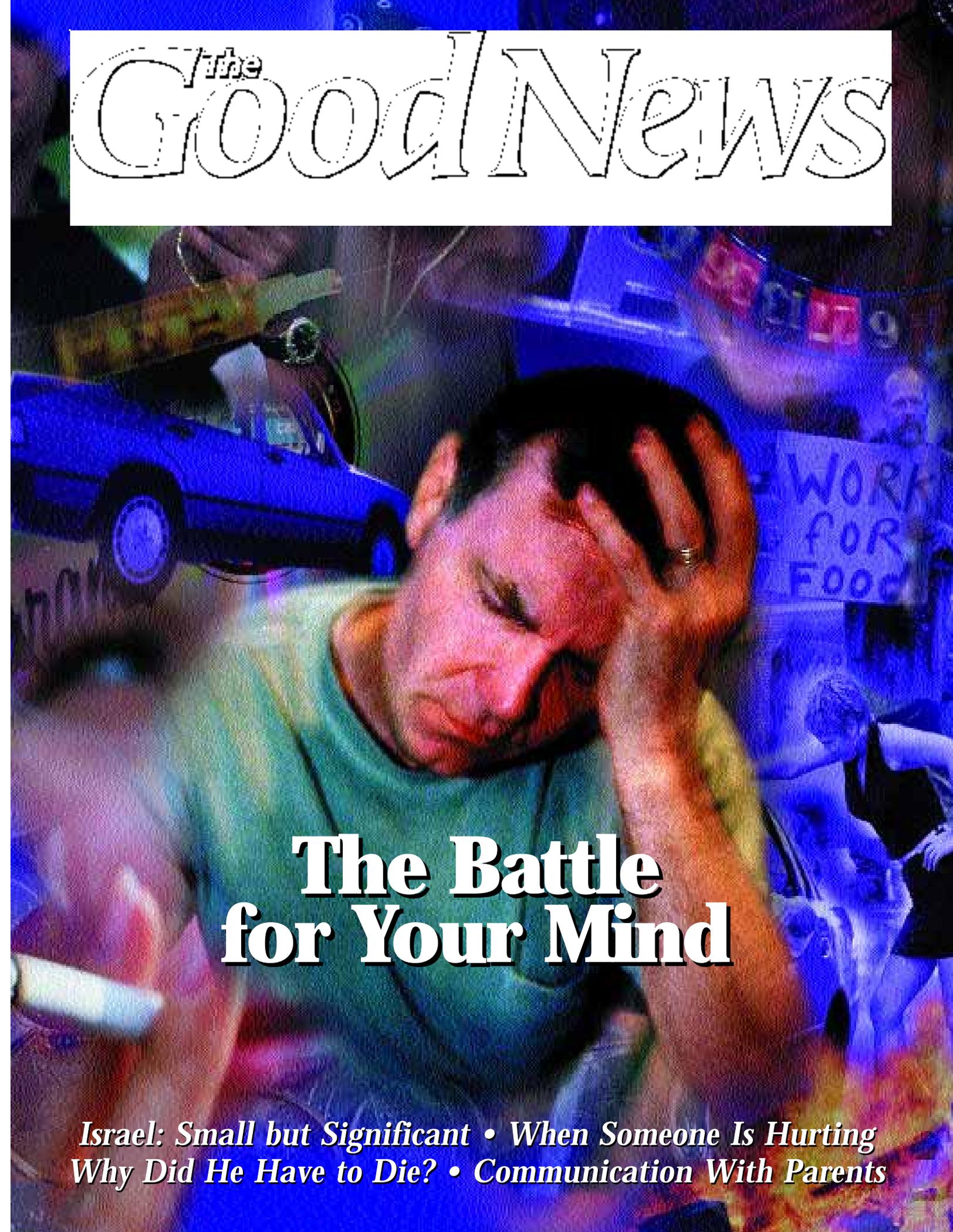


The Good News

A man in a green t-shirt is the central focus, covering his face with his hands in a gesture of distress or grief. He is surrounded by a crowd of people, some of whom are holding signs. One sign in the background reads "WORK FOR FOOD". The scene is lit with blue and purple lights, suggesting an outdoor event at night.

The Battle for Your Mind

*Israel: Small but Significant • When Someone Is Hurting
Why Did He Have to Die? • Communication With Parents*

Reexamining the Roots of Christianity

Millions have had the blessing of education in the 20th century and knowledge has enhanced our ability to perceive, analyze and understand the world in which we live. Although education is valuable, is everything we learn to be accepted at face value? Do our teachers always tell us the truth, or do they sometimes pass on preconceived ideas learned from *their* teachers? Following a biblical principle, should we not seek to “prove all things and hold fast that which is good”?

Against this backdrop we should examine a bias in the world of theology. Some fervently believe that the Jewishness of the New Testament is something to be ignored at all costs. Is this reasonable? Some scholars now admit that the established churches have been in gross error about important aspects of the founder of Christianity and His early followers. Is it possible that the churches that have sprung up in the name of Christ have been fundamentally wrong about His teaching and practice? Was the early Church far more Jewish than has been taught?

Well, as they say, “truth is stranger than fiction.” The subject of early Christianity’s Jewishness has been avoided in fact by most scholars because of a long-standing prejudice in the theological world. But a change of sorts is under way and it is causing a reevaluation of some of the underlying approaches of traditional Christianity. If understood in their totality, the implications are profound.

Recognizing that the context of Jesus’ life was within the Israelite religion of the Hebrew Scriptures, Roman Catholic theologian John Pawlikowski notes: “[Some] biblical scholars share the conviction that Jesus must be returned to his essentially Jewish context if the Church is to understand his message properly.”

More pointedly he writes: “It is now becoming increasingly apparent to biblical scholars that the lack of a deep immersion into the spirit and content of the Hebrew Scriptures leaves the contemporary Christian with a truncated version of Jesus’ message. In effect, what remains is an emasculated version of biblical spirituality.”

The Hebrew Scriptures comprise what we call the Old Testament, and we privilege the “New” over the “Old” by doing so. More accurate and less misleading terms would be *Hebrew Scriptures* and the *Apostolic Writings*. Then we might better understand what the early Church knew and that its teachings and practice were firmly rooted in the only “Bible” they had—the Old Testament.

In practical application this meant that those first Christians observed what many today would say are “Jewish” customs, such as the Passover. It’s eye-opening to read the accounts of Jesus’ last days with this Jewish background in mind. On the night preceding His crucifixion, Jesus sat down with His disciples for the Passover meal, eaten by the Israelite peoples for centuries following the Exodus from Egypt.

Jesus was an Israelite, of the tribe of Judah. He was also God in the flesh. That night He took bread and wine and introduced new symbols into an ancient memorial, infusing it with new significance. He was soon to become the Savior of all humanity by His sacrificial death in our stead. He was the Passover Lamb of God.

That evening He also performed a menial task by washing His disciples’ feet. Today some follow His example, once a year on the Passover washing each other’s feet, symbolic of their desire to humbly serve fellow human beings. They also take bread and wine in memory of the ultimate sacrifice of the Son of God. One teacher of theology told me a few years ago that some friends had recently begun the practice of footwashing, and she considered them better Christians for doing so.

In light of the findings of today’s scholars, it would be good for all of us to consider what it means to be a Christian in respect of the Founder’s essential Jewishness. Which other early Church beliefs and practices should we imitate? *The Good News* will bring you that knowledge as the months go by.

—David Hulme

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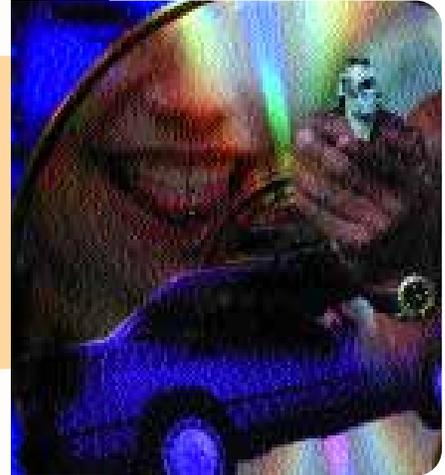
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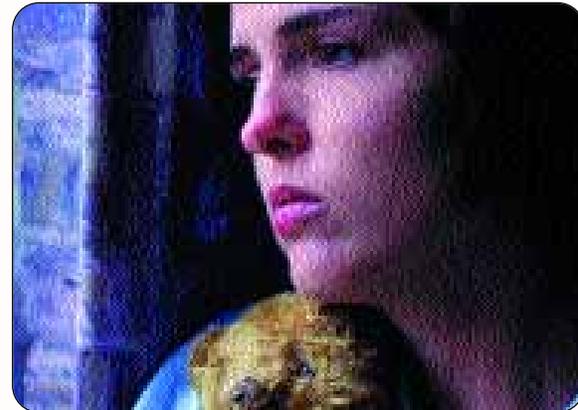
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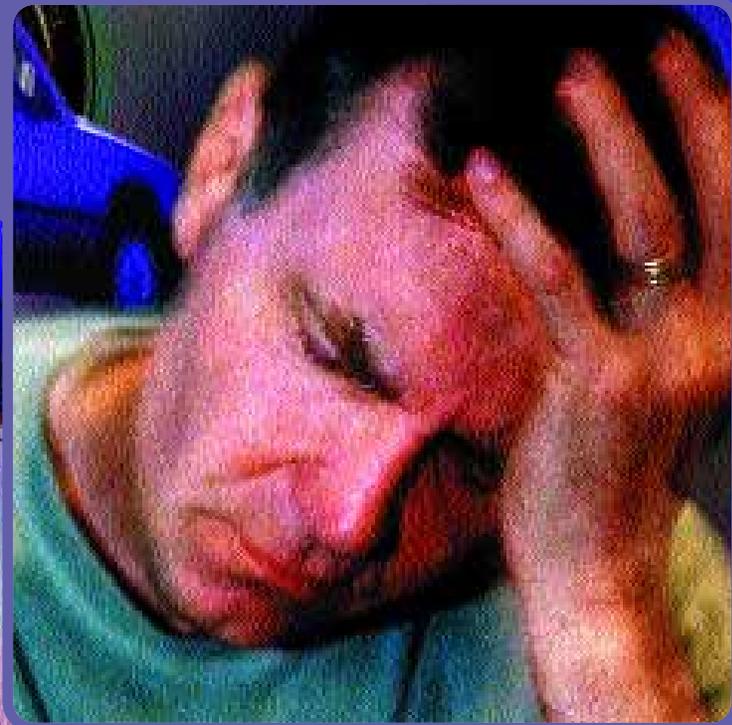
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The Battle for Your Mind



Why do you think the way you do? Are the choices you make truly your own, or do influences beyond your control unduly sway your opinions?



B

by Roger Foster

ged by a cacophony of sights, sounds, impressions, images and emotions—all competing for our time, attention and thoughts—our minds are daily exposed to far more information than we can consciously process. Even in sleep we see people, places and events into partly real, sometimes frightful and at other times wildly whimsical dreams. The sheer volume of ideas and information incessantly bombarding our minds creates for us an information crisis, a battle for control over what we think and believe.

The battle for your mind is a reality that you cannot afford to ignore. Believe it or not, you are the focus of relentless efforts to alter your beliefs, and some of the subtle skills meant to shape the way you think are astonishingly powerful and effective.

Commercial advertising is a widely recognized example. Marketing efforts thrive on shaping public habits and influencing choices.

Honest and legitimate advertising is a benefit to consumers and a valuable information source in any modern economy. Yet not all advertising honestly represents the facts, as illustrated by the old saying “Let the buyer beware.”

Beguiling and seductive schemes are so sophisticated and pervasive that America’s *NBC Nightly News* telecast with Tom Brokaw includes a regular

behavior. How you think controls the way you live and how you relate to other people. Your thoughts will influence your decisions and thus your actions. Ultimately, in this sense, you are what you think.

Consider these questions: Who exerts the greatest influence on your personal opinions? What are the external pulls that sway your thinking the most? What are the sources that affect the standards for your behavior? If you address these questions honestly, you’ll find their answers disturbing as well as profound.

Let’s examine some commonly recognized influences that shape the choices millions of people make every day, noticing the colossal impact those influences have on the behavioral standards of society. Then let’s look at some of the direct and concerted endeavors to modify—and in some cases abolish—almost all standards and values. Finally, let’s squarely face another momentous question: Who should have the greatest influence on how we think and the choices we make, and what is our personal responsibility?

Influence of television and movies

Television is the most powerful medium ever invented for conveying ideas and information to large numbers of people. Remarkably effective and influential, television is drastically altering our society’s thinking and behavioral patterns, even encour-

Irrational ideas generally produce irrational behavior. How you think controls the way you live and how you relate to others.

feature called “The Fleecing of America.” Like it or not, you are the target in a never-ending struggle for control over the way you think—and behave.

Right and wrong influences

Under the right circumstances, the influence of others on our lives can be beneficial. People who positively affect our thinking expand our understanding and knowledge. They stimulate our minds and expand our horizons, increasing the excitement and challenge of life itself. From them we learn and grow. Emotionally, we benefit immensely from their nurturing influence. Our fellow human beings contribute enormously to our personal development.

But not all who seek to shape our views are constructive. This is especially true of the massive efforts at work to eradicate society’s standards and values. The previously mentioned adage “Let the buyer beware” is just as applicable to this intellectual and spiritual domain as it is to the marketplace.

In general, irrational ideas foster irrational

aging so-called alternative lifestyles.

Film critic Michael Medved describes the profound impact of the TV and movie business on society. The power of the entertainment business “to influence our actions flows from its ability to redefine what constitutes normal behavior in this society,” he writes. Entertainers have “assumed a dominant role in establishing social conventions. The fantasy figures who entertain us on our TV and movie screens, or who croon to us constantly from our radios and CD players, take the lead in determining what is considered hip, and what will be viewed as hopelessly weird” (*Hollywood vs. America*, Harper-Collins Publishers, New York, 1992, p. 261).

Mr. Medved notes that society’s standards and values are incrementally but constantly altered by the entertainment media: “According to all available research on the subject, the most significant aspects of influence are gradual and cumulative, not immediate, and they occur only after extended exposure . . . What this means is that the full impact of

today's media messages will only be felt some years in the future" (ibid., p. 260).

"Hollywood no longer reflects—or even respects—the values of most American families. On many of the important issues in contemporary life, popular entertainment seems to go out of its way to challenge conventional notions of decency" (ibid., p. 10).

Music to whose ears?

All too often popular music represents the cutting edge of a philosophy that influences its adherents to seek to undermine all established conventions. Combining catchy tunes with sometimes blatantly antisocial lyrics, popular music exerts a near-incessant influence on many young people. Most adolescents can easily and flawlessly recite the words to today's most-played tunes, yet they stumble over memorization work at school. Even adults can recall lyrics that were popular decades ago, but they flounder over names and phone numbers of friends.

Music's influence is profound and pervasive. It is one of the most effective tools to alter the attitudes and outlook of those hearing it, both positively and negatively. It reaches emotions and reasoning simultaneously, ensuring a lasting impact.

For those immersed in the cynical hostility that has characterized much of popular music in recent decades, the consequences can be devastating. Consider the rationale behind the promotion of some music-industry artists:

"Those in the rock business understood very well that the music's subversion of authority was a large part of its appeal to the young. An impresario who developed one star after another was asked how he did it. He said, 'I look for someone their parents will hate'" (Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, Regan Books, 1996, p. 23).

Tragically, however, all too many parents find themselves inadequately equipped to explain right from wrong. A recent survey of American adults by the Barna Research Group reveals that 71 percent of Americans still believe in right and wrong, that such a thing as sin exists. But the survey also found that most adults simply grasp no clear concept of right vs. wrong.

An article that accompanied the survey observed that "77 percent of non-Christians said, 'There are no absolute standards for

morals and ethics.' Yet, shockingly, the majority of born-again Christians—64 percent—agreed with the secular culture that morality is relative. No wonder our lives are indistinguishable from the surrounding culture . . . The church has 'tons of teachers' yet it 'doesn't seem to be making a difference'" (*Southern California Christian Times*, June 1996).

Who should set your standards?

Intelligent moral standards serve simply as practical rules for considerate conduct. They establish our ethics, ideals and values. They allow society to function in peace and safety for the benefit of all. Proper moral standards should be carefully thought-out principles for distinguishing right from wrong. Without them, we retain no guidelines for the way we live.

Who holds the prerogative to set absolute standards for the way we think and behave? Some among the academic elite do well to tell us that human traditions are *not* reliable sources; they are too often contradictory and parochially biased. But they are wrong to tell us that absolute standards of right and wrong do not exist. There most certainly is a source for absolute standards for humanity. The Almighty God, He who created mankind, reveals to us *how we should live*.

"The distortions and insults about organized religion [in movies and television]," writes Mr. Medved, "will continue unabated as long as our popular culture continues its overall campaign against judgment and values. A war against standards leads logically and inevitably to hostility to religion because it is religious faith that provides the ultimate basis for all standards" (Medved, p. 89).

Only the God who created us can define perfect and reliable guidelines for human conduct. He reveals them to us through the Holy Scriptures. Make no mistake: God's Word is not of human origin. It carries the highest authority possible.

God cares how you think

How we think—our ideals and beliefs—are important to God. Yet our normal way of thinking is quite different from His. Through the prophet Isaiah, God describes the scope of our universal human problem: "'For My thoughts are *not* your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways

THE WAR AGAINST STANDARDS AND VALUES

For several decades many of the academic elite, the world's intellectual leaders, have actively promoted the concept that *absolute* values do not exist. They have advocated embracing moral relativism. In their published writings and lectures they ridicule the idea that any set of standards for measuring proper human behavior can apply universally to humankind. No wonder that today's entertainment media and popular culture so often belittle and reject traditional values.

Richard Tarnas articulates the latest shift in some academic thought: ". . . Postmodern critical thought has encouraged a *vigorous rejection of the entire Western intellectual 'canon' as long defined* . . . Received truths concerning 'man,' 'reason,' 'civilization' and 'progress' are indicated as *intellectually and morally bankrupt* . . . In this radically transformed cultural context, the contemporary academic world has increasingly concerned itself with the *critical deconstruction of traditional assumptions* . . ." (*The Passion of the Western Mind*, Ballantine, New York, 1991, p. 400, emphasis added).

Writer Tarnas adds: "Implicitly, the one postmodern absolute is critical consciousness, which, by deconstructing all, seems compelled by its own logic to do so to itself as well" (ibid., p. 402). He concludes that "the postmodern era is an era without consensus on the nature of reality . . ." (ibid., p. 409).

Offering no solid alternatives, some among the intellectual elite have rejected religious and traditional values held for centuries by civilized societies. By encouraging people to experiment by thinking and acting independently—doing what they *feel* is right—they promote individualism at the expense of responsibility. They reject the old standards but offer no effective guidelines to replace them. They would leave society aimlessly adrift.

Like it or not, and *recognize* it or not, you are bombarded daily with these concepts and ideas. Your ideals and beliefs—the thoughts of your mind that define who and what you are—are the target of a nihilistic, valueless secular philosophy. *GN*

higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9, emphasis added throughout).

The apostle Paul explains the reason for the gulf between the values of God and most humans: People tend simply to tune out God’s instruction. “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they *knew* God, they did *not honor* him as God or *give thanks* to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their *senseless minds* were darkened” (Romans 1:20-21, New Revised Standard Version).

How wrong thinking began

The rejection of God’s guidance is nothing new. It began as far back as the Garden of Eden. There “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan,” began an influence and distortion of human thinking that still grips humanity (Revelation 12:9).

Essentially, Satan’s line to Eve was:

Eden and began a life of toil and hardship, all because they allowed their thinking to be swayed by Satan, the archadversary of God (verses 6, 17-19). Satan won this early battle for the human mind. With relatively few exceptions, he has continued to win ever since.

God wants you to think like Him. He wants the principles expressed in His laws to live in your heart and mind (Hebrews 10:16), to form the foundation for your convictions, your thoughts and the way you choose to live your life. He wants to establish *in your mind* appropriate standards for human behavior—a clear *understanding* of right and wrong (1 John 3:4).

The apostle Peter expresses God’s concern for the way you think. “Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to *wholesome thinking*” (2 Peter 3:1-3, New International Version).

Learning to think clearly

Paul goes further, giving timeless guidelines for what we should allow to enter our

dards: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21, NIV).

An outstanding model of clear, level-headed thinking is recorded for our benefit: the personal example of Jesus Christ. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,” wrote Paul (Philippians 2:5). He admonished: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in *lowliness of mind* let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the *interests of others*” (verses 2:3-4).

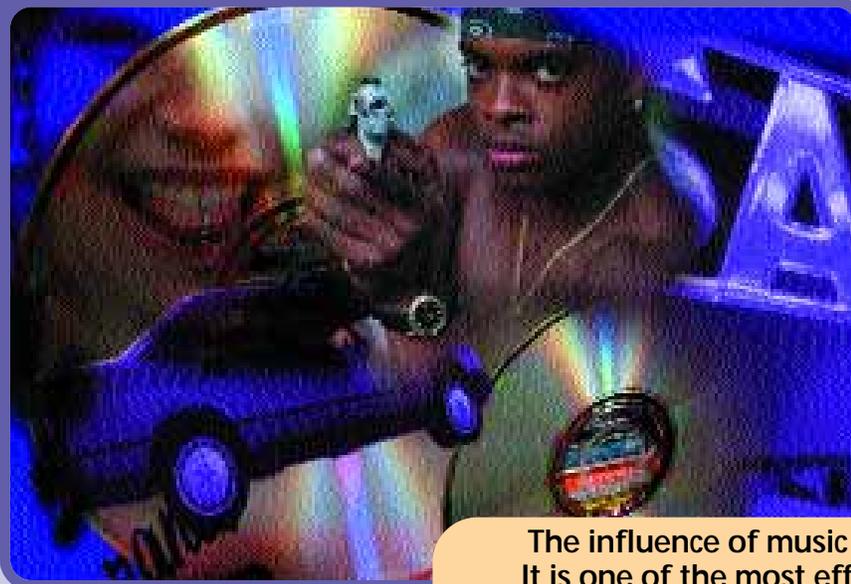
Clear, wholesome thinking puts concern for others as a priority—equal to concern for oneself. It is founded on genuine love for others.

A matter of choice

We live in a society that prides itself on its new ways of thinking, many of which have really been around as long as mankind has existed. Because of the sheer force of these ideas, we are confronted with a personal battle for control of our thoughts and values in spite of almost overwhelming opposition.

