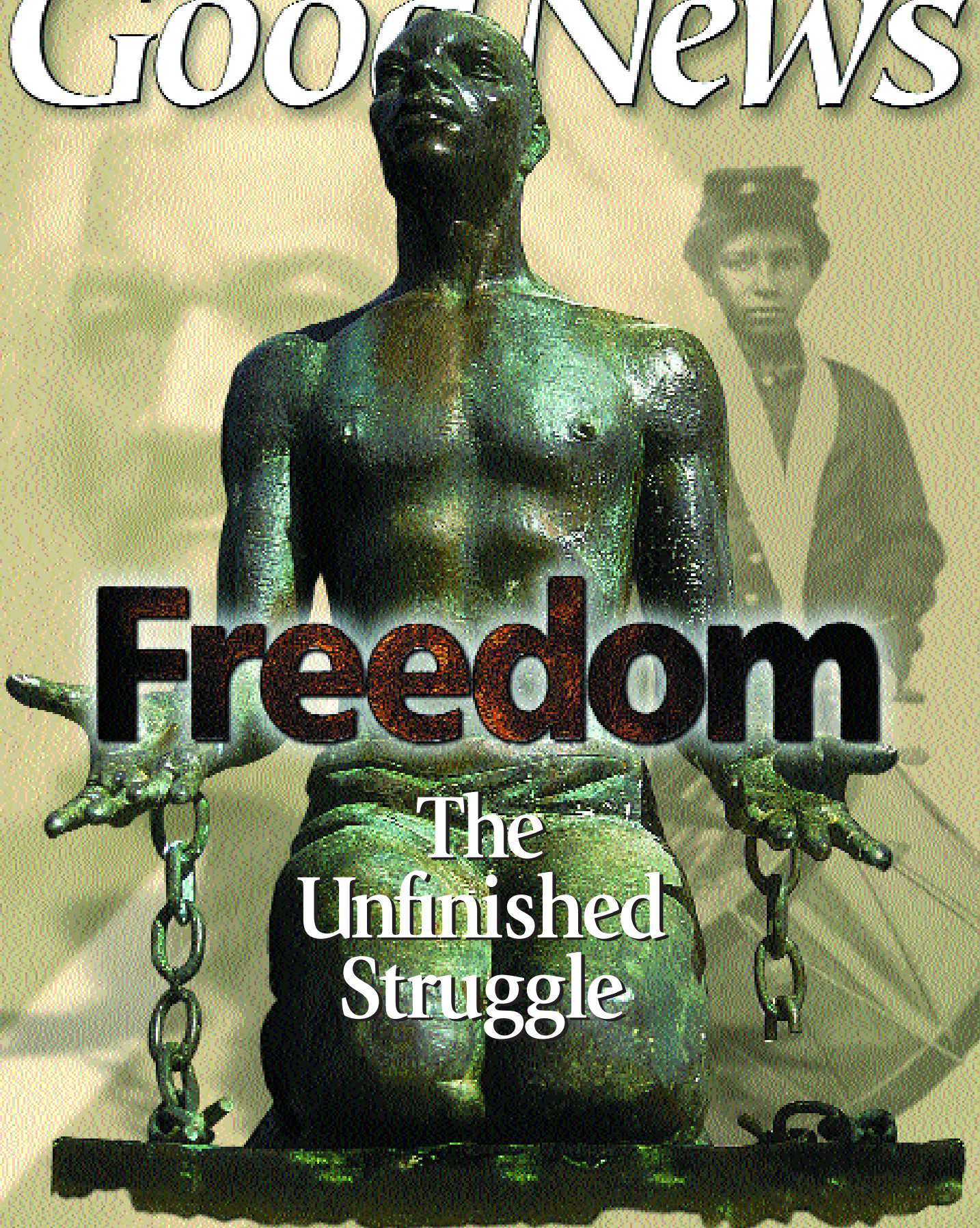


# <sup>The</sup> Good News

March/April 1999



## Freedom

### The Unfinished Struggle

Mankind's Choice: Freedom or Slavery? • Forgive, and You Shall Be Forgiven  
Does Character Matter? • The Euro: Crucial Step for a Future Superpower?

## The Eternal Quest for Freedom

Recently I visited Egypt and walked among the colossal monuments of kings and queens of an ancient superpower. Even now, thousands of years after these long-dead monarchs, the might and grandeur of the ancient Egyptian empire is evident.

Although Egypt has changed in many ways, it is sobering to realize that human nature and the human condition haven't changed that much. I saw much evidence that even there, in a land of ancient abundance and plenty, bloodshed and oppression were all too common.

Most students of the Bible quickly associate ancient Egypt with the suffering of the Israelite slaves at the hand of a cruel pharaoh. Their suffering was indeed harsh. According to the biblical account: "... Taskmasters were appointed over them to oppress them with forced labour . . . until the Egyptians came to loathe them. They ground down their Israelite slaves, and made life bitter for them with their harsh demands . . . In every kind of labour they made ruthless use of them" (Exodus 1:11, 13-14, Revised English Bible).

With a huge captive work force, prospects looked bright for the Egyptians but darker than ever for their Hebrew slaves. As if their brutal forced labor were not enough, the Egyptian monarch instituted a policy of infanticide, commanding his minions to throw newborn male babies into the Nile. No one knows how many innocent infants met their deaths in the swirling, muddy waters of the Nile, nor how many Hebrews perished under the clubs and whips of their captors.

The story of the Israelites' deliverance from slavery has been dramatized in two major films: *The Ten Commandments* and, more recently, *The Prince of Egypt*. Both vividly depict the suffering of the Hebrew slaves and their exultation when finally delivered from their oppression. Their story is one of hope and inspiration for people of all generations who long for the end of oppression.

In later years another saga of slavery played out on the world stage. Over a span of three centuries several million African men, women and children were systematically captured and sold into slavery. Forcibly shipped to the New World, many never saw their families and loved ones again. Then, once they had new families on American shores, all too often those unions were later broken up as family members were sold again.

Slavery was finally abolished in the United States after a decades-long struggle by many courageous men and women, black and white alike. Scars from the American slavery experience, however, remain with us to this day. Through its lingering effects we can still sense some of the deep-rooted agony and pain brought on by generations of degradation and humiliation. Bondage has never been a pretty sight.

We'd like to think we now live in an enlightened age. But do we really?

Not long ago a giant war machine used slave labor to build tanks, planes, bombs and bullets with which to enslave much of Europe. Laborers were worked until they dropped, then discarded like debris, their bodies burned or buried in mass graves. Families were again split up, some sentenced to a quick death and others to misery at hard labor before many of them, too, met their end.

It is sobering to think that these tragic conditions existed barely five decades ago—and in geographical areas of man's greatest cultural achievements. Perhaps we're not as enlightened as we think we are. The human heart retains some desperately dark recesses.

Has the world seen the end of slavery?

Don't answer too quickly. Man's time of slavery is not yet over. Slavery remains alive and well. Humanity has much to learn and far to go before we finish our quest for freedom. *The Good News* is dedicated to showing how that ultimate human freedom will finally become a reality.

—Scott Ashley

# Good News

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# Freedom

## The Unfinished Struggle

*A decades-long struggle brought freedom for slaves in America.  
But the struggle for freedom from slavery is not over.*

by Wayne Dunlap

**T**hat night in Nantucket was charged with expectation for several hundred townspeople gathered on Aug. 16, 1841, for a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society.

Whites and blacks alike met for the antislavery cause. Prominent Quakers and other religious leaders joined the audience, along with the people of Guinea, the black section of town. They met in the Big Shop, a building on the edge of the city used for crafting whaling boats.

City officials had withdrawn permission for use of the elegant Atheneum meetinghouse for which the event was originally scheduled. They were uneasy about the expected presence of antislavery agitators—and especially queasy about the guest speaker, an escaped slave named Frederick Douglass.

The house was packed. Some of the more agile attendees mounted the 12-by-12-foot rafters and lofts, legs dangling, impatiently waiting for William Lloyd Garrison,

founder of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, to wrap up the opening business. The young guest speaker grew restless as the moment neared for his first major public address.

The audience grew still in anticipation as Douglass was introduced. Then he spoke with electrifying eloquence, telling the story of slavery from raw experi-

ence. He referred to his scar-covered back and to his own blood pouring out under the fury of the lash.

His story transfixed the audience. Douglass described from his own experience slavery's impact on the minds and bodies of its victims. He was living proof that many of the horrifying reports regarding slavery were true.

From that night forward, Douglass dedicated his life to exposing the degradation bred by slavery and to ending the nightmare for millions of men, women and children held in bondage in America.

### Turning the tide against slavery

Douglass and other former slaves were successful in driving home slavery's cruelty. White abolitionists like Garrison and Theodore Dwight Weld could speak against slavery as observers, but Douglass and his fellow escaped slaves spoke from personal experience of their suffering.

Douglass would later meet Harriet Beecher Stowe, who drew from his speeches and writings, along with Weld's powerful book *American Slavery As It Is*, to write her famous antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. Through the efforts of like-minded men and women, the message about slavery would find its way into the hearts of those who were yet uninformed or willingly chose to ignore the issue.

A deeply religious person in his teens and early adulthood, Douglass was later ordained a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church at New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he served until 1841.

### Born to a life of slavery

Frederick Douglass was born Feb. 17, 1817, to a



slave on a plantation in Tuckahoe, Maryland. Frederick was separated from her in infancy and saw her only four or five times. Douglass, whose slave name was Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, never knew his father. Shortly after his mother's death, his master, a Capt. Anthony, sent him to Baltimore to work for Hugh Auld, who hired him out to a ruthless taskmaster, Edward Covey.

In his youth Douglass was often whipped and beaten. At age 16 he fell faint with sunstroke in a field and was kicked and beaten by Covey until his head was gashed and bloodied. Shortly after, he began to make plans to escape.

His first attempt, in 1833, failed. Five years later, with the help of friends, 21-year-old Douglass escaped to New York City. He eventually settled in New Bedford and changed his name from Bailey to Douglass to elude authorities.

After his marriage to Anna Murray and the birth of two of their four children,

worked toward ending the importation of African slaves to the United States and British overseas possessions. By 1804 states north of Maryland had abolished slavery. In 1807 slave trade to the British colonial possessions was ended, and in the same year the United States began prohibiting importation of slaves, although slave smuggling continued until 1862.

Slavery persisted in the plantations of the South, where it had become a social and economic institution, especially in the early 19th century with the onset of the profitable cotton-based agricultural economy. But, as the century progressed, American abolitionists abandoned their gradual approach to eliminating slavery in favor of calling for its immediate abolition.

### Abolition gains ground

The religious and moral fervor of preachers and professional orators gave new life to the abolitionist movement

degradation had not yet struck home to the general public.

Weld had been preaching about the immorality of slavery at Cincinnati's Lane Seminary in 1834 and counted among his converts the preacher Henry Ward Beecher and his sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose powerful antislavery message in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* helped propel abolition.

In 1841, when Frederick Douglass joined the ranks of the abolitionist orators, the

## The abolition movement in America brought together black and white men and women in a common purpose—to bring to an end human oppression.

Douglass was invited in 1841 to speak before the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in Nantucket. His speech describing his life as a slave was so powerfully moving and strikingly eloquent that he was asked to sign on as an agent for the society.

At age 24 Douglass began a brilliant career as an abolitionist and champion of freedom. His powerful speeches and writings later gained the attention of President Abraham Lincoln, who invited him for consultations at the White House. Douglass, in his mid-40s, developed a working relationship with the president and, along with others, helped foster a climate that eventually led Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

### Slavery in the Americas

Historians estimate that 10 million Africans were captured in Africa (many of them by black slave traders) and forced into slavery in North and South America between the 16th and 19th centuries (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition, Macropedia, Vol. I, p. 205, "Africa").

Toward the end of the 18th century, abolitionists in America and Britain

beginning in the 1830s. Led by Garrison and Weld, the American Anti-Slavery Society gained many converts and supporters. However, awareness of slavery's



antislavery message took on deeper impact. Douglass and other former slaves who joined the antislavery speaking tour brought home the plight of people in bondage.

After his presidency, John Quincy Adams, during his second career in Congress, rallied to the abolitionists' cause. He presented to the House of Representatives a resolution providing that every child born in the United States after July 4, 1842, would be legally free and that neither slavery nor the slave trade should exist in the District of Columbia after May 4, 1845. Other congressmen followed his lead as the abolitionists' message gained greater national support.

Blacks and whites working together forged an unusual and powerful message that eventually led to the rejection of slavery through religious, social and political influences. Eventually the Emancipation Proclamation (Jan. 1, 1863), which proclaimed freedom for slaves in all territories at war with the Union, combined with the bloodshed of more than a million casualties in the American Civil War, brought down the institution of slavery. With the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, slavery became illegal in the United States.

Another battle remained to be fought: the struggle for equal rights for the emancipated slaves. Douglass insisted that freedom from slavery was of little meaning without full rights of citizenship, including the right to vote, which was finally guaranteed with

condition of slaves in North Carolina in 1839, citing eyewitness accounts of abuse of slaves. Concluding his narrative, he wrote, "May God look upon their affliction, and deliver them from their cruel taskmasters!" (Weld, 1839, p. 17). This statement is reminiscent of the story of ancient Israel's enslavement in Egypt.

When God called Moses to be His human instrument for delivering the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, He said, "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows" (Exodus 3:7).

The people of Israel lost their freedom and fell to enslavement in Egypt. But God heard their pleas for help: "... Behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them" (Exodus 3:9). By dramatic miracles God brought the people of Israel out of slavery and "passed over" their houses when He struck the Egyptians with plagues (Exodus 12:27).

This miraculous deliverance has powerful implications for us. The apostle Paul reminds us that scriptures "were all written for our instruction, in order that through the encouragement they give us we may maintain our hope with perseverance" (Romans 15:4, Revised English Bible).

The Bible pictures our world as spiritual Babylon, a condition of warped values and priorities by which "all nations" have

become polluted (Revelation 18:3). God calls on all who will hear His warning to break free of their bondage to sin and leave behind the ways of spiritual Babylon. He tells us, "Come out of [Babylon], my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (verse 4).

