



The Good News

July/August 1996

Jerusalem 3000

An Uncertain Celebration

*Election-Year Challenges Face U.S. President • John: Apostle of Love
Respect: A Dying Virtue? • How Do We Know That We Love God?*

The Good News is published bimonthly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 444 E. Huntington Drive, Suite 206, Arcadia, CA 91066-3678. © 1996 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Arcadia, Calif. 91006, and at additional mailing offices.

The City of Truth

For the last issue, this column was written from Jerusalem in the days before the Israeli election. At that time it was a neck-an-neck race with much speculation about the short-term implications for peace in the region should Benjamin Netanyahu emerge as the winner. The election results were so close that Mr. Netanyahu won by a mere 29,507 votes out of 3.1 million—barely a mandate. The new prime minister moved quickly to reassure his Arab neighbors that the peace process would continue, thereby calming jittery voices of various persuasions.

But real peace of the lasting kind is not often found in this region. Benny Begin, son of former Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin, once told me that the Middle East is “a dangerous neighborhood.” And it has been for a long time. This geopolitical crossroads will remain a flashpoint mentioned more frequently in the news than other less strategically significant places on the globe. At the intersection of so many of the great power’s strategic interest, the land of the biblical peoples seems destined to continue its history of conflict.

Is that the reason the Bible names Jerusalem and the territory of the ancient Israelites so often in its prophetic passages? Does the Bible have anything valuable to tell us in the late 20th century about the future of the Middle East?

Home to three religions that claim common origins, the area surely cannot escape prophetic attention. The Bible’s pages are filled with such elements. From time to time *The Good News* will focus on those prophetic passages that illuminate our way in the often confusing rush of daily events. We all need an anchor, and the Bible can provide it. Bible prophecy examined in a measured and balanced way speaks to the action behind the news and gives an invaluable perspective on world events and trends.

In this issue Dan Taylor’s cover article on Jerusalem’s 3,000th- anniversary celebrations addresses the past, present and future of a city second to none in its emotive power over humanity. Not without reason does the Bible refer to Jerusalem as, among other things, “a very heavy stone for all peoples” (Zechariah 12:3) and the future “City of Truth” (Zechariah 8:3). The latter is what all people of goodwill seek for the world’s spiritual capital.

—David Hulme

Does the Bible have anything valuable to tell us in the late 20th century about the future of the Middle East?

Publisher: David Hulme

Managing editor: Scott Ashley

Copy editors: Dixon Cartwright, Peter Moore

Art director: Shaun Venish

Editorial reviewers:

John Bald, Robert Boraker, Roger Foster, Bruce Gore, Paul Kieffer, Rod McQueen, John Meakin, Brian Orchard, John Ross Schroeder, Richard Thompson, Lyle Welty, Dean Wilson

United Church of God Council of Elders:

Gary Antion, Robert Dick (chairman), Jim Franks, Roy Holladay, Doug Horchak, David Hulme, Victor Kubik, Dennis Luker, Burk McNair, Peter Nathan, Leon Walker, Donald Ward

Scriptural references are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers) unless otherwise noted.

Subscriptions: *The Good News* is sent automatically to members of the United Church of God and is free to all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the generous, voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, an International Association, and their co-workers. Donations are gratefully accepted and are tax-deductible in the United States. To request a subscription, call (818) 294-0800 or write to *The Good News*, United Church of God, P.O. Box 661780, Arcadia, CA 91066-1780, or to the international addresses below.

Personal contact: The United Church of God has almost 300 congregations and more than 450 ministers in virtually all U.S. states and many countries. For locations and times of services nearest you, write or call the addresses listed or dial our fax information service at (818) 294-0818. You can access our World Wide Web home page at <http://www.ucg.org/> on the Internet.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to *The Good News*, Box 661780, Arcadia, CA 91066-1780.

International addresses:

Australia: United Church of God—Australia
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia
Phone: 075 5 35 6030 Fax: 075 5 35 6106

Bahamas: United Church of God
P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: (809) 324-3169 Fax: (809) 364-5566

Canada: United Church of God,
an International Association
9251-8 Yonge St. No. 303,
Richmond Hill, ON L4C 9T3, Canada
Phone: (416) 231-9379, (800) 338-7779
Fax: (416) 231-8238

South Africa: United Church of God
P.O. Box 4345, 2125 Randburg, South Africa
Phone: 011 792-4601 Fax: 011 791-0711

Spanish-speaking areas: United Church of God
P.O. Box 458, Big Sandy, TX 75755, U.S.A.
Phone: (903) 636-4928

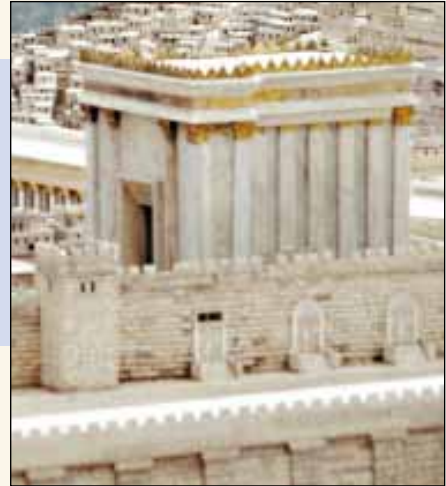
United Kingdom: United Church of God (UK)
P.O. Box 5929, Thatcham, Berkshire RG19 6YX,
United Kingdom
Phone: 01635-528063 Fax: 01635-522797

Table of Contents

Cover Feature

Jerusalem 3000: An Uncertain Celebration 4

As Jerusalem celebrates the 3,000th anniversary of King David's choice of the city as his capital, questions abound about the future of the city and the territory of David's ancient kingdom. Age-old antagonisms resurface regularly, often accompanied by violence, tragedy and bloodshed. Will this city, contested by conquerors and cultures over the millennia, ever find a true and lasting peace?



Model of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem 4

Archaeology and the City of David

Almost 160 years of excavations have confirmed many details of biblical accounts of the city's history. The Bible continues to be verified. 8



Resurgent problems in the Far East 12

King David: Man or Myth?

Was David, Israelite warrior-king, a historical figure? Archaeological discoveries show that he was a real ruler of ancient Israel. 10

U.S. Election-Year Challenges Beyond President's Control

In this election year, old problems in the Far East, Russia and the Middle East have resurfaced as if they had never gone away. 12

Reflections on the Dunblane Tragedy

A deranged man brings unimaginable horror to a quiet Scottish town. Is there a missing dimension in the suffering we see around us? 17

How Do We Know That We Love God?

Is love just a nice, warm feeling toward God, or is there more to it than that? The Bible is clear, and you need to understand this vital truth! 18

Respect: Is It a Dying Virtue?

Lack of respect is a growing problem in many societies. Are you teaching your children to show respect for others? Here are some practical tips. 26

What Happened to the Family Meal?

In today's busy society, enjoying the family meal together is becoming increasingly rare. Here's why it's worth saving—and how to save it. 28



Enjoying mealttime as a family 28

Regular Features

World News and Trends *Significant Developments Dot the World Scene* 14

Profiles in Faith *John: The Apostle of Love* 20

Understanding God's Word *What Is the Gospel?* 24

Letters From Our Readers 27

Just for Youth *Too Young to Die* 30

Jerusalem

An Uncertain Celebration

As Israel celebrates Jerusalem 3000, it is clear that political complexities have tied a Gordian knot the likes of which only divine intervention can sever.



A flock of sheep passes by Absalom's Pillar, an ancient tomb outside the Old City walls.



Churches of many religious faiths dot the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem.

em 3000

by Dan Taylor

About 3,000 years ago, David, son of Jesse, became king over the people of Israel. But he came to the throne of a divided nation. Israel was torn by tribal as well as family loyalties. Some had supported the family of David's predecessor, Saul, and some had shown loyalty to David. So David knew he had to try to bind up old wounds and unify his people.

After reigning over Israel for 7½ years from Hebron, deep in the tribal lands of Judah, David decided he and the nation as a whole needed a fresh start, so he captured the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem and made it his capital.

This bold move accomplished two things: It removed the last vestige of Canaanite power in the area. And, since no Israelite tribe had occupied the city for some time, Jerusalem gave David a neutral location from which to rule a united kingdom comprised of 12 tribes whose relationships continued to be strained with tribal jealousies and bickering. David's new capital not only became the unifying governmental and spiritual center of his people, it became—historically and prophetically—the geographic focal point of human history.

This year the modern nation of Israel is celebrating the trimillennial anniversary of the establishment of Jerusalem as David's capital. But, rather than being a celebration of unity as in David's time, Jerusalem 3000, as the festivities are called, ironically has become a source of division. In fact, critics of the celebration abound, and few aspects of the anniversary go unquestioned. Of all the ambivalence surrounding the celebration, nothing seems more uncertain than the future of the city that is at the heart of the celebration.

As Israel celebrates Jerusalem 3000, it is clear that local, national and international political complexities have tied a Gordian knot the likes of which only divine intervention can sever.



An olive grove and poppies decorate the slopes of the Mount of Olives.



Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock

A celebration mired in dispute

“United Jerusalem is ours! Jerusalem forever!” With those words September 4, 1995, the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin inaugurated Jerusalem 3000, a 16-month celebration leading up to January 12, 1997. Two months after his announcement, Mr. Rabin was dead, assassinated by a fellow Jew at a peace rally in Tel Aviv. The celebration he launched with such high hopes is now often ridiculed by Jews and non-Jews alike.

Not even the date of the celebration goes uncriticized. In the estimation of many laymen and scholars, the “3000” in Jerusalem 3000 is premature. Scholars from an ultrareligious Jewish sect, the Charedim (meaning “those who tremble”), believe that the anniversary of King David’s conquest of Jerusalem should not take place until the year 2132. Their date is based on the second-century *Sedar Olam Raba*—a document that charts Jewish history.

But, according to Israel’s Ben-Zvi Institute, “[t]he accepted date for this event is based on the account in the Bible, on archaeological data and on external sources, which confirm that it took place about 1004 B.C.E.” (before the common era, the equivalent of B.C.). Still other scholars insist the celebration is three to seven years off. Organizers acknowledge the controversy concerning the date of the celebration but note that, if nothing else, 1996 is a pretty good compromise.

Not even the schedule of cultural events has escaped criticism. Referring to the list of operas, symphonies and other musical performances planned for throughout the celebration, Jerusalem’s ultrareligious Deputy Mayor Meir Porush told the *Jerusalem Post*’s news service: “These celebrations have no Jewish content. They are good for Wash-

ington, D.C., but not for Jerusalem.”

on Jerusalem than its former mayor, Teddy Kollek, who managed the city from 1965 until his electoral defeat in 1993. Among other highly visible projects, Mr. Kollek helped found the Israel Museum and the Jerusalem Foundation. The latter funneled more than \$350 million into the physical transformation of the city into an international cultural center. In fact, one of Jerusalem’s most noted

port, Mayor Olmert, himself not ultrareligious, has favored Charedim politicians with many high local government appointments. This sect, which until recently avoided politics, now holds and exercises the balance of political power in Jerusalem—and it wants to make some changes.

First, with Charedim adherents fast increasing and housing hard to come by,



Detail of a scale model of Jerusalem and the magnificent temple built by King Solomon, son of David, after David made the city Israel’s capital.

architectural points of interest stems from a Kollek-era mandate (a holdover from British policy) that all buildings in the city be faced with local Jerusalem limestone. The result of that regulation gives Jerusalem its breathtakingly beautiful tawny glow at sunrise and especially at sunset.

As for Jerusalem 3000, this was to be

one of the first changes involves lifting the ban—stringently enforced during the Kollek years—on high-rise apartments. Next on their agenda is making the rule of law more responsive to conservative religious views. To fans of former mayor Kollek, this means that the wheels are in motion to turn Jerusalem into the center of Jewish fundamentalism.

Still more criticism

From the perspective of the Palestinian population of the city, Jerusalem 3000 is a celebration of Jewish control. The Arab community has pointed out that the only recognition given the Arab contributions to the city’s history is a single museum exhibit called The Contribution of Islam to Western Culture, Science and Art. No one was surprised that the Palestinians have boycotted the opening and subsequent celebrations.

One magazine editorial, noting the lack

To the Palestinian population of the city, Jerusalem 3000 is a celebration of Jewish control.

ington, D.C., but not for Jerusalem.”

The deputy mayor’s comment aptly illustrates not only the deep divisions over Jerusalem 3000 but the dramatic shift in the city’s political climate. Nowhere is that transformation felt more than in the ousting of a political icon.

Shift in city administration

Few men have left more of an imprint

the grand finale for Teddy, as the mayor was commonly called. Instead, Mr. Kollek’s successor, Ehud Olmert, is now running the event.

Mr. Olmert, a member of the conservative Likud Party, defeated Mr. Kollek with the help of the Charedim, Israel’s version of the American religious right. As a payback for the Charedim’s sup-

of recognition for Jerusalem's non-Jewish population in the celebration, said: "What's sad about this amnesia is that this ancient holy city deserves better. If Israel really wants to celebrate Jerusalem, and not just attract homesick tourist dollars . . . , it can further the peace process by recognizing the spiritual feelings of all its citizens" (*Glow*, September 4, 1995).

Another group conspicuously absent at

say or do anything that indicates that any of the world's politicians look upon East Jerusalem as anything other than occupied territory.

Even Zvi Raviv, the international coordinator of Jerusalem 3000, admits that many Palestinians and members of the diplomatic corps hold the impression that, in light of the peace process between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the celebration is not so much a commemoration of the establishment of King David's ancient capital as it is a slick diplomatic move to gain recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

But Mr. Raviv counters the idea by noting that the celebration was planned by the Kollek administration long before the Oslo peace agreement was signed on September 28, 1995.

Whose Jerusalem?

As a spiritual center for three of the world's religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—the city faces political realities more complex than those of most other cities on the planet. Jews and Arabs both point to long connections with Jerusalem. Their claims will be put to the test in the next round of bargaining in the peace process.

For Jerusalem's Palestinian

under Israeli sovereignty if the east side is under Palestinian sovereignty" ("Passions Set in Stone," by Paul Goldberger, *New York Times Magazine*, September 10, 1995, p. 76).

The official Israeli position views any such division of Jerusalem as out of the question. Mayor Olmert was quoted as saying, "If Jerusalem is split, the city will be destroyed—it will be a death penalty



Image Corel Professional Photos

All that remains of Herod's magnificent temple are foundations of the southern and western retaining wall, including what is known by some as the Wailing Wall.

As a spiritual center for three of the world's religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—the political realities for Jerusalem are more complex than those of most other cities.



AP/Wide World Photo

Part of the reality of life in Jerusalem. A terrorist bomb blew up this bus in March as part of a string of attacks in Israel.

the opening ceremonies was the diplomatic corps from the European Union. Many other diplomats have approached the celebration with extreme caution so no one will think they advocate Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. None wishes to lend support to any de-facto recognition of Israel's control. And none wishes to

population, the Oslo Agreement and the continuing peace process are much on their minds. To them, the single most important issue is sovereignty, and they make no bones about it. They want East Jerusalem to be the capital of their new state, and they offer a practical view of why this should be so.

"What good is it to control some area if you cannot go there except with guns, and you cannot enjoy life there?" said Faisal Hussein, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Jerusalem. "I think people want to enjoy life in Jerusalem, and not to have all this fighting go on. I accept that the west side of the city is

on the city." Yet, clearly, other Israelis seem to be willing to look at the issue. In a poll conducted by the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information in May 1995, 28 percent of Israeli adults said they were ready to accept some form of a division of sovereignty of Jerusalem.

The recent election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister of Israel has only further clouded the peace process between Israel and the PLO. The newly elected prime minister has made sweeping promises for strengthening and increasing Israeli settlements in occupied lands. And for those promises he received enormous and unexpected support from religious Jews. Concerning the

Continued on page 11

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE CITY OF DAVID

Perhaps more than any other academic discipline, archaeology has enlarged our understanding of the historical record in the Bible. Archaeologists have found some of their most spectacular artifacts in the City of David, an area of 12 square miles in the southeast part of modern-day Jerusalem.

From the earliest investigation, conducted by American Edward Robinson in 1838, to the extensive excavation under the direction of Yigal Shiloh from 1978 to 1982, archaeology has progressively and dramatically confirmed the biblical account—from both Old and New Testaments.

The City of David itself contains only a limited amount of material from the actual Davidic period of Iron Age I and II. To date, diggers have unearthed no evidence of Solomon's Temple.

The archaeological record of Jerusalem in the late 11th and early 10th centuries B.C. is not nearly as prolific as we might wish it were. Indeed, one of the noteworthy products of excavation in Jerusalem, commonly called the Tower of David, excavated by archaeologist R.A.S. Macalister in the 1920s, bears a title that can easily mislead. Although the tower's name associates the structure with Israel's most famous monarch, in fact only the lower courses of the tower are from the Davidic period. Most of this fortified edifice dates to the Maccabean period of the 2nd century B.C.

From the earliest investigation to the more recent extensive excavations, archaeology has progressively and dramatically confirmed the biblical accounts.

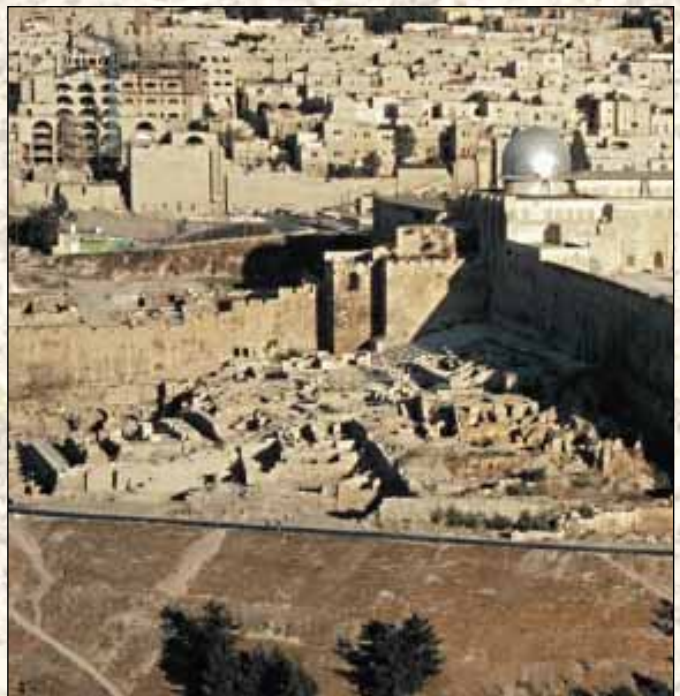
Other archaeological work convincingly documents the history of the Bible. In particular the grande dame of British biblical archaeology, Kathleen Kenyon, revealed an important archaeological feature from the time of David. In 1961 her excavation exposed a part of the Jebusite wall that surrounded Jerusalem when David took the city near the end of the 11th century B.C. (see 2 Samuel 5:6, 7).

Stealthy fighter

Relevant to this same episode, another discovery numerous archaeologists have examined has supported fascinating speculation about the account of Joab's stealthy entry into Jebusite Jerusalem. The event, related in 2 Samuel 5, occurred near the beginning of David's reign over all 12 Israelite tribes. David had offered to reward the man who took Jerusalem by appointing him leader over Israel's army. David's own nephew, Joab, achieved this seemingly impossible feat

by gaining entrance into the city through the *tsinnor*, loosely translated "gutter" (verse 8) in the King James Version of the Bible and "water shaft" in the New King James Version.

This reference quite possibly describes a subterranean Jebusite water shaft discovered in 1867 by Englishman Capt. Charles Warren. Joab may well have discovered the underground passageway leading to the shaft, then scaled it to gain entry into the city. To demonstrate the possibility of such a feat, one member of the Capt. Montague Parker Mission (1909-1911) climbed the shaft from top to bottom. Though archaeologists still are not certain they have found the right shaft, the wedding of the biblical account and the particular geological feature of the city raises interesting



Jerusalem is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and was occupied long before David made it his capital. Numerous archaeological excavations, like these at the base of the Temple Mount area, have been carried out over the years.

possibilities.

Another major feature, not to mention popular tourist attraction, beneath the City of David is Hezekiah's Tunnel. This underground channel is associated with the reign of Judah's 8th-century (B.C.) king and religious reformer Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:2-4). Edward Robinson was the first man in modern times to explore it. Many others, scholars and tourists alike, have followed in Robinson's footsteps.

Again, the evidence is subject to interpretation, but the tunnel may well be part of a comprehensive defensive response to a late-8th-century Assyrian invasion, first of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and later the kingdom of Judah. The latter military campaign is described in 2 Kings 18:9-19:37 and Isaiah 36:37. The discovery of the Nahaman Avigad excavation of 1970 is generally considered evidence of the story in 2 Chronicles 32:5, describing significant work on the 8th-century city wall. Hezekiah's concern about an impending military threat is evidenced by the remnants of a wall that expanded to the south and west, considerably beyond the boundaries of the City of David (Isaiah 22:9-11).

