

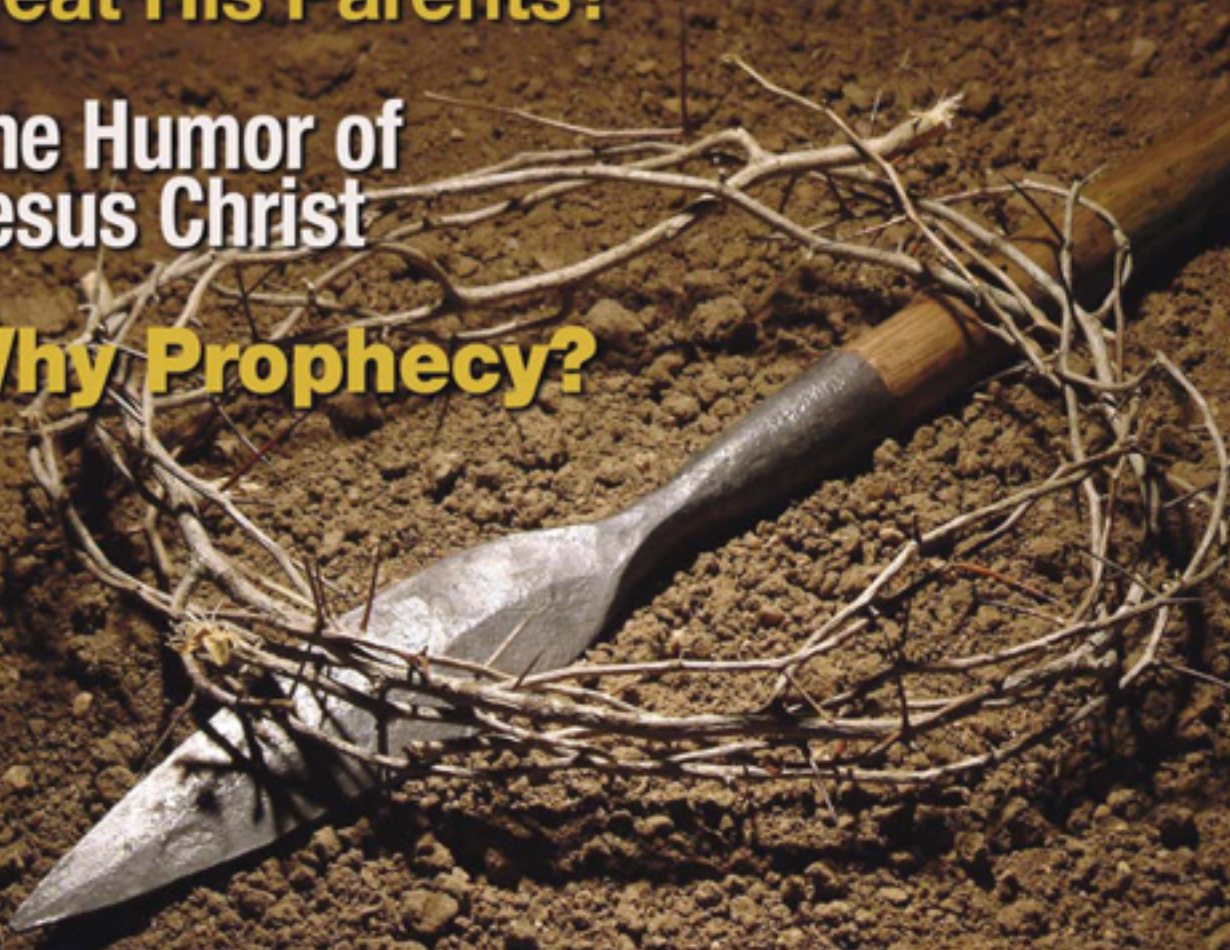
Is Jesus Real?

**How Did Jesus
Treat His Parents?**

**The Humor of
Jesus Christ**

Why Prophecy?

"The Exception to the Rule"



Person of **the Millennia**

At the beginning of each new calendar year, newsmagazines often designate individuals as “People of the Year.” These selections are usually based on the impact or influence these people have had on society. Occasionally, historians will describe someone as the person of the century. But what about a longer period of time—say, thousands of years, all the millennia humanity has existed?

The most influential human being of all time was undoubtedly Jesus Christ (the name signifying Jesus the Messiah or Anointed One). Of course, this statement takes nothing away from God the Father—the One Jesus said was greater than He (John 14:28). It simply reflects that Jesus was the member of the God family who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Jesus was the One who became human.

When we consider the impact people of note make on others, there are generally some who are pleased and others who are upset. This principle is most certainly true concerning Jesus! Today there are many who claim to be Christians—that is, followers of Christ—and there are many who despise Christianity and its leader. Some

even say Christianity is a hoax for which simpleminded folk have fallen.

Given this polarization and the strong feelings so many hold today, we believe it’s important for you to hear the real story.

Each of us needs to know whether Jesus really lived, who He really was and His

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expectations of us today. After all, our future and that of every other person in the world hinges on the real, authentic Jesus of history and the Bible.

We begin our exploration of this vital subject with “Is Jesus Real?” Here we find four solid proofs of Jesus’ historical existence. After laying this foundation, we offer “What Did Jesus Look Like?”—a surprising portrait that turns most people’s perceptions of Jesus’ appearance upside down.

Next we turn to the ever-interesting subject of prophecy—divine predictions of the future. Did you know that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10)? In other words, Jesus is intimately involved with many future prophecies relating to His return to earth to establish and rule over the Kingdom of God. To better understand this intriguing subject, you’ll want to read “Why Prophecy?”

To round out a more complete picture of Jesus, we’ve also included articles titled “How Did Jesus Treat His Parents?,” “What Does Jesus Want From You?” and “The Humor of Christ.” What? You didn’t know Jesus was funny? You’ve got a lot to chuckle over and learn, so be sure to read this initial article in what is slated to become a running series.

For a heartwarming story of real Christianity in action, be sure to read our concluding article, “The Exception to the Rule.” As usual, you’ll find interesting “Questions and Answers” sprinkled throughout the issue and “In the News”—to keep you apprised of items of relevance to young people.

After reading this issue, it is our hope that you will have more confidence in the reality of Jesus’ existence and that you will make a commitment to follow His directions. As usual, we’re challenging you to engage in some serious vertical thinking. We pray we can all rise to the challenge.

David Treybig
Managing editor



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4 Is Jesus Real?

Some people claim that Jesus Christ was not a real historical person. How can you prove to yourself and others that the Savior of mankind lived and died and lives again exactly as the Bible says?

8 What Did Jesus Look Like?

The article proclaims, "Advances in forensic science reveal the most famous face in history." This article challenged the popular view of the appearance of Jesus.

10 Why Prophecy?

What's the big deal about prophecy? What do the biblical images of beasts, four horsemen and great empires rising and falling have to do with everyday life?

12 How Did Jesus Treat His Parents?

Unlike His mother and stepfather, Jesus was God in the flesh. Yet how He treated His physical parents serves as an example for us today.

14 What Does Jesus Want From You?

If you believe Jesus truly was the Son of God, do you know what He wants you to do? And what He wants to do for you?

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Is religion only serious business? Should there be no joy or laughter in church services? Do religious people take themselves too seriously? Was Jesus always solemn and staid in His teaching?

20 "The Exception to the Rule"

Do you sometimes find it difficult to be different from others because of your religious beliefs? Don't be discouraged! I faced the problem and so can you.

22 In the News

Search for Noah's Ark is dead in the water; teen sexual activity encouraged by sex on TV; ditch-a-date service proves popular; the family that eats together...

Challenges to the historical existence of Jesus Christ arise regularly. Consider the best-selling fiction book *The Da Vinci Code*. Author Dan Brown claims that Jesus married and had children by one of His followers, Mary Magdalene, and that her body is the actual "Holy Grail."

Critic Sandra Miesel incisively targets the substance and style of Brown's book: "It would be too easy to criticize him for characters thin as plastic wrap, undistinguished prose, and improbable action. But Brown isn't so much writing badly as writing in a particular way best calculated to attract a female audience. (Women, after all, buy most of the nation's books.) He has married a thriller plot to a romance-novel technique" ("Dismantling *The Da Vinci Code*," www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm).

The bulk of Brown's cited sources are other speculative books, all too typically oriented toward modern feminism, which attempt to deride and degrade the existence



The Bible, by far the most reliably preserved ancient text, validates Jesus Christ's historical existence.

Proof #1: His Book

Here's a quick lesson on the transmission of ancient history down to our day. With the exception of rock inscriptions, very few original, historical documents now exist

Some people claim that Jesus Christ was not a real historical person. Others believe there was a person with the name *Jesus*, but that biblical accounts of His life are not true. How can you prove to yourself and others that the Savior of mankind lived and died and lives again exactly as the Bible says?

by **Randy Stiver**

Is Jesus R

and deity of Jesus. *The Da Vinci Code* is not a book of historical fact.

Even so, such dubious books about Jesus Christ mesmerize some people. It almost seems such folks would consider *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and Monty Python's *The Holy Grail* to be factual documentaries! People with mind-sets like that certainly aren't vertical thinkers. But the biblical account of Jesus is real, and you can prove it. Following are four powerful proofs of His existence.

because they disintegrated or were burned or otherwise destroyed in the past. Handmade copies of old documents, some of which are ancient or near ancient themselves, are our key windows to ancient history.

Additionally, historians of centuries ago whose writings exist today often quoted historians of centuries before them whose writings no longer exist, and they in turn had cited the writings of original authors. The study of history consists of piecing together historical documents to learn the story of man—and in this case, God.

The bottom line is that when we have large numbers of historical documents or fragments on a particular topic dating from or faithfully transcribed from ancient times, then we can consider the history gleaned from them remarkably accurate.

For instance, no one—especially your literature teacher—questions the authenticity of the epic poem *The Iliad* by the ancient Greek poet Homer. In fact, it is the second most well-documented historical writing in existence, with 643 manuscripts still surviving, the oldest complete text dating from the 13th century. Quite impressive!

Now consider the ancient text that is the *most* well-documented.