Just as God anciently brought His people out of bondage in Egypt, He is willing to rescue those who cry out to Him for help in our day. And He will rescue His people from the plagues prophesied to fall on nations in the end time.

Jesus Christ warned His followers: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand

before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). God will intervene for those who truly believe in Him and are willing to ask for His power and direction in their lives.

### **Jesus calls us out of slavery**

Moses was the man God used to bring Israel out of slavery. God has provided another Deliverer for our world: Jesus Christ. He calls on people of understanding to break free of their own enslavement to join the vanguard of those who will help usher in a new way of life at Jesus' return.

When Jesus was verbally assaulted by religious leaders of His time, His replies to them struck a nerve and aroused their anger. He admonished them: "... You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

They angrily responded: "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free'?" (verse 33). Their response was not honest. Although not directly enslaved, these Jewish residents of Jerusalem were living under Roman occupation. They also knew that their forefathers, descendants of Abraham, had spent considerable time as slaves in Egypt until God delivered them under the leadership of Moses.

When these leaders pressed Him further on how He could possibly make them free, since they were not slaves, Jesus offered a stinging reply: "Most assuredly, I say to you, *whoever commits sin is a slave of sin*" (verse 34, emphasis added throughout). These outwardly religious men were bent on killing Jesus (verse 37), yet they claimed God as their Father (verse 41). They were indeed enslaved to their own selfish, sinful nature.

### **An unrecognized source of slavery**

The Bible reveals that our nature prevents us from enjoying the freedom of abundant life promised by Jesus Christ (John 10:10). Paul tells us we are naturally hostile to God and His laws (Romans 8:7). "... The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Teachers of moral relativism offer supposed freedom from moral absolutes but fail to understand the consequences. Peter described this secular approach and its result: "*While they promise them liberty,*

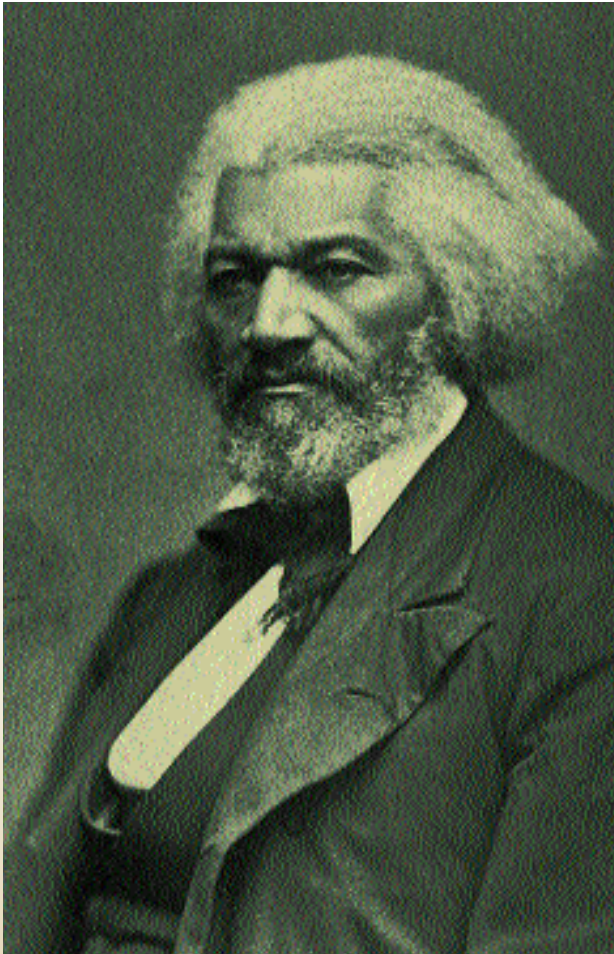
## **The suffering of Frederick Douglass and all those who have ever endured the indignity of slavery will fade like a long-forgotten dream when the Master of all creation returns to earth.**

ratification of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 1870.

Douglass went on to write his autobiography in 1845, which he revised and completed in 1892 as *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. He began his own antislavery newspaper, *The North Star* (later *Frederick Douglass's Paper*), which he published from 1847 to 1860. He later became marshal for the District of Columbia and recorder of deeds and was appointed in 1889 as U.S. minister and consul general to Haiti.

### **Another people called out of slavery**

Nehemiah Caulkins of Waterford, Connecticut, reported in *Slavery As It Is* on the



**Frederick Douglass, a former slave, became a powerful voice for the abolition of slavery in the United States.**

*they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage”* (2 Peter 2:19).

Christians are called out of the corrupting influence of sin, just as ancient Israel was called out of slavery in Egypt. Jesus came to earth to bring a new way of life, the way of truth. He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

If we live according to God’s truth (His Word is truth; John 17:17) and rely on His forgiveness when we fall short, we can be free from the slavery to our sinful nature. It is God’s will that the human race ultimately be set free from this bondage: “. . . The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

### **The freedom yet to come**

Throughout history millions of people have lived and died under bondage—whether in cruel slavery under harsh and

wicked taskmasters; in captivity to false beliefs and satanic deceptions; or shackled by the downward pulls of their own sinful nature. No matter what the yoke of human oppression, the truth of God’s Word and His ways ultimately looses the bonds of the enslaved and leads them to abundant life.

The abolition movement in America brought together black and white men and women in a common purpose—to bring to an end human oppression. Through tireless self-sacrifice they succeeded in eliminating slavery. They set aside their differences long enough to win a battle for the cause of human freedom and dignity.

The suffering of Frederick Douglass and all those who have ever endured the indignity of slavery will fade like a

long-forgotten dream when the Master of all creation returns to earth to begin a new world of freedom, justice, harmony and peace. Read what the Bible promises about that coming world: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

### **A world set free**

However heavy our burdens, Jesus Christ offers us a way to lighten our load. “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29). Many seek this rest by merely professing the name of Jesus, calling Him Lord and saying they love Him. But He expects more. “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’” He asks, “and do not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

He adds, “Not everyone who says to

Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

You need to discover what God’s will is for you. Be sure to write for the free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. These Scripture-based guides will help you find your way out of the darkness and confusion of this world to discover the rest and light Jesus Christ promised.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God reveals the way to freedom from the bonds of wickedness and relief from oppression and heavy burdens by drawing near to Him (Isaiah 58:6-9).

Millions labor under the grinding oppression of war, hunger, poverty and disease. We routinely watch the heartbreaking sufferings of men, women and children on television news. How horrible it is for the people experiencing that suffering! Yet God will set these people free from their oppression when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

The time is coming when Jesus Christ will return to earth and break every yoke of human bondage, freeing humanity from its self-imposed slavery. Then “many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD . . . He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths” (Micah 4:2).

Those who heed the calling of God will be part of the vanguard to help usher in a new way of life at Christ’s return. All people will have the opportunity under the direct leadership of the living Jesus Christ to learn and understand the truth of God’s will and way—and that precious truth will set them free! **GN**

### **RECOMMENDED READING**

God earnestly desires all men and women to be free and to reach their ultimate destiny. But how will that come about? And what is that destiny? Be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. To discover how God will bring true freedom to the entire world, please request *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. All are yours free for the asking when you contact our office in your country, or the country nearest you, listed on page 2.

# Mankind's Choice: Freedom or Slavery?

*Captivity begins with human choice, spirit and character.  
Discover how we can be freed from spiritual slavery.*

by Howard Davis

**T**he struggle for freedom is a popular theme in literature, songs and movies. Recently *The Prince of Egypt*, a feature-length animated film, retold the story of Moses and his efforts to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.

The story of Moses and the Exodus is by no means the only biblical story about freedom from slavery. Strange as it may sound, an even greater Bible-based saga of freedom from slavery is playing out even as we speak.

To understand the struggle against oppression described in the Bible, and to comprehend how mankind will find the path to freedom from slavery, let's go back in time to the dramatic story of the Exodus.

## A drama for all time

It's no wonder that even in Hollywood biblical stories like Israel's flight from Egypt surface and resurface as themes. After all, freedom, oppression and choice are among the great, timeless issues.

Consider why the characters and causes of the Exodus are so attractive to film producers.

For one thing, the Israelites dwelled as captives in an empire filled with monuments so stupendous that they still inspire awe as the most magnificent building efforts of the ancient world.

The first villain in a cast of thousands is an egomaniacal leader possessed with the delusion that he is as powerful as any god. This pharaoh believes he has a divine right to subjugate a race of people on whose backs he has built his empire.

With indifference to their suffering, he treats the Israelites as beasts of burden to be used and discarded. The Egyptian monarch institutes a policy of killing male babies to further degrade and wipe out a

whole generation of Israelites.

The Bible outlines the Israelites' path to freedom, with God setting up Moses as their human leader. Through Moses, and a future Prophet like him (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18), God revealed for all time the nature of divine mercy and love and the ultimate fate of institutions of slavery.

## Confrontation over freedom

Out of a burning bush God spoke to Moses: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come

## The tragic lesson of ancient Israel is an example of human nature's fundamental problem. It teaches one of the most profound lessons of history.

down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Exodus 3:7-8).

At this time the Egyptians, like most of our world, did not know the Eternal God of Israel. So God chose Moses and his brother Aaron to represent Him: "And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do" (Exodus 4:15).

Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness'" (Exodus 5:1).

Pharaoh's response exemplified the all-too-common attitude of men who acknowledge no power higher than themselves: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go" (verse 2).

Pharaoh's instinct was to assert his ostensibly divine authority. His word alone was law. No word, command or law from the

God of Israel would affect his course of action. The Egyptian king was answerable and accountable to no one but himself.

## The captivity of arrogance

Throughout history leaders of people and nations have persisted in an arrogance that places themselves ahead of the commandments of God or the welfare of their people.

As in the story of Israel's road to deliverance, the Bible narrative abounds with examples of man's egotistical obsessions. Tyrants often harden their positions when chastised by God or challenged by their

fellowman to alter their oppressive policies and attitudes.

Mankind and its leaders assume the right to forge society on their own terms. As the apostle Paul concisely put it: "... The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). People tend to rebel against God when He provokes them with His authority.

Pharaoh's reaction, when ordered to allow the Israelites freedom to leave Egypt, was to increase the level of oppression. He would no longer provide straw for the slaves to make bricks. He commanded the Egyptian taskmasters, "Let more work be laid on the men . . ." (Exodus 5:9).

"Also the officers of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten . . ." (verse 14). The Israelites failed to meet the heightened demands of the Egyptian ruler. Matters worsened until only God could

put an end to the Israelites' nightmare.

### God vs. the gods

God powerfully intervened with 10 supernatural plagues to demonstrate His condemnation of oppression, captivity and slavery. *The Prince of Egypt*, with Hollywood's special-effects wizardry, spectacularly depicts the divine interventions, as did

permanently separated and protected His people by means of sacrificial lambs' blood over the doorways of Israelite households. God passed over Israel and spared the Israelites from the death that struck Egypt's firstborn (Exodus 12:13). Israel's deliverance depicted the long-term solution to captivity, oppression and slavery—the sacrifice of “Christ, our

to write: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

When the children of Israel rejected obedience to the law of love expressed in God's commandments, “in their hearts, they turned back to Egypt” (Acts 7:39).

The tragic lesson of ancient Israel is an example of human nature's fundamental problem. It teaches one of the most profound lessons of history.

Although God gave the Israelites physical freedom and protection, they never lost the lust, selfishness and spiritual blindness that had enslaved their minds in Egypt. Israel insisted on choosing its own gods and writing its own rules, a self-destructive tendency that has plagued mankind through the ages.

Israel enslaved itself when it rejected God's rulership and way of life. In more than 800 years of subsequent history, the Israelites chose to “worship the host of heaven” in spite of God's warning that He would “carry [them] away beyond Babylon” if they persisted in their idolatry (Acts 7:42-43).

By 587 B.C., through the Assyrians and Babylonians, God expelled both the House of Israel and the House of Judah from the Promised Land and took them into captivity for rejecting His way of freedom.

### A lesson for us

Is the story of the Exodus pertinent to our era? Believe it or not, our century has been more barbaric than the days of Moses. Only 60 years ago Adolf Hitler was possessed of a satanic arrogance as brutal as Pharaoh's. He plunged the world into the deadliest, most destructive war in history. He came close to accomplishing his intention of exterminating the Jews of Europe.

Our century's slaughter of six million European Jews and scores of millions of Armenians, Slavs, Cambodians, Russians, Ugandans, Rwandans and Chinese shows that barbarity and brutality are alive and thriving. They endure every bit as real as the biblical account of Israel's slavery.

We pride ourselves on our enlightenment compared with the religion of the Egyptians. Most of us no longer worship rivers, animals, insects, stars and planets. Instead, our gods—the objects of our affection and adulation—are materialism, money and sensual pleasures. These are



*The ancient Egyptians' minds were enslaved by their worship of a panoply of false gods, heavenly bodies, animals and insects. Today mankind futilely pursues another assortment of “gods”—materialism, selfish pleasures, sexual immorality and the like—that enslave our thinking and culture.*

its dramatic predecessor a generation ago, *The Ten Commandments*.

Miracle by miracle, God demonstrated His power over the purported gods of Egypt: the Nile River, frogs, cattle and insects. Even the sun, symbol of the god-man Pharaoh, disappeared in a darkness so dense it could be “felt” (Exodus 10:21).

At times Pharaoh seemed to waver. After locusts devastated Egypt's crops and greenery, he said to Moses: “I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and treat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only” (verses 16-17).

But Pharaoh's change of heart was not to last. His self-centered arrogance kept him in contempt of any power greater than the Egyptian kingdom. Again and again his heart hardened.

In the 10th and final plague, God

Passover, [who] was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Egypt did not fall under the protection of the Passover blood. The heir apparent to the throne of Egypt, the firstborn son of Pharaoh himself, died—along with many other Egyptian firstborn—because of his father's arrogance and tyranny.

### Out of Egypt but still slaves

God led the Israelites to and through the Red Sea, severing them from Egyptian slavery by destroying the army of Pharaoh (Exodus 14). After crossing through the sea, Israel began 40 years of wandering that reveals the greatest obstacle to true freedom.

