

# *The* Good News

January-February 2012

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

## Islam vs. The West

Why the Clash of Civilizations?

Page 4

What Does Islam's History Teach Us? 8 • Why Is Israel the Focus of Muslim Hostility? 21  
Work: It's More Than Just a Job 32 • What Can You Do When Life Isn't Fair? 35

## More Good News for You!

**W**ith this issue we're making some major changes to *The Good News* to make it an even more valuable and helpful resource for you!

As you read through this issue, you'll no doubt notice several things that are different. First of all, we're adding 16 more pages to give you more *Good News*.

For the last 13 years we've produced a sister publication, *World News and Prophecy*, devoted to explaining what's going on in our world in the light of Bible prophecy. For much of that time we've mailed it to 30,000 to 50,000 subscribers, a much smaller audience than *The Good News*' 300,000-350,000 subscribers.

Considering how the world is rapidly changing before our eyes, and in ways foretold long ago by the biblical prophets, we thought it appropriate to merge *World News and Prophecy* into *The Good News* so far more readers could benefit from that valuable information. It's

### In our fast-changing world, it's more important than ever that we understand where we're going.

also a better use of resources since we're able to send the same total number of pages to the wider audience for a far lower mailing cost.

As a result, you'll notice a new section in this magazine titled "World News and Prophecy." Here you'll find the news articles and features you're used to seeing in *The Good News*, as well as additional articles from the writers of *World News and Prophecy*.

In our fast-changing world, it's more important than ever that we understand where we're going—and even more important, *why*. *The Good News* will continue to be a magazine of understanding, helping you to see *why* the world is in the sad condition it's in. The reasons are right there in your Bible, and we'll continue to open it up for your understanding.

This issue's in-depth focus on Islam is an example. In the following articles you'll see things seldom if ever discussed in most news articles and magazines. Yet without an understanding of the teachings of the Koran and of Muhammad, the founder of Islam, you'll be at a loss to understand what's really behind most of the wars and civil unrest taking place around the world today.

It seems evident that most writers and reporters are deliberately obscuring Islam's role in world events, but we take you right to the heart and core of the problem so you can see what's really going on.

You'll notice other changes in this issue, too. We're organizing the content into sections so you can easily find the information most helpful to you—whether news in the light of Bible prophecy, Christian living, the latest discoveries about science and the Bible, or articles explaining biblical teachings and how to live by them.

In particular, we're starting two more regular features to help you better understand the Bible. One is a new column titled "Follow Me," by longtime *World News and Prophecy* columnist Robin Webber. In each issue he'll explain different aspects of what it means to embrace Jesus Christ's challenging admonition to "Follow Me."

Another new feature you'll find is a mini-study on a particular biblical topic. In it we'll cover any number of scriptural subjects in a short, two-page overview. In this first installment we look at a particularly important foundational subject—how the Bible provides both practical answers for life now as well as real hope for the future.

That, my friends, is truly *Good News*. We deeply appreciate the generosity of our growing family of coworkers who make sharing this with you possible.

—Scott Ashley, *Managing editor*



# The Good News

January-February 2012 Volume 17, Number 1 Circulation: 329,000

*The Good News* (ISSN: 1086-9514) is published bimonthly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 555 Technecenter Dr., Milford, OH 45150. © 2012 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Milford, Ohio 45150, and at additional mailing offices. Scriptural references are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

Donations to help share *The Good News* and our other free publications with others are gratefully accepted and are tax-deductible in the United States and Canada. Those who choose to voluntarily support this work are welcomed as coworkers in this effort to proclaim the true gospel to all nations.

*Publisher:* United Church of God, an International Association

*Council of Elders:* Gary Antion, Scott Ashley, Bob Berendt, Bill Bradford, Bill Eddington, John Elliott, Roy Holladay, Darris McNeely, Melvin Rhodes (chairman), Mario Seiglie, Don Ward, Robin Webber

*Church president:* Dennis Luker *Media operation manager:* Peter Eddington *Managing editor:* Scott Ashley

*Senior writers:* Jerold Aust, Roger Foster, Melvin Rhodes, Tom Robinson, John Ross Schroeder

*Art director:* Shaun Venish *Circulation manager:* John LaBissoniere

To request a free subscription, visit our website at [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) or contact the office nearest you from the list below. *The Good News* is sent free to all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, an International Association, and others. **Personal contact:** The United Church of God has congregations and ministers throughout the United States and many other countries. To contact a minister or to find locations and times of services, contact our office nearest you or visit our website at [www.ucg.org/churches](http://www.ucg.org/churches).

**Unsolicited materials:** Due to staffing limitations, unsolicited materials sent to *The Good News* will not be critiqued or returned. By their submission authors agree that submitted materials become the property of the United Church of God, an International Association, to use as it sees fit. This agreement is controlled by California law.

#### NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

**United States:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

**Canada:** United Church of God—Canada, Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada

Phone: (905) 614-1234, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (905) 614-1749 Website: [www.ucg.ca](http://www.ucg.ca)

**Caribbean islands:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

**Spanish-speaking areas:** Iglesia de Dios Unida, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.

Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: [www.ucg.org/espanol](http://www.ucg.org/espanol) E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

#### EUROPE

**Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg):** P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands

**British Isles:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England

Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 020-8386-1999 Website: [www.goodnews.org.uk](http://www.goodnews.org.uk)

**Eastern Europe and Baltic states:** Head Sõnumid, Pk. 62, 50002 Tartu Postkontor, Estonia

**France:** Église de Dieu Unie—France, 127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France

**Germany:** Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten, Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany

Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

**Italy:** La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy

Phone and Fax: (+39) 035 4523573 Website: [www.labuonanotizia.org](http://www.labuonanotizia.org) E-mail: [info@labuonanotizia.org](mailto:info@labuonanotizia.org)

**Scandinavia:** Guds Enade Kyrka, P.O. Box 3535, 111 74 Stockholm, Sweden

Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 E-mail: [sverige@ucg.org](mailto:sverige@ucg.org)

#### AFRICA

**Cameroon:** United Church of God Cameroon, BP 10322 Bèssengue, Douala, Cameroon

**East Africa—Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda:** United Church of God—East Africa

P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi 00200, Kenya E-mail: [kenya@ucg.org](mailto:kenya@ucg.org) Website: [www.ucgeastfrica.org](http://www.ucgeastfrica.org)

**Ghana:** P.O. Box AF 75, Adenta, Accra, Ghana E-mail: [ghana@ucg.org](mailto:ghana@ucg.org)

**Malawi:** P.O. Box 32257, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi Phone: 085 22 717 E-mail: [malawi@ucg.org](mailto:malawi@ucg.org)

**Nigeria:** United Church of God—Nigeria, P.O. Box 2265 Somolu, Lagos, Nigeria

Phone: 8033233193 Website: [www.ucgnigeria.org](http://www.ucgnigeria.org) E-mail: [nigeria@ucg.org](mailto:nigeria@ucg.org)

**South Africa:** United Church of God—Southern Africa, P.O. Box 36290, Menlo Park, 0102, Pretoria, South Africa

Phone: +27 12 751 4204 Fax: +27 (0)86 572 7437 Website: [www.south-africa.ucg.org](http://www.south-africa.ucg.org)

E-mail: [UnitedChurchofGod.SA@gmail.com](mailto:UnitedChurchofGod.SA@gmail.com)

**Zambia:** P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia Phone: (02) 226076 E-mail: [zambia@ucg.org](mailto:zambia@ucg.org)

**Zimbabwe:** P.O. Box 928, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe Phone: 0773 240 041 E-mail: [zimbabwe@ucg.org](mailto:zimbabwe@ucg.org)

#### PACIFIC REGION

**Australia and all other South Pacific regions not listed:** United Church of God—Australia

GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202

Fax: 07 55 202 122 Website: [www.ucg.org.au](http://www.ucg.org.au) E-mail: [info@ucg.org.au](mailto:info@ucg.org.au)

**New Zealand:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 22, Shortland St., Auckland 1140, New Zealand

Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763 Website: [www.ucg.org.nz](http://www.ucg.org.nz) E-mail: [info@ucg.org.nz](mailto:info@ucg.org.nz)

**Tonga:** United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 518, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

#### ASIA

**All except Philippines and Singapore:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027,

Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A. Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

**Philippines:** P.O. Box 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines Phone and fax: +63 82 224-4444

Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444 Website: [www.ucg.org.ph](http://www.ucg.org.ph) E-mail: [info@ucg.org.ph](mailto:info@ucg.org.ph)

**Singapore:** United Church of God, GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia

Website: [www.ucg-singapore.org](http://www.ucg-singapore.org) E-mail: [info@ucg.org.au](mailto:info@ucg.org.au)

#### ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.

Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 40026236.

Canada return address: *The Good News*, 2835 Kew Drive, Windsor, ON N8T 3B7.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to

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

# Table of Contents



4



8



21



30



32



38

## Cover Feature

### Islam vs. the West: Why the Clash of Civilizations?

To comprehend why Islamic and Western civilization conflict so sharply requires studying the basic differences between their underlying philosophies. Make no mistake: The bare facts reveal that the West now finds itself in very serious jeopardy. . . . . **4**

### The History of Islam: What Does It Teach Us?

When and how did the religion of Islam come into existence? What are its values and beliefs? How did it rise to dominate many nations? And will it ultimately persist? . . . . . **8**

### Islam in Europe: A Return to Religious Intolerance?

For centuries Europeans fought wars over religion. Eventually, the proliferation of Protestant denominations led to greater tolerance. But now religious intolerance is back due to demographic changes that are changing the face of the continent. . . . . **12**

### Europe's Woes: Setting the Stage for Bible Prophecy?

With the European sovereign debt crisis, the elites' dream of economic integration is in real jeopardy. Will a split come soon? What does the Bible reveal about Europe's future? . . . . . **18**

### Why Is Israel the Focus of Muslim Hostility?

At the heart of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East is ongoing hatred among Muslim nations toward Israel and the Jewish people. What are the underlying causes? . . . . . **21**

### The Koran and Conquest: A Look at Islamic Theology

Why do we hear of so much terrorism originating in the Muslim world? Will an examination of Islam's history and its holy book, the Koran, help us to understand? . . . . . **25**

### Kitchen Table Economics: What Is It That Governments Don't Understand?

There are times when households reach the end of their financial resources and have to declare bankruptcy. Their income cannot meet their debts. Has America come to such a defining moment? . . . . . **30**

### Work: It's More Than Just a Job

In and outside the home, work is a critical part of life. But for whom are we really working, and what is the ultimate purpose of work? . . . . . **32**

### What Can You Do When Life Isn't Fair?

Unfairness seems to pervade life. When unfair circumstances affect you, how can you best respond? . . . . . **35**

### An Invitation to Eternity

"Follow Me." What does this invitation from Jesus Christ involve? What does it require? Are you willing to join Him on the journey? . . . . . **38**

### St. Valentine, Cupid and Jesus Christ

On February 14 millions of people exchange tokens and messages of love and affection. Where and how did the curious customs of Valentine's Day begin? Does God have anything to say about such practices? . . . . . **42**

## Regular Features

<b>Current Events and Trends</b> <i>An overview of conditions around the world</i> . . . . .	<b>16</b>
<b>Mini-Study</b> <i>Real Hope, Practical Answers</i> . . . . .	<b>40</b>
<b>Beyond Today</b> <i>Television log</i> . . . . .	<b>43</b>
<b>Letters From Our Readers</b> <i>Readers of The Good News share their thoughts</i> . . . . .	<b>45</b>
<b>Youth Focus From Vertical Thought</b> <i>Dealing With Debt</i> . . . . .	<b>46</b>

Photos, from left: iStockphoto, Al Jazeera Creative Commons Repository, Wikimedia, Photos.com, courtesy of John LaBissoniere, U.S. Library of Congress Cover: iStockphoto



# Islam vs. the West: Why the Clash of Civilizations?

To comprehend why Islamic and Western civilization conflict so sharply requires studying the basic differences between their underlying philosophies. Make no mistake: The bare facts reveal that the West now finds itself in very serious jeopardy. *by John Ross Schroeder*

in one God, the God of the Bible and Allah of the Koran are *not* one and the same. “Islam begins and ends with the concept that there is no God but Allah. Allah is all-powerful, sovereign and *unknowable*” (David Burnett, *Clash of Worlds*, 2002, p. 114, emphasis added throughout).

While the Arabic word *Allah* means “God,” the fact that Allah is pictured in the Koran as so distant, abstract and transcendent as to be *unknowable* helps to show that Allah is not just another name for the Christian God, as some mistakenly believe.

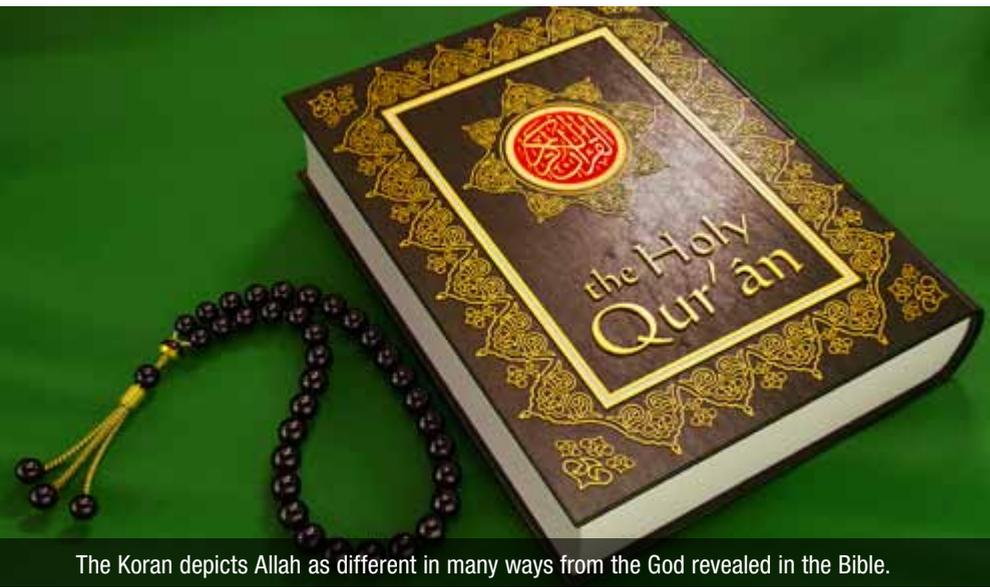
Our Creator has revealed His personhood and merciful, compassionate nature in His Word. In contrast to the Muslim view of Allah, the God of the Bible is *knowable*! In Jeremiah 9:24 He says, “But let him who glories glory in this, that he *understands and knows Me.*” Jesus Christ said in His prayer to the Father not long before His suffering and death on behalf of mankind, “And this is eternal life, that they may *know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*” (John 17:3).

There is also the matter of reliability. For example, the Koran describes four conflicting calls to Muhammad.

Muhammad first stated that Allah appeared to him in the form of a man. Later Muhammad said that he was called by the Holy Spirit. Still later he said that angels (plural) appeared to him and said that Allah had called him to be a prophet. Last of all, he said that the angel Gabriel appeared to him and revealed the Koran to him.

The Koran similarly lumps peoples, places and practices separated by thousands of years and hundreds of miles all together at the same time. For example, it has crucifixion being used at the time of the Exodus, but it didn’t come into practice until about a thousand years later.

It has Haman, a Persian official mentioned in the biblical book of Esther, working for



The Koran depicts Allah as different in many ways from the God revealed in the Bible.

**A**uthor Samuel Huntington stated in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* that “religion is a central defining characteristic of civilizations” (1998, p. 47). He’s correct, of course. Most world religions are associated with one or more of our present civilizations.

Today we live in a multipolar age of multiple civilizations. We’ll narrow our focus here to just two—Western Christian civilization and its Islamic counterpart. What sets them apart, and why are they at odds?

## Crucial differences between Christianity and Islam

The Christian religion draws its teaching

and values from a large number of books, written over a 1,500-year period, that collectively form the Bible. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles wrote down, while divinely inspired, the content of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures.

In contrast, while Islam teaches that the Bible is revealed Scripture, it also claims that the Bible has been corrupted and superseded by the Koran (or Quran, meaning “Recitation”). This book, which is about the size of the New Testament, is supposedly based on divine communication to Islam’s founder, Muhammad (A.D. 570-632). The Koran is supplemented by the Hadith (or “Report”), a traditional record of other sayings and acts of Muhammad.

While Islam and Christianity claim belief

the pharaoh in Egypt at the time of the Exodus, when that event took place a thousand years earlier. It claims that Alexander the Great was a Muslim who lived to a ripe old age, when Alexander was a Greek idolater who died in his early 30s.

These are only a few of the many conflicts not only between the Koran and the Bible, but between the Koran and historical fact.

Over the centuries these and other fundamental differences have produced profound clashes between the two disparate civilizations.

## Relationships to worldly governments differ sharply

Western civilization, largely rooted in Christianity, has always recognized that practical conflicts between citizens need resolution sooner or later. It also understands that national political authorities are in place to maintain the social order.

According to the Bible, the state deserves respect and basic compliance from its citi-

zens. Jesus Christ clearly stated, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

Two of Christ’s apostles elaborated on this basic principle. Paul wrote, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1). Peter wrote: “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s [Christ’s] sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors . . . Honor all people. Love the brotherhood [members of the Church]. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Peter 2:13-14, 17).

In sharp contrast, the ultimate goal of Islam is to bring all nations under its Islamic religious law (Sharia) *now* during this age of man—even if it means bringing down existing governments. Radical Islamic fundamentalists use suicide bombing and other gruesome forms of terrorism to accomplish this goal.

Wrote British author Roger Scruton: “The Muslim conception of holy law, point-

ing the unique way to salvation, and applying to every area of human life, involves a *confiscation of the political*. Those matters which, in Western societies, are resolved by negotiation, compromise, and the laborious work of offices and committees are [under Islamic rule] the object of immovable and eternal decrees, either laid down explicitly in the holy book [the Koran], or discerned there by some religious figurehead” (*The West and the Rest*, 2002, p. 91, emphasis in original).

By contrast, true Christians *await* their soon-to-return King of Kings to supernaturally usher in the divine Kingdom of God to rule all nations—at last bringing peace and prosperity to this chaotic world (Revelation 11:15; 20:4-6).

## Two radically different ways of life

The devastating 9/11 attacks on the United States revealed a world divided into two sharply different spheres—the Western democracies and populations propelled by radical religious fundamentalism. Islamists actually see a two-fold division of the nations—*dar al-Islam* (the “Abode of Submission”) and *dar al-harb* (the “Abode of War”).

To devout Muslims, only those countries predominantly controlled by the Islamic religion constitute the Abode of Submission (*Islam* means “submission”). The rest face infiltration, oppression and attacks by Islamic believers until they are coerced into submission. Until then, these non-Islamic nations are part of *dar al-harb*, the Abode of War.

In non-Muslim lands with a minority Islamic population, the basic strategy is to appear outwardly peaceful and cooperative. And many Muslims may well be. Yet radicals work covertly underground in carrying out subversive designs. And as their proportion of the population grows, particularly in Western nations, Muslims in increasing numbers become more assertive in demanding their “rights,” using Western freedoms to advance their cause at the expense of others.

Then, if and when the demographic tipping point arrives, the tactics switch to various types of coercion and force, using the fresh powers of a recently acquired Muslim plurality or majority. Any activity becomes permissible as long as it serves the overall end result—the advance of Islam.

But *first* those countries outside of the realm of Islam are usually asked to convert. If they refuse conversion, then the radicals feel free to use whatever means are nec-

## Over the centuries fundamental differences between Christianity and Islam have produced profound clashes between the two disparate civilizations.

## Middle East Oil and the Clash of Two Civilizations

The abundance of oil in the Middle East has aided and abetted the spread of Islam into the West and around the world. Author David Burnett comments: “Oil has given the Muslim world an economic and political power for use against the dominant Christian world. The oil is believed by Muslims to have been placed there by Allah, and is given for the

propagation of Islam. For this reason, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries are using their newfound wealth for the extension of Islam” (*Clash of Worlds*, 2002, p. 123, emphasis added).

Using this massive transfer of wealth from the West to Islamic countries, Muslims have constructed hundreds of mosques in major Western cities, established influential TV and radio stations in various places, and printed and distributed vast amounts of literature to facilitate the spread of Islam. Islamic forces are on the offensive in the West and throughout the world. If it’s not there already, Islam is coming soon to your corner of the world.



The sale of oil has led to a massive transfer of wealth from the West to the Middle East.



essary to bring these countries into the Islamic fold.

## Twin assaults on Western civilization

Not only are the radical fundamentalist elements of Islam actively working to destroy the West, but our own civilization paradoxically finds many of its political and cultural leaders and movements actually *undermining* resistance to these foreign influences that would destroy Western civilization.

By choosing political correctness over facing the hard facts of reality, we willingly participate in our own downfall. We simply don't want to confront the moral cancers that are primarily responsible for our current civilizational and cultural decline.

*Daily Mail* columnist Melanie Phillips explains: "Our [Western] culture has been upended by moral and cultural relativism, the doctrine that denies any hierarchy of values but is doctrinaire in its own enforcement. Faced with an onslaught from the

Abortion and euthanasia have gained acceptance by this misguided liberal thinking. Too many justify the murder of those not yet born and even encourage the premature death of the old and infirm among us. Marriage and family—the glue that holds society together—are redefined or discarded to meet people's personal whims.

## Islam's gains paralleled by the West's decline

Unlike Islam, the West has lost faith in its own traditional religious values. Mainstream churches have endured decades of disturbing decline. Attendance is often in near freefall. The teachings of the Bible are impugned, and even God's existence is seriously questioned in religious quarters. Western clergy now includes so-called "Christian atheists."

Note Melanie Phillips again: "*The loss of religious belief has meant the West has replaced reason and truth with ideology and prejudice, which it embraces in the*

## "If ever there was a time for the religious guardians of Western civilization to stand as its rock-solid defenders through their conspicuous moral clarity, surely this is it."

*Islamic world that correctly recognizes Western culture as decadent, we no longer know what it is we want to defend.*

"We tell ourselves that we stand for human rights, freedom, democracy, tolerance—and yet we also tell ourselves that we cannot uphold these rights because to prefer one culture over another is racist or xenophobic, even if the culture so preferred is one's own. So a liberal society by definition cannot defend itself but, in the interests of equality, must apparently accept its own obliteration" (*The World Turned Upside Down*, 2010, pp. 281-282).

"Right and wrong" becomes a matter of adhering to one's own personal standards, based on whatever culture we currently embrace—whether liberal secular, nominally Christian or any other. Anciently, King Solomon warned us that the way of life that may seem so right to us will end up in our own spiritual destruction and death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

As in the days of Israel of old, many men and women today are thinking and doing what is right in their own eyes and choosing wrongly (see Judges 17:6; 21:25). Biblical standards are first ridiculed and then largely abandoned.

manner of a secular inquisition. The result has been a kind of mass derangement, as truth and lies, right and wrong, victim and aggressor are all turned upside down.

"In medieval-style witch-hunts, scientists who are skeptical of global warming are hounded from their posts; Israel is ferociously demonized; and the United States is vilified over the war on terror—all on the basis of falsehoods and propaganda that are believed as truth" (*The World Turned Upside Down*, inside front cover).

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah foresaw this aspect of our tragic human condition today: "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness . . ." (Isaiah 5:20). Our Creator God makes His own views known through His Word of truth and judgments, which endure forever (Psalm 119:160).

God built the principle of cause and effect into the very fabric of our world. A simple biblical example: "For as the churning of milk produces butter, and wringing of the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife" (Proverbs 30:33). So the simple principle of cause and effect produces these trends among various civilizations.



## The Iranian President's Goals For Mankind

The Koran, Islam's holy book, envisions a world in which Islam will eventually dominate the entire globe. Failure to understand this basic fact blinds many Western leaders to the overall goal of Muslim leaders who take their religion seriously. Some Muslims, predominately Shiites, believe in a coming Islamic messiah whom they refer to as the *mahdi*, meaning "Guided One." This mahdi, they believe, will lead Islam to what they believe to be its rightful place as the dominant religion over the entire world, with followers of other religions either forced to convert or put in subjugation to Islam.

Though such religious fervor seems far-fetched to those in the largely secular and irreligious West, some Islamic leaders are quite open in stating this as their belief and ultimate goal. For example, in his last three speeches before the United Nations General Assembly (2009, 2010, 2011), Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad expressed his ultimate desire for the world—a new age in which the mahdi would come and establish Islam as the religion for all mankind in a world governed by the Koran. Notice these excerpts:

- UN speech in 2009: "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the universe, and peace and blessings be upon our master and prophet Muhammad . . . O God hasten the arrival of Iman Mahdi" (Sept. 23, 2009).

- UN speech in 2010: "The Holy Qu'ran [Koran] is the Divine book and the eternal miracle of the Prophet of Islam [Muhammad]" (Sept. 23, 2010).

- UN speech in 2011: "A promising future for humanity . . . will be built when humanity initiates to [tread] the path of the divine prophets and the righteous under the leadership of Iman Al-Mahdi, the Ultimate Savior of mankind . . . The creation of a supreme and ideal society with the arrival of a perfect human being who is a true and sincere lover of all human beings, is the guaranteed promise of Allah" (Sept. 22, 2011).

The Bible, however, presents a very different picture. The apostle Peter said of Jesus Christ: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The perfect human being, without sin, came to this earth some 2,000 years ago. To learn more, request or download our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

# The Bible and the Koran:

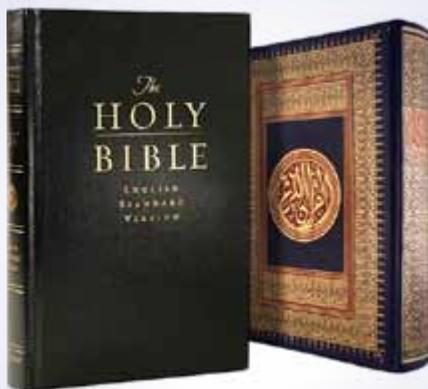
## A Fundamental Difference in Approach

Before the invention of printing made the Christian Bible widely available, certain of the faithful were very adept at memorizing large portions of the Holy Scriptures. Today we are blessed to have many translations of the Bible along with multiple commentaries, dictionaries and other biblical helps available for studying God's Word as never before in history.

Our study of Scripture involves reason. The human ability to reason, analyze and imagine is a wonderful gift from God, springing from our having been created in His image (see Genesis 1:26-27). Clearly the Bible encourages the proper use of our reasoning powers. "Come and let us reason together, says the LORD" (Isaiah 1:18).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ asked His disciples many questions, reasoning with them on a daily basis. On one occasion a non-Israelite woman asked Christ to heal her daughter of demon

possession. At first He replied that the children in a household should be fed first—referring to the Jewish people of His day. But she reasoned with Him in a right attitude, and then He gladly complied with her request, praising her faith.



