

# <sup>The</sup> Good News

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



## America's Astounding Destiny

**Was It Foretold in the Bible?**

Pornography: Definitely Not for Adults • The AIDS Crisis: A Firsthand Account  
Do You Know How to Use a Credit Card? • Parenting Begins With the Brain

**T**his July 4 marks the 225th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, which set in motion the formal break between America and Britain that would lead to the United States becoming a separate country.

The new nation's rise from British colony to superpower is a remarkable story and one with lessons for countries and individuals everywhere. That point is well illustrated by this recent letter from a subscriber in Nigeria:

"... I praise God for the beautiful job you are doing by educating us on current events and how they can be seen from the biblical perspective. In your March-April issue you gave us an explanation of how people misuse their freedoms . . . I thank God that I enjoy a bit of freedom, but not in comparison to the total freedom being enjoyed in America.

"I want to also praise God for the first leaders of America for building her on the solid foundation of the Word of God. In contrast, the house they built is now beginning to collapse. People are becoming more immoral day in and day out. If this level of immorality is not checked, people will misuse their freedoms and things will fall apart. Please continue to educate our people about the ills of their wrongdoings. I want everyone to know that America is leading the world today because of their motto 'In God We Trust.' I pray that we don't ever have an American leader who would dig America's grave by changing the motto."

Sometimes it takes a perspective such as this to help the rest of us recognize some profound truths. What is so clear to this reader in Nigeria can be difficult for the rest of us to grasp. We're too easily distracted by the rush of our busy lives that we seldom take stock of where we're going—or where we've been.

God recognizes our all-too-human tendency to lose sight of His role in the rise and fall of nations. Notice His warning to the ancient Israelites as they prepared to enter the Promised Land after He had miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt and sustained them for 40 years in the wilderness:

"When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. *Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God . . .*

"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth . . . *If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed*" (Deuteronomy 8:10-19, New International Version, emphasis added).

In this issue of *The Good News* we begin a series of articles examining America's unlikely, unexpected rise to greatness. Regrettably, this amazing story is seldom discussed much these days. Along with the story of the strong religious convictions of the nation's founding fathers, it is often shoved into the background, rarely allowed out for public display.

The United States has been blessed unlike any nation in history. Never has any one nation so dominated world culture and civilization with its economic, political and military strength.

However, as our reader in Nigeria pointed out, America, its people and its leaders are rapidly losing sight of the source of those blessings—if they have not already. May the wise, especially all readers of *The Good News*, remember the danger inherent in God's warning not to forget Him—before it's too late.

—Scott Ashley

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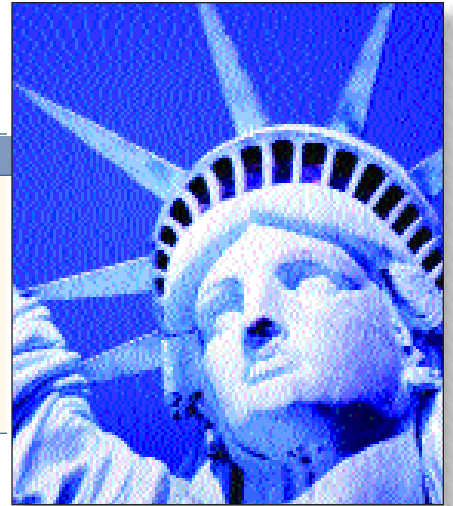
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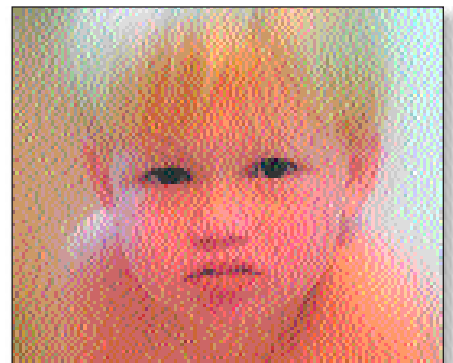
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# America's Astounding Destiny

## Was It Foretold in the Bible?

by Melvin Rhodes

*The rise of the United States of America from British colony to superpower is an incredible story worth retelling. Equally incredible is the fact that the rise of the United States and the British Empire was foretold thousands of years ago.*



*"We may, with a kind of grateful and pious exultation, trace the finger of Providence through these dark and mysterious events . . ."*

—George Washington, July 20, 1788

Few people can remember a time when the United States did not dominate the world. At the dawn of the 20th century the country had only just emerged on the world scene after victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898. Forty years later, on the eve of World War II, the nation's military strength still ranked below that of Portugal and Greece, its army the size of Romania's.

Today it is indisputably the world's greatest power. Ten years after the demise of its Cold War rival, the Soviet Union, the United States is the only superpower.

Power and influence are not measured only in terms of military capacity. American culture is pervasive. Movies made in Hollywood are dubbed into countless languages and shown all over the world. Television stations in Prague, Hong Kong, Kampala, Melbourne, Johannesburg, Barbados and just about everywhere else broadcast American television shows. In most of the world's capitals fast-food outlets sell America's favorite junk foods, often washed down by those symbols of American imperialism, Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

No matter what you might think of the United States, the world would be a much different place if it did not exist. Without the United States the world would have succumbed to one or other of the two despotic tyrannies that struggled for world dominance for several decades from the 1940s through the 1980s.

Fascism and communism both threatened the peace and security of the world during that span of 50 years. Victory for either would have meant the end of life as we know it. The basic freedoms many take for granted today would have been denied this generation and future generations had not these twin evil ideologies foundered on the strength of American resolve.

Yet few people 200 years ago could have imagined that America's position of global leadership would be the destiny of the fledgling republic.

How did America reach a point of global dominance? Is it possible that the United States was overlooked in the biblical prophecies about our time? Or was everything foretold a long time ago? What does the future have in store for the nation?

### America might not have been

Some years ago America's noncommercial Public Broadcasting System televised a series of documentaries on the American Revolution. The historians researching and presenting the series came to the interesting conclusion that the Revolution *should not have happened*. Others through the years have said the same.

Gordon Wood, a professor of history at Brown University, wrote in his 1991 book *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*: "... The social conditions that generically are supposed to be behind all revolutions—poverty and economic deprivation—were not present in colonial America. There should no longer be any doubt about it: the white American colonists were not an oppressed people; they had no crushing Imperial chains to throw off. In fact, the colonists knew they were freer, more equal, more prosperous, and less burdened with cumbersome feudal and monarchical restraints than any other part of mankind in the eighteenth century" (p. 4).

Modern American history goes back 400 years to the founding of the English-speaking colonies of Virginia and Massachusetts. Later other colonies were added, settled primarily by people from the British Isles. Americans before the Revolution saw themselves as Englishmen and were proud of their heritage.

"In the year 1775, when the War of Independence began, the thirteen colonies had a population of perhaps 2,418,000 people, of whom possibly one fifth were black. Small Dutch, German, and Swedish minorities were included in these statistics, but the vast majority of white inhabitants were of British

stock” (Russell Kirk, *America’s British Culture*, 1994, p. 69).

### The land of the free

In the 18th century the English were the freest people on earth. Englishmen living in English colonies were even freer than their kin at home. They enjoyed freedom of the press, free right of assembly and freedom to trade without the restraints that governments placed on people in other nations. Each colony had its own parliament. Eighty to 90 percent of all free (nonslave) men could

be voted at Plymouth 13 years later; the Puritans arrived at Boston in 1630—while Calvinists spread elsewhere throughout New England. Catholics followed in Maryland in 1634 and Quakers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania in 1682. Baptists and Methodists came later.

With all these basic freedoms, why did the Revolutionary War take place? The answer is quite simple: *in order that Bible prophecy should be fulfilled.*

The outcome of the Revolutionary War was far from certain. Historian Thomas Fleming, in a chapter titled “Unlikely Victory: Thirteen

years 48:19). This prophecy was never fulfilled by the people who now live in the Middle Eastern nation of Israel, either in ancient times or recently.

At the beginning of Genesis 49 we read: “And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, ‘Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall befall you *in the last days*’” (verse 1, emphasis added throughout). This was not a prophecy to be fulfilled in ancient Israel, but by the descendants of Jacob “in the last days”—before the second coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

(We might note here that many people erroneously assume that when the Bible mentions Israel it refers only to the Jewish people. Biblical and secular history, however, shows that this common belief is wrong. In fact, the first time the Bible uses the term *Jews*, in 2 Kings 16:6-7 in the King James Version, they are *at war* with the kingdom of Israel! The story is spelled out in greater detail in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.*)

Genesis 49 lists the strengths and weaknesses of each of Jacob’s sons. In verse 22 Jacob prophesies of his son Joseph’s descendants: “Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall.” From Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were to come “a multitude of nations” and the “great” single nation that would be incredibly fruitful, industrious and productive, spreading out from their boundaries to other parts of the earth.

God had promised Jacob that his descendants would number “as the dust of the earth,” spreading in all directions, and that “all the families of the earth” would be blessed through his offspring (Genesis 28:14). His descendants would also be blessed with great material and agricultural wealth and abundance and dominate other nations of the earth (Genesis 27:28-29).

Thousands of years were to pass before these prophecies would be fulfilled. Their fulfillment came in relatively recent times with the rise of the British Empire and Commonwealth, the “multitude of nations”; and the United States of America, the greatest single nation.

### A separation prophesied

Until the 1770s the 13 American colonies were content to be a part of the British Empire. The colonists had recently fought alongside the mother country against France, winning a war that gave the English-speaking peoples domination of the eastern seaboard



**The original 13 colonies** fought for independence from Britain in the Revolutionary War of 1776-1783. In the 1783 Treaty of Paris, which officially ended hostilities, Britain ceded to the United States its territories west of the colonies as far as the Mississippi River.

vote. By virtue of an act of the English Long Parliament (1640-42), before the English Civil War, they even had the right to bear arms, without which the American Revolution could never have started.

The colonies were also the home of religious diversity. The colonial governor of New York, Thomas Dongan, wrote in 1687: “Here be not many of the Church of England; few Roman Catholics; abundance of Quakers preachers . . . ; Singing Quakers, Ranting Quakers; Sabbatarians; Antisabbatarians; Some Anabaptists[;] some Independents; some Jews; in short[,] of all sorts of opinions there are some, and the most part [are] of none at all” (Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776*, 2000, p. 185).

Religion had played a major role in the development of the American colonies. The first British colony at Jamestown, Virginia, was planted by Anglicans; the Pilgrims set-

Ways the Americans Could Have Lost the Revolution,” states: “When a historian ponders the what ifs of the American Revolution, chills run up and down and around the cerebellum. There were almost too many moments when the patriot cause teetered on the brink of disaster, to be retrieved by the most unlikely accidents or coincidences . . .” (*What If? The World’s Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*, Robert Crowley, editor, 1999, p. 157).

But the Bible prophesied that the American and British peoples would separate.

### Ancient prophecies fulfilled in recent times

In the book of Genesis we read of a time when the descendants of the two sons of Joseph, the 11th son of Jacob (also known as Israel), would become “a multitude of nations” and a “great” single nation (Gene-

# America's Religious Roots

**F**rench historian and political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59) wrote his famous *Democracy in America* in 1835, after he visited the United States in 1831-32 to study the nation's prison system. His formal study of the new nation turned out to be the greatest sociological work of the 19th century. He marveled at the contrast between the stability of the American republic and the unstable and violent republics of South America. He attributed the difference to the *mores* of the people.

He used the word *mores* "to cover the whole moral and intellectual state of a people . . . [and] to cover the sum of the moral and intellectual dispositions of man in society" (*America's British Culture*, Russell Kirk, 1994, p. 70).

"It is their mores, then, that make the Americans of the United States, alone among Americans, capable of maintaining the rule of democracy; and it is mores again that make the various Anglo-American democracies more or less orderly and prosperous . . ." (*ibid.*).

Tocqueville was aware of the instability in his own country, France, where he served in government through a tumultuous period. To him the Anglo-American democracies stood out as models of political order. "The importance of mores is a universal truth to which study and experience continually bring us back. I find it occupies the central position in my thoughts; all my ideas come back to it" (*ibid.*).

Russell Kirk comments: "In every culture of the past, everywhere in the world, the principal source of a culture's mores—its traditional customs, its way of regarding the human condition, its principles of morality—has been religious belief" (*ibid.*).

"Tocqueville perceived that this widespread religious belief—or, in some, this outward profession of belief—gave the American democracy its strength and its temperateness. 'There is an innumerable multitude of sects in the United States. They are all different in the worship they offer to the creator, but all agree concerning the duties of man to one another. Each sect worships God in its own fashion, but all preach the same morality in the name of God'" (*ibid.*, p. 72).

Kirk observes that, regardless of their theological differences, America's citizens "all were reared in a British climate of opinion, with the Ten Commandments at the back of their minds, when not in the forefront" (*ibid.*, p. 72).

God's laws were familiar reading to the founders of the American republic. The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy directly addressed the issue of how a new nation could choose to be blessed or cursed, to succeed or fail.

". . . If you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, . . . the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 28:1-2).

It is significant that, at the time of America's and Britain's ascendancy to greatness and world dominance, their laws were based on the Ten Commandments. As King Solomon learned thousands of years ago, "righteousness exalts a nation" (Proverbs 14:34).

John Adams, America's second president, wrote in his diary on Feb. 22, 1756: "Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! Every member would be obliged in conscience, to temperance, frugality, and industry; to justice, kindness, and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love, and reverence toward Almighty God . . . What a Utopia, what a Paradise would this region be" (William Federer, *America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations*, 1996, p. 5).

Almost a decade later Adams wrote in his notes for *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*, February 1765: "I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth" (*ibid.*).

John Adams' son, John Quincy Adams, who became the sixth president of the United States, wrote a letter to his son in September 1811, while serving as U.S. ambassador to Russia. He had been pleased to hear that his son was reading the Bible daily.

"I have myself, for many years, made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year . . . My custom is to read four to five chapters every morning immediately after rising from my bed . . . It is essential, my son, in order that you may go through life with comfort to yourself, and usefulness to your fellow-creatures, that you should form and adopt certain rules or principles, for the government of your own conduct and temper . . .

"It is in the Bible, you must learn them, and from the Bible how to practice them. Those duties are to God, to your fellow-creatures, and to yourself. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thy self.' On these two commandments, Jesus Christ expressly says, 'hang all the law and the prophets'; that is to say, the whole purpose of Divine Revelation is to inculcate them efficaciously upon the minds of men . . ." (Federer, p. 16).

of North America. George Washington had fought in that war.

The British Empire was continuing to grow, with colonies and strategic sea gates around the world. Americans' security clearly lay within the empire, their freedoms protected by the Royal Navy and British armies. Each colony looked to the mother country rather than to neighboring colonies.

Then friction suddenly arose over taxation, the levies the British tried to raise to pay for the recent war against France. This discord rapidly escalated and led to the events of the Revolution and the eventual birth of the United States.

The events recorded in Genesis 48 show us that, for prophecy to be fulfilled, the United States had to separate from the British Empire. A distinction would eventually become apparent between the "multitude of nations" and the "great" single nation.

## A rising empire

The British Empire, later to become the British Commonwealth, was then in its early stages. It would go on to encompass countries scattered around the globe. Some would be colonies ruled from London, represented locally by a British governor. Some would be protectorates, territories that in some cases had asked to be a part of the empire and retained their own traditional leaders.