Only a few weeks after they left Egypt, the Israelites refused to enter into a relationship with God by rejecting the way to true freedom: obedience to His covenant based on living His law of love.

God later inspired Jesus' disciple John

# Captivity to Choices and Curses

Our world's astounding technical and scientific progress, coupled with widespread prosperity in recent decades, masks enormous suffering in the world.

Today's mixture of optimistic progress and debilitating misery is as deceptive to humanity as it was to the ancient Egyptians.

But it isn't hidden to God. "Do not be deceived, *God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.* For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption . . ." (Galatians 6:7-8, emphasis added).

Our world is not so far removed from ancient Egypt, which awed other nations at the time of the Exodus. However, although it displayed a dazzling veneer, its core was corrupt. Eventually Egypt felt the consequences of this depravity when God virtually destroyed its society to free His people from enslavement. The Egyptians finally reaped the fruits of their actions.

People are shortsighted. Just because we don't personally and immediately feel the consequences of our actions, we think we can do as we please as long as we please. We don't realize how such thinking leads us to enslavement and its consequent grief.

Consider some results of people's choices. Our decisions and actions can enslave us to suffering.

- By rebelling against God's laws and purpose for marriage, the United States has a divorce rate near 50 percent. Other nations are not far behind. Enslaved to their own emotions, feelings and desires, many lack the character to control themselves. Many couples simply cannot sustain long-term, loving relationships.

- Mental depression continues to afflict an ever-larger portion of the population. Suicide is the second-highest cause of death among young Americans, trailing only accidents.

- Slavery to the deceptive pleasures of promiscuity has led to the abortion of some 30 million American babies, mostly white and of the middle class, over the last 30 years since the Roe-vs.-Wade Supreme Court decision legalized abortion. It also has created a shortage of young workers to support an aging population that will lead to increasing economic problems for the retirement and welfare systems. For a generation America has been killing its own firstborn.

- The American addiction to irresponsible sex and divorce is the leading cause of the nation's growing poverty among women and children. Children brought up in homes headed by single mothers are twice as likely to engage in criminal behavior as those brought up in two-parent homes.

- Sexually transmissible diseases account for five of the 10 communicable diseases most commonly reported to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The centers estimate that one in five teens and adults—45 million Americans—are infected with incurable genital herpes. In addition to health and social costs, such diseases cost taxpayers \$10 billion a year in direct expenses such as Medicaid payments and indirect costs from higher health premiums.

- Worldwide, an estimated 34 million people are infected with the AIDS virus, spread largely through sexual promiscuity. Some 16,000 people contract AIDS every day; a tenth of those are infants infected with the virus during childbirth. AIDS has taken 20 million lives.

- The illegal-drug industry is so massive that, according to United Nations estimates, it generates \$400 billion to \$1 trillion in revenues and accounts for 8 percent of trade worldwide. Drug abuse exacts an enormous financial toll on American society, costing an average of \$300 per person annually in added medical costs, criminal activity and declines in productivity. The United States has an estimated 12.8 million drug abusers, about 6.1 percent of the population.

- American addiction to violence, drugs and theft, in entertainment and lifestyle, holds the nation captive. Prisons can barely be built fast enough to house America's 1.8 million prisoners, a fourfold increase in 20 years. Each imprisoned felon costs taxpayers an average of \$20,000 per year, excluding the billions of dollars spent for police and other law enforcement and the massive federal and state court system.

- In the last decade the American people and state governments have become addicted to gambling. In a stunning reversal of 350 years of thrift and public morality, much of the American population hopes to get something for nothing in the get-rich-quick explosion of government-sponsored lotteries, casinos and gaming resorts.

- Tragically, the United States' legal system based on universal rule of law has been severely undermined in the wake of the lying and immorality scandal at the highest levels of government. If, as a result of the American people's sins and debauched leadership, America's 200-year-old constitutional system melts down, what could be left is a dictatorship not unlike the administration of Pharaoh—or chaos—or both.

God will not be mocked.

—Howard Davis

enslaving to the human mind and culture as any ancient gods.

## Christ, Moses and freedom

At the time of the release of the animated film *The Prince of Egypt*, interest in Moses as ancient Israel's deliverer motivated a cover story in *Time* magazine to ask, "Who Was Moses?" While scholars debate, the Bible speaks clearly about the worth of the timeless work and example of Moses.

Jesus Christ and Moses championed the same ideals and perspective; they both advocated God's way of life. Jesus Himself personifies the godly way. He offers to live within us (Galatians 2:20; John 14:23), empowering us to live according to the divine law that shows us the true way to freedom (John 8:31-32). This is the character—the nature—of Christ to which man must ultimately convert and conform.

Although Christian conversion couldn't come to pass under

Moses, God used Moses to define righteous behavior for all time.

The apostle James, Jesus' half brother, spoke of the law of God given at Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments, as the way of freedom: "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). Paul affirms that God's law "is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12).

But Paul also points out the fundamental problem an unconverted heart has when challenged by God's rule of living. "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Romans 7:14).

God's law is spiritual in nature, as are God the Father and Jesus Christ (John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 15:45). But we are not spiritual.

Humanity has never been able to fully obey God's way of freedom by itself because our inherent selfish nature and sinful ways have held us captive (Romans 7:21-23). Enslaved, humanity is doomed to death like the Egyptians. The devil, "who deceives the

whole world,” ensnares and captures us (Revelation 12:9).

Our carnal desires and motivations imprison us to a blind panoply of lusts and delusions, just like the Egyptian overlords held their Israelite captives. “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16).

The way out of our impasse—the inevitable bondage, oppression and slavery of the evil in human nature—is through the death and life of Jesus Christ. “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Romans 6:6).

### The path to freedom

Christ explained that the way of life God gave to Israel under Moses is the way everyone should live. He told a young man who asked how he could enter eternal life to “keep the commandments.” He listed several of the Ten Commandments to make clear what He was talking about (Matthew 19:17-19).

God’s way of life is possible for us because Christ can dwell in us, which gives us freedom, after repentance and baptism, from sin. God’s law is then “fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4).

Many have been the champions down through history of human triumph over oppression. Mankind’s struggle to throw off oppression is a major theme of the Bible. The Exodus is perhaps the most celebrated such event, changing the course of the history of the world. The story resonates with people everywhere because people grow weary of oppression and suffering and want to live free.

But the oppression, captivity and slavery that grip other people’s minds and behavior do not have to grip you. God calls His people out the embrace of a dangerous and evil world. “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4).

As Moses led Israel out of Egypt, Christ our Passover will come as the deliverer of mankind, leading it to utopia under the reign of the Kingdom of God on earth. And, even now, He is delivering from the bondage of sin those who respond to His call for true repentance.

This is the wonderful news Jesus Christ brought.

“... Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel!’” (Mark 1:14-15).

What will you do about it? **GN**

### RECOMMENDED READING

God earnestly desires all men and women to be free and to reach their ultimate destiny. But how will that come about? And what is that destiny? Be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. To discover how God will bring true freedom to the entire world, please request *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. All are yours free for the asking when you contact our office in your country, or the country nearest you, listed on page 2.

## Who Are We?

Who is behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to anyone who requests it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by people — people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people share a goal: to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the



world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought: the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43, 8:1). Gospel means “good news,” and from this *The Good News* gets its name.

The message Jesus brought truly is good news: the answer to all mankind’s problems. Through the pages of *The Good News* and various booklets we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten the very survival of humankind.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, teaching the truth of God’s purpose and plan

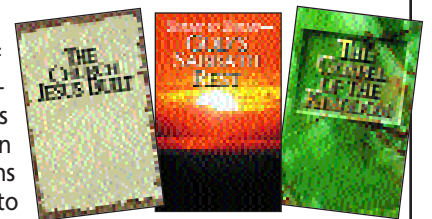
for mankind as taught by Jesus Christ.

Jesus also told His followers, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). He freely shared this message with us; we freely share it with all who ask.

Jesus also commanded His followers to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17). To fulfill this command, the United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, write or call the addresses listed inside. Visitors are always welcome.

For additional information, you can use your computer to access our World Wide Web site on the Internet. The address [www.ucg.org/](http://www.ucg.org/) gives you access to general information, back issues of *The Good News*, booklets and more.

United Church of God  
*an International Association*



# The Euro: Crucial Step for a Future Superpower?

*In January, 11 nations launched the euro, the new European currency. What does this crucial event mean for the rest of the world?*

by Melvin Rhodes

Recently, only four months apart, I made two trips to England. Harold Wilson, British prime minister 1964-1970 and 1974-1976, noted the volatility of governments, nations and economies when he once observed, "A week is a long time in politics." Four months, in the political realm, can be an eternity, as I discovered when reflecting on my second trip.

On my earlier visit, many people in England and on the Continent seemed unaware of the euro. Today, a few months later, the new currency has obviously gained a much wider awareness. European journalism is dominated by news of the euro: its launch, its exchange rates, its effect on members and nonmembers of the European Community, its relationship with the growing world recession, the building momentum for full political union on the heels of monetary union, and Europe's relationship with the world's main trading currency, the American dollar.

*Newsweek's* recent "Euroland" special issue brought up the discussion with these words: "In January, the world will start getting used to a new currency. Whether you love the euro or hate it, know this: nothing so big has ever happened before."

The euro may not be big news on American television, but its impact on America could be greater than any issue currently under discussion. To understand why, we need to consider the economic and political ramifications of the euro.

## Changes in dominant currency

Before World War II the pound sterling was the dominant currency of world trade. Prices of goods traded between nations that had nothing to do with Great Britain were often quoted in pounds because businessmen the world over knew the value of the pound. The Bank of England issued the pound. A saying during the last century, and for much of this one, was "It's as safe as the Bank of England."

After World War II the U.S. dollar became the major trading currency, but the pound continued as a reserve currency and was the principal monetary unit

of trade between nations of the British Commonwealth (one quarter of the world's countries at the time) and some others that had close ties to Britain.

By the early 1970s, however, sterling was no longer able to carry the burden of being a major international trading currency. Britain was too vulnerable to currency speculation and pressures that built up whenever uncertainty over its economy grew evident. The dollar, from that point, became the leading currency.

Today the U.S. dollar is used the world over. Although not the legal tender of many nations, those nations use dollars when trading with other countries. Individuals hoard dollars when their own country's money is unsettled. High inflation rates in Russia and many parts of South America, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific have led people of many lands to trust the U.S. currency more than their own. The dollar is also the preferred currency of international drug dealers, who are merchants in one of the world's biggest businesses.

Because the dollar is so readily accepted, it has enabled its citizens to overspend, a situation exacerbated in recent months by the collapse of U.S. export markets in Asia. The latest *monthly* trade deficit was more than \$15 billion. This means America spent \$15 billion more on foreign goods than it sold.

This situation means that more than half the dollars in circulation are outside of the United States. This makes America vulnerable, as Britain was in the 25 years after World War II. If a sudden international loss of confidence in America occurred (spurred, for example, by stock market instability, another Persian Gulf conflict, a Y2K or pre-Y2K panic or the like), billions of dollars could suddenly be dumped, forcing the value of the dollar down against other currencies. This would result in higher prices for U.S. consumers.

## A new world currency

Enter the euro. The fledgling European currency is the only credible alternative to the dollar. The

*"The arrival of a common European currency is a watershed . . . It promises to be the most important event for the U.S. since communism collapsed"*

(William Pfaff,  
The Los Angeles Times)



economic output of the nations adopting the euro is almost as great as America's. If the economies of European nations considering adopting the euro are also included, it is greater.

More important, the currencies of the 11 countries that support the euro have been more stable than the American dollar during the last few years. This little-known fact was first realized by international-currency speculator George Soros, who transferred billions of dollars into European currencies in September 1998. Even Japan, the third-largest economy, has been selling U.S. Treasury bonds to put more assets into euro-based economies.

Other developments have included a Persian Gulf leader suggesting that the world price of oil should be fixed in euros, not dollars, a decision that would raise gas prices at American pumps should the dollar fall in value. The euro is in its early days yet, but any uncertainty about the United States could trigger major changes on currency markets. Remember what Harold Wilson said: A week is a long time in politics.

The biggest international-currency market is still in London. This could change if Britain doesn't adopt the euro. Some fear that Frankfurt, headquarters of the new European Central Bank, could gradually oust London from its preeminent role. This fear is behind the pressure from many British bankers and businessmen for Britain to adopt the euro as soon as possible. If a decision were made to enter the single-currency union, Britain could be ready in as little as eight months.

Britain is faced with a dilemma. If it does not switch to the euro, it risks economic decline on the periphery of the European Union. If it belatedly adopts the

euro, it will also risk economic decline on the periphery of Europe. Yes, you did read that right. Joining could be as detrimental as not joining. Pressure will be put on euro users to harmonize rates of taxation so that no country will have an advantage over any other. (In America that is something that not even Washington, D.C., has tried to force on the 50 states.)

This would mean higher taxes on British businesses, greatly reducing their competitive edge.

### Wakeup call for the United States

*The New Republic* was the first mainstream American magazine to warn of the dangers of the euro to both Britain and the United States.

"The pragmatic British, as ever, remain wallflowers at the continental dance. But the British see something close up that the Americans would do well to understand from afar. The reason that the French in particular are prepared to countenance such risks is that they seek to convert a united Europe into an *alternative world power* to the United States.

"The economic union of Europe is, in Paris's eyes, a mere prelude to *political* union. And the point of political union is to lessen American influence and involvement on the continent, and elsewhere, by means of an eventual attempt to construct a defense and foreign policy *that may well be antagonistic to American interests*. The more honest europhiles are not coy about this. Nor should they be. But neither should Americans be complacent. If Britain especially is subsumed within a common European defense policy, the United States will lose its only truly reliable European ally" (Jan. 25, emphasis added).

The push for full political union has intensified after the genuine accomplishment of economic union. Note the attitude of London's *Daily Telegraph*: "We should be grateful to Joschka Fischer, the German foreign minister, for pressing the cause of European federalism with an honesty that puts British ministers to shame. In an impassioned speech to the European Parliament yesterday, he warned that the European Union would suffer 'an institutional

heart attack,' unless it moved rapidly to full *political* integration.

