

May/June 2000

The Good News

The Abortion
Quagmire:

Who Will Speak for the Children



What Are Our Children Worth? • Was Jesus Christ Who He Said He Was?
"Peace, Peace!" When There Is No Peace • Conflict in the Middle East

Confusion and misunderstandings often occur over the definitions of words and terms. What does “pro-life” mean? What does “pro-choice” mean? Let’s consider these words from a biblical viewpoint.

To say God is pro-life is an understatement. God is the Creator, Sustainer and Protector of life. One of His Ten Commandments prohibits taking life (Exodus 20:13).

God is also pro-choice in the sense that He created human beings with freedom of choice. He does not control us in a way that robs us of the freedom to choose our own way. Human life is an ongoing series of choices.

But choices are not all equal. There are wise and foolish, good and bad, and right and wrong choices. Some would have us believe that one choice is as good as another and merely a matter of personal preference. Such thinking is based on the idea that there are no absolutes.

But there is absolute truth. The Bible is God’s revelation of ultimate truth. Jesus Christ said of God the Father, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The Ten Commandments summarize God’s standards of right and wrong.

God doesn’t force His standards on anyone. He does, however, reveal what is right, show some of the consequences for our actions and exhort us to choose what is right. But then He leaves it up to us to choose.

For example, God instructed Adam and Eve, forewarned them of consequences and allowed them to make their own choice—and then they paid the penalties for their wrong decision.

God inspired Joshua to tell the Israelites, “. . . Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve”—whether the false gods of the pagans around them or the one true God (Joshua 24:15). In Isaiah 65:12 God pronounces judgment on the Israelites “because, when I called, you did not answer; . . . but did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight.”

For unborn babies, parents should choose life rather than death. Abortion is the wrong choice. God is pro-life. He abhors killing, including killing unborn babies.

The terms pro-life and pro-choice have taken on an additional meaning in many countries. Politically speaking, pro-life refers largely to people seeking legislation and the help of courts to outlaw or restrict abortion.

Pro-choice refers largely to people seeking the opposite—to remove restrictions on abortion. Though God is pleased with the goal of saving babies, one must be careful not to assume God approves of every pro-life tactic, especially when they involve physical harm or destruction of property. Nor should we assume He is behind every pro-lifer’s efforts or various legal and political actions.

Legislation, you see, will not be the ultimate solution for the evil of abortion or any of the other evils of society.

What this world so desperately needs is a *change of the human heart* from selfish to selfless, from carnal to caring. What we need is a change from *spiritual blindness* to a clear understanding of *right values*.

Rather than a philosophy of hedonism (“If it feels good, do it”), we need to consider the long-term results of sexual promiscuity—rampant venereal diseases, broken homes, shattered relationships, drug abuse, suicide and, yes, the continuing slaughter of the innocents conceived from such unions. They have certainly done nothing that deserves one of the most nightmarish deaths one could imagine.

We desperately need to learn God’s perspective of right and wrong. For most of mankind, this will not happen until Jesus Christ returns to establish His Kingdom on earth.

In all our thinking, God encourages us to choose life—life in general as well as the way that leads ultimately to eternal life. He tells us: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; *therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live*” (Deuteronomy 30:19, emphasis added).

—Don Hooser

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The Abortion Quagmire:

Who Will Speak for the Children?

Since the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision in 1973, the abortion issue in the United States has been a political hot potato polarized into two camps stamped pro-choice and pro-life. Fundamentally, pro-choice proponents claim that a woman has the right to determine what happens inside her own body, including the right to destroy an embryo. Pro-lifers make their stand on the rights of the unborn child as a human being. Both sides claim that their respective platforms rest on an ethical foundation of basic human rights.

Government legislation on this issue often takes the so-called middle ground: that abortion can be legally sanctioned in early pregnancy but forbidden after a specified number of weeks of the development of the fetus in the mother's womb.

The stakes are high. After all, the line between murder—the unlawful taking of a human life—and legal abortion hinges on the question of when human life begins.

Debate over when life begins

The arguments center on the criteria that determine when an embryo or fetus can be called human. Most pro-lifers claim human life begins at conception. Many pro-choice proponents claim that abortion is acceptable only in early stages of pregnancy.

Some argue that human life begins with brain activity, while others claim that abortion should be legal during any stage of pregnancy. This last position has led to procedures such as partial-birth abortions, in which a partially delivered fetus has its skull punctured and collapsed to make the remains easier to remove from the mother's body.

A professor at Princeton University has taken the debate even farther. Dr. Peter Singer, a professor of bioethics, maintains that mothers should have the right to kill any baby that is physically or mentally disabled for up to 28 days after birth. His rationale is that a baby isn't a thinking, self-aware person at this time.

Two unmarried teenagers agonize about the girl's pregnancy. Afraid to confide in their families, the couple manages to deliver the baby in a motel room. They wrap the newborn in plastic and throw her in a trash bin. They are convicted of manslaughter. If they had procured an abortion just a few weeks—or even a few days—earlier, they would not have faced a trial and jail terms. This is just one of hundreds of news stories appearing over the past few years in a nation mired in the moral quagmire of abortion.

by Gary Petty

Even most pro-choice proponents would find Professor Singer's position repugnant. Yet the all-important question remains: Who and what determines the point when an embryo or fetus is no longer considered mere tissue but a distinct life with the moral right to live?

The question is vital to the more than 3,000 babies who will be aborted in the United States in the next 24 hours.

The ripple effect of Roe vs. Wade has dramatically changed American society. A 1998 *U.S. News & World Report* article concluded that, at current rates, more than four in 10 American women may have an abortion in their lifetime.

"The statistic is astonishing: 43 percent of American women will have an abortion in their lifetime, if current rates are sustained. That would mean, for better or worse, abortion is as common a life experience for women as divorce—and more than three times more common than breast cancer. It would mean that more than twice as many women have abortions as get college degrees. It would mean that 25 years after *Roe v. Wade*, abortions are safe, legal, and *not* rare.

"Yet the statistic, gathered by the pro-abortion-rights Alan Guttmacher Institute, holds up to scrutiny. (In any given year, the odds a woman will have an abortion are small, but since women have about 30 reproducing years, the odds of having one at some point in life are far greater)" (Steven Waldman, Elise Ackerman and Rita Rubin, "Abortions in America," *U.S. News & World Report*, Jan. 19, 1998).

When does life begin?

At conception a sperm impregnates an egg about the size of the period at the end of this sentence. Growth and development are immediate and remarkable.

The new life has a heartbeat around the age of 18 days. At around

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Roe vs. Wade* overrode all state laws. But the court stated that it could not resolve the difficult problem of when an unborn child becomes a human person. Thus the court's decision was **to err on the side of taking life rather than saving it.**



three weeks, usually even before the mother knows she's pregnant, the tenth-of-an-inch-long embryo is already forming eyes, a spinal cord and a digestive system. Forty days after fertilization brain waves can be recorded. Delicate, tiny toes and fingers are beginning to show by the eighth week. By the 18th week the fetus is moving, punching and kicking.

In the United States, during the 18th and 19th centuries, it was a common belief that life started when the baby could be felt moving around in the mother's womb. Abortions before this time, called "the quickening," were accepted by some, even in religious circles. The American Medical Association was instrumental in changing attitudes towards the unborn, and by the early 1900s virtually all states had passed laws outlawing abortion.

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Roe vs. Wade* overrode all state laws. But the court avoided the critical issue by stating that it could not resolve the difficult problem of when an unborn child becomes a human person. Thus the court's decision was to err on the side of *taking* life rather than to err on the side of *saving* life.

When, then, does life begin? And when can it be considered *human* life?

James Drummey in *The New American* urges us to consider this perspective: "One of the key elements in the abortion debate is the true nature of the victim. If the unborn child is a human being, then he or she deserves the full protection of the law. Though it still may surprise some, there are few things more certain . . . than that the unborn are human beings.

"It is a biological and scientific fact that human life begins at fertilization, when the sperm cell of the father impregnates the egg cell of the mother. That unique genetic package, something that each of us was, contains everything that a person will become—the color of her eyes, the size of his feet, even whether he or she will contract diabetes at age fifty" (James Drummey, "Abortion: The Other Holocaust," *The New American*, Jan. 20, 1986, pp. 21-26).

The fertilization of a human egg, uniting the chromosomes that determine human traits, marks the beginning of a life. If it isn't a human life, what is it?

Is it a legal or religious matter?

Pro-abortion factions argue that abortion is a secular and legal matter rather than a religious one. But is the value of human life simply a legal matter?

“Not since slavery has an issue so polarized American society—and perhaps never has an issue posed a greater moral dilemma. The modern debate over abortion, as it is played out in the nation’s courts and legislative halls, is a conflict of competing moral visions and of fundamental human rights: to life, to privacy, to control over one’s own body.

“Yet when stripped of the political rhetoric and entangling legal arguments, it is an issue that rests on basic theological questions. What is human life? When does it begin? What is its value and source?” (Jeffrey Sheler, “The Theology of Abortion,” *U.S. News & World Report*, March 9, 1992).

This issue is hotly debated even among church denominations. For Christians the final authority is the Bible. Although God’s Word doesn’t specifically mention abortion, it does have much to say about the underlying principles and the value of human life.

Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that God made humanity *in His image*. This statement is profound in that it gives us insight into the purpose of human life. God reveals the potential of human beings when He declares, “. . . I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:7). God created humanity because He wants children of His own!

By creating man and woman, God chose the method for human reproduction. He told Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth . . .” (Genesis 1:28).

Human sexual reproduction, sanctified in marriage, is a beautiful expression of the love of two people committed to each other in a lifelong relationship. The children of this union are a blessing from God (Psalm 127:3). Though parents are responsible to rear and nurture their offspring, ultimately the children belong to God as His sons and daughters.

God’s view of the unborn

Since God created man and woman, and the method of sexual reproduction, does the Bible reveal His perspective on the unborn?

King David, writing under God’s inspiration, said of His Creator: “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

“My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed” (Psalm 139:13-16, New Revised Standard Version).

God even told the prophet Jeremiah that

He knew him before he was formed in his mother’s womb: “Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations’” (Jeremiah 1:4-5).

These passages show that the formation of the unborn in the womb is part of God’s creative work. The Bible is clear not only about the value of human life, but also that human sexual reproduction is the method God created to begin the process of bringing into existence His own family.

The real issues

The abortion issue is most hotly debated when discussing whether a pregnancy is dangerous to a mother’s health. The truth is that abortions involving cases where the mother’s life is at stake are a small percentage of all abortions. Most abortions are simply a method of birth control.

According to *U.S. News & World Report*: “The basic facts are these: Roughly 1.4 million women have abortions each year—89 percent before the 12th week of gestation. Eighty-two percent are unmarried or separated, and 44 percent have had at least one previous abortion . . .

“Fewer statistics exist illustrating *why* women get abortions. In the last survey, in 1987, 76 percent said they were concerned about how having a baby could change their lives, and 51 percent had problems with a relationship or wanted to avoid single parenthood. Thirteen percent cited health of the fetus; 7 percent the health of the mother; 1 percent rape or incest. A *U.S. News* survey found, surprisingly, that even for most abortions occurring in the 20th week or later, the health of the fetus or mother was a relatively minor factor in the decision to have an abortion” (Waldman, Ackerman and Rubin, “Abortions in American,” *U.S. News & World Report*, Jan. 19, 1998.)

If life begins at conception and gestation is the method by which God begins the process of creating His children, then virtually all the abortions committed constitute murder in the Creator’s sight. Worse yet, it is killing *for the sake of convenience*.

That may sound like a harsh verdict in our pluralistic society. We are used to thinking in shades of gray rather than in terms of black and white or absolute right and wrong. The Bible, however, spells out *absolute* moral values—not a decide-for-yourself, if-it-feels-good-do-it morality.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome some poignant words about society in

A Gory Harvest

Technology has inspired and made possible a nightmarish controversy over the use of aborted embryonic and fetal parts in medical research.

World magazine reports that researchers can even place orders for body parts: “Most researchers want parts harvested from fetuses 18 to 24 weeks in utero, which means the largest babies lying in lab pans awaiting a blade would stretch 10 to 12 inches—from your wrist to your elbow. Some researchers append a subtle ‘plus’ sign to the ‘24,’ indicating that parts from late-term babies would be acceptable. Many stipulate ‘no abnormalities,’ meaning the baby in question should have been healthy prior to having her life cut short by ‘intrauterine cranial compression’ (crushing of the skull)” (Lynn Vincent, “The Harvest of Abortion,” *World*, Oct. 23, 1999, pp. 16-19).

Although some medical researchers claim they are merely making the best of a bad situation, with the high demand for fetal tissue the moral implications are dismaying.

“Ironically, it is the babies themselves who are referred to as ‘donors,’ as though they had some say in the matter. Such semantic red flags—and a phalanx of others—have bioethicists hotly debating the issue of fetal tissue research: Does the use of the bodies of aborted children for medical research amount to further exploitation of those who are already victims?

“Will the existence of fetal-tissue donation programs persuade more mothers that abortion is an acceptable, even altruistic, option? Since abortion is legal and the human bodies are destined to be discarded anyway, does it all shake out as a kind of ethical offset, mitigating the abortion holocaust with potential good?” (same source).

Some biomedical research companies circulate brochures showing what they will pay for aborted body parts. One such list in *World* offered the following: Spinal column \$150. Spinal cord \$325. Limbs (at least two) \$150. Eyes \$75 (\$50 if older than eight weeks). Brain \$999 (if up to eight weeks old; 30 percent less if significantly fragmented).

