

The Good News

March-April 2011

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

The Book That Changed the World

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Heed These Words of Wisdom!



One of my responsibilities as managing editor is to write an editorial for this space to introduce the theme of each issue. However, considering this issue's theme, I thought it appropriate to yield this space to others whose words carry far more impact than any I could craft.

Following are what some of history's greatest figures—presidents, prime ministers, monarchs, scientists and others—have said or written about “the book that changed the world,” the Bible. Think deeply about their wisdom in this regard!

Sir Isaac Newton, known as the father of modern physics and astronomy, said, “There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane [i.e., secular] history.”

The noted French writer and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote: “Peruse the works of our philosophers; with all their pomp of diction, how mean [or lowly], how contemptible, are they, compared

Read what some of history's greatest figures have said or written about the Bible. Think deeply about their wisdom in this regard!

with the Scriptures! Is it possible that a Book at once so simple and sublime should be merely the work of man?”

The brilliant German scholar and philosopher Immanuel Kant said: “The existence of the Bible, as a book for the people, is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it is a crime against humanity.”

Sir Winston Churchill, the great British prime minister, statesman, historian and author, said: “We reject with scorn all these learned and labored myths that Moses was but a legendary figure. We believe that the most scientific view, the most up-to-date and rationalistic conception, will find its fullest satisfaction in taking the Bible story literally.”

Queen Victoria, the longest-reigning monarch in British history, said of the Bible, “That Book accounts for the supremacy of England.”

Many American presidents have affirmed their deep respect for the Bible. George Washington, first president of the United States, said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.”

Thomas Jefferson, third U.S. president, stated: “I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make better citizens, better fathers, better husbands . . . The Bible makes the best people in the world.”

John Quincy Adams, sixth U.S. president, wrote, “So great is my veneration of the Bible that the earlier my children begin to read it the more confident will be my hope that they will prove useful citizens of their country.” He also stated: “My custom is to read four or five chapters of the Bible every morning immediately after rising . . . It seems to me the most suitable manner of beginning the day . . . It is an invaluable and inexhaustible mine of knowledge and virtue.”

Abraham Lincoln, 16th U.S. president, stated: “In regard to this Great Book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man.”

Theodore Roosevelt, 26th U.S. president, said, “A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.”

Ronald Reagan, 40th U.S. president, said, “Of the many influences that have shaped the United States into a distinctive nation and people, none may be said to be more fundamental and enduring than the Bible.”

What is your view of this greatest of all books? Do you honor and revere it as these great figures of history did? Keep their words in mind as you read this issue—then blow the dust off your Bible and delve into it to discover its great treasures for yourself!

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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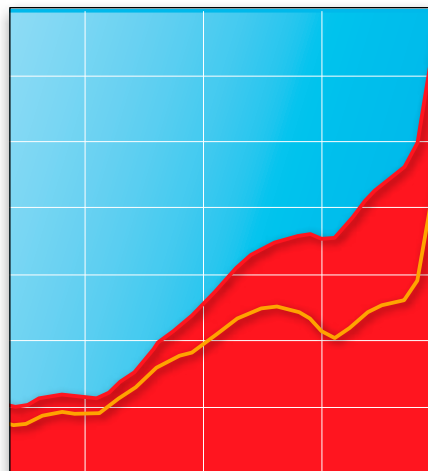
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The Book That Changed the World

by John Ross Schroeder

In its 400-year history, the King James Version has been the most printed and the most influential of all Bible translations. Commissioned by England's King James I, this Bible translation produced in 1611 transformed English life and culture. Several billion copies have been published. What makes this book so unique?

The Bible remains the most fundamental book gracing our Western civilization. Along with the works of William Shakespeare, the King James Version played an important role in the formation of the English language itself. As author Alan Thomas put it, "No book has had greater influence on the English language" (*Great Books and Book Collectors*, 1988, p. 110). The KJV has repeatedly been referred to as "the noblest monument of English prose."

Even today, the King James Bible very much remains part of our collective cultural thinking. Elegantly written and also the most poetic and rhythmic of all biblical translations, the King James Version holds an exclusive status in our literary history.

Wrote the conservative British theologian Michael Nazir-Ali: "Without that [biblical] tradition, it is impossible to understand the language, the literature, the art or even the science of our civilisation. It provides the grand themes in art and lit-

erature: of virtue and vice, atonement and repentance, resurrection and immortality. It has inspired the best and most accessible architecture. It undergirds and safeguards our constitutional and legal tradition" ("A Cure for Our National Amnesia," *Standpoint*, November 2010).

Still monumental in the English-speaking world, the King James Version stands at the very heart of our cultural and even our governmental legacy. After all, English common law was originally founded on biblical principles, mainly due to the efforts of pioneer statesmen like the early English ruler Alfred the Great (849-899). In 2009 U.S. President Barack Obama took the oath of office on the same copy of the King James Bible that Abraham Lincoln had used nearly 150 years before in 1861.

Celebrations in America and Britain

Officially, the English-speaking world celebrates the King James Version's 400th anniversary on May 2, 2011. In Britain this

year's festivities have been described as being "of biblical proportions." About 70 anniversary events have been planned.

There will be an exhibition at St. John's College in Cambridge. Other celebratory events will occur from Aberdeen, Scotland, to Plymouth in the southwest part of England—including reading marathons, lectures, conferences and even concerts. Already, BBC Radio 4, with a U.K.-wide listening audience, is presenting regular readings from various books in the King James Version.

Oxford University Press (publishers of the KJV since the 17th century) will sponsor the printing of a special 1,520-page quadricentennial edition.

Not to be outdone, the Americans will hold celebrations at the Dunham Bible Museum in Houston, Texas. Other events will take place in Kentucky, Louisiana and other Bible Belt states. Also a special conference at Ohio State University in Columbus will highlight the enduring literary legacy and influence of the King James Version on noted writers like the early 20th-century Southern novelist William Faulkner.

But why such national celebrations in the English-speaking world? Let's briefly summarize the background to see how and why this book has played a monumental role in history.

The struggle to translate the Bible into English

In the centuries before the English language began to form and take hold in Britain, the Bible could not be read by most ordinary people anywhere in the world. Until around A.D. 400, only those fluent in Hebrew or Greek could read Scripture. When the first Latin translation was completed in 405, it stood as the official version for the next thousand years.

But as time passed after the fall of the Roman Empire, fewer and fewer people could read or understand Latin. And the dominant religious leadership, the Catholic authorities, tightly controlled the common people's access to the Bible, effectively preventing people from reading it. This was the sad state of affairs for many centuries.

The modern world owes a great debt to early Bible translators like John Wycliffe, the philosopher and theologian who gave the British people God's Word in the English language during the 1380s. Wycliffe's Bible, translated from Latin, proved very popular. However, heresy-hunting religious authorities eventually banned his translation.

Several courageous men went through severe trials—often risking their lives—to bring us the Holy Scriptures in English. Some had to flee their homes and countries to bring you the Bible. Others gave the supreme sacrifice, dying as martyrs to translate and spread the Scriptures.

Tyndale's enormous contribution to the King James Bible

One translator in particular stands above the others. William Tyndale, who lived in the early 1500s, was the first to translate the Bible into English directly from its original languages of Hebrew and Greek.

David Daniell, the leading Tyndale scholar of our modern age, wrote: "William Tyndale gave us our English Bible. The sages assembled by King James to prepare the Authorised Version of 1611, so often praised for unlikely corporate inspiration, took over Tyndale's work.

[Nearly] nine-tenths of the Authorised Version's New Testament is Tyndale's" (*William Tyndale: A Biography*, 1994, p. 1). In his autobiography the late movie actor Charlton Heston (star of *Ben Hur*, *The Ten Commandments* and *El Cid*) marveled that a committee could produce such a monumental classic as the King James Version.

Although the KJV's skilled team of translators must be accorded due credit for

their own monumental contribution, Brian Moynahan, William Tyndale's most recent biographer, wrote: "A complete analysis of the Authorised Version [KJV] . . . was made in 1998. It shows that Tyndale's words account for 84 per cent of the New Testament and 75.8 per cent of the Old Testament books he translated" (*William Tyndale: If God Spare My Life*, 2003, p. 1).

But well before any thorough, painstaking analytical study had ever been done, the noted British Greek expert and Bible scholar F.F. Bruce commented on the work of the compilers of the King James Version: "All the existing English versions lay before the translators . . . But the abiding influence of one man in particular may be



William Tyndale & King James I of England

traced throughout great portions of their work, and that man was William Tyndale" (*The Books and the Parchments*, 1984, p. 221).

Tyndale's English version was a Bible translation born in European exile. Persecution by Catholic bishops in England required that he cross the English Channel in 1524 to accomplish the 12-year task. A written prohibition, composed by British clergy in 1408, "forbade anyone to translate, or even read, any parts of vernacular versions of the Bible, without express episcopal permission"—which was adamantly refused to Tyndale by Cuthbert Tunstall, bishop of London, during the summer of 1523 (Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament*, 1995, p. xxix).

Men died to bring you the Book

In May of 1535, the authorities finally cornered and arrested the elusive Tyndale, halting his goal of translating the entire Bible into English from the original biblical languages. Even while Tyndale endured the most horrendous conditions in a dreadful prison near Brussels, Belgium, he requested a Hebrew grammar book

The King James Bible in British and American History

When King James I of England commissioned the translation of the Bible into English from its original languages, the massive undertaking was accomplished by a large committee of scholars representing the best translative skills then available. For almost 400 years, this monumental work, completed in 1611, has been recognized as one of the premier translations ever undertaken. Although the Bible has been translated into almost every language, this English version remains the most influential of all.

Timewise, the actual translation took three years, as did the review. Then it took another nine months to prepare the new translation for printing. It took nearly seven years in all.

But why is it that the Bible has been so predominant in

Britain and the United States? *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* notes that the Bible is "the most widely known book in the English-speaking world . . . No one in the English-speaking world can be considered literate without a basic knowledge of the Bible" (E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph Kett and James Trefil, 1988, p. 1, emphasis added). In Britain it was rated as one of the top 50 most interesting books. In the United States it is perennially a best seller and the single book that Americans say has most influenced their lives.

Is it possible that the Bible has so influenced the people of Britain and the United States because this book is *their* history book? It not only tells the story of their distant ancestors, but also their future. To learn more, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

so he could continue translating the Old Testament.

On Oct. 6, 1536, he was bound to a stake, strangled and burned. His final prayer was for God to open the eyes of the king of England.

The religious establishment cruelly martyred the man who some scholars believe—in his mastery of the English rhythm,

What's the Difference Between Various Bible Versions?

The English language has changed substantially over the four centuries since the King James Version of the Bible was first published. Many people find it increasingly difficult to understand the words and may be put off by the KJV's foreign-sounding speech. We can be thankful, however, that many newer versions exist that are much more up-to-date in their wording. But this raises another issue: Which of these many versions is best for reading and studying the Bible? How do they differ? The following is excerpted from our free booklet *How to Understand the Bible*:

More than 60 English-language versions are available. We can divide them into three broad types: word-for-word, meaning-to-meaning (also called thought-for-thought) and paraphrased. Usually a particular Bible version will explain, on its introductory pages, which approach was used in preparing it.

Word-for-word translations

The word-for-word versions most accurately follow the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. Generally speaking, the King James Version and its modern counterpart, the New King James Version, are word-for-word translations. They are readily found in most bookstores or on the Internet.

How trustworthy is the King James or the New King James Bible we have today? Other manuscripts discovered since the King James Version was translated show it to be extremely reliable. For instance, when the King James Version is compared with what was found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, "the King James Bible is 98.33 percent pure [in terms of comparison]" (Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 1974, p. 263).

In the New Testament the sheer bulk of thousands of texts (4,500 Greek manuscripts) means that many minor variations among the manuscripts will be found. The King James Version, for example, is based on the majority of the authoritative Greek texts.

About 98 percent of the known Greek manuscripts agree with the basic text of the King James Bible. Even the variations that do exist rarely affect the basic meaning in the remaining 2 percent of those manuscripts. The text of Scripture has been preserved and transmitted over the centuries remarkably well.

The Old Testament books are equally trustworthy. Although a few textual errors are to be found in some of the manuscripts used in translating the King James Bible, comparisons with other Bible versions can easily clarify most problems.

As an expert on textual criticism remarked: "If any book from ancient times has descended to us without substantial loss or alteration, it is the Bible. The Bible is the best-attested book from the ancient world! This has prompted Sir Frederic Kenyon to say: 'The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that



it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world" (Neil Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, 1963, p. 120).

Meaning-to-meaning versions

The accuracy of a version is obviously of utmost importance. Although the King James Version contains some mistakes, to establish sound doctrines the first choice of versions should be a more literal edition such as the King James or New King James Version.

What about the meaning-to-meaning versions? They can be valuable in putting the Scriptures into more understandable wording. For example, the New King James Version of Hebrews 2:17-18, describing why Jesus Christ came to live among mankind as a flesh-and-blood human being, reads: "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."

The New International Version, a meaning-to-meaning translation, has: "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

The latter explains the point more clearly for most readers today, although the former is a more direct translation of the original language. So, when the text is not clear, many times a modern meaning-to-meaning translation can help. The Revised English Bible, Good News Bible and New Living Translation are other popular meaning-to-meaning translations.

A meaning-to-meaning translation is also helpful in conveying the point of ancient figures of speech—idioms—that would not make sense to us in modern language. Consider the modern American idiom "kick the bucket." This phrase may not be around centuries from now, and someone translating it then might need to use the word "die" instead—a meaning-to-meaning rendering rather than a literal one. Ancient

Hebrew and Greek had such expressions as well, and in such cases a meaning-to-meaning translation is very helpful.

In general, meaning-to-meaning versions use more up-to-date language and thus are easier to understand—although, again, they are not the best choice for establishing doctrine because they at times involve some interpretation of what the original writers intended to say.

Paraphrased Bibles

Paraphrased Bibles, such as The Living Bible or The Message, also can be useful. Their goal is to make the Bible even easier to read in modern language. We should be cautious in working with these, however, because the authors exercised considerable "poetic license" in interpreting biblical terms and passages according to their own personal religious ideas.

Paraphrased versions can be consulted to better grasp the story flow but should not be relied on exclusively to establish doctrine. They should be considered inadequate sources for accurately determining the meaning of any text.

Which version of the Bible should you buy? The King James Version, although both accurate and popular, is increasingly difficult to understand simply because the English language has evolved considerably over the 400 years since its publication.

The meanings of some of its words have changed over time. Many readers find the archaic language distracting and difficult to follow. For this reason material produced by the United Church of God, publisher of this magazine, most often uses the New King James Version. This version, while retaining much of the beauty of the original King James wording, is more readable and is still usually faithful to the original text.

Modern translations like those mentioned above are helpful for comparing and clarifying the meaning. Many people find a parallel Bible, which contains two or more versions side by side on the same pages, to be helpful. Indeed, even apart from that it's best to consult multiple versions in studying the Bible, but one will likely be your primary version.

Regardless of the Bible version you choose, the most important factor is that you *actually use it*. A Bible should be considered an investment in which a little more expense up front will pay off in the long run. Consider buying a version with wide margins that will allow you to add notes from your personal study over the coming years. Although more expensive, a higher-quality, leather-bound Bible will last years longer than a hardbound or paperback volume and should become a lifelong companion.

