set they must change onscreen visual images rapidly. Otherwise other distractions will win the day.

Try this experiment yourself: Watch the evening news and time the number of seconds that separate new and/or moving images, small or large. You'll quickly see why there's little wonder that some are concerned about the potential of rewiring a two-year-old's brain beyond what is considered safe and normal.

On balance, Jennifer Kotler, assistant director for research at Sesame Workshop, which produces educational children's television programs including *Sesame Street*, questioned whether Dr. Christakis'



studies would legitimately apply to educational programming. She wondered whether more variables could be included in such studies to see whether content or kids watching with their parents make a difference (ibid.). Still, common sense and good parenting can make for normal and therefore better child brain development. Reading to your child trumps TV. (Source: Associated Press.)

"It [the EU constitution] will create a new European state of which we will all be citizens. It will be able to sign treaties and join international bodies and its law will supersede our own. Britain will become a mere region within its federal embrace."

compromise and cooperate to possibly reach a final agreement within the first half of this year.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is a strong supporter of the European constitution, but past polls indicate that well over half of the British people clearly oppose it in its present form.

British fears are well summarized by *Daily Mail* feature writer Edward Heathcoat Amory. He wrote: "It will create a new European state of which we will all be citizens. It will be able to sign treaties and join international bodies and its law will supersede our own. Britain will become a mere region within its federal embrace."

Notwithstanding the good intentions of present European statesmen, the Bible foretells the eventual emergence of a European superstate with terrifying results for the whole world. To learn more, request our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *Daily Mail* [London], *EUObserver.com*.)

Atheism in British and Spanish education

The British government should be engaged in encouraging youth trends like the one on the opposite page ("Religion very important to teenagers"). Instead, a leading Labour government think tank is advocating that "children should learn more about atheism and less about Jesus" (*Daily Mail*).

"Children with strong religious beliefs would be encouraged to question them and to ask what

grounds there are for holding them." While this approach is appropriate in certain legitimate contexts, one gets the feeling of a deliberate intent to undermine religious beliefs rather than strengthen them. Conservative Christian groups have expressed their strong opposition, but regrettably the recommendations of this particular think tank often become government policy.

One popular British atheist author is Philip Pullman. Apparently "even the [current] Archbishop of Canterbury says Philip Pullman's anti-God books should be taught in school" (*Daily Mail*, March 11).

Also, the new administration of Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero wants to severely deemphasize religious education. However, a vigorous opponent has stated that "to renounce religious studies is to go against 80 percent of parents in Spain" (*The Times*, April 9).

Good News readers may wish to request our free booklets *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*, *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* and *Is the Bible True?* Alert Christians need to be thoroughly informed so they can sustain their faith in these troubling times. (Sources: *Daily Mail*, *The Times* [both London].)



Never on Sunday?

The *Daily Mail's* social affairs correspondent Steve Doughty recently summarized a somewhat surprising Anglican Church report. It said: "Sunday should be abandoned as the Sabbath day because nobody wants to go to church at the weekend . . . Britain is no longer a Christian country and most of the population would rather spend Sunday with their families."

This is a rather sad assessment. While Sunday is, in fact, not the biblical Sabbath (as it is an ancient

substitute for the true Christian Sabbath, Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, as explained in our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*), the grounds for Sunday's rejection in the above report have nothing to do with that. Indeed, the same thinking would also rule out the true Sabbath as a day of worship.

This development comes in the wake of years of declining adult and child church attendance. As an example, in the 20th century attendance at Sunday school collapsed from 55 percent to 4 percent of children. The team of clergymen producing this report

recommended that the church rebuild itself by having meetings at other less-formal times.

The fact of the matter is that one of God's Ten Commandments tells us to remember and observe the Sabbath day, which comes on the weekend (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Indeed, the Sabbath is the holy day that ends each week. And on it God commands His people to assemble before Him (Leviticus 23:3). One day, the whole world will learn this important truth and live by it (Isaiah 66:23). (Source: *Daily Mail* [London].)

Building the behemoth

The Middle East isn't getting any quieter or terrorists less suicidal. Thus Europe is quietly ramping up its defensive capabilities. On April 5 in Brussels, the European Union endorsed 2007 as the date by which it plans to formulate six or seven battle groups of 1,500 each, able to fight in the world's most hostile and dangerous locations.

"It is hoped the groups will be deployable within 15 days and sustainable for 30 days (120 with rotation), as preparation for a larger EU contingent, if necessary. The EU had previously agreed to have 60,000 rapid reaction troops available at 60 days' notice, sustainable for up to one year by the begin-

ning of this year. Now some say these new battle group proposals signal a watering down of the EU's ambitions after laborious work was made of the 60,000 goal. The EU's Foreign Policy representative,

Bible prophecy tells us that in the end time, a European-centered power will dominate the world. Keep your eyes on the EU's internal and foreign policies.

Javier Solana, emphasized . . . 'You must get it out of your minds that the EU is starting from scratch. Lots of things are ready. For operations of this size, we

have at this point enough capabilities to deploy them,' he told journalists" (*EUObserver.com*, April 5).

Bible prophecy tells us that in the end time, a European-centered power will dominate the world (see "The Rising European Superpower: Prophesied in the Bible?," beginning on page 4). Keep your eyes on the EU's internal and foreign policies. The EU-endorsed battle groups appear to be the tiny bud of a great blossoming standing army.

The Middle East cauldron will eventually stir up and directly affect this coming great behemoth. You might well live to see it happen! (Source: *EUObserver.com*.)

Religion very important to teenagers

Laura Sessions Stepp articulated an obvious but important truth in a recent article for *The Washington Post*. She stated: "Last year, a commission convened by Dartmouth Medical School, among others, studied research on kids, including brain-imaging studies, and concluded young people who are religious are better off in significant ways than their secular peers. They are less likely than nonbelievers to smoke and drink and more likely to eat well, less likely to commit crimes and more likely to wear seat belts; less likely to be depressed and more likely to be satisfied with their families and schools" (emphasis added throughout this article).

Religious teachings impact human behavior. More and more teenagers are coming to realize the significance of religion in their lives. One survey in 2001 showed that "three out of five teenagers said religion was 'pretty important' or 'very important.'" This amounted to a significant increase over past years.

These commission members stated that "reli-

gious congregations benefit teenagers by affirming who they are, expecting a lot from them and giving them opportunities to show what they can do." But the keynote is the follow up: "What sets religious groups apart, however, and makes a surprisingly big difference to kids, according to the panel—is that they promote a 'direct, personal relationship with the Divine.'"

Secular Britain is also exhibiting some encouraging signs of teen interest in greater morality. A *Daily Mail* article titled "Teens Are Absolutely Fed Up With Their Liberal Parents" makes for interesting reading. It begins: "Teenagers are far more conservative than their parents on moral issues, a survey of young people shows today. They frown on abortion, underage sex and drugs and are firmly in favour of the institution of marriage" (March 11).

Commitment to God and biblical morality protects children, as well as adults, from risky conduct. We all need God in our lives. The publishers of *The Good News* also produce a free magazine for teens and young adults, *Vertical Thought*. Interested readers in that age group are welcome to subscribe. (Source: *The Washington Post*, *Daily Mail* [London].)

Who will be the new pharaoh?

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is now 75. He has ruled Egypt since Anwar Sadat's assassination in 1981. Much has happened in the Middle East in those two decades. Mubarak is aging. He has tried to groom his son to replace him, but many Egyptians disapprove of any modern-day pharaonic dynasty. Clearly, a succession crisis looms in Egypt while a 30-year "cold peace" may give way to ethnic, cultural and religious heat to ignite another war between Egypt and Israel.

Egypt has stockpiled chemical weapons and purchased Scud missiles from North Korea. There is a strong Muslim fundamentalist movement in Egypt motivated by hatred of Israel.

The Bible speaks of Egypt's involvement in a future confederation of Arab nations, led by an individual it calls "the king of the South," who will be overrun by an invasion from the north (Daniel 11:40-43). Thus, leadership changes in the Arab and Muslim world should draw our attention. The next just might be the one who helps inspire a confederation among the Muslim Arabs and bring about the fulfillment of these prophecies. But a lasting peace will eventually come. God will solve the Middle East crisis in due time (Revelation 19:11-21; Daniel 2:44).

Read World News and Trends Every Day

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Also, to get a biblical perspective on major events, visit www.ucg.org/commentary for a weekly commentary on the trends shaping our world—and what they mean for you.



The Horsemen of Revelation

The Black Horse of Famine

The food-rich countries' potential to feed the entire planet makes it hard to imagine a famine extensive enough to thrust the earth into a global crisis. Yet the third seal of Revelation 6, employing the symbol of a black horse, describes just such a horrifying scene. How could this happen? What would be its consequences?

by Darris McNeely

People are—and have long been—suffering from famine in many parts of the world. Famine has returned to Ethiopia where more than 7 million are in desperate need of emergency food supplies in order to avert starvation. Perhaps another 2 million require immediate help in Eritrea.

For Africa as a whole, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) declared in March that 23 of the continent's 53 countries—*almost half*—face dire food shortages.

More than two million people have died in the past decade in North Korea due to food shortages caused by a combination of flood, drought and bad government policy created by Kim Jong Il, the nation's dictatorial ruler, who currently threatens the use or sale of nuclear weapons. Periodically he has used his threats to gain aid, including food

and oil, from the world community.

The scourge of famine has appeared cyclically throughout history. Often it is caused by drought, blight, floods and other natural means beyond human control. At other times the causes are all too human—war, social unrest and breakdown, and inefficient or outright malevolent government policy.

In today's global society, there should be no real obstacle to alleviating the effects of food shortages wherever they occur. Modern agricultural methods

and generally stable weather patterns produce bumper crops in the developed world resulting in massive levels of food production, more than enough to feed the hungry of the world.