God will never force us to think like Him. Even to ancient Israel He said, “. . . I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life* . . .” (Deuteronomy 30:19). God provides the guidance, but the *choice* to heed or ignore it is always ours.

Those who would abolish standards of



The influence of music is both profound and pervasive. It is one of the most effective tools ever devised to alter the attitudes and outlook of those hearing it.

“Don’t believe God and trust His words. Trust yourself. Eat the forbidden fruit. Then you will have all the wisdom you need to determine good and evil” (Genesis 3:1-5). Eve was impressed. The devil kindled in her the desire to decide right and wrong for herself.

Eve eagerly fell for Satan’s seductive pitch. Then she persuaded Adam that the two of them were capable of deciding such matters for themselves. They chose to disobey God. They lost their inheritance in

minds: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—*think about such things*” (Philippians 4:8, NIV). Wholesome thinking flows from honesty and truth, from a knowledge of what is right, pure and admirable.

Paul describes the results of behavior based on thinking that rejects God’s stan-

conduct often imply that acceptance of values defined by anyone besides yourself—whether God or man—is an abdication of choice.

To blindly accept the ideas of others would, of course, be abdicating personal responsibility. However, to carefully examine, comprehend and adopt the wisdom of God is the mark of one who makes informed and intelligent choices. Acting

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Israel: Small but Significant

*“This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations,
with countries all around her” (Ezekiel 5:5).*

by John Ross Schroeder

Have you ever stopped to think about why the true size of the state of Israel is so hard for us to grasp? As celebrated American author Mark Twain once commented while visiting the Holy Land, “I could not conceive of a small country having so large a history.” We normally equate size with significance.

And how could a country constantly on TV news be so insignificant on the world map? The United States is enormous by comparison, yet many American citizens have an awareness of Israel far out of proportion to its geographical size. As Mark Twain also observed: “I have got everything in Palestine on too large a scale . . . The word Palestine always brought to my mind a vague suggestion of a country as large as the United States.”

Actually the modern nation of Israel comprises nearly 11,000 square miles in comparison to California alone’s some 160,000 square miles. Israel is only 40 miles wide and about the size of Wales. Why then does this tiny nation get so much global attention?

The historical answer

The answer, of course, ultimately lies in Israel’s spiritual, historical and literary legacy. As author

“No one yet knows what awaits the Jews in the twenty-first century, but we must make every effort to ensure that it is better than what befell them in the twentieth, the century of the Holocaust.”

—Benjamin Netanyahu

Amos Elon put it: “Even more extraordinary is the fact that the [Hebrew] Bible, as it was written in Jerusalem, unlike the books of other ancient peoples, was not the literature of a major or regional power nor even of a ruling elite, but the literature of a minor, remote people.”

The New Testament itself talks of this outsized historic contribution to humankind. The apostle Paul asked: “So what advantage has the Jew? What is the good of being circumcised? Much in every way. In the first place the Jews were entrusted with *the messages of God*” (Romans 3:1-2, *The Translator’s New*

Testament throughout article unless otherwise stated, emphasis added).

Much of the New Testament was composed in the Holy Land as well. It is the basic geographical location from which both the Old and New Testament Scriptures sprang forth. Truly this is the land of the Book populated by the peoples used to author and preserve the Bible.

Palestine is also where human frontiers tend to touch the infinite—and here they blur. According to the Bible itself spiritual salvation is not dependent on national borders determined by human beings whether through wars, conquests, peaceful negotiations or simple passive assent to the outworkings of history.

American novelist Saul Bellow captured the spirit of this theme in his book, *To Jerusalem and Back*: “Certain oddities about Israel: Because people think so hard here, and so much, and because of the length and depth of their history, this sliver of a country *sometimes seems quite large. Some dimension of mind seems to extend into space*” (page 58, emphasis added).

The world of the Jew

This concept is very deeply embedded in the Torah, usually understood as the five books of Moses. What God originally revealed to the Jews and the other eleven tribes was ultimately intended for a much larger audience—far beyond mere national borders, ethnic identities—and transcending territorial or political considerations.

Moses said to Israel concerning God’s laws: “Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deuteronomy 4:6-7).

And as Areil and D’vorah Berkowitz have written, “God equipped Israel for this task in many ways. For example, He chose to situate the nation at the crossroads of the world! The Promised Land was an ancient and natural landbridge between Japan, India and China in the Far East, Africa in the south, and Europe in the north.” The land of Israel was astride or near many of the major trade routes crucial to the ancient world.

It was from Jerusalem that the apostles took the gospel to the known civilized world: the original 12 apostles first to the House of Israel, and later Paul by way of Antioch, Asia Minor and Greece to Europe in a mighty way. It was as a result of the efforts of this apostle—not of the original 12, but one called “out of due season” (1 Corinthians 15:8)—that the early Church had to grapple with the controversial issue of circumcision and the question of who ultimately could be defined as a Jew.

Mining the inspired wisdom given of God, Paul was moved to write to Roman Christians in Europe: “For it is not the outward appearance that makes a true Jew; his circumcision is not an outward physical matter. No, the inward reality makes the true Jew; his circumcision is an inward state. It has to do with the spirit, not with the written Law. It is God, not man, who recognizes him” (Romans 2:29-30).

The apostle to the Gentiles never seem to tire of this basic theme. He told the Churches of Galatia: “There can be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free man, man nor woman; you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s people, then



The past is never far away in Israel. Here, Jews gather to pray at the Western Wall, which dates back to the first century B.C., when it was part of the vast temple platform.

you are Abraham’s offspring, and God’s gift is yours because of the promise” (Galatians 3:28-29).

Paul explained the very same thing to both Gentile and Jewish Christians at Colosse: “In this new life there is no difference between Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian,

Scythian, slave or free man. Christ is all, Christ is in all” (Colossians 3:11).

Finally he reiterated this identical wonderful truth to the Roman brethren again: “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for all have the same Lord and his riches are available for all who call on

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SMALL CAN BE DANGEROUS!

For millennia tiny nations and islands have posed massive problems for major countries. In this very century even superpowers can be drawn to the brink of all-out war over disputes involving relatively minuscule nations. Witness the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. The U.S. and the now-former USSR found themselves on the very edge of a catastrophic nuclear exchange before finally finding a way out of the crisis.

Britain and Argentina fought a brief war over the Falklands in 1982. A year later the U.S. liberation of Grenada produced a major diplomatic dispute with the UK—after all the Queen is head of state on this small Caribbean island. More recently the Gulf War was partially fought to liberate a relatively small Arab state, Kuwait.

Summing up the problem, a British House of Commons Report stated in 1984: “As the world has so often learned in the past, and at such great cost, wars break out and alliances fall apart, not so often as the result of deliberate decisions by the major powers, but as a result of the inability of the great power system and the alliances which support it, to cope with the problems of small countries in faraway parts of the globe.”

In the early seventies President Richard Nixon felt forced to restrain Russian Mideast intentions in order to render support to Israel, one of the tiniest nations in the world. U.S. forces had to be temporarily put on full alert.

So the words of former Commonwealth secretary-general Shridath “Sunny” Ramphal have the ring of authenticity: “The truth probably is that the world community has not yet thought its way

through the phenomenon of very small states in the world that is emerging in the end years of the twentieth century” (*Small is Beautiful but Vulnerable* speech in London, July 18, 1984).

The plain fact is that Israel is not alone in its plight. Although some of their problems may be unique, others—like territorial integrity—are all too common to many tiny nations.

Mr. Ramphal perceptively concluded: “Sometimes it seems as if small states were like small boats, pushed out into the turbulent sea, free in one sense to traverse it; but, without oars or provisions, without compass or sails, free also to perish. Or, perhaps, to be rescued and taken on board a larger vessel.”

Many small nations have had to rely on the umbrella of larger nations just in order to survive. Others, however, have had a good try at economic independence. Consider Eritrea in Africa as an example. *Independent on Sunday* feature writer Neal Ascherson recently visited this tiny nation of only 3.5 million people. Surprisingly he found “a stable country full of hope and economic energy” (22 December, 1996).

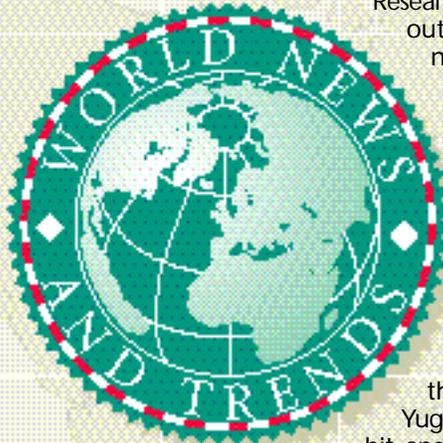
Ascherson visited with and interviewed Iseyas Afewerki, the President of Eritrea. This leader of a small and still poor nation stated that “Dependency is what we fear . . . Dependency, especially for food aid, can be disabling, dehumanising and very restrictive; it does not motivate human beings to be active.”

Writer Ascherson concluded his feature article with the thought that “What the Eritreans are saying is that poor nations must and can save themselves . . . Eritrea then is good news.”



An Overview of Conditions

Peace in whose time?



The Stockholm Institute for Peace Research is celebrating a world without war between sovereign nations. Regular *Times* feature columnist Simon Jenkins stated: "In 1997 we contemplate a second year in which, for the first time since proverbial records began, nothing that could be called a state of hot war exists between sovereign countries. Guns are not firing across borders."

Sometimes friction among the nations of the former Yugoslavia may stretch this point a bit, and civil war certainly exists at several points on the globe. Also tensions are

much in evidence between sovereign states; witness the Middle East.

Still, we have to be thankful for whatever peace does exist while keeping a wary eye on Jeremiah's ancient prophecy of national leaders proclaiming, "Peace, peace!" when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). The apostle Paul also referred to a time when would shall say, "Peace and safety!" yet sudden destruction would soon follow (1 Thessalonians 5:3). (Source: *The Times*.)

Crime and sexual freedom: a relationship?

Does male teenage promiscuity have anything to do with rising crime rates? According to a report by the Institute of Economic Affairs in Britain, it does. Newspaper coverage in *The Independent* showed that "the freedom of young men to engage in sexual intercourse without being powerfully restrained by the pressure to become monogamous husbands or fathers is closely linked to crime."

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A similar article in *The Observer* reluctantly agreed that "it is ludicrous to deny the relationship between fatherlessness and crime. The areas of high unemployment, highest lone parenthood and worst crime are coterminous."

The report's author, Norman Dennis, maintained that cultural mechanisms that once sent messages of "responsibility, striving, self-help and self-improvement" to the next generation have broken down.

American historians Will and Ariel Durant understood this principle well. "A youth boiling with hormones will wonder

why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires," they wrote; "and if he is unchecked by custom, morals or laws, he may ruin his life before he matures sufficiently to understand that sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group."

Undeniable, yet often overlooked, is the relationship between the biblical commandments against promiscuity in thought, word and deed and those forbidding the crimes of stealing and murder. The apostle James noted this connection: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 4:10).

The adulterer steals affection that belongs to another. The news and entertainment media regularly bear out that sexual promiscuity can lead even to murder. Both Old and New Testaments command us to love our neighbor by refraining from these illicit acts that enslave and to diligently teach our children to follow this royal law of liberty (verse 12). (Sources: *The Independent*; *The Observer*; Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1968, pp. 35-36.)

Rampaging girl gangs

Gender bending, gender crossing and gender confusion have become characteristic phenomena of the late 20th century, increasingly borne out by the bad behavior of both sexes in conduct once thought unnatural and certainly unthinkable.

Nick Peters reported from Washington, D.C., for *The Sunday Times* (of London) that "gun-toting girl gangs stake claim to America's streets." Significantly, he notes, "the arrest rate for teenage girls is now twice that of teenage boys. In some areas of the country, girls account for nearly 25 percent of violent juvenile crime, including murder, robbery with violence—even rape."

This article unwittingly revealed that the cause of much of this macabre behavior is the breaking of God's law in the home: "At the core of the crisis are home lives where violence, sexual abuse and drug taking are commonplace." (Source: *The Sunday Times*.)

Don't overlook the weather

In January extreme weather was a worldwide phenomenon. Snow and ice gripped Europe while storms battered the western United States and parts of Asia. Nations can quickly recover from weather-related calamities. But sometimes the worst weather can have lasting effects. Consider the winter of 1947 in Europe. Recently Barry Turner recalled that big chill for us in a *Sunday Times* feature article:

"Fifty years ago, Europe suffered its worst winter on record. The snow falls buried Britain's brief dream of socialism and led to [West] Germany's resurgence as a dominant force in Europe . . . [It was] the cold snap that shaped the post-war world."

Snow fell in some parts of Britain from January 27 to March 17, continuing in the Pennines mountain range until June. Widespread flooding followed the bitter cold, devas-





tions Around the World

tating thousands of acres of cropland and forcing a financially strapped Britain (her strength sapped by the war) to pay for expensive foodstuffs from overseas.

Before World War II Great Britain's assets totaled some £3 billion; at war's end the nation owed that much. Weather conditions greatly exacerbated her financial condition. According to a *Sunday Times*, the winter of 1947 was the worst since record-keeping began. Writers described the

Nations can quickly recover from weather-related calamities. But sometimes the worst weather can have lasting effects.

onslaught as bringing "the longest period without the sun," "the lowest average temperature," "the fiercest snowstorms" and "the deepest drifts."

The Continent was hit hard as well. Wrote Mr. Turner: "On the continent the icy cold had an instant political impact, triggering Marshall aid from America and consolidating Western Europe as a bulwark against communism, anchored to a resurgent Germany" (emphasis ours). West Germany received well over \$400 million in Marshall aid, helping to enable a relatively quick recovery. The hard-working German nation abolished rationing six years before Britain did.

"If the winter of 1947 has to take much of the blame for turning American favour towards Germany as the driving force for a new Europe, it also stalled the British economic recovery."

We should never overlook the weather's potential role in the fulfillment of prophecy. (Sources: *The Sunday Times*, *Daily Telegraph*.)

Monarchy under fire

As we approach Century 21 we see a world exceedingly troubled by national strife and political instability. Long-standing institutions come under increasingly severe scrutiny by entertainers and journalists.

Hardly any institution is sacrosanct, including the British monarchy. Although the modern monarchical tradition in Britain has existed for a millennium, the royal family has come under siege in recent years, perhaps because of questionable behavior of some of its younger members.

A major television channel brought the national debate to a boil by airing a live program in early January titled "Monarchy: The Nation Decides." Listeners were invited to phone in their opinions. Some 2.6 million people did. Surprisingly, the vote was nearly two to one in favor of a continued monarchy in Britain.

Ultimately the question of retaining a British monarchy rests in the hands of Almighty God. His is the only referendum that really counts. (Sources: *The Times*, *The Independent*.)

Church unity: a step forward?

It's been more than 450 years since the Protestant Reformation, a watershed event of mainstream Christendom. From

time to time, particularly in the 20th century, reconciliation has been attempted. None of the attempts has succeeded.

In the 1980s former archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie tried his best to forge meaningful links between his own Anglican congregation and the Roman Catholic Church. His efforts foundered, principally on the issue of ordaining women priests.

In the closing months of 1996 the Anglican Church in Britain endorsed the Porvoo Agreement: "a mutual compact between the Anglican and Lutheran Churches of the British Isles and virtually all Nordic and Baltic nations. This will mark the most significant step towards reunification since the Reformation." Besides its obvious symbolic value, in practice this agreement involves mutual acceptance of baptisms and the receiving of each other's sacramental ministrations.

This covenant between churches also marks a remarkable change of strategy for the Church of England. It is seen as a step-by-step approach towards the Roman Catholic Church. "Church leaders have wisely recognised the need to build ecumenicalism block by block. *A road to Rome cannot be built in a day*" (emphasis ours). (Source: *The Times*.)

American abortion rate drops to 20-year low

The Centers for Disease Control report that 1994 marked a 20-year low in the abortion rate among women in the United States, with 21 of every 1,000 women 15 to 44 years old undergoing an abortion that year.

Although the rate has decreased, the number of abortions remains staggeringly high, with 1.2 million performed in 1994 and 1.3 million in 1993. The number of abortions in the United States peaked at 1.4 million in 1990. Since abortions were legalized in 1973, more than 25

Since abortions were legalized in 1973, more than 25 million fetuses have been aborted in the U.S.—more than the population of many countries.

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For every 1,000 live births in 1994, 321 abortions were carried out. This was the lowest rate since 1976, when 312 abortions occurred for every 1,000 live births. The profile of women seeking abortions has not changed from earlier years: Most are single, white and less than 25 years old.

Opinions diverse on reasons for the drop in the rate and number of abortions. Some pro-abortion groups cite the increasing difficulty of getting abortions, better access to birth control and harassment from right-to-life organizations. Abortion foes, on the other hand, attribute the decreases to their education efforts directing women toward churches, pregnancy centers and other alternatives to abortion. (Source: Associated Press.)

—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley





D

usk was approaching on the cold, snowy afternoon of January 13, 1982, in Washington, D.C., when the throttles of Air Florida's Flight 90 were pushed forward to the takeoff position and the jetliner's engines roared their response. Strapped into their seats were five crew members and 74 passengers, including a 46-year-old bank executive from Atlanta.

He could not have known that within seconds only he and five other people would still be alive. Nor could he have guessed that whether those few would live or die would be *his* decision.

Only 73 seconds after its takeoff roll, 103,000 pounds of aircraft slammed into the concrete and steel of the 14th Street bridge, then plowed through the frozen surface of the Potomac River. Only the tail section remained afloat in the nightmarish scene.

Six people, three men and three women, clung to their lives in the mangled remnants of the huge airliner bobbing in the freezing waters. Firefighters attempted to rescue the survivors from the shore, but were simply too far away to reach them. The cruel, sure progression of hypothermia had nearly robbed

Why Did He Have to Die?

by Cecil Maranville

them of the ability to hold on during the 22 minutes that passed before the arrival of *Eager I*, a National Park Service helicopter.

The bank executive was the first to have a rescue line dropped to him. To the astonishment of the rescuers aboard the helicopter, this man refused safety for himself and placed the line around another passenger instead. When that person was safely aboard the chopper, the line was again dropped to the banker. A second time he secured it around someone else, making a difference between life and death.

The third time the line fell to him, the third time he passed it to another. And the fourth. And the fifth. Five times he made a conscious decision to put the lives of the other survivors ahead of his own. He had to know that the threat to his own life increased with every passing moment. Yet, selflessly, he persisted in passing the life-saving line to others.

One of the men manning the helicopter, who had previously flown combat missions in Viet-



nam, later said he had never seen such courage. Another rescuer was so inspired by this raw heroism that he was willing to jump into the river himself to retrieve this man who had saved the others.

But that was not to be. Having delivered survivor No. 5 to shore, *Eager 1* returned to reel in the hero, only to find he had slipped out of sight to join his fellow passengers in a watery grave.

His identity disappeared with him. For 18 months the only thing known was the ultimate sacrifice he made on that bitter winter day. Finally, in June 1983, after an intensive investigation identified him, his mother was presented with the Coast Guard Lifesaving Medal by President Ronald Reagan in a ceremony at the White House.

Why did he have to die? If he had put his own life first, certainly some—if not all—of the five who survived the tragedy of January 13, 1982, would have died.

Another hero in another time

Another man in another time gave up His life so that others would live. When that happened, no swell of inspiration appeared among onlookers. Rather than cheering His heroism, they cheered His impending death. Rather than praise and encouragement, He felt the sting of jeers and insults.

The scene was not the crash of an airliner, a collapsed building or a sinking ship. It was the public execution of a man who had been sentenced to a torturous, humiliating death.

Yet He was a hero. How He gave up his

life so that others could live is not as immediately obvious as the hero of Flight 90. Yet His heroism far transcended even that awe-inspiring demonstration of courage by the man who repeatedly delayed his own rescue so that others could survive.

The death of this man was no accident. His own Father was well aware of the plans and designs that went into this sacrifice of a life, but He did nothing to stop it. As a matter of fact, the Father had a hand in the planning of His own Son's death!

What kind of father would allow the execution of his son? Was this tragedy the result of some bizarre familial hatred? What father could calculate the killing of his son and stand by while the execution took place?

Once we know the background, we'll understand that this death truly was a heroic act by *both* Father and Son. Its heroism far surpassed any other act of giving one's life for another. You see, the hero is Jesus Christ, whose Father is God Himself.

Does this introduction to Jesus' death help us think more deeply about His sacrifice? Jesus' Father actually did plan His

life flickering against the night sky or listening to the wailing sirens of police cars and fire trucks. Perhaps no somber news commentator is interrupting television or radio broadcasts to report disaster. But, just the same, the issue here is our survival.

Most people are understandably concerned with surviving, just staying alive. But the issue of survival that lies behind the death of Jesus Christ goes far beyond our everyday concerns of escaping death from injury, disease or old age.

In a familiar Bible passage, God summarizes the planning behind the death of His Son. A close look at these verses helps us comprehend why Jesus had to die. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

This tells us that God the Father sent Jesus Christ so that mankind would "not perish" but would "be saved." Addressing why Jesus had to die, this scripture clearly

This is the story of two men who gave up their lives so others would survive. The heroism of the first was as obvious as it was inspiring. The heroism of the second wasn't immediately apparent, yet this man's selflessness far surpasses the courage of the first. It's a story you need to understand.

Son's death. The decision was not made at a moment of crisis in reaction to an emergency or sudden disaster. Looking to the Bible as our source of information, we're told that the death of Jesus Christ was planned "from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

Why? Why did Jesus have to die? Why couldn't God come up with some other plan, considering the amount of time that passed from the first humans until the death of Christ? Wasn't there another way?

If we take such difficult questions apart and methodically analyze the information given us, we will discover the profound truth grasped by so few.

Survival is the issue

Whether we realize and admit it or not, survival is the issue facing each of us.

We may not be caught in the middle of the flaming wreckage of a shattered fuse-

box says it truly was a matter of survival.

What is death?

The Bible shows that eventually death comes to all (1 Corinthians 15:22). Contrary to what many believe, death is not an altered state of life in heaven, hell, purgatory or some other place or condition. "The dead know nothing," says the Bible, "and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten" (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

The Bible reveals death as the cessation of life, thought, consciousness. Eventually, even the memory of those who are deceased fades from existence. One who perishes ceases to live, with no power or ability to exist again.