"The launch of the euro, he said, had set up a 'dynamic' that would inevitably sweep aside the current political arrangements of Europe. 'The introduction of the single currency is not primarily an economic but rather a sovereign and thus eminently political act,' he said, adding: 'Political union must be our lodestar from now on'" (Jan. 13, emphasis added).

### Slow and steady

In many ways Europe is a citadel, a fortress being built slowly but surely, made to last. That's why the European dream of unity has taken so long to achieve. Past attempts to unify Europe have been through force. This time it is being accomplished peacefully. It takes time as sensitivities of many countries are taken into account.

It is understandable that many U.S. citizens yawn at talk of European unity. Remembering how quickly the Continental Congress brought the original 13 colonies together, they think that if Europeans were really going to unite they would have done so long ago. This failure to understand the difference between Europe and America has led some to believe Europe will never unite.

Europeans have a long history. If it takes a few decades to unite, so be it. They have been working on it for 50 years; now they are in the final stages. The roof is finally being put on the citadel.

In the light of recent developments in Europe, it is important to note a particularly pertinent prophecy, in Revelation 17:12: "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast."

Acceptance and implementation of the euro came slowly and systematically. Europeans have taken more than 40 years to come to this point since the European Economic Community was founded in 1957. It was the Maastricht Treaty earlier this decade that pledged member countries to form a single currency.

Many nations needed to discuss it first. Two, France and Denmark, put it to a referendum, allowing the people to decide directly. For some years each country wanting to join had to adopt economic policies that would enable it to qualify for

*Continued on page 16*

# Forgive, and You Shall Be Forgiven

*How can we remove the pain and guilt of broken relationships?  
How can we learn to practice forgiveness?*

by Dale Schurter

**M**ost of us have experienced the feelings: pain too deep to express; sorrow that does not go away; guilt that holds us captive; bitterness that fuels resentment and hate; accusations and condemnation of others because of the anguish they have caused us.

We know what it's like to feel and act this way. We suspend love and personal responsibility and give in to thoughts and emotions that hold us captive.

When we're sorely offended—yes, even sinned against—our first impulse is to strike back, to exact revenge. But then we recall Jesus' admonition: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you . . . whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matthew 5:38-39).

How do we put these sometimes-troublesome words of Jesus into practice?

There's more: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, *love your enemies*, bless those who curse you, do

forgive your trespasses" (verses 25-26).

How often have we read these Bible verses and been puzzled and even frustrated by them? Yet we need to think of forgiveness as a complete and awesome blessing, one that can free us from guilt and heal our wounds.

Christ tells us that not only *can* we forgive others, but forgiving is a *condition* for our receiving forgiveness from God for our own sins and faults. Forgiveness is a key that unlocks the door of resentment and hate. It breaks the chains of bitterness and selfishness.

History offers a lesson from the time of George Washington, when he was commander in chief of the American colonial army. Church pastor Peter Miller was much loved by his townsfolk, except by one villager who scorned all religion and opposed the church on every issue. No friend of the Americans' cause, this man was arrested for treason and sentenced to die.

Peter Miller walked 60 miles to plead with Gen. Washington for the man's pardon. Regretfully, the general shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I cannot grant your request to spare your friend," he said.

Quietly, Pastor Miller replied: "My friend? He is my worst enemy?"

Amazed, Washington exclaimed: "What? You have walked all this distance to save an enemy? Then how can I do other than pardon him!"

## Reactions to being wronged

It is too easy to react according to our emotions and thought processes and the destructive influence of Satan, who wants us permanently antagonistic toward and estranged from each other.

We react to wrongs in various ways. Sometimes, not wanting to deal with it, we try to ignore an offense directed toward us. In doing so we may convince ourselves that we have forgiven. But then we wonder why the hurt doesn't go away. This is not true forgiveness.

Sometimes, out of pride, we refuse to forgive. Have we

*We need to stay in a forgiving frame of mind. A forgiving attitude is far better than resentment and hate.*

good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (verses 43-45, emphasis added throughout).

We see, then, that a beginning point for the healing process is to actively follow the advice and direction of Jesus Christ.

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him . . ." (Mark 11:25).

The stakes couldn't be higher. Jesus went on to say we must forgive others so "your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." He adds, "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven

ever thought that someone's misdeed was simply too great to be forgiven? Yes, we *would* forgive, we say to ourselves, but first the offender needs to learn a lesson.

Or maybe we're just too hurt to consider forgiveness. If we feel this way, our own foolish pride, as it is often rightly called, prevents us from forgiving.

But God's Word does not make such allowances. "Do not repay anyone evil for evil," wrote the apostle Paul. "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head'" (Romans 12:17-21, New International Version).

Consider the example of Paul's forgiveness and his admonishments toward the brethren at Corinth to forgive a member they had earlier expelled from the congregation for his sins.

"The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him," wrote Paul. "Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him" (2 Corinthians 2:6-8, NIV).

We need to stay in a forgiving frame of mind. The quiet peace that comes with a forgiving attitude is far better than debilitating resentment and hate.

### Steps to forgiveness

From the mind and heart, in word and deed, we should be able to say, "I forgive everyone who has hurt me or wronged me." We should forgive, then promptly forget, the transgressions of others—remembering only the lessons learned.

We must keep in mind why Christ had to shed His blood. It was "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28, NIV)—our sins as well as the sins of others. "... Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22, NIV).

Our conscience, mind and heart can change. The blood of Christ really can purge our minds from dead works (Hebrews 9:14)—our own misdeeds and those of others.

We must tell ourselves to forgive, and we must talk to God about it. We may also have to ask God's help for the resolve to forgive.

Just as faith without works is dead (James 2:26), halfhearted attempts that result in superficial forgiveness without the necessary follow-through are also dead. Such an approach just will not work. You will not find yourself free from the captivity of pain and guilt. Healing cannot begin, and you will not experience peace of mind, unless you fully forgive.

Remember, God will not allow trials to come upon you that are more than you can bear. He will always provide a way of escape, a method of handling the problem. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Forgiveness is a God-given way of escape. It's available if we choose it and act on it. Or we can decide to remain captive to our feelings. Do we sometimes ask God for comfort and healing while rejecting the means for achieving the healing that He provides? Do we forget that emotional and spiritual

## *Forgiving does not condone wrongdoing. But it does require sympathetic understanding of the reasons for the transgression and a willingness to help the guilty one.*

healing requires *active* forgiveness, faith *with* works?

### Fruits of forgiveness

Make no mistake. Forgiving does not condone wrongdoing. Nor does it mean that an offender will get off scot-free. But it does require sympathetic understanding of the reasons for the transgression and a willingness to help the guilty one.

You may begin by saying to yourself, "I forgive." Maybe you will also speak the person's name. Maybe you will first think it, then say it aloud. Then say it to God. Then, in the appropriate circumstance, say it to the person who wronged you.

As we grow in practicing forgiveness, we are released from the guilt and pain that grip us. We begin to heal as soon as we forgive. Healing is not dependent on whether the offender repents or says he is sorry; it begins with "I forgive you."

Not only do we begin to cast off our suffering and sorrow, we are guaranteed forgiveness of *our* sins whenever we repent.

When we ask God's forgiveness, we should accept His forgiveness to free us from the guilt and anguish our sin has caused.

"If we confess our sins," writes John, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

That forgiveness is complete. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow," God tells us (Isaiah 1:18, King James Version).

Through King David God says: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:11-13).

Christ's promise that if we forgive others God will forgive us should encourage us. Christ guarantees us that "all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23). We should act on that promise and put the power of forgiveness into action.

### Jesus' prayer teaches forgiveness

Let's remember the importance of for-

giveness as shown in the model prayer Jesus gave us to emulate. "Our Father in heaven, . . . forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:9-12).

*Forgive* here means literally "to send forth" or "send away" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "Forgive").

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (verses 14-15, NIV).

In practice, it's easier to forgive someone if you don't obsessively meditate on what the person did. Catch yourself before you begin to fall into problems caused by bitterness, hardheartedness or pride. If you cannot forgive and forget, you can end up bitter and lonely.

Also ask God to forgive the person for his sin and to bless him and lead him, with mercy and patience, to repentance. You can become a partner with God in pursuing the wrongdoer's forgiveness and restoration.

Remember that Jesus Christ suffered far more injustice than we ever will. Although He was deeply hurt by His enemies and friends alike, He did not worry about His own feelings. He never let pride or self-pity sway Him. His concern was for others; He wanted to save them from their own mistakes and sins. He never ceased loving those who treated Him spitefully. In all He endured, He patiently waited on God for the reconciliation of mankind. He expects the same of us.

### Daily forgiveness in action

A writer once asked Gene Tunney, the world's champion heavyweight boxer, "How did you get a body like that?"

Tunney replied, "Every single day I push against tremendous resistance, and it sculpted my body into what you see today and made me a champion."

Every day we should practice resisting any temptation to be unforgiving so we can be sculpted by God into a champion. We should desire to be a champion not so we can receive an earthly reward or title, but so we can gain an eternal one.

Are you prepared to forgive from the heart every day, even "seventy times seven" times a day? (Matthew 18:22). God is always ready to forgive. "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive . . ." (Psalm 86:5).

Forgiveness helps create a bond of love on a godly level. Sometimes it's difficult to forgive. Yes, offenses can hurt, and what if the offender isn't sorry? But with Christ in us (Galatians 2:20) and God with us we can forgive. Remember, it was "while we were still sinners" that Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Forgiveness does not come naturally to us; we must *learn* to forgive. When we practice forgiveness daily, it becomes a habit with us. It sweetens our life and glorifies God. It releases us from the captivity of our hurts.

As Jesus Christ was crucified, one of His last acts was to express love and mercy toward others: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus forgave His unrepentant torturers and murderers, setting us a perfect example of forgiveness. We who have sinned, whenever we are sinned against, must forgive our transgressors. When we do forgive, and as we repent of *our* sins, God guarantees us full forgiveness. The blood of Christ pays for our sins. Healing of our anguish, grief and guilt will follow. Liberty from captivity is sure.

With God's willing help, you can do it. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. **GN**

# The Euro

*Continued from page 13*

membership in the economic union. It was a carefully orchestrated, well-planned project. One mistake and the whole thing might have collapsed.

### Prophecy waiting for fulfillment?

Revelation 17:12 suggests the adoption of the euro could also be the means of achieving full political union. Ten nations (or small groups of nations) will decide on full political union.

From the wording of this verse and in view of the euro precedent, it appears these 10 nations may simultaneously hold elections to decide on the issue of European

political union and to choose the governments that will forge them into the United States of Europe. This could mean 10 countries would change their leaders at the same time with the intent that the leaders then choose an overall federal leader.

At some point a union of nations, led by 10 leaders and a supreme leader, will transform into the aggressive beast power prophesied in the Scriptures. Perhaps this transformation will be driven by external threats that a democratic system cannot handle. Time will tell.

*The New Republic* is right. A new superpower is in the final stages of coming together. Two centuries of Anglo-Saxon domination of the globe may draw to a close. The world will never be the same. **GN**

## Unforeseen Consequences?

Could Europe's new currency unit, the euro, and the economic union behind it have unexpected and dangerous side effects? Yes, says Martin Feldstein, professor of Economics at Harvard University and president of the National Bureau of Economic Research. In an article titled "EMU and International Conflict," published in the November 1997 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, he states that, far from being only a European concern, the new monetary unit may well contribute to international economic instability as well as political turmoil and conflict.

Feldstein believes that the transition to the euro may well bring about two unexpected results: an increasingly contentious and perhaps only short-lived union among European participants, and conflict between Europe and other countries, including the United States. He presents the following scenario: Existing disagreements on goals and methods of monetary policy among European Monetary Union (EMU) participants would be aggravated when normal business cycles raise unemployment in any given country (Europe has a notoriously high and tenacious unemployment rate). This would cause a rise in inter-European distrust, which would be compounded by unrealized expectations about power sharing, as well as both domestic and international policies.

Particularly important to watch are the relations between France and Germany: "What is clear," writes Feldstein, "is that French aspirations for equality [with Germany], and a German expectation of hegemony are not consistent. Both visions drive their countrymen to support the pursuit of EMU, and both would lead to disagreement and conflicts when they could not be fulfilled." As to the smaller EMU countries, Feldstein maintains they will become frustrated by the increasing dominance of the heavyweights in deciding not only foreign but also domestic policy for the European Union (EU).

"There is no doubt that a Europe of nearly 300 million people with an economy approximately equal in size to that of the United States could create a formidable military force," writes Feldstein. He then asks some chilling questions: "Might a stronger Russia at some time in the future try to regain control over the currently independent Ukraine? Would a stronger, unified EU seek to discourage such action by force? Could that lead to war between Russia and the EU? How would a strong and unified Europe relate to other nations in the vicinity, including those in North Africa and the Middle East, and the Muslim states of the former Soviet Union, which are important or potential sources of energy for Western Europe?"

As to the United States, it would no longer be able to count on Europe as an ally in its relations with other countries: "The Europeans, guided by a combination of economic self-interest, historical traditions, and national pride, may seek alliances and pursue policies that are contrary to the interests of the United States." Feldstein does not speculate on how adversarial these particular relations could become, but concludes on a note of uncertainty and potential menace: "If EMU occurs and leads to such a political union in Europe, the world will be a very different and not necessarily safer place."

—Joel Meeker

**S**teve was popular. He was 6 feet tall and a good basketball player, and he could play the piano. He made good grades and had a great personality. He was a good listener and conversationalist.

But what set him apart more than any of his natural talents was something that must be cultivated. That something is called character.

Steve was different from most teenagers because he exhibited good character, especially when his peers made fun of him for not breaking rules. I watched him on occasion, and during those times I could see his inward struggle as his friends sometimes ridiculed him for obeying the rules.

self-discipline and fortitude.

The character of a person is his inner makeup. Many young people don't think about character, good or bad. Younger people in our society would probably prefer this slogan: If what I want to do doesn't hurt someone else, then it's okay!

