

The Good News

March-April 2007

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



Is There Really a Spirit World?

Page 4

The Spirit World's Dangerous Dark Side **7** • What If Radical Islam Triumphs? **10**
How to Make Wise Media Choices **14** • Christians Who Don't Celebrate Easter **16**



If you did an Internet search using the phrases “Does God exist?” and “Does Satan exist?,” what would you expect to find? What level of interest and research is there, do you suppose, for those two crucial questions?

The feedback from one popular search site was, to me, stunning— not so much for the first question, but for the second. It found information on “Does God exist?” on 562,000 Web sites, but only a paltry 3,130 sites for “Does Satan exist?”

Maybe those aren’t the right questions, I thought, so I tried “Is there a God?” and “Is there a devil?” Same results: The God question hit 243,000 sites, but only 718 resources explore the devil’s existence.

So what does one learn from this exercise? Only that it confirms what other surveys say: People don’t take very seriously the existence of the devil.

It’s strange that in the great debate over whether God exists, few people ask, “But what about Satan?” Doesn’t it follow that if God

It’s strange that in the great debate over whether God exists, few people ask, “But what about Satan?”

exists, then a spirit realm also exists? Of course, questions would remain regarding the nature of that spirit realm. Are there other spirit beings? And if so, are some good and others evil?

Some surveys show that while most Americans believe God exists, many of those same people deny that a devil exists. And of the minority who believe that Satan does exist, most of them don’t think he actually exerts any real influence over people. They believe the biblical Satan and his demonic cohorts are merely “symbols” of evil.

How can people seriously explore whether God exists, decide that He does, then dismiss what He reveals about the existence of other beings in the spirit world? Shouldn’t we consider the reality of Satan?

Ultimately, to diminish or dismiss Satan’s role in the universe is not a statement we make about Satan—it’s a statement we make about our regard for the Bible and its Author, God! It shows a disturbing lack of respect for what Scripture says—especially disturbing when some who dismiss Satan regard the Bible as the Word of God!

The Bible says plenty about Satan’s origins, his motives and his methods. It emphatically warns us about the dark side of the spirit realm, urging us to grasp the scope of Satan’s influence on the world and on our personal relationship with God.

Indeed, understanding Satan’s influence helps explain many great philosophical questions. Why evil? Why suffering? Why do we behave so self-destructively? What can we do about it?

The Bible, which can be shown through many proofs to be the true Word of God, doesn’t take Satan lightly! So if we casually dismiss Satan’s existence, or play down his influence, we cheapen God’s Word itself! With the stakes so high, can we afford to do that?

We must address the logical string of questions: If God exists, then do other spirit beings? If they do, are some evil? If evil spirits exist, do they have a leader—Satan the devil? And what does this have to do with you and me?

God’s Word, combined with human history, clearly teaches that our core problems are *spiritual* in nature, and *spiritual problems require spiritual solutions*. The fact is, either God’s or Satan’s spiritual influence will rule your life. Instead of searching the Internet for answers, try the Bible. This issue of *The Good News* will help you explore what God reveals about the power of the spirit world.

—Clyde Kilough, Church president

The Good News (ISSN: 1086-9514) is published bimonthly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 555 Technecenter Dr., Milford, OH 45150. © 2007 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Milford, Ohio 45150, and at additional mailing offices. Scriptural references are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

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

Publisher: United Church of God, an International Association **Council of Elders:** Aaron Dean, Robert Dick (chairman), Bill Eddington, Jim Franks, Clyde Kilough, Victor Kubik, Les McCullough, Joel Meeker, Richard Pinelli, Larry Salyer, Richard Thompson, Leon Walker
Church president: Clyde Kilough **Media operation manager:** Peter Eddington **Managing editor:** Scott Ashley
Senior writers: Jerold Aust, Roger Foster, Melvin Rhodes, Tom Robinson, John Ross Schroeder
Art director: Shaun Venish **Circulation manager:** John LaBissoniere **Editorial reviewers:** John Bald, Bruce Gore, Paul Kieffer, Graemme Marshall, Richard Thompson, David Treybig, Lyle Welty

To request a free subscription, visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org or contact the office nearest you from the list below. *The Good News* is sent free to all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, an International Association, and others.

Personal contact: The United Church of God has congregations and ministers throughout the United States and many other countries. To contact a minister or to find locations and times of services, contact our office nearest you or access our Web site at www.ucg.org/churches.

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

NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

United States: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Web site: 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: www.ucg.ca
Bahamas: 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: 020-8386-1999 Web site: 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, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy
Phone and Fax: (+39) 035 4523573 Web site: www.labuonanotizia.org E-mail: info@labuonanotizia.org
Netherlands: P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands
Scandinavia: Guds Enade Kyrka, P.O. Box 3535, 111 74 Stockholm, Sweden
Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 Fax: 0046 0142 10340 E-mail: sverige@ucg.org

AFRICA

East Africa—Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda: United Church of God—East Africa
P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi 00200, Kenya E-mail: kenya@ucg.org Web site: www.ucgeastafrica.org
Ghana: P.O. Box 3805, Kumasi, Ghana E-mail: ghana@ucg.org
Malawi: P.O. Box 32257, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi Phone: (02) 226076 E-mail: malawi@ucg.org
Mauritius: P.O. Box 53, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius E-mail: mauritius@ucg.org
Nigeria: United Church of God—Nigeria, P.O. Box 2265 Somolu, Lagos, Nigeria
Phone: 01-8113644 Web site: www.ucgnigeria.org E-mail: nigeria@ucg.org
South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland:
United Church of God—Southern Africa, P.O. Box 2209, Beacon Bay, East London 5205, South Africa
Phone and Fax: 043 748-1694 Web site: www.ucg-rsa.org
Zambia: P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia Phone: (02) 226076 E-mail: zambia@ucg.org
Zimbabwe: P.O. Box 928, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe Phone: 011716273 E-mail: zimbabwe@ucg.org

PACIFIC REGION

Australia and Papua New Guinea: 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: www.ucg.org.au E-mail: info@ucg.org.au
Fiji: United Church of God, P.O. Box 11081, Laucala Beach Estate, Suva, Fiji
New Zealand: United Church of God, P.O. Box 22, Auckland 1015, New Zealand
Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763
Tonga: United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 2617, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

ASIA

All except Philippines: 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
Philippines: P.O. Box 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines Phone and fax: +63 82 224-4444
Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444 Web site: www.ucg.org.ph E-mail: info@ucg.org.ph

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

Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 40026236.
Canada return address: *The Good News*, 2835 Kew Drive, Windsor, ON N8T 3B7.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to *The Good News*, Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

Table of Contents



How much do you know about the spirit world? 4

Cover Feature

Is There Really a Spirit World?

Have you wondered about the spirit world? Popular culture and religion bombard us with references to it. But does a spirit world really exist? If so, what's it all about? Where did it come from? Is it beneficial, or is it dangerous? It's crucial that you know the answers, but where can you turn to sort out fact from fable? 4

The Spirit World's Dangerous Dark Side

Strange practices and religions such as Wicca, Santeria, voodoo and channeling are growing in popularity. What's behind them? Are such things harmless, or is there more to them than meets the eye? 7



Popular entertainment's message to your children 14

What Will It Mean for the West If Radical Islam Triumphs?

Defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq may not worry the average American or European citizen, but could defeat there also mean defeat at home? Could the advance of radical Islam continue into the West? 10

Teaching Values: How to Make Wise Media Choices

It's no secret that much of our popular entertainment sends messages that contradict basic Christian values. How can we teach our children to properly decide what music to listen to and which movies to see? 14

Christians Who Don't Celebrate Easter: What Do They Know?

Easter is the most important holiday for hundreds of millions of believers around the world. Yet thousands of Christians don't observe it. Do they know something about this holiday that others don't? 16

Radical Liberalism: What's the Harm?

Lawyers argue that pornography is constitutionally protected free speech. Radical feminists denounce traditional family. Homosexuals want to totally redefine marriage. What is happening to America? 21

The Jesus So Few Know

Why is the Christianity people see around us so different from the Jesus Christ of the Bible? Could it be that many professing Christians have a fundamental misunderstanding of His teaching? 23

Spiritual Growth: From Immaturity to Immortality

In the previous articles of this series we have explained seven essential tools for spiritual transformation. Now we consider how to use all these tools together to attain our ultimate destiny of eternal life! 26



How did strange symbols come into Christianity? 16

Regular Features

World News and Trends	<i>An overview of conditions around the world.</i>	12
Beyond Today	<i>Television and radio log.</i>	20
Letters From Our Readers	<i>Readers of The Good News share their thoughts</i>	30
Questions and Answers	<i>Answers to readers' questions</i>	31

Is There Really a Spirit World?

Both popular culture and religion bombard us with references to the spirit world. But is it real? What's it all about? Where can you turn to sort out fact from fable?

by Mario Seiglie

Have you ever wondered about the spirit world? Almost everyone is curious about the subject. Perhaps you know of friends or relatives who have even dabbled in it.

Does the spirit world truly exist, or is it just a figment of fertile imaginations? More importantly, is it beneficial or dangerous to delve into this area?

These are important questions. And whether we like it or not, we are constantly bombarded by issues about the spirit world from newspapers, TV, radio and movies. If you look up the 10 top grossing pictures or fictional books at any given time, chances are several will deal with the subject of the spirit world. TV programs with “channelers,” those who claim to communicate with the dead, are becoming more popular.

In this technological age, it might seem that more interest would be given to scientific subjects, but the fact is we see a fascination with all facets of the spirit world—both good and evil.

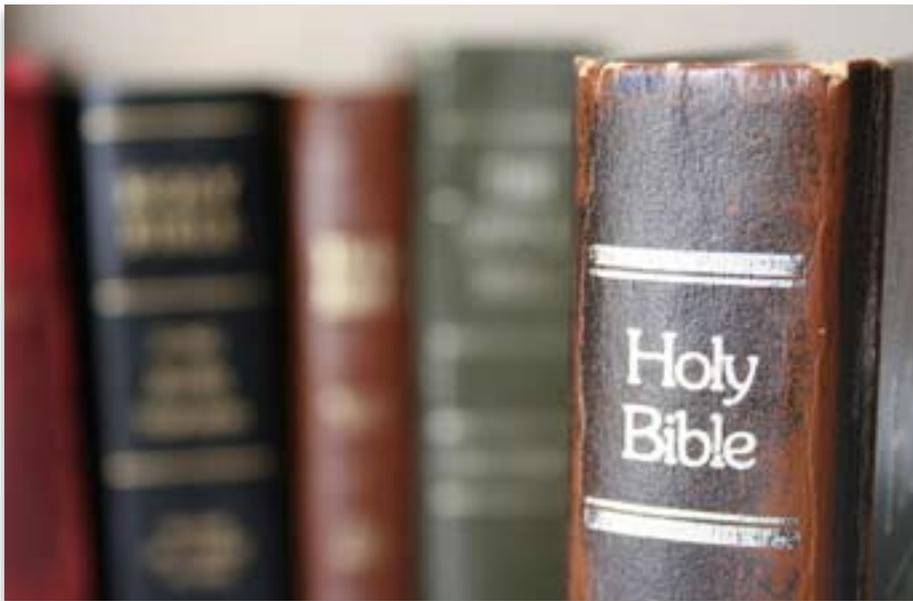
Moreover, this subject is so vital that one day the right information about it could spare you and your loved ones untold grief and suffering!

So what do we need to know about it? And where can we go to find accurate information?

Finding the true source

Can we go to science to find the answer? If the spirit world exists, it would be, by its very nature, not composed of matter or atoms. A dictionary definition of *spirit* is “a supernatural being or essence.” And the scientific community has little to say about things that can’t be seen under a microscope or through a telescope or that can’t be examined in a laboratory. Science admits it deals best with the physical world and is highly skeptical of anything dealing with the spiritual realm.

What about religion? Certainly most religions have something to say about the spirit world. But how reliable are they? Eastern religion, for instance, speaks of the spirit world, but its numerous books often



Unlike other books, the Bible declares it was inspired by the One who inhabits and is over the whole spirit world—God!

contradict themselves on the subject. The Bible of course has a lot to say about the spirit world, but can it be trusted?

After studying Eastern religions for 42 years, M. Montiero-Williams, a former professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University, compared the Eastern religious books with the Bible. What did he conclude?

“Pile them [the books on Eastern religion], if you will, on the left of your study table; but place your own Holy Bible on the right side—all by itself, all alone—and with a wide gap between them,” he wrote. “For, there is a gulf between it and the so-called sacred books of the East which severs the one from the other utterly, hopelessly, and forever . . . a veritable gulf which cannot be bridged ever by any science or religious thought” (quoted by Sidney Collett, *All About the Bible*, 1958, pp. 314-315).

This is true not only for the mystic Eastern books, but for virtually all of the literature dealing with the spirit world—so much is confusing and unconfirmed.

Is the Bible a reliable source?

Of all the books that deal with the spirit world, only the Bible has been shown

throughout the centuries to be a reliable source of information, separating the good from the bad of the spirit world—for certainly there are two opposite sides to it.

Unlike other books, the Bible declares that it was inspired by the One who inhabits and is over the whole spirit world—God! It states, “*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, emphasis added throughout).

The Bible is also the only book that consistently describes the spirit world without contradictions in a logical, historical manner. It is the one lasting source that has given trustworthy information about the spirit world and has served as a faithful counterweight to the evil spiritual forces.

In fact, close to 2,000 years ago, its influence caused many to repudiate books dealing with the evil side of the spirit world. When the apostle Paul visited the city of Ephesus and preached from the Bible about God’s truths, the reaction of those using books on witchcraft and magic

was to renounce these sources of spiritual darkness.

We read: “Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:19-20).

Likewise, we see today that the Word of God is still the most powerful force against the powers of evil. Thanks mostly to the Bible, we live in a world where so much that was prevalent in the ancient world of magic, idolatry and superstition has been eliminated—although from time to time, these false beliefs try to make a comeback, as they are presently doing.

So, what does the Bible say about the spirit world? How can it help us?

A spirit world filled with angels

First, there is a side of the spirit world that the Bible describes as wholesome and beneficial. It has to do with the realm of good and righteous angels. God tells us that it was He who created these spirit beings. We read, “And of the angels He says: ‘Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire’” (Hebrews 1:7). Yes, it was God who created all the angels.

God’s Word gives a few descriptions of the realm inhabited by millions of angels. The apostle John was shown in a vision this angelic world: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of *many angels* around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and *the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*” (Revelation 5:11).

God also reveals that He created the angels before the existence of the physical earth. Giving Job a glimpse of that time, He asked, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars [a biblical symbol for angels] sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4, 7). Here, the “sons of God” is a reference to angels who shouted for joy when they saw the earth being created.

These angels are composed of spirit and, according to the Bible, cannot die (Luke 20:36).

The purpose of holy angels

What was the purpose for creating angels? Here is another question for which only the Bible has a reliable and definite answer. It says, referring to angels, “Are

they not all *ministering spirits* sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).

So the angels were created to aid human beings in fulfilling God’s plan of salvation. This angelic help includes protecting God’s people in numerous ways. As Psalm 34:7 states, “The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.”

So God uses the holy angels to protect and take care of His own. This is the part of the spiritual realm we shouldn’t fear. In fact, we should be very thankful to God for having created these powerful angels for our benefit.

We also should constantly ask God to place these angelic servants around His people to protect them from harm. Psalm 91:11 tells us that God “shall give *His angels* charge over you, to *keep* [preserve or protect] *you in all your ways*.”

But what about the other side of the spirit world that the Bible also describes—the dark realm? It is, sadly, a reality we must face. But the Bible provides us with valuable information to protect ourselves from it and make us aware of its deceitful ways.

The origins of an evil spirit world

If God created the spirit world to be good, how did the dark side arise? And why would a good and loving God have allowed it? Again, the only true and reliable source of information is the Bible, written under the inspiration of the supreme spirit being called God, who is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing and who best knows the story—for He was there from the very beginning.

He says, “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done . . .” (Isaiah 46:9-10). Thankfully, He has chosen to reveal to us how and why this evil side of the spirit world arose.

God first discloses to us that evil began with one of those created angels, called *Lucifer* in Latin (later called *Satan*), who rebelled against Him.

God addresses this being in Isaiah 14:12-14: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount

What if You Are Confronted by the Dark Side of the Spirit World?

The Bible provides a guide to successfully countering any of Satan’s deceptions. Below are several principles you should follow.

First, avoid participating in anything to do with the evil side of the spirit world (see Ephesians 5:11). Instead of harboring dark thoughts that can lead to being influenced by dark forces, the Bible clearly tells us to focus on the positive: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

Respect the power of the dark world and don’t play around with it. Avoid any type of séances, gothic rituals or such devices as Ouija boards, all of which can open portals to the evil world. At the same time, don’t be *afraid* of the dark forces. Remember, God is still in charge and is far more powerful than any of these evil agents. The Bible tells us, “He who is in you is *greater* than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

By drawing closer to God, you will move farther away from the world’s evil sources. Through prayer, Bible study, meditation and occasional fasting, you will be greatly strengthened and will successfully resist Satan’s temptations. “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and *he will flee from you*. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8).

If you ever feel there is a strange and evil presence around you, the Bible gives advice based on the confrontation between the archangel Michael and Satan. “Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (Jude 9). So, if you do rebuke a spirit, don’t do it in your name, but always in God’s name, providing you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That is the only authority evil spirits respect. Realize also that the spirit world is nothing to be trifled with (Acts 19:13-17). If you feel troubled by a spirit, you should seek counsel and advice from one of God’s true ministers.

Another great source of spiritual strength is simply studying the Bible. Jesus Christ quoted the Bible numerous times to successfully counter the wiles of the devil (Matthew 4:3-10). There are many scriptural passages that provide comfort and courage when one is facing dark spiritual forces, especially in the book of Psalms—particularly Psalms 23, 27, 34, 37 and 91.



of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.”

God adds more information in His Word about Satan and the beginning of sin and evil. In Ezekiel 28:14-17 He again addresses this being: “You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God . . . You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you . . . You became filled with violence within, and you sinned . . . Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor . . .” (Ezekiel 28:14-17).

