



The Good News

May 1996

The Incredible Meaning of the Feast of Firstfruits

*When Will We See Peace in the Middle East? • Living a Great Miracle
The Bible and Archaeology • God's Family—the Reason You Were Born*

From the publisher

Facing the Big Questions in Life

JERUSALEM—The city that has seen so much conflict over the centuries is in the midst of a celebration. This is the observance of an approximate anniversary, since it commemorates the estimated 3,000th year since Israel's hero king, David, chose Jerusalem to be the nation's capital. No matter the exact date, this place has an antiquity that intrigues us all. And it is not just the stones that captivate the visitor. There is definitely something about the spiritual implications of it all that affects the sensibilities. This land of biblical origins forces us to ask the deeper questions of life. On this visit I've overheard travelers talk about life's mysteries in a way they seldom do at home. There is the undeniable impact of simply being in this place.

The message Jesus Christ brought

When Jesus came to the synagogue in Nazareth around A.D. 27, He announced His mission to His own townsfolk. He said, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:18, 19).

Jesus Christ's words capture the ever-present human dilemma: How do we overcome poverty, heartbreak, oppression, lack of freedom and spiritual blindness? More big questions. The difference between today's Holy Land visitor and Jesus was that He was able to provide the sure answers. His questions struck a chord in a Roman-dominated world, and they strike a chord today. His answers were powerful then, and they are powerful now. Jesus said that God had sent him to show the way to the Kingdom of God. This, He said, was the "gospel," or good news.

Not everyone valued that message. Indeed they eventually killed the messenger. Jesus taught that "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). He knew that the penetrating light of truth would prove too much for some. "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (verse 20).

Yes, Jesus Christ's message was revolutionary and still is. As visitors to this city ponder the events of biblical days, it is hard to avoid the consequences of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth: "... He who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God" (verse 21).

Finding solutions to age-old problems

How do we measure up in these closing years of the 20th century, this age of anxiety and total war? The Book of Books holds the key to our very survival if we can grasp its significance in an era of doubt and skepticism. It holds out to us the truth of God for our contemplation and action. Isn't it time we took it more seriously and faced life's big questions?

This issue of *The Good News* will help us all do that. When the apostle Paul wrote about the Christian's role in this life, he didn't spare his words or his advice: "Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life..." (Philippians 2:14-16).

The Word of God is the word of life. It is the written expression of God's truth, of Jesus Christ's gospel. It is the answer to the human dilemma.

—David Hulme

Good News

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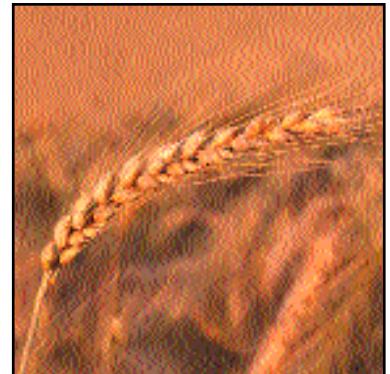
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The Lesson of the Feast of Firstfruits

If Jesus Christ came to save mankind, why is the world in such sad shape?

by Bill Bradford

If Jesus intended to save the world, then has He succeeded? Is it logical to conclude, when we observe man's cruelty on an unprecedented scale, that the world is truly saved?

Jesus Christ Himself said He “did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (John 12:47). But in a world in which hundreds of people die every day from wars, civil unrest and murder—in which thousands die daily from starvation, disease and natural disasters; accidental deaths claim hundreds more; injustice, immorality and every godless act abounds; professing Christians go to war against and kill other Christians; thousands die daily without having heard the name of Jesus Christ or even seen a Bible, much less read one—can we truly say that Christ’s mission was successful?

Was Jesus Christ mistaken? Has He not succeeded at what He said He would do? Doesn’t the very condition of the world itself show that God has failed in the very purpose for which Jesus said He was sent into this world? After all, we are told that “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

If Jesus intended to save the world, then has the world truly been saved? Is it logical to conclude, when we observe man’s inhumanity to man on an unprecedented scale, that the world is saved?

Enigmatic questions

These questions have always posed an enigma to thoughtful people willing to face the facts. If the Christian Church had as its mission to take the message of Christ in power to the world so the world could be saved, why is the world in such religious disarray? Further, if the gospel Jesus Christ brought holds the answers to man’s problems, why is the world in such sad moral shape?

Did Christ fail to gain the cooperation of His own Church to carry out this mission? Is that the problem? Is He not able to inspire the faith in His professed followers to do greater works than He (John 14:12), as He promised? Or are the opposing forces simply too powerful for faithless mankind? The answer is none of the above.

However, there are answers to all these questions, and, remarkably, they are illustrated in a festival called the Feast of Firstfruits (Exodus 23:16). This observance, along with other of God’s annual Holy Days, is commanded by God in Leviticus 23:15-21.

In describing this and other sacred observances, God said, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts’” (verse 2).

Later, we find the Church Jesus founded also observed this festival, known by Jesus’ followers as the Day of (or Feast of) Pentecost. As a matter of fact, the founding of New Testament Church occurred on this very day, and was accompanied by other miraculous events (Acts 2:1-41). It has great relevance and importance for Christians today.

God had a reason for His nation Israel to keep His festivals and later for His Church to observe them. Through these observances, God reveals to His people the stages of His plan of salvation for humanity. In particular, the feast celebrating the harvest of the firstfruits, or Pentecost, has a meaning that reveals one of the major phases of God’s plan for salvation.

Common, but erroneous, assumptions

Most branches of professing Christianity assume that God intended for everyone to hear the message of salvation, starting immediately after Jesus Christ's resurrection.

Further, most believe that every person hearing that message would at that point have his opportunity for salvation now, in this life. The various churches' mission was thus to bring this message to every living person, giving him the opportunity to accept Christ before it would be too late. This general view, adopted by most of the Christian world, has resulted in churches believing they must bring as many people as possible to accept Christ immediately, regardless of the depth of their interest or commitment.

But, you should ask yourself, how many people have never accepted Christ? And how many untold millions over the centuries have never heard of Him? If salvation is a matter of accepting Christ in this physical life, what is the fate of the hundreds of millions of people who lived and died before Jesus Christ was born and for whom it was impossible to accept Christ?

Faced with these questions, must we conclude that the power Jesus promised His disciples simply never translated into the saving work He envisioned?

No, we should not doubt the saving power of Jesus Christ. Instead, perhaps we should examine our understanding of His intentions. We should take a long look at several commonly held beliefs.

If Christ intended to bring the world to Himself and make the world understand, He certainly could have exercised the authority and power to accomplish that task. After all, He said that "all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

The apostle Paul wrote that Christ was resurrected and sits with God the Father ". . . in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion . . ." (Ephesians 1:20, 21).

If Christ's power and authority, which are far greater than any other, are not strong enough to triumph over the opposing powers of darkness, then perhaps we should feel a little nervous.

Or perhaps God has had something else in mind all along.

How this feast fits in God's plan for humanity

What does the Feast of Firstfruits, also known as the Day of Pentecost, have to do with these all-important questions?

There is great significance in the name, Feast of Firstfruits. By its very



name, this festival indicates that there is more than one time of harvest.

As we will see, this festival foreshadows God's intention to reap a small harvest of people for salvation (called "firstfruits" in the Scriptures), and to later call a vastly greater number of people to salvation.

One might say that God put into use a systematic procedure to lead the vast majority of mankind to His light and salvation: bringing first the firstfruits, and later the greater harvest of humankind, to salvation.

Let us notice this amazing truth as demonstrated by the divinely revealed festivals of God. God timed His feasts to coincide with the agricultural cycle of the two harvests in Palestine—one in spring and the other in the autumn—to teach His people an important lesson.

The Feast of Firstfruits coincided with the first harvest, the barley and wheat harvest in that area (Exodus 34:22). This festival was also known as

the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9, 10). The Greek name for this feast is Pentecost, meaning "fiftieth," in this case implying "fiftieth day." It was so named because it was celebrated 50 days from the harvest of the first sheaf of grain.

On this day, the Israelites offered two loaves of bread made from flour taken from the new grain of the harvest. These loaves were called "the firstfruits to the LORD" (Leviticus 23:16, 17). The people were to "do no customary work" on this day and gather for a sacred religious assembly (verse 21). This was a very significant occasion.

A later festival, the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering (Exodus 34:22), coincided with the conclusion of the later harvest when all the produce, including cucumbers, melons, lentils, chickpeas, nuts and especially dates, figs, olives and grapes had been gathered. The threshing and winnowing of the grain had continued throughout the summer and was finally completed by the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:39; Deuteronomy 16:13). This, too, was an event of great significance

marked by sacred religious assemblies and cessation from work.

These two feasts both represent major stages in the spiritual harvest of mankind for salvation. The Feast of Firstfruits, or Pentecost, symbolizes the calling and preparing of the church in this age. This is the first spiritual harvest.

The later spiritual harvest will take place in the age to come. God's first harvest of people occurs in preparation for that coming age when Jesus Christ will bring His Kingdom to earth.

The physical depicts the spiritual

The spiritual significance of the first harvest, celebrated by the Feast of Firstfruits, is made clear in the Scriptures. ". . . Now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: *Christ the firstfruits*,

afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:20, 22, 23; author's emphasis throughout).

The wave sheaf offering, which began the barley harvest 50 days prior to Pentecost, pictured the resurrected Christ ascending to His Father (See "The Wave Sheaf Offering: A Ceremony Foreshadowing Salvation," p. 14). The offering of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest on Pentecost (Leviticus 23:17) was then symbolic of the firstfruits of God's harvest of humankind for salvation.

Did you notice that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, clearly states that God will resurrect the dead *in a specific order*? First was Jesus Christ, who was resurrected as "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep," to be followed by others at Jesus Christ's return.

Paul states that the resurrection of the saints at Christ's coming to immortal, spiritual bodies (verses 44, 53) will take place in an instant "at the last trumpet" (verse 52)—the mighty, supernatural clarion call that will announce the return of Jesus Christ to rule the earth (Revelation 11:15).

At that time, God will resurrect the dead who had previously been faithful to Christ, and He will change to immortal children of God—raising them to meet Jesus Christ in the air—those who are still alive and have likewise been faithful (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

This miraculous event is described as "the first resurrection" in Revelation 20:6: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

The world under Christ's rule

During this reign of Jesus Christ and the resurrected saints on earth (Revelation 5:10), the second harvest of humanity for salvation will begin. God's knowledge will at last be widely available, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). All people will experience firsthand the wonderful Kingdom of God, which Jesus Christ proclaimed during His earthly ministry (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:43).

Isaiah 2:2, 3 provides us a picture of the beginning of this latter and great harvest: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

Humanity will then have the opportunity to learn and live according to

Through these observances, God reveals to His people the stages of His plan for the salvation of humanity.

God's ways. "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).

What of those who have lived and died in the past, having never known anything of God the Father and Jesus Christ? Revelation 20:6, quoted above, shows that God's faithful saints are in "the first resurrection." But, if there is a *first* resurrection, there must be another. And indeed there is. The book of Revelation makes it clear that there will be another resurrection of the dead. After the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ and the resurrected saints on earth (Revelation 5:10), "the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:5).

This will continue God's great second harvest of humanity for salvation. At that time, all who have ever lived but did not have the opportunity to learn of

God's ways or hear of Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice will enjoy their opportunity for salvation. This resurrection of countless millions of people to a physical, perishable life is described in Ezekiel 37:1-11; Matthew 12:41, 42 and Revelation 20:5, 13. These people will gain the opportunity—for the first time—to repent and be converted through God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Then they, too, will inherit eternal life.

We see in this wonderful plan the fulfillment of God's desire for "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9), and through His plan all who have never had the opportunity for salvation in their physical lives can be saved.

Firstfruits to overcome the world

The firstfruits of God's plan are those who are called now, in this age, and are having their minds and attitudes changed to become like Jesus Christ through God's Spirit working within them. The apostle James noted that God "chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created" (James 1:18, New International Version).

Paul well understood that those called and converted now, in this age, are the firstfruits of God's plan for the salvation of humanity. He referred to several first-century Christians as the firstfruits of God's calling in specific locations (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:15). Looking forward to the resurrection of those who remain faithful to their calling, he said, "We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23).

However, the firstfruits of God's plan, those who are called now, find themselves in a vastly different situation from that of those who will follow in the latter harvest. Jesus said that those who are His followers in this age are not to be "of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:16). They are called out of the world and are expected to develop the character of Christ, while

the rest of mankind is deceived (Revelation 12:9) and following values that are abhorrent to Christ (1 John 2:15-17).

The present evil age

The firstfruits—God’s people—are called and strive to obey God while living in “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4), of which Satan is the actual ruler (2 Corinthians 4:4). The harvest of firstfruits is small, because at this time relatively few will accept God’s calling, repent, be converted and remain faithful to God’s way of life. That is why Jesus said, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:14).

After Christ’s return, which will usher in a new age, the world—society as a whole—will learn to live by the laws and values of God. In that age, God will bind Satan and not allow him to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:2, 3). Without Satan’s influence, the world will at last know peace. Everyone will know the LORD (Hebrews 8:11).

Those who have not conformed to the world (Romans 12:2) will be those who assist Christ in bringing all nations to His truth (Revelation 20:4). They will overcome the world just as Jesus overcame the world, and Christ will use them in bringing all other people to serve Him (Revelation 2:26; 3:21).

Gift of the Holy Spirit

God enables His people to fulfill His purpose for them.

Significantly, God chose the Day of Pentecost to begin His Church by sending the Holy Spirit to His few faithful disciples (Acts 1:15; 2:1-4). Many think of a church as a building, but that is a relatively modern use of the word. The word translated “church” in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, meaning “called out (ones).” The Church is the collective body of people who are called out of the world to carry the gospel to every nation (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20).

Through the Holy Spirit, which God gives to those who are a part of God’s Church, members are empowered to overcome the world. It is through God’s Holy Spirit that the Church can preach the gospel to the world and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 24:14; 28:19). It is

this Spirit that enables a person to belong to Jesus Christ and be a part of the Church (Romans 8:9). For there to be a Church, it was necessary for God to send His Holy Spirit. The Day of Pentecost marks the beginning of the Church of God.

The firstfruits of God’s plan for salvation are those called to be in God’s Church in this age. The Church, also spoken of as “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27), is made up of individuals in whom dwells the Holy Spirit. They have repented of their sins and turned to Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. They have committed themselves to obedience to His holy

The firstfruits are those who are called now and are having their minds and attitudes changed to become like Jesus Christ.

and righteous laws. They are willing to give up everything to remain faithful to Jesus Christ (Luke 14:33).

Firstfruits follow Jesus Christ

Revelation 14:4 speaks of God’s people who are “firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.” The preceding and succeeding verses provide insight into the character of those who are the firstfruits and why they accompany Jesus Christ.

Why are they so valued by God? They are described as having the Father’s name written in their foreheads (verse 1); God is foremost in their mind and thoughts. These have not been seduced by a false religious system (Revelation 14:4), which is depicted as an immoral woman seducing humanity (Revelation 2:20-22; 17:1-6).

The firstfruits have come out of and avoided the political and religious system that has dominated the world (Revelation 17:1-6). When they were called by Jesus Christ, they understood that they were to come out of this system (Revelation 18:3, 4).

In addition, the firstfruits “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (verse 4). They are faithfully devoted to Jesus Christ. They will allow nothing to entice them from their personal loyalty to Him. Since Jesus will use them to assist Him to bring His knowledge to the world, it is vital that His firstfruits will forever be true to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

They “have been redeemed from among men” (verse 4). They have been purchased by God with the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18, 19). Having been bought by God, they know that their lives no longer belong to them, but rather to Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:20). They are now to glorify God in body and spirit (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Also, “in their mouth was found no guile” (verse 5). They have learned to deal with the malice commonly found in the hearts of men. There is no deception, plotting or feigning in their actions or words. They have learned about the genuineness, sincerity and simplicity of Christ. They have, in short, come to grips with the deceit of their own hearts and have fully submitted to the pure and unspotted life of Christ dwelling in them. For these things, “they are without fault before the throne of God” (verse 5).

Picturing the plan of God

This most important step in God’s plan for the salvation of mankind is revealed in the observing of his Holy Days. Naturally, those who are of the firstfruits will be observing the very day that pictures the calling and harvest of the firstfruits of God’s plan, the Day of Pentecost.

They will gratefully observe the very day that celebrates another milestone in God’s great plan, the founding of the Church through the granting of God’s Holy Spirit.

We now live in the age of the firstfruits, the time during which God is preparing a special, chosen people to reign with Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9). Are you part of that group? You will be if you heed the counsel of the apostle Peter when he admonished us to “be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). **GN**



Britain's Need to Return to the Bible

LONDON—In spite of some popular television advertisements to the contrary, this is most certainly not the age of the train in Britain. Time was when railways dominated the transport landscape here. No more. Today they struggle just to keep a small share of the freight and passenger market.

There is a parallel in this story with the Bible here in Britain. In an important sense, this is certainly not the age of the Bible, either. Or, to put it another way, it is not the age of faith. Jesus Christ Himself once asked the question: When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?

True, the availability of the Holy Scriptures is at an all-time high, but the anomaly is that demand for biblical knowledge is at a new low. We who are trying our best to convey this precious good news in England constantly run right into this massive barrier of biblical ignorance. Our work of publishing the gospel has been greatly impeded simply because the majority of people are largely unaware of the contents of this most basic of textbooks.

The Bible of centuries past

In the time of translator William Tyndale, the people of Britain would risk death to own just a few pages of the Bible in their native language. Today we can buy the Bible in a variety of translations for relatively little money. Yet sad to say real public interest is all too lacking.

A new biography profiles the English visionary William Blake. It turns out that Blake's closest and most significant attachment was to the Bible. As Blake's biographer Peter Ackroyd marvels: "It is hard to re-imagine a culture in which that book was the central and pre-eminent text, through which the world itself was to be under-

stood" (*Blake*, p. 25).

Yet, according to British historian Christopher Hill, "The Bible was central to all intellectual as well as moral life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (*The English Bible*, p. 21). Clearly, at one time the Scriptures were an integral part of the British culture. No more is that true in this secular age.

How did we lose respect for the Bible as a book of ultimate religious authority? Why is it viewed by so many as just another classic piece of literature?

A great many reasons are involved, not the least of which were two faith-destroying world wars in this century in which much of British manhood was lost in the trenches. This is not to mention the earlier effects of Darwinism, which challenged the very idea of God and the authority of the Bible.

Blatant disregard for proper tradition

But there are other important reasons. One is that our modern taste for almost anything new and different has altered the scales of sound judgment in our century

Why, for instance, did the 20th century descend, in many writers' opinion, into barbarity? And why, as veteran Czech author Ivan Klima asks, "in a century in which human genius has achieved so much, had there been mass exterminations and death camps?" (*The Spirit of Prague*, p. 146). Could all of this possibly have anything to do with our general rejection of the traditions, values and timeless wisdom of the Bible?

In 1898, Mexican writer Victoriano Salado Alvarez penned a remarkably accurate depiction of 20th-century England and Europe.

"In Europe, the advantages of urban and private comfort, a variety of cheap entertainment, the distaste for everything that has already been used and the longing to try something quite

new, has brought with it a certain sat- edness, a degeneration, a neurosis, countless forms of hysteria and many kinds of folly."

In some ways, patterns of living extant for thousands of years have been destroyed in less than a couple of generations. Today far too much has gone wrong in too short a time.

Effects and causes of spiritual instability

American historians Will and Ariel Durant wrapped their minds around the lessons that could be learned from the panorama of history and came up with this gem: "As the sanity of the individual lies in the continuity of his memories, so the sanity of the group lies in the continuity of its traditions; in either case a break in the chain invites a neurotic reaction" (*The Lessons of History*, page 72).

Visionary writers and historians pick up on this theme. Ivan Klima is no stranger to it and, in fact, expands upon it.