By a late 20th-century reckoning, there are over 5,300 surviving ancient Greek manuscripts, 10,000 in Latin and over 9,300 other early-language versions for a grand total of 24,633 manuscripts of this document—the one we call the New Testament of the Bible! This amounts to phenomenal historical validity. This ancient text, by far the most reliably preserved of any, thus validates Jesus Christ's historical existence (Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Vol. 1, pp. 39-40).

Proof #2: His biblical biography

This is the internal, biblical proof that Jesus historically existed. The New Testament presents a collection of 27 different historical (and divinely inspired) documents written in the first century. From Jesus' birth to about A.D. 100, these books and letters record the life and times of Jesus Christ plus the existence and work of His group of followers—the Church of God. With three exceptions, the authors were His immediate disciples and two of His half-brothers (James and Jude)—all men who knew Him well.

The first of the three exceptions was Mark, who appears to have recorded the eyewitness account of the apostle Peter. Second is

Real?



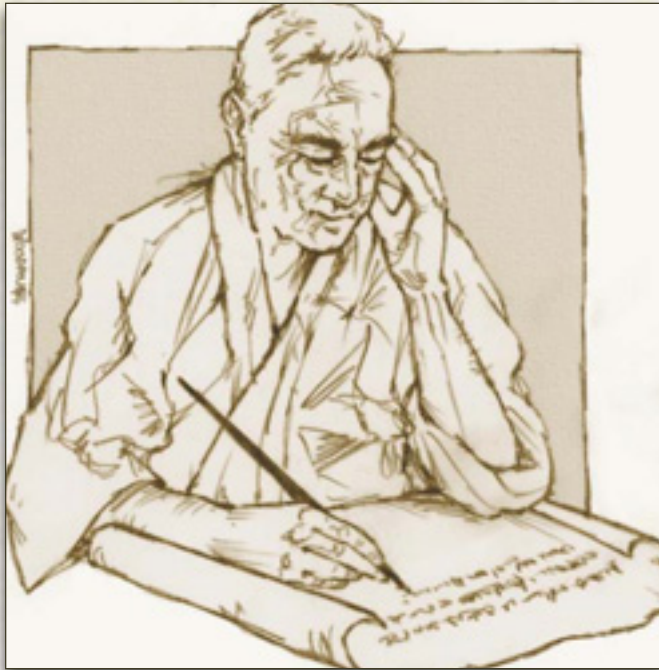
to “kill the messenger”
—Jesus Christ Himself—in a futile effort to destroy the

law of love. In other words, if Christ didn't really exist, then there would be no divine law and no reason to feel guilty for one's sins.

It doesn't work, by the way. They still feel guilty. There's only one solution for that guilt—repentance! (Mark 1:14-15).

Paul, an apostle to whom Jesus personally appeared (1 Corinthians 15:8). Third is Luke, the physician who traveled with Paul (Colossians 4:14).

Luke's systematically thorough, historical approach sparkles in the introduction to his biography of Christ: “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most



Most of the New Testament writers were Jesus' immediate disciples or half-brothers, men who knew Him well.

excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:1-4).

You will find in the book of Luke detailed research based on interviews with eyewitnesses who themselves personally knew, heard and saw Jesus during His human lifetime and ministry. Historically, Luke's work is typical of the rest of the New Testament's detailed and true-to-life presentation of Jesus.

Theophilus, in case you're interested, was a true believer who either commissioned Luke's research and writing, or to whom it was simply dedicated. Luke also wrote the book of Acts (Acts 1:1), the Church history that spanned its first three decades.

The New Testament thus provides solid, testimonial proof, replete with amazing detail, of the literal, historical existence of Jesus.

Proof #3: His reputation in secular history

Proverbs 11:14 says, "In the multitude of counselors there is safety." An important part of evaluating historicity is multiple references to the event and/or person in various historical sources. The logic is, if Jesus existed with the societal impact the Bible says He had, then He should be mentioned in other ancient histories. And so He was. Here are a few:

- Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37-100) wrote a monumental history, *Antiquities of the Jews*, in which he referred to Jesus twice. In section 18.3.3 he called Jesus "the Christ" and wrote of His "marvelous deeds." In section 20.9.1 he referred to the trial of James and identified him as the "the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ."
- Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia (in northern Turkey), wrote a letter (*Epistle X.96*) to Roman Emperor Trajan (c. A.D. 112) seeking counsel on how to deal with Christians whose practice it was to meet on appointed days to sing a hymn

"to Christ as if to God."

- Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman historian who, in his *Annals* (XV.44, c. A.D. 115), wrote of "Christus" (from *Christos*, Greek for "Christ") who "was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius."
- Suetonius, the popular Roman writer, about A.D. 120 described how the Emperor Claudius commanded the Jews to depart from Rome for "continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus" (*Vita Claudii XXV.4*). "Chrestus" is again a corrupted form of *Christos* (Christ). Luke made reference to this situation in Rome in Acts 18:2.

During the later part of the second through the fifth centuries, many more historical references to Jesus were made in Jewish rabbinical literature, especially the *Talmud*. Several prominent pagan philosophers—Celsus, Lucian of Samosata and Porphyry of Tyre—wrote attacks on Jesus, His teachings and followers. Early Christian writers and church leaders—Polycarp (c. A.D. 69-155), Irenaeus (c. A.D. 130-200) and others—wrote extensively about Jesus Christ as well.

Archaeology has also contributed tremendously to our knowledge of the historicity of Christ through excavations on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Israel, Turkey, Greece and Rome. These excavations have confirmed the Bible's amazing historical accuracy.

The Good News magazine, a sister publication also produced by the United Church of God, ran a 24-part series of articles

Highly regarded ancient historians—including Flavius Josephus, Pliny the Younger and Cornelius Tacitus—confirm the historical existence of Jesus Christ.



on the Bible and archaeology proving this point. You may read or download these at www.gnmagazine.org/archaeology.

From these secular and biblical references and archaeology combined, we know more about the life of Jesus than we do about virtually any other person in the ancient world!

Proof #4: His followers

As a supertanker creates a massive wake and as an elephant impresses huge and unmistakable tracks in the soil, so a great religious leader leaves a path of followers behind him. Buddhism came from Buddha, Confucianism came from Confucius, Islam from Muhammad.



Jesus Christ's existence is proven by His Church, the wake of followers flowing through history behind Him.

By founding His true Church, Jesus Christ spawned a massive religious movement through the centuries. Today Christianity is the largest religious movement on earth, with well over two billion followers. Sadly, the vast majority of these traditional Christians know little of the actual truth and gospel of the

Kingdom of God that Jesus preached, but they do profess to follow Him. The very existence of such a vast following throughout history validates the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth!

Jesus' book, the Bible, is historically sound, therefore His biblical biography is historically sound. The secular references to Him in history are readily located, and the existence of a massive following through the centuries points directly to His historical existence. The proofs of Christ's historicity stand firm and sound. But all this begs an answer to one more question: What will you do with what you now know?

There's no running away from the truth that Jesus Christ existed as a man and continues to exist as the Son of God soon to come again to an earth near you. He wants you as one of His true followers preparing for His return. He wants you to be living proof of His existence!

For more information about the importance of Christ's life and what He expects of us, be sure to read our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. You can request or download a copy, or read it online, at www.ucg.org/booklets.

Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Coos Bay, Eugene and Roseburg, Oregon.



Q. Do we need to know about secret codes embedded within the text of the Bible in order to understand it?

A. The claim that there is a secretly embedded code in the Bible discernible by computer calculations has created much interest of late, but knowledge of such a code is not necessary to understand the Bible. While it is true that God inspired the Scriptures in a way that veils their meaning, the key to understanding is God's Spirit—not a codebook, computer or clever mathematician.

The apostle Paul wrote that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God . . . nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Spirit of God is a gift to the children of God, not restricted to a few who discover the keys to a hidden code.

Notice also the words of a related prophecy found in Isaiah 29:10-14: "For the LORD has poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes [blocked your understanding] . . . The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed [closed, unable to be understood], which men deliver to one who is literate, saying,

'Read this, please.' And he says, 'I cannot, for it is sealed.' Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, 'Read this, please.' And he says, 'I am not literate.'

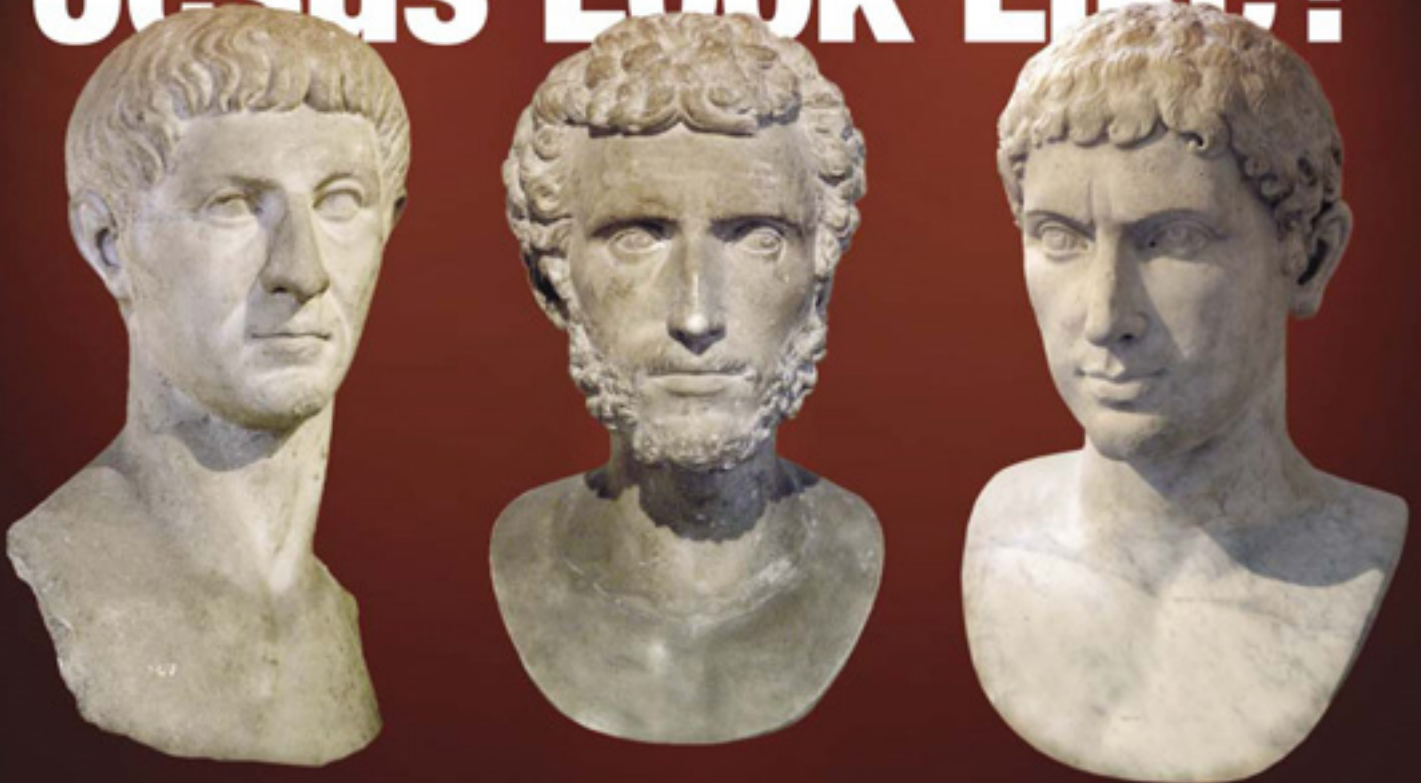
"Therefore the LORD said: 'Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.'"