This enlarging of the wall suggests that the population of Jerusalem swelled during the years before the Assyrian invasion of Judah. No doubt the project was in part the result of refugees from the falling Northern Kingdom relocating in Jerusalem. Perhaps some Jews as well left the hinterland of the kingdom to seek safety in the capital.

It is plausible that Hezekiah, anticipating the Assyrian onslaught, took measures to ensure a steady water supply should Jerusalem be put to siege. And well he should have; King Sennacherib's Assyrian forces overran the kingdom. According to the biblical record and the Taylor Cylinder (a small cylinder-shaped clay tablet from Sennacherib's archives inscribed with a version of the story of the siege of Jerusalem), Hezekiah found himself, albeit temporarily, trapped like a bird in a cage.

Inscription found

The serpentine tunnel itself runs from the intermittent Gihon Spring, just outside the northeast wall of the City of David, and winds some 1,750 feet before resurfacing at the Pool of Siloam. Evidently Hezekiah's workmen constructed this engineering marvel by tunneling from opposite ends and meeting near the middle. To commemorate such a landmark achievement, someone left a Hebrew inscription on the rock wall near where the two teams of tunnelers eventually met.

When discovered in 1880 near the Pool of Siloam, it was almost entirely preserved. This "Siloam inscription," now housed at the Museum of the Ancient Orient in Istanbul, reads:

"When the tunnel was driven through. And this was the way in which it was cut through: while . . . were still . . . axes, each man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut through, there was heard the voice of a man calling to his fellow, for there was an overlap in the rock on the right and on the left. And when the tunnel was driven through the quarrymen hewed the

rock, each man toward his fellow, ax against ax; and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for 1,200 cubits, and the height of the rock above the heads of the quarrymen was 100 cubits."

The Bible, apparently referring to this engineering marvel, says: "Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah—all his might, and how he made a pool and a tunnel and brought water into the city—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" (2 Kings 20:20).

The above examples identify only some of the significant archaeological discoveries scientists have

To commemorate the digging of Hezekiah's Tunnel, an ancient tunneler left an inscription on the rock wall where the two teams of tunnelers eventually met.

unearthed in or near the City of David. Christians can be grateful for the evidence archaeological excavation provides. It inspires faith in the infallible Word of God. **GN**

—Rick Sherrod, Ph.D.

Major Archaeological Excavations in Jerusalem

1838	Edward Robinson	Hezekiah's Tunnel
1864, 1867	Charles Warren, Charles Wilson, Claude R. Conder	Hezekiah's Tunnel and Jebusite shaft
1886	Conrad Schick	Solomonic irrigation channel
1894-1897	F.J. Bliss A.C. Dickie	Byzantine church above Pool of Siloam
1909-1911	Parker Mission	Hezekiah's Tunnel and Jebusite shaft
1913-1914, 1923-1924	Raymond Weill	Tombs believed to be of kings of Judah
1923-1925	R.A.S. Macalister	Tower of David
1961-1967	Kathleen Kenyon	Jebusite city
1968-1982	Benjamin Mazar	Temple Mount area
1970	Nahaman Avigad	Hezekiah's wall
1978-1982	Yigal Shiloh	Gihon water system

This lists only the most prominent excavations in the area of Jerusalem. Many other excavations are not listed.

KING DAVID: MAN OR MYTH?

Suddenly, as David and his men finished climbing the last hill, there it was, the mighty fortress of Jebus, later called Jerusalem. It was not then under Israelite control, but, as in the days of Joshua, the city was a stronghold of the Jebusites.

What chance did David have of conquering the city? Perhaps the reply of the Jebusites can give the best indication. They taunted him: “You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you,” thinking, “David cannot come in here” (2 Samuel 5:6). They were so confident of their impenetrable stronghold, they shouted to David they would not even put their best men on the walls to defend the city but would man them with the weakest and most sickly among them.

Yet, as often happens in life and warfare, in their confidence, they overlooked a weak spot that would prove fatal. At the bottom of the hill of the city was a cave that had a natural spring inside. Since water was so vital, the Jebusites had dug a shaft downward to tap this water. David realized that, if someone could go up the shaft, he could secretly enter the city and open the doors. David said: “Whoever climbs up by way of the water shaft and defeats the Jebusites . . . shall be chief and captain . . . Then David dwelt

Stela. Discovered in 1868, unfortunately it was broken into pieces and it has taken much time and effort to piece together the original words. In 1995 scholar Andre Lemaire finally put it all together and discovered the words “House of David.” In line 31 of the Moabite Stone are the words “. . . the sheep of the land. And the house [of Da]vid dwelt in Horonen” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, May-June, 1994, p. 33).

The article continues: “The recent discovery at Tel Dan of a fragment of a stela containing a reference to the ‘House of David’ (that is, the dynasty of David) is indeed sensational and deserves all the publicity it has received. The Aramaic inscription, dated to the ninth century [B.C.], was originally part of a victory monument erected at Dan, apparently by an enemy of both the ‘King of Israel’ (also referred to in the fragment) and the ‘[King of the] House of David.’ The inscription easily establishes the importance of Israel and Judah on the international scene at this time—no doubt to the chagrin of those modern scholars who maintain that nothing in the Bible before the Babylonian exile can lay claim to any historical accuracy . . . Nearly two years before the discovery of the Tel Dan fragment, I [Lemaire] concluded that the Mesha stela contains a reference to the

In spite of the account of David's life and exploits recorded in the Bible, some critics doubt that King David actually existed.

in the stronghold, and called it the City of David . . .” (2 Samuel 5:8, 9). The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 11:6 adds: “And Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, and became chief.”

David’s soldiers conquered Jerusalem. Soon David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, setting the stage for the construction of the temple under Solomon. In so doing David gave his people a rallying point they have looked to for centuries.

Thus, around the year 1000 B.C., Jerusalem became Israel’s capital and David its first king. This water shaft, which enabled David to capture the city, can still be seen by modern-day visitors.

In spite of the account of David’s life and exploits recorded in the Bible, some critics doubt that King David actually existed. As one of them candidly admits, “I am not the only scholar who suspects that the figure of King David is about as historical as King Arthur” (Philip R. Davies, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July-August, 1994, p. 55). Recently, however, archaeological discoveries have verified that David, king of Israel, was indeed a real historical figure.

In 1993 a fragment of a monument was found at the site of the ancient Israelite city of Dan that mentioned David and his dynasty dating to about 100 years after David’s death. As *Biblical Archaeology Review* reports: “Avraham Biran and his team of archaeologists found a remarkable inscription from the 9th century [B.C.] that refers both to the ‘House of David’ and to the ‘King of Israel.’ This is the first time that the name David has been found in any ancient inscription outside the Bible. That the inscription refers not simply to a ‘David’ but to the House of David, the dynasty of the great Israelite king is even more remarkable” (March-April, 1994, p. 26).

Then another mention of King David was found in a monument of about the same time. It is called the Moabite Stone or the Mesha



Woodcut by Gustav Doré

In one mighty act of valor and faith, the young shepherd David thrust himself into the history of Israel by slaying the giant, Goliath.

‘House of David.’ Now the Tel Dan fragment tends to support this conclusion” (ibid., pp. 31, 32).

Slowly, as more excavations bring to light new material, the biblical record continues to gain solid historical backing. So far, archaeology has confirmed the existence of the following kings of Israel and Judah: Omri, Ahab, Jeroboam II, Jehu, Pekah, Hoshea, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manasseh. Now David is also placed in this growing list of historically confirmed kings and no longer viewed as a myth. **GN**

—Mario Seiglie

Jerusalem

Continued from page 7

issue of Jerusalem specifically, Netanyahu noted in his victory speech the special connection of the Jewish past with the present and applied it specifically to Jerusalem. Mr. Netanyahu called Jerusalem “the eternal capital of the Jewish people and the city that will never be divided again . . .”

Mr. Netanyahu’s election has left many Arab nations cautious at best about further progress toward peace. The threat of violence will loom large if the new Netanyahu government is perceived as renegeing on negotiating in good-faith issues like the status of Jerusalem—issues that were being discussed with the previous Labor government. At this point, Palestinians are relying on foreign governments—especially the United States—to pressure the Israelis to continue the course set by the Rabin-Peres administration.

It is not yet clear what will be the result of the political, social and religious forces at work in Jerusalem. Surely the most difficult issue of the coming peace talks will center on Jerusalem. With the potential for at least a tense peace or another hot war in the Middle East, the stakes for Israelis, Palestinians and the rest of the world are enormous.

Anciently, the Hebrew prophet Zechariah wrote that “it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:3). His words echo with a striking resonance in today’s circumstances.

What lies ahead for Jerusalem?

Over the centuries, Jerusalem has endured the boot of many an occupying army. Jesus Christ foretold the devastation of Jerusalem that occurred in A.D. 70 by Titus’s Roman legions. “Do you not see all these things?” Christ asked His disciples while surveying the buildings of the temple complex. “Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:1, 2). All that remain today of Herod the Great’s once magnificent temple complex are the foundation stones of the western

and southern retaining walls of the temple enclosure.

After predicting for His disciples the destruction of the temple, Jesus led them out of the city and up to the Mount of Olives for a private conversation. There He answered their questions about the sign of His second coming and of the end of the age. He told them of intervening wars and rumors of wars, of nation rising up against nation, of tribulation and persecution and of a time of the preaching of the gospel message—the good news of the coming Kingdom of God—to all the nations as a witness, “and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:3-15). Christ went on to tell of a terrible war that will befall Judea (verses 16-21).

Sobering times indeed lie ahead. But the good news for Jerusalem—and for other bloodstained cities like Beirut, Sarajevo and Belfast—is that the story doesn’t end there. There is indeed wonderful news ahead.

The book of Zechariah includes a heartening prophecy concerning Jerusalem. In the 14th chapter we read that God says He will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem, and the city will fall. But, as all hope seems lost, we read in verse 3 that “in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.” And in verse 5 we read, “Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You.”

This joyous passage concerning the Messiah’s dramatic return gives hope to Jerusalem and all mankind. It closes with the profound statement that “Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited” (verse 11).

Something to celebrate

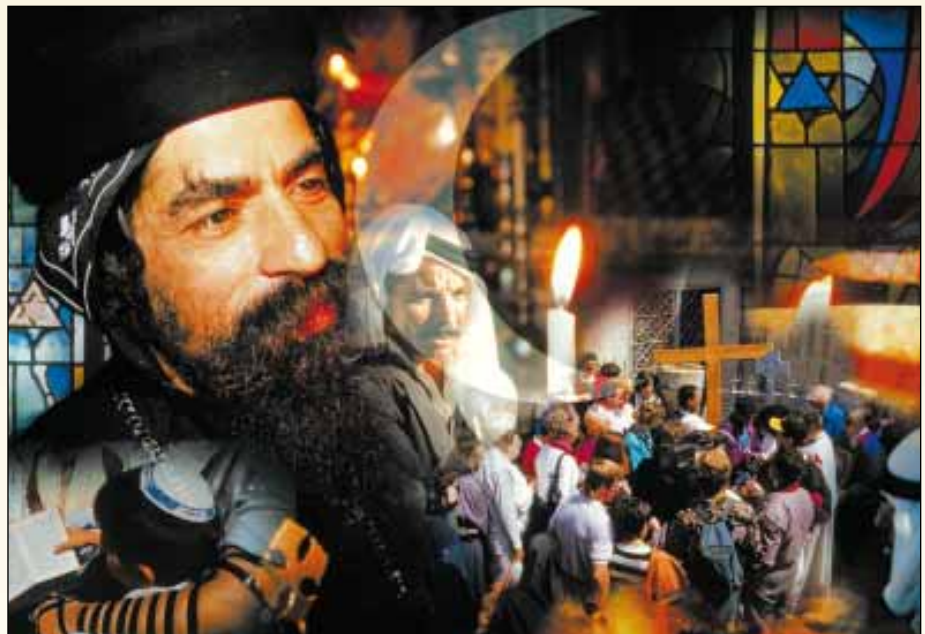
Is a time of peace and safety possible in Jerusalem? According to Bible prophecy, yes, it is possible. No longer a “heavy stone” (Zechariah 12:3) for the nations, Jerusalem will stand as a model city for the entire world. Only under the righteous government of God, administered through Jesus Christ, will such a time arrive.

Jesus will bring to fulfillment such prophetic passages as Isaiah 60 and Ezekiel 40-48, which picture a glorious future for Jerusalem. David, the king who brought peace to Israel 3,000 years ago, will be resurrected to eternal life and will lead the nation, under Christ, to peace once more (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 37:24, 25). Under the glorious rule of Jesus Christ, the city will become the religious capital of the world (Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 14:16, 17).

The Jerusalem of the Kingdom of God will be all that King David, and the celebrants of Jerusalem 3000, could have hoped for—and more.

The modern Jewish state’s celebration of Jerusalem 3000 is a far cry from the event that took place in David’s era. The

Continued on page 16



Jerusalem, which has seen many cultures in its 3,000-year history, is revered by three major religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

U.S. Election-Year Challenges Beyond President's Control

by Melvin Rhodes

Former president George Bush optimistically talked of "a new world order" after the fall of the Soviet Union five years ago. His successor, President Bill Clinton, appeared ready to reap the financial and other benefits of presiding over a nation no longer threatened by another major power. But, in this election year, suddenly old problems are reemerging that seem beyond the president's control or influence. Problems in the Far East, Russia and the Middle East are back with us as if they had never gone away.

In this election year, suddenly old problems are reemerging that seem beyond the president's control. Problems in the Far East, Russia and the Middle East are back with us as if they had never gone away.

Other nations have seen the People's Republic of China as a threat ever since Mao Tse-tung's communist forces took control of the Chinese mainland in 1949. Mao's successors may be in the process of switching to a free-market economy, but the ruling dictatorship remains and is once again flexing its muscles.

The major issue this year has been Taiwan, classed as a renegade province by the leaders in Beijing. Mao's defeated enemies fled to the offshore island of Taiwan back in 1949 and continued their "Republic of China" with U.S. military backing. The defeated Chinese nationalists on Taiwan always claimed the mainland, and the communists in control of the mainland always claimed Taiwan. But not anymore.

Now the Taiwanese want independence. Their country is one of the greatest success stories of Asia, with foreign-currency reserves exceeded only by Japan's, making Taiwan one of the richest countries in the world. The Taiwanese want to preserve their capitalist system as well as the democracy that has only recently been introduced there.

Why has independence become an issue? It is partly because of Hong Kong. This British colony is to revert to China at the end of June 1997, after 156 years of British rule. Although the Chinese have

promised to preserve Hong Kong's way of life for 50 years after the takeover, these promises ring hollow to many observers. The inhabitants of Hong Kong fear excessive governmental control resulting in loss of freedom and the collapse of their sophisticated economy, the third most vibrant in the world.

Taiwanese fear that, once China has reclaimed Hong Kong and then Portuguese Macao (scheduled to revert to China on the last day of 1999 after four centuries of Portuguese rule), Chinese attention will turn to Taiwan. Thus the Taiwanese push for independence, but are resisted by Beijing.

Few realize that Taiwan belonged to *Japan* before and during World War II, so the country has a history of separation from the mainland.

Beijing is also concerned about Taiwan's successful democratic election earlier this year, the first free election conducted by a nation of Chinese people. The people of China have not forgotten the stu-



Mainland China launches missiles into waters off the coast of Taiwan during military exercises.

AP/Wide World Photo

dent pro-democracy movement the government crushed in 1989 with loss of life and resulting international condemnation.

China is not the only cause for concern in Washington. China's ally, North Korea, is making threatening noises directed at its neighbor, South Korea, a nation that also depends on the United States for security.

Old battle No. 2

Meanwhile, on a different part of the globe, another chronic problem area has again flared into open conflict.

At a conference of world leaders in Egypt earlier this year in response to a wave of suicide bombings in Israel, Islamic fundamentalist terrorism was

compromise is not likely, in spite of Western leaders' constant attempts to mediate peace.

Jerusalem itself continues as a great cause of division. In words reminiscent of those spoken by the prophet Jeremiah—"Peace, peace!" when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14)—the mayor of Jerusalem lamented that his city is the focus of conflict even as politicians talk peace.

In Luke 21: 20 we see that Jerusalem is destined to be a major battleground at the time of the end, just before Christ's return. Armies have often fought over Jerusalem, but the last 50 years have seen dramatically increased contention and bloodshed as the young Jewish state has

dead, increased the pressure for a Jewish homeland. The modern nation of Israel came into being in May 1948 as a result of a partitioning of Palestine. The partition was imposed by the United Nations aided by the administration of U.S. President Harry Truman. Israel immediately faced a war for survival against the armies of its Arab neighbors.

Further wars followed, in 1956, 1967 and 1973. In the last 20 years Israel has gained recognition from neighboring states once hostile to its existence. Some nations still want to see Israel removed and are willing to help Palestinians seeking retribution for loss of land in 1948. Among those most hostile to Israel are the Islamic leaders (mullahs) who overthrew the shah of Iran in 1979.

Continuing support by the mullahs for Hezbollah, a Palestinian organization based in Lebanon, has enabled the Hezbollah to stage devastating terrorist attacks on civilians inside Israel. Israel retaliated with massive bombing raids on southern Lebanon late in April in an attempt to destroy a Hezbollah support base. A cease-fire was arranged after international intervention, but the problem is far from solved.

We need to keep our eyes on the Middle East.

Old battle No. 3

Add to Asia and the Middle East the possibility of a return to communism in Russia. Recent campaigns and elections have shown that many people are dissatisfied with incumbent Russian President Boris Yeltsin, and many are turning to communist candidates for solutions to the country's problems.

In presidential elections held June 15, President Yeltsin garnered 35 percent of the vote compared to 32 percent for communist party challenger Gennady Zyuganov. Since none of the 10 presidential candidates received a majority, much is at stake in the runoff between Yeltsin and Zyuganov to determine Russia's next president.

Little attention was given in the press to the recent decision by the Duma—the Russian parliament—to resurrect the Soviet Union, dismantled in December 1991. By a vote of 250-98, elected members of the Duma voted to restore the old

Continued on page 16



AP/Wide World Photo

In what many believe was a show of intimidation, thousands of communist-Chinese soldiers participate in military exercises on China's coast in March just before the landmark Taiwanese elections.

confronted by unified international rhetoric, but by little else. Virtually nothing can be done to prevent suicide bombers from taking their own lives along with the lives of as many of their enemies as possible. The freedoms we value in the Western world make responding to terrorism difficult.

At stake is Palestine, the area many Christians refer to as the Holy Land, most of which is now a part of or governed by the Jewish state of Israel. Many Islamic fundamentalists want to see nothing less than Israel's destruction. With such deep division, meaningful

sought to establish itself and gain recognition from its neighbors.

From the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in A.D. 70 until well into this century, the historical lands of Judea and Israel were not occupied by people of Jewish descent. Jews started returning to their former homeland late in the 19th century with the rise of the Zionist movement. After the First World War, with Palestine then under British control, the Jewish population of the area increased to about 500,000.

The Nazi holocaust in World War II, which left six million European Jews



New Three-Pronged Axis on the Rise in Europe?

The concept of a European army—separate and entirely apart from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—has been in and out of the news for at least 10 years.

A small conference on a standing army for Europe occurred five years ago at Weimar in former East Germany. Reports Britain's *The Independent*: "In the town of Weimar in 1991 the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland gathered to inaugurate a new alliance. Their meeting went almost unnoticed by the rest of Europe, but the foreign ministers of the three

The idea of some Euro-federalists is to merge all the national sovereign armies (including Britain's) into a single supranational force with the German heartland at its natural geographic center.

countries have continued to meet annually to devise a common security concept."

Some British observers now talk of a new axis, an alignment of France, Germany and Poland. Britain has not been included in annual discussions of the alliance. Margaret Thatcher, former British prime minister, consistently opposed a common European army that would be an essential component in a European federal state with its own foreign and defense policy.

The idea of some Euro-federalists is to merge all the national sovereign armies (including Britain's) into a single supranational force with the German heartland at its natural geographic center. But, as the *Independent* article pointed out, "France, Germany and Poland have repeatedly been the area for European aggression and war."

Memories of this area tend to be of armed conflict. Could some of these events in central Europe eventually result in history repeating itself? (Sources: *The Independent*, *The Sunday Telegraph*.)

The Environment in Retreat

In spite of some notable successes here and there in the world, the public often has the uneasy, even unspoken, feeling that we are gradually losing ground in the war against pollution and environmental damage to our precious planet. Now even advisers to national governments are confirming our worst fears.

Says Tom Burke (formerly of Friends of the Earth and now an adviser to a British cabinet minister): "Successes of the past 25 years have been mere tactical victories in a long retreat for the environment." Official reports show, for instance, that European Union countries are not meeting targets set at the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro four years ago. (Source: *The Independent*.)

The Resurgence of Infectious Diseases

Keep a watchful eye on old diseases we thought we had mostly conquered—and potentially many new ones. Says the World Health Organization in its 1996 report, "The world is facing a crisis over infectious diseases which kill at least 17 million people a year." These maladies include cholera, pneumonia, typhoid, malaria, hepatitis and AIDS. A growing resistance to drugs is a big part of the problem.