Yes, angels were created with free will, able to choose between good and evil and thus capable of sin.

Satan's domain on earth

This angel, a cherub, one of the mightiest of angels, sometime in the distant past led a rebellion against God and was cast down to the earth with those angels that followed him. Scripture says that “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).

The term “hell” in this verse is *tartaroo* in the Greek and means a place of confinement. (For more information, request our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

Where is this place of confinement? The Bible reveals it is here on earth! When God asked Satan in Job 1:7, “From where do you come,” Satan replied, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.” This is his dominion and where his angels also dwell.

Furthermore, when Jesus was tempted by Satan, the devil showed Him the world’s kingdoms and said, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6).

It was therefore the rebellion of this powerful angelic being that began the reign of evil and sin here on earth, long before human beings were created. By the time Adam and Eve were formed, Satan was already here on the earth, and either presented himself as a serpent or spoke through it to deceive Eve (Genesis 3:1-5).

The Scriptures also reveal these fallen angels will attempt one more time to storm heaven, but they will not succeed. This is described by the apostle John in Revelation

12:7-9: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.



Whether we are aware of it or not, a spiritual battle is going on—a battle for our minds.

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

Thus we see that God’s Word explains that sin and evil originated with an angel, Lucifer. He rebelled along with other angels and became Satan, the “Adversary,” as this name means, of both God and mankind. This was also the origin of the dark side of the spirit world.

Satan is the great deceiver “who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9) and, along with his angels, is an expert in disguising himself as an apparent doer of good. As the apostle Paul writes: “For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

The fallen angels, hostile to God and men, are called demons in the Bible. They share with Satan, their leader, the goal of deceiving people with false doctrine, generally making human life miserable and, if possible, even destroying people. As the Bible says, “In latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

The battle for our minds

So, whether we are aware of it or not, a spiritual battle is going on—a battle

for our minds. The apostle Paul says of this spiritual warfare: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness” (Ephesians 6:12).

As we mature, we will inevitably notice struggles in our own minds where good and bad thoughts and attitudes battle for dominance to shape behavior. Satan has the power to transmit attitudes and tries to persuade us to do evil. One need only look at some of history’s most murderous tyrants—men like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin or Pol Pot—to realize the menace that arises when evil thoughts come to totally dominate one’s thinking. It *is* real, and it *is* deadly and dangerous.

The apostle Paul explains how Satan operates by transmitting invisible but powerful negative attitudes: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Thankfully, the Bible foretells a future time on earth when Satan will no longer be able to transmit his evil attitudes and the world will finally be at peace (Revelation 20:2-3). But in the meantime, we must be careful to guard our minds as this unseen spiritual battle rages around us! **GN**

Recommended Reading

The Bible reveals much more about the spirit world than we have covered in this article. It reveals that the spirit world is very real, even if we can’t detect it with our limited human senses. To learn more, request our free booklets *Is There Really a Devil?* and *Who Is God?* Both eye-opening booklets are yours free for the asking. Request or download them today!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

The Spirit World's Dangerous Dark Side

Strange practices and religions such as Wicca, Santeria, voodoo and channeling are growing in popularity. What's behind them? Are such things harmless, or is there more to them than meets the eye?

by Mario Seiglie

As traditional Christianity has lost its appeal for many people, growing numbers have sought to fill that vacuum in their lives in other ways. Some turn to alternate religions popular in other parts of the world. Some turn to witchcraft and pre-Christian paganism. Some seek answers in the occult. A few even knowingly turn to Satanism and evil spirits.

Some are simply curious; others are very serious. But whether they recognize it or not, all are dabbling in dangers that likely are well beyond their limited comprehension. That's why these dangers are often referred to as the occult—things that are secretive, mysterious and concealed.

Maybe you've never directly seen Satan or his demons, but certainly those familiar with the Bible recognize their influence in this rapidly degenerating world. No wonder the Scriptures describe Satan as "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

His influence is not new, but its prevalence in modern society certainly is. What was once banned or very limited in dealing with the dark spirit realm is now mostly out in the open. Satanism is rampant in movies, and movements based on it, such as Wicca, Santeria, voodoo and consultation with mediums, are thriving, especially with the young.

The apostle Paul tells us we should be wary of such practices, "lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Wicca, Santeria and voodoo

One of the fastest growing movements in Western nations is Wicca, a modern version of witchcraft. Part of its popularity is due to American TV programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Charmed*. Wicca is so popular that the United States, Great Britain and many other nations now recognize it as a legitimate religion with legal rights.

The term *Wicca* was popularized in



Whether they recognize it or not, many people are dabbling in dangers that likely are well beyond their limited comprehension.

1954 by the British leader of the movement, Gerald Gardner, who described it as a return to the "Old Religion" popular in Europe before Christianity.

Wicca, from an Old English word for "witch," incorporates many of the trappings of ancient British witchcraft practices. The satanic pentagram is used as its symbol, and one of its main tenets is adoring nature through different rituals and deities. Some, but not all, covens, or groups, practice casting spells, divination and magic. *Wicca* is an umbrella group or movement that gathers under its fold very different beliefs and practices—but is at its core a thinly disguised type of old-fashioned witchcraft.

Santeria is a Caribbean religion based on mixing African witchcraft with Roman Catholic beliefs—similar in many ways to voodoo or pure African witchcraft. Its followers practice animal sacrifices and perform feverish dancing during Santerian rituals that can lead to possession of a person by an orisha or "saint" being invoked. The individual then is said to speak and

act as that saint. If this is an actual spiritual experience, however, it is nothing more than demonic possession.

All of these practices have this in common: Satan is their originator and they should be absolutely avoided. God, who knows exactly how Satan and his demons work, emphatically warns us not to have anything to do with them. He tells us to

not "give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:27, New International Version).

We should not consult with people associated with these practices, in spite of what they claim are good intentions to help us. God says: "There shall not be found among you anyone who . . . practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD" (Deuteronomy 18:10-12, emphasis added throughout).

What are mediums and familiar spirits?

What about mediums and people who use such things as tarot cards and Ouija boards to consult with the spirits?

Mediums—also sometimes called "seers" or "clairvoyants"—are people who may be used by the fallen angels the Bible calls demons. They might appear normal and helpful, but those who are not fakes (and many are) can genuinely have contact with deceitful spirits who

What Is Channeling?

Most have heard of the term *channeling*. It has become increasingly popular on TV and radio, especially with the arrival of the “New Age” movement. This is a modern version of mysticism with roots in Hinduism, Buddhism and occultism. Some famous actors and actresses have promoted this new take on some very old religious practices.

Those who do the channeling claim they are receiving information or commands from a divine or unknown source. In effect, they say, they are like a radio receiving a signal from a transmitter.

On TV and radio shows, the channeler, or medium, has one or more spirits enter his mind, and then he becomes the “mouthpiece.” Through the medium, the spirit then offers information, advice or predictions on almost any subject imaginable, from the present condition of a departed loved one, to medical counsel, financial advice or even how to improve one’s love life.

Who is speaking through the channeler? The spirits claim to have varied identities. Some say they are the spirits of the dead, sometimes of famous persons, such as Napoleon, Winston Churchill, the so-called Virgin Mary and even Jesus Christ. Others claim to be aliens of extraterrestrial origin.

In reality, there is not much that is new about the “New Age” movement. Mediums were used to consult with the dead from the dawn of history. They were used in Babylon, Egypt, India, China, Asia Minor, Greece (which had the famous oracle at Delphi) and even by the native North and South American Indians.

Although some of the so-called channelers clearly are frauds—and the famous magician Harry Houdini spent 30 years exposing such fakes—in other investigations researchers could not detect any fraud. The late Lord Dowding, who commanded the British Air Forces during the Battle of Britain in World War II, conducted many rigorously supervised laboratory experiments with psychics and found some indeed passed the tests as being genuine.

This is why the Bible constantly warns us not to participate in any type of “channeling” that requires one to open his or her mind to these spirits. Instead, the Scriptures say, “gird up [hold tightly] the loins of your mind” (1 Peter 1:13). Instead of exposing our minds to foreign sources, we should keep the natural barriers of our minds well protected from any outside spirit influence.

The apostle Peter adds: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith . . .” (1 Peter 5:8-9). That’s good advice!



seek to attract and use human beings for their own evil purposes. For this reason these evil angelic beings are called in the Bible “*deceiving spirits*” (1 Timothy 4:1).

A true medium has a “familiar spirit” in him, and the term comes from the Hebrew word *obh*, meaning “a leather bottle.” To the ancient Hebrews, the hollow sound of the voice of a familiar spirit, speaking through a medium, sounded as if it came out of a skin bottle. Just as a skin bottle is a type of vessel, so a person who has a familiar spirit serves as a vessel or a “medium” that contains the spirit.

Familiar spirits, in reality disguised demons, *can* have an intimate knowledge of people, alive or dead. They have at their disposal an extensive network of information from fellow demons who are more than willing to share their knowledge with the deceived “host.” In this way, they will entice many more people to be deceived and hooked—ending sometimes as pawns to these spirits.

This is the grave danger of participating in any of these practices—at first these spirits appear as willing servants, but inevitably they end up as harsh taskmasters.

That is why we should avoid coming into *any* contact with people who claim they can communicate with the dead. God, who is intimately familiar with this spirit world, warns us that “the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, *I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people*” (Leviticus 20:6).

The Scriptures candidly admit that legitimate mediums do exist and can establish contact with demons, who disguise themselves as departed loved ones, to attract the unsuspecting into their dark spirit world.

Tarot cards and Ouija boards

Some use manual devices such as tarot cards or Ouija boards to consult directly with these familiar spirits. These objects should be avoided at all costs—they are not innocent “games” but ancient ways of attracting these familiar spirits.

Think of these instruments as potential passports into your mind—possibly opening an entry to the zone that should only be inhabited by your own thoughts and

God’s Holy Spirit. If you do not invite these evil spirits, they cannot enter. Yet sometimes even an unsuspecting invitation through these devices can give demons a green light! Sadly, many people have unknowingly invited evil spirits into their minds—never to be quite the same again.

As the Scriptures reveal, these spirits need to be cast out by genuine ministers of God. Acts 19 records an instance where some would-be exorcists tried to cast a demon out of a person and the



demon turned on them, saying, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” Much to their surprise, “the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” (verses 15-16).

This is therefore no laughing matter or cute entertainment—it is deadly serious! Scripture records several instances of people falling into such forbidden practices with disastrous results.

Saul and the medium of En Dor

In the Old Testament, we find the tragic example of King Saul going to a medium. He had first tried to consult with God, but because of his multiple sins, especially his slaughter of 85 priests and an untold number of innocent inhabitants of the town of Nob, he did not receive any answers (1 Samuel 22:18-19).

Saul then broke God’s law and consulted with a medium at En Dor (1 Samuel 28:7). She invoked a figure of one appearing as the prophet Samuel. Yet Saul never saw him; he only heard a voice. This is one reason why God prohibits such consultations—demons are very clever and can impersonate the

person being summoned. Notice the Bible had said God would not answer Saul's inquiries "either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets" (verse 6). This clearly was not the prophet Samuel!

The spirit the medium saw ascending out of the earth (verse 13) was in fact a demon. Saul only *thought* it was Samuel, but this demon had tricked him. As the apostle Paul explains: "For Satan himself transforms himself into [or disguises himself as] an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also

that he would die the next day. He never did turn back to God. That is one of the reasons he is such a tragic figure in the Scriptures.

Paul confronts a spirit of divination

Another case of a medium is found in the New Testament, and it is quite instructive.

We read in Acts 16:16-19: "Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a *spirit of divination* met us, who brought her masters

One can find many programs on radio or TV, backed by successful businessmen, where people with a spirit of divination can greatly impress audiences with their apparent intimate knowledge of those they interview. Most of the time these persons openly call themselves channelers, psychics or mediums. Of course, not all who practice this profession are genuine mediums, for there are many clever charlatans as well, *but some are authentic!*

As the biblical case in Acts 16 shows, the slave girl with the spirit of divination was a real medium. We know this because when the demon left her, she could no longer reveal intimate details of a person's life or predict the future.

Another insight from this account is that the message from a spirit can be positive and true. After all, the Bible plainly says the young girl used by the spirit of divination announced that Paul and his companions came from God and preached the way of salvation. This was true, so what was the problem?

The problem wasn't the message itself, but the *source* of the information. We see here the subtle element of deceit. Many times, the initial message of a spirit of divination, or a demon, can seem positive, harmless and helpful. Just as a fisherman entices fish with succulent bait, so these spirits know they must attract innocent victims with something useful and agreeable. They know, once their victims are hooked, there will be plenty of time later for them to change their message.

Simply say "No!"

We must simply say "No!" when enticed to play with this dark spirit world. Don't fold under pressure from friends, family or anyone else. Put God and His Word first! Literally, your life and your mental welfare could depend on it!

God, who knows exactly how Satan and his demons work, emphatically warns us not to have anything to do with them. We should not consult with people associated with these spirits in spite of any stated intentions to help us. God's Word is clear: "Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:31).

Ask, "Would Christ approve of this?" Certainly He would not! So we should avoid all contact with mediums, fortune-tellers, witches and their devices—and not be fooled by whatever means they might use to try to entice us. **GN**



All of these practices have this in common: Satan is their originator and they should be absolutely avoided.

transform themselves into [or impersonate] *ministers of righteousness*, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

It was not unusual, therefore, for a demon to have impersonated the dead prophet Samuel. The Scriptures clearly tell us Samuel was dead, buried and unconscious: "For the living know that they will die, but the dead *know nothing*" (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Saul was left with the dire prediction

much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

"And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities" (emphasis added throughout).

This passage tells us quite a bit about the dark side of the spirit world. First, it reveals there are some cases where people actually *do* have the spirit of divination and are quite economically successful at what they do. Nowhere does this section deny the fact that people can tap into this source for valuable information. Also, it shows there are others willing to promote such a business, which can be quite profitable. Today, millions if not billions of dollars are made from this ancient and harmful practice.

Recommended Reading

The dark side of the spirit world is very real and nothing we should dabble in. The Bible has a great deal to say about the leader of that dark side, a powerful and evil being called Satan the devil. Where did this being come from? What are his goals, his methods? What are his followers, the demons? To learn more, request our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?* It's yours free for the asking.



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

www.gnmagazine.org/booklets



What Will It Mean for the West If Radical Islam Triumphs?

Defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq may not worry the average American or European, but could defeat there also mean defeat at home? Could the seemingly inexorable advance of radical Islam in the Middle East be replicated in the West?

The West defeated fascists and communists in World War II and the Cold War. It now faces a foe equally determined, if not more so. Can it defeat radical Islam?

Daniel Pipes, author of 11 books on Middle Eastern topics and director of the Philadelphia think tank Middle East Forum, asked that crucial question in his Dec. 26, 2006, article “How the West Could Lose” in the *New York Sun*.

“On the face of it, [the West’s] military preponderance makes victory seem inevitable . . .,” he wrote. “Yet, more than a few analysts, including myself, worry that it’s not so simple.

“Islamists (defined as persons who demand to live by the sacred law of Islam, the Sharia) might in fact do better than the earlier totalitarians. They could even win. That’s because, however strong the Western hardware, its software contains some potentially fatal bugs. Three of them—pacifism, self-hatred, complacency—deserve attention.”

In discussing pacifism, Dr. Pipes writes of those in the West who believe that a military solution is not possible. Yet, he points out, “What were the defeats of the Axis, the United States in Vietnam, or the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, if not military solutions?”

His paragraph on self-hatred illustrates a phenomenon peculiar to the West. “Significant elements in several Western countries—especially the United States, Great Britain, and Israel—believe their own governments to be repositories of evil . . . Self-hating Westerners have an outsized importance due to their prominent role as shapers of opinion in universities, the media, religious institutions, and the arts. They serve as the Islamists’ auxiliary *mujahideen*.”

Thirdly, he focuses on *complacency*. “The absence of an impressive Islamist military machine imbues many Westerners,

especially on the left, with a feeling of disdain . . . Too many dismiss terrorism as a mere ‘nuisance,’” he wrote.

Yet, as Dr. Pipes points out, they could win.

What do Islamists have going for them?

Dr. Pipes lists some of the capabilities Islamists have in their favor:

- “A potential access to weapons of mass destruction that could devastate Western life.
- “A religious appeal that provides deeper resonance and greater staying power than the artificial [religious] ideologies of fascism and communism.
- “An impressively conceptualized, funded, and organized institutional machinery that successfully builds credibility, goodwill, and electoral success.
- “An ideology capable of appealing to Muslims of every size and shape . . . The movement almost defies sociological definition.
- “A non-violent approach . . . that pursues Islamification through educational, political, and religious means . . . Lawful Islamism is proving successful in Muslim-majority countries like Algeria and Muslim-minority ones like the United Kingdom.
- “A huge number of committed cadres. If Islamists constitute 10% to 15% of the Muslim population worldwide, they number some 125 to 200 million persons, or a far greater total than all the fascists and communists, combined, who ever lived.”

In conclusion he paints decidedly worrying scenarios of the near future.

Pacifism, self-hatred and complacency, he notes, only hinder the struggle against the threat from radical Islam. Only after devastating losses in lives and property



will many Westerners belatedly recognize the stakes and the magnitude of the danger. And while the West may then prevail, the battle will have been unnecessarily prolonged and won at considerably higher cost.

Alternatively, he explains, if Islamists avoid turning world opinion against them by not using methods and weapons of mass destruction and instead follow non-violent and political routes to gain control, they may prove unstoppable in the long run. After all, high Muslim birth rates and declining Western births mean the demographics are definitely on their side.

In other words, either way the West is seriously threatened by Islamists determined to advance radical Islam and the rule of Sharia into the very heart of the Western democracies.

In *The Wall Street Journal*, editor Daniel Henninger warns that “militant Islam is on the march, literally, with enormous moral self-confidence. By contrast the West . . . is in ‘an era of post-modern insouciance’”

(“Western Civ 101,” Dec. 1, 2006). *Webster’s Dictionary* defines “insouciance” as “lighthearted unconcern.” It’s as if there is no threat at all.