The human condition being as it is, we may soon see the day when people will put in orders for needed tissue, women seeking abortions will be contacted or even impregnated, and at the suitable time the unborn child will be aborted for medical use by another human being. The reasoning that medical researchers are just making the best of a bad situation rings hollow.

his day. He described the process that takes place in our thinking when we reject the source of absolute moral authority:

“Thus, because they have not seen fit to acknowledge God, *he has given them up to their own depraved way of thinking, and this leads them to break all rules of conduct.* They are filled with every kind of wickedness, villainy, greed, and malice; they are one mass of envy, murder, rivalry, treachery, and malevolence; gossips and scandalmongers; and blasphemers, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent new kinds of vice, they show no respect to parents, they are without sense or fidelity, without natural affection or pity. They know well enough the just decree of God, that those who behave like this deserve to die; yet they not only do these

growing societal tragedies is our willful disregard of our Creator’s instructions, given for our good (to better understand their benefits, be sure to request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments*). The healing solution is to return to marriage as the only acceptable environment for a sexual relationship and conception of children.

What if I’ve had an abortion?

Many women suffer emotional scars from having an abortion. Some describe waking at night hearing a baby cry. They experience pangs of guilt when seeing a mother playing with her child and sometimes fear that God won’t forgive them.

It’s easy to fall into the trap that our sins are so terrible that even a merciful God won’t for-

repents than over the ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7).

If you’ve had an abortion, turn to your Father in heaven and repent. Ask Him to apply the sacrifice of His Son in your stead and help you have a Father-daughter relationship with Him. If you continue to suffer from guilt, seek counsel.

Likewise, if you have fathered a child and participated in the decision to abort it to avoid your parental responsibility, you should repent of your part in the taking of an innocent human life.

In either situation, remember the words Jesus spoke to a woman caught in the act of adultery: “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:11). God forgives, but He expects us to stop sinning.

One last case

A man and wife who thought they could never have children sat anxiously while a doctor explained the dangers of her pregnancy. The young woman had undergone a series of X rays before she knew she was pregnant. The doctor explained that there was little hope for the fetus and recommended an abortion. A second doctor concurred.

The pair never doubted their course of action. They prayed for a miraculous healing, prepared to accept God’s will and went through with the pregnancy.

Their son, the baby the doctor recommended be aborted, was valedictorian of his high-school graduating class this spring. An athlete with a winning personality, my nephew’s major problem is trying to decide which college to attend.

Just in the past hour some 150 unborn children were killed in the United States. Those 150 children will never laugh, attend school, discover the cure for cancer, fall in love, see a sunset, squeeze sand between their toes or write a symphony.

The ultimate solution

God will send Jesus Christ back to earth to establish His Kingdom, to build a new world governed by a higher law. He will create an environment of peace and harmony, a world that is safe for children. It will be a world safe for the unborn.

The prophet Zechariah was inspired to write of this time when the Messiah will reign: “Old men and old women shall sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets” (Zechariah 8:4-5).

Pray for that day. **GN**

The abortion issue is most hotly debated when discussing whether a pregnancy is dangerous to a mother’s health. The truth is that abortions involving cases where the mother’s life is at stake are a small percentage of all abortions. Most abortions are simply a method of birth control.



things themselves but approve such conduct in others” (Romans 1:28-32, Revised English Bible, emphasis added).

The act of terminating the life of an unborn child doesn’t proceed out of a vacuum. Abortion is a *symptom*. Along with divorces, broken homes, mental anguish and the physical suffering of venereal diseases, abortion is one of many symptoms of a society that has a selfish, misguided and even perverted view of the sexual relationship God Himself designed for human reproduction, which God meant for human beings to enjoy as an expression of love within the bounds of marriage.

Every effect has a cause. The cause of

give us. Paul writes that God forgives even though “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), but often it is easier to apply such statements to others.

Jesus was condemned by the religious leaders of His day because He ate meals with people who were obviously sinners. He told the leaders a parable about a man who had 100 sheep, but one wandered off and became lost. The shepherd, He said, would naturally search for the lost sheep until he found it, then hoist it to his shoulders and carry it home.

Jesus concludes the parable with the statement: “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who

What Are Our Children Worth?

by Howard Davis

I'm spending my children's inheritance!" The bumper sticker on the huge recreational vehicle ahead of me may have been meant only in jest. But it reminds me of the best-selling title my wife saw recently in a bookstore: *Die Broke*. The book proclaims a radical plan to "afford the lifestyle of your dreams."

These are catchy, lighthearted phrases. But they mask a darker truth for societies with exploding populations of alienated youths, many struggling with personal crises.

It's ironic that, while baby boomers and other older adults live better and have more wealth than any other adult population in the history of the planet, they place such a comparatively small value on children.

In the United States one third of all children are born out of wedlock. In Britain two out of five children are illegitimate. One third of children in America live in single-parent homes (usually a single mother), with a third of those living below the poverty line. Tens of millions of American youths hunger for spiritual and emotional care. Many cry in the dark, alone. While some of these literally hunger for food, all hunger for parental love. They long to be valued and appreciated.

The problems are especially acute in households with teenagers. In the United States 60 percent of mothers in two-parent families work outside the home. In families headed by single mothers, 70 percent of them work outside the home. Overall, only 25 percent of teens say their mothers are always home when they return from school. Only 58 percent say their fathers care about them.

The effects of this out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach have left permanent scars on millions of children. They in turn will influence the future of the nations for generations.

Newsweek magazine reported that since 1991 the percentage of American 12th-graders who have illegally obtained and used alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs in the last 30 days is up dramatically to 50 percent, 35 percent and 25

percent, respectively (May 10, 1999).

Several months ago a Public Broadcasting System special telecast shocked its viewers with a documentary revealing that large-group teen orgies were rapidly becoming a way of life in some upper-middle-class suburbs. In some cases teens simply carried out the sexual acts they had watched on the pornography channels brought into their homes courtesy of their cable-television providers.

Many of these youths, seriously scarred, simply didn't care about any eventual psychological, emotional or physical health consequences. They were merely acting out the sexual perversion endemic in many parts of modern culture. Their parents didn't know what was going on in their own homes. The ongoing orgies were discovered only when health workers tried to find the source of sudden outbreaks of venereal diseases in the teens' schools.

Causes and effects of neglect

These problems—many among affluent households and communities—are symptoms of underlying ills. We have created a system of devaluing children and neglecting the needs of our youth. Let's understand how popular media culture is a form of abuse that inflicts serious and lasting harm.

I am a father of four children ages 6 to 17. I am one of scores of millions of parents challenged daily to go against the grain of a society that pays lip service to the love of children. The society in reality delivers them up to a venomous culture from which they must be protected, repaired and rejuvenated. Woe to the children who don't get enough parental support. Alas, their numbers are legion.

In the United States more than half of children 18 and younger do not live with their natural fathers. The fatherless-home phenomenon shortchanges children on one of their greatest needs: the daily involvement of both a father and mother. Children need both parents to

help, support and guide them. Sadly, the emotional abandonment that usually follows divorce, or the unwillingness to support a child born after casual sex, is all too prevalent.

Neglect from fathers, coupled with lack of child-rearing skills when fathers are present, contributes to children's risks. When fathers are present, they typically spend an average of only five minutes a day talking face to face with each child.

Since fathers don't talk with their children, what happens instead? The vast majority of dads and moms place their kids in front of electronic baby-sitters to free up time for things they'd rather be doing. The Kaiser Foundation recently reported that American children spend an average of 35 nonschool hours weekly with electronic entertainment media. Many sources put TV viewing alone at 25-28 hours weekly.

What do children see on television? Multitudes of scientific studies conclude that unregulated TV makes a destructive and abusive impact on the developing minds and personalities of children.

With their often schizophrenic, violent, sexually promiscuous and sometimes perverted formats and themes, far too many TV programs become the primary educator of our children, the chief source of their view of the world and the foremost influence in forming their values. The result? Said a Texas 17-year-old: "Our generation is far more desensitized to violence than any other generation. TVs raise children now more than parents do, and television caters to children's violent fantasies. Parents are working more and spending less time with their kids."

Best parenting practices

The surest way to see your children succeed is to practice an approach that reorients parents' values to support youth development. Some call it forming a child-centered universe.

Jesus put it this way when some of His disciples tried to deny children access to Him:

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:16).

Jesus warned people not to treat children offensively or expose them to circumstances that would defile them (Matthew 18:6). Parental neglect, coupled with the profaning of children by a culture pushed on them by unscrupulous adults, indeed creates a world in which children can be swallowed up by evil.

Bible readers aren't surprised to learn that programs built around scriptural principles are among the most effective for helping at-risk youths. Researchers have found that excellence in parental support of children leads to successful young men and women who develop resilience, strength of character and a healthy identity.

Hill Walker is codirector of the University of Oregon's Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior, which has programs in schools throughout the United States. Dr. Walker offers these keys for effective child rearing:

- **Parent involvement.** Parents should be involved with their children at all times, whether in structured or unstructured activities. Involvement needs to be continuous from birth until the child leaves home as a young adult. Parental contact with children is the crucial factor, because children gain security by knowing parents are always there. This is as important for teens as it is for younger children.

A critical part of parental involvement is a daily discussion time in which parents review the child's day with him and discuss what happened. It tells the child the parents care

for him and are concerned about what happens in his life. It is also an excellent method to detect problems in the child's life that parents might not discover otherwise. Once the child begins school, it is extremely important to conduct a daily discussion of this type. The dinner table is often a good place for this to happen. A relaxed family conversation after a meal may be much more effective than what the child may perceive to be a formal interrogation period.

- **Monitoring.** Careful parental monitoring of the child's activities, behavior, schedules, whereabouts, friendships and associations with other children is one of the single most important things parents can do to ensure their children grow up healthy, safe and fully engaged in building success for themselves and others. Careful monitoring can be a powerful protective factor in a child's life. But use wisdom. Remember the apostle Paul's wise words: “And you fathers, *do not provoke your children to wrath*, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, emphasis added).

- **Positive techniques for parents.** Parents with positive outlooks are supportive and encouraging toward each of their children. It is important to establish a loving relationship between parents and children that involves mutual respect and affection. Parents then will be better able to influence their children in the right directions using praise and approval, persuasion and the teaching of logical thinking.

In the absence of positive techniques, many parents grow harsh and punitive, forcing the child into desired behaviors. A child, however, can take such harshness as discouraging

attacks on his worth as a person. In the child's mind, the parent is then placed in an adversarial position instead of the child's protector and advocate.

- **Discipline.** Parental discipline needs to be fair, consistent and predictable. It should never be harsh or overly punitive. There should be a logical relationship between child behavior and the consequences that are applied to it.

- **Problem-solving, conflict resolution and crisis intervention.** During their upbringing, children experience many crises that are minor but loom large in their perceptions. When they bring problems to their parents for assistance, it is important that parents respond to their concerns immediately and completely.

Parents should develop alternatives for the child to consider in solving the problem and encourage him to choose one that is acceptable and that works for him. Children should always have the confidence that such problems will receive a fair hearing and that they will have access to parental assistance when needed.

A blessing and a responsibility

The Bible tells us that children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3-5). Being a good parent is one of the most important responsibilities that we incur in life, with the distinct possibility of truly satisfying rewards. By our godly example and positive teaching, we can influence the lives of our sons and daughters for the good.

You can find much more information in our free booklet *Making Life Work*. It contains a wealth of helpful knowledge about child rearing, family life and success in general. **GN**

A Dramatic Shift in American Society

What's taking place in Western societies that has brought us so many serious problems? The difficulties our children face are a consequence of choices made by their parents and grandparents of the last two generations. Our choices have lasting effects, whether we are discussing individuals, families or societies. As God told Moses about the decisions of the ancient nation of Israel, if the Israelites chose amiss, their children would suffer “to the third and fourth generations” (Exodus 20:5).

About 50 years ago many American families made a choice with lasting and unforeseen consequences. They moved away from the longtime model of a family structure involving sacrifice by parents for the care of children. Parents chose to pursue economic and personal success, placing their happiness before that of their children.

Before World War II the American father was principally concerned with marriage and rearing children. His job was a means to the end of supporting his family- and child-centered goals.

But, in the aftermath of the Great Depression and Second World War, materialism, sports and social life with other adult male friends outside the family became a man's principal measure of manhood, personal identity and success. Many men became only secondarily

concerned with the details of their children's lives. The day-to-day details of their children's needs were delegated to their wives.

This change in values led to a devaluation of the perceived worth of children. Later trends intensified the problem. Subsequent decades brought preoccupation with material success and rebellion against personal responsibility. Divorce and illicit sex abounded—with lasting hurtful consequences to the well-being of children.

A generation later is it any wonder that youth problems are epidemic? Should we be surprised that many parents are largely unaware of what their children are doing or what is happening emotionally in their lives?

No one escapes the consequences of the principle of cause and effect. We are well into a second generation of adults who, for the most part, have downgraded child rearing as a priority after material and professional success. In many cases parents have made choices that have seriously compromised their ability to be adequately involved with their children. Increasing tax burdens and household costs have also played a part, leading many couples to conclude that both parents must work outside the home to meet family expenses.



An Overview of Conditions

Zimbabwe: a crisis-torn country

Zimbabwe, at one time a prosperous African nation, is seriously short of food, and a lack of fuel has brought industry to a standstill. The country's infrastructure is fraying badly, with schools and hospitals struggling to survive. More than half the work force is unemployed, and one third of the army is helping the Congo's president, Laurent Kabila, in an expensive civil war in the Congo. Most blame these misfortunes on the brutal regime of Zimbabwe's president, Robert Mugabe.

As *Financial Times* reporter Victor Mallet observed: "Millions of Zimbabweans have tired of old-fashioned anti-imperialistic rhetoric and want a change of faces at the top."

The Sunday Telegraph reported: "With the country's economy in tatters, thanks to years of misrule, Mugabe thought he had a guaranteed vote winner when his loyal constitutional panel drew up clause 57, to enshrine land confiscation and demand compensation for white farmers [from] the old colonial power: Britain."

