

# *the* Good News

## Moral Leadership: *Does It Really Matter?*

A Nation's Political and Moral Dilemma • A Kingdom Miraculously Delivered  
Creation and Evolution: The Bible Explanation • Winning With Your Strengths

## Leadership: A Biblical Perspective

What does God look for in a leader? Does He expect certain standards and behavior in a person chosen for a role of leadership and service to others?

At a time many Americans are asking themselves what behavior they should expect from their president, and the holder of that office is frequently heard quoting the Bible, perhaps we should examine what God expects of a leader.

The Bible is clear that God expects one put in a position of responsibility to meet certain qualifications. This is first brought out when God began working with the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt. God was working with a nation of former slaves, shaping and molding them into a new nation. Where would He begin?

One problem quickly became apparent. Since the people brought all their questions, problems and disputes to Moses, the decision-making process quickly became a bottleneck and ground to a halt. The solution? Share the load by delegating authority to capable leaders.

By what criteria were leaders to be chosen? Moses was advised to "select from all the people *able men*, such as *fear God*, men of *truth*, hating covetousness . . ." (Exodus 18:21, emphasis added).

With a core leadership of able, God-fearing, truthful, unselfish men, the new nation would build a firm foundation. Moses solved his immediate problem and gave his people a sound start on nationhood.

Later, through the apostle Paul, God enumerated requirements for positions of leadership and service within His Church. Consider the standards, listed below, that Paul gave to his fellow minister Timothy for choosing such leaders:

" . . . The presiding elder must have an impeccable character. Husband of one wife, he must be temperate, discreet and courteous, hospitable and a good teacher; not a heavy drinker, nor hot-tempered, but gentle and peaceable, not avaricious, a man who manages his own household well and brings his children up to obey him and be well-behaved: how can any man who does not understand how to manage his own household take care of the Church of God? . . .

It is also necessary that he be held in good repute by outsiders, so that he never falls into disrepute and into the devil's trap.

"Similarly, deacons must be respectable, not double tongued, moderate in the amount of wine they drink and with no squalid greed for money . . . They are first to be examined, and admitted to serve as deacons only if there is nothing against them" (1 Timothy 3:1-10, New Jerusalem Bible).

Titus 1:7-8 adds: "The presiding elder has to be irreproachable since he is God's representative; never arrogant or hot-tempered, nor a heavy drinker or violent, nor avaricious; but hospitable and a lover of goodness; sensible, upright, devout and self-controlled . . ." (New Jerusalem Bible).

We should ask ourselves: If these are minimum qualifications for overseers of a small congregation of believers, what should we expect from those who oversee states and nations?

Those who excuse the president's admitted peccadilloes fail to note that any schoolteacher or principal, university professor or supervisor in private business would likely be immediately fired for such conduct. Military officers would be discharged, court-martialed or imprisoned—and many have been—for actions many are willing to tolerate in the nation's commander in chief. Many Americans don't seem to appreciate the irony that they hold the presidency to lower standards than any of these jobs.

Moses and Paul understood that leadership requires *moral* authority to be credible. If one is to accept advice, decisions and instructions from leaders, one must have confidence in the core values and moral foundation behind their words.

—Scott Ashley

# Good News

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# Moral Leadership: *Does It Really Matter?*

*“ . . . The country has embraced unprecedented moral laxity. Some people say [the U.S. president] has given no moral leadership, which is false. [He] has led America into an acceleration of its moral decline. A country inclined to take an easy line with lies and deception, especially regarding sexual infidelity, now has little choice but to accept cheating as common when the President sets the country’s children such a startling example.”*

—The Daily Mail (London)

by Scott Ashley

**D**oes morality matter? In recent weeks and months, the world has been treated to the spectacle of poll after poll showing that, while most Americans disapprove of the president’s private behavior, they approve of his job performance by a wide margin. A large number express the view that he has done nothing deserving of punishment.

Time after time Americans have seen television commentators, legal analysts and people on the street assure us that it’s nobody’s business what elected officials do in private; the only thing that matters is how they do their job.

Does moral leadership matter? Can lack of moral values coexist with exemplary leadership? What are the consequences of strong political power without a moral foundation?

## **Where have all the leaders gone?**

Nations everywhere seem to be drifting dangerously out of control. Russia is close to economic collapse, its government perilously unstable. Her neighbors, including many of the former Soviet republics, are understandably anxious and nervous. There is nothing quite like a collapsing superpower armed with thousands of nuclear weapons to give cause for concern.

Many Asian countries that were economic powerhouses in the global economy only a few years ago are mired in recession and deflation. Millions have been thrown out of work, plummeting overnight from relative prosperity to poverty.

Some Asian countries face food shortages in the coming months. People naturally look to Japan to pull Asia out of its economic straits, but Japan is crippled by its own governmental stalemate and is hardly in a condition to help others.

Nearby, India and Pakistan rattle their newly developed nuclear sabers at each other while Iraq and Iran quietly pursue the development and acquisition of their own nuclear, chemical and biological arsenals. Meanwhile, much of Africa remains mired in perpetual poverty, crippled by corrupt and incompetent leadership.

The list of world problems goes on and on. At a time of many global crises, where have our leaders gone?

The generation of leaders forged in the fires of the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War has largely passed from the scene. In the last two U.S. presidential elections, voters chose telegenic baby boomer Bill Clinton over World War II veterans George Bush, a former U.S. Navy carrier pilot; and Bob Dole, a former infantry officer who lost the use of an arm on a battlefield in Italy.

*The Daily Mail* of London recently headlined an article, “Where Is the Leader We So Badly Need?” It observed: “It seems hard to believe that only ten years ago we still enjoyed the authoritative certainties of Thatcher and Reagan, and that we could still also believe in Gorbachev. That now seems a vanished world, about as distant from our present discontents as the era of Bismarck and Disraeli.”

Times have changed and not for the better. If this is what we can expect from our current crop of administrators and heads of state, what will be the quality of the next generation to assume the reins of leadership?

## **Good intentions aren’t good enough**

For thousands of years nations and their leaders have wrestled to create a government that



*What does it say when the nation’s highest elected official is accused of numerous felony offenses? More important, what does it say about a people and other government officials willing to excuse such behavior?*

would provide the most good for the greatest number of people. The longest-lived governments have been monarchies in which absolute power passed from generation to generation within families. Many such dynasties lasted for centuries. Sadly, these were often long-lived simply because of their absolute control over their subjects.

Administrators and forms of government rise and fall. This century has seen the spectacular rise of a new form of government—communism—and its equally spectacular collapse. Communism promised equality for all. But it was destined to fail because, in rejecting God, it lacked a moral foundation.

History shows that many forms of government have started with good intentions, only to fail as weaknesses become apparent. In most cases the failure came down to the moral downfall of the leader or the general populace. Often, of course, the leader was a reflection of the people—and vice versa.

This is evident in the present American predicament, with poll after poll showing that most Americans want their president—an admitted liar and adulterer—to remain in office.

### Tolerance of evil

What does this say about the American people? As *The Times* of London observed: "There are many men who belong to Bill Clinton's generation and identify with him . . . There are many women who are indulgent towards his sexual escapades. There are many black people who see him as a sympathetic President. These people do not want to believe the evidence; they want to explain it away."

Economist and writer Thomas Sowell noted remarkable ironies and inconsistencies coming to light in the reactions of the American people to revelations of presidential behavior.

" . . . The polls of the past several months make it hard to be optimistic about the American public's understanding of the society in which they live or the dangers in that kind of society," he wrote. "Consider some polls. The public has a far more negative view of Monica Lewinsky than Bill Clinton. Since it takes two to tango, why would you blame one more than the other—and especially the one who is younger and

who has no power and no responsibility to the nation at large?

"[Special prosecutor] Kenneth Starr's approval ratings have barely made it out of the single digits. He is far more disliked for bringing out the truth than Bill Clinton is for lying . . . Susan McDougal's stonewalling on Bill Clinton's part in the Arkansas fraud has been magically transformed into something noble by the media. More important, the public has bought it. Hey, obstruction of justice is not so bad if she's a spunky gal . . .

"What will matter very much—and perhaps tragically—is if the public has degenerated to the point where it can only react emotionally to what is right under their noses, rather than understand how much this country's freedom and well-being depend on the rule of law."

### Are there moral absolutes?

Such findings point not only to a president but a nation dangerously adrift from its moral moorings. The gradual acceptance of moral relativism—that moral absolutes do not exist—shows up in the many comments that it doesn't matter what the president does in his private life, that it's nobody's business, or it's just between him and his wife.

Such sentiments ignore a leader's fundamental responsibility to properly lead his people. What does it say when the nation's highest elected official, the head of the executive branch of the U.S. government, charged with enforcing the laws of the land, is accused of numerous felony offenses? More important, what does it say about a people and other government officials willing to excuse such behavior?

Some 4,500 years ago another nation faced a crisis of government. Shaking off the shackles of slavery, that nation had the opportunity to do things right. Its people were promised peace, stability and prosperity in their homeland if they would build upon a *proper moral foundation*.

After giving the ancient Israelites His law—the national constitution that would ensure the blessings of peace and prosperity—God exclaimed, "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My

"Most of us, like the president himself, just want to get past this thing, shrug it off, put it behind us, and get on with the national life. But that, too, is an illusion, however popular at the moment. One event flows from another. As one good deed produces another, one sin leads to another, one scandal to the next. That's why character cannot be separated from competence . . .

"We long for business as usual. A respect for certain human bonds—truth, honor, the majesty of the law—seems too much trouble for most of us just now. Me, I wish for a renaissance of guilt, of shame, of forgiveness and therefore of human progress—the real thing and not the slick substitute for it, the cheap grace that has been marketed so successfully in this Clintonized culture.

—*The Washington Times*

"Paige Patterson, President of America's Southern Baptist Convention, said he [Mr. Clinton] should resign and seek forgiveness for his personal transgressions 'before he is instrumental in corrupting all our young people' . . . He went to express concern that the American people appeared to be continuing to support the President simply because the economy is strong. This bespeaks a certain enthralling materialism which is exactly what caused the demise of Rome to say nothing of 21 other great civilisations. And it will kill us, too."

—*The Times* (London)

"When the President of the United States and commander-in-chief of the western world describes himself as 'a broken spirit,' his predicament becomes more than a purely domestic issue. It concerns America's allies and the whole world. With two years of his term still to go, it matters deeply that whoever occupies the White House generates respect and trust.

The quality, just as much as the material strength, of the American leadership has underpinned democracy's struggles against a succession of tyrannies since Roosevelt and Churchill called for a new world order in the Atlantic Charter of 1941. When the chips are down we depend on America doing the right thing and that, with occasional detours and stumbles, is what it has done for most of this century . . .

"The undeniable fact is that Mr Clinton's cavorting, and attempted cover-up has landed the presidency in its deepest mire since the Watergate scandal destroyed President Nixon 24 years ago . . ."

—*The Sunday Times* (London)

"Yet where is the steadying hand in all this explosive volatility? Seldom in this century has there been such a dearth of authority in the world's capitals . . .

"In better times, leadership might have been provided by Washington. But President Bill Clinton is a busted flush, dreading the next revelations in the Lewinsky scandal, haunted by the possibility of impeachment and as much an embarrassment to his own country as [Boris] Yeltsin is to his own people . . .

"There are fears of a full-blown recession. A time may be coming when the lack of decisive leadership in this crisis will be seen as the crucial factor in undermining not only our prosperity but perhaps our safety too."

—*Daily Mail* (London)

"It would be no more appropriate for *The Sunday Telegraph* to tell the American people what to do about the presidential crisis now afflicting their Government than it would make sense for *The New York Times* to issue instruction to British voters facing a similar predicament. But the President of the United States is also the leader of the free world, the captain, as it were, of the team. At present, and at a time of great danger in different parts of the world, the captain is off the pitch. His likely fate—whether or not he is impeached—affects us all . . .

"Mr Clinton may yet survive this, his greatest test. More perhaps than any politician in history, he has the guile and stamina to do so. But, if he does, it will be a victory for political art rather than a victory for honour; it will be America, indeed, that may then be afflicted by a 'broken spirit.'"

—*The Sunday Telegraph* (London)

"Those in authority are rightly held to certain standards . . . Is the leader of the world's most powerful country to be allowed a lower standard of behaviour, just because he sits in the White House? The reverse should be true; precisely because he sits in the White House, the perceived exemplar and guardian of his country, he should be prepared to leave if he cannot behave."

—*The Economist*

"The tragedy is that the status of the Presidency has been so demeaned by Bill Clinton and some of his predecessors that trust is being eroded. That is the legacy of the Lewinsky scandal and all those that have gone before. When the leadership of the free world is so mired in sleaze and lies, all of us are less secure."

—*The Daily Mail* (London)

commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deuteronomy 5:29). God knew their adherence to this moral foundation would be key to their success and survival as a nation.

God understood the crucial role of leaders in a nation's success. He literally laid down the law to the Israelites; He gave specific instructions the nation's human head of government was to follow to keep it on the moral path.

" . . . When he has taken his place on the seat of his kingdom," God instructed Israel concerning its head of state, "he is to make in a book a copy of this law . . . And it is to be with him for his reading all the days of his life, so that he may be trained in the fear of the Lord his God to keep and do all the words of this teaching and these laws: so that his heart may not be lifted up over his countrymen, and he may not be turned away from the orders, to one side or the other: but that his life and the lives of his children may be long in his kingdom . . ." (Deuteronomy 17:18-20, Bible in Basic English).

Adherence to this law, God promised, would result in national leaders who would not exalt themselves—would not be "lifted up"—over their people, men who would fear God and lead their people in righteousness and truth by example. Sadly, it was not to be.

### Influence on a nation

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah around the time of the downfall of the kingdom of Israel, God noted that evil had spread through all levels of Israelite society. "*The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores . . .*" (Isaiah 1:5-6, emphasis added throughout).

God identified the nation's leaders as the source of corruption. Rather than providing proper leadership, they were leading the kingdom to destruction. "*For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and those who are led by them are destroyed*" (Isaiah 9:16).

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God added this sad footnote: "An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their

own power; and *My people love to have it so . . .*" (Jeremiah 5:30-31).

People had not only come to accept corrupt leadership, but to *love* it. In God's view, this was "astonishing" and "horrible."

For their sins, God allowed His people to be taken into captivity. The prophet Hosea condemned the "spirit of harlotry" that turned them from God (Hosea 5:4). Their leaders failed them miserably. Rather than providing moral guidance and proper example, they appealed to people's base instincts and impulses. The result was national disaster.

### Danger signs

Abraham Lincoln recognized that the greatest dangers to a nation often come not from external threats, but *from within*. "At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected?" he asked. "I answer, if it ever reach us, it must *spring up amongst us*; it cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot we must *ourselves* be its author and finisher" (emphasis added).

We are witnessing a national debate over right and wrong, whether adultery and lying are serious crimes and sins and whether they can be glossed over because of the popularity of the perpetrator. Where will it lead? If Bible prophecy is an indicator, conditions like those that Isaiah and Jeremiah described will be the outcome.

Paul, describing trends leading up to Jesus Christ's return, wrote: "But be certain of this, that in the last days times of trouble will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, uplifted in pride, given to bitter words, going against the authority of their fathers, never giving praise, having no religion, without natural love, bitter haters, saying evil of others, violent and uncontrolled, hating all good, false to their friends, acting without thought, lifted up in mind, loving pleasure more than God . . ." (2 Timothy 3:1-4, Bible in Basic English).

