

The Good News

March-April 2014

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

Who Was Jesus?

Was Jesus Truly One of Us? 8 • Do Prophecies About Jesus Prove He Was the Messiah? 11
Something Better Than Easter 19 • Jesus Christ's Resurrection: Our Hope of Life 22

BEYOND
TODAY
UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

Did Jesus Keep
His Word? page 16





Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God," said Jesus Christ (Luke 4:4; Matthew 4:4). So why don't more people believe that statement—especially those who claim to follow Him?

Too many who say they follow Jesus ignore what we today commonly call the Old Testament—even though that was the only "Word of God" people knew when Jesus uttered these words. In fact, He was quoting the Old Testament itself (see Deuteronomy 8:3).

Indeed, the Old Testament has so much to teach us about our Savior. And by not living by its words (almost three-quarters of our Bibles!), dismissing them as irrelevant and obsolete, people miss out on a great deal about what God reveals about the role and mission of Jesus Christ and the kind of relationship He wants to build with us.

Soon millions of churchgoers will be celebrating Easter, one of

Did you realize that Passover is mentioned more than 70 times in the Bible? What do those Christians who will be observing Passover know that others don't?

the world's most popular religious holidays. Curiously, it's a holiday found nowhere in the Bible (except in one place in the King James Version where it's a clear mistranslation of the original Greek).

Meanwhile, a relatively small number of churchgoers will be participating in an observance that *is* found in the Bible—*Passover*.

Did you realize that Passover is mentioned more than 70 times in the Bible (compared to no mentions of Easter)? What do those Christians who will be observing Passover know that others don't?

For one thing, they know what John the Baptizer, whose role was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, exclaimed when he saw Jesus: "Behold! *The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29, emphasis added throughout).

They also know that Jesus Himself, observing the Passover with His apostles on the night before He was crucified, left them with the bread and wine as symbols of His sacrifice, telling them (and His subsequent followers throughout the centuries) to partake of these symbols "*in remembrance of Me*" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

They also know that the apostle Paul, writing more than 20 years after Jesus Christ's death and ascension to heaven, tells us that "*Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

And in the very next verse he tells the members of the church in Corinth—including many who were gentile and not Jewish—to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, another biblical feast closely associated with Passover, and mentions several spiritual lessons Christians are to learn from keeping this feast in the right way and in the proper spiritual attitude.

Does this sound like instruction that is obsolete, outmoded and no longer relevant to Christians? Maybe we'd better carefully consider our assumptions!

In this issue we'll help you discover how these little-understood biblical festivals teach us a great deal about Jesus Christ—our Savior and coming King. They tell us why He *had* to come, why He offered Himself as a sacrifice and what He expects of us in return.

Nothing could be more important for you to understand in building a right relationship with Him—a relationship built on the understanding God reveals to us through the festivals He commands for us in His Word, the Bible.

Are you ready to start living "by every word of God," as Jesus tells us to? We hope so, and what you'll learn in this issue is a good start!

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

United States: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: 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) 614-1234, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (905) 614-1749 Website: www.ucg.ca
Caribbean islands: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: www.GNmagazine.org E-mail: info@ucg.org
Spanish-speaking areas: Iglesia de Dios Unida, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: www.ucg.org/espanol E-mail: info@ucg.org

EUROPE

Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg): P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands
British Isles: United Church of God, P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England
Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 020-8386-1999 Website: www.goodnews.org.uk
Eastern Europe and Baltic states: Head Sõnnuid, Pk. 62, 50002 Tartu Postkontor, Estonia
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Italy: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy
Phone and Fax: (+39) 035 4523573 Website: www.labuonanotizia.org E-mail: info@labuonanotizia.org
Scandinavia: Guds Enade Kyrka, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027 E-mail: norden@ucg.org

AFRICA

Cameroon: United Church of God Cameroon, BP 10322 Bessengue, Douala, Cameroon
East Africa, Madagascar and Mauritius: United Church of God—East Africa
P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi 00200, Kenya E-mail: kenya@ucg.org Website: www.ucgeastafrica.org
Ghana: P.O. Box AF 75, Adenta, Accra, Ghana E-mail: ghana@ucg.org
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Nigeria: United Church of God—Nigeria, P.O. Box 2265 Somolu, Lagos, Nigeria
Phone: 8033233193 Website: www.ucgnigeria.org E-mail: nigeria@ucg.org
South Africa: United Church of God—Southern Africa, P.O. Box 1181, Tzaneen 0850, South Africa
Phone: +27 79 725 9453 Fax: +27 (0)86 572 7437 Website: www.south-africa.ucg.org
E-mail: UnitedChurchofGod.SA@gmail.com
Zambia: P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia Phone: (0026)0966925840 E-mail: zambia@ucg.org
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Table of Contents



Cover Feature

Who Was Jesus?

Where did Jesus Christ come from? Who was He? This is a mystery that far too few really understand. Do you? It does matter—your future and your salvation depend on it! **4**

The Captain of Our Salvation: Was Jesus Truly One of Us?

Was Jesus truly a human being? Was He really tempted just like us? **8**

Do Prophecies About Jesus Prove He Was the Messiah?

The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ fulfilled hundreds of prophecies, proving that the Bible is true—and that God’s plan for your future will come to pass. **11**

Three Days and Three Nights: Did Jesus Keep His Word?

The length of time Jesus said He would be in the grave simply doesn’t fit with the traditional Good Friday–Easter Sunday time frame. What does the Bible actually tell us? **16**

Something Better Than Easter

How did Easter—a holiday not found in the Bible—come to replace an observance that is found in the Bible? . . . **19**

Jesus Christ’s Resurrection: Our Hope of Life

What is the real significance of Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the grave? What does it mean for you? **22**

Are You Ready to Change?

Your Creator offers the ultimate change for the better. **26**

How Can You Experience the Power That Drives Transformation?

God reveals the way to powerfully transform your life. Are you ready to tap into it? **28**

Washing Away Pride

On the evening before His death, Jesus left His followers with a profound lesson of service and humility. . . . **30**

“Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant”

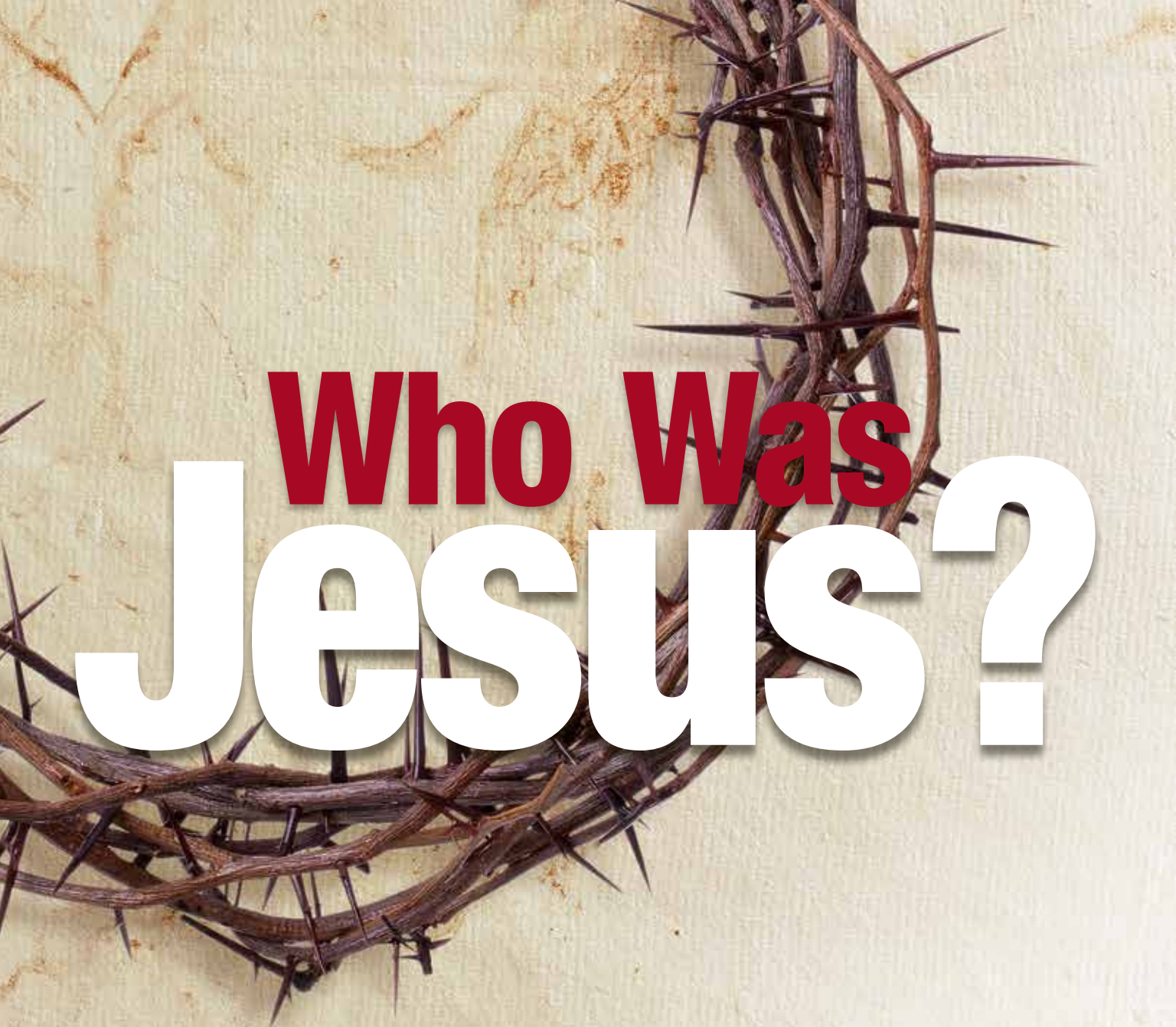
Jesus Christ gave two parables that hold crucial lessons about what He expects us to do with what He’s given us. Will we learn those lessons? . . . **32**

Christianity and Capitalism: Do They Go Together?

Recently Pope Francis slammed capitalism and the free market, advocating redistribution of wealth and other steps to level out incomes between rich and poor. What does the Bible say about Christianity and capitalism? **36**

Regular Features

| | | |
|--|---|-----------|
| Current Events and Trends | <i>An overview of conditions around the world</i> | 14 |
| Beyond Today | <i>Television log</i> | 17 |
| Letters From Our Readers | <i>Readers of The Good News share their thoughts</i> | 34 |
| Questions and Answers | <i>Answers to your questions about the Bible and Christian living</i> | 35 |
| Youth Focus From Vertical Thought | <i>Are You Doing the Most With What You Have?</i> | 39 |



Who Was Jesus?

Where did Jesus Christ come from? Who was He? This is a mystery that far too few really understand. Do you? It does matter—your future and your salvation depend on it! *by Bill Bradford*

Who, really, was Jesus Christ? He asked His disciples a year before He was arrested and executed by the horrible death of crucifixion, “Who do men say that I am?”

They gave the top four opinions of the moment: “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:13-14). As we see from this response, some people of that time were willing to go out on a limb and consider that He might have been a prophet brought back to life by God just for this time.

But if you were going to be a true disciple

of Jesus Christ, He would insist that you have to know His true identity. So He asked them a second question: “But who do *you* say that I am?”

Simon Peter was the first to answer: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” That Jesus was the Son of God was such an important understanding that He remarked, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, *but My Father who is in heaven*” (verses 15-17, emphasis added throughout).

What does it mean to be the Son of God? Over time the disciples came to understand that Jesus existed before His human birth.

But who was He? Where was He from?

Son of David through Mary— and Son of God

Jesus was born of the descendants of the tribe of Judah living in the traditional Israelite homeland, at that time under military occupation by Rome. The Gospel writers Matthew and Luke record His genealogy. Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus through His legal father, Joseph. In his opening statement Matthew says this is “the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1).

Matthew immediately answered the question any Jew would have about someone who claimed to be a king of God’s people. The Messiah would be a descendent of Abraham and also of King David. God had previously told Abraham, “In your seed



shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18; compare Galatians 3:16).

The Jews also understood that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David based on 2 Samuel 7:13, where through the prophet Nathan God promised to “establish the throne of his [David’s] kingdom forever.”

Both Matthew and Luke (who gives us Mary’s genealogy) document that Jesus was a descendant of both Abraham and David. Both are also careful *not* to state that Jesus was the son of Joseph. Matthew 1:16 tells us that “Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ,” and Luke 3:23 says that Jesus “began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph . . .” The same verse then says “of Heli.” This Heli is not Joseph’s father Jacob but Mary’s father, who is shown to also descend from David.

The story, as Matthew tells it, is that Joseph was betrothed to Mary, but they had not yet lived together as husband and wife, in accordance with betrothal and marriage customs of the time. Mary was pregnant, and Joseph knew he was not the father of the child. He wondered what he should do,

with God, and the Word *was* God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). John refers to Jesus Christ as the Word. He says He was in the beginning *with* God, and that He *was* God.

This is not as big a mystery as it seems. What we clearly see here are two divine Beings existent together before all else, both of them God.

This tells us something about God. God is more than one person. The fact that One is *with* the other and both are God tells us clearly that there are two distinct personages who are God. Some get confused about this, not understanding how the Bible defines or describes “God.”

The commonly accepted idea is that Jesus was one person of a triune God—that is, three persons in one. This concept of God cannot be found in John’s statement. First, John doesn’t speak of three. He names two—the Word (the One who became Jesus Christ), and God (who would become known as the Father).

It wasn’t until the fourth century that the Roman church decided in their councils that God is one being but in three persons. Thus, it was long after Jesus’ original disciples died that men began to define

restored to that same glorified state He had earlier *with* the Father.

Jesus the Creator, Father and Son are family

John, in the introduction of his Gospel, goes on to say of the One who became Jesus that “*all things were made through Him*, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3). He is telling us that the Word, who existed with God the Father, is the One who actually carried out the creation at the Father’s direction!

The apostle Paul further substantiates that Jesus was the Creator of everything that was brought into being:

“For *by Him all things were created* that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16). Paul’s terminology includes the creation of angels and the authority they currently have in the universe.

Paul adds in verse 17 that “He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” This means that not only was He the agent who carried out the act of creation, but that He is the One through whose power the creation is sustained.

That is, the creation is maintained in its present state of existence—sustained, ordered, arranged and continued by the One who was and is the Word. Hebrews 1:3 describes Him as “upholding all things by the word of His power.” This obviously refers to a Being of infinite power and creative capacity! He is eternal and divine.