There is no reason to expect people to starve when this is coupled with the means to transport food to any location in the world. Yet famine and suffering from food shortages continue—and at times even grow.

It's easy to dismiss famine when it's on the other side of the planet or some far-off, isolated corner of the globe. Is it conceivable famine could spread to impact the wealthy, food-rich countries of the world?

The third horseman rides

In the last two issues of *The Good News* we covered the meaning of the first two horsemen of Revelation 6—religious deception and war. We come now to the third horseman's ride. What does it portend for the world?

Notice what it says in verses 5-6: "When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.'" What does this mean?

The Expositor's Bible Commentary explains regarding this passage: "This amount [of money] suggests food prices about *twelve times higher than normal* . . . and implies inflation and famine conditions (Matt 24:7). A quart of wheat would supply an average person one day's sustenance. Barley was used by the poor to mix with the wheat." Food shortages cause inflation

in food prices. And higher prices make the remaining food harder to afford.

Oil and wine, though, are typically symbols of plenty. The reference here could indicate there will be pockets of abundance in the midst of famine. Christ's reference to famine "in various places" (Matthew 24:7) indicates the same possibility.

The cry to not "harm" the oil and wine could represent attempts to safeguard the pockets of abundance against plundering. However, The Living Bible interprets the phrase in Revelation to mean that there is practically no oil and wine left. That would also fit with the admonition that what is left not be harmed—lest there be none left at all.

In any case, the opening of the third seal indicates the onset of a period of severe



In some countries, food shortage is not the only problem. The famine is aggravated by the AIDS epidemic that grips the continent. About 25 percent of the adult population of these countries is infected with the virus.

famine unlike any in the past. While famines of varying severity have struck throughout history, it appears things will get much worse. Most of us have seen pictures of famine in our time, usually in parts of drought-stricken Africa. In 1984, a famine in Ethiopia developed through natural means, but was aggravated by the unstable government. Millions were at risk of starvation.

Thankfully, a massive humanitarian effort from around the world stopped the famine from killing as many as predicted. (Even then, corrupt government officials withheld some of the donated food as a weapon to starve their political opponents.)

This was testimony to the generosity of the many wealthy nations and the global means of transport that is available. However, if a nation's social fabric begins to unravel, larger problems can set in. The crises in Africa may be a foretaste of larger tribulations to come.

Prelude to an apocalypse?

The six southern African countries of Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique currently suffer from large food shortages and will need help for months to come. Prolonged drought and bad farming practices have contributed to the problem.

But more recently another factor is having a growing impact on the ability of these countries to feed themselves: A large number of agricultural workers are infected with or have died from AIDS.



About 25 percent of the adult population of these countries now is infected with the virus. As more adults succumb to this plague, fewer people are left to plant and harvest the crops. Worse yet, as the adult community dies, the knowledge needed for growing food for survival is not passed on to the younger generation. Consequently, the society loses its ability to produce food—even if weather and soil conditions were optimal.

An article in Britain's *The Economist* describes a woman whose tragic personal example depicts vividly this larger unfolding catastrophe.

"In the past, when food was short, Jenerah Michelo, a Zambian subsistence farmer, could buy or beg from neighbours. But then her husband died of AIDS, leaving her with six children, a nearly empty food pot and a debilitating virus in her bloodstream. Now she is too feeble to forage, and neighbors are

reluctant to help because she is a 'patient.'

"Foreign donors sometimes bring food and tablets to treat convulsions. But the medicine should be taken after a full meal, 'so I get side effects, I become weak and dizzy, I cannot manage.' She cannot get hold of anti-AIDS drugs, but if she could, they too would be useless without adequate nourishment" ("Cursed, Twice Over," Feb. 13, 2003).

In his January 2003 State of the Union address, U.S. President George W. Bush pledged \$15 billion in emergency medical aid to Africa over the next five years. This is a generous, noble and helpful step in a mounting battle, but medicine alone will not solve the crisis.

Other needs, not the least of which is education, come into play. Food is also a major factor. A person infected with the HIV virus needs extra calories, especially protein, as well as powerful drugs, to keep the infection from developing into full-blown AIDS. When there are massive food shortages, the death toll keeps rising.

In large portions of rural Africa today, the future looks bleak. In fact, *the future is dying*. The combination of famine and disease is hitting mainly those who are in their most productive years, those under 40.

A majority of victims are women who traditionally do most of the farming. As parents die, the children leave school to take care of themselves and other children in the family. The tribal village has been the traditional backbone of African society, but it is beginning to crack under the strain of loss from the famine.

A social breakdown is occurring in many areas of Africa due to the twin problems of famine and disease. *The Economist* ended its report by saying: "Indeed, there are signs of such a breakdown in Mrs. Michelo's village: her family cannot help her, her neighbours will not, and some have even been stealing her chickens. Such theft was unknown during previous food shortages, as was hoarding by the better off, which has now become commonplace" (ibid.).

Devastating famines of the past

Famine is listed in Revelation 6 as following the previous horsemen of religious deception and war. While nature—drought, floods and insect infestations—is often the cause of famine, quite often war and misrule, as well as malignant political or religious ideology, are prime factors. A look at past famines gives us an idea of how devastating they can be.

During the 20th century two humanly engineered famines brought devastating consequences. In 1932-34, the Soviet dictator

Joseph Stalin sought to suppress Ukrainian nationalism by forcing a system of collectivized agriculture on the peasants. Food supplies were removed to the cities, crops failed and food supplies were barred from the region. This *manmade* famine resulted in the starvation of between 6 and 8 million people. It was a state-sponsored attempt at genocide.

China's "Great Leap Forward" in 1958-60 resulted in mismanaged food production and the disruption of distribution chains. Fertile rice fields were plowed over and factories built on them. Farms were collectivized. Farmers who knew only the land were at a loss in factories. Coupled with bad weather, the result was the death of 20 million people by starvation during 1960 and 1961.

Famine in prophecy

Let's step back in history to the book of Leviticus for a look at God's warning to man through the example of Israel. Here we can see the consequences of false religion, war, famine and pestilence when Israel was unfaithful to God.

Leviticus 26 is a chapter of promises from God—the promise of blessings for obedience and of curses for disobedience. The first step toward blessings is faithfulness in the worship of the true God. "You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God. You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am the LORD" (verses 1-2).

For keeping His statutes and commandments, God promises in the next verses the necessities for plentiful food production: "rain in its season" so that "the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit . . . you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely."

Continuing, He says: "I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land . . . For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you" (verses 3-9).

By living righteously and avoiding false religion, Israel would be able to receive divine blessings of good weather, fertile soil and plentiful rainfall. Peace, material abundance, good health and the absence of disease would follow. In other words, the curses like those accompanying the horsemen of apocalyptic disaster would not go through their land as long as they sincerely obeyed God and worshipped Him in truth.

This promise will be applied to all nations after the return of Christ. In time, they also will receive these same promised benefits when they, too, learn to live the way God has revealed in His Word. But until then, we will continue to see cyclical occurrence of famine, from all sorts of causes, resulting in millions of people dying when they *could* have lived.

Terrifying look into the future

In Deuteronomy 28 God details the horror of a people stricken with the curse of famine. It demands our attention so we may understand what lies ahead for the world when the third horseman rides.

For disobedience, God says He would bring a nation from afar to besiege and blockade the cities. All the food stores would be forcibly taken. The resulting starvation

Yet scenes like this have occurred in history—and God says they will happen again. Reading this in the light of today's reported tragedies is profoundly sobering. But such deeply distressing events inevitably occur when men and women become entrenched in their disobedience to God's laws.

Hope in the midst of horror

Jesus Christ wept over the fate that was about to fall on Jerusalem in the first century. He knew that terrible scenes would occur within the "city of peace." He wanted to gather the people into a loving and protective embrace and keep them from such tragedy.

But their sins and defiant attitude would not allow them to repent and escape what was coming. So the only course left for them was impending desolation and the cruel lessons of experience (see Matthew 23:37-



For keeping His statutes and commandments, God promises the necessities for plentiful food production: "rain in its season" so that "the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit . . . you shall eat your bread to the full . . ."

would cause the social structure to unravel at a frightening speed. The results are horrifying to contemplate.

"You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters . . . in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you. The sensitive and very refined man among you will be hostile toward his brother, toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the rest of his children whom he leaves behind, so that he will not give any of them the flesh of his children whom he will eat, because he has nothing left in the siege . . ." (Deuteronomy 28:53-55).

Famine-induced cannibalism is the lowest depth of depravity to which a nation can sink.

39). The worst horrors described above in Deuteronomy 28 fell on them during the Roman siege of Jerusalem. Those horrors will only grow as mankind continues its self-destructive course of rejecting God.

Nothing is more basic to human survival than food and water. Yet the entire world is wholly dependent on elements totally beyond human control—namely sufficient rainfall, sunshine, temperate weather and fertility of the earth beneath our feet—to keep us alive.

The many recurring reports of droughts, floods, losses of fertile land and disturbed weather patterns should wake us out of our complacency. Ultimately, *we are dependent on God for everything*. When He decides to pull

In Our Next Issue

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

the plug on the systems that support human life on earth, it will be too late to realize how much we've taken these things for granted.

One horseman is yet to ride in this grim scenario. We will see in our next installment that he rides in tandem with this third horseman. We have not yet seen the full depths of the catastrophe that awaits the world as the seals of Revelation 6 are opened and the human tragedies described in them unfold.

In His Olivet prophecy, Jesus gave the first description of the events symbolized by these seals—and His prophecy is unerring. He foretold that there will be a time of great

tribulation, greater than any previous world conflict, and unless that time is cut short, no human flesh will survive.