Yet, as Dr. Pipes so clearly points out, the numbers of Islamists worldwide is “a far greater total than all the fascists and communists, combined, who ever lived.” Bluntly speaking, that means that the threat from radical Islam is the greatest

One Bible verse in particular comes to mind in helping to explain the attitude of so many in the West. It can be found in Revelation 3:17 in the evaluation of the “lukewarm” church of the Laodiceans. They are described as self-satisfied, “rich, . . . wealthy, . . . and [in] need of nothing.”

That certainly sums up the prevailing attitude of most people in the West. People are enjoying greater abundance than

services of the Church of England.

Islam an expansionist religion

For well over two centuries the West has been led by the two great English-speaking powers, the British Empire before World War II and the United States since.

This period of domination is rapidly drawing to a close.

Overlooked in talk of withdrawal from Iraq is the fact that *if the war in Iraq is lost, it will be the first time that the United States and Great Britain, fighting together, have lost a war!* The same could be said for Afghanistan, where defeat seems set to follow. It’s as if God is removing His protective hand from the English-speaking peoples.

Defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq may not worry the average person in the United States or Western Europe, but could defeat there also mean defeat at home? Could the seemingly inexorable advance of radical Islam in the Middle East be replicated in the United States, Australia, Canada or Britain?

History shows Islam to be an expansionist religion. With its origins in the cities of Mecca and Medina almost 14 centuries ago, it has now spread throughout the Middle East, North Africa, large parts of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and pockets of Europe.

Mass immigration into Western countries since World War II now means that millions of Muslims now reside in Western nations. In the 1970 census there were only 500,000 Muslims in the United States; today it’s at least 7 million. Many of these are converts from mainstream Christianity. As churches have turned progressively away from the Word of God, people have left seeking alternative religions.

If, as Dr. Pipes claims, 15 percent of Muslims are committed radicals, that means there are well over one million in the United States alone. Even if the proportion is far smaller, it’s still a disturbingly high number.

The director of the British intelligence service warned recently that Britain was a primary target of radical Islam and claimed that investigations were continuing into 30 ongoing terrorist plots. Attacks on public transportation in London in July 2005 were perpetrated by British nationals—the sons of Muslim immigrants to the country. A few months later, France and

Continued on page 29



Now the United States faces international humiliation, with the possibility of defeat at the hands of militant Islamists, religious fanatics who seem determined to take the world back to the Dark Ages.

threat ever to the Western democracies. And overthrowing Western civilization is their stated goal.

Why do so few see it?

I recently heard a panel discussion on National Public Radio in which the topic was the first U.S. Muslim congressman, newly elected from Minnesota, taking office. All five people on the show expressed the opinion that the more Muslims we have in Congress (and the country generally) the better.

The panelists repeated the politically correct mantras stating that what the country needs is more cultural, ideological and religious diversity (excepting that of the Christian variety, of course). This, they argued, is a good thing.

they have ever had. Consequently, most people are focused on having fun, largely oblivious to the growing threat to their very existence.

Even many professing Christians have succumbed to this “Laodicean” attitude. Most of those who claim to be Christians today rarely attend church, and when they do, it’s for a rushed hour on a Sunday morning that makes them feel good. They’ve done their duty! Many claiming to be Christian have private lives that are incompatible with the standards laid down by Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, all over Europe churches and cathedrals sit empty or nearly so. In Britain, it’s reached the point that a greater number of people go to Muslim services in mosques each week than attend

British Royal Navy could be cut by half

Although the decision is not yet final, the British government apparently plans to mothball up to half of the royal fleet. Also plans to build two new giant aircraft carriers may be scuttled. Recently retired First Sea Lord Sir Alan West “told *The Daily Telegraph* that the government was turning the armed forces into a ‘tin-pot’ gendarmerie, good only for scuffling with terrorists” (Jan. 5, 2007).

The overall problem runs throughout the armed forces. Noted author and defense commentator Max Hastings stated: “Like eruptions from an overstrained water main, revelations about the problems of Britain’s armed forces burst forth daily. The word ‘crisis’ is often abused, but it is justified here. Programmes are being slashed, training curtailed and capabilities cut as the Ministry of Defence struggles to control runaway spending” (*The Guardian*, Jan. 8, 2007).

The article goes on to show that the size of the



“... The past 15 years . . . has seen the progressive dismantling of the United Kingdom’s armed services on a scale it would be inadequate to describe as reckless.”

defense forces is becoming so small that they are losing critical mass and the military’s credibility as a British institution is now at stake. One point to note is that “the army is facing a recruitment crisis as frontline troops quit” (*Daily Mail*, Jan. 5, 2007).

Columnist Gerald Warner of *Scotland on Sunday* probably had the most biting reactive remarks in the media. He wrote: “When a strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods are in peace’ (Luke 11:21). This axiom does not seem to have penetrated the minds of our rulers, Labour and Tory [the British political parties], over the past 15 years. This period has seen the progressive dismantling of the United Kingdom’s armed services on a scale it would be inadequate to describe as reckless.”

He further stated: “Anyone who thinks this is a time for Britain to disarm is several kilotons short of a fission.” This veteran journalist concluded his

article with the warning words: “Pax Britannica? Be very afraid . . .” (Jan. 28, 2007).

Meanwhile the *International Herald Tribune* reported that “President Hu Jintao has called on China’s military commanders to build a powerful navy, the state media reported Thursday as the country continues to spend heavily on a modern blue-water fleet” (Dec. 29, 2006).

The Chinese president is effectively commander-in-chief of the armed forces. China wants to counter the growing naval fleets of Japan, India and other Asian nations. Also, “Vladimir Putin claimed Russia was developing a new breed of nuclear missiles, superior to any existing” (*Scotland on Sunday*, Jan. 28, 2007).

Britannia once ruled the waves of the entire world! It is all too easy to forget that “at the summit of its extraordinary dominance of the world’s oceans, the Royal Navy has been bigger than the next seven national fleets combined” (*Daily Telegraph*, Jan. 5, 2007). *The New York Post* talked about “a 400-year epoch of world history” drawing to a close (Jan. 14, 2007).

The *Post* interpreted the present crisis in the overall context of what it terms “Britain’s decades-long decline as a world power.” This American newspaper also asked two crucial questions: “Is Britain part of an English-speaking, Atlantic-based strategic alliance that includes the United States and Canada? Or is it part of Europe as envisioned by technocrats in Paris, Brussels and Berlin?”

One cannot comprehend the current difficulties besetting the major powers of the English-speaking world today without the basic knowledge and understanding of its prophetic origins. To understand more, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *The New York Post*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Scotland on Sunday*, *Daily Mail* [London], *The Daily Telegraph* [London].)

Israel to nuke Iran?

The *Sunday Times* occasionally publishes material that few other newspapers dare to print. Its latest controversial article is headlined, “Revealed: Israel Plans Nuclear Strike on Iran” (Jan. 7, 2007). The first paragraph reads: “Israel has drawn up secret plans to destroy Iran’s uranium enrichment facilities with tactical nuclear weapons.”

Such an attack, if it happens, does have historical precedent. In 1981 Israel destroyed Iraq’s nuclear reactor.

However, Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev formally denied the *Sunday Times* report (*The Jewish Chronicle*, Jan. 12, 2007). Yet the same article quoted Professor Uzi Arad, founding director of the Institute for Policy and Strategy, as saying that Iranian nuclear ambitions were “the single most vital item on Israel’s agenda.” He further stated that Israel had to “think the unthinkable and take all the necessary measures so that if Iran did have nuclear weapons, it would not think of using them.”

The Spectator weekly magazine actually preceded *The Sunday Times* with a cover article titled “The Nuclear Option: Israel Can Stop Iran” (Jan. 6, 2007). It predicted a probable nuclear attack, possibly fairly early this year.

The author, Douglas Davis, stated that he received information from a senior Israeli source who said: “We are the product of the Holocaust in Europe and we will do everything—and I mean everything—to prevent another holocaust recurring in Israel. If the Americans do not act, then we will act. And that moment might be closer than people dare to imagine.” (Sources: *The Sunday Times*, *The Jewish Chronicle*, *The Spectator* [all London].)

Doomsday clock ticks closer

For some 60 years the “doomsday clock” has been ticking in Chicago, sponsored by the directors of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. They set it at seven minutes to midnight—midnight being a nuclear holocaust—back in 1947. Since then its hands have been moved forward and backward according to world tensions. According to *The Bulletin Online*, on Jan. 18 the clock was moved two minutes forward. It is now set at five minutes to midnight.

According to Max Hastings, editor of the *Daily Mail*, “The clock’s hand is being advanced for the first time in four years” (Jan. 17, 2007). Many atomic scientists think that the world is now entering a very dangerous nuclear phase. Once that nuclear line is crossed and someone again uses an atomic device, it will make repetition almost inevitable.

In the wake of Iran’s feverish determination to



achieve nuclear weapons, six Arab states have indicated a desire or intention to go nuclear. They are Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Nuclear proliferation could be on the verge of getting out of control, especially in the already dangerous Middle East.

Professor Colin Gray, in his book *Another Bloody Century*, wrote that “future warfare will see the use of weapons of mass destruction, including those of a nuclear variety.” Many atomic scientists agree. To understand more about the dangerous world in which we are now living, request our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* (Sources: *The Bulletin Online*, *Daily Mail* [London].)

Jews in Britain under attack

Just over a year ago, in mid-February of 2006, British Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks called for calm “in the face of recent, highly disturbing events” indirectly affecting the Jewish community in Britain. To most British Jews an act against the state of Israel is an act against themselves.

Rabbi Sacks wrote in *The Jewish Chronicle*: “The strength of a people is tested in troubled times. Events have succeeded one another at a breakneck pace. The Iranian threat to wipe Israel off the map; the election by the Palestinians of Hamas, a group committed to the destruction of Israel . . . [and] locally there was the vote of the synod of the Church of England to heed a call to divest from companies associated with Israel” (Feb. 17, 2006, emphasis added throughout).

These negative events against the state of Israel have not ceased to affect the British Jewish community. The latest evidence is the publication of the “Anti-Semitic Incident Reports 2006.” It shows that the number of such incidents has nearly quadrupled since 1984, totaling 594 last year, up sharply from 455 in 2005.

According to the *Daily Mail*, “There were 112 violent assaults, 37 per cent more than in 2005; 70 cases of damage to Jewish communal property; 27 threats, including death threats against individuals and organisations; 365 cases of abusive behaviour; and 20 incidents in which mass-produced anti-Semitic literature was distributed” (Feb. 1, 2007).

The Community Security Trust produces the Incident Report annually. Trust spokesman Mark Gardner stated: “Today’s anti-Semitism is a wave of hatred, intimidation and abuse against British Jews, who are stupidly blamed and randomly attacked over international tensions for which they bear no responsibility” (ibid.)

Beyond being irrational, animosity toward Israeli Jews or the Jewish community at large violates the spirit of the Ten Commandments and other biblical commands such as “you shall not hate your brother in your heart” (Leviticus 19:17).

However, considering what the Bible reveals about end-time events, neither growing anti-Semitism nor hatred of Israel is surprising. (Sources: *The Jewish Chronicle*, *Daily Mail*.)

France no longer a Catholic country?

A recent poll printed in *Le Monde Des Religions* revealed that “the number of self-declared French Catholics had dropped from 80 percent in the early 1990s and 67 percent in 2000 to 51 percent



today.” In contrast, the number of declared atheists rose from 23 percent in 1994 to 31 percent today.

Henry Samuel, in Paris reporting for *The Daily Telegraph*, stated that “of the 51 per cent who still call themselves Catholics, only half said they believed in God. Many said they were Catholics because it was a family tradition” (Jan. 10, 2007, emphasis added throughout).

“In its institutions, but also in its mentalities, France is no longer a Catholic country,” said Frederic Lenoir, *Le Monde Des Religions* editor in chief. According to what’s prophesied in God’s Word, religion will yet play a major part in European affairs. An alliance of a great religious power and a secular power will emerge in Europe and dominate the world. For further information, request our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Source: *The Daily Telegraph* [London].)

Why bad news in The Good News?

Speaking of conditions before His return, Jesus Christ said our planet will experience “a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again” (Matthew 24:21, Revised English Bible).

The United Church of God, whose members and supporters provide the financial backing for *The Good News* and other publications, proclaims the good news of the imminent return of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet we often report on the negative consequences of human behavior leading to the very conditions Jesus described.

Following Jesus’ example, part of our purpose

is to highlight the lessons mankind is writing in its self-centered way of living and to warn of where this way is leading. But more than that, our intention is to illustrate the need for an alternative way of life—the godly way of life Jesus revealed and personified. Beyond the bad news, we present this way of living that would eliminate all of man’s problems. We also explain from Scripture that under the coming rule of Christ, God’s way will become universal—and humanity will at last know true and lasting peace.

The world of today is indeed filled with bad news. Yet the future holds incredible promise—Christ’s return to establish the Kingdom of God (Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 11:15), ushering in a wonderful world of peace, prosperity and plenty during which all people will at last learn to live God’s way of life. This truly is good news!

Money may not buy happiness, but marriage can

In searching for happiness, marriage is more important than money, according to a December 2006 Gallup poll.

According to a Gallup news release, “Those who are married at any income level are as likely (if not more likely) to report being happy than even the wealthiest people who are not married.” Put simply, marriage matters more than money when it comes to happiness.

The poll of more than 1,000 adults found that 84

percent of Americans are satisfied with their personal lives—a stark contrast with the only 30 percent who are satisfied with how things are going in the country.

Not surprisingly, those with higher incomes were more satisfied and happier than those with lower incomes, and those who were married reported greater happiness at all income levels.

The primary ingredient in American adults’ personal happiness showed that those who were married were happier than those who were not, regardless of their income. The Supreme Being who created marital and family relationships tells us that it is a good thing for a man to find a wife. “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor [a delight and blessing] from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22). (Source: Gallup News Service.)

How Can You Make Sense of the News?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today’s dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You’re probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. So are we. That’s why we’ve created the *World News & Prophecy* Web site—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. This eye-opening site offers you a perspective you won’t find anywhere else—the perspective of God’s Word, the Bible. Visit us at www.wnponline.org today!

Teaching Values to Your Child: How to Make Wise Media Choices

It's no secret that much of the media our children are exposed to promotes values contrary to Christian values. How can we teach them how to decide what music to listen to and which movies to see?

by Larry Greider

How do you teach values or morals to your children in the 21st century? Actually, the same way it has been done at any time in history. As a parent or teacher, you use the environment around you to identify what is good and true and expose what is wrong and harmful.

The Bible says this very eloquently in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

Perhaps one of the best teaching opportunities for our consumer-focused younger generation is to challenge the choices they make, especially in entertainment, that can have an undue influence on developing minds.

Today there are 31.6 million 12- to 19-year-olds in the United States—the largest generation ever—with plenty of buying power. In 2000, U.S. teens spent an estimated \$105 billion and influenced their parents to spend an additional \$48 billion. The choices made by teens are thus quite relevant to merchants. Perhaps there has never been a time when so many young people have had so much leisure time plus money in their pockets to just have fun.

Choices, choices, choices. What movie, CD or video game should I spend my money on this time? What's cool, and what's going to be exciting and fun?

Not all options are good

One author succinctly summed up what's on TV: “Most television programming is insipid, illicit, and idiotic” (Douglas Groothuis, Ph.D., “How the Bombarding Images of TV Culture Undermine the Power of Words,” *Modern Reformation*, January-February 2001, p. 39).

It's obvious to those who've been watching TV and movies for a few years that there is more violence and sex than ever before—actually, *quite a lot* more. Every

major network has a show, often in prime time, featuring a homosexual character, not to mention all the shows that glamorize extramarital sex.

Media analyst Marshall McLuhan remarked, “We become what we behold.” Joshua Meyrowitch, a professor of communication, complains that his students tend



Is this appropriate? Are the words of the song or the plot of the movie good for us? It is true that options are often few.

Are these shows, which admittedly entertain and stimulate people, really good for you? Are the big screen's latest flicks appropriate for Christians?

In 1939, Rhett Butler, talking angrily to Scarlett O'Hara in the cinematic blockbuster *Gone With the Wind*, appeared without his shirt and also used a four-letter word considered shocking if said in public. These two issues made this epic movie controversial.

Today, nudity or partial nudity is considered normal. The use of expletives is so commonplace that some characters would have virtually nothing to say if you deleted curse words. Casual sex, graphically depicted, is almost natural between the main characters in most movies.

Ratings of movies (seldom enforced, as most teens know) have been steadily getting looser—meaning less and less is censored. Full frontal nudity, lots of blood and guts, and generous quantities of profanity are not that big a deal anymore.

to have an image-based standard of truth: “If I ask, ‘What evidence supports your view or contradicts it?’ they look at me as if I came from another planet” (*ibid.*, p. 33).

Ideas for making choices about movies and music

Here are some questions to ask when it comes to entertainment choices.

- *Is this appropriate?* Are the words of the song or the plot of the movie good for us? It is true that options are often few, even at a major multiplex with 10 or more theaters. One recent marquee offered three R-rated flicks that had adult language, nudity and violence, two movies dealing with the paranormal (spirit world including demon possession), and one thoroughly gross picture labeled a comedy.

That didn't leave much to view, which is very sad. The powerful combination of surround sound and high-definition digital technologies allow for stunning imagery. It seems we get addicted to special effects



worth watching. Why not go do something or get with a group and talk about ideas, plans, etc.?

Have you ever thought about going to a park and throwing a Frisbee or football around? Your imagination is the limit of things to do that are fun, creative and friendship-building.

Going to a movie is getting to be more expensive and often injects ideas into your mind that are not clean and pure.

Ever thought about going to a park and throwing a Frisbee or football around? Your imagination is the limit of things to do that are fun, creative and friendship-building.

them at the mall. Full of profanity, violence and misogyny, rage rock is literally a challenge thrown up to marketers—just try to market this!

But marketers accepted the challenge. Rage rock became big business. Not only did Insane Clown Posse become mainstream, but much bigger acts like Eminem and Limp Bizkit were breaking sales records and winning Grammy nominations and other mainstream music awards.



Just talking in a peaceful environment with good friends might actually be the most fun of all. Learning from others while sharing your concerns and fears can be healthy and helpful in building lasting relationships.