In contrast, the Islamic approach to the Koran differs markedly from the biblical model of reasoning. Author David Burnett states: "In Islam, it is the revelation given by Allah that is all important, not intellectual knowledge by analysis. It is the Qur'an [Koran] that is the embodiment of that revelation and so for the Muslim it is beyond question or reason. . . . The importance is not in understanding it, but the significance depends on its own intrinsic power. Thus the Qur'an should be memorized but not necessarily understood. Learning is primarily by rote and not by deductive logic" (*Clash of Worlds*, 2002, pp. 116-117, emphasis added).

Our minds matter! Christianity is not a mindless religion. God does not want us to suspend our reasoning powers when clearly confronted with questionable or hopelessly ambiguous information. Our Creator made us with the capacity for rational thought, a divine attribute of the image of God. Of course, we must in humility reason with God's Word and not exalt our human reasoning above His clear revelation (Proverbs 3:5).

In any case, trust in God and His Word is to be a reasoned faith, not a blind faith.

We see one end result all around us: Islam grows in numbers and strength while the West continues to decline. The adherents of Islam do not question Allah or the teachings of the Koran, however contradictory we Westerners feel that they are. But we in the supposedly Christian West are cavalier about foolishly and disrespectfully questioning God and the Bible.

God laments: "Has a nation [ever] changed its gods, which are not [even] gods? But My people have changed their Glory [the true God] for what does not profit" (Jeremiah 2:11).

### What should the West do?

The ideal reaction of Western civilization would be to follow the advice offered by Melanie Phillips in the *Daily Mail*: "If ever there was a time for the religious guardians of Western civilization to stand as its rock-solid defenders through their conspicuous moral clarity, surely this is it" ("Paralysis and Moral Confusion on Piazza Mahatma Gandhi (Otherwise Known as St Paul's)," Nov. 8, 2011).

But the likelihood of this seems very remote. So it comes down to your personal choices.

Your relationship with God must be at the very heart of your existence. Jesus Christ tells you exactly how to approach these end-time trends and events:

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your

hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the earth. *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 21:34-36, emphasis added throughout).

The alluring deceits of this age with its ungodly entertainment, its focus on gratifying the self and its multiple distractions will entice you to follow its false ways. The apostle John warns God's people: "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).

In pursuit of the global restoration of His righteous ways (Acts 3:19-21), God is in the process of bringing this evil age of man to a close. Jesus Christ instructs us to pray, "*Thy kingdom come*" (Matthew 6:10, King James Version). Our Creator will answer that prayer!

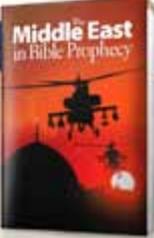
But first He will teach the nations some very hard lessons. As Jesus said of the events leading up to His return, "*For these*

*are the days of vengeance*, that all things which are written [in the prophecies of the Bible] may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22).

This will be a time of traumatic reckoning. Jesus also said of that time: "It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive" (Matthew 24:21:22, Revised English Bible).

As the end of this age draws closer, it is high time for us to shift the focus of our lives onto God and His marvelous plan for mankind! **GN**

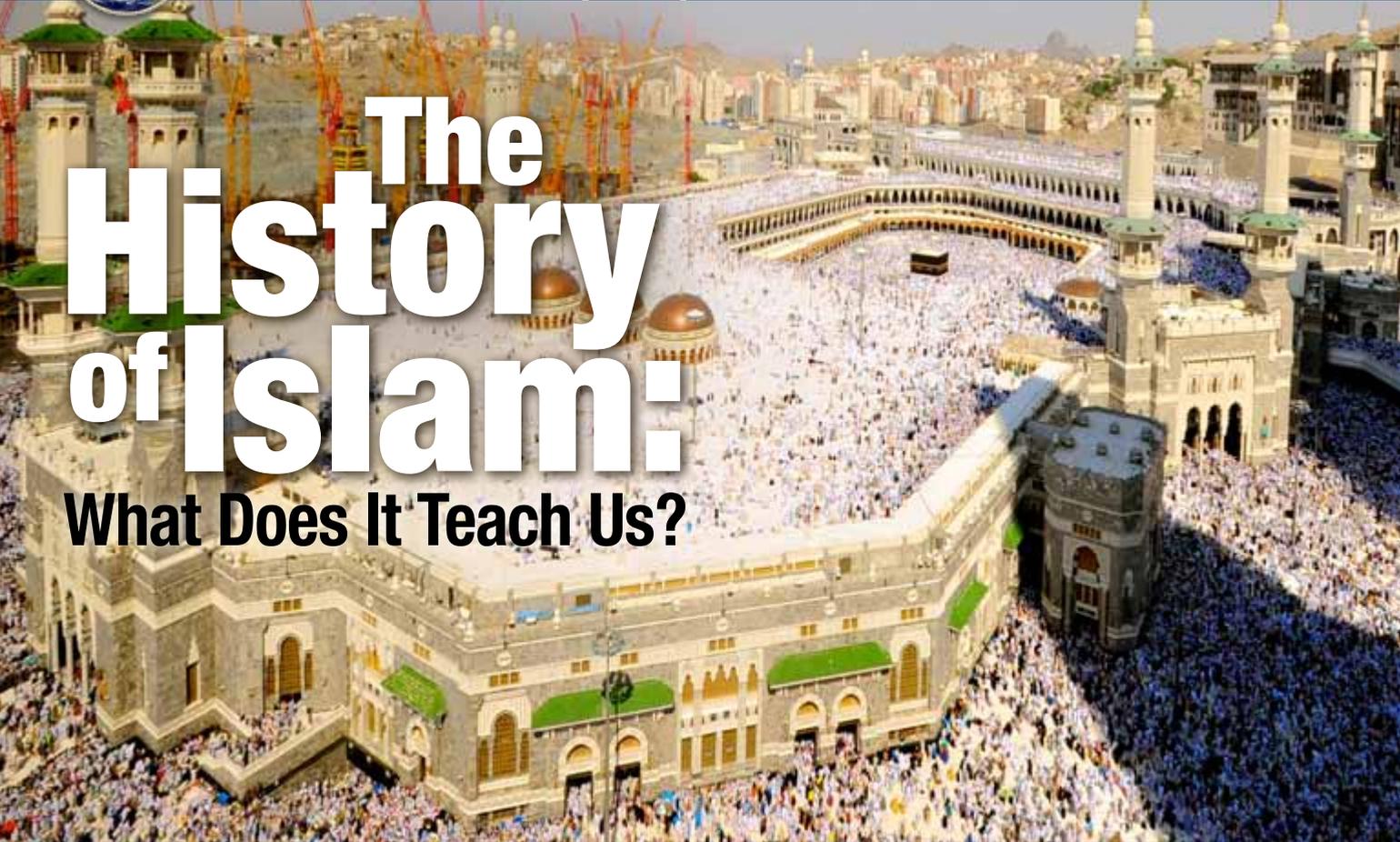
Learn More



Download or request your free copy of the booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. It focuses on the fact that the Middle East region will be where the crucial events of end-time prophecy culminate, and explains the eventual fate of Islam when properly understood in the light of the framework of Bible prophecy. This eye-opening booklet will give you a much clearer picture of where the Western and Islamic nations are really headed. And be sure to read the section "What Should You Do?" on pages 74-75, which explains the steps you can personally take to ensure your own salvation.

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

[www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)



Thousands of Muslim pilgrims flock to the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, during the annual Hajj, one of the five religious duties of Islam.

**When and how did the religion of Islam come into existence? What are its values and beliefs? How did it rise to dominate many nations? And will it ultimately persist? by Noel Hornor**

**T**he two largest religions in the world are Christianity and Islam. Christianity is the largest with about 2 billion followers, and Islam isn't far behind at around 1.5 billion. If present trends continue, it's expected that Islam, with a rate of growth four times that of Christianity, will become the world's largest religion in the next 20 years. What does this mean for the world?

At times the followers of these two faiths have lived alongside one another in relative peace. But often their interactions have been punctuated by hostility, violence and war.

The most recent major explosion that rocked and shocked the Western world occurred Sept. 11, 2001, when Muslim hijackers flew four U.S. airliners into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field, killing almost 3,000 Americans and citizens of a number of other countries. The United States was transformed almost overnight, as the need for security at home and abroad, including American

involvement in two foreign wars, have placed a severe drain on its treasury and helped lead the world's only military superpower to the verge of financial collapse.

The fortune that America has expended continues to present it with critical choices regarding security issues and its ability to prevent future attacks. U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has stated that the looming reductions in military spending will be devastating. Yet certain cuts are inevitable if America is to remain financially afloat. The encroachment toward bankruptcy will surely result in chinks in America's defensive armor, which others will certainly seek to exploit.

If the past is any indication, Islam will continue to play a major role in geopolitical events. It's no coincidence that the "Arab Spring" (with its toppling of Arab dictators), the never-ending conflict over Israel, and Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons continue to dominate our news headlines. The Middle East has long been the "ground zero" of

Bible prophecy, and understanding Islam and its history helps us understand why.

**A long cultural advance through conquest**

Islam began in Arabia six centuries after the time of Jesus Christ with its founder Muhammad. He gained a following that, after his death, soon swept across the Middle East, North Africa and beyond—carrying with it a distinct culture. One historian explains, "Muhammad was one of the cleverest leaders in human history because he built a culture so strong that it has lasted for fourteen hundred years with very little change" (Mark Gabriel, *Culture Clash*, 2007, p. xvi).

It helps if we understand that Islam is more than a religion. It is a way of life into which true believers immerse themselves. "A Muslim person is indoctrinated and programmed by that system, though he may not realize it. He grows up in that way of life. He cannot think to ask if this is right or wrong. His mind cannot go beyond that line that Muhammad drew" (p. 3).

The faith is primarily an imposed one—at times by force.

When many think of Islam today, the word *jihad* frequently comes to mind, typically thought of as "holy war." The word of

itself, however, does not necessarily imply violence. It simply means “struggle” and can refer to a spiritual struggle within oneself. But it can and also does mean the struggle for expanding the territory of Islam.

“The semantic meaning of the Arabic term *jihad* has no relation to holy war or even war in general. It derives, rather from the root *j.h.d.*, the meaning of which is to strive, exert oneself, or take extraordinary pains” (Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*, 1999, p. 16). Yet for a large portion of Islamic history, many of its followers have adopted a pattern of aggression and bloodshed, which they justify as “holy war.”

History shows that Muhammad engaged in warfare for much of his adult life. And the Islamic religion requires complete obeisance to this human leader, regularly referred to by Muslims as “the perfect man.”

Much of the teaching of Islam opposes the teachings of Jesus, who said His disciples should be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). Jesus even commanded all His followers that they should pray for their enemies who persecuted them and reviled them (verse 44).

Militant Muslims, however, in accordance with Islam’s holy book, the Koran (or

in the city of Mecca in what is now Saudi Arabia. His early life, as religious scholar Huston Smith explains, “was cradled in tragedy, for his father died a few days before he was born, his mother when he was six, and his grandfather, who cared for him after his mother’s death, when he was eight” (quoted by John Miller and Aaron Kenedi, *Inside Islam*, 2002, p. 15). Muhammad was then raised by his uncle and eventually became a trader, traveling throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

At the time of his birth, Mecca was already viewed as a holy place due to its being a center of idolatry and religious practices. The city was the home of the Kaaba, a cube-shaped structure about 50 feet high and 35 by 40 feet at its base. It originally housed hundreds of images of tribal gods, as well as a black meteorite, which those who worshipped there believed had been sent from heaven.

Even though it was a pre-Islamic pagan shrine, the Kaaba became and remains the central focus of a Muslim’s pilgrimage to Mecca. Every Muslim who is physically and financially capable of doing so is expected to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, known as a *hajj*, at some time in his life. This is one of

the Greeks” (p. 11). Of course, Judaism and post-apostolic Christianity also incorporated Greek falsehoods.

In line with corrupted Christianity, Muhammad embraced the pagan concept of the immortality of the soul and accompanying belief in eternal torment in hell. (For the truth on these matters, request or download our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

### Encounter with the spirit realm

As an adult, Muhammad became accustomed to frequenting a cave on Mount Hira on the outskirts of Mecca in search of solitude. It was here, at the age of 40, that Muhammad claimed the angel Gabriel revealed Allah’s word to him for the first time. Historians sum up Muhammad’s version of events this way:

“One day without warning a voice spoke to him. It must have been the first time that the sense of something extraordinary had come to him so clearly . . . The Voice said three words in Arabic which were to shake the world. They translate into English: ‘You are the Messenger of God’” (Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad*, 1980, p. 71).

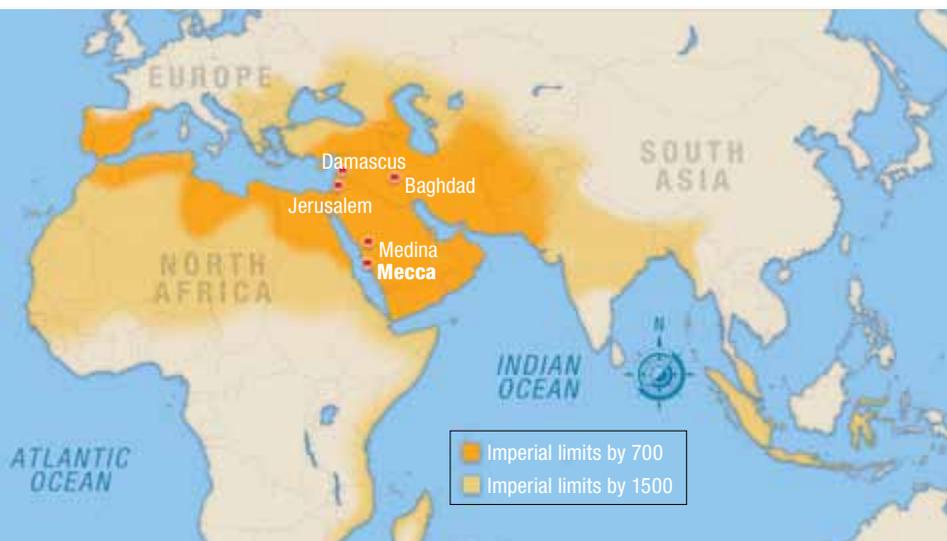
As Huston Smith relates: “Soon from this mountain cave was to sound the greatest phrase of the Arabic language; the deep, electrifying cry that was to rally a people and explode their power to the limits of the known world: a ilaha illa ‘Llah! There is no god but [Allah] . . . A voice falls from heaven saying ‘You are the appointed one’” (quoted by Miller and Kenedi, p. 16).

“The words . . . came to Muhammad in manageable segments over twenty-three years through voices that seemed at first to vary and sometimes sounded like ‘the reverberating of bells,’ but which gradually condensed into a single voice that identified itself as Gabriel’s” (p. 21).

Did this really happen? Not as attributed, for God would not have sent the angel Gabriel to communicate anything contrary to true Scripture—and these messages, while they contained occasional right teachings, contradicted the Bible in various respects. So there are really two alternatives here: Either Muhammad was a charlatan who made this up or he actually encountered a fallen angel, a demonic spirit, posing as Gabriel.

The latter possibility should not be considered farfetched, as demons are involved in false religion (see 1 Corinthians 10:20), and Satan himself appears as “an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Muhammad stated that in the first visita-



Islam greatly expanded its reach in waves of conquests during the 7th and 15th centuries.

Quran), seek to annihilate, enslave or subjugate their enemies—anyone who does not accept Islam. They cite Koranic verses such as Sura 2:193, which says, “Fight against them until idolatry [worship of any god other than Allah] is no more and [Allah’s] religion reigns supreme.”

### Muhammad’s early religious exposure

Muhammad was born around A.D. 570

the five “pillars,” or religious duties, of Islam.

As Muhammad grew and traveled, he became exposed to a variety of religions—including Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism—and philosophical concepts. It should come as no surprise that the religion he founded was syncretistic—blending religious teachings and customs. “Religiously it stands in the Abrahamic family of religions, while philosophically it builds on



tion from Gabriel, the angel ordered him to recite this revelation to others to spread Allah's message. He shared these visions with his wife Khadijah, his cousin Ali and his friend Abu Bakr. This small group became his first converts.

Most of Muhammad's recitations at the time promoted compassion, kindness, honesty and charity. Others, however, went against prevailing religious beliefs of the day. Some railed against unfair contracts and usury and provoked resistance from powerful business people in Mecca. His teachings

## “War is not a sidebar of history for Islam; it is the main vehicle for religious expansion.”

that one should worship no god but Allah brought him into conflict with those in Mecca who worshiped all manner of gods and goddesses.

### The Night Journey and the flight to Medina

In 615 some of Muhammad's followers fled to Ethiopia. In 619 Khadijah died. And a year later Muhammad experienced his so-called Night Journey, or Night of Ascent, a vision in which he was supposedly guided by the angel Gabriel through heaven into the presence of Allah.

Muhammad related that Gabriel led him to a white mule with wings attached to its thighs—the same mule that had supposedly carried other prophets, including Abraham. Muhammad says that he got on and went high into the sky and then was taken to *masjid al-aqsa*, “the farthest mosque,” where he met many prophets, including Moses and Jesus. (After Muhammad's time this location was taken to be a reference to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem—though Jerusalem is nowhere mentioned in the Koran.)

Muhammad says his journey continued with his ascent to heaven, passing through seven heavenly realms. At the seventh level, he supposedly saw an old man whom Gabriel identified as Abraham. Gabriel then took Muhammad into paradise, where he spoke to Allah.

Supposedly Allah instructed Muhammad regarding prayers, telling Muhammad that Muslims must utter 50 prayers a day. Moses, however, later told Muhammad to go back to Allah to have this unbearable number reduced. So Muhammad did, and Allah reduced them to 10. But Moses then told Muhammad this was still too many, whereupon Muhammad asked Allah to again reduce the number, which he did—to five.

Muhammad then returned to Mecca.

Following Muhammad's directive, devout Muslims still pray five times a day—offering formal prayers before sunrise, at noon, in the late afternoon, at sunset and in the evening before retiring for the night. For centuries individuals have been appointed to announce these times to Muslim communities by loudly chanting the call to prayer.

The next significant chapter in Muslim history occurred in 622, when Muhammad and his followers, facing increasing opposition, left Mecca for Medina. Before

and began the institutionalization of Islam.

### “A fingerprint of blood through every page”

Muhammad continued to extend Islamic control in Arabia until his death in Medina in 632. Afterward, his followers continued to use warfare in their religious aims. They had the prophet himself as their example: “Muhammad's military campaigns were, in one sense, the beginning of the Muslim conquests. His example showed that armed force was going to be an acceptable and important element first in the defense of the new religion and then in its expansion” (Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests*, 2007, p. 48).

The Koran contains many statements that, when taken at face value, call for violence and bloodshed against those who refuse to submit to Allah and accept Islam. For example, Sura 9:5 states, “Slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them”—unless and until they convert to Islam.

These words allow for beastly brutality as well as magnanimous mercy. What way of life has often prevailed? Here is the observation offered by one former radical Muslim: “Islam has left a fingerprint of blood through every page of its history, beginning with *Hijra* up to this very day . . . From the time of *Hijra*, when Muhammad and his followers emigrated from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622, up to this hour, terror and fear have been the strategy of Islam” (Reza Safa, *Inside Islam*, 1996, pp. 36, 47).

Another source catalogues some of the violent expansion: “During the first thousand years of military competition between the cross and the crescent, Muslim standards waved in triumph over countless battlefields as the ghazis [tribal warriors] who followed Mohammed's revelation annihilated Christian armies and devoured ‘infidel’ states, ultimately dominating half of the territory we now include in Europe. Arab cavalry raided north of the Pyrenees [into France], and Muslim emirs ruled over the Iberian Peninsula [of Spain and Portugal] for centuries.

“In a later wave of Muslim conquests, the Turks rampaged across the Balkans, their janissaries [infantry units of the sultan] failing them only at the plague-haunted gates of Vienna. Tatars [central Asian Turks] thrust deep into Poland, Arabs mastered Sicily, and the Greeks lost their independence for half a millennium . . .

“The greatest of struggles between civilizations produced history's longest military confrontation . . . the thirteen-hundred-year



the advent of Islam, the city of Medina was known as Yathrib, but it was personally renamed by Muhammad as Medina. Medina in Arabic was *madinat an-nabi*, which means “city of the prophet.” It's regarded as the second holiest place in Islam (after Mecca) and is Muhammad's burial place. The journey to Medina by Muhammad and his disciples is called the *Hegira* or *Hijra*, which means flight or departure. This event marks year 1 of the Muslim calendar.

In Medina, Muhammad fought against and ultimately banished or executed his Jewish opponents and their political allies, took control of the city and built the first Islamic mosque.

In 624, Muhammad's followers in Medina defeated opponents from Mecca at the Battle of Badr, and Muhammad returned to Mecca to rule. His followers destroyed the images of tribal gods in the Kaaba and marketplace

# The Koran vs. The Bible

The messages that became the Koran, or Quran, make up a volume about four-fifths the size of the New Testament. The Koran is divided into 114 chapters, or *suras*, which are arranged in order of decreasing length, with the exception of the brief first sura, which is part of a Muslim's daily prayer.

Muslims reject the Bible—and by extension, Christianity and Judaism—as being corrupt and superseded by the Koran. “Muslims regard the Old and New Testaments as sharing two defects from which the Quran is free . . . They record only portions of the Truth . . . [and] the Jewish and Christian Bibles were partially corrupted in transmission, a fact that explains the occasional discrepancies that occur between their accounts and parallel ones in the Quran . . . The Quran [is] the final and infallible revelation of God's will. Its second chapter says explicitly: ‘This is the Scripture whereof there is no doubt’” (John Miller and Aaron Kenedi, *Inside Islam*, 2002, p. 22).

“Muhammad was at political odds with the

Christians when he had acquired a certain amount of supplementary information concerning Christian beliefs. . . The Christians were wrong in saying that Jesus . . . was the son of Allah . . . There was only one God, Allah . . . He [Jesus] was not God . . . Islam, the last prophetic revelation, which had been granted to the Arabs, was therefore the supreme and definitive religion” (Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad*, 1980, p. 240).

There are many conflicts between the Bible and various passages in the Koran. Sura 19:34-35 refers to Jesus as merely the son of Mary and denies that He was the Son of God. Sura 4:157 denies that Jesus was killed in the crucifixion, saying that it was another who looked like Him.

Sura 61:6 states: “Jesus son of Mary, . . . said to the Israelites: ‘I am sent forth to you from [Allah] to confirm the Torah already revealed, and to give news of an apostle that will come after me whose name is Ahmad [the Praised One]’”—the latter being a reference to Muhammad, whose name meant “Praiseworthy.” Jesus is here presented as

declaring Himself as merely the forerunner of the greater and final prophet Muhammad.

The Bible, of course, presents Jesus as the Son of God, the ultimate Prophet and the way to salvation. As Paul wrote, “There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Yet based on what the Koran states, “Muslims respect Jesus as one of perhaps 124,000 messengers or prophets Allah has sent, and one of the 25 listed in the Quran, but not as our Redeemer” (Marvin Olasky, “Islam vs. Liberty,” *World*, Sept. 10, 2011).

Some branches of Islam teach that Jesus will return to earth—not as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, as the Bible teaches, but rather to accompany the *mahdi*, an Islamic messiah, and to convert the world, including Christians, to Islam by force.

Clearly, there is a stark contrast between the Holy Book of God and the revelation to Muhammad and teachings of Islam. And there cannot be two opposing revelations from the same God, as God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Only one source is true—the Bible. For evidence of its trustworthiness, send for or download our free booklet *Is the Bible True?*

contest for hegemony over the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe never really ceased . . . The intervals of peace were simply fits of exhaustion” (Ralph Peters, *Endless War*, 2010, pp. 3-4).

## War a primary vehicle for Islamic expansion

Here is the observation of two brothers who were reared as Muslims but read the Holy Bible and came to believe in Jesus (both of them now longtime professors and administrators at Christian colleges):

“Several conclusions must be drawn from the fourteen hundred years of shared Muslim-Christian history:

“With the notable exception of the Crusades, Muslims have initiated almost all wars, due largely to the philosophy of jihad.

“War is not a sidebar of history for Islam; it is the main vehicle for religious expansion. It is the Muslim duty to bring world peace via the sword . . .

“While modern people are familiar only with the defensive Islam of the last three hundred years [standing against the encroachment of Western culture and imperialism], the religion has never forgotten the previous one thousand years of conquest in the cause of Allah. It is this traditional conquering Islam that has reemerged” (Ergun Caner and Emil Caner, *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's*

*Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs*, 2009, p. 74).

The two former Muslims go on to show the modern terrorist mindset as in line with that history—and completely contrary to Christian thinking:

“The Hadith [the passed-down compilation of reports about Muhammad's statements and actions that Muslims consider supplemental to and clarifying of the Koran] explicitly states that the Muslim is promised eternal victory in the act of holy war. Victory includes both the success of battle, the promise of eternal forgiveness, and translation to the highest level of paradise . . .

“The terrorists who died in the bombing [of Sept. 11, 2001] sincerely believed that they would be forgiven of all sin by Allah. They followed a route completely antithetical to the Christian mind, since Muslim beliefs are antipathetic to the Christian faith. Since Allah is completely removed from his people and is in no way incarnational or personal, the terrorists followed the route imposed upon them by the only sources they trusted and that guaranteed them paradise: the literal rendering of the Hadith and Quran” (p. 195).

According to the teachings of the Bible, such thinking is wholly wrong. The servants of the true God in this age are not to engage in military conquest of the world or attacks against those with different beliefs. Rather, we are to reach out to the world with the

good news of God's coming reign. And as much as possible, we are to be, as earlier mentioned, peacemakers.

## Peace through Jesus Christ's reign

Yet it should be mentioned that God will ultimately take over the entire world when Jesus Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God over all nations. And this will include wiping out forces that fight against Him. However, this conquering of the globe will not be by human followers but through the direct intervention of Jesus Christ coming in power and glory with the hosts of heaven. Moreover, this taking over is to save humanity from itself and bring about the real peace the world has long yearned for.

Tragically, in this age of deception the whole world is confused and divided, with religious deception spawning untold wars. The conflict will continue until that time when our Lord Jesus Christ appears from on high to quash all false religion that has led to so much bloodshed and to bring eventual eternal joy and rest.