No treaty, no cease-fire, no human being, will be able to stop this end-of-the-age cataclysm. Events will drive the world into an out-of-control spin. But for the sake of a remnant called "the elect," His true followers, "those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22).

Too often, people speak of this period as "the end of the world" or by some other similarly gloomy name. Terrible as that time will be, the world will not end and human life will not be extinguished. The Bible gives us hope that the light will dawn out of the chaos at the end of this age. It is when we keep our eyes firmly focused on this truth that we can have hope beyond the tensions of our present world. **GN**



For disobedience, God says He would bring a nation from afar to besiege and blockade the cities. All the food stores would be forcibly taken. The resulting starvation would cause the social structure to unravel at a frightening speed. The results are horrifying to contemplate.

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The Story of Jesus Christ: Why Can't They Get It Right?

The movie The Passion of the Christ has raised many questions about Jesus of Nazareth and His sacrifice. Yet one of the most important questions is also one of the most basic: Why can't they get it right?

by Scott Ashley

Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* generated a huge amount of publicity and controversy. So far, the movie has drawn more than 50 million viewers and is on course to become one of the top money-makers in cinema history. This is all the more amazing for a film restricted for younger viewers because of its violence and in which every line of dialog is spoken in Latin or Aramaic, two long-dead languages.

Mr. Gibson, who financed and directed the movie, put a great deal of effort into making the film. His storytelling genius comes through in many ways. The movie is a powerful and moving attempt to tell the story of the last 12 hours of the life of Jesus Christ.

Yet, for all his effort, Mel Gibson didn't get the story right in several significant ways.

It's not like there isn't an accurate script

After all, this same Jesus inspired the apostle Paul to write this criticism of long hair on men in 1 Corinthians 11:14: "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?"

After his miraculous conversion, Paul apparently was personally taught by Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12). He also certainly knew some of Jesus' family members and many followers who had spent time with Him during His ministry. It's inconceivable that Paul would have written this statement if Jesus Himself had long hair. The common portrayal of Jesus Christ simply isn't accurate biblically or historically.

Adding to the story

Those familiar with the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John may have heard about or seen several scenes in the

of the first century, the apostle Paul noted that some were already preaching "another Jesus whom we have not preached" and "a different gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:4).

Thus we shouldn't be surprised that many people—and even many churches—have misconceptions about Jesus, His life and His teachings. Many of the ideas Paul warned about took root in the first century and have continued right down to our day, when we find a "Christian" religion that bears only a superficial resemblance to the one Jesus founded.

Only when we get our own human ideas and traditions out of the way can we get the story right and begin to understand the *real* Jesus of the Bible.

Central facts left unexplained

Since the film covered the last 12 hours of Christ's life, of necessity it passed over the bulk of His life and teachings. While understandable given the time constraints of the movie, this is regrettable—for in focusing on Jesus' sacrifice without explaining who He was and why He voluntarily submitted to such a cruel fate, we are essentially left with only one act of a multipart play.

Who was Jesus? In His questioning by the Jewish religious authorities, they demanded to know whether He was the Messiah and Son of God. When He affirmed that He was, they flew into a rage and demanded that He be put to death for blasphemy (Matthew 26:63-66).

The reality of Jesus' identity, though, goes *even beyond that* to something that even most of His followers today don't understand. Surprising as it may sound, many scriptures tell us that He was the One the Israelites knew as God in the Old Testament!

For example, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, explains that the Israelites wandering in the wilderness "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, *and that Rock was Christ*" (emphasis added throughout).

He also writes in Colossians 1:16 that "*by Him [Jesus Christ] 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.*" He explains in

Only when we get our own human ideas and traditions out of the way can we get the story right.

to work with. After all, the four Gospels that describe the events have been around for almost 2,000 years. He simply made the same mistake so many others do when they approach the subject of Jesus Christ—they let their own ideas get in the way.

An accurate depiction of Jesus?

Old ideas die hard, and one of the oldest is what Jesus Christ looked like. For centuries people have assumed that Jesus had long hair. After all, that's the way they've always seen Him portrayed in every painting, drawing or movie. That's the only Jesus they've ever seen. But are those depictions accurate?

The fact is, we don't know what Jesus looked like, because the first depictions of Him weren't created until several centuries *after* His ministry. Thus every image we've ever seen is based on nothing but the artists' imaginations.

While we don't know what Jesus *did* look like, we do know that He *didn't* look like the common depictions of Him with long hair.

movie they couldn't recall reading about in the Gospels.

This is because Mr. Gibson incorporated elements from nonbiblical sources, including *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, a book containing the supposedly divine visions of a mystic nun who lived 200 years ago. A few other scenes and events appear to have come from Mel Gibson's imagination or traditional Catholic ideas that aren't found in the Bible.

While much of the film follows the biblical accounts and gives a remarkable feel for the setting and emotional impact of these events, it's regrettable that the human tendency to add to or think the story can be improved on gets in the way. In both the Old and New Testaments, God makes it clear that He takes a dim view of adding to or taking away from His Word (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19).

Sadly, people began changing the real story of Jesus Christ within only a few years of His death and resurrection. By the middle

Ephesians 3:9 that God the Father “created all things through Jesus Christ.”

The apostle John is even more explicit: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning [before the creation of the universe] with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3). John adds in verse 14 that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .”

John tells us that this Being, who was God and also had been with God (that is, with the Father, the other member of the divine family consisting of both Father and Son), the One through whom the entire universe was made, became a living, breathing, flesh-and-blood human being. This is the startling true identity of Jesus Christ that few really grasp!

The point of the passion

Before *The Passion* opened, Mr. Gibson was reportedly told by Hollywood executives that his film was a career-killing move and that he would never work in the movie industry again. As if to emphasize the point, no major movie distributor wanted to touch the film for fear that it would be a box-office disaster.

Many movie critics savaged it. *The New Republic* ridiculed it, calling it “a sacred snuff film.” A *New York Times* review scorned it as “an unnerving and painful spectacle.” The *Boston Globe* called it “an obscene movie . . . a blasphemous insult to the memory of Jesus Christ.”

The *New York Daily News* condemned it as “a brutal, nasty film” and “a compendium of tortures” characterized by “grotesque, savage” violence. The reviewer asked whether its director, Mel Gibson, is truly devout or simply insane.

I could cite many other similar examples, but I think you get the point.

The real problem with so many of these critics is that they *didn't* get the point. One has to wonder if they only saw the movie without having ever opened the Book.

By focusing on the film's violence, they dismiss the movie's powerful and uncomfortable message that *sin*—thumbing our noses at God in how we think, act and live—carries a devastatingly high price tag.

Jesus' sufferings more violent than the movie

The Passion of the Christ is indeed a graphic movie. But the fact is that, if anything, the violence is understated. Mel Gibson was asked in an interview why he didn't tone down the violence. “I *did* tone it down!” was his response.

And Mr. Gibson is right. Crucifixion was a

horrible way to die. The pain was so intense that the Romans had to invent a new word to describe it—*excruciating*, meaning literally “from the cross.”

No other film has presented such an unflinching, unsanitized version of Jesus Christ's suffering. For those used to seeing pictures of a crucified Jesus with a few scratches here and there and a prick in His side, this film is a shock to the senses, an in-your-face shout that demands one's attention—as it should.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all verify that the death of Jesus Christ was a brutal, degrading demonstration of evil and cruelty. By design the Romans planned that crucifixions were public spectacles, reserved for those criminals whom they wanted to make a public example by inflicting the most painful, humiliating and torturous death they could devise. The Romans did their gruesome work well.

The true horror of what Christ endured is revealed in prophecies of His suffering and death written centuries before these events unfolded. One indication of the extent of this brutality is found in a verse cited in the New Testament, Isaiah 53:5: “And by His stripes we are healed.” For “stripes,” the New King James Version margin has “blows that cut in.”

The people of Jesus' day could envision such cutting blows much more readily than we can today without such depictions as that in *The Passion*. Another indication of the violence Jesus suffered is found in Isaiah 50:6: “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting” (New International Version).

Another prophecy in Isaiah 52:14 is even more graphic: “His form, disfigured, lost all human likeness; his appearance [was] so changed he no longer looked like a man” (Revised English Bible). Do you grasp what this prophecy of Jesus' suffering is telling us? It says that He was so badly beaten, so bloodied and maimed, that *He was virtually unrecognizable as a human being*.

Another sobering prophecy of His suffering and crucifixion is found in Psalm 22:14-17: “. . . All my bones are out of joint. My heart . . . has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my

tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death . . . they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me” (New International Version).

This prophecy describes the Messiah's body wracked in pain from having His bones pulled out of joint, the extreme thirst resulting from massive blood loss, the agony of having iron nails pounded through His hands and feet and the awful shock of seeing His own bones exposed where the scourging ripped away His flesh.

Sadly, the part of the movie that's perhaps been most criticized is the part that is likely its most accurate (though at the same time understated). Sin is ugly, brutal and hideously painful, and Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price for the sins you and I have committed.

Why did He do it?

Paul tells us that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). By sinning—breaking God's law as summarized in the Ten Commandments (1 John 3:4)—we have all earned that death penalty. None of us is exempt (Romans 3:23).

Thus when we die, all that any of us deserve is eternal oblivion, the nothingness of death forever (heaven and hell is another matter entirely—to learn more about this request our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*).

However, Jesus Christ came to spare us from that fate (John 3:16-17). It required the death not just of a righteous human being, but the dying of the *very Creator of every man, woman and child who has ever lived* to pay the penalty for the sins of everyone. It took the *death of God in the flesh* (John 1:14)—the death of the One who made us. This is the awesome and little-understood magnitude of Christ's sacrifice.

Why can't people get the story of Jesus Christ right? The story is there waiting for us. This article has only scratched the surface of the story of the God who gave His life for you.

