

The Good News

July/August 1997



Bringing Up a Moral Child

*Africa: Still the Heart of Darkness? • Dust to Dust
Keep a Close Friend Close • Israel: Small but Significant*

The Family in Perspective

From our human vantage point the family is central; it's what most of us experience first in life. Depending on our circumstances, most of us know and come to love a father and mother. In our experience the family is so fundamental that those who lose their families are at a critical disadvantage, sometimes for life.

In the 1960s child psychiatrist John Bowlby showed the adverse side effects on babies of the deprivation of a mother's love and attention. The need for children to bond with their fathers has been well documented as well. These findings point to the crucial importance of the family to mankind in general.

Even more-important family relationships exist, however. On the spiritual level, the Bible reveals that God is our Father, that His Son Jesus Christ is our elder Brother and that the Church is our mother. We also learn of a spiritual kinship among people called into the Church: They are brothers and sisters in a true, spiritual sense. Beyond this life our destiny is to become the children of God, participating in God's spiritual family.

One of the reasons Jesus Christ came on earth was to reveal God the Father. Jesus told His disciples, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). A little later He prayed: "O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me" (John 17:25). It's astonishing that the world did not know the Father until Jesus came to reveal Him. Even more surprising, perhaps, is that Jesus' countrymen thought they knew God, but didn't: "It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him . . ." (John 8:54-55).

We find Jesus Christ referring to His followers as brothers: "I will declare Your [the Father's] name to My brethren" (Hebrews 2:12). According to the apostle Paul, Jesus is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). He is our elder Brother, ready to help His younger brothers and sisters in time of need.

What about our spiritual mother? By comparing scriptures we see that the Church is described as our mother. Paul writes that "the Jerusalem above is . . . the mother of us all" (Galatians 4:26). We also read that God's people "have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . , to the general assembly and church of the firstborn . . ." (Hebrews 12:22-23).

The "heavenly Jerusalem" is the Church, and "Jerusalem above" is "the mother of us all." Just as our mothers take care of us mentally, physically and emotionally, the Church exists to take care of us and sustain our spiritual development.

Our experiences with these two families—one physical and the other spiritual—is connected. The one can affect the other. How?

Our physical family relationships can impact our understanding of and feeling toward the family of God. When we endure a poor relationship with our physical father, we may find difficult a right relationship with our heavenly Father. Our early association with our physical mothers may affect our responsiveness to our spiritual mother. How we relate to siblings or close friends may help or hinder our relationship with our elder Brother.

Thankfully all of these relationships are emotionally retrievable, and spiritual help is available to repair damage done at the human level. That is where the spiritual family can help. God reveals Himself as "a father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5). Jesus Christ encouraged us to come to Him for help: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). They are ready to provide the answers we all need in all our human inadequacies.

Right family relationships are crucial at the physical and spiritual levels. They parallel and picture each other. The family is indeed an eternal reality.

—David Hulme

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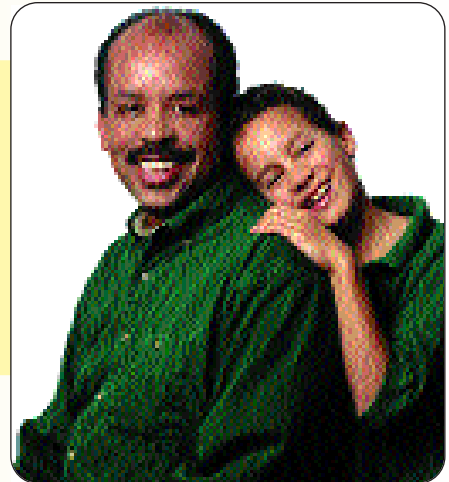
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Bringing Up a



Is proper child rearing a lost cause? What pressures do parents face, and where can they find help in bringing up children with proper moral values?

by Jerold Aust

“**W**hen I grow up, I want to be just like my dad,” the boy in the television commercial reassured us. The scene showed a proud father and son sitting together under a large oak tree. Each time the father moved, his son imitated him. The ad closed with the father reaching into his pocket for a cigarette and lighting it. The camera closed in on the little boy as he picked up a small twig, placed it between his fingers and raised it to his mouth just as his hero, his father, had done.

The voice-over finished the scene with, “When I grow up, I want to be just like my dad.”

Our children are getting an education. But who—and what—is doing the educating? What good and bad influences are hard at work in the minds of our children, forming and shaping them? If you are a parent, are you the guiding force in shaping your child’s thoughts and moral standards? If not, how can you become the primary influence in the life of your child?

Being a parent is a complex responsibility. In many families both parents hold down jobs, trying to keep up with the needs of family, house, car and so many other things. The pressures can

be staggering. It’s no wonder so many parents feel overwhelmed when they consider their child-rearing responsibilities—and the world our children are inheriting. Such is symptomatic of the moral malaise we face.

Just how bad is it? What are some of the problems parents face as we near the 21st century? What can we do about them?

Rise of the antiheroes

Chicago Tribune columnist Robert Davis, in a recent article titled “Naughty as They Wanna Be,” asked: “Have we lost the capacity to be shocked by language?”

Davis wrote about the vulgarity of the times, using basketball star Dennis Rodman’s often crass attitude as an example. “Chicago Bulls bad boy Dennis Rodman stood up before 200,000 sports fans in Grant Park and millions more in the radio and television audience and blatantly drawled the dreaded four-lettered adjective,” he wrote. “The sports fans gave him a wild ovation. What the heck is going on these days, anyway? Is nothing forbidden? When did smutty talk and dirty pictures turn up over the airwaves and bandwidths with impunity?”

Who gets hurt by such behavior? Civilization itself suffers. Our children do. We all do. Unfortunately, when shocking becomes common, it no longer startles anyone.

Is it too late to face the issues of morality and values head on? Some think we must assert ourselves in this critical area or we will be overcome by smut, filth and increasingly shocking behavior—that parents with high values will be swept overboard into a sea of amorality. What will become of our children then? What lies ahead for the new generation?

Values vs. amorality

Observers are divided on the issues, and chaos fills the vacuum. Some courageously stand up for right and worthy values, but many people simply don't appear to care whether good values and morals are practiced.

Then there are those who adamantly argue that no one has the right to determine the values or morals that should



serve as a society's blueprint for living. "Who do you think you are?" is a common knee-jerk reaction by some.

Others take the question another step: "Who do you think you are? God?"

Let's briefly explore the latter question. Notice its implication. The question assumes there is *someone* who can determine human values and morals: the Supreme Being.

Literary editor David Klinghoffer agrees with this assumption. In his article *The Road Back to God*, he suggests that society has strayed from God and that, if society is to return to Him, at least one way leads back: talking about God in public.

"The most effective way to get other people to take God, and thus morality, seriously is to talk about Him seriously, and in public, yourself" (*National Review*, July 15, 1996, pp. 49-50).

But how does talking about God fit with better child rearing?

Take God seriously

God sets concrete standards. We can know where God stands on the issues facing civilization itself. Some parents look beyond human reason to God's transcen-

dent principles for parental guidance.

American television news commentator Ted Koppel, in an address to the graduating class of Duke University, made this observation: "What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions. They are commandments. *Are*, not *were*. The sheer brilliance of the Ten Commandments is that they codify in a handful of words acceptable human behavior, not just for then or now, but for all time."

Mr. Koppel had a point. If God's values were merely to be regarded as 10 suggestions, then secularism and situation ethics rule the day. But, if they are based on eternal commands given by the eternal God, then we're dealing with transcendent values, applicable to all people for all time.

God made us and knows how we think (1 Samuel 16:7; Hebrews 4:12-13). He created us from the dust of the ground (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). He owns us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). He intended

mankind to choose between good and evil, to "choose life" by honoring God's values, which lead to eternal life (Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Matthew 19:16-17).

The human mind isn't automatically equipped with a moral compass (Jeremiah 10:23). God's Word *is* that moral compass, serving as the operating manual for human behavior. The Bible's laws serve as the moral compass for humanity; its morals and values transcend human thinking (Isaiah 55:6-9). Those laws are guides, signposts for human thought (Psalm 119:105).

God's values can help parents bring up happy, secure, successful children. Parents can have the knowledge and assurance to guide them in bringing up moral children. Right values can help inoculate children against the immorality and amorality poisoning civilization.

Breaking the cycle

Parents have a vital role in educating their children, not just by what they *say*,

but by what they *are*.

What is most important in shaping a child's mind: words or example? A small boy who follows his father's lead to the point of mimicking smoking with a twig is following his dad's example. Good words help, but actions speak much more eloquently.

How do children think? Some researchers believe that a child's pattern of thinking is mostly set by the age of 3. Pressure from other people, including peers, affects even babies. Babies and other youngsters are especially susceptible to others' examples, therefore their thinking processes soon have the imprint of this world's ways, as someone might form letters on a soft clay tablet. Their little minds come equipped with the basic powers to recognize and learn, but are otherwise empty and ready to be filled with knowledge, both good and bad.

What an incredible responsibility this places on parents! Consider what you have seen in watching parents interact with their children. Sometimes this is



pleasurable, especially when parents are so obviously interested in their children. At other times it's uncomfortable and discouraging, as when parents show little interest in their offspring and react to them with hostility. A parent's example is indelibly imprinted on his children.

We live in an era of parents speaking to their children with demeaning, self-destructive phrases: "You're stupid!" "You idiot!" These terms show frustration



and selfishness on the part of parents. Why would adults use such language with their children? All too often it's because that's the way their parents talked to them. Society accumulates habits, attitudes and practices—particularly in family relationships.

“For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:5-6).

The Second Commandment, referred to here, points out that the perpetual breaking of God's life-giving laws—as

well as the painful fruit of such choices—is handed down from generation to generation. God doesn't have to punish; punishment is self-inflicted when His way of life is rejected and the resulting attitude is passed from parents to children.

However, this biblical passage also hints that the cycle can be broken. Parents *can* break the rhythm of self-destructive habits and behavior by honoring and obeying God.

We can improve on the old saying, “Do as I say, don't do as I do.” But it takes effort and hard work. It also takes vision, a perspective that values God's instructions to guide parents in effec-

tively rearing their children. Moral children don't just happen.

Foundation for a moral child

The most important key to raising a moral child can be summarized in one word: *example*. The power of parental example knows no bounds.

When a father and mother consistently set the standard for their children, their offspring reap the enduring benefits, as will their sons and daughters after them. The values and morals instilled in children when they are young become their compass, the foundation for the decisions they will make.

God gives basic instructions for how to

Keys to Better Parenting

We have a choice: Either we teach our children good values or we abandon their future to chance. If we don't teach our children, somebody else will.

Consider the influences on your children: other neighborhood kids, 30 or more hours before the television each week, questionable printed material and unrestricted peer pressure from classmates. Who is really teaching them?

For most parents, the honest answer is that others have far more influence on children than they do.

How can we gain and maintain proper influence over what our children learn? How can we help ensure that they learn proper values and standards? Here are practical keys to bringing up successful children:

- **The key of education.** The pattern of a child's life is often established by age 3. After this age basic patterns of behavior change only with considerable difficulty; the child's personality is largely set.

After age 3, however, a child will learn a great deal through formal education. Reading to your children while they are young broadens their world and sets the stage for them to satisfy their intellectual curiosity. You can help your children learn to love books.

Suggest books that match their interests. If they're fascinated by one author, encourage them to read other books by that same writer. Let your children choose some of what they read. Make time to take them to the library to browse among the books of their choice. Reading to your children teaches more than just learning skills. It also brings families closer and makes children feel they are loved.

Do not fail to give your children spiritual guidance. A good way to do this is to read to them from the Bible. As you go through biblical stories with them, note the problems the real-life men and women of Bible times faced and how they dealt with them. Point out the lessons they learned and the cause-and-effect relationships described there. The Bible is a book of cause and effect and often shows the consequences of right and wrong behavior. Its lessons can help your children through difficult times in their lives.

- **The key of personal involvement.** Many parents, busy with

their jobs, careers and other pressures, are quick to give money and other things to their children. It's too easy to overlook that, rather than money and other things, what they really crave is *our time* with them.

It's difficult to overstate the importance of parental involvement. Children simply *need* their parents. They want and require their love, attention, support and encouragement. If you take the time to look around and notice well-balanced, secure children, you can usually follow the involvement trail right back to their parents. Get involved with your children. You will reap rich dividends for yourself and them.

- **The key of loving discipline.** Parents should sensitively and lovingly guide their families. They should set sensible rules for their children, appropriate to each child's age. Peace requires order, and order requires certain rules. Parents must take the time to explain why each rule exists—in a way the child can understand at his or her age—showing that rules are set to help, not hurt.

Of course, parents must follow the same rules. If children are expected to eat good breakfasts, Dad shouldn't head out the door with a doughnut clenched between his teeth. Scripture describes the value and effectiveness of self-discipline (Proverbs 7:1-2; 8:33-36; 10:17; 13:1, 18; 19:20), which takes patient teaching and a good parental example. When small children understand how things work and how they benefit from doing things right, they are more apt to successfully govern themselves.

- **The key of hugging, holding and reassurance.** A parent should never feel embarrassed to show affection through hugging and holding his children. All children need affection and reassurance to know that their parents really love them. When they succeed at just about anything, encourage them, letting them know you are pleased to see their success. Of course, say it in your own words, but say it. Children need reassurance, just as adults do.

Life is short, gone before we know it. Parents, love your children and teach them while you can. Take advantage of the time you as a parent have with your children.

—Jerold Aust

build a moral family structure. His instructions to parents are clear: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today [primarily the Ten Commandments, listed in the previous chapter, Deuteronomy 5:6-21] shall be in your heart.

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). In short, the home is to be a values-driven, morals-oriented institution in which the father and mother are the teachers, instructing their children in God's way of life. No human effort can improve on God's model for moral teaching.

Knowing these guidelines is half the battle. Doing them is the rest. For parents to rear moral children, they must act from the heart, from clear and decisive convictions. External conformity or ceremony isn't enough. Sooner or later children will see through their parents'



pretensions.

Parents who raise moral children realize how important their examples are. They also realize that to truly love their children they must live for their children, putting them high on their list of priorities.

Knowledge into practice

We live in a secular, selfish society. Self-sacrifice is out, self-gratification is in. Our children pick up on this; they are constantly exposed to it. To counteract this

unfortunate circumstance, right values must be taught and lived in their presence.

Here are some questions you might ask yourself to see if you are effectively instilling proper values in your children:

• **Are you involved in your children's lives?** Some children say they would rather give up a parent before they would be willing to give up watching television. This doesn't say much for parental involvement.

Studies show that children have greater intelligence when parents regularly spend time with them. Involvement comes when you talk with your children, take the time to put them to bed, pray with them, help them with homework, drive them to their activities.

Children need father and mother and a proper relationship with both. A friend said to me that he spent so much of his formative years with his mother that he considered his father just a long-term houseguest with spanking privileges.

• Do you cheer

their successes? It's natural for a father to support and identify with his son, but what about his daughter? A daughter, too, must emotionally understand her father's concern for her welfare and success in life. Parents can make a dramatic difference in positively shaping their children's future when they take the time to applaud and work toward their successes.

• Can the children count on you?

Do you keep your promises? Children take parents at their word. Kept promises mean a lot to them. We must sacrifice our time and resources to keep them, but the effort will be worth it.

• Do you tune out your children?

Children need their parents' attention, especially when around other people. If we fail to give them our attention, they may resort to other means, including acting, dressing or grooming themselves in outrageous ways.

• Are you understanding in a conflict?

Sometimes children want to do something to which their parents are opposed. In such cases parents should be honest and open with their children, explaining why they feel the time or situation is not right or why the action is inappropriate. Parents may feel the child is too young or that it is not safe for him or her. Explaining your reasons for refusing a request can strengthen a relationship with those you love.

• Do you back each other?



need to agree on household rules and stick to them. If the children try to get either parent to break the rules, both parents should remember their agreement made to each other and refuse such a request. Children gain a sense of security from living with two adults who love and support each other.

William J. Bennett, former U.S. secretary of education, provides us with these words: "Moral education—the training of heart and mind toward the good—involves many things. It involves rules and precepts—the dos and don'ts of life with others. It involves explicit training in good habits. And it involves the example of adults who, through their daily behavior, show children they take morality seriously" (*The Children's Book of Virtues*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1995, p. 5).

By conscientiously striving to set the best example possible for your child, you can bring up a moral child in today's world. Perhaps the acid test of a good parent is to ask a simple question: Would you be happy if your children grew up to be like you? *GN*

How to Raise Good Children in a Bad World

Standards all around you may be slipping, but here are some principles to help you stay in charge of your child's moral upbringing.

by Becky Sweat

It's 11 o'clock at night and Ted and Joyce know where their children are: safely in bed. At 11 o'clock in the morning they also know where their children are: underfoot.

Ted and Joyce, who both work at home, see plenty of their children. Sometimes they feel they see too much of Steve, 5, and Millie, 2, even though they can afford an efficient nanny to help look after them.

From Ted and Joyce to the single-parent groupings at the other end of the family spectrum, more and more parents are like one mother I know who said of her family's way of life: "We're so busy running here and there and taking the kids to different activities that we hardly ever have time to just sit and talk with each other."

Running out of time (and money)

A changing job market, increasing cost of living and rising tax burdens have resulted in parents spending more time earning a living and less time with their children. In just the past 20 years the average work-week jumped from 41 hours to 48. People with incomes of more than \$50,000 work an average of 52 hours a week, while small-business owners are putting in more than 55 hours a week.

One result, according to various studies, is that parents in the 1990s spend 40 percent less time with their children than their parents did in the 1960s and 1970s.

"A lot of times both parents are working full time away from the home, in some instances working 50 to 60 hours a week on two different jobs just to get by financially," notes Dr. Frank Vitro, a professor at Texas Woman's University with a special interest in moral education. "Parents can become so overworked and stressed from problems at the office that they don't have any emotional energy left for their children when they come home at night."

Not only do children spend less time with their parents, they have less contact with other relatives. "We don't have the same sense of community that we used to have—partly because people are getting job transfers all over the country and moving to where they

don't know anybody, but also because more families are splitting up and becoming separated geographically," says Dr. Marti Erickson, director of the Children's and Family Consortium at the University of Minnesota.

"Grandparents, for example, have less chance to make an impact on their grandchildren's lives because they live hundreds of miles apart and rarely get to see each other."

Many of us live in large metropolitan areas where we don't know even the names of the people living in the apartment next door.

"When I was a child," a 72-year-old man told me, "everyone in the neighborhood was like a big family. If a neighbor saw me getting into mischief, not only would that person scold me, he'd also take me home and tell my parents what I did. But, if I took that kind of involvement today, I'd probably be told to mind my own business."

Getting satisfaction

Consumerism also plays a bigger role in the 1990s. Says one father: "My kids insist they have to have Nintendos, the latest compact discs, more videotapes, designer-label clothes, their own phone, a computer.

"When I tell them they don't need more things, I have to look at my own example. We have boxes and boxes in the garage filled with gadgets and other needless stuff that we've moved from one home to the next without ever opening."

"Certainly computers, CD players, amusement parks, soccer fields and other things that weren't available a generation ago can be very rewarding for children," Dr. Vitro says, "but parents have to be careful. The message kids often get is materialism is more important than true values. That's why kids only care about getting that \$10 allowance by the end of the week. It doesn't matter what they learned or how many good deeds they've done. Our society has moved away from feeling good about internal morality and ethical gains, and we're more focused on extrinsic, material satisfaction."

To make matters worse, children often spend several hours a day in front of the television set, soaking up values few parents want for their children.

“We are a shrinking world, and kids are becoming more aware of violence through the media,” says Dr. Ned Gaylin, a family-studies professor at the University of Maryland. “And even if kids don’t live with violence directly—and some of them do—they are aware of it via their television screens.”

obstacles and bringing up good children.

Wearing other people’s shoes

Impress positive values on your children by frequent repetition and admonition. Directly teach children right from wrong and urge them to act in a moral manner. If they exhibit attitudes, actions or language that you don’t approve of, seriously and firmly let your children know how you feel.

One of the most important moral

Florence Nightingale, talk about biblical heroes: Joseph’s moral example when tempted and threatened by Potiphar’s wife and David’s modesty when God chose him as a leader. Discuss the results of their choices.

Compare them with Samson’s immorality and Absalom’s vanity and the results of their choices.

Clip magazine and newspaper articles that tell about ordinary people who do good deeds or overcome obstacles. Tell

The key to having helpful discussions with youngsters is to listen.



values you should teach your children is concern for other people.

“From the earliest ages you need to talk about feelings, to remind your kids how it felt when they were treated the way they’re now treating someone, and to use their imagination to put themselves in the other person’s shoes,” says Dr. Michael Schulman, author of *Bringing Up a Moral Child*. “Try to make sure your children treat others well, not just to stay out of trouble, but so that their lives are connected to others in a good way.”

Other values you should steep your children in are honesty, justice, dependability, charity and tenacity. Be enthusiastic when explaining and discussing these values with your children. Let them know these are concerns you hold dear and why they are important. Give concrete reasons to show that certain behaviors are right and others wrong. For instance, rather than just say, “No cheating,” include a reason: “If you cheat when you play a game, it gives you an unfair advantage over the other players.”

