

The Good News

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A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



After Iraq, What Next?

America Faces a Dangerous World

The Middle East: A Century of Turmoil • The World Divides Into Three Spheres
Cloning: A Dangerous Journey? • Homeland Security: The Crucial Missing Piece

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NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

United States: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795

Web site address: www.gnmagazine.org E-mail: info@ucg.org

Canada: United Church of God—Canada

Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada

Phone: (905) 876-9966, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (905) 876-0569

Web site address: www.ucg.ca

Caribbean: United Church of God, P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas

Phone: (242) 324-3169 Fax (242) 364-5566

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

Spanish-speaking areas: Iglesia de Dios Unida

P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.

Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org

EUROPE

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

Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 01257-453978 Web site address: www.goodnews.org.uk

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

Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten

Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24100 Bergamo, Italy

Phone: (+39) 035-452.16.26 Fax: (+39) 035-58.21.40

Web site address: www.labuonanotizia.org E-mail: redazione@labuonanotizia.org

Netherlands: P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands

Scandinavia: Guds Forenade Kyrka, Mailbox 144, 111 73 Stockholm, Sweden

Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 Fax: +44 1257 453978

AFRICA

Ghana: P.O. Box 3805, Kumasi, Ghana

Mauritius: P.O. Box 53, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius

South Africa: United Church of God, Southern Africa

P.O. Box 2209, Beacon Bay, East London 5205, South Africa

Phone and Fax: 043 748-1694 E-mail: rsa@ucg.org

Zambia and Malawi: P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia E-mail: ucgzamal@ucg.org

Zimbabwe: P.O. Box 3393, Paulington, Mutare, Zimbabwe

Phone: 09 263 20 68102 E-mail: zimbabwe@ucg.org

PACIFIC REGION

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

Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202 Fax: 07 55 202 122

Web site address: www.ucg.org.au E-mail: info@ucg.org.au

Fiji: United Church of God, P.O. Box 10577, Nadi Airport, Fiji Phone: 723-678

New Zealand: United Church of God, P.O. Box 22, Auckland 1015, New Zealand

Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763

Philippines: P.O. Box 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines

Phone: 82 241-0150 Web site address: www.ucg.org.ph

Tonga: United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 127, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

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

Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org

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Imagine, for a moment, two very different worlds in the coming months. In the first, U.S.-led military forces quickly drive Saddam Hussein from power. No longer do billions of dollars of Iraqi oil revenue go to support him and his goal to dominate the region through weapons of mass destruction. No longer does Iraq provide support for terrorist movements.

Next door, Iran, fearing it might be next in line for attack if it doesn't change its ways, abandons its own pursuit of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and its long support of terrorists. Its religious leaders give up their quest to transform the entire Middle East into a Muslim theocracy.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Syria, another longtime supporter of terrorism, abandons its longtime occupation of Lebanon and accepts peaceful relations with Israel. The Palestinians, seeing the military and terrorist support network provided by their key allies evaporate, elect new leadership and accept Israeli offers of a Palestinian state.

A calm settles over the Middle East. Former belligerent powers begin to use their oil wealth for modernizing their infrastructure, educating their people and diversifying their economies. The world economy, seeing oil supplies and markets stabilize, begins to pick up steam again.

Now imagine some quite different scenarios.

With allied forces massed along Iraq's border, a few well-aimed Scud missiles tipped with chemical warheads—the kind Saddam claims he doesn't have—catch troop concentrations by surprise. Unable to don protective gear in time, the casualties quickly mount into the thousands. In the Persian Gulf, explosives-packed suicide boats roar in among U.S. aircraft carrier groups and detonate. A few of these craft carry an even deadlier cargo, and clouds of chemical and biological poisons envelop the American warships. Several are lost; others are crippled.

Although the invasion of Iraq continues, it slows to a crawl at Baghdad, where Iraq's best-trained, best-equipped troops are dug in. Weeks stretch into months before a costly victory is secured. The nightmare scenarios envisioned by some U.S. military planners have come true. America's military, though the strongest in the world, is thoroughly demoralized.

Throughout the Islamic world, anger at America and its "crusader" allies reaches a fevered pitch. In the oil-rich countries, first one leader, then another, then more are overthrown, viewed by their subjects as being too corrupted by the West. The world oil supply, lifeblood of Western economies, is thrown into chaos. The world economy quickly follows.

On the home front, "sleeper" terrorist cells are secretly activated and quietly spread to attack government buildings, schools and shopping malls with deadly chemical and biological poisons. No American feels safe.

Does this sound too unthinkable to be possible? These scenarios—and far worse—have been extensively discussed and written about by military planners, international observers and antiterrorism experts.

Which of these two vastly different visions might we see in the future? Either scenario, and anything in between, is possible. And they remain possible for the next conflict, as America's war on terror continues.

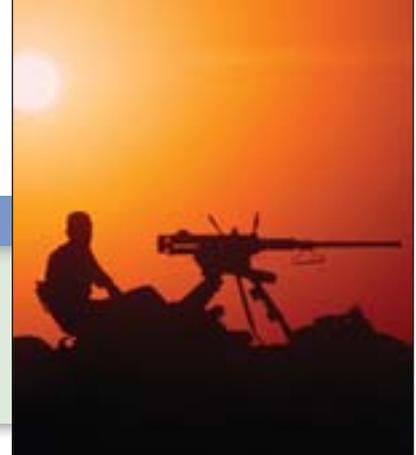
We certainly hope for a continuing stable world in which the wonderfully encouraging message of Jesus Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God can be preached (Matthew 24:14). But God alone will determine how long He will allow that mission to continue (Romans 9:28).

We also know that today's relatively stable world will not continue indefinitely. In Matthew 24:21-22 Jesus Christ foretells a terrible time of global turmoil preceding His return: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved. . . ."

Which crisis will set this final, unalterable chain of events in motion? And, more important, will you be ready?

—Scott Ashley

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After Iraq, What Next?

America Faces a Dangerous World

As the world focuses its attention on the conflict between the United States and Iraq, it's easy to overlook the many other threats facing the United States. What are these threats, and what do they portend?

by **Scott Ashley**

Sept. 11, 2001, may well have forever shattered Americans' sense of invincibility. The terrible events of that day demonstrated that being the world's only superpower doesn't make you invulnerable to attack and sudden death at the hands of sworn enemies. If anything, it may make you a more likely target.

Regrettably, many others watched that disaster unfold and learned the same lesson—that even a giant has its weak spots and chinks in its armor. Are these others even now lining up, waiting for circumstances and conditions to be ripe to take their turn? Time will tell.

Regardless of how events unfold in Iraq, the United States is facing a dangerous world that appears to be turning increasingly against American interests. A region-by-region look at trends is sobering.

Iraq: Tip of the Middle East iceberg?

“Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter,” wrote Winston Churchill in 1930, well before

leaders alike. Throw into the mix weapons of mass destruction (WMD), terrorism, unstable governments and religious fanaticism and almost anything can happen.

As happened in the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam Hussein is more than willing to attack Israel to draw Arab support to his side. And this time few doubt that, if given the opportunity, he would use chemical and biological warheads in his missiles, possibly augmenting them with unmanned aircraft or agents on the ground to spread deadly poisons.

Israel, for its part, has long wielded an implicit threat—the “Samson option,” by which, if its survival were threatened, the tiny Jewish state would unleash its nuclear arsenal and turn threatening Arab cities into glowing pools of glass. U.S. leaders have assured Israel of military aid and protection against hostile neighbors precisely to prevent such a regional conflagration and the devastating impact it would have on the rest of the world.

American military planners have also long been concerned about threats from WMD to U.S. troop concentrations such as military bases and naval forces clustered around its

prove true of the Iraq conflict.

While Iraq is solidly Muslim, the country is divided into two major competing and at times antagonistic Islamic camps. Its 24 million people are approximately one-third Sunni Muslims and two-thirds Shiite. Saddam Hussein, a minority Sunni Muslim, has long kept the majority Shiites under his domination.

What will happen in the aftermath of his fall? One worrying scenario is that Iraq's Shiite majority may find a natural ally in neighboring Iran, where almost 90 percent of its 67 million people are also Shiites—Shiites who control a government that is, for the most part, rabidly anti-Israel. Thus, neutralizing one enemy of Israel through defeating Iraq may actually create an even greater obstacle to Mideast peace should Iran's and Iraq's Shiite Muslims form some sort of official or unofficial alliance.

Iran, of course, is a significant problem to the United States in its own right, with its own determined efforts to acquire or develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and missiles to deliver them. In fact, some observers have argued that Iran should be an even higher U.S. priority in combating terrorism and the spread of WMD, and only after Iran is dealt with should America take on Iraq.

Russia is constructing a nuclear reactor in Iran that is scheduled to begin operations later this year. It hasn't helped matters that in December U.S. spy satellites detected two facilities in Iran capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium and enriched uranium or that in February Iran announced that it had begun mining uranium deposits in two regions to produce its own nuclear fuel.

Another U.S. concern in the region is that if one Arab dictatorship is replaced, no one can predict where it might end. Few Arab leaders are publicly willing to support Saddam Hussein's overthrow precisely because they don't want to give “regime change” validation—lest it lead to *their own* downfall.

Most prefer the status quo and have been willing to put up with a dangerous, heavily armed neighborhood bully so long as they can

Regardless of how events unfold in Iraq, the United States is facing a dangerous world that appears to be turning increasingly against American interests.

he led Britain through the dark years of World War II. Once war begins, he continued, a national leader “is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.”

Such is the quandary the United States finds itself in with Iraq. Certainly, ignoring the problem indefinitely—as so many have been willing to do, hoping it would go away—has been an utter failure. On paper the United States has overwhelming military superiority, greater than that of many real or potential enemies combined, and war against Iraq should be quick and relatively easy.

But the Middle East has a centuries-long track record of confounding the best-laid plans of generals, diplomats and political

aircraft carriers. While few believe Saddam Hussein has successfully developed nuclear weapons, the threat from chemical and biological weapons is very real.

Such an attack is so potentially devastating that the United States has repeatedly warned that Iraqi officers playing a role in such an attack will be prosecuted for war crimes. Less vocally, America has also threatened that an attack by Iraqi chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction may be met by a *nuclear* response.

What might success bring?

As has so long been true in the Middle East, resolving one problem often creates its own set of new problems. This could also

maintain their own non-democratic hold on power. Many are also concerned about a repeat performance of what happened in 1979 in Iran, when extremists overthrew the shah, purged their enemies and instituted Islamic law throughout the country.

The Western world's worst nightmare would be for Iran's experience to be repeated throughout the Middle East, with anti-Western Islamic extremists toppling Arab governments to gain control of most of the world's oil supply and a stranglehold

plutonium. U.S. analysts estimated that North Korea could produce several nuclear weapons from those materials in a matter of months and admitted that North Korea probably already had one or more warheads.

North Korea upped the rhetoric on Feb. 6, announcing that any attack on its nuclear facilities would "spark off a total war," while a government spokesman hinted at its own possible strikes, stating that "preemptive attacks are not the exclusive right of the U.S." On Feb. 17 North Korea threatened to pull out

already raised its level of military preparedness in anticipation of just such a scenario.

Meanwhile, the India-Pakistan conflict still threatens to go nuclear, with India's defense minister warning as recently as January that Pakistan would be "erased from the world map" if it used nuclear weapons against India.

The growing threat from North Korea may also force the Japanese to enter the nuclear club, which they could likely do in months. But if that were to happen, warns the Jan. 20 international edition of *Business Week*, the world should "get ready for an Asian arms race" because "China would likely want to boost its arsenal, which would prompt India to develop more nuclear weapons, which would spur Pakistan to do the same—and on and on into an ever more perilous future."

Europe: Distrust of the United States

One thing is clear from the diplomatic maneuvering over Iraq: Stark divisions exist between longtime Western allies—the United States and the United Kingdom on one side and Germany and France, the political and economic heart of Europe, on the other.

The shift in European attitudes toward the United States since Sept. 11 has been pro-



As has so long been true in the Middle East, resolving one problem often creates its own set of new problems. This could also prove true of the Iraq conflict.

on the lifeblood of the world's economy.

Asia: Threats from several quarters

When it comes to war, anything short of decisive victory will often lead to the same problems rearing their ugly heads again within a few short decades. Just as an indecisive victory in the 1991 Gulf War left Saddam Hussein in power with considerable forces and murderous intentions intact, so did the inconclusive Korean War of 1950 to 1953 leave another backward, belligerent regime in power to come back to haunt America.

Barely a year ago President George W. Bush identified Iraq, Iran and North Korea as today's "axis of evil." In December, as U.S. forces began gathering in the Middle East in anticipation of hostilities with Iraq, North Korea announced its intention (later carried out) to restart its nuclear facilities, and in early January it suddenly withdrew from the global Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The regime also ominously hinted that it possessed nuclear warheads and expelled monitors from the International Atomic Energy Agency who had been in place to prevent the facilities' existing nuclear materials from being reprocessed into weapons-grade

of the armistice agreement that ended the Korea War, accusing the United States of repeatedly violating the pact.

Although hobbled by a communist government and economy that cannot adequately feed its own people, North Korea is nevertheless extremely dangerous. Its 1.2-million-man military is the third-largest in the world and twice that of South Korea's.

North Korea also has an aggressive missile program—on Feb. 12 CIA Director George Tenet acknowledged that it had ICBMs that could reach the West Coast—and markets its Scud-class missiles throughout the Arab world. U.S. leaders are increasingly concerned that the impoverished North Korean regime will at some point add nuclear weapons to the military wares it offers for sale around the world, either to governments or terrorist groups.

And that's not all as far as Asia's concerned. While North Korea may be the most publicized threat in the region, by no means is it the only one. China has repeatedly threatened to take back Taiwan—by force if necessary—and, if it decides to act, would likely do so at a time when the United States is militarily preoccupied elsewhere. Indeed, in mid-February Taiwan announced that it had



found, as discussed in previous articles in *The Good News* and our sister publication *World News and Prophecy*. With the collapse a decade ago of a common enemy—the Soviet Union—Europe and America are now increasingly finding that less unites them than divides them. Iraq is only the latest in a lengthening list of disputes between the former allies.

Robert Kagan, world affairs analyst for *The Washington Post* and a former U.S. State Department official, describes the European mood in his Jan. 31 column: "... Anti-Americanism has reached a fevered intensity. I live in Brussels, famed 'capital of Europe,' and have traveled across the continent over the past year, speaking with intellectuals, journalists, foreign policy analysts and government officials at the endless merry-go-round of highbrow European conferences. The settings couldn't be nicer; the food and

wine couldn't be better; the conversations couldn't be more polite. *And the suspicion, fear and loathing of the United States couldn't be thicker*" (emphasis added).

Many Americans have been puzzled if not angered over French and German political leaders' refusal over the past several months to get behind U.S. calls for disarming Saddam Hussein—indeed, not just refusing to help but repeatedly attempting to block such moves.

"But here's what Americans need to understand," explains Dr. Kagan. "In Europe, this paranoid, conspiratorial anti-Americanism is not a far-left or far-right phenomenon. *It's the mainstream view.* When [German Chancellor] Gerhard Schroeder campaigns on an anti-American platform in Germany, he's not just 'mobilizing his base' or reaching out to fringe Greens and Socialists. *He's talking to the man and woman on the street, left, right and center.* When [French President] Jacques Chirac and [French Foreign Minister] Dominique de Villepin publicly humiliate [U.S. Secretary of State] Colin Powell, they're playing to the gallery. *The 'European street' is more anti-American than ever before*" (emphasis added).

America truly faces a dangerous world with growing threats on many sides. Where will these trends lead?

While a significant number of *Eastern* European countries are still pro-American, that seems bound to change as these nations realize more and more that their futures and fortunes are inextricably tied to France and Germany. Europe and America appear to be going their separate ways in the geopolitical equivalent of a divorce—the only questions being how quick that divorce will be, and how nasty.

The worldwide terrorism threat

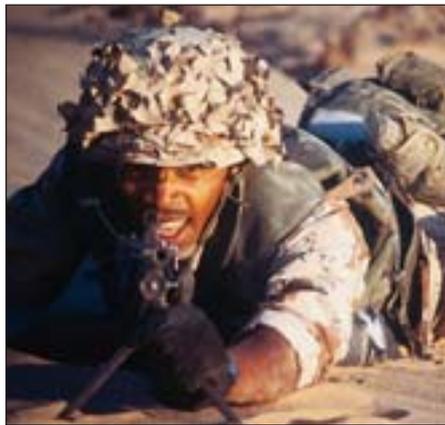
As if on cue, as Americans struggled with digesting news of North Korean nukes and deep divisions within NATO and the UN, a new taped message from Osama bin Laden turned up urging suicide bombings and other terrorist strikes against the United States. It followed an earlier, less-publicized call by a Hamas leader for what are euphemistically called "martyrdom operations" should America attack Iraq.

Acting on information from various sources, the U.S. government announced in February that it was raising the terrorism threat level in the country to orange, indicating a high risk of terrorist attacks. Although one warning was apparently a hoax, its serious nature—that Washington, D.C., New York or Florida would be hit with a radioactive "dirty bomb"—forced officials to act.