It's good to take some time to consider that. The uncomplicated, sobering message is that all humans will perish—those who have died after peaceful and productive lives, those who have died after sad

and troubled lives. Everyone would cease to exist, *permanently* were it not for the heroic self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He came that we “should not perish,” that we should not experience the black nothingness of death forever.

Death and the afterlife are monumental concepts; they aren’t dealt with fully here because each deserves a long discussion beyond the reach of this article. But they must be mentioned to help us understand why Jesus had to die.

Sin is another topic that cannot be fully addressed in a few paragraphs. Yet we must understand it, for sin is also part of why Jesus Christ had to die.

“... Through one man sin entered the world, and *death through sin*, and thus *death spread to all men, because all sinned...*” (Romans 5:12)

Sin is often joked about, dismissed from our thoughts as too religious to concern us in our daily routines. But sin is a deadly serious subject. We certainly would pay attention to the discovery of a sure cure for cancer, because cancer is widely acknowledged to be a killer. So why not pay attention to the cause and cure for *death itself*? Here, in fact, is a description of sin, the specific and actual cause of death.

Sin is one of the most powerful forces in the universe. Sin is so powerful that it can eliminate any chance for survival. Unless an antidote can be found for its effects, sin’s presence spells the total destruction of life and of the hope of life. Sin’s consequences are enormous. The stakes could not be

Sin is often joked about, dismissed from our thoughts as too religious to concern us in our daily routines.

greater. Sin kills and kills forever.

What is the value of one life?

What can counteract sin? As stated above from Romans 5, “death spread to all men, because all sinned” (verse 12). Every man or woman who has drawn breath has been corrupted by sin. With everyone polluted, tainted, and infected by sin, who or what can nullify its poisonous effect?

Jesus Christ can. He, uniquely, was “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 3:5). Therefore, God could offer His Son’s life as the single hope to destroy death.

What value did the life of Jesus hold in comparison to the value of human life? Mere words make it difficult to contrast that which sin has not touched with that which

sin has corrupted. The one untouched by sin lives forever. The other dies forever. The difference in value is infinite.

Christ’s life is worth so much that it outweighs the value of all humans who ever lived before Him, who have lived since and who will yet live. That is the clear truth of the Bible, the awesomely incomparable value of Christ’s life.

Perhaps one simple word can help us begin to understand the worth of Christ’s life: *enough*. Jesus’ life was worth enough—actually, infinitely *more* than enough—to pay for and nullify the ruin caused by all sin: the sin of *all* people of *all* nations throughout *all* history and into *all* of the future.

Could Jesus have effected this result without dying? No. The fact is, sin causes death (Romans 6:23). No one has ever existed who could find a way around that ultimate penalty. It can’t be minimized, plea-bargained or dismissed. Because of the monstrous reality of sin, Jesus had to die to block its destructive end.

We’ve already acknowledged that death comes to all. What Christ’s death successfully challenges is the *permanence* of death (2 Timothy 1:10). Having paid the debt for the sins of all, Jesus possesses the authority and capacity to reclaim people from death. To Martha, shortly before bringing her brother back to life as a demonstration of His broader plan, Jesus spoke these telling words: “I am the *resurrection* and the *life*. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall *live*” (John 11:25).

Jesus’ statement amplifies a few more of the words of John 3:16, which state that “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Sin is so toxic that only divine countermeasures can make possible any hope of a renewal of life. Life *can be* renewed, but only because Jesus Christ died to counteract the penalty of sin.

Willing sacrifice for mankind

Jesus Christ’s life could pay the penalty for all sin for all time because His divine life is worth more than the lives of all humanity before or since. Only by the sacrifice of a life of enormous worth could the enormous penalty for all sin be paid.

John 3:17 tells us that Jesus, the Son of God, was sent not to condemn the world,

but to save it from death. Christ was sent *by* the Father *to* the world, from His position in the Godhead, to live as a mortal man.

Jesus Christ, the Word, existed in the beginning “with God” and “was God” (John 1:1). His life was divine. “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3). Jesus was the One who created this earth, the marvelous universe and humanity (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16). As mankind’s Creator, Jesus is worth more than the total of all the lives He has created.

His divine state before He was sent to earth as a man is evident from John 17:5. His last recorded prayer before His execution: “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you *before the world began*” (John 17:5, New International Version).

Before He became a mortal human, no evil force could have swept Jesus to His death. He was divine, immortal, beyond the frailty and vagaries of human life.

By simple analogy, He was like one of the bystanders at the tragic downing of Flight 90, rather than one of those on board. As such, He would not be threatened by the life-crushing impact of the doomed airliner on steel and concrete, nor by the freezing waters of the Potomac. His life was not in any danger.

Yet He chose to give it up.

The motivation behind the plan

Why did Jesus have to die? Why did He involve Himself with the survival of others when His own life was not at risk?

He died because of love. His death was an act of love.

From the initiation of the plan to counteract sin’s evil, both God the Father and Jesus Christ were motivated by Their love for all mankind. Recall the premise of John 3:16: “For *God so loved* the world...” It says that the Father planned this infinitely meaningful, eternally powerful sacrifice of His Son out of love for all who have lived.

Why do the Father and Son care what happens to people?

It may be difficult to fathom Their profound interest in and deep concern for all men and women. From earth’s beginning, God has loved earth’s inhabitants as potential members of the *divine family*. Our Father says to those who have, through Christ, left behind the curse of sin, “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Jesus viewed His decision to become human as a decision to become like His *brothers and sisters* (Hebrews 2:17, New Revised Standard Version).

A deadly consequence of sin is that it cuts us off from God, severing us from the relationship God desires to have with us (Isaiah 59:2). Through Christ's sacrifice that broken relationship is restored, our sins are forgiven, and we are reconciled to God (Colossians 1:21-22).

The family relationship God desires to have with us is restored: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-2).

The literal fulfillment of this statement—that we will become children of God—will come to pass in the resurrection at Jesus Christ's return (Hebrews 2:10-13; Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

Making the supreme sacrifice

What could be more convincing evidence of love than the act of the Father of offering His only Son to die for us? God and Jesus were willing to pay the supreme sacrifice to seek and secure the possibility of a loving, personal relationship with us.

Few passages capture the essence of Christ's act of love as does the one that says that Jesus, "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8, NIV).

Until Jesus became a man, He could not have died. With His Father, He made a conscious choice, in the context of calm reason rather than in a condition of crisis. That makes the depth of Their love and the sincerity of Their commitment all the more evident and profound.

After He became a man, Jesus still would not have suffered the agony of execution by crucifixion had He not chosen to offer Himself. His biographies in the Gospels make plain that, as His terrible fate approached, He felt the natural pulls of any man to assure His own survival. Death

was not an easy choice. He confirmed His heroic decision to set aside His desires and His life right up to the excruciating end (Matthew 26:39).

Jesus described His decision to step into the human realm, to pay the exacting price for sin, as the supreme act of love: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Can we possibly comprehend why Jesus had to die?

Jesus died because He *chose* to die. His

The literal fulfillment of this statement—that we will become children of God—will come to pass.

death was not just a matter of giving up a life, as noble as that act can be. He chose to step aside from being God, alive forever, to die *so we humans could live forever*.

How should we remember this?

Appropriately, the hero of Flight 90 was remembered with a medal, presented by none other than the president of the United States. What way is appropriate to commemorate the heroic act of Jesus Christ?

Jesus inaugurated His own memorial. Christians assemble every spring on the Passover to commemorate Christ's courageous, loving sacrifice. According to His instructions, this annual memorial begins with a ceremony of Christians washing each other's feet. This humble demonstration of a servant's duty is a powerful reminder of the kind of humble service Christ performed in His life and especially in His death and a reminder of His expectations for His followers. Initiating this symbolic yet profound act, Jesus told us to do likewise: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

He used two other symbols by which we are to remember His sacrifice: unleavened bread and wine. Of the bread, Jesus said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:24). Concerning the wine, He instructed, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28).

Both are dramatic representations of the most meaningful, most powerful self-sacrifice in all history. (To better understand the significance of this event, be sure to request our free booklet *God's Holy*

Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. Contact us at the phone number or address nearest you on page 2.)

Medals tarnish with time, and memorial ceremonies can grow routine. The greatest tribute to the deed of the hero of Flight 90 is the inspiration stirred among the witnesses to emulate his selfless heroism. Isn't the highest tribute to Jesus' infinitely greater act of heroism that we imitate His action?

We cannot give our lives to pay for sin, because nothing we could do can buy back

our lives corrupted by sin. But we can love as He does. We are urged in one of Paul's epistles to "live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2, NIV).

Paul described Christ setting aside His divinity, willingly surrendering it and sacrificing His life for our sakes. He wrote this stirring appeal to live our memorial to Christ: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Paul encourages us to assume the attitude of humble, selfless service typified by Christ: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (verses 3-4).

Looking out for the interests of others is a living memorial of the love of God, a fitting way to perpetually remember Jesus' invaluable sacrifice. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

Why the Son of God had to die

Why did Jesus have to die? He had to die because of the sins of humanity and the death they demand—to make possible a relationship between the Father and all men and women, who are invited to become children of God; to make possible the resurrection to eternal life; to defeat the awful penalty of eternal death.

Why did Jesus have to die? Jesus had to die because He chose to die for each of us in a decision of pure love made with His Father. If They are willing to pay such a price to gain a relationship with us, what are we willing to do to have a relationship with Them? **GN**

Battle

Continued from page 7

only on feelings and emotion shows neither discretion nor intelligence.

Corrupting power behind the scene

What is the real source of our society's rejection of godly values? The apostle Paul explained that his God-given mission to earth's inhabitants was "to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God . . ." (Acts 26:18).

The Bible reveals Satan as a powerful unseen force influencing humanity. He is described as "the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient," a being influencing men and women to lead a life of "gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts" (Ephesians 2:2-3, NIV).

Satan's influence is so pervasive that it affects every area of life in every society. How great is his power over humanity? He "deceives the whole world"! (Revelation 12:9).

Through thousands of years of deceiving people, he has become the "god of this world [who] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel . . ." (2 Corinthians 4:4, NRSV). The influence of Satan and his demons is such that they can sway even the opinions and decisions of world leaders (Revelation 16:14).

Surprising to many, Satan has succeeded in influencing religious beliefs and institutions. He manages to disguise his own ostensibly Christian ministry and religious assemblies (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15; Revelation 3:9).

He does not present his ways as the greedy, self-centered, vain practices they really are. Nor does he show their destructive, painful end, leading inexorably to suffering and death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). On the contrary, he masquerades his thoughts and way of life as one of enlightenment, fulfillment and satisfaction. God's Word warns us that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14, NRSV).

Besides religion, Satan's ideas invade such arenas as business, education, philosophy, government and science. No human interest or endeavor escapes his intrusion. Indeed, we read that "the whole

world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

Does Satan influence your mind?

The consequences of Satan's influence on mankind's thought processes have proved devastating. Seldom has the world seen peace; 150 million people have died in wars in just this century. In the same time, more than 100 million more have died from diseases, pandemics and natural disasters. Humanity possesses the ability to erase human life from earth many times over.

In spite of constant attempts to improve our lot, thousands live on the verge of starvation, and millions go to sleep hungry every night. A fourth of earth's population lives under totalitarian regimes with little control over basic decisions that affect their lives.

Under Satan's influence, human thinking has become so absorbed with self-gratification that "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot" (Romans 8:7-8 NRSV).

The prophet Jeremiah recognized that people are blinded by the deceit of their own evil intents. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Satan has succeeded at turning humanity away from God. The apostle Paul describes the inevitable, tragic results of rejecting God and His way of life:

"Furthermore, since they did not think it worth while to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them" (Romans 1:28-32, NIV).

Who will win?

God calls some out of this immoral, ungodly, Satan-dominated world He calls them to fight the influences around them, to resist the tendencies and desires of their

own minds. This deeply personal battle, however, is not the sort of conflict we often envision. This battle "is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against . . . the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12, NRSV).

This struggle pits us against the ingrained, self-centered habits and ways of thinking that have influenced us from birth, as well as a personal foe determined to separate us from God: "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith . . ." (1 Peter 5:8-9, NIV).

Who will determine your values? Who will win the battle for your mind? Will you allow the influences of Satan on society to control and corrupt your personal beliefs and convictions? Or will it be "God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

A godly victory is possible only by establishing righteous standards as your values. That will require you to make difficult choices.

The apostle Paul expressed it so well in these words: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds [on our minds]. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5, NIV).

Who you allow to exert the greatest influence on your life is your choice. Will you permit God, by seeking His knowledge and assistance, to win the battle for your mind? **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

A godly life is possible only through knowing the proper standards for your values and know why they are important. To learn your real purpose in life and more about why God wants all human beings to learn to think like Jesus Christ, be sure to read our free booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. Please contact us at the address nearest you listed on page 2.

The Good Friday-Easter Sunday Question

How do the biblical three days and three nights after Jesus Christ's crucifixion fit between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning? Or do they?

by Wilbur Berg

In the northern hemisphere, the spring of each year brings several of Christianity's most important religious observances. The Lenten period from Ash Wednesday to Easter is observed by some with fasting and penance. Good Friday, or Holy Friday, as it is sometimes called, is celebrated two days before Easter as a commemoration of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Easter Sunday is revered as the day of Jesus' resurrection, sometimes by sunrise services.

These practices are so much an ingrained tradition in the church calendar that many would consider it heretical to question them. But most of the world is scarcely aware that the original apostles did not institute or keep these customs, nor were they observed by the early Christian Church. Try as you might to find them, Lent, Good Friday and Easter are not so much as mentioned in the original Greek wording of the New Testament. The word *Easter* appears only once in the King James Version of the Bible (Acts 12:4) in a flagrant mistranslation of the Greek word *pascha*, which should be translated "Pass-over," as most versions render it.

The justification for the Lenten 40-day preparation for Easter is traditionally based on Jesus' 40-day wilderness fast before his temptation by Satan (*Harper's Bible Dictionary*; "Lent"; Matthew 4:1-2; Mark 1:13). The problem with this explanation is that this incident is not connected in any way with Jesus' supposed observance of Easter. The 40-day pre-Easter practice of fasting and penance did not originate in the Bible.

Pagan practices adopted

Many people still follow such practices, assuming that such activities honor God

and are approved by Him. But, we should ask, how does God regard such extrabiblical customs? Consider God's instructions to those who would worship Him:

"Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You *shall not worship the LORD your God in that way*; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. *Whatever I com-*

mand you, be careful to observe it; you shall *not add to it nor take away from it*" (Deuteronomy 12:30-32, emphasis added throughout).

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes: "The term Easter was derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'Eostre,' the name of the goddess of spring. In her honor sacrifices were offered at the time of the vernal [spring] equinox" (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982, Vol. 2, "Easter").

Many battles were fought over its observance date, but the Council of Nicea finally fixed the date of Easter in A.D. 325 to fall on the first Sunday after the full moon on or after the vernal equinox (March 21).

Not generally known is that "the preparation for Easter season, beginning on Ash Wednesday and continuing for a week after Easter Day, was filled with pagan customs that had been revised in the light of Christianity. Germanic nations, for example, set bonfires in spring. This custom was frowned on by the Church,

which tried to suppress it . . . In the sixth and seventh centuries [monks] came to Germany, [bringing] their earlier pagan rites[,] and would bless bonfires outside the church building on Holy Saturday. The custom spread to France, and eventually it was incorporated into the Easter liturgy of Rome in the ninth century. Even today the blessing of the new fire is part of the Vigil of Easter.

"Medieval celebrations of Easter began at dawn. According to one old legend, the sun dances on Easter morning, or makes three jumps at the moment of its rising, in honor of Christ's resurrection. The rays of

Most of the world is scarcely aware that the original apostles did not institute or keep customs such as Easter and Lent.

light penetrating the clouds were believed to be angels dancing for joy.

"Some Easter folk traditions that have survived today are the Easter egg, rabbit and lamb. During medieval times it was a tradition to give eggs at Easter to servants. King Edward I of England had 450 eggs boiled before Easter and dyed or covered with gold leaf. He then gave them to members of the royal household on Easter day. The egg was an earlier pagan symbol of rebirth and was presented at the spring equinox, the beginning of the pagan new year.

"The Easter rabbit is mentioned in a German book of 1572 and also was a pagan fertility symbol. The Easter lamb goes back to the Middle Ages; the lamb, holding a flag with a red cross on a white field, represented the resurrected Christ [rather than the sacrifice of His life, as a fulfillment of the Passover lamb, that paid for the sins of the world (John 1:29)]" (Anthony S. Mercatante, *Facts*

on *File Encyclopedia of World Mythology and Legend*, New York and Oxford, 1988, "Easter").

Passover out, Easter in

Easter traditions are embraced by many who profess Christianity. None of these practices are to be found in the Bible or the customs of the early Church. Jesus and His apostles did not establish or perpetuate such practices, which obscure the true biblical meanings and observances of this time of year. In fact, a 4th-century church historian, Socrates Scholasticus, wrote in his *Ecclesiastical History* that neither the apostles nor the Gospels taught the observance of Easter, nor did they or Jesus give a law requiring the keeping of this feast. Instead, "the observance originated not by legislation, *but as a custom*" (chapter 22, emphasis added).

Even as early as the close of the 2nd century, the theologian Irenaeus bore witness in his letter to Victor, bishop of Rome, that some early Roman bishops forbade the observance of Passover on the 14th of Nisan. This was the date of the biblical observance practiced each spring by Jesus and the apostles. At the time that the Nisan 14 Passover observance was banned, ecclesiastical authorities introduced Lent and Easter into Christian practice.

Distorting Jesus' words

A century later the *Syriac Didascalia* recorded the attempts of teachers in Rome to reconcile Jesus' words that He would be entombed "three days and three nights in

the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40) with a Friday-afternoon crucifixion and a Sunday-morning resurrection. According to their reasoning, Jesus' sufferings were part of the three days and three nights of Scripture. Friday morning from 9 to noon was counted as the first day, and noon to 3 p.m. (which was darkened) was considered the first night. Three in the afternoon to sunset was reckoned as the second day, whereas Friday night to Saturday morning constituted the second night. The daylight part of Saturday was the third day, and the night portion to Sunday morning was the third night.

In other words, the three days and three nights in the grave that Jesus said would be the sign that He was indeed sent from God were transformed into a period of two days and two nights, or a total of no more than 48 hours. This has subsequently been reduced even further in modern times by figuring from late-afternoon Friday to early Sunday morning, which takes away another 12 hours or more. Such reasoning has to discount or somehow explain away Jesus' clear promise that He would be entombed three days and three nights.

Easter and Lent are nonbiblical and were not observed by the apostles or the 1st-century Church. The biblical record shows, however, that the early Church diligently kept *other* observances, the New Testament Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, just as Jesus and the apostles had done (Matthew 26:17-19; Acts 20:6; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 11:23-26). These were supplanted in later years by the customs

and practices of Easter and Lent.

Passover is an annual reminder of Jesus' sacrificial death to pay the penalty for our sins (Matthew 26:26-28). The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a celebration that focuses on a Christian's need to live in sincerity, truth and purity (1 Corinthians 5:8). The nonbiblical festivals of Lent and Easter, added decades after the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles, only cloud the true significance of Christ's life, death and resurrection and the purpose of His coming.

The Passover was instituted in Exodus 12 and continues, by Jesus Christ's example and command, but with a change of symbols. Jesus' death fulfilled the symbolism of the sacrificial Passover lamb (Matthew 26:17-28; John 1:29), but the New Testament Passover has been improperly replaced as an annual memorial of the *death* of Christ by Easter. We are commanded to commemorate Christ's *death*, not His resurrection (1 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Facts about Jesus' last days

Jesus Christ's promise was fulfilled exactly as He said, a fact that is made clear when we study and compare the Gospel accounts. These records give a clear, logical explanation that is perfectly consistent with Christ's words. Let's focus on Jesus' last days on earth to gain the proper perspective and understanding of how and when these events occurred.

Jesus said that, like the prophet Jonah, He would be entombed three days and

The Chronology of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection

Tuesday: Jesus ate an early-evening Passover meal with His disciples (at the beginning of Nisan 14, Jewish reckoning) and instituted the New Covenant symbols (Matthew 26:26-28). Jesus was then betrayed by Judas, arrested and during the night brought before the high priest.

Wednesday: Jesus was crucified and died around 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50). This was the preparation day for the *annual*, not weekly, Sabbath, which began that evening (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). Jesus' body was placed in the tomb at twilight (Matthew 27:57-60).

Thursday: This was the high-day Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:4-7). It is described as the day after the Day of Preparation (Matthew 27:62).

Friday: The high-day Sabbath now past, women bought and prepared spices for anointing Jesus' body (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56).

Saturday: The women rested on the weekly Sabbath, according to the Fourth Commandment (Luke 23:56; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus rose around sunset, *exactly three days and three nights* (72 hours) after burial, to fulfill the sign of Jonah and authenticate Jesus' messiahship.

Sunday: The women brought the prepared spices early in the morning while it was still dark (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Jesus had already risen (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:2-3; John 20:1).

three nights and that He would be raised up the third day after His crucifixion and death (Matthew 12:39-40; 17:23; 20:19). Putting these scriptures together, we see that He was resurrected *at the end of the third day* after His death. Luke 23:44 shows that He died around the ninth hour (Jewish reckoning), or 3 p.m. He would have been buried within the next few hours so that His body could be entombed before the approaching Sabbath (John 19:31).

Jesus' resurrection could not have been on a Sunday morning because John 20:1-2 shows that He had *already risen* before Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early in the morning, arriving "while it was still dark." Therefore, neither could His death have occurred Friday afternoon, since that would not allow for His body to be in the grave three days and three nights. Clearly, the Good Friday–Easter Sunday explanation and tradition is without scriptural foundation.

Notice also that John 19:31 mentions that the Sabbath immediately after Jesus' death was "a high day"—not the weekly seventh-day Sabbath (from Friday evening to Saturday evening), but one of the annual Sabbaths, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see Leviticus 23:6-7), which can fall on any day of the week.

In fact, two Sabbaths—first an annual Holy Day and then the regular weekly Sabbath—are mentioned in the Gospel accounts, a detail overlooked by most people. This can be proven by comparing Mark 16:1 with Luke 23:56.

Mark's account tells us, "Now *when the Sabbath was past*, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 16:1). However, Luke's account describes how the women who followed Jesus saw how His body was laid in the tomb. "Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils" for the final preparation of the body. *And they rested on the Sabbath* according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56).