Teach your children about underhanded media marketing

Sadly, companies that see the youth market as a real bonanza produce many of the things considered cool. The intention of most sponsors is to make money, not help build character. MTV (Music Television), which seems to have turned into one big continuous commercial, does not always have the purest of motives.

In a PBS *Frontline* documentary titled “Merchants of Cool” (first aired Feb. 27, 2001), media analyst Douglas Rushkoff spoke with teens at a concert by the Detroit-based Insane Clown Posse, purveyors of a genre of music that became known as “rage rock.”

When asked to describe what appealed to them about such music, the teens invariably responded that it belonged to them; it hadn’t yet been taken and sold back to

In the documentary, Mr. Rushkoff detailed how MTV and other huge commercial outlets orchestrated the rise of Limp Bizkit—despite the group’s objectionable lyrics—and then relentlessly promoted them on the air.

But in doing so, critics ask if MTV is truly reflecting the desires of today’s teenagers or stoking a cultural infatuation with music and imagery that glorifies violence and sex as well as antisocial behavior and attitudes. In today’s media-saturated environment, such questions, it seems, are becoming increasingly difficult to answer.

If you want your teens to be aware of godly values, you will have to teach them. The world around us attacks what is good, pure and right. I was struck by Paul’s use of the word “if” in Philippians 4:8: “*If* there is any virtue and *if* there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

As parents, we must search for what is appropriate for our children and guide them toward making right decisions. Their future success and happiness will depend on it! **GN**

and need more and more to be thrilled. But what about the mind? Do we need to guard this important gateway to our character? Of course we do.

• *Will this be uplifting and positive?*

It’s great to have powerful music that lifts your spirit and makes you feel good. A few years ago I visited Epcot Center in Disney World. Toward the end of the day, there was a colorful parade with puppets 20 feet high, dancers and rolling drums with the accompaniment of the most intriguing and inspiring music I’ve ever heard. I was so taken that I had to find the CD for my collection.

Music should fit the mood but not create a negative or destructive one. You can select from a huge variety of music today. Make wise choices. Choose music that inspires and uplifts you.

• *What are the options?* Suggest to your children that it might be more fun and rewarding to do something else instead of taking in a movie, if there isn’t anything

Christians Who Don't Celebrate Easter: What Do They Know?

Easter is the most important holiday for hundreds of millions of believers around the world. Yet thousands of Christians don't observe it. Do they know something that others don't?

by Jerold Aust

Every spring, the anticipation and excitement of Easter is electrifying for many people. Churches prepare elaborate Easter programs that illustrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Parents take time to color Easter eggs and hide them so their children can hunt for them.

It's typical for TV movies this time of year to depict Easter as an enjoyable occasion of renewed happiness. Television advertisements and commercial businesses also get very involved with Easter as they offer colorful Easter baskets, Easter costumes and chocolate rabbits to celebrate this great religious event.

Many churches advertise outdoor Easter sunrise services, with any and all invited. Weather permitting, the Easter celebration is visually reinforced by watching the sun rise in the east.

But what do bunnies and colored eggs have to do with Jesus' resurrection?

And if this celebration is so important, why didn't Jesus teach His apostles and the early Church to observe it? The books of the New Testament were written over a span of decades after Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, yet nowhere do we see so much as a hint of any kind of Easter celebration.

So where exactly did Easter and its customs come from? Why do hundreds of millions of people celebrate the holiday today?

Can we find Easter in the Bible?

Easter is considered the most important religious festival in today's Christianity. "The Easter feast has been and still is regarded as the greatest in the Christian church, since it commemorates the most important event in the life of its Founder" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1986, Vol. 2, "Easter"). Given its popularity, one would think that surely this observance is found in God's Word.

Some cite Acts 12:4 as authority for celebrating Easter. But there's a problem in that Easter isn't really mentioned there

at all. The King James Bible translators substituted "Easter" for the Greek word *Pascha*, which means "Passover." "The word [Easter] does not properly occur in Scripture, although [the King James Version] has it in Acts 12:4 where it stands for Passover, as it is rightly rendered in RV" (*ibid.*).

The vast majority of Bible translations recognize this error in the King James Version and rightly translate the word as



What do bunnies and colored eggs have to do with Jesus' resurrection? And if this celebration is so important, why didn't Jesus teach His apostles and the early Church to observe it?

"Passover" in Acts 12:4. The truth is, "there is no trace of Easter celebration in the [New Testament]" (*ibid.*)

Where did Easter come from?

If Easter isn't found in the Bible, where exactly did it come from? And just exactly what does the name *Easter* mean?

It's important to review credible historical sources to understand the celebration's true history. For example, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* tells us: "At Easter, popular customs reflect many ancient pagan survivals—in this instance, connected with spring fertility rites, such as the symbols of the Easter egg and the Easter hare or rabbit" (15th edition, Macropaedia, Vol. 4, p. 605, "Church Year").

In the ancient world of the Middle East, people were far more connected to the land and cycles of nature than we are today. They depended on the land's fertility and crops to survive. Spring, when fertility returned to the land after the long desola-

tion of winter, was a much-anticipated and welcomed time for them.

Many peoples celebrated the coming of spring with celebrations and worship of their gods and goddesses, particularly those associated with fertility. Among such deities were Baal and Astarte or Ashtoreth, mentioned and condemned frequently in the Bible, whose worship typically included ritual sex to promote fertility throughout the land.

It was only natural to the peoples of the ancient Middle East to incorporate symbols of fertility—such as eggs and rabbits, which reproduce in great numbers—into those pagan celebrations for their gods. As *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* notes above, Easter eggs and the Easter rabbit are simply a continuation of these ancient spring fertility rites.

Nineteenth-century Scottish Protestant clergyman Alexander Hislop's work *The Two Babylons* is still considered a definitive work on pagan customs that survive

in today's religious practices.

On Easter, he wrote: "What means the term Easter itself? It is not a Christian name. It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven, whose name, as pronounced by the people of Nineveh, was evidently identical with that now in common use in this country. That name, as found by [early archaeologist Sir Austen Henry] Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar" (1959, p. 103).

The name *Easter*, then, comes not from the Bible. Instead its roots go far back to the ancient pre-Christian Mesopotamian goddess *Ishar*, known in the Bible as Astarte or Ashtoreth.

Ancient resurrection celebrations

What did worship of this goddess Ishtar

involve? "Temples to Ishtar had many priestesses, or sacred prostitutes, who symbolically acted out the fertility rites of the cycle of nature. Ishtar has been identified with the Phoenician Astarte, the Semitic Ashtoreth, and the Sumerian Inanna. Strong similarities also exist between Ishtar and the Egyptian Isis, the Greek Aphrodite, and the Roman Venus.

"Associated with Ishtar was the young god Tammuz [mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14], considered both divine and mortal . . . In Babylonian mythology Tammuz died annually and was reborn year after year, representing the yearly cycle of the seasons and the crops. This pagan belief later was identified with the pagan gods Baal and Anat in Canaan" (*Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1995, "Gods, Pagan," p. 509).

Alan Watts, expert in comparative religion, wrote: "It would be tedious to

describe in detail all that has been handed down to us about the various rites of Tammuz . . . and many others . . . But their universal theme—the drama of death and resurrection—makes them the forerunners of the Christian Easter, and thus the first 'Easter services.' As we go on to describe the Christian observance of Easter we shall see how many of its customs and ceremonies resemble these former rites" (*Easter: Its Story and Meaning*, 1950, p. 58).

He goes on to explain how such practices as fasting during Lent, erecting an image of the deity in the temple sanctuary, singing hymns of mourning, lighting candles and nighttime services before Easter morning originated with ancient idolatrous practices (pp. 59-62).

Another author, Sir James Frazer (1854-1941), knighted for his contributions to our understanding of ancient religions,

The Length of Jesus' Time in the Tomb Proves He Was the Messiah

Jesus gave one sign that would be proof of His resurrection as our Savior—the amount of time He would spend in the tomb. Jesus stated: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).

"And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17). The timing then of Jonah's experience is the same amount of time Jesus would be in the grave. Jesus said this length of time would be proof that He is our living Savior.

If you want proof as to whether Easter represents Jesus' resurrection from the dead, all you have to do is count correctly. Following the traditional reckoning of a late-afternoon Good Friday crucifixion to an Easter Sunday morning resurrection, at best one can only come up with one full day, two small parts of daytime and two nights. Yet Jesus said the proof that He was the Messiah was that He would be in the grave or tomb *three days and three nights*.

Something is obviously wrong with the traditional Good Friday–Easter Sunday timing. It simply doesn't work, no matter how you try.

A key to counting this time correctly is found in a proper translation of Matthew 28:1. The Ferrar Fenton translation correctly renders this verse: "After the Sabbaths [plural], towards the dawn of the day following the Sabbaths [plural], Mary, the Magdalene, and the other Mary, came to examine the tomb."

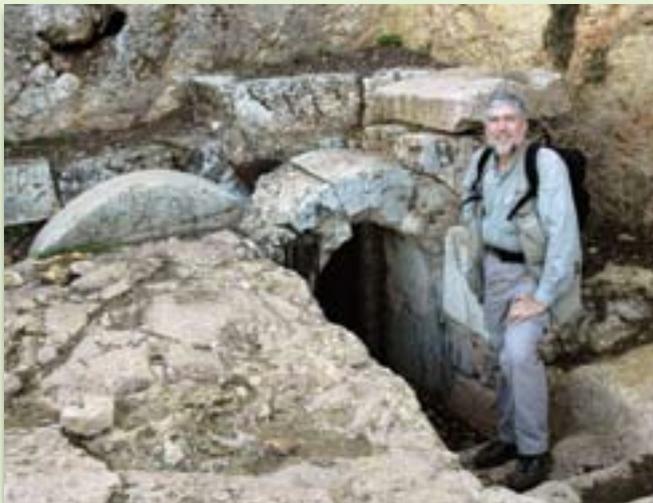
There were, in fact, *two* Sabbaths that particular week. Putting all the information together, Jesus died in the middle of the week, on a Wednesday afternoon, and was laid in the tomb close to sunset (John 19:31-42). He had to be laid in the tomb by sunset because the night and day that followed were holy (verse 31), the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:4-7), a Holy Day Sabbath that could fall on any day of the week.

Then came Friday, a regular work day, followed by Friday night and Saturday daytime as God's weekly seventh-day Sabbath. Ferrar Fenton gets it right, translating the plural Greek word *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 as *sabbaths*.

Once we understand that *two* different Sabbaths were involved, it becomes clear that Jesus was indeed three days and three nights in the tomb, fulfilling the only sign He gave that He was the Messiah. From sunset Wednesday to sunset Thursday was the first night and day; from sunset Thursday to sunset Friday was the second night and day; and from sunset Friday to sunset on the weekly Sabbath was the third night and day—three days and three nights, just as He said.

The prophesied three days and three nights is also the all-important key to recognizing the fact that Jesus was resurrected at the end of the weekly Sabbath and not on Sunday morning.

John 20:1 tells us: "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, *while it was still dark*, and saw that the stone had been taken



In Jerusalem, Good News managing editor Scott Ashley inspects a first-century tomb with a rolling-stone entrance, one of several such tombs found in Israel. Dozens of such archaeological finds confirm the accuracy of historical details mentioned in the Gospels.

away from the tomb." She found the tomb *already empty*, and the angel told Mary that Jesus had *already risen* (Matthew 28:5).

This means He was resurrected before the sunlight of dawn, which puts us back to the actual time of resurrection as being the end of the weekly Sabbath at the time of sunset on Saturday. Comparing and correctly understanding the Gospel accounts makes it clear that Easter sunrise cannot be the time of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' time in the grave—the same amount of time that Jonah was in the belly of a fish—indeed proves that Jesus was the Messiah.

describes the culmination of the ancient idolatrous worship this way: “The sorrow of the worshippers was turned to joy . . . The tomb was opened: the god had risen from the dead; and as the priest touched the lips of the weeping mourners with balm, he softly whispered in their ears the glad tidings of salvation.

“The resurrection of the god was hailed by his disciples as a promise that they too would issue triumphant from the corruption of the grave. On the morrow . . . the divine resurrection was celebrated with a wild outburst of glee. At Rome, and probably elsewhere, the celebration took the form of a carnival” (*The Golden Bough*, 1993, p. 350).

A new celebration with ancient idolatrous roots

In various forms, worship of this god under the names Tammuz, Adonis and Attis, among others, spread from the outer reaches of the Roman Empire to Rome itself. There a truly remarkable development took place: Early Catholic Church leaders merged customs and practices associated with this earlier “resurrected” god and spring fertility celebrations and applied them to the resurrected Son of God.

The customs of the ancient fertility and resurrection celebrations weren't the only ones morphed into a new “Christian” celebration, but they are among the most obvious. After all, many historians readily admit the origin of the name *Easter* and the ancient fertility symbolism of rabbits and decorated eggs (which you can verify yourself in almost any encyclopedia).

Frazer observes: “When we reflect how often the Church has skilfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith on the old stock of paganism, we may surmise that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis” (p. 345).

He goes on to note that the desire to bring heathens into the Catholic Church without forcing them to surrender their idolatrous celebrations “may have led the ecclesiastical authorities to assimilate the Easter festival of the death and resurrection of their Lord to the festival of the death and resurrection of another Asiatic god which fell at the same season . . . the Church may have consciously adapted the new festival [of Easter] to its heathen predecessor for the sake of winning souls to Christ” (p. 359).

Surprisingly, the celebration of Easter didn't finally win out until A.D. 325, nearly

The word Easter comes from the Chaldean fertility goddess Astarte, called Ishtar by the Assyrians and Ashtoreth in the Bible.



Worship of this goddess, strongly condemned in the Bible, included fertility rites and ritual prostitution intended to ensure continued fertility of the land. Astarte figurines, such as this one in the Istanbul

Archaeological Museum, are commonly found in the ancient lands of the Bible.

300 years after Jesus Christ's death and resurrection!

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains in the section titled “The Liturgical Year,” “At the Council of Nicaea in 325, all the Churches agreed that Easter . . . should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon . . . after the vernal equinox” (1995, p. 332).

Up until this time, many believers had continued to commemorate Jesus' death through the biblical Passover as Jesus and the apostles had instructed (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Now, however, with the power of the Roman Empire behind it, the Catholic Church enforced its preference for Easter. Those who wished to continue to observe the biblical Passover had to go underground to avoid persecution.

Would Jesus Christ celebrate Easter?

The record of the New Testament is clear: The faithful members of the early Church continued to observe all that the apostles taught them, as they were taught by Jesus Christ. The record of history is equally clear: In later centuries new customs, practices and doctrines were introduced that were quite foreign to the original Christians, forming a new “Christianity” they would scarcely recognize.

So a key question is, should a Christian follow what Jesus taught or what later religious teachers taught?

It's always a good idea to ask the question, *what would Jesus do?*

If Jesus were in the flesh today, would He celebrate Easter? The simple answer is *No*. He does not change. “Jesus Christ is *the same, yesterday, today, and forever,*” as Hebrews 13:8 tells us (emphasis added throughout). Jesus never observed Easter, never sanctioned it and never taught His disciples to celebrate it. Nor did the apostles teach the Church to do so.

Today, Jesus would observe the biblical Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread as Scripture teaches and as He practiced and taught (John 13:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8). In fact, He specifically said that He anticipated observing the Passover with His true followers “in My Father's kingdom” after His return (Matthew 26:26-29).

The feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread have deep meaning to Christ's true disciples. They reveal aspects of God's plan for the salvation of humanity—commemorating the fact that Jesus died for us and lives in us and for us (1 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:3-4).

Should you observe Easter?

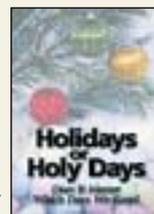
If you want to be a true disciple of Christ Jesus, you need to carefully examine whether your beliefs agree with the Bible. It is not acceptable to God to merely assume that He approves of or accepts non-biblical celebrations, regardless of whether they are done for proper motives.

The fact is that God says, “Learn not the way of the heathen”—those who don't know God's truth (Jeremiah 10:2, King James Version).

His Word gives us explicit instructions regarding worshipping Him with practices adopted from pagan idolatry: “Do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How

Recommended Reading

Are you surprised at what you've learned in this article? Don't feel alone—most people are shocked to learn the true origins of some of our most popular holidays! If you'd like to learn more—and there's much more to learn!—request or download your free copy of *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* If you'd like to discover how the early Christianity of Jesus and the apostles was replaced over time with something quite different, be sure to read *The Church Jesus Built*, also free for the asking.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' *You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way*; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods . . . Whatever I command you, *be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it*" (Deuteronomy 12:30-32).

Jesus Christ now commands everyone to

repent of following all man-made religious traditions: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30; compare Matthew 15:3).

Will you honor Christ's lifesaving instructions so that God can bless you? He said: "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant

will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor" (John 12:26).

God wants you and me to obey His life-giving Word. When we do, we can serve Christ as His ambassadors on earth. There is no greater calling on earth and throughout time. For your ongoing happiness and security, turn to God now and seek His complete and perfect way. **GN**

What Some Christians Know—and Why They Don't Observe Easter

Remarkably, there are thousands of Christians who don't celebrate Easter, yet they firmly believe in Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, and His resurrection. Why have they made this choice? Here they explain in their own words:

An office manager from Australia wrote: "I don't observe Easter because it has nothing to do with Christ, His sacrifice or the Bible. It derives its origins from pagan celebrations and rituals God tells us not to learn: 'Learn not the way of the heathen' (Jeremiah 10:2, KJV).

"God does not want us to learn the way of the heathen lest we start to do as the heathen do. What do the Easter bunny and colored eggs have to do with Christ and His dying for the sins of the world and being resurrected on the third day? They don't have anything to do with it at all. Christianity has adopted pagan festivals and called them Christian and, in doing so, has disobeyed God."

A.H., Australia

A California high school principal shared the reasons he doesn't celebrate Easter: "My wife and I, many years ago, discovered that Easter is a pagan custom and has nothing to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter was never observed by the early New Testament Church. Once we found out about its pagan origin, we stopped observing it.

