

The Good News

May/June 1999



The Real **STAR WARS**

Discover the surprising truth that will affect your future!

Terror and Tragedy at Columbine High School • Family Finances: A Biblical Guide
What's Behind the Crisis in Kosovo? • Aging Gracefully in an Uncertain World

The Origin of Evil and Suffering

The tragic shooting of 36 students and teachers at Columbine High School last month is a graphic reminder of the struggle between good and evil in the world. Witnesses reported that one of the teenage gunmen asked a trapped student, "Do you believe in God?" The girl answered yes—and he pulled the trigger.

This senseless massacre is an unnerving reminder of the unease we feel deep inside, the unexpressed fear for our personal safety and security and that of our loved ones. We want life to be predictable and safe. We don't want to fall victim to crime, social unrest, terrorism or that greatest of tragedies, war.

Where and how did evil begin?

Jesus Christ spoke of one He called "a murderer from the beginning" and "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44, New Revised Standard Version). Here Jesus identifies the origin of evil and suffering, a being who initiated lying, deceit, hatred and murder—the enemy, the adversary of mankind, the devil (1 Peter 5:8).

We wonder, and rightly so, what happens in the mind of a criminal that transforms him into a sadist, a mass murderer, a savage beast with no compassion. Such a change took place in the mind of the being who became the devil.

Scripture tells us he was once a glorious superangel whose name, Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12), meant "light-bringer." God says of this being: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering . . . you were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you" (Ezekiel 28:12-15).

Lucifer was a special kind of spirit, "the anointed cherub who covers"—an angel whose wings covered the very throne of God Himself (compare Exodus 25:17-20; Hebrews 9:1-9, 23).

But something changed in Lucifer. God told him: "How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:12-14, New International Version).

Lucifer convinced himself he was as good as or better than his Maker. He rebelled against God, determining to exalt himself above "the stars" of God—the other angels (Revelation 1:20). "... You were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you . . . Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour . . ." (Ezekiel 28:16-17, NIV).

Although the Bible introduces Satan when he deceives Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), he has been around far longer. He was the first criminal, a being whose mind and thinking grew corrupt, twisted and perverse. He introduced evil into the world. Humanity has struggled against evil ever since.

This issue's cover story details this struggle and helps you understand the good news about how that struggle will end.

—Scott Ashley

The Good News

May/June 1999 Volume 4, Number 3

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. © 1999 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.

Publisher: United Church of God, an International Association

Managing editor: Scott Ashley

Writer-researchers: Jerold Aust,

Roger Foster, John Ross Schroeder

Copy editor: Dixon Cartwright

Art director: Shaun Venish

Editorial reviewers:

John Bald, Bruce Gore, Paul Kieffer,

Graemme Marshall, Richard Thompson,

David Treybig, Lyle Welty, Dean Wilson

United Church of God Council of Elders:

Gary Antion, Aaron Dean, Robert Dick (chairman),

Roy Holladay, John Jewell, Victor Kubik,

Dennis Luker, Les McCullough (church president),

Burk McNair, Richard Thompson, Leon Walker, Donald Ward

Subscriptions: Call (513) 576-9796 or write to *The Good News*, United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, or contact us at the office nearest you (see international addresses below). *The Good News* is sent free to all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, an International Association, and others. Donations are gratefully accepted and are tax-deductible in the United States. Those who choose to voluntarily support this worldwide work are welcomed as coworkers in this effort to proclaim the true gospel to all nations.

Personal contact: The United Church of God has more than 350 congregations and 400 ministers in the United States and many other countries. To contact a minister, or to find locations and times of services nearest you, write or call the addresses listed or dial our fax information service at (513) 576-9794. You can access our World Wide Web site on the Internet at www.ucg.org.

Scriptural references in *The Good News* are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

International addresses:

Australia: United Church of God—Australia

GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia

Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202

Fax: 07 55 202 122

Web site address: www.ucg-aus.org.au E-mail: ucg@b022.aone.net.au

Bahamas: United Church of God

P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas

Phone: (242) 324-3169 Fax: (242) 364-5566

British Isles: United Church of God

P.O. Box 4052, Milton Keynes, Bucks, MK13 7ZE, England

Phone: 0181-386-8467 Fax: 01257-453978

Canada: United Church of God—Canada

Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada

Phone: (416) 231-9379, (800) 338-7779

Fax: (416) 231-8238 Web site address: www.ucg.ca

French-speaking areas: United Church of God

P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

Phone: (513) 576-9796

Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten

Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany

Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unità

Casella Postale 187, 24100 Bergamo, Italy.

Phone: 0039-035583474 Fax: 0039-035582140

Web site address: www.labuonanotizia.org

New Zealand: United Church of God

P.O. Box 22, Auckland 1015, New Zealand

Phone: Toll free 0508-463-763

South Africa: United Church of God

P.O. Box 4345, 2125 Randburg, South Africa

Phone: 011 886-4650 Fax: 011 886-7610

Web site address: www.ucg.org.za

Spanish-speaking areas: United Church of God

P.O. Box 458, Big Sandy, TX 75755, U.S.A.

Phone: (903) 636-4928

Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 1487140.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to

The Good News, Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

Table of Contents

Cover Feature

The Real Star Wars

The Star Wars movies have been among the most popular and successful in motion-picture history. Their powerful themes of the struggle between good and evil have intrigued viewers of all ages. But those themes aren't just a movie maker's fantasy. They've been around for thousands of years. Discover a surprising truth that will affect your future! 4



The timeless truth behind a popular movie series 4

A Violent Century Begins and Ends in the Balkans

World War I began with an assassination by a Serb nationalist in the Balkans. Now the Balkans are again in the headlines. Why is this region such a perpetual trouble spot? And what's behind the current crisis there? 9



Terror and Tragedy at Columbine High School

A bloody rampage by a pair of teenage gunmen leaves 15 dead and 23 wounded in a hail of gunfire and homemade bombs. The world watches as a quiet Denver suburb grieves for its lost children. Why doesn't a loving God stop such tragedies? . . . 12

Aging Gracefully in an Uncertain World

As the number of elderly grows around the world, societies examine their role and contributions. Growing old should be a positive and valuable experience. What can we do to make the sunset years a more positive and productive time? . . . 17

King Hussein's Uncertain Legacy

The Middle East has a long history of one-man rule, whether by colonels or kings. But what happens when a national leader passes from the scene? How will the death of Jordan's popular monarch, King Hussein, impact its future? . . . 22

A deadly shooting prompts vital questions 12

Family Finances: a Biblical Guide

The Bible is a book about all major aspects of life. Our personal and family finances are a major aspect of life. Discover what the Bible advises in this overview of biblical principles and statements about money and possessions. . . . 24

The Intertestamental Period: Daniel's Prophecies Come to Pass

As the period covered by the Old Testament drew to a close, Daniel wrote a series of prophecies about events that would soon transform the Middle East. Read how his astounding prophecies were fulfilled in remarkable detail. . . 26



A surprising source of sound financial advice 20

Regular Features

World News and Trends *An Overview of Conditions Around the World 20*

Profiles of Faith *Esther: A Queen Offers Her Life for Her People 28*

The *Real* S

TAR WARS

*Discover a surprising truth behind the movie series—
a truth that will affect your future!*

Good vs. evil. Light vs. darkness. A struggle for control of the universe. A powerful, personal force that helps humans resist and overcome the menacing influence of the dark side.

These intriguing themes have propelled the *Star Wars* movie series to a position among the most popular and financially successful films in motion-picture history. Their dramatic stories strike a powerful chord with moviegoers of all ages.

Amazingly, a surprising amount of truth lies behind many of *Star Wars*' powerful stories. Some of the series' fascinating underlying themes not only represent the truth, but they have exerted—and continue to exert—a profound impact on history.

The central conflict of the series—the ascendancy of a seemingly invincible evil force and the resulting struggle to overthrow that power—isn't a mere science-fiction fantasy. The story has been around for thousands of years—in the pages of your Bible.

***Star Wars*' factual foundation**

Consider for a moment: What is the theme of the *Star Wars* movie series? It chronicles the valiant struggle of a tiny group against overwhelming odds. A massive evil empire dominates the universe, and it in turn is controlled by a few sinister figures who don't hesitate to use their

continue their courageous and determined battle against evil.

In many ways their story is the story of mankind. History is largely a chronicle of despots and oppressors whose vain ambition has brought unspeakable suffering to others. Such evil rulers and empires have ultimately fallen, only at times to be replaced by equal if not greater evil. The carnage of World War I, for example, led directly to the even greater devastation of World War II and its resulting death camps and Stalinist purges and the world's ongoing nightmare of potential nuclear annihilation.

But where did such evil begin in history? How and when did it originate? Why, in spite of several thousand years of struggles, have we not been able to forge a lasting peace with our fellowman?

Why have such enormous—and enormously costly—worldwide efforts such as the League of Nations (created from the rubble of World War I) and the United Nations (formed from the devastation of World War II) failed to bring peace and security? Why do despots and oppressors rise again and again to threaten our peace and safety?

The answer, curiously enough, lies in the themes behind the *Star Wars* series, and it is expressly revealed within the pages of your Bible.

The facts behind the fantasy

Genesis, in the Greek language, means “origin.” In the Bible the book of Genesis describes the origins of many things. It begins with the origin of the heavens and the earth, every living plant and animal, and the first man and woman. It describes the peaceful paradise Adam and Eve shared with each other and their Creator.

But something went wrong. Another being entered the idyllic picture, and the course of history was forever changed. You might say that the evil empire had begun.

Influenced by this being, Adam and Eve rejected the instruction of their Creator. They chose to take of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Under the sway of the evil being, they willingly fell prey to the dark side. Rejecting God's revelation, they chose to follow what they perceived to be a better way—that they

The central conflict of the series—the ascendancy of a seemingly invincible evil force and the resulting struggle to overthrow that power, isn't a mere science-fiction fantasy. The story has been around for thousands of years—in the pages of your Bible.

by **Scott Ashley**

supernatural powers to ruthlessly crush any opposition to their rule. These leaders are dominated by “the dark side,” an evil force that holds them tightly in its grip.

Combating the mighty empire are a handful of men and women who join forces in a heroic struggle to overthrow their cunning and powerful enemy. They, too, utilize a supernatural power, “The Force,” which empowers them to

could, through their own efforts, experimentation and reasoning, start their own quest to find the best way for people to live.

It didn't take long for the fruit of their fateful choice to become evident. They were expelled from the paradise God had provided. Tragedy struck among their own children. "... And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him" (Genesis 4:8). Of the first brothers, one became a murderer and the other his victim. Man's pattern of settling his differences through violence was established early in history.

Over several generations the problems grew worse. By Noah's time "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and . . . every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

The battle the dark forces fought for the control of people's minds looked ominous. The results of men and women giving in to their darker impulses became evident: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence . . . ; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (verses 11-12). Humanity had grown so degenerate and barbaric that God determined to start the human race all over again

through Noah and his immediate family.

What else is new?

In our world things haven't changed all that much from Noah's time. We still see a world filled with brutality, bloodshed and suffering. Hanging over our heads is the threat of annihilation from nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, increasing natural disasters, environmental destruction and terrifying diseases.

The world is far removed from the paradise Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden before Satan and sin entered the picture. For much of mankind the world is a frightening, deadly, depressing place. The evening news assaults our senses with painful images of starvation, refugee camps, violence and destruction.

The apostle Paul wrote that we live not in a time of peace and plenty, but what he called "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). And the apostle John told us that "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). Both understood that humanity is dominated by an evil empire.

But how did such evil and suffering begin? Let's go far back in time to the beginnings of our problems.

Why do evil and suffering exist?

Many people find it difficult to believe in God, or at least that He is interested and active in human affairs. After all, they wonder, how could a loving and merciful God allow suffering to exist?

What they don't realize is that *this is not God's world*. God gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to make a utopian world for themselves and their offspring. But they refused. They refused to follow God's instruction. Since our first parents—and all their descendants since—persisted in rejecting God's guidance, God has allowed mankind to form his own societies, governments and civilizations apart from Him.

God hasn't cut Himself off from mankind. We chose to cut ourselves off from Him. Through the prophet Isaiah He tells us: "The LORD's arm is not too short to save nor his ear too dull to hear; rather it is your iniquities that raise a barrier between you and your God; it is your sins that veil his face, so that he does not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2, Revised English Bible).

God has always wanted a loving relationship with humanity. He has offered us a way of life that would bring peace and prosperity, that would eliminate sorrow and suffering.

The Dark Side: Its Effect on Humanity

Humanity has had thousands of years to build societies and civilizations and experiment with governments, administrations and lifestyles. So why haven't we been able to solve our problems? Why does suffering still exist?

We have not succeeded in finding solutions to our pervasive problems because, in the final analysis, *humanity simply does not know how to live*. Solomon, king of ancient Israel, put it bluntly: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Sadly, mankind has proved the truth of those words for generations. Under man's rule the world has never seen a time that was free of war, strife, turmoil and suffering. Conditions are so grave that we have the ability to erase human life from earth many times over.

Why should this be?

Our world is threatened by overwhelming problems because *we have rejected God*. God Himself made this clear over the centuries through his prophets. Under God's inspiration, King David wrote of mankind: "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one" (Psalm 14:1-3).

The prophet Jeremiah also noted that people are largely blinded by the deceit of their own evil motives and intents. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9, New International Version).

Left to ourselves, we would eventually annihilate life from earth. Does this sound shocking? It is. But Jesus Christ Himself said it is true. Describing the time immediately before His return to earth, He said: "It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive*; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:21-212, Revised English Bible, emphasis added).