Mark tells us that the women bought the spices *after* the Sabbath, "when the Sabbath was past." Luke, however, tells us that they prepared the spices and oils, "and they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment." How could the women have bought spices after the Sabbath, yet then prepared them and rested on the same Sabbath?

That is obviously impossible—unless

two Sabbaths are involved, with a day between them. Once we realize this, the two accounts become clear (see "The Chronology of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection," p. 18). Christ died near 3 p.m. and was placed in the tomb near sunset that day—a Wednesday in 31. That evening began the "high day" Sabbath, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which fell on Thursday that year. The women rested on that day, then on

The principal holidays observed by mainstream Christendom are a poor and pale reflection of true biblical teachings.

Friday purchased and prepared the spices and oils for Jesus' body, which could not be done on either the Holy Day or the weekly Sabbath. They then rested again on the weekly Sabbath before going to the tomb before daybreak on Sunday morning, at which time they discovered that Christ had already been resurrected.

Two Sabbaths confirmed in text

The fact that two Sabbaths are involved is confirmed by Matthew 28:1, where the women went to the tomb "after the Sabbath." The Sabbath mentioned here is actually *plural* in the original Greek and should be translated "Sabbaths." Some Bible versions, including Alfred Marshall's Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, Ferrar Fenton's translation, Green's Literal Translation and Young's Literal Translation, make this clear.

Once we realize that two Sabbaths were involved—first an annual Holy Day, which was observed from Wednesday evening until Thursday evening, and the normal weekly Sabbath from Friday evening to Saturday evening, the fulfillment of Christ's words becomes clear.

The Savior of all humanity died near 3 p.m. on Wednesday and was buried shortly before sunset that day. From Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset is one day and one night; from then until Friday sunset is two days and two nights; and from then until Saturday sunset is three days and three nights. Jesus Christ was resurrected at the end of this three-day and three-night period, near sunset on Saturday. Thus He was already risen long before the women came to the tomb before daylight on Sunday morning.

Jesus Christ's words were thus perfectly fulfilled, as verified by the Gospel accounts. He was not crucified on Friday

afternoon, nor was He resurrected on a Sunday morning. The biblical evidence shows the Good Friday–Easter Sunday tradition to be a fabrication.

A correct harmonization of all the facts demonstrates that Jesus died near 3 p.m. that Wednesday afternoon, was entombed near sunset and was resurrected near sunset on Saturday, exactly three days and three nights later—just as He had stated. These are the facts, the correct biblical

chronology that verifies the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The accompanying chart gives a day-by-day chronology of these events as described in the Gospel accounts.

The biblical festivals

Actually, the principal festivals and holidays observed by mainstream Christendom are a poor and pale reflection of true biblical teachings. Easter and Lent are a poor substitute for the wondrous truths revealed by keeping God's feasts.

The New Testament Church continued to observe the annual Passover to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ, but used the new symbols of bread and wine that He instituted (1 Corinthians 11:23-28). Today the United Church of God, an International Association, commemorates this eminently important event in the same manner, in accordance with Christ's instructions. Again, the Bible contains no record of the Church observing Easter or Lent during the time of the apostles, nor any biblical command to observe Good Friday or Easter Sunday, especially since Christ did not die on Good Friday and was not resurrected on Easter Sunday. Instead, the apostles faithfully followed Christ's instructions to observe the biblical Passover "in remembrance" of Him (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

The marvelous plan of God has been obscured by theologians and religious leaders trying to merge nonbiblical practices with biblical events. To better understand why Jesus instructed His followers to observe Passover along with the other biblically defined festivals, request your free copy of *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. You may contact us at the phone numbers or addresses on page 2. **GN**

How Can You Help? When Someone Is Hurting

If you put your mind to it, you can find ways to help others in their time of need.

by **Becky Sweat**

Debbie was 22 when her parents died in an auto accident. “The first months after their death were terrible for me,” she recalls. “Whenever I tried to talk about it with my friends, they would tell me about a sale at the mall or offer to take me out to the movies. I know they wanted to help, but what I really needed was a shoulder to cry on.”

When Brad’s fiancé, Stephanie, called off their wedding, he was crushed. “My friends told me things like they thought Stephanie was hard to get along with and that they never really liked her,” Brad

During difficulties friends need our support. But, although many want to help, successfully comforting someone takes some thought.

explains. “They may have been trying to stick up for me, but their words only made me feel worse. I still think Stephanie is a nice person, even though things didn’t work out for us.”

After Ramona’s mastectomy, her friends came to the hospital to cheer her up. “When I told them I was worried the cancer would spread, they acted as if I had nothing to be concerned about,” Ramona says. “They made comments like, ‘Don’t worry! You’ll probably live to be 100,’ and ‘Plenty of people have had breast cancer and survived.’ They shrugged off anything I said about my illness and made me feel guilty for being scared.”

Like Debbie, Brad and Ramona, we all have our bad times. A serious illness, a tragic automobile accident, the death of a family member, marital problems, financial difficulties, the loss of a job—all are part of life.

During difficulties our friends need our support more than ever. But, although many automatically want to help, successfully comforting someone

takes some thought. Anyone can blurt out remarks that hurt people.

Knowing what to say to a hurt friend isn’t easy. Should we try to make our friend laugh, or should we bring up our own problems? Should we encourage him (or her) to talk about the situation, or should we try to pass along some good advice? In some situations we may feel so awkward that we avoid a suffering friend altogether rather than risk saying the wrong thing.

Although each crisis is different, we can respond tactfully, sincerely and appropriately. Here are some sugges-

tions for helping a wounded friend.

Preparing to listen

- Let him talk it out.

When Kathy came to work Monday morning, two of her friends greeted her at her desk.

“How was your weekend?” they asked.

Kathy burst into tears.

“My husband and I had a huge fight Friday night, and he hasn’t spoken to me all weekend!”

Her friends hadn’t expected such an honest reply to their question.

“It can’t be that bad,” one friend told her. “There are doughnuts in the kitchen. Why don’t you go get one?”

“No thanks,” Kathy sighed. “I guess I’d better get to work.”

One of the biggest mistakes you can make when a friend starts telling you bad news is to deny he said anything out of the ordinary. Let him talk about his problem.

Changing the subject, making jokes and coming up with why the problem

isn’t a problem convey to your friend there’s something wrong with feeling sad or expressing sorrow. “Don’t worry,” “Get tough” and “You’re blowing this out of proportion” minimize the tragedy and make your friend think he’s at fault.

Many people are so uncomfortable because they don’t know what to do or say that they make themselves more comfortable by shutting out the other person’s suffering. Rather than encouraging him to “be tough” and not to cry, your friend needs to be able to express his feelings.

If your friend says something negative after a traumatic experience, try not to let it make you nervous. Remember that he is in pain and needs to be able to talk, and at that moment that is exactly what he feels.

This doesn’t mean you should never bring up encouraging scriptures, such as Romans 8:28, but don’t do it without first acknowledging that your friend is going through a difficult situation.

Knowing what to listen for

- Listen to understand.

The best response you can give a hurting friend is to listen in a nonjudgmental way and try to understand why he feels the way he does. In general, sufferers need to know the listener recognizes they feel sad and will support them in their sadness.

Calmly accept your friend’s situation for what it is and try not to deny what is happening. Responses such as “Tell me more about it,” “You’ve been through a lot” and “I’m sorry to hear the bad news” communicate concern and acceptance.

Let your friend do most of the talking. Remember, you’re not there to tell your story. When your friend is talking, give him your full attention. Watch your body language. Don’t look at your watch, let

your eyes wander or nod impatiently. Don't try to finish your friend's sentences because you think you know what he's going to say. You could be wrong.

Choosing carefully

- Don't say, "I know just how you feel."

After Carol's baby died, her friends tried to comfort her. Unsure of what to say, her friend Jennifer told her, "I know it's terrible to lose a baby."

"I felt like saying, 'How would you know?'" Carol says. "Jennifer is single and busy with her career. My baby is dead. How could Jennifer possibly know what I am going through?"

Be careful not to assume you know what your friend is feeling. Remind yourself that, even if you have been through a similar experience, it isn't the particular situation your friend is going through.

Making room

- Respect the other person's privacy.

Realize that some hurting people may not be ready to talk about their problem or may open up to only one or two of their closest friends. Let the sufferer call the shots. If you know someone is going through a serious trial, don't jump on him the second you see him and start prying. First, discern if it's a good time to talk, and don't take it personally if the sufferer does not feel comfortable opening up to you.

Asking, "How are you doing?" or mentioning that, "if you ever need to talk, I'm available," lets the sufferer know you are willing to listen if the need arises. Otherwise, you may appear pushy or like a busybody.

Don't be offended if the family of someone who is seriously ill limits the number of visitors for a while. You can still send a card or note with a message reminding the family members that they are in your thoughts and prayers.

Some people go to the extreme of respecting someone's privacy by being afraid to intrude and backing off completely. Don't assume a grieving friend doesn't want to be bothered without first giving him a chance to talk. If your friend doesn't feel like talking, he'll let you know. If he would like to talk, he'll appreciate your being perceptive enough to notice.

Being cautiously positive

- Offer realistic encouragement.

Although you want things to instantly be better for your friend, avoid making statements you don't know are true as a way of trying to be positive.

A few weeks after Kevin's skiing accident, a friend told him, "You'll be skiing again in no time."

I wanted to ask, "Really? How can you be so sure?" Kevin says. "My doctors told me they doubted I would ever be able to ski again. But my friend seemed to imply I could lead the same life I had before the accident if I really wanted to."

Learn to accept your friend's new-found limitations after an accident or major illness. You don't have to stretch the truth to encourage. When you visit an ailing friend in the hospital, recognize that the situation does not have to be rosy or anywhere near perfect for you to be positive and upbeat. Focus on what you know is true: that you care about your friend and are pulling for him.

thinking of his situation. Often, however, it just doesn't work that way.

Unsolicited advice can put the sufferer in an awkward position if he doesn't take your suggestion. When Mike lost his job, he received much unwanted advice.

"Usually I didn't think other people's suggestions would work," Mike relates. "I felt like I had to defend the way I was handling my situation and didn't feel encouraged at all. Instead, I'd think to myself, Whew, I made it through another interrogation."

If a friend asks for advice, it can be all right to give it if your advice comes in the form of several alternatives, rather than one specific course of action you think he should take. Rather than say, "I think this is what you should do," say, "This is what I've done," or "This is what works for me." Let your friend make the final decision about what to do.

Taking it slowly

- Be patient.



To say, "I'll pray for you," and mean it is enormously encouraging and will bind you to him.

Encouraging words

- Don't give unsolicited advice.

What to do to solve your friend's problem may seem obvious to you, but resist the temptation to give unsolicited advice. The consequence of giving advice may be that we cut off communication. We'd like to think that, if we can distract the friend by coming up with some brilliant advice, he'll stop crying or

Don't get impatient with your friend if he is not over his tragedy, even though you and others may think he should be. Grieving takes time. Depending on the severity of the situation, it can take months or years to fully recover from some tragedies. Coming to terms with the death of a marriage partner can take at least three years.

Fight the tendency to tell yourself things like, "If she won't help herself, there's nothing I can do." It's important to be there for our friends during their

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Archaeology and the Book of Exodus: Exit From Egypt

by Mario Seiglie

In earlier issues, *The Good News* examined several archaeological finds that illuminate portions of the book of Genesis. In this issue we continue our exploration of discoveries that illuminate the biblical accounts, focusing on Exodus, the second book of the Bible.

Exodus in English derives from the Latin and means simply “to exit.” The book of Exodus describes the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, an event distinguished by a mighty struggle between two unequal opponents. On the one hand was an oppressed nation of slaves and on the other the most powerful nation in the Middle East, if not the world. Viewed strictly physically, the odds in this struggle between Israel and Egypt were stacked against the Israelites.

What has archaeology found that pertains to the Exodus and the Israelites’ time in Egypt? Scientists have made several significant discoveries

that make this part of the Bible come alive.

Egyptian brick-making

In the book of Exodus we see the Egyptians forcing the Israelites to build great cities for Pharaoh: “Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses” (Exodus 1:11).

Most of us know a little about the Egyptian pyramids, which were built of stone. But not all Egyptian pyramids were made of stone; brick was the principal building material used in the country. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes that “throughout Egyptian history sun-dried brick was the chief building material. Stone was reserved for temples and other monumental constructions” (Vol. 1, p. 546).

Therefore the Egyptians needed millions of

Archaeologists have made many significant discoveries that make the book of Exodus and the Israelites’ time in Egypt come alive.



Egyptian brick-making is depicted in this wall painting from the tomb of Egyptian nobleman Rekhmire from the mid-second

millennium B.C. The painting shows workmen gathering materials, forming bricks and carrying the finished bricks after drying.

bricks, and the Israelites labored long and hard to supply the demand. The Egyptians “made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in *brick*, and in all manner of service in the field” (Exodus 1:14, emphasis added throughout).

When Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh that God wanted His people, the Israelites, to stop working and observe a religious festival in the wilderness, Pharaoh was incensed. Instead of yielding, he increased the work load: “So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, ‘You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves’” (Exodus 5:6-7).

This cruel measure added to the Israelites’ already arduous tasks. The Israelite slaves had to head for the fields to gather straw to mix with the mud.

The biblical detail about using straw in brick-making is puzzling to some. How, they ask, could the addition of straw as an ingredient make bricks stronger?

In Egypt the mud-straw combination was commonly used to strengthen building blocks. It also prevented the bricks from cracking or losing shape. Modern investigators have run tests that show that when straw is mixed with mud the resulting bricks are three times as strong as those made without straw. Fluids in the straw release humic acid and harden the bricks (Gerald Vardaman, *Archaeology and the Living Word*, 1966, p. 37). To this day, after thousands of years, mud-brick monuments still stand in Egypt.

The 10 plagues

Egyptology has illuminated our understanding of the Bible’s description of the plagues that struck Egypt and led to the Israelites’ departure from that land.

The Egyptians were religious people. They had gods for everything and scrupulously tried to please them. They had 39 principal gods, many of them depicted in Egyptian art with animal bodies or heads. In Egyptian temples, priests cared for many types of sacred animals that represented deities.



This statue of the Egyptian Nile god Hapi dates to about 900 B.C. God’s first plague intended to free the Israelites struck the mighty Nile River, and their gods proved powerless to protect the Egyptians.

In one respect the Israelites’ exodus out of Egypt was a confrontation between the true God, Yahweh, and the false gods of that land. It would remove any doubt in the Israelites’ minds as to who was the true God and which was the true religion. God had in mind not only to take His people from Egypt, but to discourage worship of the supposedly powerful Egyptian gods. He made this clear when He told Moses: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against *all the gods of Egypt* I will execute judgment: I am the LORD” (Exodus 12:12).

Later, in Numbers 33:4, we read that “on their gods the LORD had executed judgments.” God directed each of the 10

plagues against the Egyptian gods that ostensibly held sway over an aspect of nature. The plagues represented, collectively, a dramatic demonstration to Israelite and Egyptian alike that the gods were false; they were powerless to come to the aid of anyone who implored them.

An ancient Egyptian calendar reveals numerous holidays dedicated to the gods—so many that it appears that not many working days remained in the year. When Moses told Pharaoh that Israel would leave for several days to celebrate a feast to God, Pharaoh was indignant: “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go . . . Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor” (Exodus 5:2, 4).

Pharaoh apparently thought that the Israelites enjoyed plenty of free time, so he refused the petition. Observing Pharaoh’s recalcitrance, God acted.

Plagues against the deities

The first plague was aimed at the most venerable and valuable resource of Egyptian civilization, the powerful Nile River, along with the gods the Egyptians associated with it. Egypt’s food supply depended on the flooding of the Nile, as well as its annual deposits of silt to replenish the fertility of the soil. Sometimes, as in Joseph’s day, failure of the Nile to overflow its banks would result in a famine. So the Egyptians prayed regularly to their gods for abundant water. The first plague made the water undrinkable and rancid. The fish, a valuable source of food, perished.

The Egyptians counted on the Nile goddess Hapi and the powerful Osiris to protect the Nile. Nothing resulted from the clamor and prayers of the Egyptians that their gods would purify the Nile. Only when Moses and Aaron prayed to the true God were the waters refreshed. Yet Pharaoh remained proud. He believed a host of powerful gods were waiting to do his bidding; indeed Pharaoh himself was considered a god by most Egyptians.

The second plague targeted one of the

creatures the Egyptians associated with the Nile. Egyptians worshiped the frog in the form of Heqt, whose statue bore the head of a frog. This god was symbolic of good crops and blessings in the afterlife. Egyptians noticed that, when the Nile reached a certain level and overflowed, frogs abounded. Their presence was an omen of bountiful crops and control of the insect population. A low Nile with few frogs meant a lack of silt, poor crops and many insects.

Heqt, god of the frogs, supposedly controlled the frog population. When the second plague produced too many frogs, it appeared to the Egyptians that the god who governed them had lost control. No amount of prayers and incense altered the situation. Only when the true God intervened did the frogs die and the crisis end.

The third and fourth plagues featured another favorite god of the Egyptians, Kheper, the scarab deity represented by beetles and other insects. The image of the scarab god appeared frequently on amulets. "The cult to flies, and especially of the beetles, was an important part of the ancient Egyptian religion" (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Exegetical Commentary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 67). "Various types of beetles were venerated in Egypt; among them the dung beetle [which] became the emblem of resurrection and continual existence . . ." (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4, p. 258).

When a swarm of lice or gnats (or possibly mosquitoes) and horseflies stung the populace, the court magicians asked the insect god to control them, but to no avail. Only when Pharaoh pleaded with Moses to ask the God of Israel to remove the pests did the plague abate.

Sacred bull

The next plague affected cattle, which the Egyptians considered to be under the control of Apis, the bull god, and Hathor, the cowlike mother goddess. The bull was considered sacred. When the bull in a temple died, it was mummified and buried with great pomp. The fifth plague struck at this mode of worship. "So the LORD did this thing on

the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the children of Israel, not one of them died" (Exodus 9:6). No amount of pagan prayer could alter the outcome.

Next came a plague of boils, which the Egyptians thought they could cure by resorting to their god of medicine, Imhotep, a legendary Egyptian physician who came to be worshiped. They also revered Thoth, the god of magic and healing. But again in this case the boils did not go away. Even worse, the court magicians who besought these entities were themselves covered with the pestilence: "And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians" (verse 11).



This enormous Egyptian stone scarab, some four feet long and three feet high, illustrates the Egyptian fascination with and worship of beetles and other insects. At the time of the Exodus, the third and fourth plagues were directed against the Egyptian deity thought to control insects.

Again, Pharaoh and other Egyptians pleaded with Moses that God would take away the problem. God's power to remove this plague served as a witness not only to the Egyptians and the Israelites, but to the rest of the world. God told Pharaoh: "But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth" (verse 16). This witness remains with us today through the Bible account.

The seventh and eighth plagues struck Egypt's crops. First, a horrible hailstorm hit the harvest, then a horde of locusts completed the destruction. The crops

were supposed to be guarded by Seth, the harvest god, and it was up to Nut, the sky goddess, to prevent weather disasters. Yet the pleas of the Egyptians fell on deaf ears. Pharaoh was running out of gods to protect his people.

God strikes the mightiest

The final two plagues were directed at the two mightiest gods of the Egyptians, Ra the chief god, represented by the sun, and Pharaoh himself.

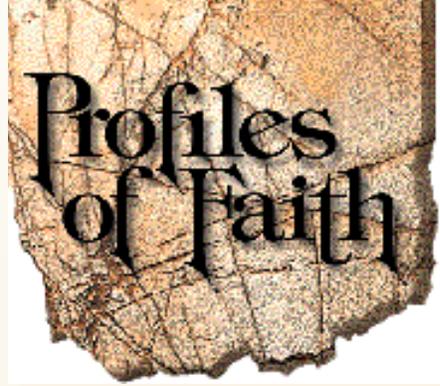
Egyptians believed Ra to be the source of life, bringing light and heat to the earth. The ninth plague brought three days of no sunlight. The darkness was so "thick," says Scripture, that even lamps could not dispel the blackness. "So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Exodus 10:22-23).

In spite of the prayers and supplications the Egyptians must have offered up to Ra, the sun god did nothing.

The final god in dire need of humbling was Pharaoh himself, who supposedly descended from the god Ra. Pharaoh's patron gods were Osiris, the judge of the dead, and Horus, the god of light. Egyptian worship of the Pharaohs found expression in the construction for their leaders of great pyramids as tombs. The 10th plague struck even the offspring of the Egyptians' man-god.

Pharaoh himself was powerless to stop the death of his firstborn son, who was next in line to sit worthy of Egyptians' worship. "And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock" (Exodus 12:29). With his gods impotent and humiliated, mighty Pharaoh finally relented, and the Exodus of the children of Israel began.

Future issues of *The Good News* will present more archaeological evidence that illuminates the historical account of the book of Exodus. **GN**



Moses

Leader of a Nation

by Jerold Aust

Set adrift on the Nile in a small, woven, waterproof basket, facing death by drowning, starvation or crocodile, a 3-month-old baby boy was surrendered by his father and mother and left to the elements and will of God rather than face certain death at the hands of the Egyptian authorities.

A new ruler of Egypt had issued an edict: All Hebrew male babies were to be killed at birth because the enslaved Israelites were beginning to outnumber their Egyptian masters. So it was that the baby's parents, Amram and Jochebed, trusted in God to spare their newborn son by setting him afloat on the Nile River rather than see him killed by the Egyptians.

They didn't know that what transpired after their faithful act was destined to change the course of history, not just for Israel but for everybody. This brief article depicts the rest of that remarkable story: how an abandoned baby, Moses, came to serve his oppressed and disenfranchised people as leader and prophet and how he came to serve all mankind as a type of Jesus Christ.

Hebrew slave to Egyptian prince

The Egyptian historian Manetho records that Moses was born around 1520 B.C. at Heliopolis in Egypt (Merrill Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1988, p. 886). His life can

be divided into three 40-year periods: his time in Egypt, his exile in Arabia and his governance of Israel (Acts 7:23, 30, 36). After Moses' birth, Jochebed concealed him from the Egyptian authorities for three months, but when hiding him became no longer feasible she prepared a basket so he could float among the reeds on the Nile. This act takes on even greater significance when set against the backdrop of Pharaoh's two methods of killing Hebrew children. The Bible tells us that Pharaoh first attempted to solicit the support of Hebrew midwives to kill any

Hebrew baby boys they helped deliver. When the midwives quietly refused to cooperate, Pharaoh then directed that newborn Hebrew boys be cast into the Nile to drown.