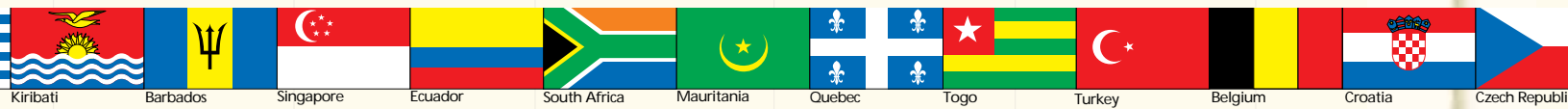
A disturbing factor is our global response to 20th-century diseases. According to an article in *The Independent*: "Despite the emergence of some 30 new diseases in the last 20 years, there is still a lack of national and international political will and resources to develop and support the systems necessary to detect them and stop their spread. Without doubt, diseases as yet unknown,

Despite the emergence of some 30 new diseases in the last 20 years, there is still a lack of national and international political will and resources to develop and support the systems necessary to detect them and stop their spread.

but with the potential to be the AIDS of tomorrow, lurk in the shadows."

Remember that disease epidemics are represented by one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse as recorded in the Bible. (Sources: *The Independent*, *The Times of London*.)





Adult Men Linked to Teen Births

Contrary to popular perception, adult men, not fellow teenagers, father most babies born to teen mothers in the United States.

Results of a California study appearing in *The American Journal of Public Health* showed that almost two thirds of babies born to teenage girls were fathered by men four to six years older than the girls themselves.

"Most people always assumed a couple of teens fooling around" caused a teen pregnancy, said researcher Mike Males of the University of California, Irvine. "But these are adult men, not [teenagers] in school, not part of the programs and countermeasures that groups have set up to fight teen pregnancy . . . It's a real complicating factor."

More than 500,000 babies are born to U.S. teens annually. (Source: The Associated Press.)

World Sets Good and Bad Records in 1995

The world set both good and bad records in 1995, according to the Worldwatch Institute's annual report, "Vital Signs 1996." The report focuses strongly on what the institute sees as evidence of worsening global climate problems, including grain shortages, mounting insurance claims and anticipated rising food prices.

"In an era of high technology, humanity is suddenly struggling in 1996 with one of the most ancient of challenges: how to make it to the next harvest," warns Lester Brown, leader of the environmental research group for the last two decades.

Citing statistics from both government and private sources, the institute reports records in 1995 for several factors central to human welfare:

- The global grain harvest was the worst since 1988, and world grain reserves—the amount of grain available to humanity if all grain production ceased—reached an all-time low of only 48 days' consumption.

- World meat production reached a new high, putting even greater pressure on grain production. Meat consumption continues to grow in Asia, where population growth and prosperity are bringing rapid increases in demand.

- Insurance companies paid out \$48 billion for weather-related damage in the first half of the 1990s, compared to \$16 billion for the entire decade of the 1980s.

- A record 4.7 million people contracted HIV infections, with most new cases appearing in Asia.

- A record 6.1 billion tons of fossil fuels was consumed, in spite of international agreements to limit carbon emissions into the atmosphere.

- The world population continued to set new records, increasing by 87 million to 5.732 billion total. The population of developing nations increased by more than 80 million.

- The global climate was the warmest since systematic records began to be kept 130 years ago. The average worldwide temperature hit 59.70 degrees Fahrenheit (15.39 degrees Celsius).

Positive developments cited in the report included a 2 percent increase in average annual personal income, to about \$3,500 per person worldwide. The report also noted the spread of democracy, citing several countries that held their first elections or made significant movements toward democracy. (Source: The Associated Press.)

U.S. Society Pays High Price for Crime

Crime costs the United States at least \$450 billion annually, according to the first U.S. Justice Department report to try to calculate the cost of domestic violence and child abuse along with other crimes including murder, robbery and rape.

The report measures such out-of-pocket costs as legal fees, police work and lost work time as well as such intangibles as mental-health-care costs and reduced quality of life for crime victims

According to a United States Justice Department report, the total yearly cost of crime in the United States amounts to almost \$500 billion.

and their families. These figures were released in "Victim Costs and Consequences: A New Look," a report sponsored by the National Institute of Justice, the U.S. Justice Department's research division.

The report excludes the costs of the nation's jails, prisons and probation and parole systems, which add another \$40 billion to the cost of crime, according to Justice Department statistics, bringing the total yearly cost of crime in the United States to almost \$500 billion.

To put this sum in perspective, this estimated total cost of crime is almost double the entire 1995 U.S. Defense Department's budget of \$252.6 billion. (Source: *The New York Times*.) *GN*

—Scott Ashley and John Ross Schroeder



Challenges

Continued from page 13

Soviet Union. The vote is not binding on the president. But a change in the Russian leadership could result in yet another name change for the country.

It is not the name that matters so much as the people's perception. After centuries of dictatorship the Russian people are unaccustomed to the democratic process. And they know that in the five years since the collapse of the communist system prices have soared, unemployment has worsened, crime and violence are endemic, and the country's standing in the world has declined.

The simple solution in the minds of some people is to restore the Soviet Union. It is no more realistic a solution than for Americans to restore the British monarchy in the hope that the country will return to pre-1776 levels of crime.

But a return to communism could happen. What would be the consequences? Initially, great fear would emerge in many of the former Soviet republics, now independent nations like Ukraine and the Baltic states. Fear would also likely arise farther afield, among the old Soviet-dominated nations of the Warsaw Pact. A return of communists to power in Russia would send shivers down the spines of most Europeans and would result in greater enthusiasm for a united Europe.

The only other experiment with multi-party democracy in Russia was in 1917. It lasted eight months. Other nations in the Eastern bloc of communist countries are more European in their thinking and will want to continue on the path of reform. Pressure will increase on the West to allow them to seek membership in the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth addressed the Polish parliament at the end of March, pledging British support for Poland's membership in both organizations. Visits to other nations in the former communist bloc are likely to result in similar promises. Russia is opposed. A war of words is likely over the issue, but Russia is not prepared for a conflict on the international front.

Problems closer to home

A worst-case scenario for Mr. Clinton,

then, is that all these problems come to a head at the same time, before the November U.S. elections.

Domestically, President Clinton may not fare much better. In spite of a surprisingly strong economy, rising fuel and food prices are issues that could affect



AP/Wide World Photo

Russian president Boris Yeltsin has been blamed by many Russians for increasing economic problems since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

the election. They are also problems no president or Congress can do much about. Changing weather patterns resulted in one of the worst winters on record, with increased demand for heating fuel, which in turn drove up prices. The same weather problems resulted in fresh-food-price increases averaging 43 percent over last spring.

A substantial tax cut would help people maintain their standard of living, but some fear that could be achieved only by controversial cuts in government programs or raising the already high budget deficit. (Others believe lower taxes would increase government revenues as more money in circulation and controlled by companies and individuals revved up the economy.)

Added to people's worries are concerns among the electorate over corporate downsizing. As big companies shed tens of thousands of jobs—many of them high-paying, white-collar positions—secure, long-term employment with one company is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. American companies must increasingly compete with rivals around the world, many of which pay their employees lower wages with few or no benefits.

Domestically and internationally, there may be little room to maneuver regardless of who is in the White House. **GN**

Jerusalem

Continued from page 11

arguments and political implications concerning the gala have served only to heighten differences. Sadly, much potentially historic significance has been lost in all of the bickering.

When David was crowned king of Israel in Hebron, he began a healing process. We read in 1 Chronicles 11:1-3 of his coronation acclamation: "Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. Also, in time past, even when Saul was king, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD your God said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over My people Israel.'"

In many ways, David's long-awaited coronation foreshadowed a far greater coronation than his own: that of Jesus



Woodcut by Gustav Doré

Many inhabitants mourn over Jerusalem's ruins after the city's destruction by Babylonian invaders in 587 B.C.

Christ, the descendant of David. As ancient Israel had to await David's rulership to be unified, humanity awaits the return of Jesus Christ to turn from living a way of confrontation to one of cooperation. As David became the shepherd of his people, Jesus Christ will return as the loving Shepherd, not only of Israel, but of all mankind. He will heal and unify a world torn by strife and sin. Jerusalem will at last see true and lasting peace. **GN**

Reflections on the Dunblane Tragedy

Was the massacre of innocent schoolchildren in Scotland only an isolated incident, or is it an indicator of a much greater problem?

by John Meakin

I will never forget March 13, 1996. I had been out most of the day and returned home around 10 p.m., just as the evening news was beginning. My wife and son were transfixed in front of the television. It was soon obvious why they wore looks of shock, horror and disbelief.

Over the next 30 minutes, I watched as the grim story unfolded. An unprecedented disaster had taken place that day in a quiet Scottish town, a town that I personally knew.

A local man had run amok with four handguns. He rampaged through the local school firing indiscriminately, then entered the gymnasium, where he systematically began slaughtering the first-grade children and their teachers. It was later revealed that more than 100 spent cartridge cases were found at the scene. The gunman killed or wounded 31 before turning a weapon on himself to take his own life.

That night it was impossible not to shed tears for delicate little lives snuffed out so brutally—

horror were painfully exposed and explored. Families and a quiet community known for its peace struggled to come to terms with their shattered world and overwhelming grief.

“Why?” became the dominant question. Why such violence? And why did this happen to so many utterly defenseless, innocent children? The parents, families, news media, government and nation all asked the same question. The stark message on one of hundreds of sprays of flowers asked simply, “Why?” Why did such an appalling evil take place in such a quiet, peaceful town?

Many issues were raised: control of firearms; school security; the man’s twisted character and tortured psyche; his family upbringing; his psychological profile. Every effort will be made to understand why it happened and to learn lessons that can prevent similar tragedies from occurring. An official inquiry examined the event in painstaking detail.

Examining the spiritual dimension

Sadly, Dunblane is not the first, nor will it be the last, occasion when something snaps inside an inadequate, deranged mind and an explosion of violence rips apart multiple lives.

There is an important spiritual dimension to consider and understand in this tragedy. Yet this element will go largely unreported because it is so little comprehended.

Why did this happen? What is the spiritual dimension behind such evil? It all has to do with the nature of man and the forces that act upon us. This is not an attempt at some trite solution that ignores important sensitivities of this tragic situation. But so much flows from correctly understanding our nature: It is one more vitally important angle to take into account when we consider the underlying roots of this and similar disasters.

Dunblane caused many to ask where was God in all this. Did He care at all? Why didn’t

Continued on page 31

There is an important spiritual dimension to understand. Yet this element in this tragedy will go largely unreported because it is so little comprehended.



as well as tears for the shattered lives of tortured parents, tears for the grieving families and tears for the devastated community.

The school’s headmaster, Ron Taylor, commented memorably: “Evil visited us yesterday. We don’t know why, we don’t understand it, and I guess we never will.” The sheer numbing horror of it all stunned a town, disgraced a shocked nation and dominated news headlines around the world.

Over the ensuing days, the facts behind the

How Do We Know That We Love God?

The Bible states over and over again exactly how we are to demonstrate our love to God. The simple answer may surprise you!

by Lyle Welty

How do we know we genuinely love God? That probably seems like an odd question to most of us. Of course, we love God, and we just know that we love Him.

But is that good enough? Is it enough to just know and feel that we love God? Is anything else involved?

Actually, the Bible—God’s inspired Word—is clear about how we show love to God. It is specific about what we are to do to demonstrate that love.

God created people to have a loving relationship with Him. God reveals Himself to us as our heavenly Father and calls us His sons and daughters, His very children. God desires a family relationship with us, with His showing love to us and our showing love to Him.

God is in the process of “bringing many sons to glory” so that He and mankind can ultimately be “of the same family” (Hebrews 2:10, 11, New International Version).

Is love just a warm, nice feeling toward God, or is there more to it? Is it enough to just know and feel that we love God? Is anything else involved?

Mutually exclusive testaments?

Most people view this close, loving God-mankind relationship as an exclusively New Testament concept and think of the Old Testament as strictly a relationship of law and enforced obedience. But is this view accurate? Are love and obedience really two mutually exclusive concepts, as many seem to think?

To answer these questions we need to ask ourselves what kind of relationship has God always wanted with mankind.

A lawyer asked Jesus Christ a vital question: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Christ said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”

The lawyer quoted from the Ten Commandments: “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”

Jesus replied to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28).

As we just read, the man asked Jesus Christ, “What shall I do to inherit *eternal life*?” Eternal life was the issue. The man quoted two Old Testament scriptures, found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Christ’s response may be surprising to some: He assured the man that he had given the correct answer and added, “Do this and you will live.”

So, to gain eternal life, it is clear that we must love God. But what does that mean? Is love just a warm, nice feeling toward God, or is there more to it?

Love loves

Love can be a noun or a verb. I like to think of love as a verb, because love as an action word implies that something is happening, something is being done.

Love (the noun) requires that someone love (the verb). For example, if we love someone, we demonstrate our love by spending time with our loved one. We do things with and for that person.

We visit him or her, go places together, talk to each other. We may make or buy gifts to demonstrate that we love and value that person. We show our love by our actions.

Since love requires action, by what action does God want us to demonstrate our love for Him? What does the Bible say about this? Some believe that in the Old Testament God focused only on obedience and law, but in the New Testament we are “under grace” and have only to “love God” in some vague way, supposing that obedience and love are mutually exclusive concepts. But can this be true?

In both Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6, God prefaces the Ten Commandments with a statement that demonstrates grace: “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage,” He said.

God focuses us on His loving act of undeserved mercy, deliverance, favor and pardon in His freeing the Israelites from slavery and establishing them as a new nation. He extended grace to them, doing something wonderful for them that they did not deserve.

In verses 9 and 10 of Deuteronomy 5, God says, “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God . . . *showing mercy* to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (emphasis added throughout). Here we see another example of grace, with God promising “mercy to thousands.” We see that grace is built into the Ten Commandments.

Biblical theme of obedience

These passages begin a thread that is woven throughout the Bible. The Scriptures show repeatedly that loving God and keeping His commandments are inextricably connected; one describes the other. God says that we show love for Him by obedience, *by keeping His commandments*.

Let’s notice some of the many examples that show the connection between love and commandment-keeping. In Deuteronomy 6:5, 6, God says, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today [referring

to the Ten Commandments, given in the previous chapter] shall be in your heart.”

This is the verse the lawyer quoted to Christ that we referred to earlier. It says we love God with all our heart, soul and might by keeping “these words, which I command you.” Those specific words were God’s Ten Commandments. These words from the Bible clearly define loving God as obeying His commandments.

Deuteronomy 10:12, 13 summarizes the response God expects from Israel and all mankind. “. . . What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all

The Scriptures show repeatedly that loving God and keeping His commandments are inextricably connected; one describes the other. God says that we show love for Him by obedience, by keeping His commandments.

His ways and *to love Him*, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and *to keep the commandments of the LORD* and His statutes which I command you today *for your good?*”

This tells us clearly that we love God and serve Him by keeping His commandments, which He gave us for our benefit.

Deuteronomy 11:1 says, “Therefore *you shall love the LORD your God*, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and *His commandments* always.” We love God by keeping His charge, His statutes, His judgments and His commandments.

The theme of loving God by keeping His commandments continues in verses 13 and 22. God says we are to “earnestly *obey My commandments* which I command you today, *to love the LORD your God* and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” We love Him when we “*carefully keep all these commandments* which I command you to do—*to love the LORD your God*, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him . . .”

Deuteronomy 13:1-4 warns us about false prophets. Even if they can predict something that comes to pass, if they say we can disobey God and ignore His law, then God’s people are to pay no

attention to them. God says He proves and tests us “to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (verse 3).

How do we prove to God that we love Him? Continuing in the very next verse: “You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him” (verse 4).

Love is expressed by doing what God says

Deuteronomy 30:6, 8 continues this theme of showing love by obedience to the commandments: “And the LORD

your God will circumcise your heart [a prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit] and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul . . . And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today.”

Circumcising the heart (conversion of the mind as described in Romans 2:29), loving God and returning to God are evinced by keeping His commandments.

God says He will “rejoice over you . . . if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul . . .” (Deuteronomy 30:9, 10). “Turn[ing] to the LORD” is shown by keeping His commandments.

“. . . I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess” (verse 16). God tells us we are to love Him by keeping His commandments, and God promises blessings for our obedience.

The theme continues in the book of Joshua, where God tells His people to

Continued on page 23

John

The Apostle of Love

by Jerold Aust

John wrote so extensively about love that Bible scholars call him the apostle of love. Why did he write so much about the subject? And what can we learn from the writings of John about the connection between God's law and love?

Did John perhaps record the depth of God's love in a way none of the other New Testament writers was able to do?

John's friendship with Christ may have given him a writer's edge in describing this most important element in a Christian's life. Let's look at John, the disciple Christ loved (John 19:26), and some of John's writings.

Taught and trained by Jesus

After Jesus called His disciples away from their jobs and professions and into a new way of life, for 3½ years John and the other 11 disciples lived their lives together. Jesus was teaching and training them to become apostles—the ones He would send after His resurrection to preach the Gospel of God's Kingdom to the world.

The Bible depicts the disciples as a close-knit group. John was especially close to Christ; in his own Gospel account he refers to himself repeatedly as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:7, for example).

Jesus' example of
love for

His disciples and all people would so affect His immediate followers that they eventually taught and practiced the same love. The godly love Jesus advocated eclipsed any human understanding of love.

The Greek of the original New Testament refers to three categories of love: *eros*, for sexual love; *philos*, for friendship or brotherly love; and *agape*, for a godly, outgoing love for others.

Movies, television programs and novels confuse these kinds of love. This is one reason that the so-called love generation of the 1970s could not discover God's love on its own. God's Word reveals godly *agape* love, which translates from the Greek into an unselfish concern for others.

The apostle John gave attention to the

ing his affection for Jesus, and the Messiah often returned John's open expressions of love with His assurance of love reciprocated. Such direct contact with the Savior of mankind could have only a beneficial influence on John and his capacity to love others.

John's early life perhaps prepared him for his later life's service to God and humanity. Little is written about the disciple's early years, except that he worked closely with his father (Matthew 4:21) and that his mother manifested an earnest desire for the welfare of her sons (Matthew 20:20).

Opportunity to share Christ's love

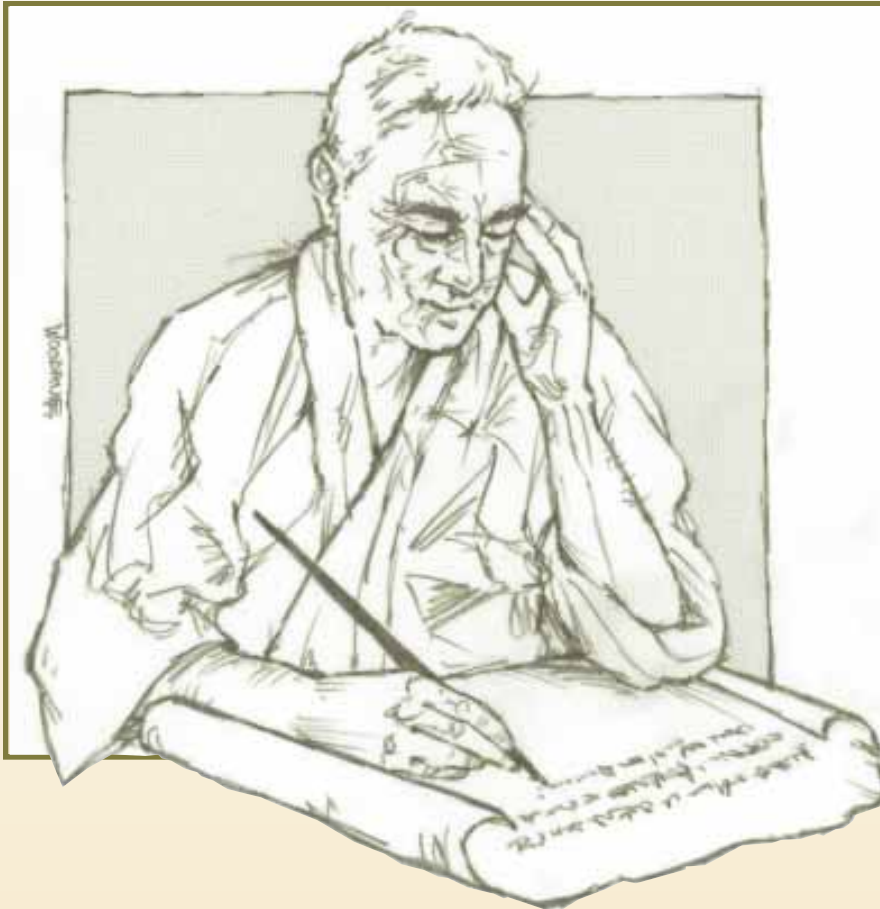
Jesus gave John, along with James and Peter, special opportunities for involvement in certain activities and plans. The Gospel writers all mention John's pres-

John wrote so extensively about love that Bible scholars call him the apostle of love. Why did he write so much about the subject? And what can we learn from the writings of John?

various kinds of love. When Jesus dined with His disciples, the biblical account generally notes the friendship and affection Jesus and John felt for each other: “Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23).

