

January 1996

The Good News

The Year

2000

What Will
It Bring?

*The Handwriting Is Still on the Wall • Abraham: God's Friend
The Real Gospel of Jesus Christ • Teach Your Children God's Ways*

From the publisher

With this issue THE GOOD NEWS begins its life as a full-fledged bimonthly publication. The 32-page premier issue (September 1995) generated much interest and enthusiasm. Reaction to its contents encourages us to press on with articles that express clearly the hope that the Kingdom of God affords.

When Jesus Christ came into Galilee approximately 2,000 years ago preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God, people were astonished at His message. In a world that desperately needs good news, that message is still filled with the hope and encouragement it originally held out. Why? The simple truth is that the promised Kingdom of God on this earth is yet ahead of us, but the disciples of that kingdom can experience a foretaste of it now. The Bible's message of a time of "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21) is the great hope of all humanity, though many have never heard about it. THE GOOD NEWS will make that truth plain from issue to issue.

The year 2000 shines like a beacon for many, but centuries' ends often bring frantic speculations. When linked with religion the result can be troublesome and misleading. Our cover story cautions against attaching significance to humanly devised systems of counting years, and finds that the Bible gives balance to the overly excited prophetic imagination. Jerold Aust's contributions this month center first on another aspect of prophecy, what the original and ancient "handwriting on the wall" means for the modern world, then on the Bible patriarch Abraham in what will be a regular feature—"Profiles of Faith."

In a related article, Roger Foster explains what it is to be a Christian in more than name. For the contemporary Christian "Called, Chosen and Faithful" is the logical extension of Abraham's walk of faith.

At the end of a Roman calendar year and the beginning of a new one the thoughts of many turn to the birth of Christ. Mario Seiglie invites us to reconsider the Christmas tradition, while Scott Ashley expands our understanding of Christianity's founder. Jesus' ministry was a brief 3½ years, yet it forever changed the world. The essential message that Jesus brought, however, has been poorly expressed by some who claim to understand. Bill Bradford explores the biblical truth in "The Real Gospel of Jesus Christ," and our regular Bible study feature focuses on the Kingdom of God.

One of the more challenging aspects of human life is the raising of children. What does the Book of Books have to offer in this endeavor? Someone wisely said that child rearing is a 20-year experiment. We all make our mistakes; we can all have successes. Bill Jacobs discusses "Teaching Your Children God's Ways." From the young person's perspective, the view is different. Dean Wilson surveyed a group of teenagers and discovered some very perceptive young minds. "What I Expect From My Parents" is heartwarming and direct. Finally the compassion so often lost in the rush of everyday events finds expression in Joanne Rutis' "Act of Kindness," Joan Osborn's "In the Shadow of Death" and Abbi Plagenza's "We All Have a Lot to Learn."

THE GOOD NEWS' staff members are here to serve you. Let us know what you would like to see in the magazine. We can't fulfill every request, but with the Bible as our base, there's a long future ahead for our writers!

—David Hulme

Good News

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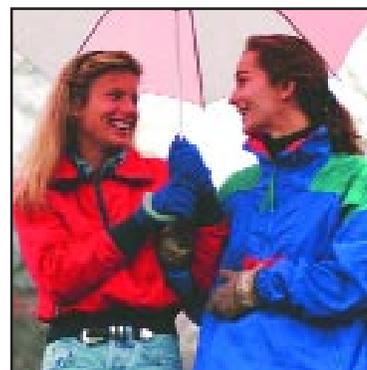
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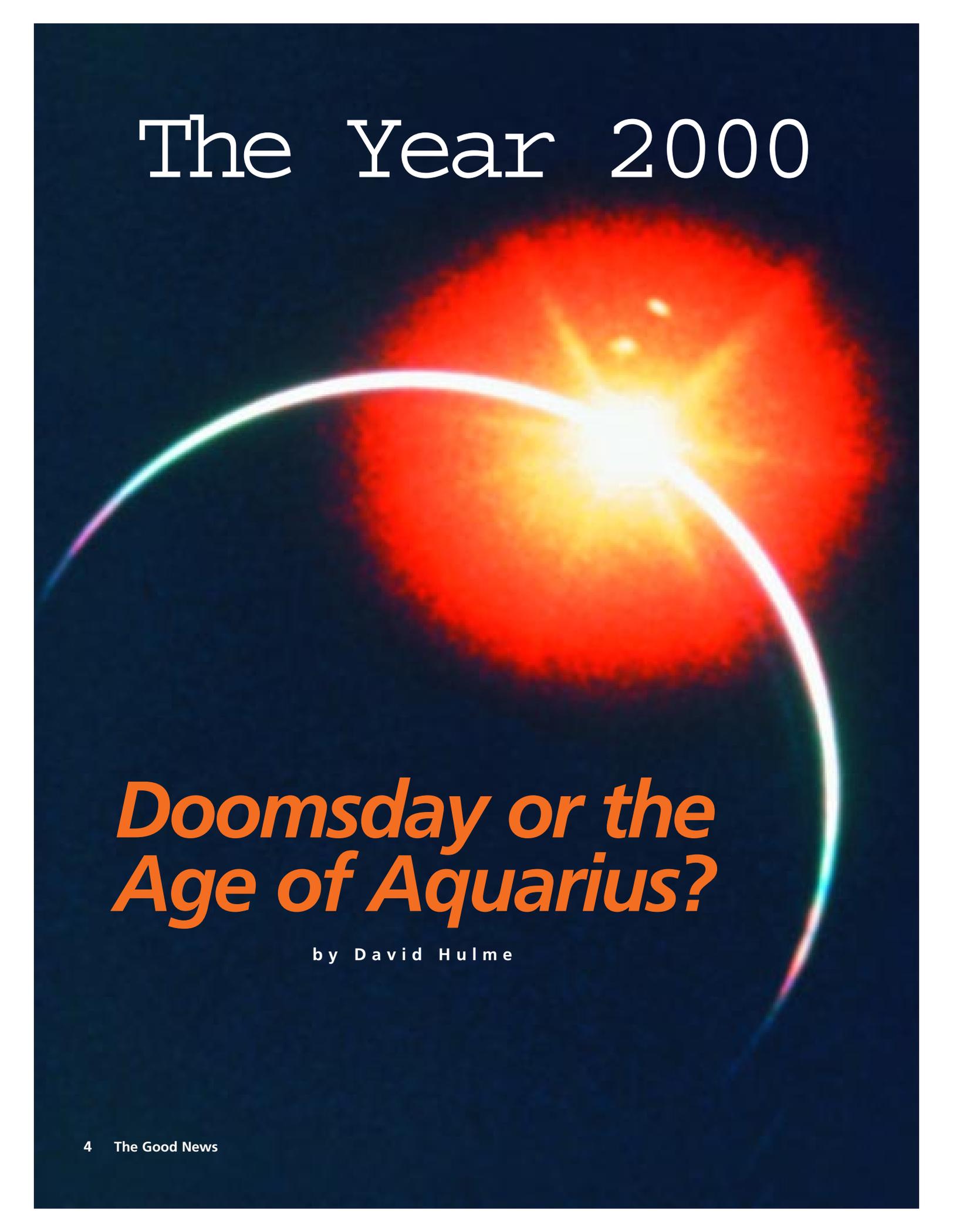
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The Year 2000

Doomsday or the Age of Aquarius?

by David Hulme

One of the world's best-selling books in recent times is *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the work of a religious author who has attempted a prophetic explanation of future geopolitical events from a biblical perspective. For some, their fascination with prediction is ever present and insatiable, and, while many others publicly discount the efforts of the end-time prognosticators, they themselves are privately curious about such forecasts.

Perhaps, in times of uncertainty, we long for some degree of assurance that there will be a future. We want certainties.

If we are realistic about the human condition and just a dash pessimistic, we can easily drift toward the cataclysmic secular prophets.

If we are more optimistic and perhaps a little unrealistic about human nature, we will probably overestimate the positive possibilities of the years just ahead. From the human perspective it's hard to achieve a really objective fix on the future.

Whether you believe the 20th century ends immediately after the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1999, or one year later, the much anticipated third millennium since Christ is upon us. The contending visions of the optimist and the pessimist are all around us.

There are those who foresee a world in which our major problems will finally be solved; there are others who predict more crises, more turmoil, more upset.

What does the beginning of the next millennium portend?

For some inclined to religion, it is a significant road sign on the way to the fulfillment of a major biblical prophecy. A recent letter from an evangelical group invited me to participate in a fast for the successful completion of the preaching of the gospel by the end of year 2000. Obviously for some the end of the 20th century has become an

important benchmark. But, whether it's a religious interest or a secular fascination, the year 2000 carries its own attraction.

Author Hillel Schwartz has studied the effect of the end of centuries on the human psyche. He says that a kind of hysteria sets in as centuries approach their end. At the close of the past several centuries, public discourse has included alternate scenarios for the century ahead. Either the world would end in a series of catastrophes or



undergo a positive transformation. It's Doomsday or the age of Aquarius, the End of the Ages or the New Age.

Earlier apocalyptic

The Roman author Lucretius wrote during the first century B.C. that "the mighty and complex system of the world, upheld through many years, shall crash in ruins. Yet I do not forget how novel and strange it strikes the mind that destruction awaits the heavens and the earth . . . My words will perhaps win credit by plain facts, and within some short time you will see violent earthquakes arise and all things convulsed with shocks . . . The whole

world can collapse, borne down with a frightful-sounding crash" (*De Rerum Natura*, MCMLXXV, p. 387).

The year A.D. 1000 may also have incited similar fears and some strange human behavior. A kind of millennial madness seemed to strike Europe, if the 15th-century German Monk Tritheim is to be believed. He wrote:

"In the thousandth year after the birth of Christ, violent earthquakes shook all of Europe and throughout the continent destroyed solid and magnificent buildings. The same year a horrible comet appeared in the sky. Seeing it, many who believed that this was announcing the last day, were frozen with fear" (Yuri Rubinsky and Ian Wiseman, *A History of the End of the World*, p. 66).

This preoccupation with heavenly signs may have had its effect on the Holy Roman Emperor of the time. Otto III is reputed to have said, "The last year of the thousand years is here, and now I go out in the desert to await, with fasting, prayer, and penance, the day of the Lord, and the coming of my Redeemer" (Hillel Schwartz, *Century's End*, p. 13).

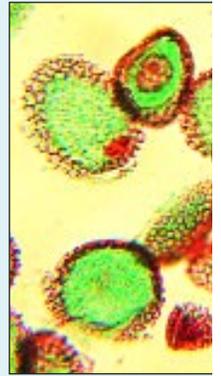
While such accounts of spectacular signs and end-time fears in the year 1000 are disputed by scholars, the idea is strong in the human imagination that cat-

aclysmic events in the heavens will announce the end of the world and the great judgment of God.

Close of the 19th century

As the last century was coming to an end, Parisians were enjoying *la belle époque*, the beautiful era: All was well with the world in the eyes of a sophisticated city. The Paris Exhibition of 1900 was ablaze with electricity. The age of dirty coal was disappearing, and a new, clean power was here. It seemed the world was on the verge of a civilized rebirth.

Lurking in the shadows, of course, was the coming horror of World War I.



Some think the year 2000 will bring a dizzying array of technological advances ushering in a utopia on earth. Others believe the coming third millennium since Jesus Christ will bring catastrophic devastation from famine, disease, natural disasters, environmental degradation and war.

Its antecedents were present as the century turned over and some recognized the possibilities of catastrophic war. While some were enjoying X-ray parties (photographing their hands in an effort to energize themselves for the new century, X-ray technology being a recent discovery), others heard the words of Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II: "The first day of the new century sees our army—in other words, our people—in arms, gathered around their standards, kneeling before the Lord of Hosts."

In a diary entry from 1898, Claude Bowers wrote of the pessimistic-optimistic view of the near future. Of his friend's concern with impending war, he wrote: "This he thought was probably what people looked forward to as the end of the world. It would be the end of conditions existing at the time, but the dawn of a far more splendid era."

The end of the world

Some portrayals of the end of the

world trace their origins, of course, to the Bible. The Bible, a book open to much misinterpretation, indeed may be the most misunderstood and misinterpreted book ever written. Those end-time images of comets and earthquakes, wars and famines, judgment and retribution, come from the prophetic passages of the Bible, both Old and New Testament.

Sad to say, many can't bring themselves to take the Bible seriously because others have so misused it, those 19th- and 20th-century prophets who have said the world would end on a specific date only to be proven wrong over and over.

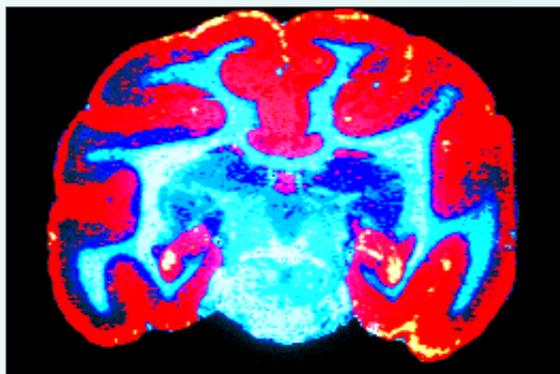
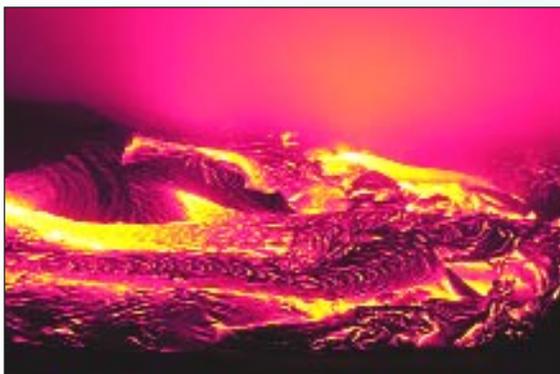
But, as you'll discover in THE GOOD NEWS, the Bible does not say a lot of the things people claim that it says. It actually makes it clear that we are *not* to know the precise time of Jesus Christ's return and that we should not misinterpret wars, earthquakes, famines and signs in the heavens as the end of the world—steps

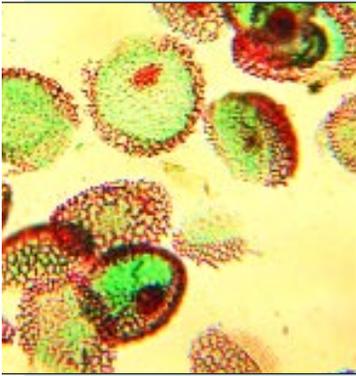
along the way, perhaps, but not necessarily signs of the end.

The prognosticators who have come and gone with their failed prophecies have made a common mistake. They have misinterpreted as signs those events and activities that occur in the general course of human life, or they have devised elaborate time sequences to project a date for the end of this age. Many are the disappointed who have accepted too precise an interpretation of the Bible's prophetic passages.

But Jesus Christ did say, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30).

In this and other places the Bible is replete with references to Christ's second coming. The early disciples clearly believed and taught that their Master would return to set up a kingdom. Was this just wishful thinking, as one group





of theologians suggests?

For that to be true, we are asked to believe that passages written after Jesus Christ's life on earth were inserted deliberately to mislead. Moreover such references would have to have been inserted consistently over many years, as many as 30 or 40.

The biblical emphasis

Consider this:

- According to *The Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, 535 verses in the Bible refer to Jesus Christ's Second Coming.
- The four Gospel writers all comment on the Second Coming, even though they wrote in different places over a span of decades.
- The Gospel historian Luke says in the Acts of the Apostles that Peter attested to Christ's Second Coming with these words: "And that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:20, 21). Here Peter, as one of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry, said that all the holy prophets (of the Old Testa-

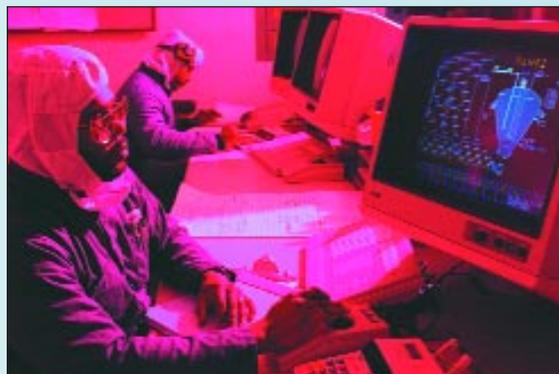
ment) spoke of Jesus' return to restore all things on earth.

- The apostle to the gentiles, Paul of Tarsus, author of at least 13 letters, or 25 percent, of the New Testament, mentions Jesus' return at least 18 times during the 14 years of his writings.
- The book of Revelation (or the Apocalypse) shows a prophetic sequence without any dates that includes Christ's return.
- The book of Revelation, with its images of the return of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, is the final book of the New Testament, setting the capstone on the New Testament canon.

What we face here is a paradox. Countless religious devotees have written and spoken about Bible prophecies, including Christ's return, yet have consistently failed to get the message straight. In their attempts to be zealous scholars and students of the Word, many have inspired others to doubt the Bible's faithfulness.

Faith in the Word of God as God's Word has been undermined. Not only

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DOES THE BIBLE SAY WHEN JESUS CHRIST WILL RETURN?

Contrary to what many people believe or claim, the Bible does not say when Jesus Christ will return. On the contrary, it clearly says that we *do not* know. Consider the following biblical statements:

Matthew 24:4-6—"And Jesus answered and said to them: 'Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

Matthew 24:23—"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it."

Matthew 24:36, 44—"But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only . . . Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him."

Matthew 25:13—"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

Acts 1:6, 7—"Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.'"

All the above passages tell us that we are *not* to know the exact time of the return of Jesus Christ, and that we should *not misinterpret* events as indicating the end of the world is upon us. We will not know for certain they are signs of the end. *GN*



World News & Trends

Symbolism abounds in transfer of Hong Kong

Since 1841, Hong Kong, on the south coast of China, has been a British colony. At the end of June 1997 it is to be handed back to China. Its 6.2 million people will cease to be British subjects and overnight will become citizens of the communist People's Republic of China. The 4,000 British troops presently stationed there will be replaced by 15,000 troops of the PLA (People's Liberation Army). Some 10,000 of those troops are to symbolically march from the Chinese border through the streets of the colony on July 1, 1997, the very day the territory reverts to China.

Empire dismantled

Symbolism abounds in this transfer of sovereignty. Fifty years ago, after victory in the Pacific, the United States and Great Britain were the dominant powers in the region. The British returned to all their former colonies after the Allied defeat of Japan. But things were not to be the same.

Early Japanese victories over Western powers had shown they were vulnerable, and nationalist movements were to grow throughout the colonies, demanding independence. The Dutch, British, French and Portuguese all dismantled their colonial empires, leaving behind a radically different Asia.

Now, almost 50 years to the day since divesting itself of its Indian

Empire, the British will hand over control of Hong Kong, the last major possession of the British crown. It's not just the end of an era for Hong Kong. It's the end of an era for Asia and Europe.

At the turn of the century, the

the decline as a power in the region.

Shifting balance of power

A major shift in the world's balance of economic, political and military power has taken place this century and will continue into the next. Hong Kong is symbolic of that change. China



European powers dominated the globe, and Asia was no exception. The British had the largest empire, controlling the second-greatest population mass, India, along with what are now Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma and Sri Lanka. They also ruled Malaya, Singapore and Borneo, Hong Kong and a string of islands throughout the Pacific.