God, however, used the Nile to save Moses. Pharaoh's daughter, who came to the river to bathe, spotted the basket floating among the reeds and sent a servant to retrieve it. To her surprise, she opened the basket and saw the infant, who began to cry. She recognized this had to be one of the Hebrew children (Exodus 2:5-6).

Moses' sister, Miriam, watching from

nearby, came immediately to Pharaoh's daughter and recommended a Hebrew nurse who could care for the little boy. As a result, Moses' own mother was allowed to care for her son on behalf of the Egyptian princess. The princess was not aware that the nurse was the baby's own mother.

God's plan for Moses was working out through these events, for God returned Jochebed's son to her and provided safety for Moses and his family under the adoptive care of Pharaoh's daughter. When someone pleases God, He can make even enemies treat that person well (Proverbs

This abandoned baby, Moses, came to serve his oppressed and disenfranchised people as leader and prophet and served all mankind as a type of Jesus Christ.

16:7). Such was the case with Jochebed and Amram. They pleased God, who rewarded them and saved their son.

The princess named the child Moses, meaning "drawn out," because she "drew him out of the water" (Exodus 2:10). Moses' name and the account of his being saved from death through the agent of water symbolize a greater meaning.

The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* suggests that the phrase in Exodus 2:10 should logically have required the word *mashui*,





means “one that draws out,” signifying how this infant slave would later be used to draw out his people from their bondage in Egypt and from the Red Sea (Israel Abrahams, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Macmillan, New York, 1971, Vol., 12, p. 372). Moses and Israel were saved from death through water: the River Nile and the Red Sea. But first Moses went through a series of other remarkable experiences.

In one day the baby Moses’ slave clothes were replaced with the raiment of a prince. He went from bearing a death sentence to a position of honor and privilege in Pharaoh’s household. Moses, suddenly a royal child, received only the best education the Egyptians could provide.

According to the New Testament, Moses was educated “in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22). For the first 40 years of his life Moses was trained and educated as only an Egyptian prince could be.

Yet in one day the 40-year-old Moses’ life was again turned upside down. Although this was the result of his own actions, it also bore the handprints of God. Prince Moses was to become the leader and prophet of a disenfranchised, disgruntled people: the enslaved nation of Israel.

Moses as deliverer and leader

Moses’ life changed dramatically when he tried to protect his own captive people. As an Israelite, he felt empathy for the Israelites because of the heavy burdens forced on them. One day Moses came upon an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave. Shocked at what he saw, Moses killed the Egyptian, then buried his body in the sand (Exodus 2:11-12).

The next day Moses observed two Israelites fighting. Attempting to play the peacemaker, he addressed the wrongdoer in the dispute, asking why he would fight with his own people. The Israelite asked: “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” (verses 11-14). Moses then realized his days in Egypt were numbered. He fled to the land of Midian.

Here we see an end and a begin-
es.



God introduced Himself to Moses in Midian through the miracle of a bush that burned but didn't burn up.

His life of privilege and luxury was over; a new, difficult life was beginning. Now God would educate him through the seclusion of a shepherd’s life, preparing him for his service to God and His people.

The biblical record of Moses’ next act also dealt with water. This time he generously helped some young women water their sheep (Exodus 2:16-17). These seven maidens were the daughters of Jethro, who then befriended Moses.

Shortly thereafter, Moses married the Midianite Jethro’s daughter Zipporah. From this union came a son, Gershom, whose name, which meant “foreigner,” identified the child and Moses as strangers and pilgrims in the land (verse 22; see also Hebrews 11:13). Moses, however, was no stranger to God, and God was about to make Himself known to Moses in a more personal way.

Moses’ calling

In due time God introduced Himself to Moses in Midian through the miracle of a bush that burned but didn’t burn up (Exodus 3:1-2). At the outset, God made two things clear: His eternal, supreme existence as the true God and Moses’ commission to help deliver His people in fulfillment of earlier promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 2:24; 6:3-8).

God informed Moses that He had heard Israel’s anguished cry for relief and that He wanted Moses to go back to Egypt to deliver His people from captivity. “Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10).

Moses tried to evade this divine directive: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11). Humanly speaking, this fallen prince of Egypt knew well the extent of Pharaoh’s power and the futility of an Israelite outcast going against the might of Egypt. Four times Moses framed arguments to convince God to use someone else. First, he said he felt inadequate to attempt the task. Second, he asked by what name God would be announced to the Israelites (verse 13). Third, he expressed doubt that the children of Israel would listen to or believe him (Exodus 4:1). Fourth, he protested that he was slow of speech (verse 10).

Patience, God answered every objection: He assured Moses that He would be with him; Moses should tell Israel that the One who sent him identified Himself as “I AM” and “the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and

the God of Jacob.”

To convince Moses of His power, God performed two miracles: Moses’ rod became a snake and then resumed its former state, and Moses’ hand became leprous and then instantly healed. God told Moses that He would perform these same miracles for him when he appeared before Pharaoh, along with a third miracle: Water from the Nile poured on the ground would turn to blood (verses 2-9). Moses again pleaded with God to send someone else (verse 13). This displeased God, but He said He would send Moses’ brother Aaron with him as a spokesman (verses 14-16).

Moses’ reaction to the circumstances reveals a man devoid of personal ambition and pride. Indeed, he holds the distinction of being the meekest man of his time (Numbers 12:3). However, once Moses undertook the mission, his willingness to submit to God’s direction and guidance

was a strong, positive attribute. God had prepared Moses to deliver and lead Israel out of Egypt, but first he had to go back into Egypt.

Back to Egypt, then the Exodus

God instructed Aaron to meet Moses in the wilderness, where Moses informed his brother of God’s instructions. Together they went to Egypt and called the elders of Israel to assemble and relayed to them God’s intention to free them from Pharaoh’s rule. This was so overwhelming to the Israelites that they all bowed their heads and worshiped God (Exodus 4:31).

Pharaoh, however, was not so receptive. When Moses and Aaron declared God’s divine instructions to him, he was contemptuous. “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go” (Exodus 5:1-2). Immediately conditions got worse for Israel. Pharaoh added to the

Israelites’ work as slaves, now forcing them to gather their own straw for brick-making while producing the same number of bricks. Pharaoh had the Israelite supervisors beaten because of the people’s inability to continue at the same rate of production.

The Israelites complained to Moses about this difficult turn of events, and Moses in turn complained to God: “LORD, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all” (Exodus 5:22-23). Moses had yet to learn that God works things out in His own good time and that He does not forget His people.

God reassured Moses and instructed him to visit Pharaoh again. In the king’s presence, Aaron threw his staff down, and it was transformed into a serpent. When Pharaoh’s magicians performed an apparently similar feat, for a moment the two sides seemed to be at a standoff. But then Aaron’s serpent swallowed the magicians’ serpents.

Even so, rather than heed Moses’ and Aaron’s request, the Egyptian ruler set his mind against them and refused to release the Israelites.

Plagues for the implacable

Pharaoh and his countrymen paid a terrible price for the ruler’s intransigence. Consider the 10 plagues God unleashed upon the Egyptians described in Exodus 7-11. First, He turned their water into blood, then covered the land with frogs. Then He sent a plague of lice, followed by a great swarm of flies. Then God cursed the Egyptians’ animals with disease and they died. Then He sent hail upon the Egyptians, followed by locusts that destroyed any plants that had survived the plague of hail.

The ninth plague was what the Bible called a “thick darkness” that covered Egypt for three days. Still the king refused to let Israel go, and he threatened Moses with death if he returned. Moses replied: “You have spoken well. I will never see your face again” (Exodus 10:29). Throughout these afflictions, Pharaoh seemed to waver but ultimately remained implacable. He refused to let God’s people go.

The 10th plague brought about the death of all the firstborn of Egypt, “from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who

MOSES AND THE LAW

Moses, who faithfully obeyed God’s laws, was also used by God to convey those laws to Israel. He is the author and compiler of the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—which later came to be called the Torah, or simply the Law (Matthew 5:17; 7:12; 22:40).

But the Torah is more than law. It is God’s teaching. His teaching, revealed through Moses, includes many historical details (Genesis, the earlier parts of Exodus, Numbers) as well as many specific laws and principles that show proper application of God’s laws (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy).

As mankind’s Creator, God provided a moral code of conduct that is summed up in the Ten Commandments, the first four of which show us how to love our Creator, the last six that show how to love our fellowman.

Centuries later Jesus Christ made this same point, saying that all of God’s instruction for mankind, including the Ten Commandments, is summed up in two great principles: “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40; see also Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

Moses gave Israel God’s laws, and in this limited sense he was Israel’s lawgiver. However, these were not *Moses’* laws, but *God’s* laws. Jesus Christ later clearly stated that the Ten Commandments are God’s commands, not those of any man (Matthew 15:3-6).

God inspired Moses to provide the laws, statutes and judgments (Exodus 21-23) based on the Ten Commandments that formed the constitution and body of law for God’s people Israel—a law designed to be a great blessing to the nation. After giving His people the Ten Commandments, God expressed His desire that Israel would have “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).

This great law of God still holds for Christians. “. . . The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good,” wrote the apostle Paul (Romans 7:12). “For we know that the law is spiritual” (verse 14).

“Blessed are those who do [actively practice] His commandments,” wrote John in the last chapter of the Bible, “that they may have the right to the tree of [eternal] life . . .” (Revelation 22:14). *GN*



...GOD, AND AN UNNUMBERED
of livestock” (Exodus 12:29). The devastation was staggering, and “there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead” (verse 30). Thousands of Egyptians, along with their firstborn livestock, lay dead.

The plagues accomplished their purpose, and the Israelites secured their freedom. Moses gained respect from Egyptian and Israelite alike. “Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people” (Exodus 11:3).

Deliverer and leader

Although God used Moses to deliverer of Israel, God Himself was responsible for delivering His people. With the last plague, the Egyptians were so panic-stricken that they pleaded with the Israelites to leave quickly (Exodus 12:33). The Israelites’ departure was so hasty that they didn’t have time to allow their bread dough to rise. They hurriedly baked unleavened, or flat, bread for their journey. Israel headed for the desert under Moses’ decisive lead. Had he taken the most direct route, through the land of the hostile Philistines, the Israelites might well have turned back into Egypt. Instead, he led them into the wilderness by way of the Red Sea, a strategy that on the surface appeared foolish indeed.

However, Moses wasn’t really the one leading them. God planned to eliminate the Egyptian army as it followed the mass of Israelites through the Red Sea. The Creator again showed His divine power through the miracle that followed: He opened up a path through the sea, allowing His people to walk safely across on dry land to the other side. When the Egyptians thought they could easily overtake the Israelites, to mercilessly slaughter or take them captive again, the walls of water crashed down on them, drowning the army.

Many centuries later the apostle Paul compared this great miracle to baptism. Baptism, he noted, figuratively washes away the sins of the truly repentant, just as the Israelites in the crossing of the Red Sea were washed clean of their old life as

people: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

Moses as deliverer helped free the Israelites from captivity and their cruel taskmasters. He would then lead them for 40 years through the wilderness.

How far from Moses’ example of selfless service are we? The golden rule (Luke 6:31) tells us to treat others as we would be treated. This timeless principle has been corrupted so that today too many say: Do unto others *before* they do unto you. Notwithstanding what man thinks, God’s prescriptive rule that “humility goes before honor” (Proverbs

TWO GREAT PROPHETS

Moses prophesied of another prophet who would arise: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren, Him you shall hear” (Deuteronomy 18:15).

That Prophet was to be Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 3:22; 7:37).

Moses was the type, or forerunner, of this great Prophet to come. The apostle Paul compared the two prophets, the type and the antitype: “Therefore, holy brethren, who share in the heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. He was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all his house. Yet Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more honour than the house . . . Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, *to testify to the things that were to be spoken later*” (Hebrews 3:1-3, 5, Revised English Bible, emphasis added).

Both Jesus and Moses were faithful to their tasks and their callings. They accomplished the work God had for them in their respective ages. As the apostle John put it, “the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

Sweeping back the curtain of history, we can read God’s revelation through both prophets. Christ told us we are to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4). Christ said that if we believe Moses we will also believe Him, “but if you do not believe what he wrote, how are you to believe what I say?” (John 5:46-47, REB). **GN**

Israel’s years of wandering through wasteland can be likened to our wanderings as Christian pilgrims through the spiritual wilderness of the world. In the Israelites’ time of tests and trials, God patiently taught them that they should revere Him by listening to His instructions in every aspect of their lives. But they failed to learn from and obey God, even though He had given them His Ten Commandments—spiritual laws that, when obeyed, lead their adherents to a successful, peaceful, happy life (Romans 7:12; Psalm 119:165).

Remember ‘My servant Moses’

Moses was a man of God. As a general and prince in Egypt, as the governor of Israel, as deliverer, leader and prophet, he was wholly dedicated to God. Yet he was a humble man (Numbers 12:3), realizing that everything he had and everything he had done had come about by God’s intervention and through God’s help (Deuteronomy 8:11-20). With this attitude, Moses was able to be a true servant of his people.

15:33, New Revised Standard Version) is a key to success in life. Moses’ life of service demonstrated this truth.

The book of Hebrews holds Moses up as an example (Hebrews 11:24-29). It tells of Moses’ refusal to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, that he chose to suffer affliction with God’s people rather than enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin, that he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater than all the treasures in Egypt, that he kept the Passover through faith and taught the Israelites to do the same. Finally, he passed through the Red Sea while leading the Israelites to safety and freedom. In God’s Word for all time, He preserved the record of Moses’ faith.

The book of Deuteronomy includes the following tribute to Moses: “But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror



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Israel

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him for help” (Romans 10:12).

This is how God views every nation, race and color. It is in this remarkable light that God wishes His followers to consider others. And though we all fall short at times of this wonderful ideal, we should always strive to attain it. This is the Golden Rule in action!

Peter and John also understood

Contrary to the views of some, Paul was not the only apostle to grasp this marvellous truth. Others also understood. Peter, Paul and John all agreed on fundamental matters. Their theology was not different as some suppose.

Knowing why we live and understanding our destiny is an antidote for despair and essential to our mental and spiritual health. We need to discover the missing parts of our lives.

Of course, both Peter and John’s background was not the same as Paul’s and they would naturally express the same truths in a somewhat different style. Peter would put it one way and Paul another.

For instance, Peter told Cornelius: “In truth I realize that God has no favourites, but in every nation whoever fears God and does what is right is accepted by him” (Acts 10:34-35). Here Peter emphasized obedience to God, disciples from all countries doing what is right.

Historically, what God does through human beings has started in the smallest way. Since we are all too prone to pride and vanity, anciently God told the Israelites that they were the fewest of all people (Deuteronomy 7:7). Very insignificant indeed!

Nonetheless God did give them His law and began to reveal His great purpose on earth to this obscure people residing in a small, narrow angular Mideastern country. Yet they began a significant spiritual work that was to expand to include representatives of all peoples in this present age. Speaking of Jesus Christ the apostle John later quoted the angelic host as saying, “. . . You purchased for God men out of every tribe, language, people and nation” (Revelation 5:10).

What is the ultimate significance of the

nation of Israel? Just this. In His marvellous wisdom God has used *physical* Israel to help bring forth *spiritual* Israel. Paul told us in another context “. . . that the spiritual does not come first, but the physical, and then the spiritual” (1 Corinthians 15:46).

And as he concluded to the Galatian churches, “Whether a man is circumcised or uncircumcised does not matter; what matters is that he can be created anew [become truly converted]. Peace and mercy be upon all who follow this rule, that is, upon *the Israel of God*” (Galatians 6:15-16).

“The Jews constitute but one percent of the human race,” wrote Mark Twain in 1869. And the Israel of God today is even more insignificant and fewer in number than physical Israel. But Jesus Christ

encouraged His people with the words, “Do not be afraid, *little flock*; it has pleased your Father to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

Our importance emanates from the eminence of our crucial message—the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. The spiritual work that began in first century Jerusalem is still going strong as the 20th century draws to a close. The United Church of God faces the future with hope—challenged by the awesome task of bringing the good news to all countries in century 21. This is a great work for *the Israel of God*.

Remember Jesus Christ said that “. . . repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed in his name among all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

RECOMMENDED READING

Many are confused concerning the real meaning of the Kingdom of God. Is it here now or is yet future? Is the Church the Kingdom? How can we enter it? These and many other questions are answered in our free booklet entitled *The Gospel of The Kingdom*. Request your copy by calling or writing the address nearest you on page 2 of this issue.

Help

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low periods, regardless of how we think they are handling their situations.

My friend, Kate, told me how she felt during the five years her husband, Randy, was battling chronic-fatigue syndrome and couldn’t work:

“Although I know people meant well, they would ask me things like, ‘When is that guy of yours going to get well and start working again?’ and ‘Why doesn’t Randy try a less-demanding job so he can at least get out of the house?’ They made us feel like there was something wrong with us. Some of our friends became uncomfortable around us and pulled away. When people avoided us, we started feeling as though we were going through our trial alone.”

We shouldn’t give up on people during their low periods. Remember that they need us, just as we need them when we are in times of despair.

Nobody’s perfect

- Know your limits.

Times may come when it’s just too hard to watch your friend suffer. You, too, will have difficult days during which you may not be able to listen at length. Reassure your friend that you want to help, but ask if he could wait and talk about his problem later, when you’re better able to handle it.

Know when your friend needs more help than you can give. If his problem is getting worse or is starting to affect his relationship with others or he’s no longer comforted by your listening to him, encourage him to seek the help of his pastor or another counselor.

You may make a few mistakes along the way. No one can be expected to know what to say or how to act in every situation. Remind yourself that people involved in serious trials need loving support.

It’s better to say something less than ideal while at your friend’s side rather than avoid him because you don’t know what to say. What matters most is to have each other’s encouragement and not have to face difficult times alone.

When you come face to face with another person’s tragedy or problem, be ready to be of help by making use of these points. We can all help those who are hurting. **GN**

When You and Your Parents Don't See Eye to Eye

Kelsey is angry with her parents because she thinks they're too strict. "They get on my case when I'm up late talking on the phone," she says. "They think by 10 p.m. I should be in bed sleeping because it's a school night. But I just don't need eight hours of sleep every night. Why can't my parents understand that?"

Jason hasn't spoken to his parents in two days. "They're making my life miserable with an ultraearly curfew," he says. "I can't even go to 7:30 movie showings because my parents want me home by 9. It's totally ridiculous."

Kelsey and Jason are hardly the first teens to clash with their parents. You, a teen, are fighting for independence. Your parents are fighting to guide and protect you. They're acting from a perspective of wisdom, experience, knowledge and understanding, trying to show you the way until you can learn these things on your own.

"In some ways teens and parents almost have mutually exclusive agendas," says Kathleen Galvin, Ph.D., associate professor of communication studies at Northwestern University. "Parents are probably still focused inward in terms of what's going on with the family, and most teens are beginning to focus outward, paying a great deal more attention to their peer groups as sources of influence."

As a result, teens clash with their parents about everything from parties and grades to how neat their bedrooms need to be and their choice of friends. But, although you may think your parents are unreasonable when they tell you to get off the phone after you've been talking for only three hours, the resulting conversation they have with you about the proper use of the telephone doesn't have to turn into a big blowup.

Here are some ways to sort out your differences:

Get to know your parents

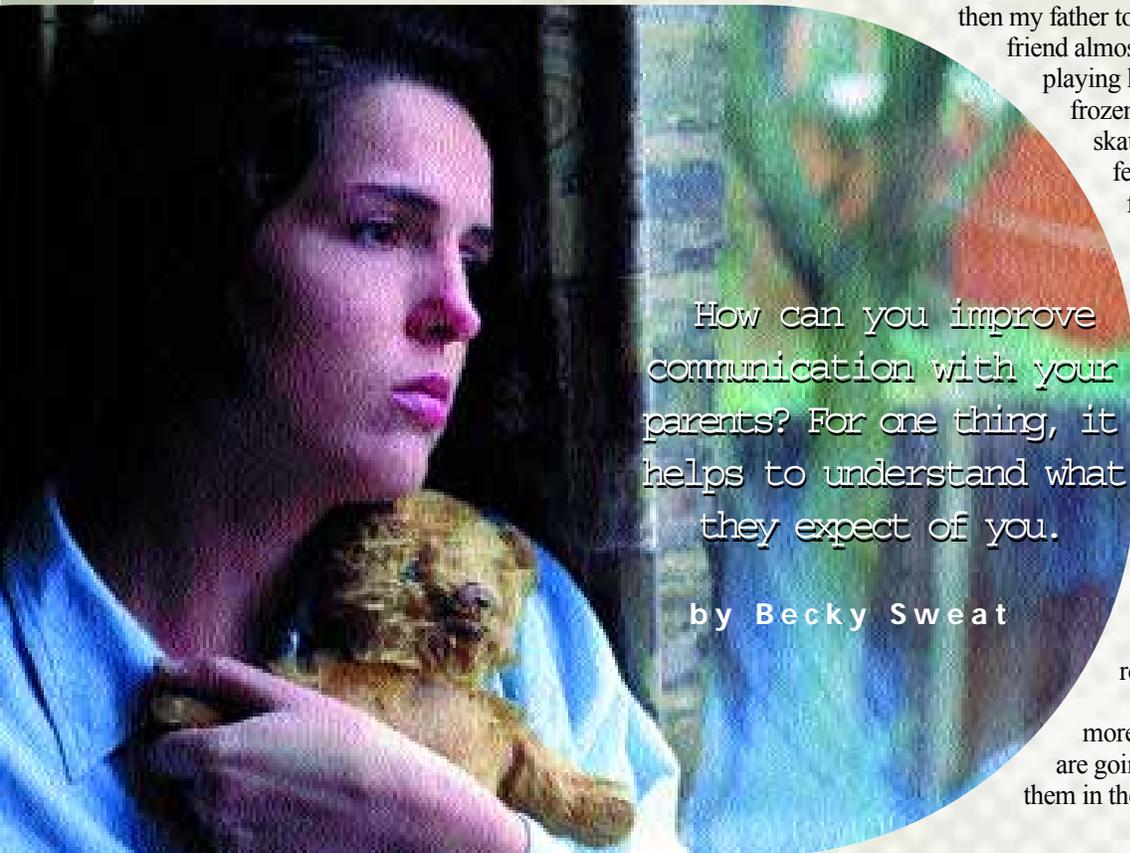
You can put an end to a lot of misunderstandings with your parents just by learning more about them. "I thought Dad was horrible for not letting me go ice-skating on the pond," admits Melodie, age 14. "But then my father told me the story of how his best friend almost died when they were teens playing hockey on a pond that hadn't frozen over completely. Dad's friend skated over a thin patch of ice and fell in. Now I understand why my father was so concerned about me."