Yet, as noted above, by no means has this been the only warning. Saddam Hussein also

has threatened as much, and the U.S. government has long been at work on contingency plans for chemical, biological and nuclear or dirty bomb attacks at the hands of terrorists.

American antiterrorism officials claim to have thwarted more than 100 terrorist plots since Sept. 11, including several attacks planned within U.S. borders. In recent weeks authorities have broken up terrorist cells in Germany, Italy, Spain and Britain—the latter involving the alarming discovery of ricin, one



of the most lethal poisons known to man and one for which no antidote exists.

Lest we forget, on the heels of the Sept. 11 attack came a small wave of letters containing anthrax spores that infected 23 Americans, killing five of them. One letter opened in a U.S. senator's office led to the closure of the Hart Senate Office Building for three months. Officials have yet to charge anyone for these crimes, nor can they realistically prevent similar attacks in the future.

The task of protecting Americans from terror is staggering. The cost of the 170,000-employee federal Department of Homeland Security alone runs almost \$40 billion a year. On a typical day this involves checking 1.6 million airline passengers and another 1 million people crossing U.S. borders, processing 2.4 million pieces of luggage at more than 400 commercial airports and inspecting tons of imported foods. Meanwhile, only a tiny percentage of the 18 million shipping containers that enter U.S. ports each year are inspected.

The consequences of failure are high. Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge cautioned in a Jan. 30 speech that "one slip, one gap, one vengeful person can threaten the lives of our citizens, at any time, in any number of ways."

What's ahead for the United States?

The United States truly faces a dangerous

world with growing threats on many sides. Where will these trends lead?

Bible prophecies of the time of the end, the period leading up to the return of Jesus Christ and the establishing of God's Kingdom on earth, do mention specific geopolitical powers that will exist at that time. But, somewhat ominously, no power identifiable as the United States is among them at the very end.

However, two end-time geopolitical entities *are* specifically mentioned, and discussed regularly in the pages of *The Good News*. The Bible calls their leaders "the king of the North" and "the king of the South" (Daniel 11:40). Perhaps not surprisingly, the geographic areas of these two powers fall within two of the United States' most glaring sore spots—Europe and the Middle East.

What is destined to happen to the United States? How will these end-time events play out? Is the stage being set for this and many other prophecies to be fulfilled? You need to continue reading *The Good News* to understand the crucial events shaping our world and where they are heading.

Never has the need for biblical understanding been so great. And never has the need been so great to draw close to our Creator and to our Savior and coming King, Jesus Christ.

In Luke 21:31-36 (New International Version) He warns us: ". . . When you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near . . . Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." **GN**

Recommended Reading

Where do such nations as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia appear in Bible prophecy? Does Bible prophecy neglect to mention them? In fact, many prophecies do mention these nations, but without an understanding of history and the Scriptures, few can identify them. The publishers of *The Good News* have produced an eye-opening book, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, that will help you understand many astounding Bible truths. Also request your subscription to *World News and Prophecy*, a newsletter that examines current trends in light of Bible prophecy. Both are yours free for the asking.



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Iraq and the Middle East: A Century of Turmoil Continues

What has led up to the current crisis in Iraq? How did the United States find itself in this deadly and seemingly insoluble quagmire?

by Melvin Rhodes

The world has changed dramatically in the last 100 years—and nowhere more so than in the Middle East. Not one of the nations of the Middle East has the same borders or governmental system that it had a century ago. Whereas Britain and the United States have enjoyed long periods of political stability, nations of the Middle East, a region at the crossroads of three continents, have seen little but turmoil and violence throughout the last century.

A hundred years ago, most of the region was within the Turkish Ottoman Empire, once a major power but by 1900 very much in decline. It fell apart during and immediately after World War I, replaced by new nations like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and the Persian Gulf States, all under direct or indirect European control, mostly British and French.

Further change came after the Second World War. Arab nationalists were incensed when the United Nations divided the British Mandate territory of Palestine into Jewish and Palestinian areas. The Jewish state of Israel came into existence on May 15, 1948—and was immediately attacked by five Arab armies, all determined to crush the small country of 500,000 people before it could get off the ground.

The consequences of this division of Palestine are with us to this day. Most Palestinian Arabs, many of whom had settled in Palestine in previous decades, fled the new territory of Israel and have been living as refugees ever since. But the creation of the nation of Israel affected not only the Palestinians.

Rising tide of Arab nationalism

Four years after the 1948 war, radical Arab nationalists, set on victory over Israel and determined to end the continuing British occupation of their country, rose up and overthrew King Farouk of Egypt in 1952. Another four years later, the new nationalist government seized the Suez Canal from Britain and France. War followed. Egypt was defeated by the combined powers of Great Britain, France and Israel, but international pressure forced

them out of Egypt and Cairo assumed control of the canal.

Elated that Europeans had been driven out of the Arab world's most populous nation, Arabs in some other Middle Eastern countries

was set to become Israel's greatest protector against the Arab world.

From the secular to the spiritual

Arab nationalism was soon followed by a



rose up against their own pro-Western leaders, replacing them with Arab nationalist governments. Iraq's monarchy, installed by the British along with constitutional government, was overthrown in 1958. Yemen's royal government soon followed. In 1969 it was Libya's turn when Colonel Muammar Gadhafi overthrew King Idris.

Meanwhile, France had lost its most important overseas territory, Algeria, in North Africa, after many years of bitter conflict. Then the British were, in turn, defeated in their colony of Aden, now a part of Yemen. Faced with increasing economic problems at home, the British announced their intention to withdraw from the region, leaving the small emirates on the western side of the Persian Gulf to fend for themselves.

America was destined to become increasingly involved in the area as the British and French withdrew. Fears of Soviet encroachment were realized with Egypt seeking Moscow's help. The United States

new force, one even more anti-Western and posing a potentially greater threat to Israel and the West. Islamic extremists overthrew the pro-Western shah of Iran in 1979 and have controlled the Islamic nation ever since. Although most Iranians are not Arab and belong to the minority Shiite sect of Islam, Iran's brand of strict Islam soon posed a serious threat to the Arab nationalists of the region, many of whom were secular and seemed morally suspect to the Iranian radicals.

In this unstable region, change was set to continue. An eight-year conflict soon began between the theocratic republic of Iran and the secular nation of Iraq. The United States supported the latter's president, Saddam Hussein, to keep the radical Islamic forces of Iran in check (though the United States evidently did not arm the Iraqis as many now contend). America saw Iran as a serious threat, especially after the Iranians took captive the U.S. embassy staff and held them for 444 days.

In the same year that Iran's theocratic

government came to power, the Soviet Union invaded Iran's neighbor, Afghanistan, determined to back up a communist government that had seized power there. For more than a decade the Soviets fought Islamic forces determined to drive out the invaders. The mujahideen rebels, backed by Pakistan and the United States, were led by a Saudi revolutionary named Osama bin Laden.

Following the Soviet withdrawal from the country (and the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union), the Taliban, a radical Islamic movement that was as set on driving out Westerners as it was the Soviets, came to power.

After World War II, Arab nationalism gave the people hope. If the Western powers were driven out, people of the region assumed they would be better off. But many weren't.

Their leaders, however, were. Corruption was endemic, benefiting those at the top while leaving the less advantaged worse off. Resentment grew. So did Islamic fundamentalism, as the radicals targeted the poor. Exploiting their grievances and offering simplistic solutions to their often complex problems, Muslim fundamentalists reorganized communities on strict Islamic lines, concentrating on assisting the poor with their needs and thereby building a solid power base.

The radical religious element is particularly critical of leaders who are deemed pro-Western, wanting the "infidels" (non-believers) out of the region. This is particularly true of Saudi Arabia, site of Islam's two most holy places, Mecca and Medina, where fundamentalists are determined to drive out American forces.

Although the Saudi government is often described as pro-Western, Saudi Arabia is home to one of Islam's most extreme and violent offshoots, the Wahhabi sect of Islam. Saudi funds finance mosques around the world, with Wahhabi *imams* (clerics) teaching young children this radical and violent interpretation of Islam. With surprisingly little resistance in Western nations committed to freedom of religious belief and practice, a radical Islamic fifth column is slowly but surely being built.

Radical Islam has made gains even since Sept. 11. Both Pakistan and Turkey saw their respective national assemblies change hands, with both now dominated by Islamic extremists, while their presidents remain secular and pro-Western. Nations throughout the Islamic world are facing increasing security problems from the extremists in their midst.

Trends warn of worse to come

Another factor in this complex part of the world has been the ever-growing Islamic birthrate. Whereas most Western nations have

low birthrates, some not even replacing their populations and suffering population decline, the poorer Third World countries tend to double their populations every few years. This has certainly been the case among the Muslim populations of the Middle East. In contrast, the Jewish population of Israel has only grown through immigration as citizens there limit the size of their families like the rest of Western society.

During the last five decades, the declining numbers in the West have been replaced by growing immigrant families from poorer parts of the world, including Islamic nations. These demographic trends, if continued, could lead to immigrant majorities in some Western nations sometime in the new century. Already they have impacted countries socially, culturally, politically and in the area of security.

The percentage of Muslims in the nations of Western Europe is greater than the percentage of Jews in the United States. Many Americans are aware of how powerful the Jewish lobby is in the United States and how important the Jewish vote is in U.S. elections. Now Europeans are finding they must consider their *Islamic* populations in making major decisions. This is partly why there is an increasing divergence of policy over the Middle East, with France, Germany and others at odds with the United States. Europeans have a marked fear of the consequences of war in the Middle East—civil disorder and terrorism at home could be the result of Western nations attacking Iraq.

Background to the conflict with Iraq

One reason the United States did not actively oppose Iraq in the 1980s was because of the secular nature of its ruling Baath party—a nationalist and socialist party similar to Hitler's Nazi party (and, as proven over time, just as ruthless). It wasn't that the United States approved of Saddam Hussein's conduct; it was rather that Iraq and the United States shared a common enemy in the extremist Muslim political leaders in Iran. Similarly, early U.S. support for Osama bin Laden's fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan was the result of a shared common enemy, communism.

The change in the U.S. approach to Iraq came with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Saddam's claim over Kuwait went right back to Ottoman days when the two countries were one administrative region of the Ottoman Empire. But his aggression, brutality and theft of oil were not allowed to stand. An invasion force of almost 40 countries liberated Kuwait in the Persian Gulf War of 1991.

But, in spite of his defeat, Saddam Hussein remained in power. One year after Iraq's defeat, the U.S. president, George Bush,

father of the current president, suffered defeat at the polls. The following year, during a visit to Kuwait, a radical group of Iraqis made an assassination attempt on the elder Bush's life.

American and British jets have been patrolling the skies over Iraq since the end of the last war, and UN sanctions have continued. These actions put ongoing pressure on Iraq to end its development of weapons of mass destruction and have prevented Saddam from exerting full control over all areas of the country.

Iraq's failure to comply with many UN resolutions has led to the present situation. Having suffered defeat once at the hands of Western nations, why does Saddam Hussein now risk his own life in another conflict?

The answer may lie in the fact that Saddam sees himself as another Saladin, the Muslim leader who defeated the Western Crusaders almost a thousand years ago. Saddam (meaning "one who confronts"), like most Arabs, wants to see today's Western "crusaders" defeated and driven out of the Middle East.

Osama bin Laden has the same desire. However, these two men, who have brought so much grief to the United States, are motivated very differently. Saddam is not overtly religious whereas Bin Laden definitely is. Saddam is the voice of Arab nationalism, Bin Laden of Islamic fundamentalism. If the two band together—a possible outcome of this conflict, with the recent message from Bin Laden urging a united front among Muslims—the West would be in for an even greater challenge.

Could the United States be defeated?

A look at a world map illustrates just how much Islam has experienced a resurgence in the last 100 years. It is a similar trend to that of the seventh century, when the new religion of Islam spread out from Arabia in all directions, soon defeating the two great powers of that day, Persia and Byzantium.

Islamic forces have already defeated the

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Soviet Union by outlasting it through years of exhaustive fighting in Afghanistan. The U.S.S.R. was one of the two greatest powers of the latter half of the 20th century. Could the same forces also defeat the other, the United States—if not in this war, the next or the one after? Americans should never become complacent about such a possibility.

Already Islamic forces dealt a dreadful blow to America's security on Sept. 11. As a direct consequence of their action, the U.S. economy suffered a major setback not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Serious chinks have been revealed in the armor of the Western alliance as nations disagree on the best approach to the new threat.

American and allied forces are active in many parts of the world trying to stem the rising threat from radical Islam. Victory in Afghanistan will only endure as long as Western nations keep substantial forces there. Even then, their authority does not extend much beyond the capital city of Kabul.

Meanwhile, U.S. and British forces are heavily committed to the Iraqi situation. Following a 40 percent reduction in the size of the U.S. military during the Clinton administration and a cutback of more than 75 percent in British forces in the last 50 years, an overstretched military from both nations has been sent in numbers not seen for many years to fight a war in the faraway Persian Gulf. Regular forces have been joined by large numbers of reservists from both countries.

Certainly military risks are involved. But there are also long-term economic and security risks in a war estimated to cost \$50-200 billion. It will be a long time before the ripple effect of this conflict settles.

While few doubt America and Britain will win the war, they could easily lose the peace.

In recent months the U.S. dollar has been under pressure from other countries, reflecting a lack of confidence in the United States around the world. The new European currency, the euro, has been the major beneficiary of the greenback's misfortune. Concern about a rising U.S. budget deficit and a trade deficit that was over \$40 billion in both November and December have put America at greater economic risk. Another Sept. 11 could tip the scales.

Lack of a quick, decisive victory in war against Iraq would have a similar effect. One of the greatest fears is the possibility of rising anti-Americanism throughout the region as Arab peoples see the U.S. bombing of Iraqis on their television screens. Leaders throughout the region remain frightened about the political consequences. Political instability will inevitably lead to greater economic instability, which will inevitably affect the

U.S. and other Western nations negatively.

Already some Arab oil ministers have called for oil to be priced in euros instead of dollars. This alone would have a severe effect on the U.S. economy, which has been largely built on cheap gasoline. With a falling dollar and a rise in the value of the euro, not to mention possible oil shortages due to war in the Persian Gulf region, fuel prices in the United States could rise substantially. A massive trade deficit might even mean America could not find the euros to buy enough oil.

The stakes are high for the United States, Britain and their allies in this strategically crucial part of the world.

An end to all war

At a time like this, with so much uncertainty and danger in the world, Christians need to remain focused on the coming Kingdom of God, the central message of hope and promise that Jesus Christ gave the world 2,000 years ago. Mark 1:14-15 makes this clear: "... Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.'" He added the following admonition: "*Repent, and believe in the gospel*" (emphasis added throughout).

No matter what happens in the world, true Christians, those who have repented of their sins, know that "the promise is to you and to your children" (Acts 2:39). In the preceding verse, the apostle Peter urged everyone to "repent and . . . be baptized . . . and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," without which it is impossible to enter God's Kingdom.

Prophesying of this time, Daniel 2:44 tells us that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . . it shall break in pieces and consume all these [human] kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Revelation 5:10 assures us that in this kingdom, those who in this life turn to God in heartfelt repentance and surrender to Him will be "kings and priests . . . and [they] shall reign on the earth." They will assist Jesus Christ in finally bringing true peace to the whole world.

Jesus lived in an uncertain and troubling time, just as we do now. Conscious of this, He taught His disciples to pray daily, "Your Kingdom come." Why? The answer follows: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Until the establishment of the Kingdom of God, we will not see peace.

Only when the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, is enthroned, ruling over this planet, will the Middle East and the rest of the world have the peace for which it has long yearned. Then, as Isaiah 9:7 tells us, "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end." **GN**

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Prophecy Being Fulfilled? The World Divides Into Three Spheres

Recent events have shown the world dividing into three competing systems, all vying for dominance in a rapidly changing world. Does Bible prophecy indicate which will survive?

by Melvin Rhodes

Only 18 months have passed since the events of Sept. 11, but since then we have witnessed a seismic shift in geopolitics. The signs were already there before the attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., but it has since become clearer that the world is dividing into three economic and political systems, all competing for universal dominance.

The first system, led by the United States, might be described as a capitalist free-for-all strongly based on individualism, promising unlimited opportunities for the creation of wealth and the acquisition of more material possessions. This force dreams of globalization and the opening up of all markets to enable the world to continue to grow and prosper. Of the three, this force is the youngest. As U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan pointed out when in London recently to receive an honorary knighthood from the queen, this system started in England about 300 years ago.

The second force, resurgent since the fall of the shah of Iran in 1979, is Islamic fundamentalism. While its roots are much older—in fact, its origins can be traced back to Muhammad 14 centuries ago—its most recent incarnation caught the world's attention with the overthrow of the pro-Western shah and the holding of U.S. embassy hostages for 444 days, finally released only when American President Ronald Reagan came into office.

If anyone had any doubts about where Islamic fundamentalism was headed, the events of Sept. 11 should have made it a lot clearer. This religious movement seeks universal domination, believing that the world will not have true peace until everyone on the planet is a Muslim.