Think of ways to illustrate moral lessons. As well as Abraham Lincoln or

stories from your own childhood and about relatives who set good examples.

Point out lessons daily

Use your children’s day-to-day experiences as a springboard for moral discussions. For example, your daughter may come home from school and say that a student she knows routinely cheats on tests at school.

As a parent, you can ask questions that stimulate your child’s thinking along spiritual lines—helping him to realize that cheating is deception and a form of lying as well as taking something unearned and is thus a form of stealing.

You can further the conversation with questions like, “Do you think you should tell the teacher?” You can also lead discussions about the moral implications of events in the news, such as politicians accepting bribes, the strike at the local factory or international conflicts.

The key to having helpful discussions with youngsters is to listen. “A lot of times the minute children start to talk the parent jumps in, telling them what they

According to one study, by the time the average American child is 15 he or she will have seen up to 15,000 murders on television.

Is there any hope for children today? Of course, there is. Proverbs 22:6 tells us to “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Even in the best of circumstances child rearing has never been easy. It wasn’t easy in King Solomon’s time, and it certainly isn’t easy now. But it can be done. Here are some suggestions for confronting modern-day child-raising

ought to think before they're finished explaining," says Dr. Susan Mackey, director of postgraduate studies at the Family Institute at Northwestern University. "But if you do that your children will begin to shut you out."

Think about what your child says and make sure you properly understand it. You might say something like this: "If I understand you, here's what you're saying."

"See if you can validate at least part of what your child tells you," Dr. Mackey says. "You might not agree with everything your child says, but hopefully you can agree with some of it. By doing so you build a connection with your child. Everyone appreciates being understood and having their feelings validated."

Actions speak louder

Your example teaches youngsters how to treat other people even more so than your discussions with them. "Children learn by observing what their parents do, so it's important to be the kind of person you want your children to be," Dr. Vitro says.

Children learn to deal honestly when their parents deal with them truthfully. They learn the importance of keeping their word when their parents follow through on their promise to spend the afternoon with them. They learn how to be kind when they observe their parents taking a meal over to an ailing neighbor.

Routine events, such as a trip to the grocery store, show our children how to act around and interact with other people. For example, returning extra change if a cashier undercharges you sets an example of honesty for your children. Saying, "Isn't it a good thing we told the cashier she gave us too much change? Otherwise, her boss may have thought she took the money," reinforces a valuable moral lesson.

We teach values when we observe the speed limit and are patient when stuck in traffic. We teach values at social gatherings, in waiting rooms and at sporting events.

Keep in mind, however, that children also copy our not-so-praiseworthy behavior. "Children are very quick to pick up on inconsistencies," says Dr. Vitro. "They notice when parents say one thing and do another." Telling youngsters not to gripe about their teachers isn't going to have much effect if they hear their parents complaining about a decision their boss made.

Of course, none of us is perfect, so when we make mistakes we should admit them and talk to our youngsters about how we should have behaved differently.

Traditions build togetherness

A child with secure roots will be much more likely to adopt his family's values. One way to give your child strong family ties is through traditions. "Rituals are a regular way of saying that the family

reading bedtime stories, going on evening walks together, a family camp-out every summer, making snowmen together after the first snowfall each winter, a pancake breakfast every Saturday morning—all can become cherished rituals.

One of the most important rituals is the family meal. "Families need to have a regular time to talk, and dinner is a nice way to reconnect after a day apart from each other," Dr. Mackey says. "But, if

How to Make Time for Them

It's a fact: The less time children and parents spend together and the fewer thoughts and activities they share, the more powerful the entertainment media, peer groups and other influences will be in shaping the thoughts and lives of our children.

"Whether or not a child will adopt the parents' values depends upon the establishment of a close relationship with the parent and a continuing and positive parental presence throughout childhood," says Dr. Isabelle Fox, author of *Being There: The Benefits of a Stay-at-Home Parent*.

Your children need to know you value them and that your time with them is for you a top priority.

"You make kids feel valued by spending regular time with them," Dr. Fox says. "When your kids feel valued, they'll identify with you and want to please you. They're not going to learn from someone they don't have a relationship with."

Of course, with busy and sometimes conflicting schedules of family members, time together is not always easy to come by. One way to ensure that you and your children spend time together is to block out time on your daily and weekly calendars to be with them, just as you would schedule a meeting with an important client. Some families set aside a regular time each week for family get-togethers. One father told me: "We keep Sunday afternoons free for family outings, day trips, hiking, going to movies, a dinner out and the like. It helps us stay bonded together."

You might want to designate one evening a week as family night. Explain to your children that this is a time for family activities and conversation. Plan to feature something interesting each week. It might be miniature golf or a baseball game; other times it might be an evening at home with games and popcorn.

Carefully evaluate your family activities. Simply wandering around a shopping mall as a form of family entertainment on weekends can leave everyone feeling unsatisfied and put the emphasis on wrong values. Instead of the mall, substitute active, family-centered activities such as a trip to a museum, a walk in the woods or a visit to a park or arboretum.

Family time can also mean getting work done together. Rather than dividing up household chores, let everyone help cook dinner, clean up the kitchen or do yard work, laundry and maintenance projects around the house. Not only will your children get to spend time with you, but they will learn to do new things and observe their parents working.

—Becky Sweat

is important and that you can count on each other," says author Isabelle Fox. "Rituals and traditions help make up the glue that holds families together."

Anything can become a tradition if a family puts energy into making it important. For example, bedtime talk, when a parent and child share thoughts just before the child falls asleep, can serve as the day's closing ritual. Praying together,

everybody is grabbing their own food and going off to four different televisions or a computer, then family members won't have that interaction and may start to grow apart."

If family members follow conflicting schedules during the dinner hour, consider getting together as a family for lunch, after-school snacks, late-night desserts or Sunday brunches.

Positive friendships

Look for ways to associate your son or daughter with children of families that mirror and reinforce your values. "You can't choose your kids' friends for them, particularly as they get older, but you can make choices that will put them in situations where they'll be more likely to have a positive peer group," notes Dr. Erickson.

Encourage your children's involvement

it's important at that stage of life that they have other adults whom they can feel comfortable talking to," says Dr. Erickson.

Some of the best mentors for your teens may be your own friends, neighbors or young married couples and college students at church who can remember what it was like to be a teenager.

Put TV in its place

Because television tends to pacify

easier to tell them to go watch television.

Being responsible parents means regulating the television, radio, CD player and other electronic intrusions. Habitual television viewing deprives family members of opportunities to visit with each other. Carefully evaluate which television programs are worth watching. Resist the temptation to plop children in front of the television set so that you can get things done, in effect using the TV as a baby-sitter.

On the other hand, make it a point, at least on occasion, to watch television with your children so you can see what they are seeing and discuss the programs afterwards. "Television violence, for example, is less harmful and can even be a learning opportunity if parents will sit down with their children and talk about the program so that you're not just accepting it at face value," Dr. Erickson says.

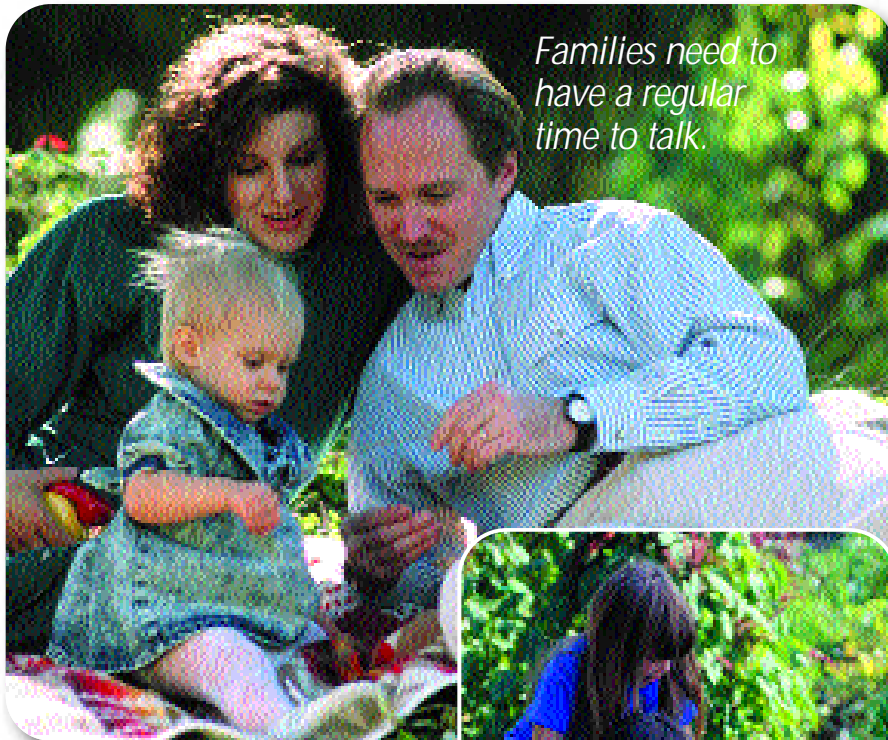
Redirect some of the hours normally spent in front of the television to reading together as a family. Family members can take turns reading aloud from the Bible, classic novels and other good books. Not only does reading create a sense of closeness between family members, it acts as a stimulus for conversation. Tell your children that reading, a key to developing comprehension and articulation, will make it easier for them to succeed in school and when they start work.

The strongest influence

In this light, something noteworthy is happening with Ted and Joyce. They recently decided to involve Steve and Millie more in their lives rather than finding ways to keep them out. One evening, instead of working as usual in their spare-bedroom and dining-room home offices, they took an hour off. They had dinner with Steve and Millie and read through one of their books with them.

Then, as they put the children to bed, Joyce and Ted took heart when they overheard Steve tell Millie: "That was nice. Mommy and Daddy stayed home tonight."

Regardless of how powerful outside influences are, parents are the earliest teachers and the biggest influences on their children. Suited as they are to teach them moral values, parents need to remain in charge of their children's upbringing. *GN*



in scouting, boys' and girls' clubs, your church's youth group, classes at your community's recreation center—wherever they are likely to meet peers who do constructive things.

It's also helpful if your children can become friends with adults who can act as adopted aunts, uncles and grandparents, especially if your relatives live in another part of the country and you rarely get a chance to see them.

"Youngsters need adults in their lives other than just their parents," Dr. Erickson says. "Children are seeing lots of adults on television who are behaving badly. They need to see adults who are living according to true values."

Teens especially need other adults around whom they can talk to. "Adolescents typically get to a point where they start to pull away from their parents, and



children while they gaze transfixed at the tube, parents often use it as a substitute for the hard work of establishing discipline.

"Watching television is easier than conversation, and it is certainly easier than confrontation, yet confrontation is sometimes what is called for in parenting," Dr. Vitro says. Instead of having to establish rules and limits and confronting children about problems, it's a lot



An Overview of Conditions

The British election: What next?



Many were stunned at the magnitude of the Labour Party victory in the British national election May 1. After 18 years in office the Conservatives were buried by a Labour onslaught that dramatically altered the political balance of power.

"So vast has been the earthquake that it will inevitably take time to adjust to the incredible changes it has wrought in our political landscape." So says Christopher Booker's controversial "Notebook" in *The Sunday Telegraph*. He continues:

"But even now, as we peer through the fog into the future, it can be predicted that, in one sense, by the time of the next election that landscape may have changed even more fundamentally."

The results of this election portend major implications for Britain's participation in the European Union. Consider also a sound bite from *The Daily Mail's* preelection editorial: "Our very survival as an independent nation is at stake in this election. All other issues pale into insignificance."

The last massive majority the Labour Party had was just after the conclusion of World War II in Europe in 1945. The party promised much, but as *The Daily Mail* pointed out, "In less than two years the 'New Jerusalem' had turned into a dismal, oppressive reality of huge housing lists, rationing more severe than in wartime, and the cramping of individual freedom by a state bureaucracy."

The new prime minister will get his opportunity to gov-

More than 200 new Labour Party members will enter Parliament for the first time. Such inexperience coupled with almost unlimited Labour power is a dangerous combination.

ern. His majority is incredible—nearly 180 seats (659 total). One pauses, however, to meditate on the experience factor. Few of the new Labour cabinet ministers will have any actual experience in governing. More than 200 new Labour Party members will enter Parliament for the first time. Such inexperience coupled with almost unlimited Labour power is a dangerous combination. Britain now has a government of novices—that could be a new beginning or matters could go badly awry. (Sources: *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Daily Mail*.)

Christianity wanes in Europe

The growth of secularism persists in Europe. In spite of impressive flurries of interest in matters spiritual here and

there, the downward trend has continued unabated the last 20 years. In that time almost every branch of Christianity has felt the reality of this decline.

According to a recent study, only 35 percent of Europeans believe in a personal God and only 31 percent in a resurrection. In Western Europe only one in five of those 18 to 24 years old believes in the resurrection. Christians, especially those under 50, have shrunk to a minority.

Further, a headline in London's *Sunday Times* (May 11) predicted that Muslims will soon outnumber Anglicans attending church in England: "A study by a research char-

Only 35 percent of Europeans believe in a personal God and only 31 percent in a resurrection. Only one in five of those 18 to 24 years old believes in the resurrection.

ity shows there will be 4,000 more regular worshippers of Islam than there are Christians attending Church of England services by the year 2002." (Sources: *The European*, *The Sunday Times*.)

World fish stocks threatened

The last five years have been marked by headlines such as "World Fishing Fleets Face Ruin as Catches Disappear," "Too Many Fishermen, Too Few Fish," "Fishing Crises in World's Oceans" and "The Madness That Threatens Our Oceans."

Here are three of the latest warnings: "North Sea Cod Gone in Two Years, Say the Scientists," "Battle of the High Seas for Remaining Catches" and "Ecologists Warn of Impending Disaster as Overfishing Threatens the Survival of Species Such as Cod and Hake."

One particular quotation that pretty well sums up this whole difficulty: "Environmentalists warned that such a dramatic fall would spell disaster for many fishing towns. Canada has already suffered such a catastrophe. In the early 1990s cod stocks in Newfoundland collapsed. Fisheries were closed and 40,000 jobs lost. Vanishing stocks in other fishing regions have provoked clashes between international fleets.

"The problem has been exacerbated by modern fishing practices. The indiscriminate catching of young fish before they have spawned is common . . . The quantity of fish discarded has also increased, and by the time they are thrown back they are usually dead . . . Current estimates are that up to 50 per cent of cod and haddock caught is discarded." (Source: *The European*.)

World health picture not encouraging

Because we are on average living much longer lives than did many of our forebears, the quality of those lives is sometimes marred by the unwelcome presence of disease. Increasingly people live with some type of severe disability. The following synopses are newspaper extracts from a recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO).





t i o n s A r o u n d t h e W o r l d

"A global epidemic of cancers and other chronic diseases was forecast yesterday by WHO. The rate of smoking induced-lung cancer among women is expected to rise by a third over the next eight years. Prostate cancer among men is set to increase by 40 per cent . . . Heart disease and strokes are the biggest killers, with 15 million victims a year. The rate is worst in Britain and other industrialised countries and is becoming more common in poorer countries. Diabetes will double by 2025 and dementia will become more widespread.

"Cancers, which kill 6.3 million people a year, are expected to double in the next 25 years. Lung cancer is the leading killer, claiming one million lives a year."

Further: "About 1.5 million died of AIDS worldwide in 1996. Tuberculosis killed 3 million. Diarrheal diseases claimed 2.5 million. Malaria killed between 1.5 and 2.7 million people." This is not utopia! (Sources: Knight-Ridder News Service, *The Express* [London], *World Health Organization*.)

German-American ties unraveling?

The relationship between Germany and America that held the Atlantic alliance together for nearly 50 years is in a sad state of disrepair, according to diplomats and politicians. Trade disputes and differences over how to deal with Russia and troublemaking states like Iran appear to be symptomatic of greater differences in agendas and interests between the formerly close allies.

With the Cold War over, some Germans see a major shift in priorities leading to loosening of bonds between their country and the United States. "NATO and the alliance with the United States no longer have the same influence on German grand strategy. Germany will remain in the alliance, but European integration—further development of the EU and close cooperation with France—is increasingly important," wrote former chancellor Helmut Schmidt in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*.

"The United States must understand that in the next century Germany will not automatically take its side in disputes between Washington and Paris," he continued. "Germany's vital interest dictates that it not become isolated or insu-

As the United States expands trading and commercial ties with Asia and Latin America, its political leaders seem disinterested in Europe's strategic value.

lated from its European neighbors, and France is the most important."

As the United States expands trading and commercial ties with Asia and Latin America, its political leaders seem disinterested in Europe's strategic value. This is reflected in the number of troops stationed in Germany. Where they once numbered 350,000, there are now fewer than 100,000, with additional cuts likely. (Sources: *Foreign Affairs*, *The Washington Post*.)

U.S. crime peril ahead?

According to a recent report from Washington, D.C., "America is bracing itself for a storm of criminal violence that, if some experts are to be believed, will sweep the country on a scale unprecedented in the nation's history."

Right now crime rates are decreasing in most American cities. Washington, D.C., is a major exception. "But gloomy demographers warn the fall in crime will soon end. Over the next decade, they say, some 52 million sub-teens will expand the base of 15- to 19-year-olds—the prime source of armed thuggery—by 15 per cent."

"Make a chain," wrote the prophet Ezekiel, "for the land is filled with crimes of blood, and the city is full of violence" (Ezekiel 7:23). One crime would follow another just like

"Over the next decade, . . . some 52 million sub-teens will expand the base of 15- to 19-year-olds—the prime source of armed thuggery—by 15 per cent."

links on a chain. No prophecy of your Bible is any more up to date than this one. (Source: *The Sunday Times*.)

America exports lethal lifestyles

Skyrocketing deaths from cancer and heart disease can be blamed in part on bad habits and unhealthy lifestyles promoted in and by the United States, according to this year's World Health Organization annual report. Particularly harmful are smoking and fatty diets, which are often emulated in other countries looking to the United States as a role model.

As a result of people following such unhealthy trends, deaths from cancer are expected to double in many poor countries in the next 25 years. The report predicts that in 2020 some 15 million cases of cancer will be diagnosed worldwide, with many of those in poor countries already burdened with killer diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis.

Diabetes, another disease often linked with diet and lifestyle, is expected to increase from its current 135 million cases to 300 million by 2025, according to the report.

While many poorer nations are gaining the upper hand in overcoming the effects of malnutrition and infections, they face the grim prospect of chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer, common killers in more-developed nations. (Source: Knight-Ridder News Service.)

Some good news

"W.H. Smith is to stop selling pornographic magazines in its high street [downtown or main street] branches. Britain's biggest chain of newsagents is to remove four soft-porn titles that it stocks in 450 stores." Instead, these shops are slated to experiment with a new line of sandwiches and snacks. (Source: *The Times* [London].)

—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley



Israel: Small but Significant

“This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her”—(Ezekiel 5:5, New Revised Standard Version).

by John Ross Schroeder

The future of the world may depend on the Middle East talks beginning today in Washington.” These were the sober words of William Rees-Mogg in *The Times* (London). But how could our future possibly even be partially dependent on the fortunes of a nation as small as Israel? How could this be so?

Americans visiting Israel are usually amazed at how small the country is. As Mark Twain once said while visiting the Holy Land, “I could not conceive of a small country having so large a history” (*Innocents Abroad*, Literary Classics of the United States, New York, 1984, p. 385). Visitors are surprised because we normally equate a state’s size with its significance.

“A glance at the map helps to explain why the history of the Holy Land has been so complex. It is small in itself, but fate placed it on the main highway of antiquity . . . Somewhat unwillingly, and often helplessly, it has been close to the centre of the historical stage and has been exalted and battered by its dramas.”

—Historian Paul Johnson, *Civilisations of the Holy Land*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1979, p. 7

How could a country so prominent on television news be so insignificant on the world map? The United States is enormous by comparison, yet many Americans have an awareness of Israel far out of proportion to its geographical size.

As Mark Twain also observed: “I have got everything in Palestine on too large a scale . . . The word Palestine always brought to my mind a vague suggestion of a country as large as the United States.”

The modern nation of Israel occupies nearly 11,000 square miles in comparison to some 160,000 square miles in California alone. Israel is only 40 miles wide and about the size of Wales. So why does this tiny nation get so much global attention?

The historical answer

The answer, of course, ultimately lies in Israel’s spiritual, historical and literary legacy. As author Amos Elon put it: “Even more extraordinary is the fact that the [Hebrew] Bible, as it was written in Jerusalem, unlike the books of other ancient peoples, was not the literature of a major or regional power nor even of a ruling elite, but the literature of a minor, remote people” (*Jerusalem: City of Mirrors*, Fontana, London, 1991, p. 19).

Elon’s view is perceptive, but consider: The New Testament itself talks of this outsized historic contribution to mankind. “So what advantage has the Jew?” asked the apostle Paul. “. . . Much in every way. In the first place the Jews were *entrusted with the messages of God*” (Romans 3:1-2, The Translator’s New Testament throughout article unless otherwise stated; emphasis added throughout).

