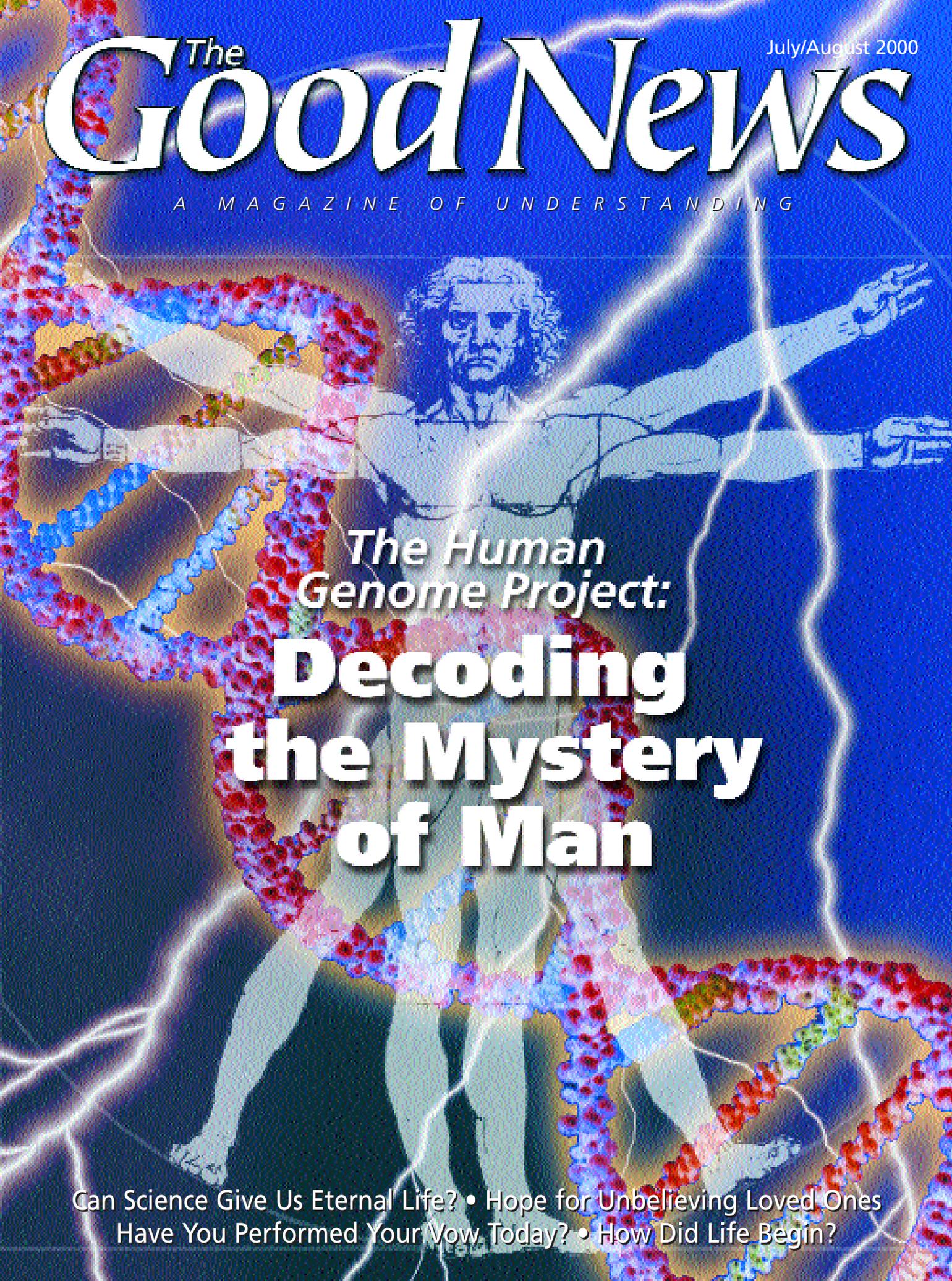


The Good News

July/August 2000

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



*The Human
Genome Project:*
**Decoding
the Mystery
of Man**

Can Science Give Us Eternal Life? • Hope for Unbelieving Loved Ones
Have You Performed Your Vow Today? • How Did Life Begin?

Four decades ago astronomer Frank Drake launched the SETI program—the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. Still going strong as current president of the SETI Institute, Dr. Drake is perhaps best known for formulating the Drake equation, his attempt to estimate the number of extraterrestrial civilizations in the Milky Way galaxy.

The Drake equation involves quantifying the estimated number of sunlike stars in our galaxy, the probable number of stars having planets in the stars' habitable zones, the number of planets on which scientists think life could spontaneously arise, the number of planets on which life could have evolved into intelligent beings, and how long such beings may have used communication signals (radio waves) that could be detected from earth. Using the Drake equation, the late astronomer Carl Sagan calculated there should be a *million* civilizations in our galaxy capable of interstellar communication.

Yet, in spite of spending hundreds of millions of dollars and countless scientific resources in the search for alien intelligence—including scanning billions of frequencies and innumerable stars and presumed planets—the number of likely candidates for alien-civilization contacts astronomers have identified remains precisely *zero*.

Meanwhile, much closer to home, over recent months researchers have issued a string of announcements about the progress of the Human Genome Project—the attempt to decode each of the almost 100,000 genes that form a human being.

This effort is truly ambitious. Scientists hope, among other things, to identify and isolate genetic factors that contribute to diseases and develop preventive measures and treatments to fight them. Some expect science will, as a result, slow or even reverse the aging process. Some predict that decoding the human genome—and then the genomes of other creatures—will lead to a scientific revolution that could surpass the astounding advancements of the space age.

Is there a connection between these two great scientific ventures?

SETI is dedicated to searching for signs of alien—nonearthly—intelligent life. The Human Genome Project seeks to decode the product of an intelligence we are only beginning to comprehend. What the scientists in the first project are diligently searching for, those in the second project are busily decoding and studying. And, interestingly enough, neither seems to see the connection.

The SETI scientists daily search the skies for messages that could point to the presence of other intelligent life in the universe. Yet an intricate, coded message has been right under their noses the whole time. It's within each of us, in the 100 trillion cells that make up our bodies.

The computer revolution has brought us remarkable advances in storage technology. We can store whole books on floppy disks and entire libraries on CDs. But nothing compares with DNA. All the instructions that reveal the design of the most complex mechanism we know—a human being—weigh only a few billionths of a gram. By some estimates the DNA from all people on earth could fit *within a pair of aspirin tablets*.

In spite of its tiny size, the coded instructions within our DNA contain all the information needed to plan and form a human body complete with heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, digestive system and skeletal framework to support them all. It carries directions for creating the sensory organs—eyes, ears, mouth, nose and skin—and a brain with 100 billion neurons and trillions of connections to process and analyze information from the organs. And that's just the beginning.

This issue of *The Good News* follows these themes and explores the scientific findings. Although it's impossible to do them justice in a few pages, we hope this issue's articles will encourage you to consider crucial questions about your place in the universe: How did life begin? What is its purpose? Are scientists discovering messages from an intelligence beyond earth?

And, most important, what do the messages tell us?

—Scott Ashley

The Good News (ISSN: 1086-9514) is published bimonthly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 5405 DuPont Circle, Suite A, Milford, OH 45150. © 2000 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Milford, Ohio 45150, and at additional mailing offices.

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Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 1487140.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to
The Good News, Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

The Human Genome Project

Decoding the Mystery of

Racing to decode the secrets of human genes, the U.S.-based National Institute of Health (NIH), the world's largest institution funding medical research, and Celera Genomics Corp., a biotech company, announced in June that they had deciphered 85-90 percent of the human genome.

Sometimes likened to the race to put a man on the moon, the decade-old Human Genome Project effort to decode our genes recently had been churning out 12,000 letters of genetic code every minute of every day, creating a list that will total more than

actions and reactions of molecules occur every second in processes that provide energy, food and cell maintenance for our bodies.

What blueprint, what set of instructions, tells these atoms and molecules what to do? The Human Genome Project aims to solve that mystery—and in such breathtaking detail that even the scientific world is awestruck.

The related processes all revolve around molecular structures called chromosomes at the fundamental level of the beginning of life. Chromosomes function in the primary unit of the body, the human cell. In your chromo-

some is the genetic document—a chemical instruction set written in chemical code—that tells your body how to arrange, structure, absorb and expel atoms and molecules.

tant, brain. Scientists estimate that 40 percent of the genome is devoted to your brain development alone.

Stunning design of DNA, genes, chromosomes

How did such astonishing complexity come about?

The design of the human cell is brilliant, its performance stunning. The most marvelous biological mystery solved in the last 50 years was the understanding of how genes drive all the developments of the body's cells at the molecular level. To discern the process, scientists had to learn how to analyze the functions of the tiniest cellular structures for feeding, repairing, eliminating waste, dividing and even dying.

As the analytical methods of microbiology became more refined and microscopes ever more powerful, the glory of the structure of chromosomes was revealed.

The key that unlocked the door was understanding DNA—shorthand for deoxyribonucleic acid. Although an acid, DNA is anything but destructive. It is the chemical parent of all the cells of the body and is found in each cell's nucleus (hence it is a nucleic acid), the command center of the cell.

DNA is the epicenter of biotech research because it functions at the heart of all systems of the human body at the molecular level. It is both a substance and an instructional blueprint for every one of the 100 trillion cells making up all body tissue. DNA directs each component of the cell in literally trillions of cellular processes that take place in your body every second of your life.

DNA is structured in a ladderlike formation of two strands with rungs creating a double-helix shape. The ladder forms a continuous, giant molecule called the chromosome. Chromosomes are unlike any other molecules in size and composition.

To better understand these tiny structures, let's compare a DNA chromosome to water. The water molecule has two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom written as H₂O, with a molecular weight of 18. By comparison, the DNA chromosome molecule has a molecular

The Human Genome Project has brilliantly illuminated our knowledge of the mechanics of life—but nothing about our ultimate purpose. To discover that, we must look to another source.

three billion when finally completed. More than 1,100 biologists, computer scientists and analysts at university laboratories in six countries have been hard at work trying to complete what some are calling biology's version of the book of life.

The glory of your genome

You may have heard much about the human genome in recent months, and there's more to come. But what exactly is the genome, and what does it mean for us?

In elementary school we learn that everything we see is made up of atoms. We learn that atoms combine to make molecules. But we only hazily understand how tiny atoms and molecules come together to make you and me the living creatures we are—filled with the wonder, complexity, potential and choices we live with daily.

How do atoms and molecules work together to create the unique being that is *you*? The search to discover the answer to that question is perhaps the greatest story of sleuthing in science.

All biological life is made up of an astonishingly complex blend of molecules. They combine, break down and recombine into the same or a myriad of other forms of molecules. Continuously, day in and day out, trillions of

some is the genetic document—a chemical instruction set written in chemical code—that tells your body how to arrange, structure, absorb and expel atoms and molecules.

The totality of your genetic instructions is your genome. Each of us has a unique genome, our own chemical genetic instruction set. In reality, each human being is a genome.

You received—or became—your genome at conception. The instant your father's sperm with its 23 chromosomes paired with your mother's 23 chromosomes in a fertilized egg, something unique and totally new was created—you!

You started life as a single cell. From that one cell you virtually exploded into being. Every growth pattern, stage and process of your body occurred like clockwork—from fetal development to birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. For your first 18 years, on average you added 100 million cells to your body *every minute*.

Such dizzying growth is so perfectly programmed from your own set of instructions contained in that first cell that by age 20 you became an adult of more than 100 trillion (100,000,000,000,000) cells—differentiated into heart, spleen, skin, bone, muscle, liver, stomach, eyes, intestines and, most impor-

Man

by Howard Davis

weight of 80 billion. For a molecule, the DNA chromosome is incredibly long and narrow. Like an endless and almost impossibly thin thread, it is coiled in the cell's tiny nucleus. With a diameter of 2 nanometers, it is a million times smaller than the distance between the two smallest marks on a ruler. Yet if it were stretched to full length it would be about 1½ inch long.

DNA's two long intertwined strands appear like stilts made of an alternating phosphate and a sugar. The steplike rungs between the strands are made up of paired bases of nitrogen compounds identified by the letters *G*, *C*, *A* and *T* (the first letters of the four kinds of bases: guanine, cytosine, adenine and thymine). These are the only substances in DNA, hence the genome consists of only these four—but in seemingly endless sequences.

These compounds tell every cell of your body what to do. They communicate through certain sequences on the genome. Special bands of these compounds are our genes.

Genes are paired on each chromosome with sequences that account for specific traits and physical characteristics. Each body trait requires one or more pairs of genes. Such things as eye color, shape of body parts and susceptibility to diseases all are found within the gene pairs of the genome. Researchers also are discovering that certain personality dispositions seem to have genetic components (a concept discussed in the Bible several thousand years ago).

There are from 80,000 to 100,000 genes in the human genome. The goal of the Human Genome Project is to decode every one.

The universe within

Though the smallest unit of the body, cells are no longer the simple structures they once were thought to be. Each cell has many thousands—sometimes hundreds of thousands—of structural components and processes controlled by chromosomes in the nucleus.

Although the universe is thought to have 100 billion galaxies with an estimated 200 billion stars each, some scientists acknowledge that each human body appears as complex and amazingly designed as the universe itself. The human brain has 100 billion neurons, with untold trillions of connections and patterns of endless wiring sequences.

We are unconscious of the incomprehensible complexity of our own creation. We are not aware of what goes on in our cells as our genome tells our cells to assemble amino acids into proteins, proteins to make cell walls, and cell walls to split and divide. We go about our lives unaware of the constant stream of virtual miracles that keep us alive, alert and functioning.

Missing pieces of the puzzle

How did such an astonishingly complex process begin? How did the billions of atoms in each DNA molecule arrange themselves perfectly for the self-perpetuation we call life?

One of the greatest problems with the science of genetics is that it involves dissecting the fundamental particles of life with no scientific framework for understanding what to do with it, where it came from or what its ultimate purpose might be.