The Indian Empire, with its 320 million people, was to be the jewel in the imperial crown. The dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa would become independent, sovereign nations, joined by the self-governing Colony of Southern Rhodesia. Altogether more than 60 countries around the world, each with its distinct culture and way of life, would form an empire upon which the sun never set.

These nations traded heavily among themselves. All benefited from considerable British investment. They enjoyed a common security backed up by the Royal Navy. But, above all, one institution united them—the British crown. Even the independent dominions, by their own choice, recognized the British monarch as their head of state.

For prophecy to be fulfilled America had to break away from this growing multitude of nations and sever its tie with the crown. There was no immediate demand for that drastic step when disputes arose

between England and the colonists. The dispute was with the British government, not the king. The king was a constitutional monarch, seen as the guarantor of liberty against ambitious politicians, the symbol of unity for English-speaking peoples everywhere regardless of their political affiliation.

Once the violence started, however, the bitterness between the belligerents grew so great that a total break—a severing of the tie with Great Britain and the crown—was inevitable.

John Adams, one of the leaders of the Revolution and America's second president, wrote to his wife, Abigail, on the day after Congress's approval of the Declaration of Independence: "It is the will of heaven that the two countries should be sundered forever" (William Federer, *America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations*, 1996, p. 9).

After the war George Washington discussed with Charles Thomson, secretary of the Continental Congress, the idea of writing their memoirs. Historian Thomas Fleming writes that "between them the two men probably knew more secrets than the entire Congress and Continental Army combined."

But the two men decided that their memoirs would be a bad idea. "It would be too disillusioning if the American people discovered how often the Glorious Cause came close to disaster. They jointly agreed that the real secret of America's final victory in the eight-year struggle could be summed up in two words: Divine Providence" (Fleming, p. 186).

### Birth of the republic

Some Americans, aware that the English Republic of the 17th century and others before it did not last long before succumbing to dictatorships, still wanted a king. Some put forth the name of George Washington, leader of the Continental Army, which had defeated the British.

Here we should note America's biblical name, Manasseh, the great single nation (Genesis 48). Manasseh means "forget." Americans were to turn their backs on Europe, forgetting their past. They were to build themselves up into the world's greatest single nation, expanding westward, developing a wilderness into the most powerful economy in history.

Washington, America's first president, was to warn against "foreign entanglements," alliances that would have been inevitable if America had adopted a monarchical system of government. The children of monarchs marry the children of other kings to cement alliances. Had America

adopted such a system, it would have looked backwards rather than to the future. But Washington had no heirs, making the possibility of a monarchy much more difficult.

The fledgling nation's form of government remained an issue. No republic in history had lasted long. At the end of the Constitutional Convention, when the delegates emerged from the meeting hall in Philadelphia, a leading lady of Washington society called out to Benjamin Franklin: "What is it to be, Mr. Franklin? A monarchy or a republic?" Was the United States to be a constitutional monarchy, or a republic—a nation without a king? His answer: "A republic, ma'am, if you can keep it."

### Stability: Key to a nation's success

America had already had representative government in colonial times. Now the new nation was to step out and boldly attempt representative government without a king. Here George Washington's leadership was crucial. After two terms as president—a total of eight years—he voluntarily stepped aside, setting a precedent that contributed substantially to America's stability as a republic.

This was no minor accomplishment. Often other nations that have adopted republican forms of government have failed in arranging the peaceful transfer of power from one president to another. America's political stability, however, has been a key to its success. The United States, without a doubt, has been the most successful republic in history, the country Sir Winston Churchill would call "The Great Republic."

Political stability was essential for prophecy to be fulfilled. Without stability, the country could never have become the greatest single nation in history.

The nation's spiritual beginnings played a crucial role in its stability. The United States did not have one official religion as other nations had. Instead, virtually all people belonged to various churches that shared a high regard for the Bible. The United States was founded on Christian ideals by men who for the most part were strongly and deeply religious and convinced God was guiding the country.

Almost 40 years after the events that surrounded independence, John Adams wrote Thomas Jefferson that "the general principles, on which the Fathers achieved independence, were the only Principles in which that beautiful Assembly of Gentlemen could Unite . . . And what were these general Principles? I answer, the general Principles of Christianity, in which all these Sects were

United: And the general Principles of English and American Liberty, in which all these young Men United, and which had United all Parties in America, in Majorities sufficient to assert and maintain her Independence" (Federer, p. 12).

Separation of church and state did not mean that the country was not to be a Christian nation, based on Christian principles and the Ten Commandments. Rather, it meant that no one church should enjoy a special status as was the case in England.

The oath of office, written by the founding fathers, states: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of the president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Washington, the first president to take the oath of office, spontaneously added, "I swear, so help me God," and kissed the Bible—a tradition that his successors have followed for more than two centuries. The sincere desire of America's founding fathers was that the republic would last. Built on Christian principles, with the Ten Commandments as its basic law, it would endure.

With a successful system of government in place, America was on course to fulfill its destiny as the greatest single nation in history.

In the next issue we will examine the astounding story of how the United States rose from newly independent former British colony to world superpower. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

Where does the United States of America appear in Bible prophecy? Does Bible prophecy neglect to mention major nations such as the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom?



In fact, many prophecies do mention these nations. But, without an understanding of history and the Scriptures, few can identify them and understand what lies ahead for them. The publishers of *The Good News* have produced an astounding, eye-opening book, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. You can request your free copy from any of our offices listed on page 2, or visit our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

# Pornography

## Definitely *Not* for Adults

*Recent decades have seen an explosion in pornography. It's big business, grossing \$10 billion in the United States alone. But that's only a tiny part of the story.*

by Melvin Rhodes

**Y**ou can't have it both ways. If companies are willing to spend millions on advertising to promote their products because advertisements influence people to buy, then pornography must also influence people's minds. If looking at an image of a commercial product makes people want to buy it, then pornographic images must influence people's behavior.

Porn is big industry. Trade in the "bodies and souls" of human beings (Revelation 18:13) has become one of the biggest growth industries in our modern prophesied economic system. Consider:

"Porno is far bigger than rock music and far bigger than Hollywood.

"Americans spend more on strip clubs than they spend on theater, opera, ballet, jazz and classical-music concerts—combined.

"In 1972 the total retail value of all the hardcore porno sold in America was estimated at \$5 million to \$10 million. By the late '90s Americans spent *\$10 billion* per year on mediated sex" (Martin Amis, "Sex in America," *Talk* magazine, February 2001).

Southern California's San Fernando Valley is home of the booming U.S. pornographic-film industry, producing more than 10,000 titles a year that are shown all over the world. America produces 80 percent of the world's porn.

### A brief history of porn

Pornography has been around for thousands of years. But in the last three decades it has boomed, partly because of liberal legislation in Western democracies that removed barriers to production and distribution, and partly thanks to technological advances that have made it easy for tens of millions of people to access porn who previously would never have done so for fear of being found out.

Now, thanks to the Internet, people can readily see porn without being seen.

According to one report, 21 million Americans visit at least one of the 60,000 pornographic Internet sites once a month or more.

A recent survey by Focus on the Family showed that 18 percent of churchgoers—almost one in five—admitted to having an addiction to porn. The rate among non-believers is no doubt even higher, since many people see nothing wrong with pornography.

In an irony bordering on the unbelievable, in three decades Americans have embraced pornography as a constitutional right while making school prayer a crime. Is there any way that the nation's founding fathers intended things to be this way when they wrote the Constitution more than two centuries ago?

Many have fallen victim to the arguments put forward by reformers in the late '60s that opened the floodgates to such widespread acceptance of porn.

Denmark was the first Western nation to legalize the publication of pornography, in 1969. After a decade of societal change that had started with the birth-control pill and continued with the liberalization of sexual and divorce laws throughout the Western world, the Danish parliament decided that pornography was harmless and would, in fact, result in fewer attacks on innocent girls by sexually frustrated men.

In a television documentary on the History International channel aired in November 2000, Danish parliamentarians responsible for the original decision said they never imagined that their 1969 determination would lead to what we see now. The title of the program—"Letting the Genie out of the Bottle"—summed up the dilemma we find ourselves in. Once pornography was made legal, there was no stopping the downward slide that was sure to follow.

The legislators' intent had been to give men "relief" at home through looking at erotic pictures. Now, 30 years later,

depictions of every imaginable sexual act are widely available—even to children, on the Internet.

An especially troubling trend is the emergence of groups dedicated to the legalization of pedophilia—sex between adults and children—which, at this point, at least, is still illegal.

Some time ago a newspaper in Lansing, Michigan, reported that the fastest-growing segment of the Michigan prison population was white males over 60 years of age, almost all incarcerated for sexual molestation of children. The reason for the sudden increase? Pornography. Just as commercials for junk food make people want to eat more, viewing pornographic materials makes the viewer crave to sample the real thing.

### Hidden story of ruined lives

Pornography corrupts more than just the person viewing it. Relationships with the partners of porn viewers are also negatively affected.

Many men (and women) want something more imaginative from their partner as a result of viewing porn. When nothing more imaginative happens, the resultant dissatisfaction with the relationship can lead to divorce, with the lustful partner then pursuing a promiscuous way of life while desperately seeking sexual fulfillment.

The continual emphasis on sex influences every purchaser of porn into believing that sex is everything—more important in a relationship than anything else. Society has told an increasing number of people for the last three decades that sex is all important and the solution to everybody's problems. The reality is that an overemphasis on sex leads to an emotional void in relationships and an ever deeper spiritual void.

Such empty pursuits leave no time for developing the spiritual dimension in a person's life. There is no time for God when spare time is devoted to porn or to the



sex-saturated music, movies and television programs that pass for entertainment.

Most people addicted to pornography and sex don't realize it, but they desperately need help. That help is often available from specially qualified counselors or competent therapists with sound value systems. More important, help is always available from God Himself.

When writing to the brethren at Corinth, the apostle Paul listed several sins—including those of an explicitly sexual nature—that could exclude people from the Kingdom of God. He told them: "And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11, emphasis added throughout). God led the ancient Corinthians to overcome and abandon their old ways.

As with so many addictions, the difficult first step is admitting the problem (even to yourself) and being willing to seek help in changing.

### The effect on participants

What about the effect on the men and

women who participate in the porn industry?

It's legal to work in the porn industry at 18, an age when few people are mature enough to understand the negative consequences of getting involved in a degenerate way of life.

Every year representatives of the adult-magazine industry descend on university campuses inviting attractive young people of both sexes to pose for provocative photos for their publications, thereby enabling them to graduate with considerably lower college bills. Many become "exotic dancers" in strip clubs, earning far more than they could by working in the retail trade or a restaurant. Others move west looking for fun and money in the adult-movie business.

How long do they last? "Some girls are used up in nine months or a year," a former performer-turned-director candidly admitted in the *Talk* article. "Nearly everyone has STDs," said Chloe, another star. "I had ten different venereal diseases during my first year in the industry." A significant number of porn stars have died of AIDS.

The emotional consequences may be worse than the physical. A woman with the professional name of *Temptress*, a

successful porn actress, said: "I don't have relationships anymore. They make life unstable. The only sex I have is the sex I have on screen."

An industry photographer observed that most actors and actresses he has met in the porn business were addicted to drink or drugs and hinted at revulsion over selling their bodies. Interestingly, almost all participants said that they had been sexually abused as children. The photographer himself went from being an eager voyeur to a participant and, eventually, a psychiatric patient.

Our modern obsession with pornography began with photos of nude women in men's magazines. Today's ostensibly adult movies depict every sex act imaginable. The downward spiral continues, now including sexual perversions and violence too horrendous to describe in the pages of *The Good News*.

### Sexual obsession and the Scriptures

This isn't the first time a society has been obsessed with sex.

The reason for the great flood of Noah's time was that "the LORD saw that the

*Continued on page 16*

## The Growing Plague of Child Pornography

"Child pornography was pretty much eradicated in the 1980s," says Kevin Delli-Colli, head of the Cyber Smuggling Center. But, "with the advent of the Internet, it exploded.

"A survey of 1,501 U.S. kids aged 10 to 17 conducted in 2000 showed that approximately one in four had had an unwanted exposure to some kind of image of naked people or people having sex in the last year. Roughly one in five kids had received a sexual solicitation or approach. One in 33 kids had received an aggressive solicitation."

The above quotes from *Newsweek* magazine (March 19) should make parents sit up and take notice. Sadly, some parents have themselves been involved in offering pornography to children. According to the same article, a Web site contained a bulletin board that "included ads from parents offering to swap their children for sex to like-minded parents," and some men were involved in an Internet chat room called "Dad & Daughter Sex."

Although Internet firms profess willingness to cooperate with police and the FBI in finding and prosecuting adults seeking sex with children, the same firms often express indignation about their "constitutional right" to provide Internet porn to adults.

Meanwhile, the content of pornographic materials continually grows more debased as people seek new sexual thrills. It is easy to see why child porn is a growing problem and why increased numbers of middle-aged men are serving prison terms for molesting children.

Child porn itself is progressively worsening. *Newsweek's* article quotes one individual working to save children: "In the beginning it was photos of nude children . . . But progressively, I began to discover tortures." One Internet site "was peddling a tape to

American suspects in which a molester was depicted . . . beating up a child."

Sadly, most of the purchasers of such material are themselves parents.

What can be done about pornography?

Americans need to be aware that, no matter what decisions courts may reach, there is no constitutional right to pornography. The framers of the Constitution could have had no concept of the technological advances that have made today's porn and its distribution possible. Typically the sexually deprived are in the forefront of efforts to support the right to access such material.

It is unlikely, though, that anything will be done about it until there is a change in public opinion. People need to realize how harmful pornography is. Many who may never look at it themselves often think of it as harmless. This is a mistake. Pornography does harm to anyone who gets involved with it—and it is increasingly harming our young children.

The Bible tells us that the consequences of the sins of one generation can extend to the next three or four generations (Deuteronomy 5:9). The *Newsweek* article states that "a significant risk factor for becoming a child molester is having been sexually abused as a child. 'Some victims of abuse may want to recreate their own experience, to give them mastery over it,' says psychologist Christine Courtois of the Psychiatric Institute of Washington."

Porn contributes to illicit sex and child porn to sex with children. Those children in turn will molest others one generation later, each one molesting dozens more. The effect on society will only worsen with each generation—unless people work together and as individuals to stop it now.

# Do You Know How to Use A Credit Card?

by David Treybig

*What tips do financial experts recommend on using credit cards? In principle, does the Bible offer advice on this modern practice? Understanding and practicing the keys revealed in this article can help your family bolster its financial security.*

**"D**o I know how to use a credit card? What a silly question! Of course I do. You just hand it to the clerk whenever you want to buy something and sign the receipt. Make the minimum payment and you can get lots of free credit. And don't worry if you max out your card. The company will probably raise your limit, and you are likely to get more offers through the mail for more cards than you can possibly use."

Does this sound familiar? It should. It's the approach millions have taken when using those little plastic cards that make purchasing items so simple and easy.

However, this common financial practice costs many families dearly. According to a recent report, the average American consumer now owes \$7,000 of credit-card debt—an amount sometimes referred to as "revolving credit" because many consumers typically pay only the interest and a bare-minimum amount of principal and thus never fully repay the entire sum.

The implications behind such debt are sobering. High rates of interest—up to more than 25 percent—voraciously consume one's income. Those with such debt flirt with financial disaster and often find their financial goals stymied or seriously delayed. Many consumers, men and women alike, find themselves saddled with so much debt that they cannot borrow a penny

more. When this happens people may be forced to pass up lifelong dreams, as well as once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, just to make the minimum monthly payments on credit-card balances.