People will be able to understand spiritual truth, not because they discover a secret code by mathematical formula, but rather because God supernaturally opens their minds. God reveals truth to those whom He calls, who show themselves willing to obey Him (Acts 5:32).

We invite you to request a copy of our booklet titled *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, which explains what the Bible says about how a person comes to repentance, receives faith, undergoes baptism, receives the gift of the Spirit of God and understands God's spiritual truths. You can request or download it at www.ucg.org/booklets.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org

What Did Jesus Look Like?



The title proclaims, "The Real Face of Jesus," followed by, "Advances in forensic science reveal the most famous face in history." This article didn't appear in a religious magazine, but was the lead story in *Popular Mechanics*, challenging the popular view of the appearance of Jesus.

by Gary Petty

The article, which appeared in the December 2002 issue of *Popular Mechanics*, begins: "From the time Christian children settle into Sunday school classrooms, an image of Jesus Christ is etched into their minds. In North America he is most often depicted as being taller than his disciples, lean, with flowing, light brown hair, fair skin with light-colored eyes.

"Familiar though this image may be, it is inherently flawed. A person with these features and physical bearing would have looked very different from everyone else in the region where Jesus lived and ministered."

Can we know what Jesus really looked like? Classical European painters usually portray Him as tall and thin and with delicate, almost effeminate features. The Original African Heritage Edition of the King James Bible has a picture of Jesus looking like a man from Central Africa.

The image of Jesus in *Popular Mechanics* was based on information gathered by experts in forensic anthropology. Author Mike Fillon writes: "Using methods similar to those police have developed to solve crimes, British scientists, assisted by Israeli archeologists, have re-created what they believe is the most accurate image of the most famous face in history."

The summary of these men of science surprised many religious

people. They concluded: "From analysis of skeletal remains, archeologists had firmly established that the average build of a Semite male at the time of Jesus was 5 ft. 1 in., with an average weight of 110 pounds. Since Jesus worked outdoors as a carpenter until he was about 30 years old, it is reasonable to assume he was more muscular and physically fit than westernized portraits suggest."

The Gospel writers record an account when Jesus avoided violence by an angry mob simply by mingling with the crowd. Judas had to identify Him with a kiss of betrayal. Obviously, these incidents show us that Jesus looked like any other Jew of His day.

By creating Jesus in our own image, have we misinterpreted what He taught? Do you really know the truth of Jesus' message, or has it become a caricature like the pictures in our Bibles?

Jesus and long hair

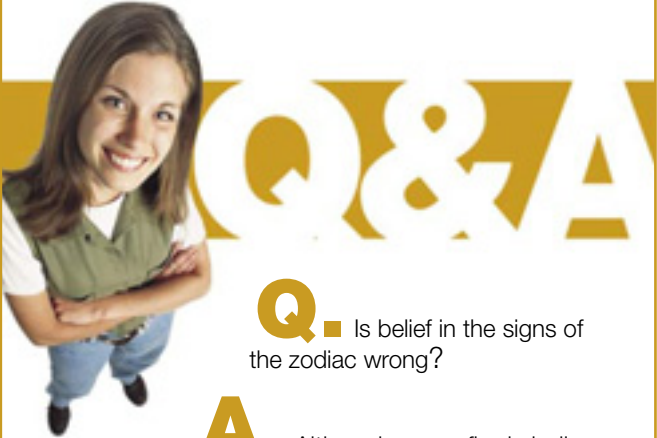
The scientists quoted in *Popular Mechanics* assert that the prevalent view of Jesus with flowing locks is also an inaccurate portrayal. It's also hard to understand why the apostle Paul would write in 1 Corinthians 11:14 that it's a shame for a man to have long hair if His Savior wore His hair long.

Where did the idea of Jesus with long hair originate? For centuries some have believed that Jesus was under a Nazirite vow. According to Numbers 6:1-6 the person taking a Nazirite vow pledged to abstain from wine and grapes, to avoid touching a dead body and to not cut his or her hair until the end of the vow's duration, when the hair had to be cut. But the Gospels record occasions when Jesus drank wine, which means He would have broken a Nazirite vow if He had been under one.

The misconception is based in part on scriptures where He is called Jesus of Nazareth or a Nazarene. Nazareth is a town in Galilee where Jesus spent time as a child. We find an account of Jesus' early life recorded in Matthew 2:23: "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'" Jesus was a *Nazarene*, not a *Nazirite*. He was never under a vow to abstain from wine or to wear His hair long.

The scientists and archaeologists who created the portrait of Jesus that appeared in *Popular Mechanics* may have been right in some details, but no one really knows the exact physical features of Jesus. The New Testament emphasizes His sinless life and moral teachings, but has almost nothing to say about what He looked like.

Continued on page 16



Q. Is belief in the signs of the zodiac wrong?

A. Although some firmly believe that the success of their day, the good fortune of their decisions and even their lives depend on advice they get from the signs of the zodiac, this is not what God says. God nowhere in the Bible tells us to build our lives around moon phases and the signs of the zodiac as astrologers teach. God even said that He will burn up unrepentant astrologers (Isaiah 47:13-14).

Jeremiah 10:2-3 tells us very clearly: "Thus saith the LORD, learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain . . ." (King James Version).

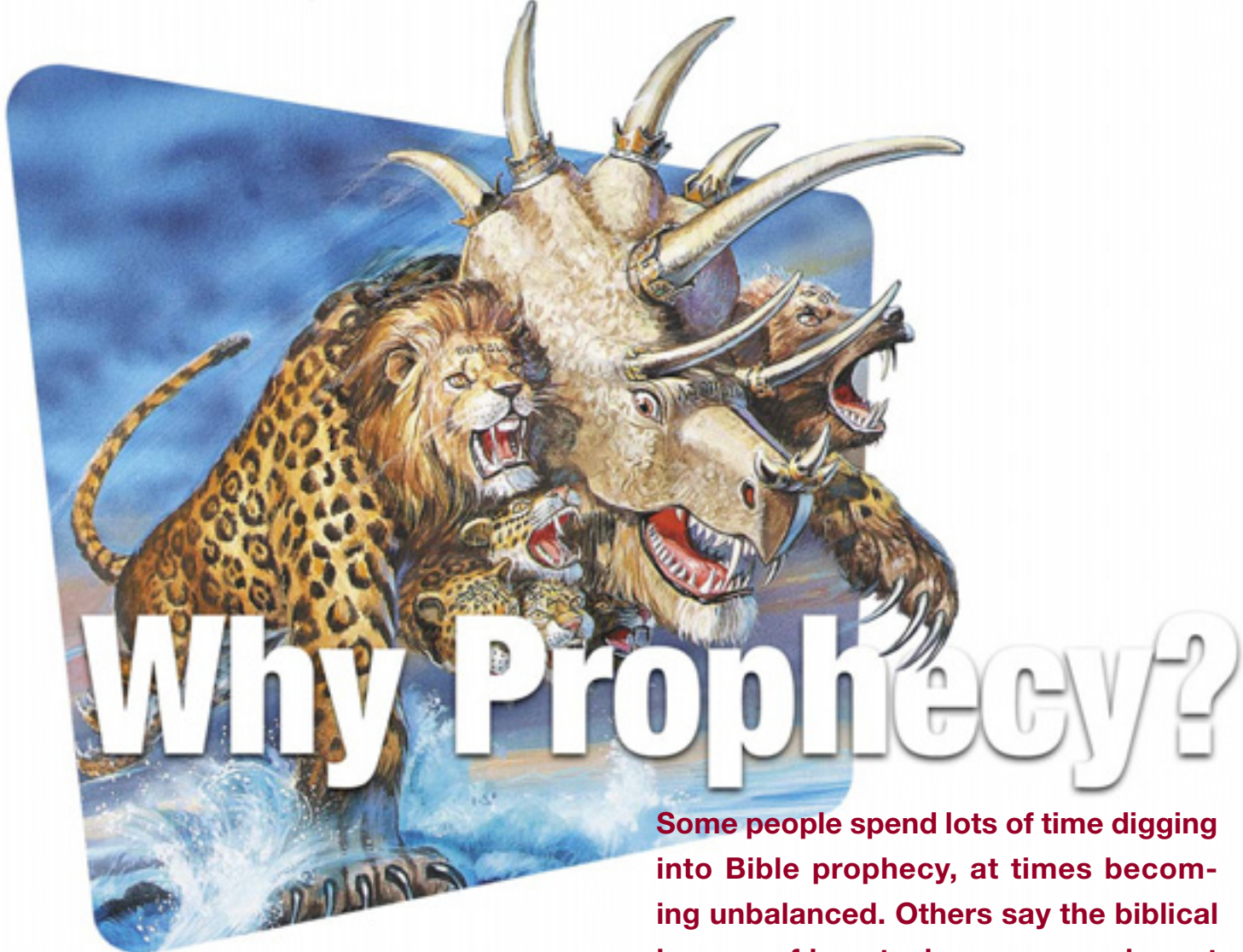
Astrology, moreover, is a form of idolatry because it puts man's devices before God's ways. Astrologers teach people to try to obtain success by means of astrology. But God expressly forbids this worship of the constellations and the host of heaven (2 Kings 23:5).