"At a certain moment in modern history, it seemed to many that memory and tradition were merely a burden that had to be cast off. The social catastrophes that befell humanity in our century were assisted by an art that worshiped originality, change, irresponsibility, avant-gardism, that ridiculed all formal traditions and . . . that took a smug delight in shocking the reader instead of responding to the questions that tormented him" (*The Spirit of Prague*, p. 38).

Of course, some traditions are manifestly manmade and are in clear contravention of the commandments of God (Mark 7:6-13). These are rightly to be rejected. Our concern is about those who rubbish sound traditions that are clearly based on biblical values.

So what's the cure? Certainly we are not advocating a blind rejection of the new or saying that we shouldn't promote or encourage creative personalities



who lift the veil from stubborn mysteries and solve some of our problems.

Some do know that the cure is nearly always in the realm of the spirit if we are to save the flesh. That will be found in the Kingdom of God rather than the kingdoms of men. Men and women desperately need the stabilizing qualities that emerge from true religion. As the Durants so wisely observed: "Even the skeptical historian develops a humble respect for religion . . . To the unhappy, the suffering, the bereaved, the old, it has brought supernatural comforts valued by millions of souls as more precious than any natural aid" (*The Lessons of History*, p. 43).

Britain's desperate need

The late J.B. Priestley wrote that "religion alone can carry the load, defend us against the de-humanizing collectives [and] restore true personality" (*Literature and Western Man*, p. 444).

However, more than just "religion," basic to the full recovery of Western religious health is the knowledge found in the Bible. There are many copies of the Bible in Britain, but most go unread and undisturbed on our bookshelves. Highly knowledgeable contestants on radio shows such as *The Brain of Britain* consistently display appalling ignorance when asked, for example, to name the four Gospels of the Bible.

Most Britons are unaware that many everyday English expressions come directly from the Bible. For a nation that prizes its national literature, we are all too ignorant of the remarkable lessons of history and humanity engraved in the Scriptures.

Somehow even Christians, who spend much time digging precious truths out of God's Word, have failed to bring even a working knowledge of biblical values to the vast majority of the British public.

How can we begin to remedy this appalling lack? Chiefly by praying! We must ask that God would lead us to see how we can best disperse the rich knowledge of the Bible all the

way from the geographical extremities of the south of England to the north of Scotland—and to the cities, towns and villages in between.

The apostle Paul repeatedly asked his readers and listeners to pray for the work he was doing. He expected people to entreat God, and he expected God to answer prayers of sincere concern for others. Here are a few examples from the New Testament.

Paul asked the Thessalonian brethren to "pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course . . ." (2 Thessalonians 3:1). Because the

The availability of the Holy Scriptures is at an all-time high, but the anomaly is that the demand for biblical knowledge remains at a new low.

Word of God does not have free course here in Britain, with many mass-media windows of opportunity closed to us, it is challenging to figure out how to effectively deliver the message of the Bible to the British people today. This is not 16th- or 17th-century England.

Only God can change the circumstances and lead true Christians to preach Christ's gospel in an effective manner. Only God can soften the hearts of people to receive the gospel.

Paul exhorted the Colossian church to "continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ . . . that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (Colossians 4:3, 4). Again, we need additional effective doors to

reach Britain with the gospel. In practical terms, Britain simply does not have the relatively unimpeded access to do the work that we thankfully see done in the United States.

But God can alter circumstances so the work gets done and the message gets out. He has done so in the past. Notice Paul's declaration to the Corinthian brethren: "For I will tarry [wait] in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me . . ." (1 Corinthians 16:8, 9).

Look for open doors, but also act

God opened doors for Paul in the first century, and he can do the same for us. The apostle did not leave matters to time, chance and circumstances; he asked the brethren to pray about those doors, as ought we Christians today! Paul himself sought out new openings to preach the gospel, actively using every opportunity he found available.

Paul uttered the same request for prayer to the Ephesian church: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit . . . and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel . . ." (Ephesians 6:18, 19).

Paul was in prison when he made this particular request to the Ephesians. How could he possibly preach the gospel while bound in chains? Yet he had the faith to ask the brethren for help, no matter what his physical circumstances.

Well over a century ago, noted traveler and author George Borrow took the Bible to Spain and Portugal on behalf of the British & Foreign Bible Society. He risked persecution and loss of life to get the Scriptures to the Iberian Peninsula.

Today we in the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic are in desperate need of many such people to make the precious knowledge of the Bible known again to the British Isles. We invite you to join us in earnest prayer that the gospel can go out in greater strength in this part of the world. *GN*

—John Ross Schroeder



God's Family

The Reason You Were Born

by Roger Foster

Have you ever wondered why you exist, why you were born? Have you ever suspected there isn't a purpose to life at all? What is the meaning of life? Is there anything beyond this physical life?

If you've ever pondered questions like these, you're not alone. Mankind has pondered these questions for millennia. Philosophers, scientists and theologians have tried to resolve them, but with confusing and contradictory results.

Can you know the answers to these questions?

Yes, you can! The astonishing answers can be found in the pages of your Bible.

Did you know that the main reason the Bible was written was to explain how God is creating His own family, the sons of God? It is amazing how few people grasp this incredible truth, yet it is so plain in the Bible.

At the beginning of the Bible is the account of the creation of Adam and Eve. All human beings are their descendants. We are, by natural descent, their great, extended family. Adam was, according to his natural parentage, a son of God (Luke 3:38). Therefore, in our natural descent, we are all the children of God. He is our Father by physical creation.

Creating immortal children

But God's purpose is far greater than the creation of corruptible and perishable human beings. God is in the process of creating His own spiritual children who will be incorruptible—children with eternal life who have His divine nature or character.

He refers to this new creation in terms of "the old man," in contrast with "the new man," who is "renewed in the spirit of [his] mind" and is "created according to God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:20-24).

The apostle Paul defined the new creation as a spiritual transformation, at first a change only in a person's nature and character, followed by a change into a literal spiritual being with eternal life. The Bible refers to this process as salvation.

The Bible refers to those who are receiving salvation as the "sons of God" in a sense that goes beyond our descendancy from our first two human parents. God is accomplishing a marvelous spiritual transformation in the lives of His followers through His Holy Spirit.

Paul explained that "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:16, 17).

Do you grasp the enormous significance of Paul's statement? It explains why we are here, the very reason for our existence, why we were born. It gives meaning to life itself. It explains why God wants all human beings to come to the knowledge of the truth. God is creating a family, *His own family*. We have the priceless opportunity to be a part of that family.

That family relationship—our becoming children of God the Father—is the heart and core of God's great plan for humanity. Notice how Paul expresses it: "In bringing many sons to glory [salvation], it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy [Christ] and those who are made holy [converted human beings] are *of the same family*" (Hebrews 2:10, 11, New International Version).

That's right!

That truly converted Christians are all of the same Father makes them members of the same family: God's family! Paul continues: "So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me'" (verses 11-13, NIV).

Notice that Jesus is not ashamed to regard converted members of His church as His own brothers (or sisters). That is how close and personal this family relationship is.

Humans created to be like God

From the beginning of the Bible, this is the clearly stated purpose of God. "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image . . ." (Genesis 1:26, 27).

Both men and women are created to be like God. The Bible often speaks of physical children as "sons" because that was the custom at the time the Bible was written, and has been in many languages, including English, over the centuries. In the Hebrew and Greek languages, in which the Bible was written, "sons" was used to mean "descendants." When used in this sense, the Hebrew and Greek words for "sons" refer to male and female descendants alike. Today, we use the words *mankind* and *brethren* in a similar sense.

God makes it clear that His family includes people who are now physical men and women, both sons and daughters. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26-28).

Also, "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and

daughters, says the LORD Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18). Men and women are God's children.

Now to the point of Genesis 1:26, 27, which tells us we are made in God's image and likeness. At the first mention of human beings in the Bible, God declares His intent to make us like Him. But to what extent are we made like Him?

God's purpose is to make us fully like Jesus Christ! In Ephesians, Paul makes this clear. He explains that God established a ministry to serve the church. That ministry is to work with those in the church, until, he

We are to become completely like Jesus Christ. As Jesus is God's Son, we will also be God's sons.

says in verse 13, "we all come to . . . the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Paul's statement in Galatians 4:19, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you," expresses the same concept in different words. Do you grasp the significance of Paul's statement? We are to become fully and completely like Jesus Christ. His character is to be formed in us. As Jesus is God's Son, we will also be God's sons.

The apostle John is explicit: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-3).

Resurrected to glorified state

Human beings who are inducted into the family that God is creating

will be given the glorious honor to be like the resurrected Jesus Christ, who today reigns in His glorified state at the right hand of God in heaven. The awesome potential of any human being as it is presented to us by Christ and His apostles seems so incredible that most people find it difficult to grasp when they first read it. But it is plainly stated in the Bible, even though people read right over it. In fact, it is the whole purpose for salvation. It is the reason God made mankind. It is why we were born.

In Psalm 82:6, we read: "I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.'" That is how God wants us human beings to relate to Him: as children of the Most High. It is truly an awesome family relationship—God's own personal family! Jesus quoted the preceding verse from Psalm 82 to show the Jews that He was not blaspheming God by claiming to be God's Son (see John 10:34).

Even the promises made to ancient Israel pertained to God's intention to eventually bring His people into a family relationship with Him. The apostle Paul said: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (Romans 9:3, 4).

Of a humbled remnant of Israel in the future, God gives this prophecy: "But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine . . . Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, "Give them up!" and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made'" (Isaiah 43:1, 5-7 NIV).

God has always kept His purpose, of making human beings His children, as the guiding principle of how He deals with human beings. He gave us His laws to teach us how to treat one another in a godly manner—the same way Christ treated people. God has always offered forgiveness to anyone who would repent of sin, which is the transgression of His laws. God shows no partiality (Romans 2:11). He says plainly that Christ came so the whole world—all people—can be saved (John 3:16, 17).

Israelites to set an example

Many readers of the Bible have wondered why God chose the descendants of Abraham—ancient Israel—as a special people if He is impartial in offering salvation to all people.

Abraham was a righteous man who was called the friend of God. God promised him that, if he would walk wholeheartedly before Him, He would use Abraham's children in a special way. God chose to build a national family from Abraham's descendants so they could, if they would cooperate, set an example as a type, or model, of God's own family.

God told Abraham's descendants: "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe . . . Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:1, 6-8).

The people of Israel agreed to become just such an example nation. But they still had a carnal, selfish nature, just as do all other human beings. Knowledge alone was not enough. God gave the Israelites His laws—the knowledge of right and wrong—but they did not have a converted mind whereby they could obey

God from the heart. As a nation, they failed to set the obedient example they had promised God they would do.

The example they did set, that of consistently abandoning their commitments to obey God, preserves an important lesson for the rest of mankind. Neither nations nor individuals can produce godly behavior without God's Holy Spirit dwelling within them, even if God personally gives them explicit knowledge of right and wrong.

The only family that can ever set the proper example of godliness and righteousness for mankind is God's own family, His own sons and daughters, when they will have been granted immortality and incorruptibil-

How can we ever hope to share with Jesus Christ such incredible responsibility?

ity. God is creating that family, and you can be a part of it!

Who will be in God's family?

Who are the children of God, and who will become a part of God's family?

The family of God will consist of those who sincerely repented of sin, which is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), who had been baptized and were imparted God's Holy Spirit as a gift (Acts 2:38). By receiving that Spirit, they had become members of Christ's spiritual body (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13), which is His Church (1 Corinthians 12:27; Colossians 1:24).

Paul explains the importance of the Holy Spirit to salvation and to becoming children of God: "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit [that] dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

Paul makes it clear that "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he

is not His" (verse 9). Why do those without that Spirit not belong to God? Because "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (verse 14).

God's children are only those who are being led by God through His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power and presence of God working in them (2 Timothy 1:6; Psalm 51:11; Philippians 2:13).

How do we receive God's Spirit? The apostle Peter said we must "repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Because of this repentance and baptism, we are then considered to be children of God (1 John 3:1).

But that is nothing compared with what we will be like at Jesus Christ's return, when the dead are resurrected: "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, NIV).

These verses depict an awesome change indeed! That is why Paul says: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:16-18, KJV).

Glory beyond compare

Do you get the picture? Being born into God's family as a very child of God, a part of God's own family, is so magnificent that it is futile to try to compare to anything we have ever known. No amount of human trials, problems and suffering in this life could ever approach the inestimable value of eternal life as children of God, of our actually

becoming like God and Jesus Christ. That is what life is all about. That is why you were born. God wants you to be like Him in every way as His son or daughter so you will be part of His very family at the time of the resurrection.

No wonder Paul exclaimed, “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed” (Romans 8:19, NIV). God’s purpose explains why Peter says, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, NIV).

Paul writes that God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4, NIV).

These scriptures tell us that God is patient, and He desires to bring all human beings into His family. He also tells us that “he who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:7).

The wonderful world of tomorrow will be inaugurated at the return of Jesus Christ, who returns to rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16). All the kingdoms of the world will be brought under His dominion (Revelation 11:15). He will establish the Kingdom of God, which is the heart of the message—the gospel, or good news—that He preached.

Those sons and daughters of God who have been faithful to their commitment to obey Him—who have overcome their own carnal, selfish nature and the temptation to return to a life of sin and lawlessness—will share in that rule with Jesus Christ as sons of God. Notice Christ’s promise: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21). Those who overcome will be given responsibility as kings and priests of God in that Kingdom (Revelation 1:5, 6).

Change to immortality

How can we mere human beings ever hope that Jesus Christ would

share with us such incredible responsibility? Certainly, we can never do so while we are still weak, imperfect human beings.

That is just the point of these and many other scriptures. We must be changed.

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:50-52).

It is a gross understatement to say

Our becoming children of God is the heart and core of God’s great plan for humanity.

that the Kingdom of God, under the rule of Christ, will be wonderful. What will make it wonderful? It will be the leadership of all the sons of God, each changed to immortal spirit being under the leadership of Jesus Christ, who will reign as King of Kings and is “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). We, the present sons and daughters of God, will share with Christ the management of that wonderful Kingdom. As we read earlier, those who are led by God’s Spirit are the children of God and Christ’s brothers and sisters: God’s family!

The prophet Daniel received from God a marvelous vision of the establishment of that Kingdom under Jesus Christ on His receiving it from God the Father. “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His

dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13, 14).

Who shares that Kingdom with Jesus Christ? “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (verse 27). Here again, we can see that people who are the “saints of the Most High” will be kings or rulers with Christ.

But certainly they will not rule like some unscrupulous worldly tyrant. Jesus said: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves” (Luke 22:25, 26). God is creating not just a family in which are kings, but kings who, as servants, will pass on wonderful blessings to those they serve!

Rulership based on love

God’s character is based on love (1 John 4:8, 16). The loving character of God must be manifest in all who are truly His children. It is that loving character that distinguishes the true children of God, that makes evident who is really a part of His family. “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).

Jesus taught the same. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven . . . You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-45, 48).

The implementation of that love

Continued on page 31

The Wave-Sheaf Offering

A Ceremony Foreshadowing Salvation

In ancient Israel, the beginning of the spring grain harvest was marked with an unusual ceremony—the waving of the first sheaf of grain to be accepted by God. This simple act holds great spiritual significance!

by Jerold Aust

The agricultural cycle of ancient Israel revolved around two harvests, one in the spring and the other in the autumn. Before any grain could be harvested in the spring, an unusual ceremony took place to inaugurate the spring harvest season.

This ceremony was the waving of the first sheaf of grain to be accepted by God. Instructions for this ceremony are detailed in Leviticus 23:10-14. No one was to eat any of the grain of the harvest until the first sheaf of the harvest was brought to the priest, who in turn waved it before God.

What was the significance of this ceremony?

Jesus Christ “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”

This first sheaf of grain was called the “firstfruits” (verse 10). It was the firstfruits of the barley harvest, the first part of the grain harvest. Thousands of years later, we find the same term used again in the Bible—describing Jesus Christ! “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20, author’s emphasis throughout).

We also find that Jesus Christ is called “the *firstborn* over all creation” and “the *firstborn* from the dead” (Colossians 1:15, 18). The apostle Paul said that Christ was prophesied to be “the *first* to rise from the dead” (Acts 26:23).

What is the connection between the first grain offering, called the firstfruits, and Jesus Christ, the firstfruits and

firstborn from the dead?

This understanding is tied in with the symbolism of the two harvests mentioned earlier and the Feast of Pentecost, observed at the conclusion of 50 days that began with the day of the wave-sheaf offering. On Pentecost, two

Without the true wave-sheaf offering, Jesus Christ, there would be no Holy Spirit to lead us, no Church to spiritually nurture us and no harvest for the salvation of humanity.

loaves were offered from the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, which followed several weeks after the barley harvest.

For a fuller understanding of the symbolism of the two harvest periods, be sure to read “The Lesson of the Feast of Firstfruits,” beginning on page 4 of this issue. The article shows that, just as there were two periods of physical harvesting in ancient Israel, so there would be two periods of spiritual harvesting in God’s great plan for the salvation of humanity. This astounding

truth is shown through the symbolism of the Feast of Pentecost.

Meanings of Pentecost

Pentecost has several meanings, each significant in its own right. The word *Pentecost* means “fiftieth (day).” In the Old Testament, this festival was known as the Feast of Weeks (seven complete weeks plus one day, Leviticus 23:15-17; Deuteronomy 16:10, 16). It was also called the Feast of Harvest or Firstfruits (Exodus 23:16; 34:22).

The word *firstfruits* suggests an initial harvest that will be followed by another harvest. The firstfruits of the wheat harvest are preceded by the wave-sheaf offering of the earlier-ripening barley harvest. The wave sheaf is symbolic of Jesus Christ.

Pentecost is an annual reminder of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Church (Acts 2:1-4). However, the festival holds even more significance. A clear understanding of the events leading up to the Feast of Pentecost makes its importance much more clear.

Pentecost deals directly with our salvation, our ability to follow Christ’s example through the power of God’s Holy Spirit and our capacity for understanding God’s spiritual truth through His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-14).

None of this understanding is possible without the fulfillment of the wave-sheaf offering: Jesus Christ’s acceptance by God the Father.

Wave-sheaf offering a forerunner

The wave-sheaf offering was the forerunner of an additional offering

brought later, on the Feast of Pentecost. On Pentecost, two loaves of bread, “the firstfruits to the LORD,” were offered (Leviticus 23:16, 17).

As the wave-sheaf offering represented Jesus Christ, so did these loaves represent God’s spiritual firstfruits, those who are called and faithfully obey God in this life (Romans 8:24; James 1:18). As the wave-sheaf offering was the necessary forerunner of the Pentecost offering, so was Jesus Christ the necessary forerunner of God’s people, who are His spiritual firstfruits.

These symbols demonstrate how God’s Holy Days relate to each other and are designed to convey the interdependence of the events in God’s plan for humanity.

For example, Passover is the first of God’s annual festivals (Leviticus 23:5). God’s plan for the salvation of mankind is built upon the death of Jesus Christ our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), as the atoning sacrifice for humanity (John 1:29). Christians cannot attain to everlasting life without Christ’s sacrifice, which reconciles us to God.

The wave sheaf, offered during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-11), portrays a resurrected Jesus now serving as our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). Without the prior sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of Pentecost—the calling and salvation of the firstfruits, those in God’s Church—could not occur.

Christ’s return to the Father

Let’s notice a few scriptures that demonstrate these points.

The Israelites’ harvest season could not begin until the wave-sheaf offering was made to and accepted by God. In like manner, the Holy Spirit was not poured out on humanity until after Jesus returned to the Father (Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-4). Jesus Christ Himself had told His followers that He had to leave before the Holy Spirit could come to them (John 16:5-14).

Even after His resurrection, Jesus Christ had to tell His followers not to touch Him until after He had gone to His Father (John 20:17). Only after Jesus had risen to the

Father and returned to them again were they allowed to touch Him (verses 19, 26, 27).