To understand the significance of credit-card debt, consider the picture for many U.S. families: "Total household debt—including credit cards, car loans, mortgages, and student loans—topped 100 percent of disposable annual income late last year for the first time" (Paul Lim and Matthew Benjamin, "Digging Your Way Out of Debt," *U.S. News & World Report*, March 19, p. 54).

The average American spends more than he earns. Credit-card debt is perhaps the most visible symptom of a bigger problem. How do people find themselves caught in such circumstances?

## The spending trap

For many young people, running up debt begins innocently enough. Entering college, many find they must finance their education through student loans. Colleges and universities, operating as businesses, help new students apply for and receive educational loans with favorable terms.

Not to be left behind, credit-card companies pay colleges and universities significant fees to be allowed to offer students their services. These companies have learned that

young people feel great loyalty to their first credit card. It's simply good business to be the first to issue a young person a card.

With the implied promise of high-paying jobs in the near future, many students enter the credit world thinking their debt will disappear as quickly as it was acquired—in just a few years after graduation. Regrettably, most graduating students find reality to be much different from their naive expectations. Continuing to charge more than they can comfortably repay, many find themselves in a spending trap in which rising debt matches or exceeds rising incomes.

Young people, of course, are not the only ones caught in such financial circumstances. Many adults have likewise given in to the allure of easy credit. Advertisers tell us we "deserve" their new and improved products—and most of us willingly believe them. The desire to enjoy life to the fullest with the latest entertainment, clothes and gadgets can be irresistible. Taken too far, it is easy to break God's commandment against coveting (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21)—placing an object of desire in a more important role than God Himself.

People can also be sucked into the vortex of credit-card debt via unemployment. If one has no savings, adding debt to one's credit cards is often the quickest way to cover basic living expenses. But, then, when they do

## Tips for Managing Credit Cards

If you carry a balance and have credit cards with high interest rates, you would be wise to look for a card with a lower rate and transfer your balances. Some cards will give extremely low rates for up to six months to attract new customers. You may wish to transfer your balances several times if necessary until you have your balance paid off.

If you are struggling to pay off credit-card debt, consider selling items you no longer need or replacing expensive luxury items (such as a fancy vehicle) with less-expensive ones. Use the cash raised to pay off

credit-card balances. When your finances improve and you have cash in the bank, you can then purchase another luxury item if you think it's a wise choice.

If you must finance a large-ticket item, consider obtaining a home-equity loan on your house instead. You'll likely find the interest rate to be much lower.

If you choose to use credit cards, select cards that give you a cash rebate (sometimes up to 2 percent) on your annual purchases.

secure a new job, many find their credit cards reach the maximum limit, and repayment schedules become a severe burden.

Although most of us don't like to consider negative possibilities, we cannot avoid financial disasters by simply ignoring reality. Given today's financial climate—a slumping stock market and loss of thousands of jobs as companies “downsize,” some economists predict “personal bankruptcies this year will break 1998's record of 1.4 million” (ibid.).

Economic downturns inevitably push



more people to the edge of financial disaster. Only those who have taken precautions or avoided precarious situations survive. Cause and effect take their inexorable toll. What can you do to avoid becoming a sad statistic?

### **Biblical guidelines for financial stability**

Since God created us, He understands how we think and operate. When it comes to finances, God reveals in His Word a simple but profound truth: “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Proverbs 22:7).

When we are in debt, we serve those

holding our debt. In the case of our credit-card masters, we serve them well. After all, what investor wouldn't like to receive a 25 percent return on his investment?

The apostle Paul wrote, “Let no debt remain outstanding . . .” (Romans 13:8, New International Version). God expects Christians to fulfill their financial obligations. Not doing so often breaks God's commandments against lying and stealing (Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19; Leviticus 19:11).

In the light of sound biblical advice, the way to financial freedom is through repaying debt, then avoiding indebtedness whenever possible. Though it may make more sense to finance essential items of long-term value such as homes, cars and education, credit-card debt is something most people can avoid. Consider how to avoid it.

### **How to pay off credit-card debt**

If you find yourself making interest payments every month on your credit cards and want to eliminate that kind of debt, the first step is to assess your income and expenses. Total your monthly expenses and subtract them from your income. This is your disposable income after expenses, the amount you have each month to use as you determine.

The next step is to stop charging items on your credit cards. Pay cash for items you must buy. Then analyze your credit-card debt. Determine which credit cards are charging you the highest rate of interest. You may be able to transfer balances from cards with higher rates to those offering lower rates. For more information about wise use of credit cards, see “Tips for Managing Credit Cards.”

Next, rank the cards in order of the interest rate charged, and use your disposable income to completely pay off the card with the highest rate. Once that card is paid off, close the account and destroy the card. Then focus your attention on the next card, and continue doing the same until all of the debt on your cards has been completely paid. Once your credit-card debt is gone, you're much better off with only a few cards—not the dozen or more carried by so many people.

### **How to use a credit card**

After you've paid off all your credit-card debt, it's time to consider how such

cards can be properly used.

They are extremely convenient tools—attested to by the fact that people charged more on credit cards last year than they spent in cash—but the wise use of credit cards is important. How do credit-card-savvy consumers use their cards?

The most important step in responsible credit-card use is to completely pay off the bill every month. Think of the credit card as using cash that is reserved each month for the items charged. This way no interest accrues, and credit cards become legitimate and helpful financial tools. They become *our* servants instead of the other way around.

Most people don't realize that God has much to say about how we use our money. As our Creator, He is the One who gives us the power to earn money and enjoy what it can buy (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19). In a parable of the coming Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ described Himself as giving His servants money (talents) to manage. How His servants managed those funds determined their reward in the Kingdom (Matthew 25:14-30).

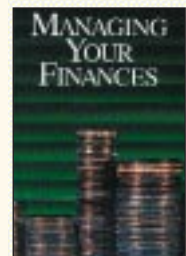
What's the lesson of this parable? The way we manage our money reveals to God much about our character. **GN**

### **Recommended Reading**

Is money really the root of all evil? Do you know what God thinks about bankruptcy? What does the Bible say about charitable contributions?

How much should we give? If you want biblical answers to these important questions, request our free booklet *Managing Your Finances*.

The Bible offers practical, down-to-earth guidance in many areas of life, not just finances. We've compiled much of that advice about marriage and family relationships, career, parenting, friendships and much more into a full-color guide, *Making Life Work*. Both booklets are free for the asking from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you may request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).





# World News and Trends

## An Overview of Conditions Around the World

### U.S. AIDS infection rates on the rise again?

Twenty years after AIDS was identified as the source of an epidemic that claimed the lives of many homosexual men, a new generation of males is contracting the HIV infection at an alarming rate.

According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 4.4 percent of U.S. men aged 23-29 who admitted having sex with other men became infected with HIV each year between 1998 and 2000. Infection rates varied drastically by race, with a 2.5 percent annual infection rate among whites, 3.5 percent among Hispanics and 14.7 percent among blacks. Linda Valleroy, senior author of the six-state study, likened the higher infection rate to "what's been seen in eastern and southern Africa."

"That rate means that of 100 men who are healthy at the start of a year, 15 will end up infected," Dr. Valleroy said. "These are explosive HIV incidence rates that we haven't seen since the early '90s."

Although the study is too small to indicate a national trend, "I think it gives a very good picture of what potentially could be happening in other parts of the country," said Helene Gayle, director of the National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention.

In the 20 years since AIDS was identified, an estimated 21.8 million people have died from the disease—including three million last year—and 36 million are believed to be infected. More than five million people—an average of 15,000 daily—are infected each year.

More than 30 experimental AIDS vaccines have been tested in humans, but none has been found effective. Margaret McCluskey, head of a vaccine study conducted by Johns Hopkins University and vaccine manufacturer VaxGen, said: "Most public health professionals agree that unless we find a definitive vaccine, which is questionable, we may not see an end to

*"Most public health professionals agree that unless we find a definitive vaccine, which is questionable, we may not see an end to the pandemic in our lifetime. Not just an end to it. We may not even be able to control it."*

the pandemic in our lifetime. Not just an end to it. We may not even be able to control it." Even optimistic researchers caution that an effective vaccine, if it can be developed, is probably a decade away. (Source: Scripps Howard News Service, *The New York Times*.)

### European cocaine flow flourishing

While U.S. cocaine use leveled off in recent years, the flow of the drug into Europe has nearly doubled—to 220 tons annually—in the last five years.

Although the United States remains the undisputed lead-

ing market for the drug, consuming an estimated 330 tons yearly, the increased flow into Europe worries European governments and law-enforcement agencies.

Europol, the European Union's police agency, estimates that 35 percent of Colombia's cocaine production found its way to EU nations, primarily through the Netherlands and Spain. In 1999 EU member nations seized 43 tons of the drug, an increase of 37 percent over the previous year. (Source: *The New York Times*.)

### Papal trip prepares ground for next papacy

Pope John Paul II is fully aware that he is 80 years old and infirm. He also knows that his present actions will help shape and undergird the Vatican's policies for the next papal government. He has never been one to shirk what he considers to be his responsibilities.

Frequently on the move throughout his pontifical reign (with some 100 major tours to date), this pope's most recent trip began in Greece and was followed by an excursion into Syria, ending in congenial Roman-Catholic Malta. The theme of this April-May journey was reconciliation, the attempted healing of bitter wounds reaching far into the past.

John Paul II was the first pope to visit Athens since 1054, when the Catholic Church divided into its Eastern and Western wings. Since some ultraorthodox Greeks view the pontiff as a heretic, 5,000 police were on hand to prevent trouble. The pope sought to heal a bitter rift between Roman Catholics and the Greek Orthodox Church. When he concluded his address, the Greek clergy burst into applause. But one Greek abbot downplayed the pope's actions: "He is doing this because he wants the Orthodox Church to recognize him."

In one sense the pope's Syrian excursion was even more ambitious. He sought to mend fences with the Muslim world and influence the tattered Middle Eastern peace process. The pontiff became the first pope ever to enter a mosque as well as the first to visit Syria.

After some inflammatory remarks against Israel by President Bashar Assad of Syria, John Paul II said: "Real peace can only be achieved if there is a new attitude of understanding and respect between the followers of three Abrahamic religions [Christianity, Judaism and Islam]."

He followed by preaching from the rubble of a Golan Heights area that Syria uses as a symbol of the supposed brutality of Israel. In effect the Pope also called for Israel to abide by UN resolutions urging its withdrawal to the pre-1967-war borders, which would include Israeli abandonment of the Golan Heights—a monumental step backwards in terms of the country's security.

Presumably his papal successor will most likely seek to carry out John Paul's wishes in this arena. If you would like to understand the biblical background of these highly significant events, please write for our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Sources: *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* [all London], *USA Today*, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*.)



## TV turns toxic

Except for reruns, the days of Perry Mason, Lawrence Welk, Jack Benny and Bob Hope are gone forever. By comparison, what we generally see on television appears dark and vulgar. Our viewing fare includes young ladies in mortal combat with vampires and monsters—not to mention *Temptation Island*, *Sex and the City*, *The Jerry Springer Show* and a whole range of imitators.

Even more sobering are modern TV-viewing statistics compared with those of 40 years ago. In 1961 the average daily

***In 1961 the average daily viewer watched television just over five hours per day. Now viewing has grown to more than hours.***

viewer watched television for five hours per day. Now viewing has grown to more than eight hours. Added to that are the multiplication of multitelevision homes, the runaway growth of households with cable or satellite connections and the more than doubling of commercial TV stations over this 40-year period.

Let's face it. Most people in the Western world spend far too much time watching television. Good TV has its uses, but many profitable leisure pursuits are easily more wholesome—reading, walking, hiking, bicycle riding and a multiplicity of available sports and games, just to name a few. (Source: *USA Today*.)

## The house that debt built

The *Financial Times* tells us that "in the US and the UK, household debt has reached a record level as a percentage of disposable income." Of even more concern for consumers is that "the real burden of debt has shifted from paying the interest to repaying the capital, and the figures can be startlingly large."

In Britain and the United States millions of credit-card users are trapped in a potential *lifetime debt* sentence. Monthly payments used to be 5 percent of the total amount owed. In some cases this has dropped to as low as 2 percent, assuring thousands of pounds and dollars of extra interest payments for many cardholders.

If you would like to know how to properly handle your own credit cards, please see "Do You Know How to Use a Credit Card?" on page 10 of this issue. You might also want to request our free booklet *Managing Your Finances*. (Sources: *Financial Times*, *Daily Mail* [all London]).

## A better life for senior citizens

A study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* shows that elderly Americans live longer, with fewer seniors requiring nursing-home care. Eight out of 10 people over 65 routinely care for themselves. Figures spanning two decades show a steady decline in the proportion of older people who are chronically disabled.

According to *USA Today*: "Researchers credit the decline to improved medical care, diet, exercise, public health advances and education about how to stay healthy." Most of these points parallel the contents of our full-color booklet *Making Life Work*. Please request a free copy if you would like to improve your life: healthwise, mentally, emotionally and most, important, spiritually. (Source: *USA Today*.)

## Display of Ten Commandments endangered?

The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to hear an appeal of a lower court's ruling that the city of Elkhart, Ind., may not keep a granite pillar engraved with the Ten Commandments on its town-hall lawn.

The lower court had earlier decided that the display of the Ten Commandments amounted to an unwarranted governmental endorsement of a particular religious belief. The case originated in 1998 when several Elkhart citizens, supported by the American Civil Liberties Union, sued the city to have the Commandments removed. The ACLU has since begun a legal offensive to remove the estimated 4,000 Ten Commandments displays at city halls and civic buildings throughout the nation.

For the Supreme Court to hear the appeal, four of its nine justices would have had to agree to hear the case. However, only three conservative justices voted to accept it.

In expressing his desire for the court to hear the case, Chief Justice William Rehnquist said: "This monument does not express the city's preference for a particular religion or for religious belief in general. It simply reflects the Ten Commandments' role in the development of our legal system." He noted that the display emphasizes the relationship between the Commandments and the U.S. legal tradition—as does a carving of Moses holding the Ten Commandments that adorns a wall in the Supreme Court's own courtroom.

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, declared that "[this] religious display must come down." He lauded the decision as "another hindrance" for religious conservatives in the United States.

Regrettably, many liberal legal scholars and judges seem determined to rid the United States of its strong Judeo-Christian values and heritage. For a little-known perspective of America's founding, be sure to read "America's Astounding Destiny: Was It Foretold in the Bible?" beginning on page 4 of

***The ACLU has since begun a legal offensive to remove the estimated 4,000 Ten Commandments displays at city halls and civic building throughout the nation.***

this issue. To better understand the supreme importance of God's Commandments, be sure to request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*. (Sources: *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times*.)

## Number of cohabiting couples surges

According to the latest census, the number of unmarried couples living together in America skyrocketed 71 percent over the last decade, far outpacing the 7 percent increase in married-couple households.

The census showed other changes that reflect trouble for the traditional family. For example, the number of people living alone increased 21 percent, and the number of women rearing children without husbands increased 25 percent.

Of the nation's 105.5 million households, slightly more than half—54.5 million—are married-couple families. Unmarried-partner families—both heterosexual and homosexual—totaled 5.5 million, or 5 percent of all U.S. families, up from 3 percent a decade ago. (Source: *The Associated Press*.)