Many Bible versions are now available as part of Bible software packages or for free viewing on various Internet sites. With these, you can compare between different versions nearly instantaneously.

Today God's Word is available in many forms, and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures has mushroomed. Yet there is precious little understanding of the Bible.



phrasing and styling—has never been equaled as a Bible translator. F.F. Bruce caught the spirit of his genius: “Tyndale, working under the white heat of potential martyrdom, rises at times to a poetic glow, transcending the style of the original Greek” (*The Books and the Parchments*, 1950 edition, p. 13).

Bruce summarized the disheartening circumstances: “Tyndale died a martyr’s death, vilified by authorities in church and state in England. Nothing was too bad to say about the translation. Thousands of copies were seized on entering the country and publicly burned” (*The Books and the Parchments*, 1984, p. 216).

Yet, paradoxically, Tyndale’s final prayer was answered only months later when the English-language translation was finally accepted by the crown. “Within months of Tyndale’s martyrdom, a complete English Bible, two-thirds of it Tyndale’s work, and licensed by Henry VIII, was circulating in Britain” (Daniell, *The English Bible*, p. 157).

What a debt we owe to those who paid with their lives to give us the Word of God!

The Bible’s value to us today

The sufferings and sacrifices of men like Tyndale, Wycliffe and the translators of

The Bible: A Blessing to Humanity

The Bible has been of more benefit to humanity than any other book in history. Whether you consider the rule of law, property rights, the rights of all individual citizens, education, charity and charitable institutions, education and the abolition of slavery—all these marvelous benefits to mankind are based on the Holy Scriptures.

Consider the equal status of the citizenry and the abolition of slavery as beginning points. The Bible teaches the fundamental ideal that all are equal before God. The apostle Peter said: “In truth I perceive that *God shows no partiality*. But in every nation, whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35, emphasis added throughout).

The apostle Paul adds: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is *neither slave nor free*, there is neither male nor female; *for you are all one in Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 3:28; compare Colossians 3:10-11). God Himself rescued a large group of slaves from ancient Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15).

Slavery has been deeply entrenched in the culture of mankind for several thousand years. Yet a number of Jesus Christ’s true teachings were advanced because of the influence of the Bible—resulting in many positive developments in society. Indeed, when efforts were begun to abolish slavery in the Western world, convictions based on the Christian Bible came to the forefront.

“Christians were the first group in history to start an antislavery movement . . . William Wilberforce spearheaded a campaign that began with almost no support and was driven entirely by his Christian convictions . . . Eventually Wilberforce triumphed, and in 1833 slavery was outlawed in Britain” (Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s So Great About Christianity?* 2007, p. 71). The American Civil War was fought largely over slavery, and the slaves were freed after this conflict ended.

Consider also the rule of law and property rights. The Ten Commandments, which constitute the basic law from God for all mankind and provide the bedrock for a proper human legal system, fully support property rights. The Eighth and Tenth Commandments against stealing and covetousness directly address the right to own property (Exodus 20:15, 17; Deuteronomy 5:19, 21).

the King James Bible force us to confront a profound question: Will we honor their efforts, or will we let the moral teachings of Scripture slip through our fingers and finally fall to the ground?

What we view on television, see in movies, listen to on the radio and find on the Internet is often contemptuous of traditional biblical values. The behavior and

Hospitals and the nursing profession are other examples of how the Bible has benefited mankind. The pagan world had little sympathy for those who were sick. Alleviating their suffering was not a priority. But Jesus was moved with compassion for the sick and healed many who were ill (Matthew 9:35; 14:14). He taught His disciples to follow His example (Luke 9:1-2). Even today, true ministers of God anoint the sick (James 5:14-15).

“Charity hospitals for the poor and indigent public did not exist until Christianity introduced them” (Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*, 2004, p. 155). As time went by, hospitals were established in greater numbers with the influence of Christianity based on premier biblical commandments like “love your neighbor as yourself” and the Golden Rule (Matthew 22:39-40; 7:12; Luke 6:31). The entire Bible is built on the foundation of these major sayings alongside the command to love God with all one’s being.

Christian charity remains a basic teaching of the Bible that has benefited humanity. The apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Education is another bulwark of biblical benefits. Jesus Himself was a great teacher (John 1:38)—and He taught His disciples to teach others what He had taught them (Matthew 28:18-20). One approach of Christianity that was revolutionary at the time was that it offered teaching to both men and women in the same setting. All were expected to learn the principles of the Christian faith. Aquila and Priscilla taught the preacher Apollos “the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26).

As time went by, the positive effects of Christianity continued to exert influence in the educational realm of society. Many of the great early universities in Britain and America were established with the express purpose of training men for the clergy or educating young people in the ways of the Bible.

All the inhabitants of the Western world, whether Christian or not, have benefited immensely from the teachings of Scripture. Where would we be without the Bible?

—John Ross Schroeder and Noel Homor

conduct of the English-speaking peoples who once prized the Bible leaves a lot to be desired.

Michael Nazir-Ali observed in the same article quoted earlier: “So many of the precious freedoms that we value today, the fair treatment of workers and the care of those in need, arise from values given to us by the Judaeo-Christian tradition. These



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values, however, are grounded in the moral and spiritual vision of this tradition. *It cannot by any means be taken for granted that these values will survive for long if the tradition itself is jettisoned.*

"The prophetic trajectory in the Bible, confirmed by the teaching of Jesus Himself, is self-critical, relentlessly pointing out the shortcomings of society, of ruler and ruled and placing before them God's demand for justice and compassion . . . The tradition itself is necessary for bringing a critique to bear on contemporary cultural mores rather than simply capitulating to them" (emphasis added).

What are you going to do?

The basic problem confronting us today is not the same one that faced William Tyndale in the early part of the 16th century. If you had lived back then, unless you read and understood the Latin language, you simply could not read the Scriptures. Bible reading and study was the sole prerogative of priests and the highly educated class.

Today God's Word has become ever more available in many translations. Commentaries, concordances, dictionaries, atlases and other Bible helps are all on the market in abundance. Available both in print and on the Internet, knowledge about the Holy Scriptures has mushroomed beyond all expectation. Undreamed of 500 years ago, the widespread availability of all types of biblical knowledge staggers the mind.

Yet there is precious little understanding of God's Word today. One well-known radio teacher used to urge his listeners again and again: "Blow the dust off your Bible!" While the Bible is a perennial best seller, many fail to open it up and read it!

Are you willing to blow the dust off your own Bible? Are you willing to study and live by what it says? The publishers of *The Good News* provide a vast array of biblical instruction, all free for the asking. We offer 33 free booklets, a 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, an online Bible reading program, online study guides, dozens of reprint articles, back issues of our various publications and more. These are all freely available on our website at www.GNmagazine.org.

As a college chancellor once said to incoming students, "There is a gold mine of valuable knowledge here, but you have to do the digging." We hope you will join us in digging away to uncover the precious eternal truths of God's Word! **GN**

The Literary Influence of the King James Version

"The King James Bible—either directly, from its own translators, or indirectly, as a glass through which we can see its predecessors—has contributed far more to English in the way of idiomatic or quasi-proverbial expressions than any other literary source" (David Crystal, *Begat: The King James Bible and the English Language*, 2010, p. 2).

Following are some common English-language expressions that find their origins in the King James Version of the Bible or its predecessors:

- Salt of the earth.
- Two-edged sword.
- Fly in the ointment.
- My brother's keeper.
- How are the mighty fallen.
- Eye for an eye.
- Scapegoat.
- Pour out one's heart.
- The land of the living.
- By the skin of one's teeth.
- Apple of one's eye.
- Sour grapes.
- Break bread.
- Turn the other cheek.
- To wash one's hands of something.
- Signs of the times.
- Out of the mouth of babes.
- Pride goes before a fall.
- Nothing new under the sun.
- No peace for the wicked.

To Learn More...

A great place to start in studying the Bible is with our free booklet *How to Understand the Bible*. Discover the crucial keys that can open up the Scriptures to your understanding. Learn how basic principles and methods of study can make a huge difference in how much you understand. See how you can live what you learn and transform your life! While you're at it, also request or download your free copies of *Is the Bible True?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.



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www.GNmagazine.org/booklets

The Bible—Miracle of Miracles!

by Don Hooser

The year 2011—the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible—is a perfect time to celebrate the “book of books” and its numerous translations. Let’s reflect on the many miracles, over a span of several thousand years, that had to happen to make the entire Word of God available and affordable in many languages!



This 11th-century Hebrew manuscript at left, showing part of Exodus 12, is approximately 1,000 years old. The papyrus manuscript fragment of the Gospel of Matthew, written in Greek and found in Egypt, is even older, dating to the third or fourth century.

The Bible has probably had a greater impact on the world than all other books combined! The history of the Bible is amazing and fascinating. Let’s consider just a few of the major highlights.

Many amazing steps took place to produce, preserve and propagate the Good Book. And it has been translated into many more languages and distributed in many more places than any other book. All this has required many miracles!

What do we mean by “miracles”?

Many miracles are not overtly and conspicuously spectacular or even immediately apparent. Seldom are there “fire-works” that make a miracle obvious to all. God usually chooses to work invisibly and quietly behind the scenes, steering events to bring about the results He has

predetermined—often in surprising ways.

The Creator and Lawgiver does not break His laws, but neither is He confined by His laws. God created nature and all that is natural, but God also frequently does things that are *supernatural* or outside the normal operations of the universe.

Also, anytime God intervenes in the affairs of men, even when He is working within His laws, we call it *miraculous* or *providential*.

Although God is masterminding and orchestrating all His creation, it’s rather amazing how much freedom He allows human beings to have. He doesn’t make us into His puppets. “The spirits of the prophets are *subject* to the prophets,” His Word tells us (1 Corinthians 14:32, emphasis added throughout).

How God allows freedom of choice and still determines ultimate outcomes is

something that is more than we can fully comprehend!

The miracle of divine revelation

God “created man in His own image”—the capstone of His creation (Genesis 1:27). God made man with amazing mental and spiritual capacities, including the ability to learn languages. God’s purpose is to have a personal relationship with each individual.

With the creation of Adam and Eve, God began to increasingly communicate His plan and purpose to humanity “by the mouth of His holy prophets” (Luke 1:70). “Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Ten Commandments hold a special place in God’s revelation because God not only spoke them but also inscribed them on stone tablets with His own finger (Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 34:1, 28).

But God told Moses to *write* the rest of what God was revealing to him (Exodus 17:14; 34:27).

In the greater sense, God is the Author of the entire Bible, but He has used many *human writers* to record His revelation—about 40 in all!

The realization that Almighty God openly reveals His plans to us human beings is breathtakingly inspiring! What an honor! In fact, God has revealed some important matters to His prophets and apostles that even His angels had been wondering about (Ephesians 3:1-12; Colossians 1:24-26; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

With the completion of the Bible, God has revealed all the spiritual knowledge that is essential for mankind to know.

The miracle of unity and perfection

In a sense, the Bible is a *library* of books composed by about 40 writers with different cultures, personalities, occupations and writing styles, living in 10 different countries, at different times over a span of about 1,500 years! One would think that under such circumstances countless contradictions and conflicts would be inevitable.

However, miracle of miracles—in spite of the Bible’s great *diversity*, there is perfect *unity*! It is consistent and coherent all the way through. With merely a cursory

reading, the Bible appears to have a few internal contradictions and discrepancies, but a closer examination shows complete harmony. As Jesus Christ Himself put it, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

With mere men this would be impossible, “but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

The miracle of biblical languages

Language is amazing. No one can fully explain how human beings can learn and speak languages.

And here is an intriguing question: When God was communicating everything that became the Bible, how did He decide which languages to use?

The scriptures that make up what we call the Old Testament were revealed and written mostly in the Hebrew language. The exceptions are the few sections written in Aramaic (i.e., Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:4–7:28). The scriptures that make up the New Testament were written in Greek.

Why did God use primarily one language (Hebrew) for a long time and then switch to another language (Greek)?

We can’t be sure of the answers until Christ returns, but many Bible scholars and others have voiced their speculations. They are fascinating to consider. We do know this: God doesn’t do anything haphazardly. Each language has its special strengths, and God had good reasons for choosing the ones He did.

A crucial point is this: In Old Testament times, God was dealing primarily with one nation, Israel, the nation He “chose” to be a model nation (although they largely failed at that). Hebrew was their *national* language.

In New Testament times, God was ready to spread His truth *to all the world*. After Alexander the Great conquered much of the civilized world, Greek (specifically, the *koine* or “common” Greek) rather quickly became the *universal* language. This, in turn, enabled Christ’s followers to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15, New International Version). The importance of this factor can’t be overemphasized.

The miracle of translations

God desires for all people to read His Word, and that requires His Word to be translated into the various spoken languages of people around the world.

Nehemiah 8:8 says of Ezra and the Levites who were teaching the gathered people of Judah, “So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they *gave the sense*, and helped them to understand the reading.” Not only were the teachers here helping the people to have spiritual understanding of the Scriptures, but they were also *translating* the Hebrew Scriptures into Aramaic for those who had come out of the Babylonian captivity and did not understand Hebrew very well.

There is abundant proof that God is in favor of translating His Word into all other languages. For example, a team of scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek by 132 B.C. That translation, known as the Septuagint, was the most popular version of the Scriptures in Jesus’ day. When the apostles were writing what became the New Testament and referred to the Hebrew Scriptures, they were quoting a Greek translation. That translation was evidently the Septuagint, at least much of the time.

As far as is known to history, the first translation of the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, was into Latin by Jerome. Later known as the *versio vulgata* (“common version”) or Vulgate, it was finished in A.D. 405. It was to be the dominant Bible for the next thousand years.

For a while, the Vulgate enabled more people to read the Bible. But with the passage of time, a self-serving clergy, bent on maintaining power over the people, soon began to prevent the common people from owning or even reading the Bible. That contributed in part to the Middle Ages becoming “the Dark Ages,” because without Bible knowledge, people are usually not highly motivated to seek other knowledge.

During the Middle Ages, the Bible was regarded as something to revere rather than read, and Latin was promoted as the “holy” language. Hebrew was ridiculed as the language of the Jews, and Greek was frowned on because the eastern Greek-speaking church had split from the Roman church. But, thankfully, religious Jews realized that the Hebrew Scriptures were “the oracles [or sayings] of God” and meticulously copied and preserved them (Romans 3:2). Greek-speaking Christians copied and preserved the Greek Scriptures.

When the Byzantine Empire was conquered by the Muslims (climaxed by the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453), many Greek-speaking people fled

westward. This contributed to the European Renaissance and revival of interest in Greek, including the Greek Scriptures and their translations into other languages.

One more point is critically important. There have always been people who consider one language to be holier than all others. For example, some people advocate that we speak only Hebrew names for God. If all the Bible had been written in only one language, they would have a stronger argument. But the Bible was written using *three* languages.

God is calling people out of “every tribe and *tongue* [language] and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). This requires the Bible to be translated into many languages!

The miracle of survival and preservation of the Scriptures

Over the centuries, Satan the devil has incited and inflamed every imaginable plot to extinguish the light of God’s truth. The prophets and other messengers of God were usually persecuted and often killed. Satan tried to have Jesus killed from the time He was a baby before finally accomplishing that end when Jesus was 33.