Jesus clearly was the awesomely powerful Being who, submissive to the will of the One He would refer to as Father, served as Creator and exercised authority to rule the entire creation—angelic beings included.

And His repeated references to the Father and Himself as Father and Son, along with the many other similar references throughout the New Testament, help us understand the true nature of God as a *divine family*—a family into which others may be born!

This is why Jesus is called “the *firstborn among many brethren*” (Romans 8:29). It is also why Paul, in 2 Corinthians 6:18, quotes God as saying, “I will be a Father to you, and *you shall be My sons and daughters*,” says the LORD Almighty.” (To learn more, download or request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

Jesus clearly was the awesomely powerful Being who, submissive to the will of the One He would refer to as Father, served as Creator and exercised authority to rule the entire creation—angelic beings included.

giving serious consideration to a private breakup.

But an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him, “That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18-20). Thus, Jesus had no human biological father. The father of Jesus of Nazareth was *God*. Jesus would call Him “*My Father*”—and He would mean it in a very literal sense.

The Word was *with* God and *was* God

The apostle John, apparently writing some six decades after Jesus’ death, does not begin with Jesus’ human genealogy or His human birth, but with His *divine origin*. John is precise, right from the beginning of his record, to tell us who Jesus is, where He came from and that He existed before His human conception.

John begins his Gospel with: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was

God as a Trinity. (To learn the whole story, download or request our free booklet *Is God a Trinity?*)

We do not see a Trinity here in John’s discourse, nor is it found in any of the other Gospels. Jesus certainly didn’t describe Himself in that way either. He referred numerous times to Himself and the One He called His Father. He described a relationship that could be understood only as one between two distinct Beings who coexisted for eternity.

John records Jesus’ final prayer before His death: “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with yourself, *with the glory which I had with you before the world was*” (John 17:5). Here John is consistent with the opening words of His Gospel. Jesus was *with* the Father before the world was created and had divine glory *with* the Father. And here, at the end of His physical time on earth, He prays to the Father to be



“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”

John 1 further explains that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (verse 14). Of course, since He became a flesh-and-blood person, it begs the question, what was He before He became a human being?

This is a most extraordinary revelation to us—that the great Being who carried out the creation of all things, inanimate and living, the One who lived forever in the past, eternal, and had all power to rule the universe, *became a finite human being* capable of experiencing everything a human being could experience, even death.

In 1 John 1:1-2 John goes into this in more detail, reaffirming everything He said previously in language that is unmistakable: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us” (New International Version).

From John’s words we see that the One known as the man Jesus preexisted as God, coexisted with God, and was the One who on Their behalf created the universe and put man on the earth for the purpose of sharing with Them Their great existence. This awesome Being would one day join human beings on earth as a human being Himself so that purpose could be realized.

Equality with God

Paul tells us, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Paul shows us Christ’s attitude of sacrifice and service by relinquishing the divine glory and might He had with the Father in His preexistence.

Paul then urges us to have the same

humble, serving, giving attitude as Jesus Christ, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped [or held on to]” (verse 6, English Standard Version).

That is, He did not seek to cling to the power and privileges He had as omnipotent God with the Father. Instead He “emptied himself, by taking the form of a [bond] servant” (verse 7, ESV). That is, He let it all go—the awesome power, glory and privileges that He rightfully had as the second great eternal Being who was God.

Paul is saying that the Word who became Jesus had equality with God the Father in terms of nature—of existing as the same kind of Being. He was eternal. He was self-existent. He was God. But He was willing to become a human being, subject to temptation, suffering, pain and even

The great Being who carried out the creation of all things, and had all power to rule the universe, became a finite human being capable experiencing everything a human being could experience, even death.

death. “He humbled Himself,” Paul says in verse 8. Seeing from where He came, we see how much He was willing to give up for our sakes!

What we see described here is the One who was in the beginning with God, who was the Creator of all things, humbling Himself, divesting Himself of the glory He had as God, and becoming human “for the suffering of death” (Hebrews 2:9).

Paul further tells us that He was the Being who appeared as God in the Old Testament. Notice 1 Corinthians 10:1-4: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.



For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed [or went with] them, *and that Rock was Christ.*”

This same Jesus was the One who said, “Let there be light!” He was the One who commanded Noah to build an ark. He was the One who met Abraham and ate with him. He was the One who descended onto Mount Sinai as the God of Israel and gave His law to the people! (To learn more, download or request our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story.*)

The One who became Jesus Christ never left the human beings He had a part in creating, but continued to interact with humanity throughout man’s brief and turbulent history. And in time, He came to earth as a human being to declare to us the Father and His grand purpose for us (John 1:18).

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A bondservant

Let's go back to Paul's statement we just read about Jesus emptying Himself and "taking the form of a bondservant" (Philippians 2:7). He took on the condition of a *servant* in contrast to one of higher rank.

In becoming human, Jesus descended to the lowest condition or status of humanity—that of a bondservant, a slave. He served God and He served us. "I am among you as the One who serves," He said (Luke 22:27).

This was His attitude, His condition, His state of mind. He was obedient to the point of death, the most terrible death a person could experience. "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8, ESV).

What Paul is saying is this: The great divine Being who is God along with the Father and who was with the Father as God in the beginning voluntarily became a lowly human being. He humbled Himself and served us and all of humanity. He paid the ultimate price of indescribable suffering and death.

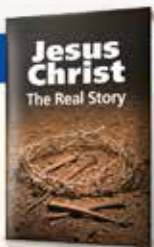
And this was the *ultimate* service. Because He was God, He could pay the price for *all* the sins of *all* of mankind for *all* time. This He willingly did—for you and for me!

When we think of Jesus Christ, we should understand Him for who He is. He is God! He is our Creator, the very One who made us! We should understand Him as One who made a clear decision to submit completely to carry out the greatest sacrifice of all time for our sake.

His sacrifice proved to us the greatest of love that could be demonstrated in a way no one should ever doubt. This is why He deserves nothing less than our complete love and service in return! **GN**

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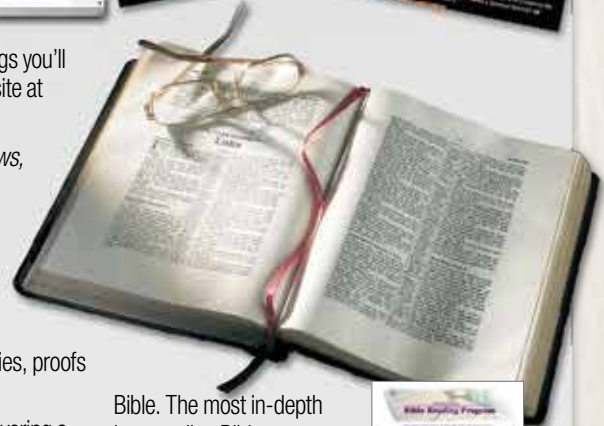


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Was Jesus Truly One of Us?

One of the most insidious heresies in the 2,000-year history of Christendom is that Jesus was not truly a human being and that He was not really tempted as we are. What is the truth? *by Bill Bradford*

Did Jesus need to be saved? If He was an eternal, divine being before His human birth, how could His experience be regarded as achieving salvation? Didn't He already have eternal life with God?

Jesus Christ is called the Captain of our salvation. A captain is one among a group who leads the others to achieve an objective. If He was an eternal being before His human birth, how could He legitimately show us how to achieve the salvation God offers?

This is clearly what the book of Hebrews, probably written by the apostle Paul, says: "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make *the captain of their salvation* perfect through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:10, emphasis added throughout).

This, naturally, brings up another question. Since He is eternal, and is God, then He was perfect. How then, would He be *made* perfect through suffering?

The question really boils down to this: Was His salvation genuine, so as to be one we can confidently follow, or was it a make-believe salvation? Could Jesus sin? Did He

need to be saved? What does the Bible say?

Jesus was human and mortal

The apostle John at the outset of his Gospel says that the Word was made flesh. John tells us who the Word is. He was *with* God, and He *is* God—the One through whom God created everything (John 1:1-3). Thus there were two self-existent divine Beings who had lived together for all eternity. John calls Them God and the Word, yet refers to both of Them as God. The Word was made flesh as the Son of the Father (verse 14).

Jesus was not merely a man living on the earth who was mysteriously linked to the second Person of the Godhead. Jesus *was* God the Word who lived for a period of time as a human being—He was the very same divine Person.

The explanation we're given in Hebrews 2 continues: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood [that is, just as all members of the human family are physical, mortal, fleshly beings], He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the

devil" (verse 14).

Jesus would destroy, or nullify, the power of the devil through His death. That's right—Jesus could die! The One who is eternal actually died—and was later restored to eternal life through a resurrection of the dead. The risen Jesus in His own words says, "I am He who lives, *and was dead*, and behold, I am alive forevermore" (Revelation 1:18).

This One who was God with God the Father died as every other human being has died. But how could God die? God can't die, unless One became a human being who could die. Hebrews 2:9 states, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower [‘for a little while lower,’ some translations render this] than the angels, for the suffering of death . . . that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone."

Not only *could* Jesus die, but He *did* die. We should consider who it was who died for us. It was not simply a man called Jesus miraculously conceived by a miracle of God, created on the spot by God for this purpose. No, *He was God*. The very Being who created all things according to the Father's will, the One who made the human race, was the One who died for us! No one less than our Maker could have paid the price for our sins through His own death. He, our Creator, died for us! (Be sure to read "Who Was Jesus?" beginning on page 4.)

Moreover, we should consider for a moment how important it was to God for us to understand God's love for His future children by sending the Word to the earth to die! The divine Word's willingness to come down to the earth, emptying Himself of His inherent glory and might to suffer and die in our place (Philippians 2:5-8, English Standard Version), is the most extraordinary example of sacrifice for the sake of others.

Could Jesus be tempted to sin?

This brings us to another question about Jesus' humanity. Was it possible for Jesus to sin? When He was God on the divine plane of existence, it is clear that He could not sin, for the Bible states that "God cannot be tempted by evil" (James 1:13). Again, though, what about Jesus while He was human?

The Bible is clear that Jesus *did not* sin. Paul says that Jesus "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). John confirms that "in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). None of His enemies could convict Him of sin (John 3:5).

But *could* He have sinned? Was He *able to choose* to sin? Hebrews again: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot

lusts in his heart or actually commits the sins, he has succumbed to the temptation. As James 1:14-15 points out: "A man's temptation is due to the pull of his own inward desires, which can be enormously attractive. His own desire takes hold of him, and that produces sin" (J.B. Phillips New Testament).

Humanly, for Jesus there were fleshly appeals, but He had to recognize the temptation and immediately make a clear choice to reject the fleshly appeal to the human heart. How was He able to resist?



His fasting in the desert for 40 days and nights and being "tempted by the devil" was not merely a pointless exercise. What the devil tempted Jesus with was appealing to any human being, and Jesus was human.

sympathize with our weaknesses, *but was in all points tempted as we are*, yet without sin" (4:15). If it wasn't possible for Jesus to sin, then was His temptation genuine?

Perhaps it's better to say that while He was capable of choosing to sin, it was certain He would not do so—the promises of the Bible hinging on His remaining sinless. We'll give more attention to why His success was sure a little later.

It's also certain that the struggles and temptations Jesus faced were genuine. His fasting in the desert for 40 days and nights and being "tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1) was not merely a pointless exercise. What the devil tempted Jesus with was appealing to any human being, and Jesus was human.

But just because something appeals to a person doesn't mean that the person has sinned. Yet if there were no appeal, there could be no temptation. When a person

Jesus stated that His supernatural, miracle-working power while in the flesh came not from Himself but from His Father (John 5:30; 14:10). The same power was required to consistently withstand temptation throughout His human life. Thus, Jesus resisted sin through relying on help from God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in Him. We must do the same.

The temptation of Christ

We earlier read where Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Undoubtedly, the greatest temptation was when He was about to be tortured and killed. Knowing what He was about to face, He prayed under great duress, as reported: "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

This is the moment referred to in Hebrews 5:7: ". . . Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear."

For Jesus to really know what it's like for human beings to struggle against sin, He had to become completely like us: "For in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make a propitiation [or atoning sacrifice] for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:17).

How could He be our example if He wasn't truly human and tempted as we are? He was tempted in all facets of life, yet He went beyond. If a person yields to temptation, he has not felt its full power but has given in while there would be yet more to resist if he did not give in. Only the one who keeps resisting and successfully prevails against a particular temptation knows the full extent of that temptation.

Jesus went the full distance. He "resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin" (Hebrews 12:4). He refused to go against His Father's will even though it meant His agonizing death! "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8, ESV).

Jesus' salvation

Thankfully, Jesus' story does not end with His death. He was returned to life—something that, again, required help from on high. The night before His death, Jesus prayed to His Father, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5).

As a human being who died, if Jesus was going to be restored to eternal life on His former level of divine existence, it would be because His Father would resurrect Him from the dead. When Jesus became flesh, He put His entire future in the hands of the Father. If Jesus had sinned while human, there would be no payment for *His* sin or for *our* sin. Neither Jesus nor the rest of us would have the hope of eternal life!

Jesus knew it was possible for Him to sin. As we have shown, the temptation on more than one occasion was great. But He also had complete faith in His Father. He



knew if He relied on His Father, the Father would give Him all the spiritual power He needed.

While Jesus had eternal life before He was human, He had to attain to salvation as a human being. Hebrews explains that “though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). Was He obedient before He was made flesh? Yes—always! Only now He learned obedience in the flesh through the things which He suffered.

“And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (verse 9). Was Jesus already perfect before He became human? Yes. Moreover, He was a perfect human being throughout His life in the flesh—as perfect as One could be as He progressed through the stages of His life. But at last He would attain to complete perfection in the flesh by meeting all the challenges to sin and overcoming to the very end. This He did through maintaining contact with the Father—His lifeline of spiritual guidance and help—remaining yielded to the Father, who would empower Him to succeed.

His salvation was put on the same footing as ours. If He was going to be given salvation, that is, granted eternal life, it would be as a human being. Did He and the Father have confidence that this would happen? They had every confidence that Jesus would live a sinless life and be obedient to God the Father during His trying lifetime here on earth.

This is an important way that Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. He went before us and showed that we can attain to salvation as human beings. Of ourselves, this is impossible. When we sin we must ask for forgiveness through Jesus Christ, who gave His life in sacrifice for those sins. We must then yield our lives to Christ dwelling in us and leading us—another critical aspect of His role as the Captain of our salvation.

As Paul wrote, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, King James Version).