—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley

# A Firsthand Account: Africa's Deadly AIDS Crisis

by Cecil Maranville

**B**ecause of the shockingly candid details related below, the author, a physician, has asked that we delete any comments that might reveal his identity. Warning: This account is sobering and distressing.

Sub-Saharan Africa, early 2001—"The main reason I can't wait to get out of here is that my personality is suddenly altering. They say it's called 'becoming a doctor.' [Here] that means your main emotion when a patient dies is relief.

"The AIDS [epidemic] is becoming alarming. Most of our beds are filled with HIV-positive patients. They talk about the 'package deal' down in the emergency department. An extremely skinny patient comes in, coughing, complaining of tiredness. On examination, they have oral thrush, often so bad that even their lips are covered with a white fungus as it climbs out of their mouths. And immediately you know that they have HIV, TB [tuberculosis] and oral candidiasis [a fungal infection].

"We go through the motions of testing them, but I don't know why. We admit them, rehydrate them, and all that we succeed in doing is prolonging their death by a week or two. *We are now at the point where we refuse to give them any active treatment (antibiotics, antifungals, even blood), which includes resuscitation.* It's quite simple—even with active treatment, the only difference you make is a few weeks. (They always wait until they are terminal before arriving at the hospital.) So why waste money you don't have to begin with?

"The other day I caught myself saying out loud that we should start refusing to admit HIV-positive patients, since we're only prolonging the inevitable. *We're turning away patients with asthma and diabetes, patients with controllable diseases who could contribute to the economy, because AIDS patients are taking up all the beds.*

## Playing God

"And then it hit me: *I'm playing God.* If we

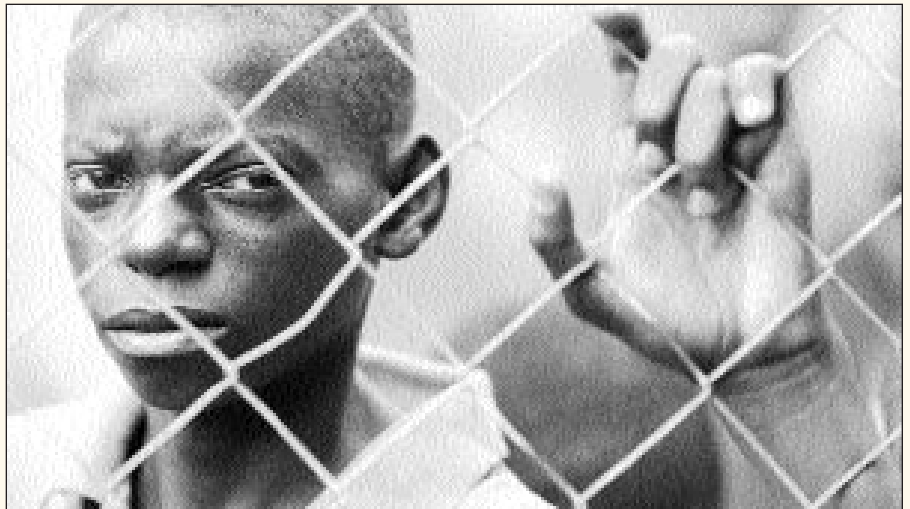
start doing that, we might as well start denying medical care to old people and premature babies, because they no longer contribute to society. We might as well start turning away patients with other terminal illnesses, like cancer and multiple sclerosis, because we're only prolonging the inevitable.

"You have no idea what kind of hell it is to

post-test 'You have HIV' speech.

## Haunting experience

"Not all of the deaths here go unnoticed. One of my patients will always haunt me. As I mentioned, most of the AIDS patients have pretty typical appearances (skinny and coughing).



*"We're turning away patients with asthma and diabetes, patients with controllable diseases who could contribute to the economy, because AIDS patients are taking up all the beds."*

do ward rounds in [this city] in the morning. You walk through rooms of skeletons, their chests rattling with each cough . . . Many of the patients lie in beds [soaked with] their own urine . . . Their lips are caked with white fungus, their faces mottled with blood-flecked sputum. They watch you from their beds, their eyes often the only body parts they can still move. Some of them still beg with their eyes for help . . .

"Some are beyond caring. Their eyes are already dead, which is why you check each patient's pulse before discussing them. We use pseudonyms like 'retrovirus' or 'high five' for HIV and 'Koch's bacillus' for TB in an effort to maintain privacy. But they all know the telltale wailing following the

"Some (especially the children) never reach that stage. This particular young girl (19 years old) didn't fit the typical profile at all. She was educated, eloquent and still looked very healthy. She had known she was HIV-positive for three years prior to her admission. (Her boyfriend had told her that he was monogamous, and so he was. Unfortunately, his previous girlfriend had not been.) She came after she suddenly started battling to breathe, rather like a severe asthma attack. In well-fed HIV-positive patients in Africa, this normally is due to pneumocystis pneumonia. This was the diagnosis in her case.

"If we could pull her through the pneumocystis pneumonia, she could still have a few good years left. So we put her on oxygen,

nebulizations and antibiotics. For two days I had to walk into the ward and watch her struggling to breathe. For two days she couldn't sleep for fear of forgetting to breathe. The [nurses] were unfortunately 'forgetting' to give the full dose of antibiotics. On the morning of the third day, she looked worse than even when I arrived. I can't describe the feeling of powerlessness when you realize that you can't give anything to 'make it go away.' The only option left to us was to give her small doses of opioids to make the struggling for each breath at least seem less painful.

"When we came round later in the day with the consultant, the patient had finally fallen asleep. He was impressed by her improvement and decided to forgo the opioids. As we moved on to the next patient, I suddenly knew that I would never see her alive again. She died that night.

### **But for the grace of God**

"Most of all, you wander between the patients and know that, but for the grace of God and a single needle-stick wound, that could be you.

*"I'm beginning to hate medicine [here].*

"Diagnostically it's no challenge, because they all have HIV. Therapeutically it's no challenge, because we do nothing. *Emotionally it takes you to places where you simply don't care about life anymore.* And still we work . . . [with] the constant danger that the next time you draw blood or put up a drip you could get HIV.

"And the state doesn't . . . [care]. They no longer even provide us with free anti-HIV drugs (AZT, etc.) following a needle-stick injury . . . We can't afford that.

"And . . . they wonder why we're leaving the country.

"I hope [these letters get] people thinking twice, whether it's about unsafe sex or an awareness of human fragility" (end of letters; emphasis added throughout).

### **No easy way to say it**

There's no easy way to describe the desperate situation that grips Africa. While this eyewitness account does not describe all hospitals there, it does point out that the epidemic is made all the more disastrous because of inadequate infrastructure.

A recent report from one African government revealed that one in every nine of its citizens and nearly 25 percent of pregnant women are HIV-positive. The same report

forewarned that, by 2016, the country's population would begin to shrink, because the number of deaths due to HIV will surpass the number of births. (Regrettably, this country is not alone. In several others overall infection rates are even higher.)

A single faint glimmer of hope appeared in statistics that show a marginal decline in HIV infection rates in regions where there have been sex-education campaigns—no easy task, given centuries-old taboos and traditions.

Promiscuity is the major reason, but not the only one, for the rapid spread of AIDS on the African continent and in other countries around the world. Many diseases that have been largely controlled in the West by advanced medicine are rampant in Africa and other regions. They include malaria, syphilis, gonorrhea, tuberculosis and pneumonia. Such diseases weaken the immune system and apparently ease transmission of the AIDS virus. Diseases that involve open sores and exposure to bodily fluids also boost the proliferation of AIDS.

In December 2000 the United Nations announced its estimate on the African-AIDS condition. It said *24.5 million people in the sub-Saharan region are HIV positive.* Contrast that with the total figure worldwide of 36 million infected. Seven out of every 10 cases in the world are in the sub-Saharan countries of this plague-stricken continent.

A race to develop an AIDS vaccine is underway in the international medical community. Billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates has personally donated \$100 million to the research, challenging other wealthy people to contribute generously as well. Mr. Gates' Microsoft Corp. has raised nearly a quarter of a billion dollars for the project so far.

AIDS drugs are notoriously expensive, out of reach for the average African government or private citizen. However, cheaper, generic versions of the patented drugs are available.

No effective anti-AIDS drug has been developed. Even if it were, and could be made available in generic form to the afflicted African nations, could AIDS be stopped?

### **Between the dead and the dying**

Numbers 16:4-48 tells of a plague that struck Israel when Moses and his brother, Aaron, governed it. At Moses' urging, Aaron literally ran between the dead and the dying with the means to stay the plague.

African governments do not work as efficiently.

Michael Ledeen, who spent many years in sub-Saharan Africa and has seen AIDS firsthand, wrote in his March 27 column—titled "Fighting AIDS Is a Losing Proposition"—that distributing medicine through African governments would never work.

"There is no infrastructure capable of delivering medicine to those who need it, nor to ensure that patients take the full course of treatment."

Unless the West virtually creates and imposes the missing infrastructure, Mr. Ledeen continues, "no matter how generously we donate medicine to Africa, a huge bloc of Africans will never receive it . . ."

Many African leaders, he warns, would enrich themselves by selling cheap medications at a markup. Further, they would probably use medicine as a political weapon. Those who ally themselves with the leaders would receive medication while those who did not would be frozen out of any supplies. Witness that type of political manipulation in the distribution of food relief in famine-stricken African countries.

"Is it hopeless, then?" Mr. Ledeen asks. His answer: "*Most likely, it is,* at least in the sense of 'solving the problem.'"

### **Hope for the hopeless**

We hope that Mr. Ledeen is wrong and that ways will be found to bring relief to the millions suffering from this dread disease. However, our hope doesn't rest in man's capabilities.

The example of Aaron mentioned above is, in some ways, a forerunner of the coming Jesus Christ, who will be forced to intervene in a devastated, sin-sick world to prevent the extinction of human life. As He warns us in Matthew 24:22: "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" (Revised English Bible).

As Aaron interposed Himself between the dead and the dying, Jesus the Messiah will intervene at His return to bring healing to the nations (Isaiah 35:5-6; Luke 4:17-21).

Clearly, our world desperately needs two kinds of healing—an immediate intervention to restore physical health and soundness to the millions who suffer and a spiritual healing of the character of individuals and their governments that have brought on the dark days in which we live.

Therein lies the hope of Africa. God speed the dawning of that day of healing. **GN**

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# Pornography

*Continued from page 9*

wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Genesis 6:5-6).

Having failed to learn the lesson of the Flood, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, two ancient cities God destroyed by fire, met a similar fate "because their sin [was] very grave" (Genesis 18:20).

In principle, Jesus Christ equated viewing pornography with adultery, the breaking of the Seventh Commandment: "... I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

Jesus explained that sin begins in the mind, with our thoughts. So, as far as God's Word is concerned, viewing pornography and committing adultery are both sinful and violations of God's law. The mental damage, the corruption of our minds, is accomplished by pornography even if these illicit thoughts are not physically acted upon.

Men especially are easily attracted by what they see, and deliberately observing nude women—whether in person, in print or on movie, television or computer screens—often will sooner or later lead to immoral sexual acts.

Our ancestors understood this even if they sometimes went overboard in the other direction. Prudery is not the answer to controlling illicit sex. In Western nations, it wasn't until after World War I that women could bare their ankles in public. Additional passages in the Bible condemn two of the sexual practices found in today's pornography—homosexuality and bestiality (Leviticus 18:22-23). Research shows that pornography has contributed to an increase in homosexual sex.

God adds: "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things . . . For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it . . ." (verses 24-25).

## An end-time prophecy

The apostle Paul prophesied that "in the last days perilous times will come" (2 Timothy 3:1). In that time, he wrote, "men will be lovers of themselves . . . without self-control . . . [and] lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (verses 2-4).

Pornography by its very nature encourages self-centeredness. Rather than focusing

one's sexual thoughts on one's marriage partner, porn fixates the mind on sexual lust and the prospect of a temporary sensual thrill. Such diversions from the commitment of the marital relationship will lead only to an absence of self-control and, in far too many cases, immoral acts that break the Seventh Commandment.

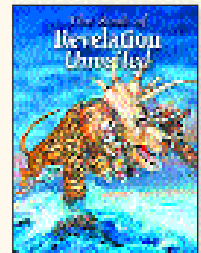
We should heed God's instructions and warnings and avoid all pornography. It is possible to avoid it. In the United States, family-friendly Internet services can screen out so-called adult material. Not subscribing to cable and satellite premium channels will reduce the likelihood of viewing pornography. Cutting down on or eliminating television and movie viewing will reduce your exposure to what is usually termed "soft porn," avoiding wrong sexual messages so common in most popular entertainment.

Pornography is almost always a private obsession. Individuals who view pornography, even those who are married, typically do so in secret. This fosters hypocrisy. While appearing to be respectable to others, addicts pursue their obsession in secret. But God sees everything. Ultimately we answer to Him. "For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light" (Luke 8:17).

We should take to heart Paul's words in Philippians 4:8: "... Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." Pornography is none of these things. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

What is the purpose of the laws and moral principles laid out in the Bible? Are they simply restrictions on our fun, keeping us from having a



good time? Are they hopelessly outdated? Few really understand why God gave the instructions He gave. Be sure to request the eye-opening booklets *Making Life Work* and *The Ten Commandments*. Both are free for the asking from any of our offices or from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).



# Successful Parenting Begins With **The Brain**

by Howard Davis

I knew something was wrong when my wife called my Seattle office the afternoon of Jan. 19, 1987. Rushing out of a computer-system demonstration for a client, I raced home to find her collapsed on the floor.

Our son wasn't due to be born for nine weeks. But, a few hours later, Benjamin was taken by cesarean section. Monitors detected he had been dying in the midst of a disintegrating placenta. Patti had lost so much blood that her life was in danger as well.

Although more than 14 years have passed, some memories remain vivid. I often reflect on the powerful impact my decisions, emotions, actions and inaction have on our children's lives.

When Benjamin was lying in an incubator for seven weeks to gain weight—he weighed as little as two pounds—I remember Patti driving to the Tacoma General intensive care unit every day to talk with—and touch—our tiny son.

I was busy with business at the time and thought it wasn't important for me to see Benjamin that often. I didn't need to reach through the openings in the incubator's side and feel his small stick-sized limbs as Patti felt compelled to do. After all, he seemed so peaceful resting there by himself, amazing me with his calm maturity for a person so tiny. He didn't really need me, I thought.

Three years later Benjamin was diagnosed with autism.

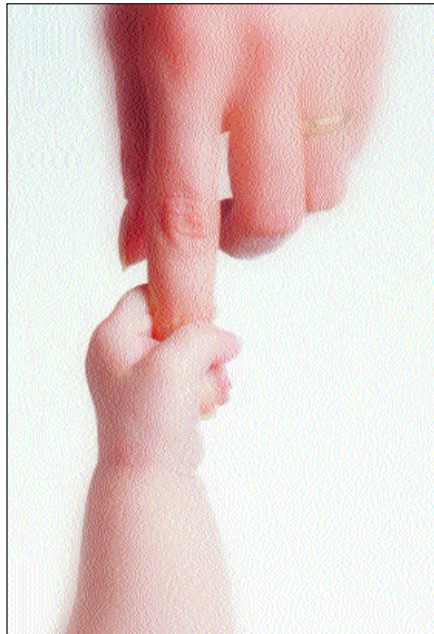
I was wrong. Benjamin had needed me more than I could have imagined.