Just before the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land, God, through Moses, reminded the people about the importance of obeying the laws that He had given them.

Notice the word of caution recorded in Deuteronomy 4:19: "And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the people under the whole heaven as a heritage."

The sun, moon and stars were not to be served in any way. The signs of the zodiac are not something to put stock in or to believe as determiners of our daily lives or destinies.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org



Why Prophecy?

by Dr. Ralph Levy

Some people spend lots of time digging into Bible prophecy, at times becoming unbalanced. Others say the biblical images of beasts, horsemen and great empires rising and falling has little or nothing to do with the practical side of life, so it's not important. What is the real purpose of prophecy?

The Bible is full of prophecy. In fact, between a fourth and a third of the Word of God is prophetic. And students of the Bible know that Jesus plays a prominent role in many of these prophecies—especially those set in the end time. If God saw to it that so much of our Bible concerns prophecy, there must be a good reason for it.

So *why prophecy?* What does it have to do with practical matters of Christian living? And why should you take any interest in the subject?

Prophecy proves who God is

Through Scripture we learn that God can accurately foretell the future. The prophet Isaiah recorded His words: “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done” (Isaiah 46:9-10). Unlike false gods, the true God accurately and

faithfully tells His people about the future, what's yet to come, and the hope beyond the time of trouble.

God also asks, “Who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them . . . Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are my witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one” (Isaiah 44:7-8).

These passages tell us there is no other god who can tell the end of the story as well as the beginning.

In the prophecies of Isaiah, we find references to the birth of a great Persian king named Cyrus. Cyrus was used by God to bring down the powerful Babylonian empire and let the Jews go free from captivity and return to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).

These were momentous events in the history of the Jewish

people back then. But the most amazing thing is that Isaiah prophesied in the late 700s B.C., long before Cyrus was even born! In fact, Cyrus didn't conquer Babylon and free the Jews until 539 B.C., more than a century and a half after Isaiah prophesied of him *by name* (see Isaiah 45:1), as well as his role in God's plan. So awesome is our God that He made this known long before the fulfillment of the event!

Prophecy impacts the lives of God's people

Just as the Jews were impacted by the Babylonian captivity and the fall of Babylon some 70 years later, so people will yet be impacted by the events foretold in Scripture. Wars will take place; freedom to worship God in peace will be taken away; persecution, and even martyrdom, will come upon Christians.

Before Jesus Christ returns to rule the earth, the Bible speaks of a time of trouble called the "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21). It will be a time of suffering for all the world, but especially for the nations called "Israel" in the Bible—that is to say,

many admonitions about the attitude and actions God's people should adopt.

Notice Jesus Christ's warning: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). In other words, these prophetic warnings aren't there just for fascination, but to prompt us to righteous living. We have to *do something* with the knowledge of prophecy!

The apostle Peter ties it in. "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness . . . ?" (2 Peter 3:11). Prophecy is a prompt to live God's way, to follow the ways described as holy conduct and godliness.

I recall a conversation I once had with a young man who had come to study at a Bible college as a result of his interest in end-time prophecy. His fascination with prophecy didn't immediately carry over into Christian living. He told me he came to

Many prophecies stress that God determined long ago that Christ will come again, establish the Kingdom of God and save humanity from itself. That's about the best news any of us could possibly hear!

the English-speaking nations of the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as well as much of northwestern Europe.

To learn more about God's perspective on prophecy and what He says will happen to these nations, read or request our free booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, at www.ucg.org/booklets.

Most readers of *Vertical Thought* have never lived in a world at war. The last world war ended in 1945, well before most of us were born.

Yes, there have been other wars since: Korea, Vietnam, various wars in the Middle East, and more recently two wars in Iraq. Yet these wars have had less impact on our lives than the future wars described in the Bible or the two great wars of the 20th century. For most of us, life has provided uninterrupted safety and prosperity. We've never had to go hungry and never had to run to a bomb shelter for cover.

Yet the Bible tells us such bad times *will* come to our world, and with greater force and power than ever before! Hard as it is to imagine, the world will have to suffer much more before the second coming of Jesus Christ than at any other time in history. And Christians—God's own people—are not going to escape without feeling the impact of some of these events.

For those who have never experienced the pain and suffering of world war, it's a good idea to learn a little about what it meant to live through the horrors of the late 1930s and the 1940s. Study the history, visit some of the war museums and read some of the biographies and autobiographies of those who went through it. As you do, remember that it will be God who will bring an end to the wars that are yet to come before the return of Jesus Christ.

Prophecy prompts us to grow

In the face of hard times to come, the New Testament contains

study prophecy, but later discovered, "Now I have to do all that other stuff too!"

That's right, we have to do all the "other stuff" too! It isn't all mysteries about beasts and speculations about dates. If we understand prophecy, we must *live right*, according to the laws and instructions of the Bible. And really, that's much more of a challenge than coming up with lots of details about prophecy!

Prophecy provides hope!

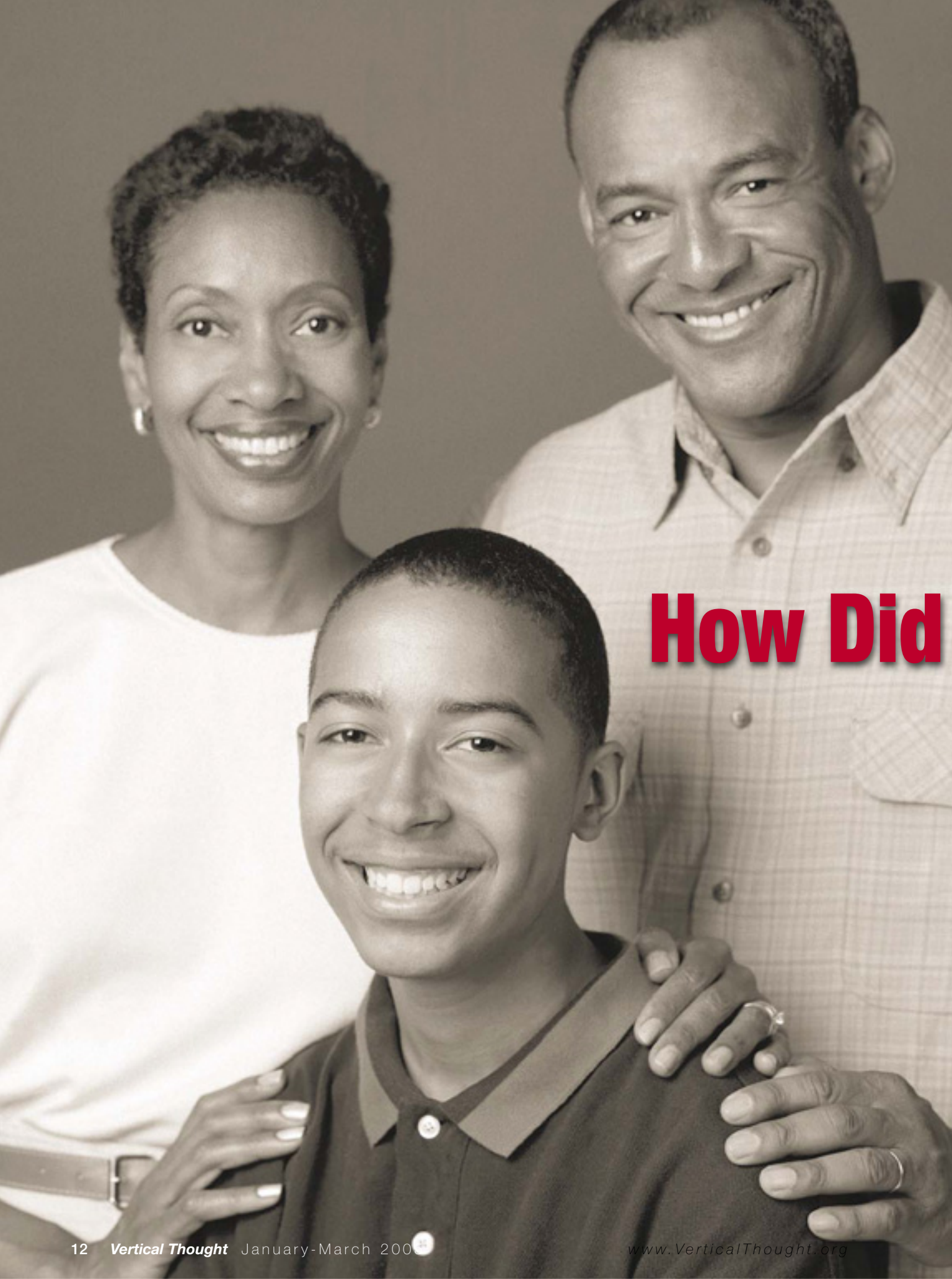
When we think of prophecy, especially end-time prophecy, we most often focus on the horrors to come at the end of this age. Yet the most *certain* event in all biblical prophecy is the one that's most hopeful—the second coming of Jesus Christ. Many prophecies stress that God determined long ago that Christ will come again, establish the Kingdom of God and save humanity from itself. That's about the best news any of us could possibly hear!

The time of suffering will be short. The Bible tells us the worst of it will last only 3½ years (Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 11:2-3; 12:14; note, "a time and times and half a time" refers to a year, years and half a year). Afterwards, these terrible days will begin to seem like a bad dream as the saints of God begin to reign with Christ over the Kingdom of God (Daniel 7:27). A much, much better time awaits us and all humanity.