Much of the New Testament was likewise composed in the Holy Land, which stands as the geography from which the Scriptures sprang. Truly this is the land of the Book, populated by the peoples God used to author and preserve both the Hebrew Scriptures and apostolic writings that form the Holy Bible.

Palestine is also where human frontiers tend to touch the infinite. And here they blur. According to the Bible itself, spiritual salvation is not dependent on national borders whether determined through wars, conquests, peaceful negotiations or simple passive acceptance of the realities of history.

American novelist Saul Bellow captured the spirit of this theme in his book *To Jerusalem and Back*: “Certain oddities about Israel: Because people think so hard here, and so much, and because of the length and depth of their history, this sliver of a country sometimes *seems quite large*. Some dimension of mind seems to extend into space” (Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1977, p. 58, emphasis added).

The world of the Hebrews

This concept is embedded in the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. What God originally revealed to

the Jews and the other 11 tribes of ancient Israel was intended for a much larger eventual audience, far beyond mere national borders and ethnic identities—transcending territorial or political considerations.

Moses said to Israel concerning God's laws: "Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deuteronomy 4:6).

As Ariel and D'vorah Berkowitz have written: "God equipped Israel for this task in many ways. For example, He chose to situate the nation at the crossroads of the world! The Promised Land was an ancient and natural land-bridge between Japan, India and China in the Far East, Africa in the south, and Europe in the north." The land of Israel sat astride or near many of the major trade routes crucial to the ancient world.

It was from Jerusalem that the apostles took the gospel to the then-known civilized world: The 12 apostles went first to the House of Israel, and later Paul traveled by way of Antioch, Asia Minor and Greece to Europe—faithfully carrying out the personal commission given to him by Jesus Christ (Acts 9, 22, 26). Perhaps primarily because of the preaching and writing of this apostle—not of the 12, but one called "out of due season" (1 Corinthians 15:8)—the early Church was able to address the controversial issue of who ultimately could be defined as a Jew and what was required for a gentile to receive salvation.

Who is a Jew—spiritually?

Mining the inspired wisdom given of God, Paul was moved to write to Roman Christians in Europe: "For it is not the outward appearance that makes a true Jew; his circumcision is not an outward physical matter. No, the inward reality makes the true Jew; his circumcision is an inward state. It has to do with the spirit, not with the written Law. It is God, not man, who recognizes him" (Romans 2:28-29).

The apostle to the gentiles never seemed to tire of this basic theme. He told the churches of Galatia: "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free man, man nor woman; you are all one in

Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's people, then you are Abraham's offspring, and God's gift is yours because of the promise" (Galatians 3:28-29).

Paul explained this understanding to gentile and Jewish Christians at Colosse: "In this new life there is no difference

for all have the same Lord and his riches are available for all who call on him for help" (Romans 10:12).

This is how God views every nation, race and color. It is in this remarkable light that God wishes His followers to consider others. Though we all fall short



Observant Jews gather to pray at the Western Wall, one of the holiest sites of Judaism. The wall is part of the foundation of the platform for the temple of Herod the Great, which was built some 2,000 years ago at the location of Solomon's temple.

"No one yet knows what awaits the Jews in the twenty-first century, but we must make every effort to ensure that it is better than what befell them in the twentieth, the century of the Holocaust."

—Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Place Among the Nations*, Bantam Books, New York, 1993, p. xxvii

between Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free man. Christ is all, Christ is in all" (Colossians 3:11).

He summarized this identical wonderful truth to his brethren in Rome: "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek,

of this wonderful ideal, we should always strive to attain it. This is the golden rule in action.

Peter and John also understood

Contrary to the views of some, Paul was not the only apostle to grasp this

marvelous truth. Others also understood. Peter, Paul and John agreed on fundamental matters. Their theology was not different.

Of course, Peter's and John's backgrounds were not the same as Paul's, and

to obey God and gain His acceptance.

God's work through humans usually starts in the smallest way. God told the Israelites that they had begun their national history as the least of all peoples (Deuteronomy 7:7).

John later quoted the angelic host as saying, ". . . You purchased for God men out of every tribe, language, people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

The Israel of God

To Christians, what is the ultimate significance of the nation of Israel? Just this: In His marvelous wisdom God used *physical* Israel to help bring forth *spiritual* Israel—a spiritual nation called out from among all peoples for a great purpose. Paul told us in another context that "the spiritual does not come first, but the physical, and then the spiritual" (1 Corinthians 15:46).

As he concluded to the Galatian churches, "whether a man is circumcised or uncircumcised does not matter; what matters is that he can be created anew [become truly converted]. Peace and mercy be upon all who follow this rule, that is, upon *the Israel of God*" (Galatians 6:15-16).

"The Jews constitute but one percent of the human race," wrote Mark Twain in 1869 (Twain, p. 398). And the Israel of God today is also insignificant and small in numbers. But Jesus Christ encouraged His people with the words: "Do not be afraid, *little flock*; it has pleased your Father to give you the Kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Remember, Christ also said that "repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed in his name among all the nations, *beginning from Jerusalem*" (Luke 24:47).

The spiritual work that began in first-century Jerusalem continues as the 20th century draws to a close. The contributors to *The Good News* face the future with hope, challenged by the awesome task of continuing to bring this message to all countries in the waning days of this century and into the next. This is a great work for the *Israel of God*. **GN**

Small Can Be Dangerous!

For millennia, tiny nations and islands have posed massive problems for major countries. In this century superpowers were drawn to the brink of all-out war over disputes involving relatively minuscule nations. Witness the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. The United States and the former U.S.S.R. found themselves on the edge of a nuclear exchange before finally finding a way out of the crisis.

Britain and Argentina fought a brief war over the Falklands in 1982. A year later the U.S. liberation of Grenada spawned a significant diplomatic dispute with Britain. After all, the Queen is head of state of this small Caribbean island. More recently the Gulf War was fought partially to liberate a relatively small Arab state, Kuwait.

Summing up the problem, a British House of Commons report stated in 1984: "As the world has so often learned in the past, and at such great cost, wars break out and alliances fall apart, not so often as the result of deliberate decisions by the major powers, but as a result of the inability of the great power system and the alliances which support it, to cope with the problems of small countries in faraway parts of the globe" (*Small Is Dangerous: Micro States in a Macro World*, edited by Sheila Harden, Frances Pinter [publishers], London, 1985).

In the early 1970s U.S. president Richard Nixon, in his support of one of the smallest of nations, Israel, felt forced to restrain Russian Middle Eastern intentions. American forces temporarily had to be put on full alert.

So the words of former Commonwealth secretary-general Shridath "Sunny" Ramphal ring true: "The truth probably is that the world community has not yet thought its way through the phenomenon of very small states in the world that is emerging in the end years of the twentieth century" ("Small Is Beautiful but Vulnerable," speech in London, July 18, 1984).

Israel is not alone in its plight. Although some of its problems may be unusual, others—like territorial integrity—are all too common to many tiny nations.

Mr. Ramphal perceptively concluded: "Sometimes it seems as if small states were like small boats, pushed out into the turbulent sea, free in one sense to traverse it; but, without oars or provisions, without compass or sails, free also to perish. Or, perhaps, to be rescued and taken on board a larger vessel."

Many small states have had to rely on the umbrella of larger nations just to survive. Others, however, have had a good try at economic independence. Consider Eritrea in Africa as an example. *Independent on Sunday* feature writer Neal Ascherson visited this tiny nation of 3.5 million people. He was surprised to find "a stable country full of hope and economic energy" (Dec. 22, 1996).

Mr. Ascherson visited with and interviewed Iseyas Afewerki, the president of Eritrea. This leader of a small and still-poor nation stated that "dependency is what we fear . . . Dependency, especially for food aid, can be disabling, dehumanising and very restrictive; it does not motivate human beings to be active."

Writer Ascherson concluded his article: "What the Eritreans are saying is that poor nations must and can save themselves . . . Eritrea then is good news." However, this would not excuse wealthy nations from generous help—especially in emergency situations.

—John Ross Schroeder

they would naturally express the same truths in a different style.

For instance, Peter told Cornelius: "In truth I realize that God has no favourites, but in every nation whoever fears God and does what is right is accepted by him" (Acts 10:34-35). Here Peter encouraged disciples from all countries

Nonetheless God did give Israel His law and began to reveal His great purpose on earth to these relatively obscure people residing in a small, narrow country. Yet the Israelites began a significant spiritual work that was to expand to include representatives of all peoples in the modern age. Speaking of Jesus Christ, the apostle

RECOMMENDED READING

Many are confused concerning the meaning of the Kingdom of God. Is it here now, or will it come later? Is the Church the Kingdom? How can we enter it? These and many other questions are answered in our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Please request your copy by contacting us at the address or phone number in your country—or the country nearest you—listed on page 2.



'Dust to Dust'

The truth about life after death is out there, but not in our stars or ourselves. Our revealed future is far greater than the stuff of dreams.

by Les McCullough

The late Carl Sagan, astronomer and author, used to wonder why smart people would believe in God. True, he spent most of the last decade of his life saying he wanted to discover whether God exists, but up until he died earlier this year he never believed in God or that he would ever again see his wife of 20 years.

Is there life after death? Is there an answer that makes sense?

As he saw his death approaching, Sagan himself said: "I would love to believe that when I die I will live again, that some thinking, feeling, remembering part of me will continue. But, much as I want to believe that, and despite the ancient and worldwide cultural traditions that assert an afterlife, I know of nothing to suggest that it is more than wishful thinking" ("In the Valley of the Shadow," *Parade*, March 10, 1996).

Many other people have also decided that this life is all there is and they try to make the most of it. If Carl Sagan and these others are right, then the rest of us, particularly those who believe the Bible's explanation, have been seriously deluded.

Skepticism about an afterlife, or of that afterlife being one of happiness forever, has long existed even among Christians. In the first century of the Christian era, the apostle Paul encountered this mind-set in Corinth. Apparently the Christians God had called in this cosmopolitan city carried some of the philosophical baggage of their times along with them. Some questioned even the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul pointedly asked: "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Corinthians 15:12).

He continued: "For if the dead do not rise, then

Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep [are dead] in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (verses 16-19).

To Paul, the issue was not one of *whether* there is a resurrection. That was an accomplished fact; eyewitnesses had seen Jesus Christ brutally executed, then had seen Him alive again. These men and women had walked with Him, talked with Him, touched Him, shared meals with Him. They knew the resurrection was real. The issue, then, was *how* and *when* will the dead be resurrected. Where are they while awaiting their resurrection?

What happens to the dead?

Humans are a physical creation. God created Adam from the dust of the earth and informed him, after he had taken of the forbidden fruit, that "in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; *for dust [clay] you are, and to dust you shall return*" (Genesis 3:19, emphasis added throughout). It isn't flattering to think of returning to dust, but that is what happens to the physical body after death.

What does it mean to die? The biblical book of Ecclesiastes was written by someone said to be the wisest man who ever lived. Solomon wrote: "For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust" (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20).

Solomon understood that the dead do not con-

To Paul, the issue was not one of whether there is a resurrection. That was an accomplished fact; eyewitnesses had seen Jesus Christ brutally executed, then had seen Him alive again.

Is Everyone Being Judged Now?

What about those who haven't accepted Jesus Christ or have never heard even a word about His message? What happens to them?

The wonderful answer to that question illustrates the hope God holds out to all people who have ever lived!

God is a loving Father. We are all His creation and children. No father wants to see bad things happen to his children, although he may allow problems to come upon them.

Our *heavenly* Father also allows us to suffer as part of His higher and greater purpose for us. Why? Because God's whole purpose is to bring mankind into the knowledge of Him and His way for eternity.

Surely a loving Father would not doom most people to the fiery hell preached by most churches. In fact, He does *not* doom ignorant people to hell. He has a plan that provides all with ample opportunity to choose to live forever.

"We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). Other translations of the Bible show that "the day of salvation" is better translated "*a* day of salvation." Notice Green's Literal Translation: "In *an* acceptable time I heard you, and in *a* day of salvation I helped you" (verse 2).

Paul told his fellow minister, Timothy, that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Putting these two passages together, it becomes apparent that the Father's intent is that *everyone* will have a chance to learn and understand His way of life. If someone hasn't been called in this life, at another time he will be raised to physical life and learn about God's plan for him and all mankind.

More than one resurrection

Revelation 20 speaks of the return of Christ and the restraint to be placed upon Satan the devil. It also speaks of Christians, martyred for their faithfulness to Jesus Christ, living and reigning with Him for a thousand years. Of those resurrected to reign with Christ, it says, "*This is the first resurrection*" (verse 5, emphasis added throughout).

That same verse, however, speaks of an additional resurrection too. "*But the rest of the dead* did not live again until the thousand years were finished." Since the first resurrection of those faithful to Christ occurs at His return, and "the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished," it becomes obvious that other people are raised to live again.

Why does God raise additional people after the 1,000 years? So they can learn the truth about the message of Jesus Christ and have an opportunity to accept the One they have never been taught about as their personal Savior!

How does "hell" fit into all this? The Hebrew word *sheol* is the word translated "hell" throughout the Old Testament. It means simply "the grave." The Greek word *hades* is translated the same way and has the same meaning. So in a sense we all go to hell, the grave, when we die. While we are there, we have no knowledge of anything earthly or heavenly.

But that is not the end. All the dead will be resurrected.

Some will be raised to life at the return of Christ, and "the rest of the dead" not until the first 1,000 years of Christ's reign ends. At that time all those who never heard of Jesus Christ, and never learned God's way, will be given their opportunity for salvation.

In contrast to those who are resurrected to immortality at Christ's return (1 Corinthians 15:22-23, 51-54), those in this resurrection are physical and mortal (as shown by the vision in Ezekiel 37:1-14). They are given physical life and the opportunity to learn God's way of life, recognize and repent of their sins and submit to God's rule over them. This is not a "second chance" for salvation, but is truly their first opportunity to learn of God's precious truth and wonderful plan for them.

Fate of those who refuse to repent

However, some will utterly refuse to allow God to rule over them. Their fate will not be the traditional ever-burning hell in which the wicked are tortured forever. They will experience a consuming hell that will burn them up completely.

Speaking through the prophet Malachi, God describes the fate of those who willingly reject His way of life and Christ's sacrifice for them. "Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the LORD of hosts, 'that will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name . . . you shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,' says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 4:1-3).

The Bible calls this "the lake of fire" (Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15). Those who choose to reject God's way will not be allowed to continue living in the misery their choice will bring on them and others. They will die, not suffer forever. As Malachi wrote, they will be consumed in this fire, leaving nothing but ashes. Their fate is far more merciful than the popular—and unbiblical—view of the wicked suffering forever in hell.

Awesome fate foretold

All ungodly things will be ultimately purged from the earth. The physical elements will melt and disappear (2 Peter 3:7-13). What is left? The glorious Kingdom of God and His immortal glorified children remain.

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (Revelation 21:1-3).

The cares of life will become a thing of the past. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (verse 4).

What an incredible destiny for the human race!

—Les McCullough

tinue alive in some other place or state of existence. He knew that “the dead know nothing” and “there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10).

Do the dead, then, live again? Yes, most definitely.

Resurrection at Christ's return

Paul, once again allaying fears, explained this to the church in Thessalonica. “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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him *those who sleep in Jesus*” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

It is perfectly clear that Paul is equating death with the state of being asleep: “For

What a wonderful promise! The dead shall rise and live again. At the time of the return of Christ, those who have believed in Him and repented and lived their lives accordingly, will stand with Him at His return as immortal children of God.

Transformation to spirit

What happens then? “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

What happens at this time? Job asks and

in them]” (1 Corinthians 15:45-48).

Raised to immortality

Now notice the outcome: “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. 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” (verses 49-51).

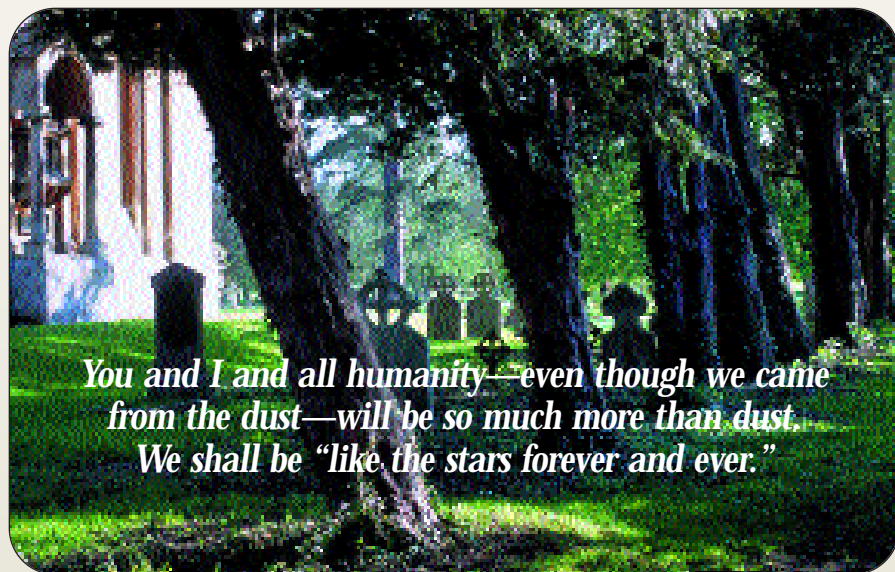
Besides those resurrected from the dead at Christ's return, others who are still alive at that time will also be transformed into spirit to become a part of the ultimate Kingdom of God. Notice how and when this occurs:

It takes place “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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (verses 52-54).

From that time on, death can no longer threaten those individuals. They will be eternal, ever-living spirit sons of God.

Death will be swallowed up by eternal life to exist no more. You and I and all humanity—even though we came from the dust—will be so much more than dust. We shall be “like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

For a man who knew the earth as “a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena,” and who became universally known for his saying that “we are all made of star stuff,” Carl Sagan, when his time to rise comes, will be happy with his newfound knowledge. *GN*



this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede *those who are asleep*” (verse 15).

Those who have died “sleep” in their graves until the time Jesus Christ calls for them at His return. At that time the dead in Christ will rise.

The dead in Christ are those who in life responded to the gospel message by repenting of their sins, accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior, being baptized for the remittance of sin and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit to help them to obey God (Acts 2:37-38).

This resurrection from the dead is clear from both the Old and New Testaments. Isaiah 26:19 says, “Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise.”

answers the question: “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). He is saying that at the return of Jesus the dead will be changed.

Paul adds another important dimension to how the process works. “And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam [Jesus Christ] became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly [those who have God's Spirit

RECOMMENDED READING

Few people really understand what the Bible says about death and God's incredible plan for mankind. To learn about your purpose in life, be sure to read our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *What Happens After Death?* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Humanity*. Please contact us at the address or phone number in your country—or the country nearest you—listed on page 2.

It's been a little more than 100 years since Europeans divided up Africa, adding vast territories to their colonial empires and radically changing the course of African history. Within three generations all of Africa changed hands; colonial powers returned home even more rapidly than they had arrived.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the independence of Britain's first black African colony, Ghana, formerly the Gold Coast. In the decade after Ghanaian independence, Britain divested itself of more square miles than comprises the United States. New nation after new nation—from Botswana to Zambia—was born.

France followed and dismantled her empire, the second biggest in Africa, though Paris still maintains economic and military control of some of her for-

suffered most is the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire, renamed after its recent change of government. The second largest nation in Africa, it was a personal possession of the king of the Belgians earlier in this century before gaining independence suddenly in 1960. Unlike Ghana, which had been ruled by progressive governors for most of the 20th century and which had ample foreign-currency reserves and three thriving universities, Congo had nothing going for it. The Belgians had not prepared their subjects for self-rule and gave them only two weeks' notice of their departure. It's little wonder that the country has suffered greatly in the interim.

Some observers believe that the only glimmer of hope lies in Congo's recent change of leadership. The long-time president, Mobutu Sese Seko, who seized power in 1965, fled the country as rebel

So it's no surprise that many people are happy to see the end of the Mobutu era. What is surprising is that his 32-year era has lasted so long, but it would not have been possible without aid from Western nations, who saw Mobutu as a bulwark against communist expansion in Africa. Now Western powers, especially the United States and France, may reap the whirlwind as Laurent Kabila, a protégé of legendary Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara, consolidates power.

Government the core of the problem

Africa's greatest problem is government, or, more precisely, a lack of proper leadership in government. After gaining independence, many countries had bureaucracies that burgeoned rapidly at the time tax revenues dropped thanks to an increase in bribery and corruption and the flight

Africa:

by Melvin Rhodes

Still the Heart of Darkness?



Why is Africa, an enormous continent blessed with great wealth, plagued with such pervasive problems? When will it find solutions?

mer territories on the continent.

Turmoil in former colonies

In the three or four decades after decolonization, Africa has been the only continent that has gone backward economically. Most people today are worse off than under colonial rule.

Before independence Ghanaians enjoyed a per-capita income greater than that of the people of Portugal. Today average income for urban African workers is only \$30 per month, and Ghana is far from being the poorest nation on the continent.

One of the countries whose people have

leader Laurent Kabila took control of Kinshasa, the capital, and much of the nation's territory.