Teens pick up on this outlook and adopt it as their own. But is this a good test for you or anyone else?

### **The downside of cheating**

Suppose someone cheats on a test. If no one sees him cheat, can his dishonest act hurt anyone else?

Cheating can hurt the honest person who has taken the time to prepare for that test. If the test is graded on

# Does Character Matter?

*In a world in which most people take the easy way out, is it worthwhile to do things differently?*

**by Jerold Aust**

It hurt Steve to sacrifice his friends' acceptance and friendship because of his values. He didn't hold to his values for just a day or a week. He held the line throughout his youth. I felt for him because I knew how much he wanted his friends' acceptance.

Although he suffered at the hands of his fellow teens, he didn't cave in. He knew character matters.

Steve's story—of a teen who placed more value on building good character than his friends' acceptance—holds lessons for all of us. Does character matter to you?

### **What is character?**

Today character isn't a priority with many people. Try talking about character to your peers and you will see from their reactions how odd you look to them. That's not to say there aren't teens who don't value good character. Some, like Steve, dedicate themselves to living exemplary lives in an increasingly immoral world.

What qualifies as good character? Further, should it be important enough for you to shoot for it, especially if it sets you apart among your friends as a little strange?

Here's the definition: Character is a distinctive trait, a pattern of behavior, that shows moral strength,

a curve, the one who cheated and got a good score thanks to someone else's paper might bring down the score of someone who worked hard to get a better grade. If others see the guilty party cheating, and he (or she) gets by with it, his cheating can influence others to cheat on future exams.

The student who cheats hurts himself in the long run. He destroys his own character, though he might not realize it. If he continues to get away with cheating, he will set a pattern that will adversely affect his relationships for the rest of his life. It can also encourage him to cheat in other endeavors and against other people. If he continues to cultivate this kind of behavior, he will eventually begin to cheat in other of life's activities and wind up in bigger trouble.

Those who begin a pattern of continually taking shortcuts, of appropriating the efforts of others rather than succeeding through their own hard work, will eventually come face to face with reality. Most of us have heard the phrase "You reap what you sow" but probably didn't realize it comes from the Bible (Galatians 6:7). Our actions eventually *will* catch up with us.

I've visited with people in prison who told me they

began their lives trying to get something for nothing. Granted, such behavior doesn't automatically destine teens for jail, but repeated bad behavior reaps destructive consequences.

### A case in point

A few years back I was in a class with about 15 young people. The teacher told the class that, if she caught anyone looking on another paper, that person would automatically fail the test. As the test began, I assumed no one would take the chance.

I was wrong. Shortly after she left the room, a couple of students began discussing the test, and two of them asked their friends if they could copy their answers. I witnessed more cheating in that classroom in that one hour than I had ever seen. I'm sure part of the problem was the tenor of the times. But what surprised me most about this overt lack of character was the students' brazenness and indifference. I mentioned this to one of them; he laughed about it and then promptly ignored me.

Someone who would cheat on a test demonstrates he has little regard for building good character. Such an attitude can shape and mold someone for the rest of his life, and its effect on other people is not to be minimized. I noticed that, during the six tests we took in that class that semester, more and more students followed the ringleaders' examples.

"If it doesn't hurt other people, it's okay

## *Those who begin a pattern of continually taking shortcuts, rather than succeeding through their own hard work, will eventually come face to face with reality.*

to do it," they, in effect, said. The problem with that philosophy is that our actions do affect other people, as well as our own character, especially during our early, most impressionable years.

### Character forms early

Our minds—especially when we're young—are malleable. Whatever we have read, heard or seen is recorded on the soft clay of our minds. Pediatricians acknowledge that much of a young person's attitude and outlook are shaped by age 5. Afterwards much of our life's perspective has been molded, and much of what comes later is window dressing. As Alexander Pope wrote: "'Tis education forms the common mind: Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd."

Parents especially, but also their young peers, imprint children's minds. If people we admire show evidence of high moral character, it's likely we too will exercise good character. Our friends' words and actions profoundly affect our lives.

Still, teens can turn their lives around and exhibit good character based on two things: knowledge and desire. Your teen years offer you an opportunity. The period between 13 and 19 years of age represents the best time for a young person to make behavioral decisions that develop moral character.

Before your adolescent years, your actions were primarily based on others' influence. During your teens, though, you can exercise the capacity to choose, on a daily basis, the type of character that will serve you best. *Knowing* the basics of good character is half the battle. The other half is a strong desire to follow through with *doing* what's right. Practicing what's right in life guarantees you ultimate happiness, security and success.

Most parents want their children to have good character. They know that high moral standards will serve their teens well in their later years, and their principled behavior makes life easier for parents.

### What do you want?

But what about you? Why should you personally want to build and exercise good character? That depends on what you want out of life. Do you want a happy, secure and

successful life? Most teens do. But how to achieve this is not always apparent.

Know this: If you're a teenager, you will not remain a teen for long. Sooner than you think you will enter your 20s, perhaps go to college and maybe get married and have children. You will age, just like the rest of us. When I was ages 14, 15, 16 and 17, I thought time stood still. Everything moved so slowly; I thought I would never enjoy the things I saw adults enjoy every day.

Boy, was I wrong. Now I'm a little older. I've attended college, married and had children, and—you guessed it—I've aged! I find time flying by like a falling star in the night sky.

An old German proverb says that we're too soon old and too late smart. Another

axiom advises that youth is wasted on the young. Both sayings suggest that youth would be better spent on the wisdom that comes with age.

Regardless, no one can easily change the course of life's main events. Soon you will experience the same things your parents did. But you are ahead of the game if you will make right character choices today. This involves sacrifice. When you begin noticing the differences between good and bad choices, you can start changing your character for the good. You will be happier, you will feel more secure, and you will succeed more often in the things that add meaning to your life.

### Character's ultimate source

I don't know what role God plays in your life, but I'm guessing that you—like everyone else—have given Him some thought. If you've thought about Him, you may have wondered if He cares about you.

Rest assured that He does care (Luke 12:6-7), and He cares about your character. God is the ultimate source of righteous character. The Bible makes this clear (James 1:17).

The Bible also reveals stories of young people who took a stand for God early in their lives. Each instinctively understood that character matters.

A young king named Josiah was one of these (2 Kings 22). At age 8 he was crowned king of Judah. He had already been taught that God's laws make for a happy and secure life, but he had to make the decision to follow them. The many adults who surrounded and clearly outnumbered him did not obey God's laws. In fact, they were at the other extreme: worshipping idols.

Young Josiah recognized that his decisions would not be popular among the citizens of his kingdom, but this didn't deter him. He set himself to rid the land of anything that offended God. This approach ultimately inspired his people, and they respected the young ruler for standing up for what was right.

Josiah eventually became a great king, and God honored him as an example for people down through the ages to follow. The character that made him a truly great leader was formed during his youth.

### How can you improve your character?

Few teens have to face the responsibilities of a king. But every teenager can exercise character similar to Josiah's by developing

confidence and inspiring other people to uphold godly principles and behavior. When you show high moral character you ultimately gain the respect of your peers, teachers and parents.

Success in life is directly related to right character. Let's notice a few ways you can be successful.

• **Get the big picture.** Everyone is challenged every day. Successful people see beyond their smaller problems. They grasp the big picture.

It's how we handle minor crises that often makes the difference between our success and failure. If we are discouraged by the negative influences in our lives, we dedicate our existence and energies to struggling with them. But, if we focus on a greater goal, something that promises better things in life for us and others, most of the small, negative, everyday crises will melt away.

By recognizing that most of our challenges are temporary, we can use our energies to a much greater advantage, focusing on and taking the right steps toward a much greater goal.

For instance, if you desire to teach or be a medical doctor or train to be an astronaut, you will focus more of your attention and energies thinking about, envisioning and working toward your goal. The minor dilemmas of your life will be appropriately placed within a greater, grander context and as such will not occupy and waste so much of your valuable time and energy.

So envision a bigger picture in your life, specifically concerning your career. The Bible says we are what we think (Proverbs 23:7). If you focus on the bigger picture, the smaller annoyances will assume their proper, minor roles. A proper focus will take you a long way toward successfully negotiating your teenage years and setting you on a long-term path of ultimate success.

• **Focus on doing right.** Like the first point, above, doing the right thing requires focus. When you keep your eye on doing right things instead of allowing others' faulty character to shape your thinking, you will rise above mind-draining, mundane, body-debilitating activities. You will immediately notice a difference in outlook. You do not have to let the negative influence of others rob you of the good things in life. Remember King Solomon's wise observation: "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20).

Your life is like money in the bank. If

you deposit character into your life's reserves, you'll grow rich in good character. And good character leads to all kinds of desirable rewards: happiness, security and, yes, even material goods and money. So focus on doing the right things today and you will be rich in character (and other good things) tomorrow.

• **Don't worry that some people will not appreciate your character.** When you make right decisions, realize that your example may cause some of your peers to become aware of their own bad habits. Therefore they may resist you and even make fun of

## *What about you? Why should you personally want to build and exercise good character? That depends on what you want out of life.*

you. But, if they ridicule you for doing the right thing, they are only tacitly admitting that they are uncomfortable with their own behavior, that your example is forcing them to see their bad habits. Do not let this deter you. Just know this will happen, and understand *why* it will happen.

Teens who rise above habitual bad behavior are achievers. You are not responsible for your friends' behavior that causes them embarrassment. They are responsible for their own bad habits. Also realize that, the more you make character-building decisions, the more others can be positively influenced by your example.

Exemplary behavior may occasionally require some sacrifices. But the compensation for following the straight path will bring great rewards later. Happiness is achieved one step at a time.

• **Never give in!** When you set yourself to build good character, some of your peers will try to influence you to quit doing what's right to do. During World War II, when Britain was threatened by a powerful adversary, Germany, Winston Churchill inspired his fellow citizens with these timeless words: "Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense."

Why was Prime Minister Churchill so intent in his exhortation? Because he knew that perseverance counts, especially in worthwhile pursuits. If you know to do right and you do it in spite of scorn and ridicule, in the end you will win. You will see rich rewards come to you in dramatic ways. You will be amazed how the good character you

build while a teen will reward you in your 20s and 30s.

### **Character pays off**

This brings me back to Steve's story.

Steve never gave up. Sure, he had occasional doubts, like everyone else, because, after all, he was human. But Steve had the big picture. He was focused on doing the right things, he accepted that his peers would not appreciate him rocking their boat, and he didn't give in.

Steve is a living success. The character he built as a teen serves him well to this day,

and it will for the rest of his natural life and in the next. He went on to earn master's and doctor's degrees. He married, and he, his wife and child are dedicated to living the right kind of life, one that is governed by what God thinks, not by others' bad character. They teach their son the benefits of good character, and he will be a teen who practices good character and has a head start in life. This pattern will help him to succeed as an adult, husband and father.

You can be like Steve and build good character. All you need is knowledge and desire. We have discussed the knowledge necessary for developing good character. Now you need to act. You *can* do it. Like He helped young King Josiah, God will help you do the right things in life if you set your hand to do them and ask for His help.

The ultimate source of life, Almighty God, says that character matters. Good character will make the difference between a life of bringing painful frustrations on yourself and experiencing a successful life. Take charge of your life, and make character count. **GN**

### **RECOMMENDED READING**

There is a fundamental guide to conduct that defines right thought and character. If you'd like to understand and live by God's guide to human behavior, request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments*. It's free for the asking at the address in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2.



# An Overview of Condi

## 1998: The world's most disastrous year

Last year was the most naturally disastrous on record, with extensive natural catastrophes occurring three times as often as in the 1960s, according to the reinsurance company Munich Re.

A representative of the company, which has monitored the frequency and scope of natural disasters for a quarter century and advises the insurance industry, stated: "Comparing the figures for the 1960s and the past ten years, we have established that the number of great natural catastrophes was three

times larger. The cost to the world's economies, after adjusting for inflation, is nine times higher and for the insurance industry three times as much."

In 1998 an estimated 50,000 people died in more than 700 natural disasters around the world—an increase of about 100 catastrophes over 1995, the previous worst year for natural disasters. Windstorms and floods accounted for 85 percent of financial losses. Most of the disasters struck poor and uninhabited areas, so insurance-industry losses were only \$15 billion. However, that figure was more than three times the industry payouts for 1997.

These worldwide disasters should remind us of Jesus Christ's prophecy of a time of unprecedented worldwide trouble, including widespread catastrophes such as "famines,

*Last year was the most naturally disastrous on record, with extensive natural catastrophes occurring three times as often as in the 1960s.*

pestilences, and earthquakes in various places," before His return (Source: *The Times* [London]; Matthew 24:6-8, 21-22.)

## The dangers of binge drinking

We try to fool ourselves. We may think we drink little alcohol. But the truth is that more and more people are indulging in occasional binge drinking—consuming large amounts of alcohol in one bout—with potentially disastrous effects.

Alcohol has enjoyed a positive press in recent years, which has misled people into thinking that the occasional binge will not harm their health. Nothing could be further from the truth. Consider a Finnish study published in the *British Medical Journal*. "It discovered that men who binge on beer (defined as six or more bottles in a session) have a much higher risk of early death regardless of their total average

consumption. Other risks are also increased."

Generally speaking, most people can benefit from a moderate amount of wine as a complement to a meal. We read in several passages in the Bible that under the right conditions alcohol can be beneficial to our health and general mental well-being. For instance, the apostle Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine to aid his digestion and ameliorate his frequent illnesses.

Yet Scripture also warns against drunkenness. That same apostle also said not to overindulge in wine, and several proverbs warn against the debilitating effects of overdrinking and alcoholism. Binge drinking fits the latter category. (Sources: *The Independent* [London]; 1 Timothy 5:23; Ephesians 5:18.)

## More British and American unmarried couples

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that four million American households consist of unmarried couples living together. In 1970 the ratio was one unmarried couple for every 100 households. In 1997 that number was eight. Further research shows that up to 50 percent of American women in their early 30s have lived with a man outside of marriage bonds.