Although that framework is available, it won't be found under a microscope or through scientific study. Only one logical explanation exists for the brilliant design of the entire biological life cycle contained in a blueprint of unimaginable complexity. But the explanation isn't the blind, random, mindless chance inherent in the evolutionary perspective held by so many scientists.

How did cells, DNA and chromosomes come about? Perhaps the greatest scientific proof that we were designed by a higher power is this: The process of one genome creating a living, self-perpetuating organism cannot happen over time. It has to be right the first time, and it must entail literally billions of *designed* elements that must be in place and functioning perfectly, or else the cell cannot exist and reproduce. The self-replicating cell exists only



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because its inherent intelligent systems—each involving billions of functions—interact perfectly. If they don't, it is dead.

The chromosome and cell are so unimaginably complex that they could never have evolved through random processes from nothing, even if given the endless time spans evolutionists require for their theory.

Evolutionists are at a loss to explain, for example, how and why heart tissue, liver tissue, skin and blood are distinctly different and have dramatically different functions. Yet, astonishingly, each cell contains the same DNA. A liver cell's DNA is identical to a brain cell's DNA. How each cell knows its identity, function and position in the body remains a mystery.

Much more than molecules

Scientific discoveries can be a two-edged sword. They can lead us to marvel at the intricate and perfect design that proves the existence of a much greater intelligence than ourselves, or they can force us to focus so much on the details that we lose sight of the big picture.

Regrettably, the genetic revolution appears to be taking our minds off the bigger picture—the spiritual potential of human existence. We are tempted to obsess on the physical manipulations of genetic engineering as possible solutions to the problems of life and death while overlooking missing pieces of the puzzle that provide true and lasting solutions.

Are you only the sum total of the preprogrammed DNA of your chromosomes? Of course not. Each person is much more than

his genome. The millions of genes unique to each person are the platform for what the Bible describes as beings *created in the image of God* (Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6). In this time of dazzling technological progress, the relevance of God and Bible are critically important tools for cutting through the labyrinth of data and technical jargon. As genetic biologists compile their new

“We have caught a glimpse of an instruction book previously known only to God.”

—Dr. Frances Collins,
director of the National Human
Genome Research Institute

blueprint of life, the classic blueprint for life—the Bible—remains ever relevant. Its counsel is timeless—though, to our peril, it is increasingly disregarded. Let's consider.

The Bible goes far beyond the Human Genome Project in describing the nature of the complete human being. It casts light on the greater truths beyond the data of man's genes. In telling us that God created us in His image, it reveals that we have a spiritual heritage far more astounding and compelling than the physical heritage revealed through the Human Genome Project, incredible though it is.

The genome of God

The central teaching of the Bible is that man exists for an ultimate *spiritual* plan and purpose. Human life is only the physical *means* to this spiritual end, not the end in itself.

God sent Jesus Christ as the manifestation

of God's design for man. He revealed the nature of the connection between man and the supernatural realm Jesus called the Kingdom of God. “And 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 . . . No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:14, 18).

What astonished Jesus' contemporaries—and was rejected by the leadership of the ancient world—was His message that man can enter the divine realm, the Kingdom of God. They rejected that teaching largely because it required a conversion and commitment to God, a repentance from the selfish, greedy, grasping nature in every one of us. In His day, just like today, people didn't want to hear about their ultimate problem and God's solution.

The heart of our problem is that man must receive a divine nature not to be found in the human genome. It's our only way out of a death trap of man's own making.

Jesus of Nazareth was the perfect, living example of the divine nature. The Bible describes Him as the perfect reflection of God the Father made visible to the world: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . . He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being” (Hebrews 1:1-3, New Revised Standard Version).

Jesus said He was the model God sent for a new life: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). The world crucified

Why the Human Genome Project?

One goal of the genetic revolution certainly appears to be the physical perfection of the human race. Through decoding the human genome scientists hope, among other things, to discover the causes for many diseases, develop new treatments and cures and slow or reverse the aging process.

Already researchers on the Human Genome Project have identified genetic disorders responsible for cystic fibrosis and some types of cervical, stomach and testicular cancer, among other diseases. Scientists regularly announce similar discoveries as they dig ever more deeply into our genetic makeup.

But will the Human Genome Project produce only good fruit?

We might ask ourselves: What happens when men and women try to reach physical perfection as the ultimate goal of existence? Already the deciphering of the secrets of genes has motivated parents to abort unborn fetuses with abnormal genetic profiles. In a society that each year aborts more than a million unborn, mostly for convenience, temptations for genetically motivated abortions are continually increasing. Even when there is no proven genetic defect but only the *potential* for genetically undesirable children,

pressure has been applied to terminate pregnancies.

At the other extreme we see an increasing trend toward creating “designer babies” by customizing personal genetic traits such as looks, abilities, height, intelligence and hair and eye color. An enterprising American businessman even set up a Web site offering—for a fee few could afford—eggs from attractive models whose photos were shown on the site.

Genetic discrimination is a real possibility. Will companies screen potential employees and deny jobs or insurance to those with genetic predisposition to some diseases? Ultimately, children could be sorted into social classes or career tracks based on career potential.

Although the Human Genome Project offers the potential for tremendous good, it opens a Pandora's box of troubling moral and ethical issues. In his book *Remaking Eden: How Genetic Engineering and Cloning Will Transform the American Family*, Princeton University professor Lee Silver asserts that “the use of reprogenic technologies is inevitable. For better and worse, a new age is upon us.”

Who Are We?

Him. But He then became the pattern of the supernatural resurrection for each of us if we follow Him into the Kingdom of God.

The Bible describes the ultimate purpose of life as entering this Kingdom, another realm of existence. Jesus focused on this theme throughout His ministry (Mark 1:14-15). It remains a message just as relevant as it was 2,000 years ago.

At the heart of the message is the story of a *family*—not the family of man, to which all of us belong courtesy of our amazing genetic heritage, but *the family of God!*

God's purpose for us

The apostle John summarizes God's ultimate purpose for us with these words: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called *children of God!* Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:1-3).

Sadly, even Christianity is in total confusion about His message. You, however, don't need to be.

Just as you can know Jesus Christ's original message, He can become the model for the transformation of your life. He is the standard, the pattern, not just for this physical life, but for the spiritual perfection and immortality God will freely give to those willing to believe Him and take Him up on His offer. He is the bridge between the marvel of the human genome and the far more awesome spiritual genome available to us in the Kingdom of God.

Are you interested in God's genome project? It's in the Bible. And it is good news! **GN**

Recommended Reading

You can learn much more about God's plan for eternal life and the future of humanity—a future far more exciting and inspiring than that predicted by scientists' ambitions. To discover the truth of what God has in store, be sure to request the free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *What Happens After Death?*, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. Write to any of our offices listed on page 2 or download any of these publications from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

Who's Behind The Good News?



Who is behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to anyone who requests it.

Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by people—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people share a goal: to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

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

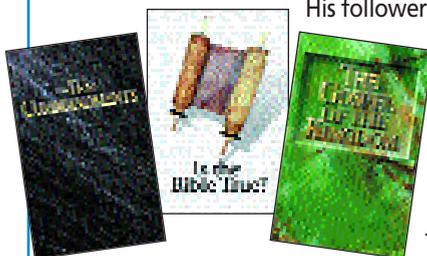
The message Jesus brought truly is good news: the answer to all mankind's problems. Through the pages of *The Good News* and various booklets (also free) we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten the very survival of humankind.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Christ. Jesus also told

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

Jesus also commanded His followers to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17). To fulfill this command, the United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scrip-

tures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, write or call us at the addresses listed on page 2. Visitors are always welcome.



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Can Science Give Us *Eternal Life?*

Man has made great strides in technology and medicine, raising the hope that human immortality may be just around the corner. How have these advances come about, and what do they mean for you?

by Larry Walker

From our earliest history, mortal man has sought in vain for immortality. Spanish explorer Ponce de León is famous for his futile search for the fountain of youth. Most other names are lost in history. The searchers had one thing in common: They all failed. Medical science is on a path that some feel will succeed in ending human mortality by reversing—or at least drastically slowing—the aging process.

Can science extend our lifespans into hundreds, or maybe even thousands, of years? Some think it's only a matter of time. A recent spate of books and magazine articles claims that this and other remarkable

Medical science is on a path that some feel will succeed in ending human mortality by reversing—or at least drastically slowing—the aging process.

prospects are possible for the near future.

Progress in the battle against aging

Over the last century advances in medical science have extended life expectancy far beyond the proverbial threescore and ten. Life expectancies in the United States in 1900 were only 48.3 years for men and 51.1 for women. By the mid-1950s they had increased to 66.0 for men and 71.7 for women. By 1996 the figures had risen to 75.7 and 82.7.

The U.S. population includes more than 50,000 people who have lived past 100 years of age, and the number of people who reach that milestone doubles every 10 years. People over the age of 85 constitute the fastest-growing segment of the population. Similar figures exist in other developed nations.

Now, for the first time, prognosticators proclaim that an end to the aging process may soon be within reach. “The Coming Triumph Over Aging” is the title of the first chapter of a 1998 book, *Cheating Death*, by Marvin Cetron and Owen Davies.

In the preface to his book *Immortality: How Science Is Extending your Life Span—and Changing the World*, also written in 1998, author Ben Bova predicts: “. . . Human immortality is no longer a fantasy or a dream but may be achievable within this generation.” The book boldly concludes: “The first immortals are already living among us. You might be one of them” (p. 251).

What is the basis for such hopeful predictions? Are such previously unthinkable life spans on the horizon? If so, what challenges will they pose for future generations? Does the Bible offer insight on this topic?

Progress in biological science

The increasing length of human life can largely be credited to advances in the health sciences. Fundamental advances in medicine and sanitation have all but eliminated smallpox and other diseases that wiped out thousands of lives in years past. (Regrettably, this good news is partially offset by the fact that degenerative diseases such as cancer and heart disease continue to exact a heavy toll in human suffering, in spite of the sophisticated equipment and vast array of medical procedures available.)

Science has made astounding achievements in developing prosthetics and transplants as a means of replacing diseased organs and other damaged body parts. The first successful heart transplant dates to 1967. Doctors can replace many other organs, sometimes more than one at a time. The main limitation seems to be lack of organ donors, but the controversial cloning process promises to come to the rescue by developing healthy replacement tissue in the laboratory.

One is reminded of a line from the old TV series, *The Six Million Dollar Man*: “We can rebuild him; we have the technology.” Yesterday’s fanciful Six Million Dollar Man and the Bionic Woman may be fictional prototypes of future real people.

Understanding aging

As awesome as this technology may seem,

transplant surgery deals merely with the effects of accidents, disease and aging. Scientists are gaining information on how aging and diseases occur, with the hope of learning how to reverse them.

Researchers have learned much about processes that occur in cells to bring on aging. Two theories have emerged—*entropic* (wearing out) and *telomeric* (death by design).

Aging and reproduction seem to be universally connected throughout most forms of life, whether they be microscopic one-celled organisms or human beings. Life and vitality appear to be designed to peak at the time of procreation and decline thereafter.

It appears that a self-limiting program is built into our genes. Like computer viruses, substances within our bodies attack and destroy cells to bring on aging and eventual death. Scientists try to locate, understand and turn off the aging switches built into living organisms.

Experiments involving melatonin, antioxidants, free radicals and the growth hormone somatrophin have yielded interesting results in laboratory tests. Lives of test animals have significantly increased. The prospects for human life are yet to be determined, as are risks and side effects.

In 1986 a team of scientists embarked on the most extensive scientific research project ever undertaken. The Human Genome Project seeks to map the genes of the human body and their functions. Genes are the master blueprints of our cells. They contain codes that regulate all of life's functions. The human genome is the scientific term for the composite genetic material of the human body. Close to 100,000 genes must be analyzed and described to complete this encyclopedic effort.

Prospects and possibilities

When the project is complete, the next step will be to determine how to use the resulting knowledge to manipulate body processes for practical benefits. Potential benefits are impressive:

- Early detection (by genetic predisposition) and possible elimination of disease.
- Slowing or eliminating aging. Ben Bova predicts, "Aging will evaporate like

a bad dream" (Bova, p. 123).

- Restoration of youthful functions (a scientific fountain of youth).
 - Extension of life span and perhaps even physical immortality.
- Of course it will take time for any



“... Human immortality is no longer a fantasy or a dream but may be achievable within this generation.”

of these benefits to become available. So, in the meantime, these mind-stretching possibilities have spawned the practice of cryonics—the freezing of dead bodies with liquid nitrogen in hopes of future restoration to life and health, perhaps even immortality, via medical and scientific methods

such as those mentioned above.

Problems of the postmortal era

However, even with the most optimistic outcome of current and future developments, the prospect of physical immortality, or even greatly extended life spans, poses a host of challenges and problems. They include:

- *Medical limitations.* At this point the best medical science can hope for is to slow the process of aging or prevent death by disease and old age; death by injury would still loom over humanity.

Knowing about genes does not confer the ability to manipulate them any more than drawing a blueprint guarantees how or if a house will be built. Genes take orders from elsewhere; they don't initiate them. Scientists must still analyze genetic interaction with a host of environmental factors. Until researchers learn more about root causes of disease, there may be a need for periodic adjustments, which could be very costly.

Tampering with the delicate intricacies of cellular interaction could produce a medical Frankenstein's monster of uncontrolled cell growth—in a word, cancer.

- *Economic considerations.* The financial cost of extending life could limit its benefits to the wealthy. On the other hand, if treatment becomes readily available, many other economic challenges will arise. Longer life spans would result in people needing to work indefinitely. Retirement would have to be postponed or even eliminated. Insurance, pension plans and retirement income programs would have to be revamped, reduced or discontinued.

The ability to read the genetic code of an employee or potential employee could result in layoffs and refusals to hire as well as insurance denials and higher premium costs.

A massive transformation of the medical industry also threatens as conventional medical treatment becomes obsolete.

- *Population problems.* As life spans increase, which they most surely will, overpopulation will exact a greater toll

on dwindling natural resources. Birth-control measures will become ever more critical. If man were to achieve immortality, how long would it take to reach a saturation point beyond which life could not continue?