These truths have been preserved for us in the Bible for centuries, lying there like gold nuggets waiting to be discovered. Isn't it about time you made the effort to get the story right? **GN**

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What Is a True Christian?

What does it take to be a Christian? According to the Bible, there is much more to being a true follower of Jesus Christ than most people realize. How does God's Word define a true Christian?

by Larry Neff

The term “Christian” is widely used to describe those who believe in Jesus Christ. However, there are many differing ideas as to just what this term means. Believers in Christ are generally anxious to be considered true Christians—but just what is a genuine follower of Jesus Christ? Is there any way to know for sure?

The Bible uses the word *Christian* only three times (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). However, various aspects of Christianity are mentioned abundantly. For example, the apostle Paul stated that we should imitate him just as he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). This is a major step in defining a true Christian, but there is more.

Called, chosen and faithful

The Bible gives us additional details. For instance, an individual must be *called* by God to be considered a Christian. In the parable of the wedding feast, our Savior stated that “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). The calling has to do with an invitation. Many are invited, but only some answer the call.

What is this calling from, and what is it a calling to? It is a calling “out of darkness into [God’s] marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). God calls whom He will out of the spiritual darkness and deceit that smothers this world and reveals to them His wondrous truth. That calling entails an *understanding* of that precious truth. If we obediently respond to that calling and come out of spiritual darkness, we are also among the *chosen* (same verse).

Then, if we remain faithful, we can claim the promise that we will join the King of Kings in the family of God (Revelation 17:14). As this verse explains, to be eligible to receive that promise we must be “called, chosen, and faithful.”

But what kind of people does God call? “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:26-27; compare Matthew 11:25-26).

Jesus emphasized that tax collectors and harlots would enter the Kingdom of God

before those who were often perceived as being righteous in His day. Typically, those looked on as righteous were in reality *self-righteous*. On the other hand, those of low standing are more likely to see their inadequacy and their need to repent of their sins. Generally speaking, they also will be more inclined to appreciate the forgiveness made possible through Jesus’ sacrifice (Matthew 21:23, 31-32).

Therefore, God most often calls people who don’t view themselves as high and mighty but

We should strive daily to “live by every word of God.” While no one can ever earn salvation—as it is God’s freely given gift—God will not give salvation to anyone who stubbornly persists in doing things his own way.

who instead see problems in themselves. They are more humble and teachable because they can more readily recognize and acknowledge their human weaknesses. They are people who have made mistakes and know it.

That is part of the reason God chooses “not many wise, not many noble,” but rather those that the world often views as foolish and weak. They more readily see *their need for God’s help*. On the other hand, those who see themselves as powerful and self-sufficient usually fail to see a need for God or His help.

Who is God calling now?

Is God now calling the majority of humanity? Most people think so. But if He is, He clearly has not succeeded. After Jesus Christ’s 3½-year ministry, only 120 disciples were gathered on the day of Pentecost to become part of the Church Jesus began. Christ’s true followers are described as a “little flock” (Luke 12:32), following a narrow and difficult pathway of life that very few find amidst the prevailing culture of “this present evil age” (Matthew 7:13-14; Galatians 1:4).

Even if all people who are classified as “Christian” were considered to be called of God, there still are far more who do not

recognize Christ and in many cases have not even heard His name. This is difficult to reconcile with the idea that God is calling everyone now.

God has revealed in His Word, however, that He has a magnificent plan through which all will ultimately come to know His way of life. Through studying this plan of salvation, we learn that God is not attempting to call the majority now, in this present age of man, but is letting most live the lesson of human experience under Satan’s sway.



After they learn hard lessons through this experience, many more eventually will want to go God’s way than would have otherwise. In the future the contrast between God’s way and Satan’s will be abundantly evident. (To more fully understand God’s great plan, be sure to request *What Is Your Destiny?* and *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

At that time, people who decided to determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong finally will come to realize that only the Great God can define what is right and wrong, holy and unholy, good and bad.

Tragically, this lesson extends throughout all human history. Just as Adam and Eve did, human beings have long tried to determine for themselves what is right and wrong, rejecting God’s revelation. Sadly, we have reaped the painful fruit of those wrong choices (Galatians 6:7).

Proper worship required

Could these wrong choices and decisions extend to the way we worship God and Jesus Christ? Jesus Himself made it clear that merely *using* His name does not make one a Christian. “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*” (Matthew 7:21, emphasis added throughout).

Did you catch that? It is possible to worship God and His Son, *but still not be a real Christian!* Christ warned of those who would institute *their own* practices and doctrines and wrongly expect God to honor such worship: “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, *but their heart is far from Me*. And in vain they worship Me, *teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*’” (Matthew 15:7-9).

Jesus noted that although God is clearly the object of their worship, since they choose to worship Him *in their own way*, as opposed to the way God *tells us* to worship Him, such worship is *vain and useless*.

By contrast, a true Christian will worship God *according to God’s instruction* in His holy Word, the Bible, and not according to his own devices and imagination (Deuteronomy 12:32). The Bible emphasizes that we should strive daily to live “by every word of God” (Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). While no one can ever earn salvation—as it is God’s freely given gift (Romans 6:23)—God will not give salvation to anyone who stubbornly persists in doing things his own way.

Ever since Adam and Eve yielded to Satan’s deception, most people simply have not correctly understood God’s truth. They do not realize that Satan the devil has continued to deceive the overwhelming majority of humankind (see 1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9). In so many cases, people are sincerely doing what they think is right. They simply do not understand that Satan, the real “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), has extended his deceitful, lying ways even into teachings and practices embraced by mainstream Christianity (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

The real test begins when God opens one’s mind to His truth. Once the Creator begins to reveal truth to a person, that individual bears a responsibility to *act* on it. If that person doesn’t show a willingness to *live* by what he or she has learned, God will add nothing more to his or her understanding. The person has shown that he really doesn’t

want to do even what he has already learned.

God requires a change

To be a true Christian, a person must take a vital step: He or she must truly *repent*. After the apostle Peter’s powerful sermon on the day the New Testament Church began, many were “cut to the heart” when they recognized that it was their sins for which Jesus was crucified (Acts 2:37).

Peter’s striking sermon had made it clear just who Jesus was—the promised future King whom God had raised from the dead and by doing so had made Him both Lord and Christ (verses 29-32, 36). Their sins had necessitated the death of the very Son of God!

They then “said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘*Repent*, and let every one of you *be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and *you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God *will call*’” (verses 37-39).

We see here several crucial steps to becoming a true Christian. First, a person must *be called* by God. Then he or she must *repent* of past sins. Although repentance is a major subject requiring more explanation than is possible here, we should realize that it is far more than merely an emotional experience. It is truly a *life-changing process*.

To repent means to *change*, to *turn around*, to *stop going the way you are going*. It is to be truly sorry for your sins, as well as to have sorrow for your inclination and desire to do the wrong things.

In biblical terms, this process of change, of surrendering yourself and turning your life over to God, is called *conversion*. Obviously a human being cannot change everything at once, but one can have a repentant attitude and turn in the right direction, making basic changes as he or she embarks on a new path and a new life of overcoming—bearing “fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8).

(To understand this process of repentance and conversion, request or download the free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.)

To be repentant, it is essential to have

some understanding of *what to repent of*. If one doesn’t realize stealing is sinful, he cannot repent of it. If he isn’t aware that profaning God’s name or profaning God’s Sabbath constitutes sin, he cannot repent of those transgressions. This is where God’s calling—His *revealing of truth* so that we might become a true Christian—applies. The Creator reveals His truth through His Word, the Bible, so we can understand what sin is and so we might comprehend the way of life to which He has called us.

We see, then, that a person cannot truly become a Christian unless he *truly repents*.

Another step required

After genuine repentance, Peter instructs that we must be baptized (Acts 2:38). The Greek word *baptisma* (baptism) refers to the “processes of immersion, submersion, and emergence” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Baptism, Baptist, Baptize”).

Water baptism is a physical act designed to teach us a vital spiritual lesson. “Baptism” performed through sprinkling or pouring fails to fulfill the symbolism of this important ceremony. Baptism is described in Romans 6 as representing our *death, burial and resurrection to new life* through Jesus Christ. Through baptism our “old man” or self is symbolically buried in a watery grave and we rise from the water as a new person to live a new life (verses 3-13).

The experience of Noah’s family in the ark during the great Flood as well as ancient Israel’s passing through the Red Sea figuratively represent water baptism (1 Peter 3:20-21; 1 Corinthians 10:2).

Both events culminated in salvation—albeit only physical deliverance for those involved—and also signified the passing from an old world and sinful way of life to a completely new one where righteousness prevails. Baptism represents our salvation and deliverance from our earlier way of living that leads to death to a new way of righteous living, leaving our old self behind in a symbolic watery grave.

In the light of these verses, can one still be a Christian and be saved *without* baptism? Read Mark 16:16 for additional biblical

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evidence: "He who believes *and is baptized* will be saved."

The gift of God's Spirit

Following water baptism, God offers His Holy Spirit to the repentant believer. Can a person be a Christian without God's Spirit? The Bible answers: "... You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit

We see here crucial steps to becoming a true Christian. First, a person must be called by God. Then he or she must repent of past sins. Repentance is far more than merely an emotional experience. It is a life-changing process.

of God dwells in you. *Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His*" (Romans 8:9).

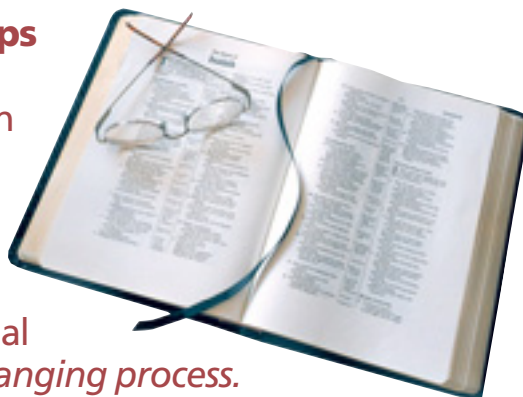
Notice how "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ" are used interchangeably. There is only one Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:4), and one cannot be a Christian without it.