The climate in Britain is similar. Author Paul Johnson has lamented: "The powers-that-be in our confused society seem to be ganging up together in a direct assault on the institution of marriage. A majority of the Anglican bishops, a body of men always inclined to side with sin if it's fashionable, say that cohabiting couples are just as worthy in God's eyes as unmarried ones." For instance, the bishop of Hereford has urged Christian people to recognize the reality of this social change, and his view is held by many.

But Paul Johnson minces no words in his conclusion: "For those who lay down the moral, or immoral, laws to us today nearly all come from stable backgrounds themselves. That is what got them the positions they hold. That is what makes their advocacy of the liberal—perhaps one should say libertine—approach so irresponsible and cruel. It is to deny to others, who are still children or yet unborn, the advantages we take for granted."

Across the Atlantic, nationally syndicated columnist William Murchison observes: "A sad likelihood is that many of today's cohabiters fear and shrink from commitment. Since 1960, the culture has worked overtime pitching instant gratification to the customers. . . Well, yes, marriage restricts and restrains; it does so in order to liberate. Cohabiters confuse license with true freedom, which flourishes only in a structured environment where rights and duties play off each other, endlessly and elegantly" (Sources: *The Los Angeles Times*; *The Daily Mail* [London]; *The Washington Times*.)

## Killer germs for sale

A team of reporters for the respected *Sunday Times* has uncovered laboratories around the world willing to sell or export lethal biological agents capable of killing thousands of people—in one case for as little as \$1,000.

Posing as representatives of a medical lab in Africa, these





# ions Around the World

undercover men were offered samples of anthrax and brucella by a lab in Indonesia. This Asian plant made no check on their identities or even asked how the lethal products might be used.

Another group of *Sunday Times* reporters was offered

*A team of reporters uncovered laboratories willing to sell or export lethal biological agents capable of killing thousands of people—in one case for as little as \$1,000.*

lethal botulinum bacteria by a plant in the Czech Republic. These two labs—one in Eastern Europe and one in the Far East—are among about 450 germ collectors worldwide. Some 50 offer anthrax; about 35 trade in botulinum.

Undercover British reporters contacted about 20 of these plants, including three in Mexico, Brazil and China. The latter did at least ask for an export license before approving the sale.

What are the implications of these discoveries? Microscopic amounts of these germs can quickly kill hundreds of people if inhaled or consumed in contaminated food products. Rogue countries such as North Korea and Iraq, along with terrorist cells around the world, are suspected of buying and storing these lethal agents. Several British politicians are clamoring for tighter international controls.

A feature article concluded: "The CIA has warned that biological and chemical weapons represent the most urgent long-term threat to the West. There are fears that anyone with a basic scientific knowledge and a backroom laboratory could use the bugs to make biological weapons." (Source: *The Sunday Times* [London].)

## One sixth of world illiterate

A United Nations report from New York stated that nearly one sixth of the world's population is illiterate. It also said that women and girls make up nearly two thirds of the 855 million people who have not learned to read or write. Small wonder that in recent years population programs have tended to center their efforts on women's education. (Source: *The Washington Times*.)

## Growing German power and influence

"The ambition of the Germans knows no bounds." So said Otto von Bismarck, the architect of the new Germany after the unification of Prussia, Bavaria and other principalities in 1871. Nearly 130 years have since passed, encompassing German redivision into two states in 1945 followed by official reunification four decades later on Oct. 3, 1990.

Some members of the British press have traditionally concerned themselves with German ascendancy in Europe. Reported Philip Sherwell from Bonn: "Two weeks after the launch of the Euro, Germany's left-wing leaders are unveiling their blueprints for a federal Europe built on the back of the single currency."

In reacting to German aspirations through a feature

editorial, *The Daily Mail* bluntly stated: "What Germany wants, Germany will get. This is the clear message. And anyone who still has not realised who will rule the roost in the fast-developing European superstate should take note."

Meanwhile Berlin is in the beginning steps of replacing Bonn as the German capital. A British paper noted that "one of the defining symbols of the millennium is the rebirth of Berlin." A massive architectural program is meeting the progressive needs of the burgeoning capital.

These developments in Central Europe have reawakened British concern. Said Tom Bower in a two-page *Daily Mail* feature article: "As Germany takes up the presidency of the European Union, strengthened by the birth of the Euro, unease has spread that the country's powerful influence could resurrect its historical bid for domination."

The shadow of two world wars hangs heavy over Europe. Britain in particular is manifesting unease about German intentions in spite of the nation's visible efforts during the last 50 years to live down the past. (Sources: *The Times* [London]; *The Daily Mail* [London].)

## Leaders forsake the arms race

For decades many nations have spent billions of dollars on bigger and better guns, tanks and military aircraft in a constantly escalating arms race. But the arms race may be over in Ecuador and Peru, whose presidents recently reached an agreement in a century-old border dispute and declared they would no longer spend their countries' resources on weapons. Instead, they hope to raise \$3 billion to build and improve roads, bridges and housing.

Ecuador's president, Jamil Mahuad, has pledged to cut the country's military draft by 60 percent and convert a fourth of his country's 57,000-member armed forces into policemen. "Maybe if God permits I will be the first Ecuadorian president to have a full term without buying arms," he said.

Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori canceled plans to spend \$1.5 billion on additional jet fighters, saying he would

*"Instead of an arms race, we are [starting] a disarmament race."*

earmark the money for housing, education and improving the country's infrastructure. "Instead of an arms race, we are [starting] a disarmament race," he announced. (Source: Knight Ridder News Service.)

## Nordic nations least corrupt

Berlin-based Transparency International reports that the 1998 "Corruption Perceptions Index" indicated Denmark, Sweden and Finland were the least-corrupt nations. This fact-finding group centers on public-sector corruption, including bribes to officials and embezzlement of public funds. It bases the rankings on surveys by other groups including the World Bank and Gallup International. (Source: *The Washington Times*.)

—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley



# The Papacy: Growing Role in Today's World?

*The latest trip by John Paul II to the Americas underscores the popularity of an aging yet dynamic religious figure.*

by Joel Meeker

Crowds of people from all over the United States and some from other countries flocked to St. Louis for the visit of Pope John Paul II in late January. The governor of Missouri and U.S. House minority leader Richard Gephardt joined the president and first lady, who flew from Washington to welcome the pope to the United States.

The schedule of activities of the man considered by the Roman Catholic Church to be the 264th pope included an evening visit to a rally attended by 21,000 youths. To emphasize the youthful nature of the day-long rally, which included Christian-rock music and motivational speakers, tickets were available only to people under age 23.

The mass at which John Paul officiated took place in the huge Trans World Dome,

Church in a special way."

## Papal procession

Just before the pope's entrance, a procession of 250 cardinals and bishops, followed by more 1,000 priests, entered the stadium in organized ranks.

Finally arriving in the specially modified white Mercedes vehicle known as the pope-mobile, John Paul II toured the stadium to rapturous applause. Cries of "Viva Papa" rang out and were met with louder applause. Archbishop Justin Rigali introduced the pope as "successor of Saint Peter and pastor of the universal church."

Amazingly, at one point when John Paul mentioned the name of Christ, I heard a loud shout of "You are Christ" that could be heard through the whole dome. It made me wonder how far some people would go in their admiration of him.

*The Catholic Church, and the papacy in particular, is sure to play a powerful and expanding role in world events as the new millennium dawns.*

organized for the event to seat more than 90,000, with overflow standing room available in the adjoining convention center.

I watched the excitement grow as the crowd swelled. The air grew more charged as the time approached for the pope to enter the stadium. His presence had a powerful impact on his admirers. "He is such a great and holy pope," enthused 22-year-old Sister Marie from the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Martyr Saint George in Alton, Illinois.

Brother Patrick of the Franciscan monastery in Meramec, Missouri, explained, "He can unite the Catholic

During his homily before the mass, he again inspired loud applause when he underscored the Catholic Church's stand for the sanctity of life and against abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide and the death penalty. His comments were aimed at encouraging orthodoxy on these matters among American Catholics, many of whom are known not to toe the church line on such questions.

He encouraged American Catholics to be strong in the "new evangelization." The Catholic Church wants to rekindle an evangelistic fervor among its members as the new millennium dawns. The pope drew his

loudest and most appreciative reaction when he proclaimed the importance of the family unit. "As the family goes," he intoned, "so goes the nation." He seemed to strike a chord with American Catholics.

## Pilgrim popes

This visit to St. Louis was a stop on the 85th pastoral trip outside Italy that Karol Wojtyla of Wadowice, Poland, has made since becoming Pope John Paul II. His travels illustrate a fairly recent trend and expanded role for the head of the Catholic Church. Between 1870, when the papal states in Italy were confiscated, and 1960, popes restricted themselves to Vatican City with an occasional visit to the papal summer residence of Castel Gandolfo. Pope John XXIII broke this tradition with a brief trip in Italy in 1960.

But in 1964 a new view of international papal involvement began in earnest when the newly named Pope Paul VI proclaimed his intention to be a "pilgrim pope." Paul VI began his journeys by being the first pope to visit the Holy Land.

According to Vatican sources, John Paul II has traveled more than any other pope in history, covering more than 650,000 miles in his voyages, which have taken him to every corner of the world and brought him into contact with many nations' leaders. John Paul II has already had 900 meetings and audiences with political figures, including 160 audiences and encounters with prime ministers.

John Paul II has taken the idea of the pilgrim papacy farther than any of his predecessors. "This pope has done more than any other pope as far as being a worldwide pastor is concerned," commented 49-year-old Benedictine brother Michael of Creve

Coeur, Missouri. "The way he connects with all types of people is very impressive."

Sister Anselma of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr Saint George, in Alton, Illinois, expressed her view of the pope's standing as a leader. "The pope is a leader for all Christians, Catholic and non-Catholic" she exclaimed. "He was chosen by God to lead the church, to lead all Christians closer to God and to lead them to greater unity among all Christians."

This evolving international presence of the pope has greatly expanded the influence of his office and position, even beyond the strictly religious arena. Some commentators have wondered whether the Berlin Wall would have come down as soon as it did had it not been for the involvement of John Paul II in defending the Solidarity movement in Poland. This trade-union-cum-civil-resistance organization, with close ties to the Catholic Church and its Polish pope, opened the first successful breach in the monolithic structure of Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe. These events started a chain of events that eventually led to the collapse of the iron curtain and dissolution of the Soviet Bloc.

The modern geopolitical world could have been a quite different place without the intervention of the papacy.

## 2000 a jubilee year

John Paul II's visit to St. Louis was linked with the Catholic Church's preparation for the turn of the millennium. These preparations have been going on since at least 1994, when the pope wrote an apostolic letter, "As the Third Millennium Draws Near," in which he encouraged the church to prepare for 2000 as "the Great Jubilee," a celebration of the 2,000th birthday of Jesus Christ.

In the pope's recent Bull of Indication of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (titled "The Mystery of the Incarnation," issued November 29, 1998), John Paul II inaugurated the final phase of preparation for the celebrations. This jubilee is planned as a time to reenergize the Catholic Church, to unify Christians of various denominations and to extend the influence of the church in non-Christian areas by evangelizing them.

Several points mentioned in "As the

Third Millennium Draws Near" are specifically connected with his recent trip to Mexico City and St. Louis. The Synod of Bishops for America began in Rome in 1997 to discuss issues of importance to the church in North, Central and South America. It concluded with John Paul celebrating a mass in Mexico City on Jan. 23, the day after he issued a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, which sums up the work of the synod and defines the goals of the church in the Americas.



*Pope John Paul II addresses some of the thousands who traveled from all over the United States and some foreign countries to see him during his January visit to St. Louis.*

The exhortation encourages Catholics to be active in "a new evangelization" that includes an inculturation (adaptation to the language and culture of the area) of the gospel, leading to evangelization of, among other key areas, "educational centers." The pope appealed for a dynamic and creative increase in cooperation between the "sister churches" on all continents.

The pontiff ended his St. Louis homily with a special prayer to Mary that illustrated the emphasis the pope places on the revitalization of the church and increasing its scope in the world starting in 2000.

Brother Patrick of the Franciscan Meramec monastery in the St. Louis area thinks the role of the church and pope needs to expand: "He is the pastor of everyone, the spiritual director of many people. He can bring unity among Christians. Nations listen to him. They respect

and follow what he says."

This concept of outreach, led by the pontiff, is on the minds of many Catholics. Brother Michael, a Benedictine monk, expressed the view that "the trend of the traveling pilgrim pope must continue," and "it might even accelerate." He thinks "the worldwide mission of evangelization that the pope has taken on is amazing" and believes the Catholic Church must take the lead among all churches. "The Catholic church should be in the forefront, trying to gather the foundation of the worldwide church."

When asked about the meaning of the third-millennium jubilee, Michael suggested that "the jubilee can be used to redefine us as Christians . . . This is a time to attempt true reconciliation with other churches. The millennium can be used to create unity and cooperation."

He made his point by mentioning the ecumenical prayer service, in which the pope would participate that evening. A rabbi would also participate, Michael pointed out, and "a few years ago that would have been impossible."

## Planned visit to Holy Land

The church's desire to reach out energizes John Paul's plans to visit the Holy Land in 2000 to, as he wrote, "visit the places on the road taken by the people of God of the Old Covenant, starting from

the places associated with Abraham and Moses, through Egypt and Mount Sinai, as far as Damascus, the city which witnessed the conversion of St. Paul." His Holy Land itinerary represents an effort to bring together people of three of the world's great religions: Jews, Muslims and Christians.

As part of the preparation for the 2000 celebration, while in St. Louis the pope placed a seal on the doors in the Cathedral Basilica, as he had already done in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The doors are to remain closed and sealed until Christmas eve 1999, when the doors in Rome and St. Louis will be opened simultaneously. They will remain open until the official end of the following Christmas, on the Feast of the Epiphany, which falls Jan. 6, 2001.

In his homily, John Paul II explained the symbolism: "The great jubilee of the year

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# Is Obeying God Worth It?