- *Social, cultural, ethical and moral considerations.* A host of social challenges would need to be dealt with, such as discrimination against the poor, elderly and diseased unable to afford life extension. And, on the other hand, discrimination no doubt would be directed against those who for philosophical, ethical or religious reasons choose not to extend their lives by scientific means.

- *Religious and philosophical issues.* If science were able to offer physical immortality, what religious and philosophical challenges would such an offer pose? The meaning of life would change. The limitations of physical life provide boundaries and parameters that define life as we know it. As King Solomon wrote almost 3,000 years ago: “To everything there is a season, . . . a time to be born, and a time to die” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).

What if life goes on indefinitely? What will future immortals do with all that time? Golfing for eternity, even for those who could afford it, would soon grow stale and boring. Meaning and purpose in life would become a vital necessity for happiness.

The prospect of physical immortality poses a major challenge to religion. Marvin Cetron asks, “Will religion still have something to offer people whose salvation is as near as the local pharmacy?” (*Cheating Death*, p. 15).

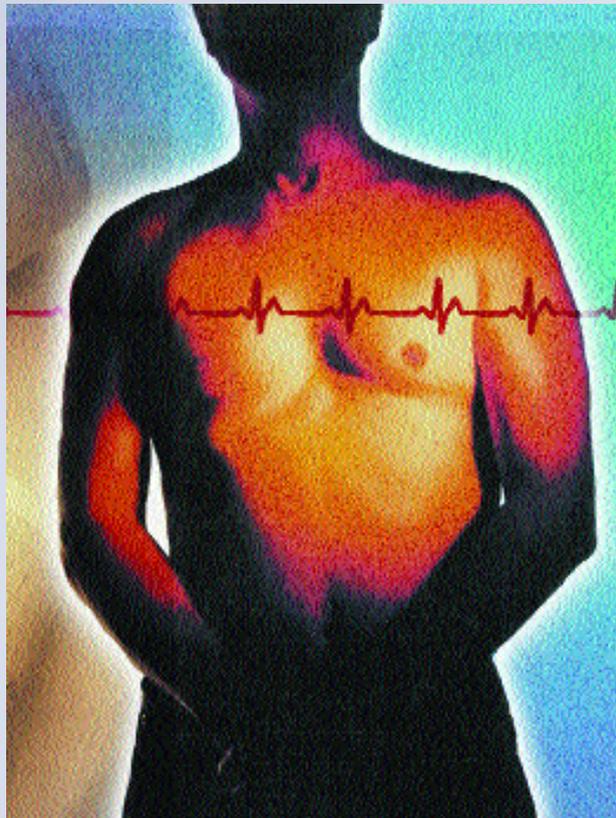
The age of enlightenment led many to look to science, discounting the need for God. The prospect of immortality could result in a quantum leap into the arms of medical science. Would immortality from the realm of science deal a death blow to religion?

Biblical perspective on immortality

Will God allow scientists to manipulate the genetic code to presume to offer eternal life in the flesh? Computer

programmers construct databases with grids that allow flexibility but prevent fundamental changes. Has God written genetic codes that cannot be changed? Or is there no limit to what He will allow man to accomplish?

Before attempting to answer this question, let’s back up and put the matter into a spiritual perspective. Any attempt to gain eternal life apart from the plan of God is doomed to fail.



The first successful heart transplant dates to 1967. Doctors can replace many other organs, sometimes more than one at a time.

Man’s quest for eternal life began long before Ponce de León. The potential for immortality dates back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God offered eternal life through the tree of life (Genesis 3:22). Death would be the penalty for partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Satan’s first lie to mankind was that man would not die but would gain knowledge by taking of the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:1-5). He managed to convince Eve. Adam went along with his wife, and the course of history was

set. Ever since, man has sought eternal life by means of the tree of knowledge, reaping a mixture of good and evil results. The latest advances in scientific knowledge are no exception.

Can man avoid death forever?

Because of sin, death is inevitable for all mankind (Romans 5:12; Hebrews 9:27). God has designed the human body to conform to the limits of mortality. The body begins its demise after peaking during the reproductive years. Genetic researchers observe this planned obsolescence at the cellular level as they continue their determined research into ways to alter the genetic code.

Will God allow man to reverse the aging process and live forever? It’s possible man could make great strides toward that end. Note that after the incident at the tower of Babel—a human attempt to thwart God’s plan and punishment for sin—God’s response was, “Now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them” (Genesis 11:6).

Does this include learning how to turn off the death switch at work in our genes? If so, eternal life in the flesh (or even a greatly enhanced life span) will be fraught with problems. In the end, man still cannot escape death in the plan of God. Regardless of the longevity of human life, Jesus warns us that God “is able to destroy body and soul” (Matthew 10:28).

Conditions at the time of the end of this age are destined to be like those at the time of Noah (Matthew 24:37-39). Other than the handful of lives preserved on the ark, all flesh was destroyed in the Flood. Peter speaks of the time when fire will sweep over the earth to burn “both the earth and the works that are in it” (2 Peter 3:10-12). So, regardless of how long medical science might be able to extend human life, the time will come when nothing physical will remain.

God’s plan for eternal life

The good news is that God plans to

destroy death and once again offer immortality to mankind. However, it won't be through scientific advances, but through a *resurrection from the grave*. The entire 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians is devoted to this awesome topic.

Our physical existence is only temporary. The ultimate destiny of mankind is eternal life in the family of God—by *His* design, not man's. He reveals that our limited physical bodies will be instantaneously transformed from mortal flesh to immortal spirit (1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 33-54; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-3). No transplants, artificial parts, drugs or therapies are required!

Revelation 21:4 assures us that death, disease, even pain and sorrow will evaporate like a bad dream (to borrow the words of a previous quote). God's version of eternal life will be freely given and available to all who follow Him (John 4:9-10, 14; Revelation 21:6; 22:17).

There will be no need for a medical industry or insurance. Life will be meaningful and busy. We will work without tiring—or retiring (John 5:17). There will be no need for income. Social security will be replaced by spiritual security, compliments of Almighty God.

All social, cultural, ethical, moral and spiritual problems will be eliminated (Revelation 21:27; 22:14-15). Population problems and overcrowding will not be an issue in the New Heavens and New Earth. God's plan more than meets the challenge to religion. God has incomparably more to offer than the local pharmacy could ever hope to provide.

Eternal life is more than a chronological matter. Immortality without meaning and purpose would be a curse. The

Bible's offer of eternal life includes an intimate relationship with the great "I Am," the Author and Designer of life (John 17:3).

Looking into the future

Regrettably, we live in the dark ages spiritually (John 1:5; 9:4). Although scientific and technological knowledge abounds, mankind utterly lacks spiritual truth (2 Timothy 3:7). This condition is destined to change dramatically. The greatest age of enlightenment is yet to be ushered in, at the return of Jesus Christ.

God's Word tells us that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). Life on earth will take on exciting new meaning as mankind learns to live according to and enjoy the blessings of God's perfect law of liberty (Isaiah 2:1-4; James 1:25). All will come to know God's plan for immortality—eternal life in His glorious Kingdom.

In the meantime, science will continue to find ways to expand the quantity and quality of human life. Time will tell how much science can improve health and longevity. But all that ultimately will pale into insignificance by the plan of God.

Can scientists give us hundreds or possibly even thousands of years of life? They certainly will try. But, even if mankind achieves remarkable breakthroughs, physical immortality from the hand of man will include all the problems and pain of our present life—and more of them spread over more years. The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:19 tells us that hope limited to this physical life indeed would be a pitiable existence. Any scientific development is a cheap substitute compared to eternal life in the Kingdom of God. **GN**

Recommended Reading

You can learn much more about God's plan for eternal life and the future of humanity—a future far more exciting and inspiring than that predicted by scientists' ambitions. To discover the truth of what God has in store, be sure to request the free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *What Happens After Death?*, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *The Road to Eternal Life*.

The theme of immortality is woven throughout seven annual observances revealed in the Bible, celebrations that offer a glimpse of God's great plan as "a shadow of things to come" (Colossians 2:16-17). Be sure to request our booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* to help you glean the precious nuggets of truth embedded in these days.

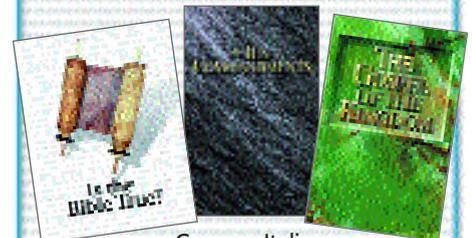
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WORLD NEWS and PROPHECY
Biblical Approaches on Current Events

them filled with helpful articles much like those you enjoy in *The Good News*.

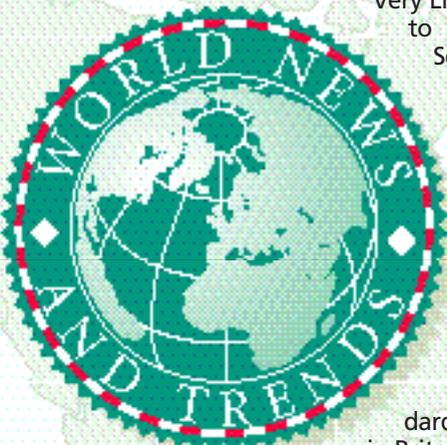
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An Overview of Condi

Disgusting developments in Britain

"Sex, Sex and More Sex [on TV], and Very Little Sense." "Film Censors to Let Teenagers See More Sex." "Why Nice Girls Like to Strip [for charity]." "Come On, Own Up, We All Like a Bit of Sex on the Telly." "TV Ads for Escort Girls." "Judge Clears Real-Life Sex Videos for Sale in Britain." "Porn Sellers Are Setting the Standards." "A Good Reason to Stop Being Hypocritical About Porn."



Moral values and standards aren't getting any better in Britain as judged by the above recent article titles from respected national newspapers.

Perhaps most jarring is that the surprising advocacy for immoral behavior reflected in these headlines emanates from opinion shapers long thought to be proponents of traditional moral values.

An *Independent on Sunday* opinion piece is typical: "The net [Internet] is making adult entertainment one of the world's biggest businesses. Britain should get real." The astonishing feature then went on to say: "The international adult entertainment industry has never had it so good. Pornography is becoming part of popular culture, and it is still the only business that can consistently turn a profit on the net."

Blatant greed for money is viewed as the basis for so-called moral standards in Britain. This feature continued: "When it comes to the business of web-based adult entertainment, the British are frozen in a kind of moral dark age by a government that refuses to consider an overhaul of ambiguous and outdated obscenity laws . . . Britain stands alone in Europe in

"Welcome to a brave new Britain where the rights of a few pornographers are considered more important than the protection of childhood innocence."

outlawing [hard core] pornography . . . The size and revenues of adult entertainment companies on the continent and in the U.S. are often understated."

We can be thankful a few voices in Britain still lament this abominable situation. We could not express it better than a recent *Daily Mail* editorial: "Welcome to a brave new Britain where the rights of a few pornographers are considered more important than the protection of childhood innocence. With the blessing of the High Court, videos showing explicit . . . sex [previously prevented by law] are to be made readily available to the public . . . The most profound human experiences of

love and commitment are being systematically demeaned. And what is even more depressing is that nobody in politics, the law or the liberal establishment seems to have the wisdom, conviction or courage to call a halt" (Sources: *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Daily Mail* [all London].)

Marriage and divorce

The disgusting advocacy for bad behavior described above has spilled over into almost every aspect of morality in Britain. A recent feature article in a national paper was titled "Marriage Lesson One: Divorce," followed by the drophead: "Finally, reality is kicking in: most relationships do not last forever. We need to learn to deal with the real world."

Another feature explained "why we're on the run from commitment." Finally we read that "lesbian affairs are the cause of more marriage breakups [in Britain] . . . Because men can't understand their needs, women feel they are much better off with a woman who can."

Much of the advice doled out to the British public is pure poison. No nation can permanently survive this kind of breakdown in attitudes and behavior. Rationalizing such moral and spiritual degradation by calling it "the real world" will inevitably lead to dire consequences for any society that condones and accepts such behavior.

We desperately need to learn the other side of the story—the right side. Please request your personal copies of the two free booklets *The Ten Commandments and Making Life Work*. They are available from any of our offices listed on page 2 or from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org. (Sources: *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Sunday Telegraph* [all London].)

Disorder on the increase in England

The crime correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph* recently wrote: "Falling police numbers have created deep problems in the inner cities with violence and disorder amounting to 'anarchy' outside pubs and clubs at night in London, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester." These are four of England's major population centers.

Some city forces are policing difficult areas with only half of the officers available five years ago. For this and other reasons (notably the general breakdown of society), mindless thuggery is on the increase in England.

Symbolic of the inclinations of British society were the thousands of dollars' worth of damage caused to a London bus by rioting students. The indignant head of the bus company reacted by personally driving the vehicle to the school and showing the headmaster the massive damage to its interior. Then he promptly canceled all runs to the school.

Of particular concern were the London riots of May 1 when officers of the metropolitan police squared off against 4,000 anticapitalist protesters near the houses of Parliament. But, before these violent rioters were fully brought under control, they had managed to deface Winston Churchill's statue in Parliament Square as well as a war memorial in the area—both historic symbols of Britons' willingness to protect their national integrity.





Albania

Zimbabwe

Bahrain

Cyprus

Burkina Faso

New Zealand

Jordan

Belgium

Argentina

Czech Republic

ions Around the World

Sir Winston was a national hero credited with being one of the most important World War II leaders who helped save the world from fascism. In many people's minds he was Britain's man of the century. Yet thugs desecrated his statue by daubing it with word *murderer*.

Daily Mail columnist Lynda Lee-Potter commented: "This vile anarchic army of would-be destroyers was recruited through the internet. The potential viciousness on the day appealed to every failure, every embittered useless troublemaker and yob in the land . . . The genuine protesters were totally swamped by those who had destruction in their hearts."