Paul describes an utterly self-centered society in which people have no regard or use for moral values. Rejecting God's standards of conduct, they will set their own standards using their own reasoning—reasoning that ultimately leads to suffering and death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Such a society may not be long in

*Continued on page 11*

# Where Can We Find a Right Moral Foundation?

In an ironic twist, the same United States government that was founded on biblical values and standards has increasingly removed the Bible and mention of God from classrooms, courtrooms and public discussion. Tragically, the sure moral foundation for a nation is largely forgotten and ignored.

One wonders what the nation's founding fathers would think of the direction America has taken. After all, as George Washington noted, "it is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

John Adams, second president of the United States, observed: "Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! Every member would be obliged in conscience, to temperance, frugality, and industry; to justice, kindness, and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love and reverence toward Almighty God . . . What a Eutopia, what a Paradise would this region be."

James Madison, fourth president and a primary architect of the U.S. Constitution, wrote that "Religion [is] the basis and Foundation of Government."

These men understood that a nation needs a solid moral foundation to survive and thrive. They knew that individuals must keep their passions and desires in check for the good of the whole.

They recognized one sure source of right moral values: the Bible.

Psalms 19:7-11 tells us: "The law of the Lord is good, giving new life to the soul: the witness of the Lord is certain, giving wisdom to the foolish. The orders of the Lord are right, making glad the heart: the rule of the Lord is holy, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, and has no end; the decisions of the Lord are true and full of righteousness."

"More to be desired are they than gold, even than much shining gold; sweeter than the dropping honey. By them is your servant made conscious of danger, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Bible in Basic English, emphasis added throughout).

## The crisis of leadership: A biblical perspective

What moral guidance does the Bible offer in light of the nation's leadership plight?

God established fundamental behavioral guidelines in the Ten Commandments. They clearly forbid sexual relations outside of marriage, and they outlaw the bearing of false witness (Exodus 20:14, 16). Jesus Christ confirmed the validity of God's law, and these commandments in particular, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17-19, 27-28, 33-37; 19:18).

Proverbs 6:32-33 warns us of dangers of extramarital sex: "Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away."

God well understood that justice hinges on the truthfulness of witnesses in any legal proceeding. "These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies,

and one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

For one found to be lying in a legal proceeding, God directed swift and effective punishment: The liar incurred the punishment the falsely accused would have received had he been convicted (Deuteronomy 19:16-19). ". . . So you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you" (verses 19-20).

Our Creator desires "truth in the inward parts" (Psalm 51:6). He is "the God of truth" (Isaiah 65:16). He knows that truthfulness—or lack of it—is a fundamental part of our character. Lying is essentially selfish, indulged in to escape the consequences of one's actions or gain advantage over others. God thus views lying as despicable. (For a greater understanding of our Creator's basic standards for human behavior, be sure to request your copy of *The Ten Commandments*. This booklet is yours free when you contact any of our offices listed on page 2.)



## Stopping sin's spread

We should ask ourselves why God labels some behaviors as sinful. The reaction of much of the American public to the scandal in the highest levels of government reveals a basic lack of understanding of why God hates sin.

The Bible defines sin as breaking God's law (1 John 3:4). God knows that any sin is harmful. In addition to bringing death (Romans 6:23), it brings on us misery and anguish. God, a Being of infinite love (1 John 4:8, 16), is deeply desirous that we don't bring unnecessary suffering on ourselves.

The apostle Paul understood how evil can spread its destruction and corruption to others. He gave instructions that a man in an improper sexual relationship was to be put out of the congregation (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). Paul warned that this must be done lest the man's influence spread to affect others (verse 6). To protect them from this harmful influence, they were told to "put away from [them]selves the evil person" (verse 13). This was a painful but necessary step to prevent inevitable greater harm should his sin spread.

In giving them His laws, God told the ancient Israelites: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply . . ."

"But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, . . . I announce to you today that you shall surely perish . . . 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 30:15-19).

God wants us to choose to obey Him and not suffer the consequences of sin. This choice, He says, will bring life and blessing. Conversely, we can choose to accept sin—a decision far too many Americans seem to have embraced during their current crisis—and the suffering it inevitably brings.

—Scott Ashley

*"It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."*

—George Washington

# Wrestling With God

## A Political and Moral Dilemma

*The founding fathers envisioned a nation rooted in biblical values. What lies ahead when its roots are challenged?*

by Howard Davis

**C**an the American system of government survive if the highest office in the nation—occupying the most powerful position in the world—is held by a man found to be guilty of immoral acts and felony offenses?

This is the question haunting congressmen and other governmental officials in the wake of a voluminous report describing the pornographic activities of the president of the United States and, by his own admission, lies to cover up these immoral activities.

A national argument ensued as the manuscript of the 445-page report and the president's lawyers' response to it appeared in newspapers and on the Internet. The controversy heightened when the president's videotaped grand-jury testimony aired on television and other evidence was released.

Within days, reactions to the lurid revelations brought to a head a crisis concerning two foundational principles of the American system of rule of law.

### Foundation of a nation

Twin beliefs underlie the 20th-century American superpower. The first is the *universal rule of law* in a structured legal framework enveloped by the Constitution.

The second is *universal accountability of personal behavior*. Such accountability is guided by standards enshrined through all levels of the American legal system in civil and criminal laws—standards of morality that are ultimately rooted in the Bible.

The founding fathers of the American republic laid both foundations more than two centuries ago.

Now we see the United States embroiled in a constitutional conflict over spiritual and moral issues—questions that evoke biblical images and metaphors.

As when George Washington prayed to God in the bitter cold of Valley Forge and Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the equality of blacks as a doctrine of Christ, the profound crisis of values at the center of the presidential controversy is based in the biblical teaching of good and evil, right and wrong. Spiritual issues of God and the Bible confront public and private behavior and the limits to presidential conduct.

What is sinful and lawful? What is illicit and illegal? What is repentance and contrition? What is forgivable, and what is criminal? What is appropriate mercy and judgment?

These are good questions, legal and practical, to be found throughout the Bible and in the pages of America's legal history.

Should criminal presidential behavior, if proven, be forgiven without impeachment and removal from office because the president is the most powerful man in the nation and the world? Or is it ultimately the integrity of the office that is

*"There certainly is a wider story here but it is almost embarrassingly simple . . . To put it crudely, the United States has indeed witnessed a titanic struggle over the past eight months between the Ten Commandments and the Dow Jones index."*  
—The Times (London)



The debate highlighted a confused and divided people's struggle with conflicting values and definitions of good and evil, sin, sex, lying, obstruction of justice, perjury and abuse of power. How, they wondered, does all this relate to the intent of the Constitution, Congress and future of America?

most important, and must the man be removed to preserve a governmental system based on the universal rule of law?

Americans have always believed that fair is fair, that its citizens are equal before the law. In courthouses across the land, justice is depicted as a woman, often blindfolded, holding scales and a sword. Her blindfold is symbolic, signifying the equality of justice for all. The presumption is that facts will be weighed, good will be exonerated, and evil will be punished.

What are the implications for the American judicial system if some crimes are ignored—overruled in the court of public opinion? What would happen if men holding lesser offices were accused of perjuring themselves, obstructing justice and committing gross acts of immorality in the innermost sanctums of the hallowed halls of government? Can a government survive with a double standard that dismisses or imprisons military personnel for immoral and illegal actions similar to those to which their commander in chief has admitted?

### Of crime and sin

God makes no distinction between sinful and criminal behavior in the Bible. Sin is a crime before God, and all biblical crime is a sin. Acts that the Bible calls sin are the basis for what the Western nations call crime. This is largely lost on today's legal profession and much of popular Christianity.

God's Word, the Bible, defines sin as "transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, King James Version). The first five books of the Bible, written by Moses at God's direction, are called "the Law" (Matthew 7:12; Luke 24:4). These books form the foundation of the Old Testament, and they undergird the teaching of Jesus Christ.

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets," He said. "I did not come to destroy but to fulfill . . . One jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven . . ." (Matthew 5:17-19).

In the Bible, as is often the case in American history, sin is synonymous with criminal behavior. Murder, stealing, bear-

ing false witness and lying under oath are some sins recognized as crimes in American law. Criminal law in many areas of the world has historically included adultery and sodomy. Under some state laws, adultery and sodomy are still considered criminal activity.

Federal officials place their hand on the Bible in swearing-in ceremonies, taking an oath before God to faithfully serve. They thereby ritualistically acknowledge the God of the Bible as the ultimate arbiter of truth and judge of behavior. The early proponents of these traditions, the founding fathers, considered the Bible as the ultimate source of law, the principles of which applied to private and public behavior.

Though many would call it puritanical, naïve and irrelevant to the mores of the '90s, the founders of the American legal system saw biblical law as foundational to criminal and civil laws. Indeed, the Ten Commandments are engraved on the wall of the Supreme Court chamber in the nation's capital.

### Standards for leadership

Holders of high office were supposed to be above reproach. Just as sinful behavior was grounds for severe punish-



ment within the community, the American public expected its leaders to hold to high standards, particularly when it came to basic truthfulness and upholding the dignity of their office. As in the Bible, the higher the office the higher the standard

for public and private conduct.

God, with dramatic judgment, dealt with the leaders of Israel who committed sin and abused their positions of power.

God forbade Moses to enter the Promised Land for overstepping the authority God gave him. God allowed King David's infant son to die because of David's sins. Leaders of the New Testament Church were held to strict character requirements for service (see 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).

Even the sin of idolatry was a state crime in Bible accounts. It was considered to be a matter for community involvement in recognition that evil is never ultimately self-contained. It affects everyone in contact with the criminal.

The apostle Paul wrote that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and a little sin "leavens the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6). Sin multiplies unless it is thwarted and contained.

Transgressions of the Ten Commandments, abuse of power by government officials, and the rule of law are all major themes of the Bible, including the teachings of Jesus Christ. He was crucified after He repeatedly condemned the political and religious elite of His day for being "hypocrites." Jesus applied that term, commonly

*"President Clinton's fate is likely to hang in the end on what Middle America thinks of the seamier details of the Starr report. It will prove a test of the nation's conflicting impulses: whether it liberally forgives him as a philanderer, or puritanically condemns him as a sexual pervert . . ."*  
—The Times (London)

used of actors, to community leaders who led public lives of prideful respectability and private lives of depravity.

### Your sin will find you out

The Bible warns that you cannot fool

## The Bible and Respect for Authority

Regardless of the outcome of the crisis of the presidency, Christians are obliged to obey God by respecting government authority—the law and national and local leaders. Two of the apostles made this point in their letters.

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities,” wrote the apostle Paul. “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Romans 13:1). This includes the payment of taxes and other obligations (verses 2-7). Remember that the Roman government of the time had its own problems with corruption and abuse of power. But such behavior does not give people an excuse to disobey the law or disrespect the authority of their leaders.

Peter gave his readers the same instruction: “Therefore submit

yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors . . .” (1 Peter 2:13-14). We are also to “honor the king” or chief ruler (verse 17). Paul echoes Peter’s instruction to Titus: “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no one . . .” (Titus 3:1-2). Elsewhere Paul exhorts us to pray “for kings and all who are in authority” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

All this does *not* mean that we are to disobey God in situations where the law of man may conflict with the law of God (Acts 4:18-20; 5:40), but even then Christians are to continue to respect government authority—even when those in positions of authority have abused their offices.

—John Ross Schroeder

God, and your sins “will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).

After months of denial, under the pressure of mounting evidence, the president of the United States admitted to “an inappropriate relationship” and that he had “misled” the American public with his previous denials. In a meeting with religious leaders, he admitted to sin in a speech sprinkled with allusions to Psalm 51, written by King David after his adultery with Bathsheba.

Yet simultaneously the president’s battery of lawyers attacked the congressional report as inconsequential and excused the chief executive’s sexual relationship and previous denials under oath as not illegal and unworthy of impeachment.

By wrapping himself in the Christian language of remorse, asserting that he had “repented” and had a “contrite heart,”

*“ . . . Mr Clinton has revealed by his conduct that he does not care much about the law, or about due process. The only court that he truly recognises, and fears, is the court of public opinion . . . ”*  
—The Sunday Telegraph (London)

the president injected biblical issues onto center stage of the legal system. The Bible’s universal themes of decency and governance, forgiveness and repentance became part of the national debate.

However, a newspaper columnist asked whether the president’s statements

of regret, apology and sin represented “acts of contrition or just an act.” Only the president can answer that question.

Use of Scripture cuts many ways. The book of Hebrews tells us that “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” and “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

By denying an adulterous relationship for many months, and encouraging White House aides and other government officials to mislead the public, the president opened himself up to charges of cover-up and the abuse of power, some of the impeachable offenses that eventually drove President Richard Nixon from office.

The president chose the interesting example of David as a metaphor. King David had conspired to have Bathsheba’s



husband murdered to cover up his adultery. His was a horrible abuse of power with enormous personal and national consequences.

Although David repented and God spared his life, God told him that, although he had committed his sins in

secret, his punishment would be open to the public (2 Samuel 12:10-12). His transgressions led to civil war, with an insurgency headed by one of his own sons. David and his kingdom suffered immeasurably as a result of his sins.

### Truth or consequences

Americans are profoundly shaken and divided over the significance of the challenge to their constitutional system and the stability of government precipitated by their president’s actions. They and their elected officials must judge how they will handle the issues of sin and illegal behavior committed by the nation’s highest elected official.

Although the American people were bystanders as the distasteful drama unfolded, when the report on the president’s actions was released they “assumed a central and conceivably decisive role in the case,” wrote *New York Times* political analyst R.W. Apple Jr.

In many ways the nation itself is on trial. Choices made will permanently affect the future of the country. Decisions may profoundly alter the nation two centuries into its great experiment in democracy.

Since the president took office in 1992, the majority of American voters for the first time in history have said, in repeated opinion polls, that a president’s personal character is not important. Many people identify with the president and his flaws, although others find his behavior distasteful and immoral. Some manage to simultaneously hold both views. One man excused the president’s behavior by commenting, “He didn’t do anything any other man wouldn’t have done.”

Parents, overwhelmed by the grossly

lurid details, have decided to lie to their children. *The Washington Post* described a mother of three who, when faced with her children's questions about the president, told some untruths of her own. "It's sort of like Santa Claus," she said. "I've never wanted to lie to my kids, but then you've got certain things where you have to."

### Painful choices ahead

Congressmen who will decide on the appropriate presidential punishment are sensitive to their constituents in their home states. Many of their constituents are divided, ambivalent and unhappy at the choices to be made.

If the citizens and the Congress do not impeach the president and allow him to remain untried and serve out the rest of his term, what will be the consequences? As some observers point out, one result will be the acceptance of an imperial presidency that is unaccountable for its behavior, with a ruler not subject to the laws of the land that apply to other citizens. This would amount to tacit abandonment of the founding fathers' doctrine that no one, even the president, is above the universal rule of law.

The Roman republic took this course with the establishment of a Caesar as a ruler who no longer had to answer to the Roman senate. History, even in recent decades, offers many examples of the danger of leaders who felt they were above the rule of law.

### Can the American system survive?

When the Constitution was established 210 years ago, it began what is often called the "great experiment" in democracy. It is the longest-running such test in history, and its founders realized that its success depended on its moral and spiritual foundations.