Zimbabwe's government was in shock after citizens found the courage to stand up to the regime by voting no in a recent constitutional referendum. Yet widespread reports persist of the occupation of white-owned farms following that national vote, with some farmers and farm workers attacked and killed.

The Zimbabwe dollar was worth 50 British pence when President Mugabe assumed power. It is now valued at 1.5 pence. And as *The Independent on Sunday* observed: "Every week 1,200 Zimbabweans die of AIDS and life expectancy since 1980 has fallen from 59 to 42."

A beautiful and formerly prosperous country has been laid

Every week 1,200 Zimbabweans die of AIDS, and life expectancy has fallen from 59 to 42.

waste, and many of British descent are applying for passports at the British High Commission in the nation's capital, Harare, evidently preparing to emigrate.

Yet, in the words of the minister of state in the British Foreign Office: "Zimbabwe could be one of the success stories of Africa: It remains one of the richest countries, with huge mineral and agricultural resources. It has the best-educated population in Africa and a relatively good infrastructure.

"Zimbabwe is too important a country to be allowed to fail. Its people deserve better and its neighbours in Africa deserve better too." (Sources: *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The*

Independent on Sunday, *The Daily Mail*, *The Financial Times* [all London].)

Africa: a crisis-torn continent

What happens to Zimbabwe now and in the near future may affect the entire continent. The long-awaited African renaissance has yet to materialize. Guns, brute force and political corruption shape Africa's future.

Daily Mail columnist Stephen Glover explains: "In post-colonial Africa political power has been exercised solely for the benefit of the elites and their families, most of whom have enriched themselves on a vast scale. Ordinary people could be ignored, or if they become tiresome, persecuted. Their lives were not valued or their rights respected."

For instance, in Sierra Leone horrifying violence against civilians has led to the deaths of 50,000 people and massive injuries to many more. The sight of people missing part of their limbs is fairly common. On-site reporter and photographer Stuart Freedman filed these words for *The Independent on Sunday*: "In one of the century's most grotesque acts of collective cruelty, tens of thousands of people have been deliberately maimed, in punishment for lack of enthusiasm for a rebel regime . . ."

Meanwhile, tribal fighting ravages Nigeria. A mass murder-suicide of some 1,000 members of a religious cult recently occurred in Uganda. The country's vice president, Mrs. Specioza Kasibwe, described the cult's leaders as "diabolic, malevolent criminals masquerading as holy and religious people who outwitted the security network to exploit the ignorance of thousands."

Civil war has created the world's largest internal flight of refugees, in the Sudan. Nearly two million people will soon need food aid. In the words of *The Sunday Times*: "Weather has brought the drought, but war has exacerbated it."

The misery of Mozambique because of the recent floods that devastated much of southeastern Africa is known to anyone who watches international news. Hundreds are dead, thousands face hunger, and the country's economy faces a rough road.

On the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is not only mired in a costly, futile war with Eritrea, but is faced with a massive famine that threatens the lives of millions. The fighting has forced farmers to abandon their harvests in grain-producing regions and has inhibited the distribution of foreign aid.

Such is the general state of Africa. Strictly speaking, in relative terms few bright spots such as Ghana lie on the horizon. In Ghana, by regional standards, the country is prosperous and stable. While good things have happened in South Africa, its rates of murder and rape lead the Western world.

Rupert Cornwall summed up the African situation for *The Independent on Sunday*: "Maybe Africa is painfully inching towards a new era, free of post-colonial illusions and Cold War distortions. But for all the brave talk, the continent is entering the new century where it began the last one—at the bottom of the international heap. And not many futurologists would bet that it would be very different 100





Albania

Zimbabwe

Bahrain

Cyprus

Burkina Faso

New Zealand

Jordan

Belgium

Argentina

Czech Republic

ions Around the World

years from now." (Sources: *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Independent*, *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Economist* [all London].)

A crisis-torn world

In spite of several millennia of technological progress and scientific advances, much of the world is mired in wars, poverty, disease and homelessness.

The more advanced nations are another story. Wrote essayist Jim Hoagland for *The International Herald Tribune*: "The arrival of the year 2000 finds more of the world's population living in good health and prosperity, educated and secure from territorial aggression than any other moment in

Although Africa is a case in point, it is by no means the only continent burdened by bad leadership.

history." At face value this reads as a somewhat overoptimistic assessment, but Mr. Hoagland does acknowledge that "more of the world's people also live in an awareness of their own relative or absolute poverty than ever before."

Approximately a billion of us are overweight, while another billion go hungry. Six billion of us live on the planet, the human family having doubled in 40 years. World population remains large and growing even though the 20th century brought unprecedented mass death and destruction, primarily by means of war and other human-induced catastrophes. What an age of incredible paradox!

Perhaps the main problem in this crisis-torn world is leadership, or the lack of it. Although Africa is a case in point, it is by no means the only continent burdened by bad leadership. Koffi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, despairs of the leaders of his own continent. He recently commented: "The quality of the leaders, the misery they have brought to their people and my inability to work with them to turn the situation around, are very depressing . . . In many countries the wrong kind have made it to leadership. They seek power for the sake of power and for their own aggrandisement rather than having a real understanding of the need to use power to improve their countries" (*The Sunday Times*).

Many national leaders clamor for more weapons of mass destruction, assuring us we need more firepower to ensure peace and prosperity. To have peace we need to be armed to the teeth—yet another paradox. (Sources: *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* [all London], *The Houston Chronicle*.)

A world lacking in law and order

Why the paradoxes? Why the ongoing plague of violence and bloodshed? Why can't the human species get along? What inhibits us from respect and cooperation between nations and peoples that would ensure our survival and well-being?

A primary factor is a pervasive decline in respect for the rule of law. As *The Washington Times* put it: "Just as the 20th century was tripped up by ideologies smoldering beneath the surface, the 21st century is threatened by the decline of law."

Historian Paul Johnson echoes this analysis and stresses the importance of the rule of law. He explains: "The rule of law as distinct from the rule of a person, or class or people, and as opposed to the rule of force, is an abstract and sophisticated concept. It is mighty difficult to achieve. But until it is achieved, and established in the public mind with such vehemence that masses of individuals uphold it, no other form of progress can be regarded as secure."

Nothing characterizes our age more than widespread disregard for law and authority. Government leaders and police are too often figures of ridicule. Many people—including, at times, political leaders—seek to get around the law in any way they can. But we will never resolve our problems until we are law-abiding citizens in nations that occupy a world of law and order.

To be effective, law must be universally applied to everyone. There can be no exceptions. As Mr. Johnson explains: "The essence of the rule of law is its impersonality, omnipotence and ubiquity. It is the same law for everyone, everywhere—kings, emperors, high priests, the state itself, are subject to it. If exceptions are made, the rule of law begins to collapse—that was the grand lesson of antiquity."

He further noted: "The Bible can be seen as a gigantic treatise on the rule of law. God, outside and above humanity, is the objective legislator and enforcer, and all humankind are subject to his laws." Of course, he describes here an ideal world in which people keep the Ten Commandments as a way of life. (Sources: *The Washington Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*.)

Coming: a law-abiding world

From the biblical point of view, we have reason to be optimistic. God promises a utopian world of lasting peace and prosperity, governed by the rule of law (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3). Obedience to God's law will become universal, embracing

God promises a utopian world of lasting peace, governed by the rule of law. Obedience to God's law will become universal.

all continents—including Africa, whose sufferings will become a thing of the past, long forgotten by its happy citizenry. This is part of the gospel—the good news—Jesus brought.

You can learn much more by requesting the free booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, *The Ten Commandments* and *Making Life Work*. They will help you understand and experience the benefits of being a law-abiding person in the midst of a world that all too often rejects law and authority.

—John Ross Schroeder



Ukraine

Mauritania

Slovenia

Barbados

Angola

Malta

Jamaica

Lebanon

Djibouti

Greenland

Cambodia

'Peace, Peace!' When There Is No Peace

After somehow surviving perhaps the bloodiest 100 years in human history, will we finally see the peace process work in the 21st century?

by John Ross Schroeder

A British author and journalist, A.N. Wilson, observed recently that "the history of the twentieth century is the history of death and slaughter on a scale [of] which our forebears could have had no inkling. The millions killed by the folly and wickedness of politicians far outstrips the numbers in Africa and Asia who died of unnecessary starvation."

Yet, about halfway through 1999, the Anglo-American news media were generally optimistic in their judgment of the world's prospects for peace. For instance, the writers of *The Economist* summed up their view on the last day of July:

"On the face of it, this has been a good season for peace, and a good one for intervention. Over the past few weeks, agreements have been reached to end three of Africa's nastiest wars—in Congo, in Sierra Leone and between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

"And restraint has prevailed, with some help from outsiders, in the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. And in Kosovo the West has put a stop to Serb ethnic cleansing. *All of a sudden the world looks quieter.* Those who have worked to end the violence—whether by diplomatic means, as in Kashmir, Congo, Ethiopia and Eritrea, or by military intervention, as in Kosovo, Sierra Leone—may feel encouraged. Blessed are the peace-makers" (emphasis added throughout).

The *Economist* article did not mention that considerable progress had apparently been made in the long-running dispute in Northern Ireland. More important, the Middle East peace process had taken a decided turn for the better with the olive branches offered by Ehud Barak, prime minister of Israel.

What a difference a year makes

But where are we now? Reading the morning papers is not an encouraging activity. Several recent stories have indicated that progress toward peace is not as advanced as the above analysis suggests.

For example, the war of words between India and Pakistan is escalating again. It would be foolhardy to imagine that these two neighboring countries have settled their long-running dispute over Kashmir. An exchange of firepower could come at any time—and

nuclear weaponry could conceivably be used. A major article in the *Financial Times* stated, "Pakistan's General Pervez Musharraf and India's Atal Behari Vajpayee are perilously close to taking their countries into another war over the disputed state of Kashmir."

According to the same article: "India regards U.S. analysis of the situation as misguided" and says that "we are not going to be immobilised because of the nuclear factor." It also stated that "the mullahs-with-nukes scenario that so horrifies the U.S. cuts little ice in India."

The Angola war in the Congo area of Africa is another case in point. Never mind how many papers have been signed, the fighting has never ceased. The latest news is that government forces have captured a rebel center in the south. *The Telegraph* also alleged that the "Angolan leader keeps [the] country at war for profit." *The Independent* added that "escalation of the Angolan war could undermine Congo peace negotiations and lead to instability across the region."

Such are the ups and downs of the peace process. Kosovo, in southeastern Europe, is back in the news. Realistically, the supposed peace that NATO made possible has been punctuated by local massacres and continued "ethnic cleansings." The positive *Economist* article quoted above stated: "Even optimists admit that full-scale blood-letting will resume unless outside troops keep the combatants apart, *certainly for years, maybe for decades.*"

To bring the Kosovo scene up to date: Violence recently erupted again as 70,000 Albanian protesters tried to storm the bridge that separates the Serbian and Albanian communities in the city of Mitrovica. Geographically, only the Ibar River keeps them apart.

Unfinished business

The Observer dubbed this conflict "the unfinished war." So many wars seem never to fully end. Correspondent Tim Judah stated that "a year ago the world's eyes were focused on the slaughter of Kosovo. Now the TV crews have gone, but the agony remains." Mr. Judah "toured the torn cities and uneasy borders where all sides are braced for a return to guerrilla fighting." It is an uneasy peace at best.

In Northern Ireland the peace process has been at

least temporarily halted by a dispute over the long-hoped-for decommissioning of Irish Republican Army (IRA) weapons. Said a *Daily Mail* editorial, "Why should anyone be surprised that the IRA has refused to hand over so much as a single bullet in the cause of peace?" A frantic scramble is underway among politicians to preserve the Good Friday Agreement.

The peace process in the Middle East has again temporarily been interrupted by Hezbollah attacks against Israeli soldiers in southern Lebanon, jeopardizing a potential peace deal between Israel and Syria and hopes for lasting peace in war-torn Lebanon.

This article is far from a comprehensive study of all the world's trouble spots. For example, we have not assessed the events in Chechnya and East Timor—or the potential perils of Taiwan. China has again threatened military action in its continuing quest to bring Taiwan under its rule. Undoubtedly, more hot spots will erupt around the globe.

Where do we go from here?

Certainly the peace process as conceived by diplomats and government leaders has many tortuous twists and turns. Things seem to be better, then they get worse, and vice versa. The process can turn out to be incredibly deceptive. The Bible predicts a time when, just as the prospects for peace look most promising, war (on a huge scale) will suddenly break out.

Near the middle of the first century the apostle Paul wrote these sobering words: "... The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, 'Peace and safety!' *then sudden destruction* comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

Jesus said the end time would be like the days of Noah. But how so? People will be about the normal everyday business of living—buying and selling, building and planting, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage—that is, until the world explodes in an unparalleled barrage of troubles (Matthew 24:37-39).

This coming time will be like the time of Noah, when the Flood destroyed nearly all human life. There were no survivors outside the ark. We can be thankful that, at the end time, there will also be some survivors thanks to the work of God through His elect (Matthew 24:21-22).

The destruction that came on the pre-Flood world was sudden. Appearances just beforehand were deceiving, and people paid no attention to Noah's warnings (2 Peter 2:5). They simply didn't comprehend what was about to happen. They didn't have a clue as to the perilous nature of the times in which they lived.

Jesus told us the inhabitants of Sodom were similarly unaware of impending disaster just before the heavens rained fire and brimstone as a judgment against their ungodly ways of living. True, they were warned. But they simply didn't see or hear the warning, having ignored God's messenger, Lot (Luke 17:28-30).

Beware a counterfeit peace

A coming time of *counterfeit* world peace will seem

so real just before a great time of trouble begins in deadly earnest. Jeremiah foresaw and was inspired to write of it: "They [the false prophets] have also healed the hurt of My people slightly [superficially], saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14). As the time of the end draws near, the world will be told that there is nothing really to worry about, that all will be well.