Most fathers—at least sometimes and often out of ignorance—neglect to take the opportunity to help, stimulate growth and nurture their children.

Benjamin's autism was a neurological disorder caused by a damaged brain that leaves a child unable to process information normally. I would learn that much of his recovery depended on me.

## Early stimulation is critical

Our tiny son had gone from hypoactivity (being underactive) for the first 12 months to



hyperactivity and explosiveness for the next two years. We spent our days and nights listening to this screaming, ever-moving child, a Jekyll and Hyde for whom we finally had a label for a condition we didn't understand.

Science in the last decade has discovered that touch can be crucial to young children with autism. Parental attention in the forms of talking, smiling, singing, feeding and touching makes a significant difference to brain-damaged children.

We now know that these parental activities are vitally important for all young children. If we don't touch our infants in the manifold ways parents should relate to them—through their bodies, eyes, ears, emotions and intellects—children are profoundly affected in ways that mark them for the rest of their lives.

Why is this so?

It is because this kind of interaction of parents with children *builds* the brain structures necessary for their further development. Brain research reveals the physical processes of constructing a personality through development of the child's central nervous system.

Mechanically, children are virtual

learning machines. They are constantly learning beings made in the image of their parents. But, to thrive as well as survive, children need constant stimulus led by competent parents.

## The learning brain

What is most important in a child's development? Is it his genetic makeup, or is it his life experiences in interacting with parents, siblings, teachers and surroundings?

This question summarizes the nature-vs.-nurture debate. People have argued it for

**Parental attention in the forms of talking, smiling, singing, feeding and touching makes a significant difference to brain-damaged children.**

2,000 years, but research proves that the either-or approach is fruitless. Nature and nurturing are *both* important.

Until the last generation, scientists thought the brain was hardwired, with all its circuits intact in early childhood, with little change possible during the remainder of a person's life.

Each child is born with 100 billion neurons (nerve cells) in the brain, the total number of which does not grow significantly for the rest of our lives.

For years researchers thought basic brain development stopped after early childhood. Now we know that the brain's wiring only *begins* at birth. Most of the adult's conscious functions of logical thinking, goal-setting, writing, planning and communicating are the result of neuron connections—called *synapses*—which develop throughout childhood. It is these connections that are created by learning and responsible for additional learning.

In a real sense, properly rearing children is the process of nurturing young brains to maturity, of correctly wiring the neural circuitry that will determine the child's personality for the rest of his life. The actions

and attitudes of parents exert a powerful force on the brain development of their children throughout childhood, regardless of their genetic makeup.

### The incredible learning machine

At birth what appears to be a long and slow process of learning begins, but every day brings the brain a spectacular array of experiences to interpret, record and respond to. Billions of bits of information must be processed and stored every hour of every day of young lives.

Brain development occurs throughout life, but the rate in childhood is much faster than it will be later. Young brains are more flexible because most of their connections are new.

## It takes a committed, mature adult to know how to shape the child's will to be positive rather than negative, to be obedient and cooperative instead of defiant and disobedient.

Consider how marvelous are the unfathomable basic structures of the human brain.

The human brain is unbelievably complex. In addition to the 100 billion neurons, the brain contains one trillion other cells that play roles other than computing messages.

Neurons hold the keys of communication and learning. Each has a long extension, somewhat like a tree trunk, called an axon. The axon transmits basic messages to other neurons. From infancy to adulthood, each neuron grows elaborate tangles of side branches called dendrites. Each neuron develops up to 100,000 dendrites. Dendrites receive information from other neurons. Through sending and receiving messages, neurons both teach and learn from other neurons.

Fifty-three specialized chemicals, called neurotransmitters, transmit electrical messages across the synapses. Each synapse has at least 10 strengths. The number of configurations, arrangements and patterns of the neurons, dendrites and synapses in one brain is at least 10 to the trillionth power—a number greater than all the atoms in the universe!

Learning is the process of the creation, growth, strengthening and weakening of these connections. Every experience either builds or weakens dendrites and connections in one or more parts of the brain.

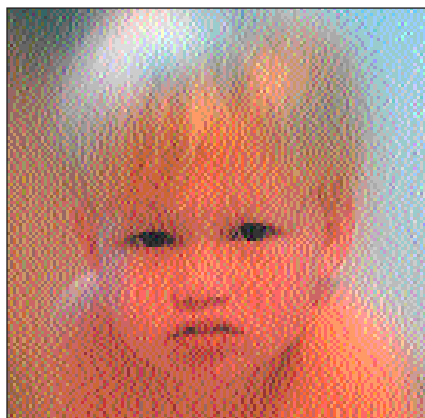
God designed and made these connections available to us so we can learn, wonder, ponder, understand and plan. You are using millions of them as you read this article.

In *A User's Guide to the Brain*, Harvard

Medical School's professor of psychiatry John Ratey writes that, "happily, this dynamic complexity is actually the solution to many people's fears that our nature is genetically 'hard-wired.'"

"The brain is so complex, and so plastic, that it is virtually impossible, except in the broadest fashion, to predict how a given factor will influence its state. Genes do contain direction for much of the brain's initial development, yet they have no absolute power to determine how the brain will respond" (2001, p. 11).

What does all this mean? To put it simply, a child's brain is an inner universe with the potential to learn, be taught and change throughout life. Childhood is a critically



important time when the connections in the child's brain are being established and strengthened for the first time.

### An independent person in the making

One more factor influences how the young brain will become wired. The brain is the seat, the home, of the whole little human being who is more than just the sum of neurochemicals firing across cells in some mechanical way.

Each child has an independent will. He is a bundle of wants, needs and desires to grow, experience and know. Basic tendencies are preprogrammed genetically. But the kinds of choices a child makes are shaped by an interaction of the child's will and the environment, especially the environment shaped by parents. Parental style and choices become critical issues in creating a child who is generally cooperative and pleasant or one who is predominantly aggressive and mean.

Parents can achieve their best outcome in rearing their children when they understand that their child has a continuous need for care, love and respect as a small person with an independent will—just like his father and mother.

The environment is not the only factor besides genes at work in brain development. The independent will of the child—based on the genetic heritage from his parents and other ancestors—also drives the brain's development. A child will develop best when parents guide him to be self-motivated and to desire to experience constructive behavior, attitudes and thoughts. A parent also must provide guidance, direction and protection from harmful influences.

### Positive parents

With each smile from his mother and father, every redirection when he gets in a fight with siblings, and each time a parent allows or doesn't allow him to be exposed to sexually offensive or violent television, a child's brain modifies some of its tangle of 100 trillion constantly changing connections. Through this process a child learns the choices he can make in reacting to these challenges the next time they arise.

But it takes a committed, mature adult to know how to shape the child's will to be positive rather than negative, to be obedient and cooperative instead of defiant and disobedient, to be outgoing toward others and not self-obsessed and self-absorbed. The tantrum-throwing terror in the supermarket is often the result of parents who don't know how to help their children be better behaved and not the manifestation of the supposedly inherently evil nature of a child.

Harvard's Ratey says that "everything we do affects everything that follows . . . Genetics are important, but not deterministic, and the kinds of exercise, sleep, diet, friends, and activities we choose, as well as the goals we set for ourselves, have perhaps equal power to change our lives" (p. 12).

Brain research shows that each child's brain is shaped—or "parented," you might say—by its interaction with its environment. Such interaction is largely controlled by the quality and quantity of parental interaction. There is nothing static about it; the process continues throughout a human being's life.

In the 21st century some of the ancient wisdom regarding the basics of rearing children has come full circle and is being recognized as the best our modern age can offer.

The foundation that reveals how parents

should rear and nurture their children is found in the Bible. God designed children to succeed under the guidance of competent parents. The guiding principle is expressed simply yet powerfully in Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

Training of the caliber expressed in Scripture comes from one huge but simple requirement for successful parents: leadership throughout the child's youth, from infancy to adulthood.

### **Continuously involved leadership**

Research shows that, from the first hours after birth, infants' eyes follow the shapes of the mother and father, associating them with their voices, warmth, care and nourishment. As soon as a child's eyes can focus well enough to perceive the smile of his mother, he begins to imitate and mirror the movements of her facial muscles, lips and laugh lines.

The mother or father orchestrates a great symphony of connections, feelings, inferences and meanings that builds a new person who is, to a remarkable degree, in the parent's own image. At birth the parent leads the external stimulation of the brain, a process responsible for 80 percent of the developing personality through the formation of trillions of synaptic connections. Each of these sensations builds the superstructure of circuitry for the subsequent development of the child's brain.

The parent is a leader who shapes the development of his child. Children are natural followers, built to imitate their parents. Without the appropriate leadership from parents, children do not develop socially and often are too aggressive and lack self-control.

In April, news sources reported the largest study ever in the United States on the behavior of young children in day-care facilities compared with the conduct of children who stayed at home with their mothers. In the study more than 1,100 children in 10 cities were rated by parents, day-care providers and others. The results are startling.

Children in day care, researchers found, are three times more likely to experience behavioral problems than those who stay at home with Mom. Young children in day care also were reported to be unhappier.

"As time [the duration of daily day care] goes up, so do behavior problems," said Jay Belsky, an investigator conducting the study. Dr. Belsky noted that, if children spend more than 30 hours a week in child care,

they generally are "more demanding, more noncompliant, and they are more aggressive." He added: "They scored higher on things like [getting] in lots of fights, cruelty, bullying, meanness, as well as talking too much [and] demand[ing that his needs] must be met immediately."

We shouldn't be surprised.

### **Mothers know best**

Natural mothers dedicated to staying at home to offer optimal nurturing for their children provide more continuous emotional warmth and support for their young children than do day-care providers with no familial attachment to children who come and go under their care.

A mother's warmth and support are registered in the neural connections in a child's brain. So is a child's less-optimal day-care experience. An at-home parent provides more continuous focused involvement throughout the day than can a day-care provider, who typically provides for many more children, all of whom are strangers to the child.

As every mother knows who has had to get a young child out of bed early, the child can be emotionally traumatized when dropped off in day care as the parent goes off to work. Even the mother is often sad at having to endure a struggle with the unhappy child who doesn't want to be separated from his mother. A sad child plus a sad mother, repeated well over a thousand times in early childhood, is hardly the best formula for proper brain development.

Parents are not effective leaders unless they are grounded in strong principles that make them proper role models. The process of successfully rearing children requires many skills, many of which they need before bearing children but are not acquired until one becomes a parent.

One might become an Olympic athlete, climb Mount Everest or think he has the greatest job in the world, but proper parenting requires as much or more leadership as these activities. Bringing up children can be as just as rewarding and thrilling an experience.

But, like these heroic and athletic endeavors, being a parent involves enduring some tough times. Leaders must make course corrections and never give up. Successful parents constantly develop their skills to rise to the next level. They are committed and involved.

The same principles that lead to success in life apply to successful parenting.

Parents always have an impact. Even though parents may not realize it, children are always learning by the action, attention, respect—or disrespect, inaction and inattention—of their parents.

As much as we would like to mystify children's behavior, the quality of parents and their child-rearing efforts are largely responsible for the nature of every child. Much of the negative behavior of youths is the result of parents who do not control negative influences, do not know how to simultaneously love, nurture and discipline and do not understand the spiritual needs of children.

We need to remember that every brain has a parent. If not the natural parent, some other influence will dramatically affect every child's brain and character.

### **Help from heaven**

After Patti and I discovered our son Benjamin was autistic, we struggled to reverse the damage he had suffered before birth. Taking cues from health-care professionals, I became Benjamin's speech therapist and helper—tickling, wrestling and holding him and taking him to Little League baseball games and on camping trips and mountain climbs. Patti did the same. Benjamin received sensory and motor therapy, school intervention and care and love from many.

But Benjamin's neural wiring problems exposed mine. I had to admit I wasn't wired as the ideal parent from birth. I often hit the wall of frustration. I was not prepared to handle the intensity of working with an autistic child. But, once you are a parent, there is no turning back.

I realized then, as I still realize, that I couldn't do it alone. I was often forced to go to God on my knees to ask for help from the heavenly throne of grace. After all, God is the greatest parent, the ultimate authority, the one who wrote the book. The Bible is *the* book about parenting. God, who is infinitely good, has given parents priceless guidance and instruction.

Benjamin is 14. After his rocky start, he has a good brain. He is doing well in middle school, has many friends, talks about things like any other 14-year-old, swims all over the state as part of the school-district swim team, is studying second-year Spanish and has forgiven me for the times I didn't know what I was doing.

His wiring will be fine in the end.

But I have learned an important lesson. Like every parent's, my wiring is still under construction. **GN**

# The Book of Revelation: History and Prophecy

by Mario Seiglie

*Many people view Revelation, sometimes called the Apocalypse, as a mysterious book of strange symbols and images. Yet it has a clear and definite historical background.*

In our long-running series “The Bible and Archaeology,” we have gone through the Scriptures from Genesis through the Epistles reviewing many of the surprising archaeological finds that confirm and illuminate the biblical record. We conclude the series with a look at archaeological and historical evidence relating to the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

Many people view Revelation, sometimes called the Apocalypse, as a mysterious book of strange symbols and images. Yet it has a clear and definite historical background. The apostle John, who wrote it under the inspiration of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1), mentions where it was written and that it was addressed to congregations in seven cities in Asia Minor.

How do the descriptions of these places compare with discoveries about them from history and archaeology?

## Exiled to Patmos

We learn from John that he wrote Revelation from the island of Patmos (verse 9), in the Aegean Sea 40 miles off the coast of Asia Minor (modern-

day Turkey). Patmos is a small island of only 24 square miles (62 square kilometers), with a coastline in the shape of a horseshoe.

Was it customary in the Roman Empire for convicts to be exiled to an island? The Roman historian Tacitus (A.D. 56-120), in his book *Annals*, mentions the policy of banishing political prisoners to small islands (Sections 3:68; 4:30; 15:71).

Patmos, a rocky, volcanic and sparsely populated isle, was an appropriate place to send captives. Banishment was a terrible punishment that often involved whippings and being bound in chains before the prisoner was sent off for years of hard labor in rock quarries. At John’s advanced age it would have been a harrowing ordeal. Yet he mentions it as an honor to participate “in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (verse 9).

During the time of John’s exile, traditionally 94-96, history records violent persecution against Christians under the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96). This despot declared himself a god and demanded the worship of his subjects—with the exception of Jews. This meant that once a year each head of household had to appear before authorities, burn incense to the emperor and declare, “Caesar is lord.” Those who refused were branded as traitors and either sentenced to death or exiled.

Since Christians confessed they had only one Lord, Jesus Christ, they were mercilessly hounded. John, the last living apostle of the original 12, apparently was banished for this reason.

## A message to seven churches

While on Patmos, John received a long and complicated vision from Jesus Christ (verses 1-2, 10-20) with the instructions: “. . . What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea” (verse 11).

How accurate are the descriptions of these seven cities mentioned in the book of Revelation according to archaeology and history? Interestingly, Jesus



*Seven cities mentioned in Revelation apparently formed an ancient postal route connected by Roman roads stretching from the port city of Ephesus to Laodicea. John received his visions while exiled on the island of Patmos off the coast of modern-day Turkey.*



**The port city of Ephesus** played a prominent role in apostolic times and is mentioned in six New Testament books. Although it was home to a large Christian congregation addressed by the apostle John in the book of Revelation, Ephesus was also a center of idolatrous worship of the goddess Diana, whose temple (right) was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It also boasted temples for the worship of several Roman emperors, including Hadrian (above), Augustus and Domitian.

used some of the characteristics of each city to spiritually evaluate its congregation and to prophesy the history of His Church up to His second coming.