That Spirit enables the Christian to understand spiritual things—"the things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11). Through the Holy Spirit, a Christian builds godly character and shows evidence of God at work in his or her life through proper fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). The Spirit works in a Christian to provide power, love and a sound, godly mind (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

Another element tied to repentance is what

Jesus Christ called "counting the cost." He cautions those who would follow Him, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it . . . so likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:28, 33).

This means that whoever would become a true Christian must be willing to give his



or her life to God, to always put God first (Matthew 6:33). True Christianity is not cheap; the cost is to *surrender your life*. It requires *total commitment*. A Christian may stumble or falter along the way. He may even hesitate. But with God's help, he or she will work through the obstacles and put God first in all aspects of life.

Walk as Christ walked

A true Christian will have a very different perspective on life. He will have an overriding goal to live like Jesus Christ. "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6). A true Christian's understanding of how to live will be deeply rooted in the example of the life of the Messiah and that of His followers, the apostles.

Included in the concept of walking as He walked is the aspect emphasized in 1 Peter 2:20-21: "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. *For to this you were called*, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."

A true Christian will look, in faith, to God, realizing his total dependence on the Creator. He or she will demonstrate the fruits of God's Holy Spirit and true Christianity through good works.

It is a fantastic privilege to be a Christian in this age, but one that requires dedication and carries heavy responsibility. The rewards are enormous for all those who choose to serve God and become true followers of Christ—*Christians as defined in the Bible.* **GN**

Lead Europe

Continued from page 11

that in 2004 "the EU would have 450 million citizens and its territory would stretch from the Atlantic to the borders of Russia" (*The Economist*, Jan. 3).

"Sounds like the Roman Empire, Romano," came the quick rejoinder. The American president obviously grasps a serious point.

The Economist feature article continued: "The drive for 'European Unity' which will proceed further this year when the EU's membership expands to 25 countries, has deep historical origins. Indeed they do stretch back to the dissolution of the Roman Empire" (emphasis added).

Interestingly enough, in A.D. 800, several centuries after the decline and fall of the original Roman Empire, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne in Rome as emperor. His political empire stretched across the map from the Pyrenees Mountains (separating France and Spain) to the Danube River—and from Hamburg in the north to Sicily in the south of Europe.

Translated from the Latin into English, Charlemagne's imperial seal read: "The Renewal of the Roman Empire."

Much later Hitler spoke of a 1,000-year

Will Enlargement of the European Union Ensure Peace?

"A new era is dawning for the European Union. Ten new member states will join the union on 1 May, 2004, thereby bringing the post-war division of Europe to a peaceful conclusion. Enlargement lays the foundation for lasting peace, stability and prosperity for future generations. It is an inclusive and irreversible process" (*Enlargement of the European Union*, a European Commission document, 2003, p. 1).

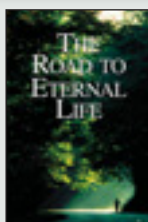
These are the bold pronouncements of Günter Verheugen, member of the European Commission responsible for enlargement. Many of his contemporaries would agree with him. French historians also tend to link European unity with peace. One spoke of "the stable society created by Charlemagne."

But as the British magazine *The Economist* observed: "British historians are much less likely than their French counterparts to assume that European unity is necessarily synonymous with peace and cultural progress" (Jan. 3).

Only the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, can bring real peace to this war-weary world (Isaiah 9:6-7). Few regions have sustained more wars than Europe. Only divine intervention on a massive scale will turn the European continent and the entire world around and bless it with universal peace and prosperity.

Recommended Reading

There's much more to learn about what it means to be a true Christian. To better understand the concepts of repentance, baptism and conversion, be sure to request the free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. To understand God's timetable for working with humanity and the incredible future He has in store for us, ask for or download our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.



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reich with Germany at the helm of Europe. In 1933 his contemporary, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, predicted that "Europe may once again grasp the helm of world civilization if it can develop a modicum of political unity." The dream of a united Holy Roman Empire has gripped many European leaders, both good and bad, throughout the centuries.

Remember that the Bible is the most important and far-reaching book of all. It gives mankind an overall perspective of past events that no history book can. Jesus Christ and His apostles entered the world scene in the heyday of the Roman Empire. Even most of Britain had been invaded and conquered by Roman armies. The biblical books of Daniel and Revelation deal with the Roman Empire and its revivals—both historically and prophetically.

Europe in Bible prophecy

It's doubtful that any of the current crop of leaders of Europe envision the type of leadership that will eventually emerge within the general territory of the old Roman Empire. Certainly when Valéry Giscard D'Estaing, principal author of the as-yet-unaccepted European constitution, urges other leaders to "dream of Europe," he is not thinking of the troubling prophecies in the book of Revelation.

But the Bible speaks frankly of a two-pronged future leadership along both political and religious lines. It uses the stark terms of "beast" and "false prophet" to describe the true nature of two charismatic individuals who will dominate an end-time dictatorial reign—holding much of the populace of the whole world in its grip (Revelation 13; 19:19-20). Bible prophecy indicates that their reign will pale the brutality of the Axis Powers of World War II into insignificance.

The magnetic personality of "the beast" will be so powerful that 10 other leaders will voluntarily give their considerable power to this ruthless political dictator for a short time in future history (Revelation 17:12-13). Even the apostle John "marveled" when Christ's angel showed him a preview of this incredible spectacle in vision (verses 6-7).

These end-time events are scheduled to take place just before the second coming of Christ ushers in the glorious reign of God on earth—bringing humankind 1,000 years of peace, plenty and prosperity. Could we be on the threshold of that awesome event?

But in the meantime, you cannot afford to neglect reading the books of Daniel and Revelation. Properly put together, they reveal the future course of events in both Europe and the Middle East, the principal geographic areas where Bible prophecy will be fulfilled. **GN**

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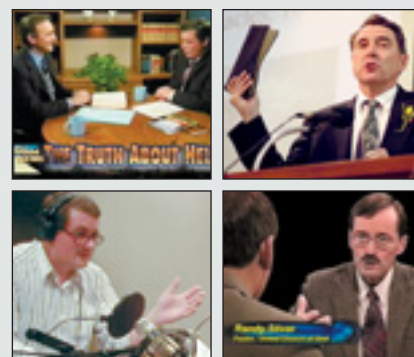
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The Gay Rights Battle

Is there a logical and biblically supportable solution to the gay rights battle?

by Gary Petty

The cultural battle over gay rights has taken on a renewed energy. A decade ago the gay rights battlegrounds were the military and increased exposure in television and movies; now the battleground has extended to society's acceptance of gay marriage's equality with traditional heterosexual marriage and family.

Some U.S. political leaders are busy trying to garner support for a new law that would define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. At the same time, other lawmakers are lobbying for expansion of gay rights including the legalization of homosexual marriages. Even President Bush got into the act when he publicly declared his belief that marriage is between a man and a woman and equated homosexuality with sin.

Gay rights activists have scored some impressive victories in recent years, both culturally and politically: the Supreme Court's striking down a Texas antisodomy law as unconstitutional, a leading retail chain's public statements about protecting the rights of gay employees and public homosexual parties at Disney World to name a few.

A *USA Today*/CNN/Gallup Poll shows some backlash against the gay agenda in the general public. While 48 percent of Americans polled said they supported legalization of same-sex relations between consenting adults, 46 percent said that same-sex unions should be illegal. This is the highest number of people taking a stand against homosexuality since 1996.

History of U.S. views toward homosexual behavior

To understand the intensity of this debate we must know a little of its history. The early settlers of the United States were nearly all Christians. They belonged to various denominations but overwhelmingly agreed that homosexual acts were morally wrong.

All of the original 13 states passed laws declaring homosexual activity punishable

by death. Thomas Jefferson felt that capital punishment was too strict and proposed it be replaced with a lesser punishment. The last state to remove the death penalty for homosexual acts from its books was North Carolina in 1869.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s many in the medical profession, especially in the

the surface that seems like a legitimate argument, but the real issue is this: What criteria determine moral behavior that is beneficial both for the individual and society?

There was a time when most people in society believed that pornography was demeaning to women and contributed to unhealthy attitudes about sex in men. Under

the guise of tolerance, pornography is now argued as a right of free speech even though the negative influences of pornography on male perceptions of women are well documented.

The real issues are vital to the future of Western civilization and the United States. Are there standards of conduct that are intrinsically wrong? Who determines right and wrong? Are good and evil simply a matter of subjective feelings so that what might be wrong for me is not wrong for you, or are right and wrong founded on objective



Today, the country is split over the traditional Christian view of homosexuality and a secular outlook rooted either in the rejection of the teachings of the Bible or in a radical reinterpretation of biblical statements.

field of psychology, considered homosexuality a mental illness. The cultural revolution of the 1960s created a new sexual freedom that included acceptance of same-sex relationships.

Today, the country is split over the traditional Christian view of homosexuality and a secular outlook rooted either in the rejection of the teachings of the Bible or in a radical reinterpretation of biblical statements.

The secular position is founded on the argument that the health of a democratic society is dependent on the acceptance of minority behavior like homosexuality. On

laws designed into creation?

Growing cultural acceptance of deviant behavior

More and more movies, television sitcoms and daytime soap operas feature gay or lesbian characters in positive roles. It was not that long ago that it would have been inconceivable for a network to air a television program like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, a big hit for the cable network Bravo.

Where homosexuality was once considered a mental illness, today a person rejecting it is criticized for being homophobic.