All will be well, but *only after* the second coming of Christ, who will establish and administer the Kingdom of God—the only hope of lasting peace. However, in this age of man ("this present evil age," Galatians 1:4), Christ warns us *not* to judge according to appearance. We have to look more deeply with the spiritual insights available through God's Word. We have to see beyond the superficial and often deceptive surface of current events.

Many people do not understand the principle of cause and effect. They live exclusively in the present, taking little notice of history and giving little thought to the future. Solomon said, "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). It's easy to be fooled into thinking that the day of reckoning will never come.

That is one reason we publish *The Good News*. We earnestly desire to alert our readers to the perilous times that lie ahead, the consequence of the wholesale breaking of God's spiritual law—a wonderful law that would govern mankind for its benefit and make life really work.

As was the apostle Paul, we hope our readers will be among those who do take heed, and we therefore repeat his encouraging words of yesteryear, fully applicable today:

"But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day [the time of great trouble culminating in Jesus Christ's return] should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day . . . Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, *but let us watch* and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6).

Would you like to learn more?

The Bible prophesies many trends and events to come to pass before this troubled age comes to an end. But what are they? To better understand world conditions in the light of Bible prophecy, be sure to request two of our eye-opening booklets, *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. Both are yours free for the asking when you contact any of our offices listed on page 2. You can also download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org. **GN**

Papal Visit Highlights Middle East Problems

Much of the state of Israel's history in the 20th century is a chronicle of wars and other conflicts with her Arab neighbors. The recent visit of the pope highlighted some of these still-simmering animosities—and hints as to what may lie ahead in this troubled region.

by Melvin Rhodes

In March the world's attention again focused on the Middle East—and Israel in particular—as Pope John Paul II visited many Bible-related sites in a long-planned and highly publicized journey. Thought by some to be the most important visit the nation of Israel has ever accommodated, John Paul's pilgrimage, which he called his "personal spiritual journey," to the Holy Land turned out to be one of the most political of his 22-year pontificate.

It was inevitable. The area Christians call the Holy Land is the birthplace of three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in that order. The region—the crossroads of three continents—has played major roles in the history of the world.

Center of controversy

Jerusalem, at the center of it all, is one of the most fought-over pieces of real estate. Since its founding in 1948, Israel has fought five wars—the War of Independence in 1948, the Suez-Sinai War in 1956, the Six Day War in 1967, the October War in 1973 and the 1982 war to eradicate Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) strongholds in Lebanon. Iraq's Saddam Hussein also attacked Israel with missiles during the 1991 Gulf War, but Israel refrained from counterattacking so as not to possibly divide the Western and Arab nations allied against Iraq.

Jerusalem, whose name means "city of peace," has not seen much peace. The Bible tells us the city will be fought over at least one more time, "trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). Revelation 11:2 adds that this will be for "42 months," a period of 3½ years.

The city is long used to conflict and controversy. Already old when King David captured it and made it his capital 3,000

years ago, it has been dominated by many peoples and nations, including the three religions that sanctify the city as holy. Roman Catholics held it for more than a century during the Crusader Kingdom of



The Zion Gate in the southern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem still bears scars from the 1967 war in which Israelis gained control over the city. The walls themselves were built between 1538 and 1541 by the Moslem ruler Süleyman the Magnificent.

Jerusalem. The Protestant British took it from the Muslim Turks in 1917, then ruled it until it was divided 31 years later when the modern state of Israel was born. The Old City section of Jerusalem was to remain a part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan until the 1967 war.

For 33 years Israel has controlled Jerusalem. Many Israelis consider it their eternal capital, though few other nations recognize it as such, preferring to keep their embassies in less-controversial

Tel Aviv. In spite of its long history, only the Jews have looked to Jerusalem as their capital. Jerusalem has never been the capital of any Islamic nation, although Palestinians aggressively assert that the city should be the capital for their planned Palestinian state.

Stage set for fulfillment of prophecy

Few people realize that so many of the prophecies in the Bible that relate to the "time of the end" before the second coming of Christ could not possibly have been fulfilled until modern Israel was established in 1948. Israel's existence led to never-ending conflict in the region. Mainly because of military aid from its chief ally, the United States, the Jewish state is the most powerful military force in the area, having gained the upper hand through the continual conflict that has afflicted the peoples of the area for more than half a century.

The so-called peace process sponsored by the United States is a progressive, organized return of lands captured by the Israelis over these decades of conflict, territory Israel considered essential for its security at the time it was taken. A younger, more liberal generation seeks peace at almost any price. Its hope is that, by handing back captured territories, Israel at last will be accepted by its neighbors and able to live in peace.

Often overlooked is that *all* the land of Israel, including the internationally recognized borders the country acquired at its birth, belonged to others in recent times. No matter how much land the Israelis return to the Palestinians during the continuing peace process, there will be further demands for more. Though Israel has made peace with some of its neighbors—Egypt and Jordan—other Arab nations, leaders and groups remain adamant that *any* Jewish



This bullet-pocked building in the Golan Heights, above, stands as a grim reminder of fierce fighting between Israel and Syria for control over this strategic area, fought over in both the 1967



and 1973 wars. Jerusalem, seen from the Mount of Olives, remains a center of controversy—particularly the Temple Mount area (center), viewed as holy by both Judaism and Islam.

state in the region is unacceptable.

Eventually the most vexing question will have to be resolved: Who will rule Jerusalem?

At this critical time in Israel's history Pope John Paul II walked into the controversy with its pent-up frustration and resentment. As students of the Bible know, the contention goes all the way back to the rivalry that existed between two brothers in ancient times: Isaac and Ishmael, ancestors of the Israelites and the Arabs, respectively. You can read about their rivalry in the book of Genesis.

The pope's apology

It is impossible to understand the complexities of the Middle East without a knowledge of the Bible and the history of the three religions that came out of the area. Animosity between the peoples of the three relevant religions have brought about countless deaths and untold suffering over the centuries. Realizing that the Roman Catholic Church, bigger than either Islam or Judaism, was often responsible for encouraging the persecution of Jews and animosity toward Muslims, the pope came with an apology, attempting reconciliation with both religions. In fact, he had even apologized before leaving the Vatican for the Holy Land.

But the apology was not sufficient for many who feel the church is still not facing up to its past. Recent revelations about the role of Pope Pius XII during World War II have inflamed feelings. The wartime leader of the Catholic Church has often been condemned for his alleged anti-Semitism and for failing to speak out against the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

The pope spoke at Yad Vashem, the Jewish memorial to the Nazi Holocaust, saying that the church is "saddened" by the Holocaust, rather than "sorry," which would be an admittance of some guilt. The church's teaching that "the Jews killed Christ" has echoed down through the centuries and greatly contributed to much of the anti-Semitism that has plagued the Jews for two millennia. Many Israelis were disappointed at what was generally perceived to be a weak apology, though few seemed to doubt the personal sorrow the present pope feels.

After his visit to Yad Vashem, the pope participated in a dialog between leaders of the three religions. One person present described the session afterward as a "dialog of the deaf." Beliefs and prejudices are too deeply entrenched for much common ground to be found.

But it was in the political arena that the pope's words were most felt. His call for a Palestinian "homeland"—recognized as support for a Palestinian state—will encourage movement in that direction. Since the Palestinians control mainly pockets of land—their population centers—bordered on most sides by Israeli-controlled territory, such a declaration would inevitably ignite further conflict in the Mideast.

A forced solution for Jerusalem?

Most issues can probably be resolved, given sufficient outside pressure and assurances from major powers. But a solution to the Jerusalem question would require the wisdom of Israel's ancient King Solomon, the builder of Israel's first temple. The possibility of the building of a third temple lies at the center of the controversies.

The site of the first and second temple, the Temple Mount, is of great importance to the Jews. There, from about 964 to 957 B.C., Solomon built the magnificent temple that was the center of worship for the kingdom of Israel and later the kingdom of Judah, until its destruction at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 B.C. After returning from captivity in Babylon, Jewish exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple from about 536 to 516 B.C.

Then, beginning in 18 B.C., King Herod the Great and his successors expanded and enlarged the temple complex, creating the magnificent edifice mentioned so often in the Gospels. It was again the religious center of the nation until the Romans razed it and much of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. To many Jews, the Temple Mount remains a holy place, the place where God dwelt.

But the site that is holy to the Jews is also holy to Muslims. Upon the Temple Mount—some say in the exact spot where the first and second temple stood—is the Muslims' Dome of the Rock, from which the prophet Muhammed is said to have ascended to heaven. Another mosque stands nearby, also on the Temple Mount. Regardless of whatever else can be divided, this piece of land cannot be. The pope visited only with Islamic leaders while visiting the Temple Mount, sending what appeared to be a clear message of support to the Palestinians over their claims to Jerusalem.

One possible solution to this contentious issue is the internationalization of Jerusalem's Old City, a site of great importance to all three faiths. In recent times several centers of contention have been internationalized; the latest are Kosovo and East

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Timor. Armed forces from several nations are based in both nations to keep the peace. Could the same thing happen to Jerusalem? If recent history is a guide, it could happen.

Vatican City, as the world's smallest nation and without an armed force of its own, could itself play a role, perhaps as guardian of the Christian holy sites. The agreement signed between the Vatican and the Palestinians noted that "an equitable solution for the issue of Jerusalem, based on international resolutions, is fundamental for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East," and "any unilateral decisions and actions altering the special character and legal status of Jerusalem are morally and legally unacceptable." This prohibition includes Israel's considering Jerusalem its capital.

Divided neighbors in a divided land

By no means is Jerusalem the only area of controversy in the region. Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak, bowing to public pressure after the deaths of many Israeli soldiers, has promised to withdraw the military from southern Lebanon, where Israel has manned a security zone to protect towns in northern Israel from Islamic guerrilla attacks. Some are calling for United Nations forces or soldiers from European nations to insert themselves as peacekeepers between the two sides.

Similarly, Prime Minister Barak seeks a peace treaty between Israel and Syria, one of Israel's longtime foes. The Syrians demand the return of the Golan Heights, a strategically crucial plateau from which Syrian artillery regularly bombarded Israeli towns and settlers before Jewish forces took the area in the 1967 war.

Syria's President Assad demands access to the Sea of Galilee, the large freshwater lake from which Israel draws nearly a third of the water it consumes. The Golan Heights also controls the headwaters of the Jordan River, the primary water source for the Sea of Galilee. In the ever-thirsty Middle East, water is a crucial resource for all concerned, not to be surrendered easily.

If Israel does reach an agreement that entails giving up part or all of the Golan Heights, it surely won't be without considerable security guarantees that most likely again will entail outside military peacekeeping forces.

Outsiders will again control Jerusalem

Whatever course is taken, Jerusalem eventually will again fall under the temporary

control of non-Israelites, as the Bible prophecies. The Middle East is at the center of Bible prophecy. Any conflict there could quickly involve nations around the world.

Asked by His disciples what events would indicate the imminence of His return to the earth to establish the Kingdom of God, Jesus spoke of a time when Jerusalem would be "surrounded by armies" (Luke 21:20).

In verse 22 He spoke of this as "the days of vengeance," a time of simmering animosities exploding in conflicts that could threaten the very existence of life on the planet. Unless those days would be cut short, Jesus said, "no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).

Israel's very existence as a nation is at stake as the peace process continues. The country is divided between those who will risk security for an agreement and those who see the dangers that lie in trusting neighbors who have long sought their demise. Bible prophecy tells us that Jerusalem will see terrifying developments as the time of the end draws near (Zechariah 14:1-2). But beyond this troubled time lies the remarkable age when Jerusalem will truly be the city of peace, when long-standing animosities will be quelled and its citizens will dwell safely in harmony. **GN**

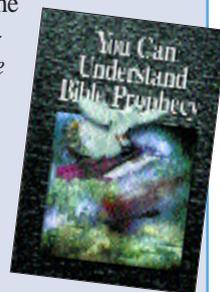
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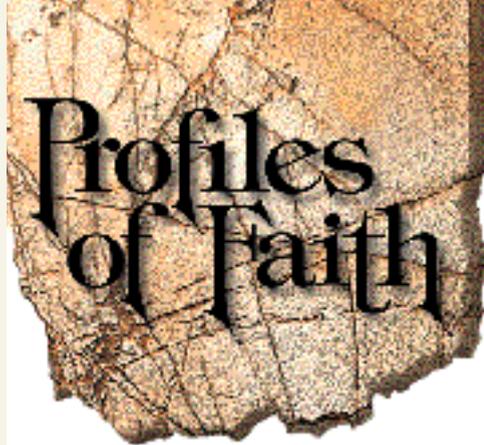
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Matthew

From Serving Mammon to Serving God

by Jerold Aust

We abruptly meet Matthew in the Gospel that bears his name: “As Jesus passed . . . He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him” (Matthew 9:9). What more can we learn about this disciple?

At the time he met Christ, Matthew was a “publican,” a tax collector for the Romans. Such men often made a good living off both the Romans and the Jews. Although the Romans tolerated the Jews who served them in such offices, they did not consider them equals. And a tax collector’s fellow Jews often detested all tax collectors—and probably Matthew as well.

One day Jesus offered Matthew the opportunity of a lifetime: “Follow Me.” At once Matthew left his disreputable but profitable profession and traded it for an extraordinarily different calling.

Rome and Judea in Matthew’s time

Rome was the greatest power on earth at the time. Jerusalem and Judea lived under the cloud of Rome, chafing under a governor appointed by the emperor.

Rome ascended to world supremacy over many years. Its strength grew as it acted against any who threatened its position. Rome did intervene to help its allies, but, since human nature hasn’t changed throughout the ages, “the lust for brutal aggression and exercise of destructive

power soon took hold of the Roman mind” (Nahum Glatzer, *Jerusalem and Rome*, 1970, p. 11).