Soon after the beginning of the New Testament Church, “a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered” (Acts 8:1). However, this worked for good to spread God’s Word. “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

Another way persecution has worked for good is this: The willingness of Christians to suffer and even die for their beliefs has been a powerful witness to others!

The earliest persecution of Christians was primarily by Jewish religious leaders who felt their influence jeopardized by the growing new movement. Later persecution was primarily instigated by the pagan Roman rulers who viewed Christianity as a threat to the established order since it required allegiance to a higher power. And later still, after a paganized form of Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire, persecution was largely on religious grounds—to exterminate differing views and teachings.

For hundreds of years leading up to the late Middle Ages, religious leaders frequently confiscated and burned Bibles. People were often put to death merely for having a portion of the Bible in their possession.

The Scriptures survived not only because

of God's divine protection, but also because of the faith and zeal of His people. They knew they had "the pearl of great price" and were willing to risk their lives to protect, preserve and propagate it (Matthew 13:46). Their zeal to make copies and distribute them made it difficult for enemies to find and destroy all the copies.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

The miracle of printing

The next major step was the invention of modern printing by German inventor Johannes Gutenberg. His invention of movable type, which allowed information to be disseminated widely at relatively low cost, is considered the most important event of the modern period. Gutenberg's printing press and technique played a key role in three major intellectual advancements—the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and the scientific revolution.

Gutenberg's first major project was the printing of the Latin Vulgate Bible, completed probably in 1455. Imitations of his invention quickly spread around the world.

The single most important effect of the invention was to enable mass production of Bibles, which soon greatly lowered the cost of owning a Bible. Once the Bible was more widely available, the flames of the Reformation were unquenchable!

The miracle of English and the English translations

English is a remarkable language in many ways. It has absorbed an amazing number of words from other languages, making it extremely versatile, expressive and colorful. Some would say it has adopted many of the "best" words of other languages.

For example, after the Norman conquest of England in 1066, English absorbed many Norman French words. Later, the far-flung British colonies and the major roles of Britain and America in international trade and foreign wars brought them into contact with many other languages.

In the 15th to 17th centuries, a combination of remarkable factors began to converge to fulfill major Bible prophecies and to enable Christ's followers to, as earlier noted, "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15, NIV).

There was Gutenberg's revolutionary invention of movable metal type around

1450, as we've seen.

Ambitions to find new trading routes and to preach the gospel led to Christopher Columbus reaching America in 1492. That led to rapid exploration and colonization around the world. It was also a significant step in the fulfillment of Bible prophecies that were fulfilled by Britain becoming a great empire and the United States becoming a great superpower. (See "The Spiritual Reality Behind *The King's Speech*," beginning on page 16.)

By 1500 modern English was developing as an improvement over Middle English.

The Protestant Reformation is commonly considered to have begun with Martin Luther in 1517. But John Wycliffe (1324-1384) has been dubbed the "Morning Star of the Reformation." He and his followers, called Lollards, translated much of the Bible from Latin to English, greatly whetting the appetites of the English people to read the Bible in their own tongue.

William Tyndale (1494-1536) stands as perhaps the greatest of all English translators. He produced English translations of the entire New Testament from the Greek and much of the Old Testament from the Hebrew. Tyndale's translations were accurate, beautiful and excellent, so much so that about 80 percent of the 1611 King James Version is Tyndale's wording.

A bittersweet fact is that in the same year that Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into English (1536), King Henry VIII granted permission for the distribution of English Bibles. That quickly resulted in more English Bibles, including the Coverdale Bible in 1535, Matthew's Bible in 1537, the Great Bible in 1539, the Geneva Bible in 1560 and the Bishops' Bible in 1568.

English Queen Mary I, a fervent Catholic known as "Bloody Mary," reigned from 1553 to 1558. Notice that the only English Bible coming together during that time was the Geneva Bible—produced in Geneva, Switzerland.

Ironically, Catholic Mary fueled the Protestant Reformation in England! The English were so horrified by the gory persecution that many then rejected Catholicism.

After Mary, the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I reigned from 1558 to 1603. She outlawed all Catholic services even though three-fourths of her subjects still professed Catholicism. In trying to appease everyone, she incorporated both Catholic and Protestant elements into the Anglican creeds

and worship. It was the Puritans who most strongly objected to this. They wanted to "purify" Christianity of all Catholic elements.

In 1603, on the death of Queen Elizabeth, James VI of Scotland assumed the throne as James I of England. On his trip to London to receive the crown, he was intercepted by a delegation of Puritan ministers with a list of grievances against the Church of England. The king responded by ordering a high-level conference to address "things pretended to be amiss in the church."

The conference took place in January 1604 at Hampton Court, one of the royal palaces. The Puritan delegation was led by Dr. John Rainolds, who proposed a purer English translation of the Bible.

King James liked the idea for a number of reasons. One was that the most popular English Bible was the Geneva Bible, and the king wanted England (and himself) to have the prestige of a popular Bible that would be truly English, translated on English soil. The king also hoped a new Bible would help to unite Puritans with other Protestants as well as the Scots with the English.

The translating began with a team of 54 scholars. They finished their work in 1611, giving the world what we usually refer to as the King James Version.

Officially called the *Authorized Version*, it quickly rose to be the most popular English translation. Not only was it a highly accurate translation, but the English fell in love with its rhythmic and beautiful wording. The widespread reading, reciting and quoting of the KJV greatly influenced not only English literature but also spoken English from then on.

However, most will be surprised to learn that the English of the KJV was more Elizabethan rather than the common English during the reign of King James. For example, *thee* and *thou* were already falling into disuse, as well as the third-person singular verb ending *-eth*. But the King James translators chose to retain much of the wording from previous English translations.

Furthermore, the "King James Version" has undergone several revisions since 1611 to correct minor errors and to update spelling. The principle revisions were in 1613, 1629, 1638, 1653 and 1762. Today's standard edition is that of 1762.

This writer has a copy of the 1611 version. Here is a passage from "The Newe

Continued on page 31

Read the Book!

by Scott Ashley

Advertising executive and writer Bruce Barton wrote about it under the title *The Book Nobody Knows*. No other book is more important to you and your future!



Presidents, monarchs and judges place their hands on it when they are sworn into office. Witnesses in trials place one hand on it while they swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Many brides carry it at their weddings.

It sits unobtrusively in desk and dresser drawers of many hotels and motels. Most residences in the Christian world have at least one, and often it occupies a place of honor on the mantel, coffee table or nightstand, where it gives the impression of being read daily.

If it were listed by booksellers, it would perpetually make the best-seller lists, with millions of copies sold and given away year after year. It has been translated into more than 2,000 languages and dialects.

This book is, of course, the Bible.

But, popular though it is, how many people ever take the time to read it?

A survey by the Barna Research Group, a research firm specializing in religious issues, found that only one in three Americans read the Bible regularly or could name the writers of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Not even half of those surveyed could name even five of the Ten Commandments.

Surveys like this show that relatively few

take the time to actually read the Scriptures. Even fewer understand them. What a remarkable turnaround from earlier generations!

Bible-believing leaders

A generation ago Dwight Eisenhower, president from 1953 to 1961, extolled the Scriptures with these words: “The Bible is endorsed by the ages. Our civilization is built upon its words. In no other Book is there such a collection of inspired wisdom, reality and hope.”

The legendary Winston Churchill firmly believed in the accuracy and integrity of the Bible. “We reject with scorn all these learned and labored myths that Moses was but a legendary figure,” the British statesman wrote. “We believe that the most scientific view, the most up-to-date and rationalistic conception, will find its fullest satisfaction in taking the Bible story literally.”

Many other great leaders have likewise believed in and tried to order their lives according to the Bible’s instructions.

Queen Victoria, who ruled Great Britain at the height of its power, exclaimed about the Bible, “That book accounts for the supremacy of England!”

Abraham Lincoln, who led the United States through the Civil War as its 16th presi-

dent, perhaps summed it up best when he said, “In regard to this Great Book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man.”

George Washington, first president of the United States and still known as the father of the country, said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.”

Substance or show?

What about you? How much attention do you pay to the Bible?

Of the world’s nearly 7 billion inhabitants, about a third claim to be followers of the Bible. But how many follow Jesus Christ’s advice to read that Book? (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Mark 2:25; 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3).

Notice God’s view of those who outwardly adhere to His words but neglect to live by them: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, *but their hearts are far from me*. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men” (Isaiah 29:13, New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

God is neither impressed nor pleased with empty outward appearances of religion. But He is pleased with those who deeply respect His Word: “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite [repentant] in spirit, and trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:2, NIV).

The choice is up to you

How does God view our choice of whether to live by His Word or not?

When He revealed His instructions to ancient Israel, formerly a slave people in Egypt, He wanted them to serve as a model nation to the other peoples around them.

Through His servant Moses, God told them: “See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, *for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’* What other nation is so great as to have . . . such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?” (Deuteronomy 4:5-8, NIV).

God intends that His way of life be a shining example. When we live by them, His

laws are a model of wisdom and understanding to those around us. Christ Himself made it clear that we are to live not only by physical food “but by every word of God” (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

But it is up to us whether we will take the initiative to study and live by those words. When God revealed His instruction to the Israelites, He set before them a choice: “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, *that you may live and multiply*; and *the LORD your God will bless you* . . .

“But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, . . . I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; . . . I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life, that both you and your descendants may live*” (Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

In other words, God promises great blessings for those willing to study His Word and put it into practice. Failing to live by it will bring its own punishment in the suffering that inevitably follows breaking God’s laws.

More reasons to read the Book

Besides these reasons straight from our Creator, there are many other reasons we should read the Book:

It is the basis for Western civilization and Jewish and Christian culture and society.

It is a unique historical document spanning some 4,000 years of history.

It is a remarkable literary work, studied in thousands of college and university classes for its value as literature alone.

It offers straightforward, practical advice on every aspect of life.

It is a consistent bestseller year after year.

The early American patriot Patrick Henry—famous for his stirring cry of “Give me liberty or give me death!”—said that the Bible “is worth all other books which have ever been printed.”

Where to begin

If by now you see the value in discovering the treasures of the Bible for yourself, you may wonder where to begin. The answer is to begin at the beginning, with the first chapter of Genesis.

Some Bibles contain only what is called the New Testament, plus perhaps Psalms and Proverbs. By omitting the Old Testament, such Bibles leave out about three quarters of

the material God inspired to be written and preserved through the ages for us.

Be sure you have a Bible that contains both the Old and New Testaments. After all, the Old Testament writings were the Holy Scriptures to which the apostle Paul referred when he wrote: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The writers of the New Testament understood the Hebrew Scriptures to be inspired by God. They included about 300 quotations from the Old Testament in their writings as well as hundreds of allusions to it.

Read and learn

If you spend only 10 to 15 minutes a day reading the Bible, you can complete it in about a year. Initially you need not be so concerned with studying the Bible or solving problems as much as simply reading through it. At other times you can sit down with *The Good News*, some of our booklets or our *Bible Study Course* lessons and study the Scriptures in much greater depth as you examine various topics.

As you read you’ll discover many fascinating stories involving history, romance, danger, violence, intrigue and even prophecy. You’ll quickly encounter men and women such as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Miriam, David, Solomon, Jeremiah, Daniel, Peter and Paul—along with the biographies and teachings of Jesus Christ. Their stories were written down as examples for us, preserved so we could learn from their many and varied experiences (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6-11).

The Bible explains things as they really are—the good, the bad and the ugly. It presents a clear picture of human failings and gives the solutions.

If some passages are unclear, comparing one or more Bible versions may help to clear things up. Used-book stores are a good place to find inexpensive Bible translations. And numerous translations are now accessible online with instant search features. (To understand the differences in approach among various translations, see “What’s the Difference Between Various Bible Versions?” on page 6.)

Try to read with an open mind and fresh approach, as though you were reading every scripture for the first time. You’ll be surprised at what you discover. Some scriptures, for example, may directly contradict what you

always believed the Bible said! Be sure to rely on what the Bible says, not what someone says it says.

Questions may come to mind as you read along. Jot them down before you forget. Feel free to write us with any questions you may have. In many cases your question will be covered in detail in one of our booklets or an earlier *Good News* article. Or you may find the answer later as you continue to read the Scriptures.

First things first

If you apply its words, reading the Bible can be the most rewarding thing you ever do. Woodrow Wilson, U.S. president from 1913 to 1921, was right to note that widespread problems could be solved through the application of God’s Word: “There are a good many problems before the American people today, and before me as president, but I expect to find the solution to those problems just in the proportion that I am faithful in the study of the Word of God.”

No doubt much of the success of the American experience can be attributed to its people’s familiarity with God’s Word.

By studying the Bible you’ll gain wonderful insights into your relationships with family, friends and others. You’ll far better understand why our world is in the condition it’s in. You’ll come to understand yourself far better than you ever did.

The Bible records a lasting compliment to the Christians of Berea in northern Greece who, on hearing the apostle Paul’s teaching, “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). They wanted to be sure that what they were being taught was really what the Scriptures said. They set a commendable example for us.

How about you? Where do you fit in? Do you search the Scriptures to discover whether what you’ve been taught is true? If you do, you can share the joy of discovery experienced by the writer of Psalm 119, who in verses 97-103 wrote this in praise of God and His eternal Word:

“Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies . . . I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” **GN**

Gradually disappearing: American economic hegemony in the world

Stories about the economic emergence of China, India and Brazil fill our serious newspapers and newsmagazines. But economic activity is on the rise elsewhere too. For instance, the 540-mile border between Syria and Turkey was once pockmarked with some 60,000 land mines. Now \$2 billion in mutual trade moves freely across this formerly hostile border. Turkey is increasingly labeled “the hub of Eurasia.”

Also, during the last 10 years trade between China and African nations has expanded from \$10 billion to \$100 billion. India and Peru have grown much closer as well. More and more South American nations are looking in the direction of Asia.

A new world economic and political order is beginning to take shape. Noted *Financial Times* columnist Philip Stephens put it this way: “We are living through one of history’s swerves. A multipolar world has been long predicted, but it has always seemed to be perched safely on the horizon. Now it has rushed quite suddenly into the present. *Two centuries of western hegemony are coming to a close rather earlier than many had imagined*” (“On the Way to a New Global Balance,” Dec. 17, 2010, emphasis added throughout).

But what about the fortunes of America, both economically and politically? In contrast to other

nations, Washington certainly appears to be facing an uncertain future. The Chinese economic challenge promises to be very serious. Gideon Rachman wrote in *Foreign Policy*: “China ... has proved its economic prowess on the global stage. Its economy has been growing at 9 to 10 percent a year, on average, for roughly three decades. It is now the world’s leading exporter and its biggest manufacturer, and it is sitting on more than \$2.5 trillion of foreign reserves ... *China’s economic prowess is already allowing Beijing to challenge American influence all over the world.* The Chinese are the preferred partners of many African governments and the biggest trading partner of other emerging powers, such as Brazil and South Africa ...

“And China is only the largest part of a bigger story about the rise of new economic and political players ... New powers are on the rise: India, Brazil, Turkey. They each have their own foreign-policy preferences, which collectively constrain America’s ability to shape the world. Think of how India and Brazil sided with China at the global climate-change talks. Or the votes by Turkey and Brazil against America at the United Nations on sanctions against Iran. That is just a taste of things to come” (“Think Again: American Decline,” January-February 2011). (Sources: *Financial Times* [London], *Foreign Policy*.)