The French possessed Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia); the Dutch owned Indonesia; the Portuguese controlled Goa, East Timor and Macao (the latter also to revert to China on December 31, 1999).

The century began with the colonial empires at the height of their power and influence; it will end with all of them dismantled and Western influence throughout the world continuing to wane. It is not only the Europeans who have lost power and influence throughout Asia; the United States is also on

today is a quite a different country from the Imperial China that ceded Hong Kong island "in perpetuity" to the United Kingdom more than 150 years ago.

The Chinese had fought and lost a brief war with militarily superior Great Britain over a problem that today still results in countless deaths: drugs. The Chinese, with an increasingly drug-addicted population, objected to Britain's selling opium there and confiscated a shipment. The resultant conflict left China humiliated. Further humiliations were to follow at the hands of Western powers and Japan, which conquered much of China in the 1930s.

Near the end of the 19th century Hong Kong had become so prosperous it needed room to grow. The Chinese were asked if they would lease Britain some territory, which they did for 99

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The Handwriting Is Still on the Wall

Your Bible tells of a future worldwide conflagration that will affect every living human. This warning remains emblazoned on the walls of prophecy!

by Jerold Aust

Bring out the golden vessels that our great King Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem. Even the mighty God, Yahweh, could not withstand the power of the unconquerable Babylonians. Where is the great God of the Jews now?

“Let it be known tonight that I, King Belshazzar, am invincible and that I will do as I please even to the point of drinking out of the very gold and silver cups and bowls reserved for the so-called great God of the Jews, Yahweh!

“Long live the mighty gods of Babylon—praise be unto them!” (Daniel 5:1-4, paraphrased).

King Belshazzar, then vice regent of the whole of Babylon and king of the city of Babylon, was already drunk, his face flushed, his eyes glazed as he gulped down another immense goblet of dark-red wine. He nearly choked on his last gasping effort to gulp down the entire contents before servants hastily brought the special temple vessels to him.

As he struggled to gain his royal composure, servants quickly passed these sacred vessels to the monarch and his retinue, who clumsily thrust their newly acquired drinking vessels before the wine-pourer, loudly demanding them to “fill it up to the brim and let it run over the sides.”

As one, they all raised their containers to the king, and together they mocked the God of the Jews while praising their gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone. It was a

night to end all nights as far as they were concerned.

An impregnable city?

Although the Babylonians were aware of the Medo-Persian threat outside their magnificent and unassailable city, they knew beyond a doubt that no army could penetrate their fortress walls. They were secure in the knowledge that their walls had not been “stormed by invaders in over a thousand years” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 70).

The historian Herodotus reported his account of that fateful night when King Cyrus’s army actually invaded and conquered the city of Babylon. He wrote: “A battle was fought at a short distance from the city, in which the Babylonians were defeated by the Persian king, whereupon they withdrew within their defences. Here they shut themselves up, and made light of his siege, having laid in a store of provisions for many years in preparation against this attack . . .” (*The Persian Wars*, Book I, Sect. 190, 191).

It appeared ludicrous to the Babylonians for anyone to dare lay siege against their impregnable fortifications. After all, according to Herodotus the city measured 120 stadia square (roughly square 14 miles) and boasted a wall 50 royal cubits (about 90 feet) wide and 200 royal cubits (approximately 300 feet) high.

From the top of the battlements, the Babylonians insulted and jeered at Cyrus and his armies. One even mocked them: “Why do you sit there,

Persians? Why don’t you go back to your homes? Till mules foal you will not take our city.” This arrogant boast was typical of the Babylonian attitude about their superior fortifications.

However, the night was not yet over. Cyrus’s clever military strategist, a General Ugbaru, had a plan that would change the course of history, thereby fulfilling the prophecies and plan of Almighty God.

Noting that the Euphrates River ran through gates right into the heart of the city, the general “diverted the waters of the Euphrates to an old channel dug by a previous ruler, . . . suddenly reducing the water level well below the river-gates” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 70).

The water was lowered to thigh depth, and the Persian attackers waded under the giant gates and clambered up the riverbank walls before the Babylonian guards knew what had happened. But, before this took place, God had warned Belshazzar of his demise.

Handwriting on the wall

Shouting, laughing, sometimes cursing, Belshazzar continued to make sport of the Jews and their hapless God. “Fill my cup again,” he demanded.

As he began to swill another goblet of the finest kingly wine, though he was wholly incapable of enjoying it, the Babylonian regent noticed something unusual in his peripheral vision. It looked like a man’s hand, but it was not attached to an arm and body of a human being.

As the hand began slowly and deliberately to approach the far wall near a lamp stand, the king began to sputter and choke, spewing wine from the sides of his mouth. Suddenly the fingers of the apparently human hand began to write on the wall. As the hand wrote, the king's face turned ashen, his blood-streaked eyes widened and his knees began to knock together (Daniel 5:6).

Immediately the revelry quieted to a deafening silence. The shocked musicians lowered and dropped their instruments. Dancing girls froze in their tracks. Stunned waiters stopped and stared. All, as one, gazed transfixed at the words being written on the wall. The stage was now set for the one true God to intervene directly in the affairs of puny mankind, specifically in King Belshazzar's life and the downfall of the mighty Babylonian kingdom.

Belshazzar couldn't interpret the words written on the wall, much less the impossibility of a disembodied hand writing them. "I demand to know what these words mean," blurted the king. "Who can tell me what this writing signifies? I will clothe the man in purple and place a gold chain around his neck and make him third ruler in my kingdom if he can explain what these words mean" (Daniel 5:7).

This was a frightening moment for King Belshazzar, so he commanded the presence of his wise men to decipher the meaning of the words on the far wall. Since the wise men could not read the writing, they couldn't tell the king what it meant. This apparently sobered the king even more. He grew even more pale and became more terrified than before. He was without a clue as to what he should do.

Daniel summoned

However, the queen mother, aware of the sudden tumult, entered the great hall to address the king (Daniel 5:10).

She attempted to calm Belshazzar, claiming she knew of a man who could both read and interpret the handwriting on the wall. "His name is Daniel, and your grandfather Nebuchadnezzar made him chief over all the wise men of Babylon because he could understand and interpret dreams," she said

(Daniel 5:11, paraphrased). (Although most translations call Nebuchadnezzar his "father," he was actually his grandfather. The Aramaic term used actually means "ancestor" or "predecessor.")

The king immediately had Daniel brought before him. Although scholars differ as to Daniel's age in 539 B.C., he was probably at least 80 years old. Apparently he was in semiretirement since he wasn't present with the other so-called wise men, and the king had not remembered his name nor his previous accomplishments under his grandfather's reign.

The news on the wall was not good news. Daniel rebuked the ruler and pronounced the prophetic and disastrous warning etched into the wall.

In any event, elderly Daniel stood before the king, ostensibly to allay his fears. The same promises were made to Daniel that had been made to the wise men or anyone who could interpret the handwriting on the wall. Daniel was not impressed, answering "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation" (Daniel 5:17).

The news on the wall was not good news. Daniel diplomatically rebuked the ruler and pronounced the prophetic and disastrous warning etched into the wall. This was the message he read and interpreted: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN," which is to say, "Mene: God has numbered your kingdom and finished it; Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; Peres [the singular form of

Upharsin]: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Daniel 5:25-28).

Remarkably, immediately after Daniel pronounced this curse on the king and Babylon, the king kept his word and made Daniel third in command in the kingdom. Belshazzar might have momentarily considered killing Daniel for declaring such a curse, especially before his entire court. However, another thought might have overcome his first impulse: If he rewarded Daniel, maybe Daniel's God would have mercy on him.

There was, as well, the thought that the king had given his word in front of his own entourage and the partygoers. Whatever the motivation, God continued to honor his servant Daniel for his unwavering faithfulness.

Daniel's elevation to this powerful position of rulership did not end with Belshazzar's demise. King Cyrus (also known as King Darius) placed Daniel as the president over the princes of his Persian kingdom once he controlled all of Babylon (Daniel 6:1-3).

Pride precedes a fall

Daniel forthrightly reminded Belshazzar of things he remembered. He told the well-known story of how God had humbled his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar by making him forage in the royal pasture with the animals for seven long years (Daniel 5:18-21). "But you his son [grandson], Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although *you knew all this*" (verse 22, emphases mine throughout).

Daniel continued admonishing the king, telling him he had lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven. Specifically, Daniel cited that Belshazzar had the arrogance to drink wine from God's vessels (verse 23). Further, he noted the king had praised his own inanimate gods while engaging in such blasphemous acts.

At this point, Daniel shows the reality of God's greatness: "And the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified" (verse 23). King Belshazzar actually experienced the irony of having his obituary read to him by a captive slave.

Belshazzar had not learned the lesson his grandfather was forced to learn: that God is in charge and whatever He wills will be done. He had not learned that God requires mankind to honor Him through humility and obedience (Daniel 4:30-37).

The king could not have been unaware of his grandfather's seven-year demise. Though years had passed, such a remarkable act would still have been common knowledge among the populace. Belshazzar was family. As he grew up, he would have been cautioned not to let happen to him what befell his grandfather. This incident has great historical import. Yet it has far greater prophetic implications for us.

That handwriting's meaning

Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation prophetically interprets for us Daniel's account. Three components comprise the fulfillment of that ancient type: (1) a king, (2) an end-time Babylon and (3) God.

Since God hasn't gone anywhere and is still omnipotent and omniscient, the third component requires no explanation. But where is the end-time Babylon, if there is such a thing?

Although characterized as a "great city" in Revelation 18, the end-time Babylon is not just a city-state as ancient Babylon was. God reveals that this Babylon is characterized both by its religious and political power (Revelation 17). Its economic power is so great that rulers and merchants will "weep and mourn" at its downfall (Revelation 18:9-19).

This great Babylon is a system and way of life so far-reaching that it encompasses many of the peoples and nations of the earth (Revelation 18:3). And it has a sinister foundation, for it traffics in the "bodies and souls of men" (Revelation 18:13).

A king also will arise who will ally himself with other rulers and the end-time Babylonian system and rule as if he were a god. This is the prophesied "beast" of Revelation 13. It is significant that this mighty end-time king is identified as the beast, recalling that the first king of Babylon was also reduced to the state of a beast (Daniel 4:32, 33).

The book of Revelation describes all the ingredients of the prophetic fulfillment of Daniel's physical antecedent. The bestial king of Revelation will follow the same foolish pride and arrogance of Belshazzar, and his final act is to fight and defy Jesus Christ at His return (Revelation 19:19, 20). Belshazzar failed the test, and so will the beast in the end time. What about us?

Will we heed the handwriting?

You should be aware that you can understand the handwriting on the wall. Daniel showed how this is done: "There is a God in heaven who

There will yet come a time in history that will be the lull before the storm. To the ordinary person, a millennial peace will appear to be on the horizon.

reveals secrets" (Daniel 2:28).

However, to simply acknowledge this is not the total answer. For a person to understand God's great plan of salvation, humility must be a top priority. The apostle Paul explains this, telling us that the wisdom of God is a mystery hidden to the world at large, understood only by those to whom God chooses to reveal it (1 Corinthians 2:7-10; Matthew 13:13-17).

Humility, then, allows the great God above to teach us His great plan for us. Human beings can learn from God if they humble themselves before His almighty hand (Daniel 5:22).

There will yet come a time in history that will be the lull before the storm. Various governments and religions will combine and make pronouncements of peace and safety throughout the world.

To the ordinary person, a millennial peace will appear to be on the horizon.

But woe to the person who accepts that ploy. For "that peace" will disappear in a heartbeat when the beast and false prophet begin to exercise their military might (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; Luke 21:20). Many will perish (Matthew 24:21, 22). But the person who truly knows God and understands His handwriting on the prophetic wall will be protected and saved (Luke 21:18, 19; Revelation 3:8-10).

God doesn't forget

God does not forget. What He has promised, that He will perform. At the very time of the end, when God pours out His seventh plague, mighty Babylon will come to its final end. "Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" (Revelation 16:19).

It is remarkable to see God use the same language that characterized ancient Babylon's destruction. Belshazzar drank wine from holy vessels that were dedicated to God alone. That was his undoing. At the final curtain, the beast, false prophet and modern Babylon will "drink of the wine of God's fierce wrath." What irony. What perfect justice.

God gives us a choice. We can either follow the proud way of King Belshazzar, avoid humbling ourselves before Almighty God and remain blinded to the handwriting on the wall, or we can be like Daniel, who possessed an "excellent Spirit."

God has promised and given that same excellent Spirit to Jesus Christ's disciples who obey Him (Acts 5:32). The Holy Spirit is that excellent Spirit, which not only reveals to us the glory of and honor due Jesus Christ, but it leads us into God's complete truth (John 16:13).

This, of course, includes the understanding, teaching and preaching of prophecy (2 Peter 1:19; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 12, 13). Whatever road you and I may choose, one thing is absolutely certain: The handwriting is still on the wall. **GN**

The Meaning of the Name Jesus Christ

by Scott Ashley

Who was Jesus Christ? What was Jesus Christ? Was He merely a gentle, kind person who went around saying gentle, kind things and who died for our sins? Or was He much more than that?

Who and what is He now? What is He *doing* now? Is He sitting in heaven, passing the time until He returns to earth? Or *will* He even return to earth? What will He *yet* do in the future?

Questions like these have been discussed and argued over by theologians and religious leaders for centuries. They have perplexed and puzzled millions of believers. Many more have not even tried to understand, thinking that simply accepting and believing in Jesus are all that matters.

Yet the answers to these questions, and the real significance of Jesus Christ's life and sacrifice, have been available to mankind all along. The answers are found in the very name of Jesus Christ.

Peter said, "There is no other name . . . by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, New King James Version except as noted). But what does that name mean? God attaches great significance to names. His own names are powerful testimonials to His great glory and majesty: God Almighty (El-Shaddai), God of Peace (Yahweh-Shalom) and God Our Provider (Yahweh-Jireh), among others.

Throughout the Bible, God uses names to signify what the person or being represents (Genesis 16:11; 17:5, 15, 16, 19; 35:10; 2 Samuel 12:24, 25; Isaiah 8:3; Hosea 1:4, 6, 9; Luke 1:13). They tell us of the individual's role and purpose in God's great plan. Time and time again God named or changed the

names of individuals to reflect the purpose for which God used them.

In the same way, the name "Jesus Christ" tells us a great deal about His purpose and part in God's great plan as well. It enlightens us about His character, purpose and love for humanity as well.

The Meaning of 'Jesus'

What does "Jesus" mean? How did He receive that name? Did Joseph and Mary choose it because they liked the sound of it? Was it the name of a relative or family member? *Why* was Jesus named "Jesus"?

In Matthew 1 we find that Mary was discovered to be pregnant during her engagement to Joseph. Joseph, not wanting to embarrass this young woman he loved, was considering how to best handle the difficult situation.

"But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins'" (verses 20, 21).

The New Testament was written in Greek, and the name "Jesus" here means the same in Greek as the Hebrew name "Joshua." "Joshua" means literally "God is salvation." So the angel's message to Joseph was "You shall call His name 'God is salvation,' for He will save His people from their sins." That name tells us of Jesus'

purpose in God's plan—that it is through Him that God saves humanity.

How are we saved?

But how are we saved through Jesus Christ?

There are two important aspects of salvation through Jesus Christ. First, we must realize that we have all sinned (Romans 3:23). We have all earned for ourselves the death penalty (Romans 6:23). Death is the total loss of consciousness and awareness forever (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10). By our sins, we have earned eternal death—the right to be blotted out of consciousness, no longer to exist, not even to be remembered, for all time. We have earned the right (if it could be called a right) to be erased from reality forever.

That's the hopeless situation we would be in without Jesus Christ. The death penalty we have earned would be carried out, and there would be nothing left for us, no hope for anything beyond the grave (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

But something happened to prevent that death penalty from being carried out. In Romans 5 Paul describes how we were stumbling along in our ignorance and blindness, and then Paul says, "When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (verses 6-8).

God didn't need us. What use were we to Him? Paul makes the point that rarely someone might give his life for a good man, but that doesn't fit us. We were as good as dead, waiting for the death penalty to be carried out, but

something happened. Jesus Christ intervened and paid the death penalty for us.

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life,” said Paul (verse 10). The penalty of eternal death has been paid for us by Jesus Christ. We can claim that sacrifice and stand innocent, pure and clean once again before God. We are reconciled, no longer cut off from God. We have access to God again. We have access to life again. Through Jesus Christ—“God is salvation”—He has saved us from being erased from existence by paying the death penalty for us.

Saved by His life

But Paul also says we are “saved by His life”—a second important aspect of salvation made possible through Jesus Christ. We know that Christ was resurrected from the grave and lives again forever. But how are we saved by His life?

Paul elaborates in Galatians 2:20, describing how Jesus Christ has transformed him. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

If we were crucified with Christ, says Paul, we died. That is what is pictured by baptism—the old self went down into the watery grave and was buried there. Figuratively, we put the old person to death, and that person no longer lives. After that has happened, Paul says, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”

If we properly understand the symbolism of baptism, we realize that our old self is dead. Now Jesus Christ lives again within us. We no longer live, but Jesus Christ lives again within us, as Paul described it. The man Paul was no longer important to Paul. *Jesus Christ living within* him was what was important to Paul.

“And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,

who loved me and gave Himself for me.” That sums up Christ’s mission and sacrifice for us. He “loved me and gave Himself for me.” Jesus Christ gave Himself for us out of love for each one of us.

Personal sacrifice for us

Paul related to Christ’s sacrifice on an intensely personal level. “He *loved me* and *gave himself for me*.” Jesus’ sacrifice wasn’t an abstract concept to Paul. It was deeply personal. Paul felt it with all his being. Paul, a man who had persecuted the Church, imprisoning and executing followers of Jesus Christ, had no doubt about his sins. He had no doubt that he deserved to be erased from existence for all eternity. But he knew that Jesus Christ intervened directly and personally for him to save him from that fate.

Do we take Jesus Christ’s sacrifice personally? Do we recognize, like Paul, what it means that Christ died for each of us personally and individually? Because of our sins, we deserve to die. Jesus Christ didn’t. But He did it for us, dying instead of us. That’s what Paul meant when he said, “He loved me and gave himself for me.”

No other person could fulfill the role of Jesus in God’s plan for salvation. He is the only one who has ever lived a perfect, sinless life. As God in the flesh, His one life is worth more than the sum total of all mankind before and after Him (John 1:14). He died for every single one of us, and without His sacrifice we would have no hope for anything beyond this life. As Paul put it, without that hope we would be “of all men the most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

In recognition of and gratitude for that truth, we allow Jesus Christ to live within us. But how does that happen? The apostle John said, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

We must follow Christ’s example. We walk as He walked. We think as He thought. We live as He lived. And we submit ourselves to God’s divine will and purpose in our lives, just as

Jesus did. “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me,” He said (John 6:38).

So it is through Jesus, whose name means “God is salvation,” that we are saved. It is through His death to pay the penalty for our sins in our place, and through Him living within us, that God gives us salvation.