Notice the apostle Paul’s depiction of Christ, our resurrected wave-sheaf offering: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:1, 3, 4).

Paul reveals that our Savior occupies a place for us in the very presence of our Father and that we are accepted by Him through Christ Jesus.

Symbols of firstfruits ceremony all pointed to Christ

In addition to the wave-sheaf offering, the other sacrifices and offerings commanded by God at the time of this ceremony also pointed forward to Jesus Christ.

Jesus was represented by a male lamb without blemish (Leviticus 23:12), which was symbolic of Christ’s spiritual purity. Christ was called “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

He was also represented by fine flour (Leviticus 23:17), symbolic of the beating, scourging and suffering through which He was perfected (Hebrews 5:8, 9). This fine flour was to be mixed with oil (verse 13), representing Christ’s being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The lamb was to be a burnt offering, totally consumed by fire (verse 12). In the same way, Jesus Christ was tested and tried in the crucible of life’s trials and problems and then He surrendered Himself totally and completely as a sacrificial offering on our behalf (Hebrews 10:12). His supreme sacrifice was as a sweet aroma (Ephesians 5:2; Leviticus 23:13) to God because Jesus had given Himself voluntarily and unconditionally for sinful mankind.

The accompanying drink offering of wine (verse 13) was symbolic of Christ’s pouring out His blood to

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WHY A 50-DAY SPAN?

Starting with the day of the wave-sheaf offering, God’s people are to count 50 days, then observe Pentecost as a day holy to God (Leviticus 23:15, 16).

Pentecost symbolizes major events in God’s plan for mankind, including the granting of His Spirit to mankind and the beginning of the Church of God through Spirit-led Christians (see “The Lesson of the Feast of Firstfruits,” page 4). As recorded for us in Acts 2, both of these events took place on the first Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection.

Every fiftieth year was called the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:28), also called the year of liberty (Ezekiel 46:17). Every 50 years, at the Jubilee, properties reverted to their original owners (Leviticus 25:8-38). This prevented poverty from plaguing successive generations of the same families. The Jubilee was celebrated as a time of liberty and freedom (verse 10).

The number 50 implies complete freedom from captivity, a theme frequently found in God’s festivals and Holy Days. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread marked ancient Israel’s freedom from Egyptian slavery, as well as our freedom from sin and death through Jesus Christ. The theme of freedom from captivity also continues in the wave-sheaf offering and the Feast of Pentecost.

The meanings of Jubilee (50 years) and Pentecost (50 days) are designed to illustrate similar blessings. God marvelously reveals His awesome plan of salvation for all humanity through symbolism such as ceremonies, harvests and holy festival seasons, and understanding of that plan is available to those who keep the Holy Days God commanded. *GN*



When Will Peace Come to the Middle East?

by John Ross Schroeder

Terrorism is not the only threat to peace in the Middle East. Wars fought using traditional methods have abounded in this blood-stained century.

Believe it or not, the Bible—not the sword of murder and mayhem—is going to have the last word in the Middle East.

Yet today, along with understandable hopes for the current peace process, we are still in the presence of stubborn and difficult antagonisms that baffle and dispirit anyone who hopes for satisfactory solutions.

Thorny Mideast conflicts are an immense drain on both human and natural resources. Israeli's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin died the victim of an internal terrorist act earlier this year, and constant political undercurrents over oil are always percolating.

A shifting world scene

On today's complex international scene, terrorism in cities like Jerusalem and Tel Aviv constantly impedes the peace process. One or two bombs wipe out thousands of hours of diplomacy. It's difficult to keep your mind on peace when your homeland is under attack by terrorists.

The March 9, 1996, issue of *The Economist* summed up the harsh reality of the situation: "Israelis, traumatised by the slaughter of some 60 people, believe they have been cheated in their land-for-peace deal with the Palestinians. But the alternative is bleak: three years of courageous risk-taking undone; a cruel war of attrition; an end to Israel's hopes of normal relations with the Muslim world. The evil men behind the suicide-bombers can congratulate themselves. Seldom, it seems has terrorism been more effective at achieving its ends."

Bombings truly test a nation's commitment to the peace process. The

potential threat of thousands standing ready for suicide bombing missions casts a shadow across all of Israel. The former chief rabbi of London, Lord Jakobovits, has written that "we must pursue the peace efforts as if there was no terrorism, and fight the terrorists as if there were no peace efforts."

But terrorism is not the only threat to peace in the Middle East. Wars fought using traditional methods have abounded in this blood-stained century.

More than a decade ago, Kuwait feared an invasion from Iran. Later the onslaught actually came from Iraq. Today the credibility of the Conservative government in the United Kingdom remains suspect because of the investigation of British arms sales to Iraq.

Who knows what nation or terrorist group we will hear from next? As veteran British newsman Peregrine Worsthorne commented in the aftermath of the Gulf War: "Saddam Hussein is not unique. There will be other Third World chancers [opportunists] encouraged by the example of how nearly he got away with his bold and ruthless plan."

So the foibles and follies of human nature transcend time, geography and political borders.

Oil and antagonisms

Yet there is every reason for real hope in the long run. In reality, the Middle East has a glorious future that we can understand when we come to hold a sound biblical vision of the area.

Let's begin an assessment of the region's problems by briefly surveying the enormously important background behind present conditions.

Fully 50 percent of the world's known crude-oil reserves exist in the

Middle East. According to a map produced by the National Geographic Society, Iraq and Kuwait possess oil reserves of nearly 200 billion barrels between them. Such is the strategic importance of these Mideast countries that compel the attention of the entire world.

So oil is the real king (or all-powerful sheikh) in the Middle East. One of the reasons the Western powers went to war in 1991 in the Gulf War was to prevent a possible Iraqi monopoly from controlling these precious black-liquid reserves. Remember that oil is always the unseen player in the Persian Gulf region.

But far more fundamental than even precious petroleum reserves are the area's age-old antagonisms. In spite of definable diplomatic progress between Israel and the Palestinians in pursuit of a separate state for the latter, ancient territorial ambitions continue to assail the region. Iraq and Kuwait have long-standing disputes that have alternately smoldered and cooled according to the prevailing political climate.

So have Iraq and Iran. The two fought an eight-year war, killing millions of people, only to later settle their famous border dispute in a supposedly amicable manner under the pressure of Western presence in the Gulf.

Does war ever make sense in the long run? Does it really solve any of these dilemmas?

Where it all began

Perhaps more than any other place on the globe, the Middle East is an area in which the past meets the future. No other human conflict is so firmly rooted in antiquity. The Bible shows that the Middle East is where humankind consciously began to think about its spiritual purposes in the world.

It is where man first perceived that he is not just a physical creature, but one with abstract, intangible longings and emotional needs. As the early chapters of Genesis make plain, religion (true and false) began

in that fabled area of the globe.

The Middle East is the home of three major belief systems that have significantly influenced the way we understand life and death, good and evil, right and wrong. The roots of three world religions—Islam, Judaism and Christianity—reside there.

Frankly every one of these faiths has its serious divisions. Fundamentalist revolutionaries lobby for extremist solutions to territorial problems. The modern nation of Israel has periodically claimed the biblical boundaries of Judaea and Samaria. Jihad—or holy war—is the recurring Arab cry the West has become accustomed to hearing. A holy war is not unfamiliar to the mainstream

Christian tradition if we remember the Crusades.

Today the Middle East is not the source of spiritual enlightenment God intended it to be in this chaotic and confused world. Instead, the atmosphere there has been marked by armed conflict, hostility and, most of all, misunderstanding—not the things the Creator wanted it to provide. Surely positive direction, opportunity and hope should have emanated from the Middle East.

Certainly serious physical and spiritual problems will be present for the foreseeable future. The potential for breaking the Sixth Commandment, the biblical injunction against murder, remains enormous. Arms proliferation is the dominant tendency in the Middle Eastern sector of the Mediter-



anean. No one knows when this buildup of weapons will explode into the next war.

Israel to be an example

In the Bible, God told ancient Israel that its peoples were to serve as a good and right example to other nations. They were presented with an unparalleled legal system that, if obeyed, would have provided peace and justice for all its citizens.

God meant for other nations to behold in wonderment the wisdom that would naturally stem from Israel's way of life and voluntarily choose it for themselves.

Notice this biblical passage written by the hand of Moses. "Observe them [statutes and laws] carefully, for thereby you will display your wisdom and understanding to other peoples. When they hear about all these statutes and laws, they will say, 'What a wise and understanding people this great nation is!' What great nation has a god close at hand as the LORD our God is close to us whenever we call to him?" (Deuteronomy 4:6, 7, Revised English Bible).

A desperate need exists for a biblical and spiritual inspiration in the Middle East today. There is also a need to understand the area's history. Since antiquity, it has been a center of the world's attention. All nations are tethered to its geopolitical swings because it encompasses the basic story of humankind. To comprehend the present, we must, as always, examine the past.

We should never forget that the Bible, in its geographic origins, comes from the Middle East. The Garden of Eden lay somewhere near the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. God called Abraham in lower Mesopotamia, the land between these two ancient rivers.

Continuing conflict in the cradle of civilization

How ironic in one sense that this cradle of civilization should often be the site of conflict, hatred and hostility. From Eden we have progressed to Babel. Yet it is not so ironic in the light of the account in Genesis. How many realize that the present Middle Eastern antagonisms are rooted in events described in the Bible's first book?

After all, nations are nothing more

than families grown great. For instance, much of the Arab world stems from Terah, the father of Abraham.

An ancient passage of biblical wisdom does advise us to "look unto Abraham your father" (Isaiah 51:2). Three major faiths trace their ancestry back to this patriarch. Yet historically the children of Abraham have split into bitterly feuding family factions.

It is a fact that this legacy of broken families has led indirectly to today's problems in the Middle East. Battles between brothers are a recurring theme: Abel was murdered at the hands of

There is every reason for real hope in the long run. The Middle East has a glorious future.

Cain; Ishmael was banished in a family dispute; Jacob and Esau struggled for their father's blessings; the 10 brothers sold Joseph into slavery. On it goes, even to the present.

Clearly the Genesis saga is about to spill over into the 21st century. In the Gulf War, an Egyptian woman's three sons were engaged in battle, one in the Egyptian army, one in the Saudi army and another as an Iraqi soldier. Her greatest fear was that one son might kill his brother. How little has really changed in the world.

The Bible and cycles of war

No war brings permanent peace. Fighting only helps assure another war, and much suffering en route. Real peace is something that must be built when the battles have stopped and the participants can truly comprehend the futility of their combative conduct.

But the spilled blood begs for vengeance from the bereaved, and on we go again. World War I (supposedly the war to end all wars) begot World War II, which led to the Cold War.

Not surprisingly, the Gulf conflict also grew in the soil of aggression. The

eight-year Iran-Iraqi war helped spawn the invasion of Kuwait and the predictable Allied response.

So war stands discredited as a permanent solution to human conflict. As Basil O'Conner once said in his address to the National Conference of Christians and Jews: "The world cannot continue to wage war like physical giants and to seek peace like intellectual pygmies."

Yet there could be real hope on our common ground. True understanding of the roots of a problem is a step to wards a solution. God has not left humankind without solutions. Long-neglected spiritual tools are still extant that men and women ignore at their peril.

The Bible actually joins Christians, Muslims and Jews in a spiritual inheritance. Although that commonality is neither complete nor perfectly expressed, they are all "the people of the book."

Spiritual principles in common

Therefore, Bible principles could act as a valuable bridge of understanding between the three great Mediterranean religions. Consider just three major spiritual precepts. We are instructed to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5), love our neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) and treat others as we would have them treat us. These three spiritual principles are enjoined in the sacred scriptures of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

But in the Middle East today the highest ideals of three faiths are largely washed aside in secular struggles for power, land and oil. Idealism has been lost in the compromises wrought by human greed and expediency. The same old desires for expansion and revenge soon submerge the lofty heights of a potentially devout life. However, if we are ever to work out our differences, we must first implement the basic principles on which these three major religions agree.

The chief rabbi of Great Britain and the Commonwealth succinctly illustrated what is desperately needed in an article in *The London Times*. "The message is clear," he wrote. "You cannot have peace without communicating, without dialogue between faiths, between nations and races. The modern dialogues were spawned by the great

religions, and religion must once again become the principal communicator to bridge divisions.”

Hope in a fresh biblical perspective

After some 45 years of the Cold War, the United States and the former Soviet Union have now experienced several years of at least trying to understand one another. Perhaps they had more in common than they previously thought. So building bridges in and between major regions is essential to true peace and real progress. Today the Mediterranean region has the potential to serve as a positive example.

The apostle Paul crisscrossed this ancient area several times, spreading a new way of life that embraces the basic tenets of two major religions. He, however, saw the two as one. Problems can sometimes be faced in the context of commonality. What do we share and how do we make the most of our common ground?

Humanly speaking, the only other option is catastrophe. Armageddon would soon be at our door. Weapons are deadlier by the day. The ancient words of Moses still ring in our ears: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses against, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). This should be an anthem for humanity.

An even broader perspective than different people’s common religious ground compels our consideration. We are all of the same species. We were made “of one blood,” as Paul reminded the men of Athens (Acts 17:26). The breathtaking view of our planet from space reminds us that we are a global village. Clumsy human border disputes must seem bizarre from God’s vantage point.

Somehow we have to turn both our genetic and geographic intimacy to our advantage. Selflessness—the key to everything from the welfare of the planet to solving the bloodstained conflicts of the Middle East—is an art that must be learned.

As many concerned observers agree, certain essential priorities must be put before selfish interests. We desperately need a new vision, a new way of think-

ing, a new world order truly based on biblical principles.

The Messiah arrives

Whatever happens in the meantime, our only permanent hope lies in the pages of the Bible. According to its own words, what began in the Middle East will also end there. Scripture prophesies a great end-time conflict involving Arabs, Jews and Europeans (see Daniel 11 and 12). This final conflagration will finish only with the return of the King of all kings, Jesus Christ, to earth (Revelation 19:11-21).

Then the Holy Scriptures assure us that human values will change overnight for the better. God’s great law of love will be practiced in Jerusalem, and nations will flow to this new world capital (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4). Jerusalem, the city of peace, will finally live up to its name.

Oil and land will cease to be the primary focus of interest. One geographic fact will dominate the globe: The spiritual headquarters of the future Ruler of this earth will be in the Middle East. From there the reigning Christ will look after the best interests of all countries, peoples and races. National representatives will then flow to Jerusalem, not to wage jihad, but to learn the way to peace.

At that time, men and women in the Middle East will surrender their lives to their Creator. The word *Muslim* actually means one who surrenders himself to God. Arabs and Israelis alike will yield their lives to a righteous God, giving up their narrow biases, prejudices and selfish interests.

Then all Mediterranean nations will eventually become one with each other, one with the world and, most importantly, one with God. The Middle East will once again be the land of promise, a place that will spread peace and true spirituality to this entire globe.

But such a radical transformation will take a new spirit and new heart (Jeremiah 31:31). It will require a fresh burst of spiritual energy directly from God.

This is what Jesus Christ brought us at His first coming. What began at Bethlehem and Nazareth will gradually spread to the entire world when Christ returns to this earth a second time as the true Messiah. *GN*

NOT ENEMIES FOREVER

In spite of the best efforts of the players in the current Middle East peace process, today the Arab and Jewish nations still have difficulty coexisting peacefully. Yet they have not always been enemies. Indeed, for centuries Jews thrived in an Arab civilization.

Shortly after the death of Mohammed in A.D. 632, Arabs began conquering vast tracts of the known world. Soon they possessed North Africa, Arabia, Palestine, Persia, Sicily, southern Italy and much of Turkey and Spain. For the next few centuries, the Arab civilization was considerably more advanced than its European counterpart.

Bertrand Russell described the way the Jews flourished under the Arabs in his book *History of Western Philosophy*. After describing the persecution of Jews in Christian Europe, and the corresponding lack of Jewish cultural contributions, Russell continued:

“In Mohammedan countries, on the contrary, Jews at most times were not in any way ill treated. Especially in Moorish Spain, they contributed to learning . . . [Then, when] the Christians reconquered Spain, it was largely the Jews who transmitted to them the learning of the Moors. Learned Jews, who knew Hebrew, Greek and Arabic, and were acquainted with the philosophy of Aristotle, imparted their knowledge to less learned schoolmen” (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1969, p. 324).

Europe’s rediscovery, by Arabs and Jews, of many Greek texts led eventually to the Renaissance and the rise of European culture. Today Europeans, Arabs and Jews could gain much from cooperation. Unfortunately, crusades, persecutions and Jihads have been all too common in their history.

Nevertheless, in the coming reign of the Messiah, the Christ, the descendants of all three groups will learn to flourish in cooperation and peace. *GN*

The Only Sure Thing

“The only sure thing in life is death and taxes.”

—Benjamin Franklin

by Les McCullough

The inveterate gambler is always on the lookout for the sure thing, the bet he can't lose. The only problem is, the sure bet doesn't exist—with one exception. If you are a gambler, there *is* one thing you can bet your life on. The odds of losing this bet are nil.

Of course, the payoff may come when you least expect it. And, even though you're sure to win, winning this bet is no fun. But all of us, whether we place the bet or not, are sure to win.

The sure thing I'm speaking of is death.

Death is far more certain than life. A newly conceived human has a 20 percent chance of never seeing birth. However, there is zero percent chance that, once born, you will not ultimately see death.

Is this not a pleasant subject to find yourself reading about?

Indeed, it is not pleasant, and it's no surprise that so many are uninformed about the subject. Refusing to think about death does not make it go away. It just makes it harder for those left living to deal with this unpleasant fact of life once it has occurred.

Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying that the only sure thing in life is death and taxes. History has proven him right. Taxes are a reality of life whether we live in Africa, Europe, the Far East or North or South America.

But taxes do change, even though usually for the worse. Most nations levy heavy taxes on their citizens, and everyone has to pay them. Personal income, fuel, airline tickets, property, hotel accommodations—you name it and it is taxed.

Consistent and inevitable

The taxes we are levied can vary, but death doesn't change. Events lead-

ing up to it may vary, but death itself is always the same. Some forms of government may bring the onset of death about more quickly, and some economic conditions may hasten it, but death catches up with people of all nationalities, creeds and backgrounds. No one is exempt.

Francis Bacon said that “old men go to death, but death comes to young men.” It is never expected by the young. When it comes, it is usually unbidden and unwanted.

When death arrives early in life, the result is devastating. Hopes and dreams are snuffed out. Some ill or elderly may welcome it and die willingly, but in other cases they may fight it with a warrior's ferociousness.

Although some people in some circumstances die willingly, death is never really a friend. It is an enemy that at times is heroically fought, but ultimately it is given in to.

When death occurs, how should you feel about it? Should you be angry? Is it wrong to be relieved? Should you be destroyed by the death of a loved one? Should you grieve? Should you mourn openly and unashamedly? Should you weep behind closed doors, concealing your feelings? How much should you grieve?

We'll get to those questions, but first let's understand more about the subject.

When does death occur? Only in our modern age has there been a need for such a question to be asked. Pages of opinions have been written and hours of arguments have taken place over this simple question. Does death occur when one stops breathing, when the heart ceases to function or when all brain activity has ceased?

These are important questions in this day of medical miracles. The body

Refusing to think about death does not make it go away. It just makes it harder for those left living to deal with this unpleasant fact of life once it has occurred.

can be maintained artificially long past the time of consciousness and potential recovery by simply forcing the continued action of the heart and lungs through a life-support system. In some cases, pregnant women have been kept on life support for weeks so their baby can be born. The debate continues on the ethics of these procedures in medical and religious circles. It is one that is never fully answered to everyone's satisfaction.

You are going to die. No one can change that. Death may be delayed for a time, but the inevitable will come to pass. All living things are subject to death, from the lowliest microscopic animal or plant to the giant sperm whale and all living things in between, from a simple spore to the majestic giant sequoia and redwood trees. Scientists say even stars die and eventually dissipate into the vastness of the universe.