Take some time to talk with your parents and get to know them better. Ask what it was like when they were teens. What did they do for fun? Did they have a lot of friends? What was school like? See if any of their experiences contribute to the way your parents deal with conflicts and why they set certain household rules. Try to find out where they're coming from, why they react the way they do.

Any effort you make to learn more about how your parents' lives are going will help you interact with them in the future.

How can you improve communication with your parents? For one thing, it helps to understand what they expect of you.

by **Becky Sweat**



Getting to know you

Picture yourself at the dinner table. Your mother asks how school was today and you respond, "Fine."

Your father asks what plans you have for the weekend and you say, "I don't know."

Mom asks how your friend is doing and you say, "All right."

Although you may be tempted to respond to your parents' questions in this way, doing so "closes your parents out in terms of being able to make any kind of predictions about your behavior," Dr. Galvin says. "Your parents will be much less likely to grant certain privileges or permission to do something, because they don't have much to go on to help them make a decision: They don't know your friends; they don't know how you feel about various issues or how you interact with your peers."

Teens who do best with their parents are those willing to talk about everyday happenings so their parents gain some sense of what their children's lives are like. Tell your parents about school activities. Introduce them to your friends. Let them know what you think about events in the news. Tell them what you enjoy doing and why. Ask questions, and listen to their answers.

In short, *talk to them*. The more they know and understand about you, the more your parents will gain some idea what you're thinking, making them more inclined to trust you.

To be trusted to make more of your own decisions—a goal of every teen—you have to show that you can be trusted. Trust is hard to gain and easy to lose, and irresponsible decisions and actions will show your parents only that you're not ready to make wise decisions. So, once you've shown your parents that you can be trusted, don't do anything to spoil the confidence they have in you.

Heading off catastrophes

Find a time and place to talk when you and your parents are relaxed. Share your concerns and discuss social activities you'd like to take part in, privileges you'd like to work towards and what you'd like to do on summer vacation.

Don't *tell* your father Saturday afternoon that you want a later curfew that night and expect a positive response. Instead, think ahead and *make your request* as far in advance as possible. You can almost guarantee a flat no if you spring things on your parents at the last moment. But, when you give them a reasonable time to consider your request, at least several days or more, depending on the event, you're more likely to elicit a positive response. When you show such courtesy and respect to your parents, they're more likely to show you courtesy and respect in return.

Try to see things from your parents' perspective and anticipate the questions they're going to ask. Think your proposal through ahead of time. You're going to have a better chance of getting a yes if you make your parents comfortable with your plans. If there are a lot of gaps and uncertainties in your plans, you'll be less likely to ease your parents' concerns.

Be willing to negotiate

"After I got my driver's license, I asked to use Mom's car so I could drive some friends to the school dance," says Breanne,

16. "When my mother asked which friends I planned to take, I didn't feel like telling her, so she wouldn't let me take the car, and I didn't go to the dance. The next day at school, everyone was talking about how much fun the dance was, and I wished I'd been willing to give in a little with my mother."

You will be setting yourself up for disappointment if you expect things always to go exactly the way you want them to.

Determine what's important

What are the issues most important to you? Use of the family car? Going on a ski trip with your friends? Extending curfew? A raise in your allowance? Dropping piano lessons? If you are constantly approaching Mom and Dad with complaints, life at home won't be pleasant for you or them.

Some teens are determined to exercise what they perceive to be their "rights" and can make a big deal out of things that

Teens who do best with their parents are those willing to talk about everyday happenings so their parents gain some sense of what their children's lives are like.

really aren't that important. Learn to accept the inevitable minor inconvenience and disappointment. Then, when you do discuss a problem with your parents, they'll know this is something that means a lot to you.

They're on your side

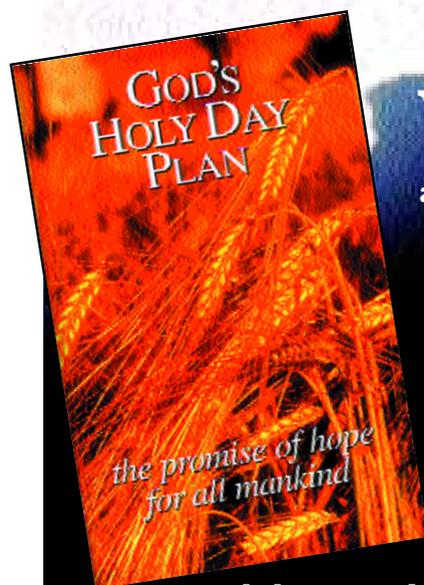
"When I told my mother about the party I wanted to go to, she instantly jumped on me with questions like who's going to be at the party? Will a parent be there? How late will the party go? It's like she doesn't want me to go and doesn't care if I have any fun. But I'm just trying to be like everyone else and have a good time." So says Brandon, age 16.

Although you may not feel that way now, your parents are on your side. They're looking out for you and aren't thrilled about telling you no.

Your parents are the people responsible for helping you make decisions until you're on your own. They want you to enjoy your teen years. They want you to grow up and become well-adjusted, successful adults. It's just that sometimes their way of getting there may be different from what you'd like to do. Remind yourself that they're *your* parents and they care about *you*, even if you don't always see eye to eye. **GN**



Does God Have a Plan for Humanity?



Why does humanity exist? Is there a purpose for human life, or are we only the result of some evolutionary process, the product of a series of cosmic accidents?

What is the fate of humanity? Are we destined to kill ourselves off through warfare, environmental destruction or epidemics? Or will we see a future utopia of peace and prosperity for all? Is it possible to know what the future holds for us?

The Creator of mankind does have a plan for us, and He reveals it to us through an annual cycle of festivals described in the Scriptures, He shows an astounding plan offering an incredible future to every man, woman and child who has ever lived.

God's Holy Day Plan: the Promise of Hope for All Mankind will help you understand the incredible truth about what lies ahead for all humanity. Write for your free copy at the address nearest you inside the front cover of this issue.

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Jericho: The Lesson of Not Coming Into Sin

Ancient Israel had to learn a painful, tragic lesson at Jericho. What should Christians today learn from their experience?

by Mario Seiglie

The Bible is replete with instructions and exhortations about coming out of sin. Equally important, however, is the concept of avoiding sin in the first place.

Jericho is a vivid case in point. The story of the fall of that ancient city took place during the season of the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread that marked the beginning of the Israelites' inheritance of the Promised Land.

After wandering 40 years in the wilderness, the unfaithful and rebellious first generation of Israelites had died off. Moses also died, and God had named Joshua as his successor. God then allowed the second generation to enter Canaan and form the beginnings of the kingdom of Israel.

In the spring the Israelites came upon the plain of Moab with the Jordan River in front of them. As He had previously parted the Red Sea, God now miraculously opened the Jordan, and they entered the Promised Land. "The LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God *did to the Red Sea*, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (Joshua 4:23-24, emphasis added throughout).

A fresh start

Once Israel passed into Canaan, God instructed that the male Israelites should be circumcised, since the previous generation had not obeyed even the simple command involving circumcision. God was forging a holy nation, and its male residents were to bear this sign that they were God's special treasure and an obedient people (Genesis 17:11; Exodus 19:5).

Next, with the powerful fortress city of Jericho nearby, the Israelites celebrated the Passover and began keeping the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Joshua 5:10-12). Once they entered the Promised Land, they no longer needed the miracle of the manna, and it ceased to appear on this first day of Unleavened Bread.

God showed them that their 40-year journey had come to an end and they no longer needed the supernatural food. As God had told them through Moses, "you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deuteronomy 8:2). The Israelites were finally inheriting the Promised Land, which God had promised to their forefather Abraham more than 400 years earlier.

As they began to eat unleavened bread made from the grain of the land, God instructed them in how they were to capture Jericho, a major obstacle to them in their conquest of the land. Seven momentous days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to follow, along with a spiritual lesson for the ancient Israelites and for us.

Facing the fortress of Jericho

God ordered the priests of Israel to march around the city on each of the seven days of the feast. The Jewish historian Josephus marks the time: "So on the first day of the feast the priests carried the ark round about, with some part of the armed men to be a guard to it . . . and when they had done this for six days, on the seventh Joshua gathered the armed men . . . and told them these good tidings, that the city should now be taken"

God instructed the Israelites in how they were to capture Jericho, a major obstacle to them in their conquest of the land. Seven momentous days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to follow, along with a spiritual lesson for the ancient Israelites and for us.

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Jericho: The Lesson of Not Coming Into Sin
Ancient Israel learned a tragic lesson we would do well to heed.

The Lesson of Foot-Washing
What does this humble example of Jesus Christ mean for us?

How Does the Bible Define Sin?
Do you know what sin is? Several scriptures define it for us.

E1	The Concepts of Sin in the New Testament <i>To remove sin from our lives, we must first understand what it is.</i>	E10
E4	How to Overcome Sin <i>Paul reveals a principle that can help us win this struggle.</i>	E12
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(*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 5, chapter 1, paragraph 5).

The biblical account begins: “Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in” (Joshua 6:1-5). The huge city doors had been sealed shut, and no one could enter or leave the heavily fortified settlement. No one could go in or out other than through the gates in the sturdy walls.

Archaeologists have described Jericho as one of the oldest cities in the world. By Joshua’s time it had already seen civilizations come and go. For the last several centuries it had successfully resisted all attempts to conquer it. Its massive fortifications had discouraged any invader.

Hundreds of years earlier Abraham and Lot had journeyed to the Jordan Valley and the area around Jericho. To the south were the “cities of the plain,” which included Sodom and Gomorrah. These had been destroyed because of their wickedness, but Jericho continued as the chief city to their north and one of the gateways to the land of Canaan. Since it occupied such a vital strategic and commercial location, the Canaanites had heavily fortified it.

Doubly fortified

In this century, archaeological evidence of the excavated Jericho shows that the level of the site that corresponds to that era had a double wall. The first part of the wall was a towering structure of huge stones 15 feet high topped by a brick wall eight feet high.

When the Israelites entered the city, God solemnly warned them not to take any of the spoils for themselves. God considered the place impure and unholy from centuries of atrocious sins.

Excavators found that, even if this first wall were breached, the attackers would find themselves trapped inside a pit and looking up at a higher second wall from which defenders could hurl deadly spears, rocks and arrows.

As the Israelites camped near Jericho, the residents of the city remained mostly confident that they could withstand any siege. The Israelites looked puny to them; they had few weapons and no siege towers or battering rams. Bizarrely, a group of priests walked around the city every day blowing horns. What did that have to do with capturing a fortified city?

Yet the inhabitants were concerned, not because of the Israelites, but because of the reputation of Israel’s God, who had

separated the waters of the nearby Jordan. “So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel” (Joshua 5:1).

A fortress finally falls

On the final day of Unleavened Bread, in what must have become a joke to the populace of Jericho, the Israelite priests marched seven times around the city. The Israelite soldiers were poised nearby, but they must have appeared powerless. The city dwellers must have thought this the most ridiculous and ill-equipped army they had ever seen.

Yet, when the priests completed their seventh encirclement, they sounded their trumpets, and instantly a mighty earthquake shook the town. The walls noisily heaved, cracked and crumbled.

Normally, since the walls were reinforced from the outside, they would have collapsed in a rubble, which still could have provided protection from the invaders. But in this case the walls appeared to defy gravity and fell out and flat, allowing the Israelite soldiers to quickly move over and through the rubble. The Bible account says that “the wall fell down flat. Then the

people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city” (Joshua 6:20).

In 1990 archaeologist Bryant Wood wrote in *Biblical Archaeology Review* about his findings in Jericho. He mentioned that parts of the outer and inner wall had collapsed outwardly, which allowed the Israelites to enter the city. His conclusions based on studies of the devastation of the city are fascinating. “Was this destruction at the hands of the Israelites?” he wrote. “The correlation between the archaeological evidence and the Biblical narrative is substantial.” He lists several points in favor of the biblical account (March-April 1990, p. 57):

- The city was well fortified (Joshua 2:5, 7, 15; 6:5, 20).

- The attack occurred just after the spring harvest (Joshua 2:6; 3:15; 5:10).

- The inhabitants had no time or opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs (Joshua 6:1).

- The siege was short (Joshua 6:15).

- The walls were leveled, possibly by an earthquake (Joshua 6:20).

- The city was not plundered (Joshua 6:17-18).

- The city burned (Joshua 6:24).

Warning to the Israelites

When the Israelites entered the city, God solemnly warned them not to take any of the spoils for themselves. God considered the place impure and unholy from centuries of atrocious sins. “Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who are in it . . . And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it” (Joshua 6:17-18).

Why did God tell the Israelites not to take spoils? After all, after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness the Israelites needed new clothing, food and other goods.

Several hundred years before, God told Abraham that in the fourth generation His people would inherit the Promised Land: “But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16).

God allotted the Canaanites 400 years to live their wicked existence. But, after this period, their sins had greatly multiplied. This was a hopelessly corrupt society, and God did not want the Israelites to participate in any of the Canaanites’ sinful ways. The Israelites had recently been consecrated. They were circumcised, took the Passover and had just finished removing leaven from their midst. They were not to soil themselves with anything of that condemned society.

True to human nature, someone defied God’s instructions. “But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan . . . took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel” (Joshua 7:1).

The results were immediate and tragic. Because of Achan’s sin, the Israelites were defeated by the inhabitants of the next city, Ai.

Joshua grew depressed and fearful, but God told him to remove the sinner and Israel would again be triumphant: “Get up!

Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among

to the south, Sodom and Gomorrah. They persisted in their moral and spiritual decline for centuries until it was too late.

As the spiritual descendants of the ancient Israelites (Galatians 6:15-16), we must not allow the allure of worldly soci-

ety to draw us into it. This is one of the lessons of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. The apostle John warns: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:28-30).
When we take the Passover and keep the seven days of Unleavened Bread each year, we remember that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us spiritually, delivering us from enslavement to the sins of the world. God wants us *outside* of those walls and doing His work: trumpeting God's truths to a world whose society might appear well fortified but one that in the time of God's judgment will collapse.

A time of destruction

As mentioned above, God had told the patriarch Abraham that his descendants would take the land of Canaan "in the fourth generation," but not before, "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16).

Just as God waited until the time was right before allowing the Israelites to come into the land of Canaan, He allots us a certain time. We do not know when God will consider the world's sins to have "reached to heaven," but we know He is watching. John in vision "heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities'" (Revelation 18:4-5).

One day God will consider that the world's evil deeds have gone far enough. This, too, is described in Revelation: "So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God" (Revelation 14:19). Someday this will happen. On which side of the wall of Jericho will God find us?

The lesson for us is to remember not only how to come out of the world, but how not to be lured back into it. We picture this, during the spring feast days, not just by *eating unleavened* bread but by *avoiding leavened* bread. Just as God inaugurated the Passover and Unleavened Bread season by removing Israel from the corrupt society of Egypt, He wanted the Israelites to remember when they entered the Promised Land that they were not to take part in the corrupt practices of the Canaanites.

We must learn this important lesson: We are to *come out* of sin (symbolized by Egypt) and *avoid going back* into sin (represented by Jericho). If we succeed, we can inherit our Promised Land, the coming Kingdom of God. **GN**



The remains of the ancient city of Jericho can still be seen at Tell es-Sultan, about six miles north of the Dead Sea. The effects of archaeological excavations that began at the site in 1907 and continued in later years are clearly visible.

their own stuff" (Joshua 7:10-11).

Joshua quickly determined who was the guilty man. After Achan confessed his sin, he and his family were stoned to death. God's favor was restored, and the Israelites continued their conquest of the Promised Land.

Lasting lessons

What can we learn from this? Jericho represents the allure of a wicked society. Sometimes one is tempted to climb up the walls of the world, so to speak, and peer inside. In Jericho the inhabitants enjoyed comfort, wealth and a certain sophistication—all new and tempting to a generation of Israelites who had known only the hardships of a life in the wilderness.

Jericho, well guarded, appeared safe inside. Little did the citizens of Jericho know they were living on borrowed time. They paid no lasting heed after they witnessed the destruction of their counterparts

ety to draw us into it. This is one of the lessons of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. The apostle John warns: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

If we are tempted to peer over the wall and lust after the world's way of life, we might find ourselves on top when the walls come tumbling down! Christ warned us of participating in the sins of the world at the time of the end. "Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot [in Canaan]: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will

The Lesson of Foot-Washing

On the evening before His death, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, then instructed that His followers would continue this practice to help us remember. What are we to learn from this simple but profound observance?

by Jerold Aust

Peter was puzzled as Jesus of Nazareth knelt down to wash His disciples' feet. Jesus and the 12 apostles had gathered in a private room. He had earlier directed Peter and John to prepare their last meal together. It was during this time that Jesus instituted the symbols of the New Testament Passover: the unleavened bread that would represent His broken body and the wine that would signify His blood that he would lose less than a day later.

Peter was watching, fascinated, as Jesus bent down to wash His disciples' feet. This was unusual, even strange, to see a teacher washing His followers' feet.

Peter had observed Jesus rising during supper to remove His outer garment and wrap a towel around His waist. Peter well knew this was an act customarily performed by slaves or servants. In that day, whenever guests were invited to a home, the lowliest household slave or servant washed the guests' feet. (John 1:27 and Luke 7:44 refer to this custom.) In this case, since this was a private gathering, no servants were present to carry out the menial job of removing sandals and washing the feet of guests.

Wasn't Jesus too good for this?

What was Jesus doing? Surely it was beneath Him to abase Himself in this way. As Jesus moved from one disciple to another, the room probably quieted. All eyes followed Jesus' every move. The disciples shifted their positions to watch Him lift the pitcher of water and pour it into a basin.

Carefully, systematically, Jesus moved from disciple to disciple, washing each man's feet. Peter looked on transfixed, scrutinizing Jesus' every move. Peter suddenly realized it was his turn.

As Jesus bent down to wash his feet, Peter blurted out, "Lord, are *You* washing *my* feet?" (John 13:6, emphasis added throughout). Apparently Peter was the only one who openly questioned—and protested—his Master's actions. His understanding of Jesus' behavior wouldn't come until God sent the disciples the Holy Spirit. Only later would they comprehend the spiritual significance of this act of humility and the symbols Jesus instituted during that evening's Passover service.

Jesus responded simply, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (verse 7). Of course, Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit's revelatory power, which would eventually guide the disciples' understanding (John 16:13), enabling them to grasp the spiritual meaning of this physical act. Later they would understand that this ceremony signifies the Christian's humble service to God, His Church and mankind.

Again, Peter's impetuosity surfaced. He protested that Jesus should never lower Himself to the undignified demeanor of a servant: "*You* shall never wash *my* feet!"

Jesus Christ calmly responded, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:8).

Peter's next saying mirrors our human tendency to overreact: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" (verse 9).

Our Savior then informed Peter: "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you" (verse 10).

He made clear that the act of washing each other's feet is not really an exercise in personal hygiene. Although His disciples wouldn't understand until later, Jesus spoke of becoming spiritually pure, which would happen through His shed blood and death for the sins of humanity.

One man among the disciples was not clean in spirit: Judas Iscariot, who would betray the Savior. Jesus knew who would betray Him, "therefore He said, 'You are not all clean'" (verse 11).

Lessons for Christ's followers

What are we to learn from Jesus Christ's act of humility? Jesus Himself clearly explained the primary lesson of foot-washing: "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (verses 13-14).

In other words, if Jesus Christ is willing to humbly and unconditionally serve His followers in a lowly human task, those disciples should follow His example and be willing to perform even the most unpleasant tasks for their brethren and mankind.

If Jesus Christ is willing to humbly and unconditionally serve His followers in a lowly human task, those disciples should follow His example and be willing to perform even the most unpleasant tasks for their brethren and mankind.

The apostle John, who recorded these events, later explained this attitude with a simple question: “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17). No follower of Christ is to set himself above serving any other human being. God observes His people and blesses those who honor Him by serving as conduits of His truth and examples of true spirituality.

Jesus instituted the foot-washing ceremony to illustrate that He had come to *serve* mankind. He had earlier made this

was his willingness to die and His death, which was to befall him the next afternoon. His example of humility, service and generosity is all the more poignant because of its contrast with the attitude of the rest of humanity. Our natural tendency is to look for ways to make others serve us. God’s way, on the other hand, is unpretentious, willing service to others.

Serving others God’s way imposes no

Peter well knew that Christ’s actions were customarily performed by slaves or servants. In that day, whenever guests were invited to a home, the lowliest household slave or servant washed the guests’ feet.

lets everyone come out ahead. It is not the way we normally, naturally think. That is why we must change to God’s way, which works forever.

Our way does not work for long. Although we may temporarily benefit, in the long run our human way of doing things traps us. Service to others lives on, but taking or serving only the self dies with those who seek to serve themselves.



Those who would follow Jesus Christ must ask a tough question: Will we dedicate ourselves to Jesus’ way of outgoing, humble service toward others, or will we go the way of the world, demanding and taking and serving ourselves? Christ’s example of washing His friends’ feet is a reminder of that fundamental choice.

You can do three things that will help you understand and capture Jesus’ attitude as He washed His disciples’ feet:

- Ask God to help you better understand and practice the spirit of foot-washing.
- Seek God’s attitude of humility and service by researching and studying the many examples of it in your Bible, including Abraham, Ruth and Daniel.
- Look for ways to serve others.

Every year as we approach the Passover season, let’s keep in mind the wonderful lesson of washing others’

clear to those who would follow Him: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it *shall not be so* among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, *let him be your slave*—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28).

Christ’s ultimate service for mankind

conditions and expects no reward: “But love [even] your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35). This powerful scripture tells us much about God’s character—that His approach is one of unbiased service to mankind.

Spiritual system at work

Jesus reveals to us a spiritual system that

feet, which symbolizes our serving others with humility and without imposing our own conditions. Jesus tells us to emulate His actions in this simple ceremony: “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15).

Then He shows us the results of a selfless, serving attitude: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (verse 17). *GN*

How Does the Bible Define Sin?