Although not all Muslims are extremists, extremism is growing and Muslims share the goal of a world converted to Islam. They are motivated by such passages in the Koran as Sura 8:40, which exhorts Muslims to

“make war upon them [non-Muslims] until idolatry [worship of any god other than Allah, which includes Christianity] shall cease and God’s religion [Islam] shall reign supreme” (N.J. Dawood translation).

The third force has also been in embryonic form for many decades. It also traces its origins back centuries, further even than Islam—all the way back to the days of the Roman Empire. This force has made great strides in the aftermath of Sept. 11, emerging as a serious contender for global leadership. It is the European Union.

These three competing forces do not have clearly defined demarcation lines. There are, for example, Muslims in the EU and United States. The United

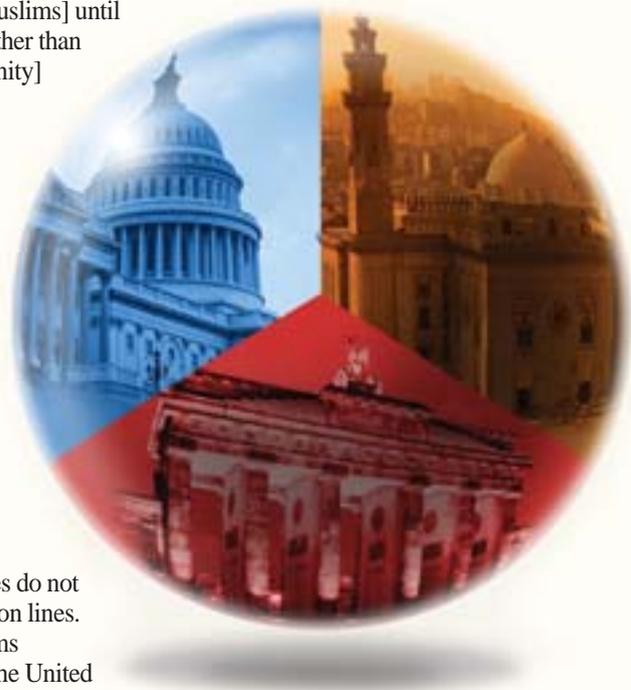
The lines of delineation between the three competing spheres are there, becoming clearer as the three systems confront each other over Iraq.

Kingdom remains a member of the EU but is arguably in the American camp. One of America's two biggest political parties would be quite comfortable with the EU model while there are those in Europe who would prefer to be more American. In the Islamic world are many peoples who have embraced many of the materialistic values of the United States while remaining followers of Muhammad.

But the lines of delineation between the three competing spheres are there nonetheless, becoming clearer as the three systems confront each other over Iraq.

Divisions in the West

While we see many similarities between



the EU and the United States, there are also many differences. As with America, the EU encourages private enterprise—up to a point. The role of the government in each member nation is greater than in the United States, theoretically ensuring a more equitable division of wealth.

One division increasingly apparent is in the area of faith. Americans in general are much more religious than Europeans, with faith influencing U.S. politics in a way that has not been seen in Europe for centuries. One commentator interviewed on BBC radio thought that the strong religious beliefs of both President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were a factor in their *alienation* from other Western nations.

Historical experience and perspective are also different on the two sides of the Atlantic. Europeans are surrounded by history, with castles and cathedrals that are sometimes more than 1,000 years old.

Awareness of history is generally much more widespread than in the United States.

Americans tend not to look back. Europeans, however, are continually looking back, trying to learn from the past before moving forward. With so many wars in their collective history, the nations of Europe are determined to unite their continent in such a way that never again will there be a repeat of the two devastating world wars of the last century.

Conscious of the past, they are also determined that no other nation will bring about a cataclysm to rival those former conflicts. Thus, opposition to war in general is greater in Europe than in the United States.

Remembering the two world wars of the 20th century, and a Cold War in which the Soviet Union threatened to gobble up Europe, Americans tend to see themselves as the saviors of Europe and cannot understand the seeming ingratitude of today's Europeans.

The perspective in Europe is somewhat different. The French perception, for example, is that America betrayed them twice in the 1950s, in consequence bringing about the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958.

Both betrayals were during the Eisenhower administration. The first, in 1954, was the failure of the United States to come through with requested military aid at the battle of Dien Bien Phu, which resulted in a French defeat and the loss of Indochina. The United States, of course, also paid a penalty for this decision, as the Vietnam War was the consequence of French withdrawal.

Two years later, American pressure forced Britain and France to withdraw from Suez after a combined military force had recaptured the Suez Canal, seized by Egypt. This, in turn, led to the French losing Algeria, the home of more than one million French nationals.

The British learned from this that they amounted to little without American support, and thus have been firm supporters of the United States in subsequent decades. The French reached a different conclusion—that they couldn't trust America (it can, of course, be said that Americans have learned the same about France). This attitude is still a complication for U.S. foreign policy, with France wielding veto

power on the UN Security Council.

Closer Franco-German ties

Closer to home, the French have also learned the necessity of a close relationship with Germany. German troops arrived in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 (leading to the fall of the Second French Empire of Napoleon III) and again in 1940. In between these two events, World War I saw massive loss of French lives. After three bloody conflicts in 70 years, they determined it would never happen again.

In a geopolitical context, this means that the relationship between Paris and Berlin is of far greater importance than the relationship each has with Washington or London.

Making the Paris-Berlin axis of greater importance was the reunification of Germany following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the more recent transference of Germany's capital to Berlin. Both events have emboldened Germany to play a much greater role in world affairs, as it has demonstrated in standing up to the United States and Britain in the UN over the Iraq conflict. Ironically, this attitude has been encouraged by Washington, which, perhaps forgetting the lessons of Germany's militaristic past, requested Berlin send troops to the Balkans and Afghanistan.

Always fearful of a resurgent Germany, the French are not about to loosen the ties that bind them to their bigger neighbor. To them, Franco-German ties remain of paramount importance.

They are of importance to Germany as well. Many liberal Germans, mindful of Germany causing two world wars in 25 years, want Germany to be firmly contained within the EU, as do other member nations. As France is the second-biggest nation in the EU after Germany, the French connection is important to Germany. The Germans gain international respectability through this close link.

This is not to say that there aren't differences. The Germans want a federal Europe, modeled on the German system. The French prefer a confederation with power remaining in the hands of national governments. However, what is important to realize is that *both* are committed to a full European Union, a superpower to stand up to, and ultimately surpass, the United States.

Economically, it already does in some ways. The EU controls more of the world's trade than the United States, giving it greater economic clout around the world. One example of this was the recent European

demand that Iran abolish the death penalty before any trade agreement could be signed. European Union economic power is set to become far greater when 10 new members join in May 2004.

Largely unnoticed in the United States, the European currency, only one year old in January, recently surpassed the American dollar in value, a reflection of growing international confidence in Europe at the expense of America. Disparity between the two currencies may well widen further, depending on how things go in the conflict with Iraq.

In foreign policy, the Middle East is the area where these two powers are in great disagreement, as evidenced by major disagreements in the UN and NATO. This is partly the result of divergent economic interests, with the Europeans heavily dependent on oil from the Persian Gulf. On the issue of Israel and the Palestinians, European support of the latter stands in stark contrast to American support for the Israelis.

Rising Islamic power

This brings us back to the other force in this geopolitical triad—Islam. Again, Europeans have a different perspective.

Some Americans are aware that the American Jewish community has been a significant factor in determining the course of U.S. elections. What few realize is that the percentage of Muslims in Western Europe is far greater than the percentage of Jews in America, making Islam a major factor in European politics. Fearful of domestic upheaval, European governments tread carefully in dealing with Islamic nations of the Middle East. If European governments support an attack on Iraq, the consequences at home could be disastrous—in the form of domestic upheaval and possibly even major terrorist attacks.

The announced formation of a pan-European Islamic political party in January can only add to the concerns of European governments. In fact, there are now more Muslims in Europe than there are French nationals! Almost all have arrived in Europe since World War II or are the children of immigrants.

Sept. 11 has only increased European fears of Islam, a repeated historic threat to the continent. Muslim Ottoman Turks twice attacked the city of Vienna in the 16th and 17th centuries, while Muslim Moors reached the gates of Paris in the eighth century.

Biblical importance of the three blocs

The Good News magazine has long

focused the attention of readers on these three forces now at the forefront of world affairs. How did we know that these competing powers would come to dominate the world scene?

The answer is found in your Bible.

In Daniel 2:28 we read that “there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets . . .” In verse 21 we note that God “removes kings and raises up kings.” In another prophetic book we read that “the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Almost one third of the Bible is prophetic, and most of that prophecy relates to end-time events that usher in the Kingdom of God.

Throughout history, nations have continually risen and fallen. No power that reaches the top remains there indefinitely. Before

World War II the British Empire was the dominant force in the world and had been for two centuries. Before Britain it was France; before France, Spain. Two thousand years ago the Roman Empire was the mightiest force on earth. God truly does remove kings and set up new ones.

Before the second coming of Jesus Christ, the Bible informs us that another powerful force will arise that is not clearly seen at present. Bible prophecy shows it to be a final resurrection of the Roman Empire, which dominated Europe until the fifth century.

While most Americans aren’t aware of it, various attempts have been made throughout history to restore Rome’s glory. The last failed attempt was under Mussolini, who proclaimed the resurrection of the Roman Empire in 1922. Later, in alliance with

Hitler’s Germany, the original “axis of evil” attempted to conquer the world. Together, they succeeded in briefly conquering most of Europe.

Europe is again coming together, this time not by force, but voluntarily. The two dominant nations of the new Europe are Germany and France, recently flexing their muscles by hindering U.S. and British efforts to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. At the same time, they are pushing vigorously for a full political, economic and military union of Europe’s ancient continent, a revived Roman Empire set in motion by the 1957 Treaty of Rome.

Setting the stage

Prophecy shows this end-time alliance of nations coming together for a short time just

Are We Witnessing the Last Days of the Present World Order?

In a Feb. 12 article titled “3 Western Pillars Already Shaken,” *The International Herald Tribune* stated: “Before a shot has been fired, the political tensions ahead of a looming Iraq war are inflicting grievous wounds on the triad of institutions that embody aspirations for multilateral security cooperation among Western democracies: the European Union, NATO and the UN Security Council.

“This combination of interlocking security arrangements, which has enabled the West to ride out trans-Atlantic tempests for decades, faces a simultaneous challenge from within that could spell change or even irrelevance for all parts of the system.”

German-American relations were already strained due to anti-American rhetoric on the part of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder in his reelection campaign last year. And then, when it came to actually enforcing UN Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq, U.S. insistence on military action was met by hard resistance from Germany as well as France—a stance that was then countered by support from the majority of European national leaders.

The *Tribune* explained: “The crisis is so hard to manage, experts said, because it calls into question, simultaneously, all three load-bearing pillars of cooperation: European unity, the U.S.-led alliance and relations among the United States and other veto-empowered Security Council members, including France and Russia.

“‘Before, if confrontation arose in the Security Council, NATO would close ranks, and splits among the European countries never threatened NATO unity, but this time the trans-Atlantic fault line is fissuring all three of the organizations that emerged intact from the Cold War,’ according to a cabinet-level British official.”

Where is this all leading—and why?

The end of NATO?

The Wall Street Journal came out with a surprising editorial on Feb. 10 titled “The End of NATO.” It stated: “France and Germany continued this weekend to gamble with the institutions that have kept something called the Western alliance united for half a century. The question to contemplate now is whether that alliance, formally known as NATO, continues to serve the interests of the United States.

“This may seem a radical thought,” the opinion piece continued, “but it is certainly warranted by the astonishing recent behavior of nations thought to be U.S. allies. Three countries—France, Germany and their mini-me minion, Belgium—have moved from opposition to U.S. policy toward Iraq into formal, and consequential, obstructionism. If this is what the U.S. gets from NATO, maybe it’s time America considered leaving this Cold War institution and re-forming

an alliance of nations that understand the new threats to world order.”

Reference was made to Germany’s suggestion that Iraq be turned over to UN peacekeepers while allowing Saddam Hussein to remain in authority—ostensibly to keep the United States from invading the country. “The real point of this exercise,” stated the *Journal*, “is to prevent the U.S. from enforcing the U.N.’s own resolutions . . . The fact that Germany would even consider offering it suggests an agenda aimed less at defusing war than at actively promoting American defeat.”

Worse still, in the *Journal’s* opinion, was Belgium’s announcement “that it would do Paris’s bidding and veto Turkey’s request for NATO resources to defend itself against Iraq . . . For Belgium to block such a request for self-defense from another NATO ally is to drive a stake into the heart of the alliance.” France, Germany and Belgium had argued that they could not yet make such a commitment, as it would have implied approval to U.S. military action before official Security Council sanction.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said it was “shameful, for me it’s truly shameful.” And, telling journalists at a defense conference in Munich that America and the other NATO countries would defend Turkey anyway, he stated, “What will be hurt will be NATO, not Turkey.”

Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel remarked that Mr. Rumsfeld’s “attitude of ‘teaching the old Europe’ is insulting. Mr. Michel praised the Europe of democratic values, humanist Europe, the Europe of the Age of Enlightenment. He accused the Bush administration of trying to impose ‘a valet-lord’ relationship with Europe” (“Belgium, Germany and France Cause NATO Split,” *EUObserver.com*, Feb. 10). Clearly there are huge differences in perspective.

American outrage

Many members of the U.S. Congress were outraged at what they viewed as a betrayal by key allies. At Congressional hearings, “some lawmakers suggested the survival of the alliance may be at stake—a concern also voiced by [Secretary of State Colin] Powell. He told senators Tuesday [Feb. 11] that NATO and UN alliances could fall apart because of a reluctance to provide military support sought by Turkey” (Associated Press report, Feb. 12).

In a House International Relations Committee meeting the next day, the committee’s top Democrat, Rep. Tom Lantos, said that he was “particularly disgusted by the blind intransigence and utter ingratitude” of France, Germany and Belgium. “If it were not for the heroic efforts of America’s military, France, Germany and Belgium today would be Soviet socialist republics,” Lantos said. “The failure of

before Christ's return (Revelation 17:12-14). This new superpower, more powerful than the United States, will threaten the peace of the world.

Pushing at this prophesied European-centered bloc will be a nation or group of nations led by a "king of the South" (Daniel 11:40), possibly soon to emerge as the Islamic world increasingly turns against the West and non-Muslims.

Meanwhile, more and more, the United States and Britain will see the world turning against them, as has been evident in events leading up to war with Iraq.

But why? Unknown to most Americans and Britons, they are in fact the modern descendants of the biblical tribe of Joseph, part of the 12-tribed nation of Israel. Because they have progressively turned

away from God and thumbed their nose at the true Source of their national blessings and power, they will soon reap the consequences of their sins. God warns that He will "break the pride of [their] power" (Leviticus 26:19) and bring devastating punishments if they continue in their sins and refuse to turn to God's way of life.

The increasing isolation and decline of the English-speaking nations, the rise of a European superpower and the emergence of fundamentalist Islam with increased conflict in the Middle East were prophesied in your Bible centuries ago. The coming together of these powerful forces will set the stage for the second coming of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

Where will you be when these things happen? **GN**

these three states to honor their commitments is beneath contempt" (ibid.).

Even several days before Belgium's action, "Richard Perle, a former assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration and now chairman of the Pentagon's Policy Advisory Board, condemned French and German policy on Iraq in the strongest terms"—particularly the former. "France is no longer the ally it once was," he said. "I have long thought that there were forces in France intent on reducing the American role in the world" (United Press International report, Feb. 4).

"Very considerable damage has already been done to the Atlantic community, including NATO, by Germany and France," Perle went on to say. Yet he believes Schroeder is a "discredited chancellor" who is out of step with the rest of Germany. But is he? And what about the rest of Europe?

European majority opinion

There is no question that Europe is facing its own share of division. The president of the European Union—now Greece, which presently holds the rotating leadership—said Feb. 12, "We are at a critical juncture." Unless the EU nations could resolve their differences regarding the Iraqi situation, he went on, "the European Union will enter a deep crisis." And Iraq surely will not be the end of the differences.

"Czech and Polish officials at the Munich meeting said that their countries saw the United States as a guarantee of their stability and position, even against larger European friends. They complained in identical language of 'arrogance' on the part of French and German policymakers, who upbraided Prague and Warsaw for publicly supporting Washington and challenging the line adopted by France and Germany" (*Tribune*).

Indeed, many have accused the United States for acting unilaterally. However, when most of Europe's leaders rallied around President Bush, France and Germany were suddenly the ones out of step. Washington was quick to label them the new unilateralists, obstructing cooperation among the allies through minority opposition that could force the United States to eventually abandon NATO.

But are France and Germany truly in the European minority?

Robert Kagan, author of the new book *Of Paradise and Power: America Versus Europe in the New World Order*, explained on a Feb. 7 Fox News program that America and Europe "have developed such different views about the legitimacy of the use of force and the kind of international order we would like to see that it's like that book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. We don't even understand each other sometimes when we talk. We use the same words but come up with different meanings. There really has become a serious ideological divide between the majority of Americans and Europeans."