American and British decline foretold in Bible

The last book in the Bible, Revelation, was penned by the aged apostle John late in the first century, nearly 2,000 years ago. Yet the Holy Scriptures remain the most up-to-date book available to our modern age. They reveal both the origins and the prophetic destiny of America and the British Com-

The Holy Scriptures reveal both the origins and the prophetic destiny of America and the British Commonwealth of nations.

monwealth of nations, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Our free, 110-page booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* charts the whole course, showing where we have come from and where we are headed. (Please ask for your personal copy or read it online.) The final chapter sets out America and Britain’s future, first severe national punishment but mercifully followed by dramatic divine intervention for the remnants of our English-speaking peoples.

Far too many present-day Americans, Australians, Britons and Canadians have refused to acknowledge the true God and the bountiful undeserved blessings

He has bestowed on our nations. Many have even chosen to deny the very existence of their Creator and have instead accepted the false theory of evolution as well as secularism in general. Some have embraced a false version of Christianity, one generally devoid of obedience to God’s spiritual laws.

Many prefer to believe that the awesome blessings of national wealth and power came either by chance or are the results of their own efforts. Like their ancestors in ancient Israel, they have chosen and are currently choosing to ignore God’s patient warnings in the Bible. The inevitable outcome of such long-term, persistent behavior has already been recorded in Scripture (see Deuteronomy 8:10-14).

Many biblical prophecies portray the real repentance of God’s people at the return of Jesus Christ to earth. Then Americans, Australians, Britons, Canadians, New Zealanders and South Africans will return to the true God. But only *after* they have suffered severe crises worse in many ways than the catastrophes that befell the ancient nations of Israel and Judah.

The latter-day deliverance of the modern descendants of the patriarch Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, has been recorded by the Old Testament prophets. Read just one example, this one concerning the Great Tribulation, which is also mentioned in Matthew 24:21 and Daniel 12:1: “How awful that day will be ... It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but [after suffering through it] *he will be saved out of it*” (Jeremiah 30:7, NIV).

Debt dysfunction in the Western world

A special edition of *Newsweek* titled “Issues 2011” recently reported: “As the world enters 2011, we are adapting to the new reality of the post-crisis era. At its roots, the crisis was a symptom of a broader dysfunction in our global, political, economic and social order. *We are now paying, and continuing to*

Sooner or later, transgressing God’s law exacts an inevitable penalty. Even nations end up paying that penalty.

pay, for the sins of the past” (“To Our Readers,” December 2010–February 2011).

It becomes a matter of more than just passing interest that our present plight would be described *in biblical terms* by the chairman and executive chairman of a popular American newsweekly with an international edition!

According to the Bible, sin is the violation of God’s law (1 John 3:4). And sooner or later, transgressing God’s law exacts an inevitable penalty. Even nations end up paying that penalty, and until the penalty is paid it remains as an outstanding debt to justice. The New Testament sometimes speaks of sin in terms of debt. Jesus instructed us to pray, “And forgive us our debts” (Matthew 6:12).

This *Newsweek* preface goes on to depict some of our specific economic sins: “Governments have assumed massive debts to save the global financial system from total collapse. As a result, countries are now grappling with higher taxes, severe reductions in public goods and services, and dwindling investments in education and infrastructure. Public disillusionment in business and political leadership is dangerously high. *Because of our continued tendency to put off problem resolution, to the detriment of our children and grandchildren, we may yet trigger a deep social and generational crisis.* All these are the defining features of our new reality.”

The Bible simply says, “For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (2 Corinthians 12:14). James Hoge, Jr., the now retired editor of *Foreign Affairs*, frankly stated: “The United States’ influence, diminished by the rise of other states and nonstate actors, will be fatally undercut if the country does not curb its unsustainable reliance on debt” (Oct. 26, 2010).

If you would like help in coping with any personal debt difficulties, request or download our free booklet *Managing Your Finances*. (Sources: *Newsweek*, *Foreign Affairs*.)



An Overview of Conditions Around the World

Can Big Brother morph into a tool of the Beast?

The novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, written by George Orwell in 1949, is about an oligarchic, collectivist society. Orwell's novel portrayed a world of perpetual war, pervasive government surveillance and mind control. In 2011 we can see many similarities to Orwell's predictions.

A *USA Today* headline and drophead warn, "Yes, You Are Being Watched: Big Brother's got nothing on today's digital sensors" (Byron Acohido, Jan. 26, 2011). The report that follows shows that we are being monitored today in numerous ways, and we don't even realize it: "Surveillance cameras at airports, subways, banks and other public venues are not the only devices tracking you. Inexpensive, ever-watchful digital sensors are now ubiquitous. They are in laptop webcams, video-game motion sensors, smartphone cameras, utility meters, passports and employee ID cards."

As digital stalkers and peepers are increasing, the cost of storing digital data is decreasing. The result is an explosion of sensor data collection and storage. "Step out your front door and you could be captured in a high-resolution photograph taken from the air or street by Google or Microsoft, as they update their respective mapping services. Drive down a city thoroughfare, cross a toll bridge, or park at certain shopping malls and your license plate will be recorded and time-stamped" (ibid.).

The chilling effect of all this is that you can be tagged, which can effectively pull you out of group photos and affect your privacy. "Once you are tagged in a photo, that photo could be used to search for matches across the entire Internet, or in private databases, including those fed by surveillance cameras" (ibid.).

Question: What's to prevent Big Brother from becoming a tool of totalitarian control in the hands of the Beast of Revelation? Prophecy indicates that the Beast will be able to keep watch over people's commercial activity (Revelation 13:16-17). (Source: *USA Today*.)

Terrorists strike in Moscow airport

Terrorists struck deep in the heart of Russia at Moscow's busiest Domodedovo Airport on Jan. 24, 2011. This was the second time in seven years that Domodedovo was targeted by suicide bombers. In 2004, two female bombers blew themselves up and killed 90 bystanders.

Although so far no one has claimed responsibility for the latest attack, in which a bomb filled with screws and ball bearings killed at least 35 people and wounded at least 180, the perpetrator was believed to be a Muslim suicide bomber (Nataliya Vasilyeva, Associated Press, Jan. 24, 2011).

Why would Islamic terrorists focus their attention on Russians, who have allegedly been supportive of Islamic attacks against the West? Several years

back it was pointed out: "In Russia, Chechen Muslims have been conducting an insurgency against the Russian government for over ten years. They have mounted extensive terrorist suicide attacks in Moscow" (Thomas Hayden, "Suicide Bombers Are Not New," *Military.com*, July 29, 2005).

Dan Eggen and Scott Wilson gave a credible answer to this insane problem in a *Washington Post* article titled "Suicide Bombing: It's Getting Worse," which identified the 'cult of glorification' which they described as a mix of nationalist, personal and religious fervor, and a fervent hatred against Israel, where boys see the glory being given to the suicide bombers and want to emulate that action" (quoted by Hayden).

The insanity will get worse as the god of this world comes nearer to his prophesied removal from the scene (Revelation 12:12). (Sources: Associated Press, *Military.com*.)

The global famine to come

The title of the London *Times* article says it all: "Rocketing Price of Food in a Hungry World Brings Riots, Fear and Conflict" (Francis Elliott, Jan. 12, 2011).

The Bible forewarns that the age-old problem of famine will eventually intensify beyond our worst nightmares. This is represented by one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse in Revelation 6 and is specifically mentioned in the prophecy Jesus Christ

gave at the end of His ministry in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

According to the *Times* article: "Many factors are being blamed for the global increases [in riots, fear and conflict] ... Experts think that the trend is upwards." Right now the effects of famine are mainly seen in poverty-stricken nations. That will change over time. Poor countries will have to cope with two billion more people seeking food in not so many years' time.

Bad weather in the form of droughts and floods

Cyberspace saturated with pornography

Pornography has become increasingly omnipresent on the Internet. An estimated quarter of all Internet searches are related to porn. Nearly a fifth of the U.S. population searched for and likely watched smut in a recent month. That's nearly 60 million Americans.

Alarming, Internet sex is becoming more abnormal, grotesque and debased by the day. The various illicit categories are unmentionable in a Christian magazine. The apostle Paul stated: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness ... For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (Ephesians 5:11-12). Tragically, while many men and some women are initially shocked at what they see on websites purveying such perversity, they can find themselves drawn in and hooked.

The intimate experience God intended to cement a lifelong love and attraction between husband and wife is thereby perverted into an unspeakable nightmare—debasing men and women, who are made in the image of God, into something subhuman as they sear their consciences by publicly performing illicit acts for money.

Sex between married partners should always be the most private of pleasurable human experiences. It should never be shared with anyone for any reason. If you want to understand the blessings God intended for His human creation in this most intimate of all of life's experiences, request our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*. (Sources: *The Sunday Times Magazine* [London], *The Atlantic*.)

(like the one in Queensland, Australia) or earthquakes (like the Haitian disaster) tend to exacerbate the basic problem of insufficient food production.

Shortages drive the price of crucial foodstuffs ever upwards. Ultimately only God can rescue humanity from the cause-and-effect cycle that grips poverty-stricken countries.

To understand more, request or download our free booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Sources: *The Times* [London], *The Wall Street Journal*.)

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 why we've created the *World News and Prophecy* website—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. This eye-opening site offers you a perspective so badly needed in our chaotic and confused world—the perspective of God's Word, the Bible. Visit us at www.WNPonline.org today!





The Spiritual Reality Behind *The King's Speech*

The movie *The King's Speech* highlights the very personal struggle of Britain's King George VI to overcome a speech impediment. Behind the film is the historical reality of the man's deep religious faith, a conviction that enabled him to lead the British Empire during its time of greatest trial.

In the last week of 2010 my wife and I went to see the film *The King's Speech*, the Oscar-nominated movie that tells the story of the struggle of Britain's King George VI with a speech impediment and of his therapist, Australian Lionel Logue.

I was so inspired by much of the movie that I searched among my books for one I've owned for a few years but had never read. *The Reluctant King*, by Sarah Bradford (1989), tells the fascinating story of this remarkable monarch, a man who was decidedly not born to be king and who very reluctantly ascended the throne in December 1936 following the abdication of his elder brother.

George VI was born in 1895, when his great-grandmother Queen Victoria was still very much alive. He lived through the reigns of his grandfather Edward VII (1901-1910), his father George V (1910-1936) and his brother Edward VIII (1936).

He lived during a very interesting time, when Great Britain was the world's preeminent power. Since the king presided over the British Empire, with a quarter of the world's people as his subjects, his office was then the most important in the world. The abdication of his brother on Dec. 11, 1936, was a major constitutional crisis affecting governments around the world, as all the dominions of the British Empire had to agree on the change.

Although traumatic at the time, in hindsight we should all be thankful that Edward VIII abdicated in favor of his brother. Edward had gotten himself involved with a twice-divorced woman from Baltimore who was still married to her second husband.

In 1936 this was totally unacceptable, and not just to the British people. The Australian prime minister, a devout Catholic, made it absolutely clear that the king's

mistress would never be acceptable to the Australian people. Similar protests came from Canada and South Africa.

Religion played a major role in the Empire

In reading *The Reluctant King*, I was struck by how much more religious Britain was at the time than it is now. When, as the young Prince Albert, he was sent for naval training at Osborne on the Isle of Wight, he found that "discipline was strict, but not, according to former cadets, unkindly [so], although the life was Spartan, beginning at 6 a.m. in summer and 6.30 in winter, when the boys, woken by a bugler playing reveille, were expected to leap out of bed at the first stroke of the cadet captain's gong, kneel down and say their prayers" (p. 43).

Everything was done in a hurry, "at the double . . . although extra time was allowed for prayers" (ibid.) For "talking before grace," the future king was later punished (p. 52). Religion was clearly taken seriously in the Royal Navy at that time.

Another interesting passage appears on page 53: "War was very much in the air when Prince Albert . . . accompanied his father on the royal yacht, the *Victoria & Albert*, for the great review of the Fleet off Weymouth from 7 to 11 May 1912 . . . Prince Albert could not have failed to be impressed by the appearance of what was then the largest and most modern war fleet in the world, equipped with the latest huge dreadnoughts and battle-cruisers and even a submarine . . ."

Naval supremacy had enabled Britain to be the dominant power in the world for well over a century when this review of the fleet took place. It was to serve the British well in World War I, which began two years later.

Is it possible there was a connection between Britain's naval supremacy, its

superpower status and its many victories over ambitious European powers and its devotedness to prayer—the outward form of its strict Christian beliefs?

In contrast to a century ago, today religious belief is far rarer among members of the British military. I asked my nephew, who serves with the Royal Air Force, how many men in his unit hold any religious beliefs. His reply? "Absolutely no one"!

This is a huge shift from England's historical experience.

On the eve of the Battle of Trafalgar against Napoleon's naval forces in 1805, Britain's Admiral Nelson led the sailors in prayer, asking God for victory against the combined fleets of France and Spain. Nelson then led the Royal Navy to a great victory, ensuring Britain's naval supremacy for more than a hundred years.

A man of faith leading a religious nation

The British people became truly thankful for their new King George VI when he led them through the dark and threatening days of World War II.

Whereas his elder brother, who had abdicated, was seemingly sympathetic to Hitler and even met the dictator on one occasion, King George would not allow himself to be intimidated by Nazi threats. In spite of the danger, he and his wife and two daughters remained in London throughout the war when most other European leaders had fled their own countries. One reason for this was the king's faith.

As *The Reluctant King* explains: "The Coronation is the single most significant ceremony of a sovereign's life, transforming him or her from an ordinary mortal to a powerful symbol, half-man, half-priest, in a solemn ritual whose history goes back over a thousand years and whose significance is far older.

"No man or woman could fail to be affected by it; for George VI, whose interest in ritual and sense of history was very strong, it was to have an extraordinarily strengthening, confidence-giving effect. For both him and the Queen the religious significance of the ceremony, in which they were to dedicate themselves before God to the service of their people, was very strong.



With increasing setbacks besetting the English-speaking peoples, the time has come for national repentance, for a day of prayer like the one called for by King George VI in the dark days of 1942.

“Cosmo Lang [Archbishop of Canterbury], an intrusive presence throughout, who saw this as an occasion for asserting the cause of Religion over the Worldliness represented by the late King [Edward VIII], held a private meeting with them at Buckingham Palace on the evening of the Sunday before Coronation Day, at which they all knelt in prayer.

“[Lang wrote:] ‘I prayed for them and for their realm and Empire, and I gave them my personal blessing. I was much moved and so were they. Indeed there were tears in their eyes when we rose from our knees. From that moment I knew what

would be in their minds and hearts when they came to their anointing and crowning.’”

“During the ceremony itself, a kind of religious exaltation came upon the King, he later privately told Lang, as the Archbishop noted in an unpublished passage, ‘that he felt throughout that Some One Else was with him’” (p. 212)

Harold Nicolson, a then-well-known diplomat and politician, wrote at the time of the king’s coronation in May 1937, “There is no doubt that the King and Queen have entered on this task with a real religious sense” (p. 205).

Bound by “the cause of Christian civilization”

Early in World War II, in a speech to the peoples of the British Empire, the king “issued a rallying cry . . . which was to be the most famous he ever made . . . [that] ‘true peace is in the hearts of men, and it is the tragedy of this time that there are powerful countries whose whole direction and policy are based on aggression and the suppression of all that we hold dear from mankind . . .