Jesus Christ tells us He must intervene to save us *from ourselves*. The danger from the dark side of human thoughts and actions is real indeed.

None of us is immune to this dark side of human nature. Even the apostle Paul, years after his conversion to Christianity, struggled against such downward pulls. Notice how he describes this battle within himself:

"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . It is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me . . . I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:15-24, New Revised Standard Version).

For most of the world, deliverance from the dark side of human nature will come only when Jesus Christ returns to save us from ourselves. But there is a way for you to overcome those dark downward pulls now. Be sure to read "May the Force—God's Power—Be With You" on page 7.

May the Force—God's Power—Be With You

In the *Star Wars* series, some of the movies' heroes draw on a supernatural power called The Force, which enables them to perform feats that normally would be impossible. Did you know that an analogous power really exists?

God's Word describes a supernatural power, a spiritual force, that He makes available to His believing and obedient servants. It enables His true followers to resist the evil dark side, the pulls of our selfish, self-serving nature. This real force is *God's Spirit*.

Jesus Christ, in His last recorded words to His disciples, told them they could have access to this power: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Directly connected with that promised power would be the apostles' work of witnessing of Him, starting in Jerusalem, then spreading throughout the region and ultimately to the ends of the earth. The book of Acts records the early years of that effort, including the apostles' dramatic miracles.

Christ made it clear that the Holy Spirit is connected with power. The Greek word translated "power" is *dunamis*. It is translated "power," "strength," "mighty work," "miracle," "might," "virtue" and "mighty." It is the same Greek root from which we get modern English words such as *dynamic*, *dynamo* and *dynamite*—all terms connoting great power, force and energy.

Writing to his fellow elder Timothy, Paul describes the effect God's Spirit should have in the lives of Christ's true followers: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power [*dunamis*] and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

God's Spirit is a source of power—of activity, energy, dynamism—and a Spirit of deep godly love and a sound, rational, self-controlled mind. It removes the spiritual blindness that shackles and enslaves our minds.

That Spirit enables us to be like Jesus Christ, to have the same power available to us that Jesus had in Him. Luke 4:14-15 describes that power at work in His ministry: "Then Jesus returned in the power [*dunamis*] of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all."

In Acts 10:38 Peter sums up Jesus Christ's ministry, showing that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power [*dunamis*], who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

We see here that God's Spirit and power from God are synonymous. That holy power enabled Christ to perform His mighty miracles of doing good and healing during His earthly ministry. That Spirit is the very presence of God's power actively working in His servants (Ephesians 2:22; Philippians 2:13). God's Spirit plays a vital role in our lives, allowing a miraculous transformation to take place.

God tells us that we, too, can receive the power of this unseen force. And He tells us how: "Repent, and . . . be baptized . . . ; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

God "now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30) so we can receive that Spirit—God's power and force at work in our lives. To learn more, please request your free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*.

When God revealed this way of life to the ancient Israelites, He pleaded with them to choose that way: ". . . I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19, emphasis added throughout).

At the same time, God lamented that people would most likely make a different choice: "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deuteronomy 5:29).

God well understood that the natural human inclination isn't to choose a relationship with Him that would lead to life, but to choose our own way that leads to death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

The prophet Isaiah continues with a description of where our natural way of thinking and acting leads: "Your hands are stained with blood and your fingers with crime; your lips speak lies and your tongues utter injustice . . . All rely on empty words, they tell lies, they conceive mischief and bring forth wickedness . . . Their works breed wickedness and their hands are full of acts of violence.

"They rush headlong into crime in furious haste to shed innocent blood; their schemes are harmful and leave a trail of havoc and ruin. They are strangers to the path of peace, no justice guides their steps; all the ways they choose are crooked; no one who walks in them feels safe" (Isaiah 59:3-8, REB).

Adam and Eve felt the heartbreak caused by their fateful choice when their firstborn son, Cain, murdered their second son, Abel. Mankind set out on a tortuous path that within a few generations led to God's decision

History is largely a chronicle of despots and oppressors whose vain ambition has brought unspeakable suffering to others.

to destroy almost all human life in a great flood. We have followed that way ever since.

Ruler of an evil empire

The Bible has more to tell us about the being who influenced the first human beings to set off on a path that has brought us to untold misery.

Appearing in the form of a serpent, this being, referred to in the Scriptures as Satan the devil (Revelation 12:9), deceived the first humans. He lied to Adam and Eve and convinced them that God was the real liar, that He was withholding something good from them (Genesis 3:1-5).

Satan has lied to mankind ever since. Jesus Christ identified him as the originator of lying and "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). His lies to Adam and Eve cost them their lives. His lies have been responsible for the losing of billions of lives since then.

How great is his corrupting influence? God's Word tells us the devil "deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). His influence is so pervasive that "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). He has blinded the world to the truth of God. His deception is so widespread and so prevalent that earth's inhabitants have no idea they are deceived.

The Bible chillingly warns us that Satan is the true "god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is the world's real ruler, the despot who exercises control over the world around us.

Make no mistake: The evil empire of the *Star Wars* movies isn't a fantasy. It's real. *And we live in it.*

Not only that, but it's going to get worse—*much worse.*

Where is this world headed?

The apostle Paul describes what happens when people reject God and His way of life:

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only

empire of the god of this age will fall, just like every other empire, kingdom and government that mankind has tried since the dawn of time.

The fall of this empire, however, will be different. Armies, weapons and tactics can’t dislodge it. Actually, it is much too powerful to be conquered by human effort. This great evil force can be overthrown only by an even greater force: the returning Jesus Christ.

Notice the Bible’s description of His triumphant return to overthrow Satan’s rule: “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head

Book [of Life]. Of those who are sleeping in the Land of the Dust, many will awaken [in the resurrection]. Those who are wise will shine as brightly as the expanse of the heavens, and those who have instructed many in righteousness, [will shine] as bright as stars for all eternity” (Daniel 12:1-3, New Jerusalem Bible).

Paul describes the awesome resurrection to eternal life: “The sun has a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour, and the stars yet another; and one star differs from another in brightness. So it is with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown as a perishable thing is raised imperishable . . . It is raised in glory; . . . sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body . . .”

“Listen! I will unfold a mystery: we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet-call. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise imperishable, and we shall be changed . . . [When] our mortality has been clothed with immortality, then the saying of scripture will come true: ‘Death is swallowed up; victory is won!’” (1 Corinthians 15:41-44, 51-54, REB).

An incomprehensible future awaits the victors in the real star wars—shining as bright as stars for all eternity! **GN**

Make no mistake: The evil empire of the Star Wars movies isn’t a fantasy. It’s real. And we live in it. Not only that, but it’s going to get worse—much worse.

do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:28-32).

We see the inevitable results all around us written in a chronicle of suffering.

Jesus Christ warned us that, shortly before He returns, the world will reap the bitter harvest mankind has sown over the centuries. “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21).

What will be the nature of these terrifying times? “. . . You will hear of wars and rumors of wars . . . Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the *beginning* of sorrows” (verses 6-8).

People’s attitudes will play a major role in setting the stage for this time of unparalleled tumult and trouble. “Remember, the final age of this world is to be a time of turmoil! People will love nothing but self and money; they will be boastful, arrogant and abusive; disobedient to parents, devoid of gratitude, piety, and natural affection; they will be implacable in their hatreds, scandal-mongers, uncontrolled and violent, hostile to all goodness, perfidious, foolhardy, swollen with self-importance. They will love their pleasures more than their God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4, REB).

Victory over an evil empire

But all hope is not lost. Eventually the

were many crowns . . . He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.”

“And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations . . . And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:11-16).

At His return, Jesus will establish the eternal Kingdom of God on earth: “. . . There were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15).

Satan the devil, the source of so much evil and suffering, will see his empire shattered. He will be bound “so that he should deceive the nations no more” (Revelation 20:1-3). God will destroy the sinister figures and forces that have aided Satan in his rule over the world (Revelation 19:19-21).

A hero’s reward

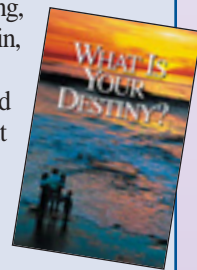
As for the handful of heroes who over the centuries have taken up a valiant struggle against those forces of darkness, prophecy reveals a reward greater than anything imagined by any movie screenwriter, director or producer.

What is that reward? “When that time comes, your own people will be spared—all those whose names are found written in the

RECOMMENDED READING

This article has only briefly touched on the major themes of the Bible. God’s Word has much more to say on Satan’s role as a cause of suffering, on our struggle against sin, on the incredible future God has set before us and how events will work out as foretold in prophecy.

We publish many booklets that will help you better understand these biblical truths. Please write or call for your free copies of *What Is Your Destiny?*, *The Road to Eternal Life*, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, *What Happens After Death?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. All are free for the asking when you contact our office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2. They are also available via our Web site’s literature library at www.ucg.org.



A Violent Century Begins and Ends in the Balkans

The defining event that opened this century was World War I, which started in the Balkans. As the century draws to a close, the Balkans remain a troublesome sore spot.

by Melvin Rhodes

A major conflict of the early 20th century began with an assassination by a Serbian nationalist in the Balkans. This century is concluding with a devastating war in the same region. But ethnic groups all over the globe are fighting each other, not just in the Balkans. These events say a great deal about the 20th century and bode ill for the 21st.

It's no wonder that schoolchildren get confused. In two world wars the United States and Britain supported the Serbs, with the help of the Russians and the French, against Germany and other powers. This time, although the Russians still support Serbia, the NATO allies are bombing key Serbian targets in an attempt to resolve the ethnic-religious conflict in Kosovo.

Now Germany stands alongside America, Britain and France in opposition to Serbia. The Chinese have switched sides, from support of Albania against Yugoslavia 10 years ago to support of Serbia (the dominant power in Yugoslavia).

Ten years ago it was almost impossible for Americans or Britons to visit Albania, although neighboring Yugoslavia benefited from a thriving tourist trade that attracted Western visitors. Today the United States and Britain support the Albanians against the Yugoslavs.

In the 1990s, in less than one decade, the United States and its Western allies have gone from opposing Russia under communism to supporting Russia as it tried democracy to squabbling with Russia over Serbia and other issues. We are talking here about only a part of Europe. Similar contradictions and confusion reign in other parts of the world.

Some of the countries involved in these



Another war broke out in the Balkans when Serbian forces began driving ethnic Albanians out of the Yugoslavian province of Kosovo. Most refugees fled with only the few possessions they could carry.



situations have changed their names, which adds to the confusion.

Can we make sense of what's taking place in the Balkans?

Recent history

These perplexing developments are directly the result of the collapse of communism. Most of Eastern Europe was communist under the control of the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia, with no border in common with the Soviet Union, could and did assert its independence and pursued a more liberal line than other communist nations.

President Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980) was the founder of the postwar communist nation of Yugoslavia and managed to hold the various ethnic groups in the country together until his death.

Less than 10 years later revolution fired Eastern Europe, sweeping communists from power or forcing them to alter their philosophies to stay in power. Formerly communist nations liberalized, giving the people a taste of freedom. That taste only encouraged demands for greater freedom, particularly as the patchwork quilt of ethnic groups began disintegrating at the seams.

The Croats were the first to secede from the Yugoslav federation and the Germans the first to recognize them. In breaking ranks with their Western allies, the government in Bonn influenced other Western countries to recognize Croatia. War ensued between the Catholic Croats and the Orthodox Serbs. As the Muslim Bosnians demanded their independence as well, the war spread. The Albanians in Kosovo also demanded freedom, and again the conflict spread. Like race, religion plays a major role in this part of the world.

But we can't blame all these difficulties on the fall of communism. The fact is that tensions between the ethnic groups that make up the Balkans go back for hundreds of years.

Put on hold by centuries of rule under the Ottoman Turks and the Catholic Hapsburgs of Austria, both empires began collapsing in the 19th century. Balkan tensions resurfaced as the demands for freedom for each ethnic group intensified. Far from being a melting pot or even a salad bowl, the divided peoples of the area had mingled for years under their foreign rulers. Now, suddenly, they found

they could no longer live alongside each another in peace since no clear-cut borders separated the groups.

After World War I the major powers created the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which attempted to combine these different peoples in one nation. The fragile arrangement didn't last long. When World War II started, Yugoslavia was invaded by Germany and came under the rule of the Third Reich (the Nazi regime of 1933-1945). That is when Tito, born in Croatia and a leader in the resistance movement that was trying to restore independence, entered the picture. Tito won power when the Germans were defeated and then ruled the country with a firm but fairly benevolent hand until his death in 1980. He held together the various nationalities.

Less than 10 years later communist regimes were falling throughout Eastern Europe. The fall of totalitarianism throughout the region encouraged the rise of nationalist sentiment as each ethnic group reached for freedom. Finally the Soviet Union fell apart into its many constituent nations. Yugoslavia began to suffer the same fate. Bitter wars were fought over Croatia and Bosnia. Then came Kosovo and the current crisis.

Kosovo's troubled history

A few months ago Kosovo's population was 90 percent Albanian. The ruling Serbs constituted only 10 percent of the population. To people in the Western democracies, it made good sense to give the ethnic Albanians what they wanted: independence in their own nation.

