



^{The} Good News

March 1996

Teaching
Youth
Proper
Values

*Parenting in the 90s • 'Christ, Our Passover, Was Sacrificed for Us'
Does Easter Commemorate Jesus Christ's Resurrection?*

From the publisher

The Good News is dedicated to explaining the Word of God in a direct, fresh and innovative way. This is a significant niche we seek to fill because we live in a world of biblical illiteracy. Despite all we hear about the explosion of interest in spirituality, the desire for knowledge beyond the purely physical does not seem to lead most people to biblical truth.

In this issue you will find a concentration of articles on the significance of that most important of Christian concepts—the death of a Savior for mankind. The true story of Jesus and His death as the symbolic Passover lamb brings with it a series of significant conclusions. It means, for example, that His death and resurrection should be examined in the context of Easter traditions. When did Jesus die, how long was He dead and when was He resurrected? These are all important questions for which there are biblical answers that defy traditional explanations. And as Wilbur Berg points out in his article, substituting non-biblical ceremonies and memorials for those God commands is not a way to please Him.

The Passover ceremony as practiced by the early New Testament Church was initiated by Jesus Christ Himself on the eve of His death. The singling out of bread and wine as symbols of His own sacrifice was an act that has reverberated down the centuries and kept Jesus' sacrifice alive in His followers' memories. Does the New Testament Passover ceremony have a deeper meaning than traditionally assumed? Bill Bradford's article provides some provocative insights.

Sin and repentance, are, of course, central to any discussion of the need for Christ's sacrifice. This month's Bible study, by Ron Weinland, focuses on repentance, and Les McCullough and Roger Foster, in their articles, explain sin's hold on us and how that death grip can be released.

The Passover in ancient Israel signified the beginning of a new round of Holy Days. In a New Testament context, the annual Holy Days reveal the marvelous plan of God for all humanity. Jesus Christ's coming illuminated many things, including the spiritual implications of each Holy Day in the year. Jerry Aust explains why Christ is our Passover and Larry Neff helps us understand the Holy Days of the New Testament.

Actively living the life of a Christian has never been an easy choice. Some years ago, I asked George Gallup Jr. whether he considered the United States a religious nation. He replied that it depended on how deeply you probed with your survey questions. A simple "Which religion are you?" produced a positive percentage in the high 90s. However, when the respondents were asked about regular church attendance, the percentage dropped to the low 40s. The most telling statistic came when those surveyed were asked about evidence of their religious commitment in daily life. Now the percentage fell to less than 10 percent.

Could successful Christian parenting make a difference to these numbers? David Treybig believes it could. His article is the subject of our cover story "Teaching Youth Religious Values." Along with regular features "Profiles in Faith" and "World News and Trends," this month's issue is completed with some encouragement from Cecil Maranville to always be ready to make a new beginning, and from Elaine Jacobs, who asks that simple hospitality be returned to everyday life.

Biblical literacy and a practical approach to Christianity go hand in hand and demonstrate the value of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God to humanity. That's good news.

—David Hulme

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Contents

COVER FEATURE

Teaching Youth Religious Values

Secular society has largely abandoned instructing children in religious values, with devastating consequences for individuals and families. What does the Bible say about passing values from generation to generation? And what are your responsibilities as a parent? 4

FEATURE ARTICLES

Parenting in the 90s

Dealing with the challenges of parenting in today's world 7

Are the Biblical Holy Days for New Testament Christians?

Why are the Holy Days of the early Church largely ignored today?..... 10

Did You Sin Today?

A vital question with a sobering answer 14

'Christ, Our Passover, Was Sacrificed for Us'

What does Jesus Christ's sacrifice mean for you?..... 16

Does Easter Commemorate Jesus Christ's Resurrection?

The surprising story behind this religious holiday 20

What Is the Value of a Life?

Just how valuable is the life of a human being?..... 24

Three Strikes and You're Out—or Are You?

When we strike out, is the game over for us? 26

The Passover Bread and Wine

The significance of the bread and wine commanded by Jesus Christ 32

The Lesson of the Feast of Unleavened Bread

The road to true freedom..... 36

Who Delivers Us From Sin?

Reasons to rejoice in the Passover season 39

If I Knew Then What I Know Now

God provides a way for us to start over..... 40

Keep It Simple, Warm and Cozy

Important lessons about the meaning of hospitality..... 44

REGULAR FEATURES

World News and Trends

What lies ahead for the British monarchy and commonwealth?..... 8

Profiles in Faith

Sarah: a story of virtue 28

Understanding God's Word

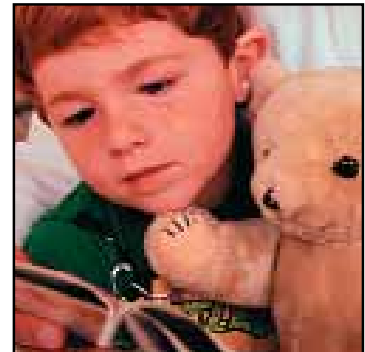
What is repentance?..... 42

Letters From Our Readers

..... 45

Just for Youth

The world's most wanted 46



Page 4



Page 7



Page 16



Page 32

Teaching Youth Religious Values

by David Treybig

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up”.

The great experiment in value-neutral education is over. This movement, which advocated the idea that parents and educators should refrain from teaching young people moral values and allow them to determine their own values, has been a tragic failure. The results include an escalating rate of sexually transmitted diseases, higher rates of children born out of wedlock, and broken marriages.

Not teaching any values tells young people that nothing is wrong. Everything is okay! In such a vacuum, no wonder so many young people make poor choices that affect them for the rest of their lives.

Parents who have agonized over whether or not to teach their children religious values should notice what God says. In Ephesians 6:4 the apostle Paul said, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Paul did not advocate value-neutral education. He, by contrast, encouraged fathers to teach their children God’s values. This statement was simply a continuation of the same principle God gave the Israelite families in the Old Testament.

Command to instruct children

When God gave Israel His eternal laws, He told them, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7).

Here, God not only told parents to teach their children His ways, but He said to be diligent about it. He also said to do it throughout the day when they were sitting, walking, going to bed or getting up in the morning. This is all-inclusive; not much time is left.

The people of the Bible clearly understood God’s direction to teach children His ways. Abraham, called the friend of God in James 2:23, was given high praise by God for teaching his children and household God’s way.

Genesis 18:19 says, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” Abraham was conscientious in obeying God, and his descendants—Isaac, Jacob and Joseph—also diligently followed God’s ways.

King Solomon understood that when we reach maturity, we reflect the training we have received as children (Proverbs 22:6). This also includes religious training. History clearly shows that Israel did neglect teaching and obeying God’s laws as given in Deuteronomy 6, and they suffered the tragic results. The verses previously cited in Deuteronomy and Ephesians clearly show that God expects parents to teach their children His religious values.

Teaching is based on love

The biblical passages dealing with parenting express God’s will that our children be treated with love, dignity and respect. Love is the foundational principle for all Christian relationships (Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:34, 35).

Jesus Christ said that obeying the Ten Commandments expresses love toward God and love toward our neighbor.

Just as God gives us laws because He loves us, we must give our children rules if we love them (Hebrews 12:7). Loving our children does include discipline. Child psychologist James Dobson has written a well-known book, *Dare to Discipline*, which advocates this biblical principle.

Establishing fair rules and punish-



ments for breaking those rules has been described as setting up boundaries. The purpose of boundaries is for our children to learn appropriate behavior and to feel secure. Proverbs 29:17 (New International Version) says, "Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul."

A value-neutral or lack-of-rules approach is a mistake for children and parents. Proverbs 29:15 says that "a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."

Authority not to be abused

Because humans have a tendency to abuse authority, some have mistakenly concluded that all authority is bad. This is not true. God intended that authority be used for good (Romans 13:1-4). Jesus commanded his disciples not to "lord it over" others in the Church (Matthew 20:25-28). In similar fashion, Colossians

3:21 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."

Ephesians 6:4 also tells parents not to use forms of authority that intimidate, bully or make children angry. Physical and emotional abuse of children is thus expressly forbidden by God. To those who foolishly reject God's direction on this issue, Proverbs 11:29 declares, "He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind."

Because physical and emotional

abuse tends to continue through successive generations, some adults who were abused as children may find it difficult to break the cycle. With God's help and a strong desire, however, this scourge can be conquered.

Much has been written to help individuals who sincerely want to change, and the encouragement of older successful parents can go a long way toward helping adults adopt positive parenting roles. Titus 2:2-6 speaks of the older people teaching and modeling proper behavior for the younger.

Amazingly, this principle of modeling good behavior has even been found effective in teaching primates better parenting skills. (See "Primates Learn Better Parenting," this page.)

An inclusive, relational approach

Notice Jesus Christ's attitude toward children. Several passages in the New Testament record Jesus

PRIMATES LEARN BETTER PARENTING

Animal research does not always translate into simple solutions to human problems, but maybe zoo keepers and social workers ought to talk. In recent years, zoo keepers faced a problem of ape mothers mistreating their offspring.

Researchers found three effective ways of reducing the problem: 1. providing better living quarters, 2. placing new mothers with other female primates (the equivalent of grandmothers, aunts, and cousins) and 3. allowing the inexperienced mother to learn from other good mothers. This program reduced the rate of abuse from 75% in the 1970's to only about 2% now. Amazingly, researchers found that when abusive mothers were given examples of good mothering, they became better parents within only a few days.

Prior to the inception of this program for apes, the standard procedure had been to take infants away from their mothers and raise them in a nursery. Unfortunately, most of the apes raised in this manner almost always turned out worse than their parents. About three out of four of these apes would reject their own offspring, sometimes beating or even killing their infants. Needless to say, this practice was discontinued for apes.

A human program with interesting similarities was recently sponsored by the University of Rochester. New mothers were regularly visited in their homes by nurses who tried to cultivate warm relationships during a period of time prior to birth and for the next two years. The nurses taught the mothers how to play and talk to their children. Close friends and relatives were also encouraged to help. Finally, the mothers were helped to find jobs and obtain public assistance.

The result was that only 4% of the low-income teenage mothers abused or neglected their children as compared with 19% of those who were not visited by the nurses ("The biological roots of good mothering" by Art Levine, U.S. News & World Report, February 25, 1991. p. 61).

rebuking His disciples for trying to keep little children away from Him (Matthew 19:13, 14; Mark 10:13, 14; Luke 18:15, 16). He had a positive attitude toward children and showed them personal attention by picking them up in his arms, praying for them and using them as teaching examples for adults.

Christ was not too important or too busy to give them some of His time. We need to remember that God considers our children holy (1 Corinthians 7:14). We, too, must treat children with dignity.

In Deuteronomy 6:20-25, where God instructed the families of ancient Israel about the importance of obeying God's laws for their collective good, the frequent use of the pronouns *we*, *us*, and *our*, is significant. For instance, in verse 25: "Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us." God obviously intended for parents to include their children in matters of family obedience. God wants parents to expect their children to obey Him.

In one of the most passionate pleas

to influence behavior, God, as our Heavenly Father, straightforwardly instructed ancient Israel in His laws, and the consequences of obeying or disobeying them. God concludes His plea, recorded in Deuteronomy 28-30, with these words: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (30:19).

Did you notice? God did not attempt to be value neutral. He told Israel to "choose life" for their own good. We, too, must be passionate about our desire for our children to adopt God's standards as their own. We must work to help them do so and strive to influence them to make that free moral choice.

Personal example

Our own example is paramount in properly influencing our children. Children are quick to notice discrepancies between what we adults ask them not to do and what we do ourselves. In some cases those differences are logically defensible. For instance, children should not drive cars if they do not have the skills necessary for safely operating a vehicle. It is a different story, however, when children see

a double standard on moral issues.

Paul pointed out this principle to Jews who were trying to influence gentiles: "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written" (Romans 2:21-24).

Parents cannot expect a "do as I say and not as I do" approach to bring success. Regardless of what parents say, most young people will adopt their parents' standards and lifestyles by the time they reach 25 to 35 years of age. In this case, actions do speak louder than words!

So when it comes to teaching values to our children, it is impossible to be neutral and God does not want us to be neutral. We adults have to concentrate first of all on being good examples ourselves. Then we can have greater expectations of successfully influencing our children to obey God for their own good. **GN**



Parenting in the 90s

by David Treybig

Today there is great concern that the youth of Western society are caught in a relentless downward spiral—"going to hell in a handbasket" as some describe it.

In a world of drugs, crime and emotional upheaval, the schools are often blamed. Yet school administrators point out they are getting a different kind of student than was common in the 1950s. Back then, most youths grew up in families where both parents lived in the same house and Mother stayed home to rear the kids.

Obviously, in the 1990s circumstances have changed. What can today's parents do to help their children grow up to be solid, productive, emotionally stable adults?

King Solomon, who ruled Israel almost 3,000 years ago, said God was the foundation of successful families. In Psalm 127:1 he wrote: "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it . . ."

Adopting God's values for families and rearing children is the best starting point for a successful job of parenting in the 1990s and beyond. Let's explore some of the basic principles of parenting revealed in the Bible.

Children are a blessing

In verse three of Psalm 127, Solomon said, "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward." Children are described as a heritage or inheritance from God, a reward or blessing.

Unfortunately, not everyone views children in such a positive light. A bumper sticker reads, "I'm suffering from a sexually transmitted disease—children." It's a quip that represents children as expensive, time-consuming inconveniences. The godly perspective is that children are wonderful blessings.

Because the family is the most basic building block of society, parenting children is one of the most important

things a couple can do. It should inspire both husband and wife to a greater level of personal maturity as they endeavor to make their part of the world a peaceful place for their progeny.

The chances for successful parenting are aided by a deep commitment to the biblical principle that children are truly



a blessing, well worth the time and energy that will be required. Most people on their death beds do not wish they had spent more time earning money. They most often regret not spending more time with their children and loved ones.

In a society of ever increasing single parents and economic pressures, many children are placed in day-care facilities so their parents can go to work. The proliferation of single parents and the lack of time spent with children are widely known to be detrimental to sound, stable families.

Sound marriages are important

Child psychologist and newspaper columnist John Rosemond often cites how important it is for children to see their biological fathers and mothers happily married. He said, "Parents must first center the family around themselves, pay-

The chances for successful parenting are aided by a deep commitment to the biblical principle that children are truly a blessing, well worth the time and energy that will be required.

Continued on page 31



What Lies Ahead for the British Monarchy and Commonwealth?

Why does it matter what happens to the British monarchy?

For most of this century, the news media have told the stories of the personalities and scandals of the British royal family. This is why, understandably, so many people continue to be fascinated with the royal House of Windsor. The essential story to know, however, is that of the major international and historical role of the British monarchy.

A short history

The British monarchy is well over 1,000 years old. The queen can trace her ancestry back more than a millennium. But it is only in this century that the monarchy has taken on the role that is familiar to people today.

After a century of turmoil, civil war and revolution, which reduced the powers of the monarchy, Great Britain was left without a royal head of state when Queen Anne died, in 1714. Some proposed that this was again the time for a comparatively liberal, educated and enlightened nation to rid itself of the expense of a monarchy and replace it with a presidency.

But an earlier experience of a republic had not been a pleasant one. After King Charles I had been executed 65 years previously, he was replaced by a republican form of government under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell. Although Cromwell was a great man in many respects, there were too many abuses of power under his rule for people to forget. Even after Cromwell's death, when Charles I's son was brought back from exile in France to be a constitutional monarch, and a sys-

tem of checks and balances was in place that left the king some powers, Parliament remained as the real power in the country.

Determined to find an heir to Queen Anne in 1714, the government traced a distant relative in the German electorate of Hanover. The king of Hanover, one of the monarchs who elected the Roman emperor, was asked to move to London and become king of Great Britain and its overseas possessions.

tionary War) was itself over the issue of the monarchy.

Britain's stable political system was exported throughout the world to her overseas possessions.

Later, totally independent nations were to embrace it voluntarily. In 1867, when Canada became an independent democratic country, it wanted to retain Britain's Queen Victoria as its own monarch. Taking inspiration from Psalm 72:8, the Canadians decided to



Shown is the royal flag of the House of Windsor with flags of the major members of the commonwealth: Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, South Africa and Canada.

Illustration by Shaun Venish

The present royal family is directly descended from the German king, George. The family name was changed to Windsor during World War I.

Britain has enjoyed unrivaled stability for almost 300 years under the descendants of that first Hanoverian king. A system of checks and balances between monarchy and Parliament has brought the British political stability during times of upheaval and change throughout the centuries. No other great power enjoyed such stability. Neighboring France has experienced various republics and monarchies. The United States has suffered two internal conflicts, one of which (the Revolu-

call themselves a dominion, with Victoria as queen.

Within the next 50 years, three more dominions were added: Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. All were completely independent but shared a common allegiance to the British monarch in what was to become known as the British Commonwealth.

A multitude in unison

These dominions, along with Britain's colonies, were to play a major role in the defense of the free world in the 20th century, a role that today is largely forgotten.



In both world wars, when Britain declared war on Germany, troops were mobilized throughout the empire (Britain's colonies) and commonwealth (the independent dominions). A multitude of nations went to war in complete unison, holding the front line of freedom in defense of Western civilization. Only later did the United States get involved.

This was the strength of the British Empire and British Commonwealth: It was a multitude of nations, held together by the throne, independent nations sharing an allegiance to the royal House of Windsor. They also shared a stable political system built on individual rights and the rule of law, with ideals of freedom and democracy held in common.

Together, they twice gained the victory against tyranny.

Britain was not alone

In the First World War, every self-governing territory in the empire entered the war voluntarily on the side of Great Britain. Canadians fought in France at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, Australians and New Zealanders at Gallipoli, the South Africans against Germans on the continent of Africa itself.

When Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, there were those who believed the dominions would not rush to her aid. After all, Britain was far away. Canada relied more on ties with the United States for its trade.

But all the nations of the empire and commonwealth again voted to help the mother country in her time of need. These countries all went through both world wars from start to finish.

People often talk of the plight of Britain standing alone in 1940 when defeat seemed inevitable, but such was not the case. The dominions and colonies were all supporting Britain—one quarter of the world's people, a multitude of nations that gave Britain the strength to defy Hitler's Third Reich.

The United States helped Britain with its lend-lease program, but this financial and material help had strict conditions. Britain had to give America her gold reserves and foreign invest-

ments, thereby transferring its leadership role to Washington. The dominion of Canada, on the other hand, gave unconditional aid, proportionately more generous than the lend-lease program.

World War II was an imperial war. The British Empire and British Commonwealth fought together as never before. It was a free association of peoples and governments, and it ended in victory. The war demonstrated the importance of the commonwealth to the cause of freedom, the need to remain a multitude of nations dedicated to working together to preserve freedom no matter the cost.

Great Britain and the dominions could have drawn the moral that the commonwealth provided a foundation for their greatness and security, individually and collectively.

However, any lessons were quickly forgotten.

Dramatic inward shift

The whole system was to change dramatically after World War II. The British people were tired of fighting seemingly endless conflicts around the world and voted for a political transformation in 1945. Out went the victorious government of Winston Churchill. In came Clement Atlee's Labour government, with a more inward-looking approach.