“‘I believe from my heart that the cause which binds together my peoples and our gallant and faithful Allies is the cause of Christian civilization’” (p. 309).

In another memorable speech he proclaimed, “Let us then put our trust, as I do, in God and in the unconquerable spirit of the British people” (p. 325).

U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt wrote to King George VI after meeting Prime Minister Winston Churchill on board a British naval vessel, expressing that “he wished . . . that the King could have been present at Divine Service on ‘your latest battleship’—the *Prince of Wales*—attended by hundreds of British and American sailors together” (p. 338).

During a time of numerous military setbacks for the Allies in 1942, the king called for a national day of prayer (p. 342). The following year, as the Allies started to see the war turning in their favor, the actor Leslie Howard, who starred in the enormously popular film *Gone With the Wind*, stood on the steps of London’s St. Paul’s Cathedral and repeated Nelson’s prayer on the eve of the Battle of Trafalgar. Prayer was very much a part of life in the Royal Navy during the time of Britain’s naval supremacy.

National enthusiasm for the Bible

None of this was a surprise for the British people at the time, for the country had been a praying nation for four centuries, ever since the religious fervor that followed the break of Henry VIII from the Catholic Church and the consequent freedom to publish and read the Bible. Henry lifted the ban in 1537, just a few months after the courageous English Bible translator William Tyndale was sentenced to death by an ecclesiastical court for smuggling Bibles into England.

Historian Benson Bobrick explains how Britain played a major role in spreading the Bible to much of the world: “Only in England was the Bible in any sense a ‘national possession’ . . . Englishmen carried their Bibles with them—as the rock and foundation of their lives—overseas . . . Beyond the shores of Albion [Britain], it fortified the spirit of the pioneers of New England, helped to shape the American psyche, and through its impact on thought and culture eventually spread the world over” (*Wide as the Waters*, 2001, p. 12).

How long did this enthusiasm for the Bible last? “It did not cease for 350 years. 1900 was the first year in which religious works [at least in England] did not outnumber all other publications” (Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence*, 2000, p. 10).

This year, 2011, marks the 400th anniversary of the translation and publication of the most influential book of all time, the King James Version of the Bible (known in England as the Authorized Version). Few are aware that the King James Bible was the culmination of a struggle that had gone on for three centuries!

In the 14th century John Wycliffe translated the Bible at a time when there was no printing press or religious freedom. After his death the Catholic authorities declared him a heretic, exhumed his remains and burned them.

His crime? Like Tyndale after him, translating the Bible into the common English language, a grave threat to the established religious order. Wycliffe’s favorite scripture was Philippians 2:12: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” This concept—that one was responsible for his own salvation without having to go through the church establishment as an intermediary—was to revolutionize



Who'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.

But 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

England and its future colonies, both religiously and politically.

It wasn't until the Protestant Reformation, 150 years after Wycliffe, that people were free to read their Bibles. Various translations soon appeared, with differences resulting in religious conflicts. So King James I of England authorized an official translation, the King James Version, which was published exactly four centuries ago. The British people then took that translation out into the world with great fervor.

From devotion to disobedience

King George VI, the reluctant king, reigned at the end of England's enthusiasm for the Bible. It was soon to change after his death.

Although his daughter, Queen Elizabeth II, kissed the Bible at her coronation service in 1953 and promised to uphold its laws, successive British governments have progressively rejected the laws of God and replaced them increasingly with the laws of man—with the resultant breakdown of the family and consequent social and economic problems. It's not surprising that national decline has coincided with this rejection of godly values.

The title of Jacques Barzun's book sums it all up: *From Dawn to Decadence*. Here, the Protestant Reformation marks the dawn of modern Western civilization, when people enthusiastically embraced the Bible and sought their own salvation through adherence to their religious faith and obedience to many of the laws of God. Decadence is the final, modern period, with the rejection of all those values and the embrace of anti-Christian ideas.

George VI would not have been surprised to hear this concept. He, his father, his grandfather and his great-grandmother Queen Victoria all believed that the British Empire was the fulfillment of ancient biblical prophecies foretelling that Joseph's son Ephraim and his descendants were to become a promised "multitude of nations" (Genesis 48:19). Ephraim's brother Manasseh was to "also . . . become a people, and he also shall be great"—a prophecy fulfilled by his descendants in the United States.

In the April 6, 1996, issue of *The Independent* there appeared a facsimile of a letter written by George VI in 1922, before he assumed the throne. In the letter, George VI wrote: "I am sure the British Israelite business is true. I have read a lot about it

lately and everything no matter how large or small points to our being 'the chosen race'"—those chosen to play a major prophetic role in human history.

In Genesis 48:16, the patriarch Jacob, otherwise known as Israel, blessed Joseph's two sons and said, "Bless the lads; *let my name be named upon them*"—meaning that biblical prophecies about "Israel" in the end time relate to the British and American peoples. (The Jews in Bible prophecy are identified as *Judah*, one of the 12 tribes descended from Israel, and not to be confused with the other 11 tribes.)

In Deuteronomy 7, we read of manifest blessings to be given to the modern Israelites, promises fulfilled right up until the time of George VI. We also read in chapter 28, beginning in verse 15, of the negative consequences for disobedience, for turning away from God—prophecies increasingly being fulfilled today. In fact, they read very much like today's headlines that document the troubles plaguing the major English-speaking nations.

With increasing setbacks besetting the English-speaking peoples—economic, military, social and even climatic—the time has come for national repentance, for another day of prayer like the one called for by King George VI in the dark days of 1942.

His and his people's focus on drawing close to God was a major factor in the Allied victory over Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan and the resulting freedoms we have since enjoyed. But our progressively distant relationship with the God who established and made the major English-speaking nations great is the most important factor in those countries' current decline and the seemingly insurmountable problems that threaten to overwhelm them. **GN**

To Learn More...

Are Britain and the United States really mentioned in Bible prophecy? While Bible prophecy mentions several rather insignificant nations by name, are major powers left out? Or are they identified in ways that few people understand? You need to see what the Bible reveals about the future of the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other countries. Request or download your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!



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What's Behind the Turmoil in Egypt?

by Scott Ashley

Recent headlines have been filled with accounts of riots, protests and demonstrations in several Middle Eastern countries. What's behind them? What does it all mean? Does Bible prophecy provide any clues?

When 26-year-old produce-stand vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire Dec. 17, 2010, in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, fatally injuring himself in an act of protest against the government, he dropped a match into the tinderbox that is the Middle East.

Some have likened his action to that of Gavrilo Princip, whose assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 ignited the flames of World War I and set in motion a chain of events that would ultimately reshape the world.

Since Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation, the president of Tunisia has fled the country, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has been forced from office, and sometimes bloody protests have broken out in Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Algeria and other Arab nations. In some cases panicked governments shut down Internet and cell phone communications nationwide to slow the spread of antigovernment demonstrations. In others, tanks, armored personnel carriers and thousands of troops patrolled city streets to maintain control.

Where will things go from here? It's anyone's guess. Things could calm down temporarily, or they could grow much, much worse.

What's behind the growing unrest?

Mohamed Bouazizi saw little hope for his future. Frustrated at being unable to find a decent job, he could only find work manning a produce stand on a city street.

His desperation is shared by millions more not only in Tunisia, but throughout the Arab world where increasingly angry citizens see little opportunity to improve their lot while their rulers—often essentially dictators for life—enrich themselves and their families, friends and associates.

Their resentment is also often directed at the West—and the United States in particular—whom they see as subjugating the Muslim world, polluting it culturally

and spiritually, while supporting puppet rulers and the often-hated state of Israel.

This feeds right into the hands of Islamic radicals and fundamentalists, who are always ready to stir unrest if it means opening the door to gaining more power for themselves in support of their goal to establish a worldwide community of Muslim believers under Islamic rule.

Chief among such groups is the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic group that originated in Egypt and wields considerable power there—so much so that it is likely to hold sizable influence in any elected government that takes shape in the post-Mubarak era. Spokesmen for the Muslim Brotherhood have already renounced Egypt's peace treaty with Israel, which would essentially return the two countries to a state of war.

The Muslim Brotherhood has given rise to various terrorist organizations. The charter of Hamas, which rules Gaza with an iron fist, says it "is one of the wings of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine." There are also links with the groups responsible for the 1997 massacre of 58 tourists at Luxor, Egypt, and the 1980 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for signing a peace treaty with Israel. The 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Osama bin Laden's right-hand man Ayman al-Zawahiri were members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Could we see another Iran?

It's very difficult for Westerners to grasp the religious fervor that drives events in many Middle Eastern countries. Because few in the West take religion seriously, it's hard for them to fathom the deep religious beliefs that motivate so many people there. It also makes it difficult to understand the huge cultural differences, much less bridge them.

Those of us in advanced Western democracies would naturally sympathize with the demands of demonstrators in Egypt, Tun-

sia, Jordan and Yemen for greater rights and freedoms and a larger say in their governments and leaders. Most human beings rightfully yearn for such things.

But as former U.S. President George W. Bush learned—and as President Barack Obama may be learning now—"instant" democracy is a myth. Suddenly granting democratic self-rule to people steeped in a culture of being told what to do, sorely lacking in democratic ideals, used to looking to strongmen as saviors and divided over age-old antagonisms can sometimes create far more problems than it solves.

We need only consider the Gaza Strip, which in its first democratic election in 2006 swept the terror group Hamas into power. Its first election was also its last. We could also look at Iraq and Afghanistan, where attempts to institute democratic institutions after the ouster of strongman rulers like Saddam Hussein and Mullah Omar have proved bitter disappointments.

Like the citizens of Gaza, Iraqis and Afghans have often looked to religious figures to lead them, and that has often only fostered further problems and divisions.

Another example we would do well to heed is Iran. The parallels between what is happening in Egypt today and events of the 1979 Iranian revolution are sobering. Leading up to that 1979 revolution, dissatisfaction among students and liberal-leaning members of Iranian society brought widespread protests much like those seen recently in Egypt. It wasn't long before vast public demonstrations brought the toppling of the pro-Western shah of Iran. Abandoned by his supporters in the West, he fled the country in disgrace.

For a time—very brief, as it turned out—it appeared that Iran might actually have a progressive, democratic government. But barely a month after the shah's departure, the Ayatollah Khomeini's followers took over and a fundamentalist revolution was in full swing. Iran quickly became a radicalized religious regime.

Now, three decades later, Iran is run by Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological offspring—including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose efforts to develop nuclear weapons have antagonized much of the Western world and inspired fear in

many of his neighbors.

Why is Egypt so important?

As noted earlier, the goal of many Muslims is to establish a worldwide community of believers under an Islamic theocracy.

Egypt would be the grand prize for Islamic revolutionaries. With 80 million people, it is the Arab world's most populous country. After Israel, it also has the region's greatest military capability. It also controls one of the world's key shipping choke points, the Suez Canal, through which up to 2 million barrels of oil pass per day to hungry Western markets.

With its storied history and cultural legacy, Egypt holds a special place in the minds of Muslims worldwide. If Egypt were to turn from its secular government and embrace Islamic fundamentalism on a national level—and polls show that many of its people lean in that direction—it would be a huge boon to the revolutionary cause.

And make no mistake, the same methods that brought revolutionaries into power in Iran are very much at work in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East today. They first spread dissatisfaction and unrest, leading to chaos and uncertainty, causing the people to cry out for solutions and stability, after which they step in as the solution to the very problems they themselves created—and a totalitarian state is born. The only difference is that this time the authoritarian state is religious in nature.

Of course, it doesn't stop with just one country. If Egypt—the Arab world's most powerful and populous country—were to fall to such revolutionaries, it would greatly embolden similar movements in other nearby states. Like falling dominoes, one can easily envision the toppling of Arab monarchies and strongmen in Libya, Algeria and Morocco to the west and Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq to the east and northeast.

In a matter of a few weeks to a few days,



Cairo's historic Sultan Hassan and Al-Rifai mosques are engulfed with smoke from a nearby fire at a police station that was set ablaze during massive protests on Jan. 28, 2011, by Egyptians demanding the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak. Similar protests have broken out in other Arab countries, leading to fears of a repeat of the Iranian revolution of 1979.

the entire Middle East as we know it could be radically transformed. Rather than one terror-exporting Iran eagerly pursuing nuclear weapons, America and the West potentially could be faced with a dozen or more like it!

If this sounds too far-fetched to be true, remember that events like those leading up to the expulsion of the rulers in Tunisia and Egypt are also already taking place in Jordan, Algeria and Yemen!

What are the prophetic implications of these events?

The writers of *The Good News* have long urged our readers to closely watch events in the Middle East. And with good reason, for the Middle East will be at the center of events that in the near future will lead to the end of this age of human misrule and the establishment of the soon-coming reign of Jesus Christ.

But it will not be pretty! From the Middle East will flow events that will create chaos and turmoil on a scale unparalleled in human history. Jesus Christ Himself said of this 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*; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

The 11th chapter of the prophetic book of Daniel describes a ruler rising from the lands of the Middle East "at the time of the end" (verse 40). This individual—apparently the leader of an end-time alliance of Muslim nations (and remember that a primary goal of Islamic fundamentalists is to unite all Muslims under a central Islamic rule)—is referred to in this verse as "the king of the South."

Daniel's prophecy spans many centuries, from the time of the Persian Empire to the time of the end and Jesus Christ's return. In this chapter the terms "king of the South" and "king of the North" originally referred to two of the successors of Alexander the Great—two of his generals who, at Alexander's death, claimed portions of his empire to the south and north of the

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An unprecedented series of protests, demonstrations and uprisings have recently taken place in the Arab countries of Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen, with minor incidents occurring in Mauritania, Morocco, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Oman. Such widespread unrest demonstrates the vulnerability of the region to an Islamic revolution that may be indicated in Bible prophecy.

Holy Land (and thus the terms “king of the South” and “king of the North”).

But over the many centuries spanned by this long prophecy, the kings of the South and North, as well as the territories over which they ruled, changed. Alliances shifted. Kingdoms, empires and dynasties rose and fell. For lack of space, we won’t go into those many details. You can find the basics covered in our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*—we hope you’ll request or download your free copy.

As spelled out in this booklet, the end-time king of the North is the leader of a European-centered alliance of nations—a new emerging global superpower that soon will dominate the world stage. He and the end-time king of the South—again, apparently the leader of an alliance of Islamic nations—will come into major conflict.

A coming clash of civilizations

Notice Daniel’s prophecy: “At the time of the end *the king of the South shall attack him; 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).

This king of the South attacks the king of the North, which provokes a retaliatory invasion into the Middle East. “He shall also enter the Glorious Land [the Holy Land, generally modern-day Israel], and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon” (verse 41).

Edom, Moab and Ammon are largely the

people of modern-day Jordan, so it appears that the king of the North and his forces will occupy Israel yet stop short of Jordan.

But notice what also happens in this invasion by the king of the North: “He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, *and the land of Egypt shall not escape*. He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and *over all the precious things of Egypt*; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels” (verses 42-43).

Libya is immediately west of Egypt; Ethiopia is to the south. The king of the North clearly invades the region and ends up controlling Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia as a result of this retaliatory offensive—and perhaps more of North Africa will be involved.

How are we to make sense of these events?

Until the rise of militant Islam, none of this seemed remotely possible. But with the Iranian Revolution and the oft-stated goal of uniting believers under the banner of Islam, we now see the increasing likelihood of some sort of Islamic movement sweeping across the nations of the Middle East and uniting Muslims against the West.