The Meaning of ‘Christ’

What about the second part of the name “Jesus Christ”? What does the word “Christ” mean? Actually, it isn’t so much a proper name as it is a title. “Christ” comes from the Greek word *Christos*, meaning “anointed.” Its meaning is the same as the Hebrew word *Messiah* (John 1:41). They both mean “anointed” or “anointed one.”

What is the significance of being anointed? The Jews of Jesus’ day understood the meaning perfectly well. They were familiar with the Scriptures we call the Old Testament today; those writings were their guide for daily life. These very Scriptures, said Jesus, foretold His coming and purpose. “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me,” He thundered to those who refused to believe (John 5:39).

The Jews of Christ’s day expected a Messiah, an anointed one (John 4:25). They knew the significance of anointing, so they understood what the role of the Messiah would be. Without the background of the Old Testament, the term “Messiah” becomes meaningless, resulting in a shallow and distorted understanding of who and what Jesus Christ is.

Those who expected a Messiah knew that, in the Old Testament, anointing was used in four extraordinary situations to set someone or something apart for a special purpose. Each of these teaches us something about Jesus Christ, His purpose and

Peter said, ‘There is no other name . . . by which we must be saved.’ But what does that name mean?

His mission, about why He is called the Anointed One.

Dedicated for God's Use

The first significant act of anointing occurred in Exodus 40. After Israel's miraculous departure from Egypt, God gave the Israelites detailed instructions for building the tabernacle, an elaborate tented structure designed to be the center of worship for the nation. After its completion, God told Moses, "Take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and everything in it; consecrate it and all its furnishings, and it will be holy" (Exodus 40:9, New International Version).

This act of anointing would "consecrate" the tabernacle. Consecrate means to dedicate or set something apart for holy use. Through this anointing, the tabernacle and the objects in it were set apart for God's sacred use and service. Anointing was symbolic of that setting apart.

What does that teach us about Jesus Christ? How does that fit into His role as the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One?

Simply put, His entire life was set apart for God's holy use. "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work," said Jesus (John 4:34). That was His motivation, His source of strength. His reason for living was to do the will of God the Father.

"... The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner," Jesus said (John 5:19).

What did Jesus do? In His own words, He did exactly what the Father did. Yet some people think He came to push the Father into the background, overturning God's holy law and removing it as a standard of guidance and behavior for mankind. What a sad contradiction of Jesus' own words!

He dedicated Himself to the mission

God had given Him. "I can of Myself do nothing," He said. "... My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30). Jesus Christ never tried to please Himself, to do His own thing. His motivation was to please the Father. What God wanted was most important to Him.

His entire life was set apart to serve God. He was an example of total commitment to and surrender to God's will and purpose. Even when facing imminent death, His final prayers were, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Jesus Christ lived His life in perfect accordance with God's will, and He gave His life in perfect accordance with God's great plan. A part of that plan was that He was set apart, His life freely offered as the one sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sins of all mankind forever (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Jesus Christ fulfilled this aspect of anointing perfectly. His entire life was an example of complete and total dedication to God's will.

Selected for the Priesthood

After the dedication and consecration of the tabernacle in the wilderness, God instructed Moses to carry out another anointing. "Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and wash them with water. Then dress Aaron in the sacred garments, anoint him and consecrate him so he may serve me as priest. Bring his sons and dress them in tunics. Anoint them just as you anointed their father, so they may serve me as priests..." said God (Exodus 40:12-15, NIV).

We see from this example that anointing was used to set individuals apart to serve as priests to God.

What is the role of a priest? What did a priest do? It is difficult for us to comprehend, because that system of a priesthood and temple worship was

crushed during the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Although alive and flourishing in Jesus' day, it is a foreign concept to many of us today, lost in the mists of long ago.

In its simplest terms, a priest's function was to serve as an intermediary between God and man. Under that system of temple worship, mankind as a whole had no direct access to God. Members of the priesthood served as God's representatives to Israel, and in performing the sacrifices they interceded with God on behalf of the people.

How does this apply to Jesus Christ? We are told that "we have a great High Priest... Jesus the Son of God" (Hebrews 4:14).

Our perfect High Priest

The book of Hebrews explains how Jesus Christ is the perfect High Priest. He can "sympathize with our weaknesses," we are told, because He "was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (4:15, NIV). Because He lived as a physical human being, He knows what we go through in this life. Because of that, He knows that we are weak and how we need God's mercy and help. In addition to this, Jesus Christ is submissively obedient and has been made perfect (5:8, 9).

Unlike human priests who grow old and die, He will never need to be replaced in that office "because Jesus lives forever, [and] he has a permanent priesthood" (7:24, NIV). He continues the intercessory work of the physical temple priesthood: "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (7:25, NIV). He will always be there to save those who come to God, forever.

"Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens." Physical sacrifices are unnecessary, we are told, because, "unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for

His entire life was set apart to serve God. He was an example of total commitment to God's will and purpose.

their sins once for all when he offered himself" (7:26, 27, NIV).

Through His function as High Priest, Jesus Christ purifies us through His sacrifice: "... The blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse[s] our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (9:14, NIV)

What is the result of this? Having been cleansed of our sins, we can now be reconciled to God and come before Him confidently. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus . . . , let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (10:19-23, NIV)

That paints a wonderful picture of Christ's sacrifice and function as High Priest and how He allows us to be reconciled to God. It shows us that Christ has removed the barrier of sin between man and God and brought us together again, making us one with God. Therefore we come boldly to God's throne, full of faith and confident that we are forgiven and pure in His sight.

Set Apart as Prophet

In 1 Kings 19:16 we find another example of anointing being used to set someone apart for a particular purpose. In this case, Elijah's days as a prophet were numbered. "... Anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet," he was told (NIV).

What significance does this have in Jesus Christ's life and mission? He was often called a prophet (John 6:14, 7:40), and said of Himself that He was a prophet (Luke 4:24, 13:33). He clearly foretold the future during His physical ministry on earth. In Matthew 24, Mark

13 and Luke 21, He prophesied of events that would lead up to His return to earth. The four Gospels contain many prophecies about His disciples and the future Church, and the book of Revelation is called "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1).

Is foretelling the future the most important thing Christ discussed? Even though Christ did foresee the future, that is a relatively small part of what is recorded for us about Him and His life. A prophet isn't just someone who reveals the future. A prophet is someone who reveals the will and purpose of God to mankind.

What did Christ speak about during His time on earth? "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak . . . Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak" (John 12:49, 50).

Divine and holy Teacher

What did He reveal? "Whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak." He revealed exactly what God the Father told Him to reveal. He taught and revealed the plan, purpose and will of God. He foretold the future, but even more than that, He was a divine and holy Teacher, revealing God's wonderful purpose and plan for mankind.

In Luke 10 Christ discussed what He revealed to people. "At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure'" (verse 21, NIV).

What was it that was being revealed? "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (verse 22, NIV).

Christ was revealing God the Father.

He was revealing a new view of God, a new understanding of God. His fellow Jews had previously understood God as a sort of national champion, the "father" of their nation who had worked mighty miracles in the days of their forefathers. But Jesus Christ revealed a very different understanding: a loving God, gently caring for His followers as a father loves his own children.

The Father that Jesus Christ revealed was a God who desired a close personal relationship with His people, wanting to share all things with His children, to forgive them, to heal them, to bless them and to give them eternal life in His Kingdom. Jesus Christ Himself personified that love. Throughout His life and ministry He revealed a love far beyond what they could have understood earlier: a love so deep that God would give His very Son as a sacrifice to reconcile each of His children to Him.

This understanding of God was a wonderful truth, said Jesus. "Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it'" (verses 23, 24, NIV).

So we see that Jesus Christ was anointed to be a prophet, not just foretelling the future, but, far more important, revealing God's will, purpose and plan to mankind and showing us what a loving God we worship.

Born to Be a King

A final significant use of anointing is found in 1 Samuel 16. God told His prophet Samuel that He had rejected Saul as king over Israel because of his disobedience, and He had chosen a new king. Samuel was sent to David. "Then the Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; he is the one.' So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the

Continued on page 40

He is referred to as 'the Lord Jesus Christ' or simply 'the Lord,' signifying that He is our Master, Ruler and King now.

Christmas

RECONSIDERED

by Mario Seiglie

Does the Bible permit a believer to observe religious festivals that are not established by God? Does He allow us to use forms of worship that originated in pagan ceremonies, adapting them to worship Him? Is the New Testament more flexible than the Old, allowing us to disregard God's prior instructions on how to worship Him? More to the point, can we justify the observance of Christmas by Christians?

Let's examine this subject and review what the Bible and history say regarding Christmas observance and its customs.

When the apostle Paul addressed the issue of how flexible Christians should be in their fellowship, he stated: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you'" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

No new days of worship

Regarding pagan beliefs and customs, the New Testament is as emphatic in rejecting them as the Old. There is not a single example in the New Testament of a new religious feast day being established in Christ's honor. Following Jesus

Christ's death and resurrection, the New Testament was written over a period of 60 to 70 years—yet nowhere in that written record is there evidence of or instructions for institution of new days of worship in His honor.

Instead, the New Testament records that Christians continued to keep the Old Testament Holy Days listed in Leviticus 23 without interruption, but with greater spiritual understanding than before. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states: "The sanctity of special times was an idea absent from the minds of the first Christians . . . [who] continued to observe the Jewish Festivals though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed" (Vol. 8, p. 828, 11th edition).

It was natural for the early Christians to continue keeping the biblical Holy Days, which now centered on celebrating Christ's successive interventions on behalf of mankind in the past, present and future.

The Bible gives clear instructions regarding the use of pagan practices to worship the true God.

God was clear when He told His people: "Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them . . . and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. *Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not*

add to it nor take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:30-32).

The New Testament Church clearly understood this, and there is no hint during that time of new days of worship being established. It was well into the second century before new man-made feasts to honor Jesus Christ began to appear in Rome.

The first was the Easter Sunday celebration, which history records was kept in Rome about A.D. 135. Christmas appears to have first been observed around A.D. 230 and became definitely established on December 25 by the year A.D. 435. Meanwhile, the biblical Holy Days commanded in the Old Testament and continued in apostolic times were systematically abandoned.

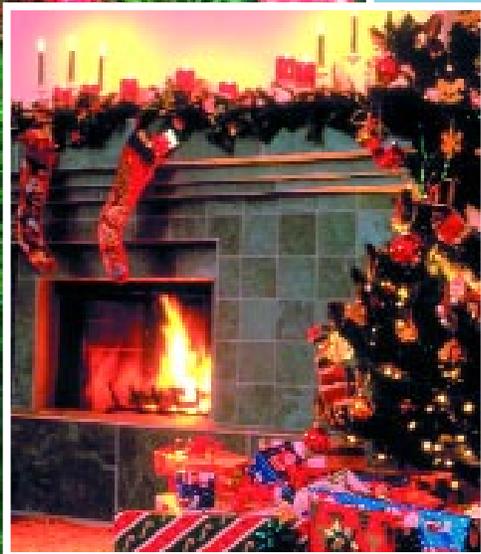
History of Christmas

If Christmas was not observed in the time of the apostles, how did it come to be observed? The pre-Christian origins of Christmas can be found in almost any book about the day. The briefest research will show that its roots extend into many different religions and pagan beliefs.

"Saturnalia and the kalends were the celebrations most familiar to early Christians, December 17-24 and January 1-3, but the tradition of celebrating December 25 as Christ's birthday came to the Romans from Persia. Mithra, the Persian God of light and sacred contracts, was born out of a rock on December 25. Rome was famous for its flirtations with strange gods and cults, and in the third century the emperor Aurelian established the festival of Dies Invicti Solis, the Day of the Invincible Sun, on December 25.

"Mithra was an embodiment of the

*What do decorated trees,
Santa Claus, elves, reindeer,
candles, mistletoe, holly,
ornaments and exchanging
gifts have to
do with the
birth of the
Son of God?*



sun, so this period of its rebirth was a major day in Mithraism, which had become Rome's latest official religion with the patronage of Aurelian. It is believed that the emperor Constantine adhered to Mithraism up to the time of his conversion to Christianity. He was probably instrumental in seeing that the major feast of his old religion was carried over to his new faith" (Gerard and Patricia Del Re, *The Christmas Almanac*, p. 17).

"As ancient as civilization itself is the custom of celebrating a festival at the time of the winter solstice, at the turning of the year, when days begin to lengthen and the sun to return. In Egypt January 6 was honored as the birthday of Osiris; in Rome December 25 was the birthday of Mithra and the feast of Sol Invictus, the unconquered sun. Both dates became identified with Christ's appearance on earth.

"In the East January 6, which had also been a pagan water festival, was fixed as the date of his baptism and marked by the blessing of baptismal waters. In the West it commemorated the adoration of the Magi, the three wise men who came to worship Christ as representatives of the people of the world. Almost everywhere December 25 came to be accepted as the day of the Nativity. The joyous celebrations of the pagan mid-winter festivals were continued by Christians" (Roland H. Bainton, *The Horizon History of Christianity*, p. 368).

Additional beliefs merged

As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, additional beliefs were merged into it, resulting in the mixture of customs observed today. "There are indications . . . that as Christians went on from year to year and century to century developing the rites of Christmas, they borrowed, adopted, or simply carried over elements of other midwinter celebrations" (Gerard and Patricia Del Re, *The Christmas Almanac*, p. 15).

Many pagan customs were imported directly into the church with little or no change. "Certainly the official Church inspired its missionaries to make the winter feast a Christian festival. In 601, Pope Gregory instructed Augustine of

Canterbury to follow the custom of decking temples with greenery by decking churches in the same manner, and to solemnize the time by Christian feasting.

"Nor let them now sacrifice animals to the Devil, but to the praise of God kill animals for their own eating, and render thanks to the Giver of all for their abundance . . . For from obdurate minds it is impossible to cut off everything at once," Pope Gregory said (William Sansom, *A Book of Christmas*, p. 30).

Does man have the authority of the Bible to innovate and adopt other days of worship? Notice what Jesus Christ told His apostles when He gave them the great commission: "'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Christ never even hinted that His followers would have the authority to establish new days of worship. He told the apostles to teach His followers "to observe all things" He had commanded them. Throughout His earthly ministry He had diligently kept God's Sabbath and Holy Days, which now were filled with new meaning. The early Church continued in their observance, following Christ's own example.

The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology states: "In the early Christian church the propriety of celebrating the festivals together with the whole of the Jewish people was never questioned, so that it needed no special mention" (Vol. 1, p. 628).

Added traditions rejected

Does the new covenant render all prior biblical forms of worship obsolete, giving Christians freedom to express their faith and gratitude in any way they wish? How much freedom do Christians have to innovate in their worship? They are given only as much freedom as was authorized in the New Testament.

For instance, notice the Pharisees' approach to the Scriptures. They argued with Christ that they could

innovate and add to God's laws new traditions, reasoning that they could better express their faith by doing so. They asked Christ, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" (Mark 7:5).

How did Christ answer? Did He explain that their practices were perfectly acceptable since He came so they could add even more traditions? He certainly did not!

Here is His answer: "' . . . In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men . . . All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (Mark 7:7-9).

Just as the Pharisees added their traditions to the law of God, so do many churches today. But Christ's answer directly condemns this practice.

What happens when God's feasts are no longer considered holy and their observance is viewed as optional? A vacuum results. Since the biblical feasts are the only ones authorized in Scripture, historically mankind has had to innovate. Religious leaders have looked to popular religious festivals outside the Bible that can be "Christianized," such as the pre-Christian festivals and celebrations that came to be renamed Christmas.

Unlike the biblical Feasts, which picture the steps in God's plan that offer salvation to all mankind, Christmas is a shallow man-made substitute.

Christ did not consider His birth of prime importance. Instead He instructed His followers to observe the Passover, commemorating the sacrifice of His life for the sins of the world. After instituting new symbols representing the importance of His life and sacrifice for us, He told the disciples "Do *this* in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24).

The whole concept of celebrating Christ's birth would have been foreign to His disciples and the writers of the New Testament. "To the early Christians the idea of celebrating the birthday of a religious figure would have seemed at best peculiar, at worst blasphemous.

Being born into this world was nothing to celebrate. What mattered was leaving this world and entering the next in a condition pleasing to God . . .

“No, if you wanted to search the New Testament world for peoples who attached significance to birthdays, your search would quickly narrow to pagans. The Romans celebrated the birthdays of the Caesars, and most non-Christian Mediterranean religions attached importance to the natal feasts of a pantheon of supernatural figures” (Tom Flynn, *The Trouble With Christmas*, p. 42)

Origin of biblical festivals

Some go so far in advocating new forms of worship as to propose that the biblical feast days commanded by God in Leviticus 23 are ultimately derived from pagan celebrations. Certainly there is no biblical basis for such a claim. Such opinions are based in liberal theology. Conservative scholars on the whole discard such theories.

Reflecting the conservative point of view, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states: “The sacred seasons of Israel stem directly from divine revelation and were designed to illustrate significant aspects of the eternal redemption that God had already ordained for His own under the OT. The Hebrew calendar of convocations is therefore not to be explained on the basis of natural phenomena, such as the phases of the moon or the Palestinian agricultural cycle.

“Neither may it be attributed to pre-Mosaic custom, whether Canaanite or nomadic. Israel’s feasts served rather as divinely revealed expressions of the moral obligations of His people, as memorials of God’s saving acts in the past, as sacraments of His sanctifying power in the present, and as types of His anticipated victory over sin in the forthcoming first and second advents of Jesus Christ” (Vol. 2, pp. 292, 293).

In fact, according to the biblical history of Genesis 1-11, it was not God’s way that came out of paganism, but paganism that came out of God’s way, when man left His guidance and laws. Mankind then established corrupted systems with only glimpses of God’s truths. Dr. Stephen Langdon, one of the

great archaeologists and Assyriologists of this century, said: “In my opinion, the history of man’s most ancient religion reveals a rapid tendency from pure monotheism to extreme polytheism and its focus on evil spirits. In its most absolute sense, it is the account of the fall of Man” (Sir Charles Marston, *The Bible Spoke the Truth*, p. 72).

Other feasts added

Some believe that since the Jews added the feasts of Hanukkah and Purim in biblical times, we are free today to add religious holidays and celebrations of our own choosing. Does their observance sanction the institution of additional religious holidays?

There is a major difference in background and intent. Nowhere did Hanukkah and Purim incorporate pagan forms of worship into a celebration honoring the true God. Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple after its defilement by the Syrian king Antiochus, and Purim commemorates the defeat of the Jews’ enemies in the time of Queen Esther. As such, they are celebrations of thanks and honor to God, similar to Thanksgiving Day as observed in the United States.

Christmas, however, is very different. It is a syncretism of numerous pagan beliefs and customs into a celebration supposedly honoring the Son of God, a practice soundly condemned in the Bible (Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:1-4, 30-32; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

“. . . Though it celebrates the mightiest event in the history of Christendom, it was overlaid upon heathen festivals, and many of its observances are only adaptations of pagan to Christian ceremonial. This was no mere accident. It was a necessary measure at a time when the new religion was forcing itself upon a deeply superstitious people. In order to reconcile fresh converts to the new faith, and to make the breaking of old ties as painless as possible, these relics of paganism were retained under modified forms, in the same way that antique columns, transferred from pagan temples, became parts of the new churches built by Christians in honor of their God and his saints” (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, p. 58, 59).