Ultimately, the throngs of ages past, present and future will live together without fear throughout the vast reaches of eternity. Then there will be no Islam—nor any other false religion. For all will know the truth. And the truth will make us free (John 8:32). Let us all pray for that day! **GN**



## Behind the Headlines

# Islam in Europe: A Return to Religious Intolerance?

For centuries Europeans fought wars over religion. Eventually, the proliferation of Protestant denominations led to greater tolerance. But now religious intolerance is back due to demographic changes that are changing the face of the continent. *by Melvin Rhodes*

**C**harlie Hebdo is a French satirical magazine that holds nothing sacred. But it may now have to do a rethink. After humorously listing Muhammad, the founder of Islam, as a guest editor for a recent issue, its offices were firebombed. So much for free speech!

This isn't the first time Europeans have been attacked for poking fun at Islam as they have long done with Christianity. Two years ago a Danish cartoonist had to receive constant police protection after drawing cartoons that poked fun at the Islamic religion and its founding prophet. Incensed Muslims burned embassies and churches, and more than 200 people were killed in riots around the world.

More than 20 years ago, Indian author Salman Rushdie famously had a *fatwa* (religious ruling) issued against him authorizing his execution for writing a novel that parodied Islam. Protecting him around the clock for years cost British taxpayers a small fortune!

In the Netherlands, Theo van Gogh was not so fortunate. A Dutch filmmaker responsible for producing a short documentary about the severe mistreatment of Muslim women, Van Gogh was assassinated seven years ago—being shot eight times and stabbed, with his body nearly beheaded on the streets of Amsterdam.

His female associate Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a native Somali who had sought asylum in Holland and been elected to the Dutch parliament, fled again, this time to the United States. Prior to Van Gogh, Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, head of an anti-Muslim-immigrant party, was also murdered for comments he had made about Islam.

The title of Van Gogh's film was *Submission*, the word here carrying a double meaning since that's what the word *Islam* itself means.

The word should make people think. How is "submission" reconcilable with Western values, freedom and individual rights, including the right to be openly critical of or make fun of another religion?

Such long-cherished freedoms are clearly at stake. The producer of *Submission* cancelled a February 2005 screening of the film at the Rotterdam International Film Festival. "Does this mean I'm yielding to terror?" he said. "Yes. But I'm not a politician or an anti-terrorist police officer; I'm a film producer" (quoted by Bruce Bawer, *While Europe Sleeps*, 2006, p. 216).

Ironically, the theme of the festival was "censored film." And replacing *Submission* on the schedule were two movies that portrayed suicide bombers sympathetically!

Obviously, Islam now wields great influence in Europe. But this is a recent development. Such influence was not even an issue 50 years ago, prior to massive immigration from Third World countries into Western European nations. Immigration has fundamentally altered the status quo in every corner of the West. High birthrates among Muslim immigrants (and low birthrates among native Europeans) have exacerbated the problem.

European governments over the years have given little thought to the growing numbers of Muslims and the dangers this poses to social cohesion. Thinking only as far ahead as the next election, politicians have largely ignored the growing threat to traditional liberties posed by Islamic intolerance.

Ignorance of history and of other cultures contributes to this. Additionally, at a time in history where few in Europe take religion seriously, it's hard for many there to conceive that others do. Such a lack of awareness is perilous.

With Islam's growing influence, it's important to recognize that its adherents have long displayed intolerance toward other religions. European multiculturalism has allowed this to grow in Europe despite its intent to promote tolerance. Could Muslim intolerance create a European backlash against multiculturalism, sending Europe back to its own former tradition of authoritarianism and religious intolerance? What do history and the Bible reveal?

### Islamic intolerance on the rise today

The roots of Islamic intolerance lie in the religion itself and in the countries of origin of the immigrants. Surprisingly, most of the intolerance seems to come from the second and third generations of immigrants, who are more radical.

In an effort to reconcile their traditional religion with their Western upbringing, many second-generation Muslims are increasingly militant. The 2005 suicide bombings on the London subway and bus system that killed 52 and injured more than 700 were perpetrated by second-generation Muslims, born in Britain, who came from wealthy backgrounds. Poverty has nothing to do with this.

In October, the BBC's World News America covered the Tunisian elections made possible by the so-called Arab Spring, the series of revolutions that led to the fall of Arab dictators in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2011. Tunisia was described as the most liberal nation in North Africa. It was clear that many young people were Westernized.

Those asked by a BBC interviewer what they wanted all replied "democracy." Further questioning revealed that they thought people should be allowed to decide things for themselves, including religion. But when asked if people should be free to *change* religion, converting from Islam to Christianity, *not one* was supportive.

Clearly, there's a limit to freedom!

In nearby Egypt the Coptic Christians now make up just 10 percent of the country's population, down from 25 percent just a few decades ago. (When Egypt was part of the

Byzantine Empire, they made up closer to 100 percent.) Again, this reflects increasing intolerance in the region. Since the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's Coptic Christians have been the target of riots, murders and church burnings.

On Nov. 11, 2011, Armistice Day in the United Kingdom (marking the anniversary of the end of World War I), Muslim demonstrators protested against the British military in the town of Barking, just outside London, even breaking the two-minute silence observed

the Roman church over the centuries, but it maintained a powerful grip on the European continent through the Middle Ages. The grip was not significantly broken over parts of Europe until the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Yet that was not the end of intolerance—even in Protestant countries.

In November 2011, Queen Elizabeth II attended a church service to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible. This version of the Bible has been described as the most influential book in

1640s was religious—between Puritans and Anglicans, respectively supporters of Parliament and the Crown. The Crown was upholding the traditional Catholic teaching of the divine right of kings, even though the country had broken with Rome a century earlier. Ironically, King James' call for a new translation of the Bible a generation earlier had been an attempt to reconcile these differences.

It wasn't until the proliferation of Protestant denominations that religious tolerance became the norm, at least in the Protestant countries of northwestern Europe. "If there were only one religion in England," wrote Voltaire in his *Philosophical Letters*, "we should have to fear despotism; if there were two, they would cut each other's throats; but there are thirty, and they live in peace and happiness" (quoted by Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 1991, p 14).

## Muslim intolerance in past centuries

Now religious tolerance is once again strained, this time because of Islam. The immigrants who have come to Europe from North Africa originate from countries that have little history of tolerance. This is also true of Muslim immigrants in the United Kingdom who have come from India and Pakistan, where conflict between Hindus and Muslims has been a major problem for centuries.

This is not to say that Islam cannot show tolerance. The Moors, who ruled Spain for more than six centuries following its conquest in the eighth century, were somewhat tolerant toward Jews and Christians. More recently, the Ottoman Empire in its later years also allowed followers of the other two religions to practice their faith. However, historically Muslim rule has generally led to the oppression of non-Muslims aimed at converting them to Islam.

Few Europeans today will have any knowledge of what happened to the greatest power in Christendom a thousand years ago, the Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire, ruled from Constantinople—formerly known as Byzantium and now Istanbul, Turkey. A thousand years ago, the population of what is now Turkey was 99 percent Christian—the Byzantines professing Eastern Orthodoxy (which split from Catholicism in the 11th century). Today Turkey is officially 99 percent Muslim.

On a recent tour of Turkey, I asked our Turkish tour guide on three occasions what happened to the Christians following the fall of Constantinople in 1453. I never did get an answer. One of the museums we visited emphasized the tolerance shown by Mehmed II, the sultan of the victorious Ottoman



In London, Muslims protest the publication of cartoons depicting Muhammad in a Danish paper.

each year in memory of those Britons who gave their lives in wars for Britain's freedom.

This disrespectful act had never happened before. Many were rightly shocked. It shows at the very least that Muslims do not identify with Britain or its past, clearly a failure of assimilation. The group responsible is called "Muslims Against Crusaders" (MAC), a reference to the Western troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, whom they liken to the Crusaders who fought to regain lands from the Muslims almost 1,000 years ago.

A counterdemonstration by the right-wing English Defense League (EDL) led to clashes. Increasing intolerance among Muslims is likely to lead to greater intolerance among other Britons who feel betrayed by the ruling intellectual elites who have imposed multiculturalism on them, against the will of the majority.

## A brief history of Europe's religious intolerance

This is not the first time that Europeans have experienced religious intolerance. Since Roman Catholicism became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century A.D., a rather intolerant system was perpetuated. There were challenges to

world (not just British) history. It remains a best seller to this day. What few understand is the sacrifices that were made to give mankind a Bible in the English language. People gave their lives in horrible deaths, some burned at the stake by the church, before we could read the Bible—a book increasingly ignored in the Western world.

After the Protestant Reformation, a new religious intolerance swept Europe. The Thirty Years' War (1618-48) began as a conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the territories of the Holy Roman Empire. The result of this religious intolerance on both sides was one of the highest death tolls, proportionate to population, of any conflict in history.

Up to a third of Germany's population died, with some regions affected more than others. Wurttemberg lost three-quarters of its people during the war. Brandenburg saw half its population perish, while in other areas the death toll was two thirds. The male population declined by half. The areas occupied by Czechs saw a one-third decrease in population due to war, disease, famine and expulsion of thousands of Protestants.

The root of the English Civil War in the



Empire. According to the museum display, he allowed the Christians to continue in their faith. However, the record of history says something quite different.

“By the time Mehmed left Constantinople, most of its Christian inhabitants had departed too. Many were marched to Adrianople (Edirne in modern Turkey, near the border with Greece and Bulgaria) where there was a flourishing slave market and where lines of captives in chains, begging in the streets, were a familiar sight . . .

“Others were taken out by ship bound for slave markets in Cairo and other great cities of the Islamic world. Mehmed himself dispatched some four hundred young men as gifts to the Muslim rulers of Egypt, Tunisia and Grenada. The vast majority of these captives would have spent the rest of their lives in servitude with no hope of seeing their families, homes or countries ever again” (Jonathan Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 2010, p. 220.)

One of the little-understood legacies of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires was the Balkan wars of the 1990s in southeastern Europe. Who were the combatants in these recent wars? Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosnians, Albanians and Kosovars. The conflicts there should effectively illustrate the foolhardiness of trying to mix different religions in the same area. Historically, it hasn't worked—except, as Voltaire showed, in recent history in Protestant countries, among a multitude of Protestant denominations.

### Duty to spread Islam and past clashes

When I was a student 45 years ago in England, where I grew up, one of my closest friends at the time was a Muslim immigrant from India. I remember asking him once what he could do as a lone Muslim in the community in which we lived. His reply was that it is the responsibility of each and every Muslim to spread Islam wherever he goes.

I was reminded of this a few years ago when I watched a lecture on C-Span given by Salman Rushdie in New York. He said (paraphrased): “When a Muslim moves from the Middle East to Detroit, he is not looking to take advantage of the American way of life to better himself. Rather, he sees himself as part of the advance guard to spread Islam to his new country.”

A radical cleric in London put it more bluntly in stating that he looked forward to the day when the Islamic symbol, a crescent moon flag, will fly over Buckingham Palace and the White House!

When we look back at history, we see that Islam has often threatened Europe. In 711

the Moors landed at Gibraltar. By 732 they had reached Paris. They were defeated at the Battle of Tours (Poitiers) by Charles Martel. If they hadn't been turned back, Islamic troops might have conquered the entire continent of Europe.

Martel's grandson, Charlemagne, was crowned by the pope as Holy Roman Emperor, the emperor of the West to rival the emperor of the East in Constantinople. The pope wanted a Catholic emperor loyal to him and one who could unite Europe against the threat of Islam.

In 1095, it was the pope again who rallied Europeans to a Crusade to regain control of Christian sites in the Holy Land, which had been captured by Muslim invaders who had aggressively spread their new faith and driven out the Christian Byzantines. (The Crusades lasted two centuries before Muslims again gained the upper hand, taking control of the Holy Land until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I.)

In the 1500s and 1600s, it was again the church that rallied Christian forces in defense of Vienna against invading Islamic forces of the Ottoman Empire. As with the Islamic invasion through Spain into France eight centuries earlier, had the Christian forces not prevailed, all of Europe might have been Muslim to this day.

### A coming clash between Europe and Islam

The Bible shows us that, prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ, the world will see a revived Roman Empire rise once again in Europe. Revelation 17:3 shows church involvement: “And I saw a woman [symbolic of a church] sitting on a scarlet beast [the revived Roman Empire], which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns”—a reference to attempts to revive the empire throughout history.

Daniel 11 foretells a coming clash between this resurrected Roman Empire and an evidently Islamic power in the Middle East. “At the time of the end the king of the South [i.e., land south of Israel—historically Egypt and a region now dominated by Islam] shall attack him [the European power to the north]; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through” (verse 40).

Could it be that the Church of Rome will once again rally Europeans to the defense of Christendom against the threats posed by Islam?

Interestingly, after the firebombs that

destroyed the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, Europeans rallied to defend the satirical magazine, whose supporters included politicians who had been targets of the publication's humor.

An article in *The Wall Street Journal* pointed out that *Time* magazine and National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States took a different approach—blaming the publication itself for its lack of sensitivity toward Islam!

“Writing about the attack on *Charlie's* offices, Bruce Crumley, Paris bureau chief for *Time* magazine, did nothing to hide his contempt—not for the attackers, but for the magazine itself. ‘Not only are such Islamophobic antics futile and childish,’ he wrote, ‘but they also openly beg for the very violent responses from extremists their authors claim to proudly defy in the name of common good’ (Anne Jolis, “A French Lesson in Free Speech,” Nov. 10, 2011).

Clearly, some are quite willing to appease radical Islam and are blind to its true nature.

But many Europeans seem to finally be waking up to the threats posed by Islamic intolerance. Will they remember their own history of religious intolerance and avoid repeating the errors of the past? Or will Islamic encroachment provoke them to revert to their past intolerance?

Disillusionment with the multicultural ideal that all faiths are equally valid emerged in Assisi, Italy, just a few weeks ago. The historical town was the center of world attention in 1986 when Pope John Paul II met there with religious leaders of many faiths, with the intent of all praying together for peace. But, under a new pope, things have changed.

“The 1986 meeting at Assisi, for all its appeal to those of other persuasions, was far from universally popular among Catholics. Among its critics was then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's doctrinal office, who told an interviewer that Assisi ‘cannot be the model’ for such encounters.

“The cardinal later wrote that ‘multi-religious prayer’ of the kind offered there ‘almost inevitably leads to false interpretations, to indifference as to the content of what is believed or not believed, and thus to the dissolution of real faith’” (Francis Rocca, “Pope Benedict's Interfaith Outreach,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 31, 2011). Clearly, there is only one path to God in the pope's mind, reaffirming the traditional Catholic view of opposing other religious beliefs.

As tensions rise, it increasingly looks like Europe is set for another historical clash between radical Islam and traditional Christianity—fitting what's foretold in Bible prophecy. **GN**

# KINGDOM of GOD BIBLE SEMINARS

January 21 or 28, 2012 • [kogbibleseminars.org](http://kogbibleseminars.org)



**Y**ou're warmly invited to attend the *Kingdom of God Bible Seminars*, coming to more than 150 locations across the United States and around the world. • Learn why Jesus Christ's message holds the key to human survival. • Understand the signs Jesus gave about His return. • Discover things in your Bible that you never knew were there. • Find the keys to developing a deeper, more meaningful relationship with your loving Creator!



Go online now for additional information and to reserve your free spot for the *Kingdom of God Bible Seminars*.

Visit: [kogbibleseminars.org](http://kogbibleseminars.org)

See the list of participating cities with times and locations. If you do not have online access at home, please visit your local library and register online.



Kingdom of God Bible Seminars • Saturday, Jan. 21 or 28, 2012 • [kogbibleseminars.org](http://kogbibleseminars.org)



# Current Events & Trends

by John Ross Schroeder and Tom Robinson

## Catastrophic conditions presage the end of an age

Scriptural prophecies of a time of unparalleled severity have gone unfulfilled for around 2,000 and more years. Deeply troubling world events now require us to face them squarely.

- “Alas, for that day is great, so that none is like it, and it is the time of Jacob’s [Israel’s] trouble . . .” (Jeremiah 30:7, emphasis added throughout; compare Ezekiel 5, especially verse 9).
- “And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time . . .” (Daniel 12:1).
- “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be . . .” (Matthew 24:21; see also Mark 13:19).

While we’re not there yet, current events should remind us this time is coming. The news of just this past year reflected frightening trends. These disturbing developments should cause us the soberest contemplation. Events like the radical reshaping of Europe, German domination of the European Union (EU), the clash between Western and Islamic civilizations, Islamic hatred of Israel, the Iranian nuclear threat, the rapid rise of China and the continuing decline of American influence demand the deepest introspection.

Above all, we desperately need to keep our heads out of the sand, for we live in a unique time of signs that herald the end of the age (see Matthew 16:2-3; Luke 12:54-56; 21:11, 25). Truly, Christians are duty bound to watch world events in the light of Bible prophecy (see Luke 21:24-36; Mark 13:32-37).

Where are the events of 2012 leading the world? Will the year ahead simply bring a further intensifying of political forces already well in motion?

### A tighter fiscal union in Europe?



Attempts to solve the ongoing eurozone crisis could eventually lead to a restructuring or partial breakup of the 27-nation European Union.

On Dec. 5, 2011, *The Wall Street Journal* reported: “The leaders of France and Germany . . . issued an ultimatum to the 27 European Union governments, saying they must decide by week’s end whether they will accept greater central control over their national budgets—effectively ceding some of their fiscal sovereignty” (“Europe at Crossroads,” Dec. 6, 2011).

And remarkably, the single currency and European project were “rescued” by Friday morning, Dec. 9. As the Associated Press reported that day: “European leaders agreed . . . to redefine their continent—hoping that by joining their fiscal fortunes they might stop a crippling debt crisis, save the euro currency and prevent worldwide economic chaos. Only one country said no: Britain. It will risk isolation while the rest of the continent plots its future. . . . [The agreement] would force countries to submit their budgets for central review and limit the deficits they can run” (“Europe Forges Fiscal Union, Sees Way Out of Crisis”).

Many analysts see this as a monumental development. Ian Traynor wrote in *The Guardian*: “When the dust settles, Friday 9 December may be seen as a watershed, the beginning of the end for Britain in Europe. But more than that—the emergence for the first time of a cold new Europe in which Germany is the undisputed, pre-eminent power imposing a decade of austerity on the eurozone as the price for its propping up the currency” (“As the Dust Settles, a Cold New Europe With Germany in Charge Will Emerge,” Dec. 9, 2011).

Others see ratification of treaty amendments by the rest of the EU to be unlikely. As Gideon Rachman wrote in the *Financial Times*: “The outcome of the Brussels

meeting is much more likely to end up as a footnote in the history books than a bold new chapter. . . . As economies worsen, voters are likely to revolt. Even under current circumstances, there are huge doubts about whether [the Dec. 9] EU agreement will ever come into force. . . .

“Both the Swedish and the Dutch governments currently lack a clear parliamentary majority—and need the votes of opposition parties to get the new agreement through. But in both countries the main opposition party has already said it will reject the new treaty. Ratification in Denmark, Finland and the Czech Republic is also far from certain” (Dec. 13, 2011).

Yet if the desired fiscal union is foiled by a few countries, we may well see increased calls for a two-speed Europe or even a partial breakup, with those EU countries that want closer integration pressing on without the others. (Sources: *Financial Times*, *The Guardian* [both London], Associated Press, *The Wall Street Journal*.)

### The growing preeminence of Germany



As just noted, many see the latest developments in the European Union as pushing Germany to greater dominance over the other member states.

“For the first time in the history of the EU, the Germans are now in charge. But they are also more isolated than before [with other nations resentful of German austerity demands],” said Charles Grant, director of the Centre for European Reform thinktank. “The British are certainly more marginal than before. Their influence has never been lower in my lifetime!” (Ian Traynor, “As the Dust Settles, a Cold New Europe With Germany in Charge Will Emerge,” Dec. 13, 2011).

Of course, the leaders of the EU are more typically deemed to be Germany and France, with Britain often

seen as obstructionist.

For several decades following World War II, Germany appeared content to let France largely assume the reins of leadership, particularly with regard to European Union affairs. But in recent years their partnership has been more equal, and the pendulum now even swings toward the Fatherland.

Philip Stevens, a leading columnist for the *Financial Times*, wrote: “Germany will have to learn leadership, and France followship . . . The rules of the European game changed forever with the reunification of Germany. It has taken the euro crisis to spell out the brutal implications” (“Now the Franco-German Question,” Dec. 9, 2011).

As was stated in *The New York Times*, “The Germans had a strategic insight or advantage to let the crisis get to the threshold within the European Union necessary for France to be willing to hand over the kind of sovereignty the country has always resisted,” said Jacob Funk Kirkegaard of the Peter G. Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington. “You could say that the crisis has either been the wake-up call or the tool that Germany has used to beat them into submission” (Nicholas Kulich, “Euro Crisis Pits Germany and U.S. in Tactical Fight,” Dec. 11, 2011).

It could even be said that Germany decided to, in the words of other political leaders, not let a serious crisis go to waste: “This is the breakthrough to the stability union,” German Chancellor Angela Merkel said. “We are using the crisis as an opportunity for a renewal” (“Europe Forges Fiscal Union, Sees Way Out of Crisis,” Associated Press, Dec. 9).

Just where are all these confusing events in Europe really headed? Biblical prophecy shows that leaders of 10 nations (or groups of nations) will give power to a ruthless but charismatic dictatorial leader—the Bible referring to him and the empire he rules over as “the beast” (Revelation 17:12-13). His authority and influence will be global (Revelation 13:7).

To understand much more, request or download our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* (Sources: *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Times* [both London], *International Herald Tribune*.)

### The downside of the Arab Spring



The Arab Spring brought the prospects for democratic development, but also the very real risks of Islamic ascension, political and economic chaos, humanitarian disaster and the persecution of Christians. The performance of the Islamist party Ennahda in the October 23 Tunisian elections, in which it won 41.5 percent of the seats, raised eyebrows in the West.

Nearly a month and a half later a special report from

Cairo to *USA Today* carried the headline “Muslim Brotherhood Wins in Egyptian Elections” (Dec. 6, 2011). The article drophead stated: “Parties’ ambitions to spread Islamic law concern some.” In the elections, “the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party topped winners with 37% of the nearly 10 million valid ballots cast for party lists in the first of three electoral rounds for the Egyptian parliament.”

For the state of Israel looking around at neighboring enemies, Egypt had been a bright spot. No more. It’s hard to imagine anything but a future cooling in Israeli-Egyptian relations. The Syrian-based Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas, which rules Gaza, is returning to its Brotherhood roots (“Hamas Joins Global Muslim Brotherhood,” *Ynet News*, Dec. 10, 2011). Several reports show that it’s even been contemplating moving its headquarters from Syria to Egypt.

Even if the Islamists do not completely dominate the emerging governments in the region, one thing is sure: The Arab world is undergoing seismic and irreversible change. As more and more dictatorial leaders fall (is Syria’s Assad next?) and the masses rise up, so do the chances for internal and external conflicts. The deep-seated hostility toward Israel is growing in openness and intensity, making the prospects for peace in the Middle East very dim. For the historical and biblical background necessary to understanding current developments, request or download our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* (Sources: *USA Today*, *Ynet News* [Tel Aviv].)

## The rise of the Chinese dragon



China is pursuing an enormous military buildup on both land and sea: “There has been much discussion and speculation in recent commentary over China’s rapid maritime rise and strategy for dominating large swaths of the Pacific . . . China’s naval buildup will soon give Beijing the means to use military force to back up its expansive territorial claims to essentially the entire Yellow Sea, East China Sea and South China Sea” (Robert O’Brien, “Ensuring China’s Peaceful Rise,” *The Diplomat*, Nov. 18, 2011).

A *Financial Times* piece titled “A Show of Force” was summarized in the table of contents in these words: “Beijing’s assertive policing of its sphere of influence is fuelling fears of a growing hold over foreign policy of a hawkish and increasingly well-equipped army” (Sept. 29, 2011). A few months earlier, another *Financial Times* piece addressed increasing military and infrastructural cooperation between China and Pakistan. As the drophead stated, “Concerns are growing about the extent of Beijing’s influence on Islamabad” (“China

and Pakistan: An Alliance Is Built,” June 30, 2011). This development comes at a time when America’s influence on Pakistan is sharply declining.

How will these events play out in the end time? The “beast” power and ruler (mentioned earlier in this feature), supported by 10 European nations or groups of nations, is also referred to in Scripture as the “king of the North” (Daniel 11:40). After vanquishing the “king of the South,” “news from the east and the north” troubles the king of the North.

Revelation 9:13-16 depicts an eastern army of 200 million people that unleashes great devastation on mankind. Later we read of “the kings [leaders] from the east” crossing the Euphrates River en route to Armageddon (the area of Megiddo) in the land of Israel (Revelation 16:12, 16). The greater part of this massive army may come from the Far East, most likely from China, India and other Asian nations.

These end-time prophecies are all part of the climactic events leading up to the second coming of Jesus Christ. (Sources: *The Diplomat* [Tokyo], *Financial Times* [London].)

## The fading American dream



The United States certainly appears to be undergoing a terminal decline that could possibly lead to the biblically prophesied time of Jacob’s (or Israel’s) trouble (Jeremiah 30:7).

Many of those with northwest European ancestry (large portions of the populations of America, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Switzerland, Northern France, and the Benelux and Nordic countries) are, along with the Jewish people, descendants of the patriarch Jacob and his 12 sons—the 12 tribes of Israel. (To obtain the essential historic and prophetic evidence, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.) The English-speaking nations in particular have dominated the world, as prophesied, for the past two centuries.

Decades of remarkable economic growth in America ended with the onset of the 21st century. Since then the country has experienced significant decline. The past decade was the worst for the American economy in modern times, characterized by high unemployment and stagnant wages. China is projected to pass the United States as the world’s leading superpower in the next couple decades or so. According to a *Sunday Telegraph* article, “The head of Goldman Sachs Asset Management has predicted that China could overtake the United States as the world’s largest economy by 2027” (“Jim O’Neill: China Could Overtake US

Economy by 2027,” Nov. 20, 2011).

*The Economist* reported that “the World Bank sees a relentless decline in various indicators of American governance” (Schumpeter, “American Idiocracy,” August 13, 2011). Many U.S. business leaders blame the decline on intransigent leadership in both the executive administration and the Congress. The country’s competitiveness is gradually sliding compared to other nations. America used to be number one in many categories.

University of Wisconsin-Madison history professor Alfred McCoy, in a piece titled “The Decline and Fall of the American Empire,” argued that U.S. dominance will end by 2025. He said, “The question is not whether the U.S. will lose its unchallenged global power, but just how precipitous and wrenching it will be” (CBSNews.com, Dec. 6, 2010). The biblical evidence has been set forth in the final chapter of the booklet mentioned above. (Sources: *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Economist* [both London], CBS News.)

## A great deliverance is coming



In no way do we wish to minimize or underestimate the troubles prophesied to come on the world. Yet each one of the dark biblical passages quoted at the beginning of this feature has an encouraging conclusion:

- “And it is the time of Jacob’s trouble. *But he shall be saved out of it*” (Jeremiah 30:7).
- “And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. *And at that time your people shall be delivered*” (Daniel 12:1).
- “And then there will be great tribulation, such as not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened [stopped from running their course], no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect’s sake *those days will be shortened*” (Matthew 24:21-22).