But the land holds great historical importance to the Serbs. For 200 years leading up to 1389, Serbia was a powerful kingdom in the Balkans, its might and unity largely depending—as now—on the personality of its leader. The territory of its last great king, Stefan Dushan, who ruled from 1331, comprised much of the Balkans. Before he died, in 1355, this greatest of Serbia's czars was able to describe himself as “emperor of the Serbs and Greeks, Bulgars and Albanians,” also ruling over what are now Bosnia and Macedonia.

As with President Tito 600 years later, not long after his death the kingdom started to fall apart, dividing into small principalities and warring clans. The area was ripe for invasion and foreign domination and began losing territory to the expanding Islamic empire of the Ottoman Turks. On June 15,

1389, the Ottoman sultan Murad I defeated the Serbian forces at the Battle of Kosovo. Centuries of foreign domination began. Kosovo to this day holds a special place in the hearts of Serbians.

Another complicating factor confuses the mix. At the end of World War II half the people living in Kosovo were Serbs and the other half Albanians. The birth rate of the latter has been significantly higher during the last 50 years with the result that only 10 percent of the people in Kosovo were Serbs when the current conflict started.

To understand the Serbs' perspective, consider how Americans would feel if Hispanics, outnumbering Anglos in California, decided to secede from the United States and join Mexico. Put that way, we can better understand the dilemma in the Balkans.

The wider significance

But the situation is even more complicated, with repercussions that may echo for years. In fact, as in 1914, events in the area may permanently change the world. From all accounts, what happened after NATO forces started bombing Serbia was unexpected. Certainly America and its allies were unprepared for the eviction of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians from their homes and the killings of countless others. Clearly Serbia is determined to rid Kosovo of its Albanian population,

leaving the West to pick up the tab.

At the time of this writing, Serbia appears to be trying to widen the conflict. The massive influx of Albanian refugees into neighboring Macedonia appears to be intended to provoke Macedonia's Serbs into action against the encroaching Albanians. The country of Albania itself, the poorest nation in Europe, has received so many refugees it is threatened with total collapse. Meanwhile, in Montenegro, a part of the Yugoslav federation along with Serbia, the arrival of tens of thousands of Albanian refugees has had the effect of destabilizing its moderate government in favor of one more sympathetic to Serbia.

Faced with a humanitarian disaster of horrendous proportions, Western governments offered to take in Albanian refugees “temporarily,” flying them to countries far from the area of conflict. This policy could play into the hands of the Serbs, who will say that the Albanians have found new homes. Even if NATO succeeds in its efforts to defeat the Serbs and supervises the return of the ethnic Albanians to their former homes, so many men have been massacred it is questionable whether the country could again be a viable entity. It certainly could not be a threat to Serbia again for many years to come.

The West failed to realize the determination and depth of feeling among the Serbs for keeping Kosovo in the Yugoslav federation.



The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe has led to new alliances, new borders and new names among the Balkan and Eastern European states. The Yugoslavian province of Kosovo is the latest flash point and the first to involve NATO military action.



The Balkans have a long history of ethnic and religious conflict leading up to the current crisis in Kosovo, where Serbian forces have driven thousands of ethnic Albanians from their homes. Most are fleeing to neighboring Macedonia and Albania.

Will to win lacking

As the conflict ensued, further problems grew apparent. Most Western military experts concluded that only ground troops would be able stop the expulsion of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. Yet President Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair both said at the start of the military operation against Serbia that there would be no use of ground troops.

This sent a clear signal to Serbia that the West was halfhearted in its opposition to Serbian objectives. More than that, it sent a clear message to the rest of the world that the two English-speaking powers that have fought repeatedly this century to preserve freedom from tyranny are now reluctant to do so if there is likelihood of many casualties.

This is not something new. The Persian Gulf War was fought with minimal casualties. After bombing raids against Iraq, ground troops were sent in. Iraq's soldiers had little heart to fight and were soon defeated. Allied troops could have gone deeper into Iraq in an attempt to replace the Saddam Hussein dictatorship with a more moderate government, but there was a reluctance then to do so out of concern over the possibility of massive numbers of casualties.

Western nations have also made significant cutbacks in their armed forces as a result of the end of the Cold War and the perception that serious security threats had ended. Added to this is another problem: the shortage of people seeking military careers in an all-volunteer military.

Not one major conflict since World War II has resulted in a clear victory for the United States or Great Britain. Wars have ended in stalemates with much left unresolved. Britain's war with Argentina over the Falklands almost 20 years ago and the 1991

Persian Gulf conflict are two examples. Both wars saw a clear military victory, but the disputes have continued.

We also shouldn't forget that most wars have unintended and unexpected long-term consequences.

Troubling implications

If the 19 nations of NATO win the conflict with Serbia, it is likely that continental Europeans will begin to play a bigger role in future conflicts. For a time public opinion in Europe favored the use of ground troops, even though such was not the case in the United States. But the White House, fearful of another Vietnam, openly expressed its reservations about sending ground troops into the conflict, sending a message that America is still partially paralyzed by traumatic memories of Vietnam.

Of course, one may take the view that, if NATO had not intervened, the Western alliance would have been damaged and its political leaders discredited.

How are we to evaluate these matters? To gain a greater understanding of the way the world works and the role of national groups within it, there is only one basic source that we can all consult. The Bible is not a book only about personal relationships; it also concerns itself with the behavior of nations and ethnic groups. Moses wrote about this: "When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples . . ." (Deuteronomy 32:8).

Later the apostle Paul spoke of God, who "made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings" (Acts 17:26). But historically nations have not been satisfied to stay within their own territory, taking

land belonging to other countries and peoples and setting up the ethnic disputes we see today.

In the book of Deuteronomy we find a list of blessings and cursings that inevitably will come to a nation as a direct result of its commitment—or lack thereof—to God and His laws. Although originally addressed to the nation of Israel, in principle the message applies across the board to all nations—particularly those who profess belief in the God of Israel.

Note what God said of the nation that honors and obeys God: "... If you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, . . . the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth . . . The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways" (Deuteronomy 28:1, 7).

Consider also His warning to those who disobey: "... If you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, . . . all these curses will come upon you and overtake you . . . The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies . . ." (verses 15, 25).

Is it mere coincidence that since World War II, as the American and British people and others of the same culture and mind-set have turned increasingly from God, the will and ability to wage and decisively win wars have been lacking? Remember Korea and Vietnam? "But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments . . . I will break the pride of your power . . ." (Leviticus 26:14, 19).

This is the situation we find ourselves in at the dawn of the new millennium. **GN**

Terror and Tragedy At Columbine High School

"I live in Denver, and I would love to kill almost all of its residents. You all better hide in your houses because I'm coming for everyone and I will shoot to kill and I will kill everything."—Internet message attributed to Eric Harris

by Scott Ashley

"Turn on the TV," came my wife's voice over the phone. "There's been a shooting at one of the high schools near here." Her anxiety came through loud and clear in her voice.

All the Denver stations were broadcasting reports from near Columbine High School in a Denver suburb. Over the following hours a parade of surreal images painted a ghastly and horrifying story: Two students, aged 17 and 18, brought an arsenal of four guns and dozens of homemade bombs to the school at lunchtime, then indiscriminately opened

fire on students and faculty members who crossed their paths.

A final tally wasn't available until the next day. The gunmen had killed 12 of their fellow students and a teacher-coach and wounded 23 others before taking their own lives. Authorities hadn't been able to release a definite count of casualties—initial estimates ranged as high as 25—simply because the carnage was so great. Victims had to be dispersed among six hospitals.

In a parting touch of madness, the teenage gunmen scattered bombs around the school and among the bodies, some with timers set to go off several hours after the shooting stopped. Some grief-stricken families had to wait more than a day for the removal of their children's bodies while officers painstakingly searched for and disarmed unexploded bombs.

One of the dead was the girls' volleyball-team captain, a senior many thought would be the class

valedictorian at graduation a few weeks later. The slain teacher was shot twice as he tried to help others escape to safety.

Media and memorials

When I visited the area the next day, black-uniformed SWAT teams and other officers were keeping visitors and the press several hundred yards from the battered school. An officer told me it would take at least several days to investigate and clear the building before visitors would be allowed in; law enforcers feared other undetonated bombs might have been hidden there and in students' cars in the school parking lot. (The next day authorities found a powerful bomb in the school kitchen; apparently the pair intended to blow up the cafeteria at lunchtime and burn down the entire 2,000-student school.)

Members of the news media, unable to get near the school, swarmed over the huge adjacent public park. The tragedy had entranced the world. A forest of satellite dishes and antennas sprouted from a growing thicket of news vans and trucks. Technicians strung cables and phone lines. Several carpenters hammered away, building a small sound stage for one of the major news networks. Around me I heard reporters speaking in Spanish, German, French and other languages.

Students were everywhere, some crying, some sobbing, many simply dazed. Hundreds brought flowers, cards and the occasional stuffed animal for several makeshift memorials springing up in the park. Many students embraced, holding hands and clinging to each other as though afraid of losing another friend. Students from other area schools, reaching out in the only way they knew how, added cards and posters to the growing mounds of flowers.

Baseball to bombs

Slowly, details of the background of the suspected killers leaked out. Both were from outwardly stable homes; one family was noticeably wealthy.



"We do not hold anyone else responsible for our actions. This is the way we want to go out."

—suicide note from Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold



Students, families, friends and a stunned community gathered at an adjacent public park the day after the shooting at Columbine High School. Many left cards, notes, flowers, stuffed animals, posters and banners as signs of grief for their terrible loss.

The boys, both seniors, were described as bright and intelligent. One had played baseball in Little League. The other had been a Boy Scout.

But somewhere along the way something happened. Their interests changed from baseball and Boy Scouts to homemade bombs and Adolf Hitler. They became part of a school clique known as the Trench Coat Mafia, whose members wore long, black coats and sometimes exchanged stiff-armed salutes and decorated their clothing with Nazi symbols.

Some of the group's members said they prided themselves on being social outcasts. In the 1998 school yearbook, the caption accompanying a photo of the black-garbed group reads: "Who says we're different? Insanity's healthy!"

Other warning signs were evident. The pair developed a passion for violent video and computer games. One reportedly created his own Web site on which he discussed how to formulate napalm, construct pipe bombs and store explosives. A hand-drawn image on the site showed a gun-and-sword-wielding figure atop a mound of burning skulls and another figure gunning down a bloody victim.

The duo had juvenile criminal records for having broken into and stolen electronic equipment and tools from a van. One reportedly had been suspended from school for hacking into a school computer. One had been reported to authorities for

threatening to kill another student. A classmate in a video-production class reported that the two made a video in which they fantasized about walking down the school's hallways firing weapons at other students.

A neighbor heard the pair breaking glass in the garage at one of the boys' houses the morning before the massacre. "I assumed it was some weird art project," he said. Police later told him the two were likely creating deadly glass shrapnel for their bombs.

Why such horror?

When confronted with such horror, we naturally wonder what could lead to two

are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Our problem is that we simply fail to understand God's purpose, plan, method and timetable for dealing with humanity's shortcomings. Without that understanding, we are at a loss to understand why such horror exists and why God doesn't intervene to stop it. Many become so bewildered by what they perceive as inexplicable contradictions that they lose faith in God.

For example, the horror of two world wars, in which two generations of European manhood and countless civilians were

When confronted with such horror, it's natural for us to ask why God, who tells us He is both almighty and all-loving, would allow such a tragedy to take place.

teenage boys cold-heartedly and calculatingly inflicting such suffering on others.

It's also natural for us to ask why God, who tells us He is both almighty and all-loving, would allow such a tragedy to take place.

The two questions have the same answer, but our thinking is so much more limited than our Creator's view that we have difficulty understanding the answer, much less accepting it. His perspective is much different from ours. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," He tells us. "For as the heavens

slaughtered in the trenches, battlefields and death camps, eroded religious faith throughout Europe. Belief and confidence in God perished along with millions of young fighting men. To this day much of the Continent is agnostic, unsure whether God exists or whether He cares what happens among His children. Therefore it is crucial that we come to understand why God allows human carnage and suffering to continue.

A matter of choice

Certainly God could intervene to prevent

Parenting and Social Responsibility

"Am I my brother's keeper?" retorted Cain when God questioned him concerning the whereabouts of his brother Abel, whom Cain had just murdered.

Cain's age-old response to God started mankind down a path that has had major ramifications for our societies and civilizations. When we reject a sense of responsibility for the welfare of our fellowman, we're reduced to savagery in a struggle for dominance and the survival of the fittest. When we accept a shared responsibility with and for one another, we are then able to work together for the common good.

In spite of the abundance of warning signs in the behavior of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold—including an obsession with violent



"Who's listening to these kids? Who is spending enough time to listen to them? Who knows them?"

video games, strange music, black clothing, Adolf Hitler and guns and explosives—the two boys marched unimpeded toward orchestrating their personal Armageddon.

The two obtained a small arsenal of guns and ammunition and materials to construct more than 60 bombs—some of them extremely sophisticated—apparently without their families' knowledge or intervention. Fifteen people lost their lives and 23 others were wounded because no one intervened to put a stop to a tragedy in the making.

What does this say about the state of modern families?

Dave DeForest-Stalls, executive director of an activity center for Denver teens and older youth, expressed the problem this way: "What it all comes down to is, Who's listening to these kids? Who is spending enough time to listen to them? Who knows them?"

Research has shown the links between broken homes and the increased likelihood of eventual criminal behavior. Yet the Columbine High catastrophe is a dramatic wake-up call to *all* families. These two students came from apparently stable, middle-class and wealthy families. But, in a society in which the norm is that both parents hold down one or more jobs outside the home, as was the case here, there isn't enough time to go around.