John Adams, the second president of the United States, recognized that a government needs the support of a moral citizenry: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

"... The Word of the LORD endures forever," says the Bible (1 Peter 1:25). Time will tell how long the American people, and the Constitution, will endure their sins and the sins of their leaders. **GN**

# Leadership

*Continued from page 7*

coming when Americans find reasons to excuse adultery and lying and allegations of perjury and obstruction of justice in their highest elected official. In fact, we might ask ourselves if it isn't *already here*.

### A different kind of leadership

Regardless of how bleak and uncertain conditions look on the national and world scene, God gives us encouragement. He promises a future government vastly different from any we know today.

Regrettably, although the specific accusations are unprecedented, the leadership crisis affecting the United States is not. All too many leaders succumb to the seduction of power and office. Some use their position to enrich themselves and a circle of friends and associates. Some use their authority to oppress others. Some allow prestige and honor to warp their perceptions, leading them to believe they *deserve* power and rule over others. These are problems typical of powerful leaders.

But it will not always be this way. "You see that the rulers of the Gentiles are lords over them, and their great ones have authority over them," said Jesus Christ to some who were eager to rule over others. "Let it not be so among you: but if anyone has a desire to become great among you, *let him be your servant*; and whoever has a desire to be first among you, let him take the lowest place: even as the Son of man did not come to have servants, *but to be a servant*, and to give his life for the salvation of men" (Matthew 20:25-28, BBE).

Jesus burst the bubble for His disciples. Rather than using power to gain more power and prestige for themselves, to put themselves above other men and women, Christ said that true leadership has one purpose: *to serve others*. This kind of leadership, He said, differs from the way most humans react when given power over others.

Jesus Christ exemplified that kind of true leadership. He taught people the solid foundation of God's law, which would help them avoid suffering the painful consequences of sin. He encouraged them to surrender to God in heartfelt repentance, no longer to live only

for their selfish desires. He exemplified what it means to dedicate one's life to serving others.

He also brought a message of a transformed world to come—an earth extraordinarily changed by the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 8:1). This kingdom, He said, would come at the climax of a series of earth-shattering events (Luke 21:31) during which all human life would be in grave danger (Matthew 24:21-22).

This kingdom is destined to replace all human kingdoms, governments and authority (Revelation 11:15; Daniel 7:14). In this kingdom, Jesus Christ will reign forever as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16).

But He will not rule alone. Others will reign with Him in His Kingdom (Revelation 20:4, 6). He will be joined by God's faithful servants (2 Timothy 2:12), men and women who have dedicated themselves to learning and practicing godly rulership as defined and exemplified by Jesus Christ.

Resurrected to eternal life (Revelation 20:6), they will help administer God's righteous government in a paradise on earth in service to mankind.

God is fully aware of the weaknesses and peccadilloes of people, regardless of their lot in life. He knows we have all sinned (Romans 3:23), but He extends forgiveness and the power to transform our lives and minds (Romans 12:2). If we are willing to make that commitment, He invites us to share in true leadership in His Kingdom. **GN**

### RECOMMENDED READING

America—and the other nations—are facing a time of great crisis. To better understand why the world is in such sad condition and what lies ahead, be sure to request your free copy of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. To understand the biblical truth about the future God has in store for you, ask for *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Also, the United Church of God has just completed a booklet, *The Ten Commandments*, to help you understand and live by God's fundamental guide to human behavior. All are free for the asking at the address in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2.



# An Overview of Condi

## Pornographic films outsell regular movies: a civil war in American values



New and disturbing commu- niqués concerning Western morality are cause for concern. According to Christopher Goodwin, reporting for *The Sunday Times* from Los Angeles: "America has become addicted to porn. Encouraged by the liberal atmosphere of the Clinton era, adult entertainment has grown into a \$10 billion-a-year business. As much as \$4.2 billion is gener- ated by videos alone . . . Ameri- cans spend more on hard-core porn, telephone sex and strip clubs than they do at the [regular] cinemas."

In a separate report for *The Independent on Sunday*, John Carlin writes about "a revolution under way in Ameri- ca . . . It's about the birds and the bees. Reading the news- papers these days, watching TV, listening in on conversa- tions in bars, in lifts [elevators], what you get is a steady diet of sex, sex and more sex."

At the same time, some surveys show that nearly 80 per- cent of Americans still believe adultery is always wrong.

*"America has become addicted to porn . . . Adult entertainment has grown into a \$10 bil- lion-a-year business . . . Americans spend more on hard-core porn, telephone sex and strip clubs than they do at the [regular] cinemas."*

Apparently many citizens in this land of liberty and oppor- tunity still believe in biblical standards.

Still, there is no denying that marketing illicit sex is a growth industry. So what we are seeing is an approaching civil war in values. There can be no compromise between these two basic ways of life. Obedience to the Seventh Com- mandment makes true happiness possible in our families; disobedience leads to suffering and misery.

The United Church of God has published a booklet, *The Ten Commandments*, that explains why adultery and other forms of illicit sex are always wrong. Be sure to request your free copy. (Sources: *The Sunday Times* [London], *The Inde- pendent on Sunday* [London], *The Washington Times*.)

## Arafat on Palestinian statehood

Without any forward movement in the Middle East- ern peace process, some commentators think Yassar Arafat will proclaim the existence of a Palestinian state

in early 1999. Although any such unilateral declaration would clearly violate the Oslo Accords, Mr. Arafat is reported to be ready to gamble.

If he makes such a declaration, Israel would be pres- sured to protect its Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and other areas of the West Bank. Speculation has it that the Israeli government would then be tempted to annex certain territories not under Mr. Arafat's full con- trol. The subsequent troop movements and the poten- tial for violence and bloodshed could be disastrous for peace prospects.

Any Middle Eastern peace settlement seems far away. The Bible predicts anything but peace in this historically troubled area for our time. In fact, it will dominate the news as the center of world conflict just before the second com- ing of Jesus Christ. (Source: *The New York Times*.)

## How bad is the Russian economy?

Russia has devalued the ruble at a time of apocalyptic pre- dictions about the state of the Russian economy. Some observers are warning that the Russian financial crisis "could spin out of control as banks collapse."

*The European's* evaluation is worse: "Thinking that a rise in fiscal receipts and a trimming of public spending will solve Russia's problems, as the IMF [International Monetary Fund] does, is to miss the self-evident point that the Russian econ- omy is bust, plain and simple. All the statistics about eco- nomic activity are probably hokum. The foundation stones of a market economy—a legal structure to enforce mutual obligations, corporate responsibility and transparent accounting—are non-existent."

More than economics is at stake here. The world has a heavy interest in Russian economic stability. The country still has too many nuclear weapons for comfort, and any tem- ptation to sell weapon technology to unstable dictatorships for badly needed cash frightens Western leaders.

In terms of Russian economic well-being, too much was expected too soon. A nation pays a heavy price for 70 years of communism, and the attempted conversion to a free-mar- ket economy and a full free-enterprise system has rocked the nation's social fabric. (Sources: *The Sunday Times* [London], *The European*.)

## Children of divorce

"Children brought up by single mothers are twice as likely to commit criminal offences than those born into two- parent families." So says a pioneering new study of nearly 1,300 children from newborn to age 16. This serves to but- tress an earlier report whose "research had confirmed that children of divorced parents are more likely to suffer greater stress and setbacks in later life than those from more stable backgrounds."

No wonder God says He hates unfaithfulness and divorce. The breakdown of families has far-reaching conse- quences for society. (Sources: *Daily Mail*, *Sunday Telegraph*, Malachi 2:14-16)





Albania

Zimbabwe

Bahrain

Cyprus

Burkina Faso

New Zealand

Jordan

Belgium

Argentina

Czech Republic

# ions Around the World

## Water may be hazardous to your health

More than five million people die annually from diseases in their drinking water, according to a recent United Nations conference on water and development. "Fresh water for human needs is rapidly getting scarce," said Abu Zeid, head of the World Water Council. He said it is "rare to find pristine water anywhere."

Mr. Zeid noted that 1.2 billion people lack access to clean water, and up to 300 million people in 26 nations have to deal

*Earth's freshwater supply is dwindling because of pollutants—including sewage, hazardous fertilizers and industrial waste—being dumped into rivers, lakes and streams.*

with severe water shortages. In another 50 years the problem could spread to affect two thirds of earth's population.

Oceans and seas cover 71 percent of the planet's surface, but 98 percent of earth's water is too salty for human use without expensive purification treatments. Earth's freshwater supply is dwindling because of pollutants—including sewage, hazardous fertilizers and industrial waste—being dumped into rivers, lakes and streams. Mr. Zeid stated that water shortages are so critical in some areas they are "endangering world peace and security." (Source: The Associated Press.)

## Submarines: new status symbol

The demise of the Soviet Union has led to a new kind of arms race—smaller nations trying to be the first in their global neighborhood to put their own submarines to sea. Shipbuilding companies in the former U.S.S.R., strapped for cash and with excess construction capacity now that the military no longer fully utilizes their services, are finding plenty of ready customers around the world.

Joining the worldwide sub club in recent years are Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Iran, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Singapore. China has announced its intention to construct its own fleet of nuclear-powered (and nuclear-armed) submarines. Forty-three nations own and operate a combined fleet of more than 400 submarines. With assistance from Russia, India plans to complete its own nuclear-powered submarine by 2004 and eventually arm it with nuclear-tipped missiles.

Why the interest in subs? Countries can buy a submarine for about \$650 million. In comparison, an aircraft carrier costs some \$4 billion to build, not counting additional billions for aircraft and supporting ships, making submarines a relative bargain.

For nations eager to wield more influence in their areas of the world—critical areas such as the Strait of Hormuz, where much of the world's oil supply floats through on gigantic, lumbering tankers—submarines are a logical, inexpensive and deadly choice. (Source: Associated Press, *The Los Angeles Times*.)

## Teenage drinking in Britain

The sad incident of a bright 14-year-old girl who accidentally fell to her death while drunk has focused public attention in Britain on alcohol abuse among young people, which is sharply on the rise in the United Kingdom. Based on a health-related behavior survey involving 400,000 pupils ages 8 to 18, consumption rose nearly 30 percent between 1993 and 1998. The report found that many teens drink at home without their parents' knowledge.

The problem is compounded by the reaction of many parents. Said Mark Bennett, a spokesman for Alcohol Concern: "When a kid comes home rolling drunk, you hear the parents say, 'Well, I'm glad it's not drugs.' It never causes the hysteria that illegal drugs do."

Unfortunately, the teenage drinking problem haunts some of Britain's most respected schools. As the *Daily Mail* recently reported: "They're bright and privileged, yet so many teenagers at our top schools are destroying themselves with drink."

Moral and health habits begin in the home. Busy parents often neglect their offspring to pursue activities that are much less important in comparison to the passing on of right values to their children. (Sources: *Independent on Sunday* [London], *The Times* [London], *The Daily Mail* [London].)

## Pope to visit Holy Land

A trip to Jerusalem in 2000 is one of the remaining unfulfilled ambitions of Pope John Paul II. Considerable progress in the necessary arrangements for such a trip comes in the wake of the Vatican's apology for not doing enough to prevent the Holocaust during World War II. Such a trip would be a crowning journey to a long series of trips taken by John Paul to many nations since 1978.

According to one report: "The Pope has said he would like to climb Mount Sinai with Jewish and Muslim leaders in the year 2,000 to 'mark the reconciliation of the world's three great monotheistic faiths.'"

*A trip to Jerusalem in 2000 is one of the remaining unfulfilled ambitions of Pope John Paul II. Such a trip would be a crowning journey to a long series of trips taken by John Paul to many nations since 1978.*

Progress towards religious unity has long been a primary goal of the Roman Catholic Church. But Bible prophecy shows that a great religious figure will join forces with a secular ruler of 10 nations to produce an alliance that will shake and astonish the world. After this last-gasp attempt at world rule by a dictator will be the second coming of Christ and the beginning of His utopian reign of peace on earth. (Sources: *The Times* [London], *The Independent on Sunday* [London].)

—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley



Ukraine

Mauritania

Slovenia

Barbados

Angola

Malta

Jamaica

Lebanon

Djibouti

Greenland

Cambodia

# Winning With Your Strengths

*If you're unhappy in your job, should you change your job? Should you find a career that matches your abilities and interests? Here's how concentrating on your talents can help you find happiness and success.*

by Jerold Aust

Jake had always wanted to play college basketball. But he soon discovered that “there were better ball players selling popcorn and Cokes in the stands than some of us down on the basketball court. Once I figured that out, I readjusted the focus on my future.”

Meet Jake. In 1956, at age 18, he excelled in high-school basketball. He averaged 30 points a game during his last two years of high school and was recruited by large and small universities. Jake was unusual in that he was only 6 feet tall but played center on his team. Fans got excited watching him play because he showed good timing, was quick, often outwitted his taller opponents and possessed an accurate soft jump shot.

He stood out in high-school basketball, but in college he found himself outclassed. College freshmen trying out for the teams needed height and superior ball handling. Jake soon rethought his future in athletics.

He loved the game, but he couldn't realize his dream of playing college basketball, so what could he do? He did the smart thing and studied to become a basketball coach. Jake focused on something he could excel at, and success followed him.

There is more to Jake's story.

## Well-meaning advisers

No matter who or what you are, somebody will be quick to advise you on your life's choices. Some unsolicited advice may be helpful, but much will not. A well-meaning mother wants her daughter to do what she never could. The well-meaning father expects his son to take over the family business.

Sometimes daughters and sons do follow in their mothers' and fathers' footsteps and are perfectly happy and successful. But this is not always the case.

Advice is cheap, and it flows freely from family and friends. Some people have spent years following a particular professional path but wish they could start all over again down a different one. Does it do any good to regret the

paths not taken, the opportunities lost?

Not according to writers Carole Klein and Richard Gotti: “Regret, which is inextricably linked to choice, has become a major malady of modern life. The more options there are to choose from, the more options we must relinquish at the moment of choice. As we choose more, we give up more, and create more ‘might have beens’” (Carole Klein and Richard Gotti, Ph.D., *Overcoming Regret: Lessons From the Roads Not Taken*, 1992, p. 10).

The Gottis quote French novelist and Nobel Prize winner André Gide, who advises: “It is a rule of life that when one door closes, another door always opens. Let us not, therefore, mourn so much for the losses behind the closed door that we miss the opportunities waiting for us beyond the newly opened door” (Klein and Gotti, p. 9). Not all of life's opportunities are stored behind door No. 1.

Although people tend to nurse regrets over jobs they should have taken, you shouldn't be quick to change occupation, vocation or profession. Age, health, the economy, personal solvency, family and other important factors can weigh heavily in your decision to make such a significant change. Counselors advise seeking professional advice and talking with people who have found themselves in similar situations.

That said, many people who have caught the job-changing bug will not be deterred by sound advice. If you are one who is determined to embark on a new profession based on your native talents and abilities, you can profit from some time-tested guidelines. Following are some suggestions that can help.

This brief listing is not a one-size-fits-all panacea. Rather, think of these tips as food for thought.

## What natural talent?

At Gallup, Inc., pollsters studied 250,000 successful professionals. They determined “that the highest levels of achievement come when people

*If you are one who is determined to embark on a new profession based on your native talents and abilities, you can profit from some time-tested guidelines.*

are matched with activities that use their strengths” (Donald O. Clifton and Paula Nelson, *Soar With Your Strengths*, 1992, p. 21). Many people decide they want to do something enjoyable for a living. But sometimes that’s easier said than done.