Jesus Christ Himself guarantees human survival!

For true Christians the news is even better. Zephaniah 2:3 proclaims, “Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. *It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD’s anger.*” And Isaiah 26:20-21 tells us what to do then: “Come My people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; *hide yourself, as it were, for a moment, until the indignation is past.* For behold the LORD, comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity” (Isaiah 26:20-21).

The key is how we choose to react to God’s warnings. May we all choose wisely.

## How can you make sense of the news?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today’s dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You’re probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. *So are we.* That’s one reason we produce the *Beyond Today* daily TV commentaries—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. This eye-opening program offers you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the perspective of God’s Word. Visit us at [ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!](http://ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!)





# Europe's Woes: Setting the Stage for Bible Prophecy?

With the European sovereign debt crisis, the elites' dream of economic integration is in real jeopardy. Will a split come soon? What does the Bible reveal about Europe's future? *by Rod Hall*

Europe's leaders are battling to keep the eurozone (the countries using the euro as a common currency) and the wider European Union (EU) together in the face of a financial crisis that threatens to split partnerships forged over the last half century.

On Dec. 9, 2011, all the leaders of the member states except for Britain agreed to a fiscal union with central budget approval. While some deem this a monumental achievement, others think the proposed arrangement will fail to be ratified. (See "A tighter fiscal union in Europe?" on page 16 for more on this.)

If the call for fiscal integration ends up rejected, will the dream of European economic union be over? Is Europe really in danger of fragmenting? And does Bible

in return for the enactment of economic reforms.

The members have also established some limited fiscal integration, like their highly political and debated annual peer review of each other's national budgets. And fiscal union could now become a reality, as mentioned.

Germany and France make up the back-

months, at all levels,' a senior EU official in Brussels told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions.

"We need to move very cautiously, but the truth is that we need to establish exactly the list of those who don't want to be part of the club and those who simply cannot be part," the official said.

"French President Nicolas Sarkozy gave some flavor of his thinking during an address to students in the eastern French city of Strasbourg . . . when he said a two-speed Europe—the euro zone moving ahead more rapidly than all 27 countries in the EU—was

## Germany and France make up the backbone of the eurozone and have been pushing for tighter controls and integration.



French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel are spearheading a more tightly integrated European alliance—an end result foretold in Bible prophecy.

prophecy have anything to say on the matter?

### The development of monetary union

The eurozone emerged from the formation of the European Monetary Union (EMU) in 1999 and quickly grew to include 17 EU nations. The euro replaced the national currencies of these nations.

While there has been no common representation, governance or fiscal policy regarding the currency among member states, some cooperation has taken place through the Euro Group meetings of the finance ministers.

With the recent period of financial crisis, the eurozone has established provisions for granting emergency loans to member states

bone of the eurozone and have been pushing for tighter controls and integration. But they often encounter resistance from other members, who currently have an equal vote.

### Two-tier Europe?

There have been high-level discussions over the past year regarding a major overhaul of the eurozone and the EU. The Reuters news agency reported on Nov. 9, 2011, that "German and French officials have discussed plans for a radical overhaul of the European Union that would involve setting up a more integrated and potentially smaller euro zone, EU sources say.

"France and Germany have had intense consultations on this issue over the last

the only model for the future.

"The discussions among senior policy-makers in Paris, Berlin and Brussels raised the possibility of one or more countries leaving the euro zone while the remaining core pushes on toward deeper economic integration, including on tax and fiscal policy" (Julian Toyer and Annika Breidhardt, "French and Germans Explore Idea of Smaller Euro Zone").

The same article later continued: "The latest discussions among European officials point to a more fundamental re-evaluation . . . including which countries and what policies are needed to keep it strong and stable—before Europe's debt crisis manages to break it apart.

"In large part the aim is to reshape the

currency bloc along the lines it was originally intended; strong, economically integrated countries sharing a currency, before nations such as Greece managed to get in.”

And the pace toward this development is accelerating: “While the two-speed Europe referred to by Sarkozy is already reality in many respects. . . the officials interviewed by Reuters spoke of a more formal process to create a two-tier structure and allow the smaller group to push on. ‘This is something that has been in the air for some time, at least in high-level talks,’ said one EU diplomat. ‘The difference now is that some countries are moving forward very quickly . . . The risk of a split, of a two-speed Europe, has never been so real’”(ibid.).

### Attempting to keep Greece and Italy solvent

To ease the pressure to reorganize and reshape the eurozone and avoid a split in the short run, the bloc was forced to provide the funds to rescue Greece. Last October lead-

ers of the 17 eurozone countries approved a 50 percent write-off of Greek sovereign debt held by banks and a fourfold increase (to about 1 trillion) in bailout funds held under the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), the vehicle financed by eurozone members to combat the debt crisis.

Former European Central Bank Vice-President Lucas Papademos heads the new unity government in Greece and is working to implement the austerity measures required under the bailout agreement.

Italy’s government also approved austerity measures demanded by the EU and central bank officials, effectively dodging a meltdown for the time being. Former EU commissioner Mario Monti is leading the new Italian government’s efforts to tackle the acute debt crisis.

Yet while it has the third largest economy in the currency union, Italy’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is still around 5 percent below its 2008 level. So it’s hard to see how

Italy can grow itself out of its 120 percent debt-to-GDP ratio. In addition, with interest rates likely to continue going up, it becomes more difficult for the Italians to cover the costs of borrowing to pay their debt.

Some economists therefore see the current austerity measures enacted in Italy as nothing more than kicking the can down the road. Concerns are growing that there may not be sufficient funds for a bailout later if that becomes necessary.

### Breaking up is hard to do

While it appears the recent measures in Greece and Italy have helped ease the immediate threat of a eurozone economic meltdown, at least four other nations remain on the financial edge with structural and debt problems—Ireland, Portugal, Cyprus and Spain.

Many experts say dramatic changes are needed in the eurozone if the 13-year-old currency is to survive. Germany and France are pushing for closer integration and tighter

## The Vatican Pushes for a Global Political and Economic Authority

The Vatican recently renewed its call for creation of a “world political authority” with broad powers to regulate financial markets and rein in the “inequalities and distortions of capitalist development” (“Vatican Document Calls for ‘Supranational’ Reform,” *America: The National Catholic Weekly*, Nov. 7, 2011).

According to Bible prophecy, in the last days a centrally controlled global economic system, like the one the Vatican proposes, will be dominated by a great false religion and its leader. Could this document serve as the blueprint?

The 41-page document, titled “Toward Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority,” was prepared by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. It says a “supranational authority” is needed to place the common good at the center of international economic activity.

The document cites the teachings of popes over the last 40 years on the need for a universal public authority that would transcend national interests. And it urges implementation because of the growing disparity between the rich and poor and the global economic crisis. One major step, it said, should be to reform the international monetary system in a way that involves developing countries.

The document encourages the creation of a “central world bank” that would regulate the flow of monetary exchanges. It also suggests taxation on financial



transactions, a “world reserve fund,” recapitalization of banks with public funds, rewarding “virtuous” behavior, and broad management over countries and “shadow markets” (ibid.). As the Reuters news agency reports, it further urges “a gradual, balanced transfer of a part of each nation’s powers to a world authority and to regional authorities” (quoted by Phillip Pulella, “Vatican Urges Economic Reforms, Condemns Collective Greed,” Oct. 24, 2011).

“In a world on its way to rapid globalization, the reference to a world authority becomes the only horizon compatible with the new realities of our time and the needs of humankind,” it said. ‘Helping to usher in this new society is a duty for everyone, especially for Christians’” (James Martin, “Vatican Issues Major Document on Global Financial Reform,” Catholic News Service, October 24, 2011).

The Reuters report cites a section of the document explaining why the Vatican feels the reform of the global economy is essential: “In economic and financial matters, the most significant difficulties come from the lack of an effective set of structures that can guarantee, in addition to a system of governance, a system of government for the economy and international finance,” it said . . .

“The world needed a ‘minimum shared body of rules to manage the global financial market’ and ‘some form of global monetary management.’

“In fact, one can see an emerging requirement for a body that will carry out the functions of a kind of ‘central world bank’ that regulates the flow and system of monetary exchanges similar to the national central banks,” it said.”

The Vatican’s call to establish a “global public authority” and “central world bank” with “supranational authority” is reminiscent of the Bible’s prophecies of just such a system being established.

It will be influenced by a major world religious leader called “the false prophet” in Revelation 19:20. Another figure mentioned here and in Revelation 13 is “the beast,” a political leader and system in cooperation with the religious leader and system. The religious leader and system are also characterized as a beast: “Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon [seemingly Christian but actually of the devil]. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence” (Revelation 13:11-12).

And notice verse 16-17: “He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”

Just as the Vatican recommends, this centrally controlled economic system will have worldwide scope and “universal jurisdiction.” It will siphon from nations some national authority for itself.

It will reward “virtuous” behavior—and severely punish those not in line with its decrees who try to do business in any “shadow markets.” All will be forced to be part of and identified with this system to be able to buy or sell.

Perhaps some groundwork is now being laid for what is to come.



controls inside the eurozone, including in sensitive areas such as corporate and personal taxation. The remainder of the EU would be left as a “confederation,” possibly expanding from 27 to 35 countries in the coming decade.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for a change in the EU treaty, pushing for all 27 EU member states to give their approval and saying that a rapid breakthrough is needed. German proposals would give the European Commission a stronger role in monitoring budgets and implementing sanctions for those that breach deficit rules.

This led to the Dec. 9, 2011, agreement. British Prime Minister David Cameron, whose country is a member of the EU but not of the eurozone, drew the ire of Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy when he was the only EU leader to oppose a financial pact that would have imposed tougher controls over member states’ fiscal policies. One of Cameron’s key concerns was that growing EU fiscal rules and regulations would unnecessarily burden London’s powerful financial district.

Sarkozy testily responded to Cameron’s decision by saying, “You can’t on the one hand ask not to be in the euro and at the same time wish to be part of all the decisions affecting a currency you don’t want and often criticize.” As for Germany, Merkel’s response to Britain was clear: “If you want to be part of Europe, you must submit to its rules” (Anthony Failoa, “Standing Alone,” *The Washington Post*, Dec. 11, 2011).

Cameron’s decision may be the first step toward Britain leaving the European Union. He is adamantly against a two-tier, two-speed Europe, fearing it would make those not in the currency union second-class citizens. He also questions whether eurozone countries can deal with their debts to survive as a union.

Others share his view, including Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz. He’s stated that the euro could dissolve at “any time now” and that the eurozone nations are unlikely to “really” solve their sovereign debt crisis (“Stiglitz Says Euro Currency Could Dissolve at ‘Any Time Now,’” *Bloomberg*, Oct. 25, 2011).

## The great divide

If the eurozone does eventually break up, how is it likely to divide?

Former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan has stated, “The European Union is doomed to fail, at least as a monetary bloc, because the cultural differences between northern and southern countries are just too vast to allow for one monetary

policy” (quoted in “Greenspan: European Union Doomed to Fail,” *Moneynews.com*, Oct. 26, 2011).

*The Wall Street Journal* reports additional details about his view. Greenspan said the “Club Med” countries such as Greece and Italy have never abandoned a lifestyle that places enjoyment and easy living ahead of hard work. In contrast, he pointed out, the northern countries like Germany, the largest workhorse economy of the currency union, are far more prudent, competitive and long-term focused.

“Markets are basically saying that a number of these countries are competitively out of sync, and they cannot take on the challenges of the global economy,” Mr. Greenspan said” (Javier David, “Greenspan: Europe’s Debt Crisis Comes Down to North vs. South,” Nov. 10, 2011).

*The Economist* magazine produced a 2011 white paper—titled *After Eurogeddon? Frequently Asked Questions About the Breakup of the Eurozone*—that agrees with Greenspan’s assessment:

“Firm predictions are tricky, but broadly a fracture between a strong northern ‘core’ and the weaker ‘periphery’ looks most likely. The process would, in our view, probably entail periphery countries breaking off individually to leave a ‘rump’ of northern countries still within a currency union. Once one peripheral country (say, Greece) left, all the other vulnerable countries would probably follow.”

The paper goes on to list the countries that are most likely to eventually leave as Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Malta and Cyprus.

It then states, “Up to ten countries could remain members of the euro: Germany, France, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia and Estonia (the last three all being small, open economies like Malta and Cyprus, but with healthier fundamentals.”

## 10-nation, world-dominating empire

As we have seen, many leaders and economists feel it is just a matter of time before the EU and eurozone will be forced to reshape themselves, with different groups going different directions at different speeds. A smaller, closer-knit, core eurozone group is likely to emerge as the leading economic powerhouse of Europe.

It is interesting to note that some see that core grouping condensing around 10 nations. While the final grouping of specific nations may well be different, students of Bible prophecy will grasp the significance

of the number 10.

The prophet Daniel wrote extensively about “the time of the end,” the period just before Jesus Christ returns to establish His Kingdom on earth. Key in those events is a new global superpower to emerge, centered in Europe.

Daniel reveals some of the details of what that final superpower empire will be like. As related in Daniel 2, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar saw a great image of a human figure in a dream. God revealed to Daniel that the segments of the image represented a series of empires that would arise.

The final one to come, a revival of the Roman Empire, is yet ahead of us. It was pictured by the feet of the image with 10 toes representing the grouping of 10 “kings” or leaders of nations who would form this final empire. The description given sounds ominously like the grouping of some of the nations in the EU today.

The toes were composed “partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron,” which indicated that “the kingdom shall be divided” and “be partly strong and partly fragile” (verses 41-42). Also, “just as iron does not mix with clay,” the components of this kingdom would not adhere firmly together for long (verse 43).

This grouping of 10 nations is described in a way that appears to indicate they preserve their individual cultures and political structures. Some will be much stronger than others. They will give their power and authority to what the book of Revelation describes as a ruthless, cunning, animal-like leader and system—“the beast” (Revelation 17:12-14).

This final system will lead the world to the brink of total destruction. But the good news is that Jesus Christ promises to return to save the human race from annihilation and establish His Kingdom over all nations (verse 14; Daniel 2:44).

Keep your eyes on events in Europe! The end of this age is approaching more swiftly than most realize. **GN**

## Learn More

Where might events in Europe be leading? Does Bible prophecy give us any indication? How might they play out? You need to know! Be sure to request or download our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. A free copy is waiting for you!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

[www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)

# Why Is Israel the Focus of Muslim Hostility?

At the heart of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East is ongoing hatred among Muslim nations toward Israel and the Jewish people. What are the underlying causes? *by Rod Hall, Tom Robinson and Scott Ashley*

**T**he conflict between the Israelis and surrounding Muslim nations has been raging since the Jewish state's inception—and the origins go back much further. Today the hostility is growing in openness and intensity, making the prospects for peace in the Middle East dim.

The Arab Spring uprisings throughout the region are allowing the wider expression of popular sentiments among the Muslim masses—inflaming the ancient animosity.

While not all Muslims feel antipathy toward Jews and Israel, there is widespread dislike and resentment by the majority, as repeatedly borne out in polls and surveys. The Pew Global Attitudes Project survey conducted last summer found that almost no one in the Muslim Middle East thinks positively toward Israel and the Jewish people.

“Ratings of Jews are dismal in the seven predominantly Muslim nations surveyed”



“Every night when I go to bed, I pray to wake up the next day to see Israel is wiped off the map.”—Kamal al Halbawi

(Pew Research Center, *Common Concerns About Islamic Extremism: Muslim-Western Tensions Persist*, July 21, 2011, p. 22). In the six of these nations that are in the Middle East or adjacent to it, only 2 to 4 percent express favorable opinions of Jews.

It is amazing that the small nation of Israel, composed of only about 8,000 square miles of land—roughly two times the size of Rhode Island—generates so much ill feeling.

Israel's territory is only about one-sixth of one percent that of the 22 hostile Arab nations that are 640 times her size. And they have 45 times more people than Israel—340 million Arabs versus 7.7 million Israeli citizens (more than a million of whom are themselves Arab).

Yet fiery rhetoric calling for the destruction of Israel can be heard in political

speeches and mosque sermons throughout the Muslim world, from Iran to Libya and in other places around the globe—including Western nations.

An example of the growing hostility toward Israel can be found across its southern border in Egypt with the increasing influence there of the Muslim Brotherhood. This organization has sired 86 branches across the Islamic world since the 1920s. The more dominant ones are in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and the Palestinian territories (the branch in the latter being the terror group Hamas, which now runs Gaza).

Comments like the following from Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Kamal al Halbawi, made while speaking at an official visit to Iran in July 2011, are all too common: “Both nations [Iran and Egypt] underline the neces-

sity for Muslim nations to maintain solidarity and unity to annihilate this cancerous tumor (Israel) . . . Every night when I go to bed, I pray to wake up the next day to see Israel is wiped off the map” (quoted by “ADL [Anti-Defamation League] Report: Muslim Brotherhood's Open Hostility to Israel Could Play Destabilizing Role In Egypt And Region,” ADL.org, Sept. 19, 2011).

Let's consider the root causes of such widespread Muslim animosity against Israel.

## Indoctrination and propaganda

Conflict between Muslims, Jews, and Christians has been around since Islam began in the seventh century A.D. But it's been exacerbated in recent times by an indoctrination of religious intolerance and anti-Semitic propaganda in the Muslim world.

The indoctrination is led by Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, which has been asserting itself as the world's authoritative voice for the religion. An important avenue for its gaining influence has been through Saudi charities funding Wahhabi madrassas (schools) and mosques in many nations (Wahhabism being an extremist form of Islam embraced by terror groups like al-Qaeda).

An illustration of the ongoing indoctrination is furnished by a 2006 study by the Center for Religious Freedom and the Institute for Gulf Affairs: “As demonstrated by excerpts from the dozen current Islamic studies textbooks analyzed in this report, the Saudi public school religious curriculum continues to propagate an ideology of hate toward the ‘unbeliever,’ that is, Christians, Jews, Shiites, Sufis, Sunni Muslims who do not follow Wahhabi doctrine, Hindus, atheists and others.

“This ideology is introduced in a religion textbook in the first grade and reinforced and developed in following years of the public education system, culminating in the twelfth grade, where a text instructs students that it is a religious obligation to do ‘battle’ against infidels in order to spread the faith” (“Saudi Arabia's Curriculum of Intolerance,” 2006, p. 10).

That's what the study found *after* the Saudi Arabian government said it had *reformed* its school system and textbooks to



be more tolerant. The study goes on to provide numerous excerpts that make the point, like these from an eighth-grade schoolbook:

“They [the Jews] are the people of the Sabbath, whose young people God turned into apes, and whose old people God turned into swine to punish them.’ As cited in Ibn Abbas: The apes are Jews, the keepers of the Sabbath; while the swine are the Christian infidels of the communion of Jesus” (p. 24).

With such ideology exported to madrasas around the world, a great many Muslims everywhere have been using textbooks with the same perspective and approach.

One might wonder why the Saudi government would sponsor the radicalization of Islamic education. It appears the strategy has been to direct the hatred of the native populace toward Israel and Western nations and away from dissatisfaction with the local national government, which might lead to rebellion.

The same has been true in other Muslim states, where government-controlled education and press have incited populations against the Israelis, Americans and other Westerners. Again, the focus is thereby taken away from dissatisfaction with local regimes.

The Arab Spring has brought the focus back on local government, but the instilled misperceptions and hatred of Israel and the West remain (with many wanting to strike out in contrast to the inaction of past regimes).

On top of the damage of formal education in this regard is a steady onslaught of media propaganda poisoning Muslim minds against the Jewish people from a young age. Arab cartoons and other children’s shows typically portray Jews as evil and bloodthirsty, and some present suicide bombing against them as heroic. A TV show for Palestinian children was hosted by a Mickey Mouse-style character calling for war against the Israelis—until he was depicted as being killed on the show by “terrorist” Jews!

Such incessant indoctrination and propaganda has had a real impact. In the Arab countries surveyed by the Pew Research Center, large majorities of Muslims who say some religions are more prone to violence consider *Judaism* to be the most violent religion by 77 to 97 percent (p. 23). This despite the fact that it’s the Jewish Israelis who’ve been repeatedly attacked by Muslims and Muslims themselves who have killed hundreds of thousands of other Muslims in conflicts and wars during recent decades!

Add to all this a left-leaning media in the West that looks on the Jewish state as a past partner in perceived U.S. imperial-

ism abroad, as a nation basing its right to exist on what they see as the antiquated and foolish notion of biblical authority, as an “occupier” and “oppressor” of the Palestinians, and as the intractable main obstacle to Middle East peace, and the hatred of Israel seems further justified to many of the Muslims in Western nations.

Then there’s the semblance of legitimacy to condemning the Jewish state lent by the United Nations General Assembly, which has been anti-Israel for years. This body represents the nations of the world, but many of them are Islamic and thuggish dictatorships trying to direct focus away from their own atrocities and misrule—Israel providing a convenient target of scorn and censure.

### Distortion of the refugee issue

No doubt, the principal issue over which the state of Israel has been criticized is that of the Palestinians—the refusal to allow refugees their “right of return” and the “occupation” of Palestinian lands both garnering region-wide and worldwide sympathy. Israel’s supposed recalcitrance is blamed for the ongoing failures of the peace process—leading to widespread condemnation and bitterness.

Yet here, too, propaganda is a major factor. Ignored is the fact that this situation exists because the Arab states attempted to destroy the state of Israel at its founding in 1948 and later in the Six-Day War of 1967.

The League of Arab States, or Arab League, was formed in 1945—mainly to unite Arab countries in opposition to the emergence of a Jewish state. Then, in 1948, five nations of the newly formed Arab League took up arms against the state of Israel following its U.N.-mandated independence.

Arabs in territory allotted to Israel who joined the invaders at that time ended up fleeing or were driven out. They became refugees in surrounding Arab states, and these states have refused them settlement, preferring to keep them in refugee camps to maintain political pressure against Israel—to get the Israelis to accept their right to return.

The Israelis, however, recognize this is a strategy to destroy the Jewish state by flooding Israel with millions of descendants of those original Arab refugees who will use Israel’s democratic form of government to transform it into just another Arab state.

Following the Arabs’ blockade of Israel that led to the 1967 war, the Israelis took possession of the Jordanian territory known as the West Bank, of the Syrian territory of the Golan Heights, and of the Egyptian ter-

ritories of Gaza and Sinai (eventually returning Sinai and withdrawing from Gaza). Besides the fact that the West Bank is really the ancient Israelite homeland of Samaria and Judah, the Israelis took over and have maintained control of this territory principally as a defensive measure—since without this buffer territory Israel is less than 10 miles wide at some points.

It’s interesting to note that it was in 1964, well before the 1967 war, that the Arab League established the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), whose charter states that “the liberation of Palestine, from an Arab viewpoint, is a national duty.” This was before Israel’s acquisition of the West Bank and other territories in the Six-Day War. While Israel had made small territorial gains in 1948, it’s important to see that in Arab eyes, the intended area of “Palestine liberation” was the *entire area* of the state of Israel.

And just who has and has not been willing to negotiate? Following the 1967 War, the Arab League issued the Khartoum Resolution with its “Three No’s”: “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it.”

For many years the PLO under its long-time chairman Yasser Arafat was basically a terrorist organization. After he and the group were eventually legitimized in the sight of the Western world, negotiations were entered into. But these did not lead to peace—only more intifadas or uprisings.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered extreme concessions, eventually 91 percent of the West Bank, but it was not enough for Arafat. It’s been speculated that Palestinian leaders did not then actually *want* self-governance, as they would’ve needed to spend the large amounts of aid sent to them on national infrastructure and could no longer blame the plight of their people on the Israelis.

Not much changed when Mahmoud Abbas succeeded Arafat as president of the Palestinian Authority. Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recalls a personal one-on-one meeting in 2008 with then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert:

“Olmert started talking again. ‘I know what he [Abbas] needs. He needs something on refugees and on Jerusalem. I’ll give him enough land, maybe something like 94 percent with swaps. I have an idea about Jerusalem. There will be two capitals, one for us in West Jerusalem and one for the Palestinians in East Jerusalem’” (*No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*, 2011, p. 651).

In addition, Olmert was willing to put an international body in charge of holy sites and allow 5,000 Arab refugees to settle in Israel.

Rice says that while Abbas started negotiations right away, his insistence that a larger number of refugees and their descendants be allowed to settle in Israel under the right of return became a deal breaker.

Over the last few years the Palestinian Authority has, with one short exception, avoided direct talks with Israel. Instead, this past September Abbas took a request for statehood to the United Nations, effectively bypassing the direct negotiations required by

term used to describe Muslim-controlled lands (sometimes also called *Dar al-Islam*, meaning “Abode of Islam”).

The other is *Dar al-Harb*, meaning “Abode of Struggle” or “Abode of War.” This term is used to denote *all other* lands. By this very terminology, all non-Muslim lands are defined as areas where Islam must struggle or war so that these areas may be converted to *Dar al-Islam*, lands ruled by Islam—the ultimate objective being the entire world brought under the rule of Islam.

It’s important to understand that, in the thinking of millions of the world’s 1.5 billion

measure. They want a *single Palestinian state* “from the sea to the sea” as they define it—from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, with no place for Israel at all.

Israel, you see, is an “infidel” country sitting on land that was once *Dar al-Islam*, the land of Islam, and thus its existence is an abomination. We can see this ideology plainly set forth in the charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement, better known as the terrorist group Hamas (the same group that controls Gaza, from which rockets and mortar shells are regularly fired into Israeli towns):

“The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine [which in Hamas’ perspective includes not just Gaza and the West Bank but the entire state of Israel] is an Islamic Waqf [inalienable endowment] consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgement Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: it, or any part of it, should not be given up.

“Neither a single Arab country nor all Arab countries, neither any king or president, nor all the kings and presidents, neither any organization nor all of them, be they Palestinian or Arab, possess the right to do that. Palestine is an Islamic Waqf land consecrated for Moslem generations until Judgement Day. This being so, who could claim to have the right to represent Moslem generations till Judgement Day?

“This is the law governing the land of Palestine in the Islamic Sharia (law) and the same goes for any land the Moslems have conquered by force, because during the times of (Islamic) conquests, the Moslems consecrated these lands to Moslem generations till the Day of Judgement. . . This Waqf remains as long as earth and heaven remain. Any procedure in contradiction to Islamic Sharia, where Palestine is concerned, is null and void” (“Hamas Covenant,” Aug. 18, 1988, Article 11).

Given this underlying ideology, it’s no wonder that the Arab nations formed the Arab League to oppose the emergence of the Israeli state. This explains why the failure to prevent its establishment was viewed as a humiliating catastrophe. And we can clearly see why the “liberation of Palestine” is considered an Arab national duty. After all, the validity of Islam itself is at stake!