The dismantling of the British Empire began with independence for the nations of the Indian subcontinent. Instead of spending money administering these far-flung outposts of empire, the British people wanted money spent on themselves. Universal medical coverage, an extensive welfare system and the public ownership of many industries were priorities for the new socialist administration.

Before the war, Britain was one of the first to recover from the Great Depression and enjoyed a standard of living three or four times higher than that of any other nation in Europe. But economic decline followed, and today it is one of the poorest nations in Western Europe.

Rapid decolonization took place in the 1950s and 1960s, with Britain

divesting itself of almost all of its overseas possessions. In 1961 South Africa was the first dominion to break away, turning itself into a republic outside of the commonwealth.

European obsession

During the 1960s, Britain began looking elsewhere for trade ties, joining the European Community in 1973. Successive British governments seemed to forget the loyalty and commitment of the British overseas dominions. Britain became obsessed with Europe.

As Britain pursues closer ties with her European neighbors, what will become of the dominions? Canada is now a member of the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA). Australia and New Zealand look increasingly to Asia, and South Africa looks to its neighbors on the African continent.

Meanwhile, independence has been granted to almost all Britain's colonies in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean. All these nations chose to remain within the commonwealth, but most decided to become republics, with their own presidents, rather than retaining the queen as their head of state. Although most at some point subsequently rejected democracy and became dictatorships, at least for a time, some have attempted a return to democracy.

The British Commonwealth of Nations was renamed the Commonwealth of Nations. The queen is still the head of the commonwealth, but there is no guarantee that the title will pass to her successor.

Indifferent to freedom

The commonwealth today is altogether different from the British Commonwealth that existed during the first half of this century. The nations that were members of the British Commonwealth shared not only the common bond of loyalty to the crown, but the ideals of democracy, the rule of law and a love of freedom. They were willing to fight together to preserve freedom at any cost.

Continued on page 23



Are the Biblical Holy Days for New Testament Christians?

by Larry Neff

Although I do not remember the exact event, I know that the first time I heard about God's Holy Days was in August of 1951. I was seven years old, and my parents were attending a religious service in Portland, Oregon.

Our family had observed Christmas, Easter and Halloween throughout my short life. I remember observing those holidays and that I did not want to give them up.

I also remember that as I began to experience God's true Holy Days, they were much more meaningful and enjoyable—even to a young boy. Eventually, I came to understand why this was so. I also came to understand that the days our family had observed earlier are not commanded in the Bible, and that the Holy Days described in Leviticus 23 are commanded in both Old and New Testaments.

The days labeled by many as “Old Testament Jewish days” are very much a part of the legacy left to us by Jesus Christ and the apostles. It has always puzzled me that people observe “religious” holidays not commanded or observed by God's servants in either the Old or the New Testament, while at the same time ignoring those days that are commanded in the Bible.

Common sense

Even while I was still in high school, I discovered that in the King James Version the word translated “Easter” in Acts 12:4 was an erroneous translation of the Greek word *pascha*, a word clearly meaning the Passover (described in

Leviticus 23:5). Later, I learned that it was not until the second century, long after the New Testament was written, that people began to replace the Passover observance with Easter.

It became more and more important to me to look to the Bible to see

I also came to understand that the days our family had observed are not commanded in the Bible, and that the Holy Days described in Leviticus 23 are commanded.

what it said, and what Jesus and the apostles did. I was not so interested in what other people did later, people who adopted the practices of those who observed celebrations involving false, non-existent gods.

Common sense told me that to associate the name of Jesus with such days did not make them any more acceptable. Christ said, “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the com-

mandments of men” (Matthew 15:8, 9).

What days are not commanded by our Savior? And which ones does He command? What does His example of obedience to the Father reveal (John 15:10)? Does it please God when we take to ourselves the right to decide how to worship him, while bypassing His example and the instructions of the Bible?

We have all been instructed to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6). And the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles, along with the prophets and Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. Let's consider the New Testament evidence for the Holy Days. Let's see that the evidence overwhelmingly points to the need for Christians today to observe these days. The rich spiritual meaning of some of these days is discussed in other articles in this issue.

Christ observed the Holy Days

It is certainly clear that the Messiah did not observe Christmas, Halloween, Easter or any similar days. Instead, He and His family observed the Holy Days given by God in the Bible. “His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast” (Luke 2:41, 42). This included the entire festival, which involved the Days of Unleavened Bread (Luke 12:43; Leviticus 23:5-8).

About 18 years later, we find Jesus Christ still observing this same festival. “Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem” (John 2:13). It is called the Passover of

the Jews because the Jews observed it; whereas Gentiles did not. In reality, God gave all the Holy Days as *His* days, saying “These are My feasts” (Leviticus 23:2).

A little after this, in John 5:1 we see Jesus’ involvement in another of the biblical feasts, although John didn’t specify which. Then, in John 7, He is shown keeping the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day (described in Leviticus 23:33-36): “After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles was at hand” (John 7:1, 2).

In spite of the threat of bodily harm, Jesus the Christ still attended this feast (verse 10), and also explained the true spiritual significance of the Last Great Day (verses 37, 38).

Christ’s personal example

Finally, as most have read, the end of the gospel accounts record Jesus observing the final Passover leading to His death. He kept all of the annual festivals, not only because He was a devout Jew, but because God commanded it and because He was setting an example for us.

When we are instructed to walk in His steps (1 John 2:6), that cannot refer only to the 40 days He was here on earth following the resurrection. There is little description of that time period. Those who say He abolished the law

through His sacrifice ignore the significance of His example.

Some believe Jesus Christ kept the law and the Holy Days to please the Jews, and just because He was a Jew and was under the law. In reality, Christ rebuked the Jews when they were in error. He firmly stated, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34).

He was not concerned about doing what the Jews wanted but was deeply concerned about pleasing the Father and doing His will. He observed the biblical Holy Days to please the Father, and castigated the Jews for their hypocrisy, self-righteousness and wrong application of the law.

Is love all you need?

In Matthew 28:19, 20, Jesus made a powerful statement that we should consider. In verse 20, He commanded His followers to “[teach] them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The Greek word for “observe” means “to watch” or “to keep.” Did He command us to keep Christmas or Easter? If we follow in His footsteps, we will “keep” what He kept—and Jesus Christ kept the biblical Holy Days.

To keep these days implies we will “watch” the calendar to anticipate and prepare for them, which is exactly what is done by those who observe the Holy Days. There is great joy while

we eagerly await each of the festivals.

Some believe we don’t need to observe any days, and only need to have love. But how does one “observe” love? Holy Days are observed, but one does not observe love. The way to love God and our neighbor is explained in 1 John 5:2, 3: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

Paul’s practice

Many theologians today believe Paul removed the obligation to observe these days. Yet, Paul made his personal practice plain: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). The New Testament shows that Paul kept the Holy Days.

Let’s see how these days were observed following Christ’s ascension.

First, consider the very day the Holy Spirit was sent. “When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). Christ had just been with them 40 days following His resurrection; He had obviously not told them they didn’t need to observe Holy Days or it is doubtful that the 120 would have been gathered together on this day.

If anything, this historical account shows the biblical Holy Days were being emphasized through the giving of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the

Biblical Holy Days in the New Testament

Biblical Observance	Commanded in Old Testament	Observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles or the Church in the New Testament
Passover	Leviticus 23:5	Matthew 26:2, 17-19; Mark 14:12, 14, 16; Luke 2:41, 42; 22:1, 8, 13, 15; John 2:13, 23; 6:4; 13:1; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29
Feast of Unleavened Bread	Leviticus 23:6-8	Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 2:43, 22:1, 7; Acts 12:2, 3; 20:6; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8
Feast of Pentecost	Leviticus 23:6-8	Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8
Day of Atonement	Leviticus 23:26-32	Acts 27:9
Feast of Tabernacles	Leviticus 23:33-43	John 7:1, 2, 8, 10, 14; Acts 18:21
Last Great Day	Leviticus 23:36	John 7:37, 38
The Feast of Trumpets, commanded in Leviticus 23:23-25, while not specifically named in the New Testament,		would have been kept by Jesus Christ, the apostles and the New Testament Church along with these other feasts.

New Testament Church. God chose to begin His Church on this special day, yet many claim He had already abolished it, but just didn't tell anyone. To the Church, Pentecost was still a "holy convocation," a commanded assembly (Leviticus 23: 15, 16, 21).

Gentiles observed biblical feasts

About 13 or 14 years later, Luke wrote about James' martyrdom and Peter's arrest. Luke was a gentile, and was writing to Theophilus, who is also considered to have been a gentile. Luke related the time of James' murder and Peter's imprisonment to the Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:2, 3). Both men clearly understood when the Days of Unleavened Bread occurred and the timing of these events.

Luke repeatedly mentioned the biblical Holy Days throughout the book of Acts, knowing that his readers would understand what he meant—understanding they would have only if they observed these days.

Next, note what Paul said in Acts 18:21, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." It would appear this was the Feast of Tabernacles. (Some translations, such as the NIV and NRSV, do not include the clause about the feast.)

Other verses in Acts show the time of events being referred to by the biblical Holy Days, not Roman or Greek festivals. Two of these references are to the Days of Unleavened Bread in Acts 20:6, and the Day of Atonement in chapter 27:9. This day, "the Fast," according to virtually all biblical scholars, refers to the Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 23:27-32.

Paul wanted to hurry to be at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, as we read in Acts 20:16. It would make no sense for him to hurry to get there if he did not observe the biblical Holy Days. But since Paul did observe the Holy Days, he had a real reason to be there by the time the day arrived.

Not spiritually unleavened

More than 20 years after the crucifixion of the Lamb of God, about the year A.D. 55, the apostle Paul gave some important instruction to the church at Corinth, a Gentile city. Most church

members there were Gentile, though some were probably Jewish.

This church had serious problems. A man was involved in an immoral relationship. The rest of the church knew about and some may have even condoned this sin. Paul instructed them to expel this man from the church in order to stop the contagious spread of sin.

Then notice what Paul told them: "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and

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wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Just as leaven spreads throughout a lump of dough, so sin, if it is not stopped, will spread throughout the Church. We put physical leavening out during the seven days of Unleavened Bread to drive home the spiritual lesson that we need to put sin out of our lives.

In a similar way, wine and unleavened bread at the Passover remind us of Christ's sacrifice (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). We are physical beings and we learn spiritual lessons through physical acts. The Corinthians had put out the leaven, but they had failed to learn and apply the spiritual lesson.

Spiritual lessons missed

When Paul commented, "since you truly are unleavened," he was not saying the Corinthians were unleavened spiritually. This account clearly shows they were anything but spiritually unleavened. They were full of sin. Paul, by mentioning the sacrifice of Christ, our Passover, is not saying they were spiritually unleavened through the sacrifice of Jesus. The blood of Jesus Christ does not pay for unrepented-of sin! And, up until this point, there was no repentance on their part.

Paul is saying in effect that they should stop slapping Christ in the face and spurning His sacrifice. They were condoning sin while putting out leaven, but making no move toward expelling the spiritual leaven. These Gentiles did put leavening out and were going through the motions of keeping the physical aspect of these days, but they also needed to carry out the spiritual meaning.

Paul said to these Gentile and Jewish Christians, "Let us keep the feast." Then he emphasized the importance of the spiritual aspect of putting sin out. Paul's intent was not to spiritualize away the Days of Unleavened Bread, but to magnify them. He did not suggest removing the physical symbolism of the day.

Keeping the feast can only be understood in the light of what the Bible instructs. The instruction to put leavening out as covered in Leviticus 23 is not abrogated. The New Testament builds on the foundation of the Old by emphasizing the spiritual intent of these days. This passage is truly a strong assertion that the annual festivals of God were being observed by and taught to Gentile Christians. If Paul elsewhere abolished these days, he did not practice what he preached, and he contradicted himself.

Not Jewish feasts

God's Holy Days have tremendous meaning—not just the Passover, but all the days God made holy are relevant to us. God does not apportion to us the right to decide what is holy and unholy, or what is right and wrong. It is His prerogative. Our choice is whether we will obey.

The annual festivals are also mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul reiterates and reconfirms the New Testament Passover, as well as reproves the sinful church at Corinth for abusing the true purpose of the occasion. Some sought to be satiated to the exclusion of others who were poorer. This attitude was hardly compatible with the dire need to recognize the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ for their sins. This is another example of where the Corinthians misunderstood or ignored the spiritual lessons they should have learned from observing these days.

Toward the end of this epistle, Paul states, “But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost” (1 Corinthians 16:8). If he were only gauging time by Pentecost, there would have been no need to wait. He waited so he could observe Pentecost at Ephesus with God’s people before continuing his travels.

“Love feasts” in early Church

God is love (1 John 4:8). The annual festivals are His feasts (Leviticus 23:2), or “love feasts.” They are alluded to in Jude 12 and 2 Peter 2:13. The early church kept “love feasts.” Is there anything that would label them as some of the quasi-religious festivals of today? The only feasts of God described in the Bible are the ones we have been reading about throughout much of the New Testament. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate they could have been anything else.

Commentaries say these days continued to be kept from the second to the fourth centuries. Then, as Adam Clarke says in his commentary, they began to be prohibited. But by that time, the “faith which was once for all delivered” (Jude 3) had already been diluted. By the fourth century, those in control of the popular churches undoubtedly found even these distortions of the original “love feasts” to be too Jewish. Easter had long since replaced the Passover and Sunday had crowded out the seventh-day Sabbath.

The annual festivals are the only feasts God ever gave! They are an expression of God’s love and a delight and joy to those who observe them.

Holy Days confirmed, not condemned

Though it is not within the scope of this article to elaborate extensively on

several New Testament passages erroneously used to discredit the Holy Days, a brief mention would be in order. Colossians 2:16, 17 is perhaps the most oft-quoted: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

Do you think Paul meant we don’t have to keep the festivals? Did he observe them, while at the same time express God’s desire that they be abolished? This would have been inconsistent and hypocritical.

Why would Paul be telling the gentile Colossians not to follow practices of asceticism on these festive days? Because they were following the

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commandments and doctrines *of men*, not God (verses 18-23). By no stretch of the imagination could one find anything in the Bible labeling the annual Holy Days as doctrines of men. They are God’s feasts.

Quite obviously, the Colossians were being led away from the proper observance of the Holy Days. If anything, these verses corroborate the practice of God’s true Church in the first century to observe these days, following the examples set by Christ and Paul. Paul here cautioned the Church not to be dissuaded by the condemnation of others regarding these festivals, which are a shadow of things to come.

Some people like to say they *were*

a shadow of Christ, and once Christ came, the shadow disappeared. That’s not what the scripture says. They are a shadow of things yet to come in God’s plan. This was stated many years after Christ was crucified.

Other observances condemned

Another misunderstood text is Galatians 4:10: “You observe days and months and seasons and years.” Nothing in these scriptures identifies these as God’s Holy Days. The Galatian Christians were gentiles who were going back to what they had come from (verse 9). They were returning to pagan observances. God nowhere made any months holy, and He condemned the observance of times in Deuteronomy 18:10, so these could not refer to biblical festivals and Holy Days.

Verses 8 and 9 of Galatians 4 refer to the practices of the Galatians before they knew the true God. Then they are shown to be returning to the weak and beggarly elements. To say that God’s laws are weak and beggarly elements is blasphemous. These “days and months and seasons [times] and years” were the pagan practices of men—possibly similar to astrology today.

When understood, these “problem” scriptures actually succeed in pointing us toward the true days God established for His people. They are days that are filled with meaning and spiritual significance—days that teach us and remind us of the various steps in God’s wonderful plan.

Biblical record clear

The record of what Christ and the apostles did is clear. When a person looks into the commands and examples in the Bible to determine which religious festivals to observe, there is only one choice to be found: the annual festivals and Holy Days of God.

If we are to build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and on the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ, we will be faithful to these days as they were. And, as we do, we will learn more and more about God’s plan every year. I have observed these days for 44 years, and each year brings deeper understanding of their meaning and significance. It’s not a process I intend to halt. **GN**

Did You Sin Today?

by Les McCullough

When was the last time you sinned? Do you know? Were you even aware of what was taking place?

Many people are not that concerned about the subject of sin. It has become so much a part of life and the society in which we live that, sadly, many of us are unaware of sin when it occurs. We may have sinned this morning or sometime yesterday. We may not sin tomorrow or the next day, but we will sin.

Often, sin results from a thoughtless response to a circumstance because sin has become a habit. Sin can be that common and that much a part of our lives. It may be an expletive left undeleted, a thought, an action or a reaction, deliberate or inadvertent. But we need to realize that sin is much more than just a single deed. Sin is a way of life. It's as natural as breathing.

Ignorance of the ubiquitous nature of sin is a tragic sign of our times. Sin isn't talked about much today. Mothers speak approvingly of their sons' or daughters' live-in partners. Youths talk about ripping off someone's automobile and taking it on a joyride as though car theft could be part of a normal holiday excursion. The use of cocaine and other drugs has become a recreational pastime.

Successful motion picture or television series routinely contain profanity and explicit sex. Rape and murder appear daily on the front page. Political leaders lie to their citizenry or instigate ethnic cleansing, and it's no one's fault. Religious leaders condone "alternative lifestyles." Single women bearing children outside of marriage isn't unusual or considered immoral. Cheating of business, government, insurance companies, the welfare system or the general public is accepted as routine.

Sin has its consequences

Some recognize what is happening, but most do not realize these acts are actually crimes. They are punishable by death. Only the few in the religious

sphere make a point of addressing such activities as sin, and when they do, they are criticized. Only the few warn people that to sin is to die. In the sight of God, the transgression of His law is that serious. Unrepented of, sin exacts the death penalty.

Is that an astonishing statement to you? It shouldn't be. It wasn't to your grandparents and perhaps your parents. Not many generations ago, much of society felt the same way. Sin is wrong. Sin brings unhappiness. Sin kills.

It is amazing to see the extent to

None of us wishes to die, so perhaps we should understand where our wrong actions can take us.

which we, as a society, we have come to accept sin as normal activity. But sin is not acceptable to God. God hates sin, and so should we—because, unrepented of, sin kills.

To sin is to die

None of us wishes to die, so perhaps we should understand where our wrong actions can take us. It is frightening to consider that the consequence of sinning is death, but be assured it is so. If you doubt it, why not get hold of a Bible and turn to Ezekiel 18:4. The message is clear: The soul who sins shall die.

The same message is repeated in the New Testament. Romans 6:23 notes that "the wages of sin is death." Wages are what we earn for what we produce. They are the remuneration we receive for our actions. To think we could receive such dramatic wages—the death penalty—and not even know we have earned it is frightening.

But unthinking reaction or deliberate action is a reflection of the heart and way of life. If that way of life is the way of sin, the result is death. We all need to understand that.

Today we often hear the question, "If it doesn't hurt anyone, what difference does it make?" and, "Whose business is it anyway? If it's something I want or it makes me feel good, what's wrong with it?"

What is sin?

"Sin is lawlessness," says 1 John 3:4, or, as the King James Version words it: "Sin is the transgression of the law." But whose law?

Parliamentary law is one of our oldest forms of law. But is it British or American law or some other man-made standard that really tells us the difference between right and wrong?

Most Western societies have done away with punishment that fits the crime, excusing many sins by considering them part of normal human activity.