Many of its citizens welcome the prospect of change. Corruption has long prevailed under Mobutu's rulership, with people surrendering up to 80 percent of their pitifully small incomes in bribes to bureaucrats and police. Meanwhile, people die in hospitals for want of electricity or simple medication.

President Mobutu is accused of amassing enormous wealth in foreign bank accounts rather than spending the nation's resources on his own people.

of technocrats and businessmen.

While the wealth became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a select few, the infrastructure of many emerging nations collapsed. Schools and hospitals deteriorated as teachers and doctors fled to Europe and America.

Is there any hope?

Yes. Africa's new generation of leaders can learn from the mistakes of the past.

Instead of being self-seeking, they can look to the example of Jesus Christ, who told His disciples that "whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:27, King James Version).

Leadership is an opportunity to *serve* others, to give without expecting to get. This is a difficult lesson for people to learn.

Western leaders need to remember this at a time of rampant corruption in government. What has helped richer countries is the realization—over centuries of historical experience—that power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely, as British ambassador Lord Acton noted.

Leaders of African nations—not to mention other states around the world—would do well to heed what the Bible says about human nature and human leadership. The prophet Jeremiah’s inspired observation that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9) applies to all people, including politicians. History has repeatedly and tragically demonstrated the truth of Jeremiah’s words.

Examples of positive leadership

Some nations have learned their painful lesson and taken encouraging steps forward.

After almost 30 years of corrupt and incompetent leaders, Ghana hit rock-bottom in the early 1980s. Bankrupt, it virtually ceased to function. It sought outside help.

Help came, but Ghana had to change. Governmental controls on every aspect of life had to be lifted. A free market was introduced, and eventually free elections took place.

The country is on the way to recovery, but it will be a long and slow process. Little of the newfound wealth has trickled down to the average Ghanaian.

South Africa, only recently added to the list of black-ruled African nations, seeks to

Museveni’s friendship with Congo’s new leader Kabila is an encouraging portent for the future.

Worldwide impact of local problems

Is any of this important to the West?

Western nations are heavily dependent on African countries for their mineral wealth, which provides much of the raw material to keep their industries going.

Problems in Africa impact the West in other ways as well. Immigration has become a major issue in some Western nations. Africans leave Africa for economic reasons. Sound economies at home would help ease the immigration burden overseas.

It is no longer possible for any nation to ignore the plight of another thousands of miles away. Western nations have a vested interest in helping Africa recover.

Africa is not beyond help. There is hope,



Mobutu Sese Seko, left, fled Congo (formerly Zaire), in May as his 32-year regime crumbled. He was overthrown by Laurent Kabila, shown celebrating with his troops.

Africa would greatly benefit if its armies stayed out of power. Many nations have experienced violent coups d’etat that have brought the ill-educated to power. Of course, often they overthrew corrupt civilian administrations, but military rule rarely brings long-term benefits.

Although British- or American-style democracy may not always work in present-day Africa, it should be possible for African nations to apply biblical principles to minimize the abuses of power that have bankrupted much of the continent. This would go a long way to reining in corruption and its devastating consequences.

maintain its system of checks and balances, avoiding the mistakes of its northern neighbors. But it must also learn the art of working together. As *The Times* magazine supplement (London) reported: “For thousands of South Africans, freedom will only truly have been achieved once they have forgiven their enemies—and for that to take place, they must first talk to them” (September 14, 1996).

Uganda is a shining example of a small nation building itself up again. Its leader, President Yoweri Museveni, introduced reforms that have turned the country around after three decades of corruption and chaos. Some observers believe that

even now, as some countries lead the way.

It is a continent that has always had a lot to offer to the human family—not only in its abundant natural resources, but in the enormous diversity of its people. For instance, some 1,300 languages are spoken in Africa. We look forward to the day when all of its national groups will have a full share of the world’s prosperity, when drought and starvation shall have ceased with the establishment of the Kingdom of God ruling on earth.

That restoration of righteous rule shall bring leadership that this continent has never seen before. Righteous rulership, along with solutions to so many of humanity’s problems through adherence to God’s laws, will be the order of the day. *GN*

Archaeology and the Book of Joshua: The Conquest

by Mario Seiglie

In earlier issues *The Good News* examined archaeological finds that illuminate portions of the biblical books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. In this issue we continue that series, focusing on the book of Joshua, which chronicles Israel's entrance into the Promised Land.

After wandering in the desert for 40 years, the Israelites were finally permitted to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Moses was about to die, and God instructed him: "Behold, the days approach when you must die; call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him" (Deuteronomy 31:14). Shortly afterwards, Joshua was named as the new leader, and Moses died on top of Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1, 5). Thus begins the story of the Israelite conquest of Canaan.

Debated dates at Jericho

"Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in" (Joshua 6:1).

The first city the Israelites faced was Jericho. According to the archaeological evidence, it is one of the oldest settlements in the world. How accurate is the biblical description of Jericho's destruction?

The question spurred a lively debate throughout this century after several major excavations of the city took place.

The first extensive dig employing modern techniques was conducted by British archaeologist John Garstang in the 1930s. After six years of excavations he reported:

"In a word, in all material details and in date the fall of Jericho took place as described in the Biblical narrative. Our demonstration is limited, however, to material observations: the walls fell, shaken apparently by earthquake, and the city was destroyed by fire, about 1400 B.C." ("Jericho and the Biblical Story," *Wonders of the Past*, Wise, New York, 1937, p. 1222).

In the 1950s Garstang's conclusion was rejected by another British archaeologist, Kathleen Kenyon. She placed the destruction of this stage of the city 150 years earlier than Joshua's time and believed that no 15th-century city existed for him to conquer. This argument lent support to many scholars who dismissed the biblical story as a myth. Archaeologist and pottery expert Bryant Wood observed: "Scholars by and large [had] 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" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April 1990, p. 49).

Evidence examined and evaluated

Unfortunately, Kathleen Kenyon died before her work could be published, making careful evaluation of her reports difficult. Fifteen years later her findings were published, and the task fell to Bryant Wood to methodically review them.

After studying her work and taking into account new discoveries, his startling conclusion was that Kenyon had been completely wrong on her date of the fall of Jericho. He found a direct correlation between the archaeological evidence and the biblical account.

What led to such a turnaround?

First was the use of a tool not available in Kenyon's days—radioactive dating. When a piece of charcoal from the burned city was examined by carbon-14 testing—generally reliable for materials up to 4,000 years old—it yielded the date of 1410 B.C., almost precisely the time of the conquest and burning of Jericho as determined from biblical chronology. (According to 1 Kings 6:1, Solomon's temple was inaugurated 480 years after the Exodus, which would place this event at approximately 1443 B.C. After 40 years in the wilderness, the Israelites would have entered the Promised Land around 1403 B.C.)

Concerning the evidence that the city was incinerated, Kenyon found a layer of ash and burnt debris a yard thick in this level of the city.

How accurate is the biblical description of Jericho's destruction? The question spurred a lively debate throughout this century after several major excavations of the city took place.

“The destruction was complete,” she reported. “Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire . . . In most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt . . .” (“Excavations at Jericho,” *Palestinian Exploration Quarterly*, 1955, p. 370).

This description of the devastation fits the biblical account of the fate of the city: Israel “burned the city and all that was in it with fire” (Joshua 6:24).

Moreover, evidence included three Egyptian scarabs—beetle-shaped amulets—discovered in a cemetery inside the city. These bore the names of three pharaohs who ruled from 1500 to the 1380s B.C. Such dates clearly contradict Kenyon’s belief that the city had been abandoned around 1550 B.C.

Biblical details confirmed

A third type of evidence was the unusual amount of stored grain found in the ruins of Jericho. “The most abundant item found in the destruction apart from pottery,” says Wood, “was grain . . . In her limited excavation area, Kenyon recovered six bushels of grain in one season! This is unique in the annals of Palestinian archaeology. The presence of these grain stores in the *destroyed* city is entirely consistent with the Biblical account. The city did not fall as a result of a starvation siege, as was so common in ancient times. Instead, the Bible tells us, Jericho was destroyed after but seven days (Joshua 6:15, 20).

“Successful attackers normally plundered valuable grain once they captured a city. This of course would be inconsistent with the grain found here. But in the case of Jericho the Israelites were told that ‘the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction,’ and were commanded, ‘Keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction’ (Joshua 9:17-18). So the Israelites were forbidden to take any plunder from Jericho. This could explain why so much grain was left to burn when [the city] met its end” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April 1990, p. 56).

Finally, the type of pottery found confirmed the traditional date of the conquest, since some bore a style that appeared only

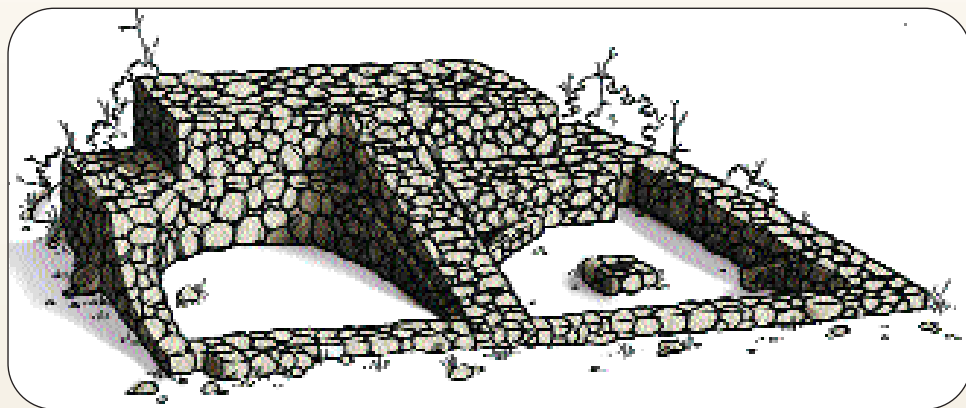
during the period of 1450-1400 B.C. Wood concludes: “Despite my disagreements with Kenyon’s major conclusion, I nevertheless applaud her for her careful and painstaking field work . . . Her thoroughgoing excavation methods and detailed reporting of her findings, however, did not carry over into her analytical work.

“When the evidence is critically examined there is no basis for her contention that City IV [the level corresponding to a violent destruction and burning of the city] was destroyed by the Hyksos or Egyptians

and sacrificed peace offerings” (Joshua 8:30-31).

The barren region of Mount Ebal had lain undisturbed for centuries. In 1982 a team of archaeologists began to scratch its surface. This was in the West Bank area and had not been explored until 1967, when Israel occupied the territory.

Adam Zertal, an Israeli archaeologist, supervised the excavation of a strange mound found on top of Mount Ebal. Slowly, after months of work, the site began to yield its secrets.



An artist's rendering shows the stone structure discovered on Mount Ebal as it might have appeared in the time of Joshua. Its excavators believe the central platform was Joshua's altar, to which priests ascended via the ramp in the center.

in the mid-16th century B.C.E. The pottery, stratigraphic considerations, scarab data and a Carbon-14 date all point to a destruction of the city around the end of Late Bronze I, about 1400 B.C.E. Garstang’s original date for this event appears to be the correct one!” (ibid., p. 57).

When *Time* magazine published an article about these new conclusions on Jericho, the evidence appeared so convincing that *Time* writers remarked, “Score one for the Bible” (Michael D. Lemonick, *Time*, March 5, 1990, p. 43).

Unusual remains discovered

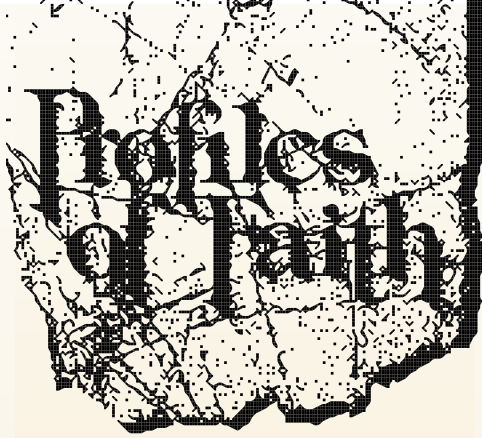
“Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: ‘an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool.’ And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD,

It was a rectangular structure made of large, uncut stones with a ramp leading to the center. It was quite a massive formation, 28 feet by 24 feet and 9 feet tall. Inside the construction was a fill of ashes, rocks, dirt, potsherds and animal bones. More than 4,000 animal bones were found and sent to a laboratory for analysis.

At first Zertal thought the structure had been a farmhouse, but it had no doors and no floor. All the houses in that period had floors, even if only of compressed earth.

From nearby Jerusalem came the analysis of the animal bones. Almost all of them were from bulls, sheep and goats, precisely the animals prescribed for sacrifice in the book of Leviticus. None of the bones came from typical farm animals that the Bible defines as unclean—horses, donkeys, pigs, dogs and cats. After further examination, this did not look like the remains of a

Continued on page 29



Joshua

God Is Salvation

by Jerold Aust

The task of taking the Promised Land from the Canaanites appeared impossible. “They are far too powerful for us to conquer!” “Their city walls are heavily fortified, and the inhabitants are giants!” “It’s true that the land is rich and fertile, but how can we overcome these fierce warriors in their own land?”

So it was that 10 fearful men gave Moses what Scripture calls a “bad report” (Numbers 13:27-33). All Israel, motivated by sight rather than faith, trembled with fear.

But the representative from the tribe of Judah, Caleb, was a faith-filled man. He quieted the people and countered the discouraging report: “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it” (verse 30). The 10 leaders staunchly disagreed with Caleb: “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we” (verse 31).

One other man who had spied out the land supported Caleb’s positive report. He was Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim. Together he and Caleb confirmed that their trust was in God: “The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. *If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, ‘a land which flows with milk and honey.’*”

Only do not rebel

against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and *the LORD is with us. Do not fear them*” (Numbers 14:7-9, emphasis added throughout).

But Joshua and Caleb couldn’t overcome Israel’s fear. In fact, the Israelites demanded that Joshua and Caleb be stoned to death (verse 10). This angered God, who threatened to destroy the faithless Israelites (verse 12).

Moses pleaded with God: “Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy” (verse 19). God spared the Israelites, but

die in the wilderness rather than in this new land (verses 2-3).

Because they believed God’s promise, Joshua and Caleb would live to enter the Promised Land. Eventually Joshua would succeed Moses as leader of Israel and would guide the people into the land God had promised them (Joshua 1:1-9).

Forty years later one of Joshua’s first daunting challenges was to determine how his countrymen would cross the Jordan River, swollen from spring rains.

Crossing the Jordan on dry ground

Unknown to Joshua, God had a plan.

Because they believed God’s promise, Joshua and Caleb would live to enter the Promised Land. Eventually Joshua would succeed Moses as leader of Israel and would guide the people into the land God had promised them.

imposed a sobering condition: They must still be punished for their lack of faith and testing of God. They would wander in the wilderness for another 40 years, until the complaining generation had died out. The Israelite fathers would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land, but their children would.

These were the same defenseless children their fathers said would surely die if they tried to enter the Promised Land (verses 3, 30-31). The unbelieving Israelites had said they would prefer to

“And the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, saying, “When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan””” (Joshua 3:7-8).

Joshua did as he was told and reassured the Israelites that God was with them and would help them overcome their enemies in the land. Standing at the



The Israelites were astonished when, as the priests bearing the ark stepped into the water, "the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap."

riverbank, the Israelites were astonished when, as the priests bearing the ark stepped into the water, "the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap." The waters backed up for miles, "and the people crossed over opposite Jericho" (Joshua 3:9-10, 13, 16).

God thus confirmed His choice of Joshua at the Jordan River as He had Moses at the Red Sea.

Joshua then instructed that 12 stones be gathered out of the Jordan riverbed and erected as a monument, a reminder to the Israelites of this miracle. This would recall for later generations their need to fear God and obey Him. Joshua instructed God's people: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' Then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land'; for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, . . . that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (Joshua 4:21-24).

God then commanded Joshua to have the sons of Israel circumcised, renewing God's covenant dating back to Abraham

(Genesis 17:10-14). The act of circumcision symbolized obedience and faithfulness to God. For 40 years in the wilderness the male children of Israel had not been circumcised, but now God required the renewal of this covenant with Israel.

The Israelites then celebrated the commanded Passover (Joshua 5:10). God stopped giving Israel the miraculous food, manna, at this point, allowing Israel to eat of the produce of the land, unleavened bread and parched grain (verse 11). These acts of obedience helped prepare Israel for its next major obstacle in the Promised Land: the fortress city of Jericho.

Help from inside Jericho

For Joshua to conquer the Promised Land, he needed help. God provided him supernatural help, but Joshua also needed help from humans besides his own army. Rahab was one who helped Joshua and Israel conquer Jericho. A citizen of Jericho, she provided Joshua an ideal means for infiltrating and spying out the city.

Rahab lived on one of Jericho's walls (Joshua 2:15). A prostitute, she helped Joshua by hiding his spies. Led by faith, she protected Joshua's men and struck a

shrewd bargain with them (Joshua 2:1-14).

Through her efforts the spies were saved. She helped smuggle them out of the city and directed where they could hide for a few days (verses 15-16).

God honored Rahab's actions many centuries later: "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Hebrews 11:31).

The apostle James extolled her faithful works: "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" (James 2:25). Rahab trusted God. Joshua didn't forget her help and faithfulness: "But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, 'Go into the harlot's house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her'" (Joshua 6:22).

And the walls came tumbling down

Out of fear of Israel, Jericho closed its massive gates, barring anyone from entering or leaving (Joshua 6:1). Unknown to the walled city's residents, God had bottled up Jericho's king and warriors to turn them over to the Israelites (verse 2).

God gave Joshua specific instructions. The Israelites were to march around the city once each day for six days. On the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times, and then the priests were to sound their trumpets.

When they heard the long blast of the ram's horn, the Israelites were to shout. The wall of the city would then fall down flat, and the Israelite troops would enter the city, climbing over the fallen walls.

There was one stipulation in all this: The people were not to shout nor to make any noise with their voices until Joshua signaled them (verses 3-10).

Israel faithfully followed Joshua's instructions and gained a miraculous victory. We're reminded again by Joshua that Rahab and her father's household were spared for their cooperation and assistance in hiding the spies (Joshua 6:25). God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34), as the Israelites soon discovered at Ai, the next city blocking their way.

A painful lesson

Joshua sent spies to Ai. When they returned to Joshua they recommended that he send about 3,000 men to attack the city.



“Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few,” they reported (Joshua 7:3). But when the 3,000 men came into contact with the inhabitants of the city, they turned and fled for their lives. The men of Ai chased and killed 36 Israelite men in that fateful battle.

What a shock to Joshua! All he remembered was that God had promised him victory in all Israel’s military campaigns. This defeat made no sense to him at all.

Joshua and the other elders of Israel fell on their faces before the ark of the LORD (verse 6). Joshua reasoned with God, reminding Him of His promise and that this defeat could endanger Israel in Canaan (verses 7-9).

But there was a deep-seated problem among the Israelites. The cause of the defeat was about to be revealed. God had warned them not to take anything from Jericho, commanding that the city be completely destroyed (Joshua 6:17-19). One man, however, disobeyed God’s instruction and stole clothing, gold and silver from the ruined city.

God told Joshua and his elders to get

burned (verses 24-25).

Victory at Ai

With Achan’s sinful influence removed, Joshua was again sent to conquer Ai. Joshua chose 30,000 soldiers and approached Ai by night. He planned his strategy: Part of Israel’s army would show itself to the men of Ai, then flee from them as before. When the men of Ai pursued the Israelites, the remaining Israelite forces would enter and take the city.

His plan worked perfectly. As the smaller group of Israelites retreated, the men of Ai poured out of their city to pursue them. “So all the people who were in Ai . . . pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel” (Joshua 8:16-17).

The remaining Israelite forces entered the city and burned it in a great victory for Joshua and Israel. It was a greater victory for the glory of God.

The difference between the two battles against Ai was obedience. God is in charge of human affairs; He fights for those who humble themselves to honor and obey Him.

Even after this great victory and the

wineskins torn and mended, old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, ‘We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us’” (Joshua 9:3-6).

After questioning these men and being convinced they had traveled from far away, Joshua agreed to spare them. However, Israel had failed to inquire of God what should be done in this case (verses 14-15). Should Joshua have consulted God on the matter? Yes, but he didn’t. Nonetheless, the Gibeonites became Israel’s servants, and the Bible shows they remained faithful servants of Israel for centuries.

The Gibeonites accepted the requirements imposed on them, preferring service as woodcutters and water-carriers for Israel rather than the fate that met the other inhabitants of the land.

They also hoped for Israelite protection, for which a need quickly arose: Five Amorite kings gathered to attack the Gibeonites to teach them a lesson and strike fear in the hearts of others who might also consider surrendering to Israel.

Victory over Israel’s enemies

When the Gibeonites saw the five armies poised to attack them, they sent for immediate help from Joshua and Israel.

Responding to the Gibeonites’ call for help, Joshua and Israel marched all night from Gilgal to Gibeon (Joshua 10:9), striking the Amorites by surprise. “So the LORD routed them before Israel, killed them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, chased them along the road that goes to Beth Horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah. And it happened, as they fled before Israel and were on the descent of Beth Horon, that the LORD cast down large hailstones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than the children of Israel killed with the sword” (verses 10-11).