Sometimes a person’s desire does not match his or her ability. In those cases, a lifetime can be misspent struggling to seek satisfying success. Brian Tracy, who conducts seminars on identifying strengths, advises: “You can’t hit a target you can’t see. You can’t accomplish wonderful things with your life if you have no idea what they are. You must first become absolutely clear about what you want” (Brian Tracy, *Maximum Achievement*, 1993, p. 21).

Some people do hone in on their target. They determine the tasks that come most naturally to them. They succeed in their newly chosen field. Determination, outside help and perseverance, along with happenstance, can make the difference when people match their life’s pursuit with their natural abilities. Daytime television shows occasionally air such success stories, and it’s exciting to see rags transform into riches when ability and activity match up.

Former test pilot and United States Air Force general Chuck Yeager offers this advice about matching ability with a career: “. . . Pick something you enjoy doing. Forget the money angle, within reason. If you enjoy what you’re doing, you’ll adjust your lifestyle to meet your income. And if you enjoy it well enough, you’ll be outstanding because you’ll always like doing it” (Dennis Conner, *The Art of Winning*, 1989, p. 178).

Jake’s example, of a short guy who loved basketball, supports Chuck Yeager’s advice. In his first year of college, after realizing he might not excel in his chosen sport, he discovered he could apply his natural ability to a related field: coaching—rather than playing—basketball.

Jake didn’t complain that life wasn’t fair. He took hold of other possibilities and prepared himself to succeed. His second-chosen field gave him more opportunities for his natural talents to grow.

### Focus on your deepest desire

Things change. Forty years ago a farmer, rancher or laborer made many of his own repairs. My father raised cattle and wheat, built his own house and repaired his farm equipment himself. He also super-

vised and maintained oil wells, keeping the pumps and motors in good working order.

But Dad also owned a shoe-repair business. He simply couldn’t make a living on the farm. So my father, out of necessity, became a jack-of-all-trades and master of one. He knew enough about mechanics, plumbing and carpentry to get by on the farm, but he was a professional when it came to repairing shoes.

Jake also focused on what he did best. He wasn’t a genius, yet he concentrated on



*Jake couldn't realize his dream of playing college basketball, so what could he do? He did the smart thing and studied to become a basketball coach. Jake focused on something he could excel at, and success followed him.*

being the best coach and teacher he could be. Twenty years later his peers designated him a master teacher and inducted him into his state’s teachers’ hall of fame.

### Daily commitment

The story goes that a young man interested in music was looking for Carnegie Hall in New York City. “Excuse me, sir,” he inquired of an elderly gentleman on the street. “Would you be so kind as to tell me how I might get to Carnegie Hall?”

“Certainly, young man,” responded the older man. “Practice, practice, practice!”

Consider Dennis Conner’s perspective

for winning in life. It was he who piloted the *Stars and Stripes*, which won back the 1987 America’s Cup yachting-race title from the plucky Australians. In Conner’s book *The Art of Winning*, he writes about “the ‘commitment to the commitment.’ I call it ‘thinking big.’ It means setting your sights on a goal that may seem unattainable, and achieving it” (Dennis Conner, *The Art of Winning*, 1989, p. ix).

Mr. Conner himself revealed his commitment in preparing for that incredible race in 1987: “Here’s what it’s like: You wake up every morning knowing that you must accomplish more than can possibly be done in the next twenty-four hours—more than you have ever done any other day of your life. You practice, and practice some more—always looking for a better way, always pushing at the limits of the possible. By the day of the first race, you know you have done everything you possibly can to prepare. *You have taken away every possible excuse to lose*” (Conner, page xv).

### Managing your weaknesses

Michael O’Brien authored *Vince*, a biography of a professional American football coach, Vince Lombardi. Mr. O’Brien wrote of Mr. Lombardi’s attempt to instill confidence in his team, the Green Bay Packers. Preparing his team to defeat its archrival, the Detroit Lions, Mr. Lombardi showed films that focused only on successful running plays previously used against the Lions. His idea was that, if his team concentrated on strengths rather than weaknesses, it had a much better chance of entering the coming game with confidence.

Although Vince Lombardi was considered a taskmaster of a coach, he understood how the mind works. He focused his team on its successes and didn’t worry about its failures.

You can manage your weaknesses. Of course, some weaknesses should be overcome, not just managed. A weakness for shoplifting is different from a weakness for chocolate pastries. If you can’t seem to get to work on time, you had better overcome that weakness or you may lose your job. If your problem is drug or alcohol abuse, you had better overcome your addiction, or your problem will overcome you.

But some weaknesses can be managed. A television writer had great difficulty because of dyslexia, which caused him

to transpose letters and numbers. He did not attempt to overcome this debility. Rather, he hired an assistant to correct his writing, making each script appear as professional as its content. He found a way to manage one of his human weaknesses.

### God focuses on your strengths

Accentuating the positive—building on your strengths—is not just good business advice. It is also supported by the Bible. King Solomon admonished people to concentrate on their strengths: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Proverbs 13:19 tells us, “A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul.”

Pinpointing and emphasizing your natural strengths and abilities are important, but an even greater principle, one with a spiritual aspect, comes into play. As a Christian, you must “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. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:33-34, emphasis added).

Seek God first. All other physical desires and needs can be met one day at a time. Although they may be important, they are secondary to seeking God’s Kingdom.

Jesus Christ set us an example of prayer in the Gospel of Luke. That prayer directs our attention to the importance of receiving daily our physical and spiritual food: “Give us day by day our daily bread” (Luke 11:3).

The apostle Paul supports the day-by-day commitment to life’s needs: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

The focus here and throughout Scripture is on a Christian’s daily commitment.

Finally, Scripture supports the effective management of weaknesses. Paul encourages: “[This] one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Philippians 3:13). Paul had to live with the unpleasant memory of his persecution of God’s saints. It would not have been hard for Paul to succumb to regret rather than positively offering his life as a profitable servant to others.

God enjoys seeing humans succeed.

Consider Job’s example, cited by the apostle James: “Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and see the end intended by the Lord” (James 5:11). Anyone who frequently reads the book of Job notices the self-righteousness of Job. Yet, when God inspired James’s use of Job as an example, James focused on only one aspect of Job’s character: his perseverance.

God could have inspired James to enumerate Job’s shortcomings, but He didn’t. God stresses Job’s patience. God lovingly and optimistically looks to our strengths, not our weaknesses (Romans 8:31-33).

In this mortal life, you may have the tendency to live the dreams of others. Longing for what might have been can drain and damage. Besides, it is usually difficult to point to a single decision that set your life on the course you wish you could change. Your life is a composite of innumerable factors, some you could have altered, others you have done nothing about.

Regardless, you should always seek wise counsel, especially before making a watershed decision affecting the direction of a vocation or avocation.

Whatever you decide, remember the importance of obeying God. Paul addresses this truth: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with [by doing] good” (Romans 12:21). God doesn’t say focus on evil by attacking it directly. The best way to overcome sin is by doing good for others. Where good exists, evil vanishes.

### Decided to fight

Jake’s positive example was enhanced by his ability to manage his weaknesses. Jake was an avid and locally renowned golfer, even though his body was racked with pain because of Hodgkin’s disease. When Jake was 20 years old, his physician told him he should get his house in order because he would probably die in six months.

Jake had a young wife. He had dreams. His future lay ahead of him, and he was anxious to share his life with others in his chosen profession. He decided he would not give up and die; he would fight for his life, marriage and hoped-for family.

And fight he did. In the 26 years of pain that followed, leading to his death at age 46, Jake accomplished much. Although he became addicted to prescribed drugs that he took for relief from his chronic pain, he managed his weaknesses so he could

present free seminars to young people about the dangers of taking drugs.

Four times he went cold turkey off drugs. “Those were terrible times,” he said. But he was committed to his goal in life, striving to share his life with young people. He fought the pain, often averaging two hours of sleep per night so he could continue teaching.

In his last years, a doctor inadvertently gave him too much chemotherapy, weakening his heart and adding stress to his already-weak body. Still, he never gave up.

One evening I found Jake driving golf balls in a park. He told me he was hitting about 300 balls every evening as part of his physical therapy, and hitting all those golf balls had sharpened his game. It was at once shocking and inspirational to watch him press a golf ball and tee in the ground, then take hold of his thin legs with his arms and hands and position his legs so he could drive the ball straight down an imaginary fairway.

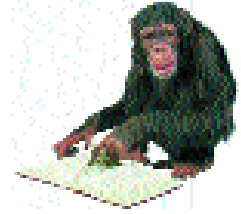
Before he died, Jake’s physicians discovered a tumor growing around his spine that, when removed, forced him to dramatically adjust his walk by learning to swing his hips and legs so he could move forward. Seeing this once-agile athlete reduced to near-immobilization was heartrending, to say the least. But he could still drive with unerring accuracy time after time. I marveled at his attitude, his singleness of purpose, his relentless determination while experiencing great discomfort, and I admired his deep desire to manage his weaknesses.

He was a remarkable success in a short life. Jake occasionally remarked that it wasn’t life that created his outgoing perspective; it was the prospect of death.

Jake had weaknesses, most of them brought on by his physical frailties, but he focused on his strengths. His example was both common and extraordinary. It was common because Jake was an ordinary person like you and me. It was out of the ordinary because Jake showed profound courage in the face of daily pain and the prospects of an early grave.

Jake learned to live one day at a time because he knew the next day might be his last. Perhaps his greatest strength was that he recognized and accepted his natural talents and therefore proved an outstanding success.

You can win with your strengths, as did my brother Jake. **GN**



# Creation and Evolution: The Bible Explanation

by Mario Seiglie

In the first two installments of this series, we examined the weaknesses of the theory of evolution as an explanation for the bewildering complexity of the forms of life we see around us. Now we turn to the Bible itself to see what the Creator God says about His creation.

One important principle to keep in mind is that God does not usually explain all there is to know about a subject in one place in the Bible. His Word is not organized so we can turn to one passage and read all of His revelation about a particular truth.

God's truths are not revealed all at once. Although He often provides a broad outline of a truth early in the Scriptures, we find that He later fills in many of the details elsewhere in the Bible. The Bible itself speaks of this principle when it talks of "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, [and who] has in these last days spoken to us by his Son . . ." (Hebrews 1:1-2).

## The nature of revelation

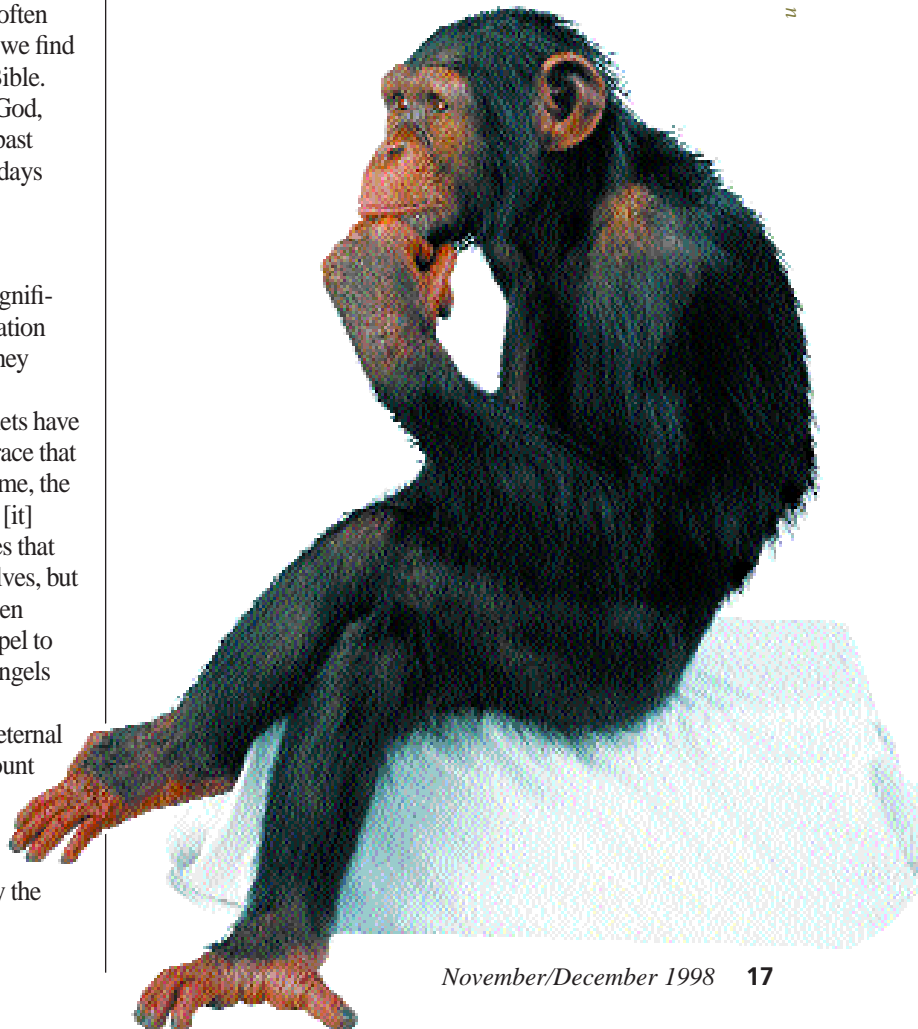
The Hebrew prophets did not always understand the significance of the prophecies they recorded under God's inspiration (Daniel 12:8-9). Their knowledge of the particular truth they received was incomplete.

"Of this salvation," writes the apostle Peter, "the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ [which] was in them was indicating when [it] testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:10-12).

The prophets obviously had partial information about eternal truths revealed to them. This is also the case with the account of creation in Genesis 1. God would reveal additional details later. Many Bible readers, however, mistakenly assume everything the Bible has to say about creation is explained there. Yet the Bible adds details later that clarify the Genesis 1 account.

In this third and final installment, we examine the findings of modern science in the light of God's Word.

"The origin of what is—man, the earth, the universe—is shrouded in a mystery we are no closer to solving than was the chronicler of Genesis. Indeed, our best current knowledge, lacking the poetic magic of scripture, seems in a way less believable than the account in the Bible or in any of the ancient texts" (*The Columbia History of the World*, edited by John Garraty and Peter Gay, 1972, p. 3).



## Genesis 1: *History or Myth?*

To excuse the account of creation in Genesis 1, some attempt to explain it away as a poetic flight of fancy rather than literal history. They call it “the hymn to creation,” although this explanation is not supported in Scripture.

Genesis 1 was not written in poetic form. Conservative scholars have pointed out all of Genesis, from chapters 1 through 50, is history written in the same narrative form.

In his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Edward Young states about the first chapter of Genesis: “We are not to regard the chapter as the reworking by the Priestly School of a myth that was common to ancient tradition. Rather, the chapter is *sober history*. Although Genesis does not purport to be a textbook of science, nevertheless, when it touches upon scientific subjects, it is accurate” (1964, p. 49, emphasis added).

When a poetic style of writing is used in the Bible, its form

is clear. For instance, in Genesis 4:23-24, Lamech’s saying is in poetic form and is set off as such in most Bible versions—yet Genesis 1 is not. The Psalms and much of the book of Job are written in poetic style and are noted as such. However, Genesis 1 is written in a narrative style, which continues throughout the book. It describes the creation in the same style as the account of Abraham in chapter 12.