What happens at death?

At death, the plant or organism ceases to function and then begins to crumble and disintegrate. What once was is no more. This may be all we need to know about the death of plants and animals, but what about people? Surely, man does not simply cease to be. What occurs when a person dies?

The body ceases to function. It decays and before long returns to the dust of the earth.

But isn't man more than just a body? He, of all creatures, seems to have an inner being. If this is so, what happens to that inner person?

More basic than that, why do we have to die? How did death come to be? Why can't life go on? The answer to those age-old questions is found in the second law of thermodynamics. In essence, it states and acknowledges that all physical things have a beginning and then start the process of running down.

Death is one of the subjects about which none of us likes to think. This is partly because we may not have an answer and partly because we are afraid of finding the answer. Fearing what the answer might be, we would rather ignore the question and hope we don't have to face the reality for a

long time.

But face it we shall, so we might as well try to understand more about the subject.

What happens after death?

What happens when we die? Do we go somewhere? Many tell of out-of-body experiences during which they feel they have died, or been close to dying, and then recovered. In most cases, they say the incident was a pleasant one.

Some describe a near-death experience as like being in a long tunnel with a light at the end while listening to lovely music and feeling comfortably warm, then returning to their body. Are these people experiencing something real or an illusion? Why? Why do they come back? If they have no control over whether they leave their body or stay, then who does?

Any discussion of death can quickly take on a theological or religious tone. In Westernized nations, most people claim to be either Christian or recognize the Judeo-Christian roots of their civilization. They may not attend church or synagogue, but they are at least aware of the claims of a First Cause, Creator or God.

So let's look into the handbook for living that has been given by God, the Bible.

The first mention of death in the Bible is in Genesis 2:16, 17. It is a part of the knowledge, the instruction if you will, God gave to the first man and woman. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"

Adam's penalty for disobedience

As the narrative goes, Adam ate of the tree and did not die, at least not until much later. Others died before he ceased to live, as revealed in the example of Adam's son, Abel, who was killed by his brother, Cain.

Adam did eventually die, however, because of his rejection of God's instruction. Although delayed for Adam personally 930 years, death

entered the world—for Cain and everyone else—at the time of Adam's rebellion and disobedience to the Father. This is clearly stated in the New Testament:

"... Through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..." (Romans 5:12).

Death exists because it is the penalty for sin. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life..." (Romans 6:23). Death came upon mankind because of the actions of one man at the beginning of human life on earth. Along with the guarantee of death came the even greater promise of the opportunity for eternal life. We mustn't lose sight of that promise, although that is a subject for a different article.

The responsibility for the actions that led to his death lies with Adam, even though the cause of Adam's action was Satan, who tempted the first man and woman. Death is a weapon Satan uses against mankind to thwart God's purpose for man. Satan inspires man to wield death and the threat of death against his fellowman through hatred, fear and jealousy. The devil delights in the pain caused by death.

How death comes

The cessation of life comes about in three ways: accidentally, naturally and deliberately.

- Accidental death is difficult to deal with, occurring when least expected, often to those in their prime years of life. It leaves no time to prepare oneself. The shock of accidental death is numbing, sometimes overwhelming.

- "He died of natural causes" can mean someone has lived his years and gently slipped into the deep slumber of the grave as the result of his body simply wearing out. The heart just turns off. You seldom read of this kind of peaceful, natural cessation of life today. In the modern age, death by natural causes is often premature, including death by disease in its many forms.

- Premeditated death includes murder, loss of life on the battlefield and suicide. These deaths are perhaps the most senseless and difficult for those remaining and trying to understand.

God frequently ends up being blamed. “Why did God allow it to happen?” is the anguished cry of those left behind.

Suicide can be the result of extreme unhappiness and the pain that a person is trying to escape. A successful suicide, however, brings great unhappiness and pain on family and loved ones.

Everybody, rich or poor, noble or base, will die. The One who created all things says that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). You may not do anything else in this life, but you will die.

Death is hard to describe

Death isn’t adequately described by expressions such as kicking the bucket, passing away, falling off the perch, buying the farm, shuffling off this mortal coil or meeting our Maker. You don’t go anywhere, other than the grave, when you die. You don’t do something when you die. You just die.

“For what happens to the sons of men also happens to beasts; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust” (Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20).

In the sense of the preceding scriptural reference, man is no different from the plants or animals, an amoeba or the stars. Man does have something these other created beings or things do not have. He has the promise of the judgment and the possibility of eternal life. But, again, that is another topic.

Even though it is a morbid subject, you should make some preparations for your death. Don’t leave the “final arrangements,” as they are called in advertisements for mortuaries, to bereaved family members. If your expiration is decades away, so much the better, but be prepared for whenever it comes.

We can control our affairs while we live and make it easier for our loved ones after we die. In the past few months, several of my friends have died, some young and some older. Their families have had to live through the experience. In some cases, death was expected, but in others it was a

complete surprise. It was traumatic in every case.

Preparing for the inevitable

One of the first steps you might want to take is to face the reality of your mortality. When all is over, the greatest value is not the cash value of the life-insurance policy in your spouse’s bank account, but how content you were with your life. “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:6, 7).

When death occurs, how should you feel about it? Should you be destroyed by the death of a loved one? Should you weep behind closed doors, concealing your feelings? How much should you grieve?

The examples of the men and women of the Bible show they often prepared for death’s inevitability. They bought burial grounds or tombs for themselves and their families. They knew where they would be buried and took comfort and satisfaction from that. Conscious of their mortality, they prepared for it.

“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children . . .” (Proverbs 13:22). Not everyone can leave an inheritance, but we can all be certain not to leave the burden of the monetary cost of our death to add to the ordeal of a grieving family.

Most people have never bothered to make a will. It is a simple action but one they do not want to take. Yet by that simple act you can assure your

family, husband, wife or children of receiving what should be theirs.

In some countries, not having a will means the government takes a much larger portion, or in some cases all, of what is left. It could mean the forced sale of the home you thought you were providing for your family. Other relatives might decide they have a claim to your estate, and a hopeless muddle could result.

In spite of advances in technology and medicine, the life span of man today is much the same as mentioned in Psalm 90:10: “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” Verse 12 continues: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

It is true, at least in the United States, that there are more centenarians today than ever before. A few have lived to even 110 or 120. They are the rare exception. Although life expectancy has increased in some countries, in others it is still low. The average hasn’t changed much. Recognizing the limitation we may have can help us to use our allotted time more effectively.

Expressing our feeling of loss

When death occurs, we need to realize that grief is natural. It should be allowed; it should be expressed. Various cultures express themselves differently. A funeral in Africa is a major event. Family, friends, neighbors come from miles around to help grieve as well as to express their feelings for the one who died.

In some cultures, a prolonged time of mourning takes place. In others, it is almost business as usual. Whatever the culture, we shouldn’t try to console with platitudes about how the individual has gone to a better place or how one should buck up and not let others see one’s sorrow.

Sorrow is a personal thing. There is nothing wrong with feeling it and expressing it. King Solomon acknowledged that there is a time to weep and mourn (Ecclesiastes 3:4). A certain amount of sorrow is a good thing. In cases in which there has been pro-

longed suffering, sorrow can be a relief. Whatever the case, most people need time to express their sadness, whether alone or with friends.

It is inane and cruel to say to a child whose mother has just died, “God wanted your mother more than you do.” What a dreadful saying, and I am aware of this actually being said. The poor child who hears this is devastated by the loss and is made to feel guilty because he didn’t want the mother enough, even though the child loved his mother with all his being.

Realize that your friend who lost a loved one may desperately need to talk about the deceased. Honor that need. You can bear with your friend for a few days. It may well be that all you can say is a sincere “I’m sorry.” Death is sad, and it affects us all in different ways. You need to be understanding and sympathetic and take your cue from the bereaved. Time will heal.

There is hope

The apostle Paul addressed the subject of death: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Paul didn’t intend that we should not sorrow. Grieving is a natural process. It is therapeutic, scriptural and a part of life.

What Paul did say is that we shouldn’t mourn as those who have no hope, knowledge or understanding about death. In the book of Job, the truth of the state of the dead is given: “If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands” (Job 14:14, 15).

There will come a time when all who have died will live again. They will rise to a life much better than the one they have known and to a time of great joy and happiness.

There will come a time when deaths will no longer occur. Mankind’s greatest enemy shall cease to exist (1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 21:4).

Death will be no more, and life will reign supreme. Look to that day with confidence. *GN*

Wave Sheaf

Continued from page 15

pay the penalty for our sins (Matthew 26:27, 28; 1 John 1:7).

The very day of the wave-sheaf ceremony pointed forward to Christ. History records that the sheaf was harvested on Saturday night, which began the first day of the week. It was then waved before and accepted by God on the first day of the week (Sunday) during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:11).

As mentioned earlier, Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, would not let His followers touch Him until He had returned to God the Father (John 20:17). Later that same day, after He went to the Father, they could touch Him (verses 19, 26, 27).

This occurred on the first day of the week (verse 19), the Sunday during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matthew 26:2, 17; 28:1). The wave-sheaf offering foretold the precise day of the week Christ would return to the Father more than 1,400 years before that day actually occurred!

These astounding parallels give us a much deeper appreciation of the significance of the wave-sheaf offering God commanded. Reading Leviticus 23:10-14 with this understanding helps us to better grasp both Jesus Christ’s supreme importance in God’s plan as well as the meaning of the wave sheaf. Without a Savior who would give His life and be resurrected to life again, there could be no later harvesting of humankind for salvation.

Christ’s purpose foretold

Almost 1,500 years later, Jesus Christ explained His purpose to His followers, using the analogy of grain: “. . . The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:23, 24). This imagery connects Jesus Christ’s sacrifice to the salvation of all mankind: Only if Jesus Christ gave His own life could more life—additional sons of God—be produced (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:10).

Christ’s role as depicted by the wave-sheaf offering differs somewhat from His role as depicted by the Passover sacrifice. Both reflect different aspects of His sacrifice and purpose in God’s plan for the salvation of humanity.

During His crucifixion, Jesus Christ declared that His sacrifice, as foreshadowed by the Passover, was completed: “So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit” (John 19:30).

Christ wasn’t saying that God’s plan for saving humankind was finished at His death. He was saying that the crucial, all-important giving of His life as our Passover sacrifice was finished. The death of Jesus Christ meant that mankind could and would be reconciled to God the Father.

But, beyond that sacrifice, there is another vital aspect of our salvation that is not yet complete. Jesus Christ’s sacrifice alone, through His crucifixion, did not and does not save humankind. It did, however, reconcile humanity to God. Beyond this reconciliation lies another truth signified by the wave-sheaf offering: “For if 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).

As the Passover precedes the wave-sheaf offering, so reconciliation precedes our salvation. We are saved by Christ’s resurrected, divine life.

All made possible through Jesus Christ

Those who keep the Feast of Pentecost appreciate the relationship to Pentecost of the wave-sheaf offering. Without the true wave-sheaf offering, Jesus Christ, there would be no Holy Spirit to lead us, no Church to spiritually nurture us and no harvest for the salvation of humanity.

Through these things, God continually assures and reminds His people that we have the promise of eternal life through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise was made possible through God, who resurrected and accepted Jesus Christ, our wave-sheaf offering. *GN*

How Archaeology Confirms the Biblical Record

by Mario Seiglie

“I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out,” said Jesus (Luke 19:40). He was referring to what would happen if His disciples did not bear testimony of Him.

The original disciples aren't around to provide their eyewitness accounts of Jesus Christ, but we do have the inspired Word of God, which they, along with many others, wrote.

Significantly enough, we also have the testimony of stones that really can bear witness to the veracity and inspiration of God's Word. The physical evidence unearthed by present-day scientists can and does speak to us through biblical archaeology.

Archae, which comes from the Greek, means “ancient,” and *ology*, which comes from the Greek *logia*, means “science.” Archaeology, then, is the scientific study of ancient things.

Unearthing the origins of archaeology

Englishman Flinders Petrie is generally considered the individual who put archaeological methodology on a scientific footing. He is credited with transforming archaeology from a treasure hunt into a disciplined search for information about the past. It was not until the 19th century that scientific methods were rigorously applied to excavations of historical sites.

A curious fact of history is that the person who indirectly contributed to this process was not a scientist but the French emperor and conqueror Napoleon Bonaparte. During his conquests of Europe and the Middle East, Napoleon arrived in Egypt in the late 1700s hoping to build the Suez Canal and drastically reduce the navigation

time for the trade route from France to India. In Egypt, before a battle in the vicinity of the famous pyramids of Gizeh, he told his soldiers, “Forty centuries are looking down upon you from these pyramids.”

His inquisitive mind led him to study the Egyptian culture and try to decipher strange drawings he saw in the ancient monuments. For that purpose, he brought along 175 French scholars and researchers, and together they set up an institute in Egypt to study the writings and ancient relics of the area.

The deciphering of the Egyptian hieroglyphics (a word meaning priestly or sacred writings) can be attributed mostly to a young scientist of that time, Jean François Champollion. Accurate translations were made possible largely by the discovery in 1799 of a large black basalt rock by French soldiers at the town of Rosetta. Later to be known as the Rosetta Stone, it bore a trilingual inscription in Old Egyptian hieroglyphic, demotic (a later, simplified form of Egyptian hieroglyphics) and Greek. With this stone as a key, Champollion in 1822 could finally decipher the ancient hieroglyphics.

The deciphering of the Egyptian hieroglyphics brought the culture of the Pharaohs to light, and the educated classes of Europe gained insight into this fascinating subject. Soon, many amateur archaeologists were on their way to fame and fortune, finding fabulous monuments and other treasures. Museums throughout Europe and America vied with each other to house these marvelous finds. The treasure-laden tomb of Tutankhamen, discovered in 1922, was one of the most

Scholars have queued up to ridicule the biblical accounts as mere myth.

A tug of war continues between scoffers and believers in the inspiration and accuracy of the Bible.

spectacular. Many early archaeologists would be honored for their efforts and would become a part of history in their own right.

Deciphering ancient writing

Elsewhere in the region, strange writings on monuments and other objects were waiting to be deciphered.



Jean François Champollion deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphics, which opened the door to understanding the culture of ancient Egypt.

Curious scratches, resembling bird footprints, were found on thousands of hardened clay tablets. Initially, some scientists thought they were decorations rather than writing. Since the marks had apparently been made with a wedgelike knife in soft clay, the experts called them cuneiform, or letterforms made by *cunei*, Latin for “wedges.”

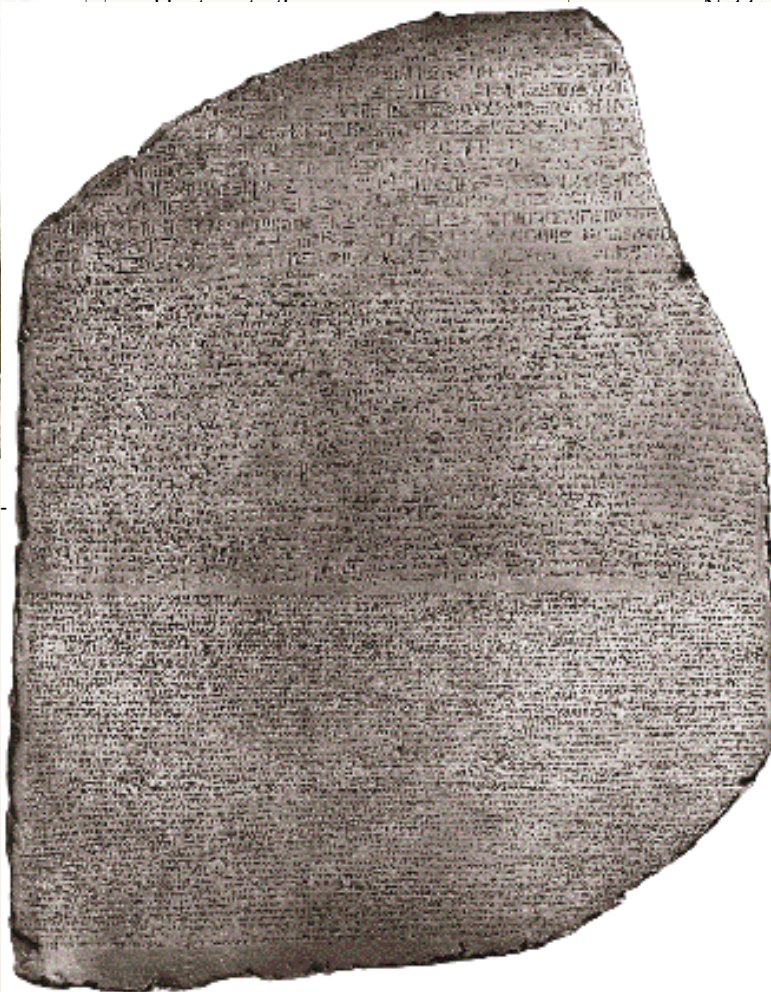
The credit for the deciphering of cuneiform would go mostly to an agent of the British government, Henry C. Rawlinson, stationed in Persia. He began a systematic study of cuneiform writing found on the Behistun Rock inscription, sometimes known as the “Rosetta Stone of cuneiform.”

Thousands of years earlier, Darius the

Great, king of Persia, had on the face of this 1,700-foot cliff overlooking a valley engraved an account of his exploits. The inscription appeared in three scripts: Persian, Elamite and Babylonian in the cuneiform style of writing.

Over a period of two years, Rawlinson traveled to the site and made the perilous climb, dangling from a rope while painstakingly transcribing the inscription. By 1847, he had deciphered cuneiform writing, opening understanding of Babylonian culture

had brought men like Champollion and Rawlinson. Layard began digging in Iraq, home of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires thousands of years before. He unearthed great cities mentioned in the Bible, including the ancient Assyrian capital, Nineveh, and Calah. Many of his finds, including enormous winged bulls and other important Babylonian and Assyrian artifacts, made their way to the British Museum. He, too, was knighted by Queen Victoria.



The Rosetta Stone, with its trilingual inscription, was key to understanding Egyptian hieroglyphics.

efforts, Rawlinson received a knighthood from Queen Victoria in 1855.

Digging up forgotten cities

Another young British subject, Austen Henry Layard, drew inspiration from such discoveries and the fame it

had brought men like Champollion and Rawlinson. Layard began digging in Iraq, home of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires thousands of years before. He unearthed great cities mentioned in the Bible, including the ancient Assyrian capital, Nineveh, and Calah. Many of his finds, including enormous winged bulls and other important Babylonian and Assyrian artifacts, made their way to the British Museum. He, too, was knighted by Queen Victoria.

...be outdone by the British, Germanists also began their searches and fame. One pioneer, Heinrich Schliemann searching for the legendary city of Troy, inspired by the ancient poet Homer. Believing Homer's sagas to be mere imagination, contemporaries ridiculed Schliemann's efforts, thinking him to be on a fanciful search. But, incredibly enough, heeding the descriptions in Homer's *Iliad* and those by other Greek writers, Schliemann began to excavate. In 1871, he found the remains of the ancient city of Troy. Following in the footsteps of these dash-venturers came the archaeologists who and classify these systematic way, giving scientific methodology

of field archaeology.

The age of skepticism

Unfortunately, the zeal for fame and treasure of many of these early archaeologists also led to unfounded claims of the discoveries of biblical sites. Some of these claims, such as the supposed discovery of King Solomon's mines and David's tomb, were later

proved false. Seeds of doubt began to be planted regarding the accuracy of the biblical account.

The 20th century inherited the skepticism of the preceding hundred years. Charles Darwin and others, espousing theories of evolution, had posited explanations for the origin and development of living creatures apart from a divine Creator. Such notions encouraged a questioning of the history of the Bible.