*Does it matter whether we take God and His instructions seriously?*

by David Treybig

**W**hat's in for me? When somebody asks us or tells us to do something, we naturally want to know what we can expect and how we will benefit from a particular course of action.

We might ask ourselves how this applies on a spiritual level. What's in it for us if we decide to obey God's instructions in the Bible?

This is an important question when it comes to sex, marriage and religion. Of course, these questions are not new. People have been asking them for a long time.

More than 2,500 years ago the prophet Ezekiel noted that his own people were saying that "the way of the LORD is not fair" (Ezekiel 33:17, 20). Just as in our day, people didn't like being told what to do—even by their Creator. Paradoxically, many would rather choose their own way than follow the path that produces the greatest happiness.

Many people see God's instructions to avoid premarital sex, adultery and divorce (1 Thessalonians 4:3; Exodus 20:14; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:3-9) as hopelessly outdated. Conventional wisdom claims sex is no problem as long as it takes place between consenting adults and as long as the participants take precautions against venereal disease and pregnancy.

As for religion, some of the same people view it as unnecessary as long as one strives to be a good person.

This highly subjective approach tempts some to describe God's way as simply one of many equally valid ways of life. But is it?

In recent years researchers have tried to discover the underlying principles that lead to successful family relationships. This kind of examination is something God Himself approves. Concerning one biblical principle, God says, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and *test Me now in this*, if I will not

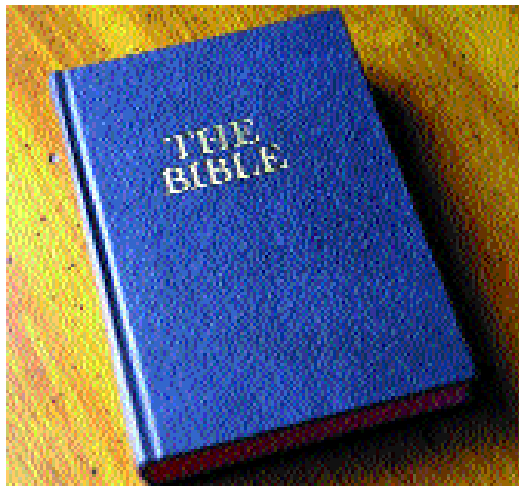
open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows" (Malachi 3:10, New American Standard Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Notice this helpful tip: God recommends *proving* His way by *doing* it. Why? So we can immediately realize the benefits of obedience without paying penalties for disobedience.

## Keys to successful relationships

What are the results of research into family relationships?

Concerning divorce: "A 1989 American Demographics report stated, 'Many studies show that broken marriages create stress, resulting in weight changes, stomach upset, fatigue, appetite loss,



headaches, nervousness, nightmares, difficulty in sleeping, and tension. No wonder divorced men and women are more likely than the married to suffer from chronic conditions, acute illnesses, and injuries" (*Current Thoughts and Trends* review of *Focus on the Family*, September 1994, "Believe Well, Live Well," Marianne Hering).

*What's in it for us if we decide to obey God's instructions in the Bible? This is an important question when it comes to sex, marriage and religion.*

A happy marriage brings more benefits than divorce. Too bad that not everyone is willing to follow the Bible principles that help prevent divorce and promote happy marriages.

What about attending church? A Heritage Foundation study concluded:



“Churchgoers have lower rates of depression, alcohol/drug abuse and criminal activity. Frequent worshippers have longer, happier marriages. Religious women even have better sex lives than agnostics. Regular church attendance reduces a person’s blood pressure by 5 millimeters—enough to reduce the mortality rate by 20 percent

you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). In contrast, Proverbs 14:12 adds, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

What about premarital sex and living together before marriage? “Statistics demonstrate that cohabiting couples are 33 percent more likely to divorce than couples who don’t live together before marriage. Women who are virgins when they marry are far less likely to divorce than women who are not” (*Current Thoughts and*

David Larson, a senior researcher with the National Institute of Mental Health, admitted: “I actually believed the evidence would indicate religion was harmful, but I found almost no empirical data supporting the idea” (*Current Thoughts and Trends* review of “Holy Health!,” Christopher Hall, *Christianity Today*, Nov. 23, 1992).

Mr. Larson explained that studying the effects of religion on health is considered academically incorrect unless the study purports to show harmful effects of practicing religion. In a personal survey of evidence reported by prestigious psychiatric journals, he found that “in over 80 percent of the cases reported in the journals religion was beneficial to the patient.” He also found that “religion also plays a preventive role as well as a curative one. Out of 20 different alcoholism studies, all but one found that religious commitment kept people from developing drinking problems. Without a single exception, 16 studies on suicide indicated that a religious person is significantly less likely to take his or her own life” (Christopher Hall).

### Promise of abundant life

Even though not all will accept it, such research that affirms the benefits of following God’s instructions should surprise no one. Living God’s way enhances one’s life.

Almost 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Later the apostle Paul noted that “godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Perhaps King David summarized it best: “As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven” (2 Samuel 22:31). **GN**

## God recommends proving His way by doing it. Why? So we can immediately realize the benefits of obedience without paying penalties for disobedience.

... Among black teenage girls, religious practice sharply reduces the rate of premarital sex and pregnancy” (*Current Thoughts and Trends* review of *Dallas Morning News*, “Religion Is Good for Your Health,” Maggie Gallagher, Feb. 12, 1996).

A University of Nevada study reported that “black men in prison come almost exclusively from one group—those who never went to church or who stopped going at about age 10” (ibid.).

### God really did know best

This line of research confirms that God’s way really is best. The Bible long ago said as much. Speaking to ancient Israel, God imparted some valuable advice: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against

*Trends* review of *U.S. News and World Report*, May 19, 1997, “Was It Good for Us?,” David Whitman).

Two University of Wisconsin–Madison sociologists came to a similar conclusion after analyzing the cohabitation and marriage patterns of 13,000 adults. “. . . Couples who live together before marriage experience higher levels of marital conflict and do not communicate as well. Such couples were less committed to marriage and saw divorce as more likely than those who had not cohabited prior to marriage” (*Current Thoughts and Trends* review of *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 54, 1992).

With such positive support for God’s instructions for families, it is puzzling why so many disdain the teachings of the Bible.

### RECOMMENDED READING

Can you believe the Bible? Can you prove whether the Bible is truly the Word of God? Is this book really what it claims to be, the ultimate guide to human life and behavior? Be sure to request your free copies of *Is the Bible True?* and *How to Understand the Bible*. If you’d like to understand and live by God’s fundamental guide to behavior, also ask for *The Ten Commandments*. All are free for the asking at the address in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2.

# The Kingdom of Judah: Exile & Restoration

by Mario Seiglie

**T**he *Good News* has traced the history of the Old Testament from Genesis through the captivity of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. This series has shown that archaeological finds have confirmed and illuminated the biblical account. In this issue we pick up the story with conditions and circumstances that allowed the descendants of the kingdom of Judah to return to their homeland.

Although many of the survivors of the Babylonian invasion of Judah were exiled to Babylon for 70 years, they were not forsaken by God. In fact, some of the greatest Bible prophecies were made at that time, not just to give hope to those suffering captives but to comfort God's people throughout the ages.

## Daniel's astounding prophecies

When Judah was defeated by the Babylonians, Daniel was one of the young princes taken captive and educated in Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's court. The details of Babylonian customs and its governmental system described in the book of Daniel fit nicely with historical records and subsequent archaeological finds.

*The New Bible Dictionary* says about the book of Daniel: "The author gives evidence of having a more accurate knowledge of Neo-Babylonian and early Persian history than any known historian since the 6th century BC . . . He knew enough of 6th century customs to represent Nebuchadnezzar as being able to make and alter the laws of Babylon with absolute sovereignty (Daniel 2:12-13, 46), while depicting Darius the Mede as being helpless to change the laws of the Medes and Persians (Daniel 6:8-9). Also, he accurately represented the change from punishment by fire under the Babylonians (Daniel 3) to punishment by the lions' den under the Persians (Daniel 6), since fire was sacred to them" (1982, p. 263, "Daniel, Book of").

During the period Daniel served in Nebuchadnezzar's court, he received a series of prophecies from God. These remarkable predictions described the final years of the Old Testament era, the Intertestamental period, the days of the New Testament and up to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

God revealed to Daniel that four kingdoms would

rule a great part of the world from Daniel's time to the coming of God's Kingdom. Although parts of these prophecies, in Daniel 2-12, are in mostly symbolic language, God does reveal the identity of the four kingdoms.

The first was Babylon, the dominant kingdom of Daniel's time (Daniel 2:37-38). Afterwards would come the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 8:20) followed by the Greek Empire (verse 21). Finally the Roman Empire would arise and defeat the Greeks and absorb parts of the previous empires (Daniel 2:40; 7:7, 23).

Although this final empire would experience periodic declines through the centuries, it would not permanently disappear. Rather, at successive intervals it would revive in the form of several incarnations of the "Holy Roman Empire." God revealed to Daniel that the last revival would be guided by a world dictator and a religious leader who would govern with 10 rulers under them. They would rule until the establishment of the Kingdom of God at Christ's return (Daniel 2:41-44; 8:23-26).

## Prophecy of Babylon's downfall

When Daniel received this prophecy, Babylon's power was at its peak. Nebuchadnezzar could boast of his massive building projects that had enlarged and beautified Babylon. "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" he proudly and rhetorically asked (Daniel 4:30). The existence of Nebuchadnezzar's massive building projects is confirmed by archaeology.

Excavators at the beginning of this century unearthed some of the remains of this vast city. A historian summarizes the finds: "In 1899 the German Oriental Society equipped a large expedition under the direction of Professor Robert Koldewey, the architect, to examine the famous ruined mound of 'Babil' on the Euphrates. The excavations, as it turned out, took longer than anywhere else. In eighteen years the most famous metropolis of the ancient world, the royal seat of Nebuchadnezzar, was brought to light, and at the same time, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the 'Hanging Gardens,' loudly extolled by Greek trav-



**The Ishtar Gate, the main entrance into Babylon, built during the reign of the biblical King Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.), has been restored in Berlin. Enameled tiles, mythical animals, lions and gods embellish the gate, which was dedicated to Ishtar, the Babylonian fertility goddess. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and took the people captive to Babylon, where they spent 70 years in exile as punishment for their disobedience to God.**

ellers of a later day, and ‘E-temen-an-ki,’ the legendary Tower of Babel. In the palace of Nebuchadnezzar and on the Ishtar Gate, which was situated beside it, countless inscriptions were discovered” (Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, 1980, p. 302).

Regarding Nebuchadnezzar, the same author mentions: “Hardly any other monarch in the past was such an assiduous builder. There is scarcely any mention of warlike activities, conquests and campaigns. In the forefront there is the constant building activity of Nebuchadnezzar. Hundreds of thousands of bricks bear his name, and the plans of many of the buildings have been preserved. Babylon in fact surpassed all the cities of the ancient orient: it was greater

than Thebes, Memphis and Ur, greater even than Nineveh” (Keller, p. 316).

It seemed impossible for this great city to be suddenly conquered. Yet Daniel predicted its demise the same night it fell to the Persians. He interpreted the mysterious handwriting on the wall of the palace and told the king: “‘Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians’ . . . [and] that very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom . . .” (Daniel 5:28-31).

About 100 years later the Greek historian Herodotus (484-420 B.C.) confirmed Daniel’s account of the fall of Babylon: “The Persians, drawing off the river [Euphrates] by a canal into the lake, which

was till now a marsh, he [Cyrus] made the stream to sink till its former channel could be forded. When this happened, the Persians who were posted with this intent made their way into Babylon by the channel of the Euphrates, which had now sunk to about the height of the middle of a man’s thigh . . . The Persians thus entered the city . . . and the inhabitants who lived in the central part of Babylon were unaware of the enemies’ presence due to the great size of the city and since they were celebrating a festival. They continued dancing and exchanging gifts until they were suddenly told of their sad fate. In this manner was Babylon conquered” (*History*, book 1, paragraphs 191-192).

### **Cyrus’s acts foretold**

True to Bible prophecy, these events occurred when the 70 years of exile expired. Cyrus the Persian, allied with the Medes, conquered the Babylonian Empire and freed the descendants of the kingdom of Judah who had been taken into captivity. Several prophets foretold the fall of Babylon. Isaiah even mentioned Cyrus by name years before he rose to defeat the Babylonians.

Some 200 years before Cyrus was born, God said through Isaiah: “I am the LORD . . . who says of *Cyrus*, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” and to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid”’

“Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to *Cyrus*, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut . . . I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, *who call you by your name*, am the God of Israel” (Isaiah 44:24, 28; 45:1-3, emphasis added).

In a day when conquerors were ruthless with their captives, Cyrus is known in history as a considerate ruler who offered relative freedom to the peoples previously conquered by the Babylonians.

About a century ago, a clay cylinder inscribed with a decree from King Cyrus was found in the ruins of Babylon. Called the Cyrus Cylinder, it is on display in the

British Museum. Its language is similar to the decree given by Cyrus in the Bible. The main difference is Cyrus's use of Babylonian wording for God. He declares that he was liberating the peoples because a particular "God" had pronounced his name and chosen him in a miraculous way.

Writing from a Babylonian perspective, Cyrus said: "Marduk [the Babylonian name for the chief god] scanned and looked through all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead him. He pronounced the name of Cyrus, king of Anshan, and declared him to be the ruler of the world . . . and ordered him to march against his city Babylon . . . Without any battle, he made him enter his town Babylon, sparing Babylon and calamity . . . I gathered all their inhabitants and returned them to their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled . . . all the gods . . . in their former chapels" J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 1969, p. 316).

### Return from exile

The biblical version of the decree, recorded in Ezra 1, reveals the prophecy's fulfillment: "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.

"Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:1-4).

Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, records the reactions of the Jews when Cyrus entered Babylon:

"This [prophecy] was known to Cyrus by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind

him of his prophecies; for this prophet said that God had spoken thus to him in a secret vision: 'My will is, that Cyrus, whom I have appointed to be king over many and great nations, send back my people to their own land, and build my temple.'