To them, Europe remains a grave threat to Islam. Even today, Islamic radicals like Osama bin Laden repeatedly refer to Western influence in the Middle East as a continuation of the Crusades, which they view as an attempt to exterminate Islam that is still ongoing.

Other Muslim figures openly talk of capturing Europe for Islam. Many would

prefer that this come through peaceful immigration and high birthrates (and Europe is wrestling with the problem of millions upon millions of Muslim immigrants and their burgeoning progeny). But they are prepared for the assimilation of Europe to come through war and *jihad* if necessary.

In today’s current atmosphere—with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad threatening the West and pursuing nuclear weapons, with Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism spreading, with conflict growing between Islam and the West, and with the possibility of secularized Arab governments falling to

Islamists—suddenly this clash of civilizations and another open war in the Middle East doesn’t sound so far-fetched at all.

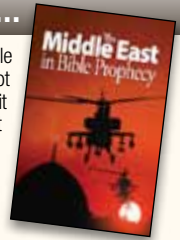
Yes, we *definitely* need to keep a close eye on the Middle East. It’s unclear how the current turmoil will affect Egypt. Perhaps peace and calm will win out temporarily. Or things could turn very bad very quickly.

Either way, even if it doesn’t happen now, these recent events show just how volatile the situation is in many of these countries and how quickly circumstances could change at any time—perhaps leading into the very events foretold by Daniel under God’s inspiration.

As Jesus Christ tells us in Luke 21:36, we are to diligently “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.” Let us make sure that we are so doing! **GN**

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Why does it seem that the Middle East is such a perpetual hotspot on the world scene? Why has it been the source of such conflict and so many bloody wars? What’s behind this region’s ancient antagonisms? Where will it ultimately lead? Discover the answers in our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. Request or download your free copy today!



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Would Jesus Christ Celebrate Easter?

by Jerold Aust

For millions of people, Easter Sunday is the most important religious observance of the year. But if Jesus walked the dusty roads of Galilee today, would He observe this holiday?

Each spring the excitement of Easter fills the air. Many churches prepare special Easter programs about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. At home, parents color Easter eggs and then hide the brightly colored holiday symbols around the house and lawn so that, come Easter morning, their children can excitedly hunt for them.

Stuffed Easter bunnies and chocolate rabbits are seen everywhere in the weeks leading up to this major religious observance. Then there are the Easter sunrise services, where churchgoers gather to hear about Jesus' resurrection and honor that miraculous event by watching the sun come up in the east.

But what do colored eggs and the Easter rabbit have to do with Jesus Christ's resurrection? How did these seemingly irrelevant symbols come to be associated with that event?

Can we find any historical or biblical record of Jesus or His disciples celebrating Easter or teaching parents and children to dye eggs and display bunnies on this holiday? Did Jesus or His apostles instruct any of His followers to meet to honor His resurrection at sunrise on Easter Sunday—or at any other time, for that matter?

If Easter was not sanctioned by Jesus or instituted by His apostles, then where did it come from? In other words, if Jesus were living among us as a flesh-and-blood human being, would He observe Easter or encourage others to do so?

Answers to these questions are readily available. Some may take a little research, but they become clear when we look into history and the Bible.



The apostles' record on Easter

As surprising as this may sound, *nowhere in the New Testament can you find any reference to Easter*. In the King James Version of the Bible you do find the word *Easter* one time (in Acts 12:4), but it is a blatantly erroneous mistranslation that has been corrected in virtually every other Bible translation.

The original Greek word there is *pascha*, correctly translated *Passover* in virtually every modern version of the Bible everywhere it appears in the Scriptures. It refers to the biblical Passover originally instituted when God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-14).

The original apostles, from the inception of the New Testament Church to near the end of the first century when the apostle John died, left absolutely no record of celebrating Easter or teaching others to do so. From Jesus to John not one of the apostles gave even the slightest hint of observing or advocating the observance of what we know today as Easter Sunday.

However, that doesn't mean the early Church did not hold to specific religious observances. The apostle Paul, some 25 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, spoke plainly to members of the church at

Corinth that they should continue to keep the *Passover* as Christ commanded.

Paul wrote: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:23-27).

Paul was concerned that the Church members in Corinth observe the Passover in the right way, with reverence and proper comprehension of its meaning.

The writings of Paul and Luke, his traveling companion and author of the book of Acts, regularly mention observing the weekly Sabbath day and the biblical festivals listed in Leviticus 23. But Easter is conspicuously absent (see 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; 16:8; Acts 2:1-4; 13:42, 44; 17:1-3; 18:4; 20:6, 16).

Again, since Easter wasn't introduced by Jesus or the apostles, where did it come from, and how did it come to be such an accepted part of traditional Christianity?

The origin of Easter

It's not that difficult to trace the surprising origins of Easter and what it really represents. Many scholarly works show that Easter is a pre-Christian religious holiday, one that was created and developed long before Jesus' human lifetime and carried forward to the modern era through such empires as Babylon, Persia, Greece and finally Rome.

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words notes: "The term 'Easter' is not of Christian origin. It is another form of *Astarte*, one of the titles of the Chaldean [Babylonian] goddess, the queen of heaven. The festival

If Easter and its symbols were not sanctioned by Jesus or instituted by His apostles, then where did they come from?

of Pasch [Passover] held by Christians in post-apostolic times was a continuation of the Jewish feast . . . *From this Pasch the pagan festival of 'Easter' was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt pagan festivals to Christianity*" (W.E. Vine, 1985, "Easter," emphasis added throughout).

Alexander Hislop in his book *The Two Babylons* (first published as a book in 1919) explores the origins of Easter. Although his work has been criticized as lacking scholarship, it is heavily footnoted with sources—and much of what he presents can be verified through other historical research. A repudiation of some of his conclusions should not suffice to overturn the whole of his work. Of course, it has been in the interest of supporters of false religion and academic tradition opposed to biblical history to discredit his findings.

Hislop discovered that a form of Easter was observed in many nations, including nations not professing Christianity. "What means the term Easter itself? . . . It bears its Chaldean [Babylonian] origin on its very forehead. *Easter is nothing else than Astarte*, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven, *whose name, as pronounced by the people of Nineveh, was . . . Ishtar*" (1959 edition, p. 103).

Easter and the practices associated with it can be traced back to various pagan rituals. Hislop explains that "the forty days' abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshippers of the Babylonian goddess" (p. 104). In Egypt a similar 40-day period of abstinence "was held expressly in commemoration of Adonis or Osiris, the great mediatorial god" (p. 105).

A pre-Christian spring festival

How did 40 days' abstinence come to be associated with a resurrection? Hislop continues, "Among the pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz, which was celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing" (p. 105).

Tammuz was a chief Babylonian deity and husband of the goddess Ishtar. Worship of Tammuz was so widespread in ancient times that it even spread into Jerusalem. In Ezekiel 8:12-18 God describes that worship and calls it an *abomination*—something repugnant and disgusting to Him.

The Babylonians held a great festival every spring to celebrate Tammuz's death



"The term 'Easter' is not of Christian origin. It is another form of Astarte, one of the titles of the Chaldean [Babylonian] goddess, the queen of heaven."

and supposed resurrection many centuries before Christ walked the earth as a human being. Hislop comprehensively documents evidence that shows Easter's origins predate the modern Christian holiday by more than 2,000 years!

Hislop cites the fifth-century writings of Cassianus, a Catholic monk of Marseilles, France, on the subject of Easter's being a pagan custom rather than a New Testament observance: "It ought to be known that the observance of the forty days (i.e., the observance of Lent) had no existence, so long as the perfection of that primitive Church remained inviolate" (p. 104).

Social anthropologist Sir James Frazer first published his most famous work, *The Golden Bough*, in 1890. In it he described Easter ceremonies entering into the established church: "When we reflect how often the Church has skillfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith on the old stock of paganism, we may surmise that the

Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis [the Greek name for Tammuz], which . . . was celebrated in Syria at the same season" (1993 edition, p. 345).

Why eggs and rabbits?

What about other customs associated with Easter? One Catholic writer explains how eggs and rabbits came to be connected with Easter. You will quickly notice an absence of any link or reference to the Holy Bible when it comes to these mythic rituals:

"The egg has become a popular Easter symbol. Creation myths of many ancient peoples center in a cosmogenic egg from which the universe is born. In ancient Egypt and Persia friends exchanged decorated eggs at the spring equinox, the beginning of their New Year. These eggs were a *symbol of fertility* for them because the coming forth of a live creature from an egg was so surprising to people of ancient times.

"Christians of the Near East adopted this tradition, and the Easter egg became a religious symbol. It represented the tomb from which Jesus came forth to new life" (Greg Dues, *Catholic Customs and Traditions*, 1992, p. 101).

Like eggs, rabbits came to be linked with Easter because they were potent symbols associated with ancient fertility rites. "Little children are usually told that the Easter eggs are brought by the Easter Bunny. *Rabbits are part of pre-Christian fertility symbolism because of their reputation to reproduce rapidly. The Easter Bunny has never had a religious meaning*" (p. 102).

Honest Bible scholars freely admit that Jesus never sanctioned this pre-Christian holiday, nor did His apostles. Not until Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicaea in 325—almost three centuries after Jesus was killed and rose again—did Easter replace the Passover, the biblical ceremony Jesus and the apostle Paul told Christians to observe. Yet this Easter Sunday observance was itself wrongly called Passover—as it still is in various languages.

Says *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*: "A final settlement of the dispute [whether and when to observe Easter or Passover] was one among the other reasons which led Constantine to summon the council of Nicaea in 325 . . . The decision of the council was unanimous that Easter [which

they wrongly called Passover] was to be kept on Sunday, and on the same Sunday throughout the world, and ‘that none should hereafter follow the blindness of the Jews’” (11th edition, pp. 828-829, “Easter”).

Constantine’s decision was a fateful turning point for Christianity. Those who remained faithful to the instruction of Jesus and the apostles would be outcasts, a small and persecuted minority (John 15:18-20). A vastly different set of beliefs and practices—recycled from ancient pre-Christian religions but dressed in a Christian cloak—would take hold among the majority.

Does Jesus approve?

Since the pagan symbols of eggs and rabbits were adopted by the Catholic Church centuries after Christ’s ascension, should Christians celebrate this holiday or encourage others to observe it?

To answer that question let’s go back to the title of this article, “Would Jesus Celebrate Easter?” Or, we should further ask, would He want *us* to? He certainly could have told us to. So could the apostles, whose teaching and doctrine are preserved for us in the book of Acts and the epistles written by Paul, Peter, James, Jude and John. But nowhere do we find a hint of support for Easter or anything remotely resembling it. What we do find, as pointed out earlier, is clear instruction from Jesus and Paul to keep the Passover and other biblical—and truly Christian—observances.

Holy Scripture does not support this pre-Christian holiday and, in fact, condemns such celebrations. Because Scripture condemns pagan worship practices even if done to honor the true God (Deuteronomy 12:29-32), we know that God the Father and Jesus His Son have no interest in Easter and do not approve of it.

Jesus, in fact, is diametrically opposed to religious rituals that supposedly honor Him but in reality are rooted in the worship of false gods. He makes clear the difference between pleasing God and pleasing men: “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. *And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men . . . All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition*’” (Mark 7:6-9, emphasis added throughout).

Easter is a tradition of men, not a commandment of God. But it’s more than that.

It is a *pagan* tradition of men that, like other traditions involved in the worship of false gods, is abhorrent to the true God. Jesus and His apostles would never sanction its observance because it mingles paganism with supposedly Christian symbolism and ritual. It is rooted in ancient pre-Christian fertility rites that have nothing to do with Jesus.

In reality, most of the trappings associated with Easter reveal that the holiday is actually a fraud pawned off on unsuspecting and well-intentioned people. God wants us to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24), not to recycle ancient customs used to worship other gods.

God wants us to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24), not to recycle ancient customs used to worship other gods.

Even the asserted timing of the events used to justify celebrating Jesus’ resurrection on a Sunday morning—maintaining that He was crucified on the afternoon of Good Friday and resurrected before dawn on Sunday morning—is demonstrably false, as an examination of the Scriptures shows.

For those who want concrete proof that He was indeed the Messiah and Savior of mankind, Jesus made a promise: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be *three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*” (Matthew 12:39-40).

Try as some might, there is no way to calculate three days and three nights from late Friday afternoon to Sunday morning before daylight. At most this amounts to barely more than a day and a half. Either Jesus was mistaken, or those who say He was crucified on a Friday and resurrected on a Sunday are mistaken. You can’t have it both ways.

Jesus’ instructions remain consistent

If Jesus walked the dusty roads of

Galilee today, would He celebrate Easter? Certainly not. But He would be consistent in that, since He does not change (Hebrews 13:8). For that reason, He would instead observe the annual Passover in the same manner He instructed His followers to keep it (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:15-17). And Jesus would celebrate the Days of Unleavened Bread in the way He inspired Paul to instruct early Christians (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Anyone who wants to be right with God, who wants to be a true disciple of Christ, the Master Teacher, will carefully examine his or her beliefs and practices to make sure they agree with the Bible. Such a person will not try to honor God with ancient idolatrous practices, violating God’s explicit commands in this regard (Deuteronomy 12:29-32; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 7:1). Easter, as we have seen, is filled with idolatrous trappings.

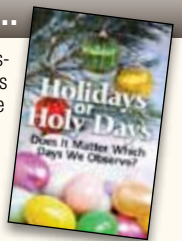
Simply claiming that something is Christian or is done to honor God doesn’t make it acceptable to Him.

Easter doesn’t represent a resurrected Jesus Christ. Rather, as difficult as it may be to admit, it merely perpetuates practices pagans followed thousands of years ago to honor their false gods. If we are to escape the calamities prophesied to come on those who place the ways of this world ahead of God, then we must repent of following traditions that dishonor Him (Revelation 18:1-5).

God desires that we instead honor and obey Him according to His instructions in His Word. Then He can use us to represent His holy Son, our Savior and the Messiah, who will soon return to the earth. No greater calling can be extended to human beings. May you have the heart to seek understanding and God’s perfect will. **GN**

To Learn More...

Most people are shocked to discover that our major religious holidays are not found in the Bible. They’re also surprised to learn that the Bible teaches us to observe seven annual festivals revealed within its pages. What are the real origins of our major holidays? What do the festivals of the Bible teach us? You need to read our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Really Matter Which Days We Observe?* Download or request your free copy today!



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The Signs of the Times

I just had to write and tell you how much I truly appreciate this latest *Good News*. It speaks so much to things that have been on my mind this past year. One of the things I try never to forget is that 30 years ago I could see that the state of the world was looking pretty bad, and God stepped in and gave me hope.

Things are much worse today than they were 30 years ago. My 14-year-old granddaughter doesn't know what it is like to go out in our backyard by herself because we always tell her to take one of the dogs out with her. This issue of *The Good News* really speaks to the times in which we are living in and what we need to be focused on. I can only say thanks to all who were involved in putting together such an excellent issue.

B.S., Cleveland, Ohio

"Is Christmas Really Merry?"

Do you have the article "Is Christmas Really Merry?" in Spanish? The Lord spoke to my husband and me through your literature, and so we brought this article to our pastor. Our church was to celebrate Christmas, but through prayer the Lord spoke to our pastor and the celebration was canceled.