When we analyze our society as a whole, the picture becomes clear. "We don't spend enough time with kids, and we've taught them they're not valued," Mr. DeForest-Stalls said. "We'll give them a check, a credit card, a car before we give them our time."

Material possessions—cars, computers, gadgets and a generous allowance—are no substitute for the priceless gift of time spent with our children.

"We have to focus on our own behavior and neglect rather than

on what's so wrong with kids these days," he continued. "We have to let them know their lives have value . . ."

God expects parents to instill proper values in their children. When He gave His laws to ancient Israel, He knew the family was the building block of a safe and decent society. Immediately after He revealed the Ten Commandments, notice His instruction to parents:

"Keep these words, which I say to you this day, deep in your hearts; teaching them to your children with all care, talking of them when you are at rest in your house or walking by the way, when you go to sleep and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7, Bible in Basic English).

Several fundamental principles for maintaining an orderly society come clear in these verses.

First, parents are to learn God's laws and allow His Word to guide their thoughts and conduct. The words and deeds of parents are the most effective teacher in instilling proper values.

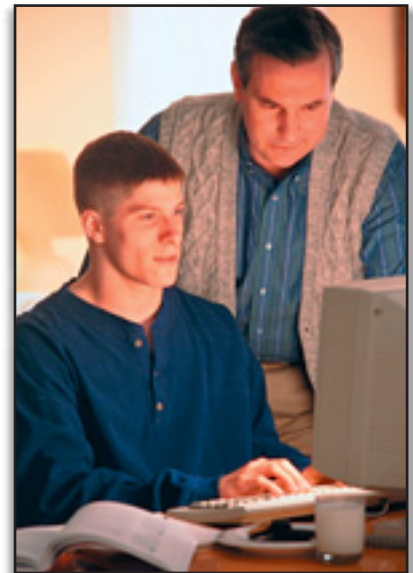
Second, parents are to teach God's laws to their children "with all care." They are to make this one of their highest priorities. No parent should excuse himself from this God-given responsibility.

Third, parents must regularly discuss God's laws and His Word with their children. Parents should teach their children, through

real-life examples we see in the news and all around us, how obedience to godly laws brings blessings and disobedience brings pain and sorrow. The tragedy at Columbine High School is a powerful example of how obsession with evil leads to indescribable anguish to everyone involved. Far too many of the adults and peers who interacted with Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had lost touch with the way they were thinking.

Fourth, this passage clearly tells parents regularly to spend time with their children—to converse with them, know what they are thinking and let them know they are loved, valued and appreciated, both by their parents and by their Creator. Parents should know how their children think and feel—what they enjoy and what causes them pain and hurt. Parents should be there to guide them in dealing with anger and coping with frustration and rejection.

If you would like to learn how obedience to God's laws leads to a safer and healthier society, be sure to request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments*. While you're at it, request free copies for your friends and loved ones. You'll find this 80-page booklet to be a valuable guide for teaching God's laws to your children.



"We have to focus on our own behavior and neglect rather than on what's so wrong with kids these days. We have to let them know their lives have value . . ."

such tragedies. “The LORD’s arm is not too short to save nor his ear too dull to hear,” He tells us (Isaiah 59:1, Revised English Bible).

Why, then, doesn’t He intervene to put an end to misery? In the next verse He points out the reason: “. . . It is *your iniquities* that raise a barrier between you and your God; it is *your sins* that veil his face, so that he does not hear” (REB, emphasis added throughout). There is a wall between humans and God. *He* didn’t create the barrier. *We* did—individually and collectively. We’ve been adding to it, brick by brick, for thousands of years.

God, you see, gives us all freedom of choice. He has dealt with mankind this way from the beginning. He offered Adam and Eve a paradise in which to live and an opportunity to build a relationship with Him that would lead to eternal life. But He didn’t force them to make that choice.

Given this opportunity, what decision did they make? Rejecting God’s explicit instruction regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they opted to do things their own way. They believed they could find a better way, that they could, through experimentation and human reasoning, choose for themselves the best way to live (see “The Real Star Wars,” page 4).

They set a pattern that all but a handful have followed ever since.

A history of wrong choices

Within a few generations after Adam and Eve, conditions had so degenerated that God decided to start over with Noah and his family. For a time, after the great flood, the world experienced peace through this righteous man. But it was not to last. Man again descended into barbarism.

Later God chose an entire nation, the Israelites, and brought them out of slavery to establish them as a role model for the nations around them. Concerning the laws God gave them, Moses told them: “Observe them carefully, for thereby you will display your wisdom and understanding to other peoples. When they hear about all these statutes, they will say, ‘What a wise and understanding people this great nation is!’ . . .

“What great nation is there whose statutes and laws are so just, as is all this code of laws which I am setting before you today? . . . Do not let them pass from your minds as long as you live, but *teach them to your children and to your children’s*

children” (Deuteronomy 4:6-9, REB).

God urged Israel to make the right choice, to “*choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). But, like Adam and Eve and like Noah’s descendants, Israel chose its own way.

God tells us: “. . . I gave them my rules and made clear to them my orders, which, if a man keeps them, will be life to him . . . But the children would not be controlled by me; they were not guided by my rules, and they did not keep and do my

There is a wall between humans and God. *He* didn’t create the barrier. *We* did—individually and collectively. We’ve been adding to it, brick by brick, for thousands of years.

orders” (Ezekiel 20:11, 21, REB). They brought on themselves devastating consequences: invaders, massacres and exile into faraway lands.

Later God sent His own Son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. What did those who heard Him choose to do? They murdered not only Him, but many of His followers. Christ warned His disciples that the world would hate them because it hated Him (John 15:18-19). God’s way would never be easy or popular (Matthew 7:13-14).

The Bible shows that God rarely interferes with man’s ability to make choices, and mankind has a long history of making bad decisions. Truly, as God’s Word tells us, “there is a way that *seems* right to a man, *but its end is the way of death*” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Choices bring consequences

Tragically, humanity has lost sight of the connection between choices and actions and their consequences. God told ancient Israel—and by extension the people of all nations—of the consequences and benefits of obeying and disobeying His laws (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). He tells us plainly, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; *for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Galatians 6:7).

What kind of seed have we as a society sown?

Today’s teenagers have easy access to glorified depictions of murder and mayhem—and sadly what is on the screen is beginning to spill over into reality. All too often the entertainment industry glorifies guns and gore in movies such as *Natural Born Killers* and *The Basketball*

Diaries—the latter in which a black-coated teen brutally shoots down students in a classroom with a shotgun.

Studies indicate that, by the time the average American teen graduates from high school, he will have seen some 16,000 violent deaths and thousands more depictions of illicit sex on television. The music industry chips in with songs that glorify masochism, violence, premarital and perverted sex and, at times, even the murder of policemen.

The teenage gunmen in Colorado

reportedly were enthralled with Doom, a computer game. Notice how Doom and its variations are advertised on its manufacturer’s Internet Web site: “The ever addictive and frighteningly realistic world of Doom is back. It’s bloodier. And it’s deadlier than ever . . . You’re a space marine armed with a mere pistol. Your mission is to locate more substantial firepower [and] blow your way through an onslaught of undead marines and mutant demons from hell . . .”

When teens—and even preteens—feed on such a diet of violence and filth, what should we expect? Why should we think they will react differently when they encounter conflicts with others?

We find it convenient to blame youths for bad decisions and choices they make. But adults—even national leaders—must also shoulder a big share of the blame. After all, it is often leaders—including our legislators and judges—who have initiated and upheld such actions as banning prayer from schools and firing teachers for keeping a Bible openly displayed in the classroom.

Little wonder that the biblical prophet Hosea spoke of a universal principle applicable to all societies, and especially to one whose motto “In God We Trust” is found on its national coinage. Well over 2,500 years ago He was inspired to render God’s assessment of the national condition. “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, *killing* and stealing and committing adultery, *they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed*” (Hosea 4:1-2).

Does this passage not describe much of our Western world today? Just a few verses later this Hebrew prophet goes on to sum up our national plight. “My people are destroyed *for lack of knowledge*. Because you have *rejected knowledge*, *I also will reject you* . . . Because you have forgotten the law of your God, *I also will forget your children*” (verse 6).

Apparently willingly ignorant of the knowledge of God and His way of life, we are the ones who set the moral tone and direction of our societies. Then we wonder why things can go so horribly wrong at a quiet suburban school. We need to face our own contribution to such problems. We need to see what we so desperately need to change.

An end to sorrow and suffering

God gives us the freedom to make choices—and to make decisions that often are an affront to Him. He allows us to build our societies and civilizations, write our laws and choose for ourselves what we consider to be good and what we think is evil.

But He also allows us to suffer the consequences when our choices turn out to be horribly wrong. Regrettably, bad decisions have a way of devastating innocent bystanders, as happened to the dozens of victims and hundreds of family members and friends affected by the Columbine High School shooting.

But with little regard for—if not outright rejection of—the biblical principles that gave our nation a sound moral foundation, our generation is willingly choosing a path that inevitably leads to such heart-breaking tragedies.

Yet God is not an unconcerned bystander. The world will not always be this way. God reveals that He plans to intervene to stop the horrors that bring so much pain and sorrow.

The time is drawing nearer when people’s decisions will bring mankind to the brink of annihilation (Matthew 24:21-22). Like the teenage gunmen who shattered the lives of dozens of families, world leaders will seek to solve their problems through a chain of events that will bring unparalleled anguish, violence and destruction (Revelation 9, 13, 17). That is the time God has chosen to send Jesus Christ to intervene on a global scale to save us from ourselves (Revelation 19:11-16; Matthew 24:21-33).

The Word of God makes it plain that it will take such earth-shattering events to humble humans to the point they will look

Continued on page 31

Individual Rights Vs. Societal Rights

In the wake of the tragedy at Columbine High School, people naturally try to determine who is to blame in an effort to prevent future tragedies. After all, something went dreadfully wrong. At stake in the raging debate over culpability is the timeless question of individual freedoms vs. societal protection—concepts that divide entire nations.

Opinions vary as to who was responsible for this most recent tragedy. Some say it occurred because other students shunned the two teenage gunmen. Others blame it on violent video and computer games. Some believe schoolteachers and administrators should have known of the potential danger and prevented it. Still others say the parents should have known about their children’s preoccupation with guns, bombs and killing and dealt with it before the tragedy could have occurred. Then there is the choice the two gunmen themselves made: They chose an evil course of action and carried it out.

Finally, the Bible reveals the existence of a “spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). This invisible power is at work in our societies and “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9).

Although we may never identify who was most at fault in this catastrophe, all of the above-noted factors undoubtedly had some influence. But now comes the difficult question: Could anything have prevented the massacre? It’s easy to say *somebody* should have done something. But who should have done it, and what should he have done?

Citizens of Western nations, including the United States, view things through the lens of human rights and individual freedoms. Citizens are free to pursue personal endeavors apart from governmental supervision or restrictions.

Although such latitude and discretion are wonderful privileges, societies built on these values are also plagued with tragedies similar to what occurred at Columbine High School. This is the expensive price of freedom. Individuals with known evil intentions or ideas cannot be restrained until they have actually broken a law—often by taking away the freedom, rights and, sometimes, even lives of others.

In this human construct, individual rights are more important than societal rights.

Other nations of the world consider the ugly side of human rights—violent crimes and murder of innocent victims—as too high a price for a civilized society to pay. Although the Western world’s financial prosperity is attractive, other nations reject what they view as excessive freedoms, stating that the stability of society as a whole has to take precedence over individual human rights. Increased crime and erosion of moral values are often the unwanted side effects of the Western approach to individual rights.

This is why some Islamic countries refer

to the United States as the Great Satan and emphasize societal rights—safety and no fear of crime for their citizens. Such countries can and do apprehend individuals they believe may have committed a crime and usually inflict much stiffer punishments for violations of their law. The downside is that innocent people sometimes are imprisoned and punished. This is the

price their citizens pay when societal rights are more important than individual rights.

So who is right? Almost 3,000 years ago, the prophet Jeremiah lamented: “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Apart from God, man simply doesn’t know how to properly build safe societies. The biblical answer to this clash between human rights and societal rights is found in Jesus Christ’s instruction to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27).

We are to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. In a truly just society, individual rights and societal rights need to be considered. No human nation has ever found this perfect balance, yet there is a coming kingdom that will perfectly employ both of these concepts. It is called the Kingdom of God and the news of its establishment is truly good news, the gospel message of the Bible. Be sure to write for your free copy of our booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. They explain how you can become a part of this just society.

—David Treybig



Aging Gracefully in an Uncertain World

Growing old should be a positive experience. How can we make life's sunset years positive and productive?

by **Graemme Marshall**

When 77-year-old John Glenn blasted off into space aboard the space shuttle *Discovery*, the positive aspects of graceful aging were clearly evident.

The United Nation General Assembly has designated 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. This shows a significant shift in Western society's attitudes towards sympathizing with aging and the elderly. Recognition of their value is long overdue.

Calling out the gray army

Retirement at an ever-earlier age is spawning a far-reaching trend. It results in a huge pool of still vigorous men and women too often involved in a restless floating about the country. Some occupy themselves with part-time jobs or self-employment as they search for effective meaning to this vital stage of their lives.

As governments' deficit spending eats away at the value of retirement programs, a gray army emerges of still-capable workers who need to pay ever-present bills—now even into their 90s.