John was comfortable openly express-

ence in the accounts of Christ and His works. John was there when Jesus restored Peter's mother-in-law to health (Mark 1:29-31). He witnessed Jesus' raising of the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:35-37). John saw the “transfiguration,” the prophetic vision of Jesus as the resurrected Son of God (Matthew 17; Mark 9;



John wrote so extensively about love that Bible scholars call him the apostle of love. Why did he write so much about the subject? And what can we learn from the writings of John about the connection between God's law and love?

Luke 9:28-36).

John was present when the Savior foretold Jerusalem's destruction (Mark 13:2). John helped Peter prepare the last Passover (Luke 22:8). John was the one who asked Jesus who would betray Him (John 13:23-26). John, with Peter and James, received the Master's invitation to watch with Him in Gethsemane as He cried out the anguished prayer just before His crucifixion (Mark 14:32, 33; Luke 22:44).

John, Peter and James, who were supposed to remain alert and on watch the whole night, fell asleep. Later, when Roman guards took Jesus prisoner, John (who is referred to in the account as "the other disciple" or "another disciple"), along with Peter, followed the band of officials to the palace and, because of John's acquaintance with the high priest, gained admittance to the building (John 18:15, 16). Apparently John was also the

apostle immediately at hand when Christ gave up His life at the crucifixion.

During the crucifixion, Jesus appointed John to care for His mother, Mary. At this critical time, John was aware that he also could be arraigned, indicted and imprisoned for his audacity. He likewise could suffer the humiliating death of a convicted criminal.

John later wrote of Jesus' charge to him: "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple [John] took her to his own home" (John 19:26, 27).

John's understanding of God's love

John was there at the last supper and observed the Passover with Jesus, witnessing the loving example of Christ's washing of His disciples' feet. John

records Jesus' teaching about our spiritual cleansing, depicted by the Passover bread and wine, which shows God's magnitude of love: "For God so loved the world that He gave [for our sins] His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

At this pivotal point in history, Jesus was finalizing the personal training of His disciples. The next day He would demonstrate the greatest love mankind has ever known, the greatest love possible: He would lay down His life and allow Himself to be crucified. John records that there can be no greater love than the love that would inspire one to "lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

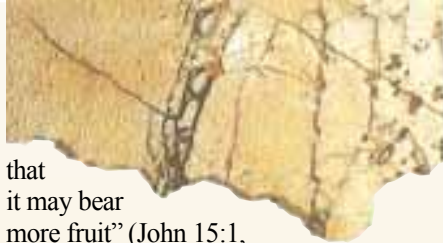
John records Jesus' reference, during His final night on earth, to a new kind of love, a love that the disciples would not be capable of giving until they later received the Holy Spirit: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). The love Christ taught His disciples requires God's Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot comprehend the *agape* love God wants to share with us.

Because of their human frailties, Christ assured His disciples of the spiritual help—the Holy Spirit—that God the Father would send them some seven weeks after His crucifixion:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever . . ." (verse 16). "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (verse 21). "As the Father loved Me, I have also loved you: abide in My love" (John 15:9).

Christ likens a Christian with God's Spirit to the branching of a vine. For the branches to bring forth fruit, they must abide in Christ—the Vine—through the Holy Spirit.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes,



that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:1, 2). “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (verse 4). “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (verse 10).

Christ promises spiritual help

John’s writings show that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth: “But when the Helper comes, [which] I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth [which] proceeds from the Father, [it] will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (verses 26, 27).

The apostle Paul explains that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit . . .” (Romans 5:5).

Christ ended His talk with the disciples on that last evening with prayer. John later mentions one of Jesus’ last conversations with God the Father before His death. Our Savior talked to the Father about the love that John and the others were beginning to understand and that can exist only through God’s Spirit:

“I do not pray for these alone, but also

John was aware that he also could be arraigned, indicted and imprisoned for his audacity. He likewise could suffer the humiliating death of a convicted criminal.

for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:20-23).

“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before

the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare

it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (verses 24-26).

Almost two months after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, John was there when God did indeed send the Holy Spirit to the apostles and others on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1, 2).

John, along with the other apostles, witnessed Jesus’ ascension into the heavens and participated in the selection of Matthias to replace the betrayer, Judas.

Son of Thunder

John’s example should teach us a lesson. Before God calls us (John 6:44), we walk “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan], the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2).

But now we have the opportunity to live as Christ’s own disciples: “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses [that is, we were condemned by our own sins], made us alive together with Christ” (verses 4, 5).

John, the apostle of love, does not appear in Scripture as a weak man, in spite of his portrayal by various artists down through the centuries. In fact, Christ referred to him and his brother as the “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). When John wrote the powerful book of 1 John, he addressed the spiritual decay of the Church of God. Heresy and apostasy prevailed. The church was scattering (1 John 2:18, 26). John, the apostle of love and a Son of Thunder, fought to preserve the truth of God.

“Little children, let no one deceive you . . . He who sins is of the devil,” John wrote in 1 John 3:7, 8. He contrasted the righteous and the unrighteous. He foretold the many false prophets (1 John 4:1

who would arise in that day and beyond.

We may now live a godly life of loving others because Jesus Christ first loved us (1 John 4:19), and He is now “our life” (Colossians 3:4). Our life, through God’s Spirit, is Christ’s life. Christ loved us even before we could recognize our sins and repent of them (Romans 5:8). God calls us to follow Christ’s example: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7, 8).

As an old man, John was used of God to write the book of Revelation, in which God warns and indicts the lawless who will not turn from their evil ways.

In this book, John shows another side of God’s love, with the Eternal meting out discipline, intervening for His elect and allowing terrifying events on the earth. Christ’s followers, however, need not be afraid of the calamities pictured in Revelation: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

Love from disciple to apostle

John, more than any other New Testament writer, waxes eloquent on love from diverse perspectives. He explains that godly love cannot originate with us; it comes only from God: “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [atonement] for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

John shows that God’s love is directly tied to the gift of the Holy Spirit: “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (verses 12, 13). John makes the inseparable connection between the ability to love others and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

John also exposes the facade of those who profess their love for God while hating their own brethren: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother



also” (John 4:20, 21). John says we show that we love God *by* loving our brethren.

Bible definitions of love

First, John defines God’s love in Christians, indirectly and directly: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments” (1 John 5:2). We could call these “if-then” proofs: *If* we love God, *then* we will be keeping God’s commandments. *If* we obey God’s commandments, *then* we will love God and fellow human beings.

The next verse provides us the most direct definition of godly love: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (verse 3). This is a fundamental biblical definition of God’s love. We must keep in mind that the keeping of God’s commandments is made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 John 3:23, 24).

John is not speaking of some new or different set of commandments in 1 John 5. He is referring to the Ten Commandments, the same law Jesus summarized as the two great commandments (Matthew 22:37-40): “Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning” (1 John 2:7). “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:11, 12).

God’s love manifests itself in right attitudes and actions. A person who expresses God’s love is a person who is becoming like God. As we read earlier, God has called us to follow Christ’s example: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born [or begotten] of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7, 8).

Love is God’s dominant quality. God is the epitome of love.

Let us act on the inspiring message of love recorded by the apostle John. As God’s children, let us follow our Creator as He is. Through godly love, we will enter into God’s Kingdom and live forever. *GN*

Love God

Continued from page 19

“take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Joshua 22:5).

Love flows both ways

Any healthy relationship of love is a two-way street, with love flowing both ways. In 1 John 4:19 we find why we should love God: “We love Him because He first loved us.” John had earlier explained what he meant by God’s earlier love for us: “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:9-11).

Romans 5:8 gives other examples of ways God has proved His deep love for us: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice to prove God’s love for us, long before we were capable of returning that love in any way.

The familiar passage in John 3:16 tells us: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

But belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God means much more than just academic agreement. Belief (Greek *pisteuo*) means acting on knowledge: living one’s life by faith, unswerving devotion and total obedience in the light of that knowledge.

Our God, His people

Jeremiah 31:3 talks of God’s deep love for mankind: “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’” God has always had as His plan for human beings a loving

relationship within His family. He describes it in eternal terms as “an everlasting love.”

Verse 33 says that, in this loving family relationship, “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” His law is permanently planted in our hearts and minds to show us how to love Him as well as how to love each other.

We see this same theme of loving God and keeping His words continuing in the New Testament. John 14:21, 23 makes this clear: “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word . . .”

The New Testament defines love for God the same way as does the Old: “For *this* is the love of God, *that we keep His commandments*. And His commandments are *not burdensome*” (1 John 5:3). God’s law is not heavy, oppressive and burdensome. As we read earlier, it was given for the benefit of humankind.

God tells us repeatedly and clearly that we demonstrate our love for Him by keeping His commandments, and that has been His intent from the beginning. The commandments John discussed were not “new,” but were “the word which you heard from the beginning” (1 John 2:7). God’s law has been a law of love from the very beginning—from the creation (1 John 3:11).

Many other scriptures make it clear that keeping God’s commandments is not something we can do by ourselves. As we repent and yield to Jesus Christ, God’s Spirit enables us to allow Jesus Christ to live in us (Galatians 2:20), giving us the desire and capacity to love God and our neighbor.

In Luke 10:25-30, quoted earlier, a man asked Christ what he should do to gain eternal life. Jesus told him the correct answer is “love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.”

Love requires action, not just feelings. How do we know we love God? The consistent, clear, biblical answer is that we love God by keeping His commandments. *GN*

What Is the Gospel?

What is the gospel? Is it the gospel of God? The gospel of Jesus Christ? The gospel about Christ? The gospel of the Kingdom of God? Or some other gospel? Is there more than one gospel? What gospel did Jesus preach? What did He instruct His disciples to teach? What about Paul? Did he teach the same gospel Jesus Christ taught? Or was it different from the gospel God sent through Christ?

The apostle Paul wrote of contemporaries who were perverting the gospel, teaching something other than what he taught. He marveled that, as a result, some were turning away from the gospel so soon after accepting it. Some say Jesus Christ *is* the gospel. If so, how does that concept fit in with the Kingdom of God, which is the focus of the good news He taught?

What do we mean *gospel*? The literal meaning of the word is “good news.” But good news of what? Let’s understand the exciting answers revealed in the Bible!

Discussion: The gospel, or good news, has its roots in the very beginning, even before the creation of the universe. Contrary to popular opinion, the gospel didn’t begin with Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry in the New Testament.

- Is the gospel revealed by Jesus Christ, even though it had been planned from time immemorial? (2 Timothy 1:9, 10).

Note: From the beginning the message was called the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:1, 14, 15).

- Did Jesus instruct His disciples to preach the same good news? (Luke 9:1, 2).
- Did Jesus preach the same message after His resurrection? (Acts 1:3).
- What gospel did Peter preach? (Acts 15:7).
- Did other followers of Christ continue to teach the same good news? (Acts 8:12).

Discussion: What about Paul? Did he preach a different message?

- Paul called the gospel his gospel. Why? (Romans 2:16).
- Was it because God called him to preach it? (Romans 1:1).
- How did Paul receive the gospel? (Galatians 1:11, 12).
- Was Paul faithful in preaching the same message Jesus and His followers preached? (Acts 20:25).

Note: Paul not only faithfully preached the authen-

tic gospel that had been delivered to him by Jesus Christ, but he was astonished that some tried to teach another gospel.

- Did Paul insist that there was only one real gospel? (Galatians 1:6-8).
- In addition to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel of the Kingdom of God, are there other names for the same message? (Acts 20:24; Romans 10:15, 16; Romans 15:16; Ephesians 1:13).

Note: The gospel is the good news of—or from—God and was taught by Jesus Christ and His disciples. It is God’s message to mankind. This one genuine gospel has different names, each emphasizing an aspect of the message. Focusing on only one aspect while excluding others forms an incomplete picture.

Discussion: A part of the gospel message involves the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the key figure—He is of first importance—in God’s plan for mankind.

- How important is this? (1 Corinthians 15:1-5).
- Through whom do the dead and the living receive eternal life? (John 11:25, 26).
- Who is the door through which we enter the Kingdom? (Acts 4:12).
- How are our sins removed? (Hebrews 9:11, 12).

Discussion: What does the gospel tell us about Christ’s present and future role?

- Who is our Savior and High Priest, our Intercessor? (Hebrews 10:19-23).
- Who will be King of Kings and Lord of Lords in the

coming Kingdom of God? (Revelation 19:11-16).

- If Jesus is to become King of Kings, what will be the extent of His Kingdom? (Revelation 11:15).

Note: The Kingdom of God of which Jesus Christ spoke will be a future world-ruling kingdom inaugurated at His return. The entire earth will be brought under His dominion and rulership.

- How long will this kingdom, ruled by Jesus Christ, last? (Daniel 2:44).

Discussion: Jesus Christ is the key figure in the gospel message. But was Jesus Christ the gospel? Does the Bible teach us other things about the gospel?

- Did preaching the good news include announcing the Kingdom of God as well as emphasizing Christ's life, death and resurrection? (Acts 28:31).
- Are repentance of sin and belief in the gospel required? (Mark 1:15).
- Is the gospel also a message of obedience? (Romans 10:16; 1 Peter 4:17).

- Are there other words to describe the good news brought by Jesus Christ? Didn't the apostle John write that Jesus' message was that His people should love one another? Wasn't this message of love in existence from before the beginning of the creation of mankind? (1 John 3:11; 2 John 5, 6).

Discussion: Many believe that the gospel didn't begin until Jesus began teaching it as recorded in the New Testament. But the good news existed long before New Testament days. As alluded to in the first part of this study, the gospel is rooted in God's plan from the very beginning. This is acknowledged by the apostle Paul in one of his letters to Timothy.

- Wasn't our calling from God in place even before creation? Isn't it now made manifest by the appearing, by virtue of His physical birth and life on earth, of our Savior Jesus Christ? (2 Timothy 1:9, 10).
- Christ revealed the gospel to mankind, but didn't it exist, wasn't it in effect, millennia before that time, even before the world began? (Titus 1:2).

Discussion: The book of Genesis starts with an offer of the tree of life to Adam and Eve. They rebelled against God and chose wrongly. Isn't the rest of the Bible the unfurling of God's plan to redeem—to buy back—all of humanity and give it the tree of life, symbolic of immortality? (Revelation 22:1, 2).

Note: The broad theme of Scripture and the message of the gospel is God's plan to give to humanity eternal life in His family. This represents the heart of the gospel. Everything else fits onto this framework.

- Doesn't the message of the gospel mean that we may partake of the very nature of God by escaping the corrupting influence of the world? (2 Peter 1:4).

- Doesn't the gospel of the Kingdom of God mean that we are redeemed, or "bought back," by Jesus' sacrifice, which was planned before the creation of the universe? (1 Peter 1:18-20; Matthew 25:34).

Note: The first chapter of the Gospel of Mark succinctly chronicles the beginning of the gospel of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus Christ.

- After Jesus' baptism, what message did He immediately begin to preach? (Mark 1:14).
- In preaching the gospel message, what action did Jesus call for on the part of a new believer? (Mark 1:15, 17).
- Can the gospel be preached from Old Testament scriptures? (Acts 28:23).
- Did the Scriptures preach the gospel to Abraham? (Galatians 3:8, 9).
- Did the prophets of God from the beginning preach the same message—about Christ, repentance and the Kingdom to come? (Acts 3:18-26).
- Did Enoch, one of God's early servants, preach the same basic message of God? (Jude 14, 15).
- Isn't the gospel of the Kingdom the same message, or "mystery," God has revealed to His followers through the ages, both before and after the time of Jesus Christ on earth? (Ephesians 3:9, 10).

Discussion: What about the future of the preaching of the gospel?

- Will the good news continue to be preached? (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16).
- How long will the gospel be preached? (Matthew 24:14).

Further study: The one and only gospel is and always has been the message of God to mankind. It has been the same message throughout man's history. That message is called by various names because it has various aspects.

The gospel involves man's need for salvation and God's requirement for man's repentance from sin and a belief in and acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It foretells the return of our great Savior, who will bring grace, peace and salvation as He establishes His Kingdom on earth. For further information, request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. GN

—Bill Winner

Respect: Is It a Dying Virtue?

Learning to respect others starts when we're young. Sadly, many today aren't learning this vital lesson.

by Elaine Jacobs

A few years ago, as I was taking my morning walk, I entered a park near our home and came upon some young children. As I walked past, one of them suggested that they throw rocks at “that old lady.”

It was bad enough that they considered me, in my early 40s, to be an old lady, but their utter lack of regard for one they thought to be an old lady astounded me.

Many adults are afraid of children, and after this little episode I can understand why.



As we show our children the virtue of honoring other people and their property, there are some specific rules of courtesy that we can teach them.

I am thankful the children who tried to assault me couldn't throw far enough to hit me, but I must admit I was leery of walking in that park again.

One dictionary defines respect as “to

consider worthy of high regard: esteem.” Are we passing this biblical principal on to our children?

The Bible instructs us how and when to teach our children. It says to instruct them by talking to them when we sit in our houses, walk by the way, lie down and rise up (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7).

Children learn their standards of respect from what they see around them. This may seem discouraging when we look at the disrespectful world around us, but parents are in a powerful position to teach by their own example, as well as their instructions.

The way we treat our children is the first model they learn for behavior toward others. They will also learn to copy our behavior and attitudes toward other children and adults.

Respect can seem to be a daunting subject to explain to a child. As we strive to show our children the virtue of honoring other people, there are some specific rules of behavior that we can teach them. We can instruct our children to be courteous toward others even in seemingly unimportant matters.

Some rules of courtesy

It is important for children to learn to respect authority, and respect begins by showing honor to parents and other adults.

If we don't teach our children to respect others, we leave them at a disadvantage in society. We all want our children to be well liked, successful and respected. By teaching them to be courteous, we can help them on their way.

The Bible teaches respect for the elderly (Leviticus 19:32) and the widow (1 Timothy 5:3). Have our children learned to give up their seats to someone older than the y when there are no other seats to be had?

Do our children know that, in most societies and cultures, it may be impolite to call an adult by his or her first name unless asked to do so?

Do our children know to share the sidewalks with others by moving to one side? Do they move out of the road quickly when they are about to impede traffic?

Regard for belongings

Have we taught our children to respect others' property? For instance, when we take our children shopping with us, do they know not to touch anything in a shop or store unless they plan to buy it?

When we visit someone else's home, do our children respect that person's property and privacy? It is, of course, impolite to use others' personal belongings without asking. "Ask before taking or using" is a phrase we can teach our

Children learn their standards of respect from what they see around them. Parents are in a powerful position to teach by their own example, as well as their instructions.

children that will cover many situations.

Owning up to accidents

On one occasion my husband, who coached basketball, invited his team of teenage boys over to spend the night before a big game.

Sometime during the evening someone spilled cranberry or grape juice on the carpet and didn't tell anyone. I found the stain the next day covered with a sheet. I never got that discoloration completely out. I might have successfully repaired the damage had someone told me about it right away.

We should explain to our children that accidents can happen to anyone. Rather than hiding the incident, they should tell someone right away so the damage can be minimized.

I know a young man who accidentally broke an antique teacup. He owned up to it immediately and apologized. I respected him for having the courage to come forward. The courtesy he showed by doing the right thing was of far more value than any antique dish.

Along the same lines, do our children know not to put glasses, cups or wet towels on wooden furniture? We should teach them to use coasters and to ask where to put their wet belongings.

Do our children know it is impolite to arrive late and keep others waiting?

When we are late we show a disregard for others. We are saying their time isn't as valuable as ours.

Do our children know it is impolite to eat in front of others without offering them some? Do our children know not to chew with their mouths open, talk with their mouths full or smack their lips while they are eating?

Years ago it was illegal to spit on sidewalks. Why? Because spittle on a walkway makes a repugnant sight and shows disrespect to others. I can tell, as I walk around the school near me, that this behavior is not an uncommon practice.

Changing behavior

Here is a simple four-step plan that

we can use to teach our children:

First, point out incorrect behavior.

Second, explain why the behavior is wrong.

Third, explain the correct behavior.

Fourth, expect correct behavior in the future.

For example, if your child addresses an adult in a too-familiar fashion, privately take the child aside. Tell him you noticed he was impolite to Mr. Smith. You could explain that we are to respect people who are older than we are. One way to do that is by calling them Mr., Mrs. or Miss and using their surname.

You can further explain that it is all right to call other children (and certain adult relatives and family friends, depending upon local custom) by their first names.

Then tell the child that you will expect him to call adults by Mr., Mrs. or Miss from now on.

It is important to give these instructions without disrespecting the child. Parents can quickly lose credibility if they are rude to their children while explaining how to be polite.

Respect is a dying virtue. We individually can't change the world, but we can make a big difference in our little corner of it. Let's make sure we're doing our part to be respectful adults and teach our children to do likewise. *GN*

Letters From Our Readers

The Good News is truly good! Once again we have clarity in learning about our Bible. The articles are very readable, and the reasoning is clearly able to be followed.

Edward Teti
Torrington, Connecticut

Finally, I have found you on the Internet. My friend has shown me your new booklets and the new *Good News*. Could you please put me on your mailing list and send me all your literature.

By the way, thank you for putting your statement of beliefs on the Internet.