After this miraculous victory, Joshua went on to conquer northern Canaan (Joshua 11). However, he did not conquer all the kings of Canaan; some were left for Israel to remove later (Joshua 13). Joshua was growing old, so God directed him

The difference between the two battles against Ai was obedience. God is in charge of human affairs; He fights for those who humble themselves to honor and obey Him.

up and face their problem: “Israel has sinned . . . They have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived . . . Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you” (Joshua 7:11-12).

God showed there was a direct relationship between Israel’s defeat and disobedience.

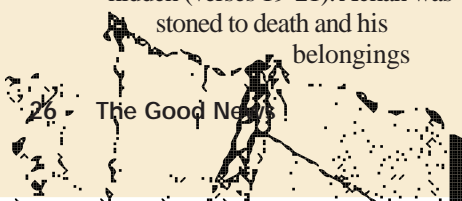
Joshua obeyed. He searched Israel by tribes and families and with God’s help narrowed the search to Achan. When confronted, Achan admitted his sin and disclosed where the booty from Jericho was hidden (verses 19-21). Achan was stoned to death and his belongings

greater one at Jericho, the Canaanite kings did not seek peace with Israel (Joshua 9:1-2). Their pride cost them their power, property and lives (Joshua 10). Not all the people of the land, however, were so proud. The Gibeonites were an exception.

The Gibeonites save themselves

The Gibeonites, terrified by the encroaching Israelites, concocted a deceitful plan to save their lives. Although they were really only a few miles away from the Israelites, some of their men posed as representatives of a faraway land seeking to establish a peace treaty with Israel.

“But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old



to divide the land among the 12 tribes.

Dividing the Promised Land

Joshua divided the land among all the tribes of Israel, with two tribes and half a tribe settling east of the Jordan River and

Joshua reminded the Israelites that as long as they obeyed God's commandments He would prosper and protect them.

the remainder throughout Canaan itself (same chapter). He established cities of refuge (Joshua 20) and specific towns for the Levites so all Israel could be properly served by God's servants (Joshua 13:14; 14:4).

Finally, when Joshua was 110 years old, he called for all the Israelites, including their elders, judges and officers, and said to them: "I am old, advanced in age. You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you" (Joshua 23:2-3).

Joshua reminded the Israelites, including their leaders, that as long as they obeyed God's commandments He would prosper and protect them. If they disobeyed God by taking on the ungodly ways of the Canaanites, He would "bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you" (verse 15).

Joshua gave God the credit for Israel's salvation and deliverance. His final admonition was to urge Israel to faithfully serve God and never forget His laws (Joshua 23-24).

Joshua's long journey of faith

Joshua fulfilled many roles during his life: slave, soldier, servant, spy, savior, statesman and saint. Joshua was born during Israel's years of bondage in Egypt. Toiling as a slave, he probably knew the cruel lash of the whip.

In the record about the Israelites in Egypt, we glimpse their despair and sense their anguished longing for liberty. Joshua witnessed the moral and social degradation of his countrymen, and when he came to a position of leadership he helped forge a nation established on the principles of justice.

As a soldier he was daring and imaginative, skillful in campaign strategy, the use of spies, the disciplining of his forces and, above all, he was faithful to God.

Joshua was initially a servant of Moses (Numbers 11:28; Joshua 1:1), although at the end of his days God referred to him as "the servant of the LORD" (Joshua 24:29), an affectionate and honorable title. Moses changed

Joshua's name from *Hoshea* (meaning "help") to *Joshua*, "God is salvation." Moses and Joshua both learned to look to God's leadership rather than physical force and leaders.

Joshua fulfilled the meaning of his new name—"God is salvation"—leading his people into the Promised Land. He helped remove the Israelites' reproach of slavery and led them to possess their promised inheritance as a nation in their own land. In this he was a type of Christ, who leads His people to victory (1 Corinthians 15:57; 1 John 5:4-5).

As a statesman Joshua directed the dividing up of the land among his countrymen, setting up the tabernacle and establishing the cities of refuge.

Finally, as a saint, he enjoyed the presence of God (Joshua 1:5; 6:27), was eminently knowledgeable of the Word of God (Joshua 1:8) and was faithfully obedient to the will of God (Numbers 32:12). No wonder that at his death, when he was 110 years old, he was deeply mourned and his service to God and Israel was universally acknowledged.

Even after his death the memory of his example spoke for him and heavily influenced Israel and its leaders, for the nation continued to serve God all the days of the elders who were contemporary with but outlived Joshua (Joshua 24:31).

Joshua lived up to his name, "God is salvation." His life is a living testimony for those who desire to obey God in living faith. In truth God, not man, is our salvation! *GN*

The Two Joshuas

Many connections are to be noted between Joshua and Jesus. The names share the same meaning: "God is salvation." *Jesus* (*Ieous*) is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Joshua* (*Yehosua*). Many parallels can be drawn between the two Joshuas.

God the Father calls Christians out of slavery to sin and this world, a modern type of ancient Egypt (John 6:44; Romans 6:16-18; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18). Whereas Joshua was the physical leader of the physical nation of Israel, Jesus Christ is the leader of spiritual Israel, the New Testament Church (Colossians 1:18; Galatians 6:16).

Jesus brings His followers to and through the ordinance of baptism (foreshadowed by the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2). Through His Spirit and truth and with our willing participation, He helps us conquer sins that can overcome us if we stray from Him (Romans 7:24-25; 8:37). Jesus Christ encourages His disciples to faithfully obey Him, to choose the right way of living (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

A specific connection between the two Joshuas—the patriarch and the Messiah—is highlighted in Hebrews 4. Here we read that the seventh-day Sabbath is a type of the coming millennial Sabbath, a 1,000-year period of rest and rejuvenation. The millennial Sabbath will offer mankind a much-needed peaceful and prosperous land, the earth. Joshua's conquest and settlement of Canaan was a type of this anticipated ultimate Promised Land, which Christians are to faithfully strive to enter (verses 8-11).

Faithful Joshua was a forerunner of the Eternal Joshua: Jesus, the Son of God. The first Joshua faithfully focused the physical nation of Israel on God. Jesus, mankind's spiritual Joshua, will faithfully turn mankind to God, forming a great spiritual nation (Romans 9:6-8; Galatians 6:15-16). Joshua saved God's people from the Canaanites. Jesus, the Eternal Joshua, saves humanity from its enemies: Satan and death, the result of our sins.

Christ, as the divine Joshua, is the captain and author of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10), leader and commander of His people, who will conquer Satan and his followers (Revelation 14:19-20), at last giving the world peace, safety and freedom from spiritual slavery.

Mankind will come to fully understand the meaning of Joshua: "God is salvation." The second Joshua—Jesus, the Son of God—will make salvation available to mankind, a divine act of mercy and love (Hebrews 4:8).

—Jerald Aust

The Disappearing Art of Hospitality

Hospitality is well on its way out. But understanding what hospitality is—and isn't—may help you recapture the spirit of hospitality.

by LeeAnn Luker

In much of the Western world, hospitality is becoming a lost art. The pressure of so many demands on time and finances often leads us to view hospitality as a luxury rather than a necessity.

Yet throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, hospitality is a frequent underlying theme.

Abraham rushed to make preparations to feed God's messengers (Genesis 18:1-8). In Leviticus 19 God gave specific instructions regarding foreigners and how to make them welcome. Paul and Peter, in the New Testament, also gave instructions on hospitality. Paul wrote to the church at Rome and encouraged the disciples there to practice hospitality as part of their Christian way of life. He instructed Titus to consider whether a man was hospitable or not before ordaining him. Peter went so far as to say that we should offer hospitality to each other without grumbling. To top that, Paul wrote that we should even feed our enemies!

Christ Himself set us a beautiful example of hospitality. On two occasions He looked out for other than just people's *spiritual* needs, concerning Himself with their physical necessities as well. He fed the multitudes with the loaves and fishes. Besides being their teacher, he was their host.

Jesus further emphasized this principle when He washed His disciples' feet. He was teaching them, by His own example, to serve. Hospitality is an act of service.

Confused understanding of hospitality

Yet how can we, in the reality of the hectic, stressful pace of the modern world, fulfill the biblical injunction to be hospitable? Where do we find the time or money?

Perhaps part of the problem, and its solution, lies in not confusing hospitality with entertaining. The word *hospitality* comes from the same Latin root as words such as *hospital* or *hospice*. These words imply care, sustenance, shelter. Entertaining, on the other hand, for most of us has an entirely different connotation. When we think of entertaining guests in our home, we tend to think of beautiful table settings, flower arrangements, gourmet dishes—everything just so.

Hospitality is not entertaining, not a planned-for event or performance. True hospitality is an *attitude* of service, the desire to confer care and concern on others. For some, hospitality comes naturally. Others must learn it. To be Christian, we must practice it.

When I was a child my father was in the U.S. Air Force. For most of my childhood I lived in a 35-foot mobile home that relocated every 18 months. Yet, in spite of the constant moving, we had an abundance of friends. My mother didn't necessarily know a great deal about entertaining, but she knew how to be hospitable. The moment friends came to visit us, she put on the coffee pot and brought out something to eat. If it was close to dinner time, she added another potato to the pot and insisted they stay for dinner.

On Saturday nights our trailer home was often filled with people playing cards, laughing and enjoying one another's company. Like us, most of these people were far from home and families of their own. My folks couldn't offer them something fancy, but it was heartfelt and genuine. I don't remember going to others' homes all that often, but I do know my folks didn't wait to be

invited before they reached out to others.

Relearning hospitality

I have had to relearn some of the lessons I'm recounting here. Several years ago I realized I had slipped into the entertaining mode, rather than the hospitality mode, and would put off having people over until I had time to do a nice dinner and made certain the house looked perfect.

But now I've come to realize that it isn't my home, food or things that people need. It's my love. Inviting someone over says: I appreciate you and want to spend time with you.

What I serve friends in my home is incidental. Instead of thinking that I have to wait until I have time to "do it right," I am learning to invite friends and acquaintances over for simple things: Sunday-afternoon tea, Saturday-night dessert and coffee, a pot of soup, a bowl of popcorn and sliced apples, a pan of piping-hot biscuits. It is the time we share and the strength we lend one another that are much more important than what we eat.

A card, letter or telephone call of encouragement can be an extension of your hospitality. It says, "I'm thinking of you. I care about you." Whoever we are and whatever our circumstances, we can all find ways to express love and show concern. It doesn't take great sums of money, fancy homes or dishes. It does take the sacrifice of our time.

We need not look far to find people who are hungry, thirsty and lonely. Sometimes they are right in our own families, in our congregations, in our cities, in our neighborhoods.

Hospitality is much more than just a social grace. It is the heart and core, the essence, of true Christianity. *GN*

Archaeology

Continued from page 23

farmhouse at all. What could it be?

Based on four more years of excavations, Zertal finally completed the picture of the structure. The resulting illustration bore a striking resemblance to the biblical specifications of an altar.

As per God's instruction, the stone ramp did not have steps: "And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it" (Exodus 20:25-26). This was a precaution so the priest's tunic would not expose his legs as he ascended the altar.

Also, the Bible describes an altar with four surrounding walls and completely filled with earth and rocks. On top of this fill a fire could be lighted for the sacrifice. This is precisely what was found.

Around this altar Zertal discovered a small wall that apparently served to define a perimeter of an area for many people to congregate. He concluded that this area was a prototype of an Israelite worship center with an altar and an open-air meeting place. He thinks this could be the altar built by Joshua at Mount Ebal (*Biblical Archaeological Review*, January-February 1986).

On God's instructions Moses had said: "Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall white-wash them with lime. And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 27:4-7).

Therefore, there is strong evidence that God's orders were solemnly carried out by Joshua. An altar at Mount Ebal was built with the unusual specifications of uncut stones and a ramp instead of steps. At this site only remains of animals biblically approved for sacrifice were found.

Future issues of *The Good News* will examine other archaeological finds that confirm and illuminate biblical history. **GN**

Letters From Our Readers

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! At last, a plausible chronology of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection in the March-April issue. I have long been troubled by the difference between "Good Friday afternoon with early Easter Sunday morning" and the three days and three nights stressed in the Bible. Even taking into account calendar differences didn't answer my doubts. The summary at the bottom of page 18 of your magazine is excellent.

Please tell me how I may obtain about 24 copies of that article and summary. My Friday-night Bible Study is interested in reading it.

Greenfield, Wisconsin

The Good News is committed to explaining and clarifying the truth of the Bible, even when it conflicts with commonly held beliefs. We encourage our readers to follow the example of the Bereans, complimented in Acts 17:11 because they "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."

As a 19-year-old Christian girl, I enjoy *The Good News*. Each time I receive one of your issues I can't wait to open it up and read. It answers so many questions that I have. I keep every one of them, and I share them with just about everyone. Thank you for such a great publication.

Could you also send me any other publications you may have. I know of two—*What Is Your Destiny?* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. I would very much appreciate it.

Londonderry, Ohio

Your booklets have been mailed. In addition to the two you mentioned, four other booklets are available, free to any who request them: The Road to Eternal Life, The Gospel of the Kingdom, What Happens After Death? and Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest.

I have thoroughly enjoyed your magazine through 1996 and I am enclosing \$3 to help with postage costs for 1997.

Your articles on Bible history, archaeology and the real birth date of Christ are my favorites. My father is a retired minister,

and reading your magazines is like having a good, long afternoon chat with him!

Keep up the wonderful articles in the future. How I wish you folks could afford to publish on a monthly basis!

LaPorte, Indiana

Just a note of thanks for *The Good News!* It is refreshing, delightful, and challenging. I appreciate the opportunity to renew my subscription and will aim to make a contribution to the support of it. I acknowledge that such is not necessary to continue receiving it, but it does cost money and I hope to be able to assist in the near future."

St. Anne, Illinois

Thank you for sending your magazine. I have to tell you it was not what I expected. It did not have much "good news."

The first piece in the September-October issue was "The Source of Violence and Terror"—that's not good news! Then your article "Neither Shall They Learn War Anymore"—I couldn't find any good news in that. In fact, it's positively depressing! How about "Drought Conditions Reach Crisis Levels"—I'd have to say that is bad news.

Is there no "good news" in the world? I'm sure there is. Please do not send me any more of your "Good News." I can see that on TV and in the daily paper.

Cathedral City, California

We agree with your assessment that the world has plenty of bad news. However, we are committed to showing why the world suffers from so many problems. The overwhelming majority of human sufferings can be traced to humanity rejecting the revelation and instruction of our Creator. The Good News is dedicated to showing the answer to our dilemma—for all men and women to turn to God and seek His revealed solutions.

We are also committed to proclaiming the true gospel, or good news, Jesus Christ taught—His announcement of the coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). That truly is good news, the best news this world can hear.

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space.

Write to us at:

The Good News,

Box 661780, Arcadia, CA 91066.

Keep a Close Friend Close

by Becky Sweat

"Shannon was my best friend for years; I'd known her since kindergarten," says 15-year-old Kelsey. "But when we got to high school our friendship became strained. I've got a heavy load of classes as well as swim team and student council, so I'm really busy, but Shannon still seems to have a lot of free time. The last few times she wanted to get together I was busy, and I think she took it personally. Now, when I see her at school, she acts really distant towards me. It's not like we

One of the best ways friends show support is by letting each other know they're not alone in their mistakes.

had a fight. We just don't spend time together anymore. But I really miss her."

When a close friendship fades, it's always sad and upsetting. You're left to grapple with troubling questions: Did I choose poorly? Did I do something wrong? What caused the friendship to strain? Is it too late to patch things up? Do all friendships fade sooner or later?

"Friendship is like money, easier made than kept," British novelist Samuel Butler once observed. But, though friendships are always at some risk of withering away over time or shattering unexpectedly over misunderstandings, you can take practical steps to preserve them. What follows are some suggestions for keeping friendships close.

Keeping the right balance

- Don't keep score.

Sometimes friends keep tabs on who did what in the friendship: "I brought flowers and candy to Colleen when she broke her arm, but when I was sick all I got was a card!"

Others keep track of which friend does the most calling, who does the most talking vs. listening or who is the one to initiate activities together.

Healthy friendships require giving and taking on both sides. If either friend starts keeping score—tracking who has given or received more—the friendship can start to fracture. The reverse is also true: When neither friend is keeping tabs, the friendship is likely to grow.

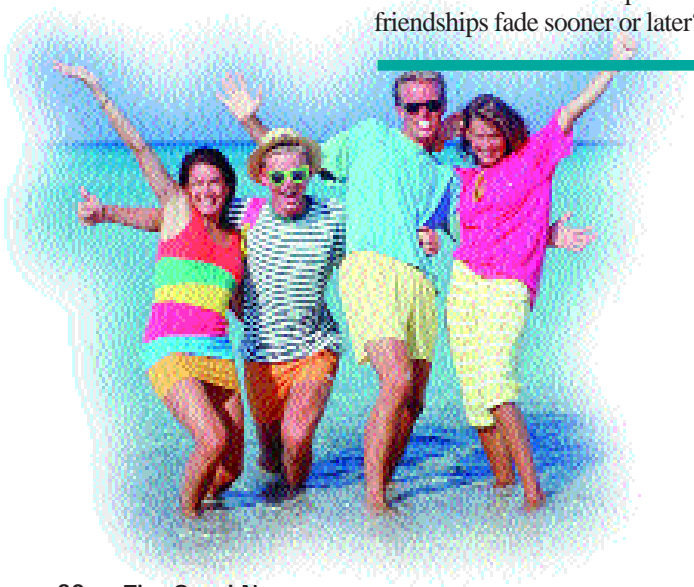
Just act naturally

- Be yourself.

Some people resist telling friends their deepest feelings. They're afraid to share their fears, frustrations, disappointments and negative emotions. But there comes a time in any friendship when you must open up.

You may think if you let others see your flaws they'll like you less. But they may like you more. When a friend moans about doing something embarrassing, I tell the story of how I once tripped on a fire hydrant; I was too busy waving to a friend across the street to notice what was directly in front of me, so I crashed on top of the hydrant. Not only does the story get a laugh, but it puts others at ease.

One of the best ways friends show support is by letting others know they're not alone in their





mistakes. That's why it's important to let them see the imperfect you.

Don't be a control freak

- Don't try to control your friend.

Marcia's and Wendy's friendship seemed ideal in the beginning. They were so much alike: They both loved to joke, came from similar families and liked sports. They spent the summer confiding in each other, laughing and having fun.

But the start of school marked a turning point in their friendship. When Wendy got to know some new girls in her social-studies class, Marcia refused to have anything to do with them. The day Wendy got invited to a party and Marcia didn't, Marcia told Wendy what a dumb party it was going to be. Although she didn't want to admit it, Marcia was worried she was losing Wendy as a friend.

It can be tempting to want a fun person all to yourself and feel threatened when your friend spends time with others. But, if you try to dominate someone, he will only grow to dislike you. If you are afraid to let your friends out of your sight, you are probably afraid of losing them. A friendship has to be flexible enough to allow each person breathing space to explore and grow. If it is a good friendship, it will survive time spent apart.

Try new things

- Broaden your interests.

If you find a friendship drifting apart because you and your friend don't have as much in common anymore, find new interests you can share. "Molly and I became friends when we were on our high school's ski team together," says Laura. "When the season ended I made a special effort to keep the friendship alive. I convinced her to take a tennis class with me. She taught me how to do calligraphy, and we discovered that we both enjoyed miniature golf—something that had never

come up while on the ski team together."

No two are exactly alike

- Learn to appreciate differences.

Jason, a high-school sophomore, says he and his best friend, Mike, rarely agree about anything. "I'm a good student, and I'm really into band," he says. "I spend a lot of time doing my homework and practicing the trumpet. Mike doesn't study much, and he thinks the band is a waste of time. I don't always like his other friends, and he doesn't always like who I like. I think the reason we've been able to stay good friends is that we've learned to accept each other's differences."

Two friends can endure major personality differences and maintain a good friendship if each has learned to respect

should be judged by how well friends stand by each other in times of trouble. But it may be even more difficult to stay friends in times of joy—our friend's joy, that is. Sure, we are happy when our friends succeed and have good luck. But in our heart of hearts there may also be some envy. We may sense that, if things get too lopsided, the friendship could be in jeopardy. One 16-year-old put it this way: "I don't want to be a better basketball player than Ryan, but I'd at least like to stay in the same league."

A good way to deal with envy of another's success is to reframe that emotion. Rather than letting possible negative feelings about a friend's achievements undermine your relationship, let that achievement spur you into improving

Learning how to disagree with a friend begins when you realize that it's not a matter of winning and losing.

the other person's point of view. "Genuine friendship has a lot of give and take in it," says Eugene Kennedy, Ph.D., author of *On Being Friends*.

He continues: "Learning how to disagree with a friend begins when you realize that it's not a matter of winning and losing; that should never be the issue. If you feel that you want to change your friend so she always agrees with you, that's not a real friendship. It's the disproportionate gratification of one person, and true friendship can never work on that basis."