Regarding the background of Christmas, Tom Flynn wrote: “In my research, I found only one Christmas custom that seems to belong exclusively to Christianity. Christians appear to have invented the Midnight Mass out of whole cloth. Celebrated in Rome as early as the fifth century, it alone appears not to have significant pagan antecedents” (*The Trouble With Christmas*, p. 70).

Worship in spirit and truth

Since Christmas is not authorized by God nor by the Bible, it can never be holy. Jesus Christ Himself said that “true worshippers . . . must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23, 24). Christmas celebration is not sanctioned by the Scriptures. Such idolatrous practices are at best futile, foolish and worthless (Jeremiah 10:1-8).

At worst, since such practices break the First and Second Commandments, they are sin. When God said: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3), He condemns forms of worship that celebrated the supposed birth of the sun or false gods. When God states: “You shall not make for yourself an idol . . . You shall not bow down to them or worship them . . .” (Exodus 20:4, New International Version), He also condemns inventing religious feasts and celebrations to replace those God ordained.

Why not just keep the Holy Days that come directly from God and picture His plan to offer salvation to humankind?

Paul’s warnings to Timothy about what would happen in the church should also be a warning to us: “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

Christmas is one of those fables. **GN**



Abraham

by Jerold Aust

“**S**on, let’s go to the mountaintop and offer a sacrifice to God.” Abraham believed his son would be that sacrifice, but Isaac assumed they would sacrifice a lamb. Fully trusting his father, Isaac might have even reached for his father’s hand.

The touch of his son’s hand must have sent shock waves through Abraham’s body. Abraham’s mind was whirring; his thoughts alternated from deliberate, studied obedience and faith to passionate resistance, hoping that God might rescind this almost unthinkable directive.

Although the biblical narrative doesn’t directly reveal Abraham’s feelings until Genesis 22:8, we can speculate on the probable thoughts and emotions of Abraham. Abraham’s faith is in evidence; the reader, unlike Abraham, can know how the story will end. God didn’t want Abraham to kill his son; He was testing Abraham’s faith in Him.

“All right, Father, let’s go. May I help carry the wood?” Abraham could only nod consent, for the

the sound that would otherwise have offered a simple, “Yes, you may, my son.”

‘God will provide’

Off they went, a sad father, his trusting son and two servants, toward the mountain on which Abraham believed he would sacrifice the only son whom God, in their old age, had given him and Sarah (Genesis 18:10, 11).

Three days later the travelers arrived at their destination, tired but aware this was the mountain God had chosen for them.

“Stay here while my son and I worship, then we will return to you,” Abraham told his servants.

Up the side of the mountain father and son trudged, Isaac with the wood for the sacrifice and father Abraham with the fire and knife.

“Father, we have the wood and fire, but where is the lamb for our burnt offering?”

“God will provide, my son. God will provide.”

This is the first hint of the rest of the story and the remarkable faith of Abraham. When they reached the precise spot for the burnt offering, Abra-

ham laid down the fire and knife and began building an altar for the sacrifice. He neatly laid the wood and gently but firmly took hold of his son and began binding him. Then he laid Isaac on the altar on top of the carefully placed wood. At that point, Abraham dutifully, obediently, raised his knife to slay his son.

“Abraham! Abraham!” cried an angel in a strong voice.

“Here I am! I hear you!” Abraham responded to the angel.

“Do not touch your son Isaac, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not held back your son, your only son from Me” (Genesis 22:12).

Abraham had passed his supreme test of faith. In his mind and heart, Abraham had already followed through with his obedience to God’s command (Romans 4:17).

It was faith of this magnitude that inspired others to write that Abraham is the father of the faithful (Romans 4:12, 16). He was a man who believed and had total, complete trust and faith in God.

Abraham: God’s Friend

Their bond was so close that God called Abraham “My friend” (Isaiah 41:8). Besides just being an interesting





concept, this idea of Abraham as a friend of God points to some fascinating and far-reaching implications. We might ask why would God pay Abraham the great compliment of calling him His friend?

The answer can be found in comparing Abraham's relationship with God to our Christian calling. Although we may never have thought of it this way, Jesus Christ also views us as His friends. He said to His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard of My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

But there is more. For Jesus to call His disciples "friends" requires a precondition. "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14).

That was the key for Abraham to be known as God's friend. Obedience to God was and is the prerequisite to faith and qualifying as God's friend. Paul highlighted Abraham's faithful obedience (Hebrews 11:8-10; 17-19).

Abraham's faithful obedience

Let's consider Abraham's faith from three perspectives:

- Abraham's call: By faith when he was called he went out (Hebrews 11:8)
- Abraham's sojourning: By faith he sojourned in a strange country (Hebrews 11:9)
- Abraham's trial: By faith, when he was tried, he offered up his only begotten son (Hebrews 11:17).

From the beginning, Abraham obeyed God (Genesis 26:5). Hebrews 11:8 tells the story briefly: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."

In the Greek, the thrust of Abraham's obedience is emphatic: "By faith being called out Abraham obeyed to go out . . ." (The Englishman's Greek New Testament).

This is an important aspect of faith. Abraham was not called because of his faith (Genesis 12:1-4). He was called because God willed to call him. His faith is to be understood in relation to Abraham's obedience. It was Abraham's immediate obedience that proved his faith and justified him (James 2:21-24).

Hebrews 11:8 tells us that Abraham went out to obey God, not knowing where he was going. That is an important and difficult step for a Christian to take, because human beings desire independence. However, God wants us to learn to depend on Him forever. Abraham looked to God for guidance, direction and protection. Had Abraham lived by sight, he would never have obeyed God's call to go into a foreign land.

Another element of Abraham's obedience is evident in his sojourning: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (Hebrews 11:9). The Englishman's Greek New Testament shows that the Greek is emphatic about how Abraham lived: "In tents dwelling" highlights that he did not live in a permanent abode.

Obedience without reservation

Like you and me, Abraham would surely have preferred a permanent, stable home and life. However, Abraham knew he was a stranger and pilgrim in a strange land. And because he knew his citizenship was reserved in a heavenly city built by God (Hebrews 11:10), he remained faithful to God and did not return to his homeland (Hebrews 11:13-16). Little wonder God called Abraham His friend. God's friends obey Him; Abraham obeyed God without reservation.

Finally, God supremely tested Abraham's faith when He commanded him to offer his only son as a sacrifice. Scripture indicates that Abraham somehow knew, that he deeply believed that God would raise his son from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). God was so moved by Abraham's faith and obedience that He guaranteed His blessings to be upon Abraham and his descendants from then on, both physically and spiritually (Genesis 22:15-18).

We must remember that Abraham and Sarah had Isaac when they were old. Bearing a son beyond their time was a tremendous blessing in itself. God had promised Abraham He would bless his descendants through Isaac.

What a shock it would be to a father that someone, anyone, would demand



hopes of two older parents, all of their desires to see their son grow up to father his own children, all of these emotions and more would have discouraged anyone of lesser faith.

Abraham's response to this trial is why God says that He is not ashamed to be called Abraham's God (Hebrews 11:16). This is also why God is preparing a city for His faithful disciples. You and I can exhibit this same faith.

Our faithful obedience

The lessons of Hebrews 11 are written for you and me. They are treasure troves of faith stored up for our spiritual enrichment. Paul encourages Christians to walk in the steps of Abraham, the father of the faithful (Romans 4:12, 16). Your Bible makes

we need to weather the storms of life. With God's help we can obey God's commands. This proves our faith and pleases God.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Our exercise of faith toward God pleases Him. "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

To please God, one must believe that God is alive and all-powerful. Abraham believed God existed. You believe God exists. Abraham diligently sought God, for he knew God would reward him for his diligence.

The lessons of Hebrews 11 are written for you and me. Christians are encouraged to walk in the steps of Abraham, the father of the faithful. Your Bible makes plain that we can and must exercise the same faith that Abraham had, and that kind of faith is within our reach.

plain that we can and must exercise the same faith that Abraham had—and that kind of faith is within our reach.

We must remember the clear teachings of James 2, that faith without works is dead. For faith to be alive and well, for faith to be active, it must be seen as alive in the actions of the person who professes it.

Don't let anyone deceive you into thinking otherwise. The works that prove our faith result from obedience to God and Christ's plain and direct commands. Such scriptural commands are either the Ten Commandments themselves, as obeyed in the Spirit, or principles based on the Commandments (James 2:8).

The tools we need to exercise Christ's faith are all readily available

You and I can diligently seek God, and we know He will reward us for studying and obeying His will.

Yes, we can please God. Yes, we do please God, and we do so through the same faith that Abraham exhibited.

This is not to say that we obey perfectly, that we show perfect faith. We do not. But our faith can grow through daily overcoming (that is, through daily contact with God in prayer, study of His Word and application of His law of love). What we lack God will provide (2 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 3:14-16).

And so the story ends. God called Abraham His friend. In the same way, Christ calls us His friends. We are God's friends because of our faith in Him, proven by our obedience to His holy commands.

Let us all continue to follow an excellent example of obedient faith, that of God's friend, Abraham. **GN**

Hong Kong

Continued from page 8

years. The lease expires at midnight on June 30, 1997, when the territory reverts to China. Although Hong Kong Island had been given to Britain forever, it is now felt that the original treaty ceding the island to Great Britain was unfair and no longer applies.

Thriving against the odds

Hong Kong today is one of the most valuable pieces of real estate on earth. Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the pre-communist Chinese Republic that overthrew the emperors in 1911, said of Hong Kong: "I began to wonder how it was that Englishmen could do such things as they have done with the barren rock of Hong Kong within 70 or 80 years, while in 4,000 years China had achieved nothing like it."

Everything is stacked against Hong Kong. It depends on China for water and food and has no raw materials of its own, and it has one of the greatest population densities in the world. Yet it has a high standard of living and was recently ranked the third most competitive economy in the world (after the United States and Singapore, replacing Japan, which slipped to fourth place). Its real estate is among the most expensive on earth; a 1,100-square-foot apartment sells for \$1 million (in U.S. dollars) or rents for \$10,000 per month.

Hong Kong has benefited greatly from British rule. As a British colony it enjoyed more than a century of stability while China suffered unprecedented turmoil as it was forced to adjust to the modern world. The Boxer Rebellion of 1900, the revolution of 1911 and the civil war between nationalists and communists weakened China before the Japanese invasion and occupation in the 1930s.

After Japan's defeat, more suffering was to follow. The civil war resumed, with the communists gaining the victory. Then, in the late 1960s, came the Cultural Revolution, which left an estimated 25 million people dead.

In the late 1970s, after the death of Mao Tse-tung, the founder of the People's Republic, came economic



reform. Realizing the inadequacies of the communist system but fearing more change would result in more chaos, the Chinese leadership began experimenting with the free market. The southeast province of Canton became a "special enterprise zone." Its capital city, Guangzhou, is now the richest city in China. Its industrial workers take home U.S. \$100 per month, considerably more than the national average.

Canton borders Hong Kong. Much of the economic development in Canton is the result of investment channeled through Hong Kong. Canton's capitalist system within a communist country ("One country, two systems" is the official slogan) has given China one of the highest growth rates in the world.

With a growing free market, calls for political reform grew, culminating in the disastrous events in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, the year that saw many communist regimes overthrown in Europe. China's leaders sent a clear message to its citizens and the world: Reform goes only so far. Economic reform is ostensibly acceptable, but other freedoms are not.

Who will change whom?

China's century of instability and its avowed communist system worry the people of Hong Kong, who fear for their way of life and financial stability. Over the last 10 years, many Hong Kong citizens have left the country to establish businesses and gain citizenship in other nations, but many are now returning (with foreign passports) to cash in on what they see as a bonanza. Many feel that, rather than China taking over Hong Kong, the latter will radically change China.

The potential is enormous. If all goes well after China takes over Hong Kong, the hope in Beijing is that Taiwan will voluntarily reunite with the mainland. Taiwan's vast holdings of foreign currency would give China yet another big economic boost.

Asia is the burgeoning giant of the planet. Growth rates in Asian countries

are far higher than in Europe or North America. Those nations in Asia that practice free enterprise are unencumbered by some of the excess baggage long-time industrial nations must contend with. Businesses and employees in Western countries are paid high wages, which makes their products uncompetitive; they pay high taxes, which discourages investment and hard work; their governments waste billions of dollars sustaining self-perpetuating bureaucracies that stifle business, discourage individual initiative and encourage a welfare mentality.

Although many Asian nations are supposedly democracies, the ordinary voters do not have the power to vote them-

Now, almost 50 years to the day since divesting itself of its Indian Empire, the British will hand over control of Hong Kong, the last major possession of the British crown. It's not just the end of an era for Hong Kong. It's the end of an era for Asia and Europe.

selves expensive benefits as in the West.

Today some of the richest countries in the world are in Asia. Japan and Taiwan are the world's leading creditor (surplus) countries, while the United States has greater debts than any nation in history. Unless this problem is resolved, the United States will inevitably decline as a major power, while others fill the vacuum. Economic decline equals political decline equals military decline. Each follows the other.

U.S. influence declining

Politically and militarily, the United States is on the decline in the region. America handed Okinawa back to Japan more than two decades ago. Pressure to close bases on the island is mounting following the rape of a 12-year-old Japanese girl by three American soldiers in September 1995. On the mainland of Japan, the public is nervous about China's growing

strength and perceives the United States as an unreliable ally. Earlier this decade, American bases in the Philippines were closed at the request of Manila. Talk of reunification between the two Koreas could lead to a U.S. withdrawal because American troops are unpopular there.

Other Western nations have already pulled out of Asia, and it appears to be only a matter of time until the United States follows.

In Australia the government of Prime Minister Paul Keating is determined to break its one last remaining link with Britain, its allegiance to the British crown. Many view this as a move intended to signal Australia's commitment to Asia at the expense of its ties to other regions of the world.

The French are experiencing opposition to their continued presence in Asia as a result of their unpopular nuclear tests in the South Pacific.

Asia has experienced a century of great turmoil. At the end of the 20th century, after 100 years of political instability, colonial occupation and debilitating poverty, the continent is coming into its own. Power is passing from the West to the East. That doesn't mean that the West is finished, but it does

mean that the West needs to make some major changes if it is to compete with the rising power of the new Asian economic giants.

Rise and fall of nations

The history of mankind has been the story of the rise and fall of nations, much of it prophesied in the Bible. Daniel 2:21 says that God "removes kings and sets up kings."

The peoples of Asia want free enterprise and Western technology, but want nothing to do with the West's values. They still cling tenaciously to their strong family values and the traditions they have held for thousands of years.

When China enters Hong Kong a few months from now, it will mark the end of a century that has seen the West decline and the East rise: the end of one age and the dawn of another. **GN**

*Teach Your Children***God's Ways**

Jesus Christ recognized that children must be included in the spiritual life of His followers. Are we teaching them to love God's ways and especially His Sabbath?

by **Bill Jacobs**

If you are one of God's people, you are a vessel God is using to preserve truth. God preserves His truth and love for His ways in the hearts of people. He preserves His truth across time, from generation to generation.

This principle is so important that God commanded the nation of Israel: "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine . . . You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up . . . that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth" (Deuteronomy 11:18-21). He knew that, if the nation was to survive and thrive, His spiritual truths must be preserved and passed down from parents to children.

Jesus Christ perpetuated this principle, instructing His disciples not to ignore the children in their midst. "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me," He said (Mark 9:37). He, too, recognized that children must be included in the spiritual life of His followers.

The Sabbath command

Since God is vitally concerned about our children, we must be concerned for our children's spiritual welfare.

We must learn to pass God's truth on to them.

How do we do that? To illustrate how we can teach our children God's truth, let's look at one of God's Ten Commandments, the fourth. Specifically, let's see how we can teach our children to love and keep God's Sabbath as He intended.

Why single out the Sabbath as our example in this article? God commanded that we observe His Sabbaths—the weekly and annual Sabbaths—as a family. God commanded that all family members, as well as household servants and visitors, were to refrain from normal work on that day (Exodus 20:10).

The Sabbath is also a test commandment, demonstrating our level of commitment to obeying God regardless of any consequences.

The Sabbath also lays the groundwork for our relationship with God and the religion of the heart. It reminds us weekly that He is our Creator and that His Kingdom will come as promised. It is a day set aside to learn more about Him and His ways. It is time in which we cease from our work to allow Him to work in us, writing His laws and ways in our hearts.

But, before we can teach our children God's ways, we first build a right relationship with them, one in which God's truth will grow and flourish in the hearts of our children. Our teaching and example must demonstrate to them a way of life they will want to emulate,

The Sabbath also lays the groundwork for our relationship with God and the religion of the heart.

rather than a burden imposed on them.

Why differing views

How do our young people view the Sabbath? Some teenagers resent it, feeling that because of it they are missing out on something. "It's so boring," they may say. They'd rather be out with friends than with their families.

Not knowing how to handle this attitude, parents sometimes have two opposite, and equally wrong, reactions. Some think: Maybe if I'm more lenient, they won't dislike it so much. This approach causes children to devalue the Sabbath and disrespect their parents as they do whatever they please on that day.

Other parents think: Maybe if I make them do it, they'll learn to like it. This causes children to resent both the day and their parents. The tug of war continues, and everyone grows frustrated, discouraged and confused.

Do teens respect the Sabbath? Some don't, but a great many do. In my job as a national coordinator for programs for youth, teens often asked me questions about the Sabbath. During a visit I made to a church, a huge, strapping teenager, who looked like he was born to play football, approached me. "My name's John," he said, looking down at me. "Here's my question: Is it really wrong to play football on the Sabbath?"

I looked him in the eye and said, "Yes, John, it really is." He broke out in a big smile and

said, "Right! I was just testin' ya!"

And he was. He wanted affirmation that his sacrifice was worth it. It was a test for him, just as it sometimes is for the rest of us. He understood the Sabbath and followed it.

Why some are bored

Why are other kids simply bored with it? Let's consider another teenager and why her outlook is different. Tina is 16, an only child. She's bright, but unmotivated in school. She doesn't mix well with other students or with anyone else. She's not active at church, and she hates sports, dances and other social events. She's disrespectful to her mother. Tina would sum up her life—school, church, family, friends, activities—in one word: boring.

What's wrong with this picture? Tina was born when her parents were well into middle age. Her father was special to her, but he is now seriously ill, and she misses him. At 16, she needs him more than ever, but he isn't there.

Tina's mother spends a lot of time taking care of Tina's father and therefore can't provide much comfort for Tina.

Who is at fault here? No one. But there is a hole in Tina's life. She feels left out, abandoned, ignored. She feels like she's not a part of anything. To deal with her plight, Tina has chosen to distance herself from her feelings of abandonment



by being bored. She has closed her heart to her family, school, church and friends. When we

have no involvement in anything, we are bored.