### The first church: Ephesus

The port city of Ephesus was a short voyage from Patmos. Therefore one could logically send a letter there and then on to the remaining six cities Christ mentioned.

Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of the Roman roads that stretched from Ephesus to Laodicea. “It is no accident,” notes John McRay, “that the letters in Revelation 1-3 are arranged in this same sequence. Beginning with Ephesus, the roads follow a geographic semicircle, extending northward, turning to the east, and continuing southward to Laodicea—thus connecting the cities on what must have functioned as an ancient postal route” (*Archaeology and the New Testament*, 1997, p. 242).

The apostle Paul had founded a large church in Ephesus, and now Jesus addressed the members there with a prophetic message that applied to them and was predictive of the Church’s future. Jesus had told John: “Write the things which you have seen, and *the things which are* [at the present time], and *the things which will take place after this*

[in the future]” (verse 19, emphasis added throughout). Hence part of the message of Revelation would apply to John’s time, and part would be for future generations.

Christ recognizes the effort of the Ephesian brethren, in spite of many obstacles, to keep the faith and carry out the commission He had given them. “I know your works, your labor, your patience,” He told them, “and that you cannot bear those who are evil” (Revelation 2:2).

In Ephesus was much evil to avoid—within and without the congregation. It was there that Paul had warned the “elders of the church” (Acts 20:17): “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (verses 29-30).

Moreover, the Ephesian brethren had to resist the many temptations the immensely popular pagan temple worship offered them. Archaeologists have found at Ephesus the ruins of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Diana, or Artemis, also mentioned in the Bible (Acts 19:27). Thousands of priests and priestesses served the temple; many of the priestesses were dedicated to cultic prostitution.

Centuries earlier Heracleitus, an Ephesian philosopher, described the inhabitants there as “fit only to be drowned[,] and the reason why [they] could never laugh or smile was because [they] lived amidst such terrible uncleanness.” Such was the reputation of ancient Ephesus. It would have been difficult to live as a Christian in the midst of such an immoral city.

Knowing this, Christ gives the brethren the hope that if they persevere in the faith they will receive something that all the temple worship of Diana could never give them—the gift of eternal life. “To him who overcomes,” He promised, “I will give to eat from the tree of life [symbolizing eternal life], which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7).

### Smyrna: Center of emperor worship

The next city on the ancient postal circuit was Smyrna, about 40 miles north of Ephesus. It was a flourishing city and the main center of emperor worship.

Jesus tells the church in Smyrna: “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days” (verse 10).

These words had not only a prophetic sense but a literal fulfillment in John's day as well. The brethren in Smyrna knew they were special targets of the persecution under Domitian, for the city's history had shown an unwavering loyalty to Rome. It was proud that it had been declared a "free city," which meant its residents had the right to govern their own affairs.

"Long before Rome was undisputed mistress of the world," comments William Barclay, "Smyrna had cast in its lot with her, never to waver in its fidelity. Cicero [the Roman orator] called Smyrna 'one of our most faithful and most ancient allies' . . . Such was the reverence of Smyrna for Rome that as far back as 195 B.C. it was the first city in the world to erect a temple to the goddess Roma" (*Letters to the Seven Churches*, 1957, p. 29).

The only way Church members could go about peacefully in this place was to carry a certificate showing they had offered incense to the emperor and proclaimed him lord. Among the ancient papyri letters that archaeologists have found is one with such a request and another with an accompanying certificate declaring: "We, the representatives of the Emperor, Serenos and Hermas, have seen you sacrificing."

Many of the Christians in Smyrna would die because of fierce persecutions. So Christ encourages and reminds them that He is offering them something Caesar worship could never provide—the chance to live forever. He exhorts them: "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (verse 11).

### **Pergamos: "Where Satan's throne is"**

Next on the Roman mail route was Pergamos, the Roman capital of Asia Minor. This city would never reach the commercial greatness of Ephesus or Smyrna, but it was the indisputable center of religious, medical and artistic culture of the region. The city's famous library, with 200,000 parchment rolls, was rivaled only by the library in Alexandria, Egypt.

Christ tells the church at Pergamos: "I know your works, and where you dwell, *where Satan's throne is*" (verse 13). Again, this prophecy had a literal fulfillment as well

as serving as a description of a future time for the Church.

The mention of Satan's throne in Pergamos likely refers to the famous worship of its most popular deity, the serpent god Asklepios Soter, whose Latin equivalent means "the man-instructing serpent and savior." The serpent god was none other than Satan, whom Revelation describes as "that serpent of old, called the Devil" (Revelation 12:9).

Pergamos was so renowned for the worship of this god, who supposedly healed the sick, that this deity was called "the Pergamene god." Many of the coins discovered in Pergamos have the serpent as part of their design.

The remains of the shrine to Asklepios have been uncovered by archaeologists. "A 450-foot segment of the widest section was excavated and reconstructed so visitors to the site can experience a beautiful approach to the Asklepieion," notes John McRay. "Dedicated to Asklepios Soter, the god of healing, the Asklepieion was a kind of Mayo Clinic of the ancient world . . . Numerous treatment rooms, sleeping rooms (for incubation and autosuggestion in psychiatric treatment), meeting rooms, and temples were located here . . . Patients coming to the shrine believed that Asklepios would heal them. There was no perceived dissonance between science and religion in the ancient world" (McRay, pp. 271-272).

"From all over the world," adds William Barclay, "people flocked to Pergamos for relief of their sicknesses. R.H. Charles has called Pergamos 'the Lourdes of the ancient world' . . . Thus, pagan religion had its center in Pergamos. There was the worship of Athene and Zeus, with its magnificent altar dominating the city [now partially reconstructed in the Pergamum Museum in Berlin]. There was the worship of Asklepios, bringing sick people from far and near, and above all there were the demands of Caesar worship, hanging forever like a poised sword above the heads of the Christians" (*The Daily Study Bible*, notes on Revelation 2:12-17, Bible Explorer Software).

### **Origin of serpent worship in Pergamos**

How did serpent worship begin in

Pergamos? Some historians trace it to the collapse of the Babylonian Empire, when some Chaldean priests established their religious center in Pergamos. "The defeated Chaldeans fled to Asia Minor, and fixed their central college at Pergamos," notes historian William Barker in his book *Lares and Penates of Cilicia* (1853, p. 232).

Certainly the Old Testament identifies Satan's chief seat of activity as being in ancient Babylon, where the doctrines of its mystery religion "made all the earth drunk" (Jeremiah 51:7). This would make its religious successor, Pergamos, the temporary new "Satan's seat" of the Babylonian mystery religion.

"That seat," comments Alexander Hislop, "after the death of Belshazzar [the last Babylonian king], and the expulsion of the Chaldean priesthood from Babylon by the Medo-Persian kings, was at Pergamos, where afterwards was one of the seven churches of Asia. There, in consequence, for many centuries was 'Satan's seat.'"

"There, under favor of the deified kings of Pergamos, was his favorite abode and was the worship of Asklepios, under the form of the serpent . . . Pergamos itself became part and parcel of the Roman Empire, when Attalus III, the last of its kings, at his death, left by will all his dominions to the Roman people in 133 BC" (*The Two Babylons*, 1959, p. 240).

In this way, the Roman emperors had become the heirs of "Satan's seat" during John's day. Later, when the Roman Empire collapsed, its successor, the Holy Roman Empire, would inherit the role. It is noteworthy that Revelation 17:4-5, 18 reveals that in the end time a powerful religious system from the ancient past will again reign over the nations and be identified as "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth."

### **Pressure to compromise in Thyatira**

Some 40 miles east of Pergamos lay Thyatira, a city important for its commerce in wool and textiles.

When the city was excavated from 1968 to 1971, its architectural remains showed it had the typical Roman style of colonnades and public buildings and a temple to the



**Pergamos, Roman capital of Asia Minor,** was the center for worship of the serpent god Asklepios Soter, which supposedly had great healing powers. This god's massive shrine, the Asklepion (left), attracted visitors from all

over the known world. Such corrupt worship led John to refer to Pergamos as the city "where Satan's throne is." Like other major Roman cities, it erected temples for emperor worship, including the Trajaneum (right).

goddess Artemis. The city was especially famous for its fine woolen cloth, usually dyed in a shade that came to be called Thyatiran purple. It was from Thyatira that Lydia, a seller of purple and convert to Christianity, had come (Acts 16:14). Inscriptions at the site reveal the existence of trade guilds, many of them associated with the powerful textile industry.

Christ says about this congregation: "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (Revelation 2:19-20).

Since Thyatira was a religious center, and the home of powerful guilds demanding religious participation of their workers in their banquets, it was difficult for Christians to resist falling into idolatry.

"The strong trade guilds in this city," says Leon Morris, "would have made it very difficult for any Christian to earn his living without belonging to a guild. But membership involved attendance at guild banquets, and this in turn meant eating meat which had first been sacrificed to an idol. What was a Christian to do? If he did not conform he was out of a job . . .

"The teaching of Jezebel [probably a

symbolic name] apparently reasoned that an idol is of no consequence, and advised Christians to eat such meals. That these meals all too readily degenerated into sexual looseness made matters worse. But we can understand that some Christians would welcome a heresy of this type. It enabled them to maintain a Christian profession while countenancing and even engaging in immoral heathen revels" (*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 1975, p. 71).

Christ reminds the Thyatiran brethren they must come out of that worldly society, no matter how enticing it appeared, and not compromise with the truth. He promises to those of Thyatira who remain faithful that they will be arrayed, not in Thyatiran purple, a cloth used mainly by Roman royalty, but at His coming with the spiritual mantle of rulership over the nations.

He tells them that "he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—as I also have received from My Father" (Revelation 2:26-27).

#### **Sardis: Warning to watch**

Poised above the rich Hermus Valley, Sardis was 30 miles south of Thyatira. The city appeared as a gigantic watchtower and was considered impregnable. Five roads converged below it and contributed to

Sardis's status as a great commercial center. The wealth of the city—which had been the capital of the Lydian Empire under the opulent King Croesus—was legendary.

Christ exhorts this church, "*Be watchful*, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God" (Revelation 3:2).

The Sardian brethren could readily identify with a warning to be watchful. The only two times Sardis had been conquered were when its citizens had become overconfident and failed to watch.

Once, when King Cyrus of Persia besieged the city, the Sardians, nestled in their fortress high above, paid little attention to the invader. Cyrus could not find a way to get up to the citadel and even offered a reward to the soldier who discovered a pathway. Sometime later a vigilant Persian soldier spied a defender who had accidentally dropped his helmet from above. The careless soldier climbed down a secret pathway to retrieve it, and that night the Persians led their troops up the same pathway and to the top. To their surprise, the site was completely unguarded. The watchmen had gone home to sleep, thinking there was no need to keep guard at night—and so Sardis fell.

Incredibly, several centuries later the same sequence of events occurred when a Greek general besieged the city. After a year's siege the Greeks appeared to lose all

hope of conquering the city. Then one of the Sardinian soldiers dropped a helmet and retrieved it. That night the Greeks led some men up the steep cliff. When they reached the top, the place was again unguarded. Sardis's inhabitants had forgotten their lesson, and their city fell again.

Christ uses this lesson to drive home a powerful spiritual point to His Church: "Therefore *if you will not watch*, I will come upon you *as a thief*, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you" (verse 3).

### Faithfulness in Philadelphia

About 25 miles southeast of Sardis lay the city of Philadelphia, newest of the seven cities. An imperial road passed through it from Rome to the east, so it became known as "the gateway to the East."

Christ says to this church: "These things says He who is holy, He who is true . . . Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more" (Revelation 3:7, 11-12).

Christ emphasizes His loyalty to His true followers and reminds them to be equally faithful to Him. If they persevere in His Word, He will give them a crown that they may rule with Him in His Kingdom.

We find a definite theme of brotherly fidelity in this section. The Philadelphian brethren could well identify with this admonition.

*Philadelphia* means "brotherly love." The city was named after the love the king who founded the city held for his brother. The city was established by Attalus II (159-138 B.C.), who was called Philadelphus ("brother lover") in honor of his loyal affection toward his brother, King Eumenes II of Pergamos. During his brother's lifetime Attalus II was his most loyal assistant. He successfully commanded his brother's forces in several wars and later became the trusted ambassador to their ally, Rome. There he won respect and admiration from the Romans for his brotherly fidelity.

*The New Bible Dictionary* comments: "As Philadelphus was renowned for his loyalty to his brother, so the church, the true Philadelphia, inherits and fulfills his character by its steadfast loyalty to

Christ" (1982, "Philadelphia," p. 926).

### Laodicea: Warning to repent

The last city on the route was Laodicea, 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia. With three main roads crossing it, the city was one of the richest commercial centers in the world. The Laodiceans were famous for producing shiny, black wool clothing and boasted of an outstanding medical center that specialized in eye ointments. With the wealth amassed, it had also become the banking center of the region.

Christ says to this church: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see" (verses 15-18).

Archaeologists have discovered the main aqueduct going to Laodicea, and several miles of it can still be traced. The water piped in from the south had so many minerals that the Roman engineers had covers installed so they could remove the mineral deposits before the pipes clogged.

"For all its wealth, the city had poor water," says *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*: "The water either came from the nearby hot springs and was cooled to lukewarm or came from a cooler source and warmed up in the aqueduct on the way" (notes on Revelation 3, Zondervan software).

Christ uses the Laodiceans' lukewarm and distasteful water to point out that their poor spiritual state is equally offensive to Him. He warns them that, if they do not rapidly improve their spiritual condition, He will reject them. He detests the Laodicean attitude of compromising with God's laws. By contrast, He later describes those who are faithful to Him as "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

Further, even if their clothing were

world renowned, Christ tells them their "spiritual garments" were in pitiful condition. He recommends they focus instead on buying from Him the spiritual clothing of true righteousness that He later describes as "fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:8).

Jesus next tells those brethren, who were blind to their true spiritual condition, that the "Phrygian powder" concocted in their medical center as an eye ointment was useless. Instead, He advised them to use His true spiritual eye salve so they can clearly see and repent of their compromising attitudes.

Lastly, Christ warns them not to put their trust in their physical wealth but in Him, who can develop the true gold that comes from overcoming trials and building righteous spiritual character. This solid advice is of lasting value to the entirety of the Church at any time in its history.

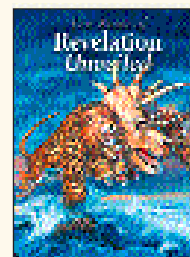
### Conclusion

This concludes our archaeological review of the last book of the Bible. We hope this series has been a satisfying journey through the Bible and that it has strengthened your faith.

Throughout this series we have confirmed what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "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." **GN**

### Recommended Reading

To learn more about the book of Revelation and what it reveals about the past, present and future, be sure to request your free copy of *The*



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# John

## *An Apostle of Godly Love*

by Jerold Aust

**T**he apostle John had an impressive biblical résumé. We first learn of him when he and his brother left their nets on the Sea of Galilee to become “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17) with Jesus of Nazareth. He helped arrange the last Passover meal and service for Jesus and his fellow disciples. He was known to the high priest and moved freely among the Jewish leadership.

John faithfully remained with Jesus’ mother during her Son’s crucifixion. On the morning after Jesus’ resurrection, John ran with Peter to the empty tomb. He saw the risen Christ walking on the Tiberias shore. With his brother James and the other apostles, he helped establish the first church in Jerusalem. Later he served other congregations in Ephesus and Asia Minor.