In our struggle to avoid and overcome sin, it is vital that we understand exactly what it is. Let's see how the Bible defines sin.

by Scott Ashley

What exactly is sin? Do you understand how the Bible defines it? As Christians, we are to avoid sin—but how can we avoid sin if we don't fully comprehend what it is?

The Bible defines sin in several scriptures, each of which gives us a better understanding of what it is. But, before we look at these scriptures that define sin, we should first understand what the word *sin* means.

Two broad concepts

The Hebrew and Greek words translated “sin” throughout the Bible revolve largely around two major concepts. The first is that of transgression. *To transgress* means “to step across” or “to go beyond a set boundary or limit.” This concept can be compared to an athletic playing field with lines delineating the boundaries within which the game is played. When a player crosses over those boundary lines, he has committed a “transgression” and gone out of bounds. Limits are set that define the playing area, and the players are to stay within the limits of that area.

Most of the other words translated “sin” in the Bible involve a second concept, “*to miss the mark*.” Again, to use a sports analogy, if a player aims for the goal and misses, how many points does he get? None. He missed the goal, missed the mark at which he was aiming.

This view of sin includes the concept of our going in one direction but straying off course to the side and not continuing in the direction we intended to go, with the result that we don't make it to the goal we intended. We miss.

This concept also encompasses the idea of failing to measure up to a standard. For example, most academic courses and tests are graded or judged according to a minimum standard. If we don't meet that standard, we fail that test or course. A minimum level of performance is expected, and anything less than that standard is failure. By not meeting that standard, we “miss the mark” and don't pass. We can miss the mark by either *missing* the goal at which we were aiming or by *falling short* of that goal. In either situation we fail to reach the mark set for us.

Both of these concepts, transgressing and missing the mark, involve a basic requirement. If we *transgress*, which means to cross over a set boundary or limit, then we must have a boundary or limit

to cross over. If we *miss the mark*, we must have a mark, target or standard to miss. Sin, then, is to transgress those boundaries God has set for us or to miss the target He set for us.

This is where the biblical definitions of sin become important, because these scriptures define the boundaries and standards God set for us. They define the playing field on which we are to live our lives. They also define the goal we are to aim for, the minimum standard we are expected to meet. In other words, the biblical definitions of sin show us the *standards* God has given us that define *what is acceptable* to Him and *what isn't acceptable*. They show us what *measures up* and what *falls short* of those standards, the fundamental principles God has given us to live by.

The definitions of sin in the Bible are not simply arbitrary dos and don'ts. Instead, they show us *the way God lives*. They show the spiritual principles by which He lives, the same standard of conduct He expects His human creations to live by.

Transgressing the law of God

What, then, are the boundaries and standards God has set for us that define sin? The most basic definition of sin is in 1 John 3:4: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for *sin is the transgression of the law*” (King James Version, emphasis added throughout). Here God defines a boundary for mankind. He says that sin is transgressing His holy, spiritual law (Romans 7:12-14). Breaking that law—crossing that divine boundary, that limit God set for us—is sin.

When we look at 1 John 3:4 in other translations, we see another important perspective. Here's how the New King James Version translates this verse: “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and *sin is lawlessness*.” The word translated “lawlessness” is the Greek word *anomia*, meaning *without law* or *against law*. The concept conveyed here is that sin is *active violation* of God's laws and basic moral principles. This refers to actions that are not just *outside* the bounds of God's law, but actions that are in *deliberate rebellion* against those laws—deliberately trampling on and rejecting that boundary.

God gave humanity His laws to show us His way of love. Those laws define how we demonstrate love to God and our fellowman (Deuteronomy 30:15-16; Matthew 22:35-40; 1 John 5:3). Sin is violation of that law of love. God showed us

The scriptures that define sin define the boundaries and standards God set for us. They define the playing field on which we are to live our lives. They also define the goal we are to aim for, the minimum standard we are expected to meet.

a way to live in peace and harmony with Him and with mankind and defined this way of life by His law. When we sin, we violate or transgress that boundary and break God's law.

Broader definition of sin

We have seen one standard God has set for mankind: He expects obedience to His laws. God's law defines acceptable behavior and actions, and, when we break the standard of God's law, we step across the bounds He has set. But has God set other boundaries for us, other ways in which He defines sin? What about actions and behavior that aren't covered by specific laws?

In 1 John 5:17 we find a much broader definition of sin: "All unrighteousness is sin . . ."

Other Bible versions help us more fully understand the meaning: "Every *wrong action* is sin" (Twentieth Century New Testament). "Every act of *wrong-doing* is sin" (Phillips Modern English). "Any kind of *wrongdoing* is sin" (Weymouth New Testament in Modern Speech). "All *iniquity* is sin" (Moffatt Translation).

The basic thrust of this scripture is that, if any action or behavior is *wrong*, it is *sin*. The word translated "unrighteousness," "wrong action," "wrongdoing" and "iniquity" in these versions is the Greek *adikia*. The *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* defines this word as "action that causes visible harm to other persons in violation of the divine standard" (Lawrence O. Richards, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1985, "Sin").

Other meanings of this word and its verb form are "evildoers," "dishonest," "unjust," "wickedness," "to be unfair," "to harm," "to mistreat," "to hurt" and "to wrong [another person]" (*ibid.*).

These meanings go beyond just physical deeds and actions and cross over into attitudes and motives for our actions and what goes on in our minds. They involve what we think. We see the beginnings of a different standard, one that involves not just what we do but what we are.

Christ reveals an underlying principle

Jesus Christ clarified this divine standard in Matthew 5:21-22: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that *whoever is angry with his brother without a cause* shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother,

'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."

One commonly understood standard of behavior was to refrain from murdering another human. If someone committed murder, he would himself be put to death. Here Jesus drew attention to the law's underlying principle: If you *think* of other people as worthless, viewing them as undeserving of life or existence, then you are in danger of *eternal death*, not just physical stoning. Jesus Christ showed that sin includes not only our physical actions, but also our thoughts and attitudes.

He explained this further in verses 27-

We should realize that sin starts in the mind. When we allow evil thoughts to enter our mind and stay there, eventually these evil thoughts can spring into action, leading us to sin.

28: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has *already committed adultery* with her in his heart." Christ said that this sin is not defined by just a physical act; if we even allow such a thought in our mind we have sinned. We have mentally crossed that boundary, trampling that limit God gave us.

We should realize that sin starts in the mind. When we allow evil thoughts to enter our mind and stay there, eventually these evil thoughts can spring into action, leading us to sin. We are what we think (Proverbs 23:7). Jesus told those of His day who were obsessed with physical cleanliness and ritual washings that it isn't what goes into our bodies that defile us, but the evil that is *already there* in our minds that debases us (Matthew 15:17-20).

Humanly speaking, we don't see anything wrong with allowing wrong thoughts into our minds. Often they are quite pleasurable and entertaining. But eventually those sinful thoughts lead us into sin. The result is the trampling of God's law. Jesus Christ instructs us to disrupt that process before it gets started, by not even allowing wrong thoughts into our minds.

Do not violate your conscience

In Romans 14 God reveals yet other ways in which we can fail to measure up to His standards. In this chapter the apostle Paul wrote to a congregation composed of Jews and gentiles, discussing how their differing backgrounds had affected them. In

the Roman Empire of the time literally dozens of holidays were observed, including feast days and fast days during which certain foods would be eaten or avoided.

Those who had been members of the Church for some time knew that such practices had no meaning for Christians, so they ate what they wanted when they wanted. But others were being called into the Church out of that Roman background and were offended at the eating of such foods. This created conflicts among the congregation because the new members had spent their whole lives thinking that eating particular foods was wrong on particular days of the calendar.

Paul addressed this problem in verses 19-22, telling Christians to be careful that they don't offend those newer and weaker in the faith. Then notice what Paul said in verse 23: "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is *not from faith* is *sin*."

Here we see a third standard that defines sin for us: "Whatever is not from faith is sin." Just what is God telling us in this passage? From the context we are told that if we violate our conscience we are sinning. If you do something that you feel you shouldn't be doing, you are sinning.

Why is this sin? Because mentally and spiritually we are compromising when we do something that we don't think is right. When we compromise, we are destroying *character*.

Character is crucial

God expects us to build spiritually mature, godly character in this life, becoming ever more like Him (Matthew 5:48). We build eternal, godly character by remaining faithful to what is right in spite of pulls to the contrary. We resist the temptation to do things we know we shouldn't. We live by faith that God will give us the strength to endure whatever trials we face in this life. But when we compromise we tear down that character. We give in. Every time we give in, we find it that much harder to resist giving in the next time we face temptation.

One of the insidious things about compromise is that it spreads. If we get away

with something once, we find it much easier to try it again next time. Compromise grows like a cancer. It comes on slowly, then spreads. Before you know it you can be in a fight for your spiritual life. That is why God says that, if our actions aren't done in faith or according to faith, if they violate our conscience, *we are sinning*.

God wants us to live within the boundaries and standards He has set for us, to change our values, attitudes, thoughts and lives so they are in line with His standards, not our own.

We need to be sure that what we do is out of faith and confidence that it is right and acceptable to God—or *not do it*. We need to be sure our motives are right and our conscience remains clear in everything we do. For this reason it is vital that we properly *educate our conscience* so that it is in accordance with God's Word, the Bible. It is not within our natural ability to discern right and wrong (Jeremiah 10:23). We are to learn God's ways that define right and wrong for us (Hebrews 5:14).

God wants us to live within the boundaries and standards He has set for us, to change our values, attitudes, thoughts and lives so they are in line with *His standards*, not our own. The process of conversion can be simply defined as replacing *our standards, values and thoughts with God's standards, values and thoughts*.

Sin can be what we *don't* do

We have seen the ways that we can sin by *what we do* as well as *what we think*. In case you haven't noticed, the standard God expects of us keeps getting *higher* and *harder* for us to meet. This last definition of sin may be the most difficult for us.

Did you realize that we could go through life without *ever* stealing, lying, hating or breaking a single command from God, all the while perfectly controlling our thoughts, and yet still sin every day of our lives? We could avoid all those things, but we could still be sinning according to this last definition of sin. Most of us probably don't realize we are involved in this last kind of sin and probably don't even realize that it *is* a sin.

We have seen that we can sin by the things we do. But we can also sin by the things that we don't do.

James 4:17 tells us, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it,

to him it is sin." Perhaps you have heard of *sins of commission*, sinning by the actions we take: stealing, lying, committing adultery and so on. But this verse tells us that some transgressions involve *sins of omission*, sinning by things we *omit* doing.

James tells us that if we *know* to do

good, and we recognize that we *ought to be doing* certain things, the *failure* to do them is a sin. We are not meeting the standard God has set for us. We are missing the mark.

The four Gospels are filled with examples of this sin. Jesus often clashed with those who were diligent about strict literal obedience to God's laws but never realized God expects more of us. In Christ's day the Pharisees referred to detailed lists of what could and couldn't be done lawfully on the Sabbath; they were diligent about tithing down to the last seed or grain of spice; they spent hours studying the law, fasting and praying. Yet Christ called them "blind guides," "hypocrites" and a "brood of vipers."

These people simply didn't comprehend the *intent* of God's law. They put great effort into *not committing* sins, but concentrated so much on this struggle that they failed miserably at doing what they *should* have been doing.

Consider the conflicts they had with Jesus Christ. Their biggest disagreements were over the Sabbath. They were infuriated that Christ *healed* on the Sabbath. According to their teaching, one could provide only medical help or treatment on the Sabbath if the situation were life-threatening. Thus when Jesus performed great miracles on the Sabbath—healing those who had been crippled or sick for years—the Pharisees were furious. Instead of rejoicing for those who were healed, they were enraged.

They wanted to kill Christ because in their distorted view He was breaking the Sabbath. They were blind to the fact that Jesus was *doing good*, that He was easing the misery and pain of people who had suffered for years. It was because of their willful spiritual blindness and hostility that Christ called them hypocrites and snakes.

Changing what we are

We should learn an important lesson from this: Strict obedience to God's laws alone doesn't change what we are. It's a start, certainly. As we have seen, obedience to His laws is a standard God expects us to meet. But there's more to it than that.

Sometimes we make the same mistake the Pharisees made. We can concentrate so much on avoiding breaking God's law that we lose sight of the purpose of that law: to change our *focus* from thinking about ourselves to being concerned for and showing love for others.

We may think that never breaking God's law is good enough. But what did Jesus Christ say? Only a few days before His execution, Jesus made clear an obligation for those who would follow Him:

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory . . . all the nations will be gathered before Him . . . Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and *you gave Me no food*; I was thirsty and *you gave Me no drink*; I was a stranger and *you did not take Me in*, naked and *you did not clothe Me*, sick and in prison and *you did not visit Me*.' . . . And these [those who *did none* of these things] will go away to everlasting punishment, but the righteous [those who *did* these things] into eternal life" (Matthew 25:31-43, 46).

Jesus illustrated this point through other examples. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) provides a prime example of a sin of omission. The rich man took *no* notice of a

poor beggar, a man who had absolutely no significance in the wealthy man's busy life but who was *greatly valued* by God.

Another wealthy man filled his barns with impressive provisions while neglecting to extend a helping hand to those in need (Luke 12:16-21). This man stored up treasures for himself, filling his storehouses to overflowing with far more than he could possibly use while at the same time showing no regard for others—another sin of omission.

Whose will is most important?

Christ's teaching helps us understand why it is sin *not* to do what we know we should do. It boils down to whose will is most important in our lives: Is it *our will*, doing what *we* want to do? Or is it *God's will*, doing what *He* thinks is most important?

Not doing what we know is right is putting *our* will ahead of God's. It demonstrates to God that we don't have the desire or character to put *His* will ahead of our own. It shows we are unwilling to completely surrender ourselves to Him. This is why it is sin: We put ourselves before God, our will before His will.

James elaborated on the requirement that we do good deeds. He asked several basic questions about our faith: "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? What good is it? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:14-17).

James says such faith—faith without godly works—is useless, worthless. Such faith is of no lasting value because *it doesn't change the person*, nor does it help others just to hear the words "Be warm and filled" when they're cold and hungry.

It is through *action*—through *works*, through doing the good that we know we ought to be doing—that God builds His nature and character within us. If we want to get rid of our selfish, sinful nature, we have to replace it with something else. We don't just magically, instantly get rid of it; we have to *replace it* with God's nature, with His thoughts and ways.

Paul tells us in Galatians 5:16, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." God's Spirit working within us will help us recognize sin and avoid it so

we no longer will "fulfill the lust of the flesh." His Spirit will likewise help us recognize, understand and grow in His ways, enabling us to strengthen and demonstrate our faith through the works that James pointed out are necessary.

Opportunities abound for us to do the good that we know we ought to be doing. We can start right in our own families by working to make them strong, by making our families a warm, affectionate, supporting, encouraging place for all family members. We have plenty of opportunities in our spiritual family as well. God's Word tells us in James 1:27 that pure religion is to "look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (New International Version).

God wants us to become a more compassionate, more caring and more truly loving people, reflecting His way of life. He wants us to become more like Jesus Christ, who gave His life as a living sacrifice for all humankind. Many opportunities exist for us to do good: to encourage, strengthen, help, give, show love for those in need. When we do those things, we are doing *good works*—sacrificing our time and energy for

the well-being and benefit of others.

The ultimate definition of sin

God sets high standards for us in finding and overcoming the sins that affect us. Ultimately, these definitions tell us that sin is *anything* that is contrary to the will of God or doesn't express the holy character of God. That is the standard He has set for us, as seen by these definitions.

Our efforts to identify and remove sin can be compared to the story of a sculptor chipping away at an enormous block of stone. Another man asks him what he's sculpting, and the sculptor replies, "An elephant." The other man then asks, "How do you sculpt an elephant?" The sculptor considers the question, then says: "It's really very simple. You just chip away anything that doesn't look like an elephant."

We are doing the same thing when we start chipping away sins from our lives. Our goal is, with God's help, to chip away *everything that isn't like God*. We are removing sin—everything that is *contrary to or doesn't express the holy character of God*—with the purpose of more fully and maturely reflecting God's very mind and way of life. *GN*

FINDING YOUR WAY BACK TO GOD

Realistically, many of our readers have been afflicted by the ravages and suffering brought on by sin. Sins of commission, sins of omission, missing the mark perhaps countless times, violating our consciences—the sheer weight of these multifaceted transgressions is just too great to bear!

The only answer to the problem of sin is, of course, Jesus Christ. He came to earth not only to make possible complete forgiveness of the past, but to help us conquer the strongholds of sin that have become deeply entrenched habits that are enormously difficult to dislodge from our lives. He is our merciful High Priest in heaven, always interceding with God the Father on our behalf, ever ready to help us gain the victory over sin.

"If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, New Revised Standard Version). The apostle John, while acknowledging our human weaknesses, encourages us not to give in to sin. "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2, NRSV).

This gives us every reason to be greatly encouraged in our daily struggle against sin. After all, Jesus Christ has been there and fully understands our plight. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16, NRSV). *GN*

—John Ross Schroeder

The Concepts of Sin in the New Testament

Examining the many Greek words defining the concepts of sin expands our understanding of sin and how it affects us.

by John Meakin

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, one of God's annual festivals, depicts the Christian's need to eliminate sin from his life. But to live a sin-free life we must first understand *what sin is*. God gives us this understanding through many scriptures.

The New Testament, which was written in Greek, contains many words that add to our understanding of the concept of sin. These are translated into various English words in addition to "sin." A close study of the use of these terms can prove rewarding in expanding our understanding of sin and its effects in our life. Following is a summary of the Greek words defining the concepts of sin.

• **Falling short: *hamartia, hamartema, hamartano*.** This word in various forms occurs around 250 times and is the most common way in the New Testament to express the concept of sin. The central idea is to "miss the mark." This word is used several ways. It can refer to general sin or wrongdoing (John 8:21) or specific acts of sin (Matthew 12:31; 1 John 5:16). The apostle Paul also used it to personify an ungodly power that can control people (Romans 6:6). It also refers to the inward element that produces wrongdoing (Romans 3:9; 7:13).

Hamartia entered the world by Adam (Romans 5:12). He disobeyed God and disregarded His instruction. Adam missed the mark and fell short. Ultimately, this mark (of perfection) is nothing short of the perfection of God's character—the ultimate aim of God's spiritual children (Matthew 5:48). As sinners we "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

God's laws give us a knowledge of *hamartia*, or sin (Romans 3:20). We must not continue in such sin (Romans 6:1-2), but repent, be forgiven and have our sins blotted out (Acts 2:38; 3:19).

• **Unrighteousness, iniquity: *adikia, adikos* (and other forms of the same word).** *Adikia* literally means "not right" and denotes injustice (Luke 18:6) or dishonesty. It is the comprehensive term for a wrong situation or wrongdoing between individuals. The human tongue is a "world of iniquity" (James 3:6). God rejects workers of iniquity (Luke 13:27) and commands us to depart from iniquity (2 Timothy 2:19).

God is righteous (Romans 9:14) and expects us to be like Him. God will forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we are willing to confess our sins and ask Him for forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

• **Trespass: *paraptoma*.** This word occurs 23 times, coming from *para*, meaning "aside," and *pipto*, meaning "to fall." It refers to a false step, blunder, sideslip, lapse or deviation—the failure to maintain godly conduct by the resistance to temptation.

Perhaps the most familiar use of the term is in Jesus' example prayer to His disciples, where we are encouraged to "forgive men their trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). Jesus was delivered to death for our trespasses (Romans 4:25). Through our acceptance of His sacrifice in our place, our trespasses, our offenses, are not imputed to us (2 Corinthians 5:19).

When we were dead in our sins, we were brought back to life through God's grace and forgiven by Christ's sacrifice (Ephesians 1:7; 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13). Our Christian task is to help those overtaken in any trespass (Galatians 6:1). Through the fall (trespass) of Israel, God has brought salvation to the gentiles (Romans 11:11).

• **Iniquity, lawlessness: *anomia*.** This word occurs 15 times and literally means "no law." It is usually translated "iniquity" in the King James Version and "lawlessness" in the New King James, though in 1 John 3:4, which contains perhaps the best-known definition of sin, it is translated "transgression" in the King James Version.

Even outwardly religious professing Christians who may do many wonderful things fall under God's stern judgment if they continue to practice lawlessness (Matthew 7:23) or fail to uphold His laws. God will remove all such people from His coming world-ruling Kingdom (Matthew 13:41).

The Pharisees were prime examples of those who seemed to be righteous but in reality were full of *anomia* (Matthew 23:28). Such lawlessness is prophesied to be the dominant spirit of the time immediately before Jesus Christ's return (Matthew 24:12). God hates lawlessness (Hebrews 1:9) and commands us to repent of it. We are blessed when

The New Testament, which was written in Greek, contains many words that add to our understanding of the concept of sin. A close study of the use of these terms can prove rewarding in expanding our understanding of sin and its effects in our life.

God forgives our lawless deeds (Romans 4:7) and He remembers our lawless deeds no more (Hebrews 10:17).

• **Transgression: *parabasis*.** This word comes from *para*, meaning “across,” and *basis*, meaning “foot.” It holds the meaning of violating a specific law, crossing a specific line God has drawn. Unless a line exists to cross over, no transgression can be committed (Romans 4:15). The effect of the law is to render people “transgressors” when they violate, or cross over, the boundary God has set.

Both Adam (Romans 5:14) and Eve (1 Timothy 2:14) transgressed God’s instruction, though of the two only Eve was deceived. In Galatians 3:19 we read that God added a law alongside another law “because of transgressions”—disobedience to *existing* law or instruction.

Because of human nature’s hostility toward God (Romans 8:7), we naturally tend to cross the boundary lines set by God (Romans 7:18). That is why Christ, who “by means of death” is mediator of the New Covenant, is so important (Hebrews 9:15). His death redeems (purchases) us from transgressions of God’s laws under the covenant to Israel. The promise of the New Covenant through Christ brings forgiveness of our transgressions and allows the same laws to be written in our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

“For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator” (Hebrews 9:13-16, NKJV).

• **Ungodliness: *asebeia*.** This word literally means “no worship.” It appears in the Bible in various forms 17 times. *Asebeia* is the opposite of *eusebeia*, which literally means “good worship” or godliness. *Asebeia* means living in rebellion against God and His standards. If *anomia* is defiance of *God’s laws*, then *asebeia* is defiance of *God Himself*. It can also mean irreligion in general.