"The Easter bunny, Easter eggs, Easter parade and all the customs of this holiday are not in the Bible and should not be observed. We do believe, however, in the New Testament Passover, as observed by the New Testament Church, and directed by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, and we also believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

D.S., California

An editor gave her feelings about Easter: "As a wife and mother, I don't observe Easter because I realize that dressing up for Easter Sunday service in the latest fashion, sometimes including a hat, for myself and children has absolutely nothing to do with the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, it appears to make a mockery of it.

"And to allow and teach youngsters to hide and hunt colored eggs and have stuffed rabbits or bunnies is not instructing them in the right principles God expects them to live by. There are so many marvelous godly principles that do that. I do not desire to mislead or deceive them."

M.A., Texas



A university professor from Georgia gave several reasons that Easter shouldn't be celebrated: "The only time the term Easter is mentioned in the Bible, it is a mistranslation of the godly ordained Passover (Acts 12:4). The term *Easter* is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible and yet many other days are commanded and described as being kept.



"The events surrounding Christ's resurrection do not indicate that Christ rose at sunrise or even close to it. For example, John indicates that by the time Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb it was still dark—Christ had already

risen. The etymology of the term *Easter* is traceable back to a false god of fertility and not the Bible."

P.A., Georgia

A North Carolina businessman offered his reasons as to why he doesn't participate in the Easter celebration: "First of all, the holiday or celebration of Easter by the world's Christian community, is not an event, a celebration, or a worship service that can be found anywhere in the Bible. In fact, the name *Easter* is really the name of an ancient pagan goddess that has roots from ancient Babylonian times dating before the birth of Christ.

"Secondly, there is no teaching in the New Testament by either Christ or His apostles about Easter or any related specifics. The practice and observance of Easter came into the Church of Rome well after all the apostles were dead and the church that Christ established had been scattered.



"Thirdly, if Christ wanted us to observe and honor His resurrection through Easter, why didn't He give specific instructions to His disciples and Church leaders? You can't find any teaching anywhere in the New Testament to observe or honor His resurrection. There's no festival or ceremonies given or outlined.

"However, there are plenty of instructions and examples of Christ teaching us to honor, remember and observe His death by what we call the Passover. The Bible clearly gives such evidence of Christ being the Passover and the symbolism of this event. Then, following His death, the New Testament apostles and Church continued with the observance of the Passover, not Easter."

J.B., North Carolina

Television Log

All channels and times listed are for cable TV unless stated otherwise. For additional information and the most current airing times, or to download or view programs online, visit www.beyondtoday.tv.

UNITED STATES

Arizona
Prescott ch. 13, Sundays 6:30 a.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m.
Prescott Valley ch. 13, Sundays 9 a.m. & 6 p.m.; Mondays 9 a.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m. & 3 p.m.
Tucson ch. 73, 98, Sundays 7:30 a.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m.

Arkansas
Fayetteville ch. 18, Sundays 10 a.m.; Wednesdays 6 p.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m.
Mena ch. 19, Sundays 8:30 a.m.
Mountain Home ch. 7, 22, Sundays 9 a.m.

California
Alamo ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Berkeley ch. 26, Thursdays 9 p.m.
Clayton ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Concord ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Danville ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Dublin ch. 26, Fridays 4 p.m.
El Cerrito ch. 26, Thursdays 9 p.m.
El Sobrante ch. 26, Thursdays 9 p.m.
Emeryville ch. 26, Sundays 8 a.m.
Eureka ch. 10, Fridays 7 p.m.
Hayward ch. 28, Tuesdays 10 p.m.
Hemet ch. 3, Fridays 3 p.m.
Hercules ch. 26, Thursdays 9 p.m.
Lafayette ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Livermore ch. 26, Fridays 4 p.m.
Marin County ch. 26, Tuesdays 10:30 p.m.
Martinez ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Modesto ch. 26, Thursdays 8:30 p.m.; Fridays 6 p.m.
Monrovia ch. 16, 98, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays 4:30 p.m.
Moraga ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Novato ch. 71, Tuesdays 9:30 p.m.
Oakland ch. 26, Sundays 8 a.m.
Orinda ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Palo Cedro ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Pasadena ch. 56, Sundays 6 a.m. & 6 p.m.
Petaluma ch. 26, Sundays 9 a.m.
Piedmont ch. 26, Sundays 8 a.m.
Pittsburg ch. 26, Thursdays 12 midnight
Pleasant Hill ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Pleasanton ch. 26, Fridays 4 p.m.
Redding ch. 11, Sundays 11:30 a.m.
Richmond ch. 26, Thursdays 9 p.m.
Rossmore ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Sacramento ch. 18, 23, Thursdays 10 p.m., 19, Sundays 3:30 p.m.
San Francisco ch. 29, Sundays 11 a.m.
San Jose ch. 15A, Wednesdays 4:30 p.m.
San Rafael ch. 26, Tuesdays 8 p.m.
Santa Clara ch. 15A, Wednesdays 4:30 p.m.
Santa Rosa ch. 72, Sundays 7:30 p.m.; Saturdays 10:30 a.m.
S. Pasadena ch. 6, Thursdays 4 p.m.
Verdugo Hills ch. 20, Thursdays 9:30 p.m.
Walnut Creek ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.

Colorado
Boulder ch. 43, Fridays 1 p.m.

Florida
Clearwater ch. 21, 96, Sundays 6 a.m.; Tuesdays 6 p.m.; Fridays 10:30 a.m.
St. Petersburg ch. 21, 96, Sundays 6 a.m.; Tuesdays 6 p.m.; Fridays 10:30 a.m.
Tampa ch. 19, 20, Sundays 3 p.m.; Tuesdays 3 p.m.

Georgia
Cornelia ch. 4, Sundays 2 p.m.

Hawaii
Lanai ch. 13, Fridays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 7 a.m.
Maui ch. 52, Fridays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 7 a.m.
Molokai ch. 13, Fridays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 7 a.m.

Idaho
Boise ch. 11, Wednesdays 7:30 p.m.

Illinois
Arlington Heights ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Bartlett ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Brookport ch. 2, Sundays 2 p.m.
Buffalo Grove ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Chicago ch. 36, times vary
Des Plaines ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
East St. Louis ch. 18, Saturdays 5:30 p.m.
Elk Grove Village ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Glenview ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Golf ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Hanover Park ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Hoffman Estates ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Lincolnwood ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Metropolis ch. 2, Sundays 2 p.m.
Morton Grove ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Mt. Prospect ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Naperville ch. 17, Sundays 10 a.m.
Niles ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Normal ch. 20, Sundays 6 p.m.
Northbrook ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Palatine ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.

Park Ridge ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Prospect Heights ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Rolling Meadows ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Romeoville ch. 6, Sundays 9 a.m.
Schaumburg ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Skokie ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Springfield ch. 4, Fridays 3 a.m., 11 a.m. & 8 p.m.
Streamwood ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Wheeling ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Wilmette ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.

Indiana
Bloomington ch. 3, Sundays 9:30 p.m.
Elkhart ch. 99, Mondays 4:30 p.m.
Evansville ch. 7, Mondays 5:30 p.m.
Ft. Wayne ch. 57, Sundays 12 noon
Valparaiso ch. 99, Tuesdays 8:30 p.m.

Iowa
Des Moines ch. 15, Sundays 11:30 a.m.

Kentucky
Benton ch. 19, Sundays 8 p.m.
Berea ch. 5, Fridays 9 & 9:30 p.m.
Calvert City ch. 19, Sundays 8 p.m.
Covington ch. 17, Sundays 9 a.m.; Fridays 8 p.m.
Hopkinsville ch. 23, Wednesdays and Fridays 11 a.m.
Mayfield ch. 19, Sundays 8 p.m.
Murray ch. 19, Sundays 8 p.m.
Owensboro ch. 52, Sundays 8 a.m. & 7 p.m.
Paducah ch. 2, Sundays 2 p.m.
Richmond ch. 5, Fridays 9 & 9:30 p.m.

Massachusetts
Amherst ch. 12, Tuesdays 9 p.m.
Boston ch. 22, 23, 83, Sundays 7 a.m.; Wednesdays 10 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.
Cambridge ch. 22, 23, 83, Sundays 7 a.m.; Wednesdays 10 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.
East Longmeadow ch. 5, Sundays 11:30 a.m.
Greenfield ch. 17, Tuesdays 4 p.m.; Wednesdays 10:30 a.m.
Palmer ch. 15, Sundays 12, 2:30 & 8 p.m.
Shrewsbury ch. 33, Wednesdays 10 p.m.; Thursdays 7 a.m.
Worcester ch. 13, Thursdays 10 a.m.

Michigan
Ann Arbor ch. 17, Thursdays 4:30 p.m.
Grand Haven ch. 22, Mondays 4 p.m.
Grand Rapids ch. 25, Tuesdays or Wednesdays 11 a.m.
Kalamazoo ch. 19, Sundays 8:30 a.m.
Midland ch. 3, Fridays 5:30 p.m.
Mt. Pleasant ch. 3, times vary
Traverse City ch. 2, Fridays 5 p.m.

Minnesota
Albert Lea ch. 6, Sundays 9:55 a.m.
Austin ch. 6, Sundays 7 p.m.
Blaine ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Brooklyn Center ch. 19, Sundays 4 a.m., 10 a.m., 4 p.m.; Saturdays 10 p.m.
Brooklyn Park ch. 19, Sundays 4 a.m., 10 a.m., 4 p.m.; Saturdays 10 p.m.
Burnsville ch. 14, Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 4:30 p.m.; Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays 4:30 a.m.
Centerville ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Circle Pines ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Eagan ch. 15, Sundays 6:30 a.m.; Mondays 12:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 9:30 p.m.; Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.; Thursdays 3:30 p.m.; Fridays 12:30 p.m.; Saturdays 9:30 a.m.
Golden Valley ch. 19, Sundays 4 a.m., 10 a.m., 4 p.m.; Saturdays 10 p.m.
Ham Lake ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Inver Grove Hts. ch. 15, Sundays 6:30 a.m.; Mondays 12:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 9:30 p.m.; Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.; Thursdays 3:30 p.m.; Fridays 12:30 p.m.; Saturdays 9:30 a.m.
Lexington ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Lino Lakes ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Litchfield ch. 10, Sundays 2 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 1 p.m., 7 p.m.; Wednesdays 1 a.m., 3 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 6:30 p.m.
Maple Grove ch. 19, Sundays 4 a.m., 10 a.m., 4 p.m.; Saturdays 10 p.m.
Minneapolis ch. 75, Mondays 6:30 p.m.
New Hope ch. 19, Sundays 4 a.m., 10 a.m., 4 p.m.; Saturdays 10 p.m.
New Ulm ch. 72, Sundays 5 p.m.; Thursdays 10 a.m.; Fridays 7 p.m.
Osseo ch. 19, Sundays 4 a.m., 10 a.m., 4 p.m.; Saturdays 10 p.m.
Plymouth ch. 19, Sundays 4 a.m., 10 a.m., 4 p.m.; Saturdays 10 p.m.
Robbinsdale ch. 19, Sundays 4 a.m., 10 a.m., 4 p.m.; Saturdays 10 p.m.
Rochester ch. 10, Sundays 10 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.
St. Charles ch. 20, Sundays 2 p.m.; Wednesdays 3 p.m.
Spring Lake Park ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Willmar ch. 8, Thursdays 11 a.m. & 8 p.m.;

Winona ch. 20, Sundays 2 p.m.; Wednesdays 3 p.m.
Wabasha ch. 20, Sundays 2 p.m.; Wednesdays 3 p.m.

Missouri
Cape Girardeau ch. 5, Sundays 9 a.m.
Jackson ch. 5, Sundays 9 a.m.
Jefferson City ch. 3, Wednesdays 6 p.m.
Poplar Bluff ch. 54, Tuesdays 4 p.m.
Springfield ch. 26, Sundays 8:30 a.m.; Wednesdays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 8:30 a.m.
St. Charles ch. 18, Sundays 8 a.m., Saturdays 10 p.m.
St. Louis ch. 18, Saturdays 5:30 p.m.

Montana
Billings ch. 7, Sundays 6 p.m.; Saturdays 11 a.m.
Helena ch. 11, Sundays 3 p.m.
Missoula ch. 7, Sundays 11 a.m.

Nevada
Carson City ch. 10, Wednesdays 7:30 p.m.
Reno/Sparks ch. 16, Wednesdays 7 p.m.

New Hampshire
LaConia ch. 25, 26, Sundays 7:30 a.m. & 4:30 p.m.

New Jersey
Newark ch. 19, Sundays 6:30 a.m.

New Mexico
Albuquerque ch. 27, Sundays 7:30 p.m.
Santa Fe ch. 16, Sundays 10 a.m.; Mondays 6:30 p.m.

New York
Binghamton ch. 4, Thursdays 5:30 p.m.
Brooklyn ch. 56, 69, Sundays 10 a.m.
Canandaigua ch. 12, Sundays 2 p.m.
Conandigua ch. 20, Thursdays 9:30 a.m.
Long Island ch. 57, Sundays 7 a.m.
Manhattan ch. 6, Thursdays 9:30 p.m.
Olean ch. 23, Mondays 6 p.m.; Wednesdays 9 p.m.
Oneonta ch. 35, Tuesdays 8 p.m.; Thursdays 3 p.m.
Queens ch. 15, Tuesdays & Thursdays 8 a.m.; Thursdays 8:30 a.m.
Rochester ch. 115, Sundays 8:30 a.m.
Westbury ch. 20, Sundays 1 p.m.; Thursdays 7 p.m.

North Carolina
Asheville ch. 5, 10, Sundays 10 a.m.
Burlington ch. 21, Saturdays 2 p.m.
Charlotte ch. 8, Wednesdays 7:30 a.m.
Durham ch. 8, Sundays 10 a.m.
Greensboro ch. 3, Sundays 7 p.m.
Hickory ch. 5, 10, Sundays 10 a.m.
Mebane ch. 22, Tuesdays 6:30 p.m.
Raleigh ch. 12, Sundays 2:30 p.m.; Thursdays 10:30 a.m.

North Dakota
Bismarck ch. 15, Sundays 9:30 a.m.; Mondays 11 p.m.
Fargo ch. 23, Sundays 7 p.m.; Wednesdays 7 p.m.
Grand Forks ch. 21, Tuesdays 7 p.m.; Wednesdays 12:30, 4:30 & 8:30 a.m.; 2:30, 6:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Minot ch. 12, Wednesdays 10 a.m. & 3 p.m.
Mandan ch. 18, Sundays 10:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 10 p.m.; Thursdays 11 p.m.; Saturdays 6:30 a.m.
Williston ch. 8, Sundays 2:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 9:30 a.m.; Wednesdays 11 p.m.; Saturdays 2:30 p.m.

Ohio
Akron ch. 15, Sundays 9:30 a.m.; Mondays 11 p.m.
Athens ch. 23, Sundays 7 p.m.; Wednesdays 7 p.m.
Brunswick ch. 21, Tuesdays 7 p.m.; Wednesdays 12:30, 4:30 & 8:30 a.m.; 2:30, 6:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Cincinnati ch. 12, Wednesdays 10 a.m. & 3 p.m.
Cincinnati ch. 18, Sundays 10:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 10 p.m.; Thursdays 11 p.m.; Saturdays 6:30 a.m.
Cincinnati ch. 8, Sundays 2:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 9:30 a.m.; Wednesdays 11 p.m.; Saturdays 2:30 p.m.
Cincinnati ch. 21, Sundays 11:30 a.m.; Thursdays 7 p.m.
Cincinnati ch. 3, Thursdays 8 p.m.
Cincinnati ch. 5, Sundays 12 noon; Thursdays 6 p.m.
Cincinnati ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
Cincinnati ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
Cincinnati ch. 1, daily 8 a.m., 2 p.m. & 11 p.m.
Cincinnati ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m.
Cincinnati ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.

Oregon
Eugene ch. 29, Tuesdays 2 p.m.
McMinnville ch. 11, Sundays 5:30 p.m.; Wednesdays 8 p.m.
Medford ch. 15, 95, Sundays 5 p.m.
Oregon City ch. 21, Mondays 8 p.m.
Portland ch. 22, Sundays 7:30 p.m.; Thursdays 12:30 p.m.; Fridays 2 p.m.; Saturdays 11:30 a.m.
Salem ch. 11, Sundays 9 a.m.

Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh ch. 21, Sundays 11 a.m.
York ch. 16, Sundays 8:30 p.m.; Mondays 4:30 a.m. & 12:30 p.m.

Rhode Island
Providence ch. 14, Fridays 10:30 a.m.

Texas
Arlington ch. 95, Mondays 1:30 p.m.
Austin ch. 11, Mondays 6 p.m.
Dallas ch. 148, 74, Sundays 12:30 p.m.;

Del Rio ch. 19, Sundays 9 a.m.; Wednesdays 5 p.m.
El Paso ch. 15, Mondays, Fridays, Saturdays 1 p.m.
Fort Worth ch. 28, Tuesdays 5:30 p.m.; Thursdays 1 p.m.
Houston ch. 17, 98, Sundays 3 p.m.
Longview ch. 10, Wednesdays 10 p.m.; Fridays 12 noon
San Antonio ch. 20, Mondays 10:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.

Virginia
Hampton Roads ch. 71, 74, Sundays 10 a.m.

Washington
Everett ch. 77, Wednesday 5 p.m.
Kennewick ch. 13, Sundays 6 p.m.; Tuesdays 8:30 p.m.
Olympia ch. 22, 29, Sundays 9 a.m.; Thursdays 10:30 p.m.
Vancouver ch. 11, Sundays 1 p.m.; Tuesdays 3:30 p.m.; Thursdays 12 noon; Fridays 8 p.m.

West Virginia
Morgantown ch. 3, Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 3 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m.