Just as we have to rely on Jesus Christ to sustain us in this life, so did Jesus have to rely on the Father to sustain Him in the days of His flesh. Jesus was a human being in the fullest sense. He needed spiritual help and received it. He experienced human emotions, pain and suffering like any other

How Was Jesus' Success in Remaining Sinless Assured?

So many promises and prophecies of Scripture depended on Jesus never sinning. How could God be so sure He would succeed when Jesus as a human being would be tempted to sin every way that we are (Hebrews 4:15), implying that He had the capacity for sin? How could He successfully never sin and become our Savior? His success was guaranteed for several reasons working together. Among them are:

1. Jesus had established righteous habit from eternity—and thus an “inertia” of character that always propelled Him toward maintaining righteousness and avoiding sin.

2. Jesus did not become flawed, weak and susceptible to giving in during His younger years under the deception of the devil as all other people are—and so He did not have to change from being unrighteous to righteous.

3. Jesus never failed and was never saddled with guilt and shame and a sense of hopelessness or defeatism about gaining the victory over sin.

4. Jesus maintained perfect fellowship with and closeness to God the Father throughout life, and that relationship strengthened and steered Him against temptation and sin.

5. Having the Holy Spirit without measure gave Jesus the additional needed power to successfully resist sin.

6. Jesus had certain awareness of His past life of divine glory with the Father, helping to keep the fleeting pleasures of sin in proper perspective as nothing beside that awesome existence.

7. Jesus, having been with the Father from eternity, had perfect faith in the Father, in God's purposes, in the divine plan, and in the rewards of adhering to God's law—He was never impeded by doubt, worry, fear or faulty human reason.

8. Jesus had constant awareness of His mission on which the whole world depended—and He had always perfect love for all so that He desired to succeed for them and to please the Father.

9. Jesus knew perfectly the consequences of sin and where giving in to temptation would lead, so Satan was not able to deceive Him.

10. Jesus was always aware that failing to stay in close fellowship with the Father would doom Him and everyone else—so allowing a lapse was unthinkable.

11. Jesus' constant success in resisting sin and temptation bred further success. Nothing succeeds like success, and in so doing His righteousness was constantly reinforced.

12. Both the Father and Jesus Christ knew what would be required to keep Him from sinning, and with all that's stated here they knew He would succeed—and He did!

—Tom Robinson

man. He was tempted to sin like any other human being but was successfully sustained by the strength of God's Spirit.

He overcame the world (Revelation 3:21). He relied on the Father with complete trust. He attained to salvation under the most trying circumstances. He was resurrected by His faithful Father after three days and three nights, showing to us all for all time that He pleased the Father.

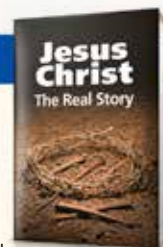
Was it a risk?

Jesus was willing to do the Father's will to come to the earth as a human being. Was there a risk? No. Not because Jesus couldn't sin, but because each knew what the other would do. Jesus would always do what pleased the Father. And the Father would never fail to sustain Him. (For more on this, see “How Was Jesus' Success in Remaining Sinless Assured?”)

The Father was faithful in what He

promised He would do, and Jesus had faith in that (see John 8:28-29). Jesus' salvation was sure, not because He had strength inherent within Himself, but because the Father was always with Him. And so is your salvation sure—if you follow the lead of the Captain of our salvation! **GN**

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Do you really understand who Jesus was? What about His purpose in coming to earth? Or the magnitude of His sacrifice? There's much we need to know that's critical to our salvation and our relationship with Him!

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Do Prophecies About Jesus Prove

HE WAS THE **Messiah?**

The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ fulfilled hundreds of prophecies. Every one came to pass with incredible accuracy. Such fulfilled prophecy serves as proof that the Bible is true—and that God’s plan for your future will come to pass. *by Noel Hornor*

Just over 2,000 years ago a male infant was born to a young woman named Mary in the small town of Bethlehem in Judea, a province of the Roman Empire. It was not understood then, but this child was destined to change the entire sweep of history. His parents, Joseph and Mary, named the newborn baby Jesus according to God’s will.

It’s not possible to adequately describe what the coming of Jesus would mean to the world. We can scarcely begin to comprehend the many works He did. One of the biblical accounts of His life and works states: “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that

would be written” (John 21:25).

Many have attempted to describe Jesus and His works. According to one noted historian, more than 100,000 books have been published about Jesus in the English language alone. The coming of Jesus Christ, His teaching and His death and resurrection, revolutionized history and gave birth to the world’s largest religion.

So was Jesus just another misguided teacher who, because His followers believed Him to be the Messiah, led them to establish a new religion in His name that happened by chance to endure and have today nearly 2 billion adherents? Or is what the Bible teaches about Him actually true—that He was the Messiah or Christ, the Son of God, and that His life and work

were foretold long before His birth?

Was Jesus truly unique?

Other men came forth in that era claiming they were some type of messiah who would deliver the people from the Roman yoke. “It is the grim fact that in Palestine between the years 67 and 37 BC no fewer than 100,000 men perished in abortive rebellions” (William Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus*, 1963, p. 45).

All of these movements came to nothing, while the work of Jesus survived and eventually flourished. This is just one of the marvelous aspects about Jesus of Nazareth. Other marks stamp on Him a uniqueness not found in any other person in all history.

One is the many prophecies about Him. The nature of His birth and many aspects of His life and works were foretold in the Old Testament. It is this facet of Jesus’ life that we focus on in this article.

One source calculates that we find in the Old Testament “three hundred and thirty-two distinct predictions which were liter-



ally fulfilled in Christ" (Floyd Hamilton, *The Basis of Christian Faith*, 1946, pp. 156-157). The probability of this occurring by chance defies our ability to measure statistics.

When we look at the Bible today, nearly two millennia after its completion, we have what are commonly called the Old Testament and New Testament. We view these as one book. Some may not realize, however, that the Old Testament was fixed in form some 400 years before the coming of Jesus Christ.

The prophecies about Him were there waiting for someone to fulfill them and add validation to the Bible as God's Word. The prophecies about Him had been long written. If a man had come from the womb and fulfilled only a few of God's prophecies, we might attribute that to happenstance. But to fulfill more than 300 prophecies defies any possibility of chance!

"Mohammedanism [Islam] cannot point to any prophecies of the coming of Mohammed uttered hundreds of years before his birth. Neither can the founders of any cult . . . rightly identify any ancient text specifically foretelling their appearance" (Wilbur Smith, *The Incomparable Book*, 1961, p. 10). The Bible is unique in this way!

Let's look at just a few of the specific prophetic fulfillments in this article.

Prophecy 1: Jesus would be born in Bethlehem

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

Anyone who knows even the bare details surrounding the birth of Christ knows that His parents didn't live in Bethlehem. They lived in Nazareth several days' journey to the north. Around the time that Jesus was about to be born, something was required to have Joseph and Mary go from their home to the village of Bethlehem.

That something was a Roman census. Emperor Augustus issued a decree that all of the inhabitants of the empire should be registered. People were required to register in their birthplaces, so Joseph took Mary, his betrothed wife, to Bethlehem. And while they were there, Jesus was born (Luke 2:1-7).

Did God motivate Augustus to declare that all inhabitants of his reign should be counted at that very time? The answer

is yes! This would be the first of many instances of divine intervention accomplishing what was foretold.

Prophecy 2: A herald would proclaim Jesus

More than four centuries before Jesus' birth, God raised up a prophet who stated that Jesus' ministry would be preceded by another prophet who would foretell His coming: "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me" (Malachi 3:1).

The herald was John the Baptist, and the record of his proclaiming the ministry of Jesus Christ is as follows: "The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the LORD, make his paths straight'" (Luke 3:2-4).

As we add up the predictions of the coming of the Lord, the odds increase against the phenomena happening by chance. Throughout human history, a number of men have been born in Bethlehem. Babies are being born there now. But how many have been born in Bethlehem who also had a heraldic crier proclaiming in advance that he was coming to preach God's Word?

Jesus' birth was foretold in the Old Testament, and then His coming was proclaimed in advance by John the Baptist. Both these prophecies were fulfilled.

Prophecy 3: Jesus would enter Jerusalem riding a donkey

The prophet Zechariah recorded a prophecy pertaining to an event that would occur during the last week of Jesus' life: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

During the last week of His earthly life, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, effectively proclaiming Himself God's Messiah (Matthew 21:7-11). How many men in the history of the world have entered Jerusalem as a ruler while riding a donkey? This prophecy alone is something for which we have no recorded historical precedent.

As we add prophecy to prophecy we further eliminate the likelihood of these events being matters of chance. How many

men entered Jerusalem riding on donkeys, who were also born in Bethlehem, and whose coming was preceded by someone announcing it beforehand?

Prophecy 4: He would be like a shepherd who is struck down

"'Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man who is My Companion,' says the LORD of hosts. 'Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'" (Zechariah 13:7).

This was fulfilled on the night when Jesus was arrested and the disciples forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:31, 56). Then Roman soldiers repeatedly struck Jesus, who had declared Himself to be the good Shepherd (John 10:14). They beat Him and struck Him with the palms of their hands (Matthew 26:67). The next day He was killed—the Shepherd was indeed struck, and His close followers were dispersed.

For each utterance that Old Testament prophets made regarding Jesus, we see its fulfillment historically recorded in the New Testament. This confirms that these events were under the overall direction of God and that the Bible is infallible. It's virtually impossible to explain unless there was a divine hand guiding these events.

Prophecy 5: He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver

"And the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter" (Zechariah 11:13).

This was fulfilled when Judas betrayed Jesus to the chief priests for the price of 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15-16). Later Judas, suffering from remorse, tried to return the money to the priests. They refused to accept it, and Judas flung the money on the temple floor. The priests later took the money and used it to buy the potter's field for burying strangers who died (Matthew 27:3-10).

This prophecy is very specific. Let us ponder this question: How many men who have accepted blood money to betray a friend have tried to return it and had it rejected? Even further, what are the chances the money was used to purchase a plot for burying vagabonds as foretold centuries earlier?

Prophecy 6: He offered no defense at His trial

"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led

as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

When Jesus was before the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate, the chief priests and elders leveled many accusations at Him, to which Jesus made no reply. Pilate “marveled greatly” that an innocent man who had so much hatred and false charges directed toward Him would not speak up in His own defense (Matthew 27:12-14).

How many men in history have, when on trial for their life, reacted as Jesus did? How could a man have the strength to restrain himself and not try to save his life when he

Again, Pilate knew that they had trumped up these charges, so he refused to sentence Jesus to be crucified. Then they coerced Pilate into sentencing Jesus through implying that Pilate was being disloyal to Caesar (John 19:12). Pilate feared being reported to Rome, as it could threaten his office as procurator.

Thus, for the one prophecy regarding how Jesus would die to be fulfilled required a chain of circumstances that were indeed unusual. The fulfillment of this prophecy regarding the life and death of Jesus Christ adds to the world of evidence that this Man, whose life was prophesied and remark-

For each utterance that Old Testament prophets made regarding Jesus, we see its fulfillment historically recorded in the New Testament.

is totally innocent? The answer is that Jesus was the Son of God. He had come to the earth to fulfill all prophecies recorded about Him. He knew that He, an innocent man, would die for our sins.

Only the Messiah could endure without complaint under such torturous circumstances. He withstood it all without sinning. “Nor was any deceit in His mouth” (Isaiah 53:9). In so doing, He set an example for all Christians who are accused concerning their faith (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Prophecy 7: He would die by crucifixion

“The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet” (Psalm 22:16). Pilate scourged Jesus and “delivered Him to be crucified” (Matthew 27:26). For this prophecy to be fulfilled required an unlikely and extraordinary chain of events.

The Jewish leaders desired to rid themselves of Jesus, whom they regarded as a competitor. However, the Romans did not allow the Jews to impose capital punishment. If they had killed Jesus, it probably would have been by stoning (Acts 7:58), since the Jews did not practice crucifixion.

The Romans utilized crucifixion for despised criminals and especially for people who were thought to represent a threat to the Roman peace. Pilate knew that Jesus was no such threat. He knew that “they had handed Him over because of envy” (Matthew 27:18).

The Jews brought Jesus before Pilate, making the accusation that He essentially represented a threat to Rome (Luke 23:2).

ably determined beforehand by God, was the Messiah. The fulfillment here adds to the infallible proof that the Bible is God’s Word. No ordinary book could have such divine fingerprints upon it.

Prophecy 8: He would die with criminals yet be buried with the rich

“He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). Although perfectly innocent, Jesus was crucified between two malefactors, flagrant violators of the law (Mark 15:27-28; Luke 23:33).

Isaiah 53 also says, “And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death” (verse 9). This can sound like a contradiction, but the first part denotes the initial assignment of a mass grave with criminals and the latter part shows what actually happened—that He was buried in the tomb of the rich man Joseph of Arimathea, who made a special request of Pilate for his body (Matthew 27:57, 60). Again, only God could have foretold all this in advance and ensured its fulfillment, recording it centuries in advance.

More to come—assured by God’s Word

Thankfully, Jesus did not remain dead and in the grave. He was prophesied to do many more great things—and that could only happen through Him living again. And indeed we know that Jesus was resurrected from the dead and, after appearances to many people, went to heaven to sit at His Father’s right hand. He’ll be there until the time that He is to come again—this time

as “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16).

We should stand in awe at the way Jesus fulfilled prophecy with such exactitude. We should read the inspired Word of God—the Bible—with wonder because it not only tells us of prophecies that have been fulfilled, but it also tells us what’s going to happen in the future.

It tells us that Jesus will return to establish God’s Kingdom on earth and that He will reign forever (Revelation 11:15). You can be there and be a part of that Kingdom if you act on God’s Word and surrender your life to Him now!

Other books have been written that purport to be holy books. How can we distinguish the Bible from all of them? One of the chief ways is fulfilled prophecy.

Speaking through Isaiah, God says: “I have declared the former things from the beginning; they went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass . . . Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, and my carved image and my molded image have commanded them’” (Isaiah 48:3, 5).

Read your Bible! Study it diligently. It is God’s Word! In it you can read about God’s plan—His will for you. That which He desires for all people is far greater than our minds can fully grasp.

However, we can gain an inkling of it by reading the Bible. As He tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10: “As it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God!” GN

Learn More

Yes, the Bible claims to be the inspired Word of God, His revelation to mankind. But is it? How can we know? You need to download or request your free copy of *Is the Bible True?* A free copy is waiting for you. Also be sure to read *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* to discover more proofs that He was indeed to long-promised Messiah and Savior of mankind!