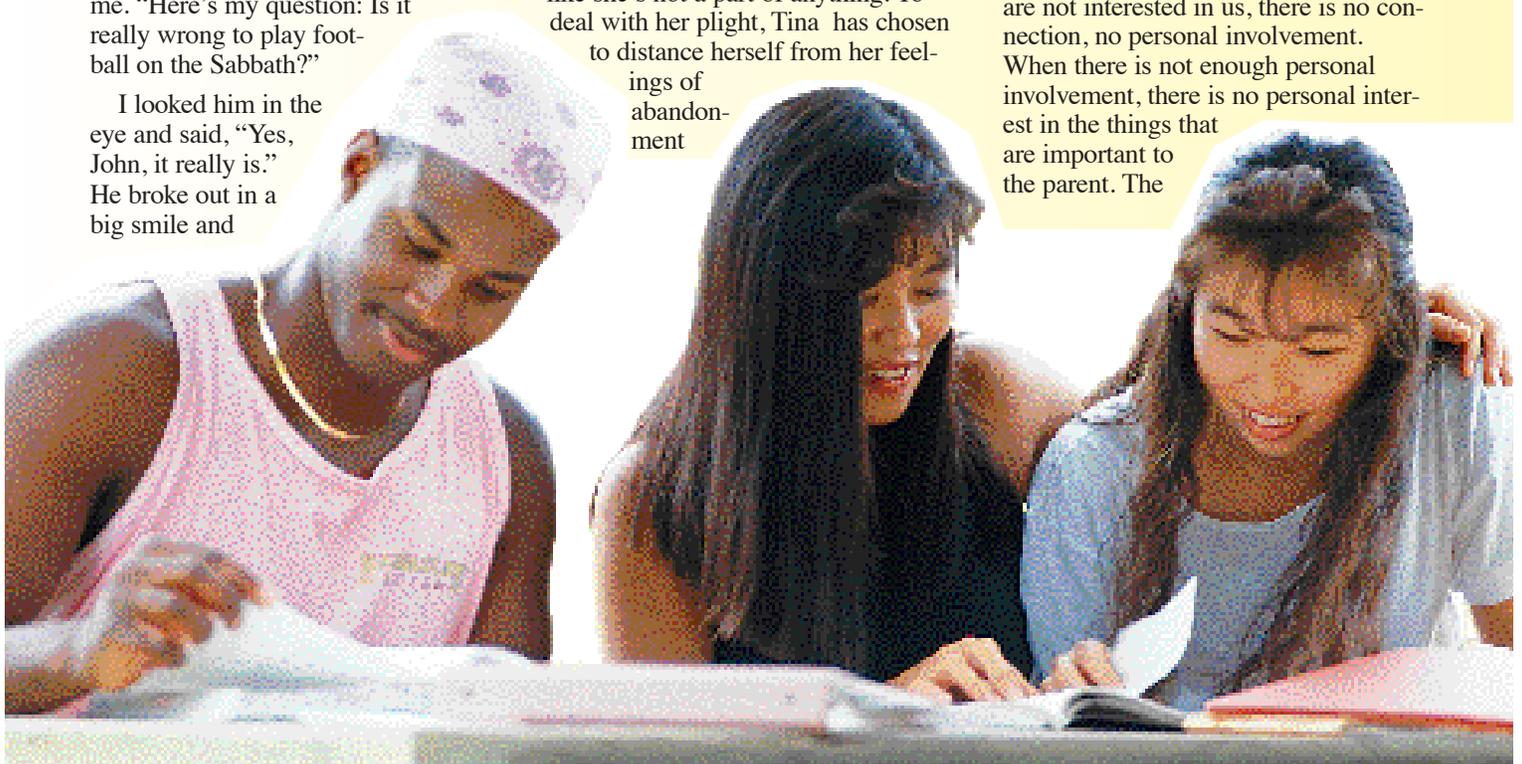
Teens who feel bored with the Sabbath are teens who don't identify with their church, who don't feel a part of it, who feel the church doesn't offer what they need. They can't see that there is anything there for them. "This is boring," they say.

It's boring because they are not included and therefore not involved. They probably have the same vague uneasiness about their families because their parents are too busy to talk to them much. They feel excluded, disconnected from family decisions.

Underlying relationships

When parents who have not won the hearts of their children try to impose rules, they meet resistance. There is a simple equation for summarizing this phenomenon: Rules without relationship = rebellion. Rules without a relationship are boring because they are seen as meaningless.

When we are interested in a subject, it is not boring. From a teen's standpoint, when our church and our parents are not interested in us, there is no connection, no personal involvement. When there is not enough personal involvement, there is no personal interest in the things that are important to the parent. The





Sabbath is boring to teens because they have no personal involvement; it belongs to other people, not to them.

If we want to pass on our values to our children, we must first open their hearts to receive them. There is also a simple equation that shows this principle: Rules with relationship = respect. Rules with a relationship are important because the child knows the parent cares, and the things that are important to the parent will be seen as important by the child.

Even though peer pressure and innumerable other distractions adversely affect children, their parents have a greater impact on their values than any other influence, and this is especially true when it comes to religious values. God, in spite of societal influences, has put parents in the most powerful position to influence their children's lifelong beliefs. He places parents in this position so that they, unlike anyone else, can open the hearts of their children to receive their values.

If you want God to write the Sabbath on the hearts of your children, you must work on your relationship with your children and open their hearts.

Dealing with boredom

Is the Sabbath supposed to be boring?

In some families, the main Sabbath activity is sleeping. Children's motive in sleeping through the day is right: They want to keep the Sabbath. They sleep just to escape boredom.

But what does the Sabbath represent? It symbolizes the millennial rest, the Kingdom of God. Is that boring? Of course not.

The Sabbath is not supposed to be boring either. If we make it boring and tedious for our children, what message are we sending them?

The problem lies in misunderstandings about the Sabbath. We sometimes don't know how to keep it properly. To correctly and positively picture the

In some families, the main Sabbath activity is sleeping. Children's motive in sleeping is to escape boredom.

Kingdom of God, and eliminate Sabbath boredom, we must teach our children the real intent of the Sabbath. Everyone knows that God rested on the Sabbath, and so should we. But God also works on the Sabbath, and so should we.

But Sabbath work must be of a particular kind.

In John 5:2-17 we read the account of Jesus Christ's healing on the Sabbath of a man who had been crippled 38 years, an act that elicited criticism from the Jews.

"But Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working'" (verse 17).

God rested from His creative work on the Sabbath, to show us that we should rest from our work as well. But God continues one kind of work seven days a week: Night and day, without ceasing, God is working to bring all of us into His Kingdom. He works to help

people grow spiritually on the Sabbath. He works constantly to build a close, personal relationship with His people.

Jesus healed more people on the Sabbath than on any other day. He traveled on the Sabbath; He taught and preached on the Sabbath.

Was Jesus sinning? No. These activities on the part of our Savior were part of God's work of helping people enter into the Kingdom of God and were perfectly acceptable to God.

Sowing seeds for the Kingdom

Whatever we do on the Sabbath should involve sowing seeds for the Kingdom. Consider the many people Jesus healed. As far as we know, most of the people He healed did not become converted. So why did He bother healing them? Did he just like to amaze people with His miracles?

I don't think so. Jesus paid a lot of attention to beggars, the blind, crippled people, children: the people others

TALK TO GOD AS A FAMILY

When our children were growing up, we had a family tradition of praying together every Friday night. We called it "talking to God."

To help everyone think of what to pray about, we had a formula we all used. Each of us would make his or her own prayer list using this formula before we would begin to pray. We would each:

- Express thanks for someone or something.
- Pray about something concerning God's work.
- Pray for someone else.
- Pray for something regarding ourselves.

Once everyone had his list complete, we would all kneel side by side in front of the sofa. As the mother, I would begin. Then each of the children would take a turn

(the order was determined before we began), and Dad would go last and close.

On occasion the girls might have guests over for the night. On those occasions, they were given the option to join us or not. Some did, some didn't.

We found this family tradition to be beneficial in several ways. Not only was it an opportunity to set the right example and teach our children how to pray, but it gave us insight into how they thought: what was important to them, what they were most concerned about.

If you're not used to praying together, it may seem awkward at first, but if you persist it will become a habit. We found that we were able to build an enjoyable family tradition of talking to God. **GN**

—Elaine Jacobs

Do you want your children to learn how to be kind and outgoing, to sow seeds for the Kingdom?

ignored.

Why? He knew that someone unaccustomed to acts of kindness who is shown a little of it will remember it forever.

Is it not possible that Jesus was setting these people up for a future relationship with Him in the Kingdom? He can walk up to these people and say, "Remember Me?" and the rapport will be instantaneous. I think He was sowing seeds for the Kingdom.

Can we do the same thing? I asked a group of fifth-graders to tell me ways they could sow seeds for the Kingdom. Here are their responses:

- Be friends with the kids everybody else picks on at school.
- Study the Bible to learn the answers to hard questions.
- Visit friends and relatives when they get sick.
- Visit the elderly.

Do you want your children to learn how to be kind, to be outgoing, to project a giving, serving attitude? Do you want them to be considerate of those less fortunate, to take them out on the Sabbath and, as a family, sow some seeds for the Kingdom?

Of course you do. And, as you teach them, talk about why you are doing what you're doing. Involve your children in the thinking as well as the activity.

Why it's important

Why is it so important to set the proper example for our children?

Because God requires it of us, as described in Matthew 25:31-40: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before

Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of



naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the

King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"



Do you want your children to build a relationship with God? Do you want God to know your children?

Of course you do. Then teach them to do good for those less fortunate. Teach your children to be partners with God in sowing seeds for the Kingdom, on the Sabbath, as Christ did. Do it with them, and you'll strengthen your relationships with God and your children at the same time.

Get them involved

Get your children involved in helping in the Church of God. Teens and youngsters can do most things the older members can do. Of course they don't know how at first, but that's what the rest of us are there for: to show them how to do it.

Paul discussed this principle in Titus 2:3, 4: Instruct "the older women likewise, that they be . . . teachers of good things: that they

admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands . . ."

We must get young people involved and help them realize they have a part in the church too. Young girls should help out in the kitchen with snacks and refreshments. Boys can help with setup and cleanup. Put them to work and patiently teach them how to serve. That's how they become a part of

the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or

We must get young people involved and help them realize they have a part in the church, too.



God's Church. That's how they learn that they are loved, valuable and appreciated.

Will there be bugs in the system? You bet. But it's far more important that young people get involved than it is for everything to run smoothly and on time.

This inclusive involvement is the way every society passes on its ways and values to its next generation. It works, and it had better work, for the sake of our next generation.

Spiritual intent

Under the old covenant, God clearly spelled out rules for how the Sabbath was to be kept. When Christ came, He magnified the law (Isaiah 42:21). He showed us the spiritual intent: that hatred, for example, is like murder and lust is as bad as adultery.

Jesus also magnified the Sabbath. In Mark 2:23-28 the Pharisees criticized the disciples because they picked some grain as they walked through fields on the Sabbath. Jesus Christ pointed the Pharisees away from their rigid way of observing the Sabbath and pointed them to the original meaning of the day. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," He told them.

Jesus taught the Sabbath's intended purpose: that the day is a blessing God gave us to help us draw close to Him. Jesus emphasized what the day is for, rather than listing all the things we can't do. This is how we must teach our children.

I received a letter from a teenage girl. "Please help me with my confusion about the Sabbath," she pleaded. "Is it okay to go out with my school friends on Friday night? Is it okay to

play school sports on the Sabbath? Everyone I know says it's no big deal. My friends wonder what's wrong with me. I want to get along with my friends and have fun, but I also want to please God and live like His Son. I don't know what to do."

I did not send her a long list of things she could and could not do. I quoted Isaiah 58:13, 14: "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from



doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken?"

Let kids make decisions

If we take time out from the busyness of our lives, ceasing from our own works to let God work on us, we will draw close to God. That is what the Sabbath is for, and we should teach our children how to use it properly. As they grow older, we can let them make decisions, just as God allows us to do. For instance, we can let them make the decision of what to do for several hours. Should they play video games, call a friend who is sick, do homework, help Mom get dinner ready—or just lie back and be bored?

Ask your kids which of these activities best fits the purpose of the Sabbath. In this process they learn to participate in Sabbath decision-making. When they make the right choices, they feel good, and the right decisions are reinforced. When they choose unwisely, they also learn.

Through this process, our children learn to become partners with God in Sabbath-keeping. They gradually learn the purpose and intent of the day, and the Sabbath becomes a part of them.

God's Fourth Commandment is being written in their hearts: not as a list of rules, but in its spiritual intent. As they grow older, the Sabbath will be a part of their lives. They will find themselves Sabbath-keepers.

When children are only a few years old, we need to tell them everything to do. But, if we continue that approach, detailing every move and behavior for them well into their teenage years, the best we can hope for is little people who understand the Sabbath only as a list of rules and regulations. They will not understand the purpose of the day

HELP YOUR CHILDREN PROVE IT

in their hearts.

But, if we build that relationship with them, opening our hearts to them, then their hearts will be open to us. Our desires and beliefs will hold great weight in their minds. They won't want to disappoint us, and they won't want to disappoint God.

Live our religion

We must live our religion at home. I once met a young man who told me about his mother. She had 18 children, and her husband did not like her religion. The family lived 150 miles from the nearest location for Sabbath services.

After the young man's mother attended church for several years, she contracted rheumatoid arthritis, which invaded most of her joints and spine, disfiguring her hands and feet. She was rendered bedfast, suffering excruciatingly.

However, every Sabbath at 4 in the morning her alarm clock would go off. She would rise slowly and, with great effort, ready herself and her children for Sabbath services.

She would ride with aching joints for three hours to services, sit on a metal chair for two hours, fellowship for an hour and ride three hours home. When she got home, she went to bed, where she stayed until 4 o'clock the morning of the next Sabbath.

After seven years of keeping the Sabbath in this manner, she died. Her son told me he found it almost unthinkable to miss services for any reason. He knew his mother's heart; she loved and honored God and wished more than anything else to obey Him.

If we want our children to love and respect God, the most important thing we can do is love and respect God. If we want our children to love and keep the Sabbath, then we must love and keep the Sabbath. We must live our religion at home, and we must remember that each of our children is a vessel dedicated to God for the preservation of His truth. **GN**

Most of us have experienced a time in our life when we have had to reexamine our spiritual foundations. During this soul-searching, the dilemma of a special group of people, our children, has given me pause.

My children are now grown, having been born and grown up in our church. Since my husband is a minister who prepares his sermons on Friday nights, most of the time it fell my responsibility on the Sabbath to read to our children and teach them God's way.

I took my responsibility seriously and was diligent, but a conversation I had with one of my daughters a few months ago started me thinking about how I could have done a better job. My daughter told me she didn't know if she believed what she believed because it was what she was taught or because she had proved it.

I imagine a lot of children who have grown up attending their parents' church have found themselves in this quandary. I started thinking about what could be done by parents of the next generation to ensure their children don't go through this.

It seems to me the thing to do is not only teach our children God's truth, but teach them how to prove it to themselves *and provide an opportunity for them to do so.*

For example, as the world's holidays approach, plan a day to take your children to the library to research the origin of the holidays. It seems to me encyclopedias would be a good place to begin the search. Help your children understand the meaning of the days and the various customs associated with them. Often, of course, you will discover the origins of such days lie in pagan

practices of the ancient world, and it is inappropriate for Christians to participate in those customs.

If your library skills are stale, as mine are, you might want to take a dry run: First go the library without your children and enlist the aid of the librarian to help you to negotiate, for example, the computerized card files.

When you do take the kids, remember you're on this outing to let them prove something for themselves. Offer to help them, but let them find the book, look up the topic and read the information.

Think of ways to make this a positive experience. Don't allow it to become hard work (by requiring a 10-page report on their findings, for instance).

Perhaps you could plan a picnic



or go for ice cream afterwards. Go to a private place where you can discuss what has been proved. You can stimulate conversation by asking questions and letting your children tell you what they learned.

Later, if you have other literature on the holiday in question, you could guide a study of the holiday, with the children taking turns reading and looking up Scriptures.

I believe an exercise like this done once a year or even semiannually will help write some of these truths on our children's hearts. Then, when they are older, they will know what they believe because they have proven it for themselves. **GN**

—Elaine Jacobs

'Thy Kingdom Come!'

For a moment, close your eyes and wrap your mind around this phrase: The Kingdom of God. What picture develops in your mind? Many people, even those with religious backgrounds, draw a blank. Many confusing ideas about God's Kingdom often make it a hazy and distant concept, raising more questions than answers. Is the Kingdom of God in heaven? Is it on earth? Who will be in it? Is it here already, in our hearts? Are you part of it now? Will you be part of it in the future? What will you do there?

These are valid, thought-provoking questions for which God's Word provides clear, authoritative answers. Throughout the Bible God focuses His servants—men, women and children, past, present and future—on that Kingdom, and He promises that all people of all ages will eventually have a chance to see the destiny, and hope, He has planned for their lives.

Researching the Kingdom of God also steers us to a personal question: Does it impact your life now? We live in a high-tech age that is bombarding our senses with thousands of distractions, all screaming for our attention. Can the Kingdom compete with Hollywood, personal computers and life in the '90s? Can it be real to us? If so, how should it affect us?

Let's take a brief journey, in Bible-study format, and find out what you need to know about the Kingdom of God.

Let's begin our study

Discussion: What is a kingdom, anyway?

The Greek word for kingdom is *basileia*, "primarily an abstract noun, denoting sovereignty, royal power, dominion," which also can be "a concrete noun, denoting the territory or people over whom a king rules . . ." (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

These meanings are standard in political science, which commonly identifies four characteristics of a state or kingdom: It must have rulers, subjects, laws and territory.

Does the Kingdom of God meet these four criteria?

- Who is its ruler? (Luke 1:26-33; Matthew 6:10; Ephesians 5:5; Revelation 11:15; 19:11-16).

Note: The phrase "Kingdom of God" itself clearly identifies the Ruler; various scriptures define Jesus Christ's role as the One directly governing the Kingdom.

- Who are its subjects? (Isaiah 2:2-4; Jeremiah 3:17; Daniel 7:13, 14; Micah 4:1-4).

Note: The term "mountain" is often prophetically synonymous with "government" or "kingdom."

- What are its laws? (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Micah 4:2; Isaiah 2:2, 3; Hebrews 8:7-13).
- What territory does it govern? (Psalms 22:27, 28; 72:1-11; Daniel 2:34, 35; Zechariah 14:8, 9).

There'll be some changes

Discussion: What will happen when God's rule is established over all the nations of the earth? Much of what we consider to be normal will change!

- Where will the new world capital be? (Jeremiah 3:17; Micah 4:2).
- Not all areas of knowledge will increase; some will just disappear (Isaiah 2:1-4). What other areas besides war do you think might be forgotten?
- The animal kingdom is in for big changes (Isaiah 11:6-9).
- How far, and into what areas, will God's healing extend? (Isaiah 35).

- What do “all things” include? (Acts 3:19-21).

Life after the Millennium?

Discussion: This all sounds wonderful, but what a shame it lasts only 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-6). Or does it? Does God’s Kingdom ever end?

- Is God’s dominion limited? (Daniel 2:20-22, 34, 35, 44, 45; Isaiah 9:6, 7).

- What lies beyond the millennial reign? Do these resurrected people also have opportunity to live under God’s rule? (Revelation 20:4-6, 11-13; Ezekiel 37).

- What happens when it’s all over? (1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Revelation 21:1-5).

Note: Revelation 21:5 gives an intriguing clue: “Behold, I make all things new.” What do you think that means? God gives us that briefest glimpse, but it is assurance that He already has grand plans in mind.

But isn’t the Kingdom already here?