Who, then, establishes the law or has the right to tell you how to live? There is One who has the right to determine right from wrong. God is the ultimate Judge and Rewarder of humankind. The One who created all things has the right to say how His creatures should live.

The complete quote from 1 John 3:4, above, reads, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."

In the New Testament, in Matthew 22:36-39, we read where a young lawyer asked Jesus Christ: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus summed up God's law to the young man by saying: "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Anything contrary to these great principles espoused by our Savior is the way

of sin. Any thought or action against God or our fellowman is a sin, whether it is a conscious act or not. We might excuse an action by reasoning, "I needed what he had, and he had more than he needed. Therefore, it's all right for me to take it." The human, physical mind is not subject to God and His ways (Romans 8:7). Human nature is the way of sin. We are simply not able to obey God without help.

We are all guilty. Hear what the apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:3: "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries."

Maybe you have never been drunk, perhaps you have never lusted after anything, but you have committed other sins—hundreds of them. You and I have broken the law of God repeatedly through allowing something else to take the place of God. We have all, in some way, lied, cheated, or coveted someone's property or husband or wife. We have all earned the death penalty.

There is a way out

The good news is that help is available. God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die and pay the death penalty for each of us. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, first, to open our minds so we can understand the way of God, second, to become an integral part of our lives, third, to give us the strength to go a different and better way.

Mankind's sins can be forgiven. That is the greatest news this sad, old, sin-filled world of ours can hear. The penalty is already paid by the death of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:7 tells us: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." You may not be aware of when you have sinned, but God, through Jesus Christ, can forgive you.

It's frightening to realize how addicting sin can become. And it's wonderful to know that you can be forgiven. There's even better news. In Romans 6:23, we read earlier that "the wages of sin is death" Now finish the verse: "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

You not only can be forgiven for sin,

but you can receive the gift of eternal life. In the book of Hebrews, we learn that Jesus Christ, "... after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:12-14).

To be sanctified is to be set apart for a special purpose. Once we have repented, we are set apart from the rest of society to become children of God. The death penalty was paid by Jesus, out of His and His Father's great mercy. Upon true repentance, every person can receive the promise of eternal life. God puts away their sins, never to remember them again. He blots out the record forever.

If you are found to have broken the law of the land and are sentenced by a

Mankind's sins can be forgiven. That is the greatest news this sad, old world of ours can hear.

judge, you become a convicted felon. Regardless of the prison term you serve, when you are finally released, your record follows you. The conviction is on your record forever.

But this is not so with God. When you repent, your sins are forgiven, and God forgets them. There is no record to check, because there is no record.

The future is bright

If we sin in the future, God is more than willing to forgive us, because we are His children. This truth should reassure us. Once we have repented, we will never have to give account for those past actions, deeds or thoughts again. Of course, any future sins will have to be repented of, but we can be confident that God will also forgive them if we truly repent.

The apostle Paul tells us: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:7, 8).

The seed we sow is important. For example, if we sow adultery, lying, stealing, unfaithfulness, we will harvest death. On the other hand, if we sow love for our fellow human beings, honesty, faithfulness, we will reap the gift of eternal life.

You and I can be forgiven regardless of how we have lived. We might be as the people in the days of the apostle Peter, when he preached his first recorded sermon. After telling his listeners about Christ and their responsibility for His death, he said: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

We can live

The gift Peter spoke of sparks our life as spiritual children of God, Who becomes our spiritual Father; and Jesus Christ becomes our elder Brother. Together, they will make every effort to see that we join them in the future as a part of the family of God.

Every human being needs to repent. No one is excluded, and no one receives preferential treatment. Whatever our background, race, nationality or gender, we need to repent.

If we are new to the Christian faith, we will be forgiven, baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, which in turn helps us finally to be given the gift of eternal life at the resurrection and the return of Jesus Christ to earth. That is the priceless gift we all look forward to.

You may not remember the last time you sinned, but you know you did. The act of sin in itself isn't the most important thing. Sin, of course, isn't to be taken lightly or passed over, but keep this in mind: Repentance is more important than sin.

God holds the wonderful blessing of forgiveness for each of us, and it is a gift He gives you and me and all of humanity at the time of our repentance of past sins. Then there is no longer any penalty for our sins.

Then, at our resurrection, along with Jesus Christ, we will live for eternity as the children of God our Father. **GN**

‘Christ, Our Passover, Was Sacrificed for Us’

by Jerold Aust

Jerusalem shone golden in the afternoon sun as 12 men and their Leader made their way from the Mount of Olives to a house in the city.

Earlier in the day, Jesus of Nazareth had instructed two of His disciples, Peter and John, to go into Jerusalem and prepare the Passover (Luke 22:7-13). Jesus said they would encounter a man carrying water, who would show them his guest room where they could keep the Passover.

After finding the man, Peter and John prepared the food and drink for Jesus and the 12 to observe what would be the first new covenant Passover service.

Jesus probably said little as they entered the room and surveyed the preparations. To Peter and John, no doubt Jesus appeared introspective, but, beyond this, their Teacher seemed composed and calm. They all began to relax at the table and eat, following the lead of their Master.

It was then that Jesus began to speak to His disciples, explaining that He had waited for this special time so He could eat this Passover with them. “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God,” He told them (Luke 22:15, 16).

It was a shocking statement. Jesus spoke of suffering? The apostles found it difficult to believe that their Savior would have to suffer physical pain, let alone die this early in His life. After all, this was the same Man who had turned water into wine, fed 5,000 hungry people on five loaves and two fish and had food left over,

and walked on the water of a tempestuous, stormy sea.

Symbols of sacrifice

At this point, the Savior began offering His disciples the new covenant symbols of unleavened bread and wine.

The bread He gave His closest followers represented His body. The apostle Peter later defined what this

The prophet Isaiah foretold Jesus Christ’s ultimate sacrifice: ‘He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities . . . and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.’

meant, writing that we, as Christians, should follow in the steps of their Savior, who “bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes [we] were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

Christ would pay the penalty for humanity’s sins “by the sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9:26). The wine, offered next, represented His shed blood, which would wash away the

sins of mankind (Luke 22:17-20).

Earlier in the evening, the disciples had quietly watched as Jesus deliberately knelt and washed their feet. Jesus told them to follow His example, explaining that this simple ceremony was symbolic of the humble and unconditional attitude of service to humanity they must hold (John 13:1-17).

Ceremonies involving bread and wine were not new to the religious Jews of that day, but the manner in which Jesus presented them, and their meaning, were. So the disciples listened attentively to Jesus’ words and participated fully as He offered the symbols.

The food and drink Christ offered His disciples had deep meaning for them and us. During the evening, He explained that before long He would offer Himself for the sins of mankind (John 13:31-33). His followers would soon see the meaning of the Passover symbols dramatically demonstrated to them.

Jesus’ sacrifice prophesied

Old Testament prophecies of a coming Savior’s sacrifice abound. The earliest can be found in Genesis. Speaking to Satan, the serpent, God said: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15).

This verse, referring to the serpent and the Seed, speaks symbolically of Satan and Jesus Christ. Satan would “bruise the heel” of Jesus by influencing His execution by crucifixion, with nails driven through His feet. But Christ, on His return to earth, will bruise Satan’s head by imprisoning

Satan for a millennium (Revelation 20:1-3). The prophecy in Genesis 3 is the earliest reference to Jesus' crucifixion and death.

The prophet Isaiah foretold Jesus' ultimate sacrifice: He was "wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

The Eternal God, Isaiah foretold, "has laid on Him [the Son of God] the iniquity of us all" (verse 6). He was "oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter" (verse 7). "He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken" (verse 8).

The agony of the crucifixion

King David, writing some 1,000 years before Christ's death, also prophesied of this sobering occasion. God inspired him to describe the humiliation and unbearable pain Jesus Christ would suffer during His crucifixion. In Psalm 22, David wrote as if Christ were crying out in the first person: "I am [despised as] a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me" (Psalm 22:6, 7).

The prophecy continues in verses 14-17: "I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me . . . You have brought Me to the dust of death . . . They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me."

The writers of the Bible recorded many prophecies about this most momentous and critical time, when our holy Savior would pour out His life for you, me and all of humanity. That time came as predicted, in accordance with God's design: "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Jesus Christ's sacrifi-

cial offering of Himself had long been planned (Revelation 13:8).

The life and death of Jesus

To better grasp the significance of Christ's sacrifice, we should review some of the events of Jesus' physical life.

When Jesus was born, Satan set out to destroy the Son of God. In Matthew we read: "Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent



The Passover lamb was symbolic of the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul recognized that, just as the sacrifice of the Passover lamb spared ancient Israel from death when the death angel passed over Egypt prior to the biblical Exodus, so does Christ's sacrifice save us from the death penalty we've earned for our sins.

forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men" (Matthew 2:16).

Later, immediately before the start of Jesus' ministry, God's Spirit led Him into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and nights. At this pivotal point, Satan came to Jesus. Matthew 4 describes the temptations the devil used to test Jesus.

First Satan attempted to goad Jesus into employing His divine power to turn stones into bread to satisfy his excruciating hunger (verse 3). Next he tried to appeal to the vanity and pride that he mistakenly assumed Jesus had (verses 5, 6).

Then Satan addressed the base human desires of greed and power

by offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world (verses 8, 9). Jesus didn't dispute that the world truly is in the hands of Satan, for Satan is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4, King James Version).

In this crucial test, Jesus never for a moment entertained the thought of sin. Although physically starving, Jesus was at His peak of spiritual strength, having fasted and communed with His Father for 40 days and nights.

So it was throughout the rest of His life and ministry. Jesus never once sinned or allowed Himself to entertain thoughts of breaking God's law. He never broke the letter or spirit of the laws of God.

Jesus knew what it was like to endure and master the anxieties and passions common to all of mankind: "In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, [He] was heard because of His godly fear . . . 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 5:7-9).

Jesus Christ lived a perfect life. He "committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). Had He broken God's law, He would have suffered the death penalty, like the rest of mankind, with no hope of a resurrection. But, since He remained sinless, and the very Son of God in the flesh, His death paid the penalty for our sins, making Him the Savior of mankind (Hebrews 10:12; 1 John 4:14).

Jesus Christ, our Passover

In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul wrote that "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." This statement holds profound meaning for Christians.

Paul wrote these words to the Corinthian church, whose members were

allowing one of their brethren to continue in a sexual sin. This was no ordinary sin, even for the profligate Corinthian society of the time. A man was involved in an immoral relationship with his stepmother (1 Corinthians 5:1).

Paul reprimanded the whole congregation and charged the Corinthians to expel the offender, lest the sin spread and contaminate them just as yeast puffs up bread dough (1 Corinthians 5:2-6).

Paul, in supporting his reasons for removing the sinner used a phrase closely associated with the Passover: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (verse 7).

What did Paul mean by that? He meant that Jesus' sacrifice was not made in vain. He meant that the Corinthians should not take lightly Christ's painful death.

Reflect Christ's sacrifice

Up to that point the Corinthians had not comprehended the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice. They didn't fully understand that once their sins were repented of and covered by Jesus' shed blood, their lives had to reflect a new commitment. They were no longer to give in to their former sinful habits.

Paul made this very clear to them: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Writing to the Romans on the same subject, Paul asked: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:1-4).

Not to be taken lightly

Paul made it plain to the Corinthians that they must not take Christ's sacrifice lightly. Accepting that sacrifice must result in a changed life, with a new outlook and approach that will not tolerate sin. "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner . . . Therefore 'put away from yourselves the evil person'" (1 Corinthians 5:11, 13).

Since the Corinthian members apparently didn't fully understand the

The Corinthian members had not comprehended the magnitude of Jesus Christ's sacrifice. They didn't fully understand that their lives had to reflect a new commitment.

implications of Jesus Christ's sacrifice and the enormous pain and suffering He endured, is it possible that we could make the same error? Do we fully grasp what He went through to become a sacrifice for us?

None of us were there to witness the Roman soldiers brutally whip, beat and ridicule Jesus Christ. But we do have the written Word of God that tells us that it happened. The prophet Isaiah, King David in the Psalms and the Gospel writers all bear witness to the cruel punishment inflicted on Jesus Christ. From these biblical accounts, plus contemporary descriptions of such punishments, we can understand, as much as humans can understand, the extent of the suffering our Savior endured for us.

When the authorities led Jesus before the high priest, Caiaphas, and in front of the scribes and elders, He was

falsely declared guilty of blasphemy. The religious authorities spat in His face, slapping and pounding Him with their fists while they ridiculed Him (Matthew 26:67, 68). When they turned Jesus over to the Romans for scourging (Matthew 27:26), He was understandably disoriented, His face cut, bruised and battered.

The halfway death

The scourging by the Romans of our Savior was barbaric. They called this type of punishment "the halfway death" because it stopped just short of killing its victim. A trained man, called a *lictor*, used a wooden grip to which several strips of leather had been attached. At the end of each strip, fragments of bone or iron had been sewn in. This was called a *flagellum*. There was no specific number of stripes to be administered, and the lictor could whip the prisoner on any part of his body.

Typically, guards tied a condemned criminal to a stone or wooden pillar, facing the pillar with one arm on each side. To further humiliate the prisoner, he was stripped of all clothing, affording him no protection from the cruel instrument.

Then the brutal procedure began. The prisoner suffered blow after blow, leaving his flesh lacerated and his bloody skin hanging like thin strips of cloth. An officer supervised the operation to see that the captive wasn't inadvertently beaten to death; the Romans knew from experience that a fragile man so beaten could die quickly.

When the scourging was over, the guards untied the prisoner, who would slump to the floor in shock. They would pour cold water on him to clean off some of the blood, torn flesh and filth. The rough scrubbing of the victim's battered body would often shock him back to gasping consciousness.

In Jesus' case, some of the soldiers gathered thorns and plaited them into a ring, which they jammed onto His head. They wrapped a robe around Him, placed a reed scepter in His hand and mockingly paid homage to Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Matthew 27:29).

"Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. And when they had mocked Him, they

Continued on page 25

WHY IS JESUS CHRIST CALLED 'OUR PASSOVER'?

In 1 Corinthians 5:7 we learn that “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”

What is the specific connection between the Passover and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ? For that matter, what *is* the Passover?

We find the Passover instituted in Exodus 12. The nation of Israel was enslaved in Egypt, and events were building rapidly to the horrifying devastation that would finally force Pharaoh to free the Israelites from slavery.

Through Moses and Aaron, God commanded Israel to set aside a lamb for each household in the nation. Before nightfall, the Israelites were to kill the lambs and put some of the lambs' blood on the sides and top of the door frame of each house. Each lamb was to be eaten that evening by the members of Israelitish household (verses 1-10).

Plague strikes Egypt

A profoundly significant event was to take place outside the homes while the Israelites were inside eating this Passover meal: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. Now the blood shall be a *sign* for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, *I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt*” (verses 12, 13, emphasis ours throughout).

This terrifying event occurred just as God said. “And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead” (verses 29, 30).

The dead likely numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Pharaoh, having ignored earlier serious warnings and plagues, learned the hard way that the God of the Israelites was not a God to be trifled with. The Israelites were set free.

Important lessons for us

There are vital lessons for all of humanity in these events. God called the sacrificial lamb “the LORD’S Passover” and “the Passover sacrifice of the LORD” (verses 11, 27). It was so named because God promised, “When I see the blood, I will *pass over* you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you . . .” (verse 13).

Some 1,500 years later, the apostle Paul used this same term to describe Jesus Christ. Why?

In the setting of the original Passover, the sacrifice of the lambs signified that those partaking of that sacrifice would be spared from death. If the Israelites ignored or disobeyed God’s warning, they would suffer the death penalty along with the Egyptians. This sacrifice was *required* to spare them from death.

Paul and the other New Testament writers understood that the Passover lambs slain at the time of the Exodus foreshadowed the later sacrifice of Jesus Christ. “Walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, *an offering and a sacrifice* to God for a sweet-smelling aroma,” wrote Paul (Ephesians 5:2).

The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ “has appeared to put away sin *by the sacrifice of Himself*” and “*offered one sacrifice for sins forever*” (Hebrews 9:26; 10:12).

Like the ancient Israelites and Egyptians, all humanity has had the death penalty hanging over it. We have earned it because of our sins (Romans 6:23). But, just as the sacrifice of the Passover lambs at the time of the Exodus spared the obedient Israelites, Jesus Christ’s sacrifice has removed that death penalty from us (Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14).

John the Baptist, when Christ came to him to be baptized, exclaimed: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Thanks to Jesus Christ, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), we have had the death penalty pass over us.

Passover lamb symbolic

The Passover lamb also foreshadowed Christ in other ways. It was to be “without blemish,” or with no deformities (Exodus 12:5). This was symbolic of the spiritual purity of Jesus Christ, “who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22).

The apostle Peter pointed out that we have been redeemed, or bought back, by God—not with material wealth, “but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

Even the manner in which the Passover lamb was to be killed was symbolic of Jesus’ death. The Israelites were told not to break any of the lambs’ bones (Exodus 12:46). Although a common practice in crucifixions was to break the legs of the suffering criminals to hasten death, Jesus Christ was already dead when the Roman soldiers came to break His legs, so His body was spared further desecration. “For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, ‘Not one of His bones shall be broken’” (John 19:36).

The prophet Isaiah, describing the coming Messiah’s sacrificial death, wrote, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). This, too, was a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus Christ’s death (Acts 8:32-35).

These and many other scriptures help us understand the wonderful truth that, as the Lamb of God, “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” **GN**

—Scott Ashley

Does Easter Sunday Commemorate Jesus' Resurrection?

by Wilbur Berg

As a boy attending a mainstream church with my family, I was always surprised to see people at services on Easter Sunday who did not come at any other time of the year, not even at Christmas.

Embarrassed and somewhat fearful, a few of them told us they hoped that God would forgive their sins and absences because they made the special effort to come to church on Easter Sunday, which to them was the most sacred time of the year.

Others felt that a special measure of sanctification, purification and holiness was imparted to them by their attendance at Easter services.

However, these people didn't realize that their faith was not based on fact and reality. None of them knew or even wondered about Easter's origins. They would have been surprised to know the truth of the matter.

Idolatrous beginnings

Many people are amazed to find that the Bible does not mention Easter at all. Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever directed that it should be observed. The word *Easter* in Acts 12:4 in the King James Version is an incorrect translation of the Greek word *pascha*, which refers to Passover, not Easter. This mistake has been corrected in modern translations of the New Testament.

Also not generally known is that Easter did not originate with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Encyclopedias and dictionaries trace the term Easter variously back to *Eostre*, the name of the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring; to *Eostur*, the Norse word for the spring season; or to *Ishtar*, the ancient spring

goddess of Near Eastern countries, also known as Astarte, or, in the Bible, Ashtoreth.

All are connected to the spring season and springtime fertility festivals which represented rejuvenation, reproduction and the life-enriching qualities of the sun. Customs and symbols associated today with Easter observance can be directly traced back to Easter's pre-Christian origins.