Phyllis Cann
Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia

I just wanted to express my sincere thanks for the Web page and the miracle of having literature available at one keystroke. As a blind member, I appreciate Guy Burke's reading of *The Good News*.

Dick Wamser
Euclid, Ohio

We invite you to access the United Church of God home page on the World Wide Web portion of the Internet. The address <http://www.ucg.org> gives you access to all issues of The Good News and booklets published by the United Church of God, as well as other information about the church. The Good News is also offered on tape as a service to the visually impaired. To receive tapes, write to the address nearest you on page 2 of this issue.

The Passover *Good News* was just beautiful! The depth and perception of the writers are far beyond man's reasoning. You've grown and matured, and you brought that growth and maturity with you—and you share it with us! It was awesome reading!

Ann Lee Russell
Rochester, Pennsylvania

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space.

Write to us at: The Good News, Box 661780, Arcadia, CA 91066-1780.

What Happened to the Family Meal?

Here's why it's worth saving—and what you can do to save it.

by Becky Sweat

Waiting in line at the grocery store check-out, the woman behind me pointed to the bags of apples, flour and sugar in my shopping cart and remarked, “Looks like you’re going home to do some baking.”

“We’re going to have apple pie for dessert after dinner tonight,” I replied.

“Dinner?” she asked in a surprised tone of voice. “Dinner with the whole family sitting around the table? About the only time my family eats dinner together anymore is at Thanksgiving.”

Unfortunately, this way of thinking is becoming

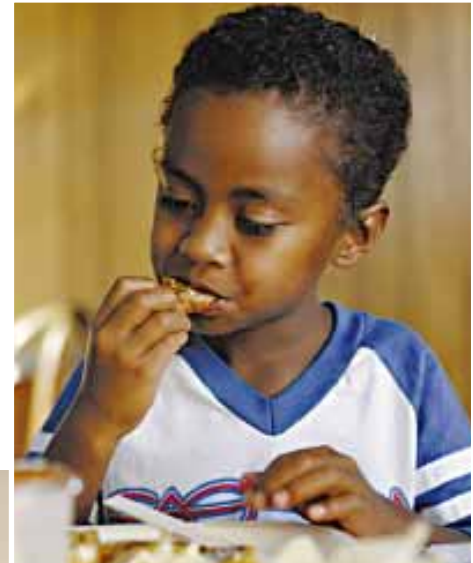


Photo Digital Stock



shows like *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*?

Nutritional reasons alone make the family meal worth saving. Kids left to themselves to find something to eat are likely to choose a diet of toaster pastries, potato chips and frozen pizza. When parents present children with a variety of foods at regular mealtimes, they better their chances of developing good eating habits in their children.

But, perhaps most important, the family dinner gives family members a chance to reconnect

The family meal can be a time to strengthen family bonds and a pleasant time for family members to spend time together.

ing the norm for American families. According to the Food Marketing Institute, only 40 percent of American families eat meals together, and then no more than two or three times a week. Is that bad? Is the family meal worth saving? Or is it destined to become a thing of the past, something seen only on reruns of old U.S. television

with each other after a long day at school or work. “Eating together as a family can help give your children a feeling of security and a sense of knowing who they are and where they come from,” says Margaret Mackenzie, a nutritional anthropologist and member of the American Institute of Wine & Food’s Resetting the Ameri-

can Table project. "The family meal is much more than food on the table. You are creating warm, happy memories and meanings your children will carry with them the rest of their lives."

Clifton Saper, Ph.D., a family psychologist in Evanston, Illinois, adds: "Sometimes the whole focus is on manners and eat your vegetables, and then the meal becomes a negative experience for both the parents and the kids."

"But, if parents can get beyond that, if their focus instead is on open communication and creating an atmosphere that's relaxed and comfortable, then the meal is going to help strengthen family ties."

Keep the interaction positive, though. As Proverbs 17:1 says, "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife" (New International Version).

Here are some suggestions for restoring this endangered tradition and

sor of family and consumer sciences at Ohio State University Extension. "Not only does this take the load off Mom's shoulders, it's also a good opportunity for communication and for teaching children how to cook."

Even preschoolers and toddlers can have a part to play. Give your 4-year-old a step stool and let him stir the muffin batter or rinse raw vegetables. Your toddler will enjoy sitting in his high chair, watching you as you cook. Talk about what you're doing as you do it. For example, "This is how we crack eggs for omelettes."

Turn off the television

For many American families, dinner means grabbing a plate of food and a TV tray and sitting down in front of the television. "People are often uncomfortable talking to each other, and television takes away the obligation to do so," Dr. Mackenzie

leave out your children. Tell them what you did at work today in terms they can understand. Ask your children how their own day went; talk about the family's plans for the weekend; get their ideas for family projects.

Be creative

Backyard cookouts, TV trays on the porch and picnics in the park are enjoyable meal alternatives for the summer months. Try ethnic-food themes. One night everything you serve might be German, and another night it might be Italian or Chinese. Fondues, making minipizzas together and Mexican dinners with plenty of tortilla chips and salsa are also fun, and they slow mealtime, allowing for more time to talk.

If your evenings are booked solid, get together with the family for after-school snacks, late-night desserts or Sunday brunches instead of dinners. If

If parents can focus on open communication and creating an atmosphere that's relaxed and comfortable, then the meal is going to help strengthen family ties.

says. "Most people are not terribly good at developing listening skills and talking in terms of what somebody said and hearing their point of view. Under these conditions, television is a refuge."

Make it a goal to eat at the dining-room table for most meals, without a TV on in the background. You may think your kids will hate you if you tell them there will be no TV during dinner, but assure them you are going to abide by the same rules yourself.

Keep conversation pleasant

The family meal is not the time for discipline, lectures, arguments, criticism or sulking. Talk should be light, happy and upbeat. If you had a rough day at work and need to blow off steam, try to do it before you come to the dinner table. Set the tone for your children. Show them that dinner is supposed to be a pleasant time.

Get the whole family involved in the conversation. You may be tempted to use up the mealtime telling your spouse about your business meeting, but don't

you're not much for cooking, pick up a giant submarine sandwich at the sub shop and a ready-made tossed salad at the grocery store.

What matters most is that the family gets together, not that it has to be at dinnertime or everything you serve has to be homemade.

Build family traditions

By creating family traditions, you give your child a sense of unity and stability for the present and happy memories for the rest of his life. Traditions can be simple, like every Saturday morning you have blueberry pancakes or on Friday nights you have banana splits for dessert. Maybe after church services your family always has a formal dinner with the good china, candles and a fresh-flower centerpiece.

Lifestyles may have changed a lot in the last generation, but the importance of the family meal has remained constant. Make shared meals a tradition in your household. Give your children warm family memories they can pass on to their own children. *GN*



Photo © 1994 PhotoDisc, Inc.

making mealtime a positive family experience.

Get everyone involved

After a long day at work, making dinner may be the last thing Mom wants to do. One solution is to make dinner a family project. "The whole family can be in the kitchen together, one person setting the table, someone else doing the stir-fry, another making a salad, and everyone can help clean up afterwards," says Barbara James, an associate profes-

Too Young to Die

by Tyanne Butler

I remember the first time I met Vicki. We were assigned to share a computer in science class, and we began writing notes back and forth on our computer. She was in two of my classes, and we often walked to class together. As time went by, we hung out together at school and became pretty good friends.

One day Vicki (not her real name) told me she had a few problems that she didn't tell many people about. They included alcohol abuse and smoking. Her brother was in trouble with the law and tended to get her in trouble too. She never tried to influence me to do the things she was doing, and I respected her for that. I think she really didn't like her dysfunctional

Why did she do it? Was Vicki's life so unbearable that she saw no other way out of her problems?

family life and didn't want to do some of the things she did.

The day she told me about the trouble she was in, she seemed afraid to confide in me, but it seemed she needed to talk to someone about it. It was hard to believe that such a sweet girl with such a pleasant and easy-to-like personality could get herself into so much trouble.

I know her family life played a big part in her problems. Vicki's parents divorced when she was 3. She lived with her dad, but they didn't get along. She said she missed her mother. Her home life was anything but happy. To me she seemed more like a victim, not a culprit.

14 is too young

As time passed, we remained friends, but I sort of forgot about what she had told me because she never talked about it again.

Then, when I came back to school after spring break, I heard the horrible news. Vicki had committed suicide.

At first I thought the story about her death was some kind of cruel joke that couldn't possibly be true. I didn't want to believe it even when our science teacher announced her death to the class.

I could think of nothing else for the rest of the day. My friend Vicki was dead. Fourteen is too young to die.

Rumors began to fly, some true, some not.

Questions remain unanswered that even Vicki's suicide note couldn't explain. Some evidence seemed to indicate that she had changed her mind about committing suicide but too late to save herself. Maybe her actions were only a desperate cry for help, and now it was too late.

For the next few days, all kinds of questions raced through my mind. Why did she do it? Was Vicki's life so unbearable that she saw no other way out of her problems? Maybe I should have talked to her more. Was there something I could have done?

All my life I had taken my friends for granted. I had never known what it was like to lose one. Dealing with the loss of a friend is almost unbearable, as is coping with the feelings of denial, blame and fear. Sometimes I still blame myself. Could I have called someone or taken some other action? Those feelings just won't go away.

I've talked to people about Vicki's suicide: my friends and especially my parents. Although they have helped me to see that Vicki's death was not my fault, it still hurts.

Needed to talk

Talking to my parents and surrounding myself with my friends has helped me the most, but sometimes I can't help feeling that tomorrow I may lose another friend.

I ask myself if there is anything in my friendship with Vicki I could have done differently. Could I have spent more time with her or maybe talked to her about her problems? I should have advised her to talk to a counselor at school since she couldn't talk to her father.

But, even through the pain of losing my friend, my parents have helped me see that there is a brighter day ahead for Vicki. I look forward to the time when there will be a resurrection of the dead, to a time when I can be there to help Vicki overcome her problems in a world that will be free of the pain of today's society.

I'm glad Vicki—and numerous others whose lives were cut off prematurely—will live again in a much happier time.

I've learned one thing for sure from this experience: Don't take your friends for granted. You never know when they might be gone. *GN*

Caution!

If you or a friend hears someone speak of suicide, you need to realize that person, even if he or she seems to be joking, may be serious and may be making a last-minute call for help. Encourage such a person, or the person's friends or parents, that professional counseling may be called for. Never take a threat of suicide lightly.

Dunblane

Continued from page 17

He prevent such carnage? To come to some understanding and comfort, let's look at the Bible, a book that authoritatively provides a vital and little-appreciated perspective on human nature. It gives a view that contributes enormously to understanding this and every other human tragedy. It provides a commentary on much of humanity's dark history. Man's inhumanity to his fellowman is, regrettably, nothing new.

A choice with tragic consequences

The biblical perspective goes back to the very beginning. We were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). God's intention was that humans would take on His own character—full of love and concern for others. His is a nature that hates evil, but does not hate mankind; a nature that does not hurt or harm innocent people.

Jesus Christ compared it to a childlike mind full of humility (Matthew 18:1-6), like that of those so unnecessarily slain. It is a mind with total concern and love for the well-being of children, ready to bless them in every way (Matthew 19:13-15). Put simply, it is a mind like that of Jesus Christ's, a Christlike mind.

In the first book of the Bible, God records that He placed a choice before Adam and Eve. It was symbolized by two literal trees in the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Life represented God's mind—the way of obedience to God and His revealed way. This choice would lead to every good result and to eternal life. In contrast, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represented man's own way of self-reliance that would lead to every kind of evil and eventual death. It pictured rejection of God's way.

Adam and Eve, influenced and deceived by Satan, made the wrong choice. Their minds changed. The results were curses that have plagued humanity ever since. From that time forward, mankind has been cut off from the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22-24) and generally denied access to the knowledge that would produce peace and happiness and lead to eternal life.

It is immensely difficult to appreciate the enormity of the impact of this ancient choice on our world at large, its history and its development. All of society—and

each individual nature and mind—results from this seminal event in human history (Romans 5:12). Human nature, and all of human society, reflects these curses. Here is the dark side of our nature that surfaces to produce evil under certain circumstances and opportunities.

Biblical description of human mind

The Bible reveals that the natural human mind, cut off from God and influenced by Satan, hates God. It is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be (Romans 8:7). Further, it states that "there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25), and "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Look at this description of human nature: "Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:15-18). Ask yourself what is the likely outcome when this type of mind—the natural human mind—is free to set its own course of action.

Our society—perpetuating the choices made by Adam and Eve—continues to reject God and His revealed way. When we avoid following God's ways, it should not surprise us that man's evil nature spills over in response to real or imagined stresses of every kind. Man's nature, under the sway of Satan, is evil. It is criminal, and it needs changing!

The spiritual perspective revealed in the Bible shows that this evil and unrestrained mind, hostile to God, is continually acted upon by Satan the devil, the great adversary, who is god of this world (Ephesians 2:2, 3; 2 Corinthians 4:4). The result is an enormously powerful recipe for great evil.

One of Satan's names in Greek is *Apolhōn*, which means *destroyer* (Revelation 9:11). Unseen, unnoticed and unrecognized, he is our enemy and the true source of the problems that plague humanity (Ephesians 6:11-13).

Man's nature is none other than a reflection of the spiritual mind that dominates and controls it—Satan the devil. Influenced by him, all too often we try to resolve our problems and grievances through force, violence and destruction. Even the apostle Paul, a giant of a man for good, recognized the constant inner conflict caused by our human nature influ-

enced by Satan (Romans 7:15-25).

God's plan to change man's nature

Thankfully, God has a plan to change human nature. That plan begins now for those God calls to see and acknowledge their sins—to repent, accept forgiveness through Jesus Christ's sacrifice and receive the indwelling Holy Spirit of God to transform the human mind. Such a changed mind is characterized by love, peace, gentleness and goodness (Galatians 5:22, 23). It is a sound mind full of love (2 Timothy 1:7). This is tremendous good news.

But this good news comes too late to prevent the Dunblane killer or to save the 17 innocent lives he erased. It comes too late to comfort the bereaved parents and families. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ says: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28, 29). Part of this promised rest reveals even more good news and looks forward to a time when this whole world will find true rest from all its evils.

There is coming a time when God will intervene in the affairs of humanity by sending Jesus Christ to reign over the whole earth. The ancient curse on mankind will be lifted, and tragedies like Dunblane will cease to occur. God's ways will be taught throughout the world, and children will be safe and secure both in learning and at play (Isaiah 11:6-9)

Humanity will be delivered from its violence, corruption and evil. Satan will no longer hold sway over human nature because he will be removed and human nature will be changed. The result will be peace and solutions for all problems, a time of perfect justice and truth. To all who have lost little ones through calamity and tragedy there is coming a time when those precious little lives will be restored to life again, to live their lives to the full with their parents present to love and guide them. Truly that rest will be glorious (Isaiah 11:10)

Continue to read *The Good News* to learn in greater detail how God says these things will come to pass. You will find comfort and great hope for a sure future in which you will see precious loved ones restored to life once more. *GN*

How to get more information

Your spiritual nourishment is important to us, and we're ready to help you in any way possible, from simple informational needs to personal ministerial counsel. Here's how to learn more:

Local Congregations

The United Church of God has almost 300 congregations and more than 450 ministers in virtually all states and many international areas. For locations and times of services in your area, write or call the addresses listed inside or dial our fax information service. Visitors are always welcome.

Printed Publications

Two exciting publications are available to you free of charge: *New Beginnings*, which is the newsletter of the United



Church of God; and *The Good News*, the bi-monthly, full-color magazine you are now holding in your hands. For your free subscriptions write the address nearest you. The United Church of God also offers booklets on a number of



biblical topics of vital interest. All are sent free upon request.

Fax Information Service

Using an ordinary fax machine, you can dial **(818) 294-0818** and get instant information on a wide range of topics, from doctrine to details on church services. A complete menu of choices guides you through how to receive by fax information such as the location of ministers and congregations near you, current and back issues of *New Beginnings*, Bible study and sermon summaries, news releases, details on our audio- and videotape service, and more. Simply use the handset on your fax machine to dial the number and follow the voice instructions.



Audiotapes and Videotapes

If you have no nearby congregation you can attend, you may have sermon and Bible study tapes mailed directly to you at no cost. Simply mail your request to the home office.

World Wide Web Page

Use your home computer to access the United Church of God home page on the World Wide Web portion of the Internet. The address



<http://www.ugc.org/> gives you access to general information and current news about the Church, automatic E-mail forms for contacting the home office, issues of *The Good News* and the *New Beginnings* newsletter, booklets, church locations and ministers, festival information, facts about our computer bulletin board, and more.

United Church of God

an International Association

The Rest of the Story: The Story of Rest

Why did God command the Sabbath to be observed? And why is it almost universally misunderstood? Read on to get a biblical view of this subject.

by Larry Walker

American radio personality Paul Harvey is famous for his opening line: “You know what the news is. Now stay tuned for the rest of the story.” Now we will find out the rest of the story of the story of rest. We will take a chronological journey through the history of the promise of rest presented in the Bible.

The story begins right at the beginning of the Bible. The first chapter of Genesis chronicles the creation of the material universe. The second chapter begins with a summary statement. Starting in verse 2 of Genesis 2 we read about another creation event: the beginning of God’s spiritual creation.

After creating the heavens and the earth, God created the Sabbath by resting from His work of physical creation. The Bible says nothing further about the Sabbath for quite some time. There is silence on the subject throughout the entire age of the patriarchs (Abel, Enoch, Noah, etc.).

Abraham was a pivotal figure, the last of the patriarchs and the progenitor of the nation of Israel. The book of Genesis condenses the 2,000-year patriarchal age into the first 11 chapters. The story then slows and

Did Abraham know of the laws of God? If not, what was the meaning of the words “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws”?

goes into great detail beginning with the life of Abraham, emphasizing the relative importance of this man and his descendants.

Genesis 26:5 contains a landmark statement about this great man of faith: “. . . Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.”

What laws? The Bible doesn’t say. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* points out: “It is remarkable that this is precisely the way in which obedience to the Sinai covenant is expressed in Deuteronomy 11:1 . . .” Did Abraham know the law? If so, how? If not, what was the meaning of the words?

Is God telling us that Abraham obeyed the same laws He commanded Israel to observe in the covenant made at Mount Sinai? The commentary concludes that Abraham had these laws “written in his heart.”

But a close comparison of both passages (Genesis 26:5 and Deuteronomy 11:1) reveals an important difference in wording. God says Abraham “obeyed my voice . . .” This suggests that God orally conveyed many of His requirements to Abraham. Could the Sabbath have been one of those commandments?

James 2:23 shows that Abraham “was called the friend of God.” In John 15:14 Jesus defines His friends as those who obey His commands. In the next verse He says He keeps His friends informed, tells them what He is doing.

Similarly in Genesis 18:17 God asks, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing . . .?”

Even though this statement specifically refers to God’s intentions regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, it illustrates the same kind of friendship. As a man confides in his friend, so does God.

Do you think God told Abraham about the Sabbath? Would God have withheld this truth from His friend only to introduce it to Abraham’s descendants many years later? This does not seem logical. If Abraham, as the friend of God, knew about the Sabbath, it makes sense that he also kept it holy.

No manna on the Sabbath

Next we come to the nation of Israel. Our story resumes soon after Israel’s departure from Egypt.

In This Section . . .

- The Rest of the Story: The Story of Rest
Get an overview from the Bible of a much-neglected commandment.
- Did the Apostle Paul Abolish the Sabbath?
Did Paul nullify or change the Sabbath commandment?
- Did Jesus Christ Abolish the Law?
Did Christ do away with the law? What does the Bible say?

- E1 | Who Is the Center of Our Worship? E10
Could the focus of our worship be misdirected?
- E4 | What Does God Require for Eternal Life? E12
What, if any, are our responsibilities beyond simple belief?
- E6 | Who Could Misunderstand the Second Coming? E15
The apostles were confused about Christ’s return—could you be also?

Exodus 16 describes the distribution of manna, which God provided as daily bread for the Israelites in response to their murmuring about a lack of food.

God also used the manna to emphasize the weekly Sabbath as a “test commandment” to determine whether Israel would obey His law or not (Exodus 16:4). God told the people to gather the “bread from heaven” daily. He commanded them to gather twice as much on the sixth day, because none would be provided on the

The Sabbath is a personal sign between God and His people and an identifying symbol to the whole world of God’s providence.

Sabbath (verses 15-26).

Sure enough, some went out to gather manna on the seventh day, contrary to God’s command, and of course found none (verse 27). God then emphasized, “Let no man go out of his place on the seventh day” (verse 29).

How is this prohibition to be understood? The Soncino commentary makes this observation: “Rabbinical tradition has deduced from this context the prohibition that no Israelite shall go more than 2000 yards from the place of his abode. This is called ‘the Sabbath day journey.’ Travelling interrupts the rest both of man and beast, and was therefore to be avoided on the Sabbath day.”

But is this an accurate assessment? One of the arguments some have leveled against the Sabbath is based on this misunderstanding. But the prohibition against collecting manna on the seventh day was only for that time. On that one occasion described in Exodus 16, Israelites would have had no need to leave their home on the seventh day if they had obeyed the command to gather food on the previous day, since the Sabbath was a day of rest. So God told them to simply stay indoors.