Asked about the level of rampant anti-Americanism in Europe, Dr. Kagan's

response was that "some of it we can't do anything about. It's the price of having more power than everyone else. Europeans have some resentment about their historic dependence on the United States and their resentment that the United States has all the power."

Yet it's not just French and German *leaders* who oppose the United States. Kagan stated that "in France and Germany the governments and the people are together, clearly." In fact, a shocking article from Reuters on Feb. 10 reported that in a poll taken in Germany by the respected Forsa institute, "57 percent agreed with the statement: 'The United States is a nation of warmongers.'" While this view is understandably outrageous and incomprehensible to most Americans, it apparently represents what many Germans think. The survey further found that "93 percent believed Bush was ready to go to war in pursuit of his [own] interests, while 80 percent said the United States wanted war to boost its power."

But again, is this really representative of the rest of Europe? What about the opinion in the nations that early on gave their vote of confidence to the United States in the Iraqi situation? Dr. Kagan explained: "In a country like Spain where the prime minister has actually sided with Bush . . . [this] is against his own population, [as] 80 percent of Spaniards disagree with American policy." He went on to say that, "by and large, except for a few courageous souls like Tony Blair, and the Spanish prime minister, and Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, there's pretty much unity in Europe. I live in Europe. But let me tell you, there is very little debate going on about this subject. Most people are just opposed."

The world is changing

The Wall Street Journal concluded its editorial: "We realize the end of NATO has been trumpeted prematurely before . . . But the Cold War is over, and the main threat to the West now is global terrorism employing nuclear and bioweapons. If NATO cannot adapt to this reality by moving its resources to meet that threat, then as currently constructed it has outlived its usefulness."

These are truly momentous times! We appear to be witnessing the beginning of the dismantling of the present world order. Bible prophecy foretells that in the years ahead a new European superpower will rise to dominate the globe for a short time. It is characterized as strong as iron and yet brittle too (Daniel 2:40-43)—evidently fragmented by the interests of the various nations that make it up.

Prophecy also speaks of a vanquished America and Britain and a series of calamities that will eventually send the human race crashing headlong to the very brink of self-annihilation (Matthew 24:21-22)—only to be rescued at the last moment by the dawning of a new and glorious age. You need to keep reading *The Good News* for understanding of the times in which we live.

—Tom Robinson

Recommended Reading

Where can we turn for understanding in these confusing and dangerous times? How can we learn where world events are leading us? To better understand today's headlines and the trends discussed in this article, be sure to request our free booklets *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, and our *World News and Prophecy* newsletter. To understand what God expects of you, read *The Ten Commandments* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, also free.



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World News and Trends

An Overview of Conditions Around the World

by John Ross Schroeder

A Christian Europe?

Former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing is in the process of drafting a new constitution for the European Union (EU). Pope John Paul II and Vatican diplomats are pressuring EU officials to include Europe's Christian roots in the preamble.

In previous years the pope has envisioned a European Christian superstate stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals. But few observers expect the current lobbying to succeed due primarily to ever-increasing European secularism—and secondarily to multiculturalism that now includes other faiths such as Islam. Muslim Turkey is actively seeking EU membership.

Given these stubborn obstacles, deciding on the exact wording of a constitutional religious reference will prove to be an arduous task indeed. German conservative member of the European Parliament (MEP) Joachim Würmeling submitted a provisional sentence which reads: "The union values shall include the values of those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty as well as those who do not share such a belief but respect these universal values arising from other sources."

There is no way this compromise statement, not even mentioning the name Christian, will ever please the Roman Catholic Church. Nor, for that matter, will it engage the minds of unbelievers. Keith Wood, director of the National Secular Society, recently stated: "A very large proportion of the European population is non-religious. We view with concern the influence of religion in the internal workings of the EU."

Europe's present direction is clearly secular. However, the Bible tells us of a rapid reversal in this ongoing trend when the time becomes right.

The book of Revelation describes a future period when a dominant religion that calls itself Christian will hold sway over the governmental systems of Europe. At that time stunning miracles will transform gullible masses into willing worshipers of a charismatic leader who dares to stand in the place of God. Having had little or no background in solid biblical teachings, and unaware of these prophesied events, most people will easily fall prey to many insidious religious deceptions.

You need to read and study the book of Revelation. It provides an overview of end-time prophecy. As a helpful guide, we also recommend that you request our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Sources: United Press International, *The European Observer*.)

EU embassies around the world?

Drafting a new European Union constitution has brought forth a flurry of proposals from member states trying to influence the contents of what is now viewed as potentially the most important document in Europe.

Not least among these is a Franco-German proposal that would see EU representations and embassies around the world (the European Commission already has offices in 130 countries). As planned, these Union diplomats would report to a European Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Peter Hain, British representative to the EU constitutional convention, recently said: "If George W. Bush wants to phone Europe, he speaks to the President of the Council (of Europe). If Colin Powell wants to, then he dials the new foreign representative." But those who know President Bush will tell you that he is far more likely to contact individual European national leaders directly.

Nonetheless, it is true that Bible prophecy shows that some of these Franco-German imperial dreams will undoubtedly come to fulfillment. (Source: *The Times* [London].)

Extramarital affairs becoming more commonplace

Sarah Womack, social-affairs correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, stated that "divorce rates [in England and Wales] rose last year for the first time in five years, leaving an additional 147,000 children [each] with a single parent." Divorcing adults often selfishly don't think of the

effects their divorcing will have on their children.

Let's face it. Although there can be many reasons for divorce, the main one is and has always been unfaithfulness to a marriage partner. Western attitudes toward adultery are not that encouraging.

A major feature article in *The Sunday Times* revealed that "up to 55 percent of people have an affair at some time in their lives . . . One in 10 men admit to an affair in the past five years . . . For men in London the average number of sexual partners over a lifetime has jumped from 12.2 in 1990 to 15.5 in 2000." Statistics about

women showed a similar increase.

Of course, affairs don't always result in divorce. The article stated that "new research suggests people are becoming more tolerant of straying spouses and brief

"American studies have shown that religious people disapprove of affairs more strongly than others—but have just as many of them."

affairs. What matters more, they say, is 'emotional infidelity.'" Genuine repentance by the offender followed by true forgiveness on the part of the offended is commendable. But in the long run so-called tolerance (mutual or otherwise) of adulterous behavior can lead only to more misery and unhappiness.

Perhaps the most disturbing statement in the article was this: "American studies have shown that religious people disapprove of affairs more strongly than others—but have just as many of them." Such blatant hypocrisy is shameful and embarrassing. The apostle Paul wrote: "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame" (1 Corinthians 15:34). To better understand why God condemns any sexual relationships outside of marriage, please write for our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*. (Sources: *The Sunday Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*.)

College faculties left-leaning

American colleges and universities pride themselves on diversity and don't hesitate to tout it. So it's somewhat surprising that, when it comes to the political leaning of their instructors, those same institutions are anything but diverse.

Findings from a recent national study of political party affiliations of faculty members at 21 top-name institutions were stunning in the lack of diversity and near-uniform liberal leaning among those who shape the thinking of America's young adults.

What were some of the numbers? At Harvard, only 4 percent of the faculty were from conservative

parties; at Cornell, 3 percent; Brown University, 5 percent; Penn State, 17 percent; Stanford University, 11 percent; the University of Colorado-Boulder, 4 percent; UCLA in Los Angeles, 6 percent; and at the University of California-Santa Barbara, 1 percent.

In many university departments such as English, history, sociology, political science and economics, researchers found only one or no conservative-leaning faculty members compared to several dozen on the left.

Many American parents, concerned about the education their sons and daughters will receive when they send them off to college, have to ask the question: Are these really institutions of higher learning, or of ideological programming? (Sources: *American Enterprise* magazine, *Capitalism* magazine, *The Christian Science Monitor*.)



Removing the Ten Commandments

The entrance to the Alabama Supreme Court is graced by the presence of a huge stone monument displaying the shortened but still correct version of the Ten Commandments. Recently a federal judge

ordered the removal of this 5,280-pound monument which, ironically, had been installed by the chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court.

The federal judge who ordered its removal described the monument as "an obtrusive display intended to proselytise on behalf of that particular religion." The monument was paid for with private funds and also bears inscriptions with quotes from

famous historical figures and documents such as the Declaration of Independence. The removal order is currently on hold while the decision is being appealed.

Our multicultural age does not necessarily favor the faith of our fathers. Also the rival forces of Christianity and secularism continually clash in American life.

Some judges still consider the Ten Commandments to be the moral foundation of American law, which indeed they are. While Christians are encouraged to write God's law in their hearts through the power of God's Spirit, a physical display also reminds us of the existence of this unique moral code of conduct given directly by our Creator. To better understand this crucial set of laws, request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*. (Source: *The Daily Telegraph* [London].)



EU expansion into Africa in the works?

European Union ambitions may reach far beyond the borders of Europe. Africa is presently being considered as the next target. Long-range plans apparently include North African nations like Tunisia and Morocco being brought into the EU. Eventually the United States will express its serious concerns about European Union ambitions in Africa. (Source: *The Sunday Times* [London].)

Moral guidance from the United Nations?

Some British politicians and Anglican Church bishops aggressively take the position that without an official UN seal of approval, any Anglo-American war with Iraq would be immoral. Other leading politicians from Germany and France (and even some in the United States) insist that the UN must first validate the legitimacy of any American conflict with Iraq.

Veteran British journalist and war correspondent Ann Leslie minces no words with her frank rejoinder. "How can we take any moral guidance from a body as venal, corrupt and self-serving as the UN?" She points out that the United Nations is a political body composed of countries, "a goodly portion of which are run by murderous dictatorships."

Libya is a case in point. That nation's undemocratic leaders routinely deal with political dissenters by beatings, hangings by the wrists, electric shocks, encounters with raging dogs, threatening and abusing family members of the accused and the like. Moreover in 1999 the UN's own "Special Rapporteur on Torture" issued a damning report on Libya's human rights record.

And yet the UN unashamedly voted to award its presidency of the Human Rights Commission to Libya. Typically, one of Libyan dictator Gadhafi's diplomats responded, "By this appointment the UN has demonstrated to the world that our human rights record is exemplary." Perhaps we shouldn't expect more from a commission that includes in its members such noted serial human-rights abusers as China, Cuba, Sudan and Syria. And, lest we forget, the United States was voted off the commission in 2001, though it was later reinstated.

To add to this absurdity, Iraq was chosen to chair the upcoming UN disarmament conference May 12-June 27. Yes, Iraq—the very nation that has invaded four of its neighbors in recent decades and

repeatedly defied various UN resolutions calling on it to destroy its weapons of mass destruction as it agreed to do after its defeat in the 1991 Gulf War. The cochair of the conference? None other than Iran, which is aggressively pursuing its own weapons of mass destruction.

In practice the United Nations views all member states as if they had equal moral standing. Interestingly, Libya was elected to this office by a commission vote of 33-3 with some abstentions. Noted American journalist and columnist Charles Krauthammer observed: "They [the UN] will now welcome a one-party police state—which specializes in abduction, assassination, torture and detention without trial—to the chair of the United Nations' highest body charged with defending human rights."

In summing up the Iraqi situation, he concluded: "The United Nations is on the verge of demonstrating finally and fatally its moral bankruptcy and its strategic irrelevance." Ann Leslie adds: "It [the UN] is not a body from which we should take moral or even, indeed, legal guidance." (Sources: *The Daily Mail* [London], News and Opinion.com.)

Religion more important to Americans

The Pew Research Center in Paris recently reported that Americans say that their religion plays a more significant role in their lives than in any other wealthy country. This particular Pew survey, conducted in 44 nations, showed that 6 in 10 U.S. citizens described religion as being very important in their lives. By comparison, even in Roman Catholic Italy fewer than 3 in 10 considered religion as personally significant. This is typical of secular Europe.

However important religious beliefs are to a country, to be truly effective they must be reflected in right ethical behavior. (Source: *International Herald Tribune*.)

Famine stalks Africa

World hunger is on the rise again, much of it afflicting the African continent, especially the sub-Sahara. To put the numbers in perspective the *Los Angeles Times* reports: "Every year about six million children under the age of 5 die as a result of hunger and malnutrition, says a UN study . . . That's as if all of California's children in that age group—more than twice over—starved to death."

This increase in world hunger is primarily because of a combination of wars, droughts, floods and governmental corruption and mismanagement, the latter of which has in turn led to a shortfall in donations from wealthy nations. The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) puts the number of undernourished people at 840 million—roughly 15 percent of the world's people. "After some progress in the 1990s, the rate has returned to levels of a decade ago" (*Los Angeles Times*).

The Independent on Sunday's environment editor, Geoffrey Lean, further explained that "this year's total world harvest will fall for the fifth year in succession, while the global population continues to grow."

More specifically, famine has returned to Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Nearly 6 million people are in desperate need of food supplies to avert starvation. Perhaps another million require immediate help in Eritrea. Also, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, Zimbabwe and other African nations are experiencing severe food shortages.

Lesotho is another case in point. Too much rain devastated crops in that country, so people are dying there. Mountainous roads are a barrier to getting aid supplies through to the population. A *London Times* feature article stated that "crop production has declined sharply over the past three decades and is expected to cease altogether over large swaths of arable land because of soil erosion and declining soil fertility." A 31 percent HIV-AIDS infection rate complicates matters further.

The book of Revelation records the devastation wrought by the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, one of which symbolizes hunger and famine (6:5-6). It appears to already be riding in Africa. (Sources: *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Times* [both London], *Los Angeles Times*.)

2003: The Storm Clouds Gather

What long-term effects will come from the unsettling events so far in 2003? No human being knows for sure. But we can observe, analyze and learn from the storm clouds gathering on the horizon.

by Don Ward

Pollsters asked the American people in recent surveys: What are your greatest concerns for 2003? In most polls the number one answer was war in the Middle East; number two was the economy.

How will war with Iraq affect your life? Anxiety over war in the Middle East has already affected your wallet. War fears and unrest in Venezuela have caused oil prices to shoot up rapidly in recent weeks—the spot price exceeding \$36 a barrel as of this writing. In some parts of the United States energy costs have soared as an arctic winter sent thermometers plummeting as far south as Miami.

The stock market is down for the third year in a row, hammered recently by uncertainty, war fears and rising energy costs. Consumer spending is slumping, unemployment is growing, manufacturing continues to slow and the trade deficit is spiraling out of sight. The U.S. dollar continues to lose ground against the euro as prospects for a brighter U.S. economic future grow dimmer.

According to Stratfor Report, Japan, with the world's second largest economy, continues to wallow in a protracted economic bust. Japan's Nikkei index has lost around 20 percent of its value over the last year.

Germany, with the world's third largest economy, also continues to experience grave difficulties. Germany's unemployment rate stands at 10 percent. Some of the nation's largest banks are in trouble.

Recently, German business leaders expressed their concerns with the economic policies of Gerhard Schroeder's government. The chairman of Adidas called the government "conceptionless" and said that "nobody has a clue in this overall chaos," while the head of IKB Deutsche Industriebank said, "Not since the end of the [Second World] war have conditions been as bad as today."

Worldwide quest for armaments

Much of the economic vitality of the nations is continually siphoned off in their pursuit of armaments. The nations of the world are trying to beat as many plowshares into swords as possible. The prophet Joel prophesies of the prelude to end-time warfare: "Proclaim this among the nations: 'Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat

your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am strong'''" (Joel 3:9-10).

America's military is the country's biggest business. The 2003 Department of Defense budget is \$369 billion, plus another \$10 billion in supplemental funds for fighting terrorism if needed.

Then on Feb. 12 CIA Director George Tenet acknowledged that North Korea has intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons to the West Coast of the United States.

The situation in Korea appears to be reaching crisis proportions, with North Korean officials threatening "total war" and preemptive



U.S. President George W. Bush has ordered the military to begin installing a national missile defense system. Ten ground-based interceptors will be installed in Fort Greeley, Alaska, by 2004 and 10 more will be added by 2005 or 2006. Washington also requested permission from the Danish and British governments to use radar sites in Greenland and England. Many analysts believe that this move will set off another arms race similar to the one that consumed much of the resources of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

North Korea, one of President Bush's "axis of evil" nations, has recently admitted that it has nuclear weapons. In December the nation pulled out of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and expelled the UN observers who were monitoring its mothballed nuclear power reactor, then announced they were restarting the reactor—which would enable it to create more bomb-making materials.

strikes against the United States. North Korea appears to be coldly calculating the odds, wondering if America is able and willing to fight an active war on two fronts.

China, the world's most populous nation, is sounding a clear clarion call that she intends to displace the United States as the preeminent power on the face of the earth.

Bible prophecy reveals that a powerful alliance will be the dominant world power just before Christ returns. According to Daniel, a European-centered power (called the "beast" in the book of Revelation) will eventually enter and set up its headquarters in Jerusalem. "He shall also enter the Glorious Land . . . But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him" (Daniel 11:41, 44-45).

Tidings out of the east and the north (directions are from the point of view of Jerusalem in the prophecy) trouble the “beast,” indicating that the world is divided between East and West. Neither China nor nations from the Middle East will have control of the Middle East at the end of this present evil age.