In some parts of the world—in particular the Indian subcontinent as well as in Asia, China and South America—the economic value of older people seems better appreciated. Because of cultural and economic necessity, many of the so-called underdeveloped countries still value senior citizens. Though walking into the sunset of their lives, many maintain fitness, health and their mental abilities.

Perhaps such countries are ahead of the affluent West. Society should see the need to treat golden-agers with more dignity, recognizing that they need not be shunted off into nursing homes for the aged.

Human laboratory on aging

An astronaut for the second time, John Glenn is a shining example of what social scientists have learned about aging gracefully. Mr. Glenn, astronaut and former United States senator, blasted into

space on a nine-day mission last October, 36 years from when he became the first American to orbit the earth. Now he holds the record for being the oldest man in space.

Scientists hope Mr. Glenn's shuttle trip will lead to further space research on how and why we age.

"Why send a 77-year-old man into space?" asked Robert Luchi of the Huffington Center on Aging at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "Here's a man who's done all the right things. He's exercised, watched his diet, his salt intake, not had too much to drink."

Aging research conducted in space may prove invaluable, Dr. Luchi and others say, because of the many physical changes astronauts experience. The near-weightless environment of an orbit around the earth resembles a speeded-up version of the aging process. The studies Mr. Glenn underwent to aid research bear on problems common with space and aging.

In astronauts, as in the elderly, muscles atrophy, bones weaken, sleep becomes difficult, and balance grows precarious. By studying an aging astronaut, scientists may better compare the effects of aging with the way the body changes in spaceflight.

Anything these tests eventually conclude may have already been upstaged by one simple fact: A 77-year-old man had the physical and mental capacity to pass stringent NASA flight testing to serve on the crew of a space-shuttle mission.

Avoiding the despair trap

Since most of us are likely to live longer than our parents lived, what can we do to make our latter years as profitable and productive as possible?

The idea of retirement tends to push some people into discouragement and despair. Then, after the sudden loss of employment, boredom results. After all, who are you when you no



John Glenn,
astronaut and
former United States
senator, blasted into
space on a nine-day
mission last October
36 years from when
he became the first
American to orbit
the earth.

longer define yourself by your work?

Retirement is one of the most troubling passages of adult life for many Americans. The higher the perceived status of one's work, the steeper and scarier the slide into anonymity. Retirees find themselves subjected to cultural prejudices, at times labeled "slow old geezers" and much worse.

The elderly who accept such characterizations usually underestimate their mental skills. Pessimism can overcome those who believe the aging process has left them behind in reasoning and verbal skills. As a result, they can begin to adopt an unnecessary dependence on spouses, children or doctors. But positive steps can be taken to sidestep these circumstances.

Debunking myths about getting older

Old people are not necessarily more handicapped than younger people. Anyone

physical strength to negotiate steps, stairs and obstacles. In fact, it appears to be the single most effective nonmedical balm to retard the negative impact of aging. Long daily walks are part of a sensible regimen.

In a fitness study, men and women typical of frail nursing-home residents worked out vigorously on exercise machines for 45 minutes three times a week to strengthen their legs. After only a few weeks these people—in their late 80s and 90s—could get around more quickly, climb stairs better and sometimes even throw away their walkers. Working out strengthens aging muscles and improves life in other significant ways.

Octogenarians who started exercising were less depressed and more likely to walk around on their own or take part in social activities. Exercise oxygenates the blood and helps release mood-elevating endorphin enzymes. It increases the oxygen and sugar available to the brain.

Octogenarians who started exercising were less depressed and more likely to walk around on their own or take part in social activities.

at any age can experience sickness or otherwise become incapacitated, even from birth. A handicap is not necessarily the result of advanced age.

According to recent studies, brain cells do not die off in extensive numbers, leading to a mental decline. Rather, they shrink or grow dormant in old age, especially from lack of stimulation and challenge. You can expect to continue to enjoy mental alertness throughout late age.

If you are an older person who practices a daily discipline of mental exercise, you already maintain intellectual agility. Staying alert can be as simple as doing crossword puzzles, writing family journals, balancing your budget or reading newspapers and books instead of passively ingesting too much television.

Certainly input and recall slow. But children, too, forget their clothes, toys and schoolbooks. How many parents exclaim, "You'd forget your head if it wasn't screwed on"? Aging does not automatically equate with forgetfulness.

Assert these positives

Proper and sensible exercise helps maintain mental sharpness, vibrancy and the

Working on your health also helps you tell yourself you have not given up on life.

A word of qualification: A person with a chronic illness or serious debilitation may need professional medical advice before embarking on a strenuous exercise program.

Consider acquiring a pet animal. Although pets are not for everyone, some hospitals and nursing homes use cats, dogs and canaries to entertain and help rehabilitate their patients. Pets can boost morale because they help people forget their problems. They induce laughter and help recall memories of favorite animals of the past. A pet can be a wonderful friend to ward off isolation and loneliness, not to mention the need for home security.

The challenge of new opportunities

Old age shouldn't be viewed as the automatic end of enjoyable and productive activities. In fact, the Bible makes it clear that new ventures in life that only the elderly can fully appreciate are on the way. The words of Psalm 92 are positively encouraging. They declare that part of a blessing of being "the righteous" is also that "they shall still bear fruit in old age;

Western economics, based on consumption and planned obsolescence, has applied questionable values to older people through the policy of mandatory retirement. After that often comes abandonment of the elderly to nursing or retirement homes. However, gov-

Coping Successfully with Growing Older

ernments cannot ignore changing demographics. A predominantly old population in the immediate future is bringing to the forefront "gray power."

Springing up in response to being repeatedly rejected for jobs are home service businesses called "the gray army." Staffed by formerly unemployed tradespeople from their mid-40s through their 60s, these workers offer home-repair services such as plumbing, electri-

Aging brings a generosity of spirit and often yields a greater self-mastery of emotions and attitudes along with a deeper appreciation for the complexity of life. It encourages the forgiveness of former enemies. It abets the sharing of thoughts by letters, sayings and jokes—all things that help lift up other people.

The Unrealized Benefits of Maturity

The elderly normally have greater self-control, partly because they no longer need to protect some inflexible position. After all, what's the most anyone can do to you? Fire you when you're already retired? You have the comfortable feeling of no longer being pushed around by fashion or peer pressure.

A settled confidence comes from experience. You may feel freer to try things you wouldn't attempt earlier, because now you have less to lose. A directness, an uninhibited expression about what you really think, ushers in a stage of life in which you know most about yourself and how better to relate to other people.

You are practiced; you know how things

Reconciliation opportunities exist in unexpected places. It's of little help to others when we want to make up for past mistakes but fail to make the time or effort to do so before we die. Each day is a window of opportunity to correct family mistakes. We can absolve the

A Time for Reconciliation

conscience and confront the uncomfortable situations of earlier years.

In the sunset of life we feel less embarrass-

cal, tiling, carpentry and painting. They bring experience, reliability and competence along with reasonable rates.

Older persons do not, if in good health, seriously diminish in their competence. Gail Sheehy, in her book *New Passages*, observes: "For the first time in the history of the world most people in the advanced societies can expect to live into the long late afternoon of life." She notes that aging studies suggest that "a woman who reaches 50 today—and remains free of cancer and heart disease—can expect to see her ninety-second birthday" (page 5). Men's longevity has similarly shifted upward.

Certain octogenarians have always stood out from the crowd. Violinist Yehudi Menuhin was away from his home in England conducting concerts throughout Australia in late 1998. He was also giving master classes for talented young musicians.

work. You can enjoy greater composure, a lessening of highs and lows. You may sense an exuberance, but less depression. Maturity brings a sense of being in control of your life.

You feel an inner peace from the acceptance of life. You can look back on your accomplishments with some satisfaction—perhaps a greater calm about what you didn't achieve. From middle age and onward, your place on the career ladder is most likely high enough. Men gain a clearer view of the need to show affection to their wives and children. They better appreciate how much their spouses contributed to their children's upbringing while they themselves were too often preoccupied with a career. Being a grandparent also helps keep one young.

Romantic love can blossom and mature for older people. What does a wife most want from her husband in her 60s, 70s and beyond? She longs for the same wants, needs, tenderness and warmth she desired when she was younger. This is the beauty of committed love from a life-long devotion. A long partnership of love that faces good and bad times means a husband and wife are real friends, confidants and allies. Committed love over the years yields the highest return on this faithful investment. It becomes a marriage of advanced maturity.

ment at losing face. We are best prepared by life's wisdom to humbly accept blame for wrongs. The mellowing of age equips us to forgo pride in favor of doing the right thing.

The best gift we can give to a child or spouse is to set things straight while we still have time. The older we get the harder it is to lie to ourselves. How much happier we could be by clearing away a guilty conscience.

So write your own epitaph. What has been the sum of your life? Is it too late to put more meaning into it? How do you want to be remembered?

they will stay fresh and flourishing" (verses 13-14).

Senior citizens need to find new goals for this critical stage of life so it turns out productive and fruitful. No matter how poor or limited life might have been, we still hold the power to shape our future.

Instead of focusing on time running out, it's a more positive exercise to make the most of each day. Priorities become different when time grows shorter. Have you heard the story of the aggressive young salesman trying to sell a 95-year-old man an insurance policy? In spite of polite refusals from the elderly gentleman, the young man persisted. Finally the old man said: "Look, young fellow, you don't seem to understand. At my age I don't even buy green bananas."

If every day is welcomed with a joy for life, you'll never feel too old. You will just keep on growing, and new opportunities will always present themselves.

Choosing the good life

At retirement or in advanced age, we have a second adulthood with an opportunity for new ambition. Instead of letting life push us around, we can begin to take charge. We invariably have two broad choices: passive aging or continued maturity. Passivity is to allow ourselves to be dominated by enfeeblement and breakdown of our health. Instead, we can make a conscious decision to push forward. Just like changing a career, it may mean trusting in faith and even involve some risk and require some tough discipline.

The closer we come to an end of our life's vitality, the Everest of all questions has to be faced. Is aging a cruel joke by the Creator? Or did He plan people to become old for a reason? What is turning elderly supposed to teach?

Near the conclusion of our life's experience, shouldn't we grapple with the basic questions like why we were born and why we even have life? We need to have the hope of living again—the expectation of a resurrection to a better life.

The aged tend to come to a clearer realization of how close they are to the Kingdom of God—a sense of urgency about making the most of each day and being closer to God. A new and better world awaits us all beyond the grave. With this comforting thought gloom and pessimism will fade. The final heartbeat is not an end, but a grand beginning.



As inconveniences of old age arrive—perhaps health problems, maybe just aches and pains—the expectation of a life in a new and better world should shine more brightly. This is to be more prized than any other possessions. Seeking the Kingdom of God first (Matthew 6:33) makes our present lives more abundant and worthwhile.

Badge of honor

God chose to portray His awesome majesty to the prophet Daniel and the apostle John by describing "the Ancient of Days" with hair as "white as wool" (Daniel 7:9; Revelation 1:14). So be delighted if white hair should come your way. Our creative, sustaining God is content to picture spiritual maturity that way. If white or gray hair represents accumulated godly wisdom, you wear a badge of honor.

Scripture encourages the younger generation to "rise up before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God" (Leviticus 19:32). It is important, however, that gray heads be "found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31).

The International Year of Older Persons is a recognition that age should not be a trash-heap experience. Rather, it should be a new start. That new start should be viewed through a proper biblical perspective. Successfully coming to terms with aging means not viewing death as a period ending a sentence. Instead it is a comma, briefly interrupting a sentence that has yet more to say. **GN**



An Overview of Conditions

Sharp rise in teen promiscuity afflicts Britain

As many as 150,000 British girls have been infected with a venereal disease primarily transmitted by promiscuous sexual activity.

Many teenage girls don't even know they have it.

Among girls, this disease has soared upward by 56 percent in the last two years, with 100,000 more likely to catch it in the next year. One of the most serious consequences of this particular disease is that it threatens the fertility of those infected.

The Daily Mail looked at the problem and summed up the national plight: "How have we allowed

sex to become such a threat to the future of the family?" It's a good question with a simple answer: Those responsible for the religious and moral education of our youth, who ought to know better, have sadly neglected to teach proper values and moral behavior.

Without this vital education from their parents and the clergy, thousands of young girls are gambling with their precious capacity to have children. The offending disease is called chlamydia, one of the most easily transmitted of all sexually transmissible diseases (STDs). Up to 70 percent of females infected develop no symptoms. The bacteria, if untreated, can lie dormant for months before passing through the cervix and possibly inflaming and blocking the Fallopian tubes, down which a woman's eggs must travel. The damage done is often permanent, rendering the victim unable to bear children.

Although the rate of infection among boys is skyrocketing similar to that of girls, the long-term health consequences are much less serious for them because symptoms soon emerge and treatment is generally administered.

This modern-day plague is caused by the wild growth of teenage promiscuity in Britain. Among both girls and boys

More adults need to wake up to the unwanted effects of allowing teenagers almost unlimited sexual freedom, while providing little or no moral guidance.

aged 16-19, one in five admitted having two or more intimate partners in the preceding year. One in 20 girls said they had sexual relations with four or more male partners in the last year. With no apologies, one professional 19-year-old said she had 10 male partners in a year with half of those liaisons being "one-night stands."

More adults need to wake up to the unwanted effects of

allowing teenagers almost unlimited sexual freedom, while providing little or no moral guidance. If you haven't already done so, please request your free copy of our booklet *The Ten Commandments* from one of our offices listed on page 2. The world desperately needs this divine guide for human behavior. (Sources: *The Daily Mail* [London].)