But there’s more to it still. Worse than being a tiny infidel nuisance, Israel is a major power in the region—largely because of support from the West, particularly the United States and Great Britain. Indeed, Israel is seen as an agent of the United States in the

## Telling Symbolism From the Hamas Logo

Hamas is the Islamic group that controls Gaza, from which attacks are regularly launched against Israel. The symbols of the Hamas logo illustrate the group’s intractable attitude toward Israel. At the top is an outline of the territory of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank shown as one entity covered in green, Hamas’ symbolic color. In the center is the Muslim shrine the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, surrounded by banners bearing the phrases “There is no god but Allah” and “Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.” Underneath those are the words “Palestine” and “Islamic Resistance Movement—Hamas.” The swords are a common Islamic motif, representing the power of Islam and the desire to spread the religion, by force if necessary.

Merged map of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank



the 1993 Oslo accords signed by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

So the idea that Israel is the hindrance to peace negotiations really doesn’t hold water.

### A worldview of expansion with no retreat

Key to all this is a critical factor many fail to understand. Underlying the Palestinian conflict and Muslim attitudes toward Israel is the fact that the very existence of the Jewish state is intolerable from the perspective of many Muslims.

The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the ensuing defeat of the invading Arab armies was seen by the Arabs as a disastrous humiliation—known as the *Nakba* or “catastrophe.” Later defeats and the fact that Israel still exists magnify the disgrace.

Yet it was not a mere nationalist humiliation. This was a catastrophe because it was a shaming affront to their religion—striking at the very heart of Islam.

What needs to be realized is that, in Islamic theology, the world is divided into two great spheres of influence. One is *Dar al-Salaam*, meaning “Abode of Peace,” a

Muslims, it is an abomination for any land that was once *Dar al-Islam*, territory controlled by Muslims, to become *Dar al-Harb*, “Abode of Struggle,” in which Muslims have lost control and seen it revert back to rule by non-Muslims (infidels). This goes directly against the Koran and other teachings of Muhammad, which avow that ultimately the entire world is to be under the control of Islam (see “Does the Koran Promote Peace and Cooperation?” on page 27).

Because these concepts are so foreign to Western thinking, these distinctions are lost on most Westerners—and, tragically, particularly on their governments and leaders. Yet it explains why, in more than a dozen nations across the globe, Muslims are waging war along the edges of the Islamic world to convert more lands to *Dar al-Islam*.

### Israeli territory claimed to belong to Muslims

It also explains why most Muslims in general, and Arabs in particular, are fundamentally opposed to the existence of a Jewish state of Israel. They don’t want a two-state solution, unless it is only as a temporary



Muslim Middle East. The Jewish state and Britain have been referred to as “the Little Satans,” while America is labeled “the Great Satan.” Thus, the Great Satan is perceived as having a foothold amidst *Dar al-Islam*.

According to a recent Zogby International poll conducted in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—sponsored by the Arab American Institute Foundation—“when asked to choose ‘the greatest obstacle to peace and stability in the Middle East,’ once again the ‘occupation of Palestinian lands’ and ‘U.S. interference in the Arab world’ rank as the top two concerns” (“Arab Attitudes, 2011,” p. 5). Probably the real concern is these posing a threat to Islam—upsetting the *Dar al-Salaam* (“Abode of Peace”).

Indeed, as the United States and Britain are predominantly Christian, their interference in the Middle East and presumed use of Israel as a proxy are seen by many Muslims as, effectively, a continuation of the Crusades (fought a thousand years ago between professing Christians and Muslims for control of the Holy Land). Yet, while the Christian powers are next in line to be dealt with in the thinking of many, Israel, because of proximity and its occupation of formerly Muslim territory, is seen as the immediate threat in need of elimination.

All this is a major part of why Israel has had to fight five wars for survival in a little over 60 years of existence and suffers from continuing terrorist bombings and rocket attacks. And it’s a big reason Israel’s continued existence is an ongoing intolerable disgrace to fundamentalist Muslims around the world, with a number perpetually calling for it to be wiped from the map.

Yet the irrational hatred goes even deeper.

### Ancient family feud and evil spirit influence

The origins of the strife we see today between many Islamic Arab people and the Jews in Israel can actually be traced back nearly 4,000 years.

The Bible records that God appeared to a man named Abram, later renamed Abraham, and promised him a son whose descendants would become a great nation. When his wife Sarai could not afterward conceive a child, she suggested that Abram take her Egyptian servant girl Hagar as a surrogate mother. And Hagar bore a son named Ishmael.

God gave Hagar this prophetic promise: “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count . . . You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael [‘God hears’],

for the LORD has heard of your misery.

“He will be a wild donkey of a man; *his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers*” (Genesis 16:10-12, New International Version, 1984, emphasis added throughout).

Some 12 to 13 years after Ishmael was born, God appeared again to Abram with another promise: “As for Sarai your wife. . . I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her” (verses 15-16).

God changed her name to Sarah. She had been barren all her life and was past normal childbearing age. Through God’s miraculous intervention she bore a son, Isaac. His descendants would become the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel, which included the tribe of Judah—predominately today’s Jews.

Ishmael, God said, would father 12 princes and become a “great nation” (verse 20), though God’s greater blessings and covenant would be with Isaac. The Arabs acknowledge Ishmael as their progenitor.

Ishmael and his mother were eventually sent away from the family. And another divide in the family came when Isaac’s son Jacob (later renamed Israel) schemed against his brother Esau or Edom. The divisions in the family—between Israelites and Ishmaelites and between Israelites and Edomites—would persist until the last days, with hostility increasing, as God foretold.

For more details on what happened and how this family division has continued over the ages, request or download our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

And besides the family dynamic and specific prophecies God has given, another underlying reason for the hatred of Israel among Muslim nations is no doubt the same one that exists for virulent anti-Semitism around the world. As the level of hatred and antagonism is completely irrational, we should recognize in it a *spiritual* cause.

The world is ruled over and deceived by a spirit being, Satan the devil, and his demonic cohorts, who hate God. And they have incited people to hatred against God’s people throughout history. Moreover, the preservation of the Jewish people and their return to the Holy Land to establish a state is a validation of the promises and prophecies of the Bible—a great frustration to enemies of God’s Word.

### Hostility builds at the time of the end

What all this adds up to is these underlying forces continuing to generate Muslim

hostility towards the Jews and Israel, growing in intensity as we approach the end of this age.

Psalms 83 contains an intriguing prophecy that reveals this growing hostility will play out in a confederation of Muslim peoples determined to eliminate Israel as a nation:

“They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of *Israel* may be remembered no more’” (verses 3-4).

This prophecy goes on to mention specific areas and peoples that will be involved. Our research reveals that some or all of the following will likely participate in this anti-Israel alliance—the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, northern Iraq, and Arab states throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

Out of this group of nations will likely come the end-time leader Daniel the prophet calls the “king of the South.” He will arise from the Muslim world and set in motion a cascade of events that will lead to unimaginable carnage in the final world war before Jesus Christ returns (Daniel 11:40).

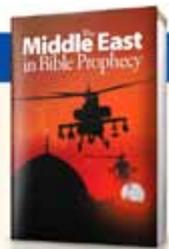
This confrontation begins with some aggressive move of the king of the South toward what Daniel calls the “king of the North,” an end-time European-centered superpower that will then occupy parts of the Middle East, including Israel.

The entire world will eventually be pulled into this developing maelstrom. Jesus Christ called the time of this final world war the “great tribulation” and said He would have to intervene to save humankind from total annihilation (Matthew 14:21-22).

The good news is that peace between these hostile peoples will finally come as former enemies learn the way of peace from the Prince of Peace. Hatred and violence will at last be no more! **GN**

### Learn More

Until Jesus Christ’s return to bring peace, we must be alert to developments in this dangerous part of the world. With the background from this article, you can now better understand the hostility that keeps this area on the verge of war. But there’s much more to the story. Request our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* to get a more complete picture!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

[www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)



# The Koran and Conquest: A Look at Islamic Theology

Why do we hear of so much terrorism originating in the Muslim world? Will an examination of Islam's history and its holy book, the Koran, help us to understand? *by Eric Snow*

Is Islam really a peaceful religion, as we are often told?

When the 9/11 hijackers flew planes into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania, killing 3,000 Americans and citizens of other countries, did they violate their own faith's teachings?

When Muslim suicide bombers blow themselves up, as hundreds have done in recent years, what motivates them? What reward do they expect now or in the afterlife?

The answers to these questions are crucial if we are to understand what is really going on in the world around us. Otherwise we risk burying our heads in the sand and remaining blind to danger.

Let's begin with a simple question: Could the actions of Muslim terrorist groups have developed logically from their faith's time-honored theology?

Do the traditional interpretations of the Islamic faith's sources of authority—its holy book the Koran (Qur'an), the Hadith (collections of the acts and sayings of Muhammad) and Sharia law—promote violence and war against non-Muslims (infidels)?

The "Arab Spring" has cleared from the world's stage several long-time secular nationalist Arab dictators, with Islamic religious groups lining up to grab a share

of power. Further, many Muslims, not least among them Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, believe in the imminent arrival of an Islamic messiah known as the Mahdi, or "Guided One," who will establish Islam as the world's dominant religion.

So it's a good time to carefully examine

**Now is a good time to carefully examine the theological underpinnings of Islam that are behind so many of today's conflicts and that could lead to the biblically prophesied end-time clash between Arab countries and the West.**

the theological underpinnings of Islam that are behind so many of today's conflicts and that could lead to the biblically prophesied end-time clash between the Middle Eastern Arab countries and the West.

## Why is Islam so different?

In the last century, political groups seeking independence from the Western colonial powers or wishing to impose communist ideology on their nations were the main sources of terrorism. But with almost all former colonies having gained independence, and with the fall of the Soviet Union

and other Eastern Bloc nations discrediting communism, what is today's largest source of terrorism?

What do an overwhelming majority of terror attacks in recent years have in common? The perpetrators are Muslim. Why? Certainly many Muslims are peaceful. Not all advocate violence or terrorism. But there is evidently something about Islamic teachings or the conditions of Muslim lands and communities that provoke far more Muslims, proportionately, to resort to violence than equally poor, mistreated

and uneducated people of other faiths.

So is it poverty, lack of education, lack of political freedom or lack of opportunity that explains Islamic terrorism? A desire for national independence or a history of suffering under imperialism hardly explains why Muslim terrorist groups presently kill far more people for political and religious reasons than non-Muslims who've suffered similarly.

## Are poverty and lack of education the cause?

According to an article in the British newsmagazine *The Economist*, a confer-



ence in Ireland brought together dozens of former terrorists and political revolutionaries to try to uncover the roots of violent extremism.

Such factors as child abuse, alcoholism, “lonely teenage years,” the desire to belong, and personal identity crises were used to explain why the participants became terrorists. But as the article acknowledged, “For some, most notably those who had been involved in Islamist groups, ideology played an important and complex role” (“Violent Extremists: Of Skinheads and Jihadists,” July 2, 2011, p. 51).

Young people may become alienated for many reasons, but why do disaffected Muslims, including second-generation ones born in Europe in circumstances considerably more privileged than their parents, generally commit its worst recent terrorist attacks?

People’s levels of poverty and education correlate poorly with people’s choice to become terrorists, explain Alan Kreuger and Jitna Maleckova in their *Journal of Economic Perspectives* article “Education, Poverty, and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” (Fall 2003, pp. 119-144).

They found that no significant correlation appears between the amount of terrorism and the average levels of either education or national GDP per capita figures (adjusted for the level of civil liberties). Likewise, Claude Berrebi’s 2007 study of 285 Palestinian terrorists discovered that they had better educations and came from less poor families.

For example, Al-Qaeda and other Islamist groups blame America’s interventions in the Middle East and/or Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians for provoking the 9/11 and other terrorist attacks. However, the United States has intervened in Latin America much more and over a longer time, yet has provoked very little terrorism from there compared to the Middle East.

Likewise, China’s Communist rulers worry far less about Buddhist Tibetans attacking Beijing than Russia’s leaders fear Muslim Chechens striking Moscow (as has happened repeatedly). A desire for national independence, political oppression and/or a history of imperialism hardly explains why Muslim terrorist groups have killed far more people than non-Muslims in similar circumstances.

Since such non-ideological, sociological factors can’t account for grossly disproportionate Muslim terrorism, let’s look for other explanations.

To understand the mindset behind such

actions, secularly minded people need to overcome a skeptical tendency to believe religion never really influences anybody’s actions. The fact is, it has and does. History shows that Islamic theology has and will stir up far more religious wars and terrorist actions proportionately than Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism or other religious belief systems.

### Some Koranic verses abrogate other verses

Those who claim that Islam is a religion of peace commonly cite verses from the Koran such as Sura 2:256, “There shall be no compulsion in religion,” and Sura 4:90, “Therefore, if they keep away from you and cease their hostility and offer you peace, [Allah] bids you not to harm them” (Dawood translation throughout).

However, few admit that, because many verses in the Koran contradict other verses, Islamist leaders long ago formulated the principle of *naskh*, or “abrogation,” which teaches that Allah’s later revelations override His earlier ones.

This is even spelled out in Sura 2:106, which says, “If We [Allah] abrogate any verse or cause it to be forgotten, We will replace it by a better verse or one similar. Do you not know that [Allah] has power over all things?”

Muslims believe Allah revealed the Koran to Muhammad over a span of 22 years. Interestingly, almost all of the peaceful, tolerant verses appear in the earlier “Meccan” suras (chapters) of the Koran, but the verses promoting violence and holy war emerge in the later “Medinan” suras.

*Naskh* isn’t some esoteric theory with no practical consequences. Two years before killing 13 people at Fort Hood, Texas, the Muslim U.S. Army Major Nidal Malak Hasan cited this principle in relation to jihad in a presentation explaining Islam that he gave at Walter Reed Hospital.

What are the historical origins of *naskh*? Muhammad began his religious career in Mecca as a preacher against considerable opposition. But after fleeing to Medina, he became a military commander leading his followers in battle against unbelieving Arabs.

Correspondingly, as his circumstances changed, so too did the supposed revelations of Allah. When he was in the distinct minority in Mecca and trying to establish his new religion, his revelations



Franks stop the Muslim invasion of Europe near Tours, France, in A.D. 732.

## History shows that Islamic theology has and will stir up far more religious wars and terrorist actions proportionately than Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism or other religious belief systems.

advocated peace and cooperation with others. But in Medina, as he gained a large following and military and political power, a very different message appeared in his revelations.

### What the Koran clearly states

According to the notorious “verse of the sword” (Sura 9:5), Muhammad was told, “Slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them”—unless they convert.

Some argue that this is no different from the biblical command to the Israelites to kill the idolatrous Canaanites when they entered the Promised Land. But there are big differences. Whereas the command to Joshua was limited in time and circumstances, the Koran places no simi-

# Does the Koran Promote Peace and Cooperation?

Although many try to explain away much of the militant teaching of the Koran, a straightforward interpretation of the following sampling of verses plainly demonstrates Islam's views toward non-Muslims, including authorizing jihad—holy wars—against them. All are quoted from the Dawood translation of the Koran.

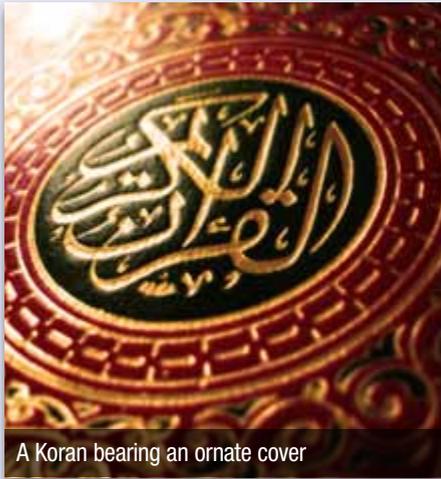
- “Fight against them until idolatry [worship of any god other than Allah] is no more and [Allah's] religion [Islam] reigns supreme” (Sura 2:193).

- “Let those who would exchange the life of this world for the hereafter, fight for the cause of [Allah]; whoever fights for the cause of [Allah], whether he dies or triumphs, on him we shall bestow a rich recompense . . . The true believers fight for the cause of [Allah], but the infidels fight for the devil. Fight then against the friends of Satan” (Sura 4:74-76).

- “Those that make war against Allah and His apostle [Muhammad] and spread disorder in the land shall be slain or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides, or be banished from the land. They shall be held up to shame in this world and sternly punished in the hereafter” (Sura 5:33).

- “Believers, take neither Jews nor the Christians for your friends. They are friends with one another. Whoever of you seeks their friendship becomes one of their number. [Allah] does not guide the wrongdoers” (Sura 5:51).

- “[Allah] revealed His will to the angels, saying: ‘I shall be with you. Give courage to the believers. I shall cast terror into the hearts of the infidels. Strike off their heads, strike off the very tips of their fingers!’ That was because they defied [Allah] and His apostle [Muhammad]. He that defies [Allah] and His apostle shall be sternly punished by [Allah]” (Sura 8:12-13).



A Koran bearing an ornate cover

- “[Allah] will separate the wicked from the just. He will heap all the wicked [i.e. non-Muslims] one upon another and cast them into Hell. These will surely be the losers” (Sura 8:37).

- “Let not the unbelievers [non-Muslims] think that they will ever get away. Muster against them all the men and cavalry at your command, so that you may strike terror into the enemy of [Allah] and your enemy, and others besides them who are unknown to you but known to [Allah]” (Sura 8:59-60).

- “Prophet, rouse the faithful to arms. If there are twenty steadfast men among you, they shall vanquish two hundred; and if there are a hundred, they shall rout a thousand unbelievers, for they are devoid of understanding” (Sura 8:65).

- “A prophet may not take captives until he has fought and triumphed in the land” (Sura 8:67).

- “Make war on them. [Allah] will chastise them at your hands and humble them” (Sura 9:14).

- “Believers, why is it that when you are told:

‘March in the cause of [Allah],’ you linger slothfully in the land? Are you content with this life in preference to the life to come? Few indeed are the blessings of this life, compared with those of the life to come. If you do not go to war, He will punish you sternly, and will replace you by other men . . . March on and fight for the cause of [Allah], with your wealth and with your persons” (Sura 9:38-41).

- “Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate” (Sura 9:73).

- “They [faithful Muslims] will fight for the cause of [Allah], they will slay and be slain” (Sura 9:111).

- “Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that [Allah] is with the righteous” (Sura 9:123).

- “When We resolve to raze a city, We first give warning to those of its people who live in comfort. If they persist in sin, judgment is irrevocably passed, and We destroy it utterly” (Sura 17:16).

- “We have destroyed many a sinful nation and replaced them by other men. And when they felt Our might they took to their heels and fled. They were told: ‘Do not run away. Return to your comforts and to your dwellings. You shall be questioned all.’ ‘Woe betide us, we have done wrong’ was their reply. And this they kept repeating until We mowed them down and put out their light” (Sura 21:11-15).

- “When you meet the unbelievers on the battlefield strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly. Then grant them their freedom or take a ransom from them, until war shall lay down her burdens” (Sura 47:4).

- “Mohammed is [Allah's] apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another” (Sura 48:29).

- “It is He [Allah] who has sent forth His apostle [Muhammad] with guidance and the True Faith [Islam], so that he may exalt it above all religions, much as the idolaters [those who worship gods other than Allah] may dislike it” (Sura 61:9).

—Scott Ashley

lar boundaries on Muslims to wage war against unbelievers.

According to Sura 9:29, Muslims are to “fight against such as those to whom the Scriptures [i.e., the Bible] were given as they believe in neither [Allah] nor the Last Day . . . until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued.”

This, in the eyes of Muslim fundamentalists, justifies permanent war against non-Muslims until the entire world is under Islamic rule.

They also cite Sura 8:39, in which, after winning a crucial battle, Muhammad received instruction that permanently authorizes holy wars to spread Islam: “Make

war on them until idolatry shall cease and [Allah's] religion [Islam] reigns supreme.”

According to the Koran, Allah gives Muslims a spiritual incentive for joining in jihad, or holy war: too: “Fight for the cause of [Allah]; whether they die or conquer, We shall richly reward them” (Sura 4:74). The reward of those who die in jihad, in Islamic teaching, is to immediately go to Paradise.

Elsewhere the Koran authorizes violent war against unbelievers (see “Does the Koran Promote Peace and Cooperation?”). No clear pacifist verses appear that temper or overrule its warlike teachings. By contrast, in the New Testament, Jesus

Christ told His followers to turn the cheek to those who would strike them (Matthew 5:39) and to love and pray for their enemies (verse 44).

After Peter tried to defend Him by attacking someone in a group trying to arrest Him, Jesus responded, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52).

While on trial for His life before the Roman governor, Jesus explained that His servants would fight only if His Kingdom were part of this present world (John 18:36). Since it wasn't, they didn't.

Even in the Old Testament, Israel's



## Resources to Learn More About Islam's History and Theology

The views of liberal Western writers, academics and politicians, plus moderate Muslims, dominate the mainstream media's views of Islam's history and theology. To get past the standard half-truths and distortions about Islamic tolerance and victimhood, it's necessary to read "the rest of the story."

Robert Spencer forcibly analyzes and demolishes common myths in three invaluable books: *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* (2003), *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)* (2005) and *Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn't* (2007).

Despite their own theological errors, Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb still provide a valuable doctrinal biblical analysis of Islamic theology in *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross* (1993). A less careful but more readable book in the same vein is Robert Morey's *Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World's Fastest Growing Religion* (2001).

Harvard professor Samuel Huntington, in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), generally analyzes how the sources of conflict in the post-Cold War era now originate from civilizations (groupings of nations with similar basic culture). Here he provides highly specific empirical evidence that supports his provocative statement that Islamic civilization has "bloody borders."



In two key books, Bat Ye'or provides the basic evidence about Islam's history of intolerance that most Western academics continue to ignore: *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (1996) and *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christianity Under Islam* (1985). Of a similar scholarly nature, but focusing on the history of jihad in particular, is Andrew Bostom's *The Legacy of Jihad: Islamic Holy War and the Fate of Non-Muslims* (2005).

Israeli historian Efraim Karsh documents in *Islamic Imperialism: A History* that Islamic terrorism and wars are historically rooted in the religion's intrinsic expansionary drive. And one of the leading academic authorities on the Islamic world, Bernard Lewis, explains (in *What Went Wrong?*) why Islamic civilization went into a long decline after having been more developed than the West for centuries.



Instead of relying on how other people summarize the Koran's teachings, some readers may wish to read Islam's central religious text for themselves. For general, non-Muslim readers, perhaps the best English translation of the Koran is by N.J. Dawood (1956). However, Muslims respect Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation (originally published in 1917) more, which also numbers the sura and verse divisions much better. The Koran is also available online.

armies sometimes miraculously won battles without any physical violence. For example, in one night, an angel struck down 185,000 Assyrians besieging Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32:8, 21; Isaiah 37:36) after righteous King Hezekiah prayed for deliverance.

### Following Muhammad's example

Serious Muslims aspire to follow the personal example of Muhammad, whom they regard as the perfect example to emulate. According to his early biographer Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad took part in 27 raids and battles. If he literally waged war to promote Islam, wouldn't that encourage his followers to do the same?

The most reliable reports among the Hadith and the early legal rulings that compose the core of Sharia law clearly endorse holy wars as well. For example, in one tradition, when asked what was the best good deed a person could do besides becoming a Muslim, Muhammad replied, "To participate in jihad"—holy war.

In another report Muhammad proclaimed, "Paradise is under the shades of swords."

According to one particularly important Hadith story, Muhammad told Muslims to ask their enemies before starting hostilities to convert to Islam, to surrender to Islamic rule, or to go to war. Restated in one form or another, this standard three-way offer repeatedly reappears historically

in Muslims' conflicts with nonbelievers.

### Later Islamic rulings enshrined jihad

The teachings of the Koran and Hadith about jihad aren't ancient dead letters. They remain a live issue *because* they were codified and frozen into place centuries ago.

Why is it so hard to reform Islamic teachings about jihad? Sunni Muslims, who are in the great majority, uphold the legal theory that open inquiry into the Koran's interpretation ended in the ninth century. Thus, freely interpreting and inquiring into the meaning of the Koran and Hadith to form basic new legal rulings is no longer allowed. As a result, the early medieval jurists' rulings about Allah's will are not to be reconsidered and overturned, including those about jihad.

The four main Muslim legal schools clearly endorse literal jihad. For example, the jurist Al-Qayrawani (who died in A.D. 996) declared: "Jihad is a precept of Divine institution . . . It is preferable not to begin hostilities with the enemy before inviting the latter to embrace the religion of Allah . . . They have the alternative of either converting to Islam or paying the poll tax (jizya), short of which war will be declared against them."

Because orthodox Islam is very legalistic, what these jurists wrote centuries ago still serves as living legal authority for mainstream Muslims. The teachings about jihad of Ibn Taymiyya, who died in 1328,

still resonate today as Osama bin Laden and other jihadists fondly quoted him.

### What about modern Koranic interpretations

To illustrate how traditional Muslim teachings are applied in today's world, consider the beliefs of Sayyid Qutb (1906-66). He was the chief ideologist of the Muslim Brotherhood. Founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan Al-Banna, this Islamist organization is the world's most influential Muslim group.

Its power and political organization far surpasses any other non-governmental group in Egypt. It boasts chapters in more than 100 countries and an estimated 600,000 members. Since the Arab Spring and the revolution in Egypt has greatly increased the Brotherhood's influence, we should be sure we understand the beliefs of one of its most important past leaders.

According to Qutb in his seminal work *Milestones*, Islam has an affirmative duty to impose Sharia law on the whole world: "Other societies do not give [Islam] any opportunity to organize its followers according to its own method, and hence *it is the duty of Islam to annihilate all such systems*" (2005, p. 48, emphasis added).

He went on to explain that the Islamic community "has a God-given right to step forward and take control of the political authority so that it may establish the divine system on earth."

According to Qutb, Muslims who teach

that jihad should only be defensive wars mistakenly ignore the progressive revelation of Allah's will in the Koran: "This is because they regard every verse of the Qur'an as if it were the final principle of this religion" (ibid.). Thus for Qutb, the principle of *naskh*, or abrogation, for Koranic interpretation allows for aggressive jihads.

### Could we see a return of the caliphate?

What about the Islamist teaching that Muslims should have a supranational spiritual leader, or caliph, to lead all Muslims worldwide? The father of modern secular Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, formally abolished the caliphate in 1924 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I.

So is the idea obsolete? Dr. Douglas McLeod's political research and polling team found that majorities in Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia and Pakistan favor reestablishing the caliphate!