This was only a command for that time, not a basic principle of Sabbath-keeping. Otherwise, how could one attend a “holy convocation” on the Sabbath as later commanded in the Old Covenant (Leviticus 23:2, 3) without leaving his “place”?

Now we come to the foot of Mount Sinai, where the command to rest on the seventh day was formalized as one of the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God on two tablets of stone (Exodus 20:8-11; 24:12). The Sabbath commandment was enjoined upon each entire household, including servants and visitors (Exodus 20:10) and even animals (Deuteronomy 5:14). The Sabbath pointed the people to God as Creator (Exodus 20:8-11) and reminded them of God’s deliverance from their bondage in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15).

The Ten Commandments are listed in the Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 (“Deuteronomy” means “second law” in Greek). Compare the texts of both passages, and notice that the wording is different. Since the Ten Commandments were written on stone, what words were written

in the Fourth Commandment?

Was all the information from both accounts written on the tablets? If so, either the tablets were huge, or the writing was minuscule. More likely God wrote only the core commandment and spoke the other information.

Why is this important? Simply because today in the “church age” God is calling individuals, not whole families, whereas under the Old Covenant the laws were directed to the whole nation. If we conclude that the actual commandment was only the basic command to keep the Sabbath holy by refraining from work, we can classify the extension of the command to the entire household as a temporal administrative ruling that does not apply in the same manner in the New Testament Church, since salvation is an individual matter based on God’s individual calling (John 6:44).

The core commandment applies only to individuals, not to entire households or even “servants” (we might say “employees”), as it did under the Old Covenant. In the church age we are all individually accountable to God. Therefore, no one can or should force the Sabbath on his or her adult family members or employees.

A sign between God and His people

The next stop on our journey is Exodus 31, where the “Sabbath covenant” is recorded in the midst of God’s instructions for building the tabernacle. The Soncino commentary observes: “The work of constructing the Tabernacle that was now to commence was of the highest importance, and was work in the service of God; but it was not of greater importance than the Divinely ordained Sabbath, and was not to be permitted to supersede it.”

The relative importance of the Sabbath command during the construction of the Tabernacle also explains another verse

(Exodus 35:3) that is often used to criticize Sabbath-keeping regulations. Orthodox Jews take the verse quite literally and in fact forbid driving an automobile on the Sabbath, because starting a car requires igniting a spark.

However, since the prohibition against kindling a fire on the Sabbath occurs in a chapter about building the Tabernacle, the restriction should be understood as pertaining to kindling a fire to work on the Tabernacle (see the *Keil-Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 245).

Going back to Exodus 31, note that the Sabbath is described as a “sign” between God and His people. God emphasizes the same two lessons as in the two accounts of the Decalogue: to remind them of the Lord who sanctified them (verse 13) and to point them back to God as Creator of the heavens and earth (verse 17).

Again quoting the Soncino commentary: “The Sabbath was more than a day of rest. Its observance by the Israelites was a constantly recurring acknowledgment of God as the Creator of the Universe. It would be an open denial of God for an Israelite to desecrate the Sabbath, even in the construction of the Tabernacle; as well as a contradiction of the essential purpose of the Sanctuary, the sanctification of Israel’s life in the service of God.”

This Jewish commentary makes an interesting observation on the meaning of the expression “that *you* may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you” (verse 13). Notice that the first “you” is in italics in many Bible translations. Who will know or recognize this sanctification? The Soncino explains that “all the world may recognize, by means of the Sabbath, that it is God Who sanctifies Israel, or provides it with the means of becoming a holy People. The Sabbath was recognized throughout the ancient world as the peculiar and distinctive festival of the Jewish people.”

The Sabbath is thus portrayed as a personal sign between God and His people and an identifying symbol to the whole world of God’s providence to Israel, His special people.

In regard to the Sabbath as “a perpetual covenant” (verse 16), the Soncino commentary says: “The weekly hallowing of the Sabbath by the Israelites, being a proclamation of belief in God and obedience to His law, effects a perennial renewal of the covenant of God with the Patriarchs.”

Another promise of rest

At this point we need to put the weekly



The observance of the Sabbath—from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, the biblical seventh day of the week—is a perpetual acknowledgement of God as the Creator of the universe.

Sabbath on the shelf for a moment and consider another “rest,” introduced to the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 3:20. Deuteronomy 12:9, 10 identifies this as rest from the Israelites’ enemies in the promised land across the Jordan. The promise is repeated in Deuteronomy 25:17-19, where the rest is understood as relief from the weariness and fatigue of Israel’s battles against enemies.

All those in the first generation that left Egypt were denied access to the new land except Caleb and Joshua. But the next generation crossed the Jordan River and entered the land under the leadership of Joshua.

In Joshua 1:13-15, Joshua reminds the people about the rest that Moses had promised to them. Near the end of the book Joshua summarizes the fulfillment of that promise: “So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled” (Joshua 21:43-45, New International Version).

We now move ahead to the time of David. Psalm 94:12, 13 promises rest (relief from adversity) to those who receive instruction from God’s law. The context anticipates a time when the wicked are dealt with and justice prevails.

Psalm 95, widely acknowledged as a Sabbath psalm, explains that the Israelites

of the first generation out of Egypt failed to enter God’s rest because of the hardness of their hearts (verses 6-11). These verses are expounded in the New Testament book of Hebrews, as we will soon see.

The prophet Isaiah also speaks of the millennial period of universal rest as including freedom from sorrow, fear and bondage (Isaiah 11:10; 14:3, 7).

New Testament examples

Finally we come to the New Testament. Jesus Christ makes a powerful statement about rest recorded in Matthew 11:28: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

His words would have fallen on eager

The Sabbath pointed the people to God as Creator and reminded them of God’s deliverance from their bondage in Egypt.

ears thanks to the heavy religious burdens imposed by the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:4). The deeper meaning of His promise is release from the bondage of sin (John 8:32-36; Romans 8:2; Hebrews 2:14-16). Yet we are still not completely free from sin (1 John 1:8, Romans 7:14-25). So the story of rest must continue.

This brings us to the book of Hebrews, where all the basic points of the story of rest are tied together. The faithfulness of Moses and Christ is spoken of in the first six verses of the third chapter. Beginning in verse 7, Psalm 95 is quoted to document the failure of the first generation of Israel as a lesson to God’s people today. Unbelief was the main cause of Israel’s failure to

enter the rest promised to them (verse 19).

The fourth chapter begins with an admonition to faith and obedience as a prerequisite to the rest that is still available to God’s people. No one has yet entered that rest, not because God didn’t have it ready; in fact, it was finished from the foundation of the world (verse 3). That God rested on the seventh day from all His works indicates as much (verse 4). David (in Psalm 95) still spoke of a promise of rest long after Joshua had led the second generation of Israel to rest in the promised land. This demonstrates that the rest fulfilled at the time of Joshua was only a type of a greater rest to come (verses 6-8).

Now we come to a controversial statement: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” The Greek word translated “rest” in every other passage throughout Hebrews 3 and 4 is *katapausis*. The word for “rest” in Hebrews 4:9 is *sabbatismos*. This is the only New Testament occurrence of this word. Its meaning is fundamental to understanding this pivotal verse, which is the conclusion of everything previously said about “rest” beginning in Hebrews 3:7.

Since *sabbatismos* is found nowhere else in the Bible, some authorities think the author made up the word. *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* asserts: “The term ‘Sabbath-rest’ (*sabbatismos*) is not attested before this passage and looks like the author’s own coinage. He did not have a word for the kind of rest he had in mind; so he made one up.”

By contrast, consider the following synopsis from the Anchor Bible dictionary on the meaning of *sabbatismos*: “The words

‘Sabbath rest’ translate the G[ree]k noun ‘sabbatismos,’ a unique word in the New Testament. This term appears also in Plutarch . . . for Sabbath observance, and in four post-canonical Christian writings which are not dependent on Hebrews 4:9 for seventh day Sabbath celebration.”

“The author of Hebrews affirms in Hebrews 4:3-11 through the joining of quotations from Genesis 2:2 and Psalm 95:7 that the promised ‘Sabbath rest’ still anticipates a complete realization ‘for the people of God’ in the . . . endtime which had been inaugurated with the appearance of Jesus (1:1-3) . . . The experience of ‘Sabbath rest’ points to a present ‘rest’ (*katapausis*) reality in which those ‘who have

DID THE APOSTLE PAUL ABOLISH THE SABBATH?

Traditional Christian belief is divided into two camps on the Sabbath issue. Some insist that the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath, are still obligatory for Christians. Most who hold this view teach that Sunday is the New Testament Sabbath, based on the claim that the early Church, or specifically the apostle Paul, changed the day.

A minority of churches believe the seventh day (Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, rather than Sunday, the first day of the week) must be observed as the Sabbath. The Sunday camp rejects any obligation to keep the Sabbath as a binding commandment and asserts that Jesus replaced all prior practices with a “law of love,” which carries no obligation for keeping any day as a Sabbath. These churchgoers meet for worship on Sunday as a voluntary church tradition.

Based on what we have discovered in our survey of the story of rest, we must ask those who teach that the Sabbath is no longer to be kept for their proofs.

Those who believe the Sabbath is no longer valid quote a few passages from Paul’s epistles to attempt to validate their claim. We will briefly consider each.

Sabbath-keeping not the issue

Romans 14:5, 6: “One person esteems one day above another, another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord . . .”

Those who oppose Sabbath observance can’t seem to resist reading it into these two verses, even though the entire chapter is devoted to eating and fasting. *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* remarks, “Whether the question of regarding the day as more sacred than another refers to Sabbath observance or to special days for feasting or fasting is not easily determined.” This would certainly be true for those who want to read Sabbath-keeping into the context.

That having been said, the quote continues: “Since the early church in Jerusalem almost certainly observed the Sabbath, it is not impossible that Paul has the

Sabbath in mind . . . Even so, if the day of worship is in view, it is strange that any believer could be said to consider ‘every day alike’ . . . The close contextual association as a time with eating suggests that Paul has in mind a special day set apart for feasting or as a time for fasting.”

The Jews fasted on Mondays and Thursdays. Human nature resulted in self-righteous condemnation of those who were not fasting at these set times. “I fast twice a week,” boasted the Pharisee in one of Christ’s parables (Luke 18:12). First-century gnostic philosophy advocated fasting and condemned feasting. The gnostics also attached special significance to times.

In Romans 14:5, 6 Paul sets the record straight by emphasizing that fasting is a voluntary exercise of worship not limited to a particular day. Therefore, one person’s fasting on a particular day when another is eating does not make him more righteous. The keeping of the Sabbath simply is not in the context of Romans 14, and to read it in is clearly a case of eisegesis (interpreting a passage of Scripture according to personal notions rather than according to original meaning).

Let no man judge you

Colossians 2:16, 17: The main thrust of this passage is “let no man judge you.” It doesn’t say whether the Colossians were keeping the Sabbath festivals or not. For that matter, it also doesn’t say whether they were eating and drinking.

The word translated “regarding” is not a preposition. Had the author, Paul, intended the meaning “regarding,” he could have used the pronoun *peri* (“concerning”) as in 1 Corinthians 8:1. Instead, he used the noun *meros* (from *merizo*, meaning “to cut”), which means “portion or part.” So the meaning here is a part or portion or aspect of the observance of the Sabbath, new moon or festival. The problem in Colossae was likely gnosticism. The gnostics did not object to observing Holy Days, only the aspect of feasting (eating and drinking) to celebrate the days.

Notice also that the passage says these days *are* (not *were*) a shadow of things to come. Based on the tenses of the verbs, the verse cannot mean that Christ’s com-

ing does away with the biblical Holy Days, because He had already come when Paul wrote that the days (still) *are* a shadow of things coming.

Ironically, this verse, which is often used to argue against the Sabbath and Holy Days, is actually a positive statement in favor of Sabbath and Holy Day observance.

Paul is not saying, as many believe, that once Jesus Christ, the “reality” or “body,” came, observance of the Sabbath and biblical Holy Days is no longer necessary. In verse 17, the word *is* is not in the text. Translators added it in an attempt to clarify the meaning. But the contrast between shadow and body doesn’t fit the main context of the passage, which is judging. The body-shadow dichotomy does occur in extrabiblical sources. However, nowhere in the New Testament does the Greek word *soma* (“body”) mean anything other than a literal body or the “body of Christ,” the Church, as used in verse 19.

Here is a paraphrased meaning of the passage: Don’t let any man judge you for eating and drinking or for any portion of a festival, new moon or Sabbath (which are a shadow of future events in God’s plan). Rather, let the Body of Christ be your judge.

Paul’s target: gnosticism

Galatians 4:10: “You observe days and months and seasons and years.” Here again, the key to understanding this verse is the gnostic heresy that prompted Paul to write this passage.

The classic *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* by Kittel sums up the meaning of this passage: “The compound (verb *paratareo* = ‘observe’) . . . seems to have the sense of ‘scrupulous, well-informed observance in one’s own interest,’ which does not fit the traditional celebration of the Sabbath or other Jewish feasts, but does fit regard for points or spans of time which are evaluated positively or negatively from the standpoint of the calendar or astrology” (Vol. VII, p. 148).

Paul is decidedly not condemning days God had instituted. His target again is gnostic beliefs and practices. **GN**

—Larry Walker

believed are entering' (4:3) and it points to a future 'rest' reality (4:11). Physical Sabbath-keeping on the part of the New Covenant believer as affirmed by 'Sabbath rest' epitomizes cessation from 'works' (4:10) in commemoration of God's rest at creation (4:4 = Genesis 2:2) and manifests faith in the salvation provided by Christ.

"Hebrews 4:3-11 affirms that physical 'Sabbath rest' (*sabbatismos*) is the weekly outward manifestation of the inner experience of spiritual rest (*katapausis*) in which the final . . . rest is . . . experienced already 'today' (4:7). Thus 'Sabbath rest' combines in itself creation-commemoration, salvation-experience, and eschaton (endtime)-anticipation as the community of faith moves forward toward the final consummation of total restoration and rest."

This multivolume work decisively concludes that *sabbatismos* means keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. Based on that conclusion, Hebrews 4:9 stresses the need to continue to keep the Sabbath in a New Covenant context, even though the day also embodies all it meant under the Old Covenant.

This is a plausible explanation, given that the book of Hebrews is addressed to converted Jews to explain the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The Sabbath and circumcision have long been considered two of the cardinal tenets of Judaism, identifying the Jews as "the people of God." However, by the time of Christ, the meaning of the Sabbath had become buried under a mountain of dos and don'ts.

Sabbath-keeping degenerated into legalism

The Sabbath, which even under the Old Covenant was to be a delight (Isaiah 58:13, 14), had become a heavy burden as Sabbath-keeping degenerated into the bondage of legalism, perpetuated by the narrow-minded scribes and Pharisees. Jesus Christ condemned their human traditions and set the example of how to keep the Sabbath as God's gift to mankind (Mark 2:27, 28).

What could be more appropriate to the book of Hebrews than the elevation of the Sabbath to its full meaning and intent in the plan of God?

So the Sabbath retains its Old Covenant meanings identifying God's specially sanctified people ("the people of God") and pointing them back to God as Creator. Added to that is the New Covenant meaning of the rest through Christ, fulfilled in type by the rest given to Israel during

Joshua's time (Hebrews 4:8).

This spiritual rest begins now in this life and reaches its consummation in the resurrection to eternal life at the return of Christ (Revelation 20:6). His return also signals the beginning of the millennial rest prophesied in the Old Testament.

The book of Hebrews cleverly weaves together three themes of rest: the rest from

Observance of the weekly Sabbath remains a vital part of the New Covenant worship of God.

enemies promised to Israel, the weekly Sabbath and the spiritual rest through Christ. The conclusion is that Sabbath-keeping is still necessary for the people of God, the New Testament Church. We must all labor to enter the spiritual rest and continue to keep the weekly Sabbath because of what it portrays in God's great master plan, as Hebrews 4:10 affirms.

Commentary on the Whole Bible by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown takes a somewhat different stance on *sabbatismos*: "Israel under Joshua enjoyed at last rest from war in Canaan. But the 'rest' in this verse 9 is the nobler and more exalted . . . Sabbath rest; [literally], 'cessation': rest from work when finished (verse 4) as God rested (Revelation 16:17). The two ideas of 'rest' combined, give the perfect view of the heavenly Sabbath. Rest from weariness, sorrow, and sin; and rest in the completion of God's new creation (Revelation 21:5).

"The whole renovated creation shall share in it; nothing will there be to break the Sabbath of eternity; and . . . God shall rejoice in the work of His hands (Zephaniah 3:17). Moses, the representative of the law, could not lead Israel into Canaan; the law leads us to Christ, and there its office ceases, as that of Moses on the borders of Canaan; it is Jesus, the antitype of Joshua, who leads us into the heavenly rest."

The conclusion here is that *sabbatismos* refers to the "heavenly rest," which we would understand to be our sin-free condition at the first resurrection, upon Christ's return. This view is supported by Jewish tradition, which has long considered the messianic age as "the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting" (Tamid 7:4).

However, note the following statement about the weekly Sabbath based on that conclusion as we continue the commentary quote: "This verse indirectly establishes the obligation of the Sabbath still; for the type continues until the antitype supersedes

it; so legal sacrifices continued till the great antitypical Sacrifice superseded it. As . . . the antitypical heavenly Sabbath rest will not be till Christ, our Gospel Joshua, comes, to usher us into it, the typical earthly Sabbath must continue till then."

Regardless of which commentary we accept, the inescapable conclusion is that observance of the weekly Sabbath remains

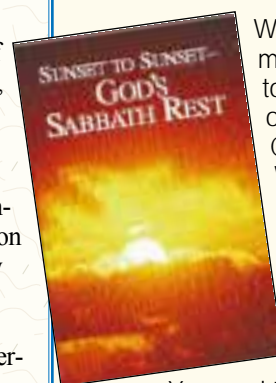
a vital part of the New Covenant worship of God.

In Matthew 5:18 Jesus said not one jot or tittle of the law would pass away until all is "fulfilled," or has completely filled its purpose. The Bible clearly tells us that circumcision, animal sacrifices and temple worship have fulfilled their purpose. If the Sabbath were not in effect today, we would logically expect to find numerous New Testament passages clearly stating that. The overwhelming importance of the Sabbath to the Jews under the Old Covenant would allow for no less.

Obviously there is still a purpose for the weekly Sabbath. As Hebrews 4:9 says, "There remains a keeping of the Sabbath for the people of God." Observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a command of God is therefore a fundamental teaching of both the New and Old Testaments.

We have come to the end of the story of rest. And now you know . . . the rest of the story. *GN*

Is the Sabbath Relevant Today?



Why did God command the Sabbath to be kept as one of the Ten Commandments? Why is this command almost universally ignored? Is the Sabbath relevant at all in today's busy world?

You need to understand the answers to these vitally important questions. Discover them for yourself in *Sunset to Sunset—God's Sabbath Rest*. Write to the address nearest you for your free copy.

Did Jesus Christ Abolish the Law?

Many believe that Jesus Christ came to do away with the law. But what did He say?

by David Treybig

Jesus Christ's sayings about God's law are important for Christians to thoroughly understand. In John 14:15 Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

This exhortation seems straightforward enough, but confusion abounds over this verse. What does Jesus mean when He says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments"?

The confusion with this scripture comes not because Jesus said to observe something. The confusion has to do with which commandments He is talking about here. What are the commandments Jesus is referring to?

Some think Jesus abolished one set of commandments, the law we read about in the Old Testament, and instituted new commandments for His disciples and followers. According to this popular theory, when Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) says He came to "fulfill," or complete, the law and prophets, He thereby does away with them. His statements in Matthew 5 beginning with the words "You have heard that it was said . . ." and "But I say to you" are cited as confirmation of this interpretation.

The Sermon on the Mount is considered to be the manifesto—or the seminal public declaration—of the way of life Jesus espoused. His comments in this message on the law and the standard of conduct He expected from His followers laid the foundation

The Sermon on the Mount is considered the manifesto of the way of life Jesus espoused. His comments on the law, and how His followers would live, lay the foundation for understanding Jesus' instruction to keep His commandments.

for understanding His instruction to keep God's commandments.

The prophecies of Jesus' ministry, the account of His life and the examples of the apostles and other Christians who lived when Jesus spoke these words help clarify our view of Jesus' teaching. Excluding these perspectives can lead to proof-texting—that is, reading one's own biased interpretation into the Scriptures—instead of letting the Bible interpret itself.

Beginning in the Old Testament are many scriptures describing events that would occur when the promised Messiah came to earth. Isaiah 42 is a prophecy describing Christ's teaching on the law. Beginning in verse 1, we read, "Behold! My Ser-

vant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles."

Verse 4 continues: "He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law."

The book of Isaiah prophesied the coming of justice and Christ's law. Verses 6 and 7 tell us Jesus' ministry would be "a light to the Gentiles" and open "blind eyes." Opening these afflicted eyes involved more than physical healing. Jesus invoked spiritual healing—the giving of understanding and discernment.