The festivals of God outlined in Leviticus 23 and practiced by the early Church were supplanted by non-biblical traditions and practices.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th edition, in its article on Easter, describes these customs and symbols as "hav[ing] been handed down from the ancient ceremonial and symbolism of European and Middle Eastern pagan spring festivals." One symbol, the Easter rabbit, is called the modern replacement for "the hare, the symbol of fertility in ancient Egypt."

Another source reveals the origin of two other popular Easter customs: "Also popular among Europeans and Americans on Easter is ham, because the pig was considered a symbol of luck in pre-Christian European culture" (*The Encyclopedia of Religion*,

1987, article, "Easter").

"In traditional folk religion the egg is a powerful symbol of fertility, purity, and rebirth. It is used in magical rituals to promote fertility and restore virility; to look into the future; to bring good weather; to encourage the growth of crops and protect both cattle and children against misfortune, especially the dreaded evil eye. All over the world it represents life and creation, fertility and resurrection . . . Later [customs concerning eggs] were linked with Easter. The church did not oppose this, though many egg customs were pre-Christian in origin, because the egg provided a fresh and powerful symbol of the Resurrection and the transformation of death into life" (article, "Egg").

Pre-Christian resurrection celebrations

Celebrating the resurrection of a deceased deity in a springtime festival also long predates Christianity. Chief among such celebrations were those in honor of Tammuz, the Babylonian "god of pasture and flocks . . . and of vegetation. He was husband and brother of Ishtar (Asherah), goddess of fertility. Babylonian epics preserve the saga of the annual dying of Tammuz in the autumn when vegetation withered; his departure to the underworld; his recovery by the mourning Ishtar; and his springtime return to the fertilized upper world" (*Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1961, article, "Tammuz").

The Babylonians taught that Tammuz was mystically revived from death in the spring by the anguish and crying of Ishtar, who was the same as the pagan goddess Ashtoreth referred to in Scripture (Judges 2:13; 10:6; 1 Kings

11:5). This ancient custom of mourning for the return of a dead god is mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14, where we read that women are “weeping for Tammuz.” His supposed resurrection marked the end of winter and the beginning of spring, with its new life and vegetation.

Ishtar, wife of Tammuz, was also worshiped as the “Queen of Heaven” (*Harper’s*, 1961, article, “Asherah”). The Bible shows that idolatry and sun worship connected with Ishtar and Tammuz became so widespread and influential that they were practiced even by people who had once known the true God but had fallen into wrong kinds of worship (Ezekiel 8:12-18; Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-23).

Worshiped in other areas under the name Adonis, Tammuz was honored with an annual celebration by a cult that “mourned his death and rejoiced at his resurrection. The cult worked its way into the folkways of Christian peasants, who wept over the lost Adonis and participated in lewd festivities” (*Harper’s*, “Tammuz”).

Subtle changes introduced

But how did such strange customs and practices become associated with biblically recorded true events such as the Passover and Jesus Christ’s resurrection?

From the start, the Roman government regarded the early Christian Church as a branch of the Jewish religion, because the earliest Christians staunchly observed the same laws and religious celebrations as did Jews. Later, as persecution increased, many groups of professing Christians chose to disassociate themselves from what had become identified as Judaism.

During the reign of Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-135), Jews were harshly persecuted and practices of Judaism forbidden. These oppressive measures apparently influenced many early Christians in Rome to abandon the biblical Sabbath and festivals and turn to Sunday, historically observed by the Romans as a day of veneration of the Sun. Hence, the first day of the week (Sunday) took the place of the seventh day (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) Sabbath, and “some

of the old heathen feasts became church festivals with change of name and of worship” (Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, *The Story of the Christian Church*, 1954, pp. 43, 45, 77, 79).

In other words, the Sabbath and festivals of God, outlined in Leviticus 23 and practiced by both Judaism and the early Church (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 21; 20:6, 16; 27:9), were supplanted by nonbiblical traditions and practices. The truth and purity of the early Church of God were corrupted.

Controversy over worship

Accompanying this transformation was early confusion and disagreement as to when the crucifixion occurred. “In Rome Easter was celebrated on the Sunday following the full moon after the spring equinox, and was a memorial of the resurrection” (*The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, 1990, p. 36).

Note that carefully. What was instituted by Jesus to annually commemorate His death was subtly changed to a celebration memorializing His resurrection. But there is no command in the Bible, by Jesus or His apostles, to solemnize His resurrection.

Instead, Jesus highlighted what was to be accomplished by His death by instituting new symbols for the new covenant meaning of the Passover (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20). He was the Lamb of God who would offer Himself as the true Paschal sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 1:29), and His death fulfilled what had been foreshadowed by the slaying of the Passover lambs.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967 edition, in the article “Easter and its cycle,” adds: “Originally both observances [Passover and Easter] were allowed, but gradually it was felt incongruous that Christians should celebrate Easter on a Jewish feast, and unity in celebrating the principal Christian feast was called for.”

The Passover ceremony, observed by Jesus Christ and commanded by Him for His followers (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke 22:19; John 13:15),

Chronology of Events

Wednesday

- +Jesus eats with disciples early Tuesday evening (days began at sunset, Exodus 12:18, Leviticus 23:32), institutes symbols of bread and wine.
- +Jesus is betrayed, arrested, tried and crucified during remainder of evening and daylight on Wednesday.
- +Jesus dies about 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50).
- +This was the “Preparation Day,” the day before the Sabbath (Luke 23:54; Mark 15:42). But this was an annual, not weekly, Sabbath (John 19:31).
- +Joseph of Arimathea entombs Jesus’ body at sunset (Matthew 27:57-60).

Thursday

- +A High Day Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31).
- +This was the day which followed the Day of Preparation (Matthew 27:62).

Friday

- +When the High Day Sabbath was past, the women bought and prepared spices for anointing Jesus’ body (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56a).

Saturday

- +The women rested on the weekly Sabbath, according to the Fourth Commandment (Luke 23:56b).
- +Jesus rose around sunset, three days and three nights (72 hours) after burial, fulfilling the sign of Jonah.

Sunday

- +The women brought the spices they had prepared to the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark (Luke 24:1; John 20:1).
- +Jesus had already risen; the tomb was empty (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1-18).

was supplanted by Easter, a day neither He nor the early New Testament Church approved.

Inconsistent and incorrect dating

The date of Easter, as part of the syncretizing of Easter with the death and resurrection of Christ, was heatedly debated during the 2nd century after Christ, especially by a group in Asia Minor known as the Quartodecimans (from the Latin for 14). They insisted on observing Easter on the 14th of Nisan on the Hebrew calendar, which was a movable date; that is, it did not fall on the same calendar day each year.

“In the mid-second century, however, some Gentile Christians began to celebrate it on the Sunday after 14 Nisan, with the preceding Friday observed as the day of Christ’s crucifixion, regardless of the date on which it fell. The resulting controversy over the correct time for observing the Easter festival reached a head in A.D. 197, when Victor of Rome excommunicated those Christians who insisted on celebrating Easter on 14 Nisan. The dispute continued until the early fourth century, when the Quarto-decimans . . . were required by Emperor Constantine to conform to the empire-wide practice of observing Easter on the Sunday following 14 Nisan, rather than on the date itself.

“Currently celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox [the Council of Nicaea fixed this date in A.D. 325], Easter falls differently for [Eastern] Orthodox Christianity which, unlike Western Christianity, did not accept the Gregorian calendar reform in 1582” (*Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 1985, article “Easter”).

We therefore see that the world’s observance of Easter is a curious mixture of ancient mythological practices and arbitrary dating which actually obscure and discredit the proof of Jesus Christ’s messiahship and resurrection. The Passover was discarded and replaced with Easter.

This gives some of the background on how Friday came to be observed as the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, and the following Sunday as the date of His resurrection. However, another prob-

lem with all this is that these observances are refuted by the details of the biblical record.

Sign of the Messiah

Matthew 12:38 shows some of the scribes and Pharisees asking Jesus for a sign to prove He was the Messiah. But Jesus told them that the only sign He would give was that of the prophet Jonah: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (verse 40).

Many people justify their belief in a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection by the notion that this segment of time does not require a span of 72 hours. They reason that a part of a day can be reckoned as a whole day.

If Jesus Christ were in the grave only from late Friday afternoon to Sunday morning, then the only sign He gave that He was the prophesied Messiah was not fulfilled.

Hence, since Jesus died around 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46), they feel the remainder of Friday constituted the first day, Saturday the second and part of Sunday the third.

What they fail to take into consideration is that only two nights are accounted for in this explanation and that Jesus had already risen before the daylight portion of Sunday (John 20:1).

Something is obviously incorrect about this commonly calculated conclusion.

Jonah 1:17 states specifically that “Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” There is

no reason to think that these days and nights were fractional. Nor is there any basis for thinking that Jesus meant only two nights and one day, plus parts of two days, when He described the length of time He would be in the grave. Such rationalization undermines the integrity of Jesus’ words.

Was Christ’s sign fulfilled?

If Jesus were in the grave only from late Friday afternoon to sometime very early Sunday morning, then the only sign He gave that He was the prophesied Messiah was not fulfilled. The claim of His messiahship rests on the fulfillment of His words; it’s that serious a matter.

Let us carefully examine the details of those fateful days. Each of the Gospel writers gives an account of the events, but each presents different aspects that need to be correctly synchronized and harmonized to produce a clear sequence and understanding of what happened (see accompanying chart).

The Bible does not contradict itself (Psalm 119:160), and we will see that not one of the Gospel accounts contradicts what the other Gospels teach.

For instance, John 19:31 preserves a crucial point that provides insight into the other narratives. The preparation day on which Jesus was crucified is described as the day before the Sabbath. But John clarifies it by stating that this approaching Sabbath “was a high day.” This does not refer to the weekly Sabbath (Friday evening to Saturday evening) but to the first day of Unleavened Bread, which is one of God’s annual high, or feast, days (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:6, 7), which could fall on any day of the week.

Some have argued that this high day fell that year on the seventh day of the week, making it a double Sabbath, with the preparation day being on Friday. But Luke’s account shows that this was not the case.

Notice the sequence of events outlined in chapter 23. Jesus’ moment of death, as well as His hasty burial because of the oncoming Sabbath, is narrated in verses 46-53. Verse 54 then states, “That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.”

Two Sabbaths described

Many have assumed that it is the weekly Sabbath mentioned here. But this is not the case. Instead, it was a Sabbath that occurred on Thursday, since verse 56 shows that the women, after seeing Christ's body having been laid in the tomb, "returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils" for the final preparation of the body.

In this sequence, such work could have been done only on Friday, since it would have been considered a violation of the Sabbath if it was done on that day, and that would not have been allowed. This is further verified by Mark's account, which states, "Now when the Sabbath was *past*, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices [which would not have been purchased on a Sabbath] that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 16:1, emphasis ours).

This conclusively proves that the Sabbath mentioned here and in the other narratives was the first Holy Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which, in A.D. 31, fell on a Thursday. The women had to wait until this Sabbath was over before they could buy and prepare the spices, on Friday, to be used for anointing Jesus' body. Then, after these activities, "they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment," which would have been the regular weekly Saturday Sabbath (Luke 23:56).

Sign of the Messiah

After this rest, the women then went to Jesus' tomb early on the first day of the week (Sunday), while it was still dark (John 20:1), and found that He had already been resurrected (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1). Therefore, if we allow the Scriptures to interpret themselves, an accurate harmonization of all four Gospel accounts attests to the validity of Jesus' statements.

Further proof of the accuracy of this sequence and explanation is found in Matthew 28:1. Most translations render "Now after the Sabbath" as if the word *Sabbath* were singular. This is not correct. *Sabbath* here is *sabaton* in the Greek text, which is genitive *plural*. Some Bible versions, including Alfred Marshall's Parallel New Testament in

Greek and English and Ferrar Fenton's translation, translate it properly as "after the *Sabbaths*," which again demonstrates that there was more than one Sabbath that week.

The wording of Mark 16:1, 2 is also confusing to some because it seems to suggest that the spices were purchased after the weekly Sabbath rather than before it, on Friday. However, this is explained by Luke 23:56, which clearly shows that the women bought the spices before, and not after, the weekly Sabbath, "and they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment." Mark did not mention this weekly Sabbath rest in his account, but Luke, who wrote later, did.

Some also stumble over Mark 16:9, not taking into account that there is no punctuation indicated in the original Greek. Therefore, to be in harmony with the material presented in the other Gospels, a better translation would be: "Now having risen, early the first day of the week He appeared first to Mary Magdalene . . ." These verses are not saying that Jesus *rose* early on Sunday morning, but that He *appeared* on Sunday morning to Mary Magdalene, having risen some time earlier.

Three days and three nights in the tomb

Be assured that the precise fulfillment of Jonah's sign of three days and three nights, which Jesus gave as verification of His authenticity and messiahship, did happen. Jesus rose late Saturday afternoon around sunset — not Sunday at sunrise — which was precisely three days and three nights after He was placed in the tomb just before sunset on Wednesday. He had already risen hours before the women came to the tomb, while it was still dark, Sunday morning.

We should be grateful that God has preserved the genuine, incontrovertible proof of Jesus' resurrection so we can have the confidence and certainty that Jesus is indeed the prophesied Messiah and Savior of the world, who has paid the full penalty of human sin by His sacrifice and death, and that He rose from the dead and lives in heaven as our Helper, High Priest and Intercessor. **GN**

Britain

Continued from page 9

None of the dominions was directly threatened by Germany and its allies in either of the two world wars, but all the dominions played a major role in helping the mother country in her struggle. They all entered both conflicts within days of Britain declaring war on Germany and were fighting with Britain long before the United States got involved.

The prime ministers of the dominions met regularly with the British prime minister to ensure a close working relationship with all the nations of the commonwealth.

Today the commonwealth is a radically different organization. It is a multicultural 52-member association, including more than one quarter of the world's countries and peoples. For decades, however, the organization was divided over what to do about former member South Africa and its system of racial separation, or apartheid. The year 1994 witnessed control of South Africa pass from white to black African hands. One of the first decisions made by South Africa's new president, Nelson Mandela, was to rejoin the commonwealth.

Some other possible developments: The November 1995 Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in Auckland, New Zealand, saw the commonwealth expand to 52 members, with the addition of Mozambique and Cameroon. The commonwealth also committed itself to helping Nigeria return to democracy, showing that the commonwealth can still act in unison in defense of freedom.

But the modern commonwealth is not the former committed multitude of nations, united in purpose, going forth together in defense of freedom.

End of the monarchy?

No longer do the former dominions look to Britain for leadership. Canada, Australia and New Zealand still retain Queen Elizabeth as their monarch, but Australia is moving toward becoming a republic, to emphasize its increasing ties to Asia. Britain continues to

Continued on page 38

What Is the Value of a Life?

by Bruce Gore

Do you own a piece of gold, a rare coin or an original painting? Have you given much thought to what makes things valuable? What determines the value of something to you?

Normally we judge the value of property based on its functionality, rarity or how much a buyer would pay for it. Our needs and desires, or a combination of these, can all play a part in determining value.

If you had \$100 in your pocket, what would you give for a drink of water right now? Probably nothing, because you're likely not thirsty, and less-expensive water is probably readily available in the kitchen or from a water fountain. But, if you were stranded in the desert and hadn't had a drink of anything for two days, your answer might be entirely different.

Some needs are more urgent and demanding than others. We all have a need to be loved. Yet survival is an even more basic human need. If you are sitting in your car, suddenly tottering on the edge of a bridge over a deep river after you've crashed through the protective fence, you will not be worrying that your wife didn't hug you that morning.

Have you ever heard of a contest in which an entrant can win a car if he is the last one in a group standing with his hand on the vehicle? Some people have remained standing for days because of a need or, in the case of this contest, a desire to win a prize.

People depreciate

Times change, tastes change, needs change, and cars and people generally depreciate with age. Yet some wine, whiskey, antiques and art appreciate with age.

Values change. A huge Syrian army besieged the ancient city of Samaria until the inhabitants suffered great famine behind their city walls. The sit-



How valuable is the life of a human being? Is it of less value than a sports car? How about a pair of fancy shoes? Yet these are all things people have killed for!

uation was so critical that people were paying up to 80 silver shekels for the little flesh they could carve from the head of a donkey. Yet when God caused a panic among the Syrians and they fled leaving all their supplies and

food, the cost of food plummeted. You can read about this in 2 Kings 6:24 through 7:1-16, where the principle of supply and demand is so graphically illustrated.

Gold is valuable because it is scarce. Water is plentiful, but it holds a certain value because we depend on it for survival. But how valuable is the life of a human being? Is it of less value than a sports car? How about a pair of fancy shoes? Or a jacket bearing the name of a famous sports team? Yet these are all things people have killed for!

Recently someone shot a young man in cold blood for the \$7 he had in his pocket. Even worse, some have killed because of an angry word or simply a facial expression they didn't like. To them the other people's lives were worth less than a loss of face.

What is the value of a human life? Jesus Christ tells us that God loves all of His creation even down to individual birds, and that He takes care of it. "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6, 7).

The price of a slave

How do we place a value on human life?

Judas Iscariot asked the religious leaders of his day who wanted to take the life of Christ, what Jesus' life was worth to them: "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" the betrayer inquired. In response, "They counted out to him thirty pieces of silver" (Matthew 26:15). The religious leaders determined that Jesus' life was worth, to them, 30 pieces of silver.

How did they arrive at that amount? Leviticus 27 states that a male whose life was previously dedicated for a





type of religious service, such as in the tabernacle, could be redeemed for 50 shekels. But the Jews did not dignify

Christ's life with that valuation. His life would not be worth that of a free person. "If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned" (Exodus 21:32). They valued Jesus' life as that of a slave.

What was Christ's real value? To God, His father, He was infinitely valuable. As the Father repeatedly stated, "This is My beloved son" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). In the parable of the vineyard, God, in type, talks of His "one son, his beloved," whom He sent, "saying, 'They will respect my son.'" (Mark 12:6).

I can't help but think of my son, Daniel, whom I love very much. I naturally expect others to feel about him the same way I do. Isn't that what God is saying here about His Son?

Once, when Jesus Christ was discussing His impending death with His disciples, "a voice came from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified [My name] and will glorify it again.'" (John 12:28). Jesus' followers standing nearby thought they had heard thunder or possibly the voice of an angel.

Jesus clarified what had happened: "This voice did not come because of Me, *but for your sake*" (verse 30). The voice thundered so they would know how much God the Father loved and valued His Son.

Humanity's worth compared to God

Christ, the Son of God, was God in the flesh. "To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?" (Isaiah 40:18). "Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing . . . All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless" (verses 15, 17). In comparison to God, that is the inherent value of all humanity: nothing!

So what is the value of the life of a man or woman? God knows our insignificant intrinsic value, but He still gave

His Son in the supreme sacrifice for us. He paid the price because He loved us, not because we are worth His Son.

"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" (John 3:16). This familiar, oft-quoted verse has unfortunately lost much of its impact. It tells us that God's love is so great that He gave His Son to pay the death penalty in our place so that eternal life could be given to us!

Can we, as parents, identify with the value of that life? Once, our son, at the age of 4, became separated from us as he was playing with some other children beside a raging, flooding river. We found him, safe and sound, about half a mile away. I feared he was lost for good in the muddy, swirling waters.