Also strong in Europe was the thinking inspired by Karl Marx who in an economic, materialist interpretation of history, discounted God and miracles. Many scholars ridiculed the biblical accounts as myth. The Bible became fair game for higher criticism; a tugging match ensued between believers in the inspiration and accuracy of the Bible and scoffers.

Biblical and theological scholars of the day declared the Bible was more recent in origin than it claimed; some argued the people of the Old Testament did not even know how to read and write. Some scholars concluded that most of the Old Testament was little more than myth.

Authors Norman Geisler and Paul Feinberg observe: "Perhaps the best example of those who hold the 'reason over revelation' view are known as 'liberals' or 'higher critics.' Roughly speaking, this refers to a theological movement that sprang from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European thought. It was influenced by Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, who concluded by human reason that parts or all of the Bible are not a revelation from God. Other higher critics have included men such as Jean Astruc (1684-1766) and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918).

"In contrast to the historic, orthodox view that the Bible *is* the Word of God, liberals believe that the Bible merely *contains* the Word of God. When they apply the canons of human reason or

modern scholarship to the Bible they feel that some parts of it are 'contradictory,' and others are simply myths or fables. Some Old Testament stories are rejected by these critics because the events seemed to be 'immoral'" (*Introduction to Philosophy, a Christian Perspective*, 1980, p. 261).

Rejecting the divine inspiration of the Bible, archaeologists from liberal

Kathleen Kenyon—to reject the biblical version.

In *Biblical Archaeology Review*, archaeologist Bryant Wood explains the earlier antibiblical view: "The archaeological evidence conflicted with the Biblical account—indeed, disproved it. Based on [archaeologist Kathleen] Kenyon's conclusions, Jericho has become the parade example

of the difficulties encountered in trying to correlate the findings of archaeology with the Biblical account of a military conquest of Canaan. Scholars by and large have written off the Biblical record as so much folklore and religious rhetoric. And this is where the matter has stood for the past 25 years" (Bryant Wood, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April, 1990, p. 49).

Evidence reexamined

Yet a reevaluation of Kenyon's work showed that her conclusions challenging biblical chronology were suspect, while the biblical account gained the strongest supporting evidence. Wood observes that Kenyon's thoroughgoing excavation methods and detailed reporting of her findings, however, did not carry over into her analytical work. When the evidence is critically examined there is no basis for her contention that City IV

the level of the city that was thought to correspond to Joshua's time] was destroyed . . . in the mid-16th century B.C.E. [before the Christian era]" (*ibid.*, p. 57).

Time magazine added the following: "Over the past three decades, the consensus has gone against the biblical version [of the fall of Jericho]. The late British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon established in the 1950s that while the ancient city was indeed destroyed, it happened around 1550 B.C., some 150 years before Joshua could have shown up. But archaeologist Bryant Wood . . . claims that Kenyon was wrong. Based on a re-evaluation of her research,



Sir Henry C. Rawlinson deciphered cuneiform, the style of writing used in the ancient Babylonian empire.

themselves to be influenced by the age of skepticism in theology. Consciously or unconsciously, they became biased against the biblical account.

Skeptical of fall of Jericho

An example of such bias surfaced recently in the matter of dating the fall of Jericho. According to the biblical record, Jericho was destroyed by the Israelites under Joshua when they began their conquest of the promised land. However, excavations of the site of Jericho led some—most notably, renowned British archaeologist

Photo courtesy Bettmann Archive

Wood says that the city's walls could have come tumbling down at just the right time to match the biblical account . . . Says Wood: 'It looks to me as though the biblical stories are correct' (Time, March 5, 1990, p. 43).

And so, the lively debate regarding the Bible's accuracy continues between conservative and liberal archaeologists.

Discoveries verify biblical accounts

As the 20th century has progressed, several archaeological finds verifying

the biblical record have come to light. In the early 1900s, German excavators under Robert Koldewey mapped the ancient capital of Babylon and found that it closely corresponded to the bib-

Continued on page 41

TWO JIGSAW PUZZLES, TWO PURPOSES

What can we say about the relationship between the Bible and archaeology? An illustration can help. Let us imagine two jigsaw puzzles. The first is the Bible, put together under the inspiration of God Himself. The pieces fit together perfectly. As God's Word says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, emphasis added).

This first puzzle's primary purpose is to reveal not science and history per se but the record of God's dealings with humankind. Much of this revelation is knowledge that cannot be examined under a microscope or perceived through our senses. It is knowledge revealed by God.

Throughout the Bible, a common theme is God's participation in human history. Whether it be the creation account, His dealings with Israel or the early New Testament Church, God is central.

Much of this information is not the kind that archaeology can discover through the study of ancient remains. Yet God's inspired account of His interaction with living, breathing people is inserted into writings about the physical surroundings of those people. Such information is genuine and true, since God "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2).

Limits of archaeology

The physical evidence can be likened to a second jigsaw puzzle, one based on scientific evidence and that is valuable to our faith by its ability to confirm the veracity of the biblical accounts.

The second jigsaw puzzle concerns how archaeology and related disciplines can reveal physical evidence concerning biblical history. The picture presented is partial; not all archaeological evidence has survived. Conclusions derived from archaeological discoveries are necessarily uncertain. Like a puzzle, pieces can be initially misplaced. As new discoveries are made or better interpretations are offered, the position of some pieces can shift. Many pieces are faded and worn, making placement difficult.

Dating of biblical sites is based primarily on surviving pottery, with its distinctive styles associated with specific historical periods. What remains is an incomplete picture of the past. As archaeologist Paul W. Lapp com-

mented, "Palestinian archaeology may be past infancy but has hardly gotten beyond childhood." Archaeology is a developing and imperfect science.

Some archaeologists estimate that only one thousandth of the original artifacts have survived. Some 5,000 sites are known to scientists in Palestine, and only about 350 have been excavated. Of these, fewer than 2 percent have been extensively excavated. All conclusions, then, are based on small amounts of evidence.

Significant portions of the Bible now corroborated

How should the relative scarcity of evidence affect our Christian beliefs? Our faith should not be based on possession of all the material and historical evidence. Definitive analysis is not a prerequisite for determining whether or not the Bible is historically accurate and true.

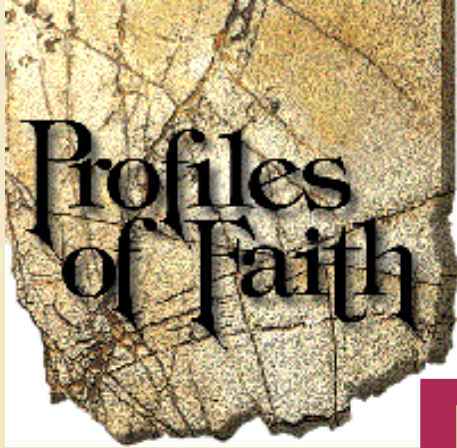
In spite of the relatively small amount of material that has been excavated and analyzed, considerable evidence confirming the biblical account is available. More is being uncovered all the time. Significant portions of the Old Testament historical record have now been corroborated by archaeology.

Bryant Wood notes the consensus of archaeologists on the following point: "The purpose of Biblical archaeology is to enhance our comprehension of the Bible, and so its greatest achievement, in my view, has been the extraordinary illumination of the . . . time of the Israelite monarchy" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, May-June, 1995, p. 33).

From c. 1000 B.C. through the New Testament period, the archaeological evidence is strong. Before that time, it is sparse. This is quite natural, considering the circumstances. As Wood explains: "Exploring that pre-history [before 1000 B.C.] is challenging: It requires tracing the archaeological record of a pastoral community, rather than an agrarian-based political entity that built cities and made contacts with surrounding nations" (*ibid.*, p. 35).

We will never possess all the physical evidence. Most has been destroyed by time and wear. We cannot reproduce miracles, nor can God's presence be examined and confirmed in a laboratory. Faith will always be based primarily on spiritual discernment and trust in God's Word. *GW*

—Mario Seiglie



Ruth

An Example of Faith and Devotion

by Jerold Aust

Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (Ruth 1:16).

For centuries, men and women uniting in holy matrimony have looked to Ruth’s famous words as a standard of unfailing devotion to each other. Although we live more than 3,000 years after Ruth, we can almost feel her emotions as we hear these words repeated in the modern marriage ceremony. Truly her words are timeless.

Few examples can compare to that of Ruth’s devotion to Naomi. Ruth’s loyal devotion can inspire us to remain faithful to God, His truth and His Church.

Blessing out of affliction

Ruth’s story begins in Bethlehem, in Judah, when a father and mother and their two sons strike out for greener pastures. Their homeland and people were suffering from a severe shortage of food and water.

This famine didn’t come upon the land just by chance. There were reasons for these dark days in Israel, then ruled by judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own

One Bible scholar describes this epoch: “The period of the judges was between the initial conquest of Palestine under Joshua and the establishment of the monarchy under Saul. It was a time of moral and political chaos in Israel with no strong central government or leader. The people repeatedly turned away from God and neighboring peoples constantly harassed and invaded the disorganized nation” (F.B. Huey, Jr., *The Expositor’s Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3, p. 509).

God had warned that, if the Israelites forgot His covenant, He would allow persecution and starvation and other physical deprivations (See Deuteronomy 28).

It was during such a stressful time that the members of a humble family in Israel decided they must live as aliens in a foreign land, Moab, on the other side of the Jordan River.

There was little food in Bethlehem and bleak prospects of garnering any. On the other hand, Moab was a fertile region with plenty of rain, and that land provided a haven for many who were hungry.

So it was that Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon and Chilion, all members of an Israelitish family, packed their belongings and headed east to a fertile garden in Moab. There they settled and were

blessed to find food and shelter.

More misfortune

But time and chance take their toll on everyone, even faithful Elimelech’s family. Tragedy struck. First Elimelech died, apparently before his time.

Suffering from the shock of life’s frailty, at the same time bearing the weight of responsibility of carrying on the family name, both sons took Moabite wives. Mahlon wed Ruth; Chilion married Orpah (Ruth 1:4, 4:10).

Misfortune struck again, and Naomi lost her two sons. Naomi was disheartened and determined to return to Bethlehem, for “she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them bread” (Ruth 1:6). She also realized that, in a foreign land, a wife without her husband as provider would find herself in desperate straits.

At first, Naomi assumed her daughters-in-law should return with her (Ruth 1:7). But then, as she considered her plight and options, she realized that her faithful Moabite daughters-in-law would undergo extreme difficulty finding new husbands in Israel. She urged them to remain in their land with their kinsmen and religion (Ruth 1:8, 9).

Ruth and Orpah both could have returned to Bethlehem with Naomi. But only Ruth chose to remain with her,



even though her prospects of finding a husband were not good and she would live as a widow in a foreign land. Ruth's determination to stay with Naomi was eloquent testimony to the sterling example Naomi had set for her daughters-in-law.

Naomi's heartfelt urging that Ruth and Orpah return to Moab had to be a touching scene. Naomi told Ruth: "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me" (Ruth 1:15-17).

Orpah returned to her homeland while Naomi and Ruth continued on the road to Bethlehem. Upon their arrival, the town buzzed with excitement, recognizing that one of the two women was Naomi. The women exclaimed, "Is this Naomi?" But she said unto them, "Do not call me Naomi [meaning "pleasant"]; call me Mara ["bitterly dealt with"], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. The Almighty has afflicted me" (Ruth 1:19-21).

So it was that faithful Naomi returned to Bethlehem with her Moabite daughter-in-law as the barley harvest was in full swing. Although Ruth couldn't know it then, her future blessings would spring from these afflictions.

Finding favor at harvesttime

The time of the return of Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem was providential, for it was harvesttime and they had no food. The barley harvest and subsequent wheat harvest were their best chance for finding sustenance. It was during these gatherings that Ruth labored in Boaz's field. Ruth's attitude while laboring in the fields, gathering and winnowing grain, served as a model for later generations of Israelite women.

Little wonder that the book of Ruth would be read in synagogues centuries later during the Feast of Weeks, a yearly



God guided Ruth to the field of Elimelech's kinsman, Boaz, a man of good character

festival that concluded the wheat harvest (A.S. Geden, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 4, p. 2528). This celebration was also known as Pentecost ("fiftieth [day]") to the New Testament Church (Acts 2), and it prophetically symbolized Jesus Christ's harvest of Christian lives (Matthew 9:36-38).

Ruth, in deference to her mother-in-law Naomi, requested permission to go alone into the fields to gather leftover grain: "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor."

Naomi replied to Ruth: "Go, my daughter" (Ruth 2:2).

The Scripture provided a precedent for the custom of gleaning. "The law expressly allowed the poor the right to glean in the fields (i.e., in the corners of the fields; Leviticus 19:9, 10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-21), but the owners of the fields were not always cooperative. A hard day's work under the hot sun frequently netted only a small amount of grain" (F.B. Huey Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 3, p. 527).

God had guided Ruth to the field of Elimelech's kinsman, Boaz. Boaz's

neighbors well knew his character, holding him in high esteem (Ruth 2:4). The very word *Boaz* means "in him is strength" or "man of strength." He lived up to his name.

Good advice

So it was that Boaz met Ruth, and would protect her and provided for her. "Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them.'

"Then she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?'

"And Boaz answered and said to her, 'It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge' (Ruth



young men working for him to let Ruth glean not just in the corners but even among the sheaves, where she could gather much more grain than was otherwise possible. He also told them to drop some wheat on the ground for her to find.

Gleaning turned out to be far more productive for Ruth than she had imagined possible. She brought home to Naomi a good supply of winnowed grain, enough for several weeks. In those times, someone could expect to glean only a few pounds of grain per day. Her amount from gleaning shows the regard the young men had for Boaz and his instructions to allow some of their harvested grain to fall to the ground in Ruth's path. It also speaks well of Ruth's diligence.

Naomi was pleased with such favor shown by Boaz to her daughter-in-law Ruth: "Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead! The man is a relative of ours, one of our near kinsmen" (Ruth 2:20).

Ruth honored Naomi's words of encouragement and gleaned "until the end" of the barley and wheat harvests (Ruth 2:23).

Redemption and blessings

Naomi began to see, once again, that God had not forgotten her. This was a critical time for her and Ruth, one that held exciting promise, especially for the daughter-in-law. Boaz was indeed a kinsman of Elimelech, Naomi's dead husband.

"Under the Levirate law (referred to by Naomi in Ruth 1:1-13), when a man died childless his brother was bound to raise an heir to him by the widow. This law extended to the next of kin, hence Naomi's plan. Ruth, by her action in verse 7, was claiming this right" (David and Pat Alexander, *Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible*, pp. 227, 228).

Naomi's plan included careful instructions for Ruth, and her words enhanced the aura of romance: "My

young women you were with, is he not our kinsman? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

"Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do. And [Ruth] said to her, 'All that you say to me I will do'" (Ruth 3:1-5).

What a trusting attitude Ruth had. Remember, she was not an Israelite; she was a Moabite, a gentile. God was working out His great purpose through Ruth, whose heart and mind were those of a spiritual Israelite led by God's Holy Spirit (compare Romans 2:29 with 2 Corinthians 3:3).

Boaz would not dishonor Ruth

Let's understand the literal meaning of "uncover his feet" (Ruth 3:4). The reader should be aware that the sexually permissive society in which we live is a far cry from the social values of Ruth's time.

"Those who interpret a sexual relation in the events reflect their twentieth-century cultural conditioning of sexual permissiveness. They fail to appreciate the element of Ruth's trust that Boaz would not dishonor her whom he wanted for his wife. They fail to appreciate the cultural taboos of Ruth's time that would have prevented a man of Boaz's position from taking advantage of Ruth, thereby destroying her reputation and perhaps endangering his own" (Huey, p. 538).

The moral character of Boaz and Ruth remains intact.

Boaz knew of another kinsman more closely related to Ruth than he. Boaz, manifesting exemplary integrity, addressed the situation straightforwardly: "There is a kinsman nearer than I," he told Ruth. "Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a near kinsman for you—good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, as the LORD lives!" (Ruth 3:12, 13).

The unfolding drama starkly contrasts

the two men. The nearer relative reacted agreeably to Boaz's mention of Naomi's land of inheritance, but, when Boaz noted the added responsibility of redeeming Ruth's inheritance, the man quickly declined. "And the near kinsman said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it. Buy it for yourself'" (Ruth 4:6, 8).

Today, as we read the account of Ruth, we know that the closest relative unknowingly denied himself a great opportunity. Boaz not only redeemed all of Naomi's inheritance, he claimed Ruth's as well.

"Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses this day. And all the people said, 'We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the LORD will give you from this young woman'" (Ruth 4:10-12).

So God blessed Naomi and Ruth through Boaz. Boaz took Ruth as his wife, and she bore him a son. Then Naomi's friends said to her: "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a near kinsman [redeemer]; and may his name be famous in Israel!" (Ruth 4:14).

Ruth became a forebear of Jesus

God blessed Ruth's faithfulness with her son, whom she named Obed. It was through Obed that Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David and direct ancestor of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Who would have thought Naomi would return to Bethlehem with only her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth? Who could have guessed that Ruth would figure in the lineage of Jesus Christ? No human being could have worked out this scenario. Faith in God and God's purpose contribute to such



miraculous results.

Had Ruth, a Moabitess, not proved faithful to her Israelite mother-in-law, she would not have returned with her, nor would Ruth have met and married Boaz, nor would she have had a son, Obed, who would become an ancestor of David and Jesus Christ.

Think for a moment all that worked against such an extraordinary outcome. By chance, Ruth met Naomi's son, Mahlon, whose family was forced by hardship to live as resident aliens in her country of Moab. By chance, she married Mahlon. By chance, her father-in-law, her brother-in-law and her husband all died in her homeland.

By chance, she insisted on returning with Naomi to Israel, to live as an alien in a strange land, away from her family, relatives, religion, homeland. By chance, she met Boaz and gained the opportunity to be redeemed and married.

By chance, Boaz married her, and together they had a son who figured in the direct lineage of the very Son of God.

Or did all of this occur by chance? To the casual observer, it might seem as if this all happened by chance. But, for those who live by faith—the same faith that Jesus Christ exercised here on earth—it becomes obvious that these miraculous events were directed by Almighty God. Ruth defied all the odds, and, even though she was a gentile, figures directly in the physical lineage of our Savior.

Ruth's faithful example extends far beyond her physical lineage. She figures prominently as a forerunner of spiritual Israel, the Church of God. She typifies the Old Testament prophecy to Abraham of the New Covenant Church, which would include gentiles and Israelites alike: "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" through Jesus Christ (Genesis 12:3).

Ruth's example acknowledged

Ruth's relationship to God while living among Israelites is aptly described by Peter in the New Testament when God gave the first gentiles His Holy Spirit: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by

Him" (Acts 10:34, 35).

God's impartiality is a bountiful blessing that neither Ruth, Boaz, nor Naomi could know during their time. But we are privileged to know such inspiring truths.

Ruth's example of faith was customarily recited in the temple and later in the synagogues during the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. Her example helps to signify our role and salvation in God's Church.

For instance, in Leviticus 23, God identifies two loaves of leavened bread offered during the Feast of Weeks: "You shall bring from your habitations two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the first-fruits to the LORD" (Leviticus 23:17).

These two loaves of leavened bread represent, at once, God's faithful disciples in both the old and new dispensations, but they also represent the two separate and now fused races of people who comprise the Church: gentiles and Israelites.

The leaven signifies our human nature, in a general sense, and the sin that so easily besets us (compare 1 Corinthians 5:6, 7 with Matthew 16:12 and Hebrews 12:1). The baked loaves show that all God's people, whether gentile or Israelite, whether part of the old or new dispensation, will have their faith forged through the fiery trials experienced in this life (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 1 Peter 1:7).

The focus of the book of Ruth highlights the barley and wheat harvests in Palestine, a time of reaping rewards from hard work and a foretaste of humanity's spiritual redemption. Even Bethlehem means "the house of bread." This motif shows God's strict adherence to detail. But, in a broader sense, God's prophetic plan is revealed through the story of Ruth and its correlation to the entire New Testament.