Nahum Glatzer, quoting the Roman poet Virgil, says: “This Rome has ‘neither period nor boundary of empire,’ but ‘dominion without end.’ From henceforward, the idea of Rome as the eternal City of Man is to endure, however transformed, in the historical and religious consciousness of Western humanity” (Glatzer, p. 13).

The power of Rome was felt throughout the Mediterranean region, more so with the

The power of Rome was felt throughout the Mediterranean region, more so with the burden of taxes. This is where Matthew’s story begins.

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The despised publicans

The Roman senate had found it convenient to farm out the job of tax collecting to the people they called the *publicani*. They granted contracts to the *equites*, the richest class of Romans, who then formed stock companies. Each company would appoint a managing director who would then appoint submanagers in the provinces. Under the submanagers were the publicans, who were in daily contact with the various classes of the population (Merrill Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 1966, p. 899, “Publican”). It was this group to

which the term “publican” refers in the New Testament.

For the Jews, to be taxed by Rome was detestable. But it was even more abhorrent to have a fellow countryman as one collecting the taxes. To the Jews the publicans were pests at best and traitors at worst.

Tax collectors were encouraged by their superiors to exact fraudulent claims as a means to unscrupulously amass more income. They were regarded as gougers, traitors and apostates, defiled by their association with the heathen, and willing tools

of the oppressive Roman overlords. “They overcharged (Luke 3:13), [and] brought false charges of smuggling in the hope of extorting hush-money” (Unger, p. 899).

Publicans worked their shrewd minds overtime, finding creative opportunities to tax the people; creatively discovering ways to levy taxes “on axles, wheels, pack animals, pedestrians, roads, highways; on admission to markets; on carriers, bridges, ships, and quays; on crossing rivers, on dams, on licenses—in short, on such a variety of objects that even the research of modern scholars has not been able to identify all the names” (Unger, p. 899).





some tax collectors involved stopping travelers, making them unload their pack animals, then rummaging through their packages, private letters and other belongings. The tax collector would leave the troubled traveler's belongings on the ground in disarray (Unger, p. 900).

No wonder publicans such as Matthew were held in such low regard. Jesus was castigated for associating with “tax collectors and sinners” (Matthew 9:11). Jesus Himself mentioned them in the same breath as grossly immoral people (Matthew 21:31).

Writer of a great book

Matthew resided at Capernaum, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. At the time, a particularly large population lived and worked around the lake. Its fisheries were a source of livelihood; its surface was busy with navigation and traffic.

The Romans established a customhouse at Capernaum to collect taxes from the lucrative fishing industry as well as on goods flowing along the Via Maris (“Way of the Sea”), the major trade route through the region. Matthew was appointed the tax collector there. His must have been a profitable position.

But, where others saw a despised tax collector, Jesus of Nazareth saw the potential writer of one of the world's best-known and best-loved books.

Mark and Luke refer to Matthew by the name Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). This indicates that Matthew was probably from the tribe of Levi, now largely absorbed into

Matthew's Gospel is notable for its long and detailed accounts of Christ's spoken teachings. Could Matthew have recorded Jesus' words on the spot using a form of shorthand? Notice what Carsten Peter Thiede, expert in early New Testament manuscripts, has to say:

“Among the disciples of Jesus, Levi-Matthew, the former customs official, would probably have had a working knowledge of *tachygraphy* [the shorthand of the day]. In consequence, scholars have suggested that he would have been able to transcribe the long Sermon on the Mount verbatim . . . Needless to say, this notion—that we have a more or less authentic transcript of the Sermon on the Mount—infuriates those New Testament scholars who are convinced that St Matthew never wrote the Gospel and that this particular sermon is a late and unreliable compilation of scattered sayings drawn up by Christian communities. What should be appreciated is that there is no logistic, technical or logical reason why such an authentic text should not have been produced by Levi-Matthew . . .” (Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew d'Ancona, *The Jesus Papyrus*, 1997, pp. 158-159).

Matthew's calling

Matthew, Mark and Luke all recorded Matthew's calling. Let's notice Luke's description of the events of that day:

“After these things He [Jesus] went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he left all, rose up, and followed Him” (Luke 5:27-28).

Matthew was ensconced in a lucrative

come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26-27). Matthew's actions proved his faith (James 2:26).

A banquet with a spiritual lesson

Let's look more closely at the events leading up to and including a feast Matthew prepared for Jesus and other of His disciples and Matthew's friends.

“Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, ‘Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance’” (Luke 5:29-32).

Matthew responded with joy at His calling by giving Jesus a great feast. That he also invited many of his tax-collector friends shows he was not fearful nor too selfish to share his calling with those with whom he associated. He was not reluctant to invite under his roof the most righteous man who ever lived with some who may have been among the least righteous.

But Jesus, and likely Matthew as well, heard the Pharisees and scribes complaining that Christ and His disciples were associating with others who had been invited. They pointedly asked Jesus, “Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (Luke 5:30).

Their self-righteous attitude provided fertile grounds for Jesus' response: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (verse 31).

Jesus drew a mental picture with which they could easily identify. They knew that people visited a doctor when they were ill. They would have associated “those who are sick” with the despised publicans.

Jesus continued, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (verse 32). Confident of their own goodness, the Pharisees and scribes naturally would have concluded that these other “sinners” needed to repent, but they had nothing that needed to change.

Matthew adds more of Jesus' words in this brief but telling conversation not found in Mark and Luke: “But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13). These self-appointed teachers needed to learn a spiritual lesson.

By virtue of his office Matthew would have been fluent in Greek, the official language, and Aramaic, the local tongue. He was literate and competent in keeping comprehensive records and an educated writer and scribe.

the tribe of Judah after the kingdom of Judah had been exiled to and returned from Babylon several centuries earlier.

By virtue of his office Matthew would have been fluent in Greek, the official language of the region—and Aramaic, the local tongue. He was literate and competent in keeping comprehensive records and an educated writer and scribe.

As a government official he also likely would have known a type of

and powerful position, supported by the might of the Roman Empire. By the standards of those around him he was probably quite wealthy.

But Scripture implies that he was willing to give up everything, as Christ requires: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [that is, to love less or place in lower priority] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and





The Romans established a customhouse at Capernaum to collect taxes. Matthew was appointed the tax collector there. His must have been a profitable position.

Jesus showed them to be unmerciful toward most other people, who could never satisfactorily measure up to their picky and legalistic standards.

Jesus quoted from Hosea 6:6: “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” He pointedly reminded them that God is far more pleased when we learn to emulate His characteristics of mercy, forgiveness and compassion than when we condemn others.

God loves all mankind. He sent His Son to die for everyone, not just for the few, nor for only those who *think* they are righteous.

A camel, needle, rich man and salvation

Since Matthew may have been quite wealthy, another spiritual lesson from Christ must have been particularly striking to him. Matthew tells of a rich young man who approached Jesus to ask what was required for eternal life. Jesus advised him to “keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

The young man asked Him which ones He meant. Jesus responded by citing

several of the Ten Commandments concerning how to treat others, plus Leviticus 19:18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Why did Jesus quote these particular commands? One reason might be that Jesus wanted the young man to understand how important it is to share what he had with others when it was in his power to do so (James 2:14-17).

The man told Jesus that he had faithfully kept these commandments since childhood. Was there anything else that he might lack? Jesus responded: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19:21).

The young man walked away dejected, “for he had great possessions” (verse 22). Jesus then turned to His disciples: “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (verses 23-24).

Jesus pointed out an important spiritual lesson that is perhaps far more applicable

in our prosperous age. When we set our minds on the things that are important to *us*—material riches and goods—we can easily lose sight of what is important to *God*. We must be sure we retain the good sense of pursuing God’s spiritual treasures.

Serve one master: God

Solomon wrote: “How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver” (Proverbs 16:16). Mankind cannot effectively serve two masters—God and mammon—at the same time.

Matthew felt compelled to answer Jesus’ call. His story began when he was a man successful by the standards of the world.

Matthew’s story ended with even greater success. God used him to write one of the four Gospels, the accounts of Jesus Christ’s life recorded in the Bible.

Like Matthew, you and I are called out of the world, with its selfish and political ways, to a life filled with concern for God and humanity (Matthew 22:37-39).

Matthew, once a publican, was called to the high honor of becoming one of Jesus’ disciples and original 12 apostles. He accepted his call immediately. Matthew witnessed and recorded not just the life and teachings of Christ, but His crucifixion, death and resurrection.

Like Matthew, many today are also called to be Jesus’ disciples, representing Him on earth. Will you answer that call as Matthew did? **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

What is faith? How can you have a loving, trusting relationship with God? To see how you can develop such a relationship with your Creator, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*. Please contact the office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2 or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Was Jesus Christ Who He Said He Was?

The Jewish teacher from Nazareth claimed to be the promised Messiah and Son of God. Could His assertions be true? Can we find evidence to back up His bold statements?

by Bill Bradford

Many of us wonder about God's existence. Is He real? Is the Bible truly His Word? Was Jesus Christ who He said He was, the very Son of God?

Is there historical proof to which we can turn for verification? Is there a single event that offers compelling evidence that God indeed exists and Jesus of Nazareth was truly His Son?

Yes, there is one such event. Many do not believe it ever took place. Most people know of the event but have never really considered its implications—but it makes all the difference in the world if it happened.

What is this event? It is *the resurrection of Jesus from the dead*. Jesus said this event would serve as a sure “sign” proving that He was indeed who He claimed to be (Matthew 12:38-40; Matthew 16:1-4; Luke 11:29-30; John 2:18-21).

But did it happen? If it didn't, then you have no reason to believe that the way of life that Christ brought was any different from any other religion. If it didn't happen, there was nothing special about Jesus of Nazareth. He was merely another devout man, albeit one who laid the foundation for one of the world's major religions, like Muhammad or the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama.

But if it *did* happen there is one great difference between Jesus and all other religious teachers. Jesus Christ *died and was raised to life again*.

Can we know whether this truly happened? What are the implications if it did take place?

Much of the Bible focuses on the life of this Jewish religious teacher. The four biblical narratives, the Gospels, culminate with His death and resurrection. It was the bringing back of Jesus from the dead that separates Him from any other religious

teacher or philosopher who has ever lived. If Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, then neither He nor His followers have any special claim.

Can we find evidence for Christ's resurrection? Can you prove it? Many people claim personal spiritual experiences and a turnaround in their lives as proof. This may be proof to the believer, but would a skeptic accept this as evidence?

There is indeed a great deal of skepticism about the resurrection of Jesus. Several theories have been put forth to explain the claim that He was resurrected. Most revolve around assertions that:

- Jesus didn't really die; He fainted away on the cross and recovered later in the grave.
- He did die, but His body was secretly removed from the grave, either by enemies or friends.
- The claimed encounters with Jesus after His death and resurrection were either fabrications or hallucinations on the part of the disciples based on their belief in a Messiah who would not die and the ability of the mind to conjure up visions to support what it wants to believe.

Ultimately only two explanations are possible for Christ's death, the disappearance of His body and His reappearance. Either these were actions of God, or they must be accounted for with purely earthly or naturalistic explanations.

What about the theories that have been put forth to dismiss the accounts of His resurrection? As we will see, they have serious difficulties when we examine the facts.

At this point we might ask, How do we know the facts are facts? Some even claim that the death, burial and resurrection stories are but myths comparable to the legends of Krishna, Osiris, Attis, Adonis, Dionysus, Mithras and other supposed

deities. Is the story of the founder of Christianity no different from theirs, merely the product of sorrow, imagination and hope?

Attack on the historical records

Historical facts ultimately stand or fall on eyewitness accounts of events. Such accounts often can be verified with similar descriptions from other eyewitnesses. Historians can piece together events with confidence if the versions are noncontradictory, similar in details, plausible and accepted at the time they were written.

The accounts of the life, death and burial of Jesus are some of the most authentic in ancient historical records. Historian Will Durant, in his volume *Caesar and Christ*, a part of his massive work *The Story of Civilization*, quotes the Jewish scholar J. Klausner: “If we had ancient sources like those in the Gospels for the history of Alexander or Caesar, we should not cast any doubt upon them whatsoever.”

The Gospel accounts, however, have been placed under severe scrutiny. “One of the most far-reaching activities of the modern mind has been the ‘Higher Criticism’ of the Bible—the mounting attack upon its authenticity and veracity,” writes Durant (*Caesar and Christ*, 1972, p. 553).

He comments on the concerted attempt to discredit what many scholars have come to see as reliable historical accounts. “In its enthusiasm of its discoveries the Higher Criticism has applied to the New Testament tests of authenticity so severe that by them a hundred ancient worthies—e.g. Hammurabi, David, Socrates—would fade into legend” (Durant, p. 557).

In other words, this respected historian recognizes a deliberate attempt to discredit the Bible—especially with respect to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—that we do not find directed toward

other historical figures. We should ask why that should be.

Telling evidence

What evidence is contained in the accounts passed down to us, and what does it tell us? The claim that a man died and then rose from the dead certainly deserves a healthy skepticism. Extraordinary claims deserve extraordinary proof. Can we find such proof?

The four Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Two of the four—Matthew and John—were among the 12 original disciples and personally involved in many of the events they recorded. Most Bible scholars believe Mark's Gospel is largely the account and personal recollections of the disciple Peter as recorded by his close friend and companion Mark (1 Peter 5:13). Luke was a painstaking historian who interviewed eyewitnesses to prepare his biography of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4).

The accounts are indeed in agreement and point to the resurrection of Jesus as a historical reality that took place exactly as the Gospels record.

Apologist William Lane Craig in his booklet *God, Are You There?* does an excellent job of summarizing three features of the burial-and-resurrection story widely accepted by New Testament historians that give the strongest credibility to the truth of the accounts:

- ***Jesus was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea.***

Because Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the same Jewish high court that condemned Jesus, he is unlikely to be a Christian invention. Mark's Gospel tells us that "Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, . . . taking courage, went into Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus" (Mark 15:43). "Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb" (verse 46).