Now comes the key question: Would this spiritual healing be accomplished by instituting new laws or by magnifying the ones already in existence? Verse 21 says, "The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will magnify the law and make it honorable." Jesus was prophesied to magnify the law, to hold it in greater esteem and respect. He was coming to "make it honorable," not to ridicule or destroy it. Why did He need to magnify the law? Jesus had to do this simply because Israel had adopted a wrong view of God's law and was not obeying it.

Ezekiel 18:25 epitomizes a common view of God's law. In a striking rebuke directed toward Israel, God said, "Yet you say, 'The way of the LORD is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?" Verse 29 repeats, ". . . The house of Israel says, 'The way of the LORD is not fair.'"

The priests, whom God gave the responsibility of teaching His laws to the people, had failed in their solemn duty. Malachi 2:7, 8 documents this: "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts."

Ezekiel writes about this conspiracy by Israel's wicked leaders: "Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them" (Ezekiel 22:26).

Daniel said Israel did not understand God's truth (Daniel 9:13). Because God's law was not

being taught, it was not being respected or understood by the people.

God gave some of the Old Testament prophets visions of Christ's ministry successfully accomplishing the magnification process. Jeremiah wrote of a new covenant God would make with His people. Notice Jeremiah 31:33: "But this is the covenant

scriptures that say the New Covenant is based on new law. Rather, the New Covenant is based on the same laws that were given in the Old Testament.

Another vital component of the New Covenant is the availability of God's Spirit, which enables humans to understand the spiritual intent of God's law and obey it.

nor indeed can be" (verse 7).

Israel had such a negative view toward God's law because the nation lacked faith. Faith requires a radically different way of thinking made possible by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). God explains this in Ezekiel 36:26, 27: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

This was a prophecy of ancient Israel's eventual resurrection and opportunity to obey God's law, of God's people eventually learning to appreciate and respect His law through the Holy Spirit. Jesus reveals this truth in John 16:8; He says the Holy Spirit would "convict the world of sin."

Historically, God's law has been ridiculed and forgotten. The prophets of old predicted Christ's coming to restore the law to its proper state of dignity and respect. Now let's go to the New Testament and see how Christ fulfilled these prophecies.

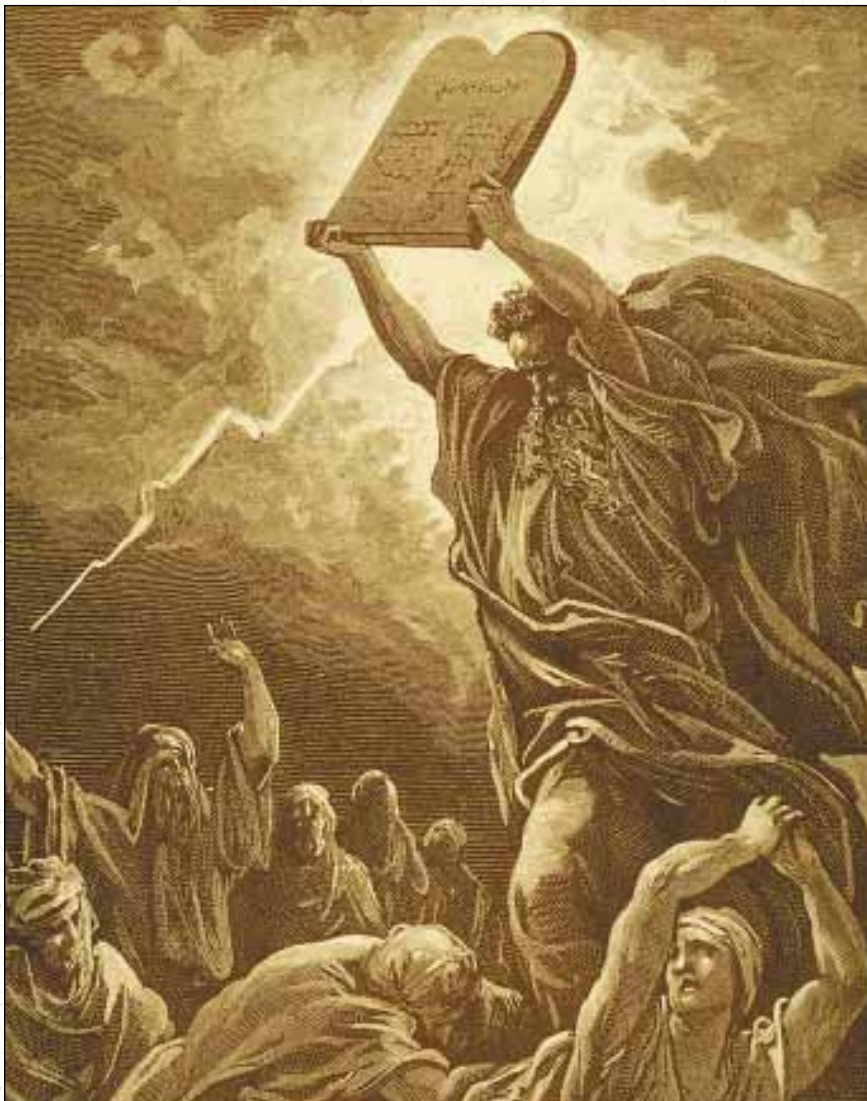
Jesus' approach in the Sermon on the Mount dealt with contrasts. The phrase "Do not be like them" from Matthew 6:8 is representative of Jesus' teaching technique. He laid the foundation for separation of His followers from pagan society and the nominal religion of the land in Matthew 4:17. We find repentance introduced as a fundamental shift in the direction of the theology of the day. Verse 17 says: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

"Repent" is translated from the Greek *metanoia*, meaning a complete change of mind. In other words, Jesus' disciples would see things from a different point of view contrasted with the perspective of the masses.

In Matthew 5:7, 8, Jesus says the merciful will receive mercy and the pure in heart will see God. These "beatitudes," as these verses have come to be called, show that Jesus expects His followers to do something, and they reveal the repentant attitude Jesus insists on. In verses 13-16, Jesus uses analogies of salt and light to explain this new way of thinking, this repentant attitude and changed mind and their effects on Christians and their neighbors. Jesus expected this new way of thinking to be reflected in the actions of His followers.

A mere letter-of-the-law approach with its focus on minimal standards was not

Woodcut by Gustave Doré



Did Jesus Christ come to the earth to save humanity from what some consider to be the harsh oppression of the law given to Moses? In this dramatic woodcut, Moses, furious at the rebellion of the Israelites, throws down the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments.

that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." This miracle would be accomplished by the imparting of God's Holy Spirit at the time of repentance and baptism.

Hebrews 8:6 and 9:15 show that better promises, including eternal life, come from obedience to this new covenant. We find no

Earlier God had prophesied to His people that He would "circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Romans 8 describes God's Spirit within us leading us to obey Him, whereas a mind without God's Spirit is "enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God,

acceptable to Jesus Christ. He wanted His followers to be activists so others could see the results of a repentant attitude. They were to be a culture that would run counter to the society around them.

By introducing the new concept of a repentant mind and attitude, Jesus inspired His listeners to wonder if He were abolishing everything God had revealed in Scripture up to that time. The people as a rule still believed in the law. They respected

Christ confirmed the validity of the Ten Commandments by citing several of them and magnifying their full intent.

God's commandments, even though they didn't properly understand them.

Now the crowd wondered how far Jesus would go in introducing and implementing His new ideas. Was He doing away with their tradition and the law as they understood it? Was He introducing new laws?

Jesus, as the Son of God, could perceive people's thoughts. In Matthew 5:17 He begins answering their unspoken questions: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets." In effect He was telling them: "If you think I came to destroy the law or prophets, you are not thinking clearly." He makes it plain that anyone who thought He was abolishing the law or prophets was mistaken. He assures them of His respect for God's law: "I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

The meaning of "destroy" is fairly simple to understand. But Jesus' use of "fulfill" has confused some readers of the Bible. As Jesus continued to speak, He clarified what He meant by "fulfill." But at this point we can simply note that, whatever Jesus meant by the word, it did not involve destroying the law. Jesus emphatically said not to think such a thing.

The word for "fulfill" comes from the Greek word *plerosai*, which means "to fill." Some believe this filling of the law means Jesus somehow filled up the law and prophets, thereby somehow abolishing the law; the law has supposedly been superseded by Christ. In effect, this theory has Jesus saying, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to abolish or supersede." Such an interpretation, called antinomian (antilaw) theology, however, is in direct contradiction to Scripture.

When we understand that Christ was prophesied to "magnify the law and make it honorable" (Isaiah 42:21), we realize that

such an interpretation is unscriptural, distorted and misleading. The remainder of Jesus' words in Matthew 5 clearly show that the "filling" of the law had to do with *filling up, or confirming, of the meaning* of the law rather than bringing the law to a completion.

In Matthew 5:18 Jesus validates this perspective when He adds, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass

from the law till all is fulfilled." As long as heaven and earth exist, Jesus said, we can be sure God's law will exist.

In verses 17 and 18 Jesus speaks theoretically about the law. But in the next two verses, 19 and 20, He speaks of the practical application—the significance of the law for anyone listening to Him and, conversely, its meaning for each of us. In verses 19 and 20 Jesus says: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

The word *breaks* comes from the Greek word *lusai*, which means "to dissolve, to loose or untie the obligation of." Jesus came out categorically against anyone who would try to water down the commandments. Because Jesus first speaks of "the Law" in verses 17, 18, His audience clearly understands He is referring to the law of God, including the Ten Commandments, when He refers to "these" commandments. Jesus does nothing to dispel this impression by His audience because it is precisely the perspective He wants them to understand. In the following verses, He confirms his listeners' understanding of the continuing validity of the Ten Commandments by citing several of them and magnifying or expounding their full intent.

Verse 19 reveals a key principle of Christ's teaching. Greatness in the Kingdom of God will be measured by "doing" the commandments of God and teaching others to do likewise. It is not our place now to judge how well others keep God's commandments, but Jesus will judge. Eternal life is a gift (Romans 6:23), but our reward

in the Kingdom of God will be determined by our works. When John quoted Jesus' revelation, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12), he was showing that Jesus repeated the same principle He had taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus presented another startling revelation to the crowd gathered around Him during that sermon when He told the people that their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). This statement shocked the crowd



because the scribes and Pharisees were considered to be the epitome of righteousness and piety.

Those leaders appeared to be law-abiding, but in fact they were law-breaking. Because they enforced hundreds of laws and prohibitions that were ostensibly part of God's law, some call them legalists. In reality they were illegalists, because they were not really respecting God's law.

As we will see in Matthew 5:21-48, many of their laws and prohibitions produced the effect of negating God's laws, exactly the opposite of Christ's preaching. Because of the Jewish leaders' hypocrisy in their pretense of righteousness while they ignored the spiritual intent of the law, Jesus spoke out strongly against them (Matthew 23).

In Matthew 5:21-48 we find the heart of the magnification of the law—the filling up of the meaning of the commandments—

that Jesus and the Father intended from the beginning. In this section we see a series of six antitheses in which Jesus used the following format: “You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you . . .”

Some have mistakenly believed that Jesus took this occasion to introduce a new set of commandments different from those of His Father. Some think Jesus rebelled against His Father’s laws. Another variation on this theme is that Jesus lived by His Father’s laws to somehow abolish them before instituting His own laws. Notice Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:21: “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.” Jesus said *entrée* into the Kingdom is based on obeying the Father’s will. In John 10:30 Jesus said, “I and My Father are one.”

In John 17:21 Jesus explains that He and His Father are in perfect unity. In John 5:30 Jesus says: “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.” Jesus perfectly yielded to the will of the Father, even to the point of death (Luke 22:42). He and His Father did not have different agendas. They did not have separate laws.

Then what did Jesus mean when He expounded using the format, “You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you . . .”? To begin, let’s notice something about these phrases themselves. “It was said”

The scribes and Pharisees gave the appearance of obeying the law while making it of none effect. They were the ones who were trying to abolish the law!

refers to the common interpretation or nominal religion of the Jewish society Jesus was addressing. This phrase does not refer to God’s law, but *Jewish tradition*.

Jesus used the Greek word *erethe* for “it is said,” as opposed to *gegraptai*, which is translated “it is written,” to make this distinction. In Matthew 4:4, 7, 10, in His confrontation with Satan, Jesus answers the devil’s questions with *gegraptai*, “It is written,” in referring to the Scriptures as the basis for His answers. Perhaps Matthew 5:43 best shows this faulty tradition: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” Those last three words were never part of God’s law. They were only part of the faulty tradition Christ condemned.

When Jesus completes the statement, saying, “But I say you . . .,” He is correcting the Jews’ erroneous understanding of the law. Their tradition actually condoned the breaking of God’s law. Jesus often spoke against these deficient traditions. For example, note Matthew 15:1-9, where the scribes and Pharisees chided Jesus for not upholding one of their additions to God’s law. They had transferred the concept of ceremonial washings to everyday life and took Jesus and His disciples to task for not following their tradition.

In verses 3-6 Jesus says: “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God’—then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.”

In this passage, Jesus showed the unlawfulness of the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. They played one honorable deed—giving money to the temple—against the commandment to honor one’s parents to justify their refusal to help their parents financially. Jesus said this kind of action nullified the law.

The scribes and Pharisees gave the appearance of obeying the law while making it of none effect. They were misinterpreting the law (Romans 10:2). Jesus con-

demns their hypocrisy as He closes His Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7:21 He says, “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.” In verse 23 He adds, “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

This example from Matthew 15 offers insight into why Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites. They made a show of being pious, righteous people when their actions circumvented God’s laws. They gave only the appearance of being lawful. The very laws they made a show of upholding and obeying they were actually watering down and even nullifying.

Modern-day Pharisees are the same way. They claim to be obedient while denying Christ’s clear directive to keep the commandments.

In Matthew 5:21-48 Jesus explains that the nominal religion of the day was actually lawlessness. Of the six illustrations He uses, four (verses 21, 27, 33, 43) are centered on commandments, and two (verses 31, 38) can be described as giving permission. In each of these, the scribes and Pharisees minimized the commandment and stretched the permission.

In expounding the commandment not to murder (verses 21-26), Jesus says no one should be angry with his brother in his heart. According to the Jewish tradition, hate was acceptable as long as one did not commit murder.

Concerning the commandment outlawing adultery (verses 27-30), Jesus says controlling one’s thoughts is important. According to the Pharisees’ tradition, lust and viewing pornographic materials would have been lawful. In verses 31 and 32 Jesus shores up the regulation giving people permission to divorce. The religion of the day pushed for a watered-down, loose, anything-goes approach to the marriage covenant.

Jesus discusses the subject of swearing and oaths in verses 33-37. The context shows the common belief was that it was acceptable to swear if one intended to carry out an oath. Jesus closes the loophole by saying not to swear at all.

Regarding restitution (verses 38-42), Jesus speaks against revenge and retribution. The common practice was to stretch the limits regarding the laws of restitution to condone vengeance. Concerning the command to love one’s neighbor (verses 43-48), Jesus repudiates the commonly held belief that hating one’s enemies was lawful and acceptable.

These six illustrations show why Jesus said His followers’ righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Their righteousness was a sham. Exceeding their form of piety would not be difficult for those who had the repentant attitude Jesus speaks of in Matthew 4:17.

For the benefit of the disciples then and now, Jesus not only *spoke* about how to live, He *showed* us how to live. His life was a perfect example of allowing God’s laws to be written in our hearts. Notice 1 John 2:6: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”

Continued on page E11

Who Is the Center of Our Worship?

Traditional Christianity claims to focus its worship on Jesus Christ. But didn't Jesus Christ Himself direct our attention, including even our prayers, to God the Father?

by Mario Seiglie

You have probably heard the sayings on the radio or television, or seen them on bumper stickers: “Christ is the answer” or, “Accept Christ and you will be saved.”

As Christians, we should not assume anything regarding our worship. Rather, we should be sure our worship practices are in accordance with Scripture. Many surprises await the student of the Bible who carefully and prayerfully looks into God's Word.

Let us look first at the sayings attributed to Jesus Christ about Himself. Did He say He should be our center of focus? The answer may surprise you.

Christ our Mediator

When Jesus Christ's disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, that would have been the perfect opportunity for Him to emphasize Himself. But, instead, He said: “When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, *hallowed be Your name*” (Luke 11:2, author's emphasis throughout).

Our Savior made it clear that God the Father is to be our focus when we pray and that we are to concentrate on His glory, power, might and love for us.

It is true that Jesus said we are to pray “in Jesus' name” (John 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:24, 26). This is because He mediates between God the Father and mankind. “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). A mediator, in either a religious or secular sense, is an integral part of a communication process, but the focus is on the one in charge.

For that reason, Jesus Christ did not focus attention on Himself. If we were to pray directly to Him, we might overlook God the Father. Many branches of Christianity put more emphasis on mediators than on the Supreme Being. Many Catholics view Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the chief mediator. Many Protestants

focus primarily on Christ and virtually ignore God the Father.

Christ revealed a loving Father

Christ came to reveal a God who loves us as a father loves his own children. As Jesus Christ said: “The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God” (John 16:27).

In the back of the minds of many Christians is the distorted idea that God the Father is the vengeful God of the Old Testament, and Jesus Christ came to shield us from the Father's wrath. That is an erroneous view. In reality, there is no difference in the love the Father and the Son have for us.

Perhaps forgotten in this context is this passage: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16, 17).

The apostle John summed up God in one word. “He who does not love does not know God, for God is *love*” (1 John 4:8).

Focus on the Father

It is this loving God whom Christ wants us to glorify. In His last prayer to His

In the minds of many Christians is the idea that the Father is the vengeful God of the Old Testament, and Jesus came to shield us from His wrath. That is an erroneous view. In reality, there is no difference in the love the Father and the Son have for us.

Father before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus said: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which *You have given Me to do* . . . that the world may know that *You have sent Me*, and have *loved them* as You have loved Me” (John 17:3, 4, 23).

Throughout His life on earth, Jesus Christ's focus was on God the Father, and Christ remained subservient to Him. “. . . The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner . . . I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:19, 30).

Jesus unequivocally gave credit to God the Father. “. . . The works that *I do in My Father's name*, they bear witness of Me . . . If I do not do *the works of My Father*; do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him” (John 10:25, 37, 38).

According to Jesus Christ, even the words He spoke came directly from God the Father: “For I have not spoken on My own authority; but *the Father who sent Me* gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak . . . Therefore, whatever I speak, *just as the Father has told Me*, so I speak” (John 12:49, 50).

He added: “The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but *the Father who dwells in Me does the works*” (John 14:10).

Jesus Christ lived His life in perfect

accordance with God's will, striving to constantly please the Father.

Apostles looked to the Father

What about the writings of the apostles? Didn't they focus their attention primarily on Christ? It is interesting to see how many times they actually referred to Christ and to God the Father.

For instance, in Paul's first epistle, his letter to the Romans, in which he explains the process of salvation, he refers to God the Father 145 times. If he wanted us to focus our attention primarily on Christ, Paul certainly would have referred to Him more and left out most references to God the Father.

But Paul, the writer of many of the epistles, does not do this. He consistently speaks of God the Father first and then Christ. The apostle Paul begins each of his epistles to the churches with the greeting "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," always putting God the Father first. When writing to disciples such as Timothy, Titus and Philemon, he also lists God the Father first in his greeting.

To avoid the obligation to obey the law of God, many shift their attention to their concept of Jesus in the mistaken belief that all Christ asks is that we "love one another" and rely on "faith" and "grace."

Paul knew who is to be the center of our worship: "For this reason *I bow my knees to the Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that *He* would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . . Now *to Him* who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, *to Him* be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever" (Ephesians 3:14-17, 20, 21).

Source of misplaced emphasis

Sadly, much of the prejudice against a view of God the Father as the center of our worship has to do with a wrong concept of God's law. Many associate the Ten Commandments, and other laws based on them, strictly with ancient Israel and a flawed concept of the God of the Old Testament.

So, to avoid the obligation to obey the law of God, many shift their attention to their concept of Jesus in the mistaken belief that all Christ asks is that we "love one another" and rely on "faith" and "grace." The result, thanks to vague interpretations of these terms, is a wide variance of beliefs. Thus spring hundreds of competing denominations, all claiming the name and authority of Christ.

Yet it was Jesus Christ who complemented the commandments of God with

His teachings. He said: "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:9, 10).

When asked by a young man what he could do to attain to eternal life, Jesus Christ was clear in His answer: ". . . If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). To make clear His meaning, Christ then quoted several of the Ten Commandments and another scripture based on them: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (verse 18).

Jesus Christ never attacked or belittled God's commandments. On the contrary, He taught that "whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and

teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17).

As prophesied, Christ came to "magnify the law, and make it honourable" (Isaiah 42:21, King James Version). He clearly upheld God's law in His actions and instruction. His teachings are extensions of God's commandments, showing us their spiritual intent and how we should apply them.