As the Arab Spring produces a power vacuum, with the old secular nationalist dictators pushed aside, the mosque emerges as the most important source of social organization in Arab Muslim countries.

Most importantly, their people's sense of national identity and patriotism is weak compared to their religious and tribal affiliations. Furthermore, even as a small but intensely committed political minority, radical Islamists could take over governments weakened by recent revolutions.

After all, few Russians were Bolsheviks in 1917, but the October Revolution ultimately gave them full control of their war-ravaged nation. Although the Muslim Brotherhood's 1982 Syrian revolt was ruthlessly suppressed, the group could use violence in the future again, and succeed.

For this reason and because Islamists can publicly intimidate the majority of sincere conservative Muslims as "bad Muslims" when they disagree with their policies, public opinion polls in Muslim countries that show Islamist parties lack popularity should *not* be reassuring.

Further, in the present unsettled conditions of Middle Eastern politics, Islamist parties could easily win elections, much as Hamas did in the Palestinian territories (2006) and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) did in Algeria (1991).

Although the brief merger of Egypt and Syria as the United Arab Republic more than 50 years ago (1958-61) proved abortive, a future dynamic leader calling himself the caliph and/or the mahdi could succeed in doing what the Arab nationalist

Gamal Abdel Nasser failed to do.

### Does this play into end-time events?

The biblical prophet Daniel tells us that "at the time of the end" a leader will arise, apparently from the heart of the Muslim world, called "the king of the South." He will launch an attack of some sort against a new European-centered geopolitical superpower (Daniel 11:40).

Given the historical background described above, it's not much of a stretch of imagination to think that either a new Muslim caliph or a new Muslim messiah would see it as his duty to expand Islam into Europe by force, or jihad. For decades now, much of the Muslim world, both Sunni and Shiite, has heard such preaching about imminent end-time events, including the coming of an Islamic messiah. And they've long desired to expand Islam into Europe—and indeed, this is a major factor in current Muslim immigration into Europe.

In the years to come, the Bible prophecies that this longtime clash of civilizations between a traditionally Christian Europe and the Islamic Arab world will reach an earth-shaking climax. After the king of the South (i.e., quite possibly a mahdi or caliph to come) attacks, the leader of the new European-centered superpower, called "the king of the North" (and in Revelation "the Beast") will strike back "like a whirlwind . . . he shall enter the [Arab] countries [of North Africa], overwhelm them, and pass through" (Daniel 11:40).

The future dictator of a united Europe will successfully invade both Israel and Egypt (verses 41-42; compare Revelation 11:1-2; Luke 21:24).

Being now forewarned by this knowledge of how Islamic theology will likely impact the world's future, what should we do?

First, we must stay alert to world news reports as Europe and the Arab worlds both become more politically unified and increasingly authoritarian as well. The high hopes of the Arab Spring for creating Western-style democracy in the Middle East will ultimately be dashed.

Since the only source of spiritual and even physical protection in the times of deep trouble to come is our great God, we need to prepare ourselves spiritually by turning our lives over to Him through repentance and faith in His Son Jesus Christ, remembering His warning to us in Matthew 24:44: "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." **GN**



**W**ho's behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by *people*—people from all walks of life, from all over the world, as enabled by God.

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

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News*, various booklets (also free) and our *Beyond Today* TV program, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very survival.

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

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address on page 2. Visitors are always welcome.



For additional information, visit our website:

[www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org)



# Kitchen Table Economics: What Is It That Governments Don't Understand?

There are times when households reach the end of their financial resources and have to declare bankruptcy. Their income cannot meet their debts. Has America come to such a defining moment?

by Darris McNeely

One of my uncles was a farmer who hit on hard times and had to declare bankruptcy. I well remember the night he and his wife came to my parents' home, sat down at our kitchen table and spread out their financial papers. They had some paperwork to accomplish and file with the court before they left town. Their eldest son had found factory work out of state, and they were traveling north to join him, in hopes that they too would find hourly work to enable them to get a fresh start in life.

**Picture a family of four with an income of \$46,000, annual costs of \$78,000, and a credit-card debt of \$281,000. This is proportionate to the U.S. government's income, outlays and accumulated debt.**

My uncle was a small farmer, and too many bad years finally caught up with him. I remember the hushed talk that night in our home as he and my parents went over their plight and what that would mean for the family. Sound financial management is vital to the family unit—and to society at large. It makes the difference between stability and chaos—for both households and entire nations.

### The United States is bankrupt

The United States of America is facing a defining moment in its history. On April 18, 2011, as CNNMoney reported, “S&P [Standard & Poor’s], one of the three main agencies that rate the ability of companies

and sovereign nations to repay their debts, lowered its outlook for America’s long-term credit rating to ‘negative’ from ‘stable.’ The change means that there is a one-in-three chance that S&P could downgrade the nation’s ‘AAA’ credit rating within two



years. That would make it harder for the U.S. government to borrow money to fund its activities” (April 19, 2011).

The sad reality is that America is fiscally bankrupt, and unless it makes some fundamental changes it will decline as a great power. Other countries will not only take America’s place in the world but will also dictate much of its future.

Anyone who honestly looks at the amount of debt we owe and the obligations coming due in the future can see that the country doesn’t have the money in hand and currently owes more than it can pay. President Barack Obama’s budget for this fiscal year nearly doubles the current debt position.

No one with an ounce of fiscal sanity can stand by and watch this train wreck about to happen without asking serious questions about the future of the country. Entitlement programs such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are unsustainable. Promises made to a generation of Americans cannot be met without the United States government going deeper in debt to other nations who are willing to finance our profligate spending patterns.

China, Japan and Saudi Arabia have been willing to buy U.S. bonds and trea-

sury bills, in effect loaning America money to finance what it cannot afford. They hold America’s future in their hands. Like any bank or lending institution, they can call that debt by demanding payment. If you cannot pay, you have to return the goods or declare insolvency. For an individual this is bankruptcy. For a nation it could mean economic servitude.

### Grasping the scope of the problem

When we speak of trillions of dollars of national debt it’s hard to really picture what that means. *The Wall Street Journal* carried a story with an illustration that brings this subject home to the kitchen table. Freshman Republican Congressman Mick

## A Note About Inflation

It should be realized that inflating the money supply is actually massive fraud and theft.

By printing more dollars for the government's and central bankers' own purposes, the value of every dollar held by others is made less. In essence, the value of the dollars in your wallet is stolen by the government and Federal Reserve to use as they see fit. Of course, this means that dollars and other debt instruments held by foreign countries are also worth less—and if inflation is unabated, these nations will eventually tire of having so much stolen from them and will transfer their wealth somewhere more secure. (Of course, these other nations do the same with their own currencies.)

—Tom Robinson

Mulvaney of South Carolina explained to a group of his constituents just how serious America's debt problems are. "It's much, much worse than I had expected," he stated.

"Picture, he suggested, a family of four with an income of \$46,000, annual costs of \$78,000, and a credit-card debt of \$281,000. That drew a gasp from the audience of mostly older voters. The figures are roughly proportionate to federal government revenue, annual outlays and the accumulated national debt, he said" (April 1, 2011).

I think we all know what that would mean if you were sitting around your kitchen table. The answer would be to file for bankruptcy, sell your assets to pay what you could to creditors and hope for a new start.

When we hear figures of billions and trillions of dollars of national debt, we instantly glaze over. No one really understands how much money a trillion dollars is. Mention that America's debt could reach \$14 trillion and we tune out. But bring it down to what that means for a family of four and we begin to get the picture.

The United States has been able to avoid the consequences of massive debt for a number of reasons. Macroeconomics works a bit differently than microeconomics, the level where the average person functions. Because of its size, power and scale of population, a large nation can go a long time without paying back outstanding debt to the rest of the world. America has been running budget deficits for decades, and because other nations have reason to accept and enable this behavior the situation continues.

### Enabling factors

One reason is that America is the world's

largest consumer nation. China's rise in recent decades has been tied to America's demand for cheap labor to produce things it wanted. Japan's earlier rise was based on this to some degree as well. It has been to these nations' advantage to see America remain in this position. If financing U.S. debt is perceived as good for business, then that's what is done.

Arab nations like Saudi Arabia produce oil that fuels America's, and much of the world's, economy. Petro dollars are good for the region and its ruling governments.

Factor in the military might of America. It protected Europe from the Soviets during the Cold War, sheltered Japan from encroachment by other Asian powers and kept the sea lanes of global commerce free and open for the world economy. The desire to maintain America in its protective role is part of why key nations have been willing partners in its descent into debtor status.

Could this come to change?

It could through any number of ways. Imagine one scenario: To finance America's debt the U.S. Federal Reserve prints more and more dollars. Since many of the basic commodities like food and fuel are denominated in dollars, this flooding of markets creates a rise in costs, called inflation. More dollars chasing fewer goods, or goods in greater demand, create a problem. (See "A Note About Inflation.")

When a person in Damascus or Cairo can't afford the rise in food costs and has to go without, it causes unrest. This leads to food riots and the potential for other instability. A commentator recently wrote, "When the Fed sneezes money, the weak economies of the world, and the poor masses who are highly vulnerable to price rises in the necessities of life, catch pneumonia."

The Middle East is already seeing massive instability. Unrest is leading to change in governments, some of which may not be as friendly to American interests in the region. They will not be able to withstand domestic upheaval. If such unrest is linked to American fiscal policy, you have another reason for some to turn from old alliances to pursue their own self-interest.

### Back to the kitchen table

Prices are rising in America as well. Food prices are going up, and gasoline wavers between the \$3- and \$4-per-gallon mark. While this is catching up with the rest of the world, it can't help but have an impact on the American consumer. When

jobs and incomes do not keep up with inflation, cuts in lifestyle will be dictated. Those prepared can manage. Those who aren't prepared will face constricting challenges.

Lawmakers in the U.S. Congress have been making proposals to begin to deal with the budget deficits. Some target the nation's health care and social entitlement programs. Changes to the tax structure are also on the table. If such changes are enacted, and if other world factors remain stable, there is some hope that America could pull out of the decline and return to fiscal stability.

Which brings me back to the kitchen table.

My uncle's bankruptcy taught him a big lesson. He moved out of a farming career to which he was not suited. The day of the small farmer was passing, and he needed to move on to other work. He found it in a factory and went on to make a living wage and another life. He later retired and moved back to our home area and died at a good age. He never again filed for bankruptcy.

You and I live in a highly challenging period, with the opportunity to learn deep and enduring lessons. Massive, uncontrollable debt is not good. As we watch large nations struggle with crippling debt loads, we are offered the chance to change our own immediate behavior regarding money. It's as if God is giving you and me the chance to prioritize our values and bring our spending habits in line with our income—to live a realistic life with the income we have.

Perhaps this is the one opportunity you will have to break old habits and begin to get control of your personal finances! Sit down at your kitchen table. Take a completely honest look at your income and expenses. Do something today's lawmakers find difficult to do, and get control of your financial life! **GN**

### Learn More

We're here to help, as always. We offer a free booklet, *Managing Your Finances*, that presents a biblical foundation for financial management. It offers practical advice along with budgeting tools to help you turn around this part of your life. You can download it at our website or request your free copy from the address for your area on page 2 of this issue.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

[www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)

# Work: It's More Than Just a Job

In and outside the home, work is a critical part of life. But for whom are we really working, and what is the ultimate purpose of work?

by John LaBissoniere

I remember it well. It was a beautiful late summer afternoon in 1960, and my dad had just returned home from work with a recent issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Opening the magazine he said, “John, take a look at this.”

He then pointed to an advertisement showing a photo of a shiny new bicycle. The caption read, “Sell just 10 subscriptions to *The Saturday Evening Post* and receive this beautiful bicycle!”

My dad then said, “John, this would be a great opportunity; I’m sure you could sell these subscriptions.” But he promptly added, “It will take some quick work because it’s only six weeks to the deadline.”

At age 11, the prospect of owning a brand-new bike instantly captivated me. So the very next day I eagerly began knocking on neighbor’s doors in an effort to find subscribers. I quickly learned, however, that earning my bicycle would be harder to accomplish than I had expected—partly because the \$10 subscription price was a hefty outlay in 1960, equaling about \$70 today.

Nevertheless, during the succeeding days I spent hours canvassing farther and farther away from our neighborhood, knocking on many doors in a search of potential buyers. It was hard work, but each time I signed up a subscriber I felt motivated and energized because I knew I was getting closer to my goal. Nevertheless, my zeal was tempered by the worry that I might not make the deadline!

In fact, as the closing date loomed I was still three subscriptions short. Mercifully, my dad came to my rescue with the remaining subscriptions from relatives and a business acquaintance. We immediately mailed

in the 10 names, addresses and payment, and within a month my new bike arrived in a big box on a big truck. As I rode my new bicycle down the driveway for the first time, I realized that all the hard work and anxious concern had paid off handsomely!

From that important experience as a young boy, I found that much satisfaction and personal fulfillment comes from working hard to accomplish a goal. Even so, there were important things I didn’t yet

**Is the work we do simply a means of earning a living? Or do we find fulfillment in our daily labor? Just *why* is work so important, and for *whom* are we *really* working?**

understand about work, and it would take several years before I learned them. I’ll cover more about that a little later.

Work, no matter how simple or ordinary, in or outside the home, is an important part of life. This is true for everyone, including those who endure physical disabilities such as visual or hearing impairment or who are retired from regular daily employment.

So just what is our attitude toward work? Does our work have purpose and meaning? Is the work we do simply a means of earning a living? Do we find fulfillment in our daily labor? And an even bigger question: Just *why* is work so important, and for *whom* are we *really* working?

## The all-important subject of work

The bicycle I worked so hard to obtain with the aid of my dad helped me discover much about myself and what it would take to be successful later in the adult world of employment.

Beginning in those early years, I did all kinds of work. At home, my parents assigned my seven brothers and sisters and me regular daily chores. In addition, I often worked with my dad in various cleaning, painting and mechanical projects. From age 12 to 16 I had a daily paper route.

Throughout high school I held various part-time and summer jobs. And working my way through college, I drove trucks, washed windows, repaired equipment, tarred roofs, painted buildings and laid concrete—along with a number of other jobs.

Thinking back on all those jobs, I realize I learned many key work habits—including punctuality, loyalty, the ability to follow instructions, the capacity to work for long

periods without supervision, and many others.

How about you? If you have worked for any length of time, you too have likely acquired many valuable work habits. Our personal work opportunities and performance can indeed teach us much, but God’s Word reveals and explains the *ultimate purpose* for work.

The Scriptures explain that work, along with the values it instills, is a critical ingredient in God’s long-range plan of *character development* for every human being. Our Creator certainly desires that we experience the joy of working and take pleasure in the fruits of our labors, but He also wants us to understand the vital, great purpose of work.

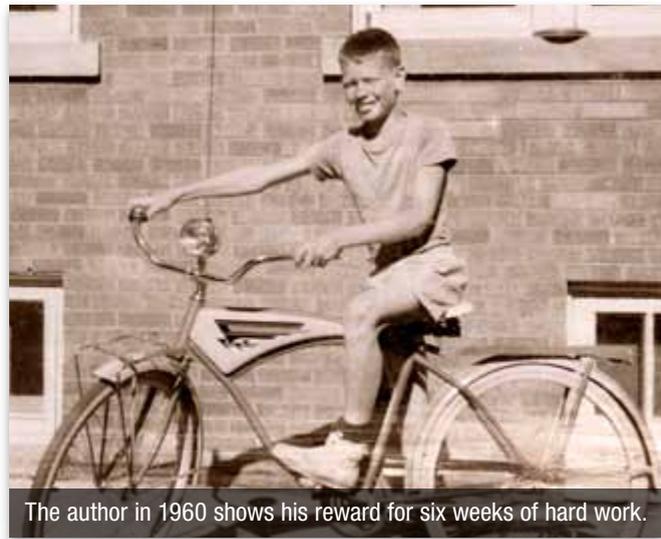
Through the biblical record, let’s learn what God has to say on this critical subject.

## God’s words about work

God Himself is a worker. Jesus Christ said, “My Father has been working until

now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). And God obtains great satisfaction and enjoyment from working. When He shaped and fashioned this beautiful world for human habitation, He was delighted that His efforts produced exceptional results: "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was very good*. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31, emphasis added throughout).

God worked six days and rested on the seventh day to reflect on and appreciate His labors, establishing the weekly Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3). He desires that we follow His example by working hard each week and keeping the Sabbath as He did, so we



The author in 1960 shows his reward for six weeks of hard work.

can rest and be rejuvenated both physically and spiritually (Exodus 20:8-11; Hebrews 4:4, 9-10).

When Jesus walked the earth as a human being, He set a vigorous example of one who works, as we just saw, and who enjoys doing so. In John 4:34 Jesus said, "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work" (New Living Translation). Christ's work was not a burden to Him, and neither should our work be to us. And it won't be if we approach it properly from a godly perspective.

Fulfillment and satisfaction through work is part of the good life that God desires for everyone. Ecclesiastes 3:13 tells us that "every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God."

God desires that all people prosper, thrive and flourish physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. But there is a way to bring this about and a way not to. Jesus explains that there is a petulant thief in

our midst who works hard to obscure and impede the only real path to an abundant, meaningful life. Contrasting this thief, Satan the devil, with Himself, Jesus said: "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness" (John 10:10, NLT).

### The results of choosing the wrong way

God wanted the first human beings Adam and Eve and their children to have "life in all its fullness." He gave them the challenge of working to maintain the strikingly beautiful Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15) and to follow the way of living that would guarantee their continuing prosperity and contentment. Regrettably, however, they sinned and rejected God's aspirations for them, bringing on man's work the curse of drudgery and hardship (Genesis 3:17-19).

Most of mankind has followed a similar pattern. By declining to pursue God's ways and His laws, history shows that most of humanity has struggled in sorrow and distress. As a result, many people have found their work unfulfilling and unsatisfactory. A poll by the Gallup organization found that only about half of American

workers are satisfied with their jobs.

But why is there so much dissatisfaction? As already mentioned, God imposed a curse on man's labor. Yet this curse is not dependent on God's direct action in many cases. Rather, man's own wrong choices automatically bring their own consequences. And being cut off from God, subject to their own lack of wisdom and to Satan's deceptions, people have made many terrible choices.

Indeed, the systems, methods and practices of this age and society are not of God's formation or design. The devil has cleverly succeeded in deceiving the whole world into following his fraudulent, bankrupt way and rejecting God's ideal path (Revelation 12:9). The apostle Paul called today's troublesome, unhappy period of Satan's influence "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). Is it any wonder then that the attitude some people have toward work is negative, gloomy and dismal?

Thankfully, we don't have to be mired in

this bad news. There is also *good* news!

### Working for God

Although we must live amid the societal problems of this world, we can boldly reject the world's often sour attitudes toward work. But how? By working *for God!* This is one of the critical principles I didn't understand in the early days of my working career. But thankfully I was able to discover it later in life by learning it from God through His Scriptures.

Even the most insignificant job can have great purpose and meaning if we bear in mind *for whom we really work!* How, then, should we approach everything we do—including our daily work as a student, homemaker, employee, self-employed individual or retiree?

The apostle Paul gave important instructions to Christians who were in bondage as slaves, but the principles apply equally as well to our own particular work environment today. He told them to consider their service to human masters as being to our *spiritual* Master or Lord—Jesus Christ:

"Slaves, always obey your earthly masters, not only when their eyes are on you, as if you had but to please men, but giving them ungrudging service, in your reverence for the Master. Whatever you do, do it with all your heart, as if working for the Master and not for men, since you know that it is from the Master that you will receive the inheritance which will be your recompense. *You are serving Christ, the Master*" (Colossians 3:22-24, Twentieth Century New Testament).

Paul further stated in Colossians 3:23, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, *as to the Lord* and not to men."

Our work takes on even greater meaning when we realize that we're not doing it merely for a salary or for our own personal fulfillment, but that we're working to honor the great God of the universe! As a result, we can bring an attitude of enthusiasm and cheer to our workplace (Proverbs 15:13).

### Having a positive work attitude

If we are truly working for God, what are some ways we can cultivate a healthy, positive attitude in our place of employment? The website Career-Success-For-Newbies.com offers some guidelines:

**1. Be a "can do" person.** When faced with setbacks on the job, we should not give up but rather work at finding a way to successfully complete our tasks. Instead of saying, "No, this can't be done," we can say, "It



looks tough, but let me see what I can do.” The effort and determination we demonstrate will pay off regardless of the success of a project. Such an attitude is valuable for both fellow employees and superiors who see and appreciate it.

**2. Don’t complain.** Nothing positive comes from simply complaining about a matter. Instead, it’s better to discuss a particular problem with a superior if we feel it’s directly affecting our job function or performance. When we do, it leaves the door open for something to be done to correct a negative situation.

**3. Work hard.** The popular expression “Work smarter, not harder” is misinterpreted by some to mean that we can forego hard work. The real meaning is that our efforts should be put to the best use (compare Ecclesiastes 10:10). We still need to exert effort, always doing the best we can. As Scripture says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

## Work habits that we’ve learned during this physical life, such as punctuality, determination, reliability, patience, etc., will suit us well in the awesome future that awaits us.

**4. Be organized.** Being organized means we can be more efficient, which allows our superior to consider giving us better assignments. This is because he or she knows we can complete a task efficiently and on time.

But how can we work for God and be energetic in our labors if we have a supervisor who is difficult to work with or seems insensitive and uncaring? Paul explains what to do: “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully” (1 Peter 2:18-19).

Of course, employees are not slaves, and no one should endure mistreatment endlessly. But it’s good to remember that, even though we are working for God as our ultimate employer, there is no perfect human work environment. So when we face difficulties on the job, we should exercise the wisdom found in these words: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

Indeed, God wants us to recognize our need for His help and to ask Him for it.

Considering this, I reflect on the assistance my dad graciously gave me when I was short those three *Saturday Evening Post* subscriptions. If we are obedient to God, relying on His help while doing what we can, *He* will take care of the rest.

### What if you are unemployed?

But what if you happen to be unemployed? It’s no secret that finding employment in today’s difficult job market involves using creativity, ingenuity and regular, steady effort. In other words, these are the very same qualities needed to perform soundly once you secure employment. You can use the same biblical principles of diligence, initiative and tenacity by *making a job out of finding a job*.

Just as you would in any other occupation, you can spend 40 or more hours a week working at securing employment. Putting pressure on yourself to reach as many potential employers as possible each day will be motivational and encourag-

ing in confronting feelings of inadequacy and dejection that sometimes accompany unemployment.

Networking with people who might be able to help you in your job search is also a valuable tool. Reading books and articles on how to search for employment more effectively can boost your job-hunting, resume-preparing and interviewing skills.

Furthermore, you can ask God for His powerful help in finding the right job. As 1 John 3:22 explains, “Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

### The ultimate purpose of work

As I mentioned earlier, God desires that we find pleasure even in the simplest of tasks and that we enjoy the fruit of our labors. But He also wants us to understand the ultimate purpose of work.

Just what is that great purpose? As incredible as it may seem, God’s people in this age are preparing *for working and serving alongside Jesus Christ as kings and priests* when He establishes the Kingdom of God on earth (Revelation 2:26; 5:10). Jesus spoke about giving His Spirit-

born, faithful followers authority over cities (Luke 19:17, 19).

And in the end, all of mankind will be offered a place in God’s Kingdom, which is ultimately His eternal, divine family. Those who accept God’s offer will inherit the entire universe, being coheirs with Christ of all things (Romans 8:17, 32). (For much more on this incredible future, be sure to request or download our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*) And we will be engaged in rewarding accomplishment for eternity to come.

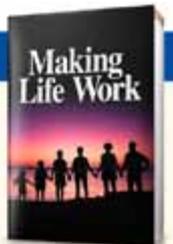
But just how can we be training for such amazing work in God’s future government on the earth and ultimately over the entire universe if we have spent our career as a truck driver, homemaker, computer technician or in another profession? Well, perhaps we won’t use the specific technical skills we learned in those occupations, but we can certainly apply the positive work habits we developed.

Work habits that we’ve learned during this physical life, such as punctuality, determination, reliability, patience, organization, thoughtfulness, cooperation and teamwork, will suit us well in the awesome future that awaits us.

God looks very closely at our performance and attitude in whatever work we do now as a critical sign as to how we will carry out our responsibilities for all eternity (Luke 16:10-12).

Little did I know when I worked to earn my new bike at age 11 that I was building vital work habits and character to help me prepare for working and serving in God’s future Kingdom for eternity to come. The same is true for you! So let us profoundly appreciate God’s great ultimate purpose for work and understand for whom we are really working. To be sure, work is more than just a job! **GN**

### Learn More



Who wouldn’t want their life to work better! Did you realize that the Bible offers a great deal of practical, time-tested advice on work and career, finances, health, marriage, child rearing, friendships and much more—virtually every aspect of life? We’ve collected much of that advice in a handy guide titled *Making Life Work*. Download or request your free copy today!

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

[www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)

# What Can You Do When Life Isn't Fair?

Unfairness seems to pervade life. When unfair circumstances affect you, how can you best respond? *by John LaBissoniere*

**W**hen I was a youngster, one of my most frequent complaints was, "That's not fair!" Everything had to be fair, and if it wasn't—well—it just wasn't fair!

When I complained about a perceived family injustice, my father would remind me of his often-used phrase, "Life isn't fair." He would explain that if I expected fairness throughout life, I would be sadly disappointed because it just wasn't going to happen.

Of course, I didn't like hearing that—but as I matured, I came to see that inequitable, troublesome and undeserved events occur in *everyone's* life.

Even so, unfair treatment still bothers me—especially when I see it deliberately perpetrated against innocent, unsuspecting people. Perhaps you share a similar reaction when you learn that an unscrupulous person has taken advantage of someone or a criminal has gone unpunished.

Furthermore, how do you feel when you are personally cheated, lied about, improperly reprimanded or deeply betrayed, or your reputation is carelessly tarnished?

Realizing such actions are inherently wrong, our natural human reaction is to feel distressed and offended. We may then respond by turning angry and bitter or seeking revenge. Alternatively, we may retreat into sadness or depression and withdraw from those who emotionally harmed us.

Are those effective ways to handle unfairness, or are there more constructive and productive methods? When life's events hand us significant troubles or when people treat us unfairly and unjustly, what should we do? How can we weather the upset and disappointment we will predictably feel?

## A difficult start in life

Consider the story of Anne Mansfield Sullivan. Born on April 14, 1866, in Feeding Hills, Massachusetts, Anne's youth was filled with hardship and adversity. Not only



Hellen Keller and Anne Sullivan

was she raised in deep poverty, but she was physically abused by her alcoholic father. At age five she contracted trachoma, a bacterial infection of the eye. This virulent disease was left untreated, causing her to nearly go blind.