If we arbitrarily attribute an allegorical, nonliteral style to Genesis 1—when it is not written in this form—then what is to stop anyone from discounting other portions of Genesis or other parts of the Bible in the same way? Ultimately anything can be dismissed as allegory, as was done by some of the misguided early church fathers and in more recent years by liberal critics of the Bible.

Both grammar and style show that Genesis 1 was not written in poetic form or as allegory. Genesis 1 should be taken at face value, as should the rest of the Scriptures.

—Mario Seiglie

Consider, for example, that Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” It might seem as if this verse describes the beginning of everything, but God later reveals details of events and conditions that took place earlier.

The apostle John, writing under God’s inspiration, takes us back to a time before events described in Genesis 1. “In the *beginning*,” he states, “was the *Word*, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3, emphasis added throughout).

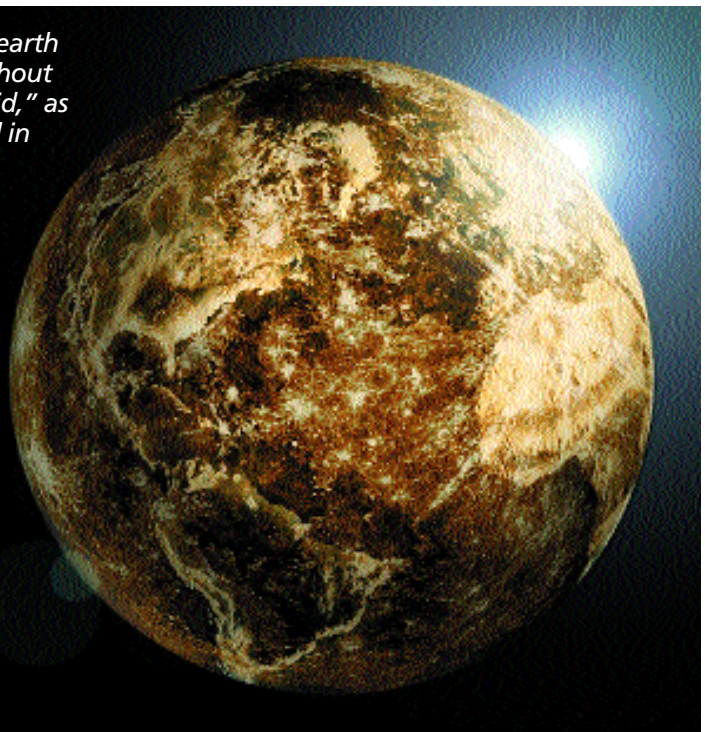
Here the Bible reveals that, before the creation of the heavens and the earth described in Genesis 1, the Word was with God and God made everything through the Word. None of this is revealed in the Genesis account, yet these details help us understand who God was in the beginning and at the time of the earth’s creation. We see that John gives us more information that helps us understand what happened “in the beginning” in Genesis 1.

Similarly, Genesis 1:2 describes the earth as being “without form, and void.” This sketchy description offers no explanation as to *why* the earth was in this condition. However, God reveals more details in other parts of His Word. We have to compile and consider all pertinent scriptures on a subject to gain a complete understanding.

For example, in another passage God explains that angels were present at the creation of the earth. The book of Genesis doesn’t mention this, but it is an important truth. We find this detail recorded in the

*How did the earth become “without form, and void,” as it is described in Genesis 1?*

*Through a careful study of the Scriptures, we can learn about earth’s history before the Genesis account.*



book of Job, where God asks Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . Who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted with joy?” (Job 38:4, 6-7). The “morning stars” and “sons of God”—the angels—exulted as they saw the earth miraculously come into being from nothing.

### The angelic revolt

A key to understanding why the earth was “without form and void” involves what happened to some of these angels. Again, nothing of this angelic story is described in Genesis. But, later in His Word, God

reveals there was a great angel, Lucifer, who rebelled against Him. “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Here God explains that Lucifer had a throne, representing a position of leadership and authority. He rose from somewhere below to try to overthrow God, but was cast down “to the ground.”

Where was this place where Lucifer had



**The fossil record** shows a series of life forms an average of a mile deep in the earth's crust. How can this be reconciled with an earth created only 6,000-odd years ago?

## The Creation-Science Movement

One aspect of the creation-evolution debate involves numerous evangelical Christians who oppose the theory of evolution. Their position is called creation science. Most do not believe in an ancient earth. In general terms, they believe the entire geologic column with its millions of fossils is the result of catastrophism, largely the result of the biblical flood of Noah.

In 1981 the basic tenets of creation science were included in the Arkansas "Act 590 of 1981": "(a) 'Creation-science' means the scientific evidences for creation and inferences from those scientific evidences . . . It includes: (1) Sudden creation of the universe, energy, and life from nothing; (2) The insufficiency of mutation and natural selection in bringing about development of all living kinds from a single organism; (3) Changes only within fixed limits of originally created kinds of plants and animals; (4) Separate ancestry for man and apes; (5) Explanation of the earth's geology by catastrophism, including the occurrence of a worldwide flood; and (6) A relatively recent inception of the earth and living kinds."

—Mario Seiglie

his throne? Jesus Christ, whom we saw earlier was the "Word" alongside God at the creation, reveals more details. "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven," He said (Luke 10:18). Lucifer, who became Satan, was cast down from heaven—to the earth!

The Bible explains that Satan retains his authority over this planet. Notice what Satan told Christ: "Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish'" (Luke 4:5-6).

Christ resisted this temptation but did not dispute the assertion of Satan's present authority. The Bible shows in many places that Satan has authority over the earth. He is even called "the god of this age" in 2 Corinthians 4:4.

It is no accident that in Genesis 3, shortly after God created Adam and Eve, Satan appeared on the scene. The earth was—and still is—his domain. He had been cast down to earth before man's creation took place. As noted in the account of the temptation of Christ, Satan had received authority over the earth. He then rebelled against God in a battle in which he was cast down to the earth, as Christ recounted.

The earth is Satan's realm. The book of Job records God asking Satan, "From where do you come?" Satan's reply was, "From going to and fro on the earth and from walking back and forth on it" (Job 1:7).

### How earth became waste and empty

In Genesis we do not see details of the awe-inspiring initial creation, the creation

long before Adam and Eve about which angels sang for joy. We do not read how that creation came to be in chaos—"without form and void."

The text, though, does offer clues. Notice how the New International Version has a marginal notation regarding the translation of Genesis 1:2: "Now the earth was [or possibly *became*] formless and empty . . ."

Does God reveal elsewhere in his Word how the earth came to be in this disorderly state, "formless and empty"? He gives us some telling hints in the book of Isaiah. "For thus says the LORD, who created the

whole fills in other parts of the story. The missing pieces are given in other scriptures, which tell us of Satan's rebellion against God. They describe his attempt to overthrow God, and, as a result of a great supernatural battle, that he was cast down again.

We see what appears to be a parallel situation in Revelation 12:7-9, which describes an attempt by Satan to overthrow God shortly before Christ's return. "And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did

*"Manned space flight is an amazing achievement, but it has opened for mankind thus far only a tiny door for viewing the awesome reaches of space. An outlook through this peephole at the vast mysteries of the universe should only confirm our belief in the certainty of its Creator."*

—Dr. Wernher von Braun (1912-1977), NASA director and "father of the American Space Program"

heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who *did not create it in vain*, who formed it to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18).

The term *in vain* here is the same word translated "without form" in Genesis 1:2. Yet here Isaiah records God as saying He did not originally create the earth in this condition. Other scriptures, such as Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23, describe similar devastation on the earth using the same words translated "without form, and void" in Genesis 1:2. There is no doubt that these words describe the earth as being an empty, void wasteland.

The Genesis account simply does not provide all the details. But the Bible as a

not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

Yet God has allowed Satan to retain authority over this present world. Satan even offered Christ the opportunity to share rulership over the earth under him.

You can see that, when we examine all the Scriptures, we find a great deal more information illuminating and explaining the Genesis account.

### Earth renewed and restored

Consider another section of Scripture

in which God inspired David to understand more about His Creation. "O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions . . . You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You *renew* the face of the earth" (Psalm 104:24, 30).

The surface of the earth needed a *renewal* when God created the present life forms we see around us. So what does the fossil record depict? It shows a series of fossilized life forms an average of a mile deep in the earth's crust. Man as we know him, made in God's image with enormous creative and spiritual abilities, has a recorded history of only a little more than 5,000 years.

This is a tiny span of time compared with the age of the earth and stars around us, as evidenced by radioactivity and other scientific findings. Man, in an incredibly short time, built the pyramids—which to this day defy imitation. Man has traveled to the moon and sent spacecraft to explore our solar system and beyond. Such achieve-

ments show the enormous difference in the earth before and after Adam.

How long did the angels exist before man was created? The Bible doesn't reveal the answer. How long did it take Lucifer to persuade as many as a third of the angels to rebel with him? (Revelation 12:4). Remember, angels are immortal beings for whom aging is of no consequence (Luke 20:36). Whatever length of time this might be, perhaps millions of years, the angels were cre-

ated for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). God "has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to the angels" (Hebrews 2:5). God created angels to serve mankind once it inherits the world to come. God is working out His plan of salvation on earth. The creation waits for the glorious moment when man inherits what God the Father has planned from the start.

"For I consider," writes the apostle Paul,

*"In this age of space flight, when we use the modern tools of science to advance into new regions of human activity, the Bible—this grandiose, stirring history of the gradual revelation and unfolding of the moral law—remains in every way an up-to-date book."*

—Dr. Wernher von Braun (1912-1977), NASA director and "father of the American Space Program"

ated and lived *before* the creation of Adam and Eve and the days of the renewal of the earth described in Genesis.

Why did God create angels? "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to min-

"that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

## Earth's Age: Does the Bible Indicate a Time Interval B

**W**e are introduced to the account of the creation of the earth in Genesis 1:1-2: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep."

The original Hebrew wording, combined with a comparison to

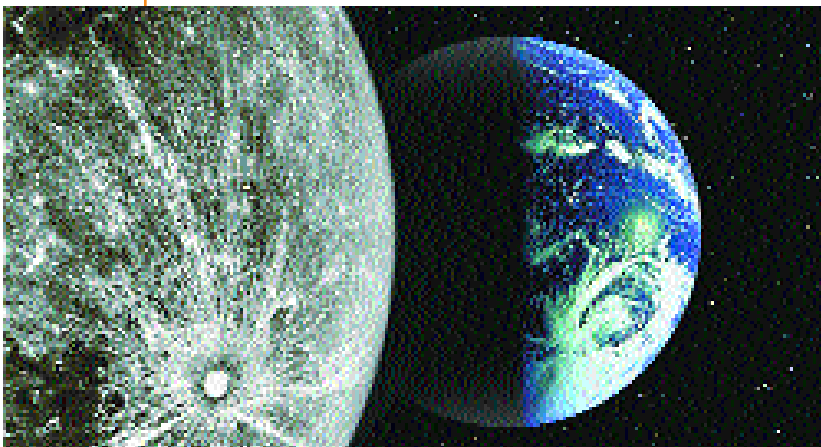
the earth is up to several billion years old. If, on the other hand, there is no such gap, then the earth itself must be only around 6,000 years old—which most scientists consider an impossibility.

Do other passages, as well as history, shed any light on this question?

Some scholars propose that Genesis 1:2 can or should be translated "Now the earth *became* without form, and void . . ." as opposed to the common rendering "The earth *was* without form, and void . . ." Others dismiss this idea entirely. They assume the original Hebrew word *hayah* must be translated "was" and then assume the earth was originally created in this disorderly way.

However, as can be seen from many Bible helps, both translations of the term are possible. Only the context of the chapter and book can determine which one is correct. Gleason Archer, professor of biblical languages, comments: "It should be noted in this connection that the verb *was* in Genesis 1:2 may quite possibly be rendered 'became' and be construed to mean: 'And the earth became formless and void.' Only a cosmic catastrophe could account for the introduction of chaotic confusion into the original perfection of God's creation. This interpretation certainly seems to be exegetically tenable . . ." (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1974, p. 184).

In a footnote Archer adds: "Properly speaking, this verb *hayah* never has the meaning of static being like the copular verb 'to be.' Its basic notion is that of becoming or emerging as such and such, or of coming into being . . . Sometimes a distinction is attempted along the following lines: *hayah* means 'become' only when it is followed by the preposition *le*; otherwise there is no explicit idea of becoming. But this distinction will not stand up under analysis. In Gen[esis] 3:20 the proper rendering is: 'And Adam called the



*Is the earth only 6,000 years old? Many assume that is what the Bible says, but the original wording of Genesis 1 allows for a much earlier creation.*

other passages of Scripture, has led some to conclude that a considerable time interval is indicated between these two verses. If such an interval is indeed intended, there is no discrepancy between the Bible record and scientific discoveries indicating that

For the creation was subjected to futility [waste], not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God” (Romans 8:18-21). (For more details, be sure to request your free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom* from the address nearest you listed on page 2.)

### The Bible explanation

Can the Bible explain the fossil record, an ancient earth and divine creation at the same time? Yes, it can. We don’t know all the details of what happened before man’s time. But Christ has assured us that when He returns “there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light” (Mark 4:22).

Instead of wandering through the confused, chaotic maze of the theory of evolution like so many, we should look to God’s Word for assurance. It is there—

directly from our Creator—that we find the truth of man’s origin.

Perhaps the following quote from George Sim Johnston best sums up that truth: “The book of Genesis has held up well under the scrutiny of modern geology and archaeology. Twentieth-century physics, moreover, describes the beginning of the universe in virtually the same cosmological terms as Genesis. Space, time and matter came out of nothing in a single burst of light entirely hospitable to carbon-based life.

“A growing number of chemists and biologists agree that life had its origin from clay templates (see Genesis 2:7), while genetic research asserts that we are all descended from one woman. I would say all this is a curious development for Darwinists” (*Reader’s Digest*, May 1991, p. 31).

But these things aren’t a “curious development” to those who faithfully believe, as Christ did, in “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

They know that such truths have been recorded for mankind in the Bible for thousands of years.

It is to the Bible that we should turn for our moral standards, to discover our one true source of salvation and, perhaps most of all, for our belief in the invisible Creator God. Why, then, should we doubt the real origin of the species mentioned in the creation epic, that rock-solid book of beginnings, Genesis? **GN**

### RECOMMENDED READING

Can you really believe the Bible? Can you prove whether the Bible is truly the Word of God? These are crucial questions. Request your free copy of *Is the Bible True?* to discover the answers for yourself. Also request *How to Understand the Bible*. Both are free for the asking. Just contact us at the office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2.

## al Between the First and Second Verses of Genesis?

name of his wife Eve, because she *became* the mother of all living.’ No *le* follows the verb in this case. So also in Gen[esis] 4:20: ‘Jabal *became* the father of tent dwellers.’ Therefore there can be no grammatical objection raised to translating Gen[esis] 1:2: ‘And the earth *became* a wasteness and desolation’” (ibid.).

Some scholars also argue against translating *hayah* “became” instead of “was” in Genesis 1:2 because they assume this interpretation came about only recently, after geology revealed the strata of the earth to be very old. Thus they consider this explanation a desperate attempt to reconcile the Genesis account with modern geology. The explanation that there existed an indefinite period between the initial beautiful creation described in Genesis 1:1 and the earth becoming waste and void in verse 2 has been called, sometimes disparagingly, “the gap theory.” The idea was attributed to Thomas Chalmers in the last century and to Cyrus Scofield in this century.