Our little girl was once ill and on the verge of death. We prayed, fasted and cried until there was nothing left to cry. In a few days she fully recovered. A tremendous burden was lifted in these incidents.

A loss of that magnitude is almost greater than we can bear. Yet we are told, "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" (1 John 4:9, 10).

Reminder of God's love for us

Passover reminds us of God's love for us. God told His Son how much He valued him, how deeply He loved Him. Many of us know how hard it is to give up someone we deeply love.

God's sacrifice, that loss, the giving up of something so precious to Him, showed how much God loves us and how He feels about sin. Even God could not overlook sin's seriousness and enormous consequences. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

Your life, in that God paid a dear price for it, has value to Him. Let's be reminded of the vastness of His love as we consider the enormity of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us. **GN**

Passover

Continued from page 19

took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified" (verses 30, 31).

What His sacrifice means for us

This is only a cursory portrayal of the agony our Savior had to suffer in our stead so the penalty of death could be removed from you and me. Without Jesus' sacrifice, we would automatically be consigned to everlasting death. The only life we could live would be the physical existence we are struggling through now.

We would have no hope of reconciliation to God our Father. We would have no prospects of His accepting our lives through the life of Jesus Christ, now at the right hand of God. We could have no reason to hope to receive the Holy Spirit, understand the truth of God, and serve Christ as His followers on earth.

We would not understand the mystery of the ages, the plan of God for mankind to become the sons of God. And we would not enjoy the privilege of fellowshiping with others of like mind, sharing the joy God blesses us with in His Church.

No wonder Paul used the words he did to bring the Corinthians back to spiritual reality. Either they did not hold to an understanding of the profundity of Jesus' sacrifice, or they once comprehended it but had grown careless of it. Whatever the situation, they needed to be reminded of the pain and agony their Savior went through for them. They needed to repent of their short-sightedness and acknowledge the great extent of that remarkable sacrifice.

Here is a question we might ask ourselves in this Passover season: Do we truly appreciate Christ's ultimate sacrifice?

Let's hope that we do.

The Passover season is upon us. We should feel the conviction of our brother, the apostle Paul, whom God inspired to remind us: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." That sacrifice was real, and it should affect our lives every day. **GN**

Three Strikes and You're Out—or Are You?

by Chris
Anderson

Strike three! You're out!" Hearing the umpire's final call, the batter bowed his head, turned and slowly walked away from the plate. The dugout was smothered in silence, unbroken by the coach's usual encouragement that would take the sting out of another failed attempt at bat. It wasn't the first strikeout for the young batter, and there would be many more times he would come away without getting to first base, let alone all the way around to home plate.

This time was different, though. The team members were counting on the last batter of the game to pull them out of the throes of another defeat and keep them in the race for the championship. But the batter failed. The game, and the season, was over. The weight of failure was heavy.

In many ways, our battle with sin is similar to that battle of the young batter. We don't always do our best when it is time to step up to the plate, when it counts so much. Sometimes we may be outclassed by a great pitch or strong defense. Sometimes we defeat ourselves by failing to prepare and get caught off guard by a fastball that sails right by us.

Failure hurts; the reality of what we have done overwhelms. If too many trips to the plate end in defeat, we are tempted to give up. David knew the feeling. "For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me" (Psalm 40:12).

Unlike a game that ends after nine innings, or a season that ends with the



victory going to an opponent, the battle against sin lasts a lifetime. Instead of 10 or 15 good years in the game, we may spend 60, 70 or even more years in the fight against sin.

Why not just forfeit?

With the competition so strong and so highly skilled, why should a Christian keep coming back to the plate? Why continue the struggle to defeat the pulls of the flesh?

Certainly, part of the answer lies in the gift of salvation that will come—after a life of striving against sin, of fighting the good fight and doing battle against the foe—as a result of our repentance of sin and Christ's sacrifice. We are driven to continue so we can hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21).

But that is in the future, and a lot can happen between now and then. How can we know *now*—day by day—that continuing to fight is worth the effort? Is it true that we *can* win and attain the goal we strive for? Has God made a way possible for us to succeed in this our greatest battle of all so that we need never think about giving up? God's Word assures us that our efforts are not

in vain (2 Peter 1:10, 11).

God has a wonderful plan for us—a plan that included giving His only Son for the sake of all mankind so that we can inherit a life without end. When we take a closer look at this part of God's plan, we find the encouragement to keep going on, to continue the fight and not give up.

God knows the depths of despair we fall into when we fail to live up to His expectations. He knows the penalty of sin—pain, suffering and heartbreak. Surely God wants better for us.

Who's counting?

"Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:1-3). Truly, if God kept track of all our failures, no one could ever hope to succeed. All hope would be lost.

But notice what God tells us through wise King Solomon: "For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin" (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

By *just*, he means *righteous*—like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and many, many more. While we may feel at times like the worst of sinners, we are not alone in our struggle; others have walked this path before us. The saying is true that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This truth should help a little in holding the right perspective. However, a rereading of Hebrews 11 should encourage us.

God does not leave us without hope. He knows we will need help, and He

provides it. As the scripture says, “This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them . . . Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:6, 7, 19).

But how does God deliver us?

We can find part of the answer in Psalm 130:4: “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.” By God’s great mercy, He is willing to forgive us when we stumble and fall. He knows we will need His forgiveness again and again, and He paid a dear price for the forgiveness He offers. Yet this is exactly how God has made it possible for us to continue this good fight. For this we should thank God every day.

God provides a Redeemer, one who paid the penalty of sin for us. “The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned” (Psalm 34:22).

Strike one

Unlike humans, God has enormous capacity to forgive. That does not give us license to sin or to treat with impunity the redemption available to us through God’s Son. God knows our heart, and He knows the power of sin. If we trust in Him—if we keep stepping back up to the plate when it is our turn again at bat, committed to hitting the ball this time and getting to first base, then second and eventually home—He will be there whenever we need strength.

He has redeemed us once and for all and will forgive us over and over until the season of our life is complete. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

David knew that God knew he had committed sin, and he knew he could not blame anyone else for what had happened. God knows what sin is, and so should we. We must come to recognize our part in the deadly process of sin, the breaking of the eternal, spiritual law of God.

“For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned,

and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge . . . Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts . . .” (Psalm 51:3, 4, 6).

A willing heart

We must be willing to go before God and accept personal responsibility for our sins. Only then, with a heart committed to doing better next time, can we count on the forgiveness God makes possible.

We must never give up. Each time

Our battle with sin is something like the battle of the batter at the plate. We need to stay in training for the victory God promises us.

we’re at the plate staring the foe in the eye, we need to ask God for the means to live in us and bring about the results He wants and we want: to succeed and inherit eternal life. Further, the team is encouraged if we take the bat confidently in hand and attempt once again to do our best. But we have to know just how much we need God every time at bat.

If we want the victory, God will help us overcome. “When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth; surely every man is vapor” (Psalm 39:11).

He shows us the error of our ways and then heals us. “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him” (Hosea 14:4).

But it takes the right attitude. “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgres-

sions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25).

God’s forgiveness makes it possible for us to step up to the plate again after the times we stumble and miss the mark. God’s forgiveness is real, thorough and complete. We must be willing to believe that it is ours if we go to Him:

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s . . . As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them who fear Him. For He knows our frame; that we are but dust” (Psalm 103:2-5, 12-14).

Our loving Father and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, our faithful brother and friend, are committed to our success, in spite of our losses. But if we quit trying, if we give up, we will never win. We must never give up. “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is . . . the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7, 8).

Over the fence

The next time you strike out or get caught off guard, remember: “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (Psalm 130:4). Then get back in training, preparing for the final victory that God promises, remembering that God makes salvation possible by His forgiveness.

What else can we do but give thanks? As David said in Psalm 40:16, 17: “Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, ‘The LORD be magnified!’ But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer. Do not delay, O my God.” **GN**



Sarah

A Story of Virtue

by Jerold Aust

Abraham married well, to a beauty named Sarah. She was pretty enough to turn the heads of a pharaoh and a king, who nearly lost their lives for entertaining the thought of taking her into their harems.

What both rulers didn't know was that they were dealing with God's faithful matriarch, Sarah, and with His faithful patriarch, Abraham. To be sure, Abraham distorted the truth a little by presenting his wife as his sister. But she *was* his half-sister. She was also his wife. And at age 65, she continued to turn the heads of rulers. However, her inner beauty of faith in God far exceeded her outward appearance.

In the process of time, God transformed Sarah into a courageous, loyal, and faithful support for her husband. Although God changed her doubt to faith, Sarah must be given credit for placing herself in God's hands for Him to reshape her perspective.

Sarah also protected Isaac and defended her hearth and home (for her, a comfortable tent) from a polygamous relationship. She forced the banishment of her handmaiden

to God for answers and blessings. Abraham. She was faithful in her marriage through thick and thin. Her shortcomings were typical for any day, any epoch, but her virtues are uncontested as an example for women and men forever.

A fitting partner

What follows is a remarkable story of one of the most faithful saints in the history of humanity. Sarah was a fitting partner to Abraham. In this story, Sarah shines as a faithful wife and mother. She might even be called the mother of all faithful women. The apostle Peter suggests such a description for her when he writes: "As Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, *whose daughters you are* if you do good and are not afraid . . ." (1 Peter 3:6).

As a wife, Sarah also transcended the occasional apprehensions of married life. Since husbands and wives can and do have different perspectives based on reason and intuition, a wife can become apprehensive of her husband's decisions.

That is where the importance of good communication comes into play in a healthy marriage. And although Sarah and Abraham likely had good communication in their marriage, through her faith she was helped in this important emotional need to look

to God for answers and blessings.

Traumatic time

Perhaps the most difficult time for Abraham and Sarah was when Sarah demanded that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness. It was a heartrending scene, a time of great crisis for Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar (not to mention young Ishmael).

For Sarah, it was the time of decision, a declaration and substantiation of her son Isaac as sole heir to Abraham and Sarah's future blessings. God had previously announced to Abraham that He would continue His covenant through Isaac, not Ishmael (Genesis 17:19-21), so this was in keeping with God's purpose.

Sarah had personally observed 16-year-old Ishmael mock young Isaac. (Comparing Genesis 16:16, and 21:5 and 8, Ishmael was 13 years old when Isaac was conceived, 14 years old at Isaac's birth, and approximately 16 years old when Isaac was weaned.) "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she [Hagar] had borne to Abraham, scoffing [literally, "laughing"]. Therefore she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac.' And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because



of his son [Ishmael]” (Genesis 21:9-11).

Sarah’s jealousy for Isaac as their only heir complemented God’s design and promise to Abraham and Sarah: “For in Isaac your seed shall be called” (Genesis 21:12; Hebrews 11:18).

Resolving family problem

Put yourself in Sarah’s place and ask what you would have done in similar circumstances. Sarah was 90 years old when God fulfilled His promise that she would bear a son. Hagar was but a handmaid to Sarah and one she had mistakenly given to Abraham in hopes of helping God along in His promise to her. Now this son of her handmaid was mocking young Isaac, her very own flesh, blood and bone.

To her, the only peace her family could enjoy would be from the removal of her handmaid Hagar and her son Ishmael. As well, having Hagar and Ishmael around continually reminded Sarah of the mistake she had made by giving Hagar to Abraham in hopes of fulfilling God’s promise of providing them a son. This was a situation Sarah found untenable.

Abraham too was grieved. Ishmael was also his son, flesh of his flesh. It hurt him deeply to part with his son, now growing into a young man. Abraham had grown to love Ishmael and spent long hours with him and taught him many basic skills he would need when he would be on his own.

Resolution in God’s hands

The best resolution to this traumatic matter was in God’s hands. “But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed’” (Genesis 21:12, 13).

So it was that Abraham rose up early in the morning and provided Hagar and Ishmael with bread and water and sent them on their way into the Wilderness of Beersheba. Again, Abraham trusted in God. Little wonder he was labeled as the father of the faithful (Galatians 3:7; Romans 4:16). Still, it must have been heartrending for Abraham to watch his son Ishmael disappear into

the wilderness, wondering whether he would ever see him again.

And what of Hagar? She probably asked herself what she had done to deserve such treatment. There had been hard feelings between her and Sarah since she had conceived Ishmael (Genesis 16:4-6), but she had been obedient to Sarah and to Abro-

have had to perform a miracle for conception to occur.

God had promised, and He was easily able to fulfill His promise. But though God had given His word, both Sarah and Abraham had a lesson to learn about faith and patience.

First, they tried to work things out



the wilderness with only bread and water. As she set off with her son across a hot and barren wilderness, she wondered what lay ahead for her and Ishmael.

God had not forgotten Abraham’s first son, so, thankfully, there was hope for Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16:10-12). At the time, however, she could only imagine that suffering and death lay ahead of them.

Hagar did not understand that God would watch over her and Ishmael, and she was not privy to God’s design to bless Israel through Isaac, the seed of promise.

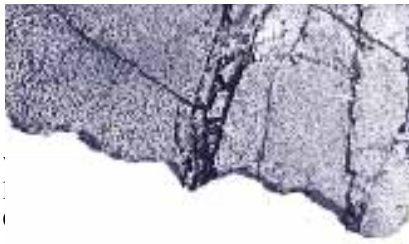
Beyond childbearing age

Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah 90 when Isaac was conceived. Sarah apparently was well beyond menopause, so God would necessarily

Sarah attempted to improve on God’s timetable. Rather than waiting on God to perform what He had promised, though they were beyond the age of procreation, they decided that perhaps God meant for them to help Him perform His miracle for them.

Let’s see now, Sarah may have thought, I have this faithful handmaiden and maybe, just maybe, God wants us to have a son through her. Hagar is young enough to bear a child, so I think I’ll suggest that Abraham have our child, the one God promised us, through Hagar.

This sounded reasonable, and it was perhaps a common practice in surrounding cultures, but it wasn’t what God had in mind. What we have here is an attempt to work things out through human reasoning and effort. Not all



born to Hagar and Abraham.

Difference between human effort and faith

In all of this, God provided us with an understanding of the difference between human effort and faith in God. Although we may know the will of God, we often try to improve on God's timing by working out His promises through our own efforts.

What God expects, however, is for us to know His will. Then with continued patience and faith, we wait on Him to answer according to His promise. Certainly there are things we can do for ourselves. But when it comes to faith, we are dealing with spiritual thought processes which connect, seamlessly, with patience.

God is not opposed to our caring for ourselves; He *is* opposed to our caring more for ourselves than for Him and His will (Luke 14:26-27). All of this and more Sarah learned, along with her husband Abraham.

These principles weren't all learned in a day or a week. It took Abraham and Sarah years to grasp them. But at all times, they received God's truth with a humility of mind and a readiness to act on what they heard. They became convicted (which is more than being merely convinced) of God's instruction. This all translated into *belief, faith*.

Believing God's promise

Patience is one of the most crucial lessons any Christian must learn. The New Testament writer Luke records

of your souls" (Luke 21:19, Amplified Bible).

Saving our spiritual lives is what is most important to God. This is not to say that faith and patience do not play a role in protecting our physical lives. They do. The example of Daniel proves this true! He patiently waited on God to deliver Him from the lions (Daniel 6:10-23). God heard his prayers, observed his faith and spared his physical life. God saves our spiritual lives and often our physical lives, too.

Sarah too was patient and faithful. She waited on God and "judged Him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11). The entire miraculous event was reduced to patient waiting on God to answer.

In all of this, God provided us with an understanding of the difference between human effort and faith in God. Although we may know the will of God, we often try to improve on God's timing by working out His promises through our own efforts.

A laughing matter

We should not conclude our profile of Sarah without noting the fact that when the Lord promised Sarah she would bear a son in her advanced age, she privately laughed about such an apparent absurdity.

According to the account in the book of Genesis, God said to Abraham: "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord [Abra-

ham] being old also?' And the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh? . . . But Sarah denied it, saying, 'I did not laugh,' for she was afraid. And He said, 'No, but you did laugh!'" (Genesis 18:10-13, 15).

Read in isolation, this dialogue between God and Sarah appears to have little significance. But the narrative continues and is also mentioned in the New Testament, where it takes on deeper meaning.

Moses shows us how the nature of Sarah's laughter changed: "And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age . . . And Sarah said, 'God has made me laugh

['made laughter for me' or 'granted me the ability to laugh and rejoice'], and all who hear will laugh [and rejoice] with me'" (Genesis 21:1-2,6).

Originally, 90-year-old Sarah laughed at the apparent absurdity of delivering a son. Her reaction was the laughter of doubt, but after she actually gave birth to Isaac, her skeptical

laughter changed to laughter of pure joy.

Now she enjoyed the laughter of faith. What satisfaction she must have felt, what satisfaction, what peace, what comfort.

Sarah's remarkable example is in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, which recounts many inspiring stories of faith. Though her story is only briefly explored here, she ranks with the Bible's faithful. Rightly did Peter also commend all faithful women of all ages when he wrote: "As Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid . . ." (1 Peter 3:6).

The implication is clear: Sarah is a shining example of the practice of faith. **GN**



Parenting

Continued from page 7

ing more attention to their marriage than to their children" ("Why Saying No to Your Children and Putting Them Second Can Be Best for Them," *Urban Family*, Spring 1993).

This is a vital key to having well-adjusted children. A nationwide survey conducted in 1988 by the National Center for Health Statistics showed that young people who grow up in traditional families (both father and mother present in the home) are two to three times less likely to have behavioral or emotional problems than their peers reared by a single parent, or by a stepfamily.

Broken marriages are tragedies for adults and children alike. No wonder God says that He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16)! God wants what is best for all mankind, children included. His desire is for adults to produce godly offspring (Malachi 2:15).

It is also interesting to note that many marriages end in divorce shortly after the last child has matured and left the home. Families in which the father and mother successfully give their own relationship greater importance than their children, not only produce better children but also find their marriages unaffected by the departure of the last child.

Parental attention

The importance of parental attention during a child's early years has been thoroughly documented. "Dr. Burton White of the Harvard University Preschool Project concluded that 'what happens between 0-18 months of life does more to influence future intellectual competence than any other time.' White's data also concluded that the nuclear family is the most important educational system.

"Children who receive inadequate nurture in their early years become nonattached. According to Selma Fraiberg of the University of Michigan, nonattachment, at its worst, can 'create bondless people who . . . contribute far beyond their number to social disease and disorder. They are

handicapped in work relationships, friendships, marriage, and child rearing'" (*Current Thoughts & Trends*, August 1994, p. 13).

Of late, much emphasis has been placed on spending quality time with children. Exactly what constitutes "quality time" is hard to discern. Originally, it likely meant giving children undivided attention or interacting with them. These are important princi-



ples. The reality, however, is that all time spent with children is important to them. The cost of an activity or the distance traveled is not a factor in determining the value of time spent. Children value all time with their parents.

Two of the greatest advantages for children are biological parents who live together in a loving relationship, and parents who spend time with them. Children from these backgrounds are most likely to succeed and be well adjusted. Children, as they grow up, see how families should work and are statistically predisposed toward living out the same scenario when they become adults.

If you are happily married and meet these principles for successful parenting, you and your children have a greater likelihood of success. Count

your blessings! Not everyone, however, is in this situation. Fifty percent of all marriages in the United States end in divorce and many single parents find themselves in economic circumstances that require they work outside the home. Are these people doomed to parenting failure? Absolutely not.