M.P., Kissimmee, Florida

We publish a Spanish edition of The Good News, and although it is a condensed version, the article was included. We are sending you a copy.

"How to battle depression"

Thank you so much for your wonderful article "How to Battle Depression." As someone who has suffered bouts of depression since I was 16 years old (I am now 59), this is the best advice on depression I have ever encountered. It grabbed my attention immediately, and I have been practicing your advice ever since I read it. I am now learning not to look so much in the rearview mirror. Knowing that God forgives our sins takes a burden off me, too. Our hope is in God and Jesus Christ. Thank you again for your down-to-earth articles.

J.S., Hopkins, Minnesota

Readers appreciate our literature

I love reading your material. I receive *The Good News*, *Vertical Thought* and *World News and Prophecy*, as well as receiving your booklets I've ordered. (I also view your TV program *Beyond Today* on Sunday mornings.) They are all excellent reading material. They are much better than reading the newspapers. I love reading your material so much that I feel that I should at least help with the printing and the postage. Enclosed please find a check for your hard work. Please don't stop!

A.B., Ephrata, Pennsylvania

I acknowledge with heartfelt thanks the receipt of your valuable booklets *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, *Managing Your Finances and Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*. These three booklets are really informative and thought-provoking. I relish reading them to widen my knowledge in many disciplines. I am a lawyer by profession in the eastern part of Sri Lanka, which has just returned to normalcy after a period of internecine and destructive warfare between the government and the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam]. So reading the booklets and *The Good News* is really a solace to the peace-loving souls of our region.

A.U., Sri Lanka

It gives me great pleasure to finally write to you and let you know how grateful I am to be receiving your free booklets. They have shown me many things that I had not known before. Now I know what the love of God is like. I pray every morning and night and ask Him to help me accomplish my goals and be a better person. I also ask God to help my son grow up to be an honest and good person.

D.S., Grenada, West Indies

Bible Study Course

There are six of us who are currently doing your *Bible Study Course*. I copy it, and we have a group study together. It is a great study, easy to understand

and learn from. Thank you for giving us access to it.

Reader from Victoria, Australia

Can I please renew my *Bible Study Course*? I have always intended to read the Bible, but I never got around to it until I started reading your booklets about 12 months ago. You reference everything back to the Bible. I have made a small library of your booklets, and I really enjoy them.

Reader from Queensland, Australia

The King James Version

Many thanks for the copies of *The Good News*, but I find your idolatrous attitude to the King James Version worrying. The KJV is only one (not very good) translation of the Jewish and Christian Bible.

D.M.H., Sligeach, Republic of Ireland

Please read the first two articles in this issue. They may give you an appreciation of the historical value and lasting legacy of the King James Bible. "What's the Difference Between Various Bible Versions?" on page 6 explains why The Good News usually quotes from the more modern New King James Version.

Readers seek to obey God

I have been reading the booklets I have requested for some time now and they have been a blessing to me. Over the past two years I have been keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and have stopped eating unclean meats. I have also been observing the Feast days and appointed times. Your booklets clearly state that we should obey God. Please accept this check as a thank you.

S.R., Collegeville, Pennsylvania

Gentlemen, I am a World War II veteran. I have been through the Great Depression and hard times beyond. I still have faith in my Creator, and above all, I try to live by His Word, as difficult as that sometimes is. Your statements carry a tone of deep faith. I hope to gain the right path of knowledge from your material. I am so thankful for the gift of life I have been given.

B.H., Roseville, Michigan

Helping to spread the gospel

I have been thoroughly enjoying each and every issue of *The Good News*. I have ordered and received virtually all of your booklets as well. The truth of the Bible and what we have all been led to accept as "gospel" are two different things altogether. I am enclosing a check to pay our tithes. And I hope it helps people like me to be able to learn and understand the Bible, our Heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thank you so much, for you have helped to truly enlighten Christians all over the world.

D.C., Vail, Arizona

I am so pleased and thankful that you are allowing me to renew my subscription to your wonderful magazine. I believe your ministry is prospering lives and has changed individuals and families for the better. Thank you very much for your time and effort. May God richly bless you and your ministry.

Reader from Papua New Guinea

I have personally received so much benefit from your publications. I am able to share them with my friends in my small rural town. I am also taking advantage of the Bible study materials. I am very grateful that you made these resources available, and I would like to contribute to your ministry. Please tell me how.

B.H., Internet

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America Drowns in a Sea of Debt—What Does It All Mean?

by Mike Kelley

America's debt load is staggering and growing worse by the minute. How did the nation that was the world's biggest lender only a few decades ago become the world's greatest debtor today?

In this day and age, computers bring the world to our door. With a few clicks of a computer mouse, one can watch a real-time clock that shows the growth of the U.S. national debt. The numbers climb at a shocking pace. It's scary to watch how quickly the debt piles up—\$48,000 *per second*, \$4.1 billion *per day*.

The beginning of 2011 saw the U.S. national debt rise to just over \$14 trillion, an amount of money incomprehensible to the average person. It's roughly equal to projected U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the worth of everything produced in the United States in one year.

In per capita terms, it adds up to more than \$45,000 for every man, woman and child in the United States. More realistically, perhaps, the average U.S. taxpayer is on the hook for \$127,000, or about 2½ years of average household income.

Any country's national debt is simply the combined total of its budget deficits, the difference between what the government spends and what it takes in. The last time the United States ran a budget surplus was fiscal year 2000. The stated surplus of \$230 billion for that year pales, however, when one realizes that the federal government *borrowed billions from other revenue sources* to achieve the stated surplus.

Since that time a perfect storm of economic factors have combined to create the present situation. Falling revenues from the recessions of 2001 and 2008-2009, combined with wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and higher spending on homeland security, rapidly plunged the government back into a deficit mode. By fiscal 2008 the budget deficit reached \$455 billion, which skyrocketed to \$1.7 trillion in fiscal 2010 as the Obama administration resorted to deficit spending to stimulate the economy while maintaining spending levels on existing programs.

What stuns most observers is the *speed* at which the debt has grown in the past decade. In historical terms, it took from the founding of the United States in 1776 to 2004 for the accruing debt over that long span to reach \$7.6 trillion. (The debt would rise during times of war and be paid down during peacetime. Still, the only previous time in U.S. history that the debt approached total GDP was 1944, at the height of U.S. involvement in World War II, but it dropped far lower after the war.)

By January 2009, however, the debt had grown to \$10.6 trillion. At the current growth rate of \$4.1 billion per day, the debt level will reach \$15.4 trillion by the end of this year. That means that in well under a decade the United States will have doubled the amount of debt accumulated in the previous 228 years combined!

A staggering amount of annual interest

Of course, the United States must pay interest on the money it borrows. For fiscal 2008, that interest amounted to about \$220 billion, and climbed to more than \$383 billion in fiscal 2009. That's more than \$1,200 for every man, woman and child in the country—and again, just for interest and just for one year alone!

Several government and private sources predict the annual interest will grow to more than \$700 billion by fiscal 2019. By comparison, the entire U.S. defense budget for the current fiscal year is \$664 billion. So in plain terms, America will soon be spending more just paying the interest on the national debt than it now spends on national defense! The federal government is obligated to pay this interest; any default, or even failure to make debt payments on time, would seriously damage the government's credit rating in world financial markets.

Mid-January 2011 saw the U.S. Con-

gress girding for a major fight over the debt ceiling, which stood at \$14.3 trillion, an amount that will be surpassed by March. A default on that debt would be, in the words of Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, "an event that has no precedent in American history."

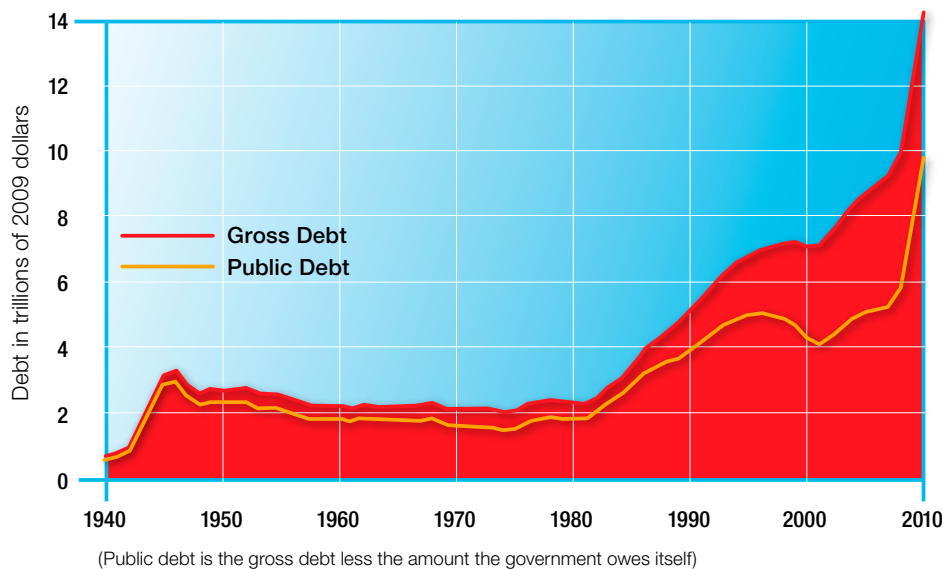
Default would force the U.S. government to drastically raise the interest rate it pays to those who buy its debt in the form of treasury bills, notes and bonds in order to attract buyers, which would increase annual interest that must be paid—that is, if the government could continue selling its securities at all. The economic and financial tidal wave this would set off in world markets could make the 2008-2009 financial meltdown pale by comparison.

A July 2010 report by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) spells out the wrenching effects of such a financial crisis. Higher interest rates needed to attract buyers of government securities would choke economic growth, while forcing the U.S. Treasury to pay additional hundreds of billions annually in interest payments.

The Federal Reserve would likely react by printing more money, fueling inflation, which would create additional pressure on interest rates. The meltdown of 2008-2009 would repeat itself, as more major financial institutions would fail due to collapse of their financial bases.

Throughout American history the U.S. Treasury has found willing buyers for its debt. But beginning in 2008 China, the largest foreign holder of U.S. debt, began signaling a growing unease over the amount of debt it holds. A Jan. 14, 2011, *Wall Street Journal* article revealed that many in the financial world, including foreign governments, are starting to get worried. Moody's Investors Service said in a mid-January report that the United States needs to reverse its expansion of debt if it hopes to keep its current Aaa credit rating.

Said Moody's senior analyst Sarah Carlson, "We have become increasingly clear about the fact that if there are not offsetting measures to reverse the deterioration in negative fundamentals in the U.S., the like-



The United States is traveling headlong down a path to enormous problems. Sadly, as the Bible shows, these national problems are symptoms of a greater problem.

likelihood of a negative outlook over the next two years will increase.” The same article quoted the head of Standard & Poor’s (or S&P) France, Carol Sirou, who told a Paris conference that the firm wouldn’t rule out lowering the outlook for the U.S. rating in the near future.

America in a financial hammerlock

Fueled by its booming economy, China is now, as mentioned, the world’s leading foreign holder of U.S. national debt, having surpassed Japan in that regard in September 2008. A November 2008 *Washington Post* story cited Beijing’s growing sway over the U.S. economy, noting that a decision by China to move out of U.S. government bonds, for economic or political reasons, could lead a herd of other investors to follow suit, which would drive up the cost of U.S. borrowing.

This gives the Chinese considerable leverage over the U.S. economy, should they ever choose to use it. *The New York Times* reported in early 2009 that China is concerned about the Obama health-care plan, and rising U.S. debt, because they finance so much of it.

Other observers have noted the growing influence of China in U.S. mortgage markets. Increasing Chinese reluctance to invest in U.S. private mortgage bonds could have long-term effects on mortgage interest rates if lenders are forced to pay higher rates themselves for mortgage capital.

“This is a sign of the growing interdependence between the Chinese and U.S. economies, but also a sign of a relationship that is not healthy in the long term,” said Eswar Prasad, an economics professor at

Cornell University and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

From largest lender to largest debtor

More and more Americans are awakening to the reality of America’s rising national debt, which is by far the largest in the world. How, many ask, did the world’s greatest economic power get into this situation?

It wasn’t so long ago that America was the world’s greatest creditor. In the aftermath of World War II, certainly in the memory of millions, the United States led the world financial system in creating the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These institutions, formed to help a world recovering from the nightmare of World War II, helped in generating tremendous prosperity in regions humbled and impoverished by war.

But in just over two decades the United States has gone from being “banker to the world” to the largest debtor nation on earth. The financial world is beginning to express its alarm. However, you may be amazed to discover that this very situation was prophesied more than 3,000 years ago!

Believe it or not, the Bible has quite a bit to say about America’s debt situation. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are known as the “blessings and curses” chapters. Here God Himself warned that foreign powers would gradually achieve dominance over the people of Israel if they rejected His laws and turned their backs on Him.

It seems ominously prophetic of today’s situation, where America has gone from the world’s leading creditor to its leading

borrower. Note the warning: “The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him. He shall be the head, and you shall be the tail” (Deuteronomy 28:43-44). It’s no wonder that this reads so much like today’s headlines when we discover the surprising truth that the majority of Americans are descendants of those same Israelites to whom God gave this warning!

The United States is traveling headlong down an economic path leading to enormous problems, if not outright destruction. Sadly, as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 show, these national problems are symptoms of a greater problem—the deep spiritual sickness that afflicts a nation that is increasingly turning its back on and denying the God who blessed it so greatly in earlier years.

The question we must all face is: Will the nation wake up in time to take the corrective action needed? Will you? **GN**

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Did Jesus Christ Fail as the Messiah?

by **Beyond Today** host Gary Petty

Jesus of Nazareth is the central figure of Christianity. His followers claimed He was the Jewish Messiah who would rule the earth, but He was put to death as a criminal. Did Jesus fail as the Messiah?

Ever since the first Roman legionnaires marched into Judea, a heightened tension permeated Jewish society. People prayed for God's deliverance from the harsh Roman oppression. They prayed that God would send the promised Messiah during their lifetime.

According to the prophets, this *Messiah*, the "Anointed One" destined to serve as the King of Israel on behalf of God, would arrive in Jerusalem with the very *power* of God. The prophets told how He would slay the great armies of those who opposed Him. He would then restore the Israelites to their status as God's chosen people, all nations would come under His rule, and His Kingdom would never end.

On this particular day, a quiet peace settled over the city of Nazareth. It was a Sabbath day—a holy time when Jews worshipped God. On this Sabbath, in the synagogue of Nazareth, a local man, a carpenter by trade (the job in that day likely including stone masonry and major construction), rose and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah by the leader of the synagogue. The young man, whose name was Yeshua (or Jesus from the Greek form), was known as the son of the late carpenter Yosef (or Joseph) of Nazareth. Jesus read from the sacred text:

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Isaiah 61:1-2).

The synagogue was filled with silent anticipation as they wondered what would



happen next. The congregation stared at Jesus as He walked back to His seat. His next statement lit a firestorm of excitement, disbelief, even anger. Jesus told the astonished crowd, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The reaction of many in the synagogue was angry dismissal: "We know you! You're Joseph's son. What gives you the presumptuous right to say these things about yourself?"

Jesus responded with the proverb, "No prophet is accepted in his own country."