God made His law for the lawless and ungodly (1 Timothy 1:9) that He may bring

them to repentance. Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6). The world in Noah’s time was destroyed by a flood because of the ungodliness of the earth’s inhabitants (2 Peter 2:5-6). God is angry with the ungodliness of men (Romans 1:18) and warns us against any corrupting activities that will produce even more ungodliness (2 Timothy 2:16-17; Titus 2:12).

Ultimately, God will intervene to “turn away ungodliness” from Israel, His chosen people (Romans 11:26). If God allows persecutions against His chosen people to judge and purify them, how much more serious will be the judgment He will bring on the ungodly (1 Peter 4:16-18; Jude 15).

Even outwardly religious professing Christians who may do many wonderful things fall under God’s stern judgment if they continue to practice lawlessness or fail to uphold His laws.

• **Debt: *opheilema*.** This word occurs only twice and is used as a metaphor for offense or sin in Jesus’ example prayer known as the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:12). Our sins are debts we owe to God.

• **Disobedience: *parakoe, apeitheia*.** This word comes from *para*, meaning “aside,” and *akouo*, meaning “to hear,” and has the meaning of “hearing amiss.” It means a refusal to hear, or heed, God’s commands and is used three times. It was through Adam’s disobedience that all humanity was made sinners (Romans 5:19). By bringing every thought into captivity, we can be “ready to punish all disobedience” (2 Corinthians 10:5-6). Our disobedience merits a “just reward” (Hebrews 2:2).

Apeitheia is used seven times and literally means “not persuaded.” It refers to obstinate rejection of the will of God. It describes the nation of Israel’s unbelief (Romans 11:30-32), which prevented Israel’s first generation from entering the promised land (Hebrews 4:6). We are warned not to go the same way (verse 11).

Satan’s spirit dominates the “sons of disobedience” of this world (Ephesians 2:2). We are warned against being deceived by such obstinate people, who attract God’s fierce anger (Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6).

• **Ignorance, error: *agnoema*.** This word occurs only once, in Hebrews 9:7, where it is translated “errors” in the KJV. The NKJV translates this as “sins committed in ignorance.” It refers to sins committed inadvertently through ignorance or unwitting error.

Lack of knowledge, however, does not

mitigate the sin, which still needs to be atoned for. Ignorance is no excuse. In ancient Israel the high priest entered the tabernacle each year on the Day of Atonement to make an offering for these sins. As we become aware of our ignorance, we need to repent. Even sins of ignorance must be covered by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

• **Fault: *amomos, hettema, memphomai, aition, elencho*.** Several Greek words are translated “fault” in English. Pontius Pilate found Christ “without fault” (Greek *aition*, Luke 23:4, 14), meaning without cause, crime or legal ground for punishment.

Paul found fault (Greek *hettema*, mean-

ing “decrease,” “diminishing” or “loss”) with the Corinthian brethren who were taking each other to court (1 Corinthians 6:7). The NKJV translates this as “utter failure.”

Paul wrote that the problem with the Old Covenant was “finding fault with them [Israel and Judah]” (Hebrews 8:8). Here “fault” is *memphomai*, meaning “blame.” The Israelites’ heart was to blame rather than any of God’s laws.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us that those chosen by God are to be “without blame” (*amomos*, meaning “rebuke,” “blemish,” “blot” or “censure”).

Matthew 18:15 instructs us that, if a brother trespasses (Greek *hamartano*, meaning to sin or fall short), we are to “tell him his fault alone” (*elencho*, meaning “to tell a fault,” “convict,” “reprove” or “rebuke”).

Understanding what sin is and recognizing its ruinous, destructive effect on human life is the first step to overcoming sin. The Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures our freedom from enslavement to sin. God has released us from sin through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, and we are to remain free from sin.

Rather than being enslaved to sin, Paul exhorts us to serve a different master: “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18, NKJV). *GN*

How to Overcome Sin

You need to understand this vital biblical formula for overcoming sin.

by John Meakin

Avital aspect of God's purpose for us involves our coming to repentance, recognizing our sinful state and how far short we fall of God's standards, and determining to begin living God's way of life. We strive to identify and overcome our sins and live a sin-free life.

However, when God helps us recognize the enormity of our sins, a natural human response is dejection and discouragement. Even the apostle Paul struggled with his weaknesses, lamenting that "in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find . . . The evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Romans 7:18-19).

How can we possibly overcome our deficiencies of character and attain to the eternal life that God offers us? How can we change and overcome sin?

During Jesus' ministry a rich young man came to Him and asked what he should do to achieve eternal life. Christ told him, ". . . If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). When the man asked which commandments Jesus was talking about, Christ referred to five of the Ten Commandments, along with the command to "love your neighbor as yourself." But He omitted mention of the Tenth Commandment, which forbids coveting. Covetousness was the man's problem and one of the reasons this account is in the Bible. The young man was just too attached to his riches to give them up, so he "went away sorrowful" (verse 21-22).

Christ noted how difficult it is for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God because of the human tendency to covet and rely on physical possessions rather than God. The disciples, amazed, asked, "Who then can be saved?" Christ's answer provides the key to overcoming sin: "With men this is impossible, but with God *all things are possible*" (verse 26, added emphasis throughout).

None of us can overcome our deficiencies, our sins, our shortcomings, without God's help. Even if we could by our own will alter our actions, only God can change our hearts. This is why Paul appealed to members of the church in Rome not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by God's Spirit and "by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:1-2).

To come to grips with our sins, each of us must surrender to God. When God is calling a person to fundamental change, He leads the person to this point of surrender. Repentance comes through

God's goodness, not our own (Romans 2:4). God grants repentance so we may know the truth (2 Timothy 2:25) and live (Acts 11:18). We are free, however, to decide whether to repent. Peter exhorted his countrymen to "*repent* therefore and *be converted*, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

After repentance, and after baptism as an outward sign of our repentance, God promises to give us His Spirit. That Spirit empowers us to recognize and overcome sin. Through conversion we become a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) as far as God is concerned. He enables us to live as a different person, leaving behind our sins.

We can overcome sin

In 1 John 3:9 the apostle John tells us, "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." We should understand several points from this verse. First, the converted Christian does not habitually sin. He has, after all, turned away from sin. The sense here is not that a Christian will *never* sin, because we remain human, imperfect and subject to the pulls of our nature and a degenerate world around us. Instead, the sense is that a Christian will not remain in the *practice* of sin.

A second point of this scripture is that God's Spirit is like sperm. It impregnates Christians and *enables* us not to sin. We are empowered not to sin by God's "seed" (Greek *sperma*), which lives in us. *Cannot* in the Greek does not mean *can never*; as it is often used in English. Rather, it means *enabled* or *empowered not to sin*. This is encouraging news—that we can, with God's help, overcome sin!

Nevertheless, in practice how do we go about rooting out sin? It is not as simple as asking for more of God's Spirit and sitting back to relax as God somehow miraculously and instantaneously nullifies our trespasses. We have work to do and must make a conscientious effort while God's Spirit continues to empower and reinforce our efforts.

In Ephesians 4 Paul presents an easy-to-understand formula for change. He illustrates the method with several examples so we may clearly understand what is involved in overcoming sin. When we examine these verses, we notice three steps we must take to shift from a sinful life to one that properly repre-

How do we go about rooting out sin? It is not as simple as asking for more of God's Spirit and sitting back to relax as God somehow miraculously and instantaneously nullifies our trespasses. We have work to do and must make a conscientious effort while God's Spirit continues to empower and reinforce our efforts.

sents God's working with and within us. If we miss any one of these steps, change either cannot take place or will remain incomplete.

Paul's instruction regarding overcoming sin is to "put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Out with the old

The first step, says Paul, is to "put off . . . the old man." To do this we must realize that our nature, the old man, is our carnal, selfish nature, which lives hostile to God (Romans 8:7). Our unconverted human heart will not obey God (Deuteronomy 5:29) and is in God's eyes "deceitful" and "desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Our self-centered way of sin inexorably earns us death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25; Romans 6:23).

The "old man" to whom Paul referred is both our unconverted mind and the individual acts of sin that spring from it. He, the old man, must be put to a symbolic death through the waters of baptism (Romans 6:1-4). Spiritually, we must lay the ax to the root so that the evil tree with its corrupt fruit will cease producing sin.

Over time God can work with the worst of us; He can free us from the many sins that imprison us—sins that we may feel we can never overcome. We can be released from the myriad bonds that ensnare us and hold us captive, even as Gulliver was held captive by Lilliputians with hundreds of tiny ropes as described in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. We can be free, even though now we lie helplessly caught in the cords of sin (Proverbs 5:22).

God, in granting us repentance and reconciling us to Himself by the death of His Son, wipes out our past sins and gives us the help we need to overcome.

With God's help we are progressively liberated from a wrong way of life that Paul described as slavery (Romans 6:16). To break free of enslavement we must "put to death" our "members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).

As we study God's Word, we see our sins revealed to us. The Scriptures help us identify changes we must make. The Word of God, if we let it, powerfully cuts and penetrates to the core of our being "and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the

heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

As we give ourselves to the penetrating light of God's Word, God helps us identify our wrong practices and thoughts. We must turn away from them and adopt godly thoughts and perform godly works. But we cannot do it alone.

Having begun to identify what we need to change, with God's Word and His Spirit we can ask God for the help to overcome. We need to stir up God's gift of His Spirit within us (2 Timothy 1:6). That Spirit can renew us every day and will empower our new nature for the successful fight against sin (2 Corinthians 4:16). By this Spirit we can "put to death the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13).

Many fail in their fight against sin by attempting to overcome it by their own strength rather than relying on God's Spirit.

God can work with the worst of us; He can free us from the many sins that imprison us—sins that we may feel we can never overcome.

Paul acknowledges this human deficiency. He knew full well the impact of the law of human nature and conduct. ". . . Evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good," he wrote (Romans 7:21). This scripture describes the struggle of Paul's—and every Christian's—corrupt nature with his new godly nature.

It is through Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice for sin and by His nature dwelling in us (Galatians 2:20), that we can live a new, godly life. We can be redeemed "from every lawless deed" and purified as "His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). With God's help we can overcome.

In with the new

If we only put off the old man, the process of overcoming is incomplete. A Christian life is a life of changes. We may have identified what is wrong: the ungodly characteristics of the old man. We may have gone to God to ask for more of His help to change. Yet now comes the hard part: We must, with God's help, incorporate the positive traits that are the opposite of the flaws we have identified. Paul described this as "put[ting] on the new man" (Ephesians 4:24) with all its godly attributes. We must focus our attention and effort on the godly behavior we desire to practice.

We must concentrate on the positive to eliminate the negative. This is where the examples Paul uses are so instructive and clear, as in his first example of lying

(verse 25). Someone came to me once and admitted he had a problem with lying. I quipped that I wasn't sure I could believe him. After all, when is a liar not a liar? He doesn't stop being a liar just because he keeps his mouth shut. He may be a liar between lies, so to speak. The only way a liar can demonstrate proof of a change in character is to "speak truth with his neighbor" (same verse). He must put off the old by putting on the new.

When a former liar begins consistently to tell the truth, his old ways of prevarication begin to shrivel up and die. This is how God's Spirit helps us overcome.

Paul lists another example, that of stealing. When is a thief not a thief? Someone who is not stealing something may be only a thief between jobs. The only demonstrable proof that a thief has changed his ways is his

starting to do the opposite. Stealing is simply the act of unlawfully getting and taking. The opposite trait is giving. God can help a thief to learn to work "that he may have something to give him who has need" (verse 28).

Destructive or constructive words?

Paul cites yet another example of the way we communicate. Our tongue is often an accurate indicator of our dominant nature, whether good or bad. Jesus Christ noted that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). James tells us that the unbridled tongue is "a world of iniquity" (James 3:6).

Keeping silent so that no corrupt communication slips out may be a step in the right direction. But keeping your mouth shut is not at all proof that your nature has changed. After all, "even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace" (Proverbs 17:28). Your nature has fundamentally changed when you begin using your tongue in a positive way. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearer" (Ephesians 4:29).

To overcome the wrong use of speech, we need to ask God to help us concentrate on *encouraging and building up* someone instead of tearing him down. Let your words spring from "a well of life" (Proverbs 10:11). Make your talk as "choice silver" (Proverbs 10:20). We should pray for God to let our speech be "always with grace,

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What Is True Sincerity?

What is true sincerity? Do you have it? Do you need it?

by Bill Butler

One day Alexis, a young man of the ancient city of Corinth, was pouring hot water into a colorful clay vessel. It began to leak and then suddenly broke apart in his hands, spilling its contents on his feet. Looking closely at the broken pottery, he discovered that the clay was mixed with wax.

When the hot water melted the wax, it revealed the inferior quality of the vessel. Alexis had bought a piece of junk.

Corinth was famous in its day for its fine pottery. However, many dishonest merchants plied that trade. If a vessel were cracked, some deceitful potters would melt wax and carefully wedge it between the cracks. They would then skillfully paint over the flaw so it couldn't be noticed by an unsuspecting customer.

Careful shoppers found they could expose the cracks by holding the pottery up to bright sunlight. They could see the flaws under the paint in much the same way an X-ray device might work.

What does wax in a piece of pottery have to do with our lives as Christians?

We can draw an analogy from this simple account that applies to every Christian's life. A man or woman of God is sometimes referred to in the Scriptures as a vessel, as in one of the apostle Paul's letters to Timothy. We are to be "a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21). God says He is the potter and we are the clay He is forming into His vessels (Romans 9:21-23; Isaiah 29:16).

Covering faults

The practice of covering up poor workmanship with wax was common in Corinth in New Testament times. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he wrote to the Corinthian church concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread: "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of *sincerity* and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8, emphasis added throughout).

The meaning of the Greek word *eilikrinia* translated "sincerity" is "purity." In the Bible it is used in referring to *purity of motive*. *Sincere* appears two times in the King James Version. *Sincerely* appears three times and *sincerity* 10 times. They are translated from Greek words meaning "genuine," "without deceit," "unmixed" and "unadulterated."

The English word *sincere* is a good translation of the original Greek. This word in English comes from two Latin words, *sin-e* and *cere*. *Sin-e* simply means without, and *cere* means wax. So *sincere* can mean literally "without wax" (John Ciardi, *Browser's Dictionary and Native's Guide to the Unknown American Language*, Harper & Row, New York, 1980, p. 360). An honest merchant in the ancient city of Corinth when presenting his product to a buyer might say that it was a sincere piece of pottery.

When you buy a jar of honey, it may say PURE HONEY on the label. Honey is considered pure if the beeswax has been removed. The little pieces of wax from the beehive have been strained out. Pure honey is honey without wax. It would be technically correct to call it *sincere* honey. Pure honey is not mixed with wax.

In the case of honey, the wax wasn't deliberately placed there; it was already there because of the way the bees made it. But its presence lessens the purity of the honey.

Wax in building materials

In ancient times unscrupulous workmen sometimes used wax in construction of buildings. This lowered the quality of the product and deceived the buyer.

Many impressive buildings stood in the city of Corinth. It was a great commercial center, a hub of trade and industry, a prosperous city. Much construction took place during the time the apostle Paul visited there.

Huge marble pillars were commonly seen as both support and adornment in public buildings. Some stoneworkers of the day lapsed into the habit of producing inferior marble to increase their profits. They would use wax to get around the time-consuming process of polishing the marble surfaces. They would give a pillar a rough polish and then rub wax into the cracks, the areas of imperfection, making it look smooth and shiny. It looked like expensive work—until the first unusually hot summer day.

As with the potters of the day, an honest stonemason would refer to his work as a sincere column; that is, one without wax.

Christians are compared to a building. We read in 1 Corinthians 6:19 that "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." We as Christians are to come to Christ "as to a living stone, rejected

In ancient Corinth dishonest merchants used wax and paint to deceitfully conceal cracks and flaws in their pottery. What does wax in a piece of pottery have to do with our lives as Christians?

indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house . . ." (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Notice how God wants us to build this spiritual house: ". . . Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (verses 1-2, King James Version). *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* lists one of the definitions of sincerity as "freedom from hypocrisy."

The Christian is expected to live a life of sincerity. Paul prayed "that your love may abound" and "that you may be *sincere* and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness . . ." (Philippians 1:9-11).

What can we learn from these analogies that will help us "abound" by growing in sincerity?

Two ways to reveal wax

Let's consider the pottery analogy. Did you notice the two ways of discovering poor workmanship by the deceptive use of wax? One way is to expose the vessel to sunlight. A second method is to expose it to heat. You can then reveal the crack by melting the wax in it.

A wise shopper in Corinth would buy a

piece of pottery only after holding it up to the sunlight so he could see through the layer of paint on the surface.

The vessel (the Christian) must look for the wax (the insincerity) by holding his life up to the light shed by the Word of God. God Himself is compared to the sun. In Psalm 84:11 we see that "the LORD God is a sun and shield" (see also Isaiah 60:19-20). God is light (1 John 1:5) and the source of light. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights . . ." (James 1:17).

Revealed by sunlight

Notice what Paul says to the saints at Philippi. He prayed "that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve [test] the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ . . ." (Philippians 1:9-10).

The English word *approve* here comes from a Greek word that means to judge or test for genuineness by sunlight or to examine by the rays of the sun. "Genuineness" is one of the many definitions of the word *sincerity*.

You've no doubt heard phrases such as "I can see through that person's motives," or "I can see right through what he is trying to do." Maybe these sayings had their ori-

gin in the testing of pottery for its sincerity by sunlight.

Do we look for the flaws in our character by holding ourselves up to the light of the Word of God? Do we really desire to know the truth about our character? God's Word will reveal it to us.

Our weaknesses can be exposed by the true light. Paul, in another epistle, tells us that "all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light . . ." (Ephesians 5:13).

A Christian must judge his conduct every day by the light of God's Word. We read that God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105), and God's commands are "a lamp, and the law is light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (Proverbs 6:23). We are "all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:5).

Sincerity and truth

The scripture we read earlier from 1 Corinthians 5 told us we are not to be leavened with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but to strive for the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (verse 8).

As important as sincerity is, we must also live according to the truth. That truth comes from the Holy Scriptures. Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).



Photo courtesy Richard Cleave

Is the pottery flawless or did an unscrupulous workman fill flaws and cracks with wax, then paint over the defects? In ancient Cor-

inth, buyers were careful to look for "sincere" pottery—vessels that were pure and well made and could stand the test of use.

Millions of people have many of the traits of sincerity we have discussed here, but they do not know the truth about themselves because they have rejected the source of all truth. They cannot understand true sincerity. This applies even to many outwardly religious people.

Blindness to insincerity will afflict any of us if we don't allow God's Word to lead us. A Gospel writer shows us that the sincere worship of many is in vain because they are "laying aside the commandment of God" and "hold the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8). God tells us that those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

Revealed by heat

Wax can be revealed a second way: exposure to heat. This is not always the most pleasant way. Remember what happened to Alexis.

God is described metaphorically as fire (Deuteronomy 4:24; Revelation 1:14). He often helps us come to see our character flaws by exposing them to heat. He allows the trials in our lives to act as this fire. He allows trials so that you, through "the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory . . ." (1 Peter 1:7).

Our true character is often revealed in our handling of the trials we face. We see a person's mettle when the heat's on. This should not frighten us. God often uses our trials to reveal our weaknesses and show us what we need to overcome. "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you," wrote the apostle Peter, "as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

But Paul warns us that "each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

God will deal with the sins of whole nations by heat and fire. "For behold," wrote the prophet Micah, "the LORD is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the

earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel" (Micah 1:3-5).

This retribution will be the result of mankind's attempts to cover up its sins with the wax of hypocrisy, deceit and guile. "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:19-20). "He who covers his sins will not prosper . . ." (Proverbs 28:13).

If we don't try to wax over our sins, and if we do our part with God's help to remove the wax, we will have nothing to fear from the test of heat and fire when it comes.

Get rid of wax

Remember the analogy of the honey. We saw that the wax was not put there deliberately. It was already present because that's the way the bees make it.

The same is true of human nature. Much wax needs to be put out of our lives simply because we are human. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

Paul knew about the natural mind of man: ". . . The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7).

The scripture we began with in 1 Corinthians 5 tells us that we are to "keep the feast" with "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (verse 8). The festival referred to here is the Feast of Unleavened Bread. God appointed this feast to be kept forever by His people (see Leviticus 23:6-8; 2 Timothy 3:16). It pictures the need for Christians to put out leaven by turning away from sin.

Ultimately all our deeds must stand up under the clear light of day and the scrutiny of the Sun spoken of in Psalm 84:11. Every work will be judged for authenticity by that ultimate source of light, Jesus Christ.

Then we will be ready when "the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Let's do our part to remove the wax of insincerity from our character and life, and our praise will come from God. *GN*

Overcome

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seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6).

Likewise, consider the contrast in behavior mentioned in Ephesians 4:31-32. We can rid ourselves of our base traits by *concentrating on upright characteristics*. We can apply the principle of these simple points to every aspect of our behavior. Apply this formula and, with God's help, change becomes at long last realistically possible.

Which force will be with you?

Two somewhat obscure verses appear in this section of Scripture that should now make sense. When we indulge the nature of the old man with all its corrupt practices, we "*grieve the Holy Spirit*" (verse 30) and "*give place to the devil*" (verse 27). Perhaps now we can understand that God's Spirit cannot dwell or work in an alien environment of lying, stealing and corrupt communication and attitudes, whereas Satan thrives in such surroundings and indeed encourages them.

On the other hand, when we put on the behavior of the new man, the opposite attitude prevails. Satan hates godly behavior and cannot remain long in such a setting. God's Spirit, however, flourishes in a person who lives a godly life.

All this beautifully illustrates some simple yet profound truths: If you "submit to God" and "resist the devil," he will flee from you (James 4:7). "Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). We can remove the air from a glass by filling it with water. Likewise we can rid ourselves of corrupt human nature by filling our life with the nature of God and its many wonderful attributes.

The good news is that by the grace of God we can overcome sin. That does not mean we will never sin again, because as long as we are physical we are subject to human weakness. However, we need not become discouraged in the face of our sins. Indeed, we should rejoice that we are mindful of them, because this awareness provides the first step toward their eradication.

God helps us recognize our misdeeds. Through the power of His Spirit working in us we are strengthened, encouraged and filled with hope in our battle against sin, knowing that our victory is assured. When we put off the old man, are renewed in the spirit of our mind and put on the new man, we will ultimately overcome sin. It is inevitable! *GN*