The good news is that in spite of the statistics, many single, working parents have made a commitment to rear their children by God's standards and are producing stable, well-adjusted children.

If you have made mistakes or been the victim of a failed marriage, you can bring your circumstances to God and commit yourself to God's values. Then your children can start to reflect the blessings that come from His timeless parenting values.

Mothers who must work outside the home, but wish they didn't have to, can take some encouragement from research done by Roger Webb of the University of Arkansas. Webb found that "while the best adjusted kids have mothers who choose to stay home and raise them, the second best adjusted children come from homes where the mothers work outside the home but don't want to. These children seem to sense that their mothers would rather be with them if circumstances allowed" (*Current Thoughts & Trends*).

Make a commitment

Making a commitment to your mate, and to spending time with your children, are important foundational steps to successful parenting. These are not the only things important in parenting, but they are a good start. THE GOOD NEWS will continue to publish articles about family matters and how you can apply God's principles in your life.

Earlier in this article I mentioned a bumper sticker. It seems only appropriate to close with another which embodies the basic principle of loving one's children. This favorite bumper sticker of mine says, "Have You Hugged Your Kids Today?" Why not do it? And while you are at it, hug your mate. It will do you and your children a lot of good. **GN**

The Passover Bread and Wine

The Meaning of the Passover Symbols

by Bill Bradford

Jesus Christ, at His last meal with His disciples, commanded His friends and followers to remember Him in a specific way. Although He had earlier warned them of His approaching death (John 12:32, 33), they found that certainty hard to accept.

But less than 24 hours later Jesus would be dead, His body hastily entombed and His disciples shocked, confused and scattered.

At that last meal, Jesus Christ told His disciples to eat bread and drink wine as symbols of His body and blood.

“... When He had given thanks, He broke [the bread] and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup [of wine] after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me’” (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25).

The New Testament Passover is one of the most widely celebrated observances of the Christian faith.

When we partake of the bread and wine, are we merely following a tradition? Does this ceremony have meaning for us in our era? How important is it that *we* understand the meaning of the Christian Passover?

Lack of comprehension

The first-century congregation of Corinth did not understand the significance of the Passover. They observed it “in an unworthy manner,” not “discerning the Lord’s body” (verses 27 and 29); they did not comprehend its real meaning.

Because of their lack of understanding, Paul warned the Corinthians they



could be “guilty of the body and blood of the LORD,” and if they failed to properly judge themselves they would be “eat[ing] and drink[ing] judgment” to themselves (verses 27, 29).

Paul took the Passover ceremony seriously. His warning makes it clear that Christians should not only observe what Christ commanded, but should understand the meaning of eating the bread and drinking the wine at the Passover service. It is vital that we understand the intent behind Jesus Christ’s commands concerning the Passover. Christ said that unless we (symbolically) eat His flesh and drink His blood, we have no life in us (John 6:53). It is that important.

Once each year, on the anniversary of the night on which one of Jesus’ own disciples betrayed Him, Christians should recall and contemplate the meaning of Christ’s death through the obser-

vance of the Passover service (1 Corinthians 11:26). Paul told the Corinthian members that “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The Passover service commemorates the death of Jesus Christ. By participating in the service, we personally proclaim the death of our Savior (1 Corinthians 11:26). We acknowledge that His dying paid the death penalty for us (Ephesians 5:2).

While the “blood” and “body” of Christ refer to the same sacrifice, Jesus Christ shows there is a clear distinction in the meaning attached to each of the two words.

Representing that differentiation are the two specific symbols: bread and wine. Let’s examine the special significance of Christ’s body and blood as represented by the two simple, unadorned aspects of the observance.

Jesus Christ’s body a sacrifice

Let’s first understand the meaning of the bread. “. . . As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body’” (Matthew 26:26).

The body of Jesus became an offering for sin, for “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man . . . offered one sacrifice for sins forever . . . For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:10-14).

Our partaking of the Passover bread indicates that we understand that Jesus Christ has put away our sin by the “sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

He willingly consented to suffer an excruciating death for us. His blood was not swiftly shed; He was tortured many hours before He died. He bore in His body the physical suffering caused by sin.

Under the first covenant the sacrifice of animals for sin by the Levitical priesthood could not remove the guilt of the ancient Israelites. Those sacrifices just reminded them of their sinfulness and were only types of the one future sacrifice that could remove all the transgressions of repentant sinners.

However, those animal sacrifices helped the Israelites understand how serious sin is in the sight of God. How much more should the sacrifice of the Son of God for the sins of the whole world help us to understand that sin has brought nothing but tragedy and suffering on mankind. Jesus had to endure intense suffering for our sake.

“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:4-6).

At the Passover service, when we eat the bread that symbolizes the broken body of Jesus Christ, we should remember and deeply appreciate why He had to offer His body to be beaten and abused as a sacrifice for us. He was “smitten,” “afflicted,” “wounded” and “bruised” for our transgressions.

Why did Christ have to die?

Why was it necessary for Jesus to die that our sins could be forgiven? Sin is the violation of God’s law of love. Through our disobedience, we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We earned the death penalty because of our sins (Romans 5:12; 6:23).

Paul explained the principle of a righteous man who would give up his own life as a replacement for one who is guilty (Romans 5:6-8). We would all be destined for the finality of death had someone not paid the penalty for our

sins. Christ substituted His death for ours. His sacrifice became the payment for our sins.

By living a sinless life and dying for us, Jesus took on Himself the penalty that we ourselves should have had to pay. Jesus Christ died in our stead so we could share life with Him forever.

A new way of life

The Passover bread also reminds us of the close relationship Christians have with Jesus Christ, resulting in a new way of life.

After transforming five loaves of bread and two fish into enough food for a crowd of multiple thousands (John 6:5-14), Jesus was followed by crowds

When we partake of the bread and wine, are we merely following a tradition? Does this ceremony have meaning for us in our era?

seeking Him for the wrong reasons—they wanted a free meal (verse 26).

“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life . . .” He told them (verse 27).

“ . . . My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world . . . I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (verses 32, 33, 35).

Speaking of the future Passover symbols of the bread and wine picturing His body and blood, Jesus Christ said, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day . . . [He] abides in Me, and I in him” (verses 54, 56).

In Romans 6:1-6, Paul shows that once we are symbolically united with

Christ in death through baptism, “we should no longer be slaves of sin” but “should walk in newness of life.”

The bread we eat at Passover demonstrates our commitment to live in Christ and allow Him to live in us.

The apostle Paul described this commitment in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Paul understood that controlling his own life was no longer important. His relationship with Jesus Christ, surrendering his life to the One who had willingly given His life for Paul, was now far more important to him.

The apostle John described this relationship very succinctly: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:3-6).

The Passover bread reminds us that Jesus Christ, the true “bread of life,” must also live in us, making it possible for us to walk in newness of life, living just as He lived.

The Passover wine

Why did Jesus command His disciples to drink wine as a symbol of His blood? What meanings are wrapped up in this extraordinary analogy that are vital to our understanding when we drink the wine at Passover?

Notice the meaning Jesus gave to the Passover wine: “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom’” (Matthew 26:27-29).

What does Christ want us to understand about His shed blood?

First, Christ knew that our drinking wine as a symbol of His shed blood would impress indelibly in our minds His death for the forgiveness of our sins. “This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

God forgives our sins through Jesus’ blood. We are taught that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Jesus Christ “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5). Christians normally understand this basic tenet of faith—that our sins are forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ—but not all professing Christians fully comprehend how this is so. Let’s be sure we understand.

Paul explains that “according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22).

In the context of the Old Testament, God instructed the priesthood to foreshadow the shedding of Christ’s blood by a system of cleansing and purification through the blood of sacrificed animals.

He commanded the nation of Israel to undertake this temporary system of the ritualistic cleansing from sins (Hebrews 9:9, 10). Animal sacrifices served as types of the one and only future sacrifice, Jesus Christ, who would pay the penalty for the sins of everyone once and for all.

Sacrifices were a reminder

In reality, the sins of the people under the old covenant were not forgiven through the blood of the animals they sacrificed. Those sacrifices only reminded them that they were sinners (Hebrews 10:1-4).

All those sacrifices, with their emphasis on blood, looked forward to the real “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Further, the ancients understood that life is in the blood (Genesis 9:4). When a person loses his blood, he dies. Therefore it is appropriate that blood make the atonement for sin (Leviticus 17:11). Jesus’ blood was shed, or poured out, while He hung on the cross (Luke 22:20; Colossians 1:20). His life drained from Him when He lost his blood (Isaiah 53:12). By allowing sinners to shed His

blood, He gave His life for us.

When we drink the wine at the Passover service, we are to consider the gravity of its meaning. It represents the very life’s blood that flowed from Jesus Christ’s dying body so we may have complete forgiveness of our sins (Ephesians 1:7).

The shed blood of the righteous Jesus Christ for our sinful life should powerfully motivate us never to want to sin again. It is the way our merciful God chooses to reach us in our obstinate states of mind.

Our wanting never to sin against our Savior is not the same as our acquiring the means to overcome sin. To effect the necessary change within us, God provides us the help of the Holy Spirit. However, the blood of Christ deals a powerful blow to sin because His undeserved death for us is one reason we

The Passover bread is also symbolic of the close relationship Christians have with Jesus Christ.

should not want to sin again. It is the realization of the magnitude of Jesus’ sacrifice for us that should bring us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Upon our repentance and baptism for the removal of those sins, God imparts the Holy Spirit to enable us to change.

Conscience freed of guilt

The second point Christ wants us to understand about His shed blood is that not only does it cover our sins, but makes it possible for us to be rid of guilt.

Notice Hebrews 9:12-14: “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God,

cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

When God grants us a pardon, we are no longer guilty in His eyes, but we still need to solve the problem of our guilty feelings—our guilty conscience. That is why Paul declares that the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. How can this be?

The word *conscience* comes from “conscire,” meaning “be conscious of guilt.” Our conscience is our awareness of right and wrong. When a person has no sensitivity to or awareness of right and wrong, we say he has no conscience.

Paul said the consciences of some people are seared (1 Timothy 4:2); that is, they have suppressed their awareness of right and wrong and have no desire to alter that tragic situation.

When God calls a person whose conscience is still sensitive to right and wrong, and that person is faced with the understanding that someone else had to die for him—and all along he has been unaware of or ignored this truth—his conscience is affected (Acts 2:36, 37). The realization of this truth brings home to him how ungodly he is, how far he falls short of the goodness of God (Romans 5:6-8). He becomes acutely aware of his own guilt; his conscience plagues him.

What can he do?

His awareness of the awesome meaning of the death of Jesus Christ for his sins awakens in his conscience a desire to obey God (Romans 7:20, 21). He can then accept Christ’s sacrifice for his sins and have faith that Christ took all his guilt upon Himself. Now he can rest assured that he can continue in “newness of life” (Romans 6:4) with a clean conscience; he can be confident that all his guilt has been erased.

No need for self-reproach

When our conscience is purged, we are freed from guilt. We were all guilty because we all violated God’s holy law and fell short of His glory (Romans 3:19, 23). Sin is breaking God’s law (1 John 3:4). When our sins are removed after we repent (Psalm 103:12), there should be no more self-inflicted guilt or self-reproach.

Unfortunately, many people still

feel guilty after they have repented and have asked God to forgive their sins. While our conscience should rightly convict us if we sin again, we should not continue in self-condemnation over the sins God has forgiven, but be able to operate confidently in the freedom from guilt God provides (1 John 1:9; 3:19, 20).

We express our faith, our confidence, that through the blood of Christ we are truly forgiven when we partake of the wine at the Passover service. The taking of the wine should impress upon us that we are free from sin and guilt, and that we do not stand condemned before God or ourselves (John 3:17, 18).

This is what it means to have “our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Hebrews 10:22).

Access to the Father

The third point Christ wants us to understand about His blood is that it makes it possible for us to come before the very throne of God.

Under the old covenant, only the priest could enter the area of the tabernacle known as the “Holiest of All” (Hebrews 9:6-10). In it was the “mercy seat,” which represented God’s throne.

In Leviticus 16 is explained a ceremony that took place each year on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest sprinkled the blood of a goat, representing the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ, on the mercy seat so the Israelites could be symbolically cleansed of all their sins (Leviticus 16:15, 16).

Because the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us and made us pure, each of us enjoys direct access to the Father (Hebrews 9:24). Jesus, as our High Priest, has entered into the Most Holy Place by His own blood (Hebrews 9:11, 12). In fact, we can approach God without hesitation or fear of rejection, but with confidence and assurance because of the blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Let us rejoice, when we take the wine of the Passover, that the blood of Christ has made us worthy to experience an intimate relationship with our Father!

Blood of the covenant

The fourth point to understand is that the blood of Christ signifies that He has entered into an agreement—

a covenant—with us. When Jesus instituted wine for the New Testament Passover, He said: “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant . . .” (Matthew 26:27, 28).

Why is taking wine, symbolic of His blood, called the “blood of the new covenant”?

Once again we go to the Old Testament for background information. Paul explained that both parties under the old covenant manifested their agreement by the ceremony of sprinkling of blood. The Bible writers called this blood the “blood of the covenant” (Hebrews 9:18-20; Exodus 24:3-8).

It is of utmost importance that we understand that our repentance of our sins, our baptism and acceptance of the blood of Jesus Christ to redeem us from the penalty of eternal death—coupled with our belief in His promise to for-

The blood of Christ signifies that He has entered into an agreement—a covenant—with us.

give our sins—constitute a covenant.

By accepting the blood of Christ for the remission of our sins, we enter into a covenantal relationship with the God of the universe. The terms of this covenant are absolute, because it was sealed with the shed blood and death of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:11, 12, 15). We renew that covenant every year when we partake of the Passover. Let us understand the terms of that covenant relationship.

“‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days,’ says the LORD: ‘I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,’ then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more’” (Hebrews 10:16, 17).

We have already seen a major difference between the old and new covenants. Cleansing from sin is no longer accomplished by the sacrifice of ani-

mals, but by the blood of Jesus Christ.

There is another major difference. Under the new covenant, we learn that God will write His laws in our hearts and minds. Under the old, God simply gave His laws on tables of stone. The Israelites agreed to obey His laws without understanding that, by their own human efforts, they were unable to do this (Exodus 24:7, 8).

His laws in our heart

This shows us the chief weakness of the old covenant (Hebrews 8:7-10). Israel did not have the heart to faithfully keep God’s commandments (Deuteronomy 5:29). Under the new covenant, God is writing His law in our hearts and minds. Not the laws of physical purification contained in the system of sacrifices, washings and service in the tabernacle; instead, He is adding to our very being His holy and righteous laws, which define right behavior and attitudes toward Him and our neighbor (Romans 7:12).

When we partake of the wine, we acknowledge the covenant relationship ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ. We are in effect saying we will allow God’s Spirit to work in our hearts and minds, meaning that we will keep God’s laws out of a deeply thankful attitude for His forgiveness of our sins. Without the gift of the Holy Spirit, we cannot muster up the spiritual strength to obey His laws.

The apostle Peter refers to us as the “elect . . . for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2). The Passover wine is a yearly renewal of our agreement to this covenantal relationship.

As we can see, the Passover is one of the most meaningful events of the year in the life of a Christian. We have seen that some in the early Church who were partaking of the Passover symbols of bread and wine were guilty of the blood and body of the Lord because they never understood or bothered to learn the real meaning and significance of their actions.

They allowed neither the depth of spiritual understanding nor the appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ to effect a spiritual change in their lives (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). It is important for us to fully understand the spiritual implications of our participation in the Passover. **GN**

From Captivity to Freedom: The Lesson of the Feast of Unleavened Bread

by Jerold Aust

The Mossad, Israel's secret service, captured one of the most notorious Nazi war criminals, Adolf Eichmann, on May 11, 1960.

Eichmann, head of the Nazi concentration-camp system, was "the man whose crimes set the standards of Nazi barbarism," wrote Peter Malkin (Reader's Digest, February 1991).

"He was the one the survivors talked about, more than Himmler or Göring, more even than Hitler. Newspaper articles appeared. Eyewitness accounts were recorded. In the public mind, he soon took on mythic proportions of evil; a contemporary Satan, the one who had organized it all."

Eichmann was the organizer and executor of the final solution—the extermination of the Jewish populace. Millions died, carrying their unspeakable pain and suffering with them to the grave. Survivors recounted the hell they had endured. We have heard the stories from those who lived to tell the tale.

This is not the first time history has recorded man's inhumanity to man. Yet, in sheer numbers alone, these atrocities have seldom been paralleled in the annals of history.

In the Bible, we see similar heinous acts perpetrated by men against other humans. In Exodus, we read that the Israelites were persecuted, brutalized and killed by the Egyptians (Exodus 1-6). God had to soften Pharaoh's cruel heart through several miserable plagues, finally taking the lives of the firstborn in Egypt, both man and beast. Only then was Pharaoh temporarily convinced to give the Israelites leave to go to the desert to worship their God.

The time of Israel's departure was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was no coincidence. It was divinely planned, for the meanings of this special feast are inseparably linked with deliverance from bondage. God's deliverance of an enslaved Israel out of a powerful, domineering Egypt serves as the prototype of our supernatural deliverance from sin today. This is the dramatic essence and meaning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Bondage and sin

The Bible speaks of sin's hold on people. Sin holds its captives—human beings—in its grip until they can be delivered by God through Christ.

Paul described sin's hold on the human mind and heart as a kind of slavery: "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear . . ." (Romans 8:15). The Christians Paul addressed were once captive to a spirit of bondage that caused them to live in doubt and fear.

Then Paul foretold events that are guaranteed to happen, in time, and will affect all humanity. The creation itself, he said, "also will be delivered from bondage of corruption . . ." (Romans 8:21). This is the condition of humanity today, under the bondage of corrupting sin. But Jesus Christ will release everyone from this bondage at His return, when He incarcerates Satan (Revelation 20:1-3).

To the Galatians, Paul explained that "we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world" (Galatians 4:3). Here Paul linked a childish perspective to the rudimentary and captivating traditions of the world,

which, as we mature and gain wisdom, we are able to leave as we abandon our former worldly outlook.

Returning to captivity

Paul then chided the Galatians: "How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?" (Galatians 4:9). Paul spoke plainly. He told his friends not to turn back to the disreputable ways of the world, warning them that they would then think and act as they had before they knew God's truth, as destitute, cringing beggars.

The point is clear. Before God freed us to follow Christ, we were in bondage to sin, just as Israel had been to the Egyptians.

Israel's enslavement was physical and ended in physical death. Our captivity to sin can end in a far worse fate, an everlasting death, with no hope of any future. Spiritual slavery brings an infinitely more negative effect.

Responsibility to avoid sin

Paul explained our responsibility to avoid sin, which reflects our part of God's conditional covenant with us: We must do all we can to remain free from our former sinful habits.

"Therefore," Paul clearly stated, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin" (Romans 6:12, 13).

Then the apostle warned the disciples who were already freed from sin through Christ by asking them: "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey,

whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" (Romans 6:16).

Even though God the Father releases us from sin through Christ's sacrifice, His plan to keep us free from sin requires our constant, vigilant efforts to remain free. We are expected to avoid sin and the temptation that can lead to wrongdoing (James 1:14, 15).