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Current Events & Trends

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

Hitting the headlines: A world in turmoil

The last several months have seen some serious weather calamities, and the global political scene remains ever more troubling.

In late 2013 Typhoon Haiyan devastated parts of Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines (where the storm is called Yolanda). And from the end of the year and into 2014, there has been severe coastal and river flooding in the United Kingdom, along with a string of winter storms with gale-force winds, travel disruptions and power outages.

As 2014 dawned, much of the United States was hit by a “polar vortex” that brought extremely low temperatures to much of the country to an extent not experienced for many years. Even cities such as

Atlanta in the nation’s south were gridlocked with ice. At the same time, California was experiencing its worst drought in decades.

With ongoing instability in the Middle East and wars breaking out in areas like South Sudan, the world is in an abysmal state.

And with American power waning, other geopolitical contenders are on the rise. In recent news, the European Union (or EU) is still seeking to become a United States of Europe. Could this lead to the final European superpower prophesied in the Bible? Check out our free Bible study aid *The Final Superpower* to learn more (at ucg.org/booklets). You may be surprised by its true identity.

Increasing disorder follows on heels of U.S. retreat

A *Wall Street Journal* article stated at the outset of the new year: “The world is messy, and it is getting more so as the U.S. retreats from its role as the protector of global order. With civil wars, uprisings against governments and other bloody disputes proliferating, it can be hard to tell the good guys from the bad” (“Global Disorder Scorecard,” Dec. 30, 2013).

As the blurb under the headline of a *Financial Times* piece by noted columnist Philip Stephens stated, “Pressures for conflict in a more disordered world are there for all to see” (“Riches and Risk: Welcome to the World of Tomorrow,” Jan. 9, 2014).

Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Gaza, South Sudan, Thailand and North Korea are all global flashpoints—along with island tensions between China and Japan.

Take the Ukrainian situation, for instance. Russian President Vladimir Putin seeks to recreate at least some semblance of the old Soviet Union, thereby restoring Russia to superpower status. Another editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* said that “Russia’s Vladimir Putin has stoked this crisis from the first and isn’t about to let up. The Russian strongman has put \$15 billion in aid and billions more in cheap energy on the table to make Ukraine . . . part of a new Greater Russia” (“America and Ukraine,” Jan. 27).

Late last year Putin pressured Ukraine into jet-tisoning an EU “association treaty.” This strategic move produced massive protests in the capital city of Kiev, soon countered by repressive new laws fomenting further protests spreading even beyond Kiev to eastern provinces. At this writing the government appears to have backed off somewhat, but “no solution to the current impasse can satisfy both the Ukrainian protestors . . . and a Russian state that aspires to re-establish its regional hegemony” (James Sherr, “Putin’s Imperial Project Threatens European Values,” *Financial Times*, Jan. 27, 2014). A divided European Union has been of little or no help to Ukraine.

The *Journal* article quoted up front about the global

conflicts scorecard concluded that “the U.S. once would have led the world in defusing these conflicts, or at least trying to defuse their harm. But President Obama has disavowed any Pax Americana”—the maintenance of peace within the reach of U.S. power (likened to that of the ancient Roman Empire).

Philip Stephens commented in his *Financial Times* piece: “There is nothing to replace the Pax Americana. Instead the neat symmetry of the cold war [between the two superpowers America and the Soviet Union] and the brief interlude of unipolarity [that is, America as the sole superpower] are being

“There is nothing to replace the Pax Americana. Instead the neat symmetry of the cold war and the brief interlude of [America as the sole superpower] are being replaced by a fragmented mosaic of global power.”

replaced by a fragmented mosaic of global power.” While Bible prophecy often focuses on specific peoples and places of the world, as our free booklets about end-time prophecy point out, God also issues prophetic pronouncements on a global scale. Isaiah 34:1-2 is a case in point: “Come near, you nations, to hear; and heed, you people! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world and all things that come forth from it. *For the indignation of the LORD is against all nations*” (emphasis added throughout).

Why would this be? Isaiah 24:5 explains that it’s “because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.” God’s way of life has been spurned by all nations, with horrendous consequences for our world as a whole. To understand much more, download or request our free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*.)

China enters the Caribbean

Older Americans well remember the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 when the Soviet Union tried to establish a nuclear military base in America’s own backyard. President John Kennedy brought the country through that ominous threat to world peace without a shot being fired. Now an emergent China has chosen *economic strategy* as a potential threat to American dominance in the Caribbean.

The *Financial Times* recently published a major analysis describing China’s inroads into the West Indies titled “Caribbean in Crisis: Chequebook Diplomacy.” The blurb beneath the headline reads, “With the US becoming an absentee superpower in the region, the Chinese are moving in”—the article pointing out that China is underpinning its overtures with infrastructure investments (Robin Wigglesworth, Dec. 17, 2013).



The analysis points out that signs of China’s presence are everywhere. More disturbing is the sentiment voiced by a prominent Chinese official: “*In entering the Caribbean, China doesn’t really care about the US’s feelings, it mainly cares about how the countries there see us,*” says Wang Peng, secretary-general of the Central America and Caribbean Research Centre at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a government think tank” (ibid.).

Regional politicians have eagerly welcomed these Chinese incursions, as they perceive America becoming an absentee superpower preoccupied by domestic interests and only certain foreign involvements elsewhere. The Chinese president has apparently promised a \$3 billion investment in the region.

In 2001 President George W. Bush declared the Caribbean area America’s “third border.” He reapplied the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 to the region, reaffirming American hegemony here. The *Financial Times* analysis concluded with a quote from Cheng Li, a senior official at the Brookings Institution, a prominent American think tank: “The US should pay more attention to China in the Caribbean, even if it is only at an early stage.” (Source: *Financial Times*.)

Revising Holocaust history

As reported by the Associated Press, Holocaust survivor and historian Randolph Braham stated Jan. 26, 2014, that he was “returning a high state award to Hungary to protest what he says are government efforts to rewrite history and exonerate the country from its role in the Holocaust” (Pablo Gorondi, “Holocaust Historian Returning Award to Hungary.”)

He said the straw that broke the camel's back was the government's plan to erect a memorial commemorating the March 1944 Nazi invasion of Hungary.



Jewish prisoners in Budapest, Hungary, in 1944.

While Hungary under the regime of autocrat Miklos Horthy was on Germany's side during World War II, Hitler suspected he was going to strike a peace deal with the Allied forces and ordered the invasion.

“Braham said the memorial was ‘a cowardly attempt to detract attention from the Horthy regime's involvement in the destruction of the Jews and to homogenize the Holocaust with the “suffering” of the Hungarians—[under] a German occupation [that], as the record clearly shows, was not only unopposed but generally applauded’” (ibid.).

This comes a few years after Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel returned a state award to Hungary in 2011 because top Hungarian officials honored a writer who was a Nazi sympathizer and “because ‘Horthy, who sent 500,000 Jews to Auschwitz in 1944, is becoming a heroic figure again in his country’” (ibid.).

Hungary's forgetfulness of its past participation in the Holocaust is disturbing—as is the rise of outright Holocaust denial around the world. Your Bible reveals that a revival of the ancient Holy Roman Empire is about to emerge, rising from the ashes through the modern European Union. And sadly, we will again see something like the Holocaust in a time the Bible calls the Great Tribulation.

But Jesus Christ will return to destroy the imperial revival along with others who oppose Him and to bring peace and salvation to the world at large. See our free publications *The Final Superpower* and *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* to learn more. (Source: Associated Press.)

Israel: A nation in dire peril

The year 1948 saw the birth of the modern state of Israel, transforming a significant portion of the Jewish people from a scattered nation (a *diaspora* or dispersion) into a nation-state with real sovereignty. For nearly 2,000 years the Jews had no permanent liberties and no kingdom they could call their own. Again, 1948 changed this, but there were many wars and political trials to come in maintaining this gain. And now in 2014, the Israeli state still faces both external and internal threats to its very existence.

Israel's economic miracle must be balanced against a number of negative factors. Begin with the religious animosity of many of the world's Muslims. Also this tiny country remains surrounded by hostile Arab states with a combined population of some 370 million. And then, too, many Palestinians think of Israel as an alien interloper that has no place in “Palestine.”

Israel's relationship with its longtime protector, the United States, has encountered some rocky shoals. The Israeli leadership is far from assured that Washington will stand by Jerusalem should the tiny nation encounter a time of severe crisis. The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu remains extremely skeptical of the ongoing U.S. nuclear negotiations with Iran.

Some observers even think that the deal with

Iran will drive Israel into an informal entente with Saudi Arabia. The latter might agree to this as part of the great divide in Islam between the majority Sunni branch and the minority Shiite branch concentrated in Iran and Iraq. Noted foreign policy professor Walter Russell Mead commented on the matter in *The Wall Street Journal*:

“Riyadh and Jerusalem have common interests that are not limited to preventing Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The Saudis believe Iran is leading Shiites in a religious conflict with Sunnis now engulfing the Fertile Crescent. They fear that the [Iranian] Islamic Republic, nuclear or not, poses an existential threat to their security as the Shiite tide rises . . .

“Israel is . . . concerned about . . . the prospect of a Hezbollah-Tehran-Syria axis along its northern frontier . . . Both countries think that a naive Mr. Obama's unicorn hunt for nuclear disarmament is leading him to sacrifice vital geopolitical interests in the hope of what will turn out to be a very bad nuclear deal with Iran” (“A Riyadh-Jerusalem Entente,” Dec. 6, 2013).

Our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* shows that the establishment of the state of Israel is one of the key prophetic benchmarks for the fulfillment of end-time prophecy. (Sources: *The Wall Street Journal*, author Ari Shavit.)

Symptoms of America's cultural darkness

An incisive article late last year by longtime nationally syndicated American columnist Cal Thomas caught our attention—titled “Signs of National Decline are Everywhere This Holiday Season” in the *Washington Examiner* (Dec. 2, 2013) and, at FoxNews.com, “A Prescription for Decline—Worshipping the False Gods of Prosperity and Money” (Dec. 3).

In one sentence each, Thomas briefly highlights a number of incidents of public violence around America. He then sums up their significance, stating, “In the era of flash mobs and a growing entitlement mentality fueled by politicians and ‘income inequality’ alarmists, these far-too-frequent instances now seem to be symptomatic of a decaying culture.” He sees failure to instill traditional values that have well served previous generations is a big factor in America's cultural decline.

He further observes: “People and nations must

be ruled by something, or there is anarchy. Either it is God, or secular laws that control our lower nature. Today, we are out of control as we pursue happiness through prosperity in the false hope that money and things will satisfy . . . As the ancient writer said, ‘Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.’ (Ecclesiastes 5:10) Who today is satisfied with their income and circumstances?”

This unusual column highlighted Americans' often reckless spending on Black Friday, the day after the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday that commonly marks the beginning of the Christmas shopping season. Thomas likened it to what King David wrote in Psalm 12:8: “The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men.”

Today far too many call evil good and good evil (see Isaiah 5:20). Living a balanced, godly life helps counter these growing blots on American life. To begin living a spiritually abundant life yourself (John 10:10), download or request our free booklet *Making Life Work*. (Sources: FoxNews.com, *Washington Examiner*.)

How can you make sense of the news?

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



Three Days and Three Nights Did Jesus Keep His Word?

Jesus foretold the length of time He would be in the grave as a sign that He was the Messiah. But that time simply doesn't fit between a supposed Good Friday crucifixion and burial and an Easter Sunday resurrection. What does the Bible actually tell us?

by Beyond Today host Steve Myers

Easter Sunday is the most attended church service of the year. People believe it celebrates Jesus' resurrection. But did you realize there's a major contradiction in the Easter story?

Most believe that Jesus was crucified and placed in the tomb on a Friday afternoon—and then raised back to life on Easter Sunday. But when you compare that to what Jesus Christ Himself said, you'll find there's a major discrepancy, as we'll see.

This is important to understand. Grasping the facts may transform your perspective and even lead you to no longer observe the Easter holiday. Yet it should actually enhance your faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and bring you to truly honor that as God desires.

This major discrepancy between religion and the Bible, between Christianity and Christ, over Jesus' resurrection is a *very serious matter*.

What does the Bible actually say about how long Jesus would be in the tomb? Does Scripture itself give contradictory information? Could identifying and understanding the discrepancy affect what you believe and even impact your eternal life?

A sign recalling a great fish

Did you know that people demanded a miraculous sign from Jesus to prove He truly was the Messiah? They wouldn't trust He was Savior without proof: "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, Teacher, we desire to see a sign or miracle

from You [proving that You are what You claim to be]" (Matthew 12:38, Amplified Bible, brackets in original).

Jesus told them there would be one proof for them—one miraculous sign. What would verify that Jesus was the Christ, the true Messiah, God in the flesh?

"Jesus answered, 'Evil and sinful people are the ones who want to see a miracle for a sign. But no sign will be given to them, except *the sign of the prophet Jonah*'" (verse 39, New Century Version, emphasis added throughout).

What was the sign of Jonah? Jesus goes on to explain: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, *so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (verse 40).

That was the sign—the *one and only proof* that Jesus gave to show them He was the promised Savior. But there's a dilemma—a clash between what He said and what most Christians believe and practice. Again, Jesus said, quoting a different translation: "Jonah was in the stomach of the big fish for three days and three nights. In the same way, the Son of Man will be in the grave three days and three nights" (verse 40, NCV).

That seems pretty straightforward, doesn't it? But here's the problem: How does a Good Friday crucifixion and an Easter Sunday resurrection match with what Jesus said is the one proof that's He's the Savior? *This traditional view would place*

Jesus in the grave for only a day and a half—not three days and three nights.

Counting conundrum from Friday to Sunday

The Bible is clear. After Jesus died, His body was quickly placed in the tomb late in the day, just before sundown when a Sabbath began (as all biblical days are counted from sunset to sunset—see Genesis 1:5, 8, 13; Leviticus 23:32).

Notice John 19: "Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken [to cause death quickly], and that they might be taken away . . . But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs" (verses 31, 33).

Soon after, His body was taken down and placed in a tomb close to where He was crucified: "So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby" (verse 42).

Did you catch the apparent contradiction in the story?

It's based on the Preparation Day being the day before a Sabbath—and the weekly Sabbath always falling from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. Thus many believe Jesus to have been crucified and buried on a Friday—often called Good Friday.

Consider now Jesus' sign of three days and three nights in the grave before being resurrected. If He was in the grave on Friday night, that's *one night*. And then the daylight part of Saturday is *one day*. Then Saturday night is *two nights*. And then Sunday morning He was supposed to be resurrected, which would seem to total *two days and two nights*. So it doesn't add up!