Sex with no consequences? Only on TV

In a recent Kaiser Family Foundation study of 1,300 network and cable television shows, researchers discovered that only 9 percent that dealt with sex depicted any accompanying risks or consequences.

Situation comedies—the most popular prime-time television genre—dealt with consequences of sexual activity only 3 percent of the time.

Researchers found that, of 88 scenes during the study period that depicted or implied sexual intercourse, not one referred to contraception or safe-sex practices. In most shows, of course, the moral issues involved are usually studiously avoided.

Mark Honig, executive director of the Parents Television Council, said of the study: "In real life, people don't hop in and out of bed without there being consequences. Kids know more about the characters on TV than they do about their next-door neighbors, and they look up to those people [on TV]. To them they're people worthy of emulation." (Source: *The Washington Post*.)

Potential aggression in East Asia

The Houston Chronicle recently highlighted a possible serious problem in the Far East: "The common goal of China and North Korea is the neutralization, removal or ejection of U.S. forces from East Asia so that China can engage in coercive reunification with Taiwan and North Korea can engage in coercive reunification with South Korea."

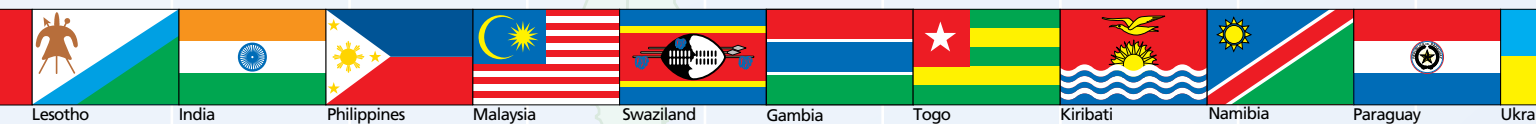
Potentially the main power lever would be a growing Chinese nuclear arsenal, made much more deadly through purchases and theft of advanced American technology over recent years. According to recently revealed national security information, China is planning a first-strike capability that is designed to move the United States to seriously rethink its long-term friendly relationship with Taiwan and also purposing to transfer critical nuclear technology to North Korea.

The Chronicle continued: "Evidence suggests that despite China's publicly supportive position on nonproliferation, it may have already passed crucial missile technology to North Korea." The current conflict in the European Balkans may command our attention, but we should also keep an eye on international politics in East Asia. (Source: *The Houston Chronicle*.)

Fresh water: the coming crisis

Nearly a billion people in some 50 nations are already experiencing severe water shortages, and official projections tell us the worst is yet to come.

An even more disturbing possibility is that future wars may well be fought over water. Wrote the science editor of the *Independent on Sunday*: "In 25 years the world will be 20 per





Albania

Zimbabwe

Bahrain

Cyprus

Burkina Faso

New Zealand

Jordan

Belgium

Argentina

Czech Republic

ions Around the World

cent short of water even if every country implements the most efficient conservation programmes imaginable."

Factors responsible for the coming crisis are a rising global population, an ever-increasing demand and worsening pollution of water supplies.

The Middle East could be a flashpoint because the general

"In 25 years the world will be 20 per cent short of water even if every country implements the most efficient conservation programmes imaginable."

area is already arid, and water disputes, both actual and potential, tend to mark the region. Israel and Jordan are currently in conflict over an Israeli proposal that would reduce the desert kingdom's water supplies. Also Iraq and Syria fear Turkish designs in building a dam on the Euphrates with the potential power of withholding water from those two countries. The Egyptians have their own concerns as the Nile flows through seven other countries before reaching Egypt. These include Uganda and war-torn Sudan. (Sources: *The Express* [London], *The Independent on Sunday* [London].)

Berlin: the future capital of Europe?

Late April marked the reopening of the Reichstag as the new permanent home of the Bundestag (the German parliament). It comes eight years after the German governing body voted to relocate itself to the historic site in Berlin.

The Reichstag was originally built during the 20-year reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II (1888-1918) and has had a turbulent history. Its destruction by arson in early 1933 served as a pretext by the Nazi regime to revoke the democratic Weimar constitution and solidify its power.

Another important development in Berlin is its current role as the biggest building site on the European Continent. The city has been described as "an enormous conglomeration of cranes and diggers." Work on Europe's largest railway station has begun in earnest.

British journalist and author Neal Ascherson traveled to Berlin for a firsthand look. His summation of its future: "Germany will be the heartland, the engine-room, of a united Europe in the 21st century. Our currency, the Euro, will be run from Frankfurt. But Berlin may come to be the focus of European culture and politics."

This veteran journalist did not mince his words. He called Berlin "the monster rising from the Prussian sands." The British press, both right and left wing, tends to be highly skeptical of German politics. Time will tell whether it is being cautious or correct. (Sources: *The German Embassy in London*, *The Guardian* [London], *The Independent* [London].)

TV, music videos fuel teen drinking

A Stanford University scientist, Thomas Robinson, has concluded that the likelihood of teens consuming alcohol is

directly related to the amount of television and music videos they watch. "You can never prove this is cause-and-effect, but we know the TV and video exposure comes before the drinking," he said.

Robinson monitored the television and music-video-viewing habits of 1,533 ninth-graders for 18 months. During that time, 36 percent of the teens began drinking alcohol. He found that the likelihood of teens starting to use alcohol rose 31 percent for every hour of daily music videos and 9 percent for every hour of daily television.

According to other studies and surveys, teens of this age watch an average of three hours of television daily. Dr. Robinson found in his study that teens watched an average of eight to 12 hours of music videos weekly. (Source: *USA Today*.)

Forests in jeopardy

A worldwide survey has revealed that "the world's forests are being stripped of their rarest trees." One in 12 species is in danger of extinction, and more than 7,000 individual tree varieties are at risk.

This is a man-made crisis brought about by environmental pollution and abuse. The threat is worldwide, ranging from Mexico and Brazil across the Atlantic to Nigeria and the Cameroon, up to Britain and then across to China.

The world is witnessing threats to fauna and flora. God gave man this beautiful earth and told him to "tend and keep it." How pleased is He with our stewardship of this majestic planet? (Source: *The Sunday Times* [London]; Genesis 2:15.)

Why bad news in *The Good News*?

Speaking of world conditions preceding His return, Jesus Christ said, "It will be a time of great distress; there has never been such a time from the beginning of the world until now, and will never be again" (Matthew 24:21, New English Bible).

The United Church of God, whose members and supporters provide the financial backing for *The Good News* and our other publications, believes in and teaches the return of Jesus

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

Christ. 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 faces the terrifying possibility of extinction (verse 22).

The world is filled with bad news. Yet the future holds incredible promise: Jesus 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 and Scott Ashley



ine

Mauritania

Slovenia

Barbados

Angola

Malta

Jamaica

Lebanon

Djibouti

Greenland

Cambodia

King Hussein's Uncertain Legacy

Power passes to the next generation in a key Middle Eastern kingdom.

by **Melvin Rhodes**

Not many world leaders make a difference either in their own country or on the world stage. Even fewer make a positive impact.

One such man who made a difference was Jordan's King Hussein, who died of cancer earlier this year at age 63.

When Hussein ascended the throne, Winston Churchill, Harry Truman and Joseph Stalin were still in power. Today's world is very different from theirs. No longer do these three powers dominate it. The United States remains the only superpower but often fails to have its own way, especially in the unpredictable and volatile Middle East.

King Hussein was a voice of moderation and reason in the region, working for peace with Israel and trying to contain the extreme elements calling for the destruction of the Jewish state. The absence of his calming influence could create a political vacuum detrimental to the stability of the area. For this reason his death could make a big difference. Even if his son and heir, King Abdullah, continues the policies of his father, his lack of experience could be a decisive factor in the Mideast cauldron.

Additionally, the sudden change in the succession just two weeks before Hussein's death may have led to division in the royal family and divided loyalties in the military and among the bedouin clans. Abdullah needs the support of all of these groups to succeed. He inherits a volatile throne. Hussein was at the side of his grandfather, Jordan's first monarch, when he was assassinated in 1951,

and Hussein survived more assassination attempts than any other monarch of the modern age.

Autocratic region

When we look at the recent history of the Middle East, it is clear that the stability of the region depends on the survival of the remaining monarchies in the area—Jordan and Saudi Arabia being the most important.

Although Britain and America in their turns played major roles in the Middle East during this century, no democracy in the region exists other than the Jewish state of Israel, which is barely 50 years old. Many of the Arab nations carved out of the defeated Ottoman Empire after World War I had kings, usually local emirs from Turkish days,

installed on their thrones by Great Britain.

These were constitutional monarchies, but their parliamentary systems did not work well, and the monarchs held most of the power. Many of the monarchs and their children received their education and military training in Britain. They often maintained alliances with the British until Britain began withdrawing from the region after the loss of the Suez Canal in 1956.

King Hussein attended Britain's most prestigious private school, Eton, followed by military training at Sandhurst. One of his four wives was British. Their son now sits on the Hashemite throne.

These monarchs are all influenced by Western ways and Western thinking. However, they must contend with a rising tide of Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism, which has led to the overthrow of some monarchies in the region and made



Jordan's Crown Prince Abdullah places his hand on the Koran as he is sworn in as Jordan's new king. Alongside him is a portrait of his father, the late King Hussein.



When King Hussein ascended the throne, Winston Churchill, Harry Truman and Joseph Stalin were still in power. Today's world is very different from theirs.

the future of the others uncertain.

Fifty years of war

The post-World War II turmoil in the Middle East began in 1948 with the end of the British mandate over Palestine and the establishment of Israel. Only two years before, the British had granted independence to Jordan, installing Hashemite King Abdullah on the throne. At the creation of Israel, Arab armies from Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon tried in vain to obliterate the Jewish state in its infancy.

This Arab failure eventually led to disgruntled army officers overthrowing Egypt's King Farouk in July 1952. Farouk was not pro-British but had an international reputation as a playboy and was perceived as a corrupt influence on the Egyptian people. After his overthrow, Farouk made a prediction: "Eventually there will be only five kings left in the world: the king of spades, the king of diamonds, the

years withdrew most of its military presence from the region. In 1958 Iraq's monarchy was violently overthrown, and its young king and all members of the immediately royal family were executed. A period of political instability followed, ending with the ascendancy of ruthless President Saddam Hussein.

Four years later Yemen's monarchy fell. Seven years later Libya's King Idris was overthrown by Col. Gadhafi. Non-Arab but also Muslim Iran saw its shah overthrown and a new radical Islamic regime take its place early in 1979. Ironically, the Iranians were celebrating the 20th anniversary of their revolution the same week King Hussein was buried.

These examples show an unmistakable trend: Each time a Middle Eastern monarchy has fallen, a radical anti-Western regime has replaced it. In most cases the army has overthrown the monarch, Iran being the exception.

Delicate balancing acts

Pro-Western monarchies remain in the Middle East, notably the small Persian Gulf states. But two are of particular importance: Saudi Arabia and Jordan. These are the largest, and their geographical position makes them extremely important to Western interests.

Both have extreme nationalists and religious fundamentalists in their midst. The radicals' strength is contained by the presence of their pro-Western leaders, but their influence must be taken into account. When the United States and Britain sought support in December for their bombing raids on Iraq, not one of the pro-Western leaders openly supported the action. To have done so could have led to increased opposition in their own countries and their possible overthrow. They walk a fine line.

Because they are willing to work with the United States toward peace in the Middle East, which means patiently cooperating as the United States increases pressure on Israel to give up the occupied territories, the stability of the monarchies is important to the United States. However, the tie with America can be seen as negative for the kingdoms themselves because their leaders can be blamed for American actions in the region, including actions against Iraq.

Jordan's new king begins his reign with much in his favor. He has the goodwill of his subjects as a result of the respect and devotion accorded his father. He is well educated and has military experience. He understands the West and will likely continue to receive the aid his poor nation needs to survive.

He is married to a Palestinian, which should help him with the majority of his subjects, who are also Palestinians. He has the support of the desert tribes within Jordan. He has the sympathy and respect of the Israelis, who sent a sizable delegation to his father's funeral. He will again receive financial support from the Persian Gulf states, support that was withdrawn when his father did not back the allies against Iraq. But he retains Iraq's friendship and even Syria's.

King Abdullah has much going for him. The peace of the Middle East depends much on this man. Time will tell whether—or for how long—he can withstand the pressures leading to instability in the region. **GN**



Jordan occupies a strategic position in the volatile Middle East. Nearby kingdoms have experienced considerable turmoil when kings and monarchies fell or were replaced.

king of hearts, the king of clubs and the king of England."

Farouk's prophecy has not quite come to pass, but several thrones did fall in following years. His overthrow led to a radicalization of parts of the Arab world and increasing Soviet influence. The Russian presence has virtually gone, but the radicals remain.

Tumbling monarchies

Britain lost control of the Suez Canal to Egypt's President Nasser four years after Farouk's overthrow and over the next 15

The radical presidents in the Mideast bring to mind an observation in Ecclesiastes 10:16-17: "Woe to you, country with a lad for king, and where princes start feasting in the morning! Happy the land whose king is nobly born, where princes eat at a respectable hour to keep themselves strong and not merely to revel!" (New Jerusalem Bible).

Some of the region's monarchies are ostentatious in their wealth, thereby encouraging resentment and dissidence within their kingdoms. But their overthrow could unbalance the area.