Yet this interpretation that the earth “became” waste and void has been discussed for close to 2,000 years. The earliest known recorded controversy on this point can be attributed to Jewish sages at the beginning of the second century. The Hebrew scholars who wrote the Targum of Onkelos, the earliest of the Aramaic versions of the Old Testament, translated Genesis 1:2 as “and the earth was laid waste.” The original language led them to understand that something had occurred which had “laid waste” the earth, and they interpreted this as a destruction.

The early Catholic theologian Origen (186-254), in his commentary *De Principiis*, explains regarding Genesis 1:2 that the original earth had been “cast downwards” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1917, p. 342).

In the Middle Ages the Flemish scholar Hugo St. Victor (1097-

1141) wrote about Genesis 1:2, “Perhaps enough has already been debated about these matters thus far, if we add only this, ‘how long did the world remain in this disorder before the regular re-ordering . . . of it was taken in hand?’” (*De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*, Book 1, Part I, Chapter VI). Other medieval scholars, such as Dionysius Peavius and Pererius, also considered that there was an interval of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

According to *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, the Dutch scholar Simon Episcopius (1583-1643) taught that the earth had originally been created before the six days of creation described in Genesis (1952, Vol. 3, p. 302). This was roughly 200 years before geology discovered evidence for the ancient origin of earth.

These numerous examples show us that the idea of an interval between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 has a long history. Any claim that it is of only recent origin—that it was invented simply as a desperate attempt to reconcile the Genesis account with geology—is groundless.

Perhaps the best treatment on both sides of this question is given by the late Arthur Custance in his book *Without Form and Void: A Study of the Meaning of Genesis 1:2*. Dr. Custance states, “To me, this issue is important, and after studying the problem for some thirty years and after reading everything I could lay my hands on *pro* and *con* and after accumulating in my own library some 300 commentaries on Genesis, the earliest being dated 1670, I am persuaded that there is, on the basis of the evidence, far more reason to translate Gen. 1:2 as ‘But the earth had become a ruin and a desolation, etc.’ than there is for any of the conventional translations in our modern versions” (1970, p. 7).

—Mario Seiglie



# Genesis 1 and the Days of Creation

*Did you know that no piece of ancient history is more scientifically grounded than the book of Genesis, including its description of the 24-hour days of creation?*

by John Ross Schroeder

During the last 150 years or so, no part of the Bible has come under more rigorous attack than the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis. Darwinists have made much of evidence that earth is apparently anywhere from five to 15 billion years old. Yet a careful genealogical study of the biblical record combined with history suggests to some people that the earth has existed for a mere 6,000 years.

Before we address this discrepancy, let us first

consider how the Bible, in its Genesis narrative, presents creation. What is the organizing principle of the biblical account of creation? How does the creation narrative present God's acts of creation to the reader? On what does God hang the whole creation epic?

The creation account hangs first on the 24-hour day, then on the seven-day week. (Genesis 1 describes the first six days of creation week; the first few verses of chapter 2 recount the seventh day.)

## The earth in orbit

We learn from observation that the earth makes one revolution around the sun in a year, and it rotates on its axis once every 24 hours. The axis rotation

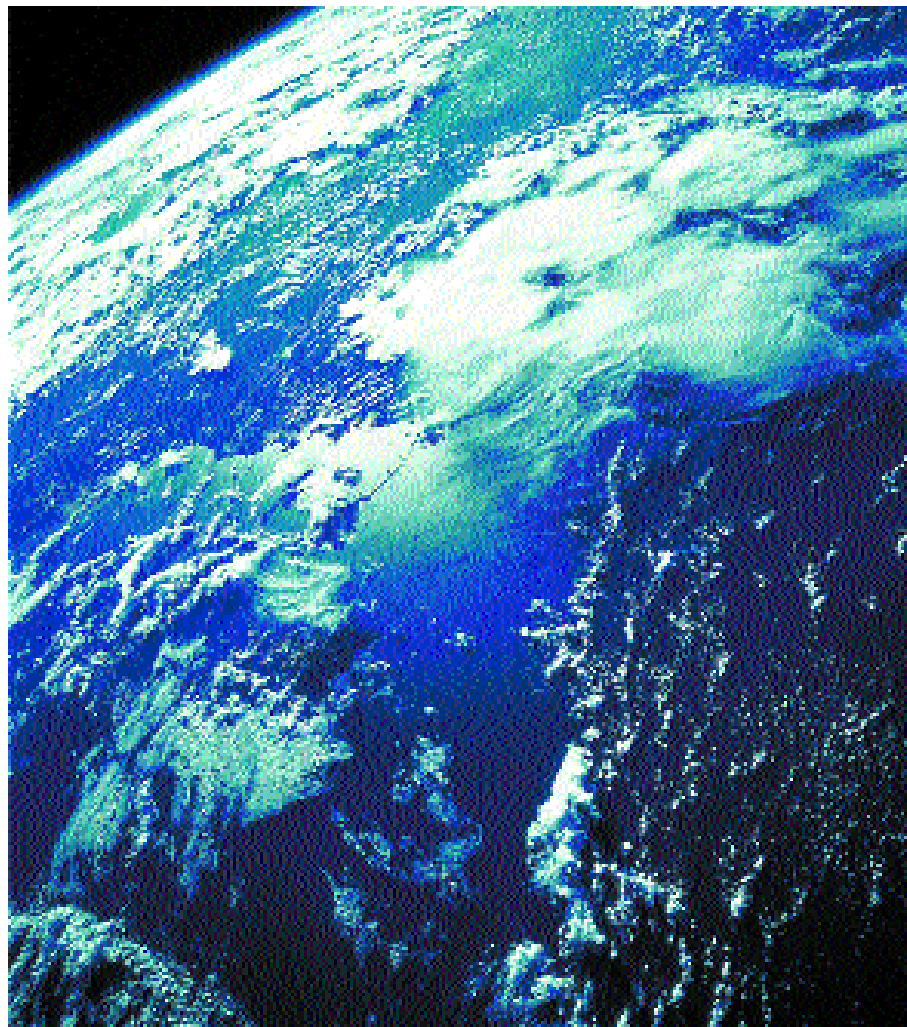
Some have tried to reconcile the biblical account with such scientific findings. Some have theorized that the seven 24-hour creation days were really much longer.

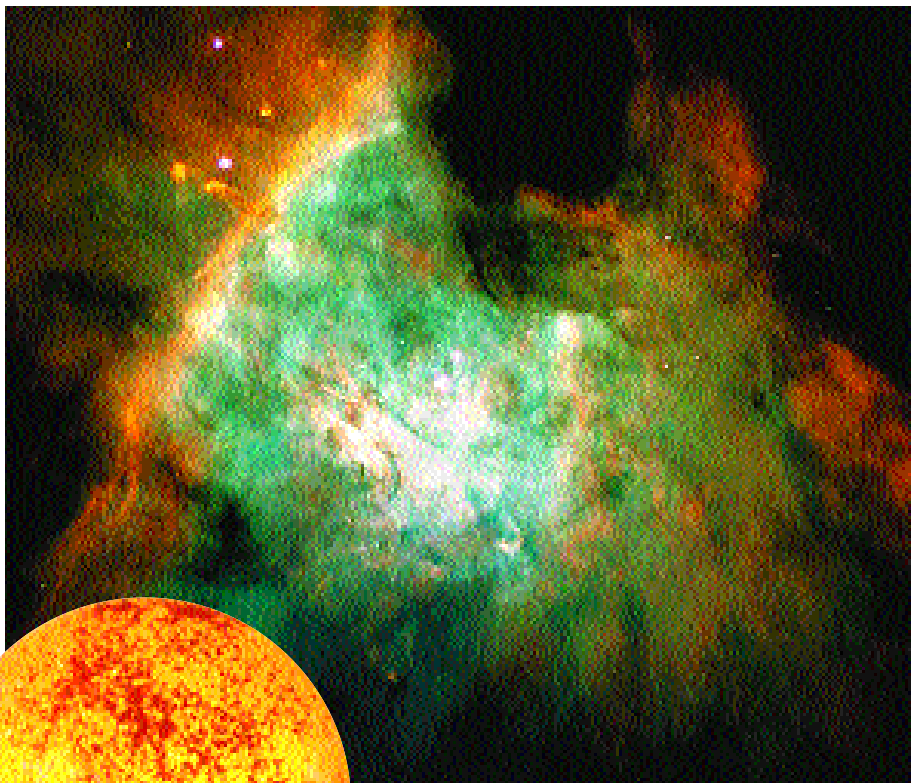
produces the familiar succession of day and night. The planet spins like a child's top at a consistent angle to the sun, maintaining that angle while making its circular journey.

Earth revolves just rapidly enough to produce the 24-hour cycle (or, more precisely, 23 hours and 56 minutes). It revolves slightly obliquely to its plane of rotation, which makes for the four annual seasons.

What does Genesis 1 have to do with these natural phenomena? Can we take seriously the Bible's creation account?

"And God saw the light that it was good, and God divided the light from darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day" (Genesis 1:4-5). We see from the account that God established the day-and-night cycle from the beginning. Day and night are functions of the rotation of the earth as it orbits the sun. Clearly the wording of Genesis describes the 24-hour period we are all familiar with. Notice further that God appointed the sun to separate light from darkness and





## The Sun: The Great Yellow Orb

According to astronomers, compared with other stars the sun is nothing to write home about. Yet the energy that animates living matter on planet earth—every flower, each tree, all living creatures—is derived from the heat and light of the sun. Move it a little closer or farther away and we find ourselves in deep trouble. Extinguish it and we are goners.

We survive because we soak up only a fraction of the sun's heat. Our star is 93 million miles away from the earth, a comfortable distance from this powerhouse of white-hot molten energy. The space probe *Soho* provides us with scientific facts about the sun we never knew before. But certain fundamental understanding can come from only one source.

It would be strange indeed had the Bible said nothing about the sun. But God's Word mentions the solar body more than 150 times throughout its pages. Perhaps the most important biblical reference about the sun is the simple observation that God created it (Genesis 1:1, 14). Thus humanity has no valid reason to worship the flaming orb as some of the Israelites and other ancient peoples did (2 Kings 23:11; Ezekiel 8:16-17; see also Romans 1:25).

Sometimes the sun is mentioned in Scripture in the context of the 24-hour day. At other times it is used metaphorically. For instance, in the transfiguration account, depicting the glorified Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God, His face shone like the sun (Matthew 17:2). The book of Revelation describes the face of Christ as "the sun shining in its strength" (Revelation 1:16). The glory of God the Father and of Jesus Christ is declared to be greater and more enduring than sunlight (Revelation 21:23).

The apostle Paul even compares the resurrection of the righteous to the heavenly bodies in their glory, mentioning the sun in particular (1 Corinthians 15:40-44). The Hebrew Bible shows that these same righteous men and women "shall shine like the brightness of the firmament" (Daniel 12:3). Jesus Christ Himself said that "the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43).

If you would like to know more about the purpose of human life, write for our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* from the office nearest you listed on page 2.

—John Ross Schroeder

to divide day from night (verse 14).

We can readily grasp the wording of the biblical creation account. It fits the context of something we experience every day. From birth to death we live in a constant succession of 24-hour days and nights. "The several pictures of creation history are set within the six work-day frames" (*The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, p. 82).

### How long were the days of creation in Genesis?

Ever since the realization by scientists that the earth's age must be measured in billions of years, well-meaning people have tried to reconcile the biblical account with such scientific findings. Some have theorized that the seven 24-hour creation days were really much longer—possibly epochs lasting thousands or millions of years. To support this idea, some have argued that the Hebrew word for "day," *yom*, means an unspecified measure of time in Genesis 1.

It is true that *yom* can mean an indefinite period such as in the English expression "at the end of the day." But the context of each of the six days of Genesis 1 makes it clear how long each day of creation actually was. The expression "So the evening and the morning were the first day" in Genesis 1 is repeated for every one of the other five days.

One rotation of the earth on its axis is the unmistakable meaning of *day* in the creation account. Throughout the history of the Hebrew people, the evening has always signified the beginning of a new day, a specific 24 hours.

However, since that particular expression does not close the account of the seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3), some have tried to lengthen the creation Sabbath as well. They reason that the seventh day of creation has not yet ended, even after thousands of years. Thus the earlier six days of creation may have lasted for thousands of years as well. But does Scripture support this view?

The Bible interprets the Bible. The account relaying the giving of the Ten Commandments confirms how long each of the creation days was, including the seventh-day Sabbath. Exodus 20:8-11 summarizes their significance:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it

*Continued on page 31*

# The Early Kings of Judah: Miraculous Deliverance

by Mario Seiglie

**T**he last two editions of *The Good News* covered the history of the kings of Israel after the northern 10 tribes broke ties with the kingdom of Judah, comprised of two tribes in the south. We now turn to see what archaeology has revealed about the kings of Judah during this time.

Around 720 B.C. the Assyrians conquered the northern tribes of Israel and expelled them from their land. But Judah, Israel's sister nation in the south, miraculously survived the Assyrian invasion and continued for another 130 years.

Although the people of Judah, too, would later succumb to invasion—from the Babylonians—they managed to survive

their ordeal with their national identity intact, unlike their kinsmen in the kingdom of Israel. After 70 years of exile in Babylon, a remnant of Judah returned to its former land. There descendants of this remnant would remain for another 600 years until the Romans finally expelled them. For nearly 2,000 years the Jews would be dispersed around the world. Finally, in this century, some of their descendants returned to the ancient land of Judah. They named their nation Israel, although "Judah" would have been more historically accurate.

What has archaeology revealed about these resilient people from the southern kingdom? We pick up the fascinating story from the time of Ahaz, who began ruling in Judah some 200 years after the two Israelite kingdoms went their separate ways.

## King Ahaz's clay seal

"In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done" (2 Kings 16:1-2).

Ancient Near Eastern kings and other officials

stamped their documents with special seals. As a result archaeologists have been able to identify the clay seals of two of the kings of Judah: Hezekiah and Ahaz. The two seals belonging to Hezekiah are not well preserved, but the one of King Ahaz of Judah is in beautiful condition. In 1996 archaeologists confirmed its authenticity. Just as people today use signatures to validate documents such as checks and contracts, in ancient times authorities stamped their official documents with seals that were typically carved from semiprecious stones. Sometimes the seals were mounted on a ring, called a signet.

The most common material used for documents at that time was papyrus. "Papyrus documents were closed by rolling them and tying them with a string," explains Tsvi Scheider, assistant librarian at Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology. "A lump of wet clay was then placed on the knot and stamped with the seal . . . After the clay dried, the papyrus was stored in an archive (see Jeremiah 32:10-14)" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, July-August 1991, p. 27).

The resulting clay imprint, or bulla, bore the seal's impression. Although the papyrus, of organic matter, would eventually disintegrate, the clay bullae often survived. Since Israel lay at the intersection of three great empires—Egypt, Assyria and Babylon—it experienced frequent wars. Conquering armies often burned enemy cities to the ground. Almost everything would perish—except for some of the clay seals, which, when baked in such fires, turned hard as pottery.

Thousands of years later, as they have conducted excavations in such cities, archaeologists have sometimes discovered the remains of royal archives. Occasionally they even stumble onto a cache of clay seals that reveal the exact spot where such official documents were originally stored for safekeeping.