It is inspiring to read the contrast of Ruth's faith to that of the Israel of her time. Her undying devotion to Naomi and her redemption by Boaz attest to her humble obedience that transcends time, race and culture.

Although we leave Ruth at the end of this story, we can't forget her righteous and faithful example. *GN*

God's Family

Continued from page 13

of God by the resurrected, immortal sons of God will produce the wonderful world of the future. God is perfecting that spirit of love and mercy in those sons and daughters who are the first-fruits of His spiritual harvest (James 1:18) so they will befit His family and demonstrate to the world that obedience to God's law is the right way of life.

God is creating in His children His own divine nature, His holy and righteous character. The apostle Peter speaks of that spiritual nature, which we can share with Jesus Christ: "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:2-4).

Those who become like Jesus Christ at the resurrection will be more than just spirit beings similar to Him. They will share with Him the very nature of the Father. God gives that godly nature to such people when they receive the Holy Spirit, but only when they become fully like Jesus Christ will they have those divine characteristics perfected in them. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ . . . that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:16, 17, KJV).

Never underestimate the value of your life. You were born to become one of God's children. You were born to receive His very nature and, eventually, eternal life. You were born to become a member of the very family of God!

If you want to know more about how you can become a part of God's family, request our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *The Road to Eternal Life* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. *GN*

Stir Up the Spirit

Here's how you can rekindle the flame of God's Spirit within you!

by David Treybig

Not too many years ago, the ability to build a fire was a skill that was vital to many people's survival. Today, most of us simply adjust a thermostat when we want to heat our homes and a gas or electric furnace quickly brings the temperature to a comfortable level.

When my father grew up on a Texas farm during the 1920s, heating the house was not that easy. Fires in heating and cooking stoves had to be built almost every day. Chopping wood and keeping the wood box full were regular chores.

In time, as my father as a young boy gained more experience in building fires, he learned that starting a fire was much easier if he kept a live coal from the previous day's fire. To make a fire last during the night and provide live coals in the morning, he would "bank" it at night. Then the next morning, by blowing on or stirring up the coals to get more oxygen to them and make them red hot, he could easily rekindle the flames.

Almost 2,000 years ago, the apostle Paul, a highly educated former member of the Sanhedrin, used this simple fire-building analogy to remind Timothy of the marvelous power of God's Holy Spirit. In 2 Timothy 1:6 he wrote, "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

The Greek word for stir, *anazopureo*, "denotes 'to kindle afresh' or 'keep in full flame' . . . [It] is used metaphorically in 2 Tim. 1:6, where 'the gift of God' is regarded as a fire capable of dying out through neglect. The verb was in common use in the vernacular of the time" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, "Stir, Stir Up," p. 600).

This gift of God, which comes to us through the laying on of hands, is His Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18). In essence, Paul

likened God's Spirit to an ember in a dying fire; he encouraged Timothy to stir that live coal up, to fan it into flames.

Timeless encouragement

Paul's encouragement to Timothy is timeless advice for us. We must stir up God's Spirit within us. We must guard against letting the fire go out.

Throughout the Bible, God's Holy Spirit is described as one of the most important gifts God makes available to us. The people of ancient Israel, who could not consistently keep God's laws because they did not possess His Spirit, were promised that one day God's Spirit would help them to obey.

Ezekiel 36:26, 27 records God's words: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

Even today, obedience to God's law remains as an identifying sign of those with God's Spirit. The apostle Peter testified to this truth when he and the other apostles had to appear before the religious authorities of their time. On this occasion, shortly after the Day of Pentecost, when God gave the Holy Spirit to the Church (Acts 2), Peter said, "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit [which] God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

Paul also wrote to the Romans about God's Holy Spirit. He said: "The mind of the flesh [is] enmity towards God; for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither can [it be]. And those being in the flesh are not able to please God. But you are not in flesh, but in Spirit, since [the] Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone has not [the] Spirit of

Christ, this one is not His" (Romans 8:7-9, *The Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green).

The Holy Spirit thus makes it possible for us to please God, and identifies us as Christians. Given the importance of this gift, we can understand Paul's reasons for telling Timothy to stir up God's Spirit. To help Timothy, Paul continued, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Through this statement in his letter to Timothy, the apostle gave his protégé much to consider. Let us examine each of the four points in this verse more closely.

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear . . ."

Fear of other people and things and events around us is something we often have to come to grips with. No one likes to live in fear, but the sad reality is that most of us at times feel fearful. As God began working with Abraham, the man the Bible calls "the father of all those who believe" (Romans 4:11), God told him, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (Genesis 15:1). "Fear not," the King James Version says.

What a wonderful concept for us to understand as we come to God! He wants us to respect Him, but He does not want us to be frightened of anything. A simple saying encapsulates this truth: Know God, no fear. Its corollary expresses the opposite effect: No God, know fear.

King David had his ups and downs. On several occasions he fled to a void being killed. Though his enemies often sought his life, David found a remedy for his fears.

In Psalm 27:1-3, he wrote: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom

shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident.”

David found great peace in trusting God to take care of him. In verse 5 of the same psalm, David continued: “For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.” In his own meditations, David could envision God hiding him in a secret place in His house or setting him high on a rock so his enemies could not reach him.

Small children often seek out secret hiding places so they can escape perceived troubles. As God’s children, even we adults should realize we have a hiding place with God, where we can be cared for and comforted.

God’s Holy Spirit performs this comforting function for us. It drives away our fears. David knew his faith in God sustained him through his difficult times. He said, “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living” (verse 13).

In taking this refuge from fear, David knew the importance of coming before God with a pure mind. That is why he asked God to create in him a clean heart and renew a right spirit within him. David realized God could take His Spirit from him if he did not approach God in this attitude (Psalm 51:10, 11). When David was able to maintain this proper outlook, he could pray to God with the confidence that God would save him (Psalm 55:16-18).

Paul enumerated for the Christians at Rome these same principles: “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit [itself] testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:15-16, New International Version).

Abba is Aramaic for “father.” The Life Application Bible, commenting on this verse, says: “Paul uses adoption or ‘sonship’ to illustrate the believer’s new relationship with God. In Roman cul-

ture, the adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate child in his new family. He became a full heir to his new father’s estate. Likewise, when a person becomes a Christian, he or she gains all the privileges and responsibilities of a child in God’s family.”

One of God’s gifts that He imparts to us through His Spirit is freedom from fear. As Paul said in verse 31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

“... but of power”

The Holy Spirit was prophesied to come upon Christ’s disciples and empower them to do God’s work. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be wit-

Paul likened God’s Spirit to an ember in a dying fire. He urged Timothy to fan that live coal into flames.

nesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The Greek word for power, *dunamis*, “denotes ‘inherent ability, capability, ability to perform anything’” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, “Might,” p. 406). This same word is used to describe miracles, supernatural occurrences (Acts 8:13; Acts 19:11; 1 Corinthians 12:10). God’s Spirit, then, is a power that works miracles.

The supernatural power of God’s Spirit often figured in the lives of early Christians. The apostle Peter, who denied Christ on three occasions before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:34, 75), spoke powerfully to the public on the Day of Pentecost after he had received God’s Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14).

Stephen, one of the first deacons, “did great wonders and signs among the people” through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:8).

Even Simon the magician, who was

thought of as possessing great power apart from God, was amazed at the miracle-working capacity of the Holy Spirit and audaciously offered to buy it (Acts 8:9-11, 13, 18, 19).

This same powerful Spirit is available to us today. There is no need for us to feel afraid or be discouraged because of our problems. Relationships can be rebuilt, sinful habits can be overcome, and confidence in God can replace our human fears.

God’s Holy Spirit, at our baptism, makes it all possible (Acts 19:5, 6). If you have not yet been baptized—if you have not yet received God’s Holy Spirit—we invite you to write for our booklet *The Road to Eternal Life*, which will show you the steps you must take to receive this wonderful gift from God.

“... and of love”

Love is the first of many attributes of God’s Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Paul said love is greater than faith or hope (1 Corinthians 13:13). When the Bible speaks of love, however, it is speaking of something different from what we normally think of when we hear the word. As humans, we think of love as primarily an emotion. Humans often look at love as something capricious, almost with a mind of its own, that takes place outside of our control.

When it comes to religion, many people believe we don’t really have to do anything out of obedience as long as we love everyone, as long as we hold warm and emotional feelings for God and our fellowman.

The Bible, however, describes love as godly action that builds an emotional bond. This approach teaches us that we hold certain responsibilities in our relationships with God and our fellowman.

Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

The apostle John wrote: “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” (1 John 5:2, 3).

Though Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8), He expects us to live in obedience to God and His laws as we grow in godly love.

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Living a Great Miracle— Being Led by God’s Spirit

by Jim Franks

God commands that, in the late spring of every year, a special day be observed (Leviticus 23:15-21). It is commonly called Pentecost, from the Greek *pentekoste*. The Jews refer to it in various ways. One is as *Shavuot*, meaning “Weeks,” because the date of its observance is determined by counting a specific number from an earlier religious observance.

Another name given it is *Hag Hakatzir*, the Festival of the Harvest, for it marks the harvesting of the wheat, the last grain harvest of the spring harvest season. And, in that context, it is also called *Yom HaBik-kurim*, the Day of the Firstfruits. There is much significance to this festival, which is vitally important for Christians.

When celebrating this festival we know as Pentecost, the descendants of the ancient Israelites are reminded of one of the greatest events in their history—the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. In his book *To Be a Jew*, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin writes: “Shavuot commemorates the awesome event experienced by the children of Israel seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt when they camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula. This event was the Revelation, when God’s will was revealed to Israel. It marked the declaration of the Ten Commandments . . . While the exact manner of this communication between God and man is not known and was always subject to various opinions by the great thinkers and Sages of Israel, it was an event of awesome proportions and a unique spiritual experience that indelibly stamped the Israelites with their unique character, their faith, and their destiny.”

The events leading up to this time—

the Exodus of the Israelites from slavery, the death of Egypt’s firstborn, the crossing of the Red Sea, the giving of manna from heaven and the giving of the law—were miracles that had a tremendous impact on the history both of Israel and much of the world. As Christians, we sometimes forget that another great miracle has taken place in all our lives. It is one of the greatest miracles of all time, the coming of God’s Holy Spirit.

Celebrating another great miracle

The Feast of Pentecost is a celebration of that event, a reminder to each of us that God works in us through His Spirit. For humans to be changed and led by God’s Spirit is one of the greatest miracles of all.

When we study the Day of Pentecost in the Bible, we find the beginnings of this great miracle. In Acts 1:8, we read Christ’s instructions to His disciples: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (New American Standard Bible).

This promise from Christ was dramatically fulfilled within a few days of His statement. This occurred on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2. Peter concluded his sermon on that day with these words: “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself” (verses 38, 39, NASB).

After the physical manifestations that are described in the first verses of Acts 2, we find the Holy Spirit descending on a large group of people. Their lives were changed dramatically. They were led by God’s Holy Spirit

from that time forward.

The book of Acts is replete with the stories of these people’s lives and the impact they had on the society of that day. The change was so evident that they were accused of having “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Such was the dramatic, dynamic power of the Holy Spirit.

Being led by the Holy Spirit

When we make reference to someone who is led by the Holy Spirit, as these people were, we must make sure we understand what is being said. This is discussed in detail by the apostle Paul in Romans 8:1-28, where he shows how the Holy Spirit works in the life of a Christian. In verse 14, Paul states: “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Here we see that a Christian is defined as one who is led by the Spirit of God.

We find this same thought in verse 9. Here Paul dogmatically states that if you don’t have the Spirit dwelling in you then you do “not belong” to God (NASB).

The implication is that it is through God’s Spirit and “Christ in us” (Colossians 1:27) that we actually accomplish what we do as Christians, rather than through our own efforts. The glory and credit must go to God.

However, it isn’t enough to simply be *led* by God’s Spirit. We must allow God, through His Spirit, to rule over our lives. The Holy Spirit must be allowed to become the energizing force in our lives to produce the qualities of true Christianity. We must ask ourselves if we are truly being led by God’s Spirit and if we are allowing it to serve as the guiding force in our lives.

Understanding the Holy Spirit

To grasp how God’s Spirit works in our lives, we must understand what

God's Spirit is. The Holy Spirit is not an individual person, along with God the Father and Jesus Christ, forming a "Holy Trinity." There simply is not biblical evidence for the Holy Spirit to be thought of as a separate person, apart from the Father and the Son. (See "Just What Is the Holy Spirit?," p. 36.) In Scripture, the Holy Spirit is described as the *power* of God at work in our lives. This divine power of God emanates from the Father, allowing us to be "led by the Spirit of God" (Romans 8:14).

What does God's Holy Spirit do for us as Christians? This question affects the very core of our religious beliefs, because without the power of God's Spirit in our lives we would have no relationship with the Father. It is because this Spirit is dwelling within us that we are the children of God (Romans 8:14-17).

It is important that we understand what it means to be "led by the Spirit." God's Spirit doesn't drive, drag or push us around; it *leads* us. It will not prevent us from sinning, nor will it force us to do what is right. It leads us, and we must be willing to follow.

God's Spirit at work

Exactly how does God's Spirit lead us? Let's consider a few ways.

The Holy Spirit keeps us in contact with God's mind. God's Spirit works with our mind. The apostle John describes it this way: "Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit [which] He has given us" (1 John 3:24). Through the Holy Spirit, which is given to us, we can be influenced by God for the good. This is in contrast to the situation in the world around us and our own human nature.

The Holy Spirit provides a deeper understanding of God's Word and His will for humanity. As 1 Corinthians 2:9-11 tells us: "But as it is written, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows

the things of God except the Spirit of God" (emphasis added throughout).

Without that Spirit, a person cannot understand God's divinely expressed Word and will, "for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (verse 14).

God's help in overcoming

The Holy Spirit makes overcoming possible. There is nothing too difficult for us with the power of God working in our lives. Romans 8:26 tells us that God's Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. Paul, the writer of the letter to the Romans, speaking for all of us said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Jesus Christ promises Christians, "With God all things are possible"

God's Spirit doesn't drive, drag or push us around; it leads us, and we must be willing to follow.

(Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27). The Christian life is to be one of overcoming. We must not believe that God wants us to remain just as we are whenever we are called. Instead, we must "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Christianity is a lifetime of overcoming and growing.

The Holy Spirit convicts our conscience and helps us see sin as it really is. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, which would be given to His followers after His death, Jesus Christ said it would "convict the world of sin . . ." (John 16:8). God's Spirit within us, working with our conscience, helps us to recognize and avoid sin. The guilt that we feel is real, prompted by recognition of sins.

Hebrews 9:14 tells us that Jesus Christ's sacrifice "cleanse[s] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God," meaning that we have forgiveness from God, and, through repentance, we no longer need feel guilt for

our sins. Christ's sacrifice washes away the sin in our lives, but we must still come to understand sin and how it affects us. Repentance must precede the forgiveness that God promises to each one of us, and repentance means change and effort to avoid sin.

Fruit of God's Spirit

The Holy Spirit produces godly fruit in our lives. Just as an apple tree produces apples, God's Spirit produces a particular type of fruit in the life of a Christian. Galatians 5:22, 23 lists the fruit that should be evident in the lives of those who are led by God's Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Each aspect of this fruit is worthy of a detailed study in itself, coupled with a self-analysis to see to what degree it is are manifest in your life.

The Holy Spirit comforts and encourages us. Jesus Christ promised to send His followers "another comforter" (John 14:16, KJV). True comfort and reassurance come from the Spirit of God dwelling in us. We need not be unduly worried about the future or what may happen to us. God's Spirit gives us the assurance that whatever happens will be for the good "to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

This provides an outlook on life that is quite rare in our world today. It is certainly possible for a Christian to become discouraged, but it is through the Holy Spirit that we can begin to look upon life differently. As noted above, peace is one aspect of the fruit of God's Spirit in the life of a Christian.

Annual reminder of miracles

The gift of God's Holy Spirit should make us exceedingly thankful. Just as we must recognize the great power of God to perform miracles in the days of the ancient Israelites, so we must not forget the power of God to work miracles in our lives.

The Feast of Pentecost is an annual reminder that God is still a miracle-working God. Whenever an individual is granted God's Holy Spirit, he becomes a walking miracle. One of the greatest miracles of all time is going on in our very midst. That miracle is for a human being to be led by God's Holy Spirit! *GN*

Just What Is the Holy Spirit?

*Is it the third person of the Trinity, or something altogether different?
You might be surprised at what the Bible really says!*

by Scott Ashley

Exactly who—or what—is the Holy Spirit? Many assume that the Holy Spirit, along with God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son, form what is commonly known as the Trinity. This doctrine expresses a belief in one God who exists in three distinct but equal persons. Is the Holy Spirit a third divine person, along with God the Father and Jesus Christ?

The word *Trinity* doesn't appear anywhere in the Bible. It didn't come into common use as a religious term until after the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), several centuries after the last books of the Bible were completed.

A.W. Tozer, in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, writes that the Trinity is an “incomprehensible mystery,” and that attempts to understand it “must remain forever futile.” He admits that churches, “without pretending to understand,” have nevertheless continued to teach this doctrine. He concludes, “The fact that it [the Trinity] cannot be satisfactorily explained, instead of being against it, is in its favor” (Harper & Row, New York, 1961, pp. 17, 18, 23).

Unger's Bible Dictionary, in its article on the Trinity, concedes that the Trinitarian concept is humanly incomprehensible: “It is admitted by all who thoughtfully deal with this subject that the Scripture revelation here leads us into the presence of a deep mystery; and that all human attempts at expression are of necessity imperfect” (Moody Press, Chicago, 1966, p. 1118).

Why is the concept of the Holy Spirit as a third person of a supposedly triune Godhead, along with God the Father and Jesus Christ, so difficult to grasp?

Because the Bible does not teach it! You cannot prove something from the Bible that is not biblical. The Bible is our only reliable source of divine revelation and truth, and the Trinity con-

cept is not part of God's revelation to humankind.

The Holy Spirit—the power of God

The Holy Spirit, rather than being a distinct person, is spoken of in the Bible as being *God's divine power*. The *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, in its article on the Holy Spirit, describes it as “[t]he manifestation of divine presence and power perceptible especially in prophetic inspiration” (Vol. 3, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 260).

Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit as the power of God (Zechariah 4:6; Micah 3:8). Paul told Timothy that it

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is the “*spirit of . . . power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:7, emphasis added throughout).

Luke 4:14 records that Jesus Christ began His ministry “in the *power* of the Spirit.” Speaking of the Holy Spirit, which would be given to His followers after His death, Jesus told them, “You shall receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you . . .” (Acts 1:8).

Peter relates how “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and *with power*, [and Jesus] went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, *for God was with Him*” (Acts 10:38). The Holy Spirit is here associated with the *power* by which God was *with Him*—the power through which Jesus Christ per-

formed mighty miracles during His earthly, physical ministry. The Holy Spirit is the very *presence* of God's power actively working in His servants.

The apostle Paul's desire was that the members of the church in Rome would “abound in hope by the *power* of the Holy Spirit,” in the same way that Jesus Christ had worked through him “in mighty signs and wonders, *by the power of the Spirit of God*” (Romans 15:13, 19).

Divine inspiration by the Spirit

Repeatedly the Scriptures reveal that God imparts His divine inspiration to His prophets and servants through the Holy Spirit. Peter noted that “prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

Paul stated that God's plan had been “revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:5), and that his own teachings were inspired by the spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10, explains that God through His Spirit has revealed to us the things which He has prepared for those who love Him. God the Father is the Revealer, working through His Spirit in those who serve Him.

Jesus Christ told His followers that the Holy Spirit, which the Father would send to them, “will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26).

It is through God's Spirit within us that we can gain spiritual understanding and insight. “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save [through] the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but [through] the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are

freely given to us of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11, 12).