Discussion: These prophesied changes are all fascinating, but what about the idea that the Kingdom of God is here now? If that is so, how does that work? If it is not so, does the Kingdom have anything to do with us now? Does having the true knowledge of God’s Kingdom make you or me a different person? What about in the future? What will we be like? What will we do?

- Is there a way in which we experience God’s sovereignty in our lives now? (Colossians 1:13, 14).
- Has God given us some sign of His plan to include us in His kingdom later? (Romans 8:11; 2 Corinthians 1:20-22; 5:4, 5).
- Does our having the Holy Spirit mean that we are now in the Kingdom? (1 Corinthians 15:50).

Will we have to do anything?

Discussion: As 1 Corinthians 15 and other scriptures show, at Christ’s return the saints will be changed into spirit, given eternal life and commissioned to rule with Christ. What then? What do we *do* once we inherit the Kingdom?

- What is involved in “rulership”? (Revelation 5:9, 10; 20:4-6).
- What are qualities of a great ruler and teacher? (Isaiah 40:1-11; 30:20, 21).

Having this golden opportunity laid before us,

how should that impact our daily lives?

- What should our reasonable response be? (1 John 3:1-3; Romans 12:1, 2).

- Should anything else take priority? (Matthew 6:33; 13:44-46).

- How should our prayer life be affected? (Matthew 6:9, 10; Luke 11:2).

What should we seek first?

Discussion: How does Kingdom-centered prayer motivate us? Or what motivates us to be Kingdom-oriented people?

- What should this focus tell us about our physical lives? (Hebrews 11:1, 8-10, 13-16; Matthew 6:33).

Don’t stop now

As promised, our journey was brief. A study of the Kingdom of God takes time. In fact, it takes a lifetime! What could be more important, more rewarding, more challenging, than to dedicate ourselves to the very purpose for which we draw each breath?

Thy kingdom come!

Further research topics

We’ve barely scratched this subject’s surface. To dig further, we suggest that you:

- Analyze how long the servants of God have known of His kingdom. You can start with Jude 14, 15, all of Hebrews 11 and many of the Psalms. A topical Bible helps greatly in this type of research.

- Examine the many parables Christ used to explain aspects of the Kingdom of God. People in Jesus’ day frequently didn’t understand, but He made sure His disciples did (Matthew 13:10-17). Matthew 13 is a good starting point. See how many times you find the phrase “the Kingdom is like . . .” Think in depth about the ramifications of each of these lessons. *GN*

This outline is intended to suggest topics and questions to spark discussion in Bible study. You may find it useful to spread the study out over a number of days and to adapt it to fit the age groupings within your family. Special thanks to Doug Johnson from Mansfield, Ohio, for his preparation of this study.

The *Real* Gospel of Jesus Christ

Is the gospel a message about Jesus Christ, or is it the message He brought? You need to understand the real good news of Jesus Christ!

by **Bill Bradford**

When Jesus Christ came to live on earth as a human, He brought with Him a message called “the gospel.” What was this message Jesus preached?

Many have been taught that the “gospel,” the “good news,” is the story of Christ’s life, birth, earthly activities, death and resurrection. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 are often used to support this definition of the gospel of Christ:

“... I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand . . . —unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures . . .”

Is this the full definition of the gospel message Christ preached?

As we shall see, Christ’s gospel message includes much more than simply the story that His life and death lead to our salvation. It includes not only what salvation really is and how God intends to save the human race from its present dilemma, but it reveals our glorious destiny in the Kingdom of God.

The gospel of the Kingdom

Let’s first look at the message Christ Himself proclaimed while on earth. Mark records for us, in Mark 1:14, 15, what Jesus preached during His ministry: “. . . 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 says this gospel is the news *of the Kingdom of God*, and this is the gospel we are commanded to believe in.

As mentioned above, the word “gospel” literally means “good news.” Jesus brought as His gospel the “good news of the Kingdom of God.”

Matthew also records for us the subject matter of Jesus Christ’s preaching. In Matthew 4:17 he writes, after Jesus’ temptation by the devil: “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Matthew’s term for the content of Jesus Christ’s preaching is “the kingdom of heaven,” another term for the same message. Jesus began preaching the message of God’s kingdom from the very beginning of His ministry.

Luke also confirms that Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, noting that Christ said, “Because for this purpose I have been sent” (Luke 4:43).

Luke’s account continues in Luke 8:1: “. . . He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings [the gospel, or good news] of the kingdom of God . . .” Later Jesus sent the 12 disciples to preach this same gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 9:2). After that, He sent 70 others, instructing them to speak also of

the Kingdom of God (Luke 10:9-11).

After His death and resurrection, but before He ascended to His Father, He “presented Himself alive” to the apostles, again “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

Paul describes his own preaching in Ephesus as relating to “the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). He discussed that Kingdom in most of his letters to individual churches. He referred to himself and his companions as “fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (Colossians 4:11). When Paul met the Jews in Rome, he preached to them about the Kingdom of God and Jesus (Acts 28:31).

It is noteworthy that Paul used the Old Testament Scriptures—“the Law of Moses and the Prophets”—to preach the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ (Acts 28:23). The Bible has a consistent message from the beginning of the Old Testament to end of the New Testament concerning the Kingdom of God. The Bible is also clear why Jesus Christ brought this message of the Kingdom of God.

A literal kingdom

What is the Kingdom of God? Is it the Church? Is it something that resides in the hearts of Christians? Let’s begin in Daniel 2.

It becomes apparent, when we read Daniel 2:28-44, that the Kingdom of God is a *literal kingdom* that has not yet been established on earth. In this

passage we see that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a dream in which he saw an image of a huge man. This image consisted of a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet a mixture of iron and clay.

Daniel, a prophet of God in Nebuchadnezzar's court, interpreted the king's dream for him. Through God's inspiration, Daniel revealed that the four parts of this image were actually four successive world empires. By God's inspiration Daniel identified the first of the kingdoms, the head of gold, as the Babylonian Empire (Daniel 2:38).

The next two kingdoms are identified in Daniel 8:20, 21, which records a later vision that foretold the second and third empires. These two kingdoms are named as "the kings of Media and Persia" and "the kingdom of Greece." History has confirmed that the Babylonian Empire was succeeded by the Medo-Persian Empire and the Grecian Empire of Alexander the Great.

In chapter 7 these four kingdoms are pictured again, this time as four beasts. The vision in this chapter characterizes the empires as wild animals, predicting that their method of rule and domination would be cruel and oppressive. The fourth kingdom featured in chapter 7 is described as especially cruel.

We know from history that Alexander's Grecian kingdom was succeeded by the Roman Empire, the latter depicted here as challenging the very authority of God and persecuting His saints (Daniel 7:25). This entity is shown in vision as having 10 horns (verse 7), which are 10 extensions or resurrections of the fourth great empire to arise.

These resurrections of this fourth kingdom continue through history to our day, and the final resurrection is depicted as existing at Jesus Christ's return (verses 8-14).

It is in the days of this fourth kingdom that God will replace these earthly kingdoms with His kingdom, according to Daniel's prophecies. "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom

ARE THERE OTHER GOSPELS?

The Bible calls the gospel "the gospel of the Kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14) or simply "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 24:14). But the biblical writers used other names for it as well. For instance, the Bible speaks of the "gospel of Christ" and the "gospel of God." Do these names refer to various messages or different gospels?

As we will see, these are other terms for the same message preached by Jesus Christ.

For example, the term "gospel of God" simply means that it was a message of good news that originated with God. The apostle Peter tells us that the gospel was sent from God through Jesus Christ. Notice Acts 10:36, 37: "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached."

It was in Galilee that the gospel of the Kingdom of God was first preached after John's ministry had ended. It was this same gospel which Peter says God sent to the children of Israel by the preaching of Jesus Christ. Hence we see the term "gospel of God" and also the words the "gospel of Christ."

The gospel of God is God's gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel Jesus brought as God's messenger.

In a similar manner, Paul sometimes uses the term "my gospel" (Romans 2:16, 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:8). This does not mean it originated with Paul, nor was it a gospel about Paul. It was a message he received directly from Jesus Christ. ". . . The gospel which was preached by me . . . came through the revelation of Jesus Christ," he said (Galatians 1:11, 12). The term

"my gospel" makes sense because he was the one preaching it.

What about "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24)? From the beginning we are called by grace, then justified by grace and also saved by grace. The "gospel of grace" is another appropriate term for the same gospel Jesus preached.

The good news of the Kingdom is also called "the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13). Since the gospel of the Kingdom of God is about your entrance into the Kingdom of God and is synonymous with salvation, there is no conflict with the other terms for the gospel.

In Revelation 14:6, it is called "the everlasting gospel." Why? Because God's kingdom was planned even before the first man was created. "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:34). God's kingdom itself will last forever (Psalm 145:13; Daniel 4:3, 34, 7:14, 27; 2 Peter 1:11).

"The gospel of peace" is also used to describe this gospel (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15). Peace is an important consequence of the gospel of the Kingdom. Prophesying of God's Kingdom, Isaiah said "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end . . ." (Isaiah 9:7).

These words and phrases all describe the same gospel. The writers of the New Testament simply used terms that emphasized various aspects of the same wonderful message. Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, 15), continued to preach it throughout His ministry (Acts 1:3) and taught His disciples to preach the same message (Matthew 10:7). Although the words to describe it varied, the message is the same. **GN**

—Bill Bradford

ARE WE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD NOW?

Some verses about God's kingdom, like Colossians 1:13, seem to imply that Christians are now in the Kingdom of God. Is this true?

Part of the confusion in some minds is caused by the meaning of the word "kingdom." The Greek word *basileia*, translated "kingdom," denotes sovereignty, royal power and dominion (W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, "Kingdom").

Colossians 1:13 shows that God's royal sovereignty and power begins in the life of the Christian at conversion. The *NIV Study Bible* accurately explains that in this verse the word kingdom "does not here refer to a territory but to the authority, rule or sovereign power of a king. Here it means that the Christian is no longer under the dominion of evil (darkness) but under the benevolent rule of God's Son."

Virtually all other occurrences of "kingdom" refer to the literal dominion that Christ will establish at His return (Matthew 6:33; Revelation 11:15). As "heirs of God" in training to inherit that future Kingdom

(Romans 8:15-16; Matthew 25:34; Revelation 20:4, 6), Christians are thus subject to the sovereignty and authority of that Kingdom now.

Jesus Christ, ruler of that coming Kingdom, is the Lord and Master of Christians now (Philippians 2:9-11). God rules the lives of converted Christians who voluntarily obey Him and His laws. They submit themselves to God's *basileia*—His royal sovereignty and power. They individually are part of the Church, the Body of Christ which God also rules. But the Church collectively looks to God's coming world rule when the *basileia* will be fully established.

Likewise the Kingdom does not reside in the hearts of men, as some assume from Christ's words that "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). The Greek word *entos*, translated "within," is better translated "in the midst of" (Vine, "Within"). Christ could not have been telling the Pharisees here that God's kingdom was within them—after all, they wanted to destroy Him (Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6).

Jesus Christ was answering their question about when the Kingdom of

God would come, and He told them that it was already in their midst. He, as representative and king of that Kingdom, was right there among them, and they couldn't recognize it (John 18:36, 37). Rather than telling them the Kingdom of God was something in their hearts, Jesus Christ was warning them that they were so spiritually blind they couldn't recognize the very personification of that Kingdom in Him.

Some think that the Church is the Kingdom of God. Although there is a connection between the two, they are not identical. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22), which is the group of believers called by God to prepare for the coming Kingdom.

Christ rules His Church and in that sense it is under his sovereignty and royal power. We might say that the Church is the precursor of the coming Kingdom of God. The Bible never uses the term kingdom to apply directly to the Church. Instead it refers to a coming world-ruling government, as shown in the accompanying article. **GN**

—John Meakin

shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44).

We see that the fourth kingdom continues to rule until Christ returns to establish His kingdom here on earth.

God's kingdom—foretold repeatedly in Daniel—is the same kingdom Jesus Christ spoke about. There can be no mistake about the nature of the Kingdom of God. The four kingdoms described in Daniel 2, 7 and 8 ruled over people and lands. They were to be world empires with dominion and power to rule, warring against and conquering other nations. They had kings, governments and laws. They were literal kingdoms, whose ruins are visible to this day.

So, too, will the Kingdom of God be

a literal sovereignty ruling over the whole earth. "... The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever," said Daniel of this kingdom (Daniel 2:44).

This kingdom was the subject of Jesus' gospel. Jesus will return to the earth and establish the Kingdom. He will be the King of the Kingdom of God. "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (Revelation 11:15).

Entering the Kingdom

When Jesus came preaching the

Kingdom of God, He said it was "at hand" and commanded people to repent and believe the good news about it (Mark 1:14, 15).

His kingdom is something we must enter (Mark 10:23, 25). Jesus warned of obstacles that can prevent our entrance into the Kingdom (Matthew 5:20; 19:23-25; Mark 9:47; Luke 18:17; John 3:5).

Jesus was at that time inviting people to repent so they could enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). His parables described what the Kingdom is, when it would come and how a person could enter it, and He clarified the requirements for and obstacles to entering it.

When does a person enter the Kingdom of God? Upon conversion, Christians become children of God and

heirs of the kingdom (Romans 8:16, 17). But they will not inherit the kingdom until the kingdom comes. Paul explains: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:50-52).

Many people stop reading after the first four verses of this chapter, thinking they describe the entirety of the gospel Paul preached. But, by continuing to read the chapter, we see clearly that there is much more to the story. Paul goes on to explain more about the resurrection from the dead and entrance into the Kingdom of God. We "inherit," or enter, that kingdom "at the last trumpet" (verse 52), the great blast that signals Christ's return to rule the earth forever (Revelation 11:15).

Salvation through Jesus' life, death and resurrection is indeed a part of the gospel message, but it is not *exclusively* (as many assume) the gospel mes-

sage. Jesus Christ died, was buried and was resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) for a reason: so we could have everlasting life in the Kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5, 16).

We can accept Jesus' command to repent and believe this gospel message. We can turn to God for forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ and begin to live by the laws of the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus Christ. Those who refuse to live by God's holy laws will be refused entrance into the Kingdom of God and eternal life (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5).

Entering the Kingdom of God is synonymous with salvation. Thus, without understanding what the Kingdom of God is, we don't understand what salvation is.

Humans not in the Kingdom

This resurrection from the dead is to take place when Jesus Christ returns at the last trump and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Those who are resurrected from mortality to immortality will have entered His kingdom. The people who remain in the nations of the earth who are not

resurrected will not yet be *in* the Kingdom of God because they are still mortal (human); they will be ruled *by* the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God's rule of the earth will consist of the reign of Christ and those who have been given eternal life (Revelation 20:4-6).

Jesus Christ is setting up His kingdom on this earth with His resurrected saints so that all may have eternal life in the Kingdom of God. God's desire is that everyone has the opportunity to escape death and inherit the Kingdom of God, each in one's own time (1 Corinthians 15:20-26).

The message Jesus brought is called, appropriately, the good news of the Kingdom of God. It really is good news, the most wonderful news imaginable for mankind. Jesus Christ is asking you to believe that good news and "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

This publication is named for the same message Jesus proclaimed. Look for more articles in THE GOOD NEWS magazine explaining the teachings of Jesus Christ about the coming Kingdom of God and what you should do to enter that glorious kingdom. **GN**

Letters From Our Readers

Comments on the premier issue

Hurrah, Hurrah! We have a wonderful GOOD NEWS magazine again. It is beautiful. I loved the cover and all the articles. Thank you very much, and I am looking forward to the next issue.

Mrs. Glenn Meeks
Roseburg, Oregon

I read the article by Bonnie Greider, "Are We Thriving or Just Coping?," and "A Heart of Flesh," by Andrea West. Both were good articles, and as Mrs. Greider pointed out, we do take things for granted. I know this to be true.

I have several handicaps that have changed my life and made me aware of what others must put up with. I tell others that I once saw people with a

problem, but now I feel it. How people can see or know of a need and not try to help is hard to understand.

M.W. Bunch
Clarksville, Indiana

THE GOOD NEWS is certainly a high-class publication filled with spiritually uplifting material for all ages. I certainly appreciate the great efforts put forth to bring this magazine to us so soon, and it was especially significant to be able to receive the premier issue at the Feast.

What a blessing to read articles that were inspired by God and written by God's people.

Jeri Holcomb
Hawkins, Texas

We see THE GOOD NEWS as a great asset in replenishing our spiritual growth. Overall, it seems that everyone would like to see articles regarding living according to God's law in

the New Testament Church, and all that entails (Sabbath, Holy Days, everyday Christian living, etc.)

It looks like you have a great start toward that.

Dan Wilson
Big Sandy, Texas

We got our premier issue of THE GOOD NEWS during the Feast. Time hasn't allowed us to get it read completely, but we wanted you to know how great it is to have a wonderful magazine like this available.

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Garrison
Des Moines, Iowa

THE GOOD NEWS magazine is such a blessing! The look, content and paper quality of the magazine—and especially the content—represent God and His people.

Mr. and Mrs. Louis Barreiro
Stockton, California

'Called, Chosen and Faithful'

by Roger Foster

How can you tell authentic disciples of Jesus Christ from anyone else? After all, there are literally hundreds of Christian religious groups, each regarding itself as possessing that special something that gives it the edge with God.

Most groups professing to be Christian represent themselves as having a "calling," or as the "chosen" of the Lord. Many non-Christian religious groups regard themselves as the chosen of God.

When viewed from a distance, the whole religious scene is confusing. No wonder millions are suspicious of all religion. Is it possible to sort the truth in this religious milieu?

Yes it is, if we are willing to take an honest look at the facts.

Jesus Christ is real. His impact on the world has exceeded that of any other man who ever lived. Everyone is familiar with the name "Jesus Christ," but who knows what He taught, what was His mission? Who truly represents Him today? What makes His true followers different?

Jesus said, "I will build My church." The Greek word for "church" is *ekklēsia*, meaning "a calling out" or "called-out ones." But Jesus warned that "narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:14).

Should we be surprised? Most people just ignore what Jesus says if they don't agree with it. Nevertheless, Jesus tells those who wish to be His true disciples that they must "enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it" (Matthew 7:13).

Even if one becomes an authentic

disciple of Christ, a real danger is that one can be swept back into the clutches of Satan, the arch-adversary of all who would be godly. The apostle Paul wrote of his concern for those converted to Christianity under his ministry:

"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you

Paul was amazed at how easily people could believe a fraudulent gospel, embrace a deceptive spirit or even accept a counterfeit Messiah.

and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough" (2 Corinthians 11:3, 4, New International Version).

Many are easily deceived

Paul was amazed at how easily people threw away his teachings to believe a fraudulent gospel, embrace a deceptive spirit or even accept a counterfeit Messiah. Satan is a master deceiver. Far too many people are easy prey, even after they have embraced the truth. They are enticed by persuasive teachers hawking a counterfeit righteousness.

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as

apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15, NIV)

No wonder so many varieties of what some would call righteousness are taught under the name of Jesus Christ. His name serves as a mask for religious philosophies that didn't originate with Him or His apostles. Jesus said, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:22, 23). The practice of lawlessness can negate all other good deeds.

Disobedience comes naturally

Lawlessness, the key ingredient in the counterfeit righteousness of these false gospels, is nothing more than a natural expression of what we call human nature. Under the influence of Satan, "the god of this age," mankind has been blinded (2 Corinthians 4:4). Human nature does not want to obey God.