Prophecy ultimately points us to some very, very good news: that Jesus Christ will return! That He will set up a glorious Kingdom, which will provide the world with a far better life than it ever experienced under any human government! And that God Himself will offer life and happiness to all, through His laws and His Son Jesus Christ!

Isn't that good news?

Dr. Ralph Levy is an instructor at Ambassador Bible Center in Milford, Ohio.



How Did

It was the wedding celebration of the year. People were mingling. The drinks were flowing. The music was playing . . . and then it happened. The wine ran out. While the host panicked, one of his friends broke into a group of young adults to ask her son to help.

A normal young adult may have ignored the plea for help. But this young man gladly left the group to help his mother and the host resolve the crisis.

The mother didn't hesitate to ask for help and the son was not put off by his mother's request. Wouldn't it be great if all parents and children had this kind of relationship?

This story is real. It happened approximately 2,000 years ago between Jesus Christ and His mother, Mary. This interaction took place in a town called Cana at a wedding party (John 2:1-11). When the host ran out of wine, it seems that Mary knew Jesus could solve the problem and didn't think twice about asking Him for help.

When she brought the problem to Jesus' attention, He first responded by saying, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not come." Then, after she instructed the servants to do whatever He asked (indicating she obviously expected Him to act on her request), He gave instructions to them and performed His first recorded miracle—

mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).

He also later inspired the apostle Paul to write, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1).

He must have been the most obedient child in the history of the world. As a teen and young adult, He must have set an awesome example of honoring His parents. The Bible doesn't tell many details of this, because the Gospel accounts have other purposes. These include showing that the spiritual—our relationship with God—is even more important than our physical family, and that Christ's mission as God in the flesh unavoidably conflicted with normal family life.

Talk about a generation gap or a communication problem! His parents truly *couldn't* understand Him at times! And although He actually did know more than His parents, He was willing to submit to them.

Some Bible readers mistakenly assume, after reading some of Jesus' comments the way they are recorded in the Gospels, that He didn't think much of family bonds. Closer analysis, however, shows that Jesus was very respectful of His parents. Since we are commanded as Christians to be like Jesus Christ, we can learn a lot about how we should regard our parents by examining how Jesus regarded His. If the perfect

Jesus Treat His Parents?

Unlike His mother and step-father, Jesus was God in the flesh. Yet how He treated His physical parents serves as an example for us today.

by Kristin Yarbrough

turning approximately 120 gallons of water into excellent wine!

While addressing one's mother as "woman" sounds cold in the English translation, its Aramaic roots show otherwise. The New International Version translates it as "Dear woman." The Jewish New Testament renders the word "Mother." Mary obviously was not put off by the way Jesus addressed her, notes David H. Stern in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*. Mary was undaunted and continued to work with Jesus toward solving the problem. Likewise, Jesus did not ignore the problem His mother brought to His attention—He went above and beyond.

Imagine it: He was the one who commanded from the midst of fire and smoke on Mt. Sinai, "Honor your father and your

Creator God could honor and love fallible human parents, so should we.

Clearing up misconceptions

Let's look at Matthew 8:21-22, where Jesus appears to rebuke a disciple for not agreeing to follow Him at the moment because he wanted to stay behind to bury his father. Verse 22 states, "But Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.'"

At first glance, Jesus appears to have given a very cold, callous response to someone who is mourning the loss of a loved one. But further information from someone familiar with the culture of the day sheds important light on this example. Dr. Stern asserts that the disciple's father was not dead yet, or he would have been at home practicing the type of deep mourning we see in later Gospel accounts of Mary and Martha at the death of their brother, Lazarus. Dr. Stern suggests that the disciple wanted to live in comfort with his father until he died, which may still have been years away, collect his inheritance and then, at his leisure, rejoin the disciples at a more convenient time.

Thus, Jesus' response could be stated as, "Let the spiritually dead (those who are consumed with the cares of this world) bury their own physical dead." Jesus was not teaching

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What Does Jesus Want From You?

If you believe Jesus truly was the Son of God, do you know what He wants you to do? And what He wants to do *for* you?

by Ken Treybig

Today many people accept the fact that a man named Jesus Christ really did live and die in the first century. Many also acknowledge that He was and continues to be the Son of God. If you accept these fundamental principles, you're doing well, but there is much more to understand and do.

As James explains: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:19-20).

So what does Jesus expect from us if we claim to truly follow Him? Let's look at seven areas:

1

Action required

In Luke 6:46-49 Jesus placed the emphasis on action, on "doing," by saying it was vain to call Him Lord while not following His instruction. Following His directives and commands is likened to building a house on a solid foundation. It will root and ground a person against the wind and waves that life throws our way.

Jesus warned that recognizing Him as Lord and even doing great things will not get a person into God's Kingdom (see Matthew 7:21-23). He emphasized living by God's instructions—doing "the will of My Father in heaven."

So while it is vital to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, Jesus' own words tell us it is also *vitaly important* to live according to His teachings, which He said came from the Father (John 7:16).

2

Worship in spirit and truth

When talking with the Samaritan woman by the well, Jesus directed worship toward God the Father, saying the time had come for true worshippers to "*worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him*" (John 4:23).

Those words are very similar to what Jesus' namesake, the Old Testament Joshua, said to ancient Israel near the end of his life in the Promised Land. In Joshua 24:14 he reminded Israel that they were to "*fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth.*" We get the picture from both testaments that truth and sincerity are both vitally important in true worship of God. Just any form of belief and worship won't do. It must be sincere as well as biblically accurate.

"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?"

James 2:19-20

3

Church attendance

God also expects us to show up when He commands a meeting, which He does each Sabbath. God said the Sabbath is a holy, commanded assembly (convocation) where attendance by His people is required (Leviticus 23:3).

How seriously you take that command says a lot about how sincere you are in your worship.

Luke 4:16 tells us it was Jesus' custom (His regular practice) to gather in the synagogue every Sabbath to appear before God. The book of Acts shows Paul attending services every Sabbath (Acts 18:4) to discuss God's way of life with both Jews and gentiles.

4

Regular prayer and study

Jesus was a praying man while in the flesh. Read any of the Gospel accounts and you will run across numerous passages that mention His going off by Himself to pray. And He expects His followers to imitate His example. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said "*when*" you pray—not "*if*" you pray (Matthew 6:6). Paul admonished us to pray without ceasing—never giving it up (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

The people of the town of Berea were praised for their daily study of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11) as they sought to learn more about the way of life Paul was preaching and living. Jesus wants us to be in regular contact with Him through prayer and to study His written words of life in the Bible.

5

Tithing

Jesus also wants us to put our money where our mouth is, so to speak. The Gospel writers record His speaking about money on many occasions. Some Bible reference books even say He spoke more about money than any other subject.

He said to lay up treasure in heaven, because where you put your money is where your heart really is (Matthew 6:20-21). He warned against covetousness—wanting to hold onto every dime or dollar we have—saying a misplaced focus on material goods can cost us our eternal life (Luke 12:15; Mark 8:36).

Paul also taught that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil that can spiritually drown a person (1 Timothy 6:9-10). The means of support for God's work that He consistently teaches in the Bible is tithing—giving a tenth of our increase to His representatives—along with offerings (Malachi 3:8-10).

6

Service to others

The reason Jesus came in the flesh was for the benefit of others—so human beings could have their sins forgiven through the sacrifice of His perfect life. Jesus drew attention to that fact when the disciples began to worry about who was going to get the highest position of honor in the Kingdom. He told them that if they really wanted to be great, they should *serve others*—just as He came not to be served but to serve humanity by giving His life for all (Mark 10:42-45).

This lesson was not lost on Paul either, as he told the churches in Galatia that they needed to express their love by serving others (Galatians 5:13).

What does Jesus want from you? For you to use every opportunity you have to do good for others—to serve them. He tells us that if we do something good to the least of our fellow Christians, it's as though we have done it to Him personally (Matthew 25:40).

7

Change

Perhaps the greatest desire Jesus has for us is that we continually examine our lives in humility before Him and change those areas that don't agree with the instructions of the Bible.

The Bible includes many words that describe aspects of that process—repentance, conversion, spiritual growth, etc. We should take note that the first message Jesus taught when He began His ministry here on earth was that people need to repent (Matthew 4:17).

It takes an attitude of humility to be willing to admit where we don't measure up to God's standards and to change. In Revelation 2 and 3 the messages to the churches all include references to overcoming. That means changing areas in our lives that do not look like Jesus. That process must continue until we are completely like Him, changed into spirit (1 John 3:2-3).

Another servant of God summed up our duty this way: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

What a concise way to sum up what Jesus wants from you—and me and everyone who eventually comes to Him! We're to do justly—to live by all of God's commands. We're to love mercy—giving it freely to others just like He does to us, realizing that if we don't forgive others, we will not be forgiven ourselves (Matthew 6:15). And we're to walk humbly with our God—looking carefully at our lives to see if we're following His instructions. Ecclesiastes 12:13 adds that fearing God and keeping His commandments is our whole duty.

Worshipping God in spirit and truth, attending church services regularly, praying, studying, serving others, tithing and changing to become like Jesus are the things He asks of each of us.

What He wants to give us

These are the high points of what Jesus Christ expects from us. But what does He want to give us in return?

The Scriptures tell us Jesus came to earth as part of God's plan to invite human beings to live forever as members of His family (John 1:12; Hebrews 2:10).

To comprehend the significance of this offer, we need only think of how limited we are by time. As human beings, we all enjoy the pleasures and joys of life—friends, food, meaningful work, nice things, etc. But all of these things come to an end. Meals are over, jobs end, parties come to a conclusion, and we all eventually die when this lifetime is over.

God's offer to us is that we can experience happy, meaningful life *forever* in His Kingdom! This is an experience you certainly don't want to miss!

Ken Treybig is the director of United Youth Camp Carter and pastor of United Church of God congregations in East Texas and Texarkana, Texas.

Jesus Look Like

Continued from page 9

The apostle John was given a vision of what Jesus looks like today in His glorified form. In Revelation 1 Jesus is said to have hair “white like wool,” “eyes like a flame of fire” and to appear “like the sun shining in its strength” (verses 14, 16).

What did Jesus teach?