Paul equated our daily resistance to sin to a life-and-death struggle. First he stated the ultimate result of continuing, habitual, unrepented-of sin: "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is [eternal] death" (Romans 6:21).

Later he warned, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13). Only by God's Spirit and with Christ's help can we terminate those old sinful habits so firmly ingrained in our minds and hearts.

Paul doesn't forget that Christ freed us from eternal death through His perfect sacrifice. "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin" (Romans 6:11). But with that thought in mind, notice that we are reminded to continue to act on that gift: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (verse 12).

Clearly, we have a direct hand in keeping ourselves free from the bondage of sin. We are told to turn from "sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1), because, if we don't, then our sins will work in our lives as yeast or leaven does in bread dough: It will eventually take us over and again hold us in bondage. This is another lesson of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Two kinds of bread

Jesus used an everyday food, bread, to teach us important spiritual lessons. Bread smells good, tastes great and can sustain life. But we need more than bread. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). He compared God's Word to spiritual bread and nourishment, which we also need to sustain us and give us spiritual life.

The bread we most often eat is leavened. Years ago, when I helped my mother bake bread, the one ingredient we invariably used was yeast. Today virtually everyone knows that yeast makes bread dough rise. Certainly the people in Christ's day understood that unusual property of the leavening ingredient, yeast.

Little wonder, then, that Jesus likened leaven in bread dough to the fermenting or corrupting process of sin. His listeners could identify with yeast as a leavening agent; they knew it would spread to puff up bread dough.

Lesson from leavening

Jesus said: "'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.' And they reasoned among

He showed them the lesson they should have learned from these feast days in the spring: the need to remove our sins and observe the feast with the spiritually unleavened bread of sincerity

themselves, saying, 'It is because we have taken no bread.'" (Matthew 16:6, 7). Jesus' followers failed to realize that Jesus wasn't talking about physical bread, but the unacknowledged sins—pride, arrogance and false doctrines—of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

"Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:12). Jesus used physical leaven to teach a spiritual lesson: how to avoid certain kinds of sin.

The apostle Paul carried this lesson further. He told members of the Corinthian church that they were "puffed up" (1 Corinthians 5:2). "Your glorying

is not good," he wrote them. "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened" (verses 6, 7).

Paul used the analogy of leaven's effect on dough to illustrate the effect of sin within a congregation of God's Church. One Corinthian member was involved in a sinful relationship (verse 1). The others had grown tolerant of this sin, much to Paul's dismay. He commanded them to remove the sinner (verses 3-5, 7) so that unrighteousness would not spread to affect other members, who were to become "a new lump" of dough—unleavened and free of sin.

The sin-free state that Paul referred to is made possible because "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us," Paul explained (verse 7). That sacrifice cleanses the Christian and removes his sin (1 John 1:7).

Understanding the spiritual

Continuing in 1 Corinthians, Paul then encouraged the Corinthians to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread with a better understanding of its spiritual intent. "Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

He showed the Corinthians the lesson they should have learned from these feast days in the spring: the need to remove their old, habitual sins, as well as sins of malice (evil intent) and wickedness (evil behavior), and to observe the feast with the spiritually unleavened bread of sincerity (pure motives) and truth (right knowledge and understanding).

Paul used leavened and unleavened bread to demonstrate two diametric opposites: sin and righteousness, evil and holiness. Symbolically, the Feast of Unleavened Bread demonstrates these eternal truths to New Testament Christians.

God's holiness in us

Unleavened bread pictures the holiness of God, which must reign in the lives of Christ's disciples. The apostle Peter admonishes us: "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). God

demands holiness from the sinners and the repentant.

We can see what God wants us to be like by reading about Christ's sinless life while He was alive in the flesh and when He was accepted by His Father as the resurrected Son of God. We see however, that when God resurrected Jesus from the dead, Jesus instructed His disciples not to touch Him before He ascended and was accepted by the Father (John 20:17).

We see what God wants in us when we read that the apostle Paul revealed that we are accepted by the Father only through our holy Savior and High Priest, Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:4).

Finally, we read that the Father doesn't bring heavenly Jerusalem to earth until all human beings are resurrected to spirit (compare 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 and Revelation 21:1-4; 24-27).

Holiness through Jesus Christ

The Scriptures are clear: God demands holiness. However, we couldn't make ourselves righteous or holy through our own efforts, even if we could live a thousand lifetimes. The Word of God shows us that we are made holy and righteous through the death of Jesus and His living in us, as well as through His ministering to us as our High Priest (Colossians 3:3, 4; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 2:17, 18).

Paul explains how this transformation is accomplished: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10). Jesus Christ's life is holy, and we are accepted as holy through His life.

Unleavened bread also represents the life-giving and life-sustaining power of Jesus Christ. "I am the bread of life," He said (John 6:48).

Jesus imparts and sustains life in many ways: through His Passover sacrifice for the sins of all humanity; by reliving His life in His followers; with His intercession on our behalf as the ever living Christ; and as the personification of God's written expression to mankind. The Feast of Unleavened Bread represents all these aspects of Christ's life and work on our behalf.

The world is in bondage to Satan, the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4, King James Version), and to sin (Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 6:17, 18, 20). Satan and sin once held us captive, but now we have been delivered from this captivity.

God released Israel from the bondage of Egypt. God through Christ has released His begotten sons and daughters from slavery under Satan, just as God freed the Israelites from slavery under Pharaoh. Israel was freed from Egyptian domination, just as Christians are freed from domination by the world. As the Israelites were loosed from serving their Egyptian taskmasters, so are we loosed from the deeply ingrained sins that held us captive and ruled us.

The last thought reminds us of Paul's imagery in Galatians 4:9, which pictures people in bondage to sin as weak, impoverished beggars. We need to thank God that He promises to rescue and deliver us and mankind through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Rejoice in freedom

Adolf Eichmann and the Nazi concentration camps of World War II help to bring this horrible context closer to home. In 1945 the Allied armies finally freed the camp inmates from their terrible bondage and horrendous sufferings. Those who remained alive in the final days of the war rejoiced at being free from their captors.

New Testament Christians can rejoice in a similar way. We, too, have been set free from captivity, from our merciless and relentless former taskmasters, no longer to serve Satan and sin.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread represents complete freedom from sin and also allows us the privilege to worship our unleavened, pure, perfect, holy Father and His holy Son, Jesus Christ. It depicts for the New Testament Christian a time of fleeing from sin while actively seeking God.

That is why Christians are told to "keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8). **GN**

Britain

Continued from page 19

strengthen its European ties. Canada has too many of its own internal problems to care much about the organization.

The queen has worked tirelessly to keep the commonwealth together at a time during which successive British governments have neglected the organization to pursue elusive economic salvation in Europe. Although it is expected that her son, Prince Charles, will be head of the commonwealth if he becomes king, there is no guarantee of that.

With the increasing problems in the House of Windsor, it is likely that commonwealth ties will continue to weaken. It is even possible that the organization will not survive at all after the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

Without the commonwealth, the world would be a fundamentally different place today. Nazi Germany could not have been held back during the dark days of 1940 and 1941. Without the dominions, Britain would have fallen, the empire and commonwealth would have fallen in disarray, and the United States would have stood alone against what would have been a more powerful Third Reich and its ally, Imperial Japan.

The world, including the United States, owes the commonwealth a debt of gratitude. This multitude of nations has greatly assisted in preserving freedom for much of the world for more than 100 years. **GN**

—Melvin Rhodes

Editor's note: In the January issue, our article entitled "Symbolism abounds in transfer of Hong Kong," referred to the alleged rape by three U.S. servicemen against a Japanese civilian on Okinawa as though the charges of rape had been proven. In fact, the guilt or innocence of the three servicemen has not been determined in a court of law. We regret any confusion or misunderstanding caused by our inadvertent omission of the word "alleged" in connection with the involvement of the U.S. servicemen in this incident.

Who Delivers Us From Sin?

by Roger Foster

What is the most important lesson we can learn during the Days of Unleavened Bread? Does the responsibility for putting sin out of our lives fall on our shoulders only? If that's what we think we could be missing the point of this festival. We need to remember who our Passover is, which is another way of saying we need to remember who our Savior is.

Did you know that the word *Passover* refers directly to Jesus Christ? "Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed" (Luke 22:7). The Passover was killed. The word here in the book of Luke refers to Jesus Christ—the Person who was killed—not just to the ceremony of slaying the literal sacrificial lamb or to the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Christ not only was slain on the Passover, He is our Passover. "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Why is it so important to understand this?

We cannot do it ourselves

Of the many principles we can learn from the spring festival season, the most important lessons have to do with what Jesus Christ did for us, not with what we can do for ourselves. It is important that we understand this if our perspective on the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread is to be grounded in the truth.

For many years I have noticed that many church members go through a time of discouragement either just before or during the spring festival season. I have noticed their enduring the same struggle year after year, reproaching them-

selves because they perceive this to be the time to focus on their sins.

As each Passover approaches, they feel compelled to concentrate most of their attention on themselves—critically reexamining their actions and attitudes so they can reinforce the terrible truth that they are still imperfect. That leads them to the perception that the most important lesson of the spring festival is that we are personally responsible for extricating ourselves from sin, that it is up to us, by ourselves, to put sin out of our lives.

No wonder the Passover season, for those burdened with this inaccurate view, becomes a time of inexplicable sadness.

What should be the focus of the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread?

The responsibility of our Savior

These days are primarily about a Savior, the One who came to save us from our sins. Christ came to save us from death, deliver us from a corrupting enslavement to our sinful nature and blot out our sins—to wipe the slate clean. He came to remove our guilt, not increase it. He came to cleanse our "conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14). He has made it possible for us to keep His commandments, sharing His joy (John 15:10, 11) with a clear conscience.

The Passover season is a time for rejoicing, a season to remember that we are being delivered from slavery. We are being "delivered from the bondage of corruption" (Romans 8:21)—just as the Israelites left Egypt with a "high hand" (Exodus 14:8, King James Version), rejoicing that God was delivering them from their slavery.

We are also being set free from our slavery, the servitude of sin (Romans 6:18-22).

It is important to remember that the leaven picturing sin should already have been removed from our homes by the time the Days of Unleavened Bread begin. The festival is not days on which we should be putting physical leaven out of our homes. That normally happens before this festival. Just as we are to withstand sin, these are the days during which we staunchly resist allowing any leavening agents or leavened products back into our dwellings, or eating food made from them.

Joyful departure

Of course, we are to learn from the Days of Unleavened Bread that, having been delivered from enslavement to sin, we are to resist sin and keep ourselves "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

There are many biblical lessons that relate directly to our part in our deliverance from the slavery of sin. Even the Israelites had to walk out of Egypt after God freed them. But keep in mind that they left rejoicing, not feeling hopeless and guilty.

The focus of these days must be on our Passover, the One who delivers us from the "bondage of corruption" (Romans 8:21). Lessons learned from our own efforts to resist and overcome sin are important and useful secondary benefits. But let us never forget that the point of this festival time is that God has delivered us from the slavery of sin through Jesus Christ. He is our Passover, our Savior.

Let's approach this festival season with joy. The apostle Paul put it concisely in Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" **GN**

If I Knew Then What I Know Now

by Cecil Maranville

You're running late for work and the car breaks down on the freeway. Later, on the job, you make a costly error. That evening you burn dinner. Just as you are squelching the screaming smoke detector, the doorbell rings. It's your neighbor. Your cat went into his kitchen through the dog door and ate his pet bird. This is the kind of day you'd like to start over.

Some things, like a written letter or a computer-generated document, are easy to cancel and start over. If only everything in life were as simple to fix as tearing up a sheet of paper or tapping the delete key on a keyboard, then starting over.

Everyone sooner or later wistfully considers just such a fantasy, of being able to go back to square one, of taking back the careless, hurtful words spoken too quickly.

Think for a moment about the big mistakes: A person drinks too much, gets behind the wheel of a car and causes a fatal accident; someone fails to exercise self-control, and a pregnancy results. The human journey is marred by such faulty judgments and their painful consequences.

Think further about Christians and their all-too-human errors. More than just wanting to avoid the pain of sin, a Christian is oriented to honor God, his Father, and enrich the lives of other people. The Bible describes a Christian as sober, or serious-minded and conscientious—or we could say conscience-driven. He knows his life should be a guiding light for everyone to see.

A serious mistake, a sin, can become a manifold source of discouragement to the Christian, with painfully familiar consequences: a sense of disappointing God, an awareness of failure to meet responsibility toward other people.

Christians need the chance to start

over. But does that statement sound a little strange? Aren't Christians people who have already turned away from the mistakes common to all mankind?

Yes, but men and women who are experienced in the day-to-day commitment of Christianity realize they are still saddled with human limitations.

God provides Christians a needed

God provides an opportunity for a new beginning—not just once, but countless times after that initial start.

opportunity for a new beginning—not just once, at conversion, but countless times after that initial start. He has given us His annual Passover festival to remind us of, and encourage us in, His help.

Heart-to-heart message

Paul put to pen a deeply personal, anguished cry in Romans 7:22-25. Whatever the circumstances were that prompted his words, they were powerful enough to capture and imprison him. He felt overwhelmed, unable to break free, even though he passionately wanted to leave the past behind. The apostle wrote:

“For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”

Paul found an avenue to the impossible. He learned how to start over.

Although *we* may be overwhelmed with regret because of what has been done, we are stopped dead in our tracks unless we find the same help of which Paul eloquently wrote.

Because the Christian's mind or conscience is taught by God and guided by His Holy Spirit, when a Christian commits a sin it in effect slaps his mind with restraints. He is discouraged and dispirited. He needs help to break free. Ritualistic religious acts can help a person feel good about himself, but they cannot create the comforted conscience he craves.

Can't change the past

The book of Hebrews describes the value on the one hand and futility on the other of carrying out what we would commonly call good works. The temple worship extant at the time Hebrews was written provides a ready-made example of such deeds. That worship typified the futility of anything a person can do in the present to affect the sins of the past:

“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:11-14).

Christ, our Passover, represents a power greater than any physically available to mankind, infinitely transcending the high cost of human error.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” said Jesus (Matthew 11:28). Christians know from experience that “rest” doesn’t mean isolation from the troubles of human existence, but release from the nagging restlessness of selfish thoughts and actions.

When we study and reflect on the truth of the Passover, we should feel refreshed and strengthened because we realize we can start over, in spite of our mistakes. Christ promised: “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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:29, 30).

The picture of God wanting to show us our mistakes so we will own up to them is incomplete. Prophesied in Isaiah 61, and quoted by Christ Himself in Luke 4:18, 19, God’s purpose is revealed as much greater than that. The person who hears the gospel—who understands and acts upon it—will of course come to see personal sin. But that person will also find healing for a broken heart, relief from oppressing circumstances and confidence to carry on in life in spite of his serious mistakes.

To show His ability as well as His willingness to help us start over, Jesus freed a man whose body had been imprisoned by a serious physical impairment. Christ’s higher purpose was to demonstrate what He, as our Passover, means to us. Think of the dramatic scene of a man permanently disabled by chronic illness suddenly made able to walk.

He gave this dramatic demonstration “that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.” Then Jesus told the paralytic to pick up his mat and go home (Matthew 9:6).

The forgiveness of sins is the healing of the soul, a release from thoughts and actions that can spiritually cripple us, an opportunity for a fresh start.

Let yourself start over

“Oh, no, I’ve made a big mistake,” the sinner may lament. “How can I help other people when I’ve let God down?” It isn’t unusual for the Christian, who is blessed with a conscience, to fall into the trap of denying himself another beginning. Our intuition tells us we

must somehow pay for our mistakes, but in this case our intuition doesn’t know what it’s talking about.

Sin is too big a mistake to pay for; anything we could offer in payment is cheap in comparison to the actual cost. The result is that we, in trying to do right, carry an unnecessary burden of guilt.

It is right and proper to live conscientiously and diligently. To simply dismiss selfish acts or outright sins as nothing to worry about is arrogant.

At the same time, to feel shouldered with responsibility to the point of becoming spiritually paralyzed is self-defeating. We need an encouraging reminder that everyone has the option of a fresh start.

“My little children, let us not love in

*While we cannot
undo the past, the
past cannot undo
us. When we repent,
a new beginning is
ours for the asking.*

word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God” (1 John 3:18-21).

Confidence toward God is the trait He seeks to rebuild in us through the truth of His Passover.

Other people’s opinions

Does acceptance by other people—boss, family member or friend—after you make a serious mistake mean God has forgiven you? When our friends forgive us, we certainly feel better about ourselves. Our conscience may no longer bother us. Is this what it takes to make sure we’re forgiven by our Creator?

No.

Conversely, if friends, relatives or associates fail to forgive us of our shortcomings or trespasses against them,

does that mean we cannot have godly confidence to go forward as a Christian?

Certainly not.

People cannot grant or deny us what can be given only by God. You cannot deny godly forgiveness to yourself, nor can others deny it to you. These truths do not diminish the value of human relationships, but show that these relationships cannot overpower you spiritually.

Here is something we can control: We can direct the extending of tolerance, forgiveness, understanding and mercy to others. While we cannot grant anyone a new beginning in the spiritual sense, we can help make the way easier for others. Doing so helps us appreciate God’s will for us and helps us take on some of His nature. Even the apostle Peter had some difficulty grasping this concept at first:

“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.’” (Matthew 18:21-23).

Jesus drove home the point to Peter in verses 32 and 33: “‘Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’”

To the early disciples, Jesus taught and explained the idea of forgiveness in the model for prayer, commonly called the Lord’s Prayer: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors . . . For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:12, 14, 15).

If I knew then what I know now

While we cannot provide anyone a guilt-free conscience, we can help create a more encouraging environment for him or her by imitating the priceless gift given us through the Passover Lamb.

While we cannot undo the past, the past cannot undo us. When we repent, a new beginning is ours for the asking—every time we need one. **GN**

What Is Repentance?

Would you like to hear a little good news for a change? How about this: Every mistake you ever made, every wrong thing you ever did, will be forgotten—never again remembered. It is possible! But there's a condition. First, you must repent. Now stay with me. Don't go away. That is also part of the good news—you can repent!

That's right. The best news you can hear is that a way exists to escape the eternal-death penalty all humans are under. Jesus Christ gave His life for you so that through repentance and forgiveness of sin you can lead a happier, more fulfilled, blessed life now and forever.

Repentance is an integral part of the gospel message, God's good news for mankind. Repentance is not a doom-and-gloom concept; it is one of the greatest gifts and blessings that can be bestowed on anyone.

Let's look closely at this subject so we can understand our need to repent, see how repentance works in our lives and value it for the blessing it is.

Discussion: Must all people repent? Why? What does it mean to repent? How does this affect you?

- Does everyone need to repent? (1 John 1:8-10).

Note: Everyone sins and needs to be cleansed (forgiven) of doing so. Confessing that fact, and acknowledging our wrong ways before God, flow from repentant thinking.

- We should begin by understanding that each human has his own perspective on life, and it is riddled with error (Proverbs 14:12).

Note: Even Israel, the nation God directly led for centuries, insisted on following its own ways. Why? (Psalm 81:11-13).