All we have to do to see the problem is count correctly. Add the days and nights between a late-afternoon Good Friday burial to an Easter Sunday morning resur-



rection, and it doesn't compute. For Jesus said the proof that He was the Messiah was that He would be in the tomb *three days and three nights*.

Something's obviously wrong with the traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday timing. It simply doesn't work, no matter how you try. But if these days don't add up scripturally, *then we don't have a Savior*.

Reinterpreting as parts of days still doesn't work

Most theologians, religious scholars, pastors and priests know this is a problem. What do they do about it? Most try to work around the conflict by arguing that *any part* of a day or night could count as a full day or night.

The next step is then typically to argue that the final few minutes of Friday afternoon were the first day, Friday night was the first night, all day Saturday was the second day, Saturday night was the second night and then the first few minutes of Sunday morning were the third day.

That might sound reasonable, but wait. *It still doesn't work*. This adds up to three days and *only two nights*, not three days and *three nights* like Jesus said.

There's another problem, too. John 20 tells us that "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 away from the tomb" (verse 1).

Did you catch it? The Bible says *it was still dark* when Mary went to the tomb on Sunday morning and found it empty. Jesus was *already resurrected well before day-break*. Therefore, He wasn't in the tomb for *any* of the daylight portion of Sunday, so none of that can be counted as a day.

That leaves us with, at the very most, part of a day on Friday, all of Friday night, a whole daylight portion on Saturday, and most of Saturday night. That totals one full day and part of another, and one full night and most of another—which is still *at least a full day and a full night short* of the time Jesus said He would be in the tomb. Once again, it doesn't add up!

What the Bible actually reveals

We know we can't fit three days and three nights between a Friday afternoon crucifixion and Easter Sunday. So what is the truth? When was Jesus crucified and resurrected?

Here are the facts from your Bible: Jesus was actually crucified on a *Wednesday* and

was resurrected near the end of *Saturday, the weekly Sabbath*. You can verify this, but it's going to take an open mind and an open Bible.

Now let's note something surprising: The week in which Jesus was crucified actually had *two* Sabbaths in it. Remember John 19:31? It tells us, "Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a *high day*)."

Again, most think this is talking about the regular weekly Sabbath day, observed from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, which is why most assume Jesus died and was buried on a Friday. But that's not accurate.

The Bible refers to *two kinds* of Sabbath days—the normal weekly Sabbath day, which falls on the seventh day of the week, and seven *annual* Sabbath days, which each come once a year and can fall on *any* day of the week (all listed in Leviticus 23).

The Sabbath that began at sundown immediately after Jesus was entombed was one of these *annual* Sabbath days. The day before wasn't a Friday at all. As we just saw noted in John 19:31, John tells us "that Sabbath was a *high day*." That's a term used to show the difference between the seven annual Sabbaths—high days—and the regular weekly Sabbath day.

So what was this "high day" that came at sunset right after Jesus was buried?

Jesus kept the annual Passover with His disciples (Matthew 26:18; Luke 22:52), then was arrested later that night. The next morning, still the Passover day, He was crucified. After dying around 3 p.m., He was later placed in the tomb before the day ended, just as the sun was setting to begin the "high day." That high Sabbath day had to be the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately follows the Passover. You can read about it yourself in Leviticus 23:5-7.

The annual first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread that year was observed from Wednesday sunset until Thursday sunset. Then from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset the normal weekly Sabbath was observed.

So let's see if the math works out:

- Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset is *one day and one night*.
- Adding Thursday sunset to Friday sunset makes *two days and two nights*.
- Then adding Friday sunset to Saturday sunset makes *three days and three nights*.
- It does add up!

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Jesus Christ was in the grave three days and three nights—just as He said. He came back to life at the exact time He foretold He would. The angel at the empty tomb confirmed it: “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; *he has risen, just as he said*” (Matthew 28:5-6, New International Version).

Does it matter—what’s at stake?

Biblical evidence reveals that the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition just doesn’t figure. To claim that it’s valid and that Jesus’ statement about three days and three nights is *not* valid amounts to a denial of Christ. If we don’t believe what Jesus said, or if we try to give it our own interpretation that doesn’t agree with what He said, isn’t that exactly what we’re doing? We’d be saying that Jesus didn’t know what He was talking about—that the only sign He said would prove He was the Messiah was either a mistake or a lie.

Sadly, many erroneously believe that the weekly day of worship was changed for Christians from the Saturday Sabbath to Sunday because Jesus was resurrected on

Sunday. But He was not, as we’ve seen, and the change in worship day was more about conforming to pagan practices and gnostic ideas. God tells us to come out of this false worship system (Revelation 18:4).

We hope you’ll take a look at the details recorded in the Bible and compare your practice with Jesus’ own words. Our worship must be based on truth. Jesus said that “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23).

So should this change your life? Should it change the way you worship? Don’t you want to worship God in the way He appreciates—the correct way? Then it really *does* matter. You don’t want to be like those Christ described as practicing a useless or vain way of worship (Matthew 15:8).

Isn’t it time to be sure that what you believe and practice is based in the Word of God? Make the commitment to worship God according to biblical truth rather than human tradition!

You’ll need to take the time to look into the Holy Bible and really get to know the

true God. Honor Him the way *He wants to be honored*, not through the traditions of manmade holidays like Easter and weekly Sunday observance.

Instead, worship Him on *His* days—the weekly and annual Sabbaths *He* instituted. Check out the Holy Days of God, the true biblical days of worship, and truly follow Christ. Read your Bible and discover them for yourself! **GN**

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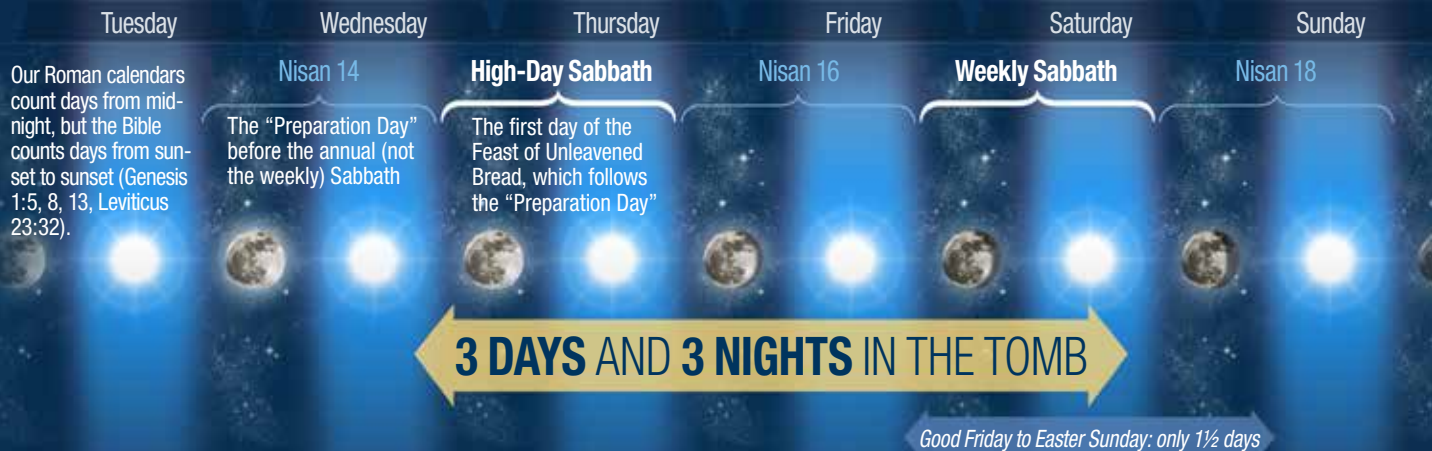


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The Biblical Chronology of Jesus Christ's Burial and Resurrection



Tuesday evening:

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

Wednesday:

Jesus was crucified around 9 a.m. and died around 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50). This was the preparation day for the annual—not weekly—Sabbath, which began at sunset (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). Jesus’ body was placed in the tomb just before sunset (Matthew 27:57-60).

Thursday:

This was the high-day Sabbath, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:4-7). It is the day after the “Day of Preparation” (Matthew 27:62). Wednesday night and the daylight portion of Thursday were the first of three days and nights Jesus’ body was in the tomb.

Friday:

After the high-day Sabbath, the women bought and prepared spices for anointing Jesus’ body before resting on the weekly Sabbath day, which began at sunset (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56). Thursday night and the daylight portion of Friday marked the second of the three days and nights.

Saturday:

The women rested on the weekly Sabbath day, according to the Fourth Commandment (Luke 23:56; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus rose late that afternoon, three days and three nights after His death and burial in the tomb, fulfilling the sign of Jonah and authenticating the sign He gave of His messiahship.

Sunday:

The women brought the spices early in the morning while it was still dark (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Jesus had already risen (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:2-3; John 20:1). He did not rise on Sunday morning, but in the afternoon the day before—three days and three nights after His burial in the tomb.

Something Better Than Easter

Exactly how did Easter—a holiday not found in the Bible and never celebrated in the early Church—come to replace the Passover, an observance that is plainly found in the Bible? *by Mario Seiglie*

How did Easter become the popular holiday it is today? Have you ever looked into it?

Isn't it important to know the truth of the matter? Jesus Christ Himself said that the truth would make us free (John 8:32). He was speaking of being free of wrong ideas that mislead, entrap and enslave us.

If we look back in history, one key date regarding Easter is the year A.D. 325. At that time, the Roman emperor Constantine held an assembly with some 250 bishops at Nicaea, a town in what is now northwestern Turkey, close to present-day Istanbul. This meeting is known in history as the Council of Nicaea.

What does this Council have to do with Easter? It actually set the stage for the

(Other languages still call it Passover of the Resurrection, which can cause some confusion. Some English sources refer to the true Christian Passover, a memorial of Christ's death, as Easter, but this is clearly a misnomer, as we'll see.).

The dispute over this matter in the early Christian centuries is known in history as the Paschal Controversy. Regrettably, we virtually have only one side of the story.

James Carroll, writing about the Nicene Council in his book *Constantine's Sword*, explains the Roman emperor's motives: "Immediately upon coming to power as the sole ruler of the empire [A.D. 324], but only then, Constantine asserted the right to exercise *absolute authority over the entire*

practice of this people, we should perpetuate to all future ages *the celebration of this rite* in a more legitimate order . . . *Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews.*

"We have received another method from the Savior. A more lawful and proper course is open to our most holy religion . . . *Let us withdraw ourselves, my much honored brethren, from that most odious fellowship*" (quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, "Council of Nice," 1974, p. 52).

At first glance, it appears Constantine was attacking only Jews of the Jewish faith, but notice what Mal and Donna Broadhurst insightfully point out: "The fact that Christianity *never* had religious fellowship with *non-Christian Jews* means the Jews referred to were *the Christian Jews*. The reference to Jews instructing Christians how to observe the Christian Passover feast *could only be applicable to Christian Jews*, as non-Christian Jews did *not* tell Christians how to observe the Passover. The fellowship from which Constantine wanted the Church to withdraw was *fellowship with Christian Jews*" (*Passover Before Messiah and After*, 1987, p. 147).

In fact, the leaders of Jewish Christianity, the successors of the group who had held the prevailing beliefs for the first century after the Church was founded, were either not invited to this Council or knew better and did not appear.

As the Broadhursts point out: "Constantine apparently began his plan to unify the church by simply not inviting any [Christian] Jewish representatives to the Council. (It is possible Jewish church leaders were invited and refused to come, but other facts about the Council lead to the former conclusion.) The lists of those present at the Council shows them all to have had Greek names. None of those present had characteristic Jewish names. The Palestinian delegates were from the coastal cities where mainly Gentiles lived. It is known that there were Jewish bishops in Palestine at the time" (p. 146).

The sword drawn against "Fourteeners"

As emperor, Constantine tolerated no

The Council of Nicaea set the stage for *the removal of God's biblical feasts* and the establishing of alternative feasts not found in the Bible, including Easter.

removal of God's biblical feasts and the establishing of alternative feasts not found in the Bible, including Easter. Yet the Bible reveals what our practice ought to be.

Constantine and the Nicene Council reject biblical practices

At the Council of Nicaea, under the dominating eye of Constantine, the majority of the bishops backed replacing the biblical and Christian observance of Passover with the celebration of Easter, among other issues.

Actually, it should be understood that while they called the new celebration of Jesus' resurrection *Pascha* or Passover, it was certainly not the Passover of Scripture, but a religious celebration derived from pagan origins. Later it would become known as "Easter," the Germanic name for this festival and what it is commonly called today.

Church. He did this despite the fact that *he was not baptized*, and, as was not unusual, would not be until shortly before he died" (2001, p. 188, emphasis added throughout).

After this Council, Constantine wrote a blatantly anti-Semitic letter to the churches in the Roman Empire letting them know his thoughts about the Easter-Passover controversy.

Here is part of what he wrote as to the rationale for Christians to abandon the biblical feast of Passover, which the Jewish people had long observed in fulfillment of God's commands: "And truly, in the first place, it seemed to everyone *a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews* in the celebration of this most holy solemnity, who, *polluted wretches!*, having stained their hands with a nefarious crime, are justly blinded in their minds. "It is fit, therefore, that, *rejecting the*



dissent. So he soon drew his sword against those not following his wishes in not conforming to the teachings of the Catholic, or universal, church. The historian Robin Lane Fox notes: “At Nicaea, the Emperor himself imposed criminal sentences of exile on the bishops who refused to sign. He also investigated other reports of heresy” (*Pagans and Christians*, 1986, p. 656).

Eventually, those bishops who did not agree with the decisions made in Nicaea were exiled and their works banned. A vicious persecution against Christian Jews and others branded as heretics began. So the Catholic Church, which previously had been persecuted, became the chief persecutor of those who chose to obey the commands of the Bible rather than the commands of a deeply compromised church.

“The Paschal Controversy was ‘settled’ at the Council of Nicaea—not theologically, but politically,” the Broadhursts further explain. “It was settled by eliminating one of the viewpoints. Church law had been laid down. No longer could any Christians celebrate [the] Christian Passover the way [the apostle] John, Philip and other [Christian] Jews had celebrated it. All were required to celebrate on the Sunday following the 14th [of the Hebrew first month of Nisan]. Once respected ‘Quartodecimans’ [‘Fourteeners’] who persisted in the belief handed down to them from the Apostles, would henceforth be called heretics” (p. 148).