A whole generation in Britain has not learned even the most basic of biblical teachings—the Ten Commandments. We are

Sir Winston Churchill was a national hero. Yet thugs desecrated his statue by daubing it with the word murderer.

reaping the bitter fruits of our careless neglect. (Sources: *The Daily Mail*, *The Economist*, *The Daily Telegraph* [all London].)

The cure for violence

Violent assaults remain a troubling aspect of life on the other side of the Atlantic as well. A problem in Texas public schools is a case in point. Last year school officials recorded nearly 51,000 assaults against students by other students. Another 3,800 incidents of assault were reported against the teachers, and 500 guns were confiscated from pupils.

The State of Texas had already formed a 22-member school-violence task force after the school murders in Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. At the center of the Texas committee's recommendations are character-education programs. It was wisely recognized at the onset that personal character is the key to the prevention of violent behavior.

However, character must first be taught in the nation's homes by responsible parents. Teachers cannot make up for parental neglect. By age 6 much of a child's character is already formed, and even teachers imbued with the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of Job are hard pressed to deal effectively with neglected children. (Source: *The Corpus Christi Caller-Times*.)

Humanity held hostage to missile threat

Magazine articles catch the eye, particularly one that begins: "A decade after the end of the Cold War there are still 550 ballistic missiles buried in America's landscape. And with them are the missileers, the young Air Force elite who are always ready to do the unthinkable." This was recently published in *The Times Magazine* in London (Saturday supplement), and of course the number does not take into account America's missile strike force carried by nuclear submarines.

The quote itself becomes even more important when considered with part of another article printed in *The Los*

Angeles Times. "Those details, published by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, reveal that the United States has encouraged Russia to keep its entire strategic nuclear force of about 3,000 missiles on hair-trigger alert as a way to reduce Moscow's anxiety about a U.S. missile defense system. The U.S. system, however, would be designed to counter no more than a small fraction of Russia's arsenals."

Undoubtedly those who man the controls in both countries are well trained and balanced. Safety requirements are no doubt stringent. As Maj. Rick McAlister, a senior Air Force instructor, said: "Every time you go out on alert, this Wing, this country, this world is depending on you to do your job perfect—not close enough, but perfect."

This is a stark reminder of what we too often forget: We live in a world that at any given time is potentially only minutes away from nuclear warfare capable of devastating much of the globe. We are held hostage to our supersophisticated nuclear weaponry.

In spite of years of effort, utopia has not come—and a war-minded world populace cannot bring it about. That's why the world desperately needs the gospel of the Kingdom of God. God's good news heralds the personal intervention of Jesus Christ and the beginning of His reign, bringing the peaceful world tomorrow when all of mankind will lay down its weapons (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). No longer will we be under constant threat from our own technology. (Sources: *The Times Magazine* [London], *The Los Angeles Times*.)

Why bad news in The Good News?

Speaking of the state of the world just before His return, Jesus Christ said our planet will experience "a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again" (Matthew 24:21, Revised English Bible).

The United Church of God, whose members and supporters provide the financial backing for *The Good News* and other publications, proclaims the good news of the imminent return of Jesus of Nazareth. This section of the magazine reports on some of the consequences of human behavior leading to the very conditions Jesus described: a dangerous world of chaos, confusion and apprehension in which man

The world is filled with bad news. Yet the future holds incredible promise: Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God.

faces the terrifying possibility of extinction (verse 22).

The world is filled with bad news. Yet the future holds incredible promise: Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God (Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 11:15), ushering in a time of peace, prosperity and plenty during which all people will at last learn to live God's way of life. This truly is good news on which you can stake your future.

—John Ross Schroeder



Ukraine

Mauritania

Slovenia

Barbados

Angola

Malta

Jamaica

Lebanon

Djibouti

Greenland

Cambodia

Africa: What's Behind the Zimbabwe Land Crisis?

When we examine the causes of widespread tragedies, we shouldn't ignore the impact of people's decisions and actions.

by Melvin Rhodes

The word *famine* is indelibly associated with Africa. Harrowing pictures of African babies with distended bellies, their faces covered in flies, skeletal bones showing through their skin, held by mothers too exhausted to stand up, haunt our television screens again as parts of Africa see the return of famine. Much of African agriculture is in crisis.

On the same news bulletins have been occasional reports of thousands of squatters taking over prosperous commercial farms in the African nation of Zimbabwe, crying out for land taken from their ancestors more than a century ago.

These news dispatches are connected. We need to understand how.

African history lesson

Twenty-five years ago I lived in Zimbabwe in a farming community in Matabeleland. Zimbabwe was then known as Rhodesia. The white commercial farmers in the area were mostly the descendants of British and South African settlers who had arrived in the colony in the 1890s and early 1900s, just as the Matabele themselves had moved into the area earlier in the 19th century. The white settlers had worked hard to develop their farms. They were the backbone of Rhodesia's economy, exporting their first-class agricultural products to other nations. They spearheaded the development of Rhodesia, whose citizens—black and white alike—then enjoyed the highest standard of living on the continent.

But it was not to last. The winds of change that swept through Africa in the 1960s took away the security of the descendants of these early settlers. They had lived under the Rhodesian flag within the security of the British Empire for so long they were taken aback when London decided to dismantle its empire and return control of their African colonies to the indigenous peoples.

They were so taken aback they, in fact, rebelled against England and declared their own independence in 1965. This was the first time any colony had done so since the American colonies broke away in 1776. The civil war that followed took its toll on the

white farmers and their black African workers. Tens of thousands died in the seven-year conflict that began the birth pangs of the new nation.

Control of the government passed to the indigenous African majority in 1980. Twenty years later Zimbabwe is still led by the man who was elected its first leader. Corruption, nepotism and bad management have taken their toll on the nation and its peoples. By some estimates the standard of living of the average black Zimbabwean has dropped by 20 percent. Tens of thousands of the minority Ndebele tribe have been massacred, and two thirds of the settlers of European descent have left—leaving only 70,000 whites in the country, 4,000 of whom are farmers.

These farmers are still the mainstay of the Zimbabwean economy. Their tobacco and food products pay for essential imports, including fuel.

Land reform has always been an issue. Demands for redistribution of land fueled the flames of the civil war. Twenty years after its conclusion, veterans of the war and many not old enough to remember the conflict are forcing the issue, reminding the world that their ancestral land was taken away by the white settlers—and now they want it back.

The challenge for Zimbabwe lies in a simple fact: Any sudden acquisition of the white farmlands or exodus of the white minority will deal a severe blow to the country's economy.

Not all farming is alike

The farmers of European descent are known as commercial farmers, while most indigenous African farmers are subsistence farmers. The difference is that, while the native black population grows only enough food to meet its own needs, the white farmers operate on a larger scale, growing food to sell and export. Their food surpluses have fed the majority black-African population for decades and paid the country's import bill. The gap between the commercial and subsistence farmers is a cultural gap, one that is not easy to bridge.

This problem is not just a Zimbabwean one. All over Africa, as European-descended settlers left after former European colonies gained independence,

Almost all of the former European colonies had been food exporters in colonial times. In a remarkable and tragic reversal, today almost all are food importers.



A tremendous cultural gap divides Zimbabwe's black and white farmers. White-owned commercial farms, like the one at left, provide Zimbabwe with the bulk of its agricultural output and

exports. If those farmers are forced out, much of the land will revert to subsistence farms, like those at right, likely leading to widespread food shortages and famine.

food crises have resulted. Fifty years ago Britain's African colonies comprised a bigger land area than the United States.

Almost all of the colonies had been food exporters in colonial times. In a remarkable and tragic reversal, today almost all are food importers. Although this is partly because of a rapidly growing population, even a short-term visitor to Africa soon sees that much of the rich agricultural land is not in use while people try to eke out an existence on \$10 or \$20 a month.

Prophecies of agricultural blessings

The British colonies, in Africa and elsewhere, along with the self-governing dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, comprise the prophesied "multitude of nations" promised to Ephraim, son of the biblical patriarch Joseph, in Genesis 48:19. The descendants of his brother, Manasseh, were to become the greatest single nation on the face of the earth—the United States of America.

Interestingly, these prophecies were to be fulfilled in "the last days" (Genesis 49:1), not in the time of the patriarchs themselves. The British Empire and Commonwealth, together with the United States, was prophesied to play a key role in world events at a time leading up to the second coming of the Messiah.

Genesis 49:22 says of the descendants of Joseph and his two sons that they would be a "fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall." Using agricultural symbolism, God revealed that these nations were to bring great development to the many parts of the world into which they would spread. They would be major food producers, with their surpluses helping to feed the world.

As the United States spread westward in the 19th century and the British Empire expanded around the world during the fulfillment of these prophesied blessings, families moved onto available land and began to produce the food that helped feed the industrial revolution.

Family farms could be found all over the English-speaking world. The names of their owners were often the same as the names of owners on the other side of the planet. Even their small farming communities had the same names. The colonial era changed the face of farming. The small plots of land that their parents had left behind in Britain and on the continent of Europe were replaced by massive farms measuring in the thousands of acres. In many cases, as in the United States, they utilized virgin farmland that had not been used before for agriculture.

Today family farms are under threat everywhere, not only in the former African colonies. In the former British territories of South Africa, hundreds of farmers and their families have been killed under the same pressures as the farmers in Zimbabwe. In the United States several hundred family farms per week go out of business, primarily due to economic pressure and urban sprawl. In Michigan, where I live, almost one million acres of farmland per year are lost to development, while the average age of farmers is almost 60. Drought and other bad weather conditions have severely hampered operations of farmers in North America and Australia.

Government policies intended to help farmers often come too late or only make things worse a few years later. British farmers have suffered setbacks as a result of British membership of the European Union. Euro-

pean Common Agricultural Policy favors the smaller, low-productivity farms on the Continent at the expense of the high-intensity full-time farmers in the United Kingdom. Bureaucracy drives farmers out of business.

Some have resorted to suicide. Suicide hotlines have been set up for farmers in various parts of the world. Others feel that they are looked down upon by a world that favors industry and cities at the expense of farmers and rural communities. After all, most voters live in the big urban centers.

As in Zimbabwe, where will the food come from in the future?

A biblical lesson in agricultural management

The Bible gives us a historical account of the farsighted genius of the patriarch Joseph. You can read it in Genesis 41. When the pharaoh had a dream that troubled him, Joseph was brought from his prison cell in Egypt to interpret the dream. Of course, it was really God who interpreted the dream for him, as Joseph made clear to the Egyptian monarch (verse 16).

In his dream Pharaoh had seen seven fat cows coming up out of a river. These were soon followed by seven emaciated cows, which then ate up the fat cattle. He further saw seven "full and good" ears of corn that were soon followed by seven that were "withered and blasted with the east wind," the latter devouring the seven good ears of corn.

The interpretation of the dream was that seven plentiful harvests would be followed by seven bad ones that would destroy the advances made during the good times. Verse 32 shows that the two visions confirmed that "the thing is established by God." It would

surely come to pass. Joseph's advice to the Egyptian ruler was that he appoint a wise administrator over the kingdom's agricultural affairs to make sure that, when the good times came to an end, there would be sufficient food stocks to provide adequately for the nation during the time of famine. Pharaoh saw the wisdom of Joseph's advice and followed it.

Fast-forwarding several thousand years, we see that the commercial farmers who

Africa is the only continent whose people are worse off than they were 40 years ago. Much of the blame lies with their own governments.

unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy of the "fruitful bough" were men who thought ahead as did their ancestor Joseph. They developed their farms with their descendants in mind, wanting to hand over the land to them and keep their farms in the family for generations to come. Their desire for family prosperity contributed to the national prosperity of the lands in which they lived.

The movement in Zimbabwe toward expelling white farmers from the land shows an absence of foresight and fails to take into account the cultural difference between commercial farming and traditional subsistence farming. Commercial farmers have to look far ahead while subsistence farmers don't. The inevitable result is greater food shortages in those areas in the future, with further demands for food aid from the United States, Canada and Australia—nations whose own food production must inevitably be affected by the rapid loss of family farms.

Bad decisions bring consequences

Will widespread food shortages follow from the African food crisis?

In my experience in Zimbabwe—and also in West Africa, where famines were a frequent fact of life—I learned that famine is not usually caused by natural disasters. All too often famine is the result of mismanagement and lack of foresight.

The long war in poverty-stricken Ethiopia and Eritrea is one such example. In the long standoff the warring sides chose to spend an average of \$1 million a day on weaponry rather than on developing the agricultural infrastructure of their countries. With another severe famine looming, Western nations are understandably hesitant to send more food aid to the war-torn region, especially since many of the earlier supplies never reached famine victims. They were pilfered to advance the aims of political and military leaders.

Such shortsightedness is nothing new. It has been around for thousands of years. Another story in Genesis provides a lesson for those involved in the African land crisis.

The patriarch Joseph's grandfather was Isaac, the son of Abraham. Industrious like his father (and his future descendants) and blessed by God, Isaac prospered greatly in an alien land, receiving in one year "a hundredfold" (Genesis 26:12). ". . . He became

very prosperous . . . for he had possession of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him" (verses 13-14).

One of the reasons Isaac had done so well was that he had irrigated his cropland. The jealous Philistines stopped up his wells (verse 15), and their leader told him to get out of the country. Isaac moved on, dug new wells and found the same jealousy forced him to move again and again—until finally he found a place where he could stay. There he again prospered.

Eventually the leader of the Philistines, Abimelech, visited Isaac. Having seen that God blessed him with abundant agricultural output, Abimelech sought a covenant with Isaac, an agreement that would allow Isaac to live in peace, recognizing that his presence brought everyone greater prosperity. There was enough land for them all. Perhaps Abimelech's subjects would even learn from Isaac how to be better farmers.

A question for the future

Before major food shortages impact the nation of Zimbabwe, it would be far better for all concerned that a similar agreement be worked out. The issue is not the need to put right the mistakes of the colonial era. The question is one for the future: how to feed Zimbabwe's population. Once the white commercial farmers have left, they will not return—and Zimbabwe's agricultural production will suffer because of their departure.