Family Finances: a Biblical Guide

Does Scripture tell us anything about how we can better manage our money?

by Bruce Gore

Money is a necessary evil, or so the saying goes. It is certainly a necessary medium of exchange, but it doesn't have to be evil. Whether money is a good or bad influence depends on our approach to it.

Jesus Christ wasn't opposed to wealth or a high standard of living. He said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). The Bible is a guidebook toward the abundant life He wants us to enjoy. Money can be an integral part of the right kind of success.

On the other hand, the love of money has corrupted and twisted the lives of many people and is a root cause of much evil (1 Timothy 6:10). The Phillips Modern English translation captures the essence well and serves as a worthy commentary on this particular passage: "For loving money leads to all kinds of evil, and some men in the struggle to be rich have lost their faith and caused themselves untold agonies of mind."

What else does the Bible have to say about money and family finances?

One group discovered that the Bible contains more than 2,300 verses on how to handle money and possessions. The book of Proverbs, a guidebook with wise advice on many subjects, contains financial guidance to help us manage money wisely. Let's take a look at some of the sound financial principles it offers.

Our attitude toward money

We must not let money become overly important to us. Indeed, one of the first statements in Proverbs shows us we should honor God, who owns everything. "Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9-10). It is essential that we return a portion of what we receive to the One who gave it.

Jesus Christ tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall

be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). If we put spiritual matters first, then we can count on His help with the physical necessities of life.

Acknowledging and giving to the One who owns all, who shares with us what we need to survive and prosper, helps us keep physical things in their proper perspective. We must not allow material possessions to become so important to us that pursuing them dominates our lives to the detriment of our spiritual development.

Money makes a good servant but a poor master. It can separate us from our families and God if we find ourselves caught up in an unwinnable race for more possessions. Wealth can intoxicate and enslave. "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist" (Proverbs 23:4, New Revised Standard Version).

The apostle Paul spoke of learning to be content with and enjoying the things that we have. "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Timothy 6:7-9).

It has been said that the test of a man's character is how he spends his time and money.

Integrity matters

How we go about earning our money is, in the long run, more important than how much we earn. Earn it in such a way that you can sleep at night. God tells us, "The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22) and "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing . . ." (verse 2).

We should earn our living honestly. Do not climb over the backs of others to make money. Proverbs tells us: "Do not rob [or exploit] the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate; for the LORD will plead their cause, and plunder the soul of those who plunder them" (Proverbs 22:22-23).

*One group
discovered that
the Bible contains
more than 2,300
verses on how to
handle money
and possessions.*



Lasting security is found not in a big bank account, but in building strength of character and a good reputation.

Such shortcuts to gaining wealth are really only traps, says God. "He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches, and he who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty" (verse 16).

We are never to take advantage of someone else. When we give our employer an honest day's work, we earn more than the day's wages. "Servants, in all things do the orders of your natural masters; not only when their eyes are on you, as pleasers of men, but with all your heart, fearing the Lord: Whatever you do, do it readily, as to the Lord and not to men . . ." (Colossians 3:22-23, Bible in Basic English). God expects us to work for our employers or customers as though we were working for Him.

Share with others

A key to financial contentment and happiness is to share our blessings. "... Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35).

Some of the most miserable people are those who cling to every last penny they have, fearful that someone else may get some of it. "Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want. A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water" (Proverbs 11:24-25, New Revised Standard Version).

Proverbs is filled with admonitions to share the wealth God has shared with us. "He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor" (Proverbs 22:9).

"He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he" (Proverbs 14:21).

"Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard" (Proverbs 21:13).

Wealth through diligence

Too often people want to get something for nothing. They look for a shortcut to wealth. The luck of the lottery comes to only a tiny minority and sometimes brings more pain than pleasure.

A more sure way to financial security is through hard work. "He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows frivolity is devoid of understanding" (Proverbs 12:11). Perhaps you are familiar with modern proverbs such as "The harder I work the luckier I get" and "Success is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration."

The Bible tells us that a key to advancement is to develop our skills and then do the best we can at what we have been given to do. "Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men" (Proverbs 22:29).

Properly manage

Once you earn money, you must properly manage it. Otherwise it will soon be gone, with little to show for it. "Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds; for riches are not forever . . ." (Proverbs 27:23-24).

Some people seem perpetually to have holes in their pockets. Their money goes out as fast as it comes in. They just can't seem to hang onto what they earn.

A family budget helps to show what is happening to what we earn and can help us to see whether we need to make any adjustments in our spending. One simple way to hang onto more of our earnings is to be cautious about buying on credit. "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7).

Financial self-discipline

It's important to control our wants. "Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man" (Proverbs 27:20, New International Version). We will always desire something. Once one want is fulfilled, our eyes will turn to something else. "The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. He covets greedily all day long . . ." (Proverbs 21:25-26).

Perhaps you've heard this saying: "Some people spend money they don't have to buy things they don't need to impress people they don't like." Don't let material pursuits cause you to live a life of deceit and pretense.

Financial success includes controlling selfish desires. "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich . . . There is desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it" (Proverbs 21:17, 20).

It is hard for young people, in particular, to be patient. They want and expect instant financial security and to amass material possessions their parents may have taken years to accumulate. Proverbs 28:20 cautions against such an approach: "A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished."

True security

Lasting security is found not in a big bank account, but in building strength of character and a good reputation. No lasting security is to be found in wealth. "He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish . . ." (Proverbs 11:28).

So many unforeseen events can wipe out material wealth overnight—an accident or natural disaster, a stock-market crash, an extended illness, a criminal act. The only lasting security is a right relationship with our Maker. "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death" (Proverbs 11:4).

We need to keep in mind another modern-day proverb: "It is good to have money and the things that money will buy, but it is also good to make sure we haven't lost the things that money can't buy." **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

This article highlights a few of the biblical statements and principles on the subject of finances.

The Bible contains much more advice to help us find and maintain financial security. If you'd like to learn more, request your free copy of the booklet *Managing Your Finances*.

Please contact the office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2.



The Intertestamental Period: Daniel's Prophecies Come to Pass

by Mario Seiglie

This series has traced the history of the Old Testament from Genesis through the captivity of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, describing archaeological finds and historical accounts that have confirmed and illuminated the biblical account. In this issue we show more evidence that confirms the accuracy of the Bible accounts by picking up the story with the Intertestamental period: the time between the testaments, when the events described in the books of the Old Testament were completed but before the events that introduced the four Gospels.

During this 420 years several crucial prophecies were fulfilled, dramatizing the authenticity of God's Word and setting the stage for another prophesied event: the appearance of the Messiah.

The Old Testament comes to a close shortly after the events in the books of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. However, Daniel's prophecies continue to forecast events within the Intertestamental period.

Alexander the Great in prophecy

In a vision, God revealed to Daniel that the kingdom to rise after the Persians would be the Greeks under Alexander the Great. Gabriel, the angelic messenger from God, explained to Daniel: "The ram which you saw, having the two horns—they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in

its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power" (Daniel 8:20-21).

The Persian kingdom rapidly came to an end in 333 B.C. when Alexander the Great defeated the armies of Darius III at Issus. Yet, 10 years later, true to the prophecy in Daniel 8, Alexander unexpectedly died and the Greek Empire divided into four parts, each headed by one of his four generals.

God's people were miraculously saved and liberated when, according to Josephus, Cyrus saw his name and feats prophesied in the Bible. The writings of Josephus also include an account of Alexander the Great sparing Jerusalem from destruction after he saw his exploits prophesied in Scripture.

When Alexander descended on the Middle East, it was natural that almost everyone resisted him. Those who did were mercilessly trampled before him. Neighboring

Phoenicia felt Alexander's wrath when he utterly destroyed Tyre. It seemed the same fate awaited rebellious Jerusalem, which had backed the hapless Persians crushed by Alexander at Issus.

Surprising showdown at Jerusalem

Josephus recounts how Alexander's troops surrounded the city and readied themselves to attack. Suddenly the city gates swung open, and out came the high priest with his entourage.

Josephus writes: "... For Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and



The rise of the Grecian empire of Alexander the Great was prophesied by Daniel well before Alexander rose to conquer most of the known world of his day.

During this period several crucial prophecies were fulfilled, dramatizing the authenticity of God's Word and setting the stage for another prophesied event: the appearance of the Messiah.

the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head, having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest . . . whereupon the kings of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him disordered in his mind. However, Parmenio alone went up to him, and asked him how it came to pass that, when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews?

"To whom he replied, 'I did not adore him, but that God who hath honoured him with his high priesthood; for I saw this very person in a dream, in this very habit [clothing], when I was at Dios in Macedonia, who . . . exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea thither, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians; whence . . . now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision . . . I believe that I bring this army under the divine conduct . . .'

" . . . And when the book of Daniel was shewed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended; and as he was then glad, he . . . bade them ask what favours they pleased of him; whereupon the high priest desired that they . . . might pay no tribute on the seventh year. He granted all they desired . . ." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XI, viii, 5).

Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the abomination of desolation

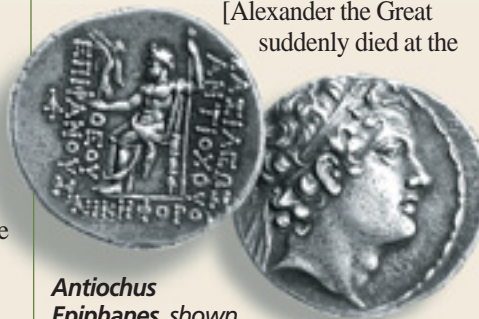
Thus began the Greek reign over Judea, which would last 150 years. In chapter 11, Daniel prophesied the changes in fortune the Jews would know under the Greeks. After Alexander died Judea became part of the realm of General Ptolemy, who governed from Egypt. By and large the period was peaceful for the Jews.

However, the intermittent wars between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria for complete control of the Greek Empire came to a head in 198 B.C. In that year the Ptolemies saw defeat. Judea then came under the dominion of the Seleucids.

Shortly after the Seleucid line of the Greek Empire began governing Judea, a king arose who was to fulfill several dire prophecies recorded in Daniel. According to historians, Antiochus IV Epiphanes was the ruler who set up the first "abomination of desolation" mentioned in Daniel 8 and 11.

Daniel 8:8-13 describes this time:

"Therefore the male goat [the Greek Empire] grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken [Alexander the Great suddenly died at the



Antiochus Epiphanes, shown here on a silver coin of his empire, tried to stamp out Jewish religious practices, abolished the Jerusalem temple sacrifices and desecrated the temple by sacrificing swine on the altar.

apex of his power], and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven [Alexander's kingdom was divided among his four top generals]" (verse 8).

"And out of one of them came a little horn [Antiochus IV Epiphanes] which grew exceedingly great toward the south [Egypt], toward the east [Mesopotamia], and toward the Glorious Land [Judea] . . . He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary [the temple at Jerusalem] was cast down . . . Then I heard a holy one speaking . . . 'How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation . . . ?'" (verses 9-13).

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says of Antiochus Epiphanes: "His career with respect to Palestine is recorded in 1 and 2 Maccabees, and remarkably predicted in [Daniel] 11:21-35" (Vol. I, p. 145, "Antiochus IV Epiphanes"). The books of 1 and 2 Maccabees

are not included in the traditional Hebrew canon of Scripture but are valuable as historical accounts. Both books were written before the birth of Christ.

Antiochus's cruel reign

A brief history of the three years of the "abomination of desolation" under Antiochus Epiphanes is to be found in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*:

"This part of the vision anticipated the rise of a ruler in the Greek Empire who subjugated the people and land of Israel, desecrated her temple, interrupted her worship, and demanded for himself the authority and worship that belongs to God. He desecrated the temple and abolished the daily sacrifice.

"Antiochus sent his general Apollonius with 22,000 soldiers into Jerusalem on what was purported to be a peace mission. But they attacked Jerusalem on the Sabbath, killed many people, took many women and children as slaves, and plundered and burned the city. In seeking to exterminate Judaism and to Hellenize the Jews, he forbade the Jews to follow their religious practices (including their festivals and circumcision), and commanded that copies of the Law be burned. Then he set up the abomination that causes desolation.

"In this culminating act he erected on December 16, 167 BC an altar to Zeus on the altar of burnt offering outside the temple, and had a pig offered on the altar. The Jews were compelled to offer a pig on the 25th of each month to celebrate Antiochus Epiphanes' birthday. Antiochus promised apostate Jews great reward if they would set aside the God of Israel and worship Zeus, the god of Greece. Many in Israel were persuaded by his promises and worshiped the false god. However, a small remnant remained faithful to God, refusing to engage in those abominable practices. Antiochus IV died insane in Persia in 163 BC" (*Logos Library System*, 1997).

The precision of Daniel's description of events of this period (given more than 300 years earlier) have led many Bible critics to redate the book of Daniel to *after* these events took place. They would not

Continued on page 31

Esther

A Queen Offers Her Life for Her People

by Jerold Aust

The Jewish exile Mordecai knew the situation was dire and dangerous. Through a sinister plot, the Jews in Persia were secretly condemned to death (Esther 3). Mordecai pleaded with Queen Esther to risk her life: “If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

The story of Esther and Mordecai transcends time and culture. The situation they faced still applies and teaches valuable spiritual lessons.

Setting for the story

Esther’s story takes place near the end of the events described in the Old Testament. The two kingdoms of Israel and Judah had fallen and been taken into captivity in Assyria and Babylon, respectively.