As if that weren’t enough, he wrote five books of the Bible: the Gospel and three letters that bear his name, and the book of Revelation.

John’s Gospel and his three epistles focus on love. In His Gospel he refers to himself as that disciple whom Jesus loved.

If you want to know about the way of God, study Jesus Christ. If you want to know the love of Christ, study John.

### **John’s background**

John was a Judean Jew who knew well the geography and customs of his homeland. His meticulous attention to numbers (John 2:6; 6:13, 19; 21:8, 11), names and other

details substantiates his claim as an eyewitness of Jesus and His teachings and miracles (John 19:35; 21:24-25).

John’s father was Zebedee (Matthew 4:21). His mother was apparently the Salome who served Jesus in Galilee and was present at the crucifixion (compare Mark 15:40-41 and Matthew 27:56). Salome appears to have been a sister of Mary the mother of Jesus (compare John 19:25 and Mark 15:40).

If so, then John was Jesus’ cousin and

*If you want to know about the way of God, study Jesus Christ. If you want to know the love of Christ, study John.*

probably about the same age. Since Jesus and John the Baptist were also cousins, this would also make him a cousin to John the Baptist, whose mother, Elizabeth, was a close relative of Jesus’ mother (Luke 1:36).

John appears to have worked in partnership with his brother James and his father, Zebedee (Matthew 4:21), as well as with Simon Peter (Luke 5:10). He had not only his fishing business in Capernaum, complete with hired servants, but he may have also had a house in Jerusalem (Mark 1:19-20; John 19:27). He was even an acquaintance of the high priest in Jerusalem (John 18:15-16).

Originally John appears to have been a disciple of John the Baptist (he is apparently the unnamed disciple in John 1:35, 40). Scripture shows that, after heeding the persuasive preaching of John the Baptist, John

the future apostle was ready to take his stand with his Savior. He was one of Jesus’ first five disciples (John 1:35-51). He was with Christ when He performed His first recorded miracle at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee (John 2:2-11).

Later, John apparently returned to his fishing enterprise at Capernaum. After a while Jesus called him and his brother to leave their business and follow Him (Mark 1:19-20). From that point on, John became a close friend and an eyewitness of the words

and deeds of Jesus, which he wrote about in what would become the Gospel of John.

Jesus nicknamed John a Son of Thunder (Mark 3:17). The Gospels don’t explain why, but it could be because John appears to have originally had a flaring temper. Early in Jesus’ ministry, for example, John forbade a stranger to use the name of Christ while casting out demons (Mark 9:38). On another occasion Jesus had to rebuke John for his hotheadedness when he wanted to call down fire from heaven onto a Samaritan village (Luke 9:52-56). Rubbing shoulders with Jesus, hearing Him speak of godly love and watching Him practice it among those who didn’t appreciate Him could have been what

transformed John into an apostle





John was one of the three disciples of Jesus' inner circle (Mark 5:37; 9:1-9; 14:33). He was recognized as the one closest to Jesus. In fact, at the 12 original disciples' last Passover together, the Bible portrays John leaning on Jesus' chest (John 13:23-25), an expression of friendship and brotherly love. If a picture is worth a thousand words, this image is priceless. John's writings explain why he was so close to Jesus: This disciple practiced the godly love he wrote about.

### "The disciple whom Jesus loved"

John used an interesting writing style in his Gospel. Throughout the book he wrote of himself indirectly, as though he were another person. For example, five times he wrote of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Let's look a little more closely at two of the five times John referred to himself this way.

In John 13, at Jesus' last Passover with His disciples, Jesus was deeply troubled because He knew Judas Iscariot was soon to betray Him.

When He told His disciples, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me" (verse 21), they were worried too. They began to look askance at each other, perhaps trying to decide who might be the one of whom Christ spoke.

At that point John set the scene for the events that followed. He shares with us the remembrance that one of the apostles was leaning on Jesus' chest and referred to that specific person as the one "whom Jesus loved" (verse 23).

As was the custom, Jesus and the disciples ate their meal reclining around a low table. In this relaxed atmosphere the disciple "whom Jesus loved" was sufficiently comfortable with his master to rest his head on Jesus' chest.

Simon Peter motioned for John to ask to whom Jesus was referring when He said someone would betray Him. So John asked, "Lord, who is it?" (verses 24-25).

Jesus answered plainly: "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." Jesus dipped the bread and gave it to Judas Iscariot. He then told Judas, "What you do, do quickly" (verses 26-27).

Amazingly, none of the disciples—including John—understood Jesus' words to Judas. Some thought He told Judas to buy necessities for the feast while

instructed Judas to give some money to the poor (verses 28-29).

Among other information and lessons revealed in this drama, John indirectly identified himself as the one "whom Jesus loved."

John used this description to identify himself at another intense moment later that day. Even as Jesus was being crucified, He demonstrated His love for Mary, His mother.

"Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home" (John 19:25-27, New International Version).

Jesus entrusted the care of His own mother to His beloved friend and follower, John. This, too, shows the closeness and trust the two shared.

This incident is telling in another way. As Christ was being put to death by the Roman authorities, John proved fearless in the face of potential accusations that he was one of Jesus' disciples. John ran the risk of being incarcerated, scourged and crucified for being an accomplice to His Master. Yet He was not afraid to be seen supporting Him in the hour of His greatest need.

His presence at Jesus' feet in His hour of trial at once validates Jesus' love for John and John's reverence for Jesus. The godly love that each had for the other reassured Christ that He could count on John to take care of His mother from that hour.

### John's godly love

John lived a life of godly love. He wrote expressively about this kind of concern for others.

His Gospel is filled with many of Jesus' discourses and conversations. John in particular wrote more about what Jesus said than what He did.

John's three letters overflow with statements that help us understand how God's kind of love contrasts with the human version. Let's notice two examples.

In his first epistle, John gives us a direct definition of godly love: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). John knew the source of godly love, understood it and practiced it. He realized that God communicates His love through the laws He gives

us, the laws by which we are to live.

Jesus Himself said that God's law can be summarized in two great commandments: Love God with all your heart, soul and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). John similarly summarized God's very nature and character when he wrote, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16, emphasis added throughout).

John focused on the most important virtue and gift of God: love. God's love is different from the natural love of humans. The Greek verb for God's kind of love, *agapao*, means a deliberately applied concern for others. A lesser level of love, *phileo* in the Greek, means a fondness or affection for another person. John focused on and taught about godly love as the most important virtue a human being can exhibit.

John also contrasted godly love with human love in 1 John 4: 18-21: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."

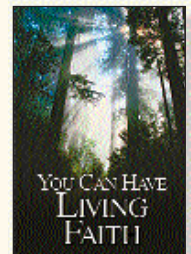
John recognized the contradiction in the concept that someone could love God yet hate his brother. He knew that we humans can distort the concept of love to make it mean just about anything we want it to mean. But God's love isn't like that. Godly love always puts care and concern for the other person first.

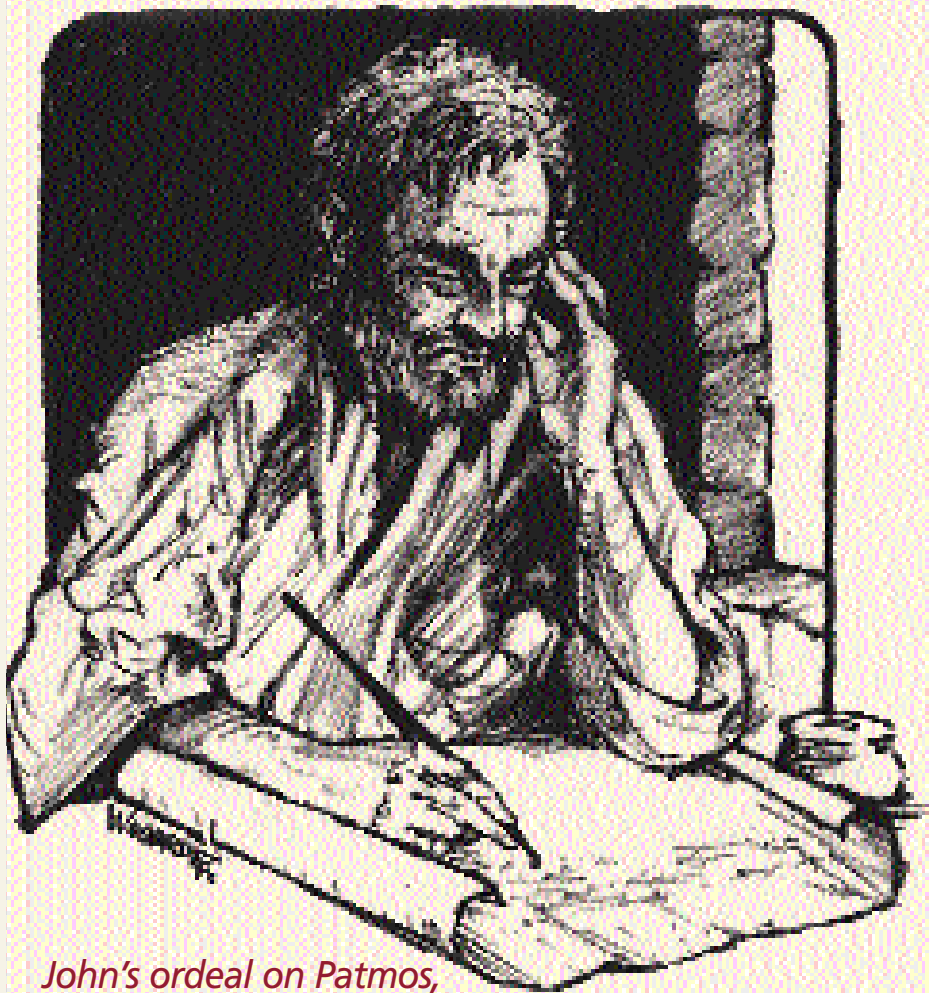
John understood godly love. He knew it because Jesus had demonstrated it to him and the other disciples. John had watched Jesus live by it and apply it for 3½ years. John knew where godly love came from and

### Recommended Reading

What is faith? How can you have a loving, trusting relationship with God? Be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*. Please contact the

office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2, or visit our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).





*John's ordeal on Patmos, where Christ revealed to him what we know as the book of Revelation, was a series of miraculous events.*

how mankind should express it. He believed and practiced it with all his heart.

**John on Patmos**

John's Gospel includes many events and details from Christ's life. His record is more personal than that of the other three Gospels and so helps complete for us the picture of Jesus' life and teachings. John, so close to the Son of God, had opportunities few others had. When we read His Gospel from this perspective, we perceive it as an intimate narrative.

In the decade of the 90s, John, though getting on in years, was still teaching and ministering in Asia Minor. During the Christian persecutions under Emperor Domitian (81-96), he was banished to the island of Patmos, in the Aegean Sea.

Christ permitted the apostle's exile on the island for a reason. Now, some 65 years beyond Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, He revealed to John the dark days that lay ahead—not just during his times, but

especially in the troubling and tumultuous last days.

Responding to Jesus' command to "write" (Revelation 1:11, 19), John recorded prophecies of the great events that would transpire from his time until Jesus returned.

John gives us a loving perspective of what Christ expected of him and of us. Twice in his first chapter John uses a phrase that depicts the responsibilities of Jesus' disciples, especially in the face of persecution.

In verse 2 he writes that he bears "witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw." He repeats this instructive thought a few verses later: "I, John, . . . was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (verse 9).

Notice that John speaks of "the word of God" and "the testimony of Jesus Christ." The word of God encompasses God's instruction, recorded for us in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The testimony of Jesus Christ can be defined as that which

Christians live and teach from Jesus' life, instructions and example.

John was faithful to Christ in all these things in spite of the threat of persecution and death. He proved his faith and love in traumatic times, although he was now in his 90s. At one point John heard a loud voice from heaven commend all Christians who overcome Satan: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb [Jesus' shed blood] and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Revelation 12:11).

John's ordeal on Patmos, where Christ revealed to him what we know as the book of Revelation, was a series of miraculous events. Without this last book of Scripture, the people of God could not understand many details about the time of the end. John's understanding and commitment to God's love and His beloved friend and Savior made possible the writing of this book.

**The apostle of godly love**

Few men knew Jesus of Nazareth as well as John did. A mutual understanding and respect for the unselfish love of God bound their relationship. Jesus had special love for John, perhaps because John had such an abiding reverence for the godly love exhibited by His Master. Beyond this special relationship, some of John's personal traits may well have made him an easy person to love.

We've learned that, early in the life of John, Jesus nicknamed him a Son of Thunder. John's writings, however, reveal a completely different man. John changed his outlook as he followed in the footsteps of his Master, listening and heeding His teachings. He was highly regarded by Jesus and the other apostles and, surprisingly, apparently by the sometimes-contrary high priest. This speaks volumes of John's character.

John understood and taught godly love. He knew that God's instructions, summarized in the Ten Commandments, are an expression of love from God to mankind, then from mankind to God and human beings to other human beings. Godly love is the greatest gift God can impart to mankind and the greatest we can return to Him and share with others. John lived the love of God.

John was an apostle who reflected God's love. He learned about godly love from God, who Himself is love (1 John 4:8). John taught the truth and worth of godly love and left us an outstanding example. **GM**

# Planning for Life

Part  
Three

## Be Sure Your Career Path Fits God's Goals

by Ken T. ...

In part 2 of this series we covered following a career path that fits you, whether it involves a college degree, a trade school or a career that doesn't require special training or higher education. Most people find *several* areas that are of interest to them and that fit their personality and aptitudes.

Some may be talented in sports, music or art. Perhaps mathematics or science is an interest that fits a person's aptitudes. Maybe mechanics, construction or engineering meets those criteria. The *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, available in most libraries in the United States, lists more than 28,000 jobs. For example, 16 job titles come under the "Art"

### Some careers have the potential to provide great material rewards but would involve activities that violate God's law.

classification, with another nine listed under "Artists." These two classifications include entries for various types of art and range from artist suppliers to creators of commercial and medical artwork.

The same variety can be found in almost every area of interest. Occupational titles number about 31,000. (The U.S. Census Bureau implemented the North American Industry Classification System for the 2000 census. The new system defines industry groups in Canada, the United States and Mexico. View the list online at [www.census.gov/hhes/www/ioindex/index.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/ioindex/index.html).)

How can you narrow the field to know which direction to head in choosing a career? In this article we cover several keys to consider.

#### Think about job demand

Something to consider is the future job market. Because of ever-changing circumstances, demands for some jobs will always be greater than for others. This doesn't mean there will be *no* need for people in the areas that show less growth but that there probably will be greater competition

for the jobs that come available.

When considering the types of careers to pursue, it's therefore wise to look for areas that will have greater needs in the future rather than struggling to compete for a job that may be hard to get—or may, over time, be phased out. Proverbs 27:12 offers some wise advice: "A sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them. The simpleton never looks, and suffers the consequences" (Living Bible).

For more information on careers projected to be the fastest growing through 2008, see the archives section of our online magazine devoted to youths at [www.youthmagazine.org/you/v1/01/career.asp](http://www.youthmagazine.org/you/v1/01/career.asp).

The October 2000 issue has an article, "Careers in the New Millennium," that gives more details on most popular job fields as well as additional tips on charting your career path.