Even the closest friends are individuals, Dr. Kennedy points out. You and your friend could be looking at the same thing, but in reality you each see the object differently because you are looking at it from two slightly different angles.

Always sticking close

- Stand by your friend during bad and good times.

Some people think that friendships

your own efforts. If he can do it, chances are you can too.

Make time for friends

- Give the gift of time as often as time allows.

Time is what we don't have nearly enough of. Yet, with a little creativity, we can make time for our friends. The key is to remember that a little is better than none and that you can do two things at once.

For example, if both you and your friend need a haircut, go to the barber-shop or salon on the same afternoon so you can talk while you're waiting. If you and your friend both need to return books to the library, go together. My neighbor and her best friend take evening exercise walks together. A friend and I who live 2,000 miles apart schedule an hour-long phone conversation once a month.

It's when life gets busy that it's especially important to be open with your friend about how much the friendship means to you. If you haven't called your friend in a long time, let her know it's not that you don't care but that you've just been really busy. Tell your friend how much her friendship means to you.

Simply saying "I miss you" with a postcard, letter or phone call will help sustain that friendship during the times you're apart. **GN**

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What Happens After Death?

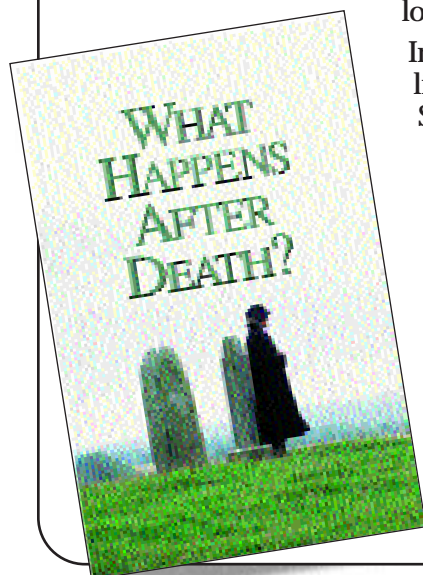
This is one of the great questions of life: What happens when we die? Is death the end of human existence and consciousness, or do we continue on in some other place or state of being? Do we go to a place of everlasting reward or eternal torment? Are we destined to be reincarnated, coming to life again in a different body in a seemingly endless cycle of living and dying? Will we ever see deceased loved ones again? *Is there somewhere you can go to find the answers?*

In spite of centuries of research, science cannot tell us when, where or how life began. Only one source tells us how life began and for what purpose. Shouldn't we go to that source to understand the mystery of death?

The Bible tells us exactly what happens after death. It tells us what happens to those who have done right and wrong and reveals the fate of the billions of people who have never known God and His way of life. Most churches claim to teach what the Bible says—but what does it really say? You need to discover the answers yourself. You'll be shocked when you find out what the Bible *really* teaches about what happens after death!

What Happens After Death? will help you understand the incredible truth about this great mystery. Write or call for your free copy at the address in your country—or the country nearest you—inside the front cover.

United Church of God
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Covetousness Is Idolatry

Many don't realize how greed is impeding their spiritual growth and how necessary it is to overcome the deadly and deceitful sin of covetousness.

by Greg Sargent

The founder of Christianity once remarked that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35), to extend a helping hand to the needy rather than amass wealth for oneself. When giving is practiced, the giver and the receiver ultimately benefit.

Of course, the prevailing practice of the modern world is the opposite: the way of getting, the practice of acquiring possessions. Many people behave like the man in the parable who said to himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19). But the man in this story did not please God, who plainly disliked his callous, selfish attitude and love of the material world.

Humanity has long been afflicted by the curse of covetousness. Jesus Christ warned the people of His day: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

A form of idolatry

Is coveting a problem we should take seriously? In Colossians 3:5 the apostle Paul directs us to “put to death” our fleshly desires, including “covetousness, which is idolatry,” or, as one translation puts it, coveting is equivalent to “the worship of strange gods” (Bible in Basic English).

Why is covetousness equated with idolatry? What is the connection? What is the Bible definition of covetousness, and why is it a sin? And, most important, how can we overcome the sin of coveting?

Our English word *covet* means to intensely or obsessively desire. It frequently refers to lusting after something (or someone) that belongs to someone else.

The biblical meaning is much the same, though expressed through a variety of Hebrew and Greek words. For example, the Hebrew *chamad*, which is

used in the Tenth Commandment, means “to greatly delight in” and can refer to a legitimate desire as well as immoral greed.

Also translated as “covetousness” (Exodus 18:21), the Hebrew word *betsa* means to plunder, to acquire or possess an insatiable desire for dishonest gain. Greek words translated “covetousness” in the



New Testament convey “greed,” “setting the heart upon,” “longing” or “lusting for.”

Taking great delight in something certainly is not always wrong. God tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:31 that we should “covet” (King James Version), or “earnestly desire” (New King James Version), spiritual gifts. We should greatly desire the good things God has to offer.

One of those gifts, which Paul described, was the ability to speak in an edifying, exhorting and comforting manner. This is a prime example of longing for—desiring—something good. Desire is not inherently evil, but the channeling of our longings toward what cannot be rightfully ours or into harmful and destructive obsessions is the sin of covetousness.

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In This Section . . .

Covetousness Is Idolatry

What does the Bible say about coveting, and is it really that bad?

What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?

There is much to learn from biblical dietary laws.

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Did God change His laws regarding clean and unclean meats?

Does God Hate Sinners? E14
We know God hates sin—but what about sinners?

E4 | Lessons Learned From Little League E15
A father and daughter learn a lot from a summertime experience.

Simply put, God allows us to rightly desire some things but not others. There is nothing wrong with wanting things that will make our lives more comfortable or enjoyable, so long as it doesn't interfere with our relationship with God. We should seek after spiritual gifts. Yet *improper* desire, the sin of coveting, is everywhere condemned in Scripture.

Modern application of Tenth Commandment

The Tenth Commandment forbids us to covet a variety of things that belong to others—our neighbor's house, wife, servant, ox, donkey and, in fact, "anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17). This covers the whole range of possessions.

Some of the examples in Exodus 20 concerning the commandment on coveting may seem antiquated to our modern way of thinking. After all, most of us do not own donkeys or employ servants. However, if we look closely at the forbidden list, it includes, in principle, a virtual wish list of everything we could desire in modern society.

Take a closer look at the listing of prohibited items in Exodus 20:17. Notice that it includes someone else's house, wife,

love them because they give us a feeling of fulfillment. They make us happy, at least temporarily.

Ultimately the forbidden but coveted fruit attracts us through our senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing, but the initial act of desire takes place in the mind. Coveting, when actually carried out, can easily become the sins of adultery, stealing and lying.

Our tendency to covet can lead us to *idolize*, to actually worship, the physical as our source of contentment. Just as adherents to pagan religions bowed down to inanimate objects they thought could make them happy, we convince ourselves that physical things will make us happy and provide us peace and joy.

Illustrating mankind's obsession with idols, God describes a man who pays deference to an inanimate object and cries, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" (Isaiah 44:17). Our human tendency is to look to the idol of our choice to deliver us from difficulties and disappointments. We expect the physical things on which we set our hearts and minds to bring us happiness.

The problem God finds with such a shortsighted view is that we enlist the

peace and a serene sense of well-being?

Let Paul comment on that: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11-13).

When Paul wrote these words to the church in Philippi, he existed as a manacled prisoner, yet he lived contentedly. He had learned that contentment did not depend on material possessions. Paul, who spent most of his adult life as a sojourner establishing, strengthening and building the Church, and his last few years as a prisoner, could not be said to have led a covetous life.

Paul realized he had much to be happy about—the glory and majesty that will be his in God's Kingdom. When we keep our eyes on the reality and significance of our calling, we find it easier to ignore the glitter of material gain.

Jesus Christ reminds us of our priorities: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things" (Matthew 6:33-34).

Jesus showed us that, when we keep the Kingdom as our goal by obeying His spiritual law, everything else is taken care of, so don't worry about—to the point of coveting—things you don't have.

God's instructions are timeless. Coveting eminently applies to this day and age, when so many people are drowning in debt because they have bought so many items they lusted after but couldn't afford.

manservant, ox, donkey and *anything else* that belongs to him. This enumeration includes many of the basics of life: property, the marriage relationship, household appliances and tools, machinery used at work and one's means of transportation. In other words, God forbids us to desire another person's mate, microwave oven, tool set or car.

God's instructions are timeless. Coveting eminently applies to this day and age, when so many people are drowning in debt because they have bought so many items they lusted after but couldn't afford.

What's wrong with wanting physical things?

But back to the question: What is the connection between covetousness and idolatry? Why, in God's eyes, is unlawful desire considered the equivalent of committing idolatry?

First let's ask and answer another question: Why do we take such pleasure in physical things we shouldn't have? We

physical to compete with the spiritual. Our idols—the things on which we set our hearts and minds—directly compete with the Spirit of God and interfere with our relationship with God. We think the objects of our affection will satisfy our innermost cravings, even though God says His Spirit alone can truly satisfy: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Galatians 5:22).

Love, joy, peace and the other fruits of God's Spirit should be visible in our lives whether we have all that we desire or not. If we feel good only when we gain what we desire, we revere our physical possessions and are guilty of coveting and idolatry.

Content in any circumstances

A perceptive person recently suggested to me that happiness is a mode of travel, not a destination. As we travel through life toward our goal, the Kingdom of God, we are supposed to be happy. But what about circumstances that don't lend themselves to

Keys to overcoming

This brings us to the question of how we can overcome covetous thoughts. The Bible gives us three keys to conquering this sin.

• **Key No. 1:** Love and obey God.

The first key is found in the commandment against idolatry. After God speaks out against idolatry, He states that He shows "mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:6).

Compare this to what we are told regarding the last days, that many in the end time will be "lovers of themselves, lovers of money" (2 Timothy 3:2). God tells us that, if we love Him first and foremost, we will not be guilty of idolatry through covetousness. However, if we love only ourselves, we will covet. Above all, we will probably desire money, which we look at as simply the power to buy anything our heart desires.

When we stop to think about it, we realize that loving ourselves before God makes no sense. God is spirit and eternal; we are of



the dust, physical and temporal. God can let us live forever (Romans 6:23); most of us will live physically only 70 or 80 years.

Everything good and true comes from God (James 1:17). All the flawed presents we could buy are like the water in a barrel with a hole in the bottom. Every physical thing is temporary, like a mist that exists for a short time and then disappears.

What about us is worthy of love? Without a spiritual relationship with God, we go to our grave and are forgotten (Ecclesiastes 9:5). God offers us a wonderful future, and that brings us to the second key to overcoming covetousness.

Faith focuses

- **Key No. 2:** Ask God for faith.

Ephesians 5 warns that no “covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (verse 5). Covetousness is the lust of the senses. Faith in God’s inheritance focuses our desire on something far more important and permanent, on things we cannot see. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things *not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1, emphasis added throughout).

An idolater longs for what he *sees* (or hears or feels) and pays no attention to the *unseen* spiritual aspects of life. The godly, those who are heirs with Christ (Galatians 3:29), hope for an inheritance in the Kingdom of God, which for the time being they can’t see. That takes faith.

Moses chose to forsake the pleasures of sin and suffer affliction because he counted “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:26).

He believed God, diligently sought Him and looked for his reward from God (Hebrews 11:6).

King David, too, focused on the “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevermore” from God (Psalm 16:11), rather than material things of the world.

When life grows empty and you desire to embark on some kind of binge—to satiate yourself, to seek fulfillment by substituting the material for God’s Spirit—simply ask God for the faith to wait for the better blessings He has in store for you. Ask for faith to trust in Him and be content with His Spirit and the promise of happiness in His Kingdom. Then work hard and rely on God, who pledges to supply your spiritual needs (Philippians 4:19).

Another perspective

- **Key No. 3:** Help others.

A key to conquering covetousness is to help others. Spending time with widows, the ill, the elderly and the incapacitated does wonders to focus our minds on serving rather than seeking to fulfill our own desires. We receive a fulfillment and contentment by helping others that physical things cannot give us.

Something happens when we practice true and undefiled religion (James 1:27). We realize that people with few possessions can learn important spiritual lessons; they can learn to “beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist of the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). We find that we grow happier by giving than by receiving (Acts 20:35). We learn to love people and use things, rather

than love things and use people.

God frees us from the distractions that could tempt us to covet and thereby prevent us from gaining eternal life in His Kingdom.

God knows that a covetous spirit cannot be satisfied (Ecclesiastes 1:8). He knows that, if He allows the covetous to obtain eternal life, they will lust after the one additional thing they do not have: God’s throne! The covetous person will not be satisfied until he can have everything. He who knows only discontent in one place will not find happiness in another; he will always want more than is rightfully his. That’s why coveting is idolatry.

However, when we reign with God in His Kingdom, His Spirit will have convicted us and enabled us to overcome all sin, including covetousness, for eternity.

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit that dwells in you” (Romans 8:11, New Revised Standard Version).

Christ’s followers, people with the Holy Spirit, bear the fruit of satisfaction and contentment—love, joy and peace of mind (Galatians 5:22). With God’s Spirit comes the assurance of our gaining entry into God’s Kingdom (Ephesians 1:14), having shed the sin of covetousness.

We have seen that coveting is an insidious sin and that God equates covetousness with idolatry. Its fruit may seem to bring us happiness, but only temporarily. Covetousness is contrary to God’s own nature and can keep us from the real joy of God’s salvation—eternal life in His Kingdom. *GN*

What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?

Many people have misconceptions about the biblical teaching on clean and unclean meats. What does Scripture really reveal on this subject, and what principles lie behind its teaching?

by David Treybig

When I was a child my parents taught me and my brother and sister the distinction God made between clean and unclean animals. I still recall their saying the names of animals and asking whether God said we could eat them or not. Beginning with the most common creatures people eat, we learned that cows, sheep, deer, chickens and turkeys were on the allowable list, while pigs, rabbits, squirrels, horses, shrimp and lobster were not.

Once we learned the basics, our childhood curiosity led us to consider exotic animals like tigers, elephants and giraffes. Since these animals were not specifically mentioned in Leviticus 11 or Deuteronomy 14, we learned to look for the identifying characteristics that showed which animals were acceptable for human consumption.

Leviticus 11:3 says, “Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud—that you may eat.” This verse taught us that tigers and elephants are unclean because they do not have a divided hoof. The giraffe, however, does have a split hoof, and it chews the cud, so it is clean. Similarly, the characteristics that make fowl, fish and insects clean or unclean are also derived from these chapters.

I admit that my childhood curiosity about eating giraffes persisted. I thought of more questions: Since giraffes are clean, why don’t we hear of people eating them? Did God make a mistake when He created them? Don’t they taste good? Surely they would make great neck soup! And why do so many people disregard what God said?

Since childhood I have learned that few people are willing to follow Jesus Christ’s command to conduct our lives “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). The reasons vary. Many people don’t realize that God made the distinctions that reveal which meats should be eaten by humans. Some others, even many who are aware of these characteristics, believe they no longer apply. Let’s consider some of these ideas.

Popular ideas about distinctions

Since many people enjoy eating pork products (ham, bacon, sausage) and experience no immedi-

ate adverse effects, some have looked for scientific reasons that God may have had in mind when He told the ancient Israelites not to eat pork. One theory is that God forbade pork because the Israelites might catch diseases, such as trichinosis, that pigs can carry. After all, the Israelites did not own refrigerators, and researchers had not yet warned people to thoroughly cook pork to kill any potential disease-carrying organisms.

Since modern research has apparently solved these problems, and since most meat is cooked thoroughly enough to kill parasites, many people assume that eating pork is acceptable to God. Since many people eat pork all their lives and live to a ripe old age, the average person—if he thinks about it at all—assumes that pork has little or no effect on health or longevity.

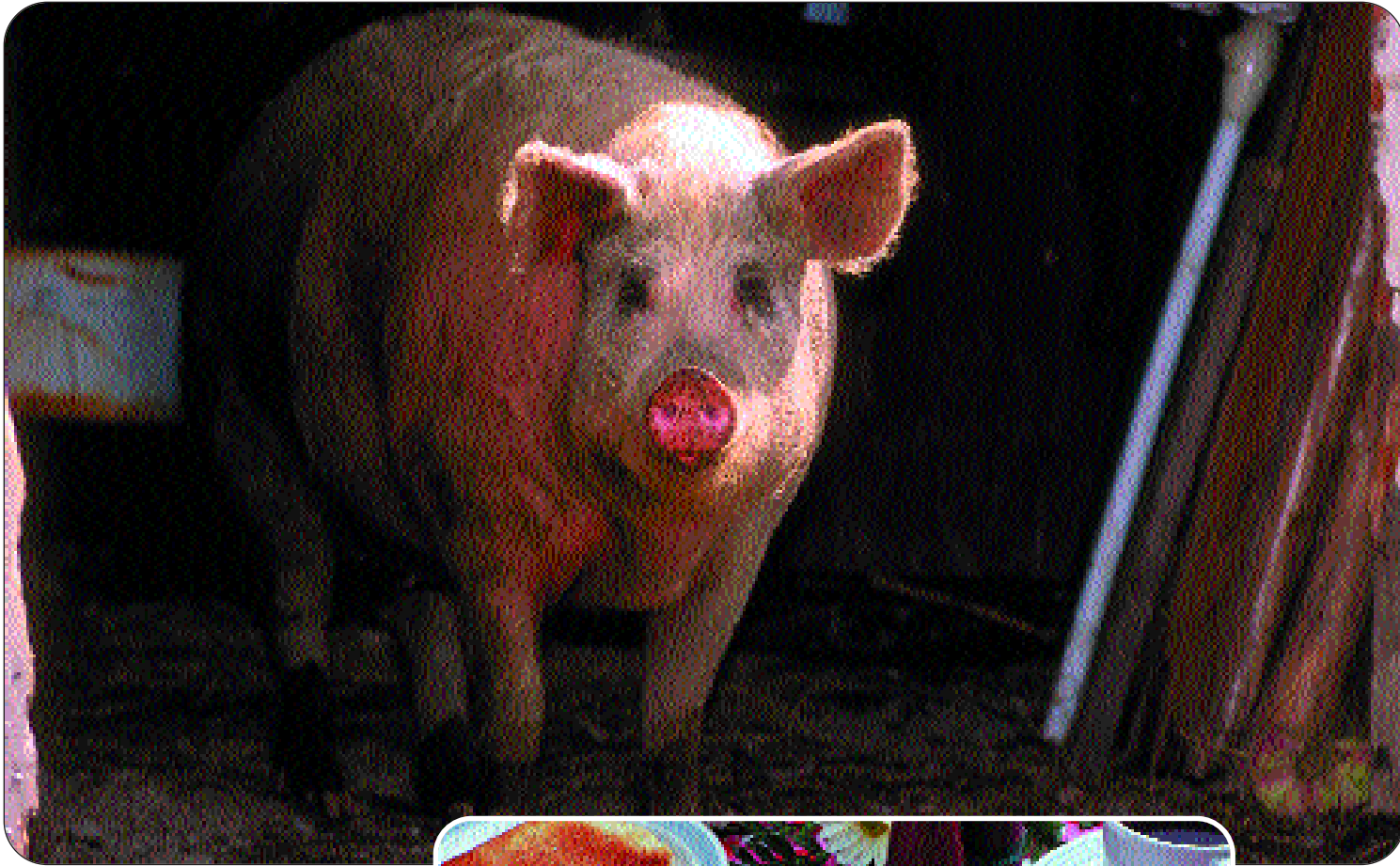
Research has convinced some doctors, however, to recommend that some of their patients avoid pork or shellfish in their diets; they have observed that some people do not properly digest these meats. So some will acknowledge that avoidance of certain meats makes sense for people with particular health problems, but not as a rule for everyone.

A religious perspective that parallels this scientific reasoning has developed. Theologians have assumed that the laws of clean and unclean meats originated under the Old Covenant with ancient Israel and came to an end with the establishment of the New Covenant. Numerous laws from the Old Testament are thus seen as no longer applicable to Christians.

Many believe that Paul confirmed this approach when he said, “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (Romans 14:14). (See “Understanding ‘Unclean’ in Romans 14,” p. E11.)

This reasoning places God in the role of master physician in the Old Testament and Jesus in the role of liberator from God’s law in the New. If we assume that God was simply looking out for the health of the ancient Israelites, the Bible lists of clean and unclean animals become only primitive health issues for which modern, enlightened, liberated mankind no longer has need. Reasoning that Christ understood this and gave His followers

We need to carefully examine the matter of clean and unclean meats. We need to be sure we understand God’s perspective instead of relying exclusively on human reasoning.



the freedom to decide for themselves in such matters, some believe God will honor any decision we make for ourselves in these matters.

This popular view is taught by most churches, but does it accurately reflect biblical teaching?

God's view is different

God made mankind in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27). In doing so God gave men and women the ability to reason. What a wonderful gift that is! But our thinking ability is not infallible. When ancient Israel's reasoning went awry, God said, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18).

But Scripture also records God telling us: "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8-9). So God, not man, should be the authority on our conduct (Proverbs 14:12), including what foods may or may not be eaten.