Robert Deutsch writes about Ahaz's seal: "The king whose seal is impressed in this well-preserved piece of reddish-brown clay is King Ahaz of Judah, who ruled from 732 to 716 [B.C.] . . . This lump of clay, called a bulla, was used to seal a papyrus document. We know this because the back of the bulla still bears the imprint of the texture of the papyrus



*"Belonging to Ahaz [son of] Yehotam [Jotham], king of Judah," reads the inscription pressed into this lump of clay, called a bulla. The clay originally sealed a papyrus scroll that is long since decayed. Ahaz ruled the kingdom of Judah ca. 734-715 B.C. A fingerprint, possibly that of the king himself, is visible on the left edge in this magnified photograph.*

... On the left edge of the front of the bulla is a fingerprint that may well be that of King Ahaz himself! ...

"The seal contains not only the name of the king, but the name of his father, King Yehotam [Jotham]. In addition, Ahaz is specifically identified as 'king of Judah' ... The Hebrew inscription, which is set on three lines ... , translates, 'Belonging to Ahaz (son of) Yehotam, King of Judah' ... The Ahaz bulla has been examined by a number of preminent scholars ... All agree that the bulla is genuine" (*Biblical Archaeological Review*, May-June 1998, pp. 54, 56).

Thus the existence of another biblical king is verified through archaeology.

### Sennacherib captures Lachish

Shortly after the fall of the northern Israelite kingdom, the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, descended on Judah. His assault came around 700 B.C., during the reign of Ahaz's successor, Hezekiah.

The Bible summarizes this invasion and Hezekiah's reaction. "And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king in Lachish, saying, 'I have done wrong;

turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay'" (2 Kings 18:13-14).

However, even though Hezekiah promised to pay Sennacherib handsomely if he would spare Jerusalem, the Assyrian king decided to conquer the city.

We not only have the biblical account of events, but also Assyrian records that closely parallel the Bible version.

A century and a half ago archaeologist Henry Austen Layard discovered the ancient city of Nineveh and Sennacherib's palace. There he found a graphic depiction of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah carved in a series of stone panels adorning the palatial walls.

Moshe Pearlman describes the find: "The gems of Sennacherib's palace for biblical scholars were a series of thirteen slabs of wall reliefs depicting Sennacherib seated upon a throne on a hill-slope before a besieged city amidst the landscape of what was evidently meant to be the land of Judah. The reliefs (which may be seen in the British Museum) are clearly recognizable as a dramatic thirteen-part story in pictures of Sennacherib's campaign in this southern Israelite kingdom ... In a panel facing the

king is a cuneiform caption: 'Sennacherib, king of the Universe, king of Assyria, sat upon a throne and passed in review the booty taken from the city of Lachish'" (*Digging Up the Bible*, 1980, p. 96).

In effect, the biblical narrative is frozen in frames in Sennacherib's wall depicting the conquest of the city of Lachish. The Bible enlarges our view by adding an account of the letter sent at that time to Sennacherib from a desperate King Hezekiah. Judah's king pleaded for forgiveness and offered any payment to avoid Jerusalem's destruction.

A careful study of the panels depicting the taking of Lachish includes grisly details. "There sits the Assyrian monarch," writes Pearlman, "richly attired, observing his army attacking a fortified city which is stoutly defended. His battering rams are being pushed up towards the walls over ramps, and are covered by archers, sling-throwers and spearmen to keep the defenders at bay. In one panel prisoners are being impaled by Assyrian soldiers; in another they are being flayed. Moving out of the city under guard is a long procession of captives, and carts laden with booty" (p. 96).

In the 20th century, archaeologists have excavated Lachish and corroborated the precision of the biblical and the Assyrian accounts of the conquest. "The magnitude of Layard's discovery was given an added dimension some eighty years later when excavations unearthed the very stratum of ancient Lachish that was stormed by Sennacherib's forces. Arrow-heads and sling-shots used by the Assyrians in that battle were among the finds, and from the remains of the shattered city it was possible to reconstruct the plan of its defensive fortifications. They virtually matched those depicted in the reliefs on Sennacherib's palace walls. Thus, Lachish is a superb example of archaeological discovery joining ancient records in word and picture to enrich the background of an episode in the Bible" (p. 97).

These exquisitely detailed contemporary finds from Assyria, along with the excavations of Lachish, dramatically corroborate each other and confirm the accuracy of the biblical account.

### The Prism of Sennacherib

The archaeological evidence of the



*Sennacherib's assault on Lachish is graphically shown in these carvings, discovered in the ruins of Sennacherib's palace. It shows Assyrian troops advancing on ramps leading to the city walls, from which the desperate defenders shoot arrows and hurl stones and firebrands. At lower right, prisoners leave the city, passing impaled captives. To the left of the prisoners, an Assyrian siege engine pounds away at a heavily defended tower. The Assyrian records and carvings and the Bible combine to tell a remarkable story.*

invasion does not end there. Another discovery sheds light on Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. In 1919 the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago purchased a 15-inch clay cylinder, called the Prism of Sennacherib or the Taylor Prism. The artifact testifies of eight of Sennacherib's military campaigns. Regarding the third, the narrator describes Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and the subsequent siege of Jerusalem.

The account reads: "As to [Judah's king] Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke. I laid siege to forty-six of his strong cities, walled forts and to countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them by means of well-stamped earth-ramps, and battering-rams brought thus near to the walls, combined with attack by foot soldiers . . . [Hezekiah] himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage" (James Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, Vol. 1, 1958, pp. 199-201).

Sennacherib boastfully begins his description of the siege. His language leads the reader to expect that the Assyrian monarch captured Jerusalem, just as he had taken 46 other strongholds during his campaign. But the account turns curiously quiet. Sennacherib ends the account bragging about the tribute money paid by Hezekiah, a poor consolation prize. Sennacherib concludes: "Hezekiah himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed, . . . did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with talents of gold, . . . talents of silver . . . and all kinds of valuable treasures, his (own) daughters . . . In order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his messenger" (p. 201).

What really happened? Although the Assyrian records are awkwardly silent, the Bible completes the story: "And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh" (2 Kings 19:35-36).

"The one city he sought to subdue, but failed," says Pearlman, "was Jerusalem, the

capital of Judah, where Hezekiah's spirit of resistance was much strengthened by the tough advice of the prophet Isaiah [see Isaiah 36-37]. Doubtless he would have wished the centerpiece of his wall decora-



*The Taylor Prism describes Sennacherib's military campaigns, including an invasion of Judah. In its own curious way, this boastful account of the monarch's exploits supports the biblical account of an astounding miracle.*

tions to have depicted the fall of Jerusalem. Instead, judging by the prominence given to Lachish, this must have been the scene of the fiercest fighting, and he evidently regarded its capture against stubborn defense as his most outstanding victory in this land"—instead of Jerusalem, which escaped (Pritchard, p. 97).

The Assyrian record describes only the siege of Jerusalem. Something incredible must have occurred for the mighty Assyrians, who had conquered many powerful

empires, to prevent the fall of Jerusalem.

## A possible explanation

Sennacherib's defeat is not only recorded in the Bible; the Greek historian Herodotus gives an account of Sennacherib's humiliation in his *History*. He attributes the miraculous defeat to mice overrunning the camp and wreaking great havoc. "An army of field-mice swarmed over their opponents in the night . . . [and] gnawed through their quivers and their bows, and the handles of their shields, so that on the following day they fled minus their arms and a great number fell" (Book 2:141).

The story about the mice might appear as fanciful myth. However, it might bear a kernel of truth. Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, also mentions Sennacherib's defeat, explaining that it was caused by a plague. He cites an earlier historian who had written: "Now when Sennacherib was returning from his Egyptian war to Jerusalem, he found his army . . . in danger [by a plague], for God had sent a pestilential distemper upon his army; and on the very first night of the siege, a hundred fourscore and five thousand, with their captains and generals, were destroyed" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book X, Chapter I, Section 5).

Some speculate the mice may have been carriers of the plague. If so, this would not be the only such historical example. Mice contributed to the spread of the black plague in the Middle Ages and just as easily could have transported this deadly malady into the Assyrian camp. The Bible states simply that the destruction came from God and does not mention specifics.

Even the biblical description of the death of Sennacherib is confirmed by discoveries in ancient Assyrian archives. "Now it came to pass, as he [Sennacherib] was worshipping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place" (2 Kings 19:37).

The Assyrian account of Sennacherib's death is the same. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* explains: "According to Esarhaddon's records, his father Sennacherib had named him over his brothers as successor. 'To gain the kingship they

slew Sennacherib their father,” forcing Esarhaddon to hasten back from a military campaign to claim the throne (1988, Vol. 4, p. 396, “Sennacherib”). A parallel Babylonian account also mentions this assassination.

Thus we see confirmed even a tiny detail from the biblical account.

## Hezekiah’s Siloam inscription

Another aspect of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem is well worth noting. Assyrian tactics called for surrounding the targeted city, shutting the inhabitants off from any outside source of food and water to starve them into submission before a final and decisive direct attack. While Sennacherib was busy plundering Judah’s other cities, Hezekiah began a desperate building project to provide the city a secure water source before the Assyrians could lay siege to the capital.

“And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that his purpose was to make war against Jerusalem, he consulted with his leaders and commanders to stop the water from the springs which were outside the city; and they helped him” (2 Chronicles 32:2-3). “. . . Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David” (verse 30).

Long after the Assyrian menace, this tunnel lay forgotten and undisturbed for centuries. Then, in 1880, two Arab boys were playing near the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem when one fell in. Swimming to the other side of the small body of water, he came under a

rock overhang. There in the darkness he noticed a small passageway. After further investigation by the authorities, the biblical tunnel of Hezekiah’s time was discovered anew. In the tunnel they even discovered an inscription in Hebrew made by the workers commemorating their amazing engineering feat during Hezekiah’s time.

It reads: “And this is the account of the breakthrough. While the laborers were still working with their picks, each toward the other, and while there were still three cubits to be broken through, the voice of each was heard calling to the other, because there was a [split, crack or overlap] in the rock to the south and to the north. And at the moment of the breakthrough, the laborers struck each toward the other, pick against pick. Then the water flowed from the spring to the pool for 1,200 cubits. And the height of the rock above the heads of the laborers was 100 cubits” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, July-August 1994, p. 37).

The “Siloam Inscription,” as it came to be called, resides in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, taken there by Turkish authorities who ruled Jerusalem at the time. Israeli authorities claim it as a national monument and desire its return to Jerusalem.

## The Bible vs. fables

All these accounts lead us to several important conclusions.

- They call into question claims of critics that the Bible is merely a collection of myths, fables and other fiction. Extrabiblical

records, like those from Assyria, consistently confirm the biblical accounts.

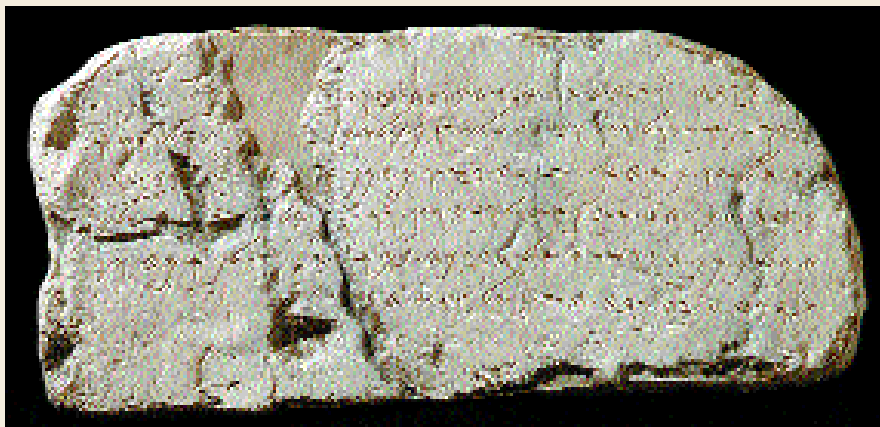
- These biblical narratives could not have been written centuries after the fact as many critics claim. The incidental details preserved in the Bible could have been known only by the people living during the events described.

- Finally, a spiritual guiding force must be inspiring the biblical accounts, for they always seem to match what independent sources describe.

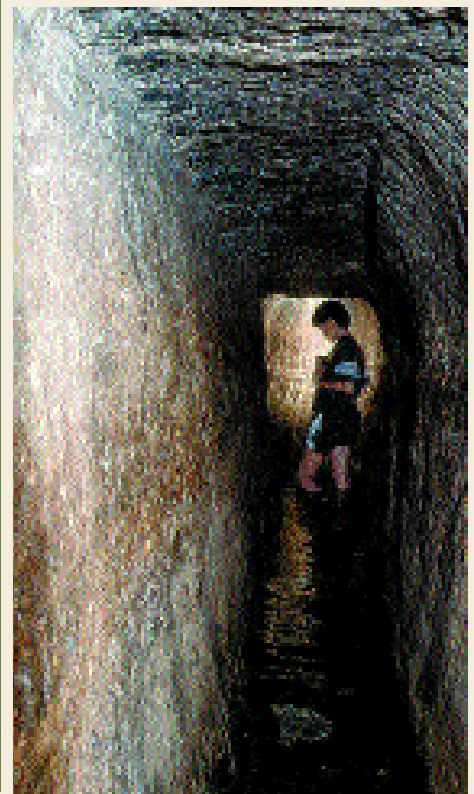
- The Bible narrative rings true. Unlike secular accounts, which exaggerate their heroes’ accomplishments, the Bible stands as a believable report. It describes both the strengths and weaknesses of its leading characters. Its truths are not exaggerated or distorted as is the obvious case with records left by scribes and narrators with transparent national interests or personal agendas.

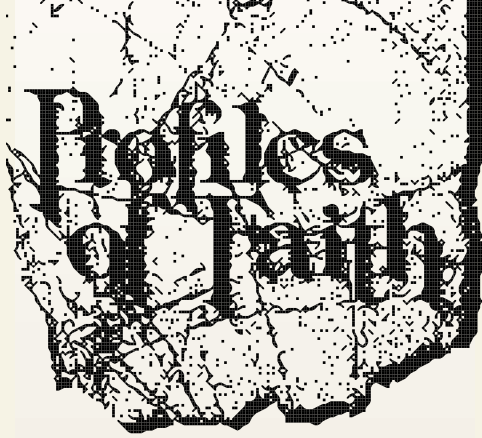
Even if archaeology is an imperfect science incapable of providing all the answers, it continues to independently verify the truthfulness of the biblical record.

In the next installment, we will continue our examination of archaeology and the kingdom of Judah. **GN**



**King Hezekiah’s engineers performed a remarkable engineering feat, carving a long tunnel (right) through the limestone underneath Jerusalem to provide the city a secure water source in the face of an Assyrian invasion. This inscription records how workers tunneling from both ends met in the middle, completing the monumental task.**





# Hezekiah

by Jerold Aust

**S**peaking in Hebrew, the arrogant representatives of the Assyrian king threatened Jerusalem's defenders: "Do not listen to your king, Hezekiah, for he deceives you. He will tell you there is only one God who can and will save you from the great king of Assyria. That's foolishness. Tell us, who were the gods who saved other nations from the mighty kings of Assyria? You know the nations by name. You know of their demise. You know not one of them was saved by their gods.

"So don't allow Hezekiah to fool you into thinking your one God can save you. The record is clear and telling. Lay down your weapons, open up the gates, and surrender. Why should you resist and suffer certain death?" (2 Kings 18:28-35, paraphrased).