- How do our ways invariably end? (Romans 6:23; Luke 13:1-5).

Note: God doesn't want His children to suffer the penalties for sin (2 Timothy 3:4). His ways are a gift that leads to fulfilled lives and ultimately to eternal life.

- Why aren't our ways God's ways? (Isaiah 55:8).
- So what are we to do? (Isaiah 55:6-8).

Note: It is said that the thought is the father of the deed. God shows us it is not just our actions that are wrong; it is our thinking. The very core of our thinking differs from His. We must overhaul a

self-centered thinking process that leads to sin.

- What does the Bible say about our natural, human way of thinking? (Romans 8:7, Jeremiah 17:9).
- Our not being subject to the law of God leads to what? What is sin? (1 John 3:4).
- Why must man repent of sin? (Isaiah 59:1, 2).

Note: Sin separates us from God, even as the father of sin, Satan, separated himself from God (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-15). Because of the influence of Satan, mankind's habitual response is to move away from God's laws.

Discussion: For one to repent, then, and move in the direction of doing God's will, what kind of change must take place? (1 Peter 4:1, 2; Ephesians 4:17-24; Romans 12:1, 2).

Note: The Greek word *matanoeo*, translated "repent," means to change the mind or think differently. Turning to God necessitates a change in the mind, a recognition and rejection of self-will and a choice to embrace God's will.

- Isn't that change of thinking the work God promised He would perform under the new covenant? (Hebrews 8:10-12).

Discussion: Psalm 119 beautifully shows how harmony with God's thinking profoundly changes one's heart and enriches one's life. Let's notice

how repentance is connected with this psalm's message of love for God's law and way of life.

- Does repentance lead to our experiencing richer blessings in our lives? (Psalm 119:1, 2, 14-16, 21, 24, 72, 97-100, 104, 165).

Note: Turning to God brings blessings from Him, because His ways produce fulfilled, happy and abundant lives in us, through our developing soundness of mind, understanding and wisdom. The world's ways produce unfulfilled, shallow lives, through people choosing the way of sin.

- Does repentance imply seeking God's law, commandments and statutes? (Psalm 119:2-5, 9-11, 18, 26-32, 47-48, 155).
- Does repentance require our turning from our way to God's way? (Psalm 119:26-29, 37, 59, 67, 71, 133, 134, 169, 170, 173-176).

Further study: As you read this psalm, note the ways our blessings are directly related to our following God's ways. Also consider that, to experience such blessings, we must first turn from our own ways (Proverbs 16:7, 8:32-34; Job 42:1-6, 12-17; Isaiah 58:13, 14)

Discussion: When Christ came, He expanded the thoughts of Psalm 119. How did He incorporate repentance into the gospel message?

- Listening to the gospel is inspiring, but acting on it is life changing. What action is necessary? (Mark 1:1, 14, 15).
- Immediately after His resurrection, what message did Jesus Christ command should be preached to the world? (Luke 24:36, 44-47).

Note: Jesus died so each of us individually, through repentance, could be forgiven of sin. This message is nothing short of great news!

- But what is required before sins can be forgiven? (Acts 3:19, 25-26).

Note: God's Word stresses that repentance is necessary before one can be forgiven. Some say that "repent" means simply to repent of not having accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, and does not refer to a change in lifestyle. However, they overlook the fact that "be converted" means to turn to God, transforming our lifestyle and behavior. God commands that we both repent and be converted (Acts 3:19).

- What else does Scripture say about this? (1 John 2:1-6).

Note: It is clear that repentance is turning from sin. To turn from our ways to God's ways is to turn to Jesus Christ as our Savior and accept His authority over our lives. It is only through Him that we can receive remission of sins.

- Since it is unnatural for humans, under the sway of Satan, to be subject to God's spiritual laws, is the natural mind of man even able to comprehend these concepts? (1 Corinthians 2:11, 14).

- How, then, can one come to a right relationship with God? (John 6:44, 45, 63; 1 Corinthians 2:9-14; Romans 2:4).

Note: Until God, through His Spirit, begins to work in one's life, the natural human mind cannot know His ways. Repentance is unnatural to humans, and the process can begin in our lives only when God's Spirit works with us so we can see and accept His ways. In His patience and goodness, He leads us to repentance. To God goes all the credit, "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29).

- What is God's attitude concerning a sinner coming to repentance? (Luke 15:10).

Note: The very angels rejoice when we acknowledge our transgressions and turn to God. Jesus Christ said, "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

- What remains, then, for us to be able to permanently receive the working of God's Spirit in our lives? (Acts 2:38).

Note: To have the Spirit of God dwelling in us, we must repent of our ways, desire to be forgiven of all sins and be baptized. Baptism symbolizes commitment to the lifelong process of obeying God and overcoming sin. To make that commitment possible, God gives His Holy Spirit, which will guide us, help us rid our lives of destructive ways of thinking and behavior, and help us grow in the blessings of His way of life. That we can repent is indeed incredibly good news from God.

Does God promise to no longer remember the sins of one who repents, is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit? (Hebrews 10:17). **GN**

This outline is intended to suggest topics and questions to spark discussion in Bible study. Special thanks to Ron Weinland from Perrysburg, Ohio, for his preparation of this study.

Keep It Simple, Warm and Cozy

by Elaine Jacobs

For the most part, entertaining was something I endured—rather than enjoyed—until I learned several basic lessons. I remember two incidents from which I learned the most.

Being “given to hospitality” (Romans 12:13) was never easy for me. Learning to entertain and be hospitable has been a 27-year struggle. I grew up in a family that kept pretty much to itself, and I have only a few vague memories of people coming to visit. So when I married a man who was called into the ministry and loves to have people over, I got a rude awakening.

I remember one of the first agreements we had to make was that he would not invite people over on the spur of the moment. I just couldn’t handle the pressure. If I know about it and can plan ahead of time, I do much better. I know some people are much more flexible and can function that way, but it throws me into a panic and my brain refuses to produce a workable menu. It says, “Food? What’s food? We don’t have any of that!”

The first time we were to entertain another visiting minister, I got so nervous I made myself sick and my husband had to take him out to dinner!

Lessons about being hospitable

I knew things had to change, so I waded in and tried to do my best. But for the most part, entertaining was something I endured—rather than enjoyed—until I learned several basic lessons. I can pinpoint two incidents from which I learned the most.

The first occurred about a month after the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake in California. We were pastoring two congregations near there at the time. One member’s home and other property they own sustained considerable damage. Everything in the house was thrown upside down and hurled to and fro. The water pump for their well was damaged,

their electricity was off, and many of their possessions were broken.

Another couple invited them to live with them while they worked to clean up the mess and make their home livable again.

One evening during this time, my husband Bill and I were invited to come for dinner. As we arrived at our host’s home, the couple whose home had been damaged in the earthquake also arrived. They were exhausted, cold and weary from having worked at their place all day.

As we walked into the house, I saw and felt it all through their tired eyes. Immediately upon entering the house we were met with warmth, wonderful smells of dinner on the stove, a fire crackling in the fireplace, soft soothing music in the background and a warm hug from our host and hostess. It was welcome comfort for the weary soul.

The gift of comfort

It occurred to me that I can give that comfort to all who enter my home, whether they are weary from travel or simply from life’s everyday burdens. I don’t remember what we were fed that night, but I do remember the cozy, soothing warmth I felt being in that home. It was wonderful.

It’s not hard to do. You just need a clean, peaceful environment. Add a candle or potpourri, soft music, a fire in the fireplace, good food cooking in the kitchen, and a warm, friendly greeting at the door.

This occasion did much to change my attitude toward entertaining. I was already doing all these things, but I hadn’t realized the impact it could have. It helped me to see things through my guests’ eyes.

Letters From Our Readers



Second lesson in hospitality

The second big lesson I learned occurred several years later when we decided to throw a going-away party for many of our friends, because several of them were being transferred that summer due to job moves. Living in California, we figured the weather would be agreeable to having a cookout. We thought it would be enjoyable to have an authentic cook-out where everything would be cooked out on the grill and everyone would eat outside.

The big day came and we set up everything on the deck. As we were setting up, we noticed that a cool breeze had begun to blow. Not exactly picnic weather, but I was hopeful the wind would die down and the

before experimenting on guests.

I don't remember our total menu now. I think we had smoked turkey, steaks, corn on the cob, shish kebab, salad and dessert. We ran into a serious problem with the corn and the kebab. We had soaked the unhusked corn in ice water, as per cookbook instructions, before placing it on the grill. When Bill put the corn on the grill, the water draining from the husks put the fire out! (The cookbook didn't warn us about that!) You probably know how long it takes to get charcoal going, not to mention wet charcoal.

This threw everything behind schedule. Finally, it was time to cook the kebab, and the meat was getting cold. So Bill rushed through the

kebab, and served it practically raw. That would have been okay because raw vegetables are good for you, but I wasn't so sure about the turkey bacon between the skewered vegetables. I worried we would all die of some dreadful food poisoning. No one did. And they all even said

they had a good time. But I learned to keep it simple and don't try new things on guests.

It also helps to be well organized. I like to plan my menu and the timing of preparation well ahead. By the time my guests arrive I try to have everything done that I possibly can. This way, I can enjoy my guests. I'm not one who can talk and cook at the same time—at least not very easily.

Now when I entertain, I always try to keep it simple, but tasty. I'm not a gourmet cook, and I know I never will be. But that's okay. Being hospitable is more than food; it's the total package that counts. Hospitality is a gift from you to your guests. *GN*



temperature would rise as morning became noon.

But they didn't. I had the perfect setup on the deck, and if we ate in the house, we would all have to be in different rooms in small groups. That wouldn't be any fun. I wanted us all together. So all together we sat out on the deck, shivering from the cold. I realized then that I should have been more flexible and put the comfort of my guests ahead of my determination to do it my way.

Another lesson learned

That wasn't the only lesson we learned that day. We had never tried cooking everything outdoors before. We should have given it a dry run

The premier issue of THE GOOD NEWS was simply wonderful, but the January issue is simply super! Wish I could find words to express how I feel about it. I could hardly put it down. I am so very thankful we have this GOOD NEWS to share with a world that is so in need of good news.

*Margaret Gipson
Dawson, Texas*

We are truly thankful for the new GOOD NEWS magazine. I've only read 3½ articles to date, but so far, it truly is filled with the truth of good strong meat, which I have been hungering and thirsting for . . .

Please keep up the good work of our Father . . . Please stay close to our Father and His Son, our Saviour, that you may truly be a clean vessel for His use!

*Carol Noël-Huston
Altadena, California*

I just received my issue of THE GOOD NEWS magazine. I was so thrilled. I'm glad the Church has taken off on solid ground. The article about the meaning of the name of Christ says a lot. I was baptized in the Gulf of Mexico on November 6, 1995, so the article brought a lot of insight to me as a Christian on my commitment and walk with Christ . . .

I'm glad THE GOOD NEWS magazine will be there to help me with my walk. May our Father continue to bless and keep us in His love. Continue the good work.

*Ray Smith
Kiln, Mississippi*

Last week I telephoned and requested literature about the United Church of God. In one day I received every issue of the NEW BEGINNINGS newsletter and the premier issue of THE GOOD NEWS magazine. I have just finished reading it all. I am amazed by how much hard work has been done in such a short time, and astounded by what you have accomplished. THE GOOD NEWS was like having an old friend back.

*Keith Willis
Palm Springs, California*

The World's Most Wanted

by Kimberly Zollner

I don't know about the rest of you, but I am tired of seeing so many messed-up relationships everywhere I look. For example, a friend of mine, Susie, is going out with Paul, but then Susie goes to Paul's basketball game and meets Paul's best friend, Steve. Then the two of them start dating behind Paul's back, but Paul has been seeing Susie's friend, Janet, for two months, the same two months Susie and Paul have been dating.

Needless to say, relationships like these don't last. After watching Paul, Susie, Steve and Janet (not their real names) make a mess of their relationships, I've decided to place a classified advertisement for a friend who will contribute to a friendship based on love. Why not? My friends seem a little too preoccupied to bother. Here's the ad.

Wanted: Someone to listen to my problems. Someone who understands my feelings. Someone who can relate to my trials. Someone who can be trusted and who will trust in me. Someone who respects my beliefs. Someone who supports my endeavors. Someone who will help me make the correct decisions. Someone to always be there, now and forever. Someone who can forgive my shortcomings, no matter how awful. Someone who will love me with the bad yet help me strive for the good.

Not many qualified

Well, all right, I might not get many responses to my ad, but it helps me make an important point. No mere human being could meet the demands of my ad. God is the only one who can comply with and actually surpass my requirements. He is flawless and perfect, the epitome of goodness and righteousness.

God's qualifications far exceed those listed above. In fact, He wants to build a relationship with each human being and invite each person to become a member of His family.

Why would the Creator of the universe even consider befriending a human being?

The thought of such a personal relationship between God and a mere human is almost beyond our comprehension. King David looked up into the starlit sky in awe of God's creation and pondered this very point: "What is man that You are mindful of him . . . ?" (Psalm 8:4). God loves all of us, and because of this He wants to develop a close relationship with human beings, His creation, and His future children.

If God is our Father, doesn't it seem like a good idea to build a relationship with Him like our relationship with our physical father? God is a far greater Father than any human father could be. So if we look at why He wants us to call Him "Father," we can see His plan for all people.

First, we learn through fear of God much like we first learned through fear of our parents. When I was five and misbehaved, I often feared my parents' punishment. Yet, as time went on, I learned to do things to please them, just as we learn to keep God's law to please Him. Eventually I discovered that My parents were right. Their standards became mine, just as Christians develop His mind as they keep His commandments (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5).

God wants a parental relationship with all of humanity. Don't we have to contribute to the relationship as well? How can we develop a relationship with God? God provides for each of His children, but what can we possibly do for Him?

God gives us other instructions in the Bible. For instance, He tells us to pray, to give glory and honor to Him and to help others. He also tells us to keep His commandments.

The first four of the Ten Commandments apply directly to God and the last six to our fellowman, although the latter also show love to God indirectly. Since the first four honor God directly, let's take a look at them in this article in view of our commitment to Him.

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First things first

The First Commandment says put God first. He gave His only Son to be beaten and mocked so we could eventually be the Father's children. He puts us first; the least we can do is to put Him first.

The Second Commandment tells us we should not what is in essence try to compact the Supreme Being of the universe into a shaped piece of stone or wood to make up for a lack of faith.

The Third Commandment warns us not to take God's name in vain. This commandment may appear minor, but breaking it is anything but minor. Even on the much less important, physical level, imagine for a moment if people shouted your name every time something went wrong and accompanied it with a lot of four-letter words.

Then the Fourth Commandment tells us to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. The Sabbath was made for us and given to us as

a gift from God. If we do not share this gift with the Giver, we not only break a commandment, but we express to Him a lack of appreciation. If we do not keep this holy day, we are actually throwing the gift away. God made the gift; we need to enjoy it with Him. God gives us the universe as our inheritance, so we should feel honored to give Him some of our time in return for His love.

How can God understand?

We know we cannot keep the commandments flawlessly, but how can a perfect being—God—realize our frustration at not being able to do so? But God does understand. He sent Jesus Christ to earth as a human being to save humanity from itself. When Christ walked among human beings, He felt what they feel and can therefore relate to us even more.

When He fasted 40 days and nights, He got hungry. When each of Jesus'

disciples betrayed Him, He hurt, just as we are hurt by someone who betrays us. Our Savior had to face temptations of wealth, power and pride just as we do, except that Christ was tested on a much larger scale.

Jesus Christ lived a perfect life in spite of His trials. He overcame, and, if we stay close to Him, He will lead us through our temptations and trials. As long as we are human, we cannot be perfect, but we must strive for perfection as God leads us. God is qualified to relate to our problems. One of His recorded names is Counselor; He knows how to listen.

Important in a good relationship, especially between parent and child, is the trust a child places in his or her parents. The parent knows to do what is best for the child, just as God knows His children's needs and wants. Our Maker gives us what we need, not always what we want.

I have seen God do this in my life several



times. The answered prayer that meant the most to me came during the summer of 1992. I had just graduated from grade school and was about to go away to summer camp for the first time. At the mature age of 14, I was terrified at the idea of living away from home for three weeks.

"You'll have so much fun!" I kept reassuring myself as I arrived at camp late the night before it began. Then I broke down and found a private place to cry.

I guess I ran out of tears because I eventually climbed into my top bunk

for the night. I prayed, as I stared at the cabin ceiling, for God to allow me to wake up in my own bed in Illinois. However uninteresting my room back home was, at least I would be with my mommy and daddy (yes, I still said mommy and daddy), sisters and brother.

Early the next morning—as I got over the initial shock of discovering I had not been transported during the night back to my home in Illinois—I crawled out of my bunk and saw my bunkmate smiling at me. We greeted each other, but I was not overly friendly. After all, God had said no to my prayer, and I knew I would have to endure three weeks of no family. Yet, as the day progressed, I learned my bunkmate's name and the names of the other 22 girls in my dormitory.

Extended family

We were a large group of girls with similar beliefs, dreams and aspirations.

We became a unit, yet somehow closer than that word

implies; it was as if we were a family.

God knew

I needed to extend my family. He didn't take me back to Illinois to give me what I wanted, but kept me at summer camp in Minnesota to give me something else I needed—a spiritual family.

Now that I think about my ad

(remember?—the one

at the beginning of this

article), I really do not need it. God is the answer, and He doesn't need an ad to tell Him how much I need Him. God is willing to be my Father whenever I need Him.

God will give all who sincerely seek Him eternal life and a place in His family. Everyone can be involved in this relationship—and there will be none better in all of eternity.

Kimberly Zollner, 17, lives in Millstadt, Illinois, with her parents, brother and two sisters.

What's the Best News This World Can Hear?

Today's headlines are filled with bad news—war, famine, natural disasters, new and baffling diseases, environmental catastrophes, governmental scandals and corruption—the litany of tragedies and bad news is relentless. In this century, more than 150 million people have been killed in war alone. Well over 100 million more have died from diseases, pandemics and natural disasters. With all this bad news, is there any hope for the future of humanity?

Almost 2,000 years ago, a prophet came bringing a message of hope for this world. That prophet was Jesus Christ, and His message was “the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14).

The word *gospel* means *good news*—but what was the good news Jesus Christ brought? And what is the Kingdom of which He spoke? Is it the church? Is it something to be set up in the hearts of men? Is it the collective good of all humanity?

Churches do not agree on either what the gospel is, or what the Kingdom of God is. Yet the Bible is clear on this most important of subjects. And the message Jesus Christ brought truly is *good news*. It is the best news this world can hear! You'll find His message not only surprising, but shocking!

In *The Gospel of the Kingdom* you can discover the message Jesus Christ brought. This booklet shows you, from the pages of your Bible, exactly what that message is—and what it means for you. For your free copy of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, write to our address nearest you. See the inside front cover for a list of addresses worldwide. Discover this good news for yourself!



How to get additional information

For additional information about the United Church of God, you can use your home computer to access our home page on the World Wide Web portion of the Internet. The address <http://www.ucg.org/> gives you access to general information and news about the church, as well as issues of *The Good News*, the *New Beginnings* newsletter and booklets.