No one trying to contrive and pawn off a fabrication would have invented a person who did not exist and say he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jewish nation. Members of the Sanhedrin were widely known. Because Joseph was a respected public figure, many people would have known



the location of his tomb. If Jesus had *not* been buried in his tomb, the ruse would have been all too easy to verify.

• **Women were the first to discover that the tomb was empty.**

Mark also records for us the detail that three women—Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James; and Salome—approached the tomb at the earliest light to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. Finding the heavy stone door rolled back, they entered the tomb and were shocked and afraid when they saw a young man, clothed in a long white robe, sitting on the right

The claim that a man died and then rose from the dead certainly deserves a healthy skepticism. Extraordinary claims deserve extraordinary proof.

side. The man told the women, “He is risen!” and instructed them to go and tell Jesus’ other disciples (Mark 16:1-8).

In the society of the day, the testimony of women was held in such low regard that they were not even permitted to serve as witnesses in a court of law. How remarkable is it, then, that women were the acknowledged discoverers of Jesus’ empty tomb?

Had someone fabricated the story at a later date, as many critics assume to have been the case, the plot surely would have made male disciples such as Peter and John the discoverers of the empty tomb. That it was women who are the chief witnesses to the fact of the empty tomb is best explained by the straightforward truth that the women named were indeed the actual discoverers.

The Gospel writers faithfully record what for them was an awkward and potentially embarrassing detail. They even record that the disciples did not believe the women’s report: “Then [the women] returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest . . . And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:9-11).

• **Those who had Jesus condemned and executed acknowledged that the tomb was empty and His body missing.**

What was the reaction of Jesus’ enemies to the disciple’s declaration that Jesus was alive again after having been executed? Did they respond that the disciples were lying, that Jesus’ body still lay in the rock-hewn tomb? No. Did they claim that the disciples

were hallucinating? No. Instead *they bribed the Roman soldiers* responsible for guarding the sealed tomb to spread a cover story, to claim that Jesus’ disciples had come and stolen His body while they slept.

Read the account in Matthew 28:11-15. This was the authorities’ attempt to explain why the body was missing and could not be found. We have evidence that the tomb was empty from the very enemies of Christ.

Eyewitness accounts of His appearances

On multiple occasions and under various

circumstances individuals and groups of people saw Jesus alive after knowing He had died. William Craig comments: “This is a fact which is virtually universally acknowledged among New Testament scholars . . . The list of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances which is quoted by Paul guarantees that such appearances occurred.”

Notice what the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: “. . . He was seen by Cephas [Peter], then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

How did Paul receive this information? He was acquainted and had spoken with the people involved. He had heard the account in their own words. Most who could verify it were still alive.

If these appearances were not true, people were alive who knew the parties involved and would have known it was not true. Such eyewitness accounts cannot be dismissed as fantasy; they must refer to actual events that were witnessed by many people alive at the time of Paul’s writing. Paul even lists the names of the best known of the witnesses so others could verify the facts for themselves.

The disciples’ astounding transformation

One of the major proofs of the resurrection of Jesus is the dramatic change in

the lives of His disciples.

The Gospel accounts are not flattering to the disciples (further evidence that they didn’t fabricate the story). At the time of Christ’s arrest and trial, all His disciples forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:56). Peter, who avowed he would always stand by Jesus, cursed and swore, denying that he knew Him (verses 69-75). Jesus, we remember, foretold Peter’s weakness and even forewarned His disciples that they would also be offended because of their association with Him (verses 31-35).

Within a short time, however, we see the apostles speaking to large crowds and openly declaring that Jesus came back from the dead. They boldly confronted the civil and religious authorities with the fact that Jesus had been killed and raised to life again. They defied orders under threat of imprisonment if they continued to speak about this man Jesus (Acts 4:1-23). They courageously faced beatings and endured death threats because they preached that He was alive and was the Messiah (Acts 5:17-42).

Whereas only weeks before they had denied they even knew Him, now nothing could stop them from openly publicizing what they knew to be true. Only one explanation for their new unshakable belief is plausible. *They saw Jesus Christ alive after they knew He was dead.* They spoke with Him, ate with Him, received extensive instructions from Him, spent time with Him and touched Him.

These men gave the remaining years of their lives—and ultimately life itself—for the one they knew had conquered death. Had they all been only participants in a giant hoax, could we believe these men would give their lives for something they knew to be a lie?

Peter’s transformation

The apostle Peter is the best known of the disciples whose lives were so remarkably changed. His boldness on the Feast of Pentecost was amazing. At the temple he addressed a huge crowd of people, from which 3,000 became disciples of Jesus the Messiah.

Peter spoke to people who lived in Jerusalem and all of Judea as well as many other parts of the Roman world. They were in Jerusalem to observe Pentecost as God had commanded in Deuteronomy 16. Peter reminded them that they all knew who Jesus was and what had happened to Him

seven weeks earlier at the Passover feast (Acts 2:22-24).

Peter fearlessly proclaimed they were the ones who had crucified the promised Messiah, but that God had raised Him up.

The reaction of the people is quite telling. There is no denial, no outcry, no attempt to stone Peter for this apparently outrageous charge. They knew of the events surrounding the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Christ. They knew that many—perhaps even some of those standing there listening to Peter—had shouted for Christ’s blood. They knew of the strange disappearance of the body from the tomb, a mystery no one had been able to solve.

They had heard of other strange events that took place at the time: the mysterious darkness that descended on the land as Jesus was being crucified, people being resurrected from the grave and walking the streets of Jerusalem, and the massive veil in the magnificent temple tearing from top to bottom with no apparent cause. How were these events to be explained? What did they mean? Peter was giving them the amazing explanation—an explanation that would require them to make a decision that would affect the rest of their lives.

Peter contrasted the empty tomb of Jesus with the nearby tomb of Israel’s greatest king, David. “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day” (Acts 2:29). His point was unmistakable: Everybody knew where David’s tomb was, and that was where the king’s body was buried. But Jesus, unlike David, was *no longer bound by the grave!*

Jesus of Nazareth, Peter declared, had been raised up by God—and there were

many witnesses to that fact. Once again there was no argument from the crowd. On the contrary, the people asked what they should do now that they, too, were convinced that Peter was right. Peter replied that they should repent and be baptized and they also would receive the Holy Spirit as had the disciples on that very day.

The only way you can explain the dramatic transformation of the disciples from a scared, frightened band ready to throw everything away and flee in despair back to Galilee is that Jesus left behind dramatic and powerful evidence: *an empty tomb*. Ordinary men from ordinary walks of life, who had denied their Master and failed Him miserably, suddenly changed almost overnight into dynamic leaders of a Church that was to defy and challenge the ancient pagan world, propelled by a powerful transformative experience.

James, half brother of Jesus

Perhaps an even more remarkable transformation took place in the life of James, the half brother of Jesus (James was the natural son of Mary and Joseph; Jesus was the son of Mary and God the Father). Notice how J.P. Moreland describes events in James’s life as recorded in the Bible and contemporary history:

“Why did these men change? Why did they undergo hardship, persecution, pressure and martyrdom? Consider James the brother of Jesus. Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, tells us that he died a martyr’s death for his faith in his brother. Yet the Gospels tell us that during Jesus’ life, he was an unbeliever and opposed Jesus.

“Why did he change? What could cause a Jew to believe that his own brother was the very son of God and to be willing to

die for such a belief? It certainly was not a set of lovely teachings from a carpenter from Nazareth. Only the appearance of Jesus to James (1 Corinthians 15:7) can explain his transformation.

“As with James, so it is with the other disciples. One who denies the resurrection owes us an explanation of this transformation which does justice to the historical facts” (*Scaling the Secular City*, 1987, pp. 178-179).

Paul the persecutor

The apostle Paul is another remarkable example. As a devout Jew he was resolutely convinced that a resurrection had not taken place. He persecuted members of the early Church for believing in such nonsense. He staked his whole mission in life on his conviction that the resurrection was a fabrication and the movement was a threat to every tradition he held sacred.

This new movement, he was convinced, deserved to be stamped out by any means, including imprisonment and execution (Acts 22:4)—and this would be his personal crusade. Then something happened. *Jesus Christ appeared to Paul and spoke to him.*

Paul was not a man given to the vivid imaginations of superstitious people. He was a level-headed intellectual. Yet he later was prepared to defend his zeal for Christ before hostile mobs as well as governors, kings and other rulers. In the end Paul was prepared to die for what he knew was true: Jesus was indeed the Messiah and was alive and well at the right hand of God.

Who was Jesus?

Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you

Continued on page 27

The Unexplained Success of the Church

No one willingly dies to perpetrate a hoax. One dies only for something he is convinced is the truth. Had Jesus’ death and resurrection been a fraud, surely at some point one or more of the disciples would have broken ranks and come forward to confess that it was all just a fabrication, or that at best they had vivid imaginations fueled by high hopes. But they all died for what they knew was true. One by one they witnessed each other die a martyr’s death because of their beliefs. Yet all remained true.

What reason can we find to explain that the Church founded on Jesus Christ transformed the world of the first century? The odds were enormous against such a small sect with so much opposition experiencing such success. “The

resurrection of Jesus is the explanation the church herself gave, and is the only adequate one. Cambridge New Testament scholar C.F.D. Moule argues this way: ‘If the coming into existence of the Nazarenes, a phenomenon undeniably attested by the New Testament, rips a great hole in history, a hole of the size and shape of the Resurrection, what does the secular historian propose to stop it up with?’” (*Scaling the Secular City*, p. 181).

As Will Durant puts it: “That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels” (*Caesar and Christ*, p. 557).

Jesus Christ's Arrest, Trial and Crucifixion

by Mario Seiglie

In recent issues of *The Good News* we have examined archaeological findings that shed light on the period of Jesus Christ's ministry in Judea in the early first century.

In the four Gospels no period of Christ's ministry is more detailed than the last few days when He was arrested, tried and crucified as a common criminal. What have archaeologists found that confirm and illuminate many of the details of Jesus' last days on earth?

Evidence of Caiaphas's tomb

Events rushed to a crescendo as Jesus and His disciples came to Jerusalem for that final Passover feast. The chief priests began to panic after hearing that in nearby Bethany Jesus had resurrected His friend Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

How did they react to news of this miracle? "Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together a council and said, 'What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.' And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you

consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.' Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation . . . Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death" (verses 47-53).

Amazingly, the tomb of this priest was discovered in 1990. Israeli archaeologist Zvi Greenhut, who confirmed the finding, describes the event:

"It was a cold day at the end of November when I received word at the Antiquities Authority that an old cave had been discovered . . . When I arrived I observed that the roof of the cave had collapsed. But even while standing outside, I could see four ossuaries, or bone boxes, in the central chamber of the cave. To an archaeologist, this was a clear indication that this was a Jewish burial cave . . . So it was that we discovered the final resting place of the Caiaphas family, one of whose priestly members presided at the trial of Jesus" ("Burial Cave of the Caiaphas Family," *Biblical Archaeological Review*, September-October 1992, pp. 29-30).

Two of the 12 stone boxes found had the name Caiaphas written on the side, and one contained the entire name, "Joseph, son of Caiaphas." Inside this box were the remains of a 60-year-old man, along with the bones of a woman and four younger people, probably those of his own family.

Archaeologist Ronny Reich provides further details of the find: "The most elaborately decorated ossuary found in this cave contains two inscriptions relating to Caiaphas . . . The elderly man buried in the highly decorated ossuary was apparently Joseph. It was probably a forefather who had acquired this nickname [Caiaphas was apparently a nickname that meant "basket," probably from "basketmaker:"]

"A person named Joseph with the nickname Caiaphas was the high priest in Jerusalem between 18 and 36 A.D. The New Testament provides only his nickname in the Greek form: Caiaphas (see Matthew 26:3, 57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49, 18:13-14, 24, 28; Acts 4:6). Josephus [the first-century Jewish

What have archaeologists found that confirm and illuminate many of the details of Jesus' last days on earth?



The Gospels tell us the high priest who plotted Christ's death was named Caiaphas. In 1990 archaeologists found the priest's family tomb and this ossuary bearing his name.



The Roman governor Pontius Pilate figures prominently in the accounts of Jesus Christ's trial and execution. In 1961 a stone plaque bearing his name and official title was discovered in Caesarea, Israel. Pilate's name (Latin

"[PON]TIVS PILATVS") is visible on the second line. In 1968 archaeologists found sobering evidence of the cruel practice of crucifixion—a human heel bone pierced by a large iron nail, with a fragment of olive wood attached.

historian] gives his proper name as well: Joseph Caiaphas, or elsewhere, 'Joseph who was called Caiaphas of the high priesthood.' In short, we are explicitly told by Josephus that Caiaphas was indeed a nickname" ("Caiaphas Name Inscribed on Bone Boxes," *Biblical Archaeological Review*, September-October 1992, p. 41).

Archaeologists have thus confirmed the existence of this important New Testament figure. They have also proven the existence of another leading character instrumental in the events surrounding Jesus' arrest, trial and execution.

The Pilate inscription

Once Jesus was arrested, on Caiaphas's orders, He was tried before Caiaphas and later sent to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. The New Testament portrayal of Pilate agrees with other historical accounts. "Philo and Josephus unite in attributing dire and evil practices to Pilate, so that a dark character is ascribed to him" (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1989, Vol. 3, p. 813).

Philo, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher (20 B.C.–A.D. 50), described Pilate as "a man of a very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as very obstinate." He says Pilate's rule was characterized by "corruption, . . . insolence, . . . cruelty, . . . continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity" (*The*

Works of Philo, translated by C.D. Yonge, "On the Embassy to Gaius," pp. 301-302).