Proper emphasis and perspective

If we are to follow the examples of Jesus Christ and the apostles, and their scriptural instruction, God must be the focus of our worship; Jesus Christ made it clear that we pray, in Jesus' name (John 14:13, 14), directly to the Father. Jesus perfectly reflects God's love and character. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," He said (John 14:9).

By becoming God-centered Christians, we will hold the biblical perspective of always looking to God the Father, following the example of Jesus Christ Himself in all He did.

Our focus must be on God the Father, His merciful law and on Jesus Christ, the Son, with His teachings. Revelation 14:12 describes Christians in the time of the end of the age: "Here is the patience [or endurance] of the saints: here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." *GN*

The Law

Continued from page E9

Just as Jesus deferred to the will of the Father, we must do the same. Just as Jesus honored His mother (John 19:26, 27) and kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and Holy Days (John 7:2, 10, 37), so should we. Some may ask if doing these things can earn us salvation. The answer is absolutely not. Obedience cannot earn us salvation. Because everyone sins (Romans 3:23) and deserves death, eternal life can come only as a gift from God (Romans 6:23). Salvation is a gift made possible by God's grace.

Disobedience, on the other hand, can cost us our eternal life. The prophetic book of Malachi records warnings given to Israel and to us of the consequences of breaking God's law. Malachi 4:1 warns: "'For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly, will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' says the LORD of hosts, 'that will leave them neither root nor branch.'" This is a description of the lake of fire prophesied for the wicked.

How does God say we may avoid this punishment? "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (verse 4). Jesus Christ inspired John to pen this same sure punishment—the lake of fire—for those who deliberately and incorrigibly break God's law (Revelation 1:1; 21:8). The simple truth is we are saved by grace for a life of obedience.

The apostles and the early New Testament Church of God obeyed Jesus' instruction to keep the commandments. They imitated the life of commandment-keeping that Jesus lived. In 1 Peter 2:21, Peter says we should follow in Christ's steps, after His example. Paul tells the church in Corinth to imitate him as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). He tells the Philippians to think like Jesus (Philippians 2:5).

In other words, we need to have the mind of Christ. Jesus did exactly what the prophets foretold. He came to expound the full meaning of God's law. He did not introduce new laws and void the old in a rebellion against His Father. He upheld the law of God publicly and in practice.

He wants us to do the same. This is why He says, in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." *GN*

What Does God Require for Eternal Life?

God promises eternal life to all who believe in and accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. But do we have any responsibility beyond believing?

by Don Henson

Does God require anything of us for us to receive eternal life? In John 3:16, perhaps the best-known scripture in the Bible, God says He will grant eternal life to those people who have faith in Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

What a wonderful, inspiring offer from our Creator—to freely give eternal life to anyone who believes in His Son.

But is that all there is to it? Based on this scripture, many believe that all one must do for salvation is to “accept Jesus,” and, at that point of acceptance, one’s eternal life will be assured. Is this what the Bible says?

It is clear that God gives us eternal life out of His deep love for humanity. As the apostle Paul explains: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,” but “God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” But is that all there is to it? What does the Bible say on this vital matter?

together with Christ . . .” (Ephesians. 2:1, 4, 5).

Later in the same chapter, Paul further explains the way we receive eternal life: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Eternal life comes as a result of God’s grace. It is His gift, unearned and undeserved on our part, freely imparted to us.

No one can earn eternal life

These scriptures make it plain that eternal life is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus, not by our own efforts or works of obedience. No one will ever be able to boast that he has earned or that he deserves the gift of eternal life. Salvation is God’s to give, not ours to demand.

But back to our question. Is anything required on the part of the ones receiving God’s wonderful gift of eternal life?

If there is an authority on receiving eternal life, it has to be Jesus Christ. After all, He is the one through whom we receive it.

Christ is called the author of our salvation: “. . . Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

Since salvation comes by faith, what does this scripture mean when it speaks of “eternal salvation to all who *obey* Him?” If Christ’s saving us is a gift we cannot possibly earn, what does obedience have to do with eternal life? If we must *do* something to receive God’s promise, how can it be a gift?

Christ the authority on eternal life

Since Jesus is the author of our salvation, let’s examine a few of His statements that tell us how we can receive that gift.

During Jesus Christ’s ministry on earth, He involved Himself in many disagreements with Pharisees, the religious leaders who demanded strict, legalistic obedience to their interpretations of God’s law. But, although Jesus had many sharp disagreements with them, He never said that obedience to God’s law was unnecessary or wrong. In fact, He said that, if we expect to enter God’s Kingdom, we must be even *more* righteousness than the Pharisees were (Matthew 5:20).

The Pharisees’ problem was that they didn’t understand the reason for obeying God’s laws. Notice Jesus’ comments to them in Matthew 23:23: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”

Jesus commended the scribes and Pharisees for their obedience, but said they had missed something: They had failed to learn the far more important lessons that should have resulted from obedience to God’s law and the very purpose for it.

Christ's point is that obedience is important, not just for the exercise of doing what we're told to do, but because through obedience we can learn the godly traits of sound judgment, loving mercy and steadfast faith.

In Matthew 7:21 Jesus made another striking statement: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

He made it clear that merely acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Master—saying "Lord, Lord"—is not sufficient. To inherit the Kingdom, we must *do* something. We must do the will of the Father, as He clearly stated.

But, if we must do something to receive eternal life, doesn't that contradict the notion that it is indeed a gift? Aren't we saved just because we believe in Jesus Christ?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "belief" as: "1. The mental act, condition or habit of placing trust or confidence in a person or thing. 2. Mental acceptance of or conviction in the truth or actuality of something."

Jesus wants us to understand that there is more to receiving eternal life than just a mental act or mental acceptance. Our conviction that He is our Savior must be more than just a warm, comforting thought or intellectual concept. Jesus warns that simply calling on His name or recognizing Him as "Lord" is not enough. Jesus taught that God *requires* us to demonstrate our faith by obediently doing the will of the Father.

Salvation is just the beginning

Jesus Christ emphasized that following Him requires a great deal of effort and sacrifice from those who would be His disciples. The acceptance of Jesus as Savior leads to challenges, choices and difficult decisions: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24, 25).

This level of effort involves much more than mere mental or intellectual acceptance. Acceptance of and faith in Jesus requires that our priorities change, as He made clear. Our lives are no longer just our own, but are dedicated to following Christ. If we do what we want, He said we will lose our lives. We are required instead to do what Jesus commands.

This demands living, active, deeply committed obedience, which demonstrates our

faith in His sacrifice for us and in His leadership over our lives.

The principle is illustrated in an example recorded in Luke 19:11-27. In a parable, Jesus compares Himself to a wealthy nobleman who leaves on a long trip. As the nobleman departs, he gives his servants money and instructs them to invest it during his absence.

Upon his return, the nobleman demands to know what each servant has accomplished. He rewards two of his servants because they increased what he had given them. The third servant claimed he was so afraid of losing the initial amount that he didn't even try to invest it.

If we must do something to receive eternal life, doesn't that contradict the notion that it is indeed a gift? Aren't we saved just because we believe in Jesus Christ?

That servant's fear and subsequent lack of obedience proved he was unfaithful. In the parable, Jesus Christ Himself, represented as the nobleman, judges the unfaithful servant to be an enemy and condemns him (verse 27).

The parable illustrates that obedience, works and spiritual growth prove our faithfulness. It also illustrates that obedience produces the results and accomplishments God expects us to achieve.

On the other hand, refusal to obey demonstrates a lack of faith and will result in condemnation.

Beginning of lifelong commitment

Another lesson we learn from this parable is that being chosen for eternal life isn't the end; it is only the beginning.

As Paul expressed it, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . ." (Colossians 1:21-23).

Notice that the chance to receive eternal life is conditional. To remain holy and blameless before God, we must "continue in the faith." We must put forth effort. We must produce.

Conversion is only the beginning of God's work in your life. Not only that, it is also the beginning of *your* work for God. More is involved in receiving eternal life than sitting by and passively expecting God to hand it over to us. We know it is a gift

and that obedience to God doesn't earn what He freely gives us, but we also are required to put that gift to work. We must demonstrate our faith by obedience.

In Ephesians 2, quoted earlier, Paul states that we are saved by God's grace and not by any works we can do. However, he then concludes his comments on receiving eternal life through grace by stating, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (verse 10, emphasis added throughout).

Paul says the purpose of our receiving eternal life is that we can begin a life of good works.

Rewards according to works

A wealthy young man approached Jesus and asked Him how he could receive eternal life. "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" the man asked (Matthew 19:16). Christ's reply, in verse 17, might shock some who think obedience to God's law is unnecessary: "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments.*"

Jesus didn't answer that nothing is required other than believing in God. He told the young man that he must *obey the commandments of God* to receive the gift of eternal life. Jesus didn't say obedience would *earn* eternal life (in fact, nothing *can* earn it), but He did make it plain that it is required.

When the young man was unwilling to sacrifice his physical wealth to dedicate himself to Christ, the disciples were confused. They apparently thought that, with all his talent and ability, this impressive young man was the kind of person who deserved eternal life. "When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, 'Who then can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'" (verses 25, 26).

Jesus reemphasizes that, although obedience to God's commandments is required, it does not earn eternal life. It is impossible for any man to earn eternal life by his own efforts.

For one thing, our efforts will always fall short, as illustrated by this young man's lack of commitment. And, no matter what

we give up or do, our actions cannot earn God's gift to us (verses 27-29). Eternal life is impossible except by the grace of God, but that reality does not relieve us of the requirement of obedience.

Free but not cheap

You may have heard the expression, "Salvation is free, but it isn't cheap." Our gift of life cost Christ His life. Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, willingly surrendered His life that we might enjoy the gift of eternal life. In turn, He expects us to surrender our lives for salvation, as well. "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26, 27).

Our love for and commitment to Jesus Christ and God the Father must be more important to us than any other relationship. Each of us must be willing to bear his "cross," to faithfully follow Jesus even through life's most difficult challenges.

Verses 28-33 carry that thought, warning us to consider carefully that accepting the gift of eternal life comes at the highest cost we can imagine. "... Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (verse 33). As Jesus gave His life for us, we must be willing to give our lives to follow Him.

Obedience earns us nothing

Jesus used a story to illustrate that we can *earn* nothing through obedience. "And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'" (Luke 17:7-10).

When a servant meets a minimum standard required of him by his master, he has simply done his duty, according to Jesus Christ. We must realize that obedience earns nothing; obeying is our duty and is required for us to receive the gift of eternal life.

In Matthew 16:27 Jesus makes a vital point about the relationship between works and eternal life: "For the Son of

Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will *reward* each *according to his works*." When Jesus Christ returns, He will judge and reward us according to our efforts, works and obedience.

Notice that Jesus will be looking for something when He returns: "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, *to give to every one according to his work*. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Blessed are those who *do His com-*

If God wants to freely give us eternal life based on our faith in Jesus, what does obedience have to do with anything?

mandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:12-14).

When He returns, Jesus Christ will reward each of us according to our works. Those who have kept His commandments can claim the right to the gift of eternal life!

Obedience is the evidence of faith

But, if God wants to freely give us eternal life based on our faith in Jesus, what does obedience have to do with anything?

Obedience is *not* an attempt to make ourselves righteous or to earn God's favor and eternal life. Instead, obedience is an expression of our deep, abiding faith in His promises. Even though we realize God requires us to obey, we learn that obedience is not something we do reluctantly or begrudgingly.

Instead, obedience is a willing expression of our love and gratitude for all He is willing to give. It is a confident and enthusiastic expression of our faith in God's promise of the gift, for "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

The apostle John confirms that there is no contradiction between faith and obedience. On the contrary, there is a clear connection between the two: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:3-5).

Through obedience, we demonstrate our faith in Jesus, overcome the world and accomplish God's purpose. John also adds

that obedience to God's commands is not an unreasonable burden.

How Abraham proved his faith

To emphasize the importance of faith, Paul said in Romans 4:13 that Abraham's righteousness was imputed to him and promises were made to him because of his faith, not his works of obedience to the law. But how did God know Abraham was faithful?

Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21, quoted earlier: Belief is pointless unless it is proven by action and obedience.

The apostle James explains that faith and obedience go hand in hand: "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together *with his works*, and by works faith was made perfect?"

"And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only" (James 2:23, 24).

The point is made again that works do not make us righteous, justify us or earn us eternal life, but the works of obedience provide the evidence and proof that we have faith, by which we are saved.

Eternal life is free, and obedience is a requirement. At first those two statements may seem contradictory. Yet, as Jesus Christ Himself clearly taught, there are things we must do if we want to inherit eternal life. He specifically mentioned God's commandments in this regard, as we read earlier. At the time of the judgment, He will proclaim a stern message for those who have believed in Him, but whose belief never translated into loving submission to God's law: "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:23).

Jesus Christ and the writers of the Bible teach faithful commitment to God, demonstrated by obedience to His law. Obedience does not contradict or deny faith. In fact, obedience establishes faith. Obedience demonstrates faith. Obedience is based on faith. Obedience to God's law is required of those who will receive the gift of eternal life. **GN**

Who Could Possibly Misunderstand the Second Coming?

Both the apostles and the early Church misunderstood Christ's second coming. Could you be repeating their mistakes today?

by Cecil Maranville

The second coming of Jesus Christ has to be one of the most widely accepted and least controversial subjects in the Christian world—right? It was the one idea that the early Church unitedly perceived in all its ramifications—wasn't it? Don't be too quick to agree. The answers might surprise you.

As we approach the year 2000, interest in the return of Jesus Christ is increasing. Will Jesus Christ return then? Why did He say He would return?

We can glean biblically sound information about Christ's return by looking at the accounts of His first coming and the years immediately after His death.

Expectations concerning the Messiah

The image of a conquering King was strong in the minds of the early followers of Christ, but their thinking was significantly different from yours or mine. They believed in *one* coming of the Messiah, not in a first coming and a subsequent return.

Since the early Church was composed of Jews and Jewish proselytes, the prophetic traditions concerning the Messiah were widely accepted among early Christians. The expectations of two elderly citizens of Jerusalem, Simeon and Anna, show the extent of that acceptance. To see the Messiah, or Christ, was a lifelong hope of each of them (Luke 2:25, 26, 36-38).

When Jesus began His ministry, He did not fit people's expectations of the Messiah. Notice the response of the residents of His own home area: "And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, 'Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? . . . Where then did this Man get all these things?' So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.' Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matthew 13:54-57).

Confounded disciples' expectations

The disciples did not understand that the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah were to be fulfilled in two separate events: a first and second coming. They did not grasp the purpose of His first coming, that He came to die for the sins of humanity.

The idea of a coming that would precede the triumphal arrival as a conquering King came as a shock to the apostles, whose stunned response was vocalized by Peter: "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem . . . and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!'" (Matthew 16:21, 22)

Even after Jesus' resurrection, during their additional 40 days with Him, the apostles still did not understand that Jesus did not intend to establish His Kingdom at that time. They were still thinking that He would immediately fulfill the Messianic prophecies.

"Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" they asked (Acts 1:6).

As we approach the year 2000, interest in the return of Jesus Christ is increasing. Will Jesus Christ return then? Why did He say He would return?

You can almost see the wistful look in their eyes and sense the anticipation in their voices. Helping them through this major shift in understanding, God sent two angels with a reassuring message immediately after Christ disappeared up into the sky: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Within that message was affirmation of yet-unfulfilled prophecies concerning the Messiah, as well as further clarification

about a second coming. That reassurance was important, lest these men lose confidence in the validity of Scripture.

The message also contained a gentle reminder that Jesus' followers should get busy fulfilling the commission Jesus told them to carry out before His return. They had to mentally adjust to this new (to them) concept: that there would be an interval between the Messiah's first and second comings, and they would have to explain the new understanding to the many first-century Jews who anxiously awaited a conquering hero. Thousands of them would accept Jesus Christ as the true Messiah, eagerly believing that His return was imminent.

New question to answer

Once convinced of and understanding that there were indeed *two* distinct periods allowed for within the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, the Church was faced with another type of challenge: how to deal with the period between the comings. Would it be short? How long would it be until Christ came back? What could a Christian expect during this time? What should they do during the interim?

Paul wrote to Timothy on the subject, telling him that a Christian could expect to endure many troubles during this period (2 Timothy 2:3; 3:10-12). If one did not realize this, he or she could be easily discouraged. Christians were to see the coming like the finish line of a race. It would draw them, motivate them, give them capacity to endure.

Paul spoke of "that Day" as synonymous with a Christian's hope in the long-awaited Messiah King. "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep

what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

The second coming of Jesus Christ was to represent a time of ultimate spiritual success: “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:10-12).

Paul understood that Christians would share in rulership with Jesus Christ in the Messianic age to be inaugurated at His return. As Jesus told John: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on

Paul warned the Thessalonian congregation that most people will not anticipate the timing of the coming, but those same people need not be caught off guard.

My throne . . .” (Revelation 3:21).

What does . . . this have to do with us?

Just like those living in Paul’s day, we also are living in a time between the comings. Therefore, everything said to the early Church on this subject applies just as well to us. Let’s take a look at two letters written to congregations of the early Church some two decades after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Early in his letter to the brethren in Thessalonica, Paul reaffirmed their belief in the second coming (1 Thessalonians 2:19). Chapter 3 contains another emphasis of this truth (verses 11-13), directing Christians toward love, clean consciences and spiritual growth so that Christ may finish the establishment of these qualities at His return. Paul pointed grieving Christians to the resurrection of the dead that will occur at Christ’s return (1 Thessalonians 4:9-18).

An unanswered question

This doctrine brought with it a new, compelling and difficult question, still unanswered to this day. When will these things happen? When will the coming take place? Paul warned the Thessalonian congregation that most people will not anticipate the timing of the coming, but those same people need not be caught off guard.

Some modern readers assume that means we can read these instructions, found in 1 Thessalonians 5, and we can then know when the coming will be. That’s not what Paul said. His message spoke of a way to protect oneself with a breastplate and helmet symbolic of faith, love and the hope of salvation (verse 8). He cautioned his readers that an unshakable belief in and anticipation

of the coming would keep them from being caught off guard, but it would not reveal to them a specific date. He made clear to them the behaviors and attitudes Christians should pursue in the time between the comings.

Paul wrote a second letter to the Thessalonians on the heels of the first to clarify certain misunderstandings. Paul assured them that Christ’s return would be more like the historically anticipated coming of the Messiah: It would be with great power (2 Thessalonians 1:8-10).

Why did Paul need to write that? It was because strange ideas about the second coming of Jesus Christ were already begin-

ning to spring up in scattered congregations.

Some were teaching that, while there were indeed two comings, they had both already occurred (2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2). This misunderstanding is not so absurd as it might first seem when we realize that, up until only about 20 or 25 years earlier, no one understood anything other than a single coming of the Messiah. If they had been ignorant about so major a prophesied event, why wouldn’t there be gross misunderstanding on the subject in all its details?

So Paul had to remind the Thessalonians of the nature of the second coming, that it would be with great power (2 Thessalonians 1:7-11). Obviously “that Day” had not already passed unnoticed by them.

In our eagerness for the Messiah’s return, we can easily project an inaccurate interpretation onto current events—just as the Thessalonians did.

Checklist for the second coming?

Today, some read into Paul’s correcting of this wrong teaching a virtual checklist for Christ’s return. But that was not Paul’s point. Jesus had made it clear that His followers would *not* know when He would return (Matthew 24:36, 44; 25:13; Acts 1:6, 7).

Instead, Paul’s message in this chapter is consistent with the other prophetic messages throughout the Bible—Christ *will* return. Meanwhile, we are to concentrate upon the responsibilities incumbent upon us before that event.

Paul wrote another letter, to the Corinthian church, dealing with the doctrine of Jesus Christ’s return. The problem at Corinth? Some taught that there wouldn’t be a

resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12, 16, 19). But, as Paul had earlier written to the Thessalonians, the resurrection was inextricably linked with Christ’s second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Paul challenged the Corinthians’ mistaken belief by reasoning through the question: “What if there is no resurrection of the dead at a future coming?” In verses 13-19 of 1 Corinthians 15, he detailed the consequent conclusions of that erroneous premise:

- There would be no hope of rescue from the miseries of this physical existence (verse 14).
- There would be no forgiveness of sin, since forgiveness is tied to another resurrection, that of Jesus Christ (verses 13, 14, 16, 17).
- There would be no hope of comfort for the loved ones of those who have died (verse 18).
- There would be no judgment to come, no invitation to join the Messiah in bringing peace to the world (verse 19).
- Christians’ beliefs would be without focus or meaning, gutting life of any hope (verse 14, 17, 19).

Who can know?

Who can possibly misunderstand the second coming? *You can. I can.* Many Christians have misunderstood, both recently and in centuries past. Yet the second coming of Jesus Christ remains sure.

The apostle Paul understood that the second coming is a key to our present conduct: “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober . . . , putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation . . . Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8, 11).

Paul knew that Christ’s second coming is a key to understanding our collective destiny. Like the other apostles and thousands of other members of the early Church, he went to his grave secure in the unshakable certainty of Jesus’ return and the resurrection of the dead at that time. He was confident of the priceless reward in store for him.

Writing to Timothy, his beloved friend and companion in the faith, he said: “. . . The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8, New International Version). ***GN***