Wisconsin
Beloit ch. 12, Thursdays 6:30 p.m.
Eau Claire ch. 11, Sundays 2 p.m.
Kenosha ch. 14, Sundays & Mondays 7:30 p.m.
Madison ch. 4, Sundays 12:30 p.m.
Milwaukee ch. 96, Mondays 2 p.m.; Wednesdays 7:30 p.m.; Thursdays 12 noon
Oshkosh ch. 2, Mondays & Tuesdays 2 p.m.; Fridays 1 p.m.; Saturdays 8 p.m.
Stevens Point ch. 3, Mondays 5 & 8:30 p.m.; Tuesdays 10 a.m. & 3:30 p.m.; Thursdays 8:30 a.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m.
West Allis ch. 14, times vary

CANADA

Nationwide
Vision TV, Sundays 11 p.m. (PST)
Star Choice Digital Channel 399, Sundays 10:30 a.m. (EST)

Alberta
The Christian Channel Telus ch. 158, Sundays 8:30 a.m.

British Columbia
The Christian Channel Telus ch. 158, Sundays 7:30 a.m.

Manitoba
The Christian Channel MTS ch. 21, Sundays 9:30 a.m.
The Christian Channel Cogeco ch. 186, Sundays 10:30 a.m.

New Brunswick
The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sundays 11:30 a.m.

Newfoundland and Labrador
The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sundays 12 noon

Northwest Territory
The Christian Channel Northwestel ch. 226, Sundays 8:30 a.m.

Ontario
The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sundays 10:30 a.m.

Saskatchewan
The Christian Channel SaskTel ch. 282, Sundays 8:30 a.m.

Radio Log

For additional information and the most current airing times, or to download or view programs online, visit www.beyondtoday.tv/radio/.

Nationwide
Internet Radio live365.com, Sundays 9 a.m. (PST)

Alabama
Birmingham 1070 AM, Sundays 7:30 a.m.

Arizona
Douglas 930 AM, Saturdays 10:30 a.m.
Globe 1240 AM, Saturdays 10:30 a.m.
Sierra Vista 1470 AM, Saturdays 10:30 a.m.
Tucson 940 AM, Saturdays 10:30 a.m.

California
San Diego 760 AM, Sundays 6 a.m.

Florida
Jacksonville 690 AM/106.5 FM, Sundays 7 a.m.

Indiana
Ft. Wayne 1190 AM, Sundays 10 a.m.

Louisiana
New Orleans 870 AM, Saturdays 9:30 p.m.

Michigan
Flint 89.7 FM, Sundays 7 a.m.
Lapeer 88.1 FM, Sundays 7 a.m.

Montana
Helena 101.9 FM, Mondays 8 p.m.; Fridays 8 p.m.; Saturdays 8 a.m.

New York
Buffalo 930 AM, Sundays 6:30 a.m.

Nebraska
Omaha 1110 AM, Sundays 7:30 a.m.

Ohio
Cincinnati 1360 AM, Sundays 7:30 a.m.

Oklahoma
Tulsa 740 AM, Sundays 8 a.m.

Washington
Seattle 770 AM, Sundays 7 a.m.

West Virginia
Wheeling 1170 AM, Fridays 8:15 p.m.



Radical Liberalism: What's the Harm?

Lawyers argue in U.S. courts that pornography falls under the constitutional right of free speech. There is a strong movement to replace Judeo-Christian influences in schools with extreme multiculturalism. Radical feminists denounce concepts of the traditional family. Homosexuals want to totally redefine marriage. What is happening to America?

by **Beyond Today** host Gary Petty

The American republic was founded on ideals of liberal democracy rooted in concepts of individual freedom and equality. The political and social liberalism of the early 21st century is in many ways radically different from the ideals of the founding fathers. U.S. culture increasingly reflects this radical or modern liberalism created by two centuries of political and social evolution.

To understand the origins of modern liberalism, you have to go back to the time in Western civilization known as the Enlightenment. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, Europe entered the thousand-year period of the Middle Ages. It was a time of political fragmentation and feudalism as well as an age of grand cathedrals and monarchs who claimed divine privilege.

Europe suffered confusion and horror in the 14th century with the Hundred Years' War, the Black Death (which killed a third of the population between India and Iceland) and the anarchy that followed in the wake of disease and war. During the next century the economic structure and social life of Europe experienced dramatic changes with the Renaissance—a revival of art, literature and music.

Medieval Catholic theologians believed the church was establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. Earthly kings received their authority from the clergy. Corruption in the Roman church's hierarchy, and a papacy more concerned with temporal politics than spiritual purity, eroded trust in pontifical supremacy.

In the 16th century religious protestors launched the Reformation. Protestants began to challenge papal rule and eventually the idea of the divine right of monarchs. Science flourished and philosophers began to assert that human problems could be solved by reason.

These trends produced a period in European history known as the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, extending from the 1600s through the 1800s. Some philosophers of the Enlightenment didn't see human nature as hopelessly corrupt, but believed that solutions to humanity's problems were rooted in reason and scientific thought. This laid the foundation for the emergence of political and social liberalism placing value on personal liberty and equality instead of duty to king and clergy.

While some Enlightenment philosophers accepted the idea of the biblical Creator, others rejected the miracles and supernatural events claimed in the Bible. A new philosophy promoted a God who revealed truth in nature, which could be discovered through observation and reason. For some Enlightenment philosophers the Bible contained good teachings, but it was stripped of its mysterious workings of God, and even the divinity of Jesus Christ was questioned.

The founding of the United States

The founding fathers of the United States attempted to create a government promoting ideals of the Enlightenment—such as personal liberty, equality and the positive aspects of human nature—while still promoting the moral teachings of the Bible. They believed that the human tendency to turn freedom into lawlessness could be checked only by the ideals of a

diverse yet moral Christian heritage.

In fact, the Enlightenment thinkers they most heavily relied on—Locke (for life, liberty and property), Montesquieu (for separation of powers in a three-branch government) and Blackstone (for common law)—all wrote with a Christian worldview.



Demonstrators chant in support of gay marriage outside the Massachusetts State House to try to prevent a popular vote on gay marriage, instituted earlier by the state's highest court.

At the same time, they rejected the class system and religious hierarchy of the Middle Ages. The influences of the Enlightenment can be seen in the Declaration of Independence. The most famous quote in American history is Jefferson's: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed . . ."

In the American republic, equality and

the personal pursuit of life, liberty and happiness replaced the old model that life was lived under the restrictions of a state church and a monarchy ordained by God. Government was no longer seen as an instrument of divine authority, but as a human institution, elected by the populace, designed to protect individual rights ordained by God.

Many of the founding fathers feared that democracy would unleash anarchy. There had to be limits to the rights of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. In 1781 they created the Articles of Confederation to govern the relationships between the states. After only seven years, this new government was in disarray. So, "in Order to form a more perfect Union," these remarkable men created the Constitution of the United States.

From its inception, the people of the United States struggled with the limitations of rule of law, which restricts behavior for the good of society, and the philosophy of equality and personal freedom.

Most founders believed that the entire experiment relied on a commonly accepted morality based in the Christian Bible. For example, James Madison, a primary framer of the U.S. Constitution (indeed, called the *father* of the Constitution) and fourth president of the United States, said: "We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."

But over the next two centuries the moral teachings of the Bible became less influential in an increasingly hedonistic society.

Trends in radical liberalism

Robert Bork, nominated for the U.S. Supreme Court by President Ronald Reagan, outlines the two major precepts of radical liberalism in his controversial book *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*. One is what he calls "radical egalitarianism," or the attempt to control the equality of outcomes instead of providing equal opportunities. The second is "radical individualism," an ideal promoting the eradication of personal limits for self-gratification regardless of societal consequences.

We can see this second precept in the promotion of pornography. Sexual freedom is one of the tenets of the radical liberal philosophy. Historically, Christian churches have opposed pornography in defense of the sacredness of sex in marriage. Liberalism states that there can be no governmental enforcement of religion and that pornography is a personal right

in the pursuit of happiness.

Thus, in the name of freedom, pornography becomes an issue of free speech, and new laws are passed or restrictions struck down by sympathetic judges. The lawful proliferation of pornography eventually allows it to become tolerated and even accepted in print, movies, television and on the Internet.

The nation has come a long way from the founders' concept of freedom of religion in order to promote a diverse Christianity as the foundation of society. Three major radical liberal trends have enormous impact on Christianity.

First is the idea that *all concepts of morality are equal*. Freedom to pursue happiness has come to mean that there are no absolute truths and that all morality is based on subjective criteria. Thus everyone should be free to choose his or her own personal morality, and no one else has a right to judge or criticize that standard.

A second trend is *radical feminism*. Since most of the Bible was written by men, many feminists approach Scripture through "the victors write history" interpretation. This means that anything that doesn't fit feminist dogma can be discarded as male chauvinism or influence rather than divine revelation.

A third is the *democratizing of churches* so that *teachings reflect current culture* instead of the church being a moral authority holding culture to higher standards. A good example is the controversy in several mainstream Christian denominations over the ordination of homosexual clergy. The biblical teachings against sin are subjected to a culture of acceptance.

Radical liberalism and the Bible

John 3:16 is the most quoted verse in the New Testament: "For God so loved

the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." God places an enormous value on the individual. He created human beings to be His children. Each person has abilities and personality traits that make him or her a unique creation.

It is a far cry from recognizing the value of the individual to the concept that freedom entitles people to abolish all boundaries of personal behavior. When reading Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, it is apparent that His emphasis is not on personal *rights*, but on personal *responsibility*, character and the law of God. The rights of the individual can be protected only in a society where each citizen has a deep-rooted responsibility to restrict behavior that is harmful and immoral.

The Bible reveals that all individuals are equal in the *opportunity* to receive the love and blessing of God, but all are not equal in *abilities* or in *outcomes* of life.

We might remember Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:14-30 of the wealthy man who goes on a journey and gives each of his servants different responsibilities. He gives one of them 10 talents, another five and a third one. When He returns, the servants have to give an accounting. Two of the servants used their talents wisely and are rewarded. The third hid his talent and is punished. All had unique abilities, all had equal opportunity, but not all outcomes were equal.

The paradox of the human condition is that true liberty can be protected only through laws that restrict behavior harmful to society. The Creator of the universe knows how life works. He has given humanity a set of laws that protect the rights of the individual, the family and greater society. They're called the Ten Commandments.

The Constitution of the United States is one of the most incredible documents ever written. It is the pinnacle of the concepts of the Enlightenment tempered with the realization of the need for the rule of law and the recognition of the necessity of the moral restrictions of the Christian Bible. But in the end the Constitution can't fix the real problem with human government. All human government eventually fails because it is run by human beings with a nature that is a mixture of good and evil.

As Christians, we must never forget that the only real solution to the problems of human governments isn't human. It is the return of Jesus Christ to establish His Father's Kingdom here on earth. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Why are the Ten Commandments the perfect guide to human behavior and relationships? Many people think of them as a restrictive list of "don'ts" designed to keep us from having any fun. But the Bible calls them "the law of liberty" and the source for true freedom! Do you really understand what the Ten Commandments are all about? Regardless of whether you think you do or don't, you need to read *The Ten Commandments*. Request or download your free copy today!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

The Jesus So Few Know

Why is the Christianity people see so different from the Jesus Christ of the Bible? Could it be that many have a fundamental misunderstanding of His teaching?

by Dan Taylor

As the memorial of Jesus' death and resurrection approaches, a Christian's mind should naturally turn to Jesus Christ. It is a sobering, yet joyful time of year.

Yet an observer comparing the modern-day beliefs and conduct of the average Christian with those of Jesus and His disciples might very well conclude that much of so-called Christianity has lost its way. Mahatma Gandhi once summed up this skeptical view when he said: "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

The results have not all been flattering.

A steady stream of scandals involving the clergy in recent years has not only shaken many of the faithful, but for an increasingly secular Western society, these revelations have given many all the more reason to think Christianity is no longer relevant to them. The message of "Don't do as I do, do as I say" resonates with a skeptical generation, but not in a positive way.

In reality, the public relations problems with modern-day Christianity aren't confined to those in the ministry. Most who call themselves Christian just don't seem

to be living up to the example of Jesus Christ. How could this be?

pels, The Nag Hammadi Scriptures, Dan Brown's best-selling The Da Vinci Code and the so-called Gospel of Judas, only further clouds the issue for a largely biblically illiterate public.

However these writings offer nothing new. The apostle John battled early gnostic influence as well: "By this," wrote John, "you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2).

In the latter part of the first century, the apostle John was confronting the ethereal gnostic belief that Jesus did not have a physical body but appeared only as an illusion—in which case He wasn't physically born nor was He really crucified and resurrected. John's advice for dealing with gnosticism, and heresy in general, was to have nothing to do with it or its proponents (2 John 7-10).

But the philosophical fog of gnosticism is only part of the problem in our lack of understanding Jesus Christ and, ultimately, Christianity.

To understand Christianity, *real* Christianity, we must first understand its foundation: Jesus Christ. To many—even those who claim to be Christians—Jesus was just a good man or a profound Jewish teacher. Still others see Him as a revolutionary, a nonconformist, a deceiver or a fraud. Yet Jesus' claim, and that of His followers, was straightforward. He was Immanuel—"God with us" (Matthew 1:23), the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:15-17).

Jesus backed up His claim by fulfilling more than 130 messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, by healing the sick, by raising the dead, by forgiving sin. He did not claim to be yet another teacher or merely a good man. Jesus said *He was God*.

Those who sought and eventually brought about His death understood His claims quite clearly, as we can read: "The Jews answered Him, saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God'" (John 10:33).

As C.S. Lewis wrote: "Either this man

Those who claim to belong to Jesus Christ have been under a great deal of scrutiny. The results have not all been flattering.

Let's face it. Many today have a bad impression of Christianity. From their political activism to their political correctness, from those who say the Bible is the literal Word of God to those who seem to hardly believe anything in the Bible at all, those who claim to belong to Jesus Christ have been under a good deal of scrutiny.

to be living up to the example of Jesus Christ. How could this be?

Who did Jesus claim to be?

Just who was Jesus Christ anyway? The recent resurgence of the ancient heresy of gnosticism in popular culture, in books and movies such as *The Gnostic Gos-*

Did Jesus Do Away With the Law?

Did Jesus do away with the commandments of God? Many turn to the Sermon on the Mount to point to "conclusive proof" that Jesus retired the Ten Commandments en masse by fulfilling our need to keep them by His death. But in fact, far from doing away with the law, the sermon Jesus gave is a *confirmation and deepening* of the understanding of the intent of God's holy commandments.

Jesus stated unequivocally in His sermon: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill," (Matthew 5:17). The Greek word *pleroo*, here translated "fulfill," means "to make full," "to fill to the full," "to make complete in every particular," "to render perfect" or "to carry through to the end" (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2005, Strong's number 4137).

Far from destroying or abolishing the law, as some interpret this verse, Jesus said He came to fill the law to the full—to complete and perfect it. This He did by showing the deeper *spiritual intent and application* of the law.

We see this through the remainder of the chapter, where Jesus proceeded to give a *deeper meaning* to it, contrasting the understanding of the commandments of those listening to Him with God's intent by the statements: "You have heard that it was said to those of old . . ." and "But I say to you that . . ."

He pointed out to those listening that while they had been taught that they should not murder, the real meaning of the Sixth Commandment was that God expects us to value all people and reconcile all of our differences with others in peace, not just refrain from taking another's life (Matthew 5:21-26). Likewise, it is the lust in our minds that conceives the act of adultery that is sin, not just the act itself (verses 27-32).

was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to” (*Mere Christianity*, 1980, p. 52).

Now if you are not a Christian, that claim at least deserves some careful study to see if it is really so. (For some insight into who Jesus really was, download or request our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.) But if you claim to be a Christian, as a follower of Jesus you need to understand something more than just who Jesus said He was. You need to understand *what He did and what He commanded His followers to do*.

The power of Christ's example

Is there a difference between the Jesus Christ revealed in the pages of the Bible—who He was, what He said and what He did—and those whom the world sees as Christians today?

Many Christian apologists would argue that any shortcomings on a Christian's part are merely because he or she is “saved” but not yet perfect. Others would point out that the problem with most Christians is that they “come as they are” and stay that way. Indeed, something seems to be missing. As Gandhi said, there is a difference between Christ and Christians—and it is noticeable.

During the last Passover that Jesus spent with His disciples, He set a powerful example. Jesus humbly knelt down to wash His disciples' feet (John 13:1-10). And presenting the wine and unleavened bread of the Passover as symbolic of His shed blood and broken body that were to soon be a reality (Matthew 26:1-30), Jesus moved His followers out of their comfort zone, out of conformity to the society and its customs.

Those customs had only a short time earlier caused many to be repelled by Jesus' teaching on our need to partake of the symbols of His blood and body in the Passover service (John 6:47-66). Quite simply, Jesus' disciples were in the process of being converted. They were shown that the humanly devised teachings and traditions they had grown up with were invalid and needed to be replaced with what Jesus was showing them.

Many claim to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Yet the moment that the Jesus revealed in the Bible becomes meddlesome by calling on them to make

What Did Jesus Teach About Sin?

Most would rather bask in nice stories about Christ, in the knowledge of His grace and forgiveness of sin without acknowledging the requirements of obedience to Him and His law or the consequences of sin.

Yet, far from honoring his or her Savior, the Christian who does this actually *demeans* the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and shows a lack of understanding of what sin is and what it costs.

Just what is sin? The Bible defines sin as transgression of the law (1 John 3:4).

Jesus taught that actions that led to sins were to be stopped, not tolerated under an umbrella of unconditional grace. In John 8 we find a story of how the religious leaders of His day sought to entrap Him by making a difficult judgment. They did so by bringing before Him a woman caught in the act of adultery and asking Him what punishment she deserved.

Jesus told those who accused her to stone her if they were without sin. The accusers left one by one. But to the woman He said: “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” She responded, “No one, Lord.” Jesus then told her, “Neither do I condemn you; *go and sin no more*” (verses 10-11, emphasis added).

Jesus told her to stop sinning. If we are followers of Christ, should we not heed His instruction as well?

changes in how they live, their religious life becomes neatly compartmentalized in a convenient corner. This is not Christianity, it is religious hobbyism.

What Jesus Christ calls on His followers to do involves nothing less than a total *transformation* of how they think and act. As we read in Romans 12:2: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

consistent. When a young man asked Him what good thing he should do to have eternal life, Jesus told him to “keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

Jesus sharpened the focus and deepened the requirements of God's law, setting the bar even higher for His followers. His is a call not to the *laissez-faire*, “Kumbaya,” once-a-week, feel-good Christianity that is so commonplace. Rather, Jesus Christ expects obedience to the same commandments He obeyed.