What was the result of this Council? Historian Jesse Hurlbut candidly describes the consequences: “But while the triumph of Christianity resulted in much that was good, inevitably the alliance of the church and state also brought in its train many evils. The ceasing of persecution was a blessing, but the establishment of Christianity as the state religion became a curse.

“Everyone sought membership in the church, and nearly everybody was accepted . . . The forms and ceremonies of paganism gradually crept into the worship. Some of the old heathen feasts became church festivals with change of name and of worship . . . As a result of the church sitting in power, we do not see Christianity transforming the world to its ideal, but the world dominating the church” (*A History of the Christian Church*, 1918, pp. 78-79).

A.D. 325 as the beginning of the Dark Ages

So the year 325 is crucial in the outcome of what traditional Christianity has become.

“As far as [the] Christian Passover is concerned,” the Broadhursts conclude, “the

beginning of the Dark Ages can be set at 325 A.D. with the Council of Nicaea. Along with turning their backs on [Christian] Jews, the Gentiles turned their backs on the Jewish Scriptures [the Old Testament].

“They disallowed Jewish input to their faith, lifestyle, and worship . . . It took a major reformation centuries later [in the 1500s] to begin to undo the horror and destruction the church brought on the world when the Gentiles at Nicaea formally adopted the policy of ‘having nothing in common with the Jews’” (p. 149).

A few years later, in 332, Constantine again sternly rebuked those who opposed Catholic teachings with this warning and threat: “Forasmuch, then, as it is no longer possible to bear with your pernicious errors, we give warning by this present statute that none of you henceforth presume to assemble yourselves together.

“We have directed, accordingly, that you be deprived of all the houses in which you are accustomed to hold your assemblies: and [we] forbid the holding of your superstitious and senseless meetings, not in public merely, but in any private house or place whatsoever.

“Let those of you, therefore, who are desirous of embracing the true and pure religion, take the far better course of entering the catholic Church, and uniting with it in holy fellowship, whereby you will be enabled to arrive at the knowledge of the truth” (quoted by Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, sect. 3, chap. 65).

A bloodbath eventually occurred. Those who did not conform to the Church of Rome, now united with the powerful Roman Empire, suffered implacable persecution. Regarding the aftermath of the Council of Nicaea, famed historian Will Durant stated, “Probably more Christians were slaughtered by Christians in these two years (342-3) than by all the persecutions of Christians by pagans in the history of Rome” (*The Story of Civilization, Vol. 4: The Age of Faith*, 1950, p. 8).

The Roman calendar adopted by the Roman Church

Due to the decisions of the Nicene Council, the pagan Roman calendar was adopted instead of the Jewish calendar to determine the dates of what were now deemed to be Christian festivals. Those who continued keeping the true Christian Passover as handed down from the apostles had to go into hiding, for they were targeted along with other “heretics” by the church under

Constantine and his successors.

Church historian Henry Chadwick points out about the Easter controversy: “Victor of Rome’s intervention [referring to the earlier Roman bishop Victor’s ruling to observe Easter instead of the Christian Passover or be excommunicated] turned out to be successful in the sense that his view was eventually to prevail. But it was a long time before those who kept Easter [i.e., the true Passover, it being misnamed here] on the fourteenth day (nicknamed Quartodecimans) died out.

“The group still existed in the ninth century despite the vigor with which church councils deplored them. It was impossible in so weighty a practical question for diversity to be allowed, but there can be little doubt that the Quartodecimans were right in thinking that they had preserved the most ancient and apostolic custom. They had become heretics simply by being behind the times” (*The Early Church*, 1967, p. 85).

So from approximately 325 to 1585, a period of 1,260 years, Christians who continued to follow the Bible’s instruction about Passover had to flee and hide from the vicious church and state persecutions during those ensuing centuries.

The curtain finally rises on the period of religious persecution

It was only during the time of Elizabethan England that a measure of religious tolerance was granted and the inheritors of the legacy of those early Jewish and gentile Christians, who followed the original practices of Jesus and the apostles, could finally emerge.

In 1585, England and Spain went to war, mainly over the attempt of Spain to militarily impose the Catholic faith on England. Spain lost the war, and also its famed Spanish Armada, so England was free to continue its religious tolerance—which eventually spread to its colonies abroad, including what became the United States and Canada.

Interestingly, there is a prophecy in the Bible which describes how the Church, symbolized by a woman, would have to flee and hide in safety for 1,260 days (Revelation 12:1-6). According to Scripture, a “day” in a prophetic context can represent a year (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). So this period mentioned in Revelation 12 could well refer to the Church having to flee from the vicious persecutions during those terrible 1,260 years—until those dark ages ended and a new era of religious tolerance began.

In large part thanks to what happened then, we enjoy those same freedoms of wor-

ship in advanced nations of the world today.

The returning Christ will lead the world to keep God's festivals

Let's move forward to the 21st century. From what we have read, dare we ask if there is something better and more biblical to observe than Easter?

To answer this, just imagine in your mind



Bust of Constantine in the Vatican Museum.

LORD strikes the nations *who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles*. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations *that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles*.”

Yet that is not the only festival all will be required to observe. Jesus will command all to celebrate God's weekly Sabbath and all His appointed annual feasts, and those who don't will be sternly disciplined. At last, all the nations will accept His rule and will observe His teachings. Then there will finally be joy, peace and harmony on the earth.

Included then among the required festival observances will be *not* Easter, but the true Christian Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread immediately following.

What Easter replaced—the Christian Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread

Shortly before His death, Jesus prophesied to His disciples what feast He would keep when He returned. Again, it was not the manmade counterfeit Easter. Rather, He said, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this *Passover* with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it *until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God*” (Luke 22:15-16). Clearly, one of the festivals Christ will again celebrate when He establishes His

since the seven annual feasts of God are grouped together as a unit in Leviticus 23, this decree would also affect the keeping of the other listed feasts as well.

This substitution of manmade feasts for the feasts of the Bible should not be taken lightly. It was prophesied centuries earlier in the book Daniel that such change would eventually be attempted, when a future haughty ruler would try to change the biblical dates and laws. (And considering that much of Bible prophecy is dual, these changes may be a forerunner of similar changes to occur during the end times.)

Speaking of this development, God had foretold in Daniel 7:25: “He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to *change times and law*”—dates on the calendar and biblical festivals, among other vile revisions. Remember, only the Bible, as the inspired Word of God, should determine which days are God's Holy Days and when they are to be kept—instead of looking to manmade traditions.

So yes, there is something available that is far better and more satisfying than Easter, and that is the Christian Passover, which was celebrated by the apostles of Jesus and the early Church. And although it was largely stamped out after the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, God's faithful people continued to celebrate this deeply meaningful biblical festival in spite of the threat of persecution and even death.

We can look forward to the day when Jesus Christ returns and restores all the genuine Christian feasts that were changed by deceived and deluded men in the distant past. The good news is that we can *now* celebrate all *His* feasts and rejoice in them every year—having wonderful fellowship and, as Jesus foretold in John 4:23-24, truly worshipping God in spirit and truth. **GN**

As emperor, Constantine tolerated no dissent. So he drew his sword against those not following his wishes in not conforming to the teachings of the Catholic, or universal, church.

the following scene: Jesus Christ has finally returned to rule on the earth, just as He had promised (Matthew 24:30).

And note what will happen, as foretold in Zechariah 14:3-19: “Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east . . . And the LORD shall be King over all the earth . . .

“And it shall come to pass that *everyone who is left of all the nations* which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to *keep the Feast of Tabernacles* [one of God's annual festivals, listed in Leviticus 23]. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, *on them there will be no rain*.

“If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive *the plague* with which the

Kingdom is the Christian Passover!

Similarly, the apostle Paul reminded Church members in Corinth to keep the Christian Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed it. He wrote: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed *Christ, our Passover*, was sacrificed for us. Therefore *let us keep the feast*, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

These true feasts of God were banished from the mainstream Christian calendar when the Council of Nicaea ruled that people were not to follow biblical instruction with regard to the feasts, but rather to eventually set up a different reckoning of time. As we have seen, the Nicene Council targeted the first of the annual biblical feasts—the Christian Passover—and there they chose instead Easter Sunday. Logically,

Learn More

The story of how the Holy Days and festivals of the Bible were abandoned and replaced by manmade pagan holidays long predating Christianity is one of history's most amazing and little-understood stories. You need to know the truth! Download or request your free copy of *Holidays of Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*



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Jesus Christ's Resurrection: Our Hope of Life

What is the real significance of Jesus Christ's resurrection from the grave? What does it mean for you? *by Darris McNeely*

Two men ran through the streets of the city, trying to see if it was true. Over the final sprint one outran the other and arrived on the scene first. Stopping, he stooped down and looked into the space and noticed the linen cloths that had once wrapped a body. Astounded, he didn't immediately enter.

His friend, not hesitating, tucked his head and went inside. He also saw the same linen cloths, with a separate piece lying nearby. He too was stunned.

Then the other joined him inside. Staring at the empty, rock-carved room, they came to realize something beyond human belief had occurred.

These two men, Peter and John, were standing in the empty tomb where a little more than three days and nights earlier the dead body of their Master and Teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, had been placed (see John 20:1-10).

They had come to an empty tomb and, on soon discovering what this meant, their lives were transformed. Jesus was not there. He had risen from the dead. *Everything had changed.*

A defining teaching

Have you looked into that tomb and considered what it means? Have you seen that Christ is indeed risen from the dead? Have you allowed your life and your thinking to be transformed by this event?

Jesus Christ's resurrection is a defining teaching of the Bible. So let's examine it directly from Scripture, without traditions that were added later.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ formed a central part of the announcement that the apostles took to the world. Peter stated in his first recorded sermon:

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you

yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it . . .

"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:22-36).

Over the next 40 days some of these men and women personally saw the resurrected Christ and heard His teaching about the Kingdom of God. They saw and accepted this as a fact that confirmed their faith and enabled them to take the gospel to the peoples of their day.

Their testimony, written in the book of Acts and the

day according to the Scriptures . . . Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 12).

Did it really happen?

The chief priests and Pharisees went to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate to request security guards at the tomb so that Jesus' disciples would not come and steal the body to claim He had been resurrected. They remembered that Jesus said He would be raised after three days and nights in



The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a defining teaching in the Bible. Have you looked into that empty tomb and considered what it means for your thinking and your life?

epistles of Paul, is firsthand evidence—eyewitness testimony of Christ's resurrection.

The apostle Paul showed that the resurrection is central to the Christian hope: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third

day. Pilate gave them a guard detail, and the stone that had been placed in front of the tomb entrance was shut with a seal (Matthew 27:62-66). The authorities knew this, both Roman and Jewish. Precautions were taken.

Matthew's account goes into detail to show there were eyewitnesses to an earth-

Where Does Easter Fit Into the Picture?



I am a Christian, but I do not celebrate Easter. Yes, I know that this holiday traditionally commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And I certainly know that the resurrection defines the Christian faith. But Easter Sunday traditions like colored eggs, bunnies and parades obscure the rich meaning of this event. Regrettably, many observe Easter Sunday without really understanding the actual timing and full truth of Christ's resurrection.

Many others do not believe Jesus was divine or that He was even resurrected from the dead. Perhaps you feel the same way or may be confused about this vital subject.

Many observe Easter without really considering what they are trying to commemorate. And that's understandable, because Easter hides the vital truth about Christ's resurrection and its deepest meaning.

It's time for you to consider whether Christ really rose from the dead. If He did not rise, then Christianity is a pious fraud. If He did, then it makes all the difference in the world.

We encourage you to delve deeper into this subject. The Good Friday and Easter Sunday traditions do not hold up to the light of Scripture. Jesus Christ was not killed on a Friday, and by the time the disciples came to the tomb on Sunday morning He was already resurrected—at the end of the previous day around sunset. (Be sure to read "Three Days and Three Nights: Did Jesus Keep His Word?" beginning on page 16.)

If you'd like to learn more about the real origins of Easter, download or request our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* You need to learn the truth about this popular holiday!

quake and that an angel had rolled back the stone covering the tomb entrance. The guards shook with fear to the point of being frozen into inaction (Matthew 28:2-4).

These same guards—and keep in mind they were not Christ's disciples—went and reported what had happened, what they saw with their own eyes, to the authorities. They were bribed by the officials to keep quiet. This was a commonly known fact among the Jews for many years (verses 11-15).

People *knew* about the resurrection of Jesus. There were multiple eyewitnesses.

Paul reported that the risen Christ was seen by all the apostles and that He was also seen by more than 500 others (1 Corinthians 15:5-8)—these in turn having given eyewitness testimony to thousands!

The point is that this was not done in a corner, covered up and then dragged out to dress up an effort to create a new sect the disciples wanted to start.

Think about this. These unlearned fishermen, tax collectors and women were the least likely of people to start a new religious

return in all power and glory.

This is the most important of matters in this life for you and me to resolve!

The empty tomb

Faith for me is a lifetime project. It began in my youth. I had an unusual opportunity to think deeply about this while in Jerusalem for a summer of work and study, walking over the same land where Jesus lived and taught.

There is a site in Jerusalem called the Garden Tomb. Years ago some proposed it as the tomb where Jesus was laid after His death. Further study has proven this to not be the case. Nevertheless, it does give an idea of what a rolling-stone tomb of the first century A.D. looked like—and it sits in a beautiful garden setting, as Christ's tomb did. Today you can visit that empty tomb in Jerusalem and get a good idea of what the disciples saw.

I used to walk down to this site and sit for a time thinking about the impact of the resurrection. In a rock-cut tomb like this you

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.”

movement—especially one built on the story of a man who had been crucified as a criminal and then raised from the dead!

Paul makes the case to the Christians in Corinth that they have a Savior and a hope of salvation. He wanted there to be no doubt in their mind of this truth. For you and I there can be no doubt as well. Paul goes on to show the implications of a faith without a resurrected Savior:

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty . . . And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (verses 13-19).

Either Jesus Christ rose from the dead or He didn't. This is a deep issue of faith for a believer. Our modern world is geared to rip from our mind and heart any belief in God or that Jesus of Nazareth was the divine Son of God, sent to earth, born of a virgin, who died and was resurrected to life eternal and sits today at the right hand of God the Father, waiting for the time to

can imagine all the events described by the Gospel writers.

Christ's body was carried in and laid on a rock-cut bench inside the tomb. Oils and special herbs would be applied to the body, which was then wrapped in linen cloth. The round stone was then rolled across the entrance, sealing the room in darkness.