Years after Christ's crucifixion Pilate was sent to Rome to undergo a humiliating trial after ordering the massacre of some Samaritan pilgrims. Eusebius, the fourth-century historian, notes that Pilate was found guilty and exiled. In his shame he later committed suicide. Such was the end of this proud and corrupt governor.

For centuries Pilate was known only from scant historical records and the Gospels. No direct physical evidence had been found. Then, in 1961, a stone plaque engraved with Pilate's name and title was discovered in Caesarea, the Roman port and capital of Judea in Christ's day. "The two-foot by three-foot slab, now known as the Pilate Inscription, was . . . apparently written to commemorate Pilate's erection and dedication of a Tiberium, a temple for the worship of Tiberias Caesar, the Roman emperor during Pilate's term over Judea.

"The Latin inscription of four lines gives his title as 'Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea,' a title very similar to that used of him in the Gospels (see Luke 3:1). This was the first archaeological find to mention Pilate, and again testified to the accuracy of the Gospel writers. Their understanding of such official terms indicates they lived during the time of their use and not a century or two thereafter, when such terms would have been forgotten" (Randall Price,

The Stones Cry Out, 1997, pp. 307-308).

Gruesome evidence of crucifixion

Until recently some scholars considered the description of Christ's crucifixion to be false. They thought it was impossible for a human body to be held up by nails driven into the hands and feet since the flesh would eventually tear away. Instead they thought the victims must have been bound by ropes.

Yet, in 1968, the body of a crucified man dating to the first century was found in Jerusalem. Here the true method of crucifixion was discovered: His ankles, not his feet, had been nailed and could easily support his weight.

Archaeologist Randall Price explains: "This rare find has proved to be one of the most important archaeological witnesses to Jesus' crucifixion as recorded in the Gospels. First, it reveals afresh the horrors of the Roman punishment . . . This method of execution forced the weight of the body to be placed on the nails, causing terribly painful muscle spasms and eventually death by the excruciating process of asphyxiation . . . Second, it was once claimed that the Gospel's description of the method of crucifixion was historically inaccurate . . . The discovery of the nail-pierced ankle bone refutes those who say nails could not have been used" (Price, pp. 309-310).

The Roman law of the time prescribed crucifixion as punishment for the most

serious offenses, such as rebellion, treason and robbery. A famous example of mass crucifixions took place in 71 B.C. when Spartacus led a slave rebellion against Rome. He ultimately failed, and the 6,000 captured slaves were crucified.

The Jews knew of crucifixions even before Roman rule, for around 87 B.C. the Jewish king Alexander Janneus had 800 rebellious Pharisees crucified. Josephus, who witnessed the crucifixion of his fellow Jews during the siege of Jerusalem (A.D. 66-70), called it “the most wretched of deaths.” It continued to be the punishment for high crimes until the time of Emperor Constantine, when it was finally abolished.

Was Jesus crucified on a cross?

The exact shape of the stake or cross used to crucify Jesus is not known, since the Romans used several styles.

The Greek word translated “cross” is *stauros*. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* gives background information on the word. “*Stauros* . . . denotes, primarily, ‘an upright pale or stake.’ On such malefactors were nailed for execution. Both the noun and the verb *staroo*, ‘to fasten to a stake or pale,’ are originally to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of a two beamed ‘cross.’ The shape of the latter had its origin in ancient Chaldea [Babylonia], and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt.

“By the middle of the 3rd cent. A.D. the churches had either departed from, or had travestied, certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the ‘cross’ of Christ.

“As for the Chi, or X, which Constantine declared he had seen in a vision leading him to champion the Christian faith, that letter was the initial of the word ‘Christ’ and had nothing to do with ‘the Cross’ (for *xulon*, ‘a timber beam,

a tree’ . . .).” (1985, “Cross, Crucify”).

The empty tomb

The Gospel writers give many details of Jesus’ burial and tomb. “Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed . . .

“On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, ‘Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, “After three days I will rise.” Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day’ . . . So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard” (Matthew 27:57-66).

How do the Gospel accounts match up with archaeologists’ discoveries about first-century burial practices? Several tombs have been found around Jerusalem that perfectly fit the description given by the Gospel writers. “In Roman times the entrance was often closed with a large circular stone, set up on edge and rolled in its groove to the mouth of the tomb so as to close it securely. This stone could then be further secured by a strap, or by sealing. Pilate thus directed that the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, in which the body of Jesus was laid, should be carefully sealed and made as inviolable as possible (Mt. 27:66)” (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1979, Vol. 1, p. 559, “Burial”).

When the Romans wanted to secure a tomb, they attached a cord across the circular stone. They secured this strap with wax and stamped it with the seal of imperial Rome. To tamper with the seal was to defy Roman authority and risk the death penalty. Guards were then placed around the tomb with orders to defend it at all costs; if any fell asleep they would pay with their lives. With all these safeguards in place, a tomb was considered to be completely secured and untouchable.

Yet, when Jesus was resurrected and an angel opened the tomb, the Bible records that the guards “shook for fear of [the angel] and became like dead men” (Matthew 28:4). When the guards revived and saw the empty tomb, they immediately sought help from the chief priests, for they knew they faced the death penalty.

“Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, ‘Tell them [the Roman authorities], “His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.” And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.’ So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day” (verses 11-15).

True to the historical description of Pilate, we see that even the chief priests understood that the Roman governor was corrupt and subject to being bribed.

Conclusion on the Gospels

Through archaeology many details of the descriptions of Jesus’ trial, crucifixion and burial have been confirmed. Archaeologist Price considers the all-important implications: “. . . Archaeology has shown us that the facts that support faith [in the resurrection of Jesus] are accurate—an identifiable tomb attesting to literal events—faith in the Christ of history *does* depend upon a historically empty tomb for its reality. While archaeology can only reveal the tomb, the persons and events attending to its historic purpose (Herod, Pilate, Caiaphas, crucifixion, and so on), the resurrection is interwoven with these facts so as to command the same consideration” (Price, pp. 315, 318).

We can summarize the purpose of this series on the Gospels with an appropriate quote: “Five gospels record the life of Jesus. Four you will find in books and one you will find in the Land they call holy. Read the fifth gospel and the world of the four will open to you” (Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus Through Galilee According to the Fifth Gospel*, 1992, back cover). **GN**

Resurrection

Continued from page 23

say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). He asked the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" (Matthew 22:42).

This is the ultimate question. Is He a figment of our imaginations? Is He a mythological figure? Was He merely an ordinary man with better-than-average religious teachings whose philosophy happened to take hold? Or is He the power of the universe?

The question of who Jesus was is decisively answered by His death—predicted by Himself and the Hebrew prophets—and His resurrection. These crucial events proved Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God.

The power of the resurrection

Paul's chief aim in life was turned upside down. What would he say if you had asked what was the most important thing to him after he had seen Jesus? His answer:

"... I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ . . . , that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, . . . [and that] I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:8-11).

The bringing back to life of Jesus from the dead changed everything for His disciples. It can change everything for you too. It is only through the certainty of the resurrection of Jesus that you can be assured that others, too, will be raised from the dead. "... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Corinthians 15:17-19, New International Version).

You, too, can be changed by belief in Jesus' atoning sacrifice and resurrection. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead will give you life as well (Romans 8:11) if that power dwells in you. It is the power that can change your life. The death and resurrection of Christ guarantee it. **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

This article touches on many crucial issues vital to you and your future. It has examined proofs for one central fact of the Bible: Jesus Christ really was dead, then

came back to life. Many were witness to these facts. The Bible makes many other extraordinary claims that you should examine. Please request your free copy of the booklet *Is the Bible True?* To understand your part in God's plan for humankind, be sure to request the booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. All are yours free for the asking. Simply contact one of our offices listed on page 2 or download information about them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Should We Celebrate Jesus Christ's Resurrection?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is indisputably an important event within Christianity. It provides hope and assurance that we may also receive eternal life. It is also proof that Jesus was indeed the long-promised Messiah. Millions of people gather every year on Easter Sunday to commemorate His resurrection. But should they? Is the veneration of this particular day something God intended? Is He pleased with this form of worship and the activities associated with this day?

The answer to these questions rests upon the issue of who determines which days are set aside for worship. If we are free to choose our own days, we can select any occasion we desire. But, if we will allow God, through the pages of the Bible, to determine on which days He is to be worshiped, we should not observe Easter. Here is why.

When we examine the humanly devised Easter celebration, obvious questions and problems come to mind. For example, where in the Bible can we read about Easter symbols and customs such as Easter rabbits, Easter-egg hunts and eating ham? Where did they originate?

These popular customs in fact came from decidedly non-biblical—heathen—practices. Of course, some will contend that their worship centers exclusively on Christ's resurrection and that they ignore these customs. However, such arguments run counter to God's explicit command that we must worship Him according to His instructions, not adding to or taking away from them (Deuteronomy 12:28-32).

Further, careful study reveals that Christ was not resurrected early Sunday morning as so many people have been led to believe. His resurrection occurred about 12 hours earlier, just before sunset on the weekly Sabbath, a day that

God had already authorized to be observed every week.

Aside from Acts 12:4 (where *pascha*, the Greek word for "Passover," is mistakenly translated "Easter" in the King James Version of the Bible), this celebration of Christ's resurrection is nowhere to be found in Holy Scripture. There simply is no biblical record of the earliest Christians ever observing it. Why? Because God Himself established the specific days of worship for His people. Those days included the weekly seventh-day (Friday-night and Saturday) Sabbath and seven annual festivals (Leviticus 23), but they did not include many celebrations and traditions that were later established, such as Easter.

The biblically sanctioned occasions, which God in Leviticus 23:2, 4 calls "My feasts" and "the feasts of the LORD" (rather than festivals exclusively for the Jewish people), represent steps in His plan of salvation for humanity. They show that He eventually will offer every person the opportunity to reconcile to Himself through His Son, Jesus the Messiah, whose role in our salvation is a central focus of the meaning of these days.

If you would like to learn more about the problems with humanly devised celebrations and the spiritual benefits of worshiping God on the days He sanctioned, request our free booklets *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*, *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, and *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*. To receive these eye-opening publications, simply request them from the office nearest you (see page 2), or download them from the literature library of our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

—David Treybig



Letters from Our Readers

Which Bible version?

Can you suggest a Bible more easily understood for Bible-study purposes than the King James Version, which I find difficult to follow and understand in many parts?

D.S., County Antrim, Northern Ireland

We suggest the New King James Version, which retains the literary flavor of the King James translation of 1611 but in modern English. We use the NKJV for biblical quotations in The Good News and our booklets and Bible Study Course. We also suggest that you request our free booklet How to Understand the Bible and refer to pages 12-15. This section discusses Bible translations and offers principles to apply in using and consulting various versions.

Cohabiting generation

Please let me tell you what a wonderful magazine you have. Your article "The Cohabitation Generation" answered a lot of my questions. I'm 23 and have often wondered if living with a person was wrong in God's eyes.

A.M., Eustis, Florida

Pro and con about the rapture

I don't often write to a magazine unless I am impressed, favorably or unfavorably. Your March-April issue was of particular interest. I applaud you for printing the truth. "What's 'Left Behind' in the Rapture Theory?" and "The Good Friday-Easter Sunday Question" were of great importance.

I have always encouraged members of the church I pastor to read and study the Bible carefully. So many people take the erroneous view of Jesus being crucified on Friday and His rising on Sunday as fact, when it cannot be true. The Bible says otherwise.

The only other thing is the rapture theory. I have read the Bible through about 12 times in the last 12 years and have found not one reference to support a rapture. I am distressed that so many preachers believe it. Christ is coming back one time to judge the world. Keep up the truth. It will stand.

L.S., Hobbs, New Mexico

I have been receiving your magazine for a while and was most disappointed with

your March-April issue. You had an article calling the rapture of the Church a theory. I do not know what Bible this man reads from, but my Bible teaches about this coming event in great detail. Unless you can clear this matter up in a biblical way, then I would like you to remove my name from your subscription list.

Dr. R.B., Bloomington, Illinois

The article's author has been in contact with the letter writer about his concerns. We are pleased to report that he did not repeat his request to be removed from The Good News' subscription list.

Battle of the sexes

Recently I picked up a copy of your magazine while waiting for my daughter at the doctor's office. I read almost the entire magazine in one sitting. Enclosed is my subscription card. But the reason for this letter is that I would like to receive a copy of the article "The Battle of the Sexes," which was in your first edition of this year. It is something I would like to share with the ladies of my church.

A.G.H., Hixson, Tennessee

New subscribers

I was walking through the post office this morning and came across *The Good News* magazine. It was an old edition, March-April 1999. While reading portions of it, I discovered very interesting material on many things I did not know about, and I would like to learn more. Therefore I would like to subscribe to your magazine. I would also like the *Ten Commandments* booklet as well as a copy of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

A.T., Hamilton, Bermuda

I was at the Laundromat this evening and found a copy of your *Good News* magazine. I enjoyed every article that I had time to read. I am writing in the hopes of becoming a regular subscriber. Is it really so easy to become one? Do I just tell you that I want to receive your magazine and you start sending me copies?

K.S., Hopkinsville, Kentucky

It's as simple as that. All of our booklets and the Bible Study Course are free upon request, as is The Good News.

I am requesting my free subscription to *The Good News* and have really enjoyed reading my first copy. I would like to have any back issues you might have to spare. I look forward to learning more in the future.

J.A., San Francisco, California

The truth of God

I have wanted to write and let you know how much I have enjoyed and appreciated your magazine. My beliefs have changed dramatically from what I've been taught through other churches. I'm thankful that you teach the truth about God's Word instead of the doctrines of men.

C.B., Mount Carmel, Illinois

Church association and attendance

Please send me information on why we should attend church or something similar.

J.W., Jamaica, New York

We recommend the free booklet The Church Jesus Built to all of our readers.