Disease epidemics to escalate

Health experts estimate that some 20 million people will die of AIDS on the continent of Africa in the next few years. American politicians, businessmen and entertainment figures have visited Africa and pledged financial support in fighting AIDS. Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, has pledged millions of dollars to fight the disease there.

On Jan. 28, in his State of the Union address, President Bush proposed an emergency plan for AIDS relief to help in the fight against AIDS in Africa. The intent of this plan is to “prevent 7 million new AIDS infections, treat at least 2 million people with life-extending drugs and provide humane care for millions of people suffering from AIDS and for children orphaned by AIDS.” He asked the U.S. Congress to commit \$15 billion over the next five years to fight AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean.

In an effort to try to understand the nature of disease epidemics in general, scientists have been looking at the environmental connection to meningitis, which ravages desert areas of North Africa. They believe that there is a connection to the “desertification” that’s been happening over the past 40 years. The disease doesn’t occur in the forested areas of Central Africa, but is endemic in the dry region stretching from Senegal to Ethiopia.

Many of the more communicable diseases are becoming more and more resistant to the so-called miracle drugs. New and more virulent strains of various diseases are rearing their ugly heads.

Upset weather conditions, food disparity

Scientists have made great strides in being able to predict the weather. Yet they cannot control it or in many cases even begin to understand it. Scientists talk about global warming and the El Niño effect, but they still don’t really know what is causing either one.

Drought plagues some areas while others receive too much rain. God foretold such a time through the prophet Amos: “I also withheld rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered” (Amos 4:7).

Up to 24,000 people a day—three quarters of them children under the age of 5—die of

hunger-related causes. More than 800 million people are chronically undernourished, 180 million children are severely underweight for their age and, says the UN, 2 billion people suffer from nutrient-deficiency diseases.

Yet the problem is not one of a scarcity of food. The United States exports 60 percent of the food it grows, but even in America, 26 million people are in need of food handouts.

Only 20 years ago, Ghana used to export rice; today its rice industry has collapsed under U.S. and Thai imports. Many Pakistani farmers have burned their harvests in desperation because they are losing money. About 20 percent of Africa’s food now comes from rich countries, even though it could in many cases grow its own.

Water becomes more and more scarce

As the world seeks and fights for the oil fields of the globe, in time another liquid will become even more precious than all the world’s petroleum reserves—water! A World Bank forecast for South Korea, a relatively well-watered country, calculates that if its economy grows 5 percent a year, industry’s demand for water will cut in half the amount available for farming within 23 years.

In China, the water needed to produce one ton of wheat worth \$200 can be used to expand industrial output by \$14,000. Farming, analysts predict, will always lose out to industry.

The paradox is that as nations continue to increase industrial production, water use increases exponentially. The result is less and less water for growing food. As the food supply of a country decreases, it is forced to depend more on other countries.

Moral decline continues to accelerate

Various authors have written volumes concerning America’s obsession with materialism and pleasure seeking. Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork gained notoriety with his book *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, in which he graphically describes the disturbing trends of America’s increasing obsession with sensual pleasure.

The United States is now in what I call “the post-immoral state” and has lapsed into a state of *amorality*. Amorality means *no* standards of morality are universally accepted. As Victor Davis Hanson writes in *The National Review Online*, “There is a postmodern amorality afloat—the dividend of years of an American educational system in which historical ignorance, cultural relativism, and well-intentioned theory, in place of cold facts, has reigned” (“Postmodern Palestine,” March 29, 2002).

When a nation falls into the cesspool of amorality, the only universally accepted

standard is that all lifestyles are to be equally accepted. Thus the greatest evil becomes *intolerance* of another person’s lifestyle. Then intolerance is suddenly defined as hate, and then laws are passed to prosecute those who would condemn another person’s lifestyle.

So one of the most disturbing trends in the United States is the secularization of society, to the point that all standards of behavior are to be equally tolerated. This has far-reaching implications for its people.

America is a nation in which 90 percent of the people profess that they believe in God. Its currency bears the national motto, “In God We Trust.” Its citizens and schoolchildren repeat the pledge of allegiance to the flag with the affirmation, “One nation under God.” In its courts jurors and witnesses are sworn in with the words, “so help me God.”

But the question of the day is, do Americans really believe in the God of the Bible? Based on the popular culture of the day, one would have to conclude that their belief is betrayed by their hedonistic lifestyles. Many Americans are now driven to try to squeeze out every ounce of pleasure they can while at the same time wallowing in the pits of hopelessness and despair, having lost sight of personal and national integrity.

A warning to all

In view of all of this, in Luke 21:34-36 Christ admonishes everyone who will listen to “take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day [of end-time calamity preceding Christ’s return] come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Will you be ready? **GN**

Recommended Reading

What’s behind the increasing troubles, the gathering storm clouds we see all around us? What do these things mean? Does Bible prophecy give us any indication? To help you understand where our world is heading, we’ve prepared several eye-opening booklets to help you understand the meaning of world trends and events. Be sure to read *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. Both are yours free for the asking.



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Homeland Security: What Crucial Piece Is the United States Missing?

After the devastating terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, homeland security became a top priority for the United States. Yet, at the same time, it seems to be overlooking the most important aspect of its safety, and the risk is incalculable. What is this crucial component of any people's long-term security?

by Cecil Maranville

Due to its immense power and peaceful relations with its immediate neighbors, the United States has long enjoyed security at home. With the end of the Cold War, a sense of invulnerability settled on the world's only remaining superpower.

Attacks on U.S. allies and its embassies abroad did not bring security concerns to the forefront of American thinking until the terrible morning of Sept. 11, 2001. Now the United States finds itself preoccupied with the safety and security of its land and people. "Homeland security" dominates American news. Not that enemies are attacking the U.S. homeland on a regular basis—at least not yet . . .

On Nov. 25, 2002, the president signed legislation that officially created the new Department of Homeland Security. Its mission statement outlines three principal objectives:

- Prevent terrorist attacks within the United States.
- Reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism.
- Minimize the damage from potential attacks and natural disasters.

The White House projects a budget of \$37 billion for the massive new department, with an additional \$35 billion spent in the private sector on homeland security. The government will employ some 170,000 people directly in the department. But, theoretically, every loyal American citizen is a volunteer sentry, for the president has repeatedly asked all to be on the alert for potential security threats.

At the time of this writing, there has not been a subsequent major attack on U.S. soil. (The FBI reports thwarting more than 100 planned attacks.) But will the United States continue to be so successful?

The crucial missing piece

Talk of homeland security brings to mind a biblical song or prayer that speaks of a people's protection. Because of its comforting thoughts about home and family, undoubtedly millions of people have read it. But how many

are aware of its *prophetic* message? Within a few words, it reveals the key to success or failure in securing any nation's homeland.

It's the second sentence of Psalm 127: "Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain" (New International Version).

"*Only the LORD can bless a home.* Without the help of the LORD it is useless to build a home or to guard a city," is the wording of the Contemporary English Version.

How is this prophetic? It reveals the consequences of lacking *divine* security. The missing dimension of homeland security is *God's divine protection*. If a home—or homeland—has God's protection, its sentries will be effective. However, if a home or homeland does not enjoy God's protection, even hundreds of millions of sentries, multiple-billion-dollar budgets and the latest in technological devices will not guarantee its safety.

Yes, U.S. political leaders sometimes call on God for His blessing and protection in their speeches. And many of America's citizens still consider themselves to be God-fearing. But is it enough merely to invoke God's name publicly? Is that enough to meet the prescription laid out so plainly and forcefully in Psalm 127? How does a country ensure divine security?

A prophecy of homeland security

A remarkable passage in the book of Ezekiel specifically addresses the issue of homeland security. The first several verses of Ezekiel 33 explain what any country will normally do when an enemy threatens it. Its people will set up an early-warning system. In biblical parlance, they post a watchman to be alert for danger.

In the following statements, God lays out a scenario in which He in fact stirs an enemy to threaten a nation neglecting an obedient relationship with Him: "The LORD said: 'Ezekiel, son of man, warn your people by saying: "Someday, I, the LORD, may send an enemy to invade a country. And suppose its people choose someone to stand watch and to sound

a warning signal when the enemy is seen coming"'" (verses 1-3, CEV).

It sounds so simple and takes so few words—but this, in essence, describes the detailed work of a homeland security department with its complicated screening methods and warning procedures. The American government has chosen a numerical and color-coded threat alert notification system:

- Green, "Low," for "Low threat of terrorist actions."
- Blue, "Guarded," for "General risk of terrorist attacks."
- Yellow, "Elevated," for "Significant threat of terrorist attacks."
- Orange, "High," for "High risk of terrorist attacks."
- Red, "Severe," for "Severe risk of terrorist attacks."

A complex web of police, FBI, Secret Service, counterterrorism special forces, border patrol agents and military personnel—along with alert citizens—combine to form a formidable phalanx of "watchmen."

Sounding the alarm is only the beginning. Americans are being told that they will have to sacrifice some of their cherished freedom of movement and seek appropriate protection, depending on the threat level. Since they all risk suffering injury or loss of life, both the watchers and those they warn must share the responsibility.

God's conversation with Ezekiel continues: "If any of these people hear the signal and ignore it, they will be killed in battle. *But it will be their own fault, because they could have escaped if they had paid attention.*"

Then, He addresses the responsibility of the watchers, the guards: "But suppose the person watching fails to sound the warning signal. The enemy will attack and kill some of the sinful people in that country, and I, the LORD, will hold *that person* responsible for their death" (verses 4-6, CEV, emphasis added throughout).

Having the charge of keeping a nation secure is a grave responsibility. But, if you follow the drift of the conversation, God moves

away from speaking of a nation appointing its own guards to speaking of *His* appointment of watchmen who will give the people His own warning. Why does He use this language?

God appoints a watchman

He explains: “Ezekiel, I have appointed you to stand watch for the people of Israel. So listen to what I say, then warn them for me. When I tell wicked people they will die because of their sins, you must warn them to turn from their sinful ways. But if you refuse to warn them, you are responsible for their death. *If you do warn them, and they keep sinning, they will die because of their sins, and you will be innocent*” (verses 7-9, CEV).

What does this have to do with securing God’s protection as spoken of in Psalm 127? Although most people are unaware of it, God still thinks and works the same way. It would be simplistic to speak in terms of a singular watchman to provide God’s warning message to this vast world. Even in ancient Israel, each city or town had a watchman—and presumably more than one to handle more than one shift of duty. So Israel had countless watchmen. Similarly, in modern times, “the watchman” is the primary instrument He works through today, the Church that Jesus Christ founded.

Throughout the ages since Ezekiel, God’s faithful servants often have repeated Ezekiel’s warning. But the most direct application of that warning message is applicable in these last days to the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa—along with other nations of the British Commonwealth and nations of northwest Europe. These peoples, by and large, have descended from the exiled kingdom of Israel of old. During the last two centuries they have received the generous benefits that God promised to their forefathers for this end time (to learn more, please request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*).

Regardless of how secure these nations seem to be when one measures defense in terms of advanced technology and military might, God’s present message is that the nations have yet to face their greatest security threat.

Today most religious people are comfortable with relying on their *own* sense of what “being good” means—rather than carefully learning the *biblical* definition of what is good and then living up to it.

For example, Americans in general are generous people, often willing to help someone next door or even a continent away. To be sure, generosity is a godly trait. All nations can point to good within their citizenry, and most individuals can point to worthwhile qualities

within their character. But, as the prophet indicates, a singular positive trait or even several fine qualities aren’t enough when we grossly neglect other major areas of righteousness.

For our well-being, God insists that we accept *all* of His definitions of right and wrong, and live accordingly. As Jesus Christ put it, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

These requirements, of course, seem old-fashioned and overly strict to many people. The very fact that they do, speaks to the times in which we live. People want God, but they want Him *on their own terms*—not His. We, as a nation, may temporarily fool ourselves into thinking that just being good according to our own terms is satisfactory, but the shocking truth is that this very attitude will deprive us of God’s protection.

Protection has conditions

If a people that has been especially blessed by God is unwilling to obey Him and seek His will, at some point in time any massive system of homeland security will be for nothing. If we desire God’s blessing, *we have to live the way He says we should live*. Just as with any physical system for security, we have to pay the price for divine protection.

God spoke in the same “all or nothing” terms in His conversation with Ezekiel. Continuing from where we left off above: “Ezekiel, son of man, the people of Israel are complaining that the punishment for their sins is more than they can stand. They have lost all hope for survival, and they blame me. Tell them that as surely as I am the living LORD God, I don’t like to see wicked people die. I enjoy seeing them *turn from their sins and live*. So if the Israelites want to live, *they must stop sinning and turn back to me*.”

In modern parlance, if people request or expect divine protection, they must stop their wicked ways that trample on God’s laws and teachings which define right from wrong. But telling people that they need to repent is most likely to evoke a response something like, “What about all the *good things* we do?”

We need to understand plainly that doing “some good” is not the same as *surrendering oneself to live by all of God’s instruction in righteousness*.

God’s words to Ezekiel pierce through the façade of “good people” today who refuse to submit to the laws and teachings He reveals to us in the Bible. Lest we misunderstand and think that this means God is harsh, take note of His ready promise of mercy along with His high standards for human behavior:

“Tell them that when good people *start sinning*, all the good they did in the past cannot

save them from being punished. And remind them that when wicked people *stop sinning*, their past sins will be completely forgiven, and they won’t be punished.

“Suppose I promise good people that they will live, then later they start sinning and believe they will be saved by the good they did in the past. These people will certainly be put to death because of their sins. Their good deeds will be forgotten.

“Suppose I warn wicked people that they will die because of their sins, and they stop sinning and start doing right . . . Then if they stop doing evil and start obeying my Law, they will live. Their past sins will be forgiven, and they will live because they have done right” (verses 10-16, CEV).

Hard to accept that we don’t please God

All during the 20th century there has been a steady shift among Western nations away from Christian or biblical values. America is virtually the only Western nation left that still makes at least some pretense at being a godly oriented nation, and even that is rapidly fading. Secularism has swept religion almost totally into the background in Europe, as it is increasingly doing in the United States.

So is it realistic to think that many Americans would respond positively to being told they do not please God? Or, if they don’t change their ways, the very God who gave them their vast wealth and power, will no longer bless them with protection from terror, war or natural disaster? They probably would not. Indeed, the Bible indicates that they are more likely to complain about how unfair God is to expect them to change their ways.

Why can we say that? Because God long ago revealed the predictability of human reasoning in people who reject the authority of His word over their lives: “Yet your countrymen say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ But it is *their* way that is not just. If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so. Yet . . . you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ But I will judge each of you according to his own ways” (Ezekiel 33:17-20, NIV).

God promises to withdraw His assistance in securing a nation’s welfare when its people turn their backs on His commandments. When He does, they lose the most important and valuable aspect of their national security.

How do you think the United States—or your own homeland—measures up to God’s expectations? Do you think He will grant His protection? Read our booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to find out. **GN**

Cloning: A Dangerous Journey Into Uncharted Waters?

What's behind the concerted efforts to clone human beings? Is this another attempt to climb to the loftiest heights of knowledge and defy our Creator?

by Mario Seiglie

It seems science fiction has a knack of becoming reality.

In 1818 Mary Shelley wrote a brooding novel about the dreadful consequences of a scientist's attempt to artificially create a human being. By trying to imitate what only God had done before—the creation of human life—this doctor brought enormous sorrow on himself and those he loved.

Her novel, *Frankenstein*, is actually a far cry from the Hollywood horror movie that made it famous. It is rather a warning to mankind about the dangers of delving into certain realms of science, such as attempting by artificial means to create human life. Such attempts may go beyond man's ability to control the outcome and unleash terrible effects. As in the novel, the created being can end up turning on its fallible creator.

Another science fiction novel that is slowly becoming a reality is the work by Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, written in 1932. It describes a futuristic world where all births are produced from test tubes in a factory. Thousands of containers are filled with genetic material engineered to produce preprogrammed individuals ranging from scientists to dim-witted laborers. Their free will is limited, since they cannot choose what to become, being fit only for their preassigned tasks. In the end, this supposed dream society turns into a nightmare as well.

As 2003 began, the firm Clonaid announced it had cloned the first human being. The name of the girl, Eve, apparently was chosen to emphasize that just as God had created Eve, the first woman, so those in this group had now created a person, but according to their own design. However, since Clonaid failed to provide any verification of their claims, many have concluded that their announcement was only a publicity hoax designed to capitalize on the public's fascination with the subject.

Nonetheless, scientists in laboratories scattered around the world have been furiously racing to become the first to produce a cloned

baby, and many are predicting that a cloned human being will be a reality during 2003.

To these scientists, this pursuit has become the scientific equivalent of climbing Mount Everest. They all know that fame and fortune awaits the first to achieve the feat, while hardly anyone will remember who came in second place. So the race is on to be the first to the top, and a lot of money and skills are being invested in the effort.

Man's conquest of knowledge

Over the last century man's discovery of vast realms of knowledge has been breathtaking. We have gone from the horse-drawn carriage to the automobile, from gas lamps to electric lights, from looking at the sky to flying through it, from the abacus to the computer and from harnessing animals to harnessing atomic power.