Certainly there was much that was wrong about colonialism. But other parts of the world have put the colonial era behind them and moved on to greater prosperity and development. It is 40 years since Africa's colonial era came to an end. Over recent decades the continent hasn't progressed but has gone backwards. It is the only continent whose people are worse off than they were

40 years ago. As many African commentators themselves are aware, much of the blame lies with their own governments.

Whatever the faults of the colonial era, as a general rule Britain's African colonies enjoyed political stability and economic progress during their period of British sovereignty. At independence they were viable economic entities with constitutions that had been agreed upon between the nationalist parties that wanted independence and the government in London.

After independence, however, in too many cases written constitutions were ignored—leading to endless power struggles and political instability that in turn led to economic problems. Governments often interfered in the marketplace by freezing agricultural prices to protect potentially troublesome workers in urban areas. The result was a severe decline in farming production and a mass exodus off the land.

When land reform has taken place, it generally has not benefited the average citizen. Large, previously prosperous farms were given to prominent politicians whose interests were not in farming. This was the case in Zimbabwe.

Jesus' words on government in Matthew 20 are sound advice for leaders to consider: ". . . Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave" (verses 26-27). Ideally, government exists to serve the people. All human governments fall short in this regard.

There is a crisis in agriculture around the world. The descendants of farming families that settled throughout the English-speaking world in the 19th and 20th centuries are being driven off the land in great numbers. They helped feed the world during a time of rapid population growth, but now world agricultural production is threatened by their loss.

Governments need to understand this and change their policies to encourage these productive farmers to continue to produce the food the world will need as its population continues to grow.

But how do these trends in Africa fit into the overall pattern of world conditions? Where are all these problems taking us?

Bible prophecy reveals many of the answers. To better understand where the world is headed, request your free copies of *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. Both are free for the asking from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can access them on our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org. **GN**

What's My Purpose Here?

There must be some meaning to humanity's mixture of awesome abilities and awful atrocities. What is the ultimate purpose and meaning of your life?

by Gary Petty



What would you ask the Supreme Being if you could get a direct and immediate answer? A poll in *USA Today* reports that the No. 1 question people would like to ask God is “What’s my purpose here?”

With all our technology and sophistication we still haven’t answered the fundamental question of what is the purpose and value of human life. It seems Henry David Thoreau’s observation that most people live lives of “quiet desperation” is all too true.

Where would you even start to discover the purpose for your life? Can you find it in psychological tests or philosophy? Aptitude tests might help you pinpoint your abilities. Personality evaluations could conceivably help you focus on aspects of who you are. But the social sciences can’t explain *why you live*.

The place to begin

The complexity and interdependency of nature around us, the miracle of life itself, reveal a Life Giver, a Creator. Would it make sense that a brilliant Life Giver would create intelligent beings without purpose? “What’s my purpose here?” can ultimately be answered only by the Creator of life.

Western society claims to have its roots

in Christianity, yet the last place many people search to find purpose in life is the Bible. The Bible reveals a special creation with a special purpose. The first book of the Bible is Genesis, which simply means “beginning.” Here is the Bible’s first sentence: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

God then created a unique biological being called man. Genesis 2:7 states, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Does this mean that man is just another animal, different in form but essentially the same as a chimpanzee or other mammal?

The theory of evolution would lead us to that conclusion, but evolution doesn’t explain the obvious differences between humanity and animals. How do we explain the human ability to create music and art, discover and use geometry, develop architecture or invent complex forms of communication?

Instinct and intellect

A slug or a spider is driven entirely by instinctive behavior. The more complex the life-form, the more it can learn. Yet the behaviors of even the supposedly highest

forms of animals are primarily instinctive. This isn’t true of humanity.

Mortimer J. Adler, in his book *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, makes the point that if we compare animals with man “a radical difference appears. In the strict sense of the term *instinct*, the human species has no instincts—no innate, performed patterns of behavior. We have a small number of innate reflexes, only some of which are congenital. We also have what might be called instinctual drives or impulses. But in carrying these impulses out, members of the human species behave in a wide variety of ways. They do not all manifest a single pattern of behavior, such as we find in all members of a particular species of bee, ant or termite” (1985, p. 31).

This ability to reason and make complex decisions and choose courses of action makes humans infinitely different from any animal. The differences between the quality or quantity of the human brain and the brains of other mammals aren’t sufficient to explain the vast differences in function. When it comes to size, some mammals have larger brains than humans’ while others have a higher brain-to-body ratio than that of humans.

The difference between other mammals and human beings—the ability to reason,

create, communicate emotions, experience love and empathy—are all aspects of what we call the mind.

Adler concludes: “The relation of the sensory powers to the brain and nervous system is such that the degree to which an animal species possesses these powers depends on the size and complexity of its brain and nervous system. This is not the case in regard to the intellectual powers. That the human mind has such powers does not depend upon the size or complexity of the human brain. The action of the brain is only a necessary, but not the sufficient, condition for the functioning of the human mind and for the operations of conceptual thought. We do not think with our brains,

has created us in His likeness.

Notice what the Bible says in Job 32:8: “But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.” One of the biblical prophets, Zechariah, declares that God “forms the spirit of man within him” (Zechariah 12:1).

Mankind and animals are both living “souls,” or beings. Both are subject to death, the cessation of life. The difference is that man possesses a nonphysical component called a *spirit* that imparts individuality, intellect, creativity and personality.

The Bible reveals the mystery science can’t solve. We are physical, chemical beings with a nonbiological component—a spirit—a mind that is in a limited way

God—who reveals Himself as loving, kind and merciful—why are we so filled with hatred, violence and selfishness? The answers lie in understanding that we are an *incomplete* creation.

Genesis reveals the root cause of humanity’s evil. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were given freedom to choose between their Creator’s instruction about life and a way simply called the “knowledge of good and evil.” They chose the latter, the knowledge of good *and* evil.

God told Adam and Eve that once they started on the course of self-determination they would embark on a path that would ultimately lead to death. Evil—what the Bible calls sin—brings about death. History is a story of good and bad, of incredible potential and incredible failure. It is also a story of death. It seems that humanity’s destiny is to struggle, suffer and eventually die.

Central to the Christian religion is the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who took humanity’s death penalty upon Himself. Jesus also came to supply the missing ingredient to make eternal life possible. On the night before His crucifixion Jesus told His disciples He would send them another “Helper” (John 14:15-18).

The apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth about the missing ingredient that keeps humanity from solving its problems: “. . . We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

“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. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:7-11).

Here Paul writes that mankind knows the things of mankind—reason, creativity, mathematics—because of the “spirit of man.” This spirit is what makes us have similarities to God and gives us the ability to have a relationship with Him. Paul shows that to really understand the spiritual nature of God we must also receive the Spirit of God.

Unlocking the Mind

Hungarian-born Joseph Kovach was only 15 when he was sent to a Russian prison. He spent four years in a bleak and meaningless world. Dr. Kovach later said: “When I look at the months,

the years, they were empty. There’s nothing in terms of thinking, of planning, of remembering the past or planning for the future. It felt almost as though I was hibernating” (*The Mind*, Richard M. Restak, M.D., 1988, p. 271).

Eventually he was moved to a gulag that contained a small library. Reading opened his mind to ideas and creativity. When he was finally released, Dr. Kovach moved to the United States, where he attended the University of Chicago.

In the landmark Public Broadcasting System series *The Mind*, Dr. Kovach concluded: “Ultimately, it is our mental apparatus, our capacity to think, our capacity to deal with ideas, our capacity to find unities, coherences in variations—that’s what makes us human. We have a way of creating worlds for ourselves, in our heads, and sharing those worlds” (Restak, p. 273).



even though we cannot think without them” (pp. 52-53).

What is the human mind?

Brain size and biology can’t explain humanity’s uniqueness. So what creates the differences?

Once again we turn to the Bible. In the creation account we see that God created each animal “according to its kind,” but human beings are in the “image” and “likeness” of God (Genesis 1:24-28).

Creativity, positive emotions, logic, love, abstract thought, communication skills—these are aspects of the mind of the Creator. These are ways in which He

like the mind of the Creator. But, if human beings are like God in so many astonishing ways, why can’t we solve our own problems?

An incomplete creation

Why are human beings capable of writing inspiring music and also able to commit terrible crimes against each other? We research into the intricate human body and create medicines that heal, yet we produce nerve gas that kills. We send a rocket to explore outer space but send a missile hundreds or thousands of miles to destroy a city.

If mankind is made in the image of

What Makes Humans Different?

What makes us human? Consider some of the ways mankind differs from the animal kingdom.

- **Self-consciousness and intelligence.** The human mind gives us capacity for reasoned thought. Instinct isn't the driving force that determines our behavior.

This ability leads us to search for meaning in our individual lives as well as meaning in human life as a whole. Libraries are full of the works of authors searching for purpose in life. Every culture produces its own religions, myths and philosophies. We even have a need to find meaning and purpose in suffering. It isn't enough for people to accept suffering. Even the youngest mind wants to know why the pet dog died or why God allows people to get sick. This leads us to another human trait: the capacity for empathy and sharing another's suffering.

- **The ability to think and plan in time.** It's an amazing aspect of the human mind to think in terms of past, present and future. We have aspirations to achieve; we set goals and organize ourselves relative to time. When was the last time you saw a gorilla or chimp open his calendar and make an appointment?

This leads us to the capacity to conceive of our own death. From the funeral pyres of ancient civilizations to modern funerals, we are ever searching for meaning in death. We are ever searching for a hope in an afterlife. Such concepts are foreign to animals.

- **The ability to create.** Human beings are unlike other creatures in their concepts and development of art, music and literature.

Beavers through instinct build the same types of dams generation after generation. There isn't a raging river

on the globe that mankind cannot dam and use to create electricity. Our creative abilities allow us to adapt to situations and solve new problems.

- **The ability to think abstractly.** An architect can visualize a skyscraper, draw lines on a piece of paper called a blueprint, then pass along the blueprint to a builder who studies the lines and constructs the vision that existed only in the mind of the architect.

Much human learning is through the five senses. Yet the human mind stretches beyond the senses to encompass concepts including infinity, liberty, beauty and humor.

- **The ability to create languages.** Human beings comprehend connections between large numbers of words, including the ability to learn languages, even so-called animal languages.

- **The ability to create economic systems.** Humans have the desire to work and be productive, to barter, exchange and set up economic systems.

- **The capacity for scientific thought.** This includes experimentation and development of theories.

- **The ability to perform mathematics and construct computers.**

- **The desire to find meaning in sex beyond procreation.**

- **The ability to consciously change our environment, personality, character, habits and even physical appearance.**

- **The ability to experience emotions such as happiness, joy, peace and, conversely, depression and despair.**

- **The ability to conceive of morality.** Because human beings can conceive of a choice between inherently right and inherently wrong behavior, we have a capacity for a relationship with God.

The Spirit of God is the missing ingredient in humanity. Without it human beings become both good and evil, lacking the wisdom to always see and choose the good. Death is the natural result. The death process must be reversed and a new nature developed in us. Peter puts it succinctly when he writes that we must become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

God's purpose for you

Humanity's problems—from agriculture to economics to education to government to family relationships to individual emotional health—are ultimately spiritual in nature. Real solutions require not just a change in environment but a *change in people*.

Our first parents chose to participate in both good and evil. Not just Adam and Eve, but every human being who has ever lived—except Jesus Christ—has made the same choice. The result is that every human suffers and dies. Jesus came to pay the death penalty for evil. He also came to make available to people the Spirit of God, the healing, missing ingredient that will change

corrupt human nature into divine nature.

What is your ultimate destiny? What awaits those who are willing to be changed by God's Spirit from corrupted human nature to become partakers of the divine?

Paul explains in Romans 8:14-17: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by [which] we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit [itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

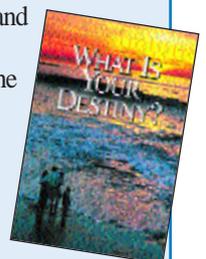
The purpose of humanity is to become the spiritual children of God! The purpose for your life is more than making money, gaining social status and wearing the right clothes. The coupling of the human spirit with the Spirit of God makes possible the development of a new nature and eventually a resurrection to a new life as immortal children of God, joint heirs with Jesus of all things.

This is the ultimate potential of every human being.

But this isn't just a nebulous promise of something in the far-off future. The Creator says you can enjoy a Father-child relationship with Him now. There are real solutions to your problems. There is hope for those willing to discover their true purpose. The first step on that road of discovery is to turn to the Creator and His instruction book. **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

Few people understand the biblical truth about our purpose and incredible potential. To better understand what the Bible reveals about your future, be sure to request your free copy of *What Is Your Destiny?* Contact any of our offices listed on page 2 or visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



How Did Life Begin?

Science has long sought answers to several important questions: What is life? Where did it come from? How did it begin? You won't find the answers by peering into a microscope, telescope or test tube.

by Doug Horchak

Millions of species share this planet. But only man has tried to understand the world and universe around him. Only man continues to search for the origin and meaning of life.

Clearly what sets us apart from all other living creatures on earth are the abilities and power of the human mind. It drives us to want to understand.

Some people's desire to understand life is made evident in religion by cathedrals, temples and churches. Others look to science in their search for meaning and gaze through microscopes, build particle accelerators and send space probes to neighboring planets in search of life and its origins.

When all is said and done, history has shown that, whether in religion or science, man's foundational curiosity has to do with the basics of life. What is life? How did life begin? How did it get here? What is the meaning of life?

Science and creation

When we consider the quest for the understanding of the universe and life within it, one of the great minds of the 20th century, Albert Einstein, comes to the fore. Although he studied physics rather than biology, Einstein was intrigued by the question of human origins and the existence of the universe. He recognized the evidence for an intelligence behind the functioning of the cosmos and the existence of life.

After years of study into the structure and origin of the universe, he acknowledged that "the harmony of natural law" he saw in the laws of physics "reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection" (*The Quotable Einstein*,

Alice Calaprice, editor, 1996, p. 151).