Good News donation policy

While browsing through a thrift shop I came across *The Good News* dated January-February 2000. It was on the top of 100-plus secular magazines that were in six or seven piles across a shelf. It cost 10 cents. That evening I read the well-written, timely articles it contained. There was a card for a free subscription, which I mailed the other day. Thanks for that and the booklets I checked. The enclosed donation is for the work of your ministry.

F.M.S., Mauston, Wisconsin

Although The Good News should never be sold for any price, we do appreciate your donation and willingness to help share The Good News with others.

I am a 20-year-old guy, and I thank you very much for sending me *The Good News* and all the booklets I requested. I wasn't expecting to receive them all because there were so many, but you showed me your kindness and that you are not doing your own will but that of our Creator, the Mighty God. I was much impressed with the verse that you include in the booklets: "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). I just want to thank you for your

generosity. Other churches are not doing what you are doing.

R.D., Harare, Zimbabwe

How do you do it? You never asked me for money. The current TV evangelists continually plead for more money. I very much enjoy *The Good News*. Most of all I enjoy your historical articles dealing with past cultures and civilizations.

J.W., Lancaster, Wisconsin

We're glad to share The Good News for free with all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of others who value The Good News' message. We welcome those who voluntarily choose to support this worldwide work

as coworkers in this effort to proclaim the true gospel to all nations.

Bible Study Course

I received the first lesson of the *Bible Study Course* sometime ago but hadn't gotten around to looking at it. When I first began learning the truth, I first had to know whether God exists and whether the Bible is His Word. Although I knew God existed, I needed to know the Bible really is God's written Word for us. Also, I really enjoyed the quotes from famous people concerning their respect for the Bible.

C.D., California

I want to thank you for the *Bible Study Course*, lesson 2. This is a wonderful way

to review the Word of God. It helps me to see the overall picture of God's great plan and how He wants us to fully understand how important it is for us to be informed. We truly live in a world confused and starved for knowledge. It's so hard to get along with people. It seems everyone is angry with someone.

V.A., Madill, Oklahoma

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to The Good News, Box 541027, Cincinnati, Ohio 45254, U.S.A., or E-mail gninfo@ucg.org (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).



Questions & Answers

Q: Where in the Bible does it say that Jesus was God in the flesh while on earth?

B.R.L., Huntsville, Texas

A: The apostle John introduces His Gospel with this statement: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The Bible later explains that "*the Word became flesh* and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (verse 14, emphasis added). That is, the Word became Jesus Christ. Please see verse 17 in context.

Later, in his general epistle, the apostle John stated: "We announce to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld, and what our hands touched, as regards the Word of Life. And the Life was revealed, and we have seen, and we bear witness, and we announce to you the everlasting Life which was with the Father, and was revealed to us" (1 John 1:1-2, Green's Literal Translation).

While still in the human flesh Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). He also said that He was the "I AM" of the Bible (John 8:57-58; Exodus 3:14-15). Hebrews 1:8-9 refers to both

Jesus and the Father as God. Matthew wrote before His birth that Jesus would be called "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). Clearly Jesus was divine, God in the flesh.

Q: Your publications state that God loves me. How can you know that God loves me?

J.A., San Francisco, California

A: God loves all human beings. This can be inferred from John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." It is our Creator's desire that all attain everlasting life in His Kingdom.

The apostle Paul further explains that prayers should 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, emphasis added throughout). But we first have to learn and then decide to accept God's way of life, the biblically mandated path to salvation. Our Creator has given us freedom of choice and will not force His truth on anyone.

Yet He is exceedingly patient in hopes that human beings will repent of their ways of life that result in suffering and death. The apostle Peter tells us, "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).

We do not want to miss out on our fantastic destiny. It stretches our imaginations to the full even to try to conceive of it. Read what Paul said when he quoted Isaiah 64:4. "But as it is written: *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him*. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Indeed the Holy Spirit is the germ of eternal life; we must receive it from God in order to be saved. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). God wants human beings to be coheirs with Jesus Christ and share His glory in the Kingdom of God (verse 17).

These important matters are all explained in detail in our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *The Road to Eternal Life* and *You Can Have Living Faith*. All are free of charge from any of our offices listed on page 2. You can also download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

Rise Above Peer Pressure

Finding true friends and dealing with unwanted pressures are challenges at any age. Where can teenagers turn for help?

by Jerold Aust

Today's teenagers live in a far more complex and demanding society than anything many of us older adults have experienced. We generally did not face pressure to use drugs, but nowadays a dizzying array of illegal substances can be found in and around every high school. Although we faced temptations to misuse alcohol and smoke, as do teens today, entertainment wasn't drenched in violence and moral perversion as it is today. Personal computers, cable television and movies with "adult" themes (in the modern sense) were almost nonexistent. Life was simpler and less demanding.

In one simple way, though, teens today are like teens of past generations. We all experience this common link: a desire to be accepted by our peer group. This is normal for people of all age-groups, but it's especially powerful when one is young.

Adults reading this know how you teens feel. We also went through this experience. Significantly, studies show that parents still exert the biggest influence on your lives when it comes to morals and goals. We dare not let you down. But peer pressure still exists. How can youth deal with it?

In years past I often heard this sincere question in a variety of ways: "I don't understand myself—why I give in to something other kids are doing that I know isn't good. I have trouble resisting. What can I do that will help me and my friends?" If you have this question, there are steps you can take that can help improve your life in and out of your peer group.

Let's face it. Teens' peer pressure is intensified by the electronic and print media. Movies, TV and music broadcast unspeakable acts of violence, sex and profanity, and some young people, looking for their day in the sun, pick up on those concepts and attempt to recreate them. It's a difficult age for the entire family, but even more so for teens. Let me offer a strategy that I've offered to teens over the years. It helped others. It might help you.

Group influence

A difficult thing for young people (and older people) is to interact with a group of friends and suddenly find the group going downhill morally. What can be done in this situation, if anything?

First, be careful about following a crowd whose collective thinking begins to deteriorate. Often groups can get off track because they act more on emotion than sound reason. When a group member assumes dominance among his (or her) peers, most people in the group will follow his influence, right or wrong. Before you know it, this person has some of the weaker group members agreeing with him. This can result in what has been called groupthink.

Groupthink can quickly go wrong. A self-appointed leader will suggest something that's daring and risky—such as taking drugs, performing some act of violence, doing vandalism or engaging in a sex act—to elevate himself in the eyes of the group.

Notice carefully: The leader will seldom risk himself but will try to push others in the group to take the

biggest risks. If you see the signs of this among your peers, it's time for you to bail. Knowledge is power. Knowing these signs can help you withdraw from a wrong group activity before it gets a full head of steam.

When you see this kind of thing building, quietly remove yourself. Suddenly you remember you have something to do somewhere else. This is a true statement, since you have better things to do with your time in some other location.

If you can leave without saying anything, that's better yet. Unless you happen to be persuasive and understand the basics of social psychology, it probably won't help to try to stem the tide of a large group. There are occasions when a teen can do this, but it's tricky and risky. It is the better part of wisdom to step aside quietly and disappear from that group. The Bible tells us that bad company can corrupt good character (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Who is a true friend?

What's your definition of a true friend? If your friends lead you into breaking the law and doing harm to others, they are not good friends. A true friend cares about your welfare. A true friend will not lead you astray. A true friend will communicate with you and interact with you in a way that upholds your standards. A true friend will protect your reputation when you are not around to defend yourself. A true friend respects you and your beliefs. What are your friends like?

The Bible speaks of choosing friends

carefully: "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul [life]" (Proverbs 22:24-25).

Jesus Christ chose His friends carefully; they were the ones who did what He said was the right thing to do (John 15:14). God's commandments are designed to protect everyone. This is the best place to start when choosing your friends. Search for friends who respect the morals found in the Bible, which are based on the Ten Commandments.

Remember the definition of a true friend, and be careful not to assign the word *friend* to just anybody who comes along. Apply critical thinking when selecting your friends. If we're too picky, we might wind up with no friends, but insist on good character in your friends.

The value of character

Good character should be at the top of your list when choosing a friend.

The Bible says we should choose a good reputation over great riches (Proverbs 22:1). We live in a world awash in moral relativism. Moral relativism is an attitude that says, "I'm okay, and you're okay, no matter what we think and do as long as it doesn't harm the other person."

Don't be fooled. Everything we think and do affects others directly or indirectly. For example, if you watch TV programs saturated with violence or sex, this will become a part of your thinking and will weaken your resolve. On the other hand, if you read or watch positive things, it will be easier to remain strong if your peer group takes a wrong turn.

Don't be deceived by someone who tries to convince you that right moral principles can vary depending on the situation. Follow God's advice from the Bible when it comes to the value of good character.

Since we interact so closely with our friends, they have a strong influence on our lives. It makes good sense to pick them

carefully. Keep in mind that they will help to shape the rest of your life.

What is good character? The word *good* comes from the word *God*. This helps us remember that good character stems from God, who is our truest Friend. This same God is our Creator, the one who made us. He gave us a manual to read and follow, one that always tells us the truth about any situation in life, showing us the best way to live. The Bible is filled with advice on developing good character and how to spot it in others.

The best advice I can give you is to begin reading the Bible to learn about the subject of good character. Learn it now and it will protect you through your teen years and enrich your adult life. What you do today lays the groundwork for tomorrow.

A true friend cares about your welfare. A true friend will not lead you astray. A true friend will communicate with you and interact with you in a way that upholds your standards. A true friend will protect your reputation when you are not around to defend yourself. A true friend respects you and your beliefs.

Don't treat this advice lightly if you want the best that life has to offer.

Let God be your guide

We've talked a lot about God in this article as the source for choosing good and true friends. Without God, you and I would have nothing worthwhile, and that includes good friends. Finding good friends is a challenge; it can be difficult to find people who exemplify the standards you value. But you can become a good friend to others and set a good example for other teens to follow. Isn't that worth your efforts?

If you will do the right things, think the right thoughts, others will gravitate to you. Why? Because you will be different, and they will

want to know what you have that they don't. At the same time, you shouldn't flaunt your good character before others. Let it speak for itself, quietly, by example. Offer sound advice when the time is right. Who knows? You might become the leader of your peer group. It has happened before.

What we're talking about here is real. Wrong peer pressure can harm you. Deep down you know that. Remember to choose friends who have good morals and ethics. Let them become your peer group. Place a high priority on character. Value it more than anything else, and it will pay off for you big time.

Finally, let God be your guide in all that you think and do. He made you. He knows what works best for you, for all of us.

These are some of the strategies I have shared with other teens. They work. Begin today to rise above wrong peer pressure. You can do it!

Recommended reading

The Bible contains many fundamental principles about how to have a rewarding, satisfying and—yes—happy life. It's packed with advice about friends, family, finances, health, success and much more. We've gathered some of its best advice into a free booklet, *Making Life Work*. We'll mail your free copy to you when you contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can download it from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org. Request your copy today! **GN**

The Ten Suggestions?

Did God give us the 10 suggestions—or the Ten Commandments?

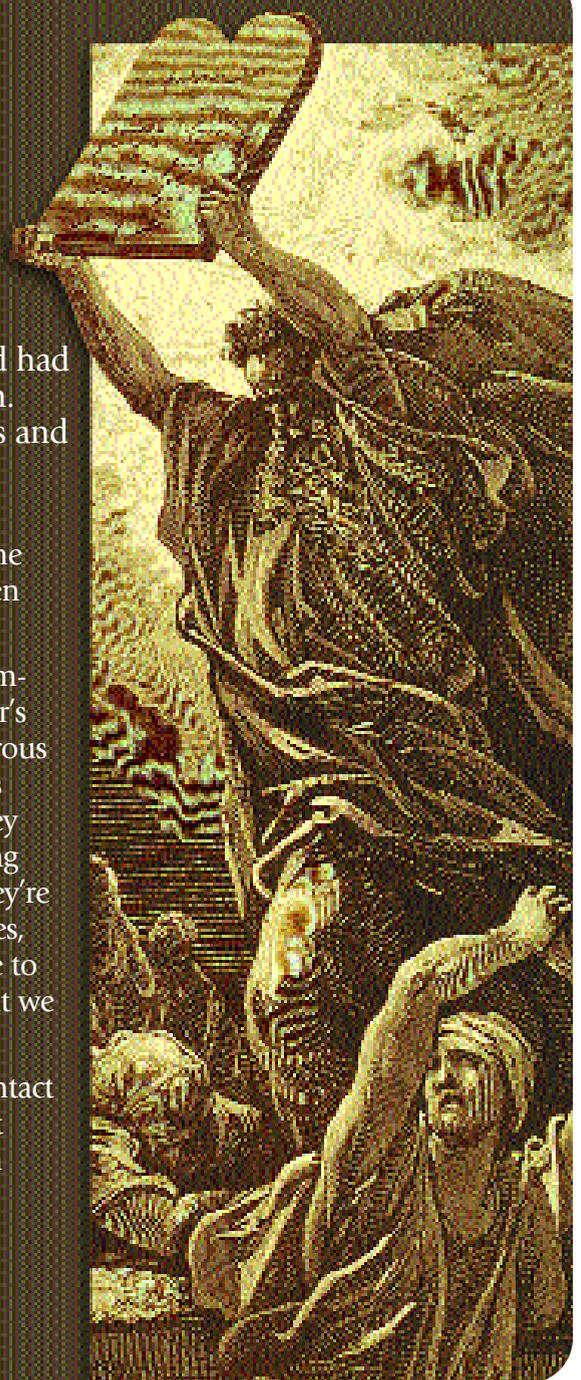
It's a crucial question. Never has our world had such a critical need for moral guidance and direction. Never have so many people lost their moral bearings and desperately needed help.

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

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

For your free copy of this 80-page book, contact any of our offices listed on page 2 or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org. Discover why God gave us the Ten Commandments, not the 10 suggestions.

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