Spoken by Rabshakeh, a commander in the great Assyrian army, these words were cleverly crafted psychological warfare against a fearful and embattled citizenry. Rabshakeh's sayings struck dread in the hearts of the city's defenders. There was a time of terror. Death or exile seemed their only choices. They could choose to fight and face certain annihilation, or they could lay down their arms and be deported hundreds of miles to other lands.

The God of Judah, declared Rabshakeh, was powerless to resist the Assyrians' might. The Assyrians would destroy the kingdom of Judah just as they had crushed so many other nations before them.

Judah's soldiers, manning Jerusalem's walls, did not reply. Rather, they did just as their king had instructed them. They well knew that the mighty Assyrian Empire had conquered and exiled their cousins to the north, the 10 tribes of Israel, a few years earlier (721-718 B.C.).

Could King Hezekiah withstand the Assyrians? Would God intervene and come to his aid? Hezekiah had given himself to God, cleared the land of idols and even conquered the Philistines, then a vassal state of Assyria. Would the army of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, overwhelm Jerusalem?

The answer to these questions can teach us important spiritual lessons.

## A king reforms his kingdom

Hezekiah lived at a time during which the very existence of Judah was threatened. But Jerusalem was blessed with a righteous king and an outstanding Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, at this critical point in its history.

Hezekiah was one of the best of Judah's kings, a man who passionately pursued pleasing God. Ironically, righteous Hezekiah was born the son of a wicked man. As a youth, Hezekiah turned to God when almost everyone else busied himself satisfying selfish cravings and pursuing evil desires.

Hezekiah ascended the throne when he was only 25. The young monarch smashed the pagan altars and images that dotted Judah's rolling hills. "And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according

to all that his father David had done. He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it . . ." (2 Kings 18:3-4).

"He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses. The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went" (verses 5-7).

## A kingdom returned to God

Hezekiah's reign was one of national religious reform and spiritual rejuvenation. He restored temple worship (2 Chronicles 29). One of his first acts was to initiate repairs on the magnificent "house of the LORD" built earlier by Solomon (verse 3). He commanded the priests and Levites to sanctify themselves and the temple, to "carry out the rubbish from the holy place" (verses 4-5).

The king warned that God was angry with His chosen people; they had turned their backs on their Creator (verse 6). "... Because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives are in captivity. Now it is within my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us" (verses 9-

10). So they gathered together, sanctified themselves and cleansed the house of God.

Some three centuries had elapsed since the reign of King David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). No king since David had set his mind to follow God like Hezekiah, who "did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done" (2 Kings 18:3).

### Hezekiah's memorable Passover

Hezekiah's godly attitude and concern for his people are shown in his approach to the first Passover observance of his reign. By the time the priests and Levites had sanctified themselves and the temple, it was past the 14th of Nisan, the first month of the Hebrew year, the time God instructed that His people celebrate the Passover. Hezekiah established an alternate time—a second Passover—in the second month according to God's instructions (Numbers 9:9-14).

"And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel. For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at the regular time, because a sufficient number of priests had not consecrated themselves, nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem. And the matter pleased the king and all the assembly" (2 Chronicles 30:1-4).

The king invited the remnant of the 10 tribes in the former northern kingdom of Israel to join Judah, the southern kingdom, in commemorating the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. "So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came up to Jerusalem . . . Now many people, a very great congregation, gathered at Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month" (2 Chronicles 30:10-11, 13).

The time was an exciting one for Judah and the remnant of Israel. Some who came from the remnants of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not as yet prepared themselves, "yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'May the good LORD provide atonement for everyone



*The representatives of the Assyrian king threatened Jerusalem's defenders: "Tell us, who were the gods who saved other nations from the kings of Assyria? You know not one of them was saved by their gods."*

who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.' And the LORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people. So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness" (2 Chronicles 30:18-21).

Those who kept this feast of God were so moved by the experience that "the whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days, and they kept it another seven days with gladness" (verse 23).

God was making His name known to Judah and the surrounding gentile nations, just as Christ will do at His return (Malachi 1:11). Thanks to King Hezekiah's reforms, Judah once again worshiped God.

In turn God blessed Hezekiah. "The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went." Hezekiah was also emboldened to resist the Assyrians. "And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza

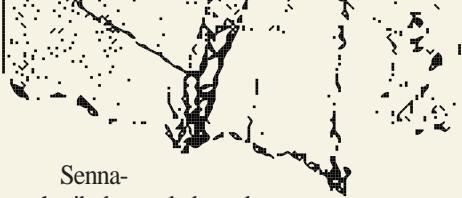
and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city" (2 Kings 18:7-8). This angered the already busy Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

### Jerusalem showdown

Less than a decade earlier, the Assyrian kings Shalmaneser and Sargon had defeated and taken captive the northern kingdom, the 10 tribes of Israel. The northerners had repeatedly disobeyed God and rejected Him; their defeat and captivity were a consequence of their disobedience (2 Kings 18:11-12).

The Assyrians were the dominant regional power in that day. When Hezekiah refused to submit, Assyria's King Sennacherib invaded Judah and stormed its fortified cities, setting the stage for a showdown at Jerusalem.

With the Assyrian monarch's forces on his doorstep, Hezekiah tried to buy his way out of danger. Hezekiah's message to the mighty Assyrian was brief: "I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay" (verse 14).



Sennacherib demanded nearly \$40 million by today's rate of exchange. Hezekiah gave him more than he demanded. He presented him with all the silver from the temple and national treasuries. He even stripped the gold from the doors and pillars of the temple (verses 15-16).

Thinking that additional treasure was just waiting to be plundered behind the walls of Jerusalem, Sennacherib broke his agreement with King Hezekiah and surrounded Judah's capital city. Sennacherib's envoys threatened the Jews in their own language, trying to persuade them to lay down their arms and accept exile to a foreign land over certain death. After all, the Assyrians boasted, history showed that resistance would be futile.

### Trust in God

King Hezekiah turned to God: ". . . When King Hezekiah heard it [the enemy's arrogant boasts] . . . he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD" (2 Kings 19:1).

He sent this message to the prophet Isaiah: "This day is a day of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left" (2 Kings 19:3-4).

Isaiah responded to Hezekiah: "Thus says the LORD: 'Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land'" (verses 6-7).

Hezekiah turned to God in faith. He would need no force of arms to bring about Sennacherib's demise.

God heard Hezekiah's humble prayer and reassured him: "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: 'He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same way shall he return; and he shall not come into this city,'

says the LORD. 'For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake'" (2 Kings 19:32-34).

Even though Jerusalem's situation seemed hopeless—the city surrounded by hundreds of thousands of battle-hardened Assyrians—God was true to His word. He dramatically intervened to spare Hezekiah and the city's trapped citizens.

"And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead" (verse 35).

The stunned Assyrians retreated before this demonstration of God's power. The mighty Sennacherib stole away in humiliation and defeat. "So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh. Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword . . . Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place" (verses 36-37).

Sennacherib came to a sad end, assassinated by two of his sons while worshiping a false god. God had spared His people and the kingdom of Judah in the face of apparently overwhelming odds.

### Hezekiah's death averted

God again dramatically intervened in Hezekiah's life. Not long after Sennacherib's defeat, the king of Judah grew deathly ill. The prophet Isaiah came to him and advised, "Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live" (2 Kings 20:1). Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and wept bitterly. He pleaded with God to save him: "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight" (verse 3).

But, before Isaiah had even left the palace, God answered the king's prayer. He instructed Isaiah to tell him: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you . . . And I will add to your days fifteen years" (verses 5-6).

Although taking heart, Hezekiah asked Isaiah for a sign. The prophet offered him a choice of miracles: "Shall the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?" Hezekiah, noting that it would be natural for shadows to go forward 10 degrees as the sun passed through the sky, asked that the shadow go backward. On

a nearby sundial, the sun's shadow moved backward 10 degrees (verses 8-11).

God had performed another mighty miracle. He healed Hezekiah, extended his life and caused the sun's shadow to reverse its course.

### Hezekiah shows his weakness

Word soon spread of the dramatic events in Judah. The king of Babylon, beginning to rise in the East, sent envoys bearing a gift (2 Kings 20:12).

But a problem arose. Hezekiah's "heart was lifted up" (2 Chronicles 32:25). He began to drift from God. So God withdrew from Hezekiah "in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (verse 31).

Hezekiah had assumed too much. He momentarily forgot God and showed the Babylonian envoys objects of his wealth.

Hezekiah's pride brought more problems on his kingdom. God warned him that the same Babylonian nation that had sent its friendly emissaries would ultimately threaten and destroy Judah (2 Kings 20:14-18).

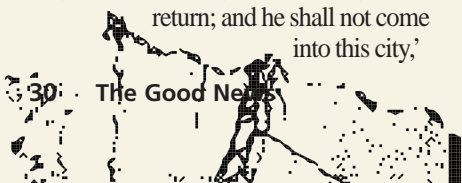
However, "Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah" (2 Chronicles 32:25-26). God spared Hezekiah's kingdom for the balance of his lifetime and for another century. In later years, in the reign of kings who rejected Hezekiah's righteous acts and example, destruction overcame Judah.

### Passing of a faithful king

Hezekiah's distinction was that he "trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah . . . He held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses" (2 Kings 18:5-6). When he died his countrymen "buried him in the upper tombs of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him at his death" (2 Chronicles 32:33).

God's mercy is always available to people in a repentant attitude, who acknowledge their inadequacies and strive to honor and serve Him. Hezekiah's life proves this is true. The key to an honorable life now, and ultimately eternal life, is to humble ourselves before God and obey Him and His laws.

After all, those laws are given for our benefit so we may acquire a godly relationship with God and man. **GN**



# Genesis

*Continued from page 23*

holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work . . . For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth . . . and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it [declared it holy].”

In defining when we are to keep one of God’s annual Sabbaths, the Day of Atonement, God tells us that, “from evening to evening [24 hours], you shall celebrate your sabbath” (Leviticus 23:32). The same principle applies to the weekly Sabbath and all of the annual feast days. (You might want to write for our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest.*)

## Understanding Genesis 1:1-2

The first two verses of the Bible are critical in this discussion. “The Genesis prologue presents those historical truths which are the necessary presuppositions for the valid pursuit of human knowledge” (*The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, p. 81). So let’s take a fresh look at Genesis 1:1-2.

Both the New International Version and the older Scofield Reference Bible suggest the possibility that the expression “the earth was without form and void” (verse 2) can be rendered “the earth *became* without form and void.” In other words, something spoiled the original creation described in Genesis 1:1 and made it necessary for God to restore order out of chaos—which He did during six 24-hour periods followed by a Sabbath rest.

The Companion Bible points out that, in the King James Version (and most subsequent translations), “the verb ‘to be’ is not distinguished from the verb ‘to become,’ so that the lessons conveyed” in these first few verses “are lost.” It goes on to explain that *without form* (Hebrew *tohu*) “is used of a subsequent event which, we know not how long after the Creation, befell the primitive creation of Gen. 1.1.”

(For a detailed account of the rationale and reference sources that confirm the possibility of the rendering “became” instead of “was,” see “Earth’s Age: Does the Bible Indicate a Time Interval Between the First and Second Verses of Genesis?,” p. 20).

Suffice it to say here that God does not

create by first making a mess (1 Corinthians 14:33). God told the cherub (angel) Lucifer, “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity [lawlessness] was found in you” (Ezekiel 28:15). God is the God of perfection, order and beauty. It is either the angelic realm or man’s world that makes the messes.

The conclusion is that an original creation (Genesis 1:1) preceded the making of a gigantic mess by Satan (the former Lucifer) and a third of the angels (Revelation 12:4), who had become demons. Sometime later God accomplished a full restoration during six 24-hour days, followed by the day of rest that created the seventh-day Sabbath (Exodus 20:11).

The time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 is an unspecified period that could encompass billions of years, accounting for the “deep time” that geologists and other scientists have discovered in the last two centuries. So the Bible itself solves the enigma. We do not need to artificially lengthen the seven 24-hour creation days to resolve the problem.

## More on creation

We can learn something every time we study the magnificent creation account in Genesis 1. Sometimes a different translation can shed new light on it and yield fresh understanding.

Consider Genesis 1:14 in the Revised English Bible: “God said, ‘Let there be lights in the vault of the heavens to separate day from night, and let them serve as signs both *for festivals* and for seasons and years.’” Of course, no translation is perfect. Sometimes another version can introduce a problem while shedding light on something else, even in the same passage.

Although “vault” is an awkward rendering for “sky” or “firmament,” the inclusion of “festivals” along with seasons and years anticipates God’s intentions for the good of mankind. God gave the Sabbath at creation just after He made man (Mark 2:27). But He revealed the biblical festivals much later to the “church in the wilderness” (Leviticus 23; Acts 7:38).

As is the case with the seventh-day Sabbath, the annual festivals are important for understanding God’s plan for mankind. Yet mere knowledge of their existence is insufficient. By actively observing the biblical festivals each year, the Church acts out the very plan of God, growing in understanding

## Why the Flat-Earth Effect?

We know the earth is a spinning sphere. But, to the untrained, naked eye, the earth appears flat. Our individual observational range is too limited to tell us otherwise. Of course, pictures taken from rockets and missiles from the late 1940s have proved the wisdom of the adage “Seeing is believing”; planet earth is spherical—as shown by photographs of our beautiful jewel-like orb taken from space since 1969.

Yet most of humanity lives its life as if the earth is flat. We go about our day-to-day business unconscious of our planet’s movement as a spinning ball hurtling through space. Though we may sit quietly unaware in comfortable armchairs, we are completing a gigantic sideways somersault once every 24 hours at a speed of 700 miles per hour relative to the earth’s axis.

We well know our days and our seasons, but God has so designed spaceship earth with such magnificent stability that we can go through life without much conscious thought of the marvelously complicated mechanisms that undergird our journey. Long before people came to understand the invisible force of gravity that keeps the heavenly bodies in place, a Bible writer observed that the Creator “hangs the earth on nothing” (Job 26:7). How marvelous are the works of our God!

We scarcely give a thought to the gravitational pulls and counterpulls that keep us on course and enable the normal cycle of the four seasons. We can be thankful we don’t have to fully understand the complex astronomical machinery to enjoy the ride.

—John Ross Schroeder

of God’s purpose (2 Peter 3:18).

Their timing is interwoven with the seasons of the northern hemisphere. God’s year does not begin in the dead of winter as on our humanly devised calendars, but in the spring when green plants emerge from the earth, birds are flying, and the creation in general brightens with resurgent light and heat.

The United Church of God publishes a booklet that explains the meaning of the annual biblical festivals. Please request your free copy of *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. **GN**

# The Ten Suggestions?

**D**id God give us the 10 suggestions—or the Ten Commandments?

It's a crucial question. Never has our world had such a critical need for moral guidance and direction. Never have so many people lost their moral bearings and desperately needed help.

Plenty of people think of these 10 principles as good suggestions. They may even make some attempt to practice them, at least when it's convenient.

But how many people view these commands for what they are: our Creator's blueprint for a peaceful and prosperous society? There's much more to God's commands than meets the eye. They are not just God's way of preventing us from enjoying a good time. They're designed to protect us, our families, our communities. They're a guide to transform the way we think, what we do and how we live our lives.

For your free copy of this 80-page booklet, write or call us at our office in your country (or the country nearest you) at the address on page 2. Discover why they're the Ten Commandments, not the 10 suggestions.

**United Church of God**  
*an International Association*