Some would say Albert Einstein, in spite of such a profound admission, was not thinking of a biblical or personal God when he spoke of this superior intelligence. But Einstein never had the opportunity to consider many of the aspects of the growing body of evidence for cosmic fine-tuning and design that cosmologists have discovered in recent decades. Discoveries about the beginnings of the universe point to a beginning, a "first cause," that many cosmologists claim is the most likely explanation for the origin of all things.

The "intelligent design" movement

According to the Darwinist model of evolution, undirected natural causes are responsible for the origin and development of life. Because Darwinist evolution is based solely on random genetic mutation, it precludes the possibility of a supernatural Creator or any guiding intelligence playing a role in life's development.

In spite of the incredible level of acceptance of Darwinism and evolution over the decades, however, there have always been some dissenters who rejected Charles Darwin's claim that undirected natural causes could not only produce life but be responsible for the countless species and forms of life we see today.

Until the mid-1980s these other voices were largely isolated and sporadic. More recently these growing voices—categorized as the "intelligent design" movement—have become more focused in their pointed criticisms of Darwinist evolution. Many attempt to overturn the cultural dominance of Darwinism in both social and academic circles. Without employing the Bible as a scientific text, many intelligent-design scientists and scholars, including authors such as Phillip

Johnson, Michael Behe, Charles Thaxton, Michael Denton and Stephen Meyer, have critiqued Darwinism on scientific and philosophical grounds.

What, then, is intelligent design?

It is a theory of our origins that begins with the observation that intelligent causes can accomplish things that undirected natural causes simply cannot. This is true of the design or development of both inanimate and living things.

Consider the word game of Scrabble as an example. Let's grant that the board and letter pieces exist. Try tossing them into the air and see how they land. You certainly wouldn't expect all the letters to land in place on the board, arranged in correctly spelled words. Yet that, in essence, is what evolutionary theory asks us to believe. To achieve an arrangement of a series of meaningful words requires the assumption of an intelligent cause—in this example the players of the game. An outside cause must sort and place the pieces in a meaningful order.

This concept—that a fundamental distinction exists between undirected natural causes on the one hand and directed or intelligent causes on the other—has served as the premise of proponents of the design concept over the centuries. This fundamental concept has been the basic thesis of the more-recent intelligent-design movement that is being accepted by a small but growing number of scientists, astronomers and cosmologists.

The quest to understand life's origins

Man has long recognized the significant difference between living and nonliving matter. Since the early days of man's realization of the rarity of life, there has never been a shortage of theories to explain the

presence of life on earth. Yet, in spite of centuries of research and hundreds of theories, the origin of life remains one of the greatest challenges to science. As Nobel laureate Max Delbruck put it: “. . . There has been an immense conceptual gap between all present-day life and no life.” The mechanics of the transition from no life to life is “perhaps the fundamental question of biology” (*Mind from Matter?*, 1986, p. 31).

Nevertheless, the immense conceptual gap between life and nonlife is seldom recognized and rarely admitted by many evolutionary theorists. Even Darwin sidestepped the issue, adopting the attitude that “it is mere rubbish thinking at present of the origin of life; one might as well think of the origin of matter” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition, Macropaedia Vol. 10, p. 900, “Life”).

Regardless of evolutionists’ enthusiasm for their theory, they must propose a credible explanation for the spontaneous generation of life from nonliving matter. After all, for the proposed process of evolution to begin, some starting material is necessary—some substance that the random processes of evolution could use to bring about life.

Scientists’ attempt to explain life

This need led to the concept of “chemical evolution” for the scientific explanation of the origin of life. When the present-day theories of chemical evolution (the natural processes on a prebiotic earth that supposedly gave rise to the first living matter) were formulated by Alexander Oparin and J.B.S. Haldane in the 1920s, little was known about the biochemical details and workings of living matter. Thus early theorists took great latitude to propose mechanistic processes by which organisms could come into existence.

Modern theories of chemical evolution

in textbooks suggest that our planet was covered with a warm, slightly alkaline ocean. The theories claim that ultraviolet light from the sun, geothermal energy from volcanoes, shock waves from thunder and cosmic radiation acted on gases of the primitive atmosphere to cause the formation of amino acids, sugars, proteins, nucleic acids and cell membranes. In time these compounds somehow came together into the first protocell, then became more

amino acids without any other characteristics of life. Among other things they are missing the all-important *informational* macromolecules that exist in all forms of life, the molecules that carry the vital information, or software, that defines life, its very nature and its functions.

Some evolutionists have recognized the difficulties of explaining the spontaneous beginning of all of the necessary chemical components to life. They observe the high



The work of the French scientist Louis Pasteur in the 1860s led to the scientific realization that only living organisms could beget other living organisms.

complex until the first true living cell came into existence.

In 1953 the work of Stanley Miller and Nobel prize-winner Harold Urey was hailed as providing the missing link in understanding how the chemical origin of life could have happened. They synthesized amino acids and proteins in what they claimed to be a simulated primitive-earth environment.

Miller’s work served as the sole pillar on which chemical evolutionists built their theories. Today, however, many scientists have concluded that the early atmosphere was vastly different from that of Miller’s experiments and that he was operating under fundamentally wrong assumptions.

Further, in almost five decades little progress has been made to indicate that such simulated primordial oceans or organic-soup experiments yield anything more than a few inanimate proteins or

degree of complexity of present life-forms and admit the seemingly impossible task of offering a plausible explanation. However, since life is present on Earth, and science demands some sort of mechanistic explanation for its existence, they continue to search for theories that will satisfy the scientific method.

The fifth miracle

In 1999 theoretical physicist Paul Davies of Australia’s University of Adelaide wrote *The Fifth Miracle* to address the defi-

nition and origins of life. In his book Professor Davies cited new research that he claimed hints that the beginnings of life may have lain deep within the earth’s hot crust rather than the “warm pond” suggested by Darwin.

The “fifth miracle” of Davies’ title refers to Genesis 1:11: “Let the land produce vegetation” (New International Version), implying the first four biblical miracles are the creation of the universe, light, the firmament and dry land. Even though Davies disavows the notion that life is the result of a miracle from a Creator God, he admits that the actual beginning of life is the most unsolvable mystery of science.

Professor Davies recounts how the work of Louis Pasteur in the 1860s led to the scientific realization that only living organisms could beget other living organisms. Pasteur’s research and findings essentially debunked the concept of

spontaneous generation, that life could arise spontaneously from nonliving matter.

Davies states: "Important though this demonstration was, Pasteur's conclusion came into direct conflict with Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin's celebrated tome *On the Origin of Species*, which had been published just three years before Pasteur's experiments, sought to discredit the need for God to create the species by showing how one species can transmute into another. But Darwin's account left open the problem of how the *first* living thing came to exist" (1999, p. 83, emphasis in original).

So we are left with the fact that, unless life had always existed, at least one species—the first—could not have come into existence by transmutation from another species, but only by spontaneous generation from nonliving matter, a concept that Pasteur's work disproved.

Darwin himself wrote a few years later: "I have met with no evidence that seems in the least trustworthy, in favour of so-called

Spontaneous Generation" (ibid.). Yet, as Davies continues: ". . . In the absence of a miracle, life could have originated *only* by some sort of spontaneous generation. Darwin's theory of evolution and Pasteur's theory that only life begets life cannot both have been completely right" (ibid.).

Man cannot explain it

Davies' book, although citing much of the current research in early-life origins (microbes around volcanic vents in the ocean's floor) and striving to offer explanations of how life came to be, is actually a work filled with admissions that science simply does not have the answer as to *how* life began. "Science rejects true miracles," he writes. "Although biogenesis strikes many as virtually miraculous, the starting point of any scientific investigation must be the assumption that life emerged naturally, via a sequence of normal physical processes. It is very unlikely that we will ever find out exactly what happened. . ." (pp. 81-82).

One of the greatest challenges to scientists, and the focus of much of modern research into life's origins, is the key issue of *information*. For life to exist, information—software, as it were—must have existed in those initial proteins and amino acids.

That is what scientists simply cannot explain and what random selection cannot reproduce. Professor Davies admits: "In a living organism we see the power of software, or information processing, refined to an incredible degree. . . The problem of the origin of life reduces to one of understanding how encoded software emerged spontaneously from hardware. How did it happen? How did nature 'go digital'? . . . It is like trying to explain how a kite can evolve into a radio-controlled aircraft. Can the laws of nature as we presently comprehend them account for such a transition? *I do not believe they can*" (p. 115, emphasis added).

Clearly, the argument that Davies and other representative viewers of modern science seem to be making is that we need to discover and understand some fundamentally new variable that is beyond both chance and law.

In spite of the lack of answers for the origin of life that are forthcoming from the known laws of physics, mathematics and biochemistry, humanity seems bent on considering *only* answers from modern science—answers that do not allow for a Creator. The concept of an intelligent force

operating in the history of life is seen by scientific materialists as some sort of magic on a cosmic scale.

The impact of modern science

Modern science, with all its achievements, continues to evolve its very research methods and definitions. A problem is that "science" has two distinct definitions in our culture.

On the one hand, science refers to a method of investigation involving exacting measurements, repeatable experiments and an open-minded attitude that insists that all claims be carefully tested. But science has also become identified with a philosophy known as materialism or scientific naturalism.

This definition of science insists that nature (the natural, physical cosmos) is all there is, or at least the only thing about which we can have any knowledge. The conclusion follows that nature had to do its own creating, that the means of creation must not have included any role for a Creator. Students are not supposed to approach this philosophy with open-minded skepticism—as they are told to do in any other scientific endeavor—but, ironically enough, to take it on faith (although they would never use that religious-sounding term).

The reason that neo-Darwinism and natural selection in evolution are so blindly accepted in the academic world is that they are the main scientific props for scientific naturalism. Students first are taught that evolution is fact, then they gradually learn more about what that fact means.

The same principle is true in the search for the origin of life. When one assumes that all living things are the product of mindless material forces such as chemical laws, natural selection and random variation, God is excluded from the picture. Humans (along with all life) thus are the accidental product of a purposeless universe.

The only alternative

Many people claim to see a huge difference between the revelations of the Bible and the factual findings of science. That view has caused many simply to disregard the Bible when they consider the quest to understand the origins of life and its meaning.

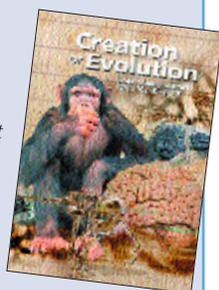
Some 2,000 years ago the apostle Paul addressed the world's alleged wisdom and

Recommended Reading

How did the universe come about? Where and how did life begin? Are we, as the theory of evolution proposes,

merely the result of a series of lucky accidents in a world with no purpose or meaning? Are we nothing more than animals, drawing breath for a short while with no future or ultimate

hope? These are crucial questions indeed, and you need to know the answers! Discover the exciting truth in these two new booklets, *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* Both examine many scientific facts and discoveries that point to one inescapable conclusion: The Creator God, who has a great purpose for you, exists! Request your free copies from any of our offices listed on page 2 or find them on our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



knowledge about such fundamental questions. He stated the obvious: that God has shown proof of Himself to man: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" (Romans 1:19, New Revised Standard Version).

Here Paul acknowledges a truth that mankind has taken thousands of years to discover in secular, scientific research—that realities about God and His part in the creation of life and the universe should be and are indeed evident to those willing to see.

He tells us that, for all of man's efforts to understand how life could have originated, proof of a Creator (an intelligent designer, as many scientists are discovering) has been in front of us all along: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (verse 20).

Yet, as was true in first-century Rome, so it is true today: Mankind simply refuses to acknowledge the need for the Creator. Of the educated elite of his time Paul noted that, "even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind . . ." (verse 28).

Later Paul prophesied that modern man would depart from acknowledging and accepting the role of the Creator God: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, . . . having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1, 5).

While the most fundamental questions of science—what is life and where did it come from—continue to perplex the best minds of secular science, God reveals that He not only has the answers to the initial question of life's origin but the solution to the profound question of life's purpose.

Whether we understand the purpose for human life or not, the Bible promises that "the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 40:5, NIV). In due time this will come to pass. *The Good News* is committed to sharing the revealed understanding to be found within the Bible.

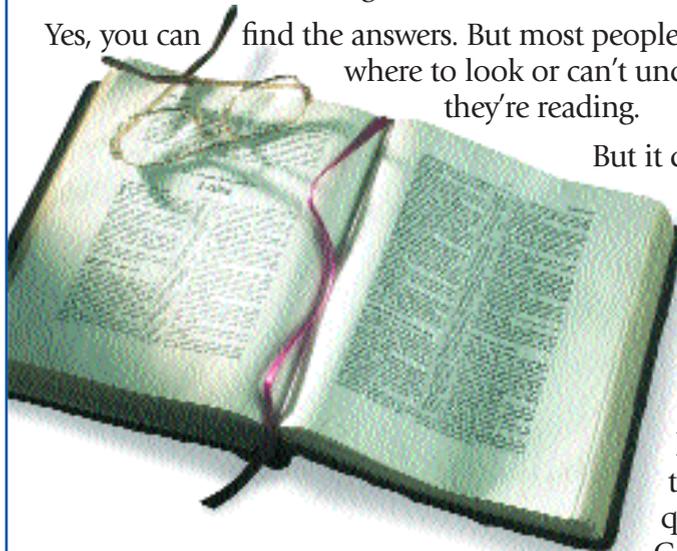
The Bible is silent on the scientific, chemical and biological origins of life. Why? Because it reveals that *all life was created by God*. This answer to the ultimate question of modern science is rejected by most, but the time will come when all will understand! **GN**

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Hope

for Unbelieving Loved Ones

What does one say at the funeral of an atheist—especially when the atheist is one's own father?

by Melvin Rhodes

I unexpectedly spent the first few days of last year in England, in my hometown of Grimsby. I wish I could have made the trip under more pleasant circumstances.

I received word early one Sunday morning that my father had died suddenly, unexpectedly—if you can say that the death of anyone who has reached the age of 75 is unexpected. Several months earlier I had accompanied both my parents on a bus tour of central Europe. Then my father had seemed healthy and alert. I expected him to live for a few more years. But it was not to be.