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To download or listen to programs online, visit www.ucg.org/radio.

as he and guests explore current trends and biblical truths and teachings with the kind of fresh, in-depth perspective you get in *The Good News* magazine.

Christians who oppose the gay lifestyle are in danger of being labeled as bigoted, hate-mongering or even mentally ill themselves.

In an opinion column appearing in the *San Antonio Express News*, author Ira Issachar describes himself as an avowed “heterosexual agnostic.” He claims to have “no quarrel, issue or discomfort with people who are gay.”

Mr. Issachar goes on to ask a question that he says is a “fundamental point of the struggle. Who is the real source of the Bible? God or man?” He finishes his editorial with these comments: “The Bible, to me, is just another religious book, written by a culture thousands of years ago.

“But I am intelligent enough to know that my views are fallible. Who knows? Maybe God does exist. Maybe God is the author of the Bible. If that was the case and I was involved in active homosexuality, I would no doubt need to soberly reassess my theology.”

Does God exist, and does it matter?

Mr. Issachar hits on a number of important points. First, there can be no compromising between those who believe in a traditional, biblically based view and the homosexual agenda. If one accepts the Bible as inspired by God, then homosexual activity is intrinsically wrong and unacceptable in a truly Christian society.

In the New Testament the apostle Paul writes to the church at Rome: “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened” (Romans 1:20-21, New Revised Standard Version).

Paul says that the obvious design, intricacy and grandeur of the creation unmistakably declare the existence of God. If there is a Creator, then He must know how His creation is supposed to function. But human beings want total self-determination and reject the Creator’s instructions.

Paul continues: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature [i.e., the creation] rather than the Creator . . .” (verses 22-25, NRSV).

Human beings may reject the revelation of God in His creation, and His instruction

book on how to live life, but because of the spiritual aspects of human nature we still desire answers to the meaning of life and death. So we create our own religious standards and values. But hollow religions built on human opinion not only fail to fulfill our need for God, they allow, or even promote, destructive behavior the Creator never intended.

Paul writes next: “For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done” (verses 26-28, NRSV).

Here gay and lesbian sexual activity is clearly condemned as sin. Paul also lists other sins condemned by God like murder, hatred, envy, violence and many other human actions that the Bible says are sin, or rebellion, against the Creator. Homosexual behavior isn’t the *only* sin, but it is definitely on the list.

Christian confusion

A good example of how even professing Christians are divided on this issue is the election of an openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church. An Associated Press story highlights the confusion over this issue by stating that “the Episcopal Church has no official rules—either for or against—ordaining gays.” A paragraph later the same article states, “In 1998, Anglican leaders approved a resolution calling gay sex ‘incompatible with Scripture.’”

Of course, it’s impossible to have it both ways. If a church claims to be biblically based, then it must follow the Bible’s teachings. The sad reality is that many churches are more in tune with societal trends and political correctness than following the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Some radicals claim that to brand homosexuality as a sin is to violate Jesus’ instruction not to judge one another. But Jesus taught against murder, stealing and dishonoring your parents. Is anyone prepared to say that murderers should be allowed to freely kill because Christians supposedly aren’t to judge between right and wrong?

How should Christians react to homosexuals?

When discussing homosexuality, many Christians immediately think of God’s pun-

ishment on Sodom and Gomorrah. The Genesis account describes God destroying with fire a populace that reveled in its acceptance of homosexuality.

Under the theocracy of ancient Israel, death was the penalty imposed for homosexual activity and other sexual sins. Jesus Christ didn’t give that same judicial authority to the Church. Christians do have the commission to proclaim the gospel, which includes a call for repentance from rebellion against the laws of the Creator—including those that forbid homosexual behavior.

This is an important question for both Christians and homosexuals to consider: Does God love homosexuals?

The Scripture says that God sent Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for the sins of *all* people. This includes the sins of homosexuality, lying, hatred, adultery, greed, lust and all other destructive behavior that goes against the way God intended for human beings to live. Christians should then reach out to homosexuals with the message of hope and forgiveness that would bring them spiritual healing and strength to abstain from any form of sinful behavior.

The battle over gay rights is more than a democratic discussion over tolerance. The future of any society depends on the strength of its families, and homosexuality strikes at the very foundation of marriage and family. The gay agenda also strikes at the very heart of Christianity, which rests on the validity of the Bible and the sovereignty of the Creator over His creation.

Christianity is more than simply professing Jesus’ name or belief in Him. It is being His disciple, a follower of what He taught. If you claim to be a Christian, it’s time you studied what God really says about issues like homosexuality. **GN**

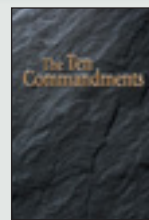
Recommended Reading

Our Creator, in His Word, repeatedly tells us that His laws are given for our good, and that they will bring blessings when obeyed and prevent the painful consequences that come from ignoring and flaunting them. To learn how these laws could transform our world and show us the way to truly abundant living, request our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Making Life Work*.

Those who are struggling with same-sex attraction (or would like to help someone who is) can request a free subscription to *Anchor: A Publication of Hope for Individuals Struggling With Homosexuality* by visiting its Web site at www.anchorhelp.com.

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

www.gnmagazine.org



'Become Like Little Children'

Being a preschool teacher is an opportunity to see the childlike nature God desires of us at work.

by Lisa Damour

As I walk down the hall to my classroom at 7:30 in the morning, I hear the familiar sounds of one of my little boys screaming. As I do, I can't help but think it's going to be one of those days.

As soon as I enter the room, he runs to me with tears streaming down his little face, crying, "Ms. Lisa, Ms. Lisa." After giving him a reassuring hug, I gather up the shoes he has kicked across the room and head to the kitchen to fix breakfast for the rest of our friends.

The golden rule

Most of the children have arrived in the classroom by midmorning. There is the customary pushing and fighting over toys or any number of other crises typical to three- and four-year-old children. Yes, it really is going to be one of those days.

Later, we sit down for our daily Bible lesson. Considering how our day has been going, I decide to teach about the golden rule. It's a subject we cover often, my hope being that something will sink in one day.

When asked what the golden rule means to them, a symphony of little voices chime in with "Treat others like you want them to treat you." We talk about how it applies to daily crises such as whether you should push someone who has pushed you. They all agree that we haven't been practicing it today.

I asked what they thought we needed to do to help us practice the golden rule. One beautiful little girl raised her hand and said, "We can pray."

Wow! It caught me off guard. That was not the answer I was expecting from a three-year-old child. So, of course, that is what we did. That's when it hit me what Jesus Christ meant when He said we should become like little children.

Become childlike

Jesus tells us that becoming like a child is one of the major keys to true conversion (Matthew 19:14). But what does that mean?

Little children are pure in heart and mind. Their innocence is so beautiful and refreshing.

I remember when my daughter was a little girl, I told her about the golden rule and how important it is to practice it. It wasn't until years later (she is 18 now) that she told me she had thought practicing the golden rule meant that if someone did something to her, they wanted her to do it to them. We laugh about it now, but it demonstrates the innocence of a child's mind.



Being a preschool teacher is a wonderful opportunity to see the gentle, loving, childlike nature God desires of us at work. As adults, we have the responsibility to obey Jesus' admonition to regain that childlike attitude. Regrettably, as our little ones grow up, they begin to lose their innocence as society encroaches in on them.

Honesty is refreshing

So what is the answer? How can we regain the childlike attitude Christ says we need?

Some would argue that as children grow past the toddler stage, they lose their innocence. I don't think so. I am reminded of what a little boy told me to explain why he couldn't help but be bad. "I'm always good at home, but when I get to school the bad just jumps from my shoulder into my head."

There is more truth to that simple explanation than many may want to admit. Another little boy was fascinated with my age. When I told him how old I was, he said, "Wow, I don't want to get old."

Little children are not afraid to ask questions for fear of sounding stupid. Part of their innocence is a hunger for knowledge. As adults, we may tire of their endless questions, but they are only displaying a thirst for knowledge.

Take a moment to reflect on the patience that our heavenly Father shows us with our questions and requests. In children's quests for knowledge we see an honesty that is refreshing. We need to become like our children when it comes to talking to our Father. Children aren't afraid to admit they don't know all the answers. Rather, they are simply attempting to add to their base of understanding as they encounter the world around them.

When my oldest son was about five years old, we had to board up our home and head for high ground because a hurricane was headed straight for us. We were instructed to go to the highest location in town, which happened to be a church-affiliated school.

The next morning, as we were eating breakfast in the cafeteria, I noticed my son looking around the room and at a crucifix displayed on the wall. Finally he said, "Mamma, when they run out of graves, do they hang people on trees?" He knew that to find the answer he needed to ask his mother or father.

"God has lots of eyes"

Just like children, we need to go to our spiritual Father to gain the knowledge we need to guide us in our spiritual lives.

So how honest are we with God? Do we say what is in our hearts? Or as we've grown older, have we lost the ability to be honest with Him and ourselves? Go to God in prayer and be completely open and honest with Him. He knows our innermost thoughts anyway. As one little girl put it, "God can see everything because He has lots of eyes."

Observe children as you have opportunity. Go to your spiritual Father for spiritual answers. And the next time you find yourself wondering how to regain the attitude of a little child, remember the words that my little preschool girl stated so beautifully—"We can pray." **GN**



Letters From Our Readers

“The Story of Jesus Christ: Where Do You Fit?”

I have been receiving your magazine for a while and honestly never read it before now. However, I have been looking for God and have been drawn towards Him. I think back and find it strange that your magazines started to make an appearance just as I was starting my search. Today I received and read the March-April edition, “The Story of Jesus Christ: Where Do You Fit?” I thought the articles were very interesting and well written.

R.P., Plain City, Utah

I wrote asking if you had any literature on the time from Christ’s final Passover through His resurrection, and found you didn’t. I’m so glad that was rectified! When I saw the titles of this *Good News* issue, I got excited. And then when I saw the booklets also available, I was thrilled. Thanks for being attentive to His prompting and feeding the flock.