In 1997, a man-made machine named Deep Blue defeated the world's chess master, showing it could on some level outthink him (though a match earlier this year against another machine, Deep Junior, ended in a draw). We are now witnessing the converging of technologies. Man is creating smarter machines, and machines used by men are creating artificially cloned creatures—such as Dolly, the first cloned sheep, in 1996.

Sadly, it is a historical fact that all too many technologies developed by man have eventually been used not only for good, but for evil.

Gunpowder, for example, was first used by the Chinese to delight the multitudes with fireworks, but eventually it was used for evil—to more effectively kill human beings. TNT was first used in mining and road building, but was soon used to make terrible bombs. Finally came atomic power, used not only to generate electricity, but also to produce nuclear bombs, which for the last 58 years have threatened humanity with annihilation.

Opening a Pandora's box?

Now a new Pandora's box is being opened. In the famous Greek myth Pandora was sent a box by the gods—but warned never to open

it. Eventually her curiosity got the best of her and, upon opening it, she loosed on the world a host of evils.

The avid pursuit of cloning by scientists—some well-intentioned, some unscrupulous—certainly looks as if it could open another Pandora's box upon the world.

Cloning may be one of the last frontiers of knowledge available to man. He has already delved into the oceans, into space and into the atom. Now he is exploring deep into the human body—the most exquisite and intricate object of God's creation. With the recent unlocking of the human genome and the possibility of creating engineered human beings through cloning, what awaits mankind as it delves into these long-hidden secrets?

"Nothing they propose will be withheld from them"

At least once before, human beings sought to climb to the loftiest heights of knowledge and defy their Creator.

From the fertile Mesopotamian plains of Babel, the Bible describes a time when men spoke a common language and quickly multiplied their technical skills—not only for good but for evil.

The Bible tells us: "Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar [modern Iraq], and they dwelt there . . . And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.' But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, 'Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them'" (Genesis 11:1-6).

God saw that with growing technology and a common language, men would soon be entering into the realms of science that would eventually spell their undoing. So He supernaturally imposed many languages on them,

and successfully divided mankind into different cultures, spreading them into diverse lands—thus slowing the pace of technology.

Now humankind again essentially has a

The possibilities are endless—and frightening. Some have already

With the unlocking of the human genome and the possibility of creating engineered human beings through cloning, what awaits mankind as it delves into these secrets?

common language and forum, given international communication in English among the world's most educated and powerful tools such as supercomputers and the Internet, by which discoveries can be relayed throughout the world in seconds.

Troubling questions and possibilities

One great question about human cloning is: As a clone's physical development would already be "mapped out" based on the life of the original person cloned, would the clone lose his ability to choose freely what to become? A similar question could be asked in regard to any child—cloned or not—who is the product of genetic manipulation.

One of God's greatest gifts to human beings is the free will to determine their own destiny. He told the ancient Israelites: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Yet, with genetically engineered and cloned individuals, there is not a healthy mixing of the mother's and father's genes, but a prepackaged individual made according to the whims of some scientists.

Besides, science journals have reported significant harmful side effects to cloning. Dolly, the cloned sheep, did not acquire youthful cells, but replicated the cells of her seven-year-old mother. The sheep, which was recently put to sleep because of a lung infection, suffered from maladies such as arthritis and premature aging.

Moreover, what will happen if cloning technology falls into the hands of evil-minded dictators? Could they then protect themselves and their corrupt regimes with armies of fighting men built like Arnold Schwarzenegger and an array of scientists replicated from the cells of an Albert Einstein?

Could we see scientists curious enough to create genetically engineered creatures like something out of H.G. Wells' novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*? After the cloning of the sheep Dolly, and the successful combining of genes from different plant and animal species, these prospects are no longer completely in the realm of science fiction.

proposed the production of cloned torsos to grow organs for transplanting. Indeed, some scientists in this field are already dreaming up anything you could imagine.

"Knowledge shall increase"

Interestingly, the Bible foretold a time when such astounding scientific leaps would come to pass. The angel Gabriel said: "At that time [the time of the end] . . . there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time . . . But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and *knowledge shall increase*" (Daniel 12:1, 4, emphasis added).

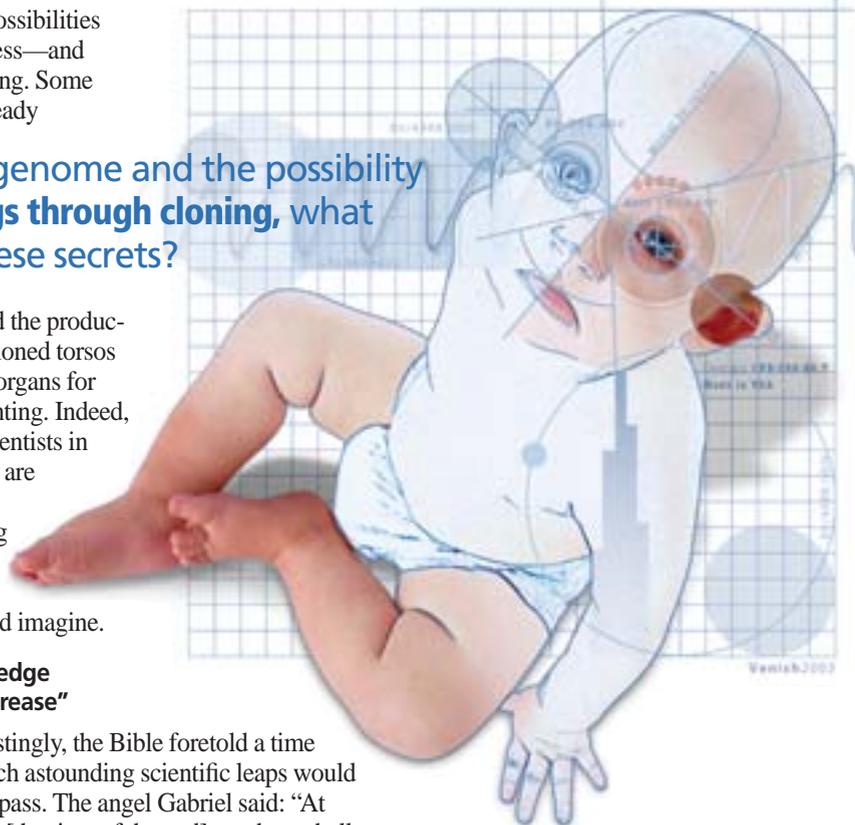
Yes, there would be a time of massive, worldwide rapid transportation and communication during which "knowledge shall increase." This would lead to a period in history described as "the time of the end," a time when God would be forced to intervene in world affairs and save mankind from itself.

Clearly man is building up a figurative "tower of Babel" with all his technology and scientific advances taking him into such dangerous realms as cloning. Regrettably, such new technologies rarely escape the pressures and pursuit of fame and power.

The good news beyond

Despite man's incessant curiosity and drive for fame, power, glory and wealth, God has not totally abandoned humanity to its own designs. The good news is that He is well aware of what is going on, and will not let mankind destroy itself, either through war or genetic manipulation.

The end of the book of Revelation shows that God will ultimately succeed in directing mankind to fulfill the purpose for which He created us. Yes, there will be difficult times ahead, but God has promised to take care of His own and establish His wonderful and



peaceful Kingdom on this earth. One of the keys to remaining faithful at this time is to keep His commandments to the end. Christ said, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

Writing to the church in Philadelphia, Christ describes a terrifying time to come when great tribulation will come on the entire world. But He tells His faithful people: "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10). (For more information, please request the free booklets *The Church Jesus Built* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*).

It certainly appears that man is crossing into a most dangerous realm of knowledge—the science of replicating and reengineering himself. As so many science-fiction writers—and now also leading world figures—have warned, the consequences of unleashing this knowledge are dire and unpredictable.

But we have a caring Creator watching what is happening and, as was the case when the Tower of Babel was being built, He is again observing that "nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them." Thus He will assuredly intervene again, just as He did back then. May the time for establishing His glorious Kingdom on this earth not be far off! **GN**

Should You Attend Church?

Many, perhaps even you, have become disillusioned with churches and religious leaders. They wonder what they should do and where they should turn. What does God say?

by Wilbur Berg

Under normal circumstances, most people who believe in God and the Bible want to attend church services because they wish to worship God together. But we live in a distrustful age that has created suspicion about religion and religious bodies—sadly, much of it well earned.

Scandals revealing the bad moral examples of church leaders have made many wary. If that weren't enough, many people are confused about which doctrines and practices are truly biblical. They are also uncertain about which, if any, church organizations are truly of God. Many are turned off by the lack of spiritual nourishment—or even outright disbelief in the Bible—they encounter in some denominations.

Consequently, a growing number of people are becoming disillusioned with their church but don't know where to turn. Others simply try to worship God by themselves, apart from any group affiliation or fellowship.

What would God have us do? Should we stay where we know things are not right, or take the path of spiritual isolation, or have confidence that there is a better alternative? Could there be dangers—possibly even unrecognized—in some of the courses of action we might choose? How does the Bible answer these important questions?

God established and preserves His Church

The first question we need answered is, what does the word *church* actually mean? Throughout the Scriptures *church* and *congregation* refer to *people*, never to a building. God's Church is made up of people called to follow Jesus Christ. It is composed of *disciples* or *students* of Jesus Christ who convene to receive God's instruction.

Both Jesus Christ and His apostles, however, repeatedly warned us not to be deceived by a false Christianity—a religious deception that was well under way even in the first century (Matthew 24:5, 11, 24; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15; Galatians 1:6-9). God's true Church is composed of those who have been called out of this satanically influenced world (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 1 Peter 2:9) to become a spiritually converted group dedicated to following God's ways as taught in the Bible. The Bible is the standard by which all

religious bodies are to be measured.

Jesus Himself stated that He would build His Church and that it would never die out (Matthew 16:18). Several decades later the apostle Paul referred to this spiritual body of people as “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground [foundation] of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

God's Church has never been a large, popular body. While many traditional Christian denominations today are large and powerful, the Bible reveals that God's true Church always would be small in numbers, somewhat scattered and often persecuted. Due to their small numbers, many of the early congregations met in private homes rather than in large halls or buildings (Luke 12:32; Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15).

Nevertheless, though scattered and few in number, God has always cared for and spiritually nourished those He has called (2 Timothy 2:19; Hebrews 13:5).

A safe refuge

The Bible also describes God's Church as a source of strength, safety and refuge for its members. The Bible refers to it as Christ's spiritual body (Colossians 1:18, 24). Further, Jesus promised that the onslaughts of Satan would not be able to overwhelm God's protection and defenses of it.

However, this does not mean that God's people are immune to satanic attacks. Anytime a Christian lowers his spiritual defenses, he places himself in grave danger of being subverted and even “devoured” by mankind's spiritual enemy, the devil (1 Peter 5:8). But if he utilizes the protection God offers, he is able to discern truth from error and can successfully withstand the spiritual trials and tests Satan instigates (Ephesians 6:10-18).

In contrast, a person who does not seek the fellowship of God's Church denies himself the sheltering bulwark and safety that God intends. If he chooses to be alone, such an individual may miss out on the protective instruction and reminders that are part of God's reason for establishing His Church.

God knows how spiritually weak and vulnerable we human beings can sometimes become, which is why He established a loving membership and ordained ministry for the encouragement and instruction of His

Church. Such assistance is not available if a person chooses to worship alone or attends with a group that does not attempt to draw its teachings from the Bible.

Notice how important these aids and supports are, and how God placed them in His Church. Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13 outline the biblical qualifications for elders and deacons. They are given so appropriate leaders can be chosen to *take care of* the Church. The rest of the membership will then benefit from their talents and abilities, further strengthening the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16). Within the Church, each member is encouraged to contribute and do his share in showing godly love for the growth and spiritual development of all (Ephesians 4:15).

In a stable spiritual environment new and inexperienced people, as well as longtime members, can find a safe haven for fellowship and spiritual growth. God knows that all His called-out ones need the protection, care and instruction that only a loving group of dedicated people can provide, which is a major reason for His giving us guidelines for an organized Church body. Many spiritual benefits are inaccessible to those who choose to seek God alone.

A classroom for spiritual development

The Church of God serves many important needs. In addition to supplying uplifting, encouraging and educational sermons, there also can be instructive Bible classes for children, teens and adults, news about the work of the Church, focused instruction and training and a host of other benefits—all to create an atmosphere where spiritual concerns are addressed and the big questions answered. And while all these things are enormously beneficial, there is yet another extremely important reason for assembling that is often overlooked.

Notice Hebrews 10:24-25: “And let us *consider one another* in order to stir up love and good works, *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day [of Christ's coming and intervention] approaching” (emphasis added). This principle finds its roots in the Old Testament. God instructed that “the seventh

day is a Sabbath of solemn rest,” but it is also a time for “a holy convocation”—a commanded assembly—a time for believers to gather with others of like mind (Leviticus 23:3).

In addition to participating in worship services at the times God commands—and receiving edifying spiritual nourishment from attending services as part of His Church—God also asks us to *give of ourselves* to others (Acts 20:35).

Life is often difficult. And Christians, like everyone else, have trials and burdens (John 16:33). At such times it is easy to become discouraged and get derailed to the point of losing one’s spiritual focus. Clearly Christians need to strengthen and give support to each other, and have an outgoing sense of responsibility toward other members. As Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 10:24, “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.” This outgoing, unselfish concern for one another is what godly love is all about.

This does not mean that we should be meddling in others’ private business (Proverbs 26:17; 1 Peter 4:15). But it does mean that we should have a discreet, wise and watchful concern for each other’s welfare, and help in whatever way we can whether by encouragement, friendliness or other needed assistance.

The fellowshiping and sharing of ourselves with other people is how God develops His love in us. It is a power that needs to be *exercised* to grow. The person who chooses to not interact with others, perhaps without realizing it, cuts himself off from this vital and necessary spiritual development.

Each of us needs to realize that forsaking God’s specific instruction to assemble for worship and fellowship with God’s people courts serious spiritual dangers. Remember that even in the physical human body, muscles deteriorate if they are not used. In much the same way, without exercising contact with other members of God’s Church, one runs the risk of slow spiritual deterioration, perhaps even of endangering his or her salvation.

Consider this vital instruction from the apostle Paul: “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

Paul’s emphasis is on the importance of the group—not on the individual (although each member is certainly important to God). Paul goes on to liken the members of the Church to the various parts of the human physical body (which in both instances must work

together so we can function properly for the accomplishment of our responsibilities).

The implications are obvious. How can individual members of God’s Church work together to fulfill the goals of the Church unless they assemble regularly to worship God together?

Without the help and general guidance of and interaction with others, we can easily become unbalanced and self-centered. We *need* each other!

A sanctuary for truth and justice

Deceit, misrepresentation and falsification permeate religion as much as any other area of our societies. Perhaps most important of all, God’s Church is where we receive biblical truth, godly instruction and discernment. As noted earlier, God’s Word reveals the Church to be “the pillar and ground [foundation or mainstay] of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

Paul tells us that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Through His Church God provides to His true servants that needed reproof, correction, instruction and, not least, encouragement. It is the responsibility of the Church to defend God’s Word—“rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15)—by using the Bible as the foundation of true knowledge.

It is easy to delude ourselves into thinking that we can stand alone—either by ourselves or in a church that teaches doctrines we know are not found in the Bible—and through our own abilities rightly interpret and understand Scripture. But because of the many complexities in the Bible and the many erroneous interpretations that can snare and mislead, we all must beware lest we be misled into accepting and believing false doctrines. Satan, as Paul warns us, appears as “an angel [messenger] of light” and he has his own ministers, many themselves deceived, who may appear to be “ministers of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

In terms of sheer numbers Satan has been remarkably successful. The apostle John tells us that he “deceives the whole world” and that the entire world has come under his corrupting influence (Revelation 12:9; 1 John 5:19).

God’s true Church is one of the few safe bulwarks against Satan’s deception. While the Church doesn’t have perfect knowledge and is not always free of mistakes, it continues to seek truth and understanding. Its members are encouraged to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Each individual needs to

follow the examples of the Bereans (Acts 17:11) and Ephesians (Revelation 2:2) to test and determine where and through whom God is working today.

If a religious organization is not upholding God’s laws and the Bible He inspired, and if there is no spiritual light in it, then it cannot truthfully claim to be God’s Church (compare Isaiah 8:20). Such a body cannot effectively carry out the work of spreading the true gospel of Jesus Christ, one of the hallmarks of God’s true Church (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20).

How much are you missing?

Christians attending such a religious body, or striving on their own without active church affiliation, miss many benefits resident in the spiritual body where God is working. Consider all the important knowledge available and the marvelous opportunities to grow in godly love and character. The personal interaction, service, offerings and prayers of God’s true people demonstrate a level of godly concern that we all need, especially in times of difficulty and personal trials.

Finally, God is still instructing and adding to His spiritual body, following the example of the early New Testament Church (Acts 2:47; 11:24-26). God still works through a dedicated and properly organized group of people, just as He did even in Old Testament times (Acts 7:38).

For those who are wondering what to do, please consider carefully the matters presented in this article and set your heart to seek out God’s Church and His people. Such affiliation and fellowship is commanded by God, who blesses and rewards those who respond to His instructions.