We find Jesus portrayed by Europeans as European, by Africans as African, by Hispanics as Hispanic and by Asians as Asian. Does it really matter how a person visualizes Jesus?

Does how you perceive Him affect the way you interpret His gospel?

Just as it is a proclivity of people to create Jesus in their own image, they tend to interpret His teachings by the standards of their culture. Statements like “take up your cross and follow Me” had penetrating impact on an audience

of first-century Jews who often saw prisoners carrying crosses to their place of execution. Many of Jesus’ teachings become profoundly clear when read in the context of the Jewish culture of almost 2,000 years ago.

Some people say that Jesus came to erase the law of God. Did you know Jesus said that “till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18)?

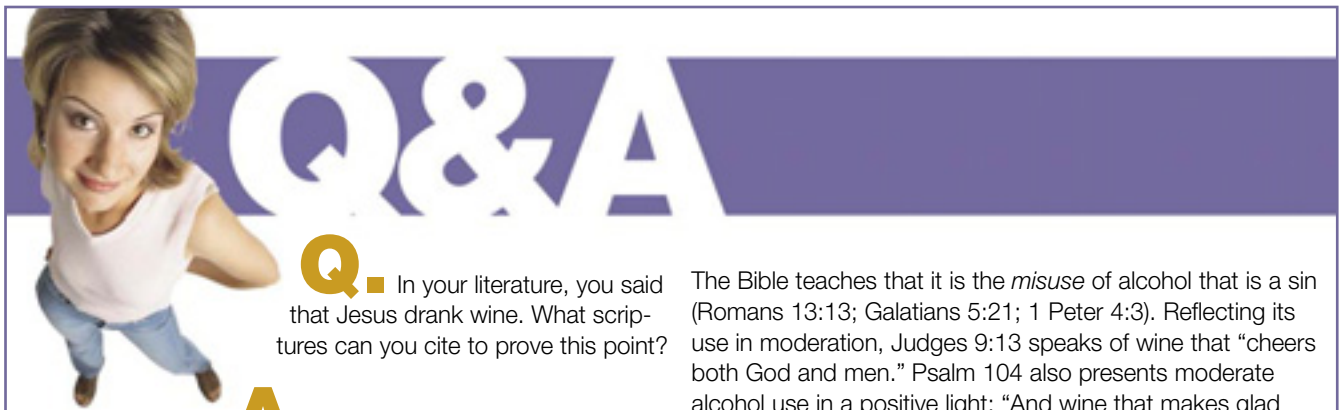
Others claim that all you have to do is accept Jesus as Savior to receive salvation. Yet Jesus taught, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice

lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

By creating Jesus in our own image, have we misinterpreted what He taught? Do you really know the truth of Jesus’ message, or has it become a caricature like the pictures in our Bibles based more on the appearance of the people making the picture or on erroneous traditional perceptions than on Jesus Himself? And does He even want us to have representations of Himself anyway (Exodus 20:4-6)?

Maybe it’s time to dust off the Gospels and discover the real Jesus. You may find that not only did Jesus look different than many have believed, but His gospel contains truths from God most have never heard.

Gary Petty is host of *The Good News* radio program, heard on stations across the country. For an Internet listing of stations and times or to download radio programs, visit our Web site at www.ucg.org/radio. While online you can also order the booklet offered on this program, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.



Q. In your literature, you said that Jesus drank wine. What scriptures can you cite to prove this point?

A. The book of Luke makes this statement quite clearly. The religious leaders of the time were upset with Jesus and charged Him with being a “winebibber.” “For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber [an excessive drinker], a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (Luke 7:33-34).

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words says the Greek word for winebibber, *oinopotes*, means “‘a wine drinker’ (*oinos*, and *potes*, ‘a drinker’).”

In the Old Testament the word *winebibber* is used to describe those who abuse the use of alcohol (Proverbs 23:20). Since Jesus drank a little wine from time to time, this opened Him up to the charge of abusing it. Christ, of course, always drank in moderation; He never abused alcohol.

The Bible teaches that it is the *misuse* of alcohol that is a sin (Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; 1 Peter 4:3). Reflecting its use in moderation, Judges 9:13 speaks of wine that “cheers both God and men.” Psalm 104 also presents moderate alcohol use in a positive light: “And wine that makes glad the heart of man” (verse 15).

It’s also noteworthy that Christ’s first public miracle was turning water into a fine quality wine (John 2:1-11), something He surely would not have done if drinking any alcoholic beverage were a sin.

Christ instructed Christians to take wine as part of the Passover service (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). In the context of this instruction, Paul corrected some of the Corinthian congregation for getting drunk at the Passover (1 Corinthians 11:21). Clearly, they were using fermented wine in the observance of the Passover or it would not have been possible for them to become drunk.

People with a proclivity toward alcoholism and those who cannot drink in moderation should not drink, nor should anyone whose conscience would be violated by doing so. Christians of legal age who choose to drink should do so in moderation.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org

Jesus Treat His Parents

Continued from page 13

disrespect for one's father. He was simply telling the disciple to get his priorities straight.

Just a few chapters later, in Matthew 12:46-50, Jesus appears to disown His own family. His mother Mary and His brothers wait outside while He is inside, teaching a group of people. Jesus' family sends word inside that they want to speak with Him, to which He replies in verses 48-50: "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.'

Mary and His brothers gave no indication why they wanted to speak with Jesus. Dr. Stern suggests that they might have simply brought Him food or water, but also could have wanted to ask Him to stop preaching or could have even planned to take Him away from His disciples by force. Since their purpose wasn't clear, Jesus probably thought it best to take the opportunity to point out that spiritual ties always come before family ties.

Likewise, in Mark 10:29-30, in which Jesus states that those who have left family or possessions for the sake of the gospel will receive much in return, He is emphasizing the importance of the Kingdom, not devaluing the family.

Some argue that Jesus advocated hatred toward family in Luke 14:26, in which He said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

Many translations and commentaries suggest that a better way of understanding the meaning of "hate" in today's language would be "love less by comparison," for a God of love who is building a family would never advocate hatred of siblings, spouses and children. Dr. Stern notes that the phrase "and his own life also" is key to understanding the verse. Total

In this most traumatic time, Jesus still showed love, respect and responsibility for His mother, Mary, to make sure she would be cared for.

dedication to Jesus and the gospel, not alienation from family, is the goal.

Jesus upholds the Fifth Commandment

In Mark 7:6-13, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for shirking their family responsibilities. In earlier verses, the Pharisees had criticized Jesus and His disciples for not practicing ritual Jewish washings before they ate. Jesus responded by calling them hypocrites for trying to get around the Fifth Commandment—to honor their parents—through their tradition of Corban.

This tradition allowed Jews to dedicate their money and possessions as a gift to God and the temple, but to retain use of their wealth until their death. Under this tradition, such

individuals refused to help their needy parents in their old age, saying that their money was Corban—that is, dedicated to God. Jesus pointed out that this was a blatant, selfish way of breaking the Fifth Commandment.

In addition to Jesus' miracle of producing wine at Cana, the Gospel accounts give us details of two other interactions

Some Bible readers mistakenly assume that Jesus didn't think much of family bonds after reading some of His comments the way they are recorded in the Gospels. Closer analysis, however, shows that Jesus was very respectful of His parents.

between Jesus and Mary. The first account is in Luke 2:42-50, when Jesus at age 12 remained in Jerusalem after the Spring Feast. Joseph and Mary believed their Son was among the group traveling with them and initially did not realize He was missing. Three days later, they found Jesus in the temple, reasoning with the teachers. Upon finding Him, Mary asked "Son, why have You done this to us?"

As a mother, she was naturally worried. But Scripture gives us no evidence that Jesus disobeyed His parents. They believed He had left with them, but there is no mention of a command to come with the family that Jesus disregarded.

Though current Western tradition regards age 18 as the time when a child becomes an adult, Jewish boys of the first century had a "coming of age" at 12. This was when they started being held responsible for keeping the law, and when they first read from the Torah during public synagogue services.

With that view of 12-year-old boys, and with the revelation Mary had been given, she should not have been so worried and should have known where to find Him, says Dr. Stern. Once again, Jesus was placing spiritual priorities ahead of physical ones, and He did not disobey His parents.

Finally, in John 19:26-27, Jesus shows love for His mother in one of His final actions as a human being. In the last hours of His life, Jesus undoubtedly had a lot on His mind, including the unbelievable pain and exhaustion He felt, the way He had been mistreated, the need not to sin in His final moments and His upcoming victory.

However, in this most traumatic time, He still showed love, respect and responsibility for His mother, Mary, to make sure she would be cared for. With the last of His strength He lovingly asked His best friend, John, to take care of her.

While the Gospel accounts don't give us detailed instructions on every issue that can arise between children and their parents, they do show Jesus obeying the Fifth Commandment. As Christians, we are commanded to live as Christ lived, so let's be sure we honor our parents.

Kristin Yarbrough works at the Home Shopping Network as a copywriter. She and her husband, Sean, live in Brandon, Florida.

The Humor of Jesus Christ

Is religion only serious business? Should there be no joy or laughter in church services? Do religious people take themselves too seriously? We begin here a new series of articles on this interesting subject.

by **Randy Stiver**

Would the great Messiah laugh at a good joke? Did He laugh like regular folks when He walked on earth? Chances are, if you're like I was, you've never given the humor of Christ serious thought!

But we can learn a lot from laughing, especially laughing with Jesus at what He found funny. Odd thing is, He was often laughing at you and me and everybody else because of the fickle foibles of human nature.

One writer contends: "The widespread failure to recognize and to appreciate the humor of Christ is one of the most amazing aspects of the era named for Him. Anyone who reads the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark and Luke] with a relative freedom from presuppositions might be expected to see that Christ laughed, and that He expected others to laugh, but our capacity to miss this aspect of His life is phenomenal" (Elton Trueblood, *The Humor of Christ*, p. 15).

So what type of humor did Christ use? One type is *hyperbole* (pronounced hi-PER-bo-lee). It is exaggeration for effect—making an extravagant statement or figure of speech not intended to be taken literally.

Examples include: "If I've told you once, I've told you fifty thousand million times—don't exaggerate!" "I'm as hungry as a horse!" "He's as strong as an ox," or, "He's as smart as an ox"—oops, that's an *oxymoron*, which is a sort of paradox. We'll save that for later.