"This was foretold by Isaiah one hundred and forty years before the temple was demolished. Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfil what was so written; so he called for the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon, and said to them, that he gave them leave to go back to their own country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem, and the temple of God . . ." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, Chapter I, Section 2).

Thus the history of the descendants of the kingdom of Judah, the Jews, continued to be recorded in what would become the Bible. However, their brethren of the other Israelitish tribes, taken into captivity earlier by the Assyrians, had by now largely lost their identity in the former Assyrian Empire, just as foretold in prophecy (1 Kings 17).

### Persian period: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

The Old Testament period ends during the era of Persian rule. Several Bible books accurately describe the Persian customs of the time. While the books of Ezra and Nehemiah relate the return of the Jews to the land of Judah, the book of Esther recounts the story of a young Jewish girl named Esther who became the queen of King Xerxes I.

Nehemiah's story begins with his service to the Persian king. "And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king . . ." (Nehemiah 2:1). While the title of cupbearer doesn't sound important today, it was one of the highest government posts of that time.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* explains: "[The cupbearer was] an officer of high rank at ancient oriental courts, whose duty it was to serve the wine at the king's table. On account of the constant fear of plots and intrigues, a person

must be regarded as thoroughly trustworthy to hold this position . . . His confidential relations with the king often endeared him to his sovereign and also gave him a position of great influence" (1979, Vol. I, p. 837, "Cupbearer").

Archaeologists have discovered a list of salaries paid to the highest Assyrian officials. This record reflects the general values of similar posts in the Persian administration. After the commanding general, the prime minister and the palace authority came the cupbearer, who earned the fourth-largest salary in the kingdom.

Nehemiah had enough wealth accumulated when he arrived as Jerusalem's new governor that he had no need to tax the local populace. Indeed he apparently took it on himself to personally provide for a large number of his Jewish countrymen. "And at my table," he writes, "were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people" (Nehemiah 5:17-18).

### Queen Esther saves the Jews

Even though thousands of Jews successfully resettled the territory of the former kingdom of Judah, many remained dispersed throughout the chief cities of the Persian Empire. The book of Esther gives us a glimpse of the influence the Jewish community had in the empire between 500 and 450 B.C., as well as the problems that influence sometimes engendered.

One of the Persian officials, Haman, complained to the king about the Jews: "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain" (Esther 3:8). "And the king said to Haman, 'The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you'" (verse 11).

*Continued on page 31*



# Ezra

## *Spiritually Restoring a People*

by Jerold Aust

**E**zra the priest was a faithful servant of God who helped fulfill God's promises to the remnant of Judah in Babylon in the 400s B.C. His calling was not self-appointed, nor could anyone on his own fulfill the kind of responsibilities to which he was called.

God recognized Ezra as a man of judgment (Ezra 7:25). He was conscientious (Ezra 9:3). His principles led him to resolutely oppose sin. He had a profound love of God's Word and devoted himself to studying it and faithfully teaching God's truth (Ezra 7:10).

Ezra found the spiritual strength he needed through prayer and fasting. He was willing to sacrifice his own needs—and encourage others to do the same—to extol and honor God.

Understanding Ezra's background can help us see how God could use him to bring His people back to wholehearted obedience.

### **Judah restored**

God forgets neither His people nor His promises. In love, He warned the people of Judah that, if they didn't repent of their sinful, rebellious ways, He would remove them from their homeland. When they refused to heed His repeated warnings through His prophets, He allowed the Babylonians to conquer and remove them through three major deportations (ca. 606, 597 and 587 B.C.). Their punishment was 70 years of captivity in a foreign land (Jeremiah 25:1-13).

True to His word, God fulfilled His promise to restore the descendants of Judah after the 70 years.

Zerubbabel headed the first return, which was to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1-6; ca. 536-516). Ezra led a later group in 457. Nehemiah, Ezra's contemporary, returned to rebuild the shattered walls of Jerusalem in 444.

The Bible tells us that Zerubbabel was a prince of Judah in Babylon. He led nearly 50,000 of his countrymen to rebuild the temple. They faced considerable opposition to this monumental project. Zerubbabel and

*When God needed a man of sterling character and strong conviction, He chose Ezra. Ezra means "help," as in helping to restore and reform Judah.*

others got sidetracked. Their focus shifted to building houses for themselves. But the corrective exhortations from prophets Haggai and Zechariah solved the problem. Zerubbabel and his workmen got back on track and completed the temple around 516.

Although the people rebuilt the physical temple, they were still in poor spiritual condition. Then Ezra entered the picture.

When God needed a man of sterling character and strong conviction, He chose Ezra. *Ezra* means "help," as in helping to restore and reform Judah. His example can be encouraging to any who desire to be faithful to God.

Ezra was a direct descendant of the

priestly family that included Eleazar, Phineas, Zadok and Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5). He was "a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses" (verse 6) and an "expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel" (verse 11). In a testimony to his convictions, we read that "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (verse 10).

While in Babylon, Ezra gained the favor of King Artaxerxes, who granted him a commission to return to Jerusalem (this was the second return, 457 B.C.). The king

invited all who wanted to go—Jews, Israelites, priests and Levites—to accompany Ezra to Jerusalem. However, only 1,754 chose to make the journey, compared with 49,897 who had returned with Zerubbabel 79 years earlier.

### **Restoration of the people**

Although the second return numbered fewer than 2,000 people, we must consider that five decades had passed since the completion of the temple in Jerusalem (in 516). Much can happen in two generations. The temple was complete and in





attitude toward Almighty God. The people still lacked understanding. They were not wholeheartedly obedient to God.

God works in a systematic and orderly way. Through the great Persian king, Cyrus, He fulfilled His promise that the Jews could return to their homeland after 70 years in captivity. Next God provided Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple. Finally God set His hand to begin to spiritually restore a remnant of Judah. He used Ezra to accomplish this.

Ezra took a census of those who volunteered to return to Judah and Jerusalem with him. An important and practical reason for the census was to determine the needs for the temple services.

Ezra was surprised—as he considered who could serve in what capacity—that no Levites were present. “And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there” (Ezra 8:15). So he directed leaders of his countrymen to “bring us servants for the house of our God” (verse 17). The leaders then made sure some Levites would return with Ezra for the service of the temple.

Next Ezra needed protection for “us and our little ones and all our possessions” on the long journey back to Jerusalem (verse 21). He was ashamed to ask the king to supply an escort of soldiers for defense against any enemies they might encounter. So he proclaimed a fast, and he and the people humbled themselves before God, asking Him to safeguard them on this dangerous trek. “So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer” (verse 23).

The journey was safe and uneventful. “So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days” (verse 32). Then they gave offerings to God.

### Removing sin

After their offerings, the leaders came to Ezra worried about a significant problem: Men of the remnant of Judah and a few from Israel had taken wives from neighboring gentile nations. This God had expressly forbidden them to do, since such marriages would weaken their resolve to honor God, who had specifically chosen and selected Judah and Israel to represent Him.

people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites” (Ezra 9:1).

These heathen nations worshiped false gods. Were the Israelite men to remain married to their foreign wives, the prospect of false religion again enticing and seducing God’s people was a real and dangerous problem. This, God had earlier warned, was precisely one of the reasons His people would be taken into national captivity unless they repented.

Israel reformed. God had sent Ezra to teach His people His way of life, to reveal to them their sins and exhort them to heartfelt repentance. “Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, ‘We have trespassed against our God, and have taken

pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this’” (Ezra 10:1-2).

Shechaniah encouraged Ezra to take the responsibility and make a decree that Jewish men separate themselves from their gentile wives. “Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath” (verse 5).

Ezra issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to the descendants of the captivity, directing them to gather in Jerusalem (verse 7). The men of Judah and Benjamin came as directed and sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of the importance of the business at hand and because of heavy rain. (This took place in the time of year we would call December.)

Ezra led a confession to God, admonishing the gathered Benjaminites and Judahites and some Israelites to put away their pagan wives. The majority of them agreed to do so and obeyed God’s command through Ezra. After several months “they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan

## Judah’s Return to Jerusalem

**D**ecades after the Jews went into captivity in Babylon, King Cyrus of Persia made a decree (ca. 538 B.C.) that the Jews in Babylon could return to Jerusalem.

“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house [temple] at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:2-4).

The Jews could return to their homeland, their beloved city, Jerusalem, and again honor and worship God there. The temple reconstruction began in 536, exactly 70 years after their first captivity (in 606), as God had promised through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10; 2 Chronicles 36:21).

Zerubbabel led the first return to Jerusalem, of 49,897 people (Ezra 1:1 through 2:70). At least 70 years had elapsed since King Nebuchadnezzar first carried their descendants away. Not all chose to return. Many had put down roots in Babylon and didn’t want the hardships involved in a long journey and being faced with starting over somewhere else. Nearly 50,000 did choose to return to their homeland, and that was enough to reconstruct a temple.

Jealousy reared its head, and Zerubbabel faced threatening opposition. This delayed the temple’s completion for a few years. In the meanwhile, Zerubbabel and others began building their own homes. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah exhorted Zerubbabel and the other builders to complete their work on God’s house, the temple.

It was finally completed some 20 years after it was begun. Although the temple was restored, it would be nearly another 60 years before the Jews would find spiritual restoration under Ezra’s leadership.

—Jerold Aust



wives" (Ezra 10:17). God, through His faithful priest Ezra, had removed a major source of sin from the people. God recognized that His people need to be united spiritually in their worship of Him (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

Although faithful Ezra had helped the remnant of Judah to return to God, they did not remain faithful. Neither had Israel repented and turned to God after Assyria removed its people from their northern kingdom almost three centuries earlier (721-718).

### Another priest to gather Israel

Many of the descendants of the kingdom of Judah are still identifiable as we near the year 2000. The so-called lost 10 tribes of Israel, which disappeared from history after their captivity in Assyria, are also still extant, although not as easily identified, as we near the beginning of the third millennium.

Ezra the priest is a forerunner of Jesus Christ, the High Priest of God the Father (Hebrews 7). Near the end of the present age of man—as promised Christ, our High Priest—a remnant of believers, spiritual Jews (Romans 2:28-29), would not only escape great tribulation (Revelation 12:12-17) but carry on the work God began through Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:14; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

God promised the people of Judah He would return them to Jerusalem, after their 70-year Babylonian captivity, to rebuild the temple and restore proper worship. God similarly promises to return Judah and Israel to their ancestral homeland. Many prophecies show that at Jesus Christ's second coming He will gather the descendants of Israel and Judah from the ends of the earth (Isaiah 11:10-12; Jeremiah 23:3-8; Ezekiel 36; 39:25-29).

"Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," says the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 39:28-29).

These astounding events are part of the good news of the Kingdom of God Jesus Christ proclaimed (Mark 1:14-15). To understand more about the incredible feats Jesus Christ has promised to accomplish at His return, be sure to request *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Your free copy is waiting for you, so please contact our office nearest you listed on page 2. **GN**

## Papacy

*Continued from page 23*

2000 will begin with the opening of the holy door in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. This is a powerful symbol of the church open to everyone who feels a need for the love and mercy of the heart of Christ."

### Television project

In a potentially far-reaching development, a special press conference after the mass announced the start of the Vatican project of Centro Televisivo Vaticano, also called TV Beyond 2000. The conference, conducted by Vatican authorities and telecommunication experts, explained that, in accordance with regulations approved by the pope in May 1998, the Vatican is entering the world of international television broadcasting with its own press agency and television-program production.

TV Beyond 2000 will consist of live broadcasts from around the world inspired by Jubilee 2000 events. The project will involve experimental connections with interactive and multimedia broadcasting tools and is organized with the cooperation of the European Space Agency and television networks in several countries. The project, it was announced in St. Louis, would have an impact on the entire planet.

The next few years may indeed see new doors open to the Catholic Church. The Vatican obviously plans an aggressive program for expanding Catholic influence. The Catholic Church, and the papacy in particular, is sure to play a powerful and expanding role in world events both religious and secular as the new millennium dawns. Your life may well be affected by these events. You need to be aware of their significance.

Biblical prophecy has much to say about the religious and secular state of the world just before Christ returns. The influence of religion is a major topic of those prophecies.

Some of the trends developing today may well be a prelude to the conditions and events of that momentous time. *The Good News* magazine plans to keep you informed about the secular and biblical implications of these events. For greater understanding of some of the religious issues facing our world, be sure to request our new booklet *The Church Jesus Built* from our office nearest you listed on page 2. **GN**

## Archaeology

*Continued from page 27*

As the book that honors her name recounts, thanks to Queen Esther's courage and faith, God miraculously intervened and caused her people to be spared. The book of Esther was obviously written by someone familiar with the procedures and customs of the Persian court of the mid-fifth century B.C.

Much archaeological evidence of this Jewish influence has been found throughout the territory of the Persian Empire. Assyriologist Georges Conteau writes:

"Hundreds of clay tablets have been found dating back to the beginning of the Persian period which deal with a prosperous Jewish enterprise, Murashu and Sons. When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 587 BC, he deported some of the noble families to Babylon, and the Murashu family was among them.

"The family of exiles prospered in the city of Nippur and reached its maximum influence and wealth under the Persian rule of Artaxerxes I (564-424 BC) and Darius II (423-405 BC). Many of the documents of the firm are written in both cuneiform and Aramaic characters so they can be more easily understood by a wider audience. Most deal with contracts, payments or rentals" (*Daily Life in Babylon and Assyria*, 1958, p. 95).

We have already seen in this article that the Persian customs and history of the account of Esther also ring true. Speaking of Esther, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* notes: "The author employs the customary formula for the beginning of an historical account . . . [and] his references to Persian customs show considerable accurate knowledge . . . More recently cuneiform evidence has been found to show that there was a Persian official named *Marduka* (Mordecai) in Susa [Shushan] at the end of the reign of Darius I or the beginning of the reign of Xerxes" (1962, Vol. II, p. 151, "Esther, Book of").

In the book of Esther, Mordecai is Esther's uncle and is a high government official who is ultimately named as prime minister to the king.

We will continue the story with a fascinating era: the Intertestamental period, the time between the testaments, when the events described in the books of the Old Testament history were completed but before the events that introduced the four Gospels. **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.

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