Jesus Christ had this spiritual understanding in abundance. As the Messiah, He was prophesied to have “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:2).

Other attributes of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is spoken of in many ways that demonstrate that it is not a divine person. For example, the Holy Spirit is referred to as *a gift* (Acts 10:45; 1 Timothy 4:14). We are told that it can be *quenched* (1 Thessalonians 5:19), that it can be *poured out* (Acts 2:17; 10:45), and that we are *baptized with it* (Matthew 3:11). It must be *stirred up* within us (2 Timothy 1:6), and it also *renews* us (Titus 3:5). These are certainly not attributes of a person.

This Spirit is also called “the Holy Spirit of promise . . . the guarantee of our inheritance . . . the spirit of wisdom and revelation . . .” (Ephesians 1:13, 14, 17).

This Spirit is not only the Spirit of God the Father; it is also “the Spirit of

Christ” (Romans 8:9; Philippians 1:19; 1 Peter 1:11). It dwells within Christians, leading and enabling us to be children of God (Romans 8:14).

In contrast to God the Father and Jesus Christ, who are consistently compared to human beings in their form and shape, the Holy Spirit is just as consistently represented in a completely different manner. It is described as appearing as a dove (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) and as “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3). Jesus Christ compared it with “living water” (John 7:37-39).

There is further evidence that the Holy Spirit is not a person, but is the divine power of God. In Matthew 1:20, we read that Jesus was begotten by the Holy Spirit (Moffatt translation). Yet Jesus Christ continually prayed to and addressed the Father, not the Holy Spirit, as His father (Matthew 10:32, 33; 11:25-27; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17, 27; 18:10, 35). He never represented the Holy Spirit as His Father.

Paul didn't acknowledge the Trinity

If God were a Trinity, surely the apostle Paul, who recorded much of the

theological underpinnings of the early Church, would have understood and taught this understanding. Yet we find no such concept in his writings.

Paul's standard greeting in his letters to churches, as well as individuals to whom he wrote, is, “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” There is no mention of the Holy Spirit.

This same greeting, with only minor variations, appears in every epistle that bears Paul's name: Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; and Philemon 3.

The Holy Spirit is *always* left out of these greetings—an unbelievable oversight if the Holy Spirit were indeed a person coequal with God and Jesus Christ.

This is even more surprising when we consider that the churches to which Paul wrote had many gentile members from polytheistic backgrounds who had formerly worshiped numerous

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GRAMMAR CONFUSES THE NATURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Much of the confusion among English-speaking peoples (and in English translations of the Bible) regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit centers on the Greek language's use of gender pronouns. Greek, like the Romance languages (Spanish, French, Italian and others), uses a specific gender for every noun. Every object, animate or inanimate, is referred to as being either masculine, feminine or neuter.

A noun's gender is usually arbitrary and has nothing to do with whether it in reality refers to something masculine or feminine. For example, in French a book, *livre*, is referred to in the masculine sense, as a “he.” In German, a girl, *mädchen*, is referred to in the neuter sense, as an “it.” By contrast, in English, nouns that aren't specifically masculine or

feminine are referred to as “it.”

In the New Testament, the words used most often in reference to the Holy Spirit are a mixture of masculine and neuter. The Greek word *parakletos* is translated “Comforter” or “Helper.” The comforter that Christ promised He would send to the disciples in the 14th, 15th and 16th chapters of John is a masculine word and thus would be referred to by the pronouns “he,” “him,” “his” and “himself” throughout those chapters. However, this is strictly a grammatical tool and not a statement on the nature of the Holy Spirit.

The other word used most often of the Holy Spirit is the Greek word *pneuma*. It is translated as “breath” or “spirit” and means breath, breeze, wind or spirit. It is the root of our modern word *pneumatic*, meaning

pertaining to or operated by air or wind. *Pneuma* is a grammatically neuter word and thus should be referred to in English by such neuter terms as “it,” “its” or “itself.”

The translators of the King James Version, influenced by the Trinity doctrine, generally mistranslated pronouns referring to *pneuma* as masculine rather than neuter. There are a few exceptions in the KJV in which the translation was properly handled, such as Romans 8:16: “The Spirit *itself* beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

Later English translations of the Bible, following the lead of the King James Version, translated references to the Holy Spirit as masculine, thus it is almost always referred to as “he” or “him” in modern versions. **GN**

—Scott Ashley

What the Bible Says About Baptism

What does the Bible teach about baptism? Baptism is one of the most important beliefs of Christianity, but why? What is this ceremony all about? Is baptism merely an archaic symbol, or does it hold a deep meaning for the modern Christian? Does it matter which method of baptism is used: sprinkling, pouring, immersion or some other technique? When should one be baptized? Let's examine what the Bible says about this important subject.

Before we search the Scriptures for the answers to these questions, let's examine some pertinent historical factors and language considerations. Baptism is rooted in the Old Testament. For example, in the book of Exodus, God required the priests to ritually bathe themselves before offering sacrifices (Exodus 30:17-20). The Jews properly viewed ritual bathing as an act that represented cleansing from sin. In time, they applied this principle to gentiles desiring to convert to Judaism.

The *Holman Bible Dictionary* comments: "At some point close to the time of Jesus, Judaism began a heavy emphasis on ritual washings to cleanse from impurity. This goes back to priestly baths prior to offering sacrifices (Leviticus 16:4, 24). Probably shortly prior to the time of Jesus or contemporary with Him, Jews began baptizing Gentile converts, though circumcision still remained the primary entrance rite into Judaism" (article "Baptism").

Because of this precedent, no one considered it strange for John the Baptist or Jesus to emphasize baptism in their ministries. Later, the apostles compared baptism to Old Testament events, Peter likening Noah's protection in the ark (1 Peter 3:20, 21) and Paul likewise relating Israel's crossing the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:2) as types, or forerunners, of baptism.

As Bible dictionaries show, the word translated into English as baptism is from the Greek word *baptizo*, meaning "to dip into" or "immerse." The Greek language clearly uses different words to express sprinkling or pouring, none of which ever refers to baptism. The New Testament reveals that baptism was usually performed in a river, with those who were baptized coming out of the water after being immersed.

Discussion: God sent a special messenger preceding Jesus Christ who taught the need for baptism. What was his message? (John 1:19-27).

- Did John the Baptist emphasize repentance as necessary for baptism? What did John expect to see demonstrated as a result of repentance? (Matthew 3:1-11).

Note: John's message regarding baptism differed from contemporary religious teaching in that he taught that baptism was much more than simply a symbol of ceremonial cleansing. He taught a baptism of repentance, confession of sin and the need for moral cleansing (verses 5-8). For more information on repentance, review the study "What Is Repentance?" in *The Good News* of January 1996.

- Did Jesus come to John the Baptist to be baptized by John? How did the Father demonstrate His approval of Christ's baptism? (Matthew 3:13-17).

Note: The sinless Son of God did not need to be baptized, but He sought baptism to fulfill all righteousness and to set an example for His followers. Note verse 16, which states that Jesus "came up immediately from the water."

- After Jesus Himself was baptized, did He encourage His disciples to be baptized and, on His behalf, to baptize others? Why do you think Christ taught this? (John 3:22; 4:1, 2).

- With what instructions did Jesus commission His Church before He ascended to heaven? (Mark 16:16).

Note: Jesus felt that the need for baptism was so important He commissioned His Church to go all over the world and baptize disciples who believe the gospel message. Let's now review in greater detail why baptism is so vitally important as a process of salvation.

- Why do you think Peter clearly emphasized the need for repentance and baptism to receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit? (Acts 2:38).

Note: Converting to Christianity is more than simply

accepting Christ as one's personal Savior. Even demons believe and know that Christ is the Son of God (James 2:19, 20), yet they are not offered salvation. Peter stresses the necessity for repentance and baptism for the removal of sins. Repentance involves a complete change in our thinking and a recognition of our need for the shed blood of Christ to cleanse us from sin. As a result of this understanding, the next step of salvation is baptism.

Baptism is a serious, life-altering commitment. For this reason, baptism is reserved for mature adults who understand the importance of this meaningful commitment. In the whole of the New Testament, there is not a single example of an infant or child being baptized.

Discussion: How do you think Paul came to this important understanding, comparing baptism to a death, burial and resurrection? (Romans 6:3, 4).

Note: The symbolism of the watery grave of baptism communicates profound meanings. First, as an ordinance, baptism represents our faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as our Lord and Master. We accept the shed blood of Christ for our sins and picture the death of our former life in the baptismal grave. As Christ was resurrected a spirit, our coming out of the grave (rising out of the baptismal waters) symbolizes our new, converted, Spirit-led life. Our understanding the true meaning of repentance and conversion lifts baptism to more than symbol status; it becomes a profound, life-changing event!

Notice how Paul refers to baptism as a call to walk in "newness of life." In Romans 6:11, he states that we, rather than facing death, are now "alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Baptism is an outward sign of an inward change of heart and mind. This powerful picture of a new life committed to obedience and faith is so important it is also discussed in 1 Peter 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22-2:3; Ephesians 4:22; and Colossians 3:10. As Paul mentions in Romans 6:1, 2, our new life in Christ Jesus should propel those of us "who have died to sin" to desire to live in it no longer, that it should not reign over us. Finally, another symbol of baptism is that it pictures our faith in Jesus to resurrect us from death when He returns (Romans 6:4; 8:9-11).

- What name should a Christian be baptized into? Why? (Matthew 28:19).

Note: We are baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not into any particular sect or denomination. This does not mean, however, that Christians should be independently preaching their own messages. Christ established His Church and actively leads it to powerfully fulfill the commission

of Jesus Christ to baptize disciples and preach the gospel to the world (Mark 16:15, 16).

- What significant event should follow the act of baptism? (Acts 8:14-18).

Note: Baptism cleanses us from our past sins, but Jesus Christ does not leave us alone to face the future. He offers us the precious gift of His Holy Spirit to empower us for a life of overcoming and serving others and Him in obedience and faith. God's Spirit is imparted to us by the "laying on of hands."

- In what way was the laying on of hands used in the Old Testament? (Numbers 8:10-12).

Note: Much like baptism, the practice of laying on of hands has its history in the Old Testament. In ancient times, this practice, often accompanied by anointing with oil, set men apart for the specific offices of king and priest. It was also invoked to set sacrifices apart for holy use.

Discussion: Since the time of Jesus, the laying on of hands after baptism signifies the actual receiving of the Holy Spirit and the setting apart of a convert as a child of God. It is only through the gift of God's Spirit that we can develop the godly attitude of obedience and faith. Scriptures that refer to the laying on of hands include Acts 9:18; Acts 19:6 and 2 Timothy 1:6.

Further study: Baptism is an essential part of the process of conversion and salvation. All who repent of their sins and accept Jesus Christ as Savior should be baptized. Our Savior was sinless, yet He was baptized as our example, and taught His disciples the important meaning of baptism. Baptism, performed in water deep enough to immerse or completely dip the believer, holds profound meaning:

- It represents our faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as our Lord and Master.
- It pictures a new, converted life on our coming out of the watery grave.
- It pictures our faith in Jesus Christ to resurrect us from death when He returns.
- It pictures our being set apart as children of God, and is followed by the laying on of hands, portraying the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

The result of baptism is the opportunity for you to have a changed life with spiritual guidance and direction through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, leading you into the Kingdom of God! *GN*

—Greg Thomas

Stir Up

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Peter tried to explain this expectation to the Sadducees when he said, “And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit [which] God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32). With obedience comes godly love.

Perhaps the actions that identify godly love are best illustrated by Christ’s admonition to us to love our enemies (Luke 6:27, 32, 35). Our human emotions tell us we cannot love our enemies, but, with God’s Spirit, we can.

Godly love, then, is more than just a feeling. It includes action. John said, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

Paul told us to “pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14:19). Clearly, godly love entails active effort.

When we practice godly love, we establish an emotional bond between us and God and between us and other Christians. With this as our approach, Paul said nothing would “separate us from the love of Christ” (Romans 8:35-39). Jesus Christ Himself said people would recognize His disciples by the love they showed for one another (John 13:34, 35).

The ties we Christians have for each other come in large measure from our understanding that godly love is more than an unpredictable feeling. Galatians 5:14 says: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Some people believe this means God’s law is no longer important if one can summon up an emotional feeling for his neighbor.

The preceding scriptures, however, show the error of this approach. In reality, someone who loves his neighbor in a godly way is respecting and obeying God’s law, not doing away with it. Paul was not contradicting Jesus, the other apostles and himself with his words about love. God’s Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to practice godly love.

“ . . . and of a sound mind.”

When God’s Holy Spirit lives in us, we are to think different thoughts. In

Romans 12:2, Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

God’s Spirit makes it possible for us to prove, or test, God’s way for ourselves. We do not simply take someone else’s word for how we should live.

Paul illustrated this concept in his first letter to the Corinthian church. “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom,” Paul wrote, “but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4, 5). Paul wanted the Corinthian brethren to place their trust in God, not in him or another human.

Paul continued: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit” (verses 7-10).

Paul wanted the members of the church at Corinth to understand that God’s Spirit helped them understand principles and truths hidden to others (verses 12, 13). He equated the Spirit-led mind of a Christian with “the mind of Christ” (verse 16). Through God’s Holy Spirit, we, too, can have a sound mind that understands God’s ways.

After Paul told Timothy to “stir up the gift of God,” he gave him the four concepts to meditate upon (2 Timothy 1:6, 7). Then he continued, in verse 8, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.”

Paul urged Timothy to act on the power he had been given. We also need to meditate on the Holy Spirit’s working in our lives. Thinking on these things can help us to be powerful witnesses of His way of life.

Do not forget to stir up God’s gift! **GN**

Holy Spirit

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gods. Paul’s epistles record no attempt on his part to explain the Trinity or Holy Spirit as a divine person equal with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

In Paul’s writings, only in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is the Holy Spirit mentioned along with God the Father and Jesus Christ, and there only about our “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (New International Version) with God and Christ.

The apostle Paul states clearly that “there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (1 Corinthians 8:6). He makes no mention of the Holy Spirit as a divine person.

Other perspectives

Jesus Christ did not speak of the Holy Spirit as a third divine person; instead He only spoke of the relationship between Him and God the Father (Matthew 26:39; Mark 13:32; 15:34; John 5:18, 22; 8:16, 18; 10:30; 13:3; 17:11). Some passages, like Christ’s reference to the “Helper” or “Comforter” in John 14, 15 and 16, could easily be read as referring to a person. However, there is no reason to do so from the original language (see “Grammar Confuses the Nature of the Holy Spirit,” p. 37).

Most Bible scholars, as pointed out in many translation notes, agree that the one biblical passage that most obviously supports a Trinity—the latter portion of 1 John 5:7 and the beginning of the following verse—is readily acknowledged by Bible scholars as a spurious addition made long after John’s epistle was written. The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* dismisses this passage as “obviously a late gloss with no merit” (Vol. 12, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 353).

In the final book of the Bible (and the last to be written), the Holy Spirit is conspicuously absent. The book describes “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1) wherein “the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them” (verse 3). Jesus Christ, “the Lamb,” is also there (verse 22). The Holy Spirit, however, is completely missing—an incredible oversight if this Spirit is the third person of a Trinity. **GN**

Archaeology

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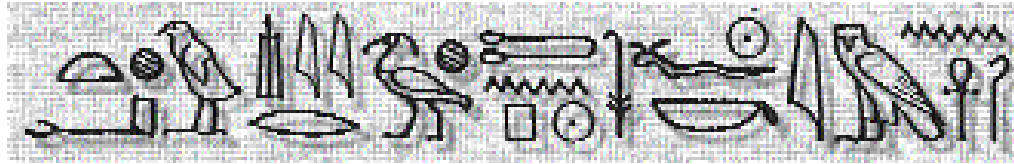
lical description. Egyptian history and culture generally matched the biblical accounts.

The archaeologist's spade has uncovered evidence of other ancient peoples mentioned in Scripture. One such example is the Hittite kingdom, mentioned only in the Bible, which had been dismissed by many critics as mythological. As Gleason Archer mentions: "The references [in the Bible] to the Hittites were treated with incredulity and condemned as mere fiction on the part of late authors of the Torah" (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 1974, p. 165). Yet, excavations in Syria and Turkey revealed many Hittite monuments and documents. These discoveries proved the Hittites to have been a mighty nation, with an empire extending from Asia Minor to parts of Israel.

Also important was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, written in ancient Hebrew script. The scrolls were found in caves near the Dead Sea in 1947. Some of them are books of the Old Testament written more than 100 years before Christ's time. Nevertheless, questions raised by earlier critics about the Bible's authenticity have shaken the faith of many.

Added dimension in understanding

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains: "There were nineteenth-century scholars who were convinced that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and perhaps even Moses were simply imaginary creations of later Israelite authors. But archaeology has put these persons in a real world. As a result, a scholar such as J[ohn] Bright, after devoting thirty-six pages to the subject, can write, 'the Bible's picture of the patriarchs is deeply rooted in history' . . . Archaeology supplies means for understanding many of the biblical situations[;] it adds the dimension of reality to pictures that otherwise would be strange and somewhat unreal, and therefore it provides an element of credibility. While the person of faith does not ask for proof, he does want to



feel that his faith is reasonable and not mere fantasy. Archaeology, by supplying him with material remains from biblical times and places, and by interpreting these data, provides a context of reality for the biblical story and reasonability for biblical faith" (1979, Vol. 1, p. 244).

Archaeological discoveries in Egypt and Iraq have been valuable in confirming the biblical account. However, much evidence still remains beneath

An atheist who set out to refute the Bible found himself accepting the Bible as God's Word because of his archaeological discoveries.

the surface. Much of the territory of the biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah remains to be archaeologically explored.

Not until the end of World War I, when some of this area came under British control, did prolonged scientific surveys and excavations begin.

After the Balfour Declaration in 1917, Jews began to arrive in Palestine; the British, Americans and others were joined in digs by Jews in their ancestral homelands. Today there are some 300 sizable excavations underway in Israel, an extraordinary number for a country only 200 miles long and 60 miles wide.

Archaeology makes a believer

The abundance of archaeological evidence in support of the Bible can strengthen faith, and in some cases it has greatly contributed to giving birth to belief where none existed before.

An example of physical evidence building one's faith is the life of Englishman William M. Ramsay (1851-1939). Born in the lap of luxury, Ramsay was dutifully raised as a nonbeliever by his atheist parents. He graduated from Oxford University with a doctorate in philosophy and became a professor at the University of Aberdeen.

Determined to undermine the historical accuracy of the Bible, he studied archaeology with the aim of disproving the biblical account. Once ready with the necessary scientific tools and learning, he traveled to Palestine and focused on the book of Acts, which he fully expected to refute as nothing more than myth.

After a quarter-century of work, Ramsay was awestruck by the accuracy of the book of Acts. In his quest to refute the Bible, Ramsay discovered many facts which confirmed its accuracy.

He had to concede that Luke's account of the events and setting recorded in the narrative were exact even in the smallest detail. Far from attacking the biblical account, Ramsay produced a book, *St. Paul, the Traveler and Roman Citizen*, which supported it.

Eventually, William Ramsay shook the intellectual world by writing that he had converted to Christianity. Ironically, this man who set out to refute the Bible, found himself accepting the Bible as God's Word because of his explorations and discoveries. For his contribution to biblical knowledge with his many books, he was knighted also.

The study of archaeology can help fortify faith. It allows us to take a fascinating journey back in time to study the stones and artifacts that bear mute but compelling witness to the truth of Scripture.

What else has been found? Future articles in *The Good News* will describe discoveries that parallel and illuminate the biblical account. *GN*

The Juggling Act

Working mothers, do you feel guilty?

by Donna Butler

It's the end of the month. The mortgage and utility bills are due. Your car's water pump just went out. The washing machine is making a strange noise. Jimmy needs new sneakers. Tina wants \$30 for her yearbook. The orthodontist is demanding another payment. Money is constantly going out, and it seems like there is never enough coming in.