Three days and nights passed in silence and darkness. And then a flash of light penetrated the dark, and life returned to the body—not the same physical life but a spirit life beyond what any human being had ever experienced. The fullness of God energized the lifeless form, and it was transformed into spiritual glory. Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, and mankind had a Savior!

Without a resurrection, Christianity is nothing more than a human philosophy on par with all other creeds and teachings. With the resurrection, nothing else matters more than this central fact and truth. With it everything becomes possible.

Symbolism in His last meal before dying and the festival that followed

On the final evening before His death, Jesus had a meal with the disciples. Commonly



A New Life Leading to Eternal Life

Sin is why God sent His Son to die for us. But because He lives again, we also can experience a very different new life! Notice Paul's words from Romans 6: "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death [as baptism symbolizes our old sinful self being put to death when we repent and accept Christ's atoning death]? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so *we also should walk in newness of life.*"

"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His resurrection*, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin . . . For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; *but the life that He lives, He lives to God.* Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but *alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 6:3-6, 10, emphasis added).

Here Paul gives us a vision of how we are to live once we have repented of living contrary to the spiritual laws of God and made a choice to obey Him and turn from a path and a culture of death to one that puts us squarely on the road to eternal life. To begin this life, this journey, is to begin to live as we have never lived previously. It is a new life, "*alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

This new life is about Christ in us by the power of God's Holy Spirit. It's about a different approach and attitude toward life than we would have without this help. It's about a choice we make to become free from sin and its consequences.

It's about turning over our power for His power in us to overcome, to do His will. It's about deciding to stop the destructive behavior of addictions to whatever may currently enslave us. It's about deciding to forgive others and letting go of past hurts and moving on in life. It's about deciding to avoid the

people, places, attitudes and temptations that keep us in the holes of life.

It's about asking the Power that created the universe to come into our life and give us the strength and courage to be transformed. Not to change a little bit; that's not what transformed means. But to become new, *a new creation* in Christ. Think about what God is proposing here—for you to *become new*. How incredible is that?

Eternal life for all mankind is possible not only because Jesus died, but because God raised Him from the dead and placed Him at His right hand, for through His resurrection and *life* He is our hope of salvation.

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

This new life is about turning over our power for His power in us to overcome, to do His will, and forgive others and let go of past hurts.

That's a powerful scripture. It brings home that He is our Savior. We're to die to our old selves, our old way of life, and become like Jesus Christ. That's the reality Paul describes here. The reality of the resurrection for me is that *Christ lives in me*, as He does in all who have truly received Him as Savior—and *He can live in you too.*

That's what Paul was saying. The life I live, I live by faith or the faith of Christ within me. That's a hugely powerful concept. Being a part of the true faith means my life can be changed. I don't have to have the same worries, the same concerns, the same old perspective that would override our thinking otherwise. Because of the faith of Jesus Christ, we can be different. We can live a different life. We can be a different person.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a central doctrine of the Christian faith. Its meaning for you is far greater than anything you can learn through the religious traditions that obscure the real meaning of the event. When we understand it within the completeness of the life and death of Christ, it completely changes everything!

The disciples found an empty tomb. Jesus was not there. He had risen. And today He sits at the right hand of the Father as the Head of a spiritual body called the Church. He is directing our lives—if we let Him.

Will you heed the voice of the Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep? Don't be afraid to know the truth, to heed that yearning within you to find better pasture and live in peace and in confidence in God!

called the Last Supper, it was actually a Passover meal. But on that evening Christ made some significant changes.

Notice what Paul tells us: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it [i.e., every Passover], in remembrance of Me'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

The events of Christ's death took place at the time of the Passover and the Feast of

Unleavened Bread. These festivals are first described in Exodus 12 at the time Israel departed from Egypt under Moses. Christ's death and resurrection breathed new meaning into these festivals.

The apostle Paul eloquently summed up these festivals to the group of believers in Corinth. He was drawing to the attention of this non-Jewish, mostly gentile congregation the fact that God's festivals are to be observed with new meaning and relevance.

Notice what he told them—and, by extension, us today: "Your glorying [a reference to their pride in tolerating sin in their midst] is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.

For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Jesus Christ, our Passover, fulfilled the symbol of the lambs killed for centuries as part of the Passover service. His sacrifice, once for all time (Hebrews 9:28), was part of God's plan of salvation from the outset.

Buried before the Holy Day and risen as foretold

Christ was laid in a new tomb cut from solid rock, a rolling-stone tomb common to first-century Jerusalem. The Gospels tell us this was done hurriedly since the

Sabbath was coming on.

What most misunderstand about this “Sabbath” is that it was not the weekly Sabbath, which was always Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, but actually the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a different Holy Day that was also a Sabbath—a particular calendar date that could fall on different days of the week in different years. John 19:31 makes this day’s distinction from the regular weekly Sabbath clear, pointing out, “That Sabbath was a high day.”

As a prophetic sign that He is the Messiah, Christ said He would be in the grave for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). This came to pass exactly as He foretold. It was the one sign He gave to the skeptics that He indeed was who He claimed to be (see “Three Days and Three Nights: Did Jesus Keep His Word?” beginning on page 16).

When the disciples came to the tomb that morning they found it empty. The prophecies had come true. As foretold, the Holy One of God had seen no decay in the grave (Acts 2:25-27; compare Psalm 16:10).

Indeed, scores of Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled with these events (see “Do Prophecies About Jesus Prove He Was the Messiah?” beginning on page 11). Over the coming weeks, Jesus’ disciples would, with His help, put together the pieces and come to better understand how He fulfilled

of salvation for us. But our hope of eternal life as part of God’s family in the Kingdom lies in receiving the life of Christ within us. Understanding this vital key is critical. Look at what Paul writes in Romans as he conveys this truth:

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:8-11).

“We shall be saved by His life”

Paul’s statement that “we shall be saved by His life” is something we should understand. Many times devout and well-meaning people focus only on Christ’s *death* for salvation and do not bring into proper perspective *His life*.

His passion and death are very important aspects of God’s plan. His death provides us with the sacrifice necessary for the reconciliation with God and the forgiveness of sin.

But this only begins the process. That Christ lived again, was resurrected from

the grave, and lives today is necessary for us to have any hope of eternal life. For it is the risen Christ who helps us to continue in obedience to God and intercedes with the Father when we fall short.

Yes, God forgives us and saves us through His grace—the gift of His divinely bestowed favor. We do not earn salvation (eternal life) through obedience. Nonetheless, God requires as a condition of His gift of salvation that we cease from practicing sin as a way of life and start obeying Him. Follow on in Romans 6: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (verses 1-2).

Sin is a word that many don’t like to

admit today. People do not want to accept the idea of conduct that violates the law of God. Our physically saturated world dulls our sensitivities to a spiritual dimension of life that is real. So many tend to think the physical is all there is to life.

As a result, the existence of spiritual laws that govern how we live—that’s right, I mean *govern*—is a thought foreign to many. Man is a physical being but with a spiritual dimension that allows us to connect with God and have a relationship with Him. The spiritual laws He revealed, when obeyed, enable us to live free of a lot of the pain and suffering brought on by bad decisions and behavior.

This is what Paul meant in Romans 12:1-2 when he wrote: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (New International Version).

Most people don’t realize that a wonderful, blessed life, a new standard, is in store for them if they are open to the transformation God offers (see “A New Life Leading to Eternal Life” on page 24). As Christ described it: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together [to make room for more] and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38, NIV).

Christ’s resurrection paved the way for us to experience, to taste and see, to know God better and to live the abundant life He has for us (John 10:10). We begin to think differently, and our lives have the potential to be more than we ever imagined—for they can be what God imagines! **GN**

Christ’s death paid the penalty for sin. That judgment is lifted from us when we repent and accept His sacrifice for the remission of sins. But our hope of eternal life lies in receiving the life of Christ within us.

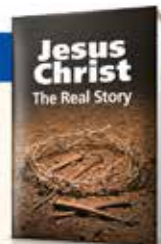
various aspects foretold about the long-awaited Messiah.

A mission and a message

His disciples then set out on the mission Jesus gave them to take the gospel, the good news of the Kingdom of God, to the world and make disciples of all nations—preaching far and wide to the world of their day. We see this fascinating story in the book of Acts, and through the teaching of the apostles we learn the importance of Christ’s life and resurrection to our hope of salvation and eternal life.

Christ’s death paid the penalty for sin. That judgment is lifted from us when we repent and accept His sacrifice for the remission of sins. This begins the process

Learn More



The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a major theme of the Bible. But how much do you really understand about the story? What does it mean for you? Be sure to read our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. Download or request your free copy today!

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Are You Ready to **Change?**

Would you like to change your life? Your Creator offers the ultimate change for the better—total transformation to the most rewarding life possible. *by Victor Kubik*

Are you really happy with the way you are? The way you look? Feel? Think? Are you satisfied with your relationships or do you wish they could be or better? Do you wish to change anything about your life? Most of us would reply, “Yes.”

There is an ocean of advice in books, in magazines, on the Internet and in seminars claiming one panacea after another that will enable us to lose weight, improve relationships, be cured of disease, overcome sin and everything else we don’t like about ourselves. In a recent year, \$11 billion was spent in the United States on self-improvement books.

God created us with self-awareness and the built-in ability to change. This is not true of instinct-driven animals with no desire to be something different from what they are. It’s we human beings who have the capacity to change from what we are to something else.

Change is not easy. Many won’t change to what they know would help them look and feel better. And for those who *do* make an effort to change, the change is often through spurts of willpower, habit-forming techniques being often short-lived. For example, more than 90 percent of people who lose significant weight will gain it all back, much to their distress.

Our Creator has built into us the capacity for change and offers us help for much greater change leading to a higher level of existence. This comes through “conversion,” a synonym for change, to a new way of life. And it is far more than just overcoming bad habits and feeling and looking better.

First call to action is for change—a complete turnaround

From the moment God created us, His intent was to move us from where we are to a higher level of conduct that, as we change our attitudes and behavior, is only the beginning of an eternal existence and relationship with Him. He offers us help through His Holy Spirit of power to *overcome*, another synonym for change. The

greatest change is finally when God grants change from temporary existence to everlasting. This is actually the good news that Jesus Christ preached.

Jesus began His ministry with this key-note statement: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent*, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15, emphasis added throughout). Repentance, yet another synonym for change, was mentioned before belief and faith. So Christ’s first call to action is to change—to make a complete turnaround from going against God to following Him.

A metamorphosis is a change into another form. A vivid example of the magnitude of this kind of change is the transformation of a pupa into an adult butterfly.

The same was true on the day the New Testament Church started—on Pentecost in Jerusalem after Christ ascended to heaven.

After the apostle Peter’s compelling sermon that day about Jesus, His life, mission, death and resurrection, those in the attentive crowd “were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’

“Then Peter said to them, ‘*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 2:37-38).

The first instruction of the New Testament Church was a call to change leading to baptism and a new way of life. Shortly afterward, Peter likewise proclaimed, “*Repent* therefore and *be converted*, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

Metamorphosis—a transformation in this life and after

The call here was for an awesome, far-reaching *transformation*. In fact, the apostle Paul later wrote to members of the Church in Rome: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be *transformed* by

the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). The word used here in the original Greek is a form of *metamorphoo*, from which we derive “metamorphosis.” It means to change into another form. A vivid example of the magnitude of this kind of change is the transformation of a pupa into an adult butterfly.

The same word occurs in the description of one of the most spectacular visions of the Bible, the *transfiguration* of Jesus Christ, where He appeared as a Being of dazzling light: “Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was *transfigured* [metamorphosed] before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Matthew 17:1-2; see verse 9).

The same Greek word is also used in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with unveiled

face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being *transformed* [metamorphosed] into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

One who obeys this is truly a “convert,” a changed person. This is conversion. It happens when we become convicted of the need to abandon our old ways of life and fill ourselves with thoughts and desires from the very mind of God. We want to change in a profound way.

This transformation is not an end in itself in our human existence but continues into the hereafter. The ultimate transformation will come when we are brought out of the grave and granted immortality.

Our hope is the same as that of Job, who asked an important question and then answered it: “If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my *change* come” (Job 14:14, King James Version).

This is supported by Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be *changed*—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead



Bread. The starting point is reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ as our Passover (see 1 Corinthians 5:7). We can't begin our spiritual journey until this event that we reconfirm annually.

Then the Days of Unleavened Bread follow. During these seven days we keep leavened bread out of our homes and eat unleavened bread—leaven being that which causes bread to rise during baking, such as yeast or baking soda, serving as a symbol of sin during these days.

The lesson of this is taught by Paul to the gentile Corinthian congregation in the mid-50s A.D.: "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (verse 8). Eating unleavened bread represents our changed converted nature of being like Jesus Christ.

If you surrender to God and His way of life, He will bring many wonderful things into

your life. Transformation produces a new man or a new woman with lasting character and integrity. Deep down you've always wanted that, but if you follow God's calling you can actually have the change you were created for. Transformation brings with it a new closeness to God and the benefits of sustained spiritual and physical life.

will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*." This is not a stretch of the word "change." It tells us the full story of the change process, which begins with a call to change through repentance and culminates in a complete transformation of our being at the resurrection. This indeed is good news.

Annual observances that teach the transformation process

God reveals a series of festivals that were meant not just for Israel but for all mankind, as they concern all people (see Leviticus 23 for a complete listing). The New Testament Church continued to observe them as we should today. In them is a systematic message of the metamorphosis process of man achieving the potential he was intended to fulfill. (To learn more, read our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for all Mankind*.)

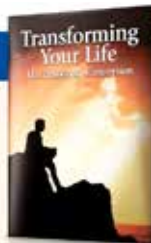
Now, early spring in the northern hemisphere, is the season for observing the first two of these annual festivals that teach us about the transformation process—Passover and the Feast of Unleavened

your life. Transformation produces a new man or a new woman with lasting character and integrity. Deep down you've always wanted that, but if you follow God's calling you can actually have the change you were created for. Transformation brings with it a new closeness to God and the benefits of sustained spiritual and physical life.

It starts with repentance. Are you ready to change? *GN*

Learn More

God's Word has a great deal to say about change. Three biblical words that are all about change are *repentance*, *conversion* and *transformation*. What are these all about? You need to know! Download or request your free copy of *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* to learn about the kind of powerful and positive change God wants to see in your life!



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Who's Behind The Good News?



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

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

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



threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of

God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

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

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How Can You Experience the Power That Drives Transformation?