Paul wrote that "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Romans 8:7, 8, NIV). In other words, alternatives to the true message of Jesus Christ have been devised to accommodate the natural human unwillingness to obey God.

Sadly, most people who accept these lawless precepts are sincere. They believe their delusions. "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs,

and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they *did not receive the love of the truth*, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them a strong delusion, *that they should believe the lie*" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11).

Now, back to our original question: What sets apart an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ?

Called and chosen

The idea that one must be "called" and "chosen" originates with Jesus Himself, who told His disciples that "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). The concepts of calling and choice are legitimately biblical, but they are rarely understood and incredibly misused. Let's be sure to get them straight.

"Many are called, but few are chosen." That's what Jesus said. But what does that mean?

God's great purpose is to give salvation—eternal life—to all mankind. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). However, all are not being saved at this time, in this age (Ephesians 1:7-10).

God chooses a person to receive eternal life only when one learns and accepts the truth.

Truth is that knowledge revealed by God through His Word, the Bible (John 17:17). All must learn and accept the truth. "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men . . . For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

All must repent

After learning what is the truth, one must repent. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). *All* must repent, said Peter.

Real repentance results from an accurate understanding of the gospel of Jesus

Christ, but how can one gain this understanding? "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14, 15).

It is clear that one must be taught by ministers who are truly sent by God, ministers who do not teach lawlessness, ministers who are faithful to God's Word, who teach obedience to God and that repentance is to cease from sin, to quit transgressing God's laws (1 John 3:4).

"Called" and "chosen" are legitimate biblical concepts. But they are rarely understood and incredibly misused.

Let's examine the difference between called and chosen. "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning *chose you* for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which *He called you* by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14).

There it is. People are "called" ("invited," in the Greek) by the preaching of the gospel (the good news of the Kingdom of God). They receive the knowledge that they need to repent of their sins.

Those who respond are "chosen" for salvation. How? By believing the truth and by being sanctified (set apart) by receiving the Holy Spirit.

Different responses to gospel

It is really a sorting-out process that begins with a miracle from God. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him . . ." (John 6:44). Then He adds, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (verse 65).

God draws our hearts toward Him.

He grants us the desire to learn His ways, to submit our wills to Him. We naturally resist submitting to God's laws (Romans 8:7). Yielding our will to God is truly a miracle, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Jesus uses the parable of the sower and the seed to illustrate people's varied responses to the gospel. In the parable, all hear the truth of God's Word preached. Only those who are called by God grasp the truth and understand it. Each responds differently. You can read the parable of the sower and the seed in Matthew 13, where Jesus not only gives the parable, but tells what it means.

First Jesus explains the response of those who are not yet being called. They do not grasp what they hear. "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and *does not understand it*, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside" (verse 19). Such people never understand the message and its significance.

Next He explains three responses different from the reactions of those who truly understand. God has opened their minds; they grasp the meaning. Each one responds differently, and for different reasons.

Short-lived acceptance

"But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles" (verses 20, 21).

This person's first response is joyful acceptance, but he quickly retreats. Why? He backs off because of pressure from other people who do not understand. He cares more about what people think than what God thinks. He is afraid to make waves or rock the boat. Conforming to his peers is what is important to him. The tribulation or persecution he experiences from trying to live God's way of life makes him stumble. He rejects the calling from God.

"Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word,

and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (verse 22).

This person is not as concerned about the opinions of his peers. His problem is selfishness. Maintaining his status and acquiring personal possessions consume all his interest, time and energy. He has no time for God. He is too busy serving himself. Material things are far more important than spiritual matters. He, too, rejects the calling from God.

“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (verse 23).

This person understands God’s Word and takes it seriously. He puts it into practice. He changes his life! This person was *chosen* for salvation. He put God first in his life.

Many are called. Many receive the opportunity for God to work in them “to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). But only a few respond. Those few truly repent and surrender their will to God, making a commitment to obey God’s commandments. Those who respond to God’s calling are *chosen* by God because *they choose* to serve God.

We must remain faithful

When God offers us an opportunity to serve Him, the choice is ours. That choice is not a one-time decision. We must commit to that choice and persevere to the end (Matthew 24:13).

The book of Revelation describes the end of this age, when a great “beast”—a political and economic union of 10 “kings”—will resist the rule of Jesus Christ at His return. These rulers will be the most influential and popular leaders in the world at that time. “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are *called, chosen, and faithful*” (Revelation 17:12-14).

That’s right. Those who are with Christ are not only called and chosen, but they are *faithful*. Being called and chosen is not the end of the story.

“For if, after they have escaped the

pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Peter 2:20-22).

Growing to be like Christ

Salvation isn’t automatic. We must remain faithful to our calling to be saved.

Jesus compares Himself to a vine and His true followers to its branches. He says, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4, 5). He warns, “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (verse 6).

Those who remain faithful will grow to be like Jesus Christ spiritually. “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (verse 8). He adds, “Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (verse 2).

God remains active in the lives of those He has chosen for salvation. He expects them to *remain faithful* to their commitment to Him and produce spiritual fruit in their lives. He even prunes them. He allows trials to develop that test and expose their weaknesses, forcing them to continue making choices to obey God, sometimes under circumstances of great difficulty.

What fruit does God expect the authentic disciples of Jesus Christ to manifest in their lives? He expects them to obey His commandments (1 John 2:3-6). He expects them to set an example in “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23, NIV). He expects them to exhibit the

basic characteristics of his own divine nature, the very character of God.

The apostle Peter sums it up so well. “. . . To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them *you may participate in the divine nature* and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For *if you possess these qualities in increasing measure*, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make *your calling and election* sure. For if you *do* these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1-11, NIV).

God has made it abundantly clear what His authentic disciples are. They are called to surrender their wills to God, to repent and receive God’s Holy Spirit. Because they choose to allow God’s Spirit to guide both their hearts and their conduct they are chosen for salvation—to have a part in His eternal kingdom.

They prove their faithfulness by enduring trials and obstacles as evidence of their continued commitment to obey God. As truly converted people they are “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27) and “the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15).

They are *called, chosen and faithful!* **GN**

Year 2000

Continued from page 7

do so many misinterpret the Bible's prophecies; they cause others to stumble as a result. But, as the apostle Paul said, "let God be true but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). God's Word will always stand, though a thousand misinterpret.

What, then, can we know about Bible prophecy in general and about the year 2000—the last year before the new millennium—in particular? The answer to the first question is rich in information for our natural curiosity. Those images of earthquakes, famines, pestilence, judgment and retribution are from Christ Himself.

Matthew's Gospel contains a prophetic passage reiterated in Mark 13 and Luke 21. Known as "the little Apocalypse," the predictions in Matthew 24 spring from questions posed by Jesus' disciples. Matthew records that, in response to Jesus' statement that one day Herod's magnificent temple would be destroyed, "the disciples came to him privately saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'" (Matthew 24:3)

The answers to their two questions frame the rest of Matthew 24 and 25. It is instructive that Jesus does not directly answer the "when" of the questions in any definitive way. He does not set a date; in fact, as we saw earlier, He states that only the Father knows (Matthew 24:36).

He disabuses His hearers of any thought that the kind of signs that people historically look for to indicate the end are valid. Acknowledging that wars, rumors of wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes will occur, He nevertheless makes it clear that "the end is not yet" and that "these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:6, 8).

A real clue

One clue that the end is near will be the international preaching of "this gospel of the kingdom" as a witness (Matthew 24:14). Clearly that will not be a sign like an earthquake or a war, or a famine or a pandemic.

Jesus also speaks of events in the

Middle East as precursors to His return. In so doing He refers to the prophet Daniel's writings in the Old Testament: "'Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place' (whoever reads, let him understand), 'then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains'" (verses 15, 16).

Some claim that this was fulfilled in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Yet Jesus calls that idea into question by saying, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days we shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."

These statements describe terror such as the world has never seen. Because of the intense danger to all humanity, the "tribulation" will be halted for the sake of "the elect," the people of God. Only then will the heavenly signs of the sun, moon and stars in disruption occur.

The return of Jesus Christ will take place accompanied by the sign of the son of man, a visible appearance of the returning Jesus Christ in the heavens. This will follow a time of unparalleled suffering brought on by man's own hand and Satan's wrath, as we discover in the book of Revelation: "Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory" (Revelation 16:8, 9).

Soon after, there is a time of great happiness during which at last the human misery can end: "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready'" (Revelation 19:6, 7).

Where does the year 2000 fit into all of this? What do the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third signify?

From a strictly biblical perspective the beginning of the next thousand years signifies nothing and the turn of the century means nothing more nor less than the progression in a humanly devised system of counting years. Remember that the year 2000 is the year 5761 for the Jews, 1421 for the Muslims and 4698 for the Chinese. In our limited awareness we often assume that dates that may be important to us should be important to everyone else on the planet.

God doesn't follow man's calendars

As we've seen, no one knows the day nor the hour of the end of this phase of human civilization, and it's unlikely that God the Father is operating according to any of these human calendars.

The prophecies of the Word of God will come to pass on time, when He determines. In the meantime, we have more than enough to busy ourselves with. The apostle Peter wrote two letters toward the end of his life. In them he distills his Christian experience. Thinking about the future day of judgment he writes: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness . . .?" (2 Peter 3:10, 11.)

The idea that we live in the shadow of Judgment Day ought to make us ask ourselves about the spiritual condition of our lives. There is a way that leads to holy conduct and godliness in this life.

Peter pleads with his readers to find that way. It comes down to accepting responsibility before our Creator for what we are and what we've done and learning how to be forgiven of sin and that sin will be obliterated.

That's the relief that God's elect find as they begin their new life now. They can be assured of God's protection in the progression of events up to Jesus Christ's return. In the meantime, they live their lives not in fear but in enthusiasm for a new way that will be eternally satisfying in the ongoing work of God. **GN**

Jesus Christ

Continued from page 15

Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power . . ." (verses 12, 13, NIV).

From this example we see that anointing signified that God had chosen that person for rulership. Several times in the Old Testament, kings are referred to as "the Lord's anointed." It was a title of respect and reverence, acknowledging that God had placed the person in that position.

How does that apply to Jesus Christ? Just before His execution, the Roman governor Pilate asked Him, "Are You a king?"

" . . . For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world . . ." answered Jesus. " . . . My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here," He said (John 18:36, 37).

Ruler of coming Kingdom

That Kingdom, of which Jesus Christ would be king, was at the heart of Jesus' teaching: " . . . I must preach the kingdom of God . . . because for this purpose I have been sent," He said (Luke 4:43).

The message He brought was "the gospel [good news] of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14). Jesus "went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God . . ." (Luke 8:1). He commanded His followers to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

That Kingdom is prophesied throughout the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. " . . . The God of Heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . . It shall break in pieces and consume all these [other] kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44).

"Then to Him [prophesying of Jesus Christ] was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom the one which shall

not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:14).

This coming Kingdom will rule over "all peoples, nations, and languages" of the earth, as we just read. It will replace the governments of this world, and Jesus Christ will be the supreme Ruler. "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (Revelation 11:15).

Assisting Jesus Christ in administering His Kingdom will be His followers, now resurrected to eternal life. "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

How will this government be administered? "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever . . ." (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

There will be no end of peace under that government. It will be established and upheld with judgment and justice forever. What a contrast to today's world, filled with every kind of suffering and anguish imaginable! But that is the kind of government mankind will have under Jesus Christ's rule in the Kingdom of God.

Exalted above all

Not only will Jesus Christ rule over that Kingdom in the future, but He is also a ruler now. Throughout the New Testament, He is referred to as "the Lord Jesus Christ" or simply "the Lord," signifying that He is our Master, Ruler and King now. "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue

should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

Do we recognize that "Jesus Christ is Lord," our Lord and Master now? Paul described to the church in Ephesus the position to which God the Father has exalted Jesus Christ. " . . . He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Paul says here that Jesus Christ is over everything, "far above all principality and power and might and dominion . . ." He is over all the angels. He is above all the powers of the universe, the galaxies, the stars, the planets. He is over all power and authority both now and in the age to come. God the Father has put everything in subjection to Him, and included in that is the Church, His spiritual body. That is the greatness and the power and the authority of our King and Master, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is truly the One through whom "God is salvation." He sacrificed Himself to pay the death penalty in our place. He lives now within us, helping us to live as He lived and walk as He walked, developing God's holy character within us.

He truly is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One. He truly is set apart, having devoted and given His physical life as the perfect example and sacrifice for us. He truly is our High Priest, reconciling us to God and giving us greater understanding of God and His ways. He truly is a holy Prophet, a divine Teacher, showing mankind the way to peace and happiness and life everlasting.

He truly is the One who will return to this earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to establish a kingdom that will bring peace forever and salvation to all. And He is our King, our Lord and our Master now.

How great is the meaning of "Jesus Christ" for us! **GN**

An Act of Kindness

My daughter and I decided to make some sock dolls, so we went to a store to buy some brightly colored yarn for the dolls' hair. At first we didn't pay much attention to an elderly woman who was carefully looking through the packages of yarn until she held up a skein and asked us, "Is this mauve-colored yarn?"

I answered that it would probably pass for such. I could have let it go at that and kept on looking for my own yarn, but something about the woman made me ask if she was checking to be sure she was getting the same dye-lot number.

Eyes no match for number

If you've worked with yarn, you know you can think you're matching colors correctly, but, if different skeins were dyed in different batches when the yarn was being manufactured, the colors can vary enough to give you an unpleasant surprise once you've completed your project.

The woman knew nothing about dye-lot numbers, so I helped her find them on the packages. We made sure all the dye lots were the same so the colors would match.

Thanking me for my help, she started to leave but came back shortly to apologetically ask if I might know where the scissors were. I directed her to the end of the aisle to a scissors display.

As my daughter and I were about to leave, the woman returned. My simple act had so impressed her that she had to come back to thank me profusely for my kindness. As it turned out she was from a senior citizens' home and had come to purchase yarn for a friend who had just undergone heart bypass surgery.

I reflected on how sad it is that my simple act of courtesy was so out of the ordinary that the woman felt it warranted such gratitude, and then I considered how often I had shown friendship toward strangers. I had to admit that it hadn't been often enough.

Too many of us live in a world in which we don't communicate with those we don't know. We pass each other in stores and don't make eye contact.

This sin-sick world has made us leery of strangers, yet God has instructed us to extend ourselves. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things . . ." said Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:35).

Following Jesus' example is to be a way of life for us. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works . . ." wrote the apostle Paul (Ephesians 2:10). "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).

We know God doesn't want us to put ourselves in dangerous situations, but whenever there is an opportunity to do an act of kindness we should be responsive to it. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all . . ." (Galatians 6:10).

Avoid isolation

Most of us don't have the time to get involved in many public-service projects. Yet, as I learned that day, we can do much with just a cheerful word or a small act of service.

Most people still pass me in the store without looking in my direction. They have shut themselves into a protective world of isolation. But, when the opportunity presents itself and I see a need, I feel it my Christian responsibility to reach out.

There might be someone, just like that elderly lady, who is looking for a smile and a little show of concern: someone who can enrich my day far more than I did hers.

As Jesus pointed out, in Acts 20:35, it is more blessed to give than to receive. **GN**

by Joanne Rutis



*I learned that day
we can do much
with just a cheerful
word or a small act
of service.*

In the Shadow of Death

by Joan Osborn

Four months after my father's death, my mother mentioned that she often found herself wandering aimlessly around the house, trying to "focus." And why not? She had spent 61 years of her life focusing her energies on husband and family. Her husband was now deceased, and her children were grown and gone from her household.

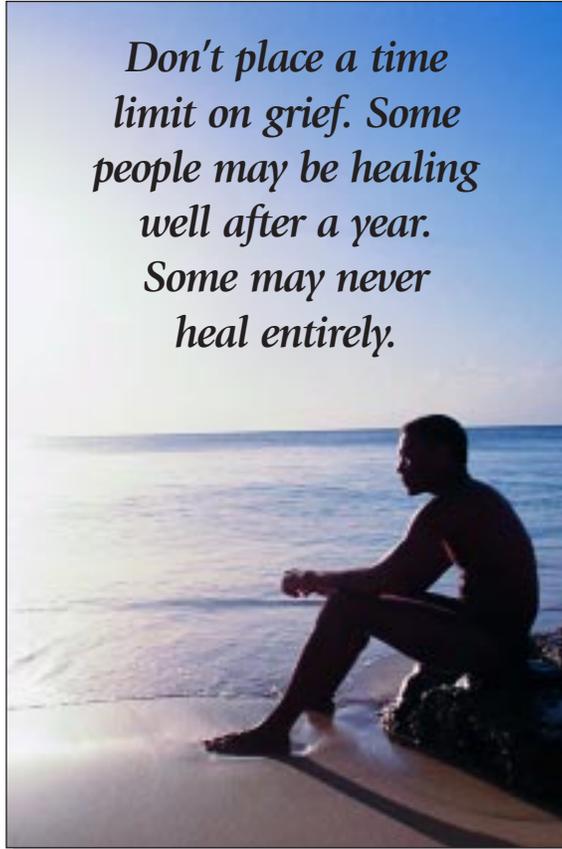
It is customary to rally around grieving friends and relatives at the time of the funeral. But as Christians we know to extend our care far beyond those initial days and weeks after the shadow of death falls upon a friend. How is the best way to show our loving concern for a friend or relative in mourning?

James' admonition to "look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27 NIV) reminds us that pure religion includes the responsibility for emotional as well as physical aid to the grieving. Here are some practical tips for ways to be there for others in their time of need.

Remember that wedding anniversaries, special occasions, family reunions and other celebrations—as well as the anniversary of the death itself—will be especially hard times for the bereaved. These represent times of togetherness for most families, but now part of the loved one's family is missing. Sometimes people want to be alone at these times of remembrance. Sometimes they want to be with others to help them through these rough periods. These are appropriate times for notes or phone calls.

Don't judge others by how they handle grief. Mrs. Jones seems to be doing fine after the death of her husband, but

Don't place a time limit on grief. Some people may be healing well after a year. Some may never heal entirely.



we may wonder why Mr. Smith seems so melancholy after losing his wife.

Each person deals with the death of a loved one in a different way. Although Mrs. Jones may seem to be doing well, inside she may be emotionally distraught. People don't always outwardly express their emotions. Mr. Smith, who shows his grief, may be healing more quickly than his stoic counterpart. We should grant each grieving friend or relative acceptance, love and respect.

Don't assume that one manifestation of bereavement is more painful than another. The loss of a parent or a spouse in a long-term marriage is agonizing. But nothing can compare with the devastation of losing a child. This is true no matter what the age of the child involved.

At the death of a parent, young children or teenagers will no longer enjoy the benefit of a mother's or father's guidance and loving presence. On the other hand, an adult whose parent has died has lost someone he has known all his life. As Christians we should be sensitive to everyone who suffers a loss, no matter what his age or relationship with the deceased.

Offer reassurance. The elderly especially often feel a sense of loss of purpose after the death of a mate. Show the new widow or widower that he or she is still important to you as a parent, friend or sister or brother in Christ. Help someone in this situation see that you appreciate what he or she is going through.

Don't place a time limit on grief. Some people may be healing well after a year. Some may never heal entirely.