The confrontation between Jesus and those in the synagogue became so intense that they turned into an angry mob and dragged Him to a nearby cliff where some would have thrown Him to His death. In the confusion Jesus was able to slip away through the crowd (Luke 4:16-30).

So began the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. It would end 3½ years later with His crucifixion outside the city of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans.

You would think that after this inglorious ministry Jesus would be a forgotten figure in history. Why did He attract such violent opposition and rise to such prominence? Why do His life and teachings still have impact on billions of people today? Moreover, was Jesus really the Messiah—or did He fail to achieve what had been foretold of this promised figure?

Background of the prophesied Messiah

To start to answer these questions we have to go back to the ancient Hebrew Scriptures, commonly called the Old Testament, in the Bible. Much of the Old Testament is the story of one family. About 4,000 years ago a man named Abraham was told by God that through his progeny all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Most of the book of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, tells the story of Abraham and three generations of his family. His descendants through His grandson Jacob, renamed Israel, eventually ended up in Egypt where, over time, their numbers multiplied and they were enslaved by the Egyptians, who saw them as a threat. The second book of the Hebrew Scriptures, Exodus, tells how God delivered them from slavery and, through Moses, led them to the land He had promised to Abraham.

The descendants of Abraham through Jacob became an important kingdom in the ancient Middle East, bearing the name Israel. Sitting astride the trade route between Mesopotamia and Egypt, Israel's history was one of wealth and power, as well as invasion and war. The nation became split into two kingdoms—Israel and Judah—and the people of both were eventually deported by enemies, with a few from Judah (known as Jews) later returning to the Promised Land. Throughout the history of Israel and Judah, prophets appeared telling the people to return to God and declaring the future arrival of God's Messiah to bless all people.

The Jews of the first century, living in the shadow of Herod's magnificent temple,



and under the heel of the Romans, longed for the promised messianic Kingdom. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus both attest to the fervor of Jewish messianic anticipation.

It was in this charged atmosphere of occupation and anticipation that Jesus, a hometown carpenter—no official priest or teacher in the temple or great warrior king—claimed that the Spirit of God was upon Him to free people and bring them a message of good news.

Obviously, the people of Nazareth were a bit disappointed in the idea that the local carpenter was the promised Messiah whom the prophets claimed would rule all nations “with a rod of iron.”

Could this be the Messiah?

After the incident in Nazareth, Jesus continued His ministry, traveling across Judea and Galilee from town to town, preaching in the synagogues, in people’s houses and on the country hillsides. He declared that the Kingdom of God was coming and people needed to turn to God. He also performed wondrous miracles—healing the sick and the lame. People began to believe. Maybe Jesus *was* the promised King.

If Jesus was the Messiah, then their deliverance was near! The rabbis told them how the Messiah would overthrow the enemies of Israel, and all the peoples of the

world would know that the God of Israel was truly God.

Isaiah had prophesied: “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it” (Isaiah 2:2). From comparing a number of scriptural references, it is evident that “mountains” symbolize large nations in prophecy and that “hills” refer figuratively to smaller nations or tribes.

Isaiah continues: “Many people shall come and say, ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (verse 3).

The Jews anticipated this glorious messianic reign when people would “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; [and] nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (verse 4).

Maybe, just maybe, this miracle-working carpenter from Nazareth really was the great warrior King of Isaiah. Around 3½ years after the hometown folks tried to throw Jesus from a cliff, He rode into Jerusalem in triumph. Thousands of believers lined the road cheering that the “Son of David,” the “King of Israel,”

had finally arrived!

The Jewish religious leaders were appalled. They asked Jesus to tell the crowds to stop this nonsense. He refused. They hatched a plot to get rid of this would-be Messiah. A few days later, they would succeed—Jesus would be dead, crucified by the Romans.

When Jesus was dragged before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, the governor asked Him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He replied, “It is as you say.” After further pressure from the Jewish leaders, Pilate finally acquiesced to their call for execution, and the lowly teacher from Nazareth was condemned as a threat to the mighty Roman Empire. The sign above His stake of crucifixion that proclaimed His crime referred to Him as “KING OF THE JEWS” (John 18:33-38; 19:19).

The mystery of the Messiah

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would rule the nations from Jerusalem. Jesus’ disciples believed He was that Messiah. They expected Him to overthrow the Roman Empire and establish God’s Kingdom on earth.

But it didn’t happen. Instead, Jewish religious leaders plotted against Him, He was betrayed by one of His own disciples, the Romans beat Him to the point where He wasn’t even recognizable and then He was publicly crucified. After His death,

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many of Jesus' followers were devastated. They lost faith and hope.

Of course, we know that's not the end of the story. Jesus, as the New Testament tells us, was raised from the dead. He visited His disciples again, telling them to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to the world and care for fellow disciples. But then He left—returning to the Father in heaven. What, then, of the Messiah's role of reigning as King over Israel and the entire world in perpetuity?

People began to question whether Jesus was really the prophesied Messiah. Some felt He had failed in His basic mission. Why would He launch His ministry by quoting from a messianic prophecy in Isaiah and then ignore other key prophecies? Why didn't He establish the Kingdom of God in Jerusalem as Isaiah said He would?

To solve our mystery, let's first look at another of Isaiah's messianic prophecies and then return to the incident in Nazareth.

In Isaiah 52 and 53 the prophet tells of a Servant of God who would be exalted. This Servant would also be beaten and brutally put to death. Isaiah writes, "Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—so will he sprinkle many nations" (Isaiah 52:14-15, New International Version).

Both the Old and New Testaments teach that it is impossible for a morally corrupt human being to come into the presence of the righteous God unless God grants that person forgiveness through divine grace, or favor.

Few people understand the fundamental biblical teaching of grace. Grace has no significance unless there is justice. Think about it: Forgiveness has no meaning unless someone has done something wrong.

Those with sound Christian background would come to know that a central biblical teaching is the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed One or Christ. Why did Jesus die? Why does the Bible focus so much on His crucifixion and resurrection?

If we don't understand why Jesus, the Son of God, was crucified as the prophesied Jewish Messiah, then His death has no importance or meaning. Knowing who Jesus Christ is, and how His life, death and resurrection applies to you, is the most important knowledge you can possess. This truth can change your life!

It's actually a simple concept

God's justice, His understanding of right and wrong, requires your life as punishment for your sins stemming from your sinful nature. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). God loves you, but that doesn't change the definition of good and evil contained in His moral, spiritual law.

God's love, however, supplied a substitute for you and me. The Son of God came to earth as Jesus of Nazareth to bless all nations as our substitute. You can't earn that kind of love. You can only understand your guilt and hopelessness before God's justice and gratefully accept His love and mercy exhibited in the sacrifice of His Son.

The blood of the "suffering Servant" foretold by Isaiah would sprinkle many nations. This was a powerful image for first-century Jews.

Day in and day out, Herod's temple was filled with the sounds and smells of sheep and goats being sacrificed, their blood splattering and sprinkling, as a substitute so that the Jewish people could have favor with God. But the book of Hebrews shows that this sacrificial system was intended to portray something much bigger—especially the great mystery of how one Man's blood would be shed in place of that of all humanity, as all humanity has stood guilty.

Isaiah tells how God's Servant would be despised and rejected, that He would be "wounded for our transgressions . . . and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

The Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament, describe the gruesome details of Jesus' death. He was beaten with rods and punched by soldiers. He was stripped naked and flogged with a whip of leather strips with bits of metal and bone on the ends that would tear and mutilate human flesh. Nails were driven into His hands and feet, and He was hung in crucifixion for people to ridicule. Finally, He was stabbed with a spear and bled to death. All this happened just as Isaiah had foretold it centuries in advance.

Now we can perhaps begin to understand what Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Returning to the synagogue in Nazareth

Let's go back to where we started. The synagogue leader handed Jesus a scroll of the book of Isaiah. Jesus opened the scroll and read, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to

heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD . . ."

It is interesting that Jesus stopped in the middle of a sentence. The next line in the passage He was reading states, "and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isaiah 61:1-2).

The "day of vengeance" is a reference to another prophecy in Isaiah—a terrifying prophecy of a time when "the indignation of the LORD is against all nations" (Isaiah 34:1-2). It is a time when God dramatically intervenes in human history. In this "day of vengeance" God will send the promised Messiah as King of Kings to judge all people and rule over the earth.

What is it we learn from Jesus here reading only part of a prophecy from Isaiah? Why didn't He read the entire passage?

Jesus was revealing a pivotal point in salvation history—we learn that the Messiah comes to earth not once, but twice!

The first time He came as a lowly carpenter and rabbi teaching the true religion of God and helping many people with various afflictions through miracles. He then died as the substitute sacrifice for the wrong choices of all humanity. That's *your* wrong choices and *my* wrong choices. Through His selfless act, He made true freedom possible. He was then resurrected to take His place at the right hand of God the Father. Without His first coming "to heal the brokenhearted [and] to set at liberty those who are oppressed," there is no authentic Christianity.

It is equally true that if Jesus doesn't return to proclaim the day of God's judgment, there likewise is no authentic Christianity. This is the answer to the mystery of the Jewish Messiah. He comes to this earth the first time as the suffering Servant and then a second time, many centuries later, as the conquering King, bringing the way of peace and prosperity to all humanity (see Hebrews 9:28).

What this means to you

You live in the stretch of time between these two appearances of the Messiah. Because of the sacrificial substitute of Jesus Christ, you can have a personal relationship with your Creator. You can become Jesus' disciple.

A disciple is more than a believer. A disciple *follows* a particular teacher. A disciple dedicates his or her life to *imitating* that teacher. Christianity has enough believers.

What Jesus Christ wants are *committed disciples*.

Study the Gospels and you will find that the core of Jesus' message is the coming Kingdom of God. He expected His disciples to be prepared for that Kingdom. His disciples were to have a different worldview, a different code of right and wrong, a different way of worshipping God. The good news of the Kingdom and all that entails is still Christ's message today. It is His message to you!

Real discipleship is more than showing up at church services once a week. Your relationships, your character, your conduct at work, how you relate to God, your

entire life must change. Christ gave His all for you and He requires nothing less than everything you are in return.

No, Jesus Christ absolutely did not fail! As the true Messiah, He succeeded perfectly in the objective of His first coming. And He will likewise succeed perfectly in the objective of His second coming. This is an absolute promise of God. Jesus is going to return soon as King of Kings to establish God's Kingdom over the entire earth. We live in the shadow of that magnificent event. Turn to God now! Become more than a believer—become a disciple! And be prepared for the Messiah's everlasting reign. **GN**

Miracle of Miracles

Continued from page 11

Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ": "Distributing to the necessities of Saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you, bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:13-15).

By 1700, the popularity of the KJV had eclipsed all other versions. Since then, many other English translations have been produced, but none even approached the popularity of the KJV until the publication of the Revised Standard Version in 1952. It was the 1978 New International Version that finally dethroned the KJV as the most popular Bible version. At some point between 1986 and 1988 it began outselling the KJV. However, the popularity of the KJV has continued to remain high for a very long time.

The miracle of "spreading the gospel"

Jesus said, "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). He also proclaimed, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

Clearly, God's plan calls for the effective preaching of the gospel all over the world in the end time to prepare the way for Christ's second coming. A parallel to that is the way the preaching of John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ's first coming.

In the last few centuries, it is the zealous English-speaking people, usually with their beloved King James Bibles, who have been

most responsible for the fact that "the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly" (Acts 6:7).

This has been largely enabled by the far-reaching British Empire and the global power of the United States of America. A major reason that the United States has been blessed with wise laws, individual freedom and great success is that its founding fathers looked to the Bible for guidance. But the main reason Britain and America were blessed with great power is that God fulfilled His promises to bless the descendants of Joseph (Genesis 48).

Joseph's father Jacob prophesied great blessings for the descendants of Joseph, including their being "a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall" (Genesis 49:22). Truly their "branches" have reached all over the world! (To learn more, download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Why did God plan to greatly bless these nations? It was not because of some kind of favoritism. One reason God enabled these nations to be powerful was *so they could and would carry the Word of God to all the world!*

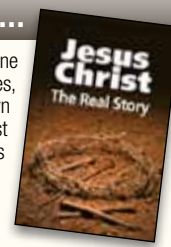
The miracles of worldwide transformation and personal transformation

The world is a much better place—in many, many ways—than it would otherwise be because of the influence of the Bible. This is thoroughly explained in two fascinating books by Dr. D. James Kennedy: *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (1994) and *What If the Bible Had Never Been Written?* (1998).

Likewise, you and I are much better people than we would otherwise be to the extent that we, with the essential help of

To Learn More...

While Jesus of Nazareth is one of history's most famous figures, He's also one of the least known and most misunderstood. Just as few grasped who He was and what He taught in His own day, so do many today not grasp who He was and what He taught. Who was He, really? What was His mission and message? What do they mean for us today? Discover the truth in our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.



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God's Holy Spirit, internalize and live by the transforming Word of God.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy, he commented on how Timothy had been supremely blessed "that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you *wise for salvation* through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

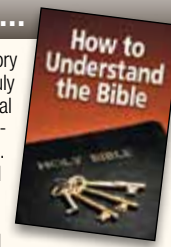
Then Paul reminded Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is *profitable* for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be *complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (verses 16-17).

The longest chapter in the Bible—Psalm 119—was written in praise of God's Word. It tells us, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

May you diligently study and drink in God's Word so that it may always be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path! **GN**

To Learn More...

As this article shows, the story of how we got the Bible is truly remarkable, spanning several continents, hundreds of individuals and thousands of years. Will you take the time and make the effort to diligently study God's Word to seek out its treasures? We've prepared a priceless guide titled *How to Understand the Bible*. It reveals the keys that will help you unlock the meaning of God's Word and begin to apply it to your life. Download or request your free copy today!



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6:30 a.m. Mountain

5:30 a.m. Pacific



How Much Do You Know About the *Real* Easter Story?

How much do you know about the origin of Easter and its popular customs? Take the following short quiz to assess your knowledge!

POP QUIZ

1 True or False? Easter didn't originate with Jesus Christ's resurrection, but had been celebrated for many centuries by that time.

2 True or False? Rabbits and eggs have nothing to do with Christ's resurrection, but are holdovers from ancient spring fertility celebrations.

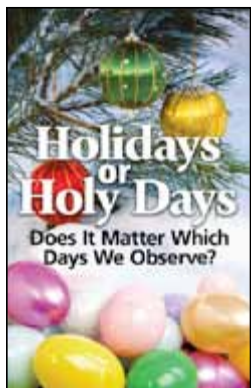
3 True or False? *Easter* gets its name from an ancient fertility goddess.

4 True or False? Pagans celebrated the supposed resurrection of their false gods in the spring many centuries before Jesus Christ.

5 True or False? The word *Easter* appears only once in the Bible—and that one time is a mistranslation of the Greek word for *Passover*.

6 True or False? Neither the apostles nor other members of the early Church celebrated Easter.

7 True or False? Celebrations such as Easter are condemned in the Bible.



The correct answer to all of the above questions is *true*—and you can verify most of these answers with a quick look through several good encyclopedias. Or, for an in-depth look at the real Easter story as revealed by history and the Bible, request your free copy of our booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

Too many people go through life thinking they are honoring Jesus Christ through popular celebrations such as Easter. But before you celebrate Easter again, why not consider what Jesus Himself thinks about this holiday? As a serious Christian, don't you think it's time you considered His point of view?

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