By this time, several hundred years after their fall, the descendants of Israel—the “lost 10 tribes”—had scattered and disappeared from the Middle Eastern map. The descendants of Judah, however, had maintained their beliefs and way of life while in Babylon. However, Babylon, too, had fallen, and now the Jews lived under the benign rule of the Persian Empire.

The Persians had allowed Jews willing to make the long overland journey the opportunity to return to Jerusalem

and their homeland. Although many had made the trip, many more had decided to remain where they were and put down roots.

The book of Esther is a complement to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Although those books describe life for the Jews who returned to Palestine, Esther is the only Bible book that offers a portrait of those who chose to remain in Persia.

The book of Esther introduces us to a great king of Persia known as Ahasuerus (Hebrew), or Xerxes (Greek). In 479 B.C. the Greeks defeated Ahasuerus in the battle at Salamis.

The Greek historian Herodotus wrote that the Persian king sought consolation in his harem after his defeat. He gave a huge banquet, lasting several days, for palace personnel (Esther 1:1-8). At that time Queen Vashti—wife of Ahasuerus—gave a banquet for the women of the palace. On the seventh day of his banquet, the king commanded Vashti to appear before his court so everyone could behold her beauty (verses 9-11).

But the queen refused to appear before her husband. So Ahasuerus, on the advice of his counselors, decided to look for someone to replace her as queen.

The king’s servants came up with a plan: “Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women’s quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king’s

eunuch . . . Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti” (Esther 2:2-4). The king agreed and looked forward to the prospect of a beautiful wife who could become his new queen.

Esther becomes queen

Mordecai was an older cousin of Esther’s who had helped raise her: “And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter, for she had neither father nor mother” (verse 7). They lived in Shushan.

The king’s decree brought to his palace many beautiful young women, but none was more beautiful than Esther. From the beginning Hegai, a eunuch and custodian of the women, favored Esther, “so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance” (verse 9).

In turn, each young lady was presented before the king. When it came Esther’s turn, she was allowed to choose her attire. However, “she requested nothing but what Hegai the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her” (verse 15). Hegai knew the king’s social tastes. Esther deferred to his advice.

Finally, Esther was presented before the king. “The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast, the Feast

of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king" (verses 17-18). Thus Esther became queen of Persia.

Mordecai averts assassination

One day Mordecai, now a royal official, found that two of the king's doorkeepers planned to assassinate the king. Mordecai told Esther, who promptly warned the king. The king hanged the men. These proceedings, including Mordecai's faithful disclosure, were "written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king" (verse 23).

Throughout this time Esther, on Mordecai's advice, had not told the king of her family background or that she was related to Mordecai.

Haman's jealous plot

Another chain of events then began that would threaten Esther and Mordecai.

King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, one of his officials, above all other officials and nobles. By the king's order all the others were to bow and pay homage to Haman. But Mordecai, faithful to God's instruction that prohibited the veneration of anyone but God (Exodus 20:5), refused.

Others noticed Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman. They confronted Mordecai, who still refused. Then they told Haman.

Haman grew furious (Esther 3:5). He determined that Mordecai was a Jew, prompting him to craft a plan to kill not only Mordecai but all the Jews throughout Persia—because of Mordecai's refusal to honor him.

Haman and his accomplices cast lots to determine the best day to massacre the Jews. They decided the best day to carry out their perfidy would arrive some 11 months later. Haman presented his plan, couched in deceptive language to hide his motivation, to the king.

"There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries" (verses 8-9).

The king, alarmed at this perceived threat, foolishly agreed: "The money and



Esther turned and pointed toward Haman: "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" Haman was mortified. The king was so angry he could not speak.

the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you" (verse 11). The decree gave any Persian the right to kill Jews and loot their property. The city of Shushan and the palace were in confusion over this bizarre decree.

Mordecai's sacrificing service

When Mordecai heard of the decree, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes as a sign of tragedy and mourning. He walked through the city crying bitterly (Esther 4:1).

Esther's servants relayed the news to her. Not yet understanding the gravity of the situation, she sent clean garments to Mordecai. He refused them. Esther then sent her servant Hathach to discover why Mordecai refused the garments. Mordecai sent details and proof of Haman's heinous plan to destroy the Jews and urged the servant to ask Esther to approach the king and plead for the lives of the Jews.

When Esther heard of Haman's plan

and Mordecai's request, she was at first undecided over how she should proceed. She knew that to come before the king without a formal invitation, even though she was the queen, could mean she would be put to death (verse 11). She sent word of her predicament to Mordecai.

Mordecai's advice was sobering yet filled with faith. "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (verses 13-14).

Yes, Mordecai told her, Esther would risk her life if she approached the king uninvited. But if she didn't she and her relatives would be killed in the coming slaughter, he warned. Mordecai knew God would ultimately preserve the Jewish people and pointedly asked Esther to consider whether her influence



could provide the deliverance of her people from catastrophe.

A fateful and faithful decision

Esther knew what she must do. First she requested that her fellow Jews join her in a three-day fast to humble themselves and seek God's intervention. She would then approach the king, willing to accept the consequences, "and if I perish, I perish!" (verse 16).

Still fasting, Esther dressed in her royal robes and went to the king, unsure of her fate.

Immediately the king held out his golden scepter to her, welcoming her presence.

"What do you wish, Queen Esther?" the king asked. "What is your request? It shall be given to you—up to half my kingdom!" (Esther 5:3).

Esther answered the king wisely and

Esther set a remarkable example of personal sacrifice. Although understandably at first hesitant, she willingly risked her life so others could be saved.

humbly: "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him."

The king reacted promptly: "Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said" (verses 4-5).

King Ahasuerus and Haman were obviously thrilled to attend Esther's banquet. The king again invited Esther to state her request. Her reply: "If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said" (verse 8).

A sudden turn

Haman was beside himself. He excitedly relayed the news of his unexpected good fortune to his wife and friends: "Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king."

Nevertheless Haman was still jealous and bitter: "Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate" (verses 12-13).

Haman's wife and his friends had an idea sure to cheer up Haman: "Let a gallows be made,

fifty cubits [75 feet] high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet" (verse 14).

Haman's sullen face suddenly erupted in a wide grin. He immediately ordered the gallows built.

On the night before Esther's banquet, however, the king couldn't sleep. He told a servant to read to him the royal chronicles.

The king's servant read aloud how Mordecai had averted the earlier plot to assassinate the king (Esther 6:1-2). Reminded of this event, the king asked his servants, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The servants responded that nothing had been done (verse 3). This shocked the king. This oversight could forever tarnish the king's otherwise magnificent reign.

The king asked if someone of high rank might be present in the court to help correct

this oversight. Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace. His jealousy and anger toward Mordecai had moved him to approach the king late at night. Ironically, both Haman and the king had Mordecai on their minds.

The king's servants said that Haman had just entered the court. "Bring him in before me," said the king.

When Haman approached, the king asked him: "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" (verse 6).

Haman couldn't believe his ears. How could things get any better for him? Now, finally, others would be forced to acknowledge his greatness.

Haman replied without hesitation: "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!'" (verses 7-9).

Ahasuerus was pleased with Haman's suggestion. He instructed him to hurry and

perform what he suggested, to take the robe and the horse "and do so for Mordecai the Jew! . . . Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken" (verse 10).

Haman was astonished. Yet he was so full of pride, so intent on currying favor with the king, that he did exactly as he was told.

Haman was forced to honor the man who would not bow to him. He told his wife and friends of this bewildering turn of events. Listening carefully, they predicted where things were headed: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him" (verse 13).

Shortly afterward, the king's eunuchs found Haman and whisked him away to Esther's banquet.

Haman's downfall

For the second time the king and Haman dined with Queen Esther. The king repeated his magnificent offer to grant her any request, up to half of his kingdom. Finally Queen Esther presented her request: "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss" (Esther 7:3-4).

The king was furious: "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?" (verse 5).

Esther turned and pointed toward Haman: "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" (verse 6).

Haman was mortified. How could things have gone so wrong? The king was so angry he could not speak. He stormed out into the palace garden. The desperate Haman began begging Queen Esther for his life. So distressed was he over the turn of events that he lost his equilibrium and fell across the couch on which Esther was seated.

Just then the king, his temper having cooled somewhat, reentered the banquet room only to see what appeared to be a clumsy attempt by Haman to molest his beloved wife, the queen of Persia! He roared, "Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?" (verse 8).

One of the servants exclaimed to the king: "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing



at the house of Haman” (verse 9).

“Hang him on it!” the king commanded.

Immediately the king’s servants hanged Haman on his own towering gallows, and only then was the king’s anger abated.

Esther informed the king that Mordecai was her cousin. Immediately the king summoned Mordecai and gave him Haman’s signet ring. Queen Esther appointed Mordecai to oversee the house of Haman.

Esther’s countrymen delivered

Even so, the potential annihilation of the Jews throughout Persia still threatened. According to Persian law, once the king had issued a decree and sealed it with his signet ring, it could not be revoked.

Esther reminded the king of Haman’s deceitful plot to destroy her people; she pleaded for their lives. Although he could not revoke the earlier decree, the king allowed Esther and Mordecai to write a counterdecree that would enable the Jews to arm themselves and band together against any who would attack them.

When the fateful day arrived, the Jews overcame their enemies (Esther 9:1-11). To express their thanks to God, the Jews instituted the Feast of Purim. The name of this feast is a reminder of Haman’s casting of lots (*pur* means “lot”) and God’s deliverance of the Jews from their enemies on the day they were to be annihilated (verses 17-32).

Esther, Jewish queen of gentile Persia, set a remarkable example of personal sacrifice. Although understandably at first hesitant, she willingly risked her life so others could be saved. In this respect she prefigured the sacrifice of the coming Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, who willingly gave His life so each of us could have the opportunity to receive God’s gift of salvation, eternal life in His Kingdom.

Similarly, Christ expects His followers, His saints, to be willing to put their lives on the line to follow Him (John 15:13).

Speaking of His followers, God’s Word describes them as having overcome Satan “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Revelation 12:11).

Like faithful Esther and Mordecai, we should have godly, loving faith built on a loving, trusting relationship with Him. To see how you can develop such a relationship with your Creator, be sure to request your free copy of *You Can Have Living Faith*. Please contact our office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2. **GN**

Archaeology

Continued from page 27

admit that the events had been prophesied. However, thanks to the discovery in 1948 of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which include parts of every Old Testament book except Esther, the traditional date of Daniel has gained additional support.

Explains Gleason Archer, professor of Old Testament and Semitic studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School: “In order to avoid the impact of the decisive evidence of supernatural inspiration with which Daniel so notably abounds, it was necessary for rationalistic scholarship to find some later period in Jewish history when all the ‘predictions’ had already been fulfilled, such as the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC) . . . With the wealth of new data from the manuscripts of the Dead Sea caves, it is possible to settle this question once and for all” (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 1982, p. 282).

Thanks to this new linguistic evidence, Dr. Archer proceeds to show the accuracy of the traditional dating of Daniel (around 530 B.C.).

Jews lose their independence to Rome

In 164 B.C., with the heroic leadership of the Maccabean family, the Jews overthrew their Syrian oppressors. For a century they enjoyed their Jewish independence under the rule of the Maccabean descendants. However, in 63 B.C. the Roman general Pompey conquered Judea, making it Roman territory.

Several decades later the Jews would suffer greatly when the Romans chose Herod the Great as king of Judea. He reigned from 37 to 4 B.C. His last years bring the Intertestamental period to a close and usher in the New Testament era.

Continue reading *The Good News* for other articles in this series examining how archaeological evidence confirms the authenticity of God’s Word.

If you would like to learn more about Bible prophecy, including the many prophecies of Daniel that remain to be fulfilled, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *Is the Bible True?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. Both are free for the asking when you contact our office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2. **GN**

Tragedy

Continued from page 16

to Him for solutions to their problems. Humanity will repent of its love affair with self-determination only when forced to admit that thousands of years of going its own way has brought it only face to face with extinction.

The Scriptures contain the promise that

Tragically, humanity has lost sight of the connection between choices and actions and their consequences.

Jesus Christ will return to usher in a new world and establish the Kingdom of God. Then and only then will mankind find lasting peace and safety. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,” God promises, “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

In a transformed world the grief and pain of those affected by the shootings at Columbine High, and others who have experienced similar tragedies, will become a distant and fading memory. No wonder Jesus Christ tells us to earnestly pray for the time when God’s kingdom will become a reality (Matthew 6:9-10). **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

God has an overall timetable for dealing with humanity. The Bible tells us what lies ahead for our troubled world. You’ll find many eye-opening answers in *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, yours free for the asking when you contact us at the office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2. You can also find it in the literature library of our Web site at www.ucg.org.

Be sure also to request your free copy of *What Happens After Death?* In it you’ll discover the reassuring truth of what God has in store for the two teenage gunmen as well as their victims in this tragedy. You’ll be amazed at what the Bible really says.



2,000 years ago, one man understood the solution to the world's problems. *Now you can too.*

Jesus of Nazareth had a keen grasp of human problems and world events. So keen, in fact, that He predicted many of today's problems more than 2,000 years ago.

Overpopulation, epidemics and pollution threaten our health. Economic difficulties threaten our peace and security. War and crime put our life and safety at risk.

Is there an answer to our problems? Jesus not only predicted today's many crises, He predicted their solution—a coming world government that will solve the critical problems that threaten mankind.

Discover why this government will be established, and how mankind's problems will be solved, in the booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. For your free copy, write or call us at our office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2.



United Church of God
an International Association
www.ucg.org

Photo courtesy Israel Government Tourist Office