He woke up one day with a pain in his leg that spread to his abdomen. He lay back down. Within minutes he was gone.

It had been so many years since he had seen a doctor that at first the family physician would not give him a death certificate and wanted to perform a postmortem examination. He changed his mind when he looked at my father's medical history. He had had two heart attacks in 1986. All indications were that this was a third heart attack.

Dad was not a religious man. In fact, he was opposed to all forms of religion, especially the Christian kind. He had been a lifelong committed atheistic communist, dismissing religion as “the opium of the masses,” calling on the words of Karl Marx, founder of modern communism.

The funeral arrangements

Members of my family didn't necessarily

expect me to attend the funeral, since the trip from my Michigan home would be long and expensive and I had spent time with my parents only a few months earlier. But I wanted to go. I needed to go.

I also wanted to officiate at my father's funeral, with my mother's consent. I

a crematorium in England is normally able to allow only about a half hour for each service.

A funeral takes place every 30 minutes in a crematorium. The speed at which families have to say good-bye to their loved ones gives little time for anybody to reflect

on that person's life, much less think about the meaning of death and whatever waits beyond the grave.

My brother and his wife requested to sing “The Lord's My Shepherd” at the funeral. Their daughter, my niece Judith, had written a poem about Granddad that she wanted to read. My mother had asked that the hymn “The King of Love My Shepherd Is” be sung before I spoke. All this was to be a part of our allotted time.

Included also was the walk into the hall as the family slowly followed my father's coffin. So I was left with about 10 minutes for my message. What can you say about your father in 10 minutes?

Except for one of my brothers, no one else in the family, immediate or extended, held any firm religious convictions. None had ever read a Bible. I have four brothers. All of them know that I am a church pastor and are aware of some of my beliefs.

What do you say about an atheist?

I decided to be honest and open about my father, which is the way he always wanted things to be. He felt no shame or embarrassment about not having a



I couldn't bear the thought of someone who didn't know my father talking about Dad going to heaven when my father never believed in the place, nor would he have wanted to be there if he had.

couldn't bear the thought of someone who didn't know my father talking about Dad going to heaven when my father never believed in the place, nor would he have wanted to be there if he had.

When I arrived in Grimsby I called the funeral director to discuss arrangements with him. My mother had chosen to have my father cremated, which is a considerably more common practice in England than in many other countries. However, in contrast with funerals involving burials,

religion. To the contrary, he was proud of the fact. Religion, in his mind, was for weak people who needed a crutch to lean on. So I began by saying that he had no religious beliefs and always ridiculed the idea of going to heaven.

I then went on to show that in this respect he was biblically quite sound—that we don't go to heaven when we die. In that brief 10 minutes I read from Ezekiel 18:4, showing the soul is not immortal; Ecclesiastes 9:5, which reveals that "the dead know not anything"; John 3:13, which tells us that "no man has ascended into heaven"; and Acts 2:34, where Peter told the multitudes that even righteous King David had not ascended into heaven. But then I asked: "Does this mean we will not see Dad again?"

I quoted from 1 Corinthians 15:19-23: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming."

"They that are Christ's" will be resurrected at His return, wrote Paul. But what about everyone else—the vast majority of people who, like my dad, never knew Christ? What about them?

The apostle Peter wrote that God "is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). These are encouraging words for those who lose loved ones who did not believe.

The Bible reveals more than one resurrection

Revelation 20:4-6 puts it all together for us, with a little help from the Old Testament. This passage takes us forward in time to the 1,000-year rule of Christ, the Millennium that follows His return. At the beginning of that time those who are Christ's (1 Corinthians 15:23) are resurrected to rule with Him, to sit on thrones alongside Him (Revelation 20:4).

This resurrection is to eternal life. Verse 6 says: "Blessed and holy is he that has part in the *first* resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (emphasis added throughout).

We learn from this about a *second* death

for some. This means there must be a *second* life, another physical life similar to the first one. If there is not to be a second life, there can be no second death.

Verse 5 helps us understand: "But *the rest of the dead* did not live again until the *thousand years were finished*." Who are the rest of the dead? By definition they

My father felt no shame or embarrassment about not having a religion. To the contrary, he was proud of the fact.

must be those who are not Christ's, those who never knew Jesus or never knew Him well enough to accept Him as their Savior, through whom one can receive eternal life.

Verse 5 refers to the resurrection to eternal life of those in Christ as "the *first* resurrection." This shows, then, that there is a *different*, subsequent resurrection for those who were *not* Christ's. Upon these the second death *does* have power, so it must be a resurrection to a physical existence.

The second resurrection is described in more detail in Ezekiel 37. Here the prophet describes a vision in which he was projected into the future to see a valley full of dry bones, the skeletons of people long dead. Verses 5 and 6 follow: "Thus says the Lord GOD unto these bones: 'Surely I will cause breath to enter into you and you shall live. And I will put sinews [muscles] on you, and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.'"

Could it be any clearer? Here is a prophesied resurrection to a second *physical* existence. If it weren't physical, there would be no need for muscles, skin and breath. Spirit beings given eternal life (those in the first resurrection) don't need these. Only physical human beings do.

Continuing with Ezekiel's vision, we see that once God has reassembled these bones, covered them with muscle and skin and given them life, He promises to give them the opportunity to "know that I am the LORD." This is *their* opportunity for salvation, an opportunity they never had before. This is *my father's* opportunity for eternal life.

A future reunion with loved ones

I intend to be there when he wakes up, 1,000 years after my resurrection to an eternal spirit existence as one of those who is "in Christ," 1,000 years during which those

in the first resurrection have the opportunity to transform this world into a perfect world ruling with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God. A thousand years is not too long to wait, especially when you are a spirit being and a part of God's spiritual family.

As Peter tells us, "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand

years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). Time will simply fly by when we are working with Jesus to prepare the world for the second resurrection—the return to life of literally billions of people who have known neither the true God nor His Son and will learn Their ways for the first time.

What a glorious future we have to look forward to! Trying to encourage people through a time of great persecution, the apostle Paul pointed the Thessalonians to the hope of the resurrection in his first epistle to them. After describing the first resurrection towards the end of chapter 4, the apostle adds in verse 18: "Therefore comfort one another with these words." **GN**

Recommended Reading

What a comfort it is to know the truth of God, that God "is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" and

receive eternal life. His marvelous plan includes the resurrection of those who never knew God in this life, pictured in His Holy Day plan. If you want to know more, be sure to request our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Few understand what the Bible really teaches about life beyond the grave. *What Happens After Death?* will guide you through the Scriptures to discover the encouraging and awe-inspiring truth so few understand. Both booklets are free from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



Have You Performed Your Vow Today?

How does "I do" become "I don't anymore"? Several common misunderstandings contribute to neglect of the marriage vows.

by David Treybig

Standing before a large crowd of friends, another young couple solemnly exchanged wedding vows. The minister asked the groom, "Do you faithfully promise and covenant with God in the presence of these witnesses to take so-and-so to be your lawful wedded wife—in sickness and in health, in good times and in difficult times, for as long as you both shall live?"

He then asked the question of the bride. Both joyfully said, "I do." But would they?

In much of the Western world many couples do not honor their vows by staying together as husband and wife. The tragedy of divorce dismantles a significantly high number of households. The pain of failed marriages is experienced all too often. Although every failed marriage has its own sad tale, several common misunderstandings contribute to the problem.

Marriage more than a physical relationship

Debates over mankind's origin don't help. The common—and erroneous—view that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution explains our existence is confusing and detrimental to marriages. The theory classifies man as part of the animal kingdom. Though placed at the top of a hierarchy of animals because of his superior skills and abilities, such thinking degrades humanity and hides the fact that God created us to be part of *His* Kingdom.

We humans often live up to the expectations of our parents or other influential figures. If we are taught or influenced to believe that we are no more than animals, should we be surprised that many of us act like animals? Although a few species of animals mate for life, most do not remain faithful to one partner throughout their

lifetimes. When the females of the species go into heat, they have sex with any opposite-sex member of their species that happens along. Driven by their sexual urges and not realizing their ultimate potential, some people live their lives in a similarly promiscuous fashion.

Although most people agree that a committed relationship with one person is ideal, television shows and movies continue to glamorize and portray indiscriminate sexual relations and divorce as normal and even desirable. Such entertainment, coupled with disregard for our spiritual potential, takes a toll. Marriages pay a dear price for such confusion and aberrant messages.

From the foundation of the world

Television shows and movies continue to glamorize and portray indiscriminate sexual relations and divorce as normal and even desirable.

(Revelation 13:8), God's plan has been to expand His family (Ephesians 3:14-15). Jesus Christ came to earth to help us attain our spiritual potential—"to become children of God" (John 1:12). Those who respond to this high calling will be invited to the greatest wedding in the history of the universe—"the marriage supper of the Lamb." When Jesus returns He will take as His bride those who have made themselves ready through "righteous acts" (Revelation 19:7-9).

The apostle Paul understood that God instituted marriage between human beings as representative of the great marriage to Christ and a way for us to better understand the loving relationship between Jesus and His devoted followers, who comprise His Church. Paul taught wives to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22)



and husbands to love their wives "just as Christ also loved the church" (verse 25). Concluding his explanation of godly marriage, Paul wrote: "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (verse 32).

Marriage is not simply a physical relationship that exists on a human level. It is a *God-plane* relationship. It was instituted by God to help us prepare for an *eternal* relationship with Him and His Son, Jesus. (If you wish to know more about God's plan for humanity, please request our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.)

Understanding love

Another misunderstanding that threatens marriages relates to *love*. Many people don't know what real love is. Assuming



someone else can do for us. Godly love, the kind of love that Paul and other biblical writers describe, focuses on what we can do for others and how we can make ourselves both more loving and lovable. (If you would like to know more about this kind of love, please request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.)

Marriage and commitment

When we understand that marriage is a *covenant* (Malachi 2:14), that understanding should have a positive impact on the longevity of our relationship with our husband or wife. Though we commonly speak of exchanging wedding vows, many forget the *three-party* covenant involved in marriage. They lose sight that the marriage covenant is a solemn agreement that includes not only one's mate but *God Himself*.

Some people apparently have never understood that love entails considerable patience, bearing with another's human weaknesses and faults.

people apparently have never understood that love entails considerable patience, bearing with another's human weaknesses and faults. Paul's instruction is not meant to condone abusive behaviors or immorality but to teach us that the little irritants of living with another human being—their likes and dislikes and foibles—need to be tolerated.

As Paul wrote: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all

things, *endures all things*. Love never fails" (verses 4 to 8).

The biblical definition of love does not cast humans as victims of a capricious, uncontrollable emotion. Instead, love involves *conscious choice*—and its depth and breadth are demonstrated most fully not in good times, but through difficulty.

Immature love is an emotion that focuses primarily on personal gratification—what

When we make a covenant with God He expects us to honor that commitment—even on the days we wake up feeling no longer "in love." Wise King Solomon explains: "When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God" (Ecclesiastes 5:4-7).

Emphasizing the personal responsibility each of us must take in fulfilling our vows, King David wrote a song that included this phrase: "Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God" (Psalm 56:12). He concluded another psalm: "So I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may daily perform [honor] my vows" (Psalm 61:8).

If you are married, consider these important questions. Do you understand that marriage is a God-plane relationship? Do you realize love is something we *do* rather than only something we feel? Finally, have you performed your vow today? **GN**

that love just mysteriously happens and they have no control over it, some believe divorce is the solution when problems appear. It seems too many forget their vows to stay together in the good times *and the bad*.

Writing to members of the Church in Corinth, the apostle Paul described how true love works. "Love suffers," he explained. And not only does it suffer, it "suffers *long*" (1 Corinthians 13:4). Some



Letters From Our Readers

Comments about *The Good News*

Thank you for sending *The Good News*. Truly speaking, I have changed a lot in my life since I began to read it. Every word I read is as if every fresh current watered my dried mind. I read and meditate. I wish everyone would read *The Good News* to correct themselves and live better. Unfortunately, the first difficulty we meet is language. Not everyone uses English, do they?

N.M.L., Vung Tau, Vietnam

We sympathize with your language plight. Although we also publish The Good News in Spanish, German and Italian, and some booklets and articles in additional languages, we regret we currently have no literature in any Asian tongue. There is some consolation in that English is rapidly becoming a world language and is actively taught in many nations.

I happened to pick up your publication while waiting at the doctor's office this morning. I am compelled to write and tell you how impressed I am on the quality of the writing and the relevancy of the topics, particularly the two I read on the rapture and the Good Friday–Easter Sunday question. These are two subjects that had never been established with any certainty in my soul. Thank you for advancing the truth in the Spirit of Christ.

H.L., Lafayette, Louisiana

What happens after death?

Thank you for sending me the booklet *What Happens After Death?* Your explanation, using scriptures from the Bible, is very effective. It proves that God is truly a loving and merciful spirit being who would never want to see any human being suffer in pain and misery for eternity. Jesus lived His life as an example of love for us to follow. Eternal damnation has no part in His love. This truth gives hope and promise to all.

J.F., Bruce, Wisconsin

The Bible Study Course

I am a new reader of *The Good News* magazine and received your letter inviting me to enroll in your free *Bible Study Course*. At the time your letter reached me I was debating whether to enroll or not.

I was considering that, since I am already a Bible teacher in my local church and run a teaching ministry, such a course would not be really for me. But, upon receipt of your letter and reading it through, it dawned on me that I should not close my mind to the possible new insights on scriptural knowledge and interpretation that your Bible course might contain. Therefore I have decided to enroll.

E.D.E., Cross River State, Nigeria

This is the kind of open-minded approach that was practiced by the Bereans, who are complimented in the book of Acts. They "were more fair-minded . . . in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). We encourage our readers not to simply accept what we or anyone else says about the Bible, but to search the Scriptures to discover and prove the truth for themselves.

Enthusiastic interest in Canada

I can't tell you how much I am enjoying your magazine, and so do the prisoners to whom I am sending the extra copies. I noticed you had a 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, which I would very much like to do myself. The inmates also love courses and especially Christian courses and literature. I would like to have *How to Understand the Bible* and *Is the Bible True?* for myself and for the inmates. I believe that the Canadian office has a Web site. I think I'll log onto it to see if I can get them to send me these materials.