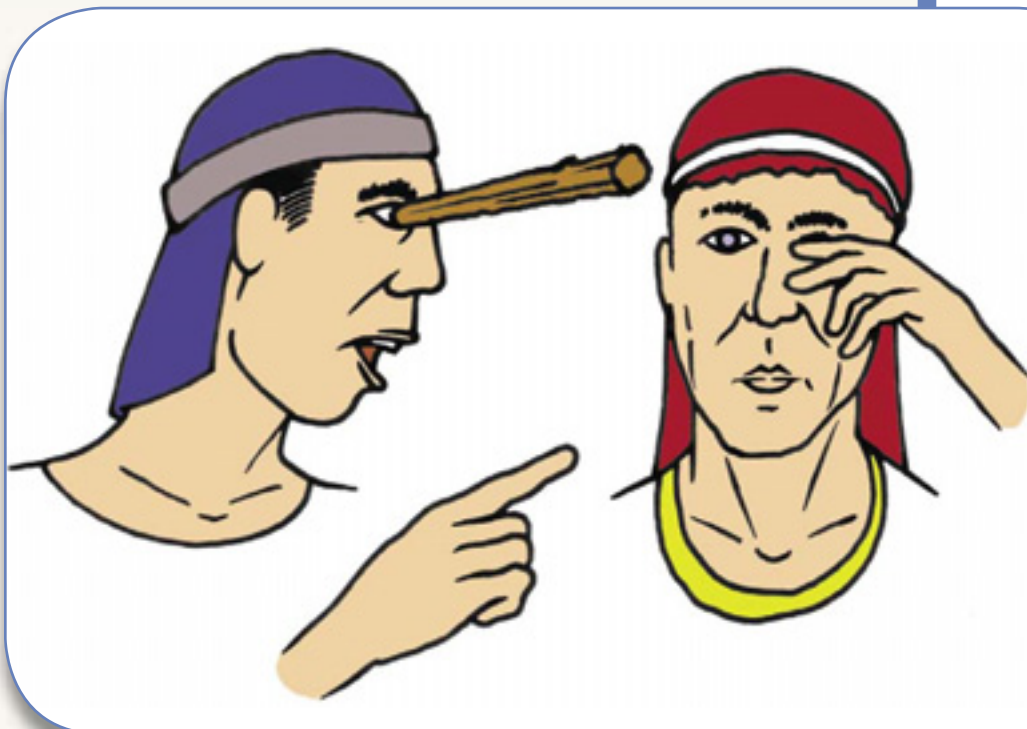
Jesus Christ loved good hyperbole. In His famous Sermon on the Mount He wove a marvelous extravagance: "And why do you look at *the speck in your brother's*

eye, but do not perceive *the plank in your own eye*? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye" (Luke 6:41-42).

Wait a minute, He said a *plank* in your eye—a plank! Don't read it in an over-serious monotone. It's true, but it's very funny too. Let me paraphrase: Why are you focused on the tiny speck in your friend's eye when you can't see the telephone pole in your own eye? Just imagine a cartoon of a person with a telephone pole protruding from his eye—and him trying to remove the speck from a friend's eye. Ha!

Makes you think, doesn't it? It's so easy to find fault with others, but so hard to see our own personal and obvious faults. Before we try to change others, Jesus tells us to start overcoming our own faults.

This can be a bitter and embarrassing pill to swallow



at times. But can't you just hear His wry and gentle laughter encouraging us to follow His example and do the right thing? You've got to love Him. His humor is funny and His teaching profoundly accurate. Let's do what He said!

Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Coos Bay, Eugene and Roseburg, Oregon.



Q&A

Q. Can babies be born after the rapture?

A. While this question is a simple one, a biblical answer is a bit complicated because the *rapture* as commonly understood is not biblical. Many people today have been mistakenly taught that there will be a secret rapture of the saints a few years before Jesus returns with them to earth. But Jesus said that when He returns it will be a very public event that all the inhabitants of the earth will see. Everyone will hear the great sound of a trumpet as He gathers together His elect from all over the earth (Matthew 24:30-31).

John also said that when Christ returns every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7). Paul says that at the time of this great

trumpet blast the dead in Christ will be resurrected and the saints who are alive will be changed to spirit instantaneously (1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The Scriptures also explain that spirit beings do not get married or have children. As Luke 20:35 explains, they “neither marry nor are given in marriage.” So there will not be babies born to people who are changed into spirit.

Within God’s plan, however, there will be people left alive who will not be changed into spirit when Jesus returns. These people will live as physical human beings, capable of having children as they learn God’s way of life.

If you wish to study more about the subjects of God’s plan for humanity, the resurrection and what happens at death, read or request our booklets, *What Is Your Destiny?* and *What Happens After Death?* at www.ucg.org/booklets.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org



Q&A

Q. If God and Jesus are one and the same, then why does Jesus refer to God as “My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17)?

A. Jesus addressed His prayers to the “Father.” At Jesus’ baptism, an angel spoke from heaven calling Jesus the “Son.” How could these passages be true if Jesus and the Father are the same being? The logical answer is that they are *not* the same. They are two separate beings in the family of God. Ephesians 3:14-15 mentions the Father of Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family is named.

Much to the surprise of many people, the Bible actually teaches that God is in the process of adding more members to His family. Notice that Hebrews 2:10 talks about God “bringing many sons to glory.”

We read in Romans 8:14-17, “For as many as are led by

the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption [sonship, NIV] by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself [itself, KJV] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” Those are incredibly important words and point out that God is expanding His family through human beings.

God the Father and God the Word (who later became the Son) have existed for all eternity. John 1:1-3 explains that the Word was *with* God the Father from the beginning. For someone to be *with* someone else requires there to be two individuals—not just one.

If you’re interested in learning more, request or download a copy of our free booklet *Who Is God?* from our literature request page, www.ucg.org/booklets. The question, “Is God a Trinity?” is answered in greater detail on pages 47-52 of this booklet.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org

Do you sometimes find it difficult to be different from others because of your religious beliefs? Don't be discouraged! I faced the problem and so can you.

by Cindy Gore Harper

"That's impossible. You cannot miss more than two days this semester. You will have to withdraw. No exceptions."

I walked away from the student services office feeling defeated. Yet challenges arising from missing school for the Feast of Tabernacles were nothing new. I had faced inflexible high school teachers and principals before, as well as college professors who promoted policy over conviction. I had also experienced power struggles that ended with a barely tolerant shift in policy that "allowed" for observing God's Holy Days.

I have always come through these challenges relatively unscathed and with high grades, despite threats of failure for missing days and work in class. Somehow school authorities don't believe it can be done, or that there can be any valid reason to miss school besides a death in the family or serious illness.

But this particular situation felt different. It was my last semester of college. For an elementary education major, the entire final semester of the program is spent in a public school. We are tested on our ability to teach and handle all the responsibilities of a real classroom.

The attendance policy for this semester of student teaching allows for no unexcused absences, and no more than two excused absences, *period*. The policy has literally prevented students from finishing for being out sick for three days. There are no exceptions to the policy, especially not for eight excused days for religious reasons.

I spent the afternoon going up the "chain of command" in the department. Each person I met with listened briefly and then turned me away. "There's just no way. It's the policy" were the words I kept hearing. When I left the student services office after again being told that what I was asking for was impossible, my last option was to talk to the dean.

My last option

I decided to take a few minutes in the restroom because I felt ready to cry instead of ready to take on the College of Education. In the quiet bathroom I prayed for strength and that God would work this out for me. It is not the worst thing in the world to miss a semester and graduate five months later than expected, but I had planned for a long time to graduate in December, go to Ambassador Bible Center (ABC) in January, and start a career and continue my life after that. Postponing this final semester would have delayed (for more than a year) the plans and goals I had set for myself a long time beforehand.

I was able to speak with the dean that day. She showed no sympathy and suggested that I not attend this "religious observance" this year. I explained that this was not an option for me but that I would be willing to do extra work and put in extra days to make up for the time that I would miss in the classroom.

She became very irritated, as if somehow my priorities were misplaced. She advised me that I would not be able to miss this much



'The Exception to the Rule'

time every autumn when I became a teacher. She then told me that what I was expecting to do would now and in the future be harmful to my students. After this criticism she said she would not allow me to be excused, but that she could make a phone call to the provost for a final decision. It was my last glimmer of hope.

And God did intervene. I received word a few days later that I could continue the semester and receive credit if I made up the missed days. I attended the Feast in Panama City Beach, Florida, with my family and friends. I made up the days and finished in the first week of January.

While all of my work was turned in and I received an A, I was not allowed to graduate with my college peers in December. That came later. However, I did graduate with my ABC peers in August, and I had grown closer to them in seven months than to anyone I met in 4½ years of college. It was a small price to pay.

Exceptions

People in authority, whether they be teachers, deans or bosses, will try to tell you there is “no way” you can miss school, work, tests, etc., because of your religious beliefs. No exceptions. But God’s people are exceptions to the rule. We have to be. It is part of our calling and part of our witness to the world. There is always a way if you have the faith to put it in God’s hands and not take “No” for an answer.

People in the Church of God all over the world put their jobs, educations and other important things on the line to keep the Sabbath and Holy Days. There are challenges and sacrifices for everyone to live this way of life because society is structured in ways that discourage the keeping of God’s commandments.

Sometimes God will allow things to fail to work out the way we want or expect. We have to be prepared to withdraw for a semester, take a class again, get dropped from a sports team, lose a job, lose the support of family or friends—and still trust God to work it out for us in the long run and bless us for obeying Him.

Jesus Christ went to His last Passover in Jerusalem knowing people were there who wanted to take His life (Matthew 20:17-19; 26:2). Trusting His Father to preserve Him until His time to die, He did not let any fear of a premature death keep Him from doing what He must do and what He knew was right.

It was that important, and remains so today. When we feel persecuted for what we believe, we need only to look at His tremendous example to realize our struggle is not as bad as we think. And God will not allow us to be tested beyond our ability (1 Corinthians 10:13). Jesus Christ never let anything get in the way of keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days, and we as Christians should follow His example.