Christians, as a whole, just don't seem to be living up to the example of Jesus Christ. How could this be?

The transformation of which the apostle Paul speaks involves change, *real change*. But if we are not to conform to society around us, if we are to change the way we have been conducting our lives, what are we to be conformed to?

What did Jesus do?

Today, many extol the slogan “What Would Jesus Do?” It's common on colorful rubber wristbands, T-shirts and bumper stickers. But far too many don't know the answer to that question because they do not know what He did. They are familiar with stories about Christ, but not the example He set as a lifestyle for Christians to follow.

Think for a moment. If you were to become a part of any group or organization, one of the first things you would want to know is what is required of you. What are the rules? For the Christian, whose goal is to be with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God, the rules are simple and

His close friend and apostle John plainly confirms this in 1 John 5:2-3: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

Will we do as He did?

Whether in having no gods before the one true God, not worshipping graven images, not taking God's name in vain, keeping the Sabbath day holy or any of the other six Commandments, Jesus Christ challenges those who call Him Lord to conform to His likeness, to obey God's instructions in both the letter and spirit of the law, to allow God's law to truly be written in their hearts.

Jesus calls for us to be free from conformity to this society and its values. He does so, even as He challenged those of His generation to understand the difference between God's commandments and traditions

devised by the religious leaders of Jewish society of that day (Matthew 15:1-9).

Jesus Christ showed His disciples a perfect example of how to properly worship God. How well do you know that example?

Jesus worshipped on God's Sabbaths (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:16) and claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath, not Sunday (Mark 2:28). He observed the Holy Days of the Bible (Luke 2:41-42; John 7:1-39). He even founded His Church on one of those days, the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

And after Jesus' final Passover, death and resurrection, the apostles continued to worship on the Sabbath and the biblical Holy Days (Acts 17:2; 18:21; 20:6; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; 16:8).

Perhaps you thought you knew the Jesus of the Bible, but if you want to know more, why not request or download our free booklets *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* for more information.

Strange as it may sound, Jesus would probably not recognize a lot of things about the religion that now bears His name, from its primary day of worship to the holidays it celebrates.

He never celebrated them. The question is, why should *you*? If your answer is, "Because it is the tradition of my church," Jesus would have you reassess that position (Mark 7:7).

You see, sadly, the missing ingredient in most Christians' lives is Jesus Christ. They do not know who He really was, or take seriously that He is, in fact, God and has rule over our lives. As our Lord and Master, He calls us out of this society and its customs—even religious traditions we may hold near and dear—if they prove to be in error. As He said, "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:14).

The vital missing ingredient

If we look at the Christianity so many disdain, what is missing? From all we have seen, the missing ingredient is *the example of Jesus Christ Himself*.

You see, Christians need to have Jesus Christ dwelling in them (Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 8:10-11). We need His mind to function as Christians and emulate the example He set for us (Philippians 2:5; 1 John 2:6). And the example Jesus set plainly shows that though we may call ourselves Christian, if we are not obeying God's commandments in their broad, spiritual intent and following the same

path set out by the Jesus of the Bible, we are kidding ourselves.

In a scathing rebuke of those who do not keep God's law, Jesus told those listening to His famous Sermon on the Mount: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but *he who does the will of My Father in heaven*."

"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, *you who practice lawlessness!*'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

As those who claim to be Christian ponder our Savior's death and resurrection at this time of year, let us not forget who Jesus really was and the example He set for us. Jesus' life and instruction set out what He expects of those who would be called by His name:

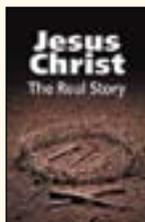
"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:18-20).

Perhaps if we as Christians would actually follow the example set by Jesus Christ, if we too would demonstrate heartfelt obedience to the spiritual intent of God's laws, others who might be watching would notice the difference. Perhaps one day, in another time and place, even Mahatma Gandhi will say: "I like your Christ, and your Christians. Your Christians are so very like your Christ." **GN**

Recommended Reading

How much do you know about the real Jesus Christ of the Bible? How did He live? What did He teach? What did He tell His followers to do? You need to read *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. Also, to grasp the fundamental truths about God's laws that so few understand, be sure to read *The Ten Commandments*. Both booklets are yours free for the asking. Request or download your free copies today!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

The Good News on the Web



If you like *The Good News* magazine, you'll love *The Good News* Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.

You'll find past issues of *The Good News*, each packed with articles about world trends and events, family and social issues, prophecy in the news and *The Good News'* eye-opening, in-depth perspective of the Bible.

There's much more too. Explore our large library of booklets covering a wide variety of biblical, family and social issues and themes. Take a look at our publications in other languages—Spanish, German, Italian, French and Dutch (and feel free to share them with a friend overseas).



Use our search tool so you can find material on any subject you want—marriage, family, biblical teachings, current events, prophecy, you name it. Feel free to download all these to your own computer so you can study them in depth, or request your own printed copies to be mailed to you.

While you're there, be sure to take a look at our companion publication *World News and Prophecy*. This eye-opening newsletter will help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy, giving you a perspective you won't find anywhere else—the perspective of God's Word.



Discover a wealth of information today! Visit us on the Web at:

www.gnmagazine.org

Spiritual Growth: From Immaturity to Immortality

In the previous seven articles of this series we have explained essential tools for spiritual transformation—prayer, Bible study, meditation, fasting, repentance, baptism and the Church. Now we consider how to use all these tools to attain our ultimate destiny of eternal life!

by Don Hooser

The purpose of this temporary human life is to seek and prepare for life after death in God’s eternal Kingdom (John 3:15-16). If you haven’t already, God wants you to make this the number-one goal of your life (Luke 12:31). So *use* your understanding of His spiritual tools and *get started* toward that goal! Or maybe you started but got discouraged or sidetracked, or relapsed into old habits. Read on, and we’ll show you how to enjoy solid, steady progress.

Physical life is evidenced by ongoing growth and development, and so is

spiritual life. We must always be *learning, changing, overcoming and serving* to become more and more like Jesus Christ. For those spiritually dead or asleep, God’s Word says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and . . . [make] the most of the time” (Ephesians 5:14-16, Revised Standard Version).

Don’t feel overwhelmed. God doesn’t expect giant leaps. What He is looking for is that our steps, no matter how small, are going *forward* and not backward. Don’t dwell on past mistakes or future worries. Focus on what you need to do *today* and thank God for each bit of progress

(Philippians 3:12-14; Matthew 6:33-34).

When we are first “baptized into Christ,” we are as “babes in Christ” (Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 3:1). But we must not *remain* as spiritual babies. “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may *grow* thereby” (1 Peter 2:2, emphasis added throughout).

Christ didn’t say that following Him and thereby entering the Kingdom would be easy. He compared it to squeezing through a narrow gate, saying that few in this age would be able to do so (Luke 13:24). But what is most valuable deserves the highest price. Jesus com-

Contact With God’s People: A Key to Spiritual Success or Failure

In the previous article in this series, we looked at the role of the Church of God. Let’s now expand on that, considering an oft-neglected factor that’s critically important for our spiritual growth. Using this tool, I have seen people undergo remarkable spiritual growth and transformation in their lives. I’ve seen them faithfully grow from spiritual and biblical novices into mature, converted Christians who have increasingly become more like God.

On the other hand, I’ve also seen many well-intentioned people start off with great zeal for learning the Bible and imitating the life of Jesus Christ. But they eventually lost their spiritual enthusiasm and vitality. They withered and died, like an uprooted plant, falling far short of fulfilling God’s purpose for their lives.

The miracle of God’s Church

What was the difference? It was this: Those in the first category fully committed themselves to using the spiritual tool of Christian fellowship—interacting and communicating with other members of God’s Church. They recognized the Church as priceless and eagerly sought to be an active part of it. They knew the people in the Church are far from perfect. In fact, that is partly why we all need God’s “workshop”—to learn God’s ways and practice them together! Miraculous change and growth can take place when God is at work in and among us.

Meanwhile, those in the second category never fully appreciated or eventually lost their appreciation for the wonderful blessings and benefits of membership and active participation in the Church of God, and their spiritual growth stopped.

The Church is a major part of God’s plan for mankind. His Church is a spiritual organism headed by Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18). If we are called to Christ, we are called to His Church because His Church is His “body” (verse 24; Romans 12:5).

Paul described how every Church member is important to God, and how

every member should appreciate, love and function with other members as individual parts of that one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). We do this through spending time together with one another—again, fellowship. This fellowship with one another is actually an essential part of our fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9-10; 1 John 1:3, 6-7)—as the Father and Christ dwell within all the members of the Church through the Holy Spirit.

We need each other

Some, due to such factors as health, age, geographical isolation or even the culture in which they live, are simply unable to meet regularly with other believers. But whenever and wherever we *are* able to attend Church services, we should not neglect this God-given opportunity. Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us, “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 approaching.”

This short passage reveals several crucial truths.

First, God knows that *we need one another*. He didn’t design us to be alone; that’s why we naturally crave relationships with others. Some have to give up friends and family for God’s truth. But Jesus promises He will give us far more friends and family (Mark 10:29-30) through His Church.

Of course, we avail ourselves of this wonderful blessing of companionship only through getting to know others in this extended family God has provided.

Second, God knows that *the right kinds of friends will encourage and strengthen one another in the right way*, spurring each other to “love and good works.” On our own, it’s all too easy to neglect these Christian responsibilities and make excuses. But true friends—and who could be truer friends than others whom God has called to be part of His Church alongside you?—will encourage one another in



pared God’s Kingdom to a treasure and a “pearl of great price” (Matthew 13:44-46). God’s Kingdom is worth any and every possible sacrifice (Luke 14:33).

God doesn’t expect us to rely on our own

and ultimately on Him (Philippians 2:12; 2 Timothy 2:15; Proverbs 3:5-6).

Spiritual tools and weapons

Paul compared God’s “tools” or strategies for entering the Kingdom with *armor* and *weapons*, because anyone trying to be a follower of Christ is automatically involved in spiritual warfare with our archenemy, Satan the devil (Luke 10:19; 2 Thessalonians 3:3).

We are not defenseless if we are courageous and use God’s equipment. “Put on the

Verse 17 defines the primary offensive *weapon*—“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”—which means our need to study, understand and live by God’s Word, the Bible. This is linked in the next verse with *prayer*.

God’s weapons and armor are *mighty* (2 Corinthians 10:4). The question is: Will we put on the armor and will we wield the weapons?

And will we use the spiritual tools that were explained in the previous articles in this series?

To recap the main points of this series, make your goal to *pray and read your Bible*, as well as *meditate, every day*. Just as we begin to feel weak when we miss meals, we begin to weaken spiritually when we miss a day of spiritual nourishment.

Jesus compared God’s Kingdom to a treasure and a “pearl of great price” worth any and every possible sacrifice.



human strength. He *does* expect us to *work* diligently as if success all depends on ourselves, but to *pray regularly and earnestly*, knowing that success will depend primarily

full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:11, New International Version). The next few verses list God’s protective armor.

We need to *fast* occasionally for the reasons explained in the article on fasting. We need to sincerely *repent* toward God every time we realize we have been guilty

Christian growth, providing positive peer pressure to help us succeed.

The ministry of the Church plays an important role in teaching and encouraging. Yet those among the general membership also instruct and motivate one another, helping to keep each other on the right track (compare Proverbs 27:17).

Third, God knows that *we need “the assembling of ourselves together”*—or, as the New Living Translation puts it, “let us not neglect our meeting together.” Sad to say, those who willingly choose to go it alone place themselves in serious danger. A lone believer is a much easier target for Satan’s attacks. And being isolated from others, he or she lacks the encouragement and support Jesus Christ provides through other believers.

Coming together on a regular basis enables the companionship, instruction and exhortation already mentioned. Besides spiritual learning, weekly Sabbath services provide a regular venue for praise and worship of God. This helps participants to face the coming week with a renewed spiritual zeal and focus.

Fourth, God knows that *we all need encouragement and support*—and His Church is intended to be a powerful support group in hard times. It’s a miserable feeling to go through trials and difficulties all on our own, with no one there to help, offer encouragement or sometimes simply listen. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:25-26: “The members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”

At times we all need encouragement to hang in there, to “endure to the end.” As Paul said in Acts 14:22, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Jesus Himself described this way of life as narrow and difficult (Matthew 7:13-14). Satan would like nothing more than to discourage and distract us from Christ’s coming Kingdom, and all the more so as it draws ever nearer. Encouraging and supporting one another are absolutely crucial for our spiritual health.

God, through Jesus Christ, gives much of His spiritual nourishment, guidance

and encouragement through His Church, “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Much of this comes in the form of sermons and Bible studies on Christian growth and living, emphasizing how to apply God’s Word to all aspects of our lives.

Don’t choose life on the edge!

God does not call people to be independent of contact with other believers. An animal that has strayed from its herd is at much greater risk. That’s why a “good shepherd” searches for the sheep that has strayed (Matthew 18:10-14). “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeing whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We need each other!

Generally, even crops growing at the edge of a field do not survive and thrive as well. The plants are apt to get less fertilizer and irrigation, and they are more exposed to wind, foraging animals and infestations of pests. All of nature teaches this truth: Being alone or on the fringe can make one vulnerable to many dangers.

Spiritually, this is especially true. Christians who are sincerely involved, engaged, immersed and active in a congregation are spiritually healthy and growing (Ephesians 4:11-16). Together they have the joy not only of continually growing to become more like Jesus Christ, but also of doing the work of God as they help prepare the way for Christ’s second coming!

In a prophecy in Malachi 3:16-17, God takes special note of those who practice Christian fellowship and the other spiritual tools covered in this series, promising them future protection and reward: “Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. ‘They shall be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son, who serves him.’”

Bearing Fruit: A Crucial Part of Spiritual Growth

God expects us to be *productive* and get *results*. In some parables, spiritual accomplishment is compared to investing and earning a profit for our Master (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). In some biblical passages it is compared to constructing a building or temple (1 Corinthians 3:9-17; Ephesians 2:19-22).

But the Bible's main metaphor for accomplishment is *producing fruit*. God compares His people with fruit trees that must "*bear much fruit*" (John 15:5, 8). We must continue to grow and bear fruit until the end of our lives.

Christ's parable of the fig tree emphasizes that, spiritually speaking, a fruitless fruit tree is worthless (Luke 13:6-9). "A certain man . . . said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down'" (verses 7-9).

The parable tells us that God expects us to bear fruit. But it also shows that God will not give up on us as long as there is still hope that we will bear fruit.

Also take note that just as a branch will die when it is cut off from a vine or trunk, we will die spiritually if we are cut off from Jesus Christ. "Abide in Me, and I in you," He tells us. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me . . .

for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

This is why contact with and becoming a part of God's true Church is so crucial. As head of that Church (Colossians 1:18), Jesus Himself guides and directs the spiritual growth of all those who submit to His leading (Ephesians 4:11-16). As the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), the Church is the source of correct understanding and teaching of His instruction. It is

also a source of much-needed encouragement and exhortation to not abandon the race, but to continue growing (Hebrews 10:25).

The parable of the sower teaches us four different ways that people respond when they hear (receive the "seed" of) the truth of God (Luke 8:4-15). Each of us should read this parable occasionally and examine ourselves as to which category or categories we fall into. We need to be in the fourth group—the fertile soil. "The seeds that fell in good soil stand for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, and they persist until they bear fruit" (verse 15, Good News Bible).

What kind of fruit does God expect of us? "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV). God also desires the fruits of good works and service to others (Titus 3:14; Matthew 5:14-16; 25:31-46). Beautiful and desirable fruit, indeed!

Stay healthy and strong spiritually, keep growing and *bear much fruit!*



of a sin. To receive God's forgiveness and to come under His grace, we need to be *baptized* (Acts 2:38). Then we can receive the gift of His Holy Spirit, which *puts us into the Body of Christ, the Church* (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Then we need to be *actively involved* in the Church the rest of our lives—for the many benefits we receive and for the opportunities to serve God by serving His people.

We must grow to maturity

We mustn't let up, but must keep growing! In Ephesians 4, Paul beautifully explains the purpose of God's Church and its leaders: "To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity . . . and become *mature* . . . Then we will *no longer be infants* . . . Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things *grow up* into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (verses 11-15, NIV).

Perhaps the best definition of spiritual maturity is the godly *love* described in "the love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13.

Kindle or rekindle your zeal

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he had reason to believe that Timothy's zeal was cooling off, like a campfire starting to

die out. Paul wrote, "Therefore I remind you to *stir up* the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6). If your fire is dying, stir it up and fan it into flames!

When the author of the book of Hebrews, apparently Paul, wrote to the Jewish Christians who had been in God's Church for many years, he knew that many of them had quit growing and had "become dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11). He said they were so immature spiritually that they still needed "milk, not solid food" (verse 12, RSV). He said, "Let us . . . *go on to maturity*" (Hebrews 6:1, RSV).

Finish the race

Paul compared the life of a believer with a race to win a valuable reward: "Run in such a way that you may obtain it [eternal life]" (1 Corinthians 9:24). He said, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may *finish the race* and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me" (Acts 20:24, NIV).

Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us, "Let us *run with endurance* the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."

It's not enough to *train* for a big race. It's not enough to *start* a race. What really counts is *crossing the finish line*. Ultimately,

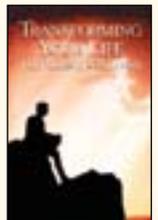
the only thing in this life that matters is crossing from mortal life to immortal life.

When Paul knew his "departure" was near, as he would soon be executed, he said: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8, NIV).

Let's hope we can say the same thing at the end of our lives. We can if we use God's tools for spiritual growth, are faithful to Him and keep growing! **GN**

Recommended Reading

Does God expect us to change when He reveals His truth to us? What does He want us to become? How is He involved in this process, and what does it lead to? You really need to understand! All the steps to repentance, forgiveness and spiritual growth are explained clearly, from the pages of your Bible, in our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. Download it or request your free copy today!



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

www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

Islam Triumphs

Continued from page 11

Italy endured weeks of rioting by second-generation Muslims.