K.M.B., Internet

Jesus Christ: The Real Story

I’d be happy to receive a free copy of your new booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. The acute problem of today is to know and to dare to trust the truth. As we have all seen, your foretelling of the future, based on the Bible scripts, really seems to be correct, i.e., the bombs in Madrid, Spain, as well as the terrorist killings in the Holy Land. These days we all need to receive all possible information to obtain knowledge and certainty.

A.E., Uppsala, Sweden

Is The Good News anti-Catholic?

I truly enjoy reading some of your articles. However, in so doing I also get this strange feeling that many of your articles are cleverly designed to disunite the various Christian denominations. They appear to target the Roman Catholic Church in particular. Recent articles about James, the half brother of Jesus, Mary’s virginity, Good Friday and Easter, plus the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath appear to contradict the catechism of the one holy Catholic and apostolic church—which truly has been the basis of the early Church and Christianity beginning from Christ, His apostles and the bishops of Rome.

One must appreciate that all other Christian denominations came about as breakaways

from this early church, not due to differences in theology, but through ignorance and lack of proper understanding of Roman Catholic teachings and practices like its devotion to the Virgin Mary and confession of sins—notwithstanding the behavior of the early bishops. As your name suggests, the United Church of God, please work hard in uniting all Christians with common themes understood and shared by all churches, irrespective of denomination.

B.R., Sidney, Australia

Are you anti-Catholic? Please reply.

L.M., Internet

The United Church of God is not “anti” any individual believer. However, we have a responsibility from God to proclaim the true teachings and doctrines of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments (Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17). We present our teachings with the hope that our audiences will evaluate them in the light of true biblical doctrines—searching the Scriptures daily to determine their validity (see Acts 17:11).

We believe that the Bible itself is the final arbiter. We do not, however, harbor any hostile or antagonistic feelings toward those who believe differently. For a basic summary of our goals and purposes plus a brief history of the early New Testament Church and what it believed, please request This Is the United Church of God and The Church Jesus Built.

“What Did the Early Church Believe and Practice?”

Wow! Your recent piece entitled “What Did the Early Church Believe and Practice?” was so excellent that I cut it out and pasted it in my Bible for future reference. What is so splendid is that you use Bible verses exclusively to prove your claims. I wish your organization had enough money to broadcast this article at halftime during the Super Bowl, so all Americans could better understand what true Christianity believes and practices. I was truly embarrassed at what this country, which claims to be “One Nation Under God,” telecast to the entire world during this event. It’s sad!

J.P.C., Broomfield, Colorado

I have been attending church all of my life. I have never heard anyone mention some of the truths I am now reading and learning

from the Bible—things I was never taught. I have read the Bible through three or four times, but didn’t understand a lot of it. With your teachings, I am learning and understanding to give God the glory.

D.S.C., Detroit, Michigan

I received *The Good News* and was appalled at the article, “What Did the Early Church Believe and Practice?” The idea that the Church should keep the Feasts of the Old Testament is simply not scriptural.

S.H., Paris, Texas

Our free booklet God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind shows that the early Church kept the biblical festivals as outlined in Leviticus 23. Also, earlier editions of The Encyclopaedia Britannica will clearly tell you that first-century Christian believers observed these biblical feasts.

Reader questions previous beliefs

I am a new Christian. A friend of my husband gave us a copy of *The Good News*. I read it and enjoyed the articles very much. However, I have become confused about my Christianity and some of the things I have been taught. An example is attending church on Saturday instead of Sunday. My family, while I was growing up, always went on Sunday. Have we been wrong all this time? I could really use some knowledge about this. I do not want my walk in the Lord to be in vain, and I am very interested in what His will is for me—even if it means changing all that I have been taught or offending my family.

M.H., Quilin, Missouri

We deeply appreciate your willing attitude and approach. We have mailed you several booklets including Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest. Hopefully these will answer your questions. However, even though we should implement the doctrinal truths we discover in the Bible, we should also try to do so as diplomatically and inoffensively as we can, not forcing our convictions on others.

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



Questions & Answers

Q: I've looked for quite some time on your Web site for any articles concerning whether Jesus Christ, when He lived as a human being, could have sinned. Do you have an article about this? I have a friend who believes that since Jesus was God, He could not have sinned.

K.S., Internet

A: The Bible indicates that since Jesus was a real human being, He *could* have sinned. But He *did not* because He had set Himself to always stay close to God the Father, who would give Him the needed spiritual strength to continue in obedience to God's spiritual laws. The Father was the source of Jesus' spiritual works (John 5:19, 30; 14:10).

This question is addressed in our new booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* in the chapter "The God Who Became a Human Being." Here are the pertinent paragraphs:

"This brings us to another question about Jesus' humanity. Was it possible for Jesus to sin? The Bible is quite clear that Jesus did not sin. Paul says that Jesus 'knew no sin' (2 Corinthians 5:21). John confirms that 'In Him there is no sin' (1 John 3:5). None of His enemies could convict Him of sin (John 8:46).

"But *could* He have sinned? Hebrews 4:15 tells us that 'we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.' If it wasn't possible for Jesus to sin, then was His temptation genuine?

"It's more fitting to say that while He *could* have sinned, it was certain that He *would not*. He faced genuine struggles and temptations, but refused to give in to the temptation to sin."

And again, it was His constant closeness to the Father that ensured the instant availability of needed help to overcome. That same spiritual help is available to us if we will draw near to God through heartfelt repentance, baptism and receiving God's Spirit (see the next answer).

You can obtain the rest of the story by requesting our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

Editor's Note: Since we regularly receive letters inquiring about baptism,

the following is a brief overview of the subject. For interested readers, much more information is available in the free booklets listed at the end of the answer.

A: In preparing for water baptism, we first need to understand that God the Father decides whom He will call to eternal life now in "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). The Father is "the Lord of the harvest" (Matthew 9:38). This is said in context of those whom our Creator is calling to salvation, His firstfruits now in this age of man.

The Father takes the first step by calling whom He will (see John 6:44, 65). And Christ has made possible the forgiveness of our sins—transgressions of God's law—through His sacrificial death on our behalf.

The first requirement on our part for water baptism is true and genuine repentance. True repentance is a *positive process* that results in *change*, rather than the selfish sorrow of this world (see Acts 2:38; 3:19). Yet fulfilling this requirement is not possible without our Creator's help. Scripture says that the goodness of God leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). God is the one who grants us repentance if we sincerely ask and earnestly desire to turn our lives over to Him.

Repentance involves an honest recognition of the errors of the past, genuine sorrow for that wrongdoing and a resolute determination to change our lives. It leads to a change of mind, a change of heart and a change of lifestyle.

After we are led to truly repent of our sins and the pulls within us that cause us to sin, God has bound Himself to completely forgive us.

Notice King David's explanation of God's extraordinary mercy in Psalm 103:8-12: "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Repentance and forgiveness go together. Jesus Christ said that He would use the apostle Paul "to open their eyes and to turn

them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that *they may receive forgiveness of sins*" (Acts 26:18, emphasis added). God forgives us because the sacrifice of His Son has abundantly satisfied the penalty for our past failures to keep God's law. Jesus Christ shed His own precious blood to pay the price for our sins—sin being the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4).

What are the requirements on our part? They consist of true repentance and living faith followed by water baptism (all with God's generous guidance and help). The final part of the baptismal ceremony consists of the laying on of hands of the ministry—the biblical method God uses to impart His Holy Spirit, which empowers us to resist and overcome sin (Acts 8:14-17; 19:5-6).

The Holy Spirit is the down payment, and its presence within us becomes the assurance of everlasting life to follow in God's Kingdom. Rest assured that God is more willing to give us His Holy Spirit than we are to give good gifts to our children (Luke 11:13). Christ said that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom (Luke 12:32).

If you would like personal counsel in regard to water baptism, please contact our office nearest you listed on page 2. We will be happy to arrange an appointment with a minister of the United Church of God. If possible, please include a contact telephone number or e-mail address. For further study about water baptism, you may also wish to request our free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life*, *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *You Can Have Living Faith*.

Correction: In last issue's article "Good Friday–Easter Sunday: It Didn't Happen That Way!," the statement was made on page 22 that "the apostle John specifically tells us that the day on which Jesus was crucified was a special Sabbath, not the regular weekly Sabbath."

It should have read: "The apostle John specifically tells us that the day *after* Jesus was crucified was a special Sabbath, not the regular weekly Sabbath." We regret any confusion caused by this misstatement.

A Course on Evolution and Faith

What happens when a young person who believes in God studies evolution? Read this first-hand account to discover what happened to one college freshman.

by Leslie Schwartz

Starting college is a major transitional stage in one's life. For me, it was a time filled with both excitement and nervous apprehension. For months I had been dreaming about what the experience would be like—what my dorm would look like, how the food would taste and all the classes I would take. I was especially excited about the last one; I had so many options when it came to planning my schedule—physics,



Question: Does God Exist? and Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe? and following up with some of the many books on the subject—see “The Case Against Evolution” at www.ucg.org/vt/fall2003/evolution.htm. But I wanted to get the information straight from the horse's mouth—or in the lion's den, so to speak.)

Evolution: theory, not fact

On the first day of lecture, my professor stood at the front of the auditorium and said, “I want all of you to understand that evolution is just

a theory and hasn't been

proven yet, but in this class, for the next three quarters, we will be referring to hard and fast scientific evidence that makes it a very believable and globally accepted idea of creation and how life arose.”

I was happy he had acknowledged the fact that evolution was still just a theory, and although he had no idea of God's marvelous plan for humankind, he wasn't going to lie to us. I knew that learning the material was not synonymous with accepting it, and was glad this attitude was presented up front at the beginning of the year. This made me feel more at ease.