In addition, the great prophet Jeremiah candidly admits, "O LORD, I know the way



of man is not in himself; *it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*" (Jeremiah 10:23, emphasis added throughout).

In light of these verses from the Bible, we need to carefully examine the matter of clean and unclean meats. We need to be sure we understand *God's* perspective instead of relying exclusively on human reasoning.

The origin of the distinctions

The first biblical account noting distinctions between clean and unclean animals

occurs long before the Exodus. Almost a thousand years before there was a covenant with the nation of Israel, God told Noah to take two pairs of unclean animals and seven pairs of clean animals into the ark (Genesis 6:19-7:2). God does not tell Noah in this account that He was, for the first time, making a distinction between animals. God simply says, "You shall take with you seven each of every *clean* animal . . . ; two each of animals that are *unclean* . . ." (Genesis 7:2).

God did not have to define for Noah the



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meaning of “clean” and “unclean”; Noah understood God’s instruction and what was required of him, and obeyed. To understand what God meant by these terms, we must go to other chapters of the Bible such as Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

The account about Noah shows that the distinction between clean and unclean existed early in human history, long before God ratified His covenant with Israel. Thus the popular idea that animals’ cleanness and uncleanness originated with the Old Covenant is shown from the Bible to be untrue. Since these distinctions existed before the Israelite sacrificial system and Levitical priesthood, it does not follow that these distinctions would cease with a change in the sacrificial system or the priesthood. As we will see, the Bible teaches that the distinction between clean and unclean has never been rescinded.

Another flaw associated with this understanding is that God’s law did not exist until the *time* described when we first read about it. This misconception leads to the equally flawed belief that the only laws applicable to New Covenant Christians are those restated in the New Testament after Christ’s crucifixion. Jesus Himself dismissed this reasoning (Matthew 5:17-19). Although such

assumptions about when God’s law came into effect lack biblical proof, they do raise an important issue for us to consider: the continuity of God’s law.

The nature of God’s law

The way God’s fundamental law regulating human relationships is treated in Genesis remains consistent with the apostle Paul’s statement that “the law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14). The spiritual principles upon which all God’s instructions are based have always existed. Just as God is eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), so are the principles that reflect His character and nature. God’s law is based on His unchanging character, not dependent on events and attitudes prevalent in human history.

Of course, at some point we *learn* of God’s law, but that does not mean God’s law *did not exist* before we understood it. Some reason that Adam and Eve could eat any animal, although Noah couldn’t, or that it was acceptable to eat unclean animals up until the time of Noah or that Noah, in spite of the distinctions made by God, was free to eat whatever he wanted because God had revealed no specific instructions that expressly forbade him from doing so.

Such reasoning is flawed. It overlooks

provides the guidelines for developing a relationship with Him that leads to eternal life (John 17:2-3).

However, keeping the law doesn’t save us; our faith—which God gives us and which enables our relationship with Him—does (Luke 7:50; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 12:3). Through time, as our relationship with God develops, we learn more about what He expects of us—the thoughts and actions acceptable under His law—and begin doing those things (Matthew 7:21; John 14:15; Revelation 14:12).

When we understand the spiritual principles that are the basis for God’s law, we don’t look for loopholes in His law to avoid doing what He commands. When we enjoy a loving relationship with Him, we keep His commandments (1 John 5:2). As the apostle John makes clear: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (verse 3). These commandments—including the food laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14—exist for our benefit.

Abraham, called the friend of God (James 2:23) and the father of all those who believe (Romans 4:11), was one who understood and kept God’s law. God described him as a person who “obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws”

(Genesis 26:5). His attitude was one of trustful faith coupled with sincere obedience. Consequently, Abraham, who lived long before the Old Covenant with Israel was established, will receive salvation, the reward “of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6, 8-16).

Did something in the law change?

Let’s note one additional consideration regarding the nature of God’s law. Some will argue that all of God’s law is temporary because of obvious changes from Old Testament times concerning the laws of sacrifice and circumcision. This argument is rooted in confusion over the use of the word *law*.

The Bible clarifies this confusion as an issue of *ministries* or *administrations*. Paul, who wrote of God’s “spiritual” law (Romans 7:14), also wrote of “differences of *ministries* [administrations, King James Version] but the same Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:5) and of the “*administrations*” God has appointed (verse 28). Paul also wrote of the differences between the Old Covenant ministry or administration compared to that of the New (2 Corinthians 3).

These administrative changes, however, are not to be confused with God’s law itself, which Jesus said would not cease to

exist “till heaven and earth pass away” (Matthew 5:18).

Codifying previously revealed laws

When God began working with ancient Israel, He was not formulating and announcing His law for the first time; He was restating it for a group of people who had spent several generations as slaves in Egypt (Exodus 12:41). Under those circumstances they probably had not remembered God’s law, much less obeyed it. Thus, much time was spent codifying God’s law for the new nation.

As the Israelites left Egypt, God began instructing them about His Holy Days (Exodus 5:1; 12:1-51). As they journeyed to Sinai, God instructed them to rest on His weekly Sabbath day (Exodus 16:23), reinforcing that lesson by miraculously sending a larger portion of manna on the sixth day and none at all on the seventh (verses 25-29). When some among the Israelites ignored God’s instruction and looked for manna on the Sabbath, God rebuked them: “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?” (verse 28).

This was before God revealed observing His Sabbath as one of the Ten Commandments, which was some time after

the Israelites left Egypt, when they came to the Wilderness of Sinai (Exodus 19:1). There God spoke the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai (Exodus 20). After this God gave His judgments—rulings on practical ways for the Israelites to apply His law—and further instructions on the weekly Sabbath and Holy Days (Exodus 21-23). If His people would obey, God promised to bless them physically by taking away sickness and providing them security within their new land (Exodus 23:25-33).

The purpose of the distinction

In Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 we find lists of clean and unclean animals. Both chapters give the same reason for God’s instruction on clean and unclean meats. In Leviticus 11 God says not to eat of the unclean things to “*be holy*” (verses 44-45). In Deuteronomy 14 Israel was told not to eat “any detestable thing” (verse 3), “for you are a holy people to the LORD your God” (verses 2, 21). To be holy means to be set apart.

An examination of these chapters reveals no mention of distinguishing between clean and unclean animals specifically for health’s sake. Although the larger context of Leviticus and Deuteronomy includes issues

How Should We Interpret Scripture?

The apostle Paul wrote to a fellow elder, “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). When Paul wrote these words, the Scriptures he referred to were those we now call the Old Testament. The writings that would be known as the New Testament had not been canonized; some of them had not even been written yet.

The Bible itself tells us that we are to understand it as a unit; *all* Scripture is inspired and a divine guide for human conduct. By putting together all the scriptures on a given subject, we allow the Bible to interpret itself and give us a complete and coherent view of God’s instruction on specific areas of life.

Viewing every passage in a different context renders the Bible little more than a conflicting, contradictory collection of human writings rather than a divine revelation. Paul’s instruction in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 shows us the correct way to interpret the Bible: All of it is God’s inspired revelation.

An opportunity to apply proper biblical interpreta-

tion can be found in Genesis 9:3: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.” Understanding this passage as part of a complete picture, we recognize it as a general statement about God providing animals for food just as He has provided plants for human consumption.

Later scriptures show that man should not eat every animal, just as we should not eat every plant. Indeed, some species of animals and plants are highly poisonous and can be fatal if ingested. Still, the animal kingdom does provide food for us—the essential point of Genesis 9:3.

Some who accept a wrongheaded disconnected style of biblical interpretation believe this passage reverses the distinctions spoken of in Genesis 7. This flawed method of biblical interpretation artificially inserts beginning and ending points for God’s laws, in effect making them—and their Giver—inconsistent and arbitrary. God simply is not like that (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17).

God expects us to learn to properly understand and apply His Word (2 Timothy 2:15).

—David Treybig

of health and hygiene, the specific purpose God gave for avoiding unclean meats is *holiness*. He wants us to be holy. In God's sight, refraining from eating unclean animals is an identifying sign of the holiness of those who have been set apart through a relationship with Him.

Holiness is reflected in the thoughts and actions of those set apart through a relationship with God. God requires holy conduct—a way of life distinctly different from that of the rest of the world. Holiness in conduct concerns attitudes toward God, others and self resulting in actions that avoid causing pain and suffering and build lasting beneficial relationships. Of course, being holy means much more than merely avoiding unclean meats. Christ spoke of the “weightier matters of the law” such as judgment, mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23).

God gave His laws to physical people who are cursed when they do not follow those laws. Breaking the law against adultery, for example, can destroy a marriage and family. Deuteronomy 28 records numerous calamities that befell the Israelites when they failed to obey the laws of God. But He said he would establish them as a holy people if they would keep His commandments (verse 9).

God's continuing desire for His people to be holy has remained constant. As Paul said, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be *holy* and *without blame* before Him in love” (Ephesians 1:4).

Hearkening to God's instruction in Leviticus 11 on unclean meats, the apostle

Peter admonished Christians, under the New Covenant, to live “as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is *holy*, you also be *holy* in all your *conduct*, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:14-16).

Of course, Peter had in mind a far wider range of godly behavior than just refraining from unclean meat. So did Paul when he reminded the Corinthians of God's instruction: “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is *unclean*, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

Change in administration

When Jesus came to earth to die for mankind's sins and become our High Priest, His *ministry* replaced the Levitical *priesthood*, which had functioned from the time of Moses (Hebrews 7:11-14). Jesus is our “surety of a better covenant” (verse 22), called the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:8, 13), which is “established on better promises” (verse 6).

Here God's law is not voided. Instead, it becomes part of the mind and is written on the heart of those who accept this covenant (verse 10). Again, Jesus said He didn't come to abolish the law (Matthew 5:17-19). The New Covenant, of which Jesus is our High Priest, contains “better promises” (Hebrews 8:6), not better law. The better promises include eternal life as well as the promise of God's Spirit, which empowers

us to uphold God's laws (Romans 8:4).

Notice Paul's summing up of this principle: “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to *holiness*, and the end, *everlasting life*. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:22-23). Living a righteous life now means that the Christian adheres to all of God's instruction about what makes us holy.

When an administrative change was made from the Levitical priesthood to the ministry of Jesus Christ, the laws or administrative principles unique to the Levites no longer applied in the same way. As Hebrews 7:12 puts it: “For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.” The law—specifically the law concerning who could be a priest (verses 13-14)—was changed, not rendered invalid. God's laws—which existed before the Levitical priesthood—continue.

The enduring practice of the apostles and early Church was to continue to follow the distinctions God gave regarding clean and unclean meats (Acts 10:14).

Some people suppose this was merely a case of culture or tradition. Yet, of prophetic fulfillments yet to come, the Bible speaks of unclean animals (Revelation 18:2) and punishment of those who disobey Him in this matter (Isaiah 66:15-17). The Bible continues to identify obedience to the laws of clean and unclean food as an identifying sign of God's people.

Continued on page E13

Not Only a Matter of Diet

From cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation, nowhere in the Bible do we find an example of a servant of God or follower of Jesus Christ eating the flesh of an unclean animal. If at any time the distinctions between clean and unclean meats had ceased to exist, shouldn't that have been made clear in the Bible through the example of God's servants?

On the contrary, well into the time of the early Church we find that Christ's followers scrupulously avoided eating animal flesh that God had revealed as being unclean (Acts 10:14; 11:8). The same distinctions are made in prophecies of the time of the end (Revelation 18:2; Isaiah 66:15-17).

But there is more to the matter than diet. A thorough study of the Bible helps us understand other dimensions to the significance of the distinctions between clean and unclean meats.

God's Word describes the flesh of unclean animals as an “abomination” (Leviticus 11:10-13, 20, 23, 41-42) and “detestable” (Deuteronomy 14:3)—and in that light we are warned against consuming such meat (Leviticus 11:43). Strong language, but the lesson is that we need to accept all aspects of God's Word, including the basic food laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

In instituting the sacrificial system for ancient Israel, God commanded many specific sacrifices involving various animals. Nowhere, however, does He command or allow the sacrifice of an unclean animal, nor is there record of any of God's servants ever sacrificing such an animal to Him. Such a sacrifice would have been simply unthinkable to a true servant of God and an affront to the Creator Himself.

—Scott Ashley

Does the New Testament Abolish Meat Distinctions?

Some people believe that certain New Testament scriptures remove all distinctions between clean and unclean meats. But what do these passages really say?

Most theologians assume that God's laws regarding clean and unclean meats ended at Christ's crucifixion. They suppose that the New Covenant removes any need for Christians to keep such laws. But is that what the Bible really says?

The administrative change from the Levitical priesthood to the ministry of Jesus Christ did not void God's expectations that His people obey His law of clean and unclean meats (or any other law) as part of their sanctification or separation as people of God (see Leviticus 11:44-47; 19:2; 20:7, 22-26; 21:8). Peter and Paul both spoke of the continuing need for God's people to be holy (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:14-16).

Scholars acknowledge that members of the early Church continued to observe the distinctions between clean and unclean meats. Because of the common misconception that the New Covenant abolishes much of God's law, many assume these food requirements were simply Jewish cultural practices that continued until the Church became more gentile in composition and outlook. Preconceived ideas have also influenced interpretations of many New Testament passages. This is known as the process of *eisegesis*, or reading one's own ideas into Scripture.

Let's examine the New Testament passages dealing with food. As we do so, let's practice *exegesis*: drawing meaning out of Scripture by thoroughly understanding the background of a passage as we seek to apply it.

Peter's vision: Have all meats been cleaned?

One often-misunderstood section of the Bible concerns Peter's vision in which he "saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth." In this sheet "were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air." Peter heard a voice tell him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat" (Acts 10:11-14).

Assuming the vision meant that he should eat unclean animals, Peter's spontaneous response

by David Treybig

was, "Not so, Lord! For I have *never* eaten anything common or unclean" (verse 14, emphasis added throughout). This same vision came to him three times (verse 16).

At this point many readers, without finishing the account, assume they know the meaning of the vision: that all kinds of flesh can now be eaten. These scriptures, however, show that that is not at all what Peter understood. On the contrary, he "wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant" (verse 17).

Later Peter realized the significance of the revelation, that "God has shown me that I should not call *any man* common or unclean" (verse 28). Recognizing the true intent of the vision, Peter baptized the first gentiles (non-Israelites) called into the Church (verses 45-48).

This divine disclosure, we see from reading further in the account, did not concern food at all. Rather, it concerned people. Because the Jewish religious leaders at the time of Christ had considered gentiles to be unclean, this dramatic vision righted this common misperception that had come to affect Peter and other members of the Church. It demonstrated that God was opening salvation up to members of any race; gentiles whom God called were now welcomed into the Church.

Far from abolishing God's instructions against eating unclean meats, these verses clearly show that Peter, almost two decades after Christ's death, had "never eaten anything common or unclean." Nor is there evidence that he ate unclean meats after this experience. He obviously continued to obey God's laws about meats that could and could not be eaten and saw no reason to change. He realized that the vision could not be annulling God's instructions, thus he "thought about the vision" until he understood its true meaning (verses 17-19, 28).

Food controversy in the Church

When reading through the New Testament, one does find references to a controversy in the early Church involving food. A careful examination of the scriptures, however, reveals the issue

Let's examine the New Testament passages dealing with food. As we do so, let's practice exegesis: drawing meaning out of Scripture by thoroughly understanding the background of a passage as we seek to apply it.

to be different from what many assume.

In 1 Corinthians 8 the apostle Paul discussed “the eating of things offered to idols” (verse 4). Why was this an issue?

“Meat was often sacrificed on pagan altars and dedicated to pagan gods in Paul’s day. Later this meat was offered for sale in the public meat markets. Some Christians wondered if it were morally right for Christians to eat such meat that had previously been sacrificed to pagan gods” (*Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986, “Meat”).

It is interesting, though not conclusive, to note that in Acts 14:13, the only passage in which the type of animal sacrificed to idols is mentioned, it was oxen—clean animals—that were about to be offered.

This controversy was not over the kinds of meat that should be eaten. Obedient Jews of the day, in accordance with God’s instruction, did not consider unclean meat even to be a possible source of food. Instead, the controversy dealt with the conscience of each believer.

Paul explained that “an idol is nothing” (1 Corinthians 8:4) in clarifying that it was permissible to eat meats that had been sacrificed to an idol. That an animal had been sacrificed to a pagan god had no bearing on whether the meat was suitable to be eaten.

Paul continued: “However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse” (verses 7-8).

When a believer bought meat in the market or was invited to a dinner at which meat was served, it was not necessary to determine whether it had been offered to an idol, said Paul (1 Corinthians 10:25-27). His concern was that the brethren be considerate of others who believed differently. He taught that in such cases it was better not to eat meat than to risk causing offense (1 Corinthians 8:13; 10:28).

This question of meat sacrificed to idols was a major controversy in New Testament times. It is the foundation for many of Paul’s discussions of Christian liberty. Unlike God’s law of clean and unclean animals, which was clearly recorded in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures do not discuss the matter of food offered to idols. But in the first-century world of the New Testament this issue varied in signifi-

cance and importance to members according to their conscience and understanding.

The timing of Paul’s letters

The chronological relationship between Paul’s letters to the Corinthians and Romans is another important piece of background information often overlooked. Many believe that Romans 14 supports the idea that Christians are free from all former restrictions regarding meats. Verse 14, in which Paul wrote, “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean,” is often cited as a proof text (see “Understanding ‘Unclean’ in Romans 14,” p. E11).

This approach, however, fails to consider the author’s perspective and the context of his letter to the Roman church. Many Bible resources agree that the book of 1 Corinthians was written about 55, although Romans was probably written from Corinth in 56 or 57. As demonstrated

Those who assume the subject of Romans 14 is a retraction of God’s law must force this interpretation into the text.

above, the food controversy in Corinth was over meat sacrificed to idols. Since Paul was writing to the Romans from Corinth, where this had been a significant issue, this subject was fresh on Paul’s mind and is the logical, biblically supported basis for Romans 14.

Understanding Paul’s intent

Those who assume the subject of Romans 14 is a retraction of God’s law regarding clean and unclean animals must force this interpretation into the text because it has no biblical foundation.

The historical basis for the discussion appears, from evidence in the chapter itself, to have been meat sacrificed to idols.

Verse 2 contrasts the one who “eats only vegetables” with the one who believes “he may eat all things”: meat as well as vegetables. Verse 6 discusses eating or not eating and is variously interpreted as referring to fasting (no eating or drinking), vegetarianism (eating only vegetables) or eating or not eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Verse 21 shows that meat offered to idols was the dominant issue of this chapter: “It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made

weak.” Both meat and wine were commonly offered to idols in the Roman world, with portions of those offerings then sold in the marketplace.

The Life Application Bible comments on verse 2: “The ancient system of sacrifice was at the center of the religious, social, and domestic life of the Roman world. After a sacrifice was presented to a god in a pagan temple, only part of it was burned. The remainder was often sent to the market to be sold. Thus a Christian might easily—even unknowingly—buy such meat in the marketplace or eat it at the home of a friend. Should a Christian question the source of his meat? Some thought there was nothing wrong with eating meat that had been offered to idols because idols were worthless and phony. Others carefully checked the source of their meat or gave up meat altogether, in order to avoid a guilty conscience. The problem was especially acute for Christians who had once been idol worshippers.

For them, such a strong reminder of their pagan days might weaken their newfound faith. Paul also deals with this problem in 1 Corinthians 8.”

What is the point of Paul’s instruction in Romans 14? Depending upon their consciences, early believers had several choices they could make while traveling or living in their communities. If they did not want to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols, they could choose to fast or eat only vegetables to make sure they did not consume any meat of suspicious background that might offend their conscience. If their consciences were not bothered by eating meat sacrificed to idols, they could choose any of the options. Within this context, Paul said, “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (verse 5) because “whatever is not from faith is sin” (verse 23).

Romans 14 is, in part, a chapter on Christian liberty—acting according to one’s conscience within the framework of God’s laws as they pertained to meat sacrificed to idols. Understood in its context, Romans 14 is *not* a permit to eat pork or any other unclean meat. When one understands that the historical food controversy of the New Testament dealt with meat sacrificed to idols and not which meats were

clean, other scriptures become clear.

Debate over ceremonial cleansing

Another often misunderstood passage is Mark 7:18-19. Here Jesus said, “Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?” The subject here was unwashed hands (verse 2), not which meats could be eaten. The purification of food referred to the way the body’s digestive process eliminates minor impurities

such as those that might be present from eating with unwashed hands.

The Pharisees, like Jesus and His disciples, ate only meat specified as clean in the Pentateuch. They objected, however, to the fact that Jesus and His disciples did not go through the Pharisees’ customary ritual of meticulously washing up to the elbows before eating.

Jesus, whose hands were sufficiently clean for eating even if not sufficiently clean to meet the Pharisees’ humanly devised standards, explained that the human body was designed to handle any

minute particles of dust or dirt that happened to enter it because of ritually unclean hands. He further suggested that, if the Pharisees were serious about wanting to obey God, they needed to revise their priorities. Cleansing one’s thoughts is eminently more spiritually important than washing one’s hands (verses 20-23).