For many women, today's cost of living has made working outside the home a virtual necessity, not just a choice. Many working wives would prefer not to work, and they often feel guilty when they do. Most feel overextended, and others are constantly exhausted. Women of the '90s find themselves juggling family responsibilities, household duties and the demands of an outside job.

If you find yourself in this predicament, what should you do? There are no magic solutions, but perhaps some tips in this article can make life a little easier.

Do you feel guilty?

Do feelings of guilt plague you from week to week? Do you feel like you are neglecting your husband and children, preparing less-than-nutritious meals, letting the house go? These are real concerns that worry working wives and mothers. If these matters are getting you down, what can you do?

Ask yourself, Why do I feel guilty?

For many women, today's cost of living has made working outside the home a virtual necessity, not just a choice.

Your answer will probably have something to do with not spending enough time with your husband and children.

Then consider the example of the perfect woman. You can read about her in Proverbs 31:10-31. This archetype of wife and mother spoken of by the writer of Proverbs would have to be something of a businesswoman and do at least some of her work outside her home. Notice verse 16: "She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard." Also, verse 24, "She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants."

Even this ideal woman of ancient times would have helped her husband provide for the family's needs. Notice that the perfect woman would enjoy a good relationship with her husband and children: "She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (verses 27, 28).

This woman's family obviously would not feel slighted. Why not? She would spend time with her husband and children and care for their needs. She would not concentrate so much on her outside pursuits that she would neglect her loved ones. She would have her priorities straight, and the fruits of her life would prove it.

In reading this portrait of the model woman, we need not feel guilty if we cannot emulate all she would do. You may collapse in a heap if you try. After all, few of us can command household servants and the financial means to make major investments in real estate.

But that is not the point of the example given for us. God wants us to see the Proverbs 31 woman as an inspiration to help us fully realize our abilities. Learn from her industry, integrity and

resourcefulness, but also consider that, in the midst of all she would do, she would still spend time with her family. With all this in mind, what can you do?

Count the cost

Sit down with your husband and go over the cost—in money and time away from your family—for you to work outside the home. Answer these questions:

- How much extra money do you spend on car maintenance and gasoline? If you have two cars, could you get by with only one if you didn't have a job?
- How much do you spend on child care?
- Do you eat out in restaurants more than you otherwise would?
- How much does it cost to buy the clothing appropriate for your job?
- Do you often work overtime?
- How many hours are you away from home each day?
- All things considered, how much extra money do you contribute to the family income?

When you answer these questions, consider the bottom line—can you afford not to work? If so, then stop working. Your guilt will disappear along with your job.

If that's not feasible, ask yourself if you are taking on more at work than you really need to. Think twice before agreeing to a promotion that will let you earn more money but will also increase stress and demand more of your time.

Instead, consider whether you can reduce the time you work, and still make ends meet. If so, then work fewer hours. You'll spend more time at home with your family and shed the guilty feelings.

Obviously, these suggestions won't work for everyone. If you can't quit, and you can't reduce your work time, you

need to face your situation squarely. Solicit the help of the whole family in an effort to set aside more time in your life for your loved ones. You may not be able to get rid of your guilty feelings entirely, but at least you'll be on your way to alleviating them.

Talk to your husband

Tell your husband you recognize the necessity of your working outside the home and express your willingness to do

make a date at least once a week for lunch. Taking this small amount of time out of your busy schedules will give you time together away from the children and enrich your marriage.

Ask the children hard questions

Do your children feel neglected or slighted because you are working? Ask them. You may be surprised to find that they don't think about it nearly as much as you do.

the perfect wife and mother, display the cleanest house on the block, serve up the best food in the neighborhood, join several neighborhood organizations and attend every child's every activity, as well as maintain a full-time job outside the house. Nothing short of Superwoman will do.

As my teenage daughter would say, "Get a life!". Superwoman is a figment of your imagination. No one can do the impossible, and you'll only tire and frustrate yourself if you try.

Arrange your priorities

A better idea is to set in order your priorities. Make yourself sit down and meditate on what is most important to you. Your relationship with God should be at the top of your list. No matter how busy life seems, making time every day to communicate with God through prayer and studying His Word should be your highest priority.

Through communicating with God, you can solicit the power of the universe. Talk to God about the stress you are under. Beseech Him for answers to the problems that burden you. Explain your circumstances, and trust Him for

Women today find themselves juggling family responsibilities, household duties and the demands of an outside job.

so. But let him know that you often feel guilty and tired. Together, discuss how you both might help lighten the load of household chores and errands. Discuss ways you can share the responsibility of spending time with the children.

Maybe on one or two evenings a month he or you could take the kids out alone. This would give you both time to catch up on the chores that always seem to go undone. After all, the children will enjoy their time alone with you, and with their father.

Talk about ways you and your husband can spend time together. Plan at least one evening out every few weeks. Or, if your workplaces are near enough,

You'll probably discover that their complaints are more specific than general. You didn't have time to go to the school play, or you missed your son's ball game. They may complain that you are grouchy. Maybe you sometimes snap at them when you are tired.

When everyone has aired his or her complaints, work out some compromises on ways to be more available for important events. Discuss how your kids can help out around the house to free up more of the time you do have at home. This will produce more family involvement from you and more understanding from the children.

Some women feel they have to be

the help you need to put everything in its proper perspective.

Obviously, your husband and children should be next on your list of priorities. How can you improve family relationships and show each family member how much you love him or her? Each week, take time to think about each one individually. Is anyone hypersensitive? Does someone seem discouraged or preoccupied? Be alert to subtle signals from a loved one who may be feeling neglected and spend extra time with that person.

Resolve to carry out some small acts

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Intelligence

Is intelligence the most important factor for success?

by Mario Seiglie

Research shows that many young people may be mistakenly deciding to give up early in life because of wrong assumptions about their intelligence and their ability to succeed.

College and university entrance exams, IQ tests, grades, scholastic ranking: Educators make use of many tools and methods to categorize students according to intelligence.

From primary school well into college and even into the job market, young people are faced with a barrage of tests to determine their intelligence. The underlying assumption, common to both schools and homes and constantly drummed into the minds of children, is that only the most intelligent are most successful in life.

Is this true? Are those born with natural, hereditary intelligence destined to be successful while others are doomed to failure? In school, when every child is classified according to his intelligence, some come to the conclusion that life is unfair, and success is determined by the inherited quality of brain matter.

Quite a few children who eventually come to the conclusion that they will never amount to much because their grades are below average, drop out of school in despair at ever contributing something worthwhile to society. Some may even let the resentment lead them into delinquent, destructive life-styles. They think they cannot succeed, so they set out to prove it.

On the other hand, others who are intellectually gifted think life is theirs for the taking. They are the proud possessors, according to tests and grades, of a superior intellect and therefore incorrectly assume they are bound to succeed.

What determines success in life?

Is success in life largely determined by the intelligence you were born with? What is intelligence, anyway, and how important is it in life?

Researchers who study intelligence have come up with startling results. Some 4-year-old children were sub-

jected to a simple test to see if their future success could be accurately determined. The psychologist in charge took each one into a room and told the child, "You can have this marshmallow right now if you want. But, if you wait until I come back, I will give you another marshmallow."

Then he left. Some children immediately ate their marshmallows. Others waited a few minutes until the delay became unbearable and then they devoured theirs. But some were determined to wait. Observing the children through a two-way mirror, researchers watched as some closed their eyes or tucked their heads to avoid the tempting morsel, some sang to themselves, others played, and some eventually fell asleep.

When the psychologist returned, the kids received their extra, hard-won marshmallow. The results were recorded, then the children's performance was traced through their later school years. By the time the children reached high school, some trends in their behavior had become obvious. The researchers found that the children who had waited for the extra marshmallow generally were the best adapted, most popular, confident and responsible among the group. Those who had yielded early to the temptation stood the best chance of becoming loners, or easily frustrated or set in their ways.

When the students took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a gauge used by many colleges to measure academic aptitude, those who had resisted the temptation to quickly eat the marshmallow scored, on average, 20 to 25 percent higher than the rest of the group.

Emotional intelligence vital

It is becoming popular for some researchers to use the phrase "emotional intelligence" to describe such attributes as understanding and controlling one's own emotions, showing empathy

towards the feelings of others and controlling one's own behavior in a way that improves one's sense of well-being.

Recently Harvard psychologist Dr. Daniel Goleman authored a book on this subject, titled *Emotional Intelligence*, after a decade of investigating how the mind produces emotions. He sees a need to redefine what "intelligence" means. His conclusion from his research: When we try to determine what produces success, it is character, or the ability to resist temptation by developing will power, self-control and empathy, which is more important than the intellectual power of the brain as measured by standard IQ tests and SAT exams.

Of course, it is wonderful if both abilities, the intellectual capacity and emotional strength and maturity, are held in abundance by a person. But, in general terms, researchers on the subject agree that the IQ, or the intelligence quotient of a person, contributes to only about 20 percent of success in life.

In light of such findings, the traditional idea of intelligence as the major predictor of success is being reconsidered. Rather than intelligence dictating one's success or failure in life, researchers are finding that intelligence may be, in reality, a relatively minor factor in one's success in later life.

Their findings should give hope to those who may have simply lost motivation because they thought their performance on intelligence tests indicated that much of their future was already determined. The research shows that many young people may be making misguided decisions about quitting based on wrong assumptions about their ability to succeed.

Five kinds of intelligence

Now, supported with findings from real-life experiences, psychologists are taking a closer look at assumptions regarding intelligence. While some classify character traits as part of a person's intelligence, other psychologists divide intelligence into five basic categories:

- **Social intelligence:** This is the ability to understand another's actions, feelings and motivations. This cannot be measured by a standard intelligence test, yet it may well be the most valuable characteristic for success in life. This type of intelligence leads to getting

along amicably and working well with others. Often this skill appears early in life, as when children can sense others' feelings and react appropriately. For example, the child may ask, "Why is Mommy sad today?"

Normally, those with a high level of social intelligence grow up to be skillful in developing valuable personal relationships. A person with superior abstract

the idea that it is the brain's superior capacity in this area that permits, for example, athletes and ballerinas to calculate the time, length and strength of their movements.

Those who have this particular ability can easily coordinate even the smallest actions, which are helpful for delicate surgical procedures, rapid typing and playing musical instruments.



Psychologists are learning that being intelligent is not just a matter of having a high IQ. There are at least five basic types of intelligence: social, athletic, linguistic, logical and spatial.

intelligence but who is callous toward others will usually end up with many conflicts and disappointments through life because of an inability to build proper social relationships.

- **Athletic intelligence:** Highly coordinated intelligence and communication between the brain and the rest of the body characterize those with high athletic intelligence. Until recently, this skill was not considered "mental," now, however, more scientists are accepting

- **Linguistic intelligence:** People with this ability are highly capable in verbal and written expression. This talent enables people to read and quickly grasp concepts. They express themselves easily and many become able writers, newspaper reporters, teachers or lawyers.

- **Logical intelligence:** This is the skill involved in reasoning and solving complex abstract problems. A high level of logical intelligence can lead to success in such careers as mathematics,

philosophy, astronomy, engineering, physics and biology.

• **Spatial intelligence:** Those with high levels of spatial intelligence can easily see relationships between colors, dimensions and perspectives, and they are usually sensitive toward music and art. They generally are most successful as painters, sculptors, musicians, architects or designers.

Most people have each of these capabilities to varying degrees. However, it takes time and effort to discover and develop your particular strengths. Many have needlessly lost hope because they didn't have good grades, so they throw in the towel, not knowing they may have had hidden skills just waiting to be developed.

According to French geneticist Albert Jacquard, "Human beings are born with only 30 percent of the brain fully connected. This means the rest is developed by learning and the environment." He also states that one can surpass the potential intelligence inherited if there exists a favorable climate for learning and the person truly desires to improve the capacity for learning.

Albert Einstein's grades in school were so poor that a teacher asked him to quit, saying he would never amount to anything.

Famous "failures" from history

It is surprising how many notable people did not let their initial failures in school and intelligence tests dampen their spirits, but through patient and constant use were able to develop their intelligence enormously. Here are a few examples.

• **Sir Winston Churchill:** While Churchill was still young, his father thought he was so dim-witted that he would never be able to earn a living in England. A hyperactive child, Churchill enjoyed history and literature (he had great linguistic intelligence) but refused to study math and entered school at the bottom of the class. Twice he failed the entrance exam to Sandhurst, the famous British military college. Finally, on the third try, he passed. Churchill went on to become a legendary statesman, including leading his country as prime minister through World War II. He later won the Nobel Prize for literature.

• **Albert Einstein:** Because he spoke haltingly for the first nine years of his life and would only answer after a prolonged period of reflection, Einstein's parents thought he was mentally retarded. His grades in school were so poor (except for math; he had logical intelligence) that a teacher asked him to quit, saying, "Einstein, you will never amount to anything." He failed his entrance exams to Zurich's Polytechnic Institute and had to reapply for the following year.

Even after finishing school, he had a hard time finding and holding down a job. Meanwhile, in his spare time, he was busy formulating his first concepts of the theory of relativity. Recently, in an opinion poll taken by *The Washington Post*, Einstein was voted by historians and scientists as the most important scientist of the last 1,000 years.

• **Pablo Picasso:** Young Pablo's father pulled him out of school at age 10 because as a child, all he wanted to do was paint. He had enormous spatial intelligence, which was undetected by standard tests. Barely able to read or write, to enable him to enter high

school, his father hired a tutor, but the instructor gave up since Picasso refused to learn math. Later, although he passed his art-school examinations with flying colors, he soon quit out of boredom.

Then Picasso studied painting on his own and struggled for years before selling his first work. However, he later came to be considered a genius in his field by many art critics, and his paintings have sold for millions of dollars. Yet, by conventional wisdom and the grades he made, he should have quit trying to be a success.

Vital lesson to learn

What should we learn from these examples? We should learn never to give up. It is more important to develop character skills, which depend more on diligence, perseverance and discipline than those based on hereditary intelligence. These traits have proven time and time again to be far more important in achieving success than other factors.

Ross Perot, self-made American multimillionaire and presidential candidate, recently addressed the graduating class of a small university. He first directed his comments to those ranked academically in the top of the class and warned them that many would not succeed because they would rely on their intelligence and not fully apply themselves.

Then he addressed those who were ranked in the middle of the class. He said they actually held the biggest opportunity to succeed in life because they knew the rewards would not come easily and would not take their first achievements for granted. They understood they would have to work hard and persevere to succeed.

Who will win the race?

All of this brings to mind one of Aesop's fables: the race between the tortoise and the hare. At the start of the contest, the hare, naturally endowed with great speed, took off and leapt far ahead. Then he paused, realized the extent of his lead and took it easy. He even lay down for a nap.

When he woke up, however, the tortoise was nowhere in sight. The hare took off desperately, but, as he neared the finish line, he saw that the tortoise had already won.

The Bible, especially in the book of Proverbs, gives young people many principles about lasting success. These God-inspired proverbs focus more on character-building traits of diligence, effort, perseverance, honesty and the respect of God rather than on those traits of raw, natural intelligence.

For instance, Proverbs 12:24, 27 says: "The hand of the diligent will rule, but the slothful will be put to forced labor . . . The slothful man does not roast what he took in hunting, but diligence is man's precious possession." Dozens of other proverbs make similar points about the value of such traits.

According to some scientists, too much raw intelligence, and not enough character values, can lead to an undesirable imbalance. It seems that the steady and time-tested character traits such as humility, patience, discipline, punctuality, effort and friendliness have the biggest chance of helping one achieve a lasting and enjoyable success.

It appears the ancients had it right: The tortoise often does win the race. **GN**

Juggling

Continued from page 43

of kindness for everyone in the family. They don't have to be big, expensive or time-consuming. Include a love note in your husband's briefcase or sock drawer. Read a young child a story. Compliment your teenage daughter on her appearance. Play catch with your son in the backyard.

Regularly spend some solo time with each one. Some of the moments I treasure most from my childhood are the times I spent talking with Mom or Dad. In our family of eight, the undivided attention of either parent was something not to be taken lightly. By not neglecting these seemingly small tasks, you will build memories your family will talk about for years to come.

When you have placed God and family as your top priorities, make a list of every task you think you have to accomplish, and don't worry about the order. Look at each point and ask yourself: What would happen if I didn't do this at all? What if I didn't do this as often? Can one of the children do this?

Write your answer beside each item. As you go through this list, you will probably be surprised to find that there are indeed some things you can get by with not doing at all or at least not doing as often.

Teach your children

Enlisting the help of your children in other areas can free up time. Sure, the kids might not do certain chores as well or as thoroughly as you, but at least the chores will get done. In the meantime, you'll be teaching your children to be responsible members of the family.

Shorten some tasks by tackling them as a family rather than spending more time accomplishing them alone. For example, ask your son or daughter to help you fold the laundry while filling you in on what happened at school.

Evaluate your personal practices. Do you eat right? Are you getting enough sleep? Do you get any exercise? If you feel tired and run down all the time, no wonder you're grouchy. Improper diet, not enough rest and no exercise can rob you of energy and health as well as your good cheer.

Plan family meals so that you make one meal do double duty. Spend a little more time preparing nutritious food whose leftovers you can freeze and use again next week. Extra time spent one day can save you hours on an even busier day. By carefully planning, you can minimize time spent in the kitchen, eat less pizza and other fast food and enjoy a healthier diet.

Set a realistic time to go to bed, and then stick to it. Strive to get seven or eight hours of sleep each night. Don't let household tasks prevent you from going to bed on time. When you feel rested, you'll be more cheerful and have more energy to tackle those daily chores, and they won't seem nearly so imposing.

You've heard it before and you'll probably hear it again: Women hate exercise. But you might as well face it: A balanced exercise program does promote better health. You have to get moving, even if it's just to take a walk with your husband or involve yourself with some other physical activity with the kids. Whatever it takes, move!

After you evaluate your life using the steps you have just read, you will know for sure whether a job outside the home is necessary. If you have found that indeed you must work, don't feel guilty. Formally listing your priorities will make sure you put God and family where they belong, at the top of the list, and physical tasks where they belong, at the bottom of the list.

Enlisting your family's help will free up time and foster family fellowship. Getting enough rest and exercise and eating properly will provide you the energy to gain the maximum benefit from the time you do have.

Trust God to help

Having done this, take the apostle Paul's advice, which should help your peace of mind: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Life may not be ideal, but know that you are doing your best in an imperfect world. Trust God to help you with the rest. **GN**

Letters From Our Readers

We write to thank you for *The Good News* magazine and to say we are delighted that it is indeed good news. The gospel has not changed and it is refreshing to read articles like these that help us to appreciate that the numerous past years have not been wasted, as some would like to have us believe.

Thank you again and please keep up the high standard of content.

*Mr. and Mrs. M. Morreel
Tauranga, New Zealand*

I was happy and thankful to get *The Good News* and the booklets. It is so good to read the truth and to know that others also stood up for the truth. I didn't realize just how precious God's truth and calling was to me until others said it doesn't matter. I could not trade the truth of God for fable. My very life depends on the truth that the loving Father gave to me.

*Cletus Pingel
Moberly, Missouri*

I have supported the Church of God for many years even though I wasn't a member. I followed Mr. Armstrong's teachings and kept all of *The Plain Truth* and *The Good News* magazines for many years back. It seemed that I just put off joining the Church. I feel that I am being led to support the United Church of God and I would like to start receiving *The Good News* magazine.

*John Leon Morris, Sr.
Portsmouth, Virginia*

Thank you for all your work in producing the booklets and *The Good News*. It is wonderful to finally feel a part of a Church that wants to accomplish the commission God gave us: to proclaim the gospel to the world. Let's all stay humble and pray that God will do His Work through us as He sees fit.

*Suzan Johns
Lititz, Pennsylvania*

Editor's note: Published letters may be edited for clarity and space.

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