Continuing concern for those who have suffered a loss can take many forms. Sending notes and cards, even just to say, "Hi! I'm thinking about you," can be encouraging. A phone call might also be welcome. Including widows and their families at simple family meals can fill a void for them. Dropping by with some vegetables from your garden or a new magazine can let people know you care.

If you have never suffered the loss of someone close to you, it may be hard to empathize with someone who has. But as Christians we have a responsibility to express loving concern. When the shadow of death falls on someone in your circle of family or friends, you can be the one to bring the words of James to life. You can be an example of pure religion. **GN**

We All Have a Lot to Learn

by Abbi Plagenza

I've always worked well with younger children and thought that someday I would follow in a profession that involved them. It was just a few short months ago, with some encouragement from a good friend, that I decided to pursue a teaching career.

I then proceeded to research my options and discovered a demand for enthusiastic teachers. To see exactly what I was getting myself into, I volunteered to help at an elementary school.

Through a program at my high school, I began working with first-graders. Little did I know the lessons I was about to learn.

I observed, astonished, at how these students' regular teacher transformed the alphabet from shapes into sound. Q, R and Z became sounds, and then words, and now somehow these five- and six-year-olds can actually read. The kids didn't even know what was happening. It was all fun to them. They felt no pressure; they were just playing a game.

Now the children had mastered the basic tool of reading. As they continue to read and gain knowledge, their regular teacher and I are there to encourage them, help with the difficult words and explain the meanings of things.

While I was going through this teaching and learning experience, a friend at high school asked me why I can't go out on Friday nights. I told him it is "because of my religious beliefs" and left it at that.

I thought that would be the end of the matter, but it wasn't. He continued his questions, so I described for him a short version of God's plan.

The fall Holy Days were fast approaching. I told my friend that my family and I would be gone for a few days, and he asked more questions. Warming to my subject, I told him, in basic terms, about the Holy Days.

He asked even more questions. There's only so much I will tell at school, so I told him that if he really

wanted to know he could talk to my mother.

He talked to her. "What is this plan Abbi has told me about?" he asked.

She explained the Holy Days and their meaning.

My friend thought her explanation made a lot of sense, so, the Sabbath before the Feast of Tabernacles, he went to church services with our family. He said he enjoyed services a lot.

He must still have been curious about the church because while we were gone for the Feast he crawled through a bedroom window of our home to get some church literature to read.

My friend was seeking more knowledge about the truth, and he obviously was pretty desperate. He did call us at the Feast to apologize for entering our house without permission. My parents told him to borrow anything he was interested in, but next time just please use the back door.

He now plans to attend Sabbath services regularly with us.

Like the first-graders I help teach, my friend has been given tools to seek knowledge. I am glad we have so much to offer, and I am glad that our Church is committed to doing a work for all the people like him in the world. Like those first-graders, many in the world are hungry and eager to learn what we have to give them.

Watching my friend's excitement has given me a new zeal for God's truth. I think it's called first love! **GN**

He must still have been curious about the church because while we were gone for the Feast he crawled through a bedroom window of our home to get some church literature to read.



What I Expect From

by Dean Wilson

Communication, or the lack of it, is one of the major issues confronting parents and their teenagers. Many parents aren't aware of their teenagers' hopes, dreams, aspirations, desires, problems or issues. Somehow we never get around to sitting down and discussing these things as a family.

On the other hand, teenagers rarely stop to think about their parents' love, dedication, goals, ambition or responsibility for them. They don't think about the decisions parents make on their behalf and how these decisions, in turn, affect their teens.

I asked some teenagers to write a paper that could be titled "What I Expect From My Parents." The results were revealing, to say the least.

I think we can all learn from them. They can help us in our family relations. They can help us bridge the proverbial generation gap.

The following essays are from 16 different teens:

Essay not easy

Writing an essay on "what I expect from my parents" isn't easy, but I'll try.

First, I don't expect my parents to be perfect, but I do expect them to do their best.

One thing that I expect is for my parents to give me the advice that I need when I do and don't want and need it.

Communication is another thing I think parents and their teens should be able to do. If not too well, then they should try to improve it. I think if you talk about your problems, it will help to find the answer and is also a good learning experience—most of the time.

Another thing I expect but don't like is discipline. If all the parents would

discipline their teens, the world would be a much better place. Most drug abusers, teen pregnancies and runaways are caused by bad homes, parents always being away and no discipline.

I also feel that families should do things together. Some time should be spent with friends, but there should be a lot of togetherness in the family. Talking about friends: I expect my parents to treat my friends as if they are their friends too.

I know my parents aren't perfect, and I love them the way they are. They don't have to have all those things down pat, but I would like them to try.

Teenagers didn't realize

When I started this project, I didn't realize all of the things teens demand or expect from their parents. There are a lot of things I never really thought about before.

I expect my parents to love and take care of me. Things such as nurse me when I am ill and give me a home I can feel loved in. Many teens don't have a home that they can really feel loved in. When I say "loved in," I mean things that involve a family.

Having family discussions can really help you with problems at school or home or to just sit down and talk about things. It helps you to get to know your parents even better.

I expect my parents to teach me all about the right way of life, so I can grow up knowing about right and wrong.

I expect my parents to let me have privileges and let me make some of my own decisions in regard to privileges. I expect them to tell me if I am wrong in a decision so I won't do it again.

I also expect my parents to have fun with me, whether it be hiking, playing cards or just a game of catch or going to see a movie. It doesn't matter what we do as long as we have fun.

I want my parents to respect me as a person and also respect my privacy. I expect them to be honest with me always. And, more important than all the things I have mentioned above, I expect my parents to love me.

My Parents!

Teenagers aren't unreasonable

It's really hard for me to write about the things I expect from my parents, because I have never really thought about it before. I suppose most kids don't stop to think about their expectations for their parents, and if they do they never tell their parents what these expectations are. I know I never have, so I am really glad to have this opportunity to tell them.

I want my parents to respect me as a person and also respect my privacy. I expect them to be honest with me always. And, more important than all the things I have mentioned above, I expect my parents to love me. It would be nice if they told me so every once in a while.

I really hope I am not expecting too much from my parents; I don't want to be unreasonable or overdemanding. I realize that because of today's economic problems it's really hard for parents to provide for their children. So we (teens) have to be understanding and patient. We have to realize that they are trying to provide for our needs, and I honestly believe my parents are doing their best to provide me with all of the things I have mentioned above, which makes me feel great.

Parents are the greatest

There are a lot of things I expect from my parents, but there are also things my parents expect from me.

First of all, I think my parents are the greatest, and they do many things which I take for granted.

Just about all my expectations my parents fulfill. They are always there when I need them. There may be times when we have communication problems, but they are always worked out.

My parents always seem to know what is good for me, even though I may not think so.

I expect my parents to let me do things on my own. I think sometimes it might be hard for them, because they have to judge things to see if they are right or wrong for me.

Parents should take responsibility seriously

First off, I would expect my parents to take the responsibility of being a parent very seriously and to use that ability wisely.

Second, I expect my parents to be exceptionally good parents and for them to give me the same respect that they expect from me.

Also, I expect them to be there especially when I need them. I mean, I know lots of kids whose parents work 9-to-5 schedules and they are never there to say, "Did you have a good day?" People wonder why teenage crime is up. It is because they are left out in the dark when the going gets tough.

I am glad to have my parents, and if it weren't for them, well, I wouldn't be here. So all I can say is thank you to my parents, and please continue to love me and take care of me. Good parents are the greatest.

I am not arrogant

First of all, I expect my parents to be the greatest and to be there through all my problems.

I also expect my parents to be honest with me just as I am honest with them.

Next, I expect my parents to respect me. I really like it when they really expect things from me.

Also, I expect them to respect me because that shows me they really love me.

Next is to let me grow up. Some-

times I get confused because you do everything for me, then you expect too much.

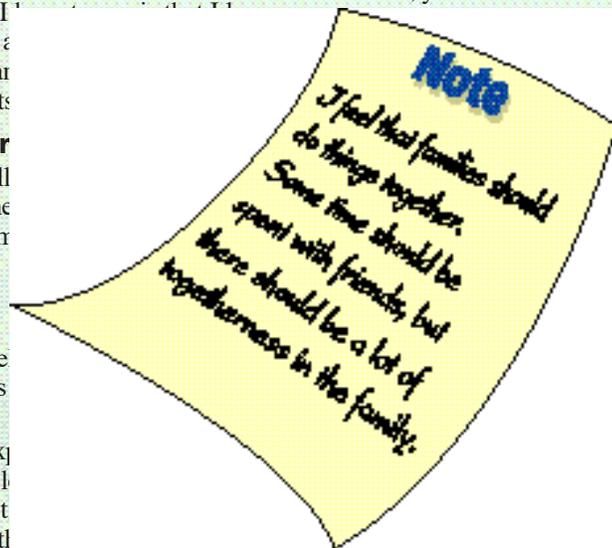
Also, let me experience some things for myself, because if I don't sometimes I don't learn my lessons the first time.

The next thing is, let me be me. I am not anybody else, even my brothers and my sisters. I can't be anybody else.

Support in time of need

One thing I expect from my parents is support, the kind of support that gives me the food I eat and the clothes I wear. Then there is the other kind of support I expect, the kind of support and backing up that gets me through life and most of all through my various problems. I expect understanding when I need it and that word of advice that gets me through the day.

The thing I expect most is love, the love and attention I need. Next to love, the thing I expect most is trust. Trust is of great importance. If you don't have trust, you don't have much.



leges such as going to a friend's house and going to a mall with a friend. You should trust to do things. If I have trust, I can be relied on. I don't have as many legs. I have trust in my parents and I expect them

I also expect respect. I expect them to give me as much respect as I give them.

Be there

First, let's start with the things all kids expect. I am talking about things like love, your parents being there when you need them, and directing you in the way to go. All kids expect their parents to be there when something exciting or sad happens. But not all kids' parents are there when they need them.

Sometimes the parents are too busy with work or something. Yet other times it's a split or divorce in the family that causes that parent not to be there. I fortunately feel that my parents have always been there for me to ask questions and tell of all my achievements.

My parents direct me in the way I should go and set a good example, which also help me in growing up.

I expect some respect from them just as I am sure

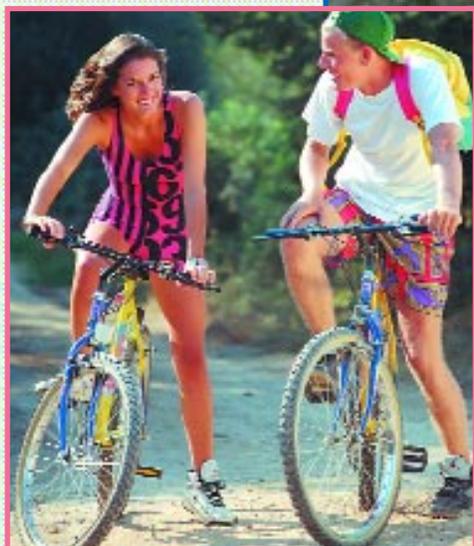
hydrotubing.

The last thing I expect from my parents is a little freedom. I mean freedom to make some of my own choices. I also mean freedom to go places with my friends or by myself sometimes. Along with freedom goes trust. I want my parents to trust my choices and trust me to choose the right friends. I feel trust is what I expect most out of my parents.

tant than food! Seriously, I expect my parents to love their kids so that they draw closer together. Some families in the world consist of hate, so lots run away from home and never return.

Another really important basic thing is that I expect them, my parents, to always be there when I need them. Sometimes, when I am troubled or in trouble, I can always depend on them to help pull me through.

I expect my parents to do themselves what they teach me to do. A



they want the same out of me. I don't want them always calling me stupid or dumb (which they don't). I want them to accept me for who I am, no matter if I am good in sports or in school or not. I expect my parents to plan things as a family and to enjoy doing things as a family. Some of the funnest times are when our family only goes skating or



Love more important than food

One of the most important things is food. There are lots of times when I feel hungry and they or myself fix something to eat.

Another important basic thing is love, which is just a little more impor-



small example would be like if my parents told me to say "please" and "thank you," then they should say it also.

I don't expect much

I really don't expect a lot from my parents. Of course, I expect things like a place to live, clothes to wear and food to eat. My mom does a pretty good job at that.

I expect some money every now and then and some time of my own to spend with my friends. You could probably call that privacy. I also expect a thank-you or maybe a little word of encouragement every now and then.

But I also expect understanding and

trust. My mom probably needs a little brush-up on those two categories.

I also expect a little religious help, maybe a little Bible study now and then. And, most of all, going to services on the Sabbath. But not too much to where it gets a little too much in this area.

Probably most of all love. I know my mom gives me a lot, but sometimes I wonder. I guess that is the typical child for you.

Even though I only live with one of my parents, I don't feel deprived because I never really knew what it was like to

live with two parents. I could say that I need. But I expect much.

I expect them to be able to talk sensibly and not to yell if you do something wrong. I expect them to believe what I say and not to doubt me. I expect them to help me when I have a problem that I can't solve.

Pay attention

I expect parents to correct, even though we don't care for it. I expect my parents to correct me when I have done something wrong.

Parents should help us work out problems when they can and not tell us to ask later or act like they are listening but really are more interested in the TV or the newspaper. They should try to be there when we need them. But also let us have our privacy when we need it.

The main thing I expect parents to do is love their kids and to show they do.

Parents, set an example

I expect parents to set the example for us. If they do not set the example, we have no role model and no one to look up to to try to be like, not that we want to be exactly like our parents. We as teens feel the need to look up to someone, if not a parent then an older brother, sister or peer.

Parents need to be the teachers. They need to show us what is right or wrong. Parents should set down laws.

But responsibility is important too. I think they should let us make some of our own decisions, provided they are not dangerous or harmful to us or anyone else. When we learn the hard way, we learn the most and it sticks with us. I think parents should give us a chance to prove ourselves, to make our own decisions and learn what life is all about.

When parents constantly put their children down, they learn to be shy. If parents give their children praise and approval, they learn to appreciate and like themselves. This poses another expectation: self-esteem. Parents should

be encouraging and uplifting.

Parents should do what they tell us to do. If they tell us not to fight, yet they fight all the time, how are we supposed to feel about fighting? If they can do it, why can't I, right?

Wrong. No one should fight. That is a problem that needs to be worked out.

Parents need to be honest. There are some things that parents keep from us that are okay. We should know about things that affect us and our family. If we are all honest with one another, it makes it easier to deal with life and its many problems.

Parents should be there when we need them. They should offer help, listen and try to understand some of our problems.

Teens expect honesty

I think that the most important thing I expect out of my parents is honesty. I think that all parents should be honest with their children. That goes vice versa too. When I ask my parents for their opinion, I expect them to give me an honest opinion of what they think.

I think that love goes hand in hand with honesty. It really makes me feel sad when I see parents that don't love their children. They don't care what their children do or what kind of trouble they get into.

My parents seem to be really concerned about what I do and the people I go around with. Sometimes I am really happy about that.

Correction is another thing I expect my parents to do. Everybody needs correction at some time or another, no matter what the age. Most kids today don't get the correction that they need; they don't get along in life either, because of that. My parents have corrected me, and I am really glad that I learned early that just because things don't go my way, that doesn't mean that I get mad and throw a tantrum about it.

My parents are honest with me. They do correct me, and there is no question in my mind about whether they love me or not. I know they do. **GN**



I expect my parents to give me love and support in a while at where they loves them. I turn to Mom

I expect my parents to and to do

things right. When you get older, you are going to have a lot of responsibilities, and if your parents bring you up to be a responsible person you won't have any problems out in the world.

Needs someone to talk to

Sometimes when you feel bad and you need someone to talk to, your parents should be there. But, if you want help for your problems, you have to open up and tell them just what it is.

You may not like their solution, but you have to realize it is in your best interest and they care for you.

Parents need to teach their kids all the valuable things they have learned in the short time their kids are around.

Parents, don't yell

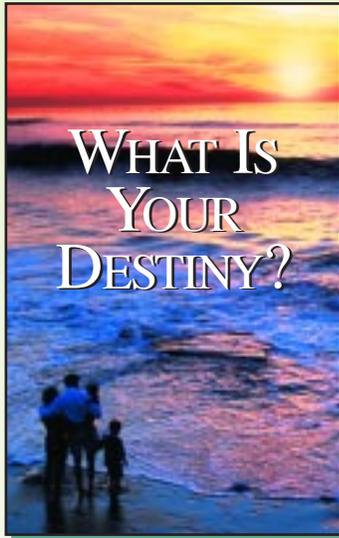
I expect love and compassion from them when I do something wrong. I expect a chance to do things that I have

If You Have Questions, We Have Answers.

Life is filled with questions. And lots of them. Questions like: Why was I born? What does this life mean? and Where is this world headed? We all have questions like these.

We can help you find the answers. We believe that the true answers to the questions of life are found in one place—the Bible.

We believe that our great Creator gave us an “instruction manual” that answers the great questions of life. The United Church of God offers informative booklets to help *you* find the answers to life’s questions. For your free booklets, write to our address nearest you. See the inside front cover for a list of addresses worldwide.



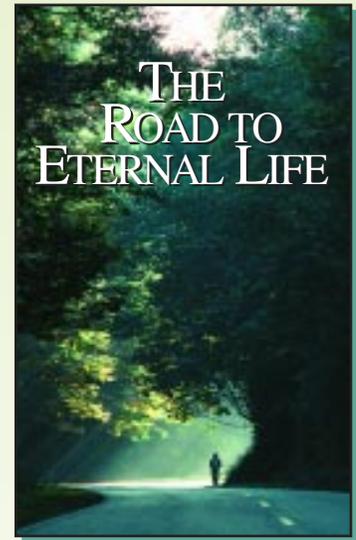
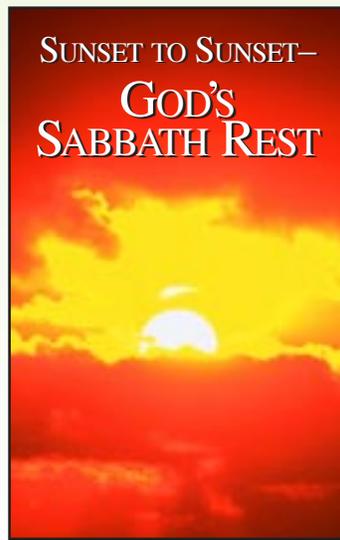
Thousands of years ago, King David looked up into the heavens and wondered, “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?”

David wondered about the purpose of man just as we do today. Every one of us was created for a purpose, but very few understand what that great purpose is.

What Is Your Destiny? will help you understand the incredible truth about *your* destiny!

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it Holy,” begins the Fourth Commandment. Why did God consider the Sabbath so important that He included it in the Ten Commandments?

Today the Sabbath command is almost universally ignored, considered irrelevant in modern society. But is it irrelevant? *Sunset to Sunset—God’s Sabbath Rest* will show you why God created the Sabbath and help you discover its vital relevance to Christians today!



Like the Philippian jailer in the Book of Acts, many of us have wondered at some time: What must I do to be saved?

The beliefs and practices of various churches differ greatly on this important question, even though most claim their authority from the Bible.

What does the Bible say? *The Road to Eternal Life* will help you understand the biblical truth. Then you can start your journey on *The Road to Eternal Life!*

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