In this present society you may feel very alone, different, even strange, as you struggle to live the way of life that you know is right and true. I challenge you to look to the future—to the coming Kingdom of God—when society will be set up in harmony with the Sabbath and Holy Days for all mankind.

Businesses, schools and activities will all revolve around these days that are unknown to most of the world today. Under the direct rule and guidance of Jesus Christ, this way of life will

no longer be the exception. It will be the standard—the way of life for all people.

We can set that standard for ourselves now as we look forward to the time when everyone will follow God’s way. No exceptions.

Cindy Gore Harper is currently working as a child-care provider and plans to return to college in the autumn to work on a master’s degree. She and her husband Daniel reside in Augusta, Georgia.



Q. Are New Year celebrations pagan in origin?

A. Simply put, the answer is yes! In the earliest days of the Church (first and second centuries after Christ) there were no such celebrations as Christmas and New Year’s. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* states: “According to the hypothesis accepted by most scholars today, the birth of Christ was assigned the date of the WINTER SOLSTICE (December 25th on the Roman Calendar . . . January 6th on the Egyptian Calendar) because on this day, as the sun began its return to the northern skies, the pagan devotees of MITHRA celebrated ‘dies natalis Solis Invicti’ (the birthday of the invincible sun).”

Those customs carried over in the observance of Christmas (with its many traditions and practices steeped in paganism and mythology), and the “birth” of the “new year” of the sun! This is why the Roman calendar designates Jan. 1 as the beginning of the “new year” as opposed to God’s holy calendar (the Hebrew calendar). The beginning of the year from God’s perspective is in the spring.

Much of the symbolism associated with New Year’s today (mistletoe among others) has very definite sexual origins and meanings.

Because we live in this secular society and must operate within the Roman calendar, even as Christians we acknowledge that a new calendar year begins to be counted on Jan. 1. Yet to get involved in the celebration of such would not be appropriate. That said, one should be careful not to become too judgmental if a Christian is, for example, viewing a football game or parade at that time of year—as opposed to actually “celebrating” the “new year.”

There are many resources that show the pagan origins of New Year’s celebrations. You can find related material in reference encyclopedias and online research resources as well.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org

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IN THE NEWS

Compiled by James Capo

Expedition's Search for Noah's Ark Is "Dead in the Water"

In the last issue of *Vertical Thought*, we reported on plans by an American businessman, Daniel McGivern, to finance an expedition to Mt. Ararat in Turkey in search of Noah's ark. Announcing the project at a news conference in Washington, D.C., Mr. McGivern showed satellite images of what he claimed was a man-made object—Noah's ark—partially exposed in the ice about 15,000 feet up the mountain.

Well, the \$900,000 project never got off the ground. "The Turkish government refused to grant the explorers permission to climb the mountain. Soon, the mission itself was put on ice," reported the *National Geographic News* (Sept. 20, 2004). Some claim Mr. McGivern knew that Turkey would deny him permission, since Mt. Ararat, which is located near the Turkish border with Armenia and Iran, is considered a military zone. They believe he was just seeking publicity.

Numerous explorers, though, have climbed—or attempted to climb—Mt. Ararat in efforts to find the remains of Noah's ark there. Some have even brought back pieces of wood that they claimed to have taken from the ark, though these claims have all been found to be false.

Will anyone ever really discover Noah's ark? Does it matter? Many believe that discovering the ark will prove the truth of the Bible, but there is plenty of evidence that proves the truth and accuracy of the Bible, whether the ark is ever discovered or not. For more information on how you can know for sure that the Bible is the reliable Word of God, request our free booklet *Is the Bible True?*

The Family That Eats Together . . .

Can eating meals with your family improve your health and well-being? Maybe so, according to a University of Minnesota study reported in the August 2004 issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

The "Project EAT" (Eating Among Teens) survey from 1998-1999 found that 26.8 percent of middle and high school students reported eating at least seven meals with their families in the previous week, while 33.1 percent reported never eating with their families or eating with them only once or twice per week.

According to the study, the less often teens eat with their families, the more likely they are to experience "tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use; low grade-point average; depressive symptoms; and suicide involvement." The study's authors wrote: "We found family mealtimes to be a protective factor in the lives of adolescents for nearly all of these variables, particularly among adolescent girls" (Aug. 20, 2004).

Many young people have broken families or relationships that no doubt contribute to these findings. But for those who seek God and want to be part of His family, God promises comfort and belonging. God is called "a father to the fatherless" who "sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:5-6, NIV). Christians are told in James 1:27 that pure religion is "to visit orphans and widows in their trouble"—in other words, to remember and care for those in unfortunate family situations.

Teen Sexual Activity Encouraged by Sex on TV

Teens who view television programs containing a lot of sexual content are twice as likely to become involved sexually at a younger age than teens who watched less, according to a study published in the September 2004 issue of *Pediatrics*, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The survey asked 1,792 teens aged 12 to 17 about their television viewing habits and about their sexual activity. The lead researcher, Rebecca Collins, referred to this study as "the strongest evidence yet that the sexual content of television programs encourages adolescents to initiate sexual intercourse and other sexual activities."

She added that shows that just talk about sex, and those that show it explicitly, affect teen sexual activity equally. "Both affect adolescents' perceptions of what is normal sexual behavior and propels their own sexual behavior," she said.

The study also showed that 12-year-olds who viewed large amounts of sexual content on TV behaved sexually more like kids two or three years older. "The advancement in sexual behavior we saw among kids who watched a lot of sexual television was striking," Ms. Collins said (LifeSiteNews.com, Sept. 7, 2004).

Rrrringg! "This Is Your Ditch-a-Date Service Calling!"

Yahoo! News reports a popular new service from Cingular Wireless and Virgin Mobile USA—fake "rescue" calls to help you get out of a bad date.

How does it work? Customers arrange to be called at a set time (apparently the peak time for bad dates in New York City

is Friday at 8 p.m.—that's when most calls are requested). When your cell phone rings, you'll hear an excuse to repeat before dropping the dud of a date, like: "Hey this is your Escape-a-Date call. If you're looking for an excuse, I got it. Just repeat after me and you'll be on your way! 'Not again! Why does this always happen to you? . . . Alright, I'll be right there.' Now tell 'em that your roommate got locked out, and you have to go let them in. Good luck!"

Bingo, the date (and your character!) is history. How popular is this "dial-a-lie" service? Over 10,000 calls a month are being logged by Cingular and Virgin Mobile customers. That's a lot of bad dates!

Want to keep your character intact and avoid nightmare dates? Dating questions are among the most common questions asked by readers of *Vertical Thought*. Date wisely! Check out the Q&A section at the VerticalThought.org Web site for some balanced advice. And while you're there, you might want to check out the archived January-March 2004 issue for feature articles on dating.

Make Your Resolution a Solution

Thousands of people make resolutions to lose weight throughout the year. In the United States it is common for many people to make resolutions as the new year begins, and each year the number one resolution is to lose weight.

Yet each year more and more people in America are doing



the exact opposite—gaining weight. Obesity increased for Americans of all ages, even youth, throughout the 1990s.

The Palo Alto Medical Foundation says: "Among children and teens ages 6-19, 15 percent (almost 9 million) are overweight according to the 1999-2000 [Centers for Disease Control] data, or triple what the proportion was in 1980. In addition, the data show that another 15 percent of children and teens ages 6 to 19 are considered at risk of becoming overweight" (www.pamf.org/teen/health/diseases/obesity.html).

Even though overweight children do not (yet) have the same health-related problems as overweight adults, overweight

young people are apt to become overweight adults who are at risk for developing heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke and some forms of cancer. A poor self-image has also been associated with being overweight or obese at a young age.

So if you believe you need to make a healthy change to your weight, talk with your parents and doctor about your concern. If they agree, you'll want to make a lifestyle change and not just a resolution that will "go by the waist side."

Here are some tips for setting and achieving your goal:

- *Set a realistic goal*—for example, "I will lose 10 pounds in 1½ months," not "I need to lose 50 pounds." Tip: If you need to lose weight, your first goal should be 10 percent of your current weight. So if you weigh 200 pounds, your goal is to lose 20.
- *Write out your goal*—be specific (set the number of pounds by a specific date). Be challenging and realistic (1 to 2 pounds of weight loss per week). Calculate your weight loss per week—that is, weigh in once per week.
- *Identify ways to achieve your goal*—exercise 30 minutes a day, five or six days a week. Eat whole grains, fruits, vegetables and less sweets and fat.
- *Assess your progress*—identify obstacles that you need to overcome that may be standing in the way of achieving your goal. Identify areas in which you have done well. Remember that it takes time, but the payoff is worth the effort.
- *Reassess your goal*—set a new goal with the information that you have gained over this time. Share your goal with family members and friends for support. Set new goals and areas that you want to improve on.

Use these steps and you can lose weight. If you have



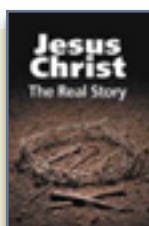
questions about developing an exercise program, you are welcome to e-mail me at info@verticalthought.org.

Cassandra Howard, M.S., ACSM, is the University of Florida Living Well director for faculty and staff.

Jesus Christ: The Real Story

Do you know the real story of Jesus Christ? Consider the following questions: Since all human beings sin, how did Jesus resist this human urge? What's the biblical problem with the Trinity? Did Jesus have the power to prevent His crucifixion? How many days and nights was Jesus in the tomb? How does this answer raise difficult questions for mainstream Christianity? Why didn't Jesus worship on Sunday or celebrate Christmas and Easter? What does Jesus expect from you?

The answers to these questions have eluded most people over the centuries. But you don't have to live in ignorance. Write for our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. You can read it online, download it or request your free copy at www.ucg.org/booklets.



Jesus Christ: The Real Story

Perhaps no figure in history has been as misunderstood and mythologized as Jesus of Naza-

areth. Hundreds of books, thousands of articles and billions of words have been written about Him. But who is He really? How much do you know about the real Jesus of the Bible? Request your free booklet online at www.verticalthought.org or by contacting our office nearest you from the list on page 22.

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