When Anne turned eight years old, her mother, Alice Sullivan, died of tuberculosis. Two years later her father abandoned both Anne and her brother James to the state infirmary in Tewksbury, Mass., after finding it difficult to raise the children alone.

Conditions at the institution were deplorable since it was chronically underfunded, in disrepair and severely overcrowded. If that wasn't bad enough, after just three months James died from tuberculosis.

During her four-year stay at Tewksbury, Anne received two operations that failed to significantly correct her vision. However, in October 1880, as Anne turned 14 years old, she was accepted into the Perkins School

for the Blind in Boston (founded in 1832 and operating to this day).

## Overcoming the obstacles

At the Perkins School her situation began to improve. Anne received additional treatment for her eyes that enhanced her sight enough so she could read for short periods. As a result, she diligently concentrated on her academic education. Anne also learned sign language so as to communicate with a friend who was both deaf and blind. Anne studied so meticulously that she graduated as class valedictorian on June 1, 1886.

In her valedictory address she challenged her classmates and herself by stating: "Fellow graduates, duty bids us go forth into active life. Let us go cheerfully, hopefully and earnestly, and set ourselves to find our especial part. When we have found it, willingly and faithfully perform it; for every obstacle we overcome, every success we achieve tends to bring man closer to God and make life more as He would have it."

Several teachers and staff members at the Perkins School were impressed with Anne's positive attitude, talents, intelligence and persistence. This included school director Michael Anagnos, who personally recommended Anne be accepted by the Keller family in Tuscumbia, Alabama, as tutor and mentor to their blind, deaf and mute daughter Helen.

Anne Sullivan became the instructor to whom Helen Keller, one of the most admired women of the 20th century, acclaimed as making an extraordinary impact on her life. In chapter four of Helen Keller's autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, she wrote, "The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me."

## We choose how to react

What does Anne Sullivan's story illustrate? Considering the significant troubles she encountered in her youth, she could have turned frustrated, morose and resentful. She could have ceaselessly complained about the unfairness of her upbringing and the hardships she experienced.



But she didn't. Instead, Anne chose to rise above her circumstances and use every opportunity to discover, develop and expand her talents and abilities. In doing so, she grew in emotional maturity and character.

Just as Anne Sullivan consciously resolved to handle her disadvantages in a constructive manner, you and I have choices when we are afflicted by inequity and injustice. Whether we face a recent difficult setback or a long-term situation as profound as what Anne encountered, *we can choose how we will react and what we will do.*

The Bible offers examples of such choices from both a positive and negative perspective.

### The story of Joseph and his brothers

To illustrate, let's briefly examine the account of Joseph and his brothers from Genesis 37. The story begins when Joseph brought a negative report to his father Jacob on how his brothers were tending their flocks (verses 1-2). Joseph's account upset and irritated them. Furthermore, the brothers could see that their father overwhelmingly favored Joseph above them (verse 3). This perceived unfairness greatly annoyed and angered them and led to intense feelings of envy and resentment—even hatred.

Later, Joseph experienced two vivid

its blood. Then they took the bloodstained garment to Jacob and told him that a wild animal must have killed Joseph. On hearing this, Jacob wept bitterly and refused to be comforted over losing his son (verse 33).

### Joseph's reaction to unfair treatment

There is much more to the remarkable story of Joseph as a slave and later as a ruler in Egypt (Genesis 39–50). But suffice it to say that, considering the unfair actions he endured, Joseph could have turned bitter and spent endless hours wallowing in his



The patriarch Joseph was taken to Egypt as a slave, but God used him to bless his entire family.

you, even if others treat you unfairly for being loyal to him" (1 Peter 2:19, Good News Bible).

### God allows unfair circumstances and events

Certainly, God *can* make things right in this physical life—but *He doesn't always choose to do so.* In His wisdom, He sometimes allows unfair and even disgraceful treatment to afflict His faithful followers (Psalm 119:75).

The Bible's "Faith chapter," Hebrews 11, describes how this was true of a number of God's servants: "Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy.

"They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (verses 36-40).

Also, consider Jesus Christ. Having lived a totally sinless life, He was undeserving of the merciless treatment He received (Matthew 16:21). What was His response to such dreadful unfairness? He willingly and faithfully placed His circumstance in His Father's just and mighty hands. "When He was reviled, [He] did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). Indeed, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

### Looking beyond today's world

What is God's message to His people today? It is to react in the same manner Christ did when we suffer unjustly. We are to "pursue peace with all people" (Hebrews 12:14), and Jesus Christ admonished His followers to handle unfairness and iniquity with love and forgiveness (Matthew 5:44-45).

Of course there may be certain instances where we can respectfully defend ourselves against unfair actions. For example, the apostle Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to shield himself from the abusive treatment of military authorities (Acts 22:25).

Also, when handling an offense or dis-

## Everyone experiences unfairness in life. The principle to remember is that *how we react* to unfair treatment is more important than *what has happened* to us.

dreams in which it appeared he was greatly honored by his father and brothers. In relating the dreams to his brothers, they imagined he was pretentiously exalting himself, which infuriated them even more (verse 5-11).

Afterward Jacob again sent Joseph to visit his brothers as they were tending their flocks and report back to him. By this time their hatred toward Joseph had grown so great that they began contemplating his murder (verses 18-20).

Realizing the dire nature of their antagonism, the eldest brother Reuben succeeded in calming the others down for a short time (verses 21-24). But later, without Reuben's knowledge, they threw Joseph into a pit and sold him to passing Ishmaelite traders for 20 shekels of silver.

To hide their treachery, the brothers killed a goat and dipped Joseph's tunic in

troubles and nursing his emotional wounds. But he didn't.

Instead, he decided to concentrate his talents and energies on becoming the best person he could be while trusting God for help in every situation. In fact, when his brothers later came to Egypt where Joseph was now a high official, he chose to treat them with kindness, generosity and forgiveness—even explaining to them that God used the bad thing they had done to ultimately save their and others' lives (Genesis 50:15-21).

His example demonstrates that what happens *within* a person is significantly more important than what happens *to* him!

As this example makes plain, God is fully capable of eventually equalizing unfair circumstances. Also, as the apostle Peter explained, God carefully watches over those who, while suffering unjustly, remain faithfully obedient to Him. "God will bless

# If you like The Good News, you'll love our Web site!

agreement with someone, the Bible counsels us to go directly to that individual to peacefully discuss the problem to determine if it can be resolved equitably (Matthew 18:15-16).

Paul also recognized, however, that complete justice will not always occur in this present age ruled by the devil (Galatians 1:4; Luke 4:6). Looking beyond today he wrote, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

## The ultimate answer to unfairness

The reality is that everyone experiences unfairness in life. It was certainly true for Anne Sullivan, for young Joseph and especially for Jesus Christ, who endured momentous injustice (Hebrews 12:2). The key principle to remember is that *how we react* to unfair treatment is more important than *what has happened* to us.

Responding to unjust situations or actions in anger, bitterness and revenge is not the answer (Ephesians 4:31-32). Rather, trusting God in faith and obedience brings true peace of mind and, in due course, entrance into eternal life (Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 19:17).

The time is coming when Satan and his demons will be removed and Jesus Christ will reign on the earth (Revelation 11:15; 20:1-5; 5:10). When that day dawns, all inequities, including those we have personally experienced, will be fully corrected (Romans 8:35-39).

So the next time you feel you have been treated unfairly, you could be right. What should you do as a result? Carefully bring to mind that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Let us always reflect and act on this when life is unfair! **GN**

## Learn More

What does it mean to have faith? And what is faith, really? The Bible tells us that we are to *live* by faith, but what does that mean? How did the many figures of the Bible live by faith? Discover the answers in our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*. Request or download your free copy today!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

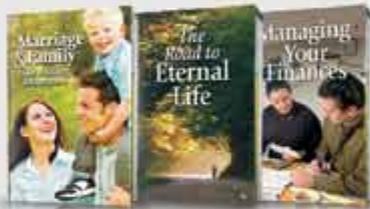
[www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)



You won't believe all the great things you'll discover at *The Good News* website at [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org)!

You'll find past issues of *The Good News*, each packed with articles about world trends and events, family and social issues, prophecy in the news and *The Good News'* eye-opening, in-depth perspective of the Bible. Discover articles about creation and evolution, profiles of biblical personalities, proofs of the Bible and much, much more!

Explore our large library of booklets covering a wide variety of biblical, family and social issues and themes. Take a look at our publications in other languages—Spanish, German, Italian,

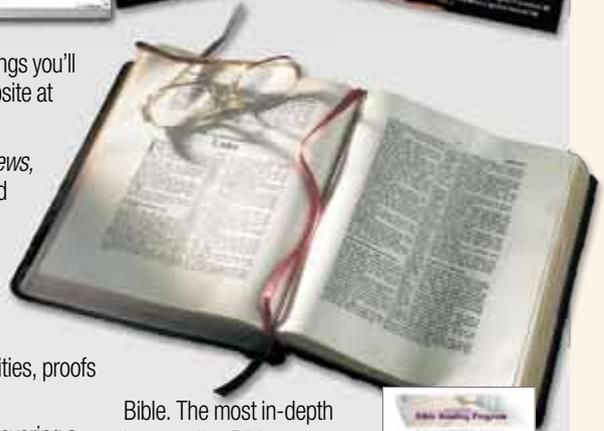


French and Dutch, to name a few (and feel free to share them with a friend overseas).

Use our search tool so you can find material on any subject you want—marriage, family, biblical teachings, current events, prophecy, you name it. Feel free to download all these to your own computer so you can study them in depth, or request your own printed copies to be mailed right to your home!

While you're there, be sure to take a look at our sister publications, *Virtual Christian Magazine* (available only on the Internet at [www.VCmagazine.org](http://www.VCmagazine.org)) and *Vertical Thought*. You'll find them filled with helpful, eye-opening articles much like those you enjoy in *The Good News*.

Our sister website, [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org), is packed with an astounding amount of information about the



Bible. The most in-depth is our online Bible commentary, a study that takes you on a chapter-by-chapter journey of discovery through the Bible with supplementary reading and graphic aids such as charts and maps to open up your understanding of the Scriptures as never before.

You'll also find answers to frequently asked Bible questions, helpful study guides on dozens of biblical topics, and so much more!

You can also listen to or download sermons, presentations and TV programs done by many of *The Good News* writers. We hope you'll visit us today to discover what you've been missing!



visit [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) today!



# An Invitation to Eternity

*“Follow Me.” What does this invitation from Jesus Christ involve? What does it require? Are you willing to join Him on the journey?* by Robin Webber

**N**early 2,000 years ago a couple of fishermen were going about their own business casting nets into the Sea of Galilee in hopes of their next big catch.

Today, like every day, Andrew and Peter were steadily plying their trade, as did their ancestors before them. The rhythm of life, just like the steady lapping of the waves on the shore, was slow, steady and assuring.

Their life was not complex, but it was nonetheless demanding. They knew the best times to come to the shore and launch their boats. The men cast their nets with an expertise developed since childhood and would pull them in with patience and precision.

Next, the catch for the day had to be separated. Then, their sturdy hands would turn the boat's rudder towards shore. Once on

“fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19).

Indeed, these two initial words would not only alter two lives but, along with others, alter the course of history.

The book of Matthew describes their response by stating, “They immediately left their nets and followed Him” (verse 20). The power of the moment is the reality that they dropped their nets and handed over their past, present and future to the man on the shore.

The first recorded words of Jesus Christ to Peter were “Follow Me.” Peter would hear these words more than once. Little could he realize where the journey would lead and what Christ would have in store for this son of Galilee.

After years of following Jesus of Nazareth over the roads of Galilee, Judah and Samaria and even into the challenging environs of

**This new column is designed not only to guide you to open the pages of your Bible, but to encourage you to “get out of the boat” and follow Jesus Christ without reservation.**

shore they would clean their nets and hang them out to dry. These nets were precious—being the ultimate tool of their trade on which their survival depended. Practically speaking, the nets meant everything!

Last, but not least, would come the grunt work of hauling the fish to market. Their day was almost done—or at least they thought so, but little could they know that the familiar rhythm of life was about to abruptly change.

## **An invitation and an immediate response**

A man of Galilee that they had known and spoken with before was standing by the shore. He used the acoustics of the still water to send one simple, yet direct, message to these two burly fishermen.

The words were a curious blend of invitation and command—“Follow Me.” He went on to declare that He would make them

Jerusalem, Peter would have to come to fully face himself and further let go of the “nets” of life.

## **Peter receives a repeat invitation**

Jesus would have one last recorded conversation with His beloved fisherman. It was after Jesus' death and resurrection, in those last few days before He ascended to heaven, that the echo of those first two words of personal engagement would be visited once more on Peter's ears. It would occur where it had all started—on those same shores by the same sea.

Often life is a circle, and God brings us right back to the initial classroom of life to get the lesson! As a preamble to hearing the invitation one more time, the apostle John in his Gospel account points out Peter's consternation and bewilderment over Christ's words

regarding the future of John and himself.

Jesus' words indicated that Peter would suffer a challenging martyrdom while John's life would apparently travel a different road (John 21:18-24). It is here that Jesus said to Peter, “If I want him [John] to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me” (verse 22, New International Version).

It's within these first and last recorded comments of Christ to Peter that we discover the ever-present echo of Jesus' invitation to disciples for all times—an invitation that simply stated, “Follow Me.” This is where His conversation always begins and never ends with those chosen by Him (John 15:16).

## **Are you willing to go the same way?**

“Follow Me” is the ever-present guiding echo that encases the journey of a Christian pilgrim as he or she navigates the challenges of a world that's turned from God. *Akoloutheo*, the root Greek word translated “follow,” brings forth a variety of definitions that convey companionship based on union or likeness. Thus it gives the sense of “one going in the same way” (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, New Testament Section, “Follow”).

In the Gospels this word is used 77 times of following Christ. It's been said that if God says something once it's important. What then is the significance when the concept of “following” Jesus is given 77 times?

Of course, the command for this spiritual journey is easy to read, but it's challenging to undertake. And it's intended to be just that—*challenging*.

In contemplating the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, we realize that it's humanly impossible to abide by its tenets without supernatural help. Christ lifted the bar so high it cannot be raised higher. A full and honest read of Jesus' words reminds all that He never said it would be easy, but rather that it would be worth it. But it comes at a cost! God still expects us each of us to “leave our nets.”

## **Excuses to avoid the invitation**

After his initial conversation with Peter, Jesus would further explain to others what

it meant to “follow Me.” The formula never changes as the account in Luke 9:57-62 bears witness: “Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’”



Peter and Andrew immediately left their fishing nets to follow Jesus

It is here that Jesus engages the earnest would-be disciple to fully consider what demands the future might bring and to prepare for a life quite unlike the one he’s been living.

“Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.’”

This man was not talking about attending a funeral right then. He seems to have had either unfinished business at home with an ailing aged parent who was not yet deceased or, if the parent had actually died, perhaps a complicated inheritance that would take time to sort out. (Or it could be a reference to the year-long Jewish mourning period of that day, after which bones of the deceased were reinterred in an ossuary or bone box.)

In any case, Jesus was not demeaning the dead or genuine responsibility to one’s family duties. Rather, He was making a demand statement on the would-be follower to hand over his present life into the care of God’s providence.

“And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

This third individual was not talking about a quick trip back to say goodbye to some guests who’d just stopped by. Instead, while considering a life of following Christ, he wanted to take time to visit his past

associates and cuddle up to a known world of companions he would be required to put behind him.

It is right here, among three would-be followers, that Jesus offers a profound and gripping message to those who would be granted the gift of eternal life by our Heavenly Father and follow Christ into eternity.

As the stunned followers begin to understand the depth of His challenge and invitation, we can almost read Jesus’ lips in discerning what He was basically saying: “The bottom line of My message is this: When My call comes, you are to drop your nets immediately just like My friends Peter and Andrew. As you do, understand that My desire and prerequisite

for companionship with Me is surrendering your past, present and future and handing it over to Me in faith and confidence that My perfection is always going to trump your human best.”

The apostle John recorded Jesus’ expectations in these terms: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

### Will you drop nets or drop anchor?

Allow me to speak plainly: Some of you reading this column may be related in mindset (at least for the moment) to the individuals we just read about in Luke 9.

Let’s fully understand that Jesus’ call to “Follow Me” is not isolated to the confines of the Middle East. This call comes every day, in unique ways, all over the world—into factories, schools, offices and homes just like yours.

You may have heard God’s call for years now, just as much as Andrew and Peter heard the voice of Christ come over the water. But instead of coming to the proverbial shore and immediately dropping your nets, you have dropped anchor where you are, at a safe distance from commitment to Someone offering something far greater than yourself.

Again, let me make it very plain: There is a profound difference between simply knowing who Jesus Christ is while safely viewing Him from a distance and walking step by step with Him towards eternity.

This new column in *The Good News*, titled “Follow Me,” is designed not only to

guide you to open the pages of your Bible, but to encourage you to open the doors of your heart to “get out of the boat” and prepare to “drop your own personal nets,” whatever issues they may be, and follow Jesus Christ without reservation—walking with Him wherever He chooses to guide.

Yes, heed His call with all your heart and leave to Him the consequences of your obedience. And yes, when we stumble and lose our way, remember the reverberating echo of God’s love is always present—“Follow Me!” We are going to trace our Master’s walk through the imprint of His perfect life, His challenging death and glorious resurrection to fuel our commitment to follow Him in every aspect of our lives.

Perhaps the voice of “Follow Me” is best heard in the story of a man whose plane crashed in a deep jungle. There he was stuck in the bush until he came on a hut in a clearing. A native man appeared from out of the hut. The forlorn pilot asked if he could get him out of there, and the native man confidently responded, “Yes.”

Thus, they began the journey. Hours went by as the native man forged ahead, slashing away with his machete at the tangled brush in front of them. Finally, the anguished pilot frustratingly cried out to the man, “You said you knew the path out of here to rescue. Where is it?”

The guide slowly turned around. And with a smile on his face and a piercing gaze into the pilot’s eyes, he proclaimed, “I am the path.”

With this story in mind, may this and future columns help us in our journey to always look to and heed Jesus’ call of “Follow Me.” As we remember, He never said it would be *easy*, but He did say it would be *worth it*. We must always trust in Him to lead us. The same One tells you this very moment in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” **GN**

### Learn More

What does it mean to have faith? And what is faith, really? The Bible tells us that we are to *live* by faith, but what does that mean? How did the many figures of the Bible live by faith? Discover the answers in our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*. Request or download your free copy today!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

[www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)

# Real Hope, Practical Answers!

**W**elcome to this new feature in *The Good News*. This first Bible mini-study looks at specific ways that Scripture can help you with the issues that worry and discourage you. The Bible is the world's most valuable book on human relations because the Author is also our Creator. Join us in exploring what God tells us in the Bible about how to make your life work—and *work right!*

## How can the Bible help me?

Wouldn't it be great if there was a practical, helpful, trustworthy place to get real answers to the worrisome challenges you face every day? There is! Here's how you can access it and get the help you need now and always.

Have you ever felt like this? "I weep with grief. . . Arrogant people have made up lies about me. . . I have suffered much. . . My life constantly hangs in the balance. . . Powerful people harass me without cause" (Psalm 119:28, 69, 107, 109, 161, New Living Translation).

We've all felt some of these strong emotions at times. Perhaps even now you're going through a trial that is sapping your strength and draining your hope. Through all of the challenges listed in Psalm 119, the person who wrote this biblical song found strength, encouragement and real help from the words and laws of God recorded in the Holy Bible. And you can as well!

"Your decrees please me; they give me wise advice. . . Your promise revives me; it comforts me in all my troubles. . . Your law is more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver! . . . Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. . . You are my refuge and my shield; your word is my only source of hope. . . Those who love your law have great peace and do not stumble" (Psalm 119:24, 50, 72, 105, 114, 165, NLT).

## What does the Bible say about solving your problems?

We all have unique challenges, talents, worries and opportunities. But the Bible has practical help and real hope for you! It wasn't just written for "other people"—those trying to be more religious, those who love to read books or whatever. It was written for teens in Texas, single moms in Sao Paulo, grandparents in Greece, prisoners in Paris—*everyone!*

Obviously in this small space we can't begin to show all the Bible's practical benefits for your unique circumstances. But we can set a foundation and give you a *taste* of its practical benefits for today and forever.

## Real hope: God cares about you!

Let's start with something it seems everyone longs for—hope! What does the Bible offer as an antidote to the depressing hopelessness spreading around the world today?

► **At one of the darkest times in the history of Judah, what was God's message through His prophet Jeremiah?**

*"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I hope in Him!' The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him" (Lamentations 3:22-25).*

The prophet Jeremiah wrote the poetic book of Lamentations in mourning over the fall of Jerusalem, the city where God's temple was. It was in the midst of terrible destruction that Jeremiah recorded these inspiring words of solid hope. Such hope is not merely wishful thinking, but a confident expectation that God will do what He has promised.

## ► Is the Bible designed to give us hope?

*"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).*

Here we learn that part of the purpose of the Holy Scriptures—the Bible—is to help us develop endurance and give us encouragement so we can have hope!

*"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).*

The Bible gives us hope because the "God of hope" recorded it for us. When things seem hopeless in the storms of this "present evil age" (Galatians 1:4), God gives hope that serves as a steady anchor (Hebrews 6:19).

## ► What makes hope possible?

*"And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5, New Revised Standard Version).*

The love of God shows Christians that even troubles work for our ultimate good.

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).*

When we love God in return, He can make everything, even the difficult times, work out for our eternal good. Many people have memorized this encouraging scripture to help them in their trials.

*"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).*

When God—the Creator of everything—is for us, all enemies are powerless to stop Him from blessing us!

## ► Does God understand our problems?

*"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we*

are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Jesus Christ experienced the pains and sorrows of human life and the temptations to do wrong. He understands and sympathizes. God has given us the priceless privilege of being able to come boldly before Him in prayer in all our many times of need!

### **Benefits of the Bible: practical examples**

#### ► **What are some of the benefits of God’s way of life?**

*“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed” (Psalm 103:2-6).*

God forgives us and wipes away the burden of guilt in a way no self-help program or psychiatrist ever could—a priceless benefit! God’s power to heal our minds and bodies, to satisfy our needs, to protect us, to strengthen us—these are things people spend their fortunes on and their lives searching for. But God fulfills them as no one else can. And He looks out for the underdog, the oppressed and those in every kind of crisis as no human being has the power to do. The rest of this inspiring psalm contains many other benefits.

#### ► **Where can we turn for practical answers?**

*“For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths*

*of justice, and preserves the way of His saints” (Proverbs 2:6-8).*

## **What is your most challenging, worrisome problem?**

### **Take it to God in humble prayer. That’s the vital first step!**

One biblical book full of commonsense advice is the book of Proverbs. It was written and compiled by Israel’s King Solomon, whom God blessed with exceptional wisdom. Applying God’s wisdom will protect us like a shield—like a force field to deflect people and problems that would otherwise deceive, seduce or hurt us. Think of all the sorrows that could be prevented! Think of the benefits of avoiding financial scams, sexually transmitted diseases, premarital pregnancies, poverty and heartache!

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).*

Without God we are lost, but life with Him has direction and meaning. Whatever He sees as best for us He will give us, including prosperity, honor, health, peace and happiness!

**► Does the Bible give keys to happier relationships with others?**

*“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).*

The natural tendency when someone speaks harshly to us is to respond in kind. But Solomon here points out that this only escalates the conflict. Thinking before we speak and choosing a nonconfrontational tone can help calm the situation.

*“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. . . . ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink’ . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but*

*overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21).*

The apostle Paul also provides tips for getting along with problem people, here quoting from Proverbs. Feeding an enemy may not be an intuitive response, but perhaps that is part of the reason it may surprise and disarm him or her. Overcoming evil with good is a powerful human relations principle given to us by our loving Creator. Check out our helpful booklets *Making Life Work* and *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* for specific tips to improve your relationships.

#### ► **Does the Bible give helpful advice for job success?**

*“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man” (Proverbs 6:6-11).*

*“He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Proverbs 10:4).*

Solomon uses the colorful analogy of the industrious ant as a lesson in success. Employers look for diligent workers who go above and beyond, improve their skills and work hard whether the boss is looking or not. These are the workers who are most in demand and thus have greater security on the job.

#### ► **Does the Bible give principles that lead to financial security?**

*“The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Proverbs 22:7).*

Our “buy now, pay later” society has forgotten this principle, but avoiding debt and paying back what we already owe is a key to security.

*“A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished. . . . Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds; for riches are not forever. . . .” (Proverbs 27:12, 23-24).*

Being alert to threats and opportunities is a key to wise planning. Conservative budgeting and planning can avoid countless pitfalls and best lead to sustained and secure growth. Many more helpful tips can be found in our free booklet *Managing Your Finances*.

The Bible is full of practical principles that offer help and hope in every challenge we face. God’s way works today in “the life that now is,” and His plan offers incredible promises for our potential in the life “which is to come”—the everlasting life He offers us as His children (see 1 Timothy 4:8; John 3:16; 1 John 3:1)! We hope this sampling of godly wisdom from God’s instruction book has whetted your appetite for more! We will cover more on this in future articles and studies.

### **Apply what you’ve learned**

What is your most challenging, worrisome problem? Listen to what God says: “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7). God cares, and He wants you to throw all your cares on His broad shoulders to carry! Take your problems, especially that biggest problem, to Him in prayer. That’s the vital first step.

Turning our problems over to God doesn’t mean we won’t have to do the hard studying, counseling, decision making, etc. But knowing that the most powerful being in the universe cares and will help us takes a huge load off our minds! **GN**

# St. Valentine, Cupid and Jesus Christ

On February 14 millions of people exchange tokens and messages of love and affection. Where and how did the curious customs of Valentine's Day begin? Does God have anything to say about such practices?

by Gary Petty

Every year in mid-February millions of people express romantic desire for each other by exchanging heart-shaped boxes of chocolate, flowers and "valentines." Children reveal hidden infatuations by sending a card as a "secret admirer." Retailers stock their shelves with merchandise covered in stylized hearts and Cupids now common on Valentine's Day.

Of course, this is nothing new. The custom of sending valentine cards actually became popular in the 1700s. Then in the early 1800s commercial valentines appeared, and soon there was no end to how entrepreneurs could make money from the holiday. Valentine's Day became so popular in the United States that one 1863 periodical claimed that was second in celebration only to Christmas.

Today, Valentine's Day is as popular as ever with children and couples. It's definitely one of the biggest moneymaking days for florists, candy makers and gift shops.

But just where did the curious customs of this day come from? What is the origin of the holiday itself? And what should the Christian perspective of this holiday be, according to the Bible?

## A martyred saint?

Valentine's Day supposedly acquired its name from a Catholic saint, although exactly who he was is a matter of debate. The two most famous candidates were a priest in Rome and a bishop in central Italy, both of whom suffered martyrdom in the last half of the third century.