Remember too the passage, “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). How can you do this? Seek Him the way He intended—in fellowship with His Church. **GN**

Recommended Reading

What does the Bible tell us about God’s true Church? Surprisingly, the Bible reveals that another great religious movement began to rise during the times of the apostles, one very different from God’s Church. Be sure to request your free copy of *The Church Jesus Built* to understand. To learn more about the United Church of God, publisher of *The Good News* magazine, request your free copy of *Preaching the Gospel, Preparing a People: This Is the United Church of God*.



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Do You Know Why Christ Died?

Christians generally agree that Jesus Christ died for their sins. But how many really understand the significance of that sacrifice?

by Jerold Aust

It was a chilling day—the day Christ died—not so much because of a cool temperature, but because it would prove to be the most sobering event in the history of mankind.

On that day the sky darkened, the earth shook and the great, thick curtain separating the temple's most holy section from its outer compartment suddenly ripped apart from the top down. This miraculous event symbolically indicated that, because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, direct access to God the Father was now available to mankind (Luke 23:44-45; Hebrews 9:1-12). This remarkable day and the unique events surrounding it changed the course of history.

In the final hours of Jesus' life, He shared some remarkable revelations with His disciples. He spoke freely about their sharing with Him a personal commitment to peace (John 14:27) and the help they would continue to receive from Him through the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). Finally Jesus, His body wracked with pain and knowing the end was near, said that His mission on earth as a human being had been completed (John 19:30).

Most Christians assume they understand the significance of Jesus' death and His shed blood. But do they?

A life of sacrifice for others

For the previous 3½ years Jesus had walked the dusty roads of Judea teaching the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God, healing the sick, feeding the hungry and rebuking evil spirits (Luke 4:14-44). Even as a youth Jesus was thoroughly knowledgeable of Scripture: "And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast [of Passover and Unleavened Bread]. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem . . . Now so it was that after three days [His parents] found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers" (Luke 2:42-47).

Jesus' life on earth was one of total self-sacrifice. He never sinned, ever (1 Peter 2:22). Yet Jesus took on Himself the sins of the world, "[bearing] our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

In the last moments of His crucifixion, Jesus was left completely alone to bear the sins of mankind (Matthew 27:46). He never failed His duty for He knew the joy beyond it—our justification, our reconciliation. "He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11).

The book of Hebrews tells us that "Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame . . ." (Hebrews 12:2). This joy over what lay ahead helped Jesus bear the deep anguish, the suffering and pain. He knew that God, through Him, was beginning the process of creating His own divine family.

Hebrews 2:9-11 explains this: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. *In bringing many sons to glory*, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. *Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family*. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

The salvation of humanity, with the opportunity for us to enter God's very family, motivated Jesus in His great hour of unconditional sacrifice. This vision supplied Him with the hope, joy and vision He needed to keep His mind focused on the purpose of His death—and subsequent resurrection.

Jesus' blood justifies and reconciles

Christians rightly believe that Jesus died for our sins. But very few understand

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Do You Know Why Christ Lives?

Christians realize that Jesus was raised from the grave. But do you understand what His resurrection and life mean to us today?

by Jerold Aust

Jesus Christ's death was crucial to our salvation. Without it, we would all still bear the guilt—and the penalty, eternal death—for our sins. Jesus, however, is not a dead Savior, but a *living* one. What is the importance of that fact to us?

When Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea helped place His body in the tomb. “. . . There was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before” (Luke 23:50-53).

Three days and three nights later, just before sunset on the weekly Sabbath, God resurrected Jesus from His grave (see “Does Easter Really Commemorate Jesus Christ's Resurrection?,” page 28). Coming to the tomb before dawn the next morning, Mary Magdalene found it empty and beside it an angel who explained that Jesus had been raised from the dead (Matthew 28:1, 5-7).

Standing before the tomb, Mary lamented the loss of her Master and Teacher. She noticed someone nearby she thought was the gardener and spoke to Him about the body of Jesus: “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away” (John 20:15).

Jesus simply spoke her name. Suddenly she realized who this was—Jesus Himself, alive again! She must have spontaneously tried to hug or grab Him, for He told her: “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:17, New International Version).

Later that day Jesus ascended to the Father; He then showed Himself to His apostles, who observed His wounds (verses 19-20). Eight days later He appeared to them again and asked doubting Thomas to come forward and touch Him—to place his hands and fingers on

Jesus' scars and even place his hand in Jesus' side—so that he would believe Jesus had indeed been resurrected (verses 26-27).

The resurrection of Jesus was an enduring act of love on the part of the Father. Amazingly, His ascension to and acceptance by the Father was acted out symbolically in an annual ritual known in the Old Testament as the wave-sheaf offering. This harvest metaphor tells us much about the living Christ and His role in God's plan for the rest of humanity.

Firstfruits of the harvest

Many centuries earlier God had instructed the Israelites to keep His annual Holy Days and festivals (Leviticus 23:1-4). During one of these festivals, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, God instituted a special ceremony called the wave-sheaf offering (verses 10-14).

In Israel, before the spring barley harvest could begin, this ceremony was to be conducted on the first day of the week during the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (verse 11). The first sheaf of barley from the spring harvest was cut and given to the priest, who would then wave it before God as a special offering. This sheaf is directly tied to and represents Jesus' resurrection, His ascension to God's throne, His acceptance by the Father and our hope for salvation.

It clearly was “of the firstfruits of your harvest” (Leviticus 23:10), the very first part of the crop harvested. Remarkably, this wave-sheaf offering shows Jesus' role as the firstfruits of the salvation of all mankind.

Notice the apostle Paul's statement about Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:20: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become *the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (emphasis added throughout). He goes on to explain: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ *all shall be made alive*. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming” (verses 22-23).

Notice that Paul uses the term “firstfruits” to describe the relationship of Jesus Christ

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Why Christ Died

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the meanings or concepts of such important spiritual principles as justification and reconciliation—or even what sin is.

Sin is the transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4)—which amounts to living contrary to God’s way of life, a way of outflowing love and concern for others. God’s law is so important that He has decreed the penalty of eternal death for its violation.

All humanity must eventually be justified (have their guilt blotted out through forgiveness) or die. Our holy God says that any “righteousness” we can muster on our own is still tainted with sin; we are still spiritually unclean: “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away” (Isaiah 64:6, Revised Standard Version).

God’s perfect justice demands that the penalty for sin be paid. It is vital that the seriousness of the matter be made that clear. And yet God is supremely merciful—so it was determined that God the Father would give up His only Son (who would Himself lay down His own life) in sacrifice to atone for the sins of all mankind—those who would rightly accept it. The Father, it should be understood, had actually created mankind through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:9; John 1:1-3). Thus, as our Creator and God, His life was worth more than that of all humanity. When He died for us, the penalty for all human sin was more than paid.

Christ’s blood, if we both repent and

called of God, repent from dead works and have faith in Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. This faith must be accompanied by a change of heart that is committed to turning from sin and toward wholeheartedly *obeying* God, a condition rejected by many “just-as-I-am” Christians and Christian teachers.

God tells us that only those who have His Spirit and are led by it are His true children (Romans 8:9, 14), and that He gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32)—not to those who continue to defy Him. Only God can empower a person to exercise the level of faith needed to believe from the heart all that He expects from us and has promised to give us.

Christian conditions

Many Christians have been incorrectly taught that God sets no conditions for His forgiveness. They have been taught, also incorrectly, that they can come to God and Jesus Christ as and when they desire, with or without God’s calling or invitation. But Jesus clearly said, “No one can come to Me *unless the Father who sent Me draws him*” (John 6:44, 65). We must have God’s help even to *want* to repent so that Christ’s sacrifice can be applied to us. Acting alone, without God’s extra help, we cannot even properly understand, much less come to, real repentance.

Jesus commands us to *obey Him just as He obeyed the Father* (John 15:10). He rebukes those who teach that keeping God’s commandments is no longer necessary: “*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will*

disqualified for every good work” (Titus 1:16). Paul adds this: “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16).

Obedience is clearly a requirement for those whom God calls or draws. Though no amount of works can justify us, a repentant, willing heart that is committed to obedience is certainly a prerequisite for those whom God grants the forgiveness needed for salvation (Acts 2:38-42). Also, “We are what God made. In Christ Jesus we have been created *for doing good deeds*. God prepared these good deeds long ago, so that we could live by them” (Ephesians 2:10, Simple English Translation). These good deeds are the result of living a way of life based on the Ten Commandments (1 John 2:3-5).

Eternal life is a gift of God that no one can earn. But neither is it freely given to those who rebel against God’s commands. A true Christian must live a life committed to good works based on the Ten Commandments (Matthew 19:16-19; James 2:14-26). God requires obedience to His law as an integral part of the Christian life.

Again, Jesus’ shed, sinless blood covers our “sins that were previously committed” (Romans 3:25). It does not sanction continued disobedience. His blood only justifies us, making us clean, and because of this, reconciles us to the Father (Romans 5:9-10). Without the effects of Jesus’ shed blood we would have no direct access to God the Father and He would never hear our prayers for forgiveness (Matthew 6:6, 8-9, 12; John 14:13-15). And if a Christian occasionally commits sin after true conversion, God has also made provision for his or her forgiveness through that same cleansing blood of Christ (see 1 John 1:7-9; 2:1-2).

More to the story

Do you believe that Jesus Christ’s blood alone saves you—that that is the end of the story? If you don’t understand the ongoing work of the resurrected Christ and His expectations of us, you need to. The apostle Paul counters that idea, saying, “. . . If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The fact that Christ has been resurrected from the dead is vital to our salvation. Now that you know the details of why Christ died, there is another important question. Do you know how important it is to us that He now lives—that He is our living High Priest? Be sure to read the accompanying article, “Do You Know Why Christ Lives?” **GN**

Eternal life is a gift **no one can earn**. But neither is it freely given to those who rebel against God’s commands.

believe, justifies us (cancels our guilt) by washing away our filthy sins—our record of lawbreaking (Revelation 1:5; 7:14). At the same time, Jesus’ blood also reconciles us to (brings us into a right relationship with) God the Father (Colossians 1:19-20). Before Jesus’ death, mankind had lost its path to God. Our sins blocked the way to Him, cutting us off from Him (Isaiah 59:2).

God is a holy God and those who would draw near to Him must be spiritually cleansed. With faith in Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins, His shed blood cleanses us and makes us acceptable to the Father through grace—the gift of God’s favor.

But this gift is not without conditions. Although always available, His grace is applied to us individually only if we are

by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. *Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:17-19).

The apostle John, the same one who regularly taught about godly love, boldly labels all those who profess that they love God and Christ but don’t keep the commandments as *liars* (1 John 2:4). After all, Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins. To continue in a life of sin is therefore an affront to God’s grace.

Those who teach and practice disobedience bring a curse on themselves: “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and

Why Christ Lives

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and His resurrection to that of all the other godly believers who will follow Him in the resurrection at His return. Jesus is the *first* of many who will be resurrected to immortality just as He was!

Jesus' sacrifice makes possible the harvesting of all humanity, and His resurrection

Father views us as righteous through the *living* Christ living in us—through the power of God's Spirit.

This is vital to understand. The Bible tells us that the normal human mind simply cannot obey God in the way that He requires (Romans 8:7). *We need spiritual help.* And that help to obey comes through the Spirit of God, by which Christ and the Father live within the hearts and minds of true Christians

Both Jesus' death and life are indispensable to our salvation. One is not complete without the other.

begins the harvest. Just as the wave-sheaf offering had to be offered before Israel's spring harvest could begin, so Jesus Himself had to be offered—and accepted by the Father as the only acceptable sacrifice for sin—before God's harvest of humanity could begin. He thus became "the origin of God's creation" (Revelation 3:14, New Revised Standard Version) and "the author [source and sole agent] of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9).

Jesus taught that God's plan for harvesting all humanity would begin with Himself. Shortly before His death He told some of His disciples: "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:23-24). He would have to die and, like a seed, be planted in the ground. But through His death and resurrection, ultimately many others would be given life in their own resurrection from the dead.

No human being could be harvested to salvation until after Jesus was resurrected. Jesus likened salvation for His Church to a grain harvest: "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

We must never forget that the death of Jesus Christ justifies us before God and reconciles us to Him, but we must also remember this: *We can only be harvested or saved by His life.* Paul makes this very clear: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life*" (Romans 5:10).

Why Christ must live in us

Christ's life is of unparalleled importance to all humanity. God accepted His death as the atoning sacrifice to pay the penalty for all of humankind's sins. But the story doesn't end there. If we are Jesus' true followers, God the

(compare 1 John 5:3; Romans 5:5; John 14:23; Ephesians 2:22).

By living in us through that Spirit, Christ assists us in living according to God's truth in our everyday lives. Paul explains it this way: "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life that He lives, He lives to God.* Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but *alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Romans 6:8-12).

He expressed this thought in slightly different words in Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (King James Version).

In other words, Paul had surrendered his will to that of Jesus Christ, and he saw his life as one in which the living Christ was also living and working mightily within him through the indwelling presence of God's Spirit (Colossians 1:29). He did not rely on his meager efforts to obey God on his own, "but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness [obedience] which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection . . ." (Philippians 3:9-10, KJV).

Continually serving His saints

King David, in an inspired prophetic psalm, indicates what the Father said to the living Christ at His ascension to the throne of God following His resurrection: "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'" (Psalm 110:1).

Christ Jesus is now making intercession for us at the Father's right hand (Romans 8:34). "Now this is the main point of the things we

are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man" (Hebrews 8:1-2). We can access His help for many needs. Probably none of those needs is more important than our need for help to continue in God's righteous mind-set and behavior in the face of Satan's continual assaults and efforts against us (1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:10-17).

In summary we are told: "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

"For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:14-18, New American Standard Bible).

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16).

We now can see that both Jesus' death and life are indispensable to our salvation. They are complementary. One is not complete without the other. If your understanding stops with Jesus' death, you are missing out on the benefits of Christ's life—as our High Priest and constant help.

Study your Bible diligently and discover the profound truth of *the living Christ*—alive not just in heaven, but within His people. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Who was Jesus of Nazareth? Was He a mere man, or much more? What was the significance of His death and resurrection? To learn more, be sure to request our free booklet *Who Is God?* To better understand how you can energize your life through the help He offers, request *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, also free.



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Does Easter *Really* Commemorate Jesus Christ's Resurrection?

What do rabbits and eggs have to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Where did the name *Easter* originate? This holiday isn't even mentioned in the Bible—so where did it really come from?

by Wilbur Berg

As a boy attending a mainstream church with my family, I was always surprised to see people at services on Easter Sunday who didn't come any other time of the year, not even at Christmas.

Embarrassed and somewhat fearful, a few of them told us they hoped that God would forgive their sins and absences because they made the special effort to come to church on Easter Sunday, which to them was the most sacred time of the year.

Others felt that a special measure of sanctification, purification and holiness was imparted to them by their attendance at Easter services.

However, these people likely didn't know or even wonder about Easter's real origins. They probably would've been surprised to know the truth of the matter!

Idoltrous beginnings of the holiday

Many people are amazed to find that the Bible does not mention Easter at all. Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever indicated or directed that it should be observed. The word *Easter* in Acts 12:4 in the King James Version is an incorrect translation of the Greek word *pascha*, which refers to *Passover*, not Easter. This mistake has been corrected in modern translations of the New Testament.

Also not generally known is the fact that Easter did not originate with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Encyclopedias and dictionaries trace the term *Easter* variously back to *Eostre*, the name of the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring; to *Eostur*, the Norse word for the spring season; or to *Ishtar*, the ancient spring goddess of Near Eastern countries, also known as *Astarte*, or, in the Bible, *Ashtoreth*.

All are connected to the spring season and springtime fertility festivals that represented rejuvenation, reproduction and the life-enriching qualities of the sun. Customs and symbols associated today with Easter observance can be directly traced back to Easter's pre-Christian origins.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th edition, in its article on Easter, describes these customs and symbols as "hav[ing] been

handed down from the ancient ceremonial and symbolism of European and Middle Eastern pagan spring festivals." One symbol, the Easter bunny, is called the modern replacement for "the hare, the symbol of fertility in ancient Egypt."

Another source reveals the origin of two other popular Easter customs. Regarding one it states, "Also popular among Europeans and Americans on Easter is ham, because the pig was considered a symbol of luck in pre-Christian European culture" (*The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987, "Easter").

And concerning the other, the egg, it explains: "In traditional folk religion the egg is a powerful symbol of fertility, purity, and rebirth. It is used in magical rituals to promote fertility and restore virility; to look into the future; to bring good weather; to encourage the growth of crops and protect both cattle and children against misfortune, especially the dreaded evil eye. All over the world it represents life and creation, fertility and resurrection . . .

"Later [customs concerning eggs] were linked with Easter. The church did not oppose this, though many egg customs were pre-Christian in origin, because the egg provided a fresh and powerful symbol of the Resurrection and the transformation of death into life" ("Egg").