Questionable interpretations

The New International Version of the Bible renders the latter part of verse 19: “(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods ‘clean’).” The New American Standard

Understanding ‘Unclean’ in Romans 14

Does Paul’s statement in Romans 14:14 that “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself” mean that there was no distinction between clean and unclean meats in the early Church?

An understanding of Greek terminology can help us here.

It is important to realize that two concepts of “unclean” were referred to in the New Testament, with different Greek words used to convey those ideas. “Unclean” could refer to animals not meant to be food (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14). “Unclean” could also refer to ceremonial or ritual uncleanness.

In Romans 14 Paul used the word *koinos*, which means “common” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1985, p. 649). In addition to the meanings of “common” or “ordinary,” as used today in English (Acts 2:44; 4:32; Titus 1:4; Hebrews 10:29; Jude 3), the word was also applied to things considered polluted or defiled. This same word, along with its verb form *koinoo*, is used in Mark 7:2, 15-23, where it clearly refers to ceremonial uncleanness because the disciples ate with unwashed hands.

Through a concordance or similar Bible help you can verify that *koinos* and *koinoo* are used throughout the New Testament to refer to *ceremonial uncleanness*, not to unclean animals or meats as defined in the Scriptures. Something could be “common”—ceremonially unclean—yet not appear on the proscribed list of meats that were biblically unclean.

An entirely different word, *akathartos*, is used for unclean meats in the New Testament. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament commonly used in Paul’s day), *akathartos* is used to designate the unclean meats listed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

In Acts 10 both *koinos* and *akathartos* describe Peter’s vision of the sheet filled with “all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping

things, and birds of the air” (verse 12), both clean and unclean. Peter himself distinguished between the two concepts of “unclean” by using both words in verse 14. After being told to “kill and eat,” Peter replied, “I have never eaten anything common [*koinos*] or unclean [*akathartos*].” Most Bible translations distinguish between the meanings of the two words used here. Peter used the same terminology in verse 28 and Acts 11:8 in discussing the vision.

When Paul said in Romans 14:14 that “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself,” he was making the same point he had made earlier to the Corinthians: Just because meat that was otherwise lawful to eat may have been associated with idol worship does not mean that it is no longer fit for human consumption. As seen from the context, Paul wasn’t discussing biblical dietary restrictions at all.

Paul goes on to state in Romans 14:20 that “all food is clean” (New International Version). The word translated “clean” is *katharos*, “free from impure admixture, without blemish, spotless” (Vine’s, p. 103). Clean meats as such aren’t addressed in the New Testament, so there isn’t a specific word to describe them. *Katharos* is used to describe all kinds of cleanliness and purity, including clean dishes (Matthew 23:26), bodies (John 13:10) and clothing (Revelation 15:6; 19:8, 14), “pure” religion (James 1:27), gold and glass (Revelation 21:18).

Realize also that, in both verses 14 and 20 of Romans 14, the word *food* or *meat* isn’t in the original wording. No specific object is mentioned relative to cleanness or uncleanness. The sense of these verses is merely that “nothing [is] unclean [*koinos*: common or ceremonially defiled] of itself” and “All is clean [*katharos*: free from impure admixture, without blemish, spotless].”

Paul’s point is that any association of food with idolatrous activity had no bearing on whether that food was suitable for eating.

—Scott Ashley

Bible similarly offers: “([Thus He] declared all foods clean.)” These translations stand in stark contrast to the King James and New King James versions, which indicate that the bodily digestive process purifies food as opposed to Jesus making a pronouncement reversing God’s laws on which meats to eat. Which view is correct?

The King James and New King James renditions best fit the New Testament culture wherein only clean meats were eaten. They also fit the context, which concerns eating with ceremonially unwashed hands rather than deciding which kind of flesh is suitable to be eaten.

Notice that in both the NIV and NASB the latter part of verse 19 is placed in parentheses, as though Mark were explaining

When we see that Peter had not eaten unclean meat years after Christ’s death, it becomes obvious that Jesus’ disciples did not believe that He had abolished the commands against eating unclean meats.

Jesus Christ’s words. This is clearly an *interpretation* of the original wording of Mark’s Gospel. In the original Greek the words “In saying this, Jesus declared” (NIV) and “Thus He declared” (NASB) are not present; translators have added them to try to explain what they think Mark intended and as a result have placed their own mistaken interpretations on Jesus’ words.

Putting together all the scriptures on the subject helps us understand the correct biblical perspective (See “How Should We Interpret Scripture?,” page E7). When we see from passages such as Acts 10, discussed earlier, that Peter had not eaten unclean meat years after Christ’s death, it becomes obvious that Jesus’ disciples did not believe that He had abolished the commands against eating unclean meats. Such a view simply cannot be sustained in the light of clear scriptures to the contrary.

No New Testament passages describe Christians eating meats that had been considered unclean; such a view is glaringly absent in the Bible. On the contrary, we do find many clear scriptures in which the apostle Paul vigorously and repeatedly upholds adherence to God’s laws (Acts 24:14; 25:8; Romans 3:31; 7:12, 22), as did James, the half-brother of Christ (James 2:8-12; 4:11) and John (1 John 3:4). Violating God’s dietary laws would have been unthinkable to them.

Colossian controversy clarified

When Paul wrote that Christians should

“let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths” (Colossians 2:16), some assume the believers he was addressing were eating pork and other meats previously considered unclean. Again, the Bible nowhere supports this assumption.

In reality, the issue of clean and unclean meats is not addressed in this section. Paul doesn’t discuss which foods the Colossians were consuming; the Greek word *brosis*, translated “food,” refers to “the act of eating” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1985, p. 245).

Some other translations make this clear. The Twentieth Century New Testament,

for example, translates this as “Do not, then, allow any one to take you to task on questions of *eating and drinking* . . .”

Although many assume that Paul’s criticism is directed at teachers who advocated Old Testament practices (such as following the law and practicing circumcision), there is no proof to support this. However, we should recognize that perversions of proper biblical practice abounded at the time, both in Judaism and the emerging early Church. As the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* explains: “There is more than Judaism in this false teaching. Its teachers look to intermediary spirits, angels whom they worship; and insist on a very strict asceticism” (1915 edition, “Epistle to the Colossians”).

The false teaching Paul condemned contained many elements of asceticism—avoidance of anything enjoyable—which was intended to make its followers more spiritual. This deluded attempt to attain greater spirituality included “neglect of the body” (Colossians 2:23). Paul characterized the ascetics’ misguided rules as “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle” (verse 21). These efforts only created a “false humility” (verse 23) and were destined to fail because they were based on “the commandments and doctrines of men” (verse 22) rather than God’s instruction.

Paul admonished the church at Colosse not to listen to the ascetics. Rather than abrogating God’s laws concerning unclean meats—which some people read into this

passage—Paul is instructing the Colossian members not to be concerned with ascetic teachers who criticized the manner in which the Colossians enjoyed God’s festivals and Sabbaths. Such enjoyment, although condemned by these false teachers, is perfectly acceptable to God.

This section of Colossians 2 is encouragement for the Church to hold fast to its teachings and proper understanding; it is not a treatise on which foods to eat or on which days to worship God. We must be careful not to read preconceived notions into these or any other scriptures.

Misunderstood instructions to Timothy

Still another part of Paul’s writings that is often misunderstood is 1 Timothy 4:3-5, where he speaks of false teachers “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

What was the motivation of these false teachers? Did Paul warn Timothy against teachers who would advocate keeping the biblical dietary laws, or was something else at work? We know that Paul told Timothy that the Old Testament scriptures were inspired by God and “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16), so it isn’t credible that Paul would caution Timothy against adhering to instructions found in these same scriptures.

On the other hand, Paul’s words show us what the real problem was: These teachers were demanding that people follow commands not found in the Bible. They were “forbidding to marry”—which is encouraged, not discouraged, in the Scriptures—“and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”

The Life Application Bible helps us understand the background of the problem Paul addressed here: “The danger that Timothy faced in Ephesus seems to have come from certain people in the church who were following some Greek philosophers who taught that the body was evil and that only the soul mattered. The false teachers refused to believe that the God of

creation was good, because his very contact with the physical world would have soiled him . . . [They] gave stringent rules (such as forbidding people to marry or to eat certain foods). This made them appear self-disciplined and righteous.”

Paul discusses the true source of these heretical teachings in 1 Timothy 4:1: Rather than being founded in the Bible, these teachings originated with “deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” Thus the problem in 1 Timothy 4 was perverted worldly asceticism, not obedience to God’s biblical laws defining clean and unclean meats. Paul’s perspective was that “those who believe and know the truth” (verse 3) would be familiar with the scriptures that identify which meats were “sanctified [set apart] by the word of God” (verse 5) for our enjoyment. He encouraged Timothy to remind them to let the Scriptures be their guide instead of these ascetic teachers.

In a similar situation dealing with asceticism masquerading as godliness, Paul gave parallel instructions: “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things

No scriptural evidence exists that indicates that New Covenant Christians of the early Church ever changed their practice of following God’s instructions regarding clean and unclean meats.

indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians 2:20-23). This helps us understand the true nature of the problem Paul discussed with Timothy: asceticism, not adherence to God’s dietary laws.

A broader view of history

As we have seen, no scriptural evidence exists that indicates that New Covenant Christians of the early Church ever changed their practice of following God’s instructions regarding clean and unclean meats.

Does the Bible give us any other indication regarding when and for how long this law is to remain in effect? Let’s set the present aside and move forward in the his-

tory of humanity to the time of Christ’s return to earth to establish the Kingdom of God. A clear picture of His will for the future provides additional understanding to help guide us in the present.

The book of Revelation, in describing the end-time events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ, uses the expression “a haunt for every *unclean* and hated bird” (Revelation 18:2). If clean and unclean designations no longer exist, why did Jesus inspire this picture for John? Could it be that God is consistent and unchanging? (James 1:17; Malachi 4:4; Hebrews 13:8; Matthew 5:17-19).

Another scripture that refers to the time of Jesus Christ’s return to earth presents this picture: “For behold, the LORD will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword the LORD will judge all flesh; and the slain of the LORD shall be many. ‘Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves, to go to the gardens after an idol in the midst, eating *swine’s flesh* and the *abomination* and the *mouse*, shall be consumed together,’ says the LORD” (Isaiah 66:15-17).

The biblical position is clear. Distinctions between clean and unclean meats existed long before the New Testament was written; they were followed by the leaders and other members of the early

Church; they are currently to be observed even by their successors in the modern Church, which “keeps the commandments of God and has the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

As we have seen, they will continue in effect and will be enforced by Jesus Christ Himself. Even though first-century Christians struggled with their consciences over meat sacrificed to idols, the Bible indicates that they lived in harmony with God’s instruction regarding clean and unclean meats. Shouldn’t we also be in harmony with those laws?

God’s laws are always for our benefit. As the apostle Paul wrote, “the benefits of religion are without limit, since it holds out promise not only for this life but also for the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:8, Revised English Bible). **GN**

Unclean

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Being different from the rest of society by following God’s law is no cause for embarrassment. Of God’s called-out people, Peter writes that “you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). God describes His chosen people as being called to holiness!

However, Christians should always use wisdom and discretion in how they introduce these practices to family and reveal them to friends and not try to force God’s laws on others. Paul advises: “Be wise in your dealings with outsiders, but use your opportunities to the full. Let your words always be gracious . . . Learn how best to respond to each person you meet” (Colossians 4:4-6, Revised English Bible).

Underlying purpose of God’s law

God’s laws are given to us for our good. They define the way to be holy, set apart to and by God. They teach us God’s standards, how to distinguish right from wrong, the holy from the common and ordinary. They define our consecration, separation and devotion to God. They help us remain separate, not from the world but from the world’s wickedness.

As we apply God’s laws, they encourage us to think differently, to think like God thinks. They alter our perceptions. For example, keeping God’s Sabbaths alters our understanding and use of time. Faithfully following God’s laws of tithing alters our perception and use of other physical resources. In the same way, obedience to God’s laws of clean and unclean meats alters our view and value of everything we allow into our bodies.

Even though some of God’s laws may seem unusual, and we may not always fully grasp their purpose, they help us avoid physical, moral and spiritual contamination. The Word of God provides a pattern for physically, spiritually and morally healthy living. God’s principles of health and cleanliness are for our lasting good, in this life as well as the life to come.

The knowledge of God’s food laws my brother, sister and I learned years ago stands valid. Following God’s laws defining clean and unclean remains an identifying sign of holiness for His people. **GN**

Does God Hate Sinners?

*Sin is humanity's most dangerous and deceitful enemy.
God obviously hates sin, but how does He view the sinner?*

by Dean Wilson

Did you ever wonder what God's attitude is toward sinners? We might reasonably expect God to be against sin, but does that mean He hates sinners, just as He does sin? God hates sin, but what exactly is sin? How do we know what is sin and what is not sin?

This is an important question that affects all of us, since the apostle Paul tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

What are the consequences of sin? Romans 6:23 emphatically states that "the wages of sin is *death*."

Again, what is sin? The apostle John tells us, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, King James Version). He later adds that "all unrighteousness [wrongdoing] is sin" (1 John 5:17).

When God created man, He gave him freedom of choice, the opportunity to choose how he would live. Although He tells us how we should live, He doesn't force that way on us: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19, emphasis added throughout).

However, Romans 8:7 explains why so few choose to live God's way of life. It's because "the carnal [physical] mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."

Satan's influence on humans

Another factor comes into play, unseen and spiritual: Satan the devil. His influence on humanity is enormous. It is so great that he is described as a being "who *deceives the whole world*" (Revelation 12:9).

When God first began to communicate with man, Satan was already lurking in the background. His work of deception began when God allowed him to deceive Adam and Eve, the first two humans on earth. Appearing to Eve in the form of a serpent, Satan asked, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1).

Eve replied that God allowed her and her husband to eat of the fruit of every tree except one, but if they ate of its fruit they would certainly die.

Satan then began his work of deception: "Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely

die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (verses 4-6).

From a strictly human point of view, what was wrong with eating this fruit? Apparently it wouldn't harm anyone, and it looked so good—at least it appeared so to Eve.

She was deceived, but Adam then took willingly of what God had forbidden. What Adam and Eve and all their human successors throughout history have overlooked is the vital importance of obedience to God. It is not always immediately apparent just why something is harmful; often that tragic lesson comes later. It pays to take God at His word.

The ugly scars of sin

Romans 5:12 shows us the consequences of what Adam and Eve started, that, "just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin," death has "spread to all men, because all sinned."

"Death spread to all men" as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve. They chose a way that all humans since have chosen to follow: the way of sin that inevitably brings death.

However, notice other serious repercussions of our choosing to sin: "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your *iniquities* have *separated* you from your God; and your *sins* have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2).

The result of being cut off from God by our sins has been disastrous. Notice Isaiah's description of sin's deadly impact on mankind: "... Your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity" (verses 3-4).

"Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, and

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God's attitude toward sinners is an important issue that affects all of us, since the apostle Paul tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Lessons Learned From Little League

*As parents, we have a responsibility to teach our children.
But keep in mind that we can learn a lot from them too.*

by Gary Petty

Little League baseball involves one of those questions I've wondered about from time to time. As a child I never had the opportunity to play, so I was excited when my 5-year-old, Christopher, decided to play T-ball. I was just as thrilled when my 9-year-old daughter declared that she wanted to play Little League.

It was a YMCA league, so we knew the games would be more for fun than hard-core competition. Coeducational teams seemed just the ticket for our tomboyish Jennifer. When we signed up we were told that no playing experience was required.

The day of the first practice I took Jen to a second-hand store, where she carefully selected a glove from the pile of well-worn mitts. The entire family was excited as we accompanied her and Chris to their first practice.

About five minutes after I arrived, I began to have a terrible feeling we had made a mistake. Around the diamond was a group of 9- and 10-year-old boys fielding and throwing balls like old pros. Their appearance, the well-worn cap, the cocky way they yelled at the batter, the easy motion of throwing, showed that most weren't novices. To top it off, Jennifer was the only girl.

There she stood, away from the other players, her just-bought used glove dangling from her hand. The coach arrived and began working with the team, testing how each player hit and fielded. Every time Jen swung the bat and missed, her face grimaced with the fear that she wasn't measuring up to the others. The boys were polite. Too polite.

On the way home Jen announced that she was going to quit. She knew what Dad would say and listened patiently while I gave her my lecture about never giving up and once you've started something you must see it through. She pursed her lips but didn't argue. Even to me the words seemed a bit shallow.

At the next practice the coach put her on third base. I cringed as I remembered playing that position in a physical-education class in college and the pounding I took. Soon it happened—a hard ground ball toward third. She placed her body in front of the ball like I had told her. The ball took a bad bounce and hit her hard in the chest.

Undaunted, she scooped up the ball and

threw it toward first base, where it landed about six feet in front of the first-baseman. She hung her head and clenched her fist like she does when she's embarrassed.

Many lessons

I was developing a new respect for the determined little girl out there playing ball. She had



taken the best shot anyone could give her. She took it head on and shook off the pain and followed through with her throw.

There were no tears, no excuses, only a resolve to do better, to get it to the first-baseman next time.

One day she asked why the shortstop kept cutting off line drives that were obviously hers to field. She knew that he was a better fielder, but it was only fair that she get her chance to make the play. I explained to her the facts of life about baseball. The boys might tolerate her, but, on the baseball diamond as in life, respect was something you earned.

She struggled through each practice and weekly game. Each week she improved. In one of the first games she hit a single and threw off her batting helmet because she felt it slowed her down. The next batter hit the ball, and she raced for second base just in time for the line drive to smack her in the head. She barely broke stride and was safe.

I was angry at her for not wearing the helmet,

Teaching our children the values of hard work, honesty, integrity, perseverance, respect toward others and love of God doesn't come just by lecturing information into their brains. These values are learned by living them.

but secretly I admired her tight-jawed determination.

About halfway through the season I noticed a subtle acceptance beginning to take place. She had earned her place on the team. At one game I made the mistake of showing up with my camera and taking pictures. Her eyes flashed as she informed me that she didn't want to be singled out from the rest of the team in any manner.

By the end of the season Jen's batting average was about in the middle of the pack. She still had a hard time fielding pop flies, and her throws to first tended to land a little short. She tenaciously stopped line drives the hard way. All the parents would sit around in lawn chairs and on blankets and cheer the kids. Whenever Jen got up to bat, her jaw set, some stranger from the crowd would shout, "Come on, Jennifer!"

Teaching right values

Christians worry about how the deterioration of values in our society affects our children. God wants us to counteract the many wrong influences impacting our children by instructing them in proper values, *His* values. God tells us in Deuteronomy 6:5-7: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall *teach them diligently to your children*, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (emphasis added).

Teaching our children the values of hard work, honesty, integrity, perseverance, respect toward others and love of God doesn't come just by lecturing information into their brains. These values are learned by living them. All the talk of Christian values is meaningless unless we daily share the actions of these values in the lives of our families.

In the process of living them—in the house, by the way, when we lie down and when we rise up—we parents may find that we learn as much as our children do.

I can't tell you how many games Jen's team won that year. Sometimes we would get home and realize that none of us even knew the score. But I'll never forget that after the first game—when I went to a scared, embarrassed 9-year-old and told her that, since she had completed one game, if she wanted to quit I would understand—she was determined to finish the season.

And what a season it was! *GN*

Hate Sinners

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there is no justice in their ways . . . [Our iniquities are] in transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing from our God, speaking oppression and revolt . . . Truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter . . . Truth fails; and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey" (verses 7-8, 13-15).

Sin's vivid consequences

Paul continues this theme with the stinging words: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside . . . There is none who does good, no, not one . . . [Their] mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:10-12, 14-18). The apostle here describes raw human nature untempered by God's influence.

Human sin is leading inevitably to the worldwide crisis described by Christ Himself in Matthew 24:21-22: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, *no flesh* would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."

God's attitude toward sin and sinners

Now back to our original question: Does God hate sinners?

Absolutely not. In fact, His Word tells us: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

Does this mean that God the Father and Jesus Christ are accepting of or tolerate sin? Hebrews 1:9 explains Their attitude toward sin and sinners. God, addressing Jesus Christ, says, "You have *loved righteousness and hated lawlessness* [sin]; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

They clearly hate sin, but that does not mean They hate those who are caught up in sin. As John 3:16-17 tells us, God sent

His only Son, not because He hates sinners, but because He loves all people and wants to offer us a way to avoid death—the ultimate consequence of our sins (Romans 6:23).

God demonstrates this love toward us in spite of our sins. "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6, 8).

Jesus' death allows us to be reconciled to God, making possible a relationship with Him. "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (verses 9-11). Through Jesus Christ giving His life to pay the penalty for our sins for us, God offers us a priceless gift: eternal life, an escape from the consequences of sin.

God's love for humanity

Psalms 103 explains God's attitude of love toward the human race: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, . . . who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies . . . The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. He will not . . . keep his anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins" (verses 2-4, 8-10).

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions [sins] from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust . . . The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them" (verses 12-14, 17-18).

Earlier we read from Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. But, for those who are willing to repent, change their ways and accept Jesus Christ's sacrifice, the rest of the verse applies: ". . . The gift of God is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord." *GN*