As the quarter progressed, I learned about everything from neutrinos to the Big Bang to Hubble's Law. Fall quarter consisted of the evolution of the cosmos, followed by another class during winter quarter on the evolution of life. During the fall, most of the lectures dealt more with facts that science presented (apart from the supposed Big Bang), so I wasn't always at odds with the material.

However, once we ventured into the evolution of life, questions and opposition started popping up on all fronts. The theories my professors presented just didn't make sense to me. While some of the facts could be observed, like how animals adapt to their

When Church friends asked me what I was taking and I replied, “Education, psychology and *evolution*,” red lights started flashing in their heads. To some, it sounded wrong and ungodly. To me, it made perfect sense.

sociology, political science, engineering, theater, classics, English composition—the list seemed endless.

So when my Church friends in my local congregation and from across the country asked me what I was taking and I replied, “Education, psychology and *evolution*,” red lights automatically started flashing in their heads. “*Evolution*—why would she want to take that if she had so many other options!” many of them thought, and even a few of them outwardly questioned. To some, it sounded wrong and ungodly. To me, it made perfect sense.

Throughout my schooling experience I was one of the lucky high school students who never had to deal with an overly liberal biology teacher forcing the theory of evolution down my throat, so I never really understood the concepts that formed its framework. I have always believed that education is one of the most powerful tools one can utilize, and that it is not only ignorant, but wrong to say you don't believe something

without thoroughly understanding why and what exactly you don't believe.

I knew and had been taught throughout the years that evolution was wrong, and that I shouldn't believe it, but I didn't know the different pieces that built up this supposedly scientific theory of our existence. I was on a quest for knowledge, and thought college would be the perfect opportunity to further this journey.

(Of course, this isn't for everybody. There are other ways to get this knowledge, such as starting with the booklets *Life's Ultimate*

Leslie Schwartz is a student at the University of California, Los Angeles, studying mass communications, education and applied developmental psychology. She plans to pursue a graduate degree in higher education and work in professional leadership development and student affairs after college. The 20-year-old was born near San Francisco and moved to Los Angeles after high school.



environments, when pieced together to form the much larger picture of macroevolution, things never seemed to fit.

Though some of my questions could be answered reasonably, the majority received the response, "We simply don't know." I don't know about some people, but I don't like to think my existence depends on a bunch of unknowns that, just by chance,

my faith in God's existence and the proof that He is working in all of our lives.

I don't regret taking an evolution class; for me, it was a way to become better educated and informed. Everyone should be educated in what they say they don't believe so they can hold intelligent conversations with people who have different beliefs and ideas. I always hated not having a good

I was happy he had acknowledged the fact that evolution was still just a theory, and he wasn't going to lie to us.

decided to occur and sporadically form life.

A marvelous revelation

In the middle of the quarter, as I walked to the nearest bus stop across the beautiful UCLA campus one Sabbath morning to catch the metro link to services, I was struck by a marvelous revelation that made everything seem so clear to me.

It started when I began examining the patterns of a falling leaf and the many interrelationships I shared with the environment and other organisms. I realized how carefully everything is made, and how beautiful life really is. All of these thoughts left me with no doubt that a Creator must exist who has a wonderful plan for all of this.

I look at life and at the world, and know that although things are not optimal in many cases, there will be a time when Jesus will establish His Kingdom and all of humanity will recognize the true and right way to live in peace.

This is the hope I hold—not the hope in chance DNA mutations to form an advanced eye structure or the possibility that flying, instead of running, developed in birds in the Jurassic period. I now had the facts I had been searching for through my study of evolution, and the final answer reaffirmed

response to someone's attacks and wanted to know my opponent's side well, if not better than they know my own.

The knowledge I gained through this class has helped me do that. It not only helps me relate better to people in the world now as I strive to live a Christ-centered life, but will eventually help me, after Christ's return, to work with people who have grown up with false beliefs like evolution.

Taking this class has strengthened my prayer life and the amount of time I spend doing Bible study because I am more inspired to prove to myself directly through Scripture why I don't believe something, rather than blindly accept what I have been taught.

My attitude toward studying evolution clearly parallels my attitude toward studying the Bible—I wanted to know the subject well so I could prove the truth to myself and figure out what I do and do not believe. Every good student of the Bible should take a similar approach.

Closer to God

As I left the lecture hall after my final at the end of winter quarter, more than ready to travel home and begin my much-awaited spring break, I realized that although I was very glad the class was finally over, I had learned more than I bargained for because I had a deep interest in searching for God's truth.

Yes, it may have sounded weird or been hard to admit that I enrolled in a class on evolution, but to me, learning is about knowing the most you can, and then choosing the right way from your knowledge. This class helped me gain a better understanding of evolution and helped bring me closer to God and the truths He offers through His promises and fabulous plan of salvation for humankind. So while I might get an A in my evolution class, God's way offers a much greater reward! **GN**



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Recommended Reading

How does the evidence for and against God stack up with the evidence for and against the theory of evolution? You've probably heard only one side of the story. But if you'd like to examine the evidence in greater detail, be sure to read the free booklets *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* Both are yours free for the asking.



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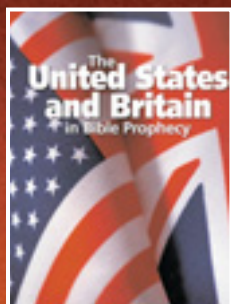
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What's Ahead for the United States?

"We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven . . . We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God . . . We have become . . . too proud to pray to the God that made us." — Abraham Lincoln



Is the world's most powerful nation—the United States of America—overlooked in Bible prophecy? Why are relatively small powers like Egypt, Syria and Lebanon mentioned, but no nation recognizable as the United States

can be found? What about other major English-speaking nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia?

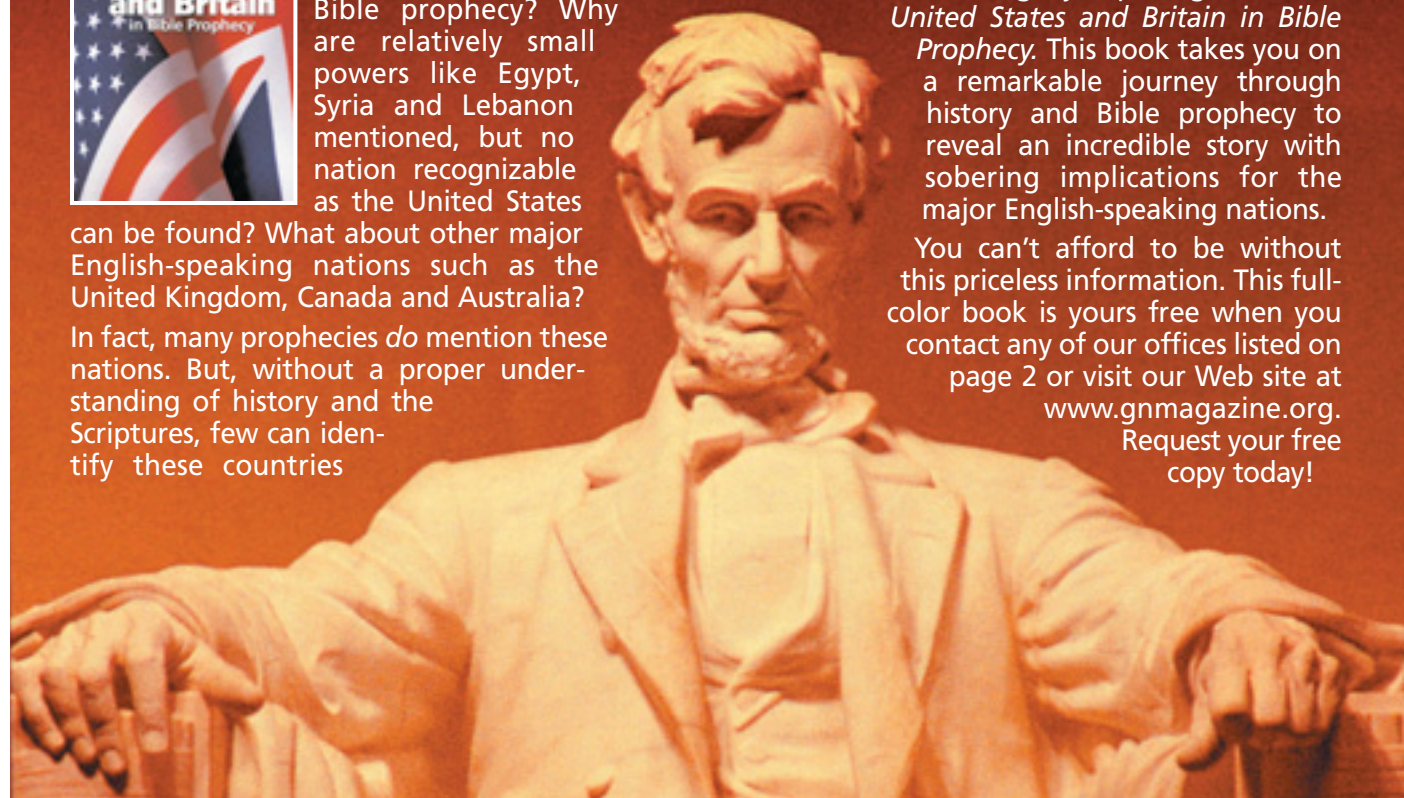
In fact, many prophecies *do* mention these nations. But, without a proper understanding of history and the Scriptures, few can identify these countries

and understand what lies ahead for them.

The publishers of *The Good News* have produced an astounding, eye-opening book, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. This book takes you on a remarkable journey through history and Bible prophecy to reveal an incredible story with sobering implications for the major English-speaking nations.

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