The threat is very real.

The solution is quite simple: *national repentance, a turning back to the true God of the Bible.*

Consequences of turning from God

In the midst of the Battle of Britain, when the fate of the free world was at stake, Britain's King George VI called for a national day of prayer. Four years later, on the eve of the Normandy landings, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt actually led the nation in prayer on the radio.

Up until the end of World War II, most Americans believed in God and accepted that they had a God-ordained purpose to fulfill in the world. That faith and confidence has eroded as the nation has turned progressively away from God. Congress and the courts, particularly the courts, have reinterpreted "separation of church and state" to mean not freedom of religion but freedom from religion. As they have rejected God, is it any wonder that He could now allow defeat?

In Leviticus 26, God promised Israel tremendous blessings for obedience and negative consequences for rejecting His laws. The United States, Britain, Australia and Canada—modern descendants of the ancient Israelites—are now beginning to experience some of those consequences. More will follow unless there is a national repentance, a turning back to God with a sincere desire to change both individually and nationally.

"I will break the pride of your power," God warned in verse 19.

Just a few years ago there was great national pride in America's military power, a feeling that the country was invincible, that any nation that dared to defy the United States could be soundly beaten, thoroughly and rapidly.

Yet now the country faces international

humiliation, with the possibility of defeat at the hands of militant Islamists, religious fanatics who seem determined to take the world back to the Dark Ages.

Multiculturalism clouds understanding

Part of the problem must lie at the feet of multiculturalism, a modern creed that has become a god in itself. In the name of multiculturalism and political correctness, all religions are declared equally valid. That includes Islam as well as Christianity.

This has resulted in many errors of judgment and a failure to correctly perceive the threat that faces the West at this time.

The Bible tells us that salvation is possible only through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Yet Islam specifically denies the divinity of Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death for the sins of all mankind.

The founders of the United States were mostly Protestants, men who had learned tolerance through two centuries of European religious conflict. Prior to the American Revolution, they considered themselves Englishmen.

The French philosopher Voltaire observed in his *Philosophical Letters*, "If there were only one religion in England, we should have to fear despotism; if there were two, they would cut each other's throats; but there are thirty, and they live in peace and happiness" (quoted by Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 1991, p. 14.)

With so many different denominations, it was agreed that there should be no official national church in America as there was in England itself.

Religious tolerance has been a major factor in the success of the United States. It has also contributed to the development of democracy on both sides of the Atlantic.

The same tolerance has not developed in other parts of the world. This helps us appreciate more fully the animosity between Sunni and Shia in the Islamic world, being played out with so much bloodshed in Iraq. It also helps us understand why democracy is unlikely to

succeed in many countries.

Rejection of the religious beliefs that inspired the English to spread around the world and helped found the United States has led to an inability to understand correctly the current threat to the West. *Because so many in the West do not take religion seriously, they fail to comprehend how others can.* Thus most people remain ignorant of the threat from radical Islam.

In Revelation 6, Jesus Christ warned of the impact false religion would have on the world in end-time events. This chapter describes the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

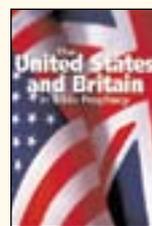
The prophecy shows that false religion will bring a sword on the world like nothing before. It will go out "conquering and to conquer" (verse 2). This will be rapidly followed by war (verses 3-4), which, in turn, is followed by famine (verses 5-6) and disease and death (verses 7-8), the inevitable result of war and famine.

Only national repentance, a turning back to God, can now save our nations from the cataclysmic events prophesied to befall them. The modern descendants of ancient Israel—primarily the peoples of the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—have increasingly rejected God and His commands. God warns us of the dire consequences.

But even if others won't repent, *you can.* Will you? **GN**

Recommended Reading

You don't need to remain ignorant of what's going on in the major Western nations and why. Nor do you need to remain in the dark as to where events are taking us. The answers were spelled out in Bible prophecy long ago—and have been unfolding just as foretold. You need to read our eye-opening booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Request or download your free copy today!



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

www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

How Your Subscription to *The Good News* Has Been Paid

The Good News is an international magazine dedicated to proclaiming the true gospel of Jesus Christ and to revealing the biblical solutions to so many of the problems that plague humanity. It is sent free of charge to all who request it.

Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, an International Association, and our extended worldwide family of coworkers and donors who help share this message of hope with others.

We are grateful for the generous tithes and offerings of the members of the

Church and other supporters who voluntarily contribute to assist in this effort to proclaim the true gospel to all nations. While we do not solicit the general public for funds, we welcome contributions to help us share this message of truth and hope with others.

The United Church of God, in accordance with responsible financial stewardship, is audited annually by an independent accounting firm.



"America at a Dangerous Crossroads"

The author wrote an astounding article that every American should read. My candid opinion is that a good many Americans today just don't concern themselves as to what is happening with the power struggles that are occurring. China has announced the capability of destroying satellites with guided missiles, which could be a serious threat to the U.S. military surveillance satellites. Russia has recently sold defensive missiles to Iran, which are considered to be the state of the art in defensive warfare.

Weaponry is being sold worldwide at an alarming rate. There are many terrorists living in the United States who are merely waiting for instructions. This country needs divine influence from God if we are to survive.

D.E.E., Bountiful, Utah

I enjoyed your article. I am a Christian military member and have served in Iraq. The war on terrorism is of great interest to me as I have studied terrorism and counterinsurgency as part of my master's degree. I will likely go back to Iraq at least one more time before the conflict is over.

The problem in America is that everyone is seeking their own agenda. The news media will ignore the ignorance of the protestors' cause in order to point the finger at the Bush administration. America's main problem is the left and right wings of society focusing on their own agendas and ignoring what is best for the nation. The symbol of America is the bald eagle. The eagle has a left and a right wing. When these wings work together the eagle can fly and go where it wants. If the eagle's wings refuse to work together the eagle cannot fly. It cannot go in the direction it wishes.

D.L.E., Internet

The Good News

I am a *Good News* subscriber and read my Bible almost every day. Now that I am receiving your booklets, they are helping me to understand the Bible more. I find myself getting excited over something besides my children.

N.G., Santa Clarita, California

I just wanted to thank you for the free magazines you send me. Many give a good talk about reaching the lost, but you folks put your money behind your talk. After I'm done with the material I pass it on to others. We have a lot of people in our church very interested in Bible prophecy.

M.J., Internet

I want to thank you immensely for the wonderful, inspiring magazines I have received from you. They have touched me and helped me to understand the Word of God in ways I did not know were possible. My faith has been strengthened and renewed. You are doing Christ's work. I am so excited to start receiving the *Bible Study Course* you are offering.

J.P., Glendale, Arizona

Bible Study Course

I am writing to you about lesson 4 of your *Bible Study Course*, "Why Does God Allow Suffering?" What a blessing it has been in my life. I am filled with hope and assurance again. I had been feeling out of place and lost. I can pray again and know that God listens, even to me.

Z.M., Old Town, Florida

We also publish a free booklet under that same title, Why Does God Allow Suffering? It is available free on request.

Letters from around the world

I am grateful to you for keeping me reading since I subscribed to *The Good News*. I have been searching for a way to know more about God, and reading *The Good News* is really helpful in understanding the Word of God and His plan for all His people. This magazine of understanding satisfies my spiritual hunger and thirst. I strongly believe that my knowledge of the Bible will help me to overcome numerous hardships and problems I face almost everyday.

J.V.C., Hong Kong

Thank you sincerely for the free subscription to *The Good News*. It has been

a blessing to me and my Christian brothers. I have been using the articles for our teachings and discussions and they have broadened our biblical knowledge and inspired us spiritually. I pray God to use you to reach many people around the globe.

O.A., Cairo, Egypt

I have received *The Good News*. Through it I have learned so many things about life, relations, prayer, dating, etc. I am sure that these magazines will help people to know the facts and realities of life. As a young person, I am really interested in them. I would like to receive the booklets *Marriage and the Family: The Missing Dimension* and *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*

E.K.J., India

Your Web site is very helpful and informative. As a young Christian, I learned a lot from it. Last time I requested some of your publications and was very impressed when I checked my post office and saw two parcels containing them.

M.M., Papua New Guinea

For several years I have received your *Good News* magazine. Please do not forget to continue sending it to me. I am a Lutheran pastor and have read your magazines and talked about them to several of my friends. Some have also requested a subscription. Having read your magazine through the years has made me think a lot. I want to continue reading it, studying the Bible and observing God's plan for His creation.

O.C.D.E., Brazil

Reader changes his mind

Some time ago I wrote you for several of your publications, which you kindly sent me. At that time I had doubts about what your writers said and I asked you not to send me any more booklets. Since that time I have had more time to study your booklets and, more importantly, to pray about them. As the old saying goes: "A fool never changes his mind, but a wise man does."

R.S., London, England

Readers in Canada

I was trying to find the July/August issue of *The Good News* that was sent to me last summer and could not find it. I wanted to read again your wonderful article "Our Amazing Spaceship Earth." Could you send me another copy? Also could I receive a few copies of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to make available on my living room table when friends come over? Your magazine is very eye-opening and enlightening.

Reader from Quebec

It is my pleasure to receive your magazine, and I am impressed with the articles. I hope to continue receiving it and would also greatly desire to read your booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. As a pastor your magazine has been an inspiration to my ministry.

D.H., Ontario

My husband and I have been greatly inspired by your magazine. It has given us things to ponder, meditate and pray about. May God bless you with your ministry.

Reader from British Columbia

Finding a church congregation

Would you please find a United Church of God near me so I can attend and worship with other Christians who celebrate the festivals of the Bible and not of the world. I read all of the publications and really enjoy them.

B.D., Des Moines, Iowa

Your e-mail has been made available to our pastor in the area, who will be contacting you. You may also find helpful our free booklets The Church Jesus Built and This Is the United Church of God.

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to *The Good News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, Ohio 45254-1027, U.S.A., or e-mail gninfo@ucg.org (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).



Q: I like reading *The Good News*, as most of the time your articles are biblically based. However, I must contend with your article in the November-December 2006 issue entitled “Baptism: Beginning of a New Life.” Though baptism is certainly an important part of the Christian life, it is not mandatory for salvation.

You specified Acts 2:38 as making baptism a “required condition.” If that were true, then you would be telling me that the thief on the cross, who confessed his sins by stating to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42, KJV), is in hell and that Jesus lied to him when He said, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” The thief had no time for baptism or a “laying on of hands,” which is also not required. Yet from these references, we can safely say that the thief went to heaven.

Another reference that goes against what your article attempts to teach is Acts 9:17-18, where Saul (later Paul) received his sight back, first had hands laid upon him by Ananias, then was filled with the Holy Spirit, then was baptized.

Also reference 1 John 1:9, where the only “required condition” is for us to “confess our sins,” and then we’ll be forgiven and “cleansed of all unrighteousness.” And reference Romans 10:9, which states, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

Nowhere do these say that baptism is a requirement. The blood of Jesus Christ washes away our sins, not water at baptism. Baptism is a symbol of our partaking of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It cannot save a person.

J.F., Las Vegas, Nevada

A: Thank you for sharing your concerns. We will examine as many of these scriptures as we can in this limited space, and offer you other resources to help.

One of the first principles of understanding the Bible is that doctrine should be based on the *whole* Word of God and not just a few passages taken in isolation. The Bible itself tells us that “man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives *by every word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:3, emphasis added throughout). Jesus Christ clearly endorsed this overriding truth by quoting these very words in rejecting Satan’s distortion of Scripture (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4).

The apostle Paul told Timothy that he should be “handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, New American Standard Bible). Singling out a few passages here and there is not a sound method of determining doctrinal truths. We must put together *all* the relevant scriptures on a particular subject to gain full understanding. Baptism is a case in point.

You stated that “baptism is not mandatory for salvation.” Yet the early chapters of all four Gospel accounts refer to John the Baptist baptizing many people, including Jesus Christ Himself. John initially protested that he was not worthy to baptize Jesus, but Christ insisted. He wanted to set us an example that we all should follow.

And in fact, “Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)” (John 4:1-2)—just as His followers do today. Jesus Himself said, “He who believes *and is baptized* will be saved” (Mark 16:16).

In his inspired sermon on the Day of Pentecost, when the Church was founded, the apostle Peter set out the proper order of events when he said, “Repent, and let every one of you *be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and *you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38).

Note that we should first repent, then be baptized, and then God responds to our obedience by giving us His Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32).

Even when God chose to reverse the normal order to miraculously demonstrate that He was calling gentiles to be part of His Church, Peter immediately said: “*Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized* who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” Then Peter “*commanded them to be baptized* in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:47-48). We have no authority from God to omit water baptism from the salvation process. The apostles of Christ mandated it.

It is certainly true, as you have stated, that “the blood of Jesus washes away our sins.” Yet we must also remember what Ananias (a man chosen by God to instruct Saul) said: “And now why are you waiting? *Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins*, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Water baptism symbolically washes away our sins, defined in the Bible as the transgressions of God’s law (1 John 3:4).

Concerning the necessity of the laying on of hands, the apostle Paul told Timothy to “stir up the gift of God [the Holy Spirit] which is in you *through the laying on of my hands*” (2 Timothy 1:6-7). This is how one receives God’s Spirit (Acts 8:17-19; 9:17; 19:6).

As to the passage on the thief on the cross, it has been badly misinterpreted. You stated that “we can safely say that the thief went to heaven.” But like all who have died except Christ, this man is not conscious in heaven but is awaiting the resurrection. Let’s take another look at this passage.

One key to understanding its true meaning is the thief’s request that Christ remember him “*when You come into Your kingdom*” (Luke 23:42). Jesus comes into His Kingdom at the time of the resurrection, when the saints of God *join Him on earth* to rule with Him (see Revelation 5:10; 20:1-4). These events are *yet future*.

We should also ask ourselves, where exactly did Jesus go after He died? Did He go to heaven that same day? No, the Scriptures are quite clear that *He went to the grave* until His resurrection three days and three nights later, just as He said would happen (Matthew 12:40; Acts 2:31-33; 13:29-30, 34-35). So the thief *could not* have gone to heaven with Him that day. Jesus Himself didn’t go to heaven that day!

Odd as it may sound to most people, heaven is *not* the reward of the saved. Scripture tells us that “*no one has ascended into heaven* but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man . . .” (John 3:13; see also Matthew 5:5).

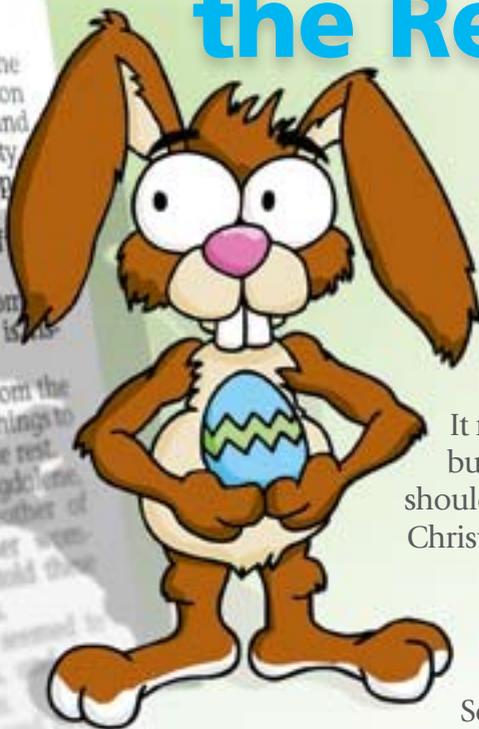
Importantly, the thief, though not yet baptized and converted, is not condemned without hope for salvation. He will be resurrected at the time of Christ’s Kingdom and given the opportunity to be saved. For a much more detailed understanding of the incident with the thief on the cross, see pages 38 and 39 of our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* This publication explains why we neither go to heaven nor descend to hell when we die. The Bible consistently pictures death as a sleep from which we awake at the resurrection.

As for your reference to 1 John 1:9, we must first realize that this verse, like the entire epistle of 1 John, is addressed to true Christians who have already repented, been baptized and received God’s Spirit. When the New Testament uses the pronoun “we,” it nearly always refers to Christians. Even righteous men and women of God slip and fall occasionally, and the apostle John is telling them—and us—what to do when this occurs.

Certainly our human minds are all too prone to come up with reasons why we might think it isn’t necessary to obey God on a particular point (see Romans 8:7; Jeremiah 17:9). But humble submission to God’s Word and will is required of all who want to remain in His grace and to be saved in the end.

The free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* explain water baptism in greater detail and why it is an essential step in the salvation process. You can request or download these free publications at www.gnsmagazine.org/booklets. It requires a good deal of prayer, time and patient Bible study to correctly understand the biblical teachings of God.

How Did *That* Get Into the Resurrection Story?



What do rabbits, painted eggs and colorful Easter baskets have to do with the death and resurrection of the Savior of mankind?

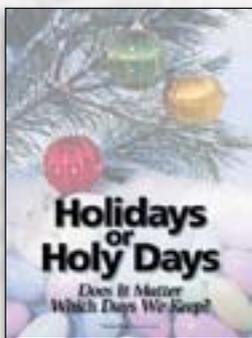
It may sound like an odd question to ask—but then it's truly odd that these symbols should have ever come to be associated with Jesus Christ's resurrection in the first place!

To answer the question, what *do* these things have to do with Christ's resurrection? The plain answer is *NOTHING*.

So how did it happen? The same way that holly, kissing under mistletoe, decorated evergreen trees and a jolly plump man in a red suit (riding in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer!) came to be associated with Jesus' birth.

Curiously, all these odd customs and symbols do have one thing in common. All were important symbols in pagan religions that had nothing to do with Christianity—most long before Christianity even started. So why are they part of the world's most important holidays today?

You need to discover the facts. And most important, since most people think they are worshipping God through these customs, you need to understand what *He* thinks about them! Our eye-opening free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* will help you discover the surprising answers. For your free copy, visit our Web site or contact any of our offices listed on page 2. A free copy is waiting for you!



Request or download your free copy at our Web site: www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

Reader Updates

Go to www.gnmagazine.org/gnupdate to sign up for e-mail updates including breaking news, important announcements and more from the publishers of *The Good News*.