Pre-Christian resurrection celebrations

Celebrating the resurrection of a deceased deity in a springtime festival also long predates Christianity. Chief among such celebrations were those in honor of Tammuz, the Babylonian "god of pasture and flocks . . . and of vegetation. He was husband and brother of Ishtar (Asherah), goddess of fertility. Babylonian epics preserve the saga of the annual dying of Tammuz in the autumn when vegetation withered; his departure to the underworld; his recovery by the mourning Ishtar; and his springtime return to the fertilized upper world" (*Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1961, "Tammuz").

The Babylonians taught that Tammuz was mystically revived from death in the spring by the anguish and crying of Ishtar, who, as already noted, was the same as the pagan god-

dess Ashtoreth referred to in Scripture (Judges 2:13; 10:6; 1 Kings 11:5). This ancient custom of mourning for the return of a dead god is mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14, where we read of women "weeping for Tammuz." His supposed resurrection marked the end of winter and the beginning of spring, with its new life and vegetation.

Ishtar, wife of Tammuz, was also worshiped as the "Queen of Heaven" (*Harper's Bible Dictionary*, "Asherah"). The Bible shows that idolatry and sun worship connected with Ishtar and Tammuz became so widespread and influential that they were practiced even by people who had once known the true God but had fallen into wrong kinds of worship (Ezekiel 8:12-18; Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-23).

Worshiped in other areas under the name Adonis, Tammuz was honored with an annual celebration by a cult that "mourned his death and rejoiced at his resurrection. The cult worked its way into the folkways of Christian peasants, who wept over the lost Adonis and participated in lewd festivities" (*Harper's Bible Dictionary*, "Tammuz").

Subtle changes introduced

But how did such strange customs and practices become associated with true events recorded in the Bible—the Passover and Jesus Christ's resurrection?

From the start, the Roman government regarded the early Christian Church as a branch of the Jewish religion, because the earliest Christians staunchly observed the same laws and religious celebrations the Jews did. Later, as persecution against Jews increased in the wake of two Jewish revolts against Rome, many groups of professing Christians chose to dissociate themselves from beliefs and practices that were closely identified with Judaism.

During the reign of Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-135), Jews were harshly persecuted and practices of Judaism forbidden. These oppressive measures apparently influenced many early Christians in Rome to abandon the biblical Sabbath and festivals and turn to Sunday, historically observed by the Romans as a day of veneration of the sun. Hence, the first day

of the week (Sunday) took the place of the seventh-day Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset), and “some of the old heathen feasts became church festivals with change of name and of worship” (Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, *The Story of the Christian Church*, 1954, pp. 43, 45, 77, 79).

In other words, the Sabbath and the festivals of God, outlined in Leviticus 23 and practiced by both Judaism and the early Church (see Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 21; 20:6, 16; 27:9), were supplanted by *nonbiblical* traditions and practices. The truth and purity of the early Church of God were corrupted.

Controversy over days of worship

As this early confusion advanced, further disagreement arose as to the days on which Jesus’ crucifixion and subsequent resurrection occurred. The pagan festival honoring the goddess of spring (renamed Easter) began to supplant the Christian Passover. “In Rome Easter was celebrated on the Sunday following the full moon after the spring equinox, and was a memorial of the resurrection” (*The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, 1990, p. 36).

Note that carefully. The Christian Passover, instituted by Jesus to annually commemorate His *death*, was subtly changed to a celebration memorializing His *resurrection*. But there is no command in the Bible, by Jesus or His apostles, to solemnize His resurrection.

Instead, Jesus highlighted what was to be accomplished by His death in instituting new symbols for the New Covenant meaning of the Passover (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20). He was the Lamb of God who offered Himself as the true Passover sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 1:29), and His death fulfilled what had long been foreshadowed by the slaying of the Passover lambs.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia adds:

“Originally both observances [Passover and Easter] were allowed, but gradually it was felt incongruous that Christians should celebrate Easter on a Jewish feast, and unity in celebrating the principal Christian feast was called for” (1967, “Easter and Its Cycle”).

Thus the Passover ceremony, observed by Jesus Christ and commanded by Him for His followers (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke 22:19; John 13:15), was supplanted by Easter, a day neither He nor the early New Testament Church approved.

Inconsistent and incorrect dating

As part of the mixing of this ancient pagan festival with the death and resurrection of Christ, whether to keep Easter, and if so on what date, was heatedly debated during the second century. A group in Asia Minor known as the Quartodecimans (after the Latin word for 14) rigorously defended the original biblical truths. They insisted on an observance of the Christian Passover on the correct biblical date, the 14th day of the month Nisan on the Hebrew calendar. This was a movable date, meaning it did not fall on the same weekly or Roman calendar day each year.

“In the mid-second century, however, some Gentile Christians began to celebrate [Easter] on the Sunday after 14 Nisan, with the preceding Friday observed as the day of Christ’s crucifixion, regardless of the date on which it fell. The resulting controversy over the correct time for observing the Easter festival reached a head in A.D. 197, when Victor of Rome excommunicated those Christians who insisted on celebrating Easter [actually the Passover] on 14 Nisan. The dispute continued until the early fourth century, when the Quarto-decimans . . . were required by Emperor Constantine to conform to the empire-wide practice of observing Easter on the Sunday following

14 Nisan, rather than on the date itself.

“Currently celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox [the Council of Nicea fixed this date in A.D. 325], Easter falls differently for [Eastern] Orthodox Christianity which, unlike Western Christianity, did not accept the Gregorian calendar reform in 1582” (*Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 1985, “Easter”).

We therefore see that the world’s observance of Easter is a curious mixture of ancient mythological and idolatrous practices and arbitrary dating that actually obscure and discredit the proof of Jesus Christ’s messiahship and resurrection. The Passover was discarded and replaced with Easter.

This gives some of the background on how Friday came to be observed as the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, and the following Sunday as the date of His resurrection. However, another problem with all this is that these observances are refuted by the details of the biblical record.

Jesus’ sign of the Messiah

Matthew 12:38 shows some of the scribes and Pharisees asking Jesus for a sign to prove He was the Messiah. But Jesus told them that the only sign He would give was that of the prophet Jonah: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (verse 40).

Many people justify their belief in a Friday burial and Sunday resurrection by reasoning that this segment of time does not require a span of three 24-hour days, or 72 hours. They argue that a part of a day can be reckoned as a whole day. Hence, since Jesus was buried just before sunset, they feel the few remaining moments of the daylight part of Friday constituted the first day, Friday sunset to Saturday sunset was the second and Saturday

The Chronology of Christ’s Crucifixion and Resurrection

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

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

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

Friday: The high-day Sabbath now past, the women bought and prepared spices for anointing Jesus’ body before resting on the weekly Sabbath day, which began at sunset (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56).

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

Sunday: The women brought the prepared spices early in the morning *while it was still dark* (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Jesus *had already risen* (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:2-3; John 20:1). He did not rise on Sunday morning, but just prior to sunset the day before.

night through Sunday morning was the third.

What they fail to take into consideration is that at most only two nights can be accounted for in this explanation, and really only one full daylight period (as a few moments of daylight at the end of Friday is not a day). So we are at least one day and one night short of Jesus' words even by this interpretation.

Something is obviously incorrect about this commonly calculated conclusion.

Jonah 1:17 states specifically that "Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." There is no reason to think that these days and nights were fractional. Nor is there any basis for thinking that Jesus meant only two nights and one day when He described the length of time He would be in the grave. Such rationalization undermines the integrity and clear meaning of Jesus' words.

Was Christ's sign fulfilled?

If Jesus were in the grave only from late Friday afternoon to sometime before dawn on Sunday morning, then the only sign He gave that He was the prophesied Messiah *was not fulfilled*. The claim of His messiahship rests on the fulfillment of His words—it's that serious a matter!

Let us carefully examine the biblical details of those fateful days. Each of the Gospel writers gives an account of the events, but each presents different aspects that we need to correctly synchronize and harmonize to produce a clear sequence and understanding of what happened (see "The Chronology of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection," page 29).

The Bible does not contradict itself (Psalm 119:160; John 10:35), and we will see that not one of the Gospel accounts contradicts what the other Gospels reveal.

John 19:31 preserves a crucial point that provides insight into the other narratives. The "preparation day" on which Jesus was crucified is described as the day before the Sabbath. But John clarifies it by stating that this approaching Sabbath "was a *high day*." This does not refer to the regular weekly Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) but to the first day of Unleavened Bread, which is one of God's annual high days, or holy feast days (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:6-7), which could fall on any day of the week.

Some have argued that this high day fell that year on the seventh day of the week, making it doubly a Sabbath, with the preparation day being on Friday. But Luke's account shows that this was not the case.

Notice the sequence of events outlined in Luke 23. Jesus' moment of death, as well as His hasty burial in the tomb because of the oncoming Sabbath, is narrated in verses 46-53. Verse 54 then states, "That day was the

Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near."

Two Sabbaths described

Many have assumed that it is the weekly Sabbath mentioned here. But this is not the case. Instead, it was the "high day" mentioned by John, a Sabbath that occurred on *Thursday* that year. We know that because verse 56 shows that the women, after seeing Christ's body having been laid in the tomb just before the Sabbath began, "returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils" for the final preparation of the body.

Such work could have been done only on Friday, since it would have been considered a violation of the law if it were done on the Holy Day, and that would not have been allowed. This is further verified by Mark's account, which states, "Now *when the Sabbath was past*, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices [which would not have been purchased on a Sabbath] that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 16:1, emphasis added throughout).

This conclusively proves that the Sabbath mentioned here and in the other narratives was the first Holy Day of the biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:4-8), which, in A.D. 31, fell on a Thursday. The women had to wait until this high-day Sabbath was over before they could buy and prepare the spices, on Friday, to be used for anointing Jesus' body. Then, after these activities, "*they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment*," which would have been the regular weekly Sabbath (Luke 23:56).

After this rest, the women then went to Jesus' tomb early on the first day of the week (Sunday), while it was still dark (John 20:1), and found that He had *already* been resurrected (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1). Therefore, if we allow the Scriptures to interpret themselves, an accurate harmonization of all four Gospel accounts demonstrates the accuracy and validity of Jesus' statements.

Further proof of the accuracy of this sequence and explanation is found in Matthew 28:1. Most translations render "Now after the Sabbath" as if the word *Sabbath* were singular. This is not correct. *Sabbath* here is *sabbaton* in the Greek text, which is *plural*. Some Bible versions, including Alfred Marshall's Parallel New Testament in Greek and English and Ferrar Fenton's translation, translate it properly as "after the *Sabbaths*," which again demonstrates that there was more than one Sabbath that week.

The wording of Mark 16:1-2 is also confusing to some because it seems to suggest that the spices were purchased after the weekly Sabbath rather than before it, on Friday.

However, this is explained by Luke 23:56, which clearly shows that the women bought the spices *before*, and not after, the weekly Sabbath, "and they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment." Mark did not mention this weekly Sabbath rest in his account, but Luke did.

Some also stumble over Mark 16:9, not taking into account that there is no punctuation indicated in the original Greek. Therefore, to be in harmony with the material presented in the other Gospels, a better translation would be: "Now having risen, early the first day of the week He appeared first to Mary Magdalene . . ." These verses are not saying that Jesus *rose* early on Sunday morning, but that He *appeared* on Sunday morning to Mary Magdalene, having risen some time earlier.

Three full days and nights in the tomb

Be assured that the precise fulfillment of Jonah's sign of three days and three nights, which Jesus gave as verification of His authenticity and messiahship, *did happen*. Jesus rose *not* Sunday at sunrise, but instead late Saturday afternoon around sunset—which was precisely three days and three nights after He was placed in the tomb just before sunset on Wednesday. He had *already* risen hours before the women came to the tomb—before sunrise—on Sunday morning.

We should be grateful that God has preserved the genuine, incontrovertible proof of Jesus' resurrection so we can have the absolute confidence and certainty that Jesus is indeed the prophesied Messiah and Savior of the world. Christ has paid the full penalty of human sin by His sacrifice and death, and He rose from the dead and now lives in heaven as our Helper, High Priest and Intercessor.

Let's no longer cling to fables such as Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Instead, as Jesus instructs us in John 4:23-24, let us worship God "in spirit and truth." **GN**

Recommended Reading

God's great plan has been obscured by merging non-biblical practices with biblical events. Our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* will help you understand the origins of popular holidays and religious traditions. You also need to understand why God expects us to observe Passover and His other commanded festivals. Be sure to request your free copy of *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at

www.gnmagazine.org

Letters From Our Readers

“The End of the World”

In reference to “The End of the World: What Does the Bible Say?,” there were a number of informative facts and quotes in this article. It was definitely thought-provoking and something we need reminding of! And the use of multiple translations can be helpful in clarifying less clear scriptures.

J.Y., Norcross, Georgia

The United States in prophecy?

I am on a Christian mother’s group online, and we were discussing the recent events in Iraq. The topic of end times has got us wondering about where the United States is in all of this. We have searched the Scriptures, yet no one seems to be able to identify the United States. Are we missing something? Are we wiped out or are we called by another name? Just wondering what your thoughts were on this question.

By the way, I love your articles and you have helped me to understand some questions about things that I couldn’t find answers to elsewhere. Thank you for your ministry.

Reader on Internet

You certainly raise good and timely questions. In fact, the United States and other major English-speaking nations are mentioned in many Bible prophecies. To discover the shocking truth of who they really are and what is prophesied to happen to them, request or download our free booklet The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.

“Vibrant Health: The Crucial Biblical Keys”

In reading your November/December issue, I found not a single flaw with any physical, emotional or spiritual guidance you have given. Previously I had no willpower, energy or drive for success—hence, no faith. All of that changed with a commitment within myself to change. Exercise, diet and quitting smoking and tobacco use have given me a new self-image. All of this has resulted in less stress, anxiety, anger and depression. Instead it has resulted in more faith, emotional stability, peace of mind and physical health.

D.E.B., St. Clairsville, Ohio

I do enjoy and look forward to each monthly issue. But it was the one about smoking that I’m going to hold tight to. After 30 years of smoking, I am going to

make my first attempt to quit—both for health and spiritual reasons. I will apply what I learned in your quit-smoking article.

J.R., Robinson, Illinois

The importance of biblical prophecy

Thank you for your publications. My biggest problem with Christianity is that there are few who teach prophecy and even fewer who want to hear it. Your organization has not made this error. As a matter of fact, your organization makes prophecy one of its main topics. Prophecy teaches the fear of God, and as I have seen, prophecy causes far more reaction to God and His Word than does only teaching the love of God. It is kind of like churches who only pass out the New Testament. How much of the New Testament can you understand if you do not comprehend the Old Testament?

J.D.H., Hesperia, California

Indeed, all these areas are important. Some want to focus exclusively on their concept of “love.” Others may want to focus exclusively on prophecy. We must learn to strike the right balance.

Reader from Russia

I get great pleasure from your magazine. I live in Russia and I’d like to receive this nice magazine, *The Good News*, but I’m not sure I can do it here. What should I do to receive it?

A.D.R., St. Petersburg, Russia

We’ve added your name to our subscription list and will be mailing it to you.

Reader from Thailand

I have received an old copy of *The Good News* and felt so encouraged by it. Living here in Thailand for 30 years now, we have little possibilities to receive Christian magazines in the English language. I am married to a Thai-Chinese man with four children and I am working by God’s calling among poor children here in Thailand. I originally came from Switzerland. If you feel it is still possible to send *The Good News* all the way to Thailand, I would be grateful and will certainly share the magazine here with others.

S.J., Bangkok, Thailand

You have been added to The Good News subscription list.

Attending church services

I am writing to thank you for all the litera-

ture I have received from you and to find out more about a group of believers close to me that I can join. I have been studying now for several years to find a church or group who believed the entire Bible. I met with many different people and attended several churches in hope of discovering those who embraced the beliefs that I had come to recognize from reading and studying my Bible.

When I began to receive your literature, my burden was lightened and my heart gladdened as I discovered that your group did indeed believe the entire Bible. My relief in finding your organization has been immense. I have several things in my life that need to be changed, one being that my current job requires me to work on Saturday, and I would treasure the help and guidance of others of like belief in bringing about the changes that I need to make. I feel I have a real need to be in fellowship.

C.T., Meridian, Mississippi

*We deeply appreciate your interest in attending church services. Our reader services staff and personal correspondents gladly communicate with all who request assistance. We have sent the telephone number of our nearest pastor. Also the feature article, “Should You Attend Church?,” beginning on page 22 of this issue, should be of help. It mentions several related booklets that you may want to request and read. In addition, our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest* (available on request) may give you the encouragement you need to step out on faith.*

Bible Study Course

Thank you! I appreciate and love the Word of the Living God. It is more necessary, essential and important—an urgent matter to our daily life. I was so touched by God’s presence and powerful love as I studied your course. I was especially helped by reading about how to rely on God in an uncertain world. I looked up and read and studied every scripture in lessons one and two.

L.P., Winnsboro, Texas

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).

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

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

POP QUIZ

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

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

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

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

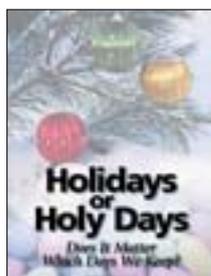
5 True or False? The word *Easter* appears only once in the Bible—and that one time is a mistranslation of the Greek word for *Passover*.

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

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



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



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