J.R., Ontario

I enjoy the articles in your *Good News* magazine and look forward to the next issue. They give one understanding of God's plan for mankind and world events as they are unfolding in our present time. Please may I have the booklets *Is the Bible True?* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* I would also like to try the *Bible Study Course*.

M.A., New Brunswick

Would you please send me the following: *God's Holy Day Plan*, *The Church Jesus Built* and the *Bible Study Course*.

Your publications are factual, interesting and appropriate in today's society. I thoroughly enjoy and absorb every word. Please accept this donation towards postage and other expenses.

K.B., Ontario

Please see the international addresses on page 2 for how to contact our office in Canada and other offices around the world. All our publications are free on request from any of our offices.

Revolting pictures

I've browsed several issues of *The Good News* magazine, and quite simply I'm less than impressed. Certainly as we need to be aware of the suffering and sorrows of this world we also need to be equally aware of and focused on the actual "good" which is in fact out there and what we can do to greater effect that good. Many of the pictures in your magazine are revolting. Why do you do this to your reading audience?

Does God's Bible have such revolting pictures? No, it does not. Thus I charge and challenge you to begin using a different pictorial approach that would be more appropriate to portraying the message of God. We see the pains and sorrows of this world every day in the print media, TV news, etc. We don't need to see it in church publications such as yours.

D.T., Fresno, California

Although we do not agree with you that our pictures are revolting, we can understand and agree with the intent of your comment. Ideally we wish that we all lived in the biblically promised wonderful world tomorrow right now and were presently enjoying the utopian conditions prophesied in the Bible. Then there would be no need to publish anything but the most positive pictures illustrating the universal good news that will mark Christ's reign in the Kingdom of God.

However, we live in what the Bible calls "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4)—a world mired in satanic deception (Revelation 12:9; 1 John 5:19). As an integral part of our mission to herald the good news of God's coming Kingdom, we are to warn as many as possible of the sure

punishments God's Word tells us will afflict an increasingly disobedient world.

The biblical writers were quite graphic in their descriptions of the suffering that results from sin and rebellion against our Creator (see, for example, Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Even Jesus Himself used two current, widely known tragedies of His day (Luke 13:1-5) to emphasize an aspect of His message: We must repent or perish. In the same vein we try to illustrate our articles that specifically fulfill this role with pictures appropriate to the subject. We try to illustrate the seriousness—and the grave consequences—of sin.

The Bible itself is God's inspired Word to mankind (2 Timothy 3:15-17). He chose not to illustrate it pictorially at all. Some Bible

publishers have added pictures and illustrations, but they carry no divine authority.

Association with our work

Thank you so much for the copy of *The Church Jesus Built* and the magazine *The Good News*. They have helped me to see Christianity in a new light. Though not born a Christian, I have always been inspired by the teachings of Jesus. They have given me strength in times of deep distress. I find your writings quite relevant and of great importance to people who find it hard to come to terms with a kind of Christianity that seems to be going every which way.

Keep up the good work. I would be happy to receive more literature in the

future. If there is any way I could associate with your work, do let me know.

M.M.S., Coimbatore, India

You might want to request our free booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *What Is Your Destiny?* In terms of spreading the good news of the coming Kingdom of God, these two publications best explain the basic purpose of our mission in the world.

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: In the article on abortion in the most recent issue, you quote Psalm 139:13-16 to demonstrate God's concern for the unborn. Do you therefore believe that the statement "In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed" implies that our lives are predetermined by God? If not, why not?

P.A., Toledo, Ohio

A: The Bible simply does not teach that God predetermines our lives, especially in the sense of ultimate salvation. Some hold to this idea, which is called *predestination*. But from the beginning God has always given intelligent beings the faculty of choice. This includes the angels, Adam and Eve, the children of Israel and all people down through history.

Notice that Psalm 139 concludes with a prayer for deliverance from sin and asks God's guidance in learning His everlasting ways. Why would David ask that if he knew his salvation were assured no matter what? This request shows that he clearly didn't see himself as being guaranteed salvation. He knew that he, like all of us, needed God's direction to find the right path.

Earlier God had said of King Saul,

"I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments" (1 Samuel 15:11). If God had predetermined the outcome of Saul's life, He wouldn't have chosen Him to be Israel's first king. A person who once had been humble (verse 17) had turned away from God and chosen the wrong path of life.

Jesus Christ taught the same thing: Individuals are free to choose. Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with several examples that call for defining action on our part (see Matthew 7:13-28). He presents us with two mutually exclusive paths—one broad and easy, the other narrow and difficult.

We must find the right path that leads to salvation—discerning between two kinds of teachers, true ones and false ones. His true servants must hear His words and then do them to obtain salvation. This is also the message of the book of James. Read James 2:8-12.

Of course, it is implicit that we all must be saved by grace through the sacrifice of Christ, but God's forgiveness should always lead to a life of obedience. (For further understanding please request our free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life*

and *You Can Have Living Faith*.)

No doubt God knows far more about us than we can imagine (1 Corinthians 13:12). But the teaching of the Bible is that individuals have freedom of choice and that we will be judged "according to our works" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Acts 17:30-31; Revelation 20:13).

What does Psalm 139:13-16, then, mean? The most recent translation of the Old Testament by the Jewish Publication Society is the Tanakh. It translates this particular passage: "My frame is not concealed from You when I was shaped in a hidden place, knit together in the recesses of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed limbs; they were all recorded in Your book; in due time they were formed, to the very last one of them."

The intent of this passage is to convey God's sovereignty over our lives beginning at conception, not to teach predestination. Our Creator is concerned that we fulfill our great purpose in life—to obtain everlasting life in the Kingdom of God—but we must willingly accept His salvation and practice His way of life. He wants us to choose rightly, but the choice is still ours. To understand more, please request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*

Wise Advice for Wise Decisions

Some of the many decisions we make every day turn out well—others not so well. What can we do to make better decisions?

by Larry Greider

How good are your decision-making skills? Have you ever wondered “What if I had . . . ?”—especially when you didn’t realize the outcome you had expected?

Perhaps you never realized the Bible is a book about making wise decisions. Not only that, it’s filled with examples of good and bad decisions and their outcomes. It shows good decisions based on right principles lead to good results. If you make emotional decisions based on anger, lust and selfishness, you should expect poor results.

The Bible reveals a principle that applies in many areas of life: You reap whatever you sow (Galatians 6:7). Sometimes this direct correlation isn’t obvious, but as we grow older the results of our decisions become clearer.

If you look at the Bible as a textbook on decision-making, you’ll find many helpful hints. If you want to make right choices, you can save yourself a lot of trouble if you take a closer look at the examples recorded for us in God’s Word.

The first child makes a bad decision

The first child, Cain, born to the first parents, made selfish decisions that led to a painful life. Cain’s decisions led to his status as the first murderer; he killed his own brother and was banished from his home. How did Cain’s life turn so tragic?

“. . . He [God] did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? *And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it*’”

(Genesis 4:5-7, emphasis added throughout.)

God told Cain that if he made the right choices He would bless him. Cain’s offering wasn’t pleasing to God because it apparently showed a lack of proper respect.

This short story gives us insights into making right decisions. Learning to put God first orients us away from the egocentric, self-first approach that ultimately leads to frustration and unhappiness. We must learn to rule over the selfish desires common to us all. Cain’s arrogant attitude and jealousy led to a disastrous act on his part—the murder of his innocent brother, Abel, and his own banishment.

“And He [God] said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.’ And Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear!’”(verses 10-13).

Cain chose poorly and reaped a life of curses and misery.

A blundering king

Another illustration of choices and their far-reaching implications is to be found in the life of the first king of Israel, Saul.

Saul was confronted with a dilemma when the warring Philistines threatened the nation of Israel. Saul felt pressured to act. The responsibility of leadership fell heavily on his shoulders. What should he do?

He knew he should consult with the prophet Samuel. But, when Samuel did not arrive after seven days when Saul expected him, Saul made a rash decision. He decided to present an offering to God himself,

something he wasn’t entitled to do.

When Samuel did arrive shortly afterward, he was shocked. He asked Saul, “What have you done?” Saul replied: “When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.’ *Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.*”

Samuel responded: “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue . . . because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:8-14, emphasis added).

Saul forfeited his kingship, lapsed into depression, turned to a fortune-teller for help, attempted murder and in the end took his own life. His decisions cost him dearly.

Are these examples relevant to us today? Perhaps they seem remote and out of context in our modern world. However, we should keep in mind that the *principles* still apply.

Don’t forget that we exist for a purpose. God created us with the potential to one day be a part of His family. Learning to make wise decisions based on God’s instructions is one of the primary lessons everyone needs to learn.

God tells us not to rely on our “own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death,” He tells us (Proverbs 14:12). How, then, do we learn to make wise decisions?

Keys to right decisions

• **Seek wisdom.** Making the right choices is much easier when we seek wisdom. “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom,” wrote King Solomon (Proverbs 4:7). We are overwhelmed with options and opportunities. But core values do not change. Learning to show respect for God as Creator of all things is fundamental to a successful life. Read the wisdom of the book of Proverbs and make it your daily quest to seek understanding and knowledge and apply them to decision-making.

• **Obey God.** After a blessed and comfortable life that enabled Solomon to experiment with all types of pleasures and projects, he summarized what he had learned. His conclusion, based on a lifetime of experimentation, was this: “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13, King James Version). Jesus of Nazareth taught His disciples a similar lesson: “. . . Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Both Jesus Christ and Solomon knew that the physical things that seem the most important to us aren’t all that significant in the long run. In the end, obeying and pleasing God are what matters. That’s the only way we can live a truly rewarding and productive life. We should keep this in mind when we make decisions.

• **Develop healthy relationships.** The Bible is all about relationships. God wants us to be in His family. He wants us to learn to work together and get along with each other in peace and love. Some of the greatest mysteries of life are revealed in learning to work together—which takes patience, respect and hard work to build friendships.

Having friends to encourage and inspire you can be a wonderful aid to helping you make right choices. Often, by talking to a close friend or someone else you respect, you come to see a clearer path.

On the other hand, some relationships can be harmful. “Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Corinthians 15:33). Being around the wrong people will affect your judgment and lead to bad decisions.

• **Structure your life.** Athletes realize that to accomplish great feats they need to practice and train. Some who desire to compete in the Olympic Games or play professional sports dedicate themselves to rigid training schedules. The apostle Paul cited an athlete’s regimen as an analogy to show that a Christian should strive to live a



Having friends to encourage and inspire you can be a wonderful aid in helping you make right choices.

godly life: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

In a world of easy addiction to games, food, alcohol, work or sloth, it makes sense to take a look at how we manage our time. Making right choices involves setting and organizing goals, then carrying them out.

• **Find meaningful work.** “In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty,” wrote Solomon (Proverbs 14:23). God gave us a mind capable of amazing discovery, one that is stimulated by problem-solving and building. Doing something profitable can help you find meaning in life and make the days go by quickly. Some people in the midst

of challenging projects lose track of time and may even forget to eat and sleep.

Remember that God gave man six days to work and one day to rest, which shows our Creator’s intention that we should be productive. Making right choices means we will work toward *productive* goals.

• **Take care of your health.** When you are sick or depressed it is difficult to get excited about much of anything. Staying healthy involves watching your diet, keeping physically fit and maintaining a positive mental outlook. You’ll operate much better when your body and mind are healthy.

Paul asks: “. . . Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . ? Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). God gave each of us an awesome, intricate gift in the form of our body—and He expects us to take care of it.

• **Daily contact with God.** If you grasp the reason for your existence, then you realize God has made you in His image. Naturally He wants us to develop a relationship with Him. This realization helps us know the purpose for our lives.

Wise decisions, when stemming from a desire to live up to our potential, make life less pressured and more rewarding. Paul encourages us to maintain this right perspective so that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through

Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Cause and effect

Centuries ago God inspired Moses to present to the children of Israel the same choices we must face.

Moses directed the congregation of the Israelites to assemble to hear and understand that their choice to obey God—to do His commandments—would lead to life. On the other hand, choosing not to obey would lead to death. “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).

May you choose wisely! **GN**

Evolution or Creation— What's the Truth?

Never has the creation-evolution debate been more heated than it is now. And never has there been such misinformation and confusion on this crucial subject. Have you been confused about the facts? Take this short true-or-false quiz to assess your knowledge.

- 1 Fossil discoveries over the last century have proven Darwin's theory of evolution to be true.
- 2 Most astronomers believe the universe has always existed, so there is no need for a Creator.
- 3 The fossil record shows simple life-forms evolving over time into more-complex creatures.
- 4 All animals and plants and relationships among them can easily be explained by the theory of evolution.
- 5 The Bible plainly teaches that the earth was created about 6,000 years ago, so it is impossible to reconcile the Bible and science.
- 6 The fossil record shows exactly what we should expect if evolution were true: many transitional links between species and the beginnings of features such as new limbs, bones and organs.
- 7 Our beliefs on evolution and God have no bearing on how we live and treat each other.

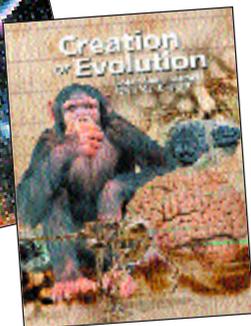
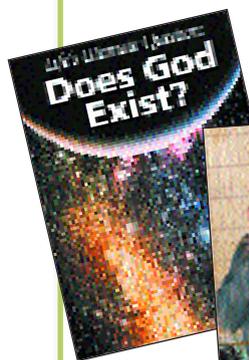
The correct answer to all of the above questions is *false*. If you missed some, don't be surprised. After all, we are routinely led to believe that most or all of these are "facts" proven by science. The truth, however, is far different!

You need to understand the truth about our origins, creation and the theory of evolution. We've prepared these two clear, easy-to-understand booklets—*Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*—to help you learn the truth. You'll discover many fascinating facts difficult to uncover anywhere else!

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