#### Consider God's instructions

A second major key is to make sure whatever career you choose is not at odds with God's law. It would indeed be foolish to get to the point in planning your life that you have almost decided on a career and then choose one that could be at odds with God's instructions for life.

We're admonished in Proverbs 3:5-6 to "put all your trust in the LORD and do not rely on your own understanding. At every step you take keep him in mind, and he will direct your path" (Revised English Bible).

Some careers have the potential to provide great material rewards but could involve activities that violate God's law. Examples are drug-dealing and confidence schemes and other forms of theft or even professional sports or entertainment that might lead to violations of the Ten

Commandments. Certain careers, although not inherently wrong, are difficult to pursue while obeying God's instruction to "remember the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20:8). To better understand the Fourth Commandment, please request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

God gave King Solomon of ancient Israel great wisdom. As a result, this wise king wrote: "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.



Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1, Revised Standard Version).

This verse does not refer to the structural stability of a building. It focuses on something much more important than that.

The builders of Egypt's massive pyramids did not know the God of the Bible, yet the structures they erected stand as a monument to their architectural genius. Nevertheless, the great empire for which those edifices were erected has long since ceased to exist.

This is but one of many examples that show that, without God's involvement and blessing, even the greatest of leaders and

empires will not enjoy lasting success.

But a kingdom is coming that will be unlike anything the world has ever seen. As shown in the pages of the Bible, God offers those who will obey Him the chance to be part of that kingdom. It will be a government that will encompass the earth (Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45) and last forever (verse 44; 7:18). It will finally solve the world's many problems. Who wouldn't like to have a part in a kingdom such as that?

**Prudent people will pay particular attention to their future. They will work to gain knowledge to help chart their course and put forth the effort to gain understanding about themselves and their future.**

Some might think such a goal is out of reach or too far in the future to be of practical concern. Our Creator, however, has quite a different perspective. He tells us that godliness is profitable at all times—both now, in this present life, and in the future (1 Timothy 4:8).

He promises great blessings now *and* later to those who seek Him and follow the advice He gives us in His Word, the Bible. Therefore, asking for God's direction and considering His perspective on any career choices we are inclined to make is one of the smartest things we can do. It can bring benefits that help us not only now but for eternity.

#### Preparing for another future

Besides avoiding the setting of goals that are immoral or contrary to God's law, what other considerations should

we make in planning a career?

Though most people don't realize it, Jesus Christ will return to earth to establish the kingdom we referred to earlier when we cited the book of Daniel. When that promised event comes, the establishing of the Kingdom of God, those who live over into that kingdom as human beings who already knew God and His way of life, will be in an excellent position to help rebuild a world that will have been ravaged by the

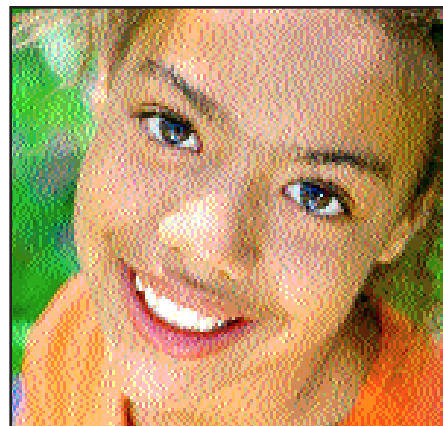
plagues and wars described in the book of Revelation. (To learn more about the Kingdom and the events that will lead up to it, be sure to request our free booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.)

If you want to take the most forward-looking approach to deciding on a career, why not consider how your choices would fit into the coming Kingdom of God? If it begins in the near future, those who are just entering the job market may immediately be in a position to use their skills to help build the kind of world human visionaries and leaders have dreamed about for centuries.

The Bible describes the Kingdom of God as a world in which even wild animals will live at peace and the earth will be full of the knowledge of God (Isaiah 11:6-9). Nations will turn from building instruments of war to creating machinery conducive to peace (Isaiah 2:2-4). Crop yields and productivity will soar to new heights, and cities will be rebuilt according to God's specifications rather than man's (Amos 9:13-14).

This does not imply that everyone will need training for such fields as construction and agriculture. There will be no shortage of opportunities as a whole new society comes about. There will be a need for all kinds of job skills, from engineers to teachers to artists, to name a few.

Asking yourself how a potential career choice could contribute positively to the process of establishing or functioning in a new society based on godly principles can help you decide whether you are entering an area in line with God's plan. These questions can help you be sure you are not building your "house" on your own (Psalm 127:1), but have God's backing and support in an endeavor that is truly in line with His thinking. **GN**



## Want to Learn More?

If you like our youth features in *The Good News*, take a look at our new E-magazine, *Youth United*, at [www.youthmagazine.org](http://www.youthmagazine.org).

This magazine is specially written for our younger *Good News* audience. Each issue is packed with helpful, eye-opening articles to help today's teens and young adults get the most out of life—both now and in the future.



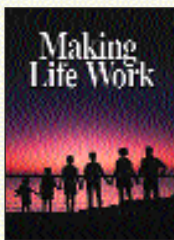
You'll uncover lots of fascinating facts, meet many interesting people, discover what's really going on behind the scenes in our world, learn answers to your questions and find practical, down-to-earth guidance on all kinds of subjects.

Check out [www.youthmagazine.org](http://www.youthmagazine.org) today—you'll be amazed at all the fascinating things you'll discover!



### Recommended Reading

Looking for some good advice? You may not realize it, but you probably already own the best self-help book ever published, one that's loaded with practical, down-to-earth advice to help you be successful in your career, marriage, family relationships, finances, friendships and every other major aspect of life. That book is your Bible.



We've prepared a guide, *Making Life Work*, to help you discover the Bible's principles for success. For your free copy, contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).



# Letters From Our Readers

## Holocaust survivor

I am Jewish and a holocaust survivor. Yours is a Christian magazine that shows understanding of the Jewish people in a way that I have never seen before.

A.S., Boca Raton, Florida

## Concerning the Ten Commandments

The commandments are a social code of conduct and instruction: Do not kill, covet, bear false witness (lie), etc. They do not admonish for promiscuous behavior. In their wisdom our elders obviously considered that sexual misconduct took a far lower priority. Why, then, do many Christians get worked up over sexual connotations when all around them their representative (Christian) governments with community approval commit every violation of the teachings that they espouse to hold so dear? I suggest that the author of the article (March-April issue, p. 16) refer to the Kinsey Report of 1946. It will show an alarming promiscuity within the Christian community. The hypocrisy within the religion is exposed daily by the general behavior of its adherents.

K.H., Devonport, Australia

*Perhaps you misunderstand the nature of God's law. God gave the Ten Commandments as a basic code of conduct that applies to all of mankind. It is a complete law covering every aspect of human behavior in statement or in principle. The commandments against adultery and coveting a neighbor's spouse, not to mention honoring one's father and mother, all solidly support the family structure. It is precisely because we are neglecting to obey these particular commands that social structures are rapidly falling apart. As a result, we continually reap the natural consequences of divorce, broken homes, cohabitation, single parenthood, resultant juvenile crime and more—the list is endless.*

*It is obvious that a large part of mainstream Christianity includes many professing adherents who make only a token effort to observe the Ten Commandments, with many resultant failures in their lives. Others try their best, with Christ's help, to submit to God's fundamental law. To under-*

*stand more fully, please request our free 80-page booklet, The Ten Commandments.*

## European sex-slave traffic

I just wanted to say thanks for putting out such a wonderful magazine. You've been so gracious that you even put it out free. This is truly the Christian way. I was interested in the small item you had in this month's edition about people being sold as sex slaves in some European countries. Please tell me more about this. Women all over the world are being treated like possessions. I'd like to learn more and find out what we can do to help.

A.S., Yokota AFB, Japan

*It is heartrending to hear about the evils being perpetrated against women in many areas of the world. You could contact the United Nations' office for drug control and crime prevention for additional information. It is likely that some charitable organizations are involved in trying to help these women. Perhaps a Web search on the Internet could help you locate sources.*

## Old and young appreciate Good News

Thank you for the latest *Good News* magazine. I am almost 80 years old, but I would like to be found reading something good. I just cannot understand how you can supply all the reading material free of charge.

W.F.H., Pretoria, South Africa

I'm a 10-year-old student. I started to read your magazine in a doctor's surgery. It intrigued me enough to write to you and ask for your free magazine. It's really cool. I didn't get time to read the March-April issue, but what I saw in 20 minutes looked okay. I'll be sure to check out your Web sites.

Student from Victoria, Australia

I've been richly blessed by all the literature you've been sending me and all for free, both the magazine of understanding and the Bible lessons. They are helping me very much as a young Christian and young adult in these present evil days to stand firm in the Lord.

Reader from Papua New Guinea

## Seeking to worship with others

Thank you for your explanation of

things, and my compliments on the article, "Europe's Coming Religious Revival" in the May-June issue. I find that I agree with some of the issues you discuss. Do you have a church in the Charleston, West Virginia, area? If so, is anyone welcome, and what would the services be like compared to traditional church services?

W.S., West Virginia

I am not sure how I started getting the magazines, but I am very glad that I do get them. I enjoy reading literature that does not belittle what the Bible actually says. There is no adding or taking away from the Word where your magazines are concerned. I looked in the phone book and cannot find the local congregation in which to worship with other believers. Please give the address and the times my family should be there.

L.D.-C., Dayton, Ohio

*The United Church of God has congregations in most larger U.S. cities and many others around the world. We have sent both readers information on how to contact the pastors of congregations in their cities.*

*The United Church of God welcomes any who wish to worship with us in peace. Our typical service consists of several congregational hymns followed by an opening prayer. Then there is usually a 10- to 15-minute message followed by more hymns, brief church announcements and sometimes a special musical presentation. The pastor then brings the sermon, followed by a final hymn and closing prayer. Many of our congregations are small groups. All of them are pleased to greet and talk with visitors. Our pastors are glad to give more details and answer questions.*

## Clean and unclean meats

I want to thank you for a tremendous March-April *Good News*. It is one of those rare issues that had me nodding my head up and down. I learned something new from your booklet about clean and unclean meats, which I have had doubts about for many years despite my reading of many articles and booklets. This fully convinced me. Maybe it was the way it was written in a new light.

N.L., Internet

## Prisoner appreciates literature

I am a prisoner in a California state prison. I happened across two of your booklets in my unit, *You Can Have Living Faith* and *The Ten Commandments*. I think they are great. I don't know whom to thank for such a wonderful and inspiring package of Christian literature—you, the United Church of God, or the man who abandoned these two booklets. I'll just thank the Lord and leave it at that.

R.G., Soledad, California

## Letters from Canada

Will you please send me the booklets offered in *The Good News*, March-April issue? I find great truths and blessings in your articles. Please find enclosed a check to defray the cost of postage.

J.B., Penticton, British Columbia

I realize there are worthy sources such as yours, and some missionary causes, so I divide the tithe where I feel I can help. Recently I had an income-tax refund that was not expected. I believe the Scripture,

“Honor the Lord with your substance and with the firstfruits of all your increase.” I believe your magazine is teaching God's way. Enclosed, as to the Lord, is my gift. I appreciate and enjoy *The Good News*.

Reader from London, Ontario

## Are the annual Holy Days necessary?

The annual feasts of God are celebrated only by Jews, except Pentecost, when all born-again believers receive God's Holy Spirit. It is not for gentiles to celebrate them. Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Feasts of Trumpets and Tabernacles and the Last Great Day are for Jews. If you disagree, please explain.

Mrs. C.D., Cornwall, England

*The idea that the biblical feasts are only for the Jewish community is deeply embedded in the thinking of most of mainstream Christianity. However, the Scriptures point to a quite different conclusion. Leviticus 23 helps explain: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy*

*convocations, these are My feasts”* (verses 1-2). *The rest of the chapter goes on to expound the annual Holy Days and festivals you mention.*

*Although they were originally revealed to Israel, the important point to understand is that they are God's feasts, not belonging solely to the Jews or any other ethnic group. This is why we find the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:8 exhorting gentile believers to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and prophecies in Zechariah 14:16-19 describing how all nations will come to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles after Christ's return. Chapter 1 of our free booklet God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind shows that the New Testament Church observed the annual festivals. They have great meaning, revealing the plan and purpose of God for humanity.*

*Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to The Good News, Box 541027, Cincinnati, Ohio 45254, U.S.A., or E-mail ginfo@ucg.org (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).*

# Questions & Answers

**Q: I would like some information, please. In Colossians 2:14 Paul speaks of “ordinances” nailed to a cross. What does this mean?**

S.B.G., Dalhart, Texas

A: The New Living Translation helps make the meaning much clearer: “He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross.” In our modern justice systems, a parallel to the “handwriting of ordinances” (King James Version) would be a formal written order of a death sentence issued after the evidence against the accused criminal—in this case, us—had been examined.

Colossians 2:14 speaks of a death warrant rightfully issued because we have all sinned by transgressing God's spiritual law (1 John 3:4). Since “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), we have all earned that sentence. However, the death sentence

is mercifully commuted when we repent of sin and seek God's forgiveness. The apostle Paul's wording is a dramatic characterization of the benefit of Jesus Christ's sacrifice. The death warrant bearing our names and the sins we committed is nailed to the cross of Christ, who willingly took the death penalty against humanity on Himself.

Forgiveness, however, is more than a pardon because the penalty for our spiritual crimes wasn't merely set aside. It was paid in full by Jesus' sacrificial death for us (1 John 1:7-9).

Imagine the certified copy of an execution order with your name on it being hammered onto the beam on which Christ was crucified—right next to His body, splattered with His life's blood—to show that you do not have to die for your spiritual crimes. This is the striking illustration Paul presents in Colossians 2:14.

Those who would have us believe that this passage refers to the cancellation of

God's law completely misrepresent Paul's powerful teaching analogy. After all, if Jesus came to do away with His Father's law, there would have been no need for Him to give His life for us since “where there is no law there is no transgression” (Romans 4:15; 5:13).

Again, likening the approach of those who believe God's law was canceled to what takes place in our modern justice system, they in effect are saying that commuting the death sentence of a murderer has canceled all laws against murder. This obviously makes no sense.

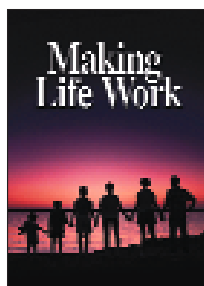
For further understanding about the effects of the sacrifice of Christ, forgiveness and real conversion, please request our free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. To better understand the purpose of God's law and why it is illogical to argue that Jesus abolished the law, be sure to request the booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

# Life Works Much Better With the Right Instruction Manual.



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Life simply isn't working for many people. They need help with the many problems, challenges and stresses of everyday life, but aren't sure where to turn.



You may not realize that most families already own the best self-help book ever published. Millions of copies have been published. Its words have been around for thousands of years. This book is *your Bible*.

Although it's a perpetual best-seller, few people take the time to read and study it. But those who do take the time find that it's a *timeless* book, filled with practical, down-to-earth advice from our Creator. It records

vital and profound lessons from real people. It can help us see and avoid the pitfalls that come with doing things our way.

It's filled with sound counsel on how to have happy families, marriages and friendships, how to properly rear children, how to manage family finances and succeed on the job, how to maintain your health, and so much more. In short, it tells us how to *make life work*.

In this booklet we've gathered and summarized some of the Bible's best advice on these topics. Be sure to request your free copy of *Making Life Work* today!

United Church of God  
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