Robert Myers, in *Celebrations: The Complete Book of American Holidays*, records

the story this way:

"Everyone knows that St. Valentine's Day is that day of the year when friends and lovers express affection for one another, through cards, candy and flowers, whatever means the imagination can find. But no one is quite certain who this St. Valentine was—or, more appropriately, who these Valentines were. The early lists of church martyrs reveal at least three Valentines, and one source boasted this number to an unwieldy eight, each of whom had his feast day on February 14.

"The various Valentines eventually evolved into one. Lover's quarrels come under his jurisdiction and, naturally, he is the patron saint of engaged couples and of anyone wishing to marry" (with the editors of Hallmark Cards, 1972, pp. 48-49).

Some have claimed that he is associated with love because he secretly performed Christian weddings during Roman persecution. Of course, all Christian ceremonies and gatherings were done in secret at the time, so this would not have been unusual for any Christian leader. Valentine's particular association with love is therefore far more likely due to other reasons.

## Birds and lovers in the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages, Valentine's Day became increasingly popular in Europe. February 14 was significant not only for its religious meaning, but because it was widely believed that birds begin to mate on this date. Geoffrey Chaucer in the 1300s mentioned the mating of birds on Valentine's Day in his poem "Parliament of Fowles."

"English literature, following Chaucer,

contains frequent references to February 14 as sacred to lovers. Shakespeare, [as well as another poet writing around 1600, Michael] Drayton, and [poet and dramatist of the 1700s John] Gay are among those who mention it in this connection, and the diarist [of the 1600s] Samuel Pepys several times discusses the day and its related customs.

"The *Paston Letters*, covering the period from 1422 to 1509, contain a letter by Dame Elizabeth Brews to John Paston, with whom she hoped to arrange a match for her daughter, which runs this way: 'And cousin mine, upon Monday is St. Valentine's day and every bird chooseth himself a mate'" (Jane Hatch, *The American Book of Days*, 1978, p. 178).

It is true that various birds are involved in courtship and mate selection around this time of year, but it is not specific to the date of Feb. 14.

What was specific to Feb. 13 through 15 on the Roman calendar was the pagan festival of Lupercalia.

## Pre-Christian origins of Valentine's Day

The obvious fact is that the origins of Valentine's Day predate Christianity. As Myers states: "The most plausible theory for St. Valentine's Day traces its customs back to the Roman Lupercalia, a feast celebrated in February in honor of the pastoral god Lupercus, a Roman version of the Greek god Pan. The festival was an important one for the Romans and, occurring when it did, naturally had some aspects of a rebirth rite to it" (pp. 50-51).

The original festival is founded in the ancient legend of Romulus and Remus, the traditional founders of Rome. The story says the two brothers were abandoned as infants but were then discovered and nursed by a she-wolf, or *lupa* in Latin—the cave where this supposedly happened, at the base of Rome's Palatine Hill, becoming known as the Lupercal.



The Lupercalia festival was celebrated in honor of a number of pastoral deities. It combined the idea of cleansing before spring renewal with the promotion of sexual fertility and reproduction, a prevalent theme throughout pagan religion. Young men dressed in the skins of sacrificed goats would run from the Lupercal cave brandishing strips of goat skin as whips. Any women slapped by these were assured fertility and ease in childbirth.

“These thongs [hide strips] were called *Februa* [from *februum*, meaning “cleansing”

last decade of the fifth century. But in reality, the intermingling of paganism and Christianity had become inseparable in much of the Western world. Saturnalia and Mithraism were incorporated into the church through claiming a December birth date for Jesus Christ. Various spring fertility rites merged to form the basis of Easter celebrations. Lupercalia evolved into the observance of St. Valentine’s Day.

Myers comments: “Everywhere that Christians came into power they immediately adapted the holidays and customs of the people to their own creed. Now it was a simple matter to call the day that this drawing [for amorous pairing mentioned earlier] took place St. Valentine’s Day . . .

“To Christianize the heathen practice of picking lots for sweethearts, all that was needed was to replace the names of the girls with names of saints and to have the young people emulate

the particular virtues of whatever saint they drew. Incidentally, this custom is not dead today and is still observed in some religious orders.

“It was always more fun, of course, to pick a girl’s rather than a saint’s name. Consequently, by at least the fourteenth century the custom had reverted to its original form” (pp. 50-51).

### Roman gods and Christian saints

But how could a day honoring pagan gods become associated with Christian saints?

The ancient Romans worshiped gods and goddesses involved with every aspect of life. Jupiter, the chief of the gods, was the god of rain and storms, while his wife, Juno, was the goddess of womanhood. Minerva was the goddess of handicrafts and wisdom; Venus, of sexual love and birth; Vesta, of the hearth and sacred fires; Ceres, of farming and harvests.

The Greeks considered Mercury, whom they called Hermes, to be the messenger of the gods, but the Romans worshiped him as the god of trade, with businesspeople celebrating his feast day to increase profits. And there were other popular deities: Mars, god of war; Castor and Pollux, gods of sea travelers; Cronos, the guardian of time; and



Many Valentine’s Day customs can be traced back to pagan practices associated with the Roman and Greek deities Cupid and Eros.

or “purification”), the festival *Februatio*, and the day *Dies Februetus*, hence arose the name of the month February, the last of the old Roman year” (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 15, 9th edition, “Lupercalia”).

Over the years many customs were added to the celebration—including the origin of drawing out valentines. “In honor of the goddess Juno, the names of young women were put into a box,” Myers states. “Youths then drew the names and the boys and girls so matched would be considered partners for a year” (p. 50).

### Lupercalia and Christianity

As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, it was common for pagan converts to retain their earlier religious customs and practices. Edward Gibbon, in his classic work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, states: “After the conversion of the Imperial city, the Christians still continued, in the month of February, the annual celebration of the Lupercalia; to which they ascribed a secret and mysterious influence on the genial [generative or reproductive] powers of the animal and vegetable world” (chap. 36).

Pope Gelasius is said to have eradicated Lupercalia from Christian observance in the

## Beyond Today Television Log

For the most current airing times, or to download or view programs online, visit [www.BeyondToday.tv](http://www.BeyondToday.tv)

### UNITED STATES

#### NATIONWIDE CABLE TV

**WGN America** Sun 8:30 a.m. EST, 7:30 a.m. CST, 6:30 a.m. MST, 5:30 a.m. PST

**WORD Network** Sun 1:30 a.m. EST, 12:30 a.m. CST, Sat 11:30 p.m. MST, 10:30 p.m. PST

WORD Network also reaches numerous other countries—please visit [www.BeyondToday.tv](http://www.BeyondToday.tv) for a partial list.

**CABLE AND BROADCAST TV**  
(Consult your local TV/cable guide for a channel in your area.)

#### Alaska

Anchorage ch. 18, Tue 9 p.m.

#### California

Los Angeles (NEW) ION ch. 30 (broadcast); ch. 8 (cable) Sun 9:30 a.m.

San Diego (north) ch. 18, 19, 23, Mon 5 p.m.

San Francisco (NEW AIRTIME) ION ch. 65 (broadcast); ch. 16 (cable) Sun 9 a.m.

#### Illinois

Chicago (NEW AIRTIME) ION ch. 38 (broadcast); ch. 13 (cable) Sun 8 a.m.

#### Minnesota

Brooklyn Park ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.

New Ulm ch. 3, 14, Sun 10:30 a.m.; Thu 9 a.m.; Fri 8 p.m.

ch. 14, Sun 10:30 a.m.; Thu 9 a.m.; Fri 8 p.m.

#### New York

Binghamton ch. 4, Thu 5:30 p.m.

#### North Carolina

Durham ch. 18, Wed 7:30 a.m.

#### Oregon

Eugene ch. 29, Tue 2 p.m.

Medford ch. 15, 95, Sun 5 p.m.

Portland ch. 22a, 33, Sun 7:30 p.m.

#### Texas

El Paso ch. 15, Mon, Fri, Sat 1 p.m.

#### Wisconsin

Kenosha ch. 14, Sun & Mon 7:30 p.m.

Milwaukee ch. 96, Mon 2 p.m.; Tue 7 p.m.; Wed 2 p.m.

West Allis ch. 14, times vary

### CANADA

#### NATIONWIDE CABLE TV

**Vision TV** Sun 10:30 p.m. EST, 9:30 p.m. CST, 8:30 p.m. MST, 7:30 p.m. PST, 11:30 p.m. AST, midnight N-L

**Grace TV** Sun 10:30 a.m. EST, 9:30 a.m. CST, 8:30 a.m. MST, 7:30 a.m. PST, 11:30 a.m. AST, noon N-L

See local listing for the channel in your area.

of course Cupid, god of love, whose magic arrows caused both human beings and immortals to fall in love. The list goes on and on.

While the Romans would call generically on “the gods,” each major deity still had its own cult, and worshippers would pray and conduct religious ceremonies to a specific god or goddess to implore help. Christianity, with its emphasis on one God, was viewed by many Romans as a strange superstition or even a kind of atheism that denied the “gods.”

Sadly, a large part of Christianity in the Roman Empire became corrupted. In attempting to retain new converts from paganism and bring in more, devotion to all the various gods was at length replaced by devotion to “saints.”

Yet it should be realized that all members of the early Christian Church were regarded as *saints*, meaning people sanctified or set apart to God. Paul greets the church at Philippi as “all the saints in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:1). However, it wasn’t long before “saints” in the Roman tradition began to take on the meaning of a special class of martyrs or performers of heroic virtue.

In the second and third centuries it became common for local congregations to honor the death of a martyr by celebrating the anniversary of his or her demise. The congregations, by this time having accepted the pagan Greek falsehood of the immortality of the soul and having lost the biblical understanding that those dead in their graves “know nothing” (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10), would then offer prayers to the dead for intercession with God.

Thus the meaning of “saint” changed from the biblical use of the word to refer to any member of the Church to referring to a deceased person declared to be a saint by the bishop of Rome or the Pope on the basis of miracles the person had supposedly performed on behalf of others after death.

The evolution from the early Church’s recognition of all members being “saints” to the veneration and worship of the dead is rooted in the early mixture of paganism with Christianity. The populace throughout the Roman Empire was not only accustomed to the worship of the Greek and Roman pantheon, but to cultic worship of local deities. It was an easy step for Christian congregations rife with paganism to replace the customs of local cults with the worship of dead martyrs.

Over the centuries the Catholic church canonized saints for any number of events, problems, illnesses and occupations, each celebrated with his or her own feast day. And

the saints took over the spheres of responsibility previously attributed to the various pagan gods. St. Stephen is the patron saint of stonemasons; doctors are to pray to St. Luke, fishermen to St. Andrew and carpenters to St. Joseph. There are patron saints for farmers, hunters, shoemakers and even comedians. And then there is the patron saint of love and romance, St. Valentine.

Some researchers have even suggested that the original Valentine was not a martyred Christian leader at all. Rather, they see in the name Valentine, meaning “worthy, strong or powerful one,” a reference to a deified hero or a Roman god, perhaps even Cupid.

While eventually portrayed as a harmless baby, the original Cupid, called Eros by the Greeks, was envisioned as a strong, athletic youth armed with bow and arrow—a mighty hunter. And this image of the mighty hunter may well go way back to the traditional founder of pagan religion following Noah’s Flood, “Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD” (Genesis 10:9).

### The danger in a “harmless” holiday

But really, what harm can there be in the celebration of lovers in the name of St. Valentine? After all, what does it matter that some of the day’s customs stem from pagan rites?

God warned ancient Israel, the people He chose to represent true religion, not to mix pagan customs with worshipping Him as the one true God: “When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, 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” (Deuteronomy 12:29-31).

In the New Testament, Paul compares mixing paganism with Christianity to worshipping demons: “What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cups of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:19-21).

Holidays like St. Valentine’s Day continually secularize into icons of Western culture,

creating a caricature of religion. Most people couldn’t care less if its origins are in the Roman Lupercalia or early church doctrines that had nothing to do with the Bible. It’s this very apathy about how to worship God, and the corresponding moral decay, that is the result of mixing Christianity with paganism.

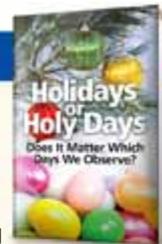
Even some Christians who reject religious holidays with roots in paganism, like Christmas and Easter, see nothing wrong with holidays like Valentine’s Day, New Year’s Day and Halloween despite their pagan origin. The reasoning goes like this: Christmas and Easter must be rejected because they are attempts to worship God with pagan customs. The other holidays, however, while they might have once been used to worship God, are now deemed completely secular. And since what God actually forbids is using pagan customs to worship Him, we are free to practice pagan worship customs if they are not now used for worship.

Yet this ignores the fact that God told the Israelites to completely eradicate all vestiges of pagan worship from their presence, not merely from their worship of Him (see Deuteronomy 12:2-4). Moreover, our whole life is to be one of worshipping and honoring God in all we do. The things we participate in should be seen in the context of bringing glory to Him. This does not mean we can’t have fun, for God wants us to enjoy life. But our fun is not to be independent of Him. All that we think, say and do should be to God’s honor.

Jesus said that His followers would “worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). The observance of Valentine’s Day is just one of many traditions that must be rooted out of Christian lives if Christianity is to return to its true foundation laid by Jesus Christ. **GN**

### Learn More

Does it matter which days we celebrate? Why do so many of today’s holidays—including many religious observances—have strange and unusual customs found nowhere in the Bible? Many people are shocked to discover the true origins of today’s most popular holidays. Does it matter to God? Check out the booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* You can download it or request a free copy to be mailed to you.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

[www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)



# Letters From Our Readers

## “Europe’s Troubles: Setting the Stage for Prophecy’s Fulfillment”

Your excellent *Good News* lead article on Europe [in the November-December 2011 issue] is the best yet. I see from the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) website article that Germany has contributed enormous funds to the EFSF—more than 27% of the total from the eurozone countries. I am amazed that some people don’t want to be part of *The Good News’* warning message!

*D. J., Heathfield, England*

## “Planet Earth Will Survive and Flourish”

This letter is to you and all who make it possible that I and many others may receive this wonderful magazine, *The Good News*, in a world that desperately needs hope. Your September-October issue meant so much to me. The article about planet earth gave me confirmation about the interloper who wants to seek and destroy. Satan is attacking all mankind and especially Christians.

It was not by chance that I was fortunate to have access to this article. May our Heavenly Father continue to bless *The Good News* and everyone that is striving to send the word out that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer who defeated the ruler of this world some 2,000 years ago. Please advise on how and when I may send contributions.

*K.G., Benton, Kentucky*

*To understand more fully what this letter summarizes for us, request or download our free booklet Is There Really a Devil? Information about contributing has been forwarded to her. Any readers who wish to donate may mail their contributions to the United Church of God. Worldwide addresses are listed on page 2. Our publications are made available free of charge, but we deeply appreciate donations to further our God-given mission of getting the gospel out to this tragic and suffering world (see Matthew 24:14; 28:16-18).*

## The Good News

I’m writing this to convey my happiness since the day I discovered *The Good News*. Here in Brazil we have a lot of questions about the future of the world and the church. Your magazine contains blessed material that helps us to understand the important points. I don’t want to miss any of your publications with explanations of the significant biblical principles. They have become a source of blessed change to me and to my family.

*J.L., Brazil*

I was given one of your *Good News* magazines. I really enjoyed reading about the end time. You explained everything so well and how it all ties up with the Bible. Would it be possible to send me a current issue of your magazine? You would make an old man happy because I don’t get out much. But I’d like to know what is going on in this sad world of ours.

*H.W., Belfast, Northern Ireland*

*Our office in the British Isles has responded to your request and will be sending you a free subscription.*

Enclosed is a small donation with thanks for *The Good News* magazine and other resources you have sent me in the past. Your magazine gives us hope in a dark world where evil abounds everywhere. A recent article I read says the suicide rate here has doubled since the economic crisis began.

*M.O., Spain*

Enclosed please find a check for your hard work. I feel I should help with the printing and the postage as I love reading your material. I get *The Good News* and *Vertical Thought* and I order your booklets. They are all excellent reading material. I also listen to your TV program *Beyond Today* on WGN America.

*A.B., Ephrata, Pennsylvania*

## Deferred interest in truth still pays off

I thank you for the great work of God in my life. I ordered three booklets from you sometime last year. I did not read them, but only opened the package and left it. Later I decided to throw these booklets away with other things. But first I did read *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*, and since that night till now, about a week, a total change occurred which I thought impossible. Now I know

that Jesus Christ is God, died for my sins, was resurrected and went back to heaven. Now it is my duty to carry on and obey God’s laws.

*R.J., Internet*

When I received your first magazine I thought it was just another piece of junk mail. Then a second magazine came later. “Will the World End in 2012?” was printed on the cover. That caught my attention. I started reading and couldn’t put it down. Then I read the whole magazine. I go to church every Sunday if I’m able, but I never hear sermons about these subjects. Thank you for publishing this magazine.

*J.P., Statesville, North Carolina*

## Beyond Today TV program

The message on *Beyond Today TV* yesterday was terrific! A lady watching with me said it was the best one she has ever heard on prayer. May God continue to bless and inspire all of you.

*P.H., Titusville, Florida*

I am a faithful listener of your TV show and I so look forward to it. You have educated me on how far off I was from the truth path without realizing it. You pointed out the fact that the Lord’s Sabbath day is Saturday, not Sunday. I wish to follow the true way, and that means obeying the Fourth Commandment as God wants us to. I look forward to your TV program and have asked for your *Bible Study Course*.

*D.W., Leander, Texas*

*A complete explanation of the true Christian Sabbath is available in our free booklet Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest, free to any who request it.*

## Discussion of church affiliations

Although your magazine teaches differently from my church, it is a great publication which I enjoy.

*J.H., Guernsey Island*

Being disillusioned with the mainstream church and their nonsense, I have really appreciated the information you have sent me through your booklets and your *Bible Study Course*.

*A.L., Aberdeen, Scotland*

Do you follow or are you affiliated with any religious denomination, or are you nondenominational? I have learned so much from your booklets and magazines, which I believe teach the truth. Keep up your good work!

*S.G., Topton, North Carolina*

I have been getting your magazine *The Good News* for a very long time. I think it is such an important publication that I have saved every issue. I reread each edition on a regular basis. I am of Orthodox Jewish descent, and I am amazed at your church’s closeness to the Jewish people. For example, you have written about the holy festival days and the weekly Sabbath—showing how we mutually accept their importance in our lives. I would very much like to see the United Church of God establish a physical presence in this area. I would help you in every possible way.

*M.S., McKeesport, Pennsylvania*

*It’s encouraging to see that the true teachings of Jesus Christ have attracted people from varied religious backgrounds. We will briefly cover the points that have been raised. First, the United Church of God has no corporate association with any other church organization or denomination. Our ongoing commitment is to recapture and practice biblical Christianity, following the same teachings, doctrine and practices of the original first-century Church.*

*To understand much more we recommend the free booklets The Church Jesus Built, This Is the United Church of God and Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God. The nearest pastor in Pennsylvania has already contacted the last reader.*

---

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to *The Good News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or e-mail [gninfo@ucg.org](mailto:gninfo@ucg.org) (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).

# Dealing With Debt

by Aaron Dean



Young people today have to deal with the debt crisis that the whole world is facing. How do you do that?

**Y**ou will have to deal with debt. Besides the massive public debt you had nothing to do with, you will face the challenge of trying to obtain an advanced education with ever-rising tuition costs. Most of your peers choose the debt route, creating trauma for them, their families and their futures. When they wish to get married or buy a car, they are forced to borrow at high interest rates. When they wish to buy a home, a more reasonable use of debt, they often can't qualify because of "too much debt."

Does this have to be your fate?

## Needed: freedom from debt

It's interesting that right after the biblical proverb about raising a child (Proverbs 22:6), the next one states, "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (verse 7). Obviously, it's better to not be in debt.

Sadly, because students and parents have not adequately planned their lives, so many young people start out as "servants." You may think you're free after graduation, but if you owe money and don't have a good job then you're not free. It's the same with unwise borrowing on the part of most of the civilized world, be it governments, companies or individuals. And we now have a global crisis because of this.

Regrettably, the education system has created a major problem for many. Blake Ellis at CNNMoney.com reported in October 2010 that "college seniors who graduated in 2009 owed an average of \$24,000 in student loan debt, up 6% from the year before, according to a report from the Project on Student Debt." It's estimated that two thirds of all graduates have student debt, with current levels estimated between \$30,000 and \$50,000. There is fear of an education bubble similar to the housing bubble.

Because of this debt and current economic conditions, CNNMoney.com recently reported that 85 percent of college graduates now move back home after graduation. With fewer available jobs, moving back home is the only real option many have. This of course creates stress on the young people and their parents, both of whom may feel that they've failed.

## You can avoid personal debt

The good news is that you can limit or avoid the majority of debt. It does take discipline, and the sooner and more disciplined you become, the better off you will be.

Try to save and pay for everything with cash or a check. Write down everything you spend for one month, and then categorize it. It's not uncommon for young people to find that they spend hundreds of dollars on nonessentials, such as lattes, computer games, movies and expensive convenience foods. Logging in everything you spend and adding it up gives you a great picture of what you spend.

Once you've done this, use it to create a budget for yourself. Write down your income and then list the necessities. If there is money left, put some into savings for unforeseen events, then use what remains for those unnecessary items. Once you've created a budget, stick to it. You will gain a great deal of satisfaction when you don't have debt hanging over your shoulder and when you do have money already saved for special opportunities with friends and family.

### Harness and train credit cards

Whether you go to college or not, avoid credit card debt. The outrageous interest rates for young people (averaging about 29 percent) mean that if you don't pay off your balance each month, it may take years to repay.

One solution I recommend if you must have a credit card (often a necessity) is to carry your checkbook with your card. Subtract the amount put on the card for each purchase from the balance in your checkbook. When the credit card bill comes due, you will have already subtracted it from your account.

This avoids the illusion that you have money because of the usual checkbook balance. In reality you've already spent that money. When your balance is low, simply don't use your card.

### Seek scholarships and do the math

Apply for all the scholarships and education grants you can qualify for and check out all possible schools. Many scholarships are available, especially if you're a good student. As an example, my son attended our local community college at little cost for two years, did very well in his classes, and then was able to transfer to a highly rated school with nearly everything paid for by scholarship.

My daughter found that the community college had a specialized two-year certificate program that was nationally rated. She graduated in 2010 with an associate degree and a certificate and had numerous offers for jobs paying between \$40,000 and \$55,000 per year—all with no debt!

You don't have to go to a high-priced school or accept the highest scholarship. One young person accepted a \$30,000 scholarship to a school that cost \$25,000 per year (\$100,000 for four years). He turned down a \$15,000 scholarship to a college costing \$10,000 per year (\$40,000 for four years). He ended up with \$70,000 in debt instead of \$25,000, while both schools

had about the same job-placement ratios.

### Get technical about training

Other young people have chosen to do technical training, often earning more than college graduates. Some computer certificates command higher salaries than four-year college degrees and only take a year or two to obtain. Of course, in an ever-changing technical environment, I assure you that you must never quit studying or you will become obsolete and jobless.

While most who get college degrees will earn more than laborers, many do well with skills in trades such as carpentry, plumbing, air conditioning, landscaping, auto repair and the like. If you are not "college material" or enjoy working with your hands, don't be afraid of this route. Physical work can be very rewarding, and usually you start your career debt-free.

Many of my physical laboring friends who stayed away from the bars and "working man" traps are farther ahead financially because they took this career path, disciplined their spending and saving, and bought homes earlier than their college-bound friends—most of whom have yet to catch up financially.

### Learn from lifestyle costs

Most importantly, check your lifestyle. Being young with all that energy is great, but too many choose a party lifestyle that hinders their future. Often this involves wrong moral choices with risky behavior that can include alcoholism, drugs, sexually transmitted diseases and/or unmarried pregnancy. Don't let the fictitious Hollywood portrayal lead you astray. Wrong decisions not only affect your finances, but they can affect your mind and your life forever—and those of others.

That doesn't mean you can't have fun. Just prioritize what you want for your entire life. Then do the things that fit those priorities.

God makes it clear that if you seek Him, He will guide you. Those who make the proper choices are blessed with a more disciplined life. This leads to stability, which in turn creates a commitment to right goals. Achieving these goals shows the older generation that you have your head on straight, leads to more rewarding jobs, higher pay and a happier, debt-free life.

For more advice on money matters, be sure to send for or download our free booklet *Managing Your Finances*. **GN**



# LEARN MORE

If you like reading our articles for teens and young adults in *The Good News*, be sure to take a look at our companion magazine, *Vertical Thought*, at [www.VerticalThought.org](http://www.VerticalThought.org).

This magazine is specially written for our younger *Good News* audience. Each issue is packed with helpful insight and eye-opening articles guiding today's young people in getting the most out of life—both now and in the future.

You'll uncover lots of fascinating facts, meet many interesting people, discover what's really going on behind the scenes in our world, learn answers to your questions and find practical, down-to-earth guidance on all kinds of subjects.

**Visit [VerticalThought.org](http://VerticalThought.org) today!**



# BEYOND TODAY

UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

Watch the *Beyond Today* TV program on WGN America!

## Sunday mornings

8:30 a.m. Eastern

7:30 a.m. Central

6:30 a.m. Mountain

5:30 a.m. Pacific



## What Does Bible Prophecy Tell Us About The Time of the End?

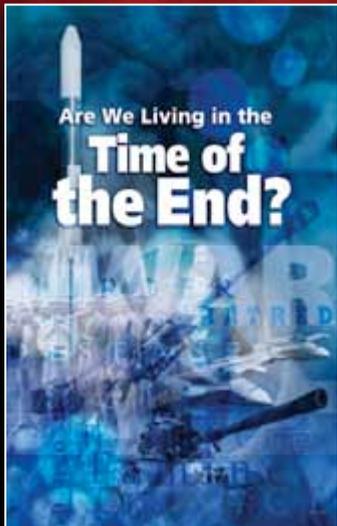
For thousands of years people have been fascinated with predictions of the end of the world. If we look into the inspired writings of the biblical prophets and apostles, we find many prophecies that refer to the time of the end. Should we take them seriously? Are world conditions such that these prophecies could be fulfilled in our day?

Jesus Christ Himself talked of a future time so horrendous that no human lives would be spared “unless those days were shortened” (Matthew 24:22). Did He have our time in mind?

Many biblical warnings leave us in no doubt that increasingly cataclysmic events will occur before God’s direct intervention in human affairs. These terrifying prophecies will see their fulfillment at some future time. The crucial question is *when*.

Our eye-opening booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* examines exactly what Jesus, His apostles and the biblical prophets really said about the intriguing days they referred to as the time of the end. You need this vital information!

Download or request your free copy today!



Request or download your free copy at [www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)