God reveals the way to the missing ingredient that can powerfully transform your life. Are you ready to tap into it? *by Mike and Jamie Snyder*

It advances earth-changing events. It transforms certain defeat into joyous victory. It energizes us with power at the least unlikely moment. It takes those who are hopeless and consumed with self-hatred and inexplicably fills them with new life and enduring strength. It *never* fails.

This complex, spiritually necessary, power-filled characteristic of God is known to us in English by a four-letter word: *love*.

All of us, from the least to the greatest, want and need more of it. We never have enough! It is often the sole difference between a tragic relationship and a highly successful bonding of minds and purpose. It allows us to forgive and *even pray for* those who harm us. A successful marriage and a vibrant family cannot exist without it.

It represents the *very essence* of Almighty God, for as the Bible reveals, God *is* love (1 John 4:8, 16). Remarkably, love of God—redirected in the form of personal worship, admiration and emulation—embodies the first and greatest commandment that Jesus Christ gave each of us (Matthew 22:37-38).

Far from a mushy sentiment, love often possesses the character of steel alloy. It gives us strength and comfort that leads directly to the peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Unconditional love reflects a God of love

Love—the inexplicable power that makes things different and transforms lives—has been the subject of thousands upon thousands of songs, poems and narratives. People who are filled with love—particularly the love that comes from God and Jesus Christ—stand out. They attract others to themselves. We want to be around them.

As we read the Bible, the inspired Word of God, we may be surprised to find that while God freely gives lavishly of His love, He expects it to flow *through* us—we are to love one another in a profound capacity that seems impossible.

Love, unconditional concern that results

in the unselfish setting of another's needs before our own, appears as the chief “fruit”—the outcome or result—of the inward presence of God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). As the apostle Paul tells us from across the ages, if we don't have real spiritual love, then we are as irritating noise, repositories of worthless knowledge, or reservoirs of failed prophecies (1 Corinthians 13). Without love, Paul asserts, we are “*nothing*” (verse 2, emphasis added throughout).

God Himself sets the standard for unconditional and unailing love. As we read, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). That verse is so common in Christian circles that it's easy to bypass its weighty meaning.

Readers of *The Good News* who are

This gift of God can give you strength and comfort that leads directly to the peace that passes all understanding.

fathers or mothers themselves can have some sense of the degree of sacrifice that God Himself made. Amazingly, God allowed His creation—puny members of the human race—to torture and ultimately execute His only Son, all so that we could have undeserved reconciliation and a direct relationship with Him. That standard of love—making possible the undeserved gift of eternal life—represents the highest form of love known to humanity.

Powerful reminders of God's love

Ironically, it is in that ultimate sacrifice that humanity can not only receive love, but can also receive the astonishing capacity to love others! How is that capacity received? How *do* we learn to love another?

Here's a fact you may not have previously considered: God's annual biblical festivals are assemblies saturated with God's unailing love for humanity!

How can ancient biblical festivals hold deep meaning of the power of transformation and God's love for us today? We invite you to reflect on these remarkable facts:

The writers of the New Testament clearly demonstrate how Jesus became the ultimate Passover lamb—the once-and-for-all atoning sacrifice for human sin—on the day of Passover, shortly before the beginning of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Paul told the Christians at the Greek trading harbor of Corinth that “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for *us*” (1 Corinthians 5:7)

At the moment of Jesus' death, when He fulfilled His role as our Passover—the ultimate sacrifice for sin—the Jerusalem temple's finely woven and heavy veil supernaturally ripped from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-51). The priests present at that awe-inspiring moment would've been shocked beyond measure. Where the elaborate and impenetrable veil once hung, now they could see directly into the Holy of Holies, a chamber where previously only the High Priest

was allowed to go once a year (Leviticus 16:1-2). Now, as the torn veil signified, direct access to God Himself was available!

Indeed, the very plan of God for humanity—outlined in powerful detail by God's annual festivals and Holy Days—advanced mightily in that very moment. Jesus, the foretold Messiah of Israel, at that instant became the “High Priest of the good things to come . . . Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption . . .

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, *through the veil, that is, His flesh* . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 9:11-12; 10:19-20).

Now, upon His miraculous resurrection three days and three nights later, the real work for us could begin!

Shortly before He was gruesomely tortured, subjected to a mock trial and summarily executed, Jesus gave every Christian a near-impossible command. In fact, the open fulfillment of this command was to be an identifying sign of His disciples. What was it?

While Jesus previously validated the power and authority of God's law of love as summarized in the two great commandments and the Ten Commandments (Matthew 5:17-20; 19:17-19; 22:37-40), here He showed that the standard was His own example and that it must be demonstrated among His followers: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

Can we grasp this? As the clock was ticking down toward a series of prophetic events, all of which involved personal pain and outright agony, we find Jesus instructing His disciples that they must openly demonstrate godly *unconditional spiritual* love!

This is so important, so pivotal, so powerful for our personal salvation that God placed it first in the series of annual biblical observances that He expects all to discern and take part in. Jesus' sacrifice was the ultimate expression of love, as He told His disciples: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). The Christian Passover then is saturated, even *overflowing*, with the love of God for each of us.

Renewing the capacity for love

As we move each year from the recognition of Jesus as our Passover to the next of God's festivals, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we again renew our powerful capacity for spiritual love. We do that through the recognition of personal character issues that lead to sin, which impedes our precious relationship with God. As Paul further instructed the Christians in Corinth, "Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Why would God use bread with no leaven—that is, no agent that causes the dough to rise in baking, such as yeast—as a symbol of spiritual transformation and require us to eat it for this seven-day period?

God's annual biblical festivals and Holy Days are *disruptive*. They require us to stop straight up in our daily habits and purposely consider where we stand in our relationship

with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The Bible points out how Christians prepare in advance for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They are to remove all leavened products from their living quarters.

Why? Because leaven over the course of these days biblically represents spreading sin and wrongful pride, an ungodly "puffed up" attitude of thinking that we're good enough and don't need God (verses 2, 6). Paul explained that "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1, New International Version). And, as we saw earlier, we can have "all knowledge," but if we don't have love (the unconditional and unfailing love that comes from God), we are *nothing*.

So we heighten awareness of our never-ending capacity for sin and self-deception by physically cleaning our homes of leaven. While doing so, we can meditate on how easily we can embrace conceit and leave off important spiritual issues. Then, as we begin the actual Days of Unleavened Bread, we are physically and intimately reminded of this every day for seven days.

Instead of consuming regular leavened bread, we eat flatbreads and crackers that have no baked-in leaven. We are thus purposefully and directly reminded of the need to constantly be in an attitude of spiritual humility, surrendering our will, minds, thoughts and actions to God Himself, which is our "true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1, NIV). These days help us to recommit ourselves to surrendering to God and overcoming (Revelation 3:11-12).

How do we show evidence of love?

So how do we know we possess and are exercising the very love of God in our lives? We must of course be obeying God's laws: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). But are we doing so in the full spirit and intent, following Jesus' own example? Let's see how the Bible describes unconditional spiritual love that comes from God in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV):

- "Love is patient."
- "Love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."
- "It does not dishonor others."
- "It is not self-seeking."
- "It is not easily angered."
- "It keeps no record of wrongs."
- "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."
- "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Do you reflect these godly attributes? No?

Maybe some? Don't be discouraged. Read here God's promise to each of us: "Love never fails"! (verse 8). Spiritual progress and overcoming remains our daily goal.

Given the human capacity to relax and slip a bit, is it any wonder why God lovingly created a whole series of festivals and Holy Days to regularly strengthen, refresh and remind us of His love and purpose for us?

Further, consider this critical fact: God's annual festivals and Holy Days possess real transformational power! They make the Bible come alive and show how you can tap what the Bible calls God's "incomparably great power for us who believe" (Ephesians 1:19, NIV).

The Bible instructs us about seven different yearly festivals, and only two have been introduced here. We invite you to read and learn more. The next one, called Pentecost, holds particular importance for those interested in the power of love. Why? Because it is through the power of God's Holy Spirit—given at the inception of the New Testament Church on the day of Pentecost nearly 2,000 years ago—that we can bear the spiritual fruit of love! God's Spirit gives us the power to love as we are "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

The Bible was written for all mankind but also for you personally, and you need this critical knowledge. As Paul wrote long ago for us today, "Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

God already loves you unconditionally. Why not begin today to learn how to love Him back, thus receiving the wonderful and incomprehensible benefits of being in a direct relationship of unfailing love with your Father and your Elder Brother Jesus Christ? Yes, God's love drives real transformation. Begin to experience it today! **GN**

Learn More

Would you like to learn more about the biblical festivals and Holy Days that teach us about God's loving plan for you and for all mankind, and for how you can be transformed to reach the incredible future He wants to share with you? Request your free copy of *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.



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Washing Away Pride

On the evening before He was captured and condemned, Jesus Christ left His followers with a profound example and lesson of service and humility. *by Robin Webber*

Yet I am among you as one who serves.”

Changing the equation

Christ dramatically alters the entire equation as to how we humanly “go about our business.” In the rigidly structured culture of that day, there were clear-cut traditions involving family and social orderings. Additionally, Jesus strips away the veneer of the Greco-Roman world in which leaders promoted themselves as “benefactors”—meaning “helpers of others,” but in reality they controlled every aspect of people’s lives and lived to be served.

The self-serving *Pax Romana*—the “peace of Rome” imposed on the known world at the point of spear and sword—came at a cost: surrender to those who had seized power and remaining in benign subservience.

The 12 didn’t know it yet, but Jesus, by example, was going to display the personality of His Kingdom that evening and provide a marked contrast between what lies in man’s heart and what lies in the loving heart of God.

He had previously stated, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matthew 20:28), but that was just so many words to this hardheaded class of 12 grown men acting like schoolkids playing “king of the mountain.” Time was short! He had to do something demonstrable so they could understand.

He knew exactly what to do, by creating an object lesson with a special twist.

The custom of the day in which sandals were the common footwear was to wash one’s feet on entering a residence after a day’s travels. The roads of Galilee and Judea, depending on the season, could be either a carpet of dust or layered with mud.

This being a private meal, apparently no household slave or servant was present to assist with the task of washing the dirty feet of those gathered there that evening. And, with tension in the air, none of the 12 were heading for the jars of water and towels!

The ageless object lesson

Jesus knew the time was ripe for a lesson

Peter of Galilee thought he had seen the Master Rabbi do everything over the last several days—from being hailed as a king entering Jerusalem to overturning the moneychangers’ tables at the temple, to sternly lecturing religious authorities—but nothing prepared him for what was coming his way now.

In the whirlwind of activity leading up to the annual Passover celebration, Jesus of Nazareth reserved for those closest to Him a unique teaching moment on how they were to live out His instruction of “Follow Me.”

His death was hours away, but His teaching wasn’t completed, and His disciples weren’t prepared to go into the world and to reflect His values until they grasped the lesson of what Peter saw was happening.

now permeating the atmosphere around the table they shared with Jesus. Seating arrangements for ceremonial occasions were never left to arbitrary choice. Who would be seated closest to the Master? Who would be on His right hand or on His left? A squabble of major proportions was brewing in their hearts.

Jesus’ fervent desire

When they were gathered at the meal that evening, Jesus made this heartfelt statement: “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-16).

But they weren’t hearing Him, for their

hearts were full of pride and ego. Luke also tells us that “there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest” (verse 24). Here on the eve of pending triumph of God’s saving work by His Son’s supreme sacrifice, contention spawned by prideful human nature was well under way among Christ’s companions.

Jesus begins thoughtfully and deliberately to set the stage for what Peter sees coming his way. He states: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table?

Jesus, by example, was going to display the personality of His Kingdom and provide a marked contrast between what lies in man’s heart and what lies in the loving heart of God.

If we are to be Christ’s followers, we must grasp it as well.

Perhaps now was the time!

The days preceding this night of special meaning had been breathtaking for Peter and the others. Weeks before, they had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus, they had in the past week heard the roar of the welcoming Jerusalem crowd, and they knew Jesus had alluded to the notion that the time was ripe for a momentous occurrence.

Perhaps now was the moment for restoring the Kingdom of Israel under the prophesied Messiah? Jesus was clearly Him! There would be new positions to fill, and who better than those closest to Him over the last few years?

What perhaps started among them as a discussion on the road to Jerusalem was



Jesus' act of washing His disciples' feet left a lasting lesson of humility and service for His followers.

to move beyond the moment and be transmitted to our day. It was time to wash away the dirtiness of human pride!

He got up, took off His exterior garments, took a towel, poured water in a basin and readied Himself for action. He began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with His towel (John 13:4-5). In the culture of that day it was unthinkable for a highly regarded rabbi to wash his disciples' feet.

Moreover, what the disciples didn't know is what Christ was acutely aware of at that moment: “That the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God” (verse 3). Here on the eve of the moment of supreme personal sacrifice was to come the moment of utmost individual humility.

Now, the sweep of events stopped right before Peter. Jesus knelt on hands and knees looking into the face of His astonished disciple.

Peter asked, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” (verse 6, New International Version). Jesus replied, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” Peter exclaimed back, “You shall never wash my feet!”

Jesus then very bluntly responded, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (verse 8). Peter anxiously proclaimed, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” (verse 9). Christ said, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you” (verse 10).

When speaking of “not all of you,” Jesus

knew a traitor was present. The Scottish commentator William Barclay captures the moment:

“Such knowledge might so easily have turned him to bitterness and hatred; but it made his heart run out in greater love than ever. The astounding thing was that the more people hurt him, the more Jesus loved them. It is so easy and so natural to resent wrong and to grow bitter under insult and injury; but Jesus met the greatest injury and the supreme disloyalty with the greatest humility and the supreme love” (*The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John*, Vol. 2, 2001, p. 161)

Continuing with John's account: “So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to

you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, *you also ought to wash one another's feet*. For I have given you an example, *that you should do as I have done to you*. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than who sent him. If you know these things, *blessed are you if you do them*” (verses 12-17, emphasis added throughout).

This statement was not designed merely for a momentary event, but was displaying an everyday lifestyle oriented toward humble service to others and on allowing God to bless us rather than taking charge and taking matters into our own hands.

Kneeling down with Christ

As we move away from that room of long ago, let's ask ourselves what lessons we may internalize to better walk in Christ's calling of “Follow Me.” Here are several we can draw from this event:

- Come to expect the unexpected from God the Father and His Son. God clearly states, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways” (Isaiah 55:8). Peter needed this reminder—*and so do we*. When the teaching moments come, learn to rebound as Peter did, allowing God's Spirit and Word to wash your pride away one lesson at a time. Ask God to help you to be sensitive and receptive to His molding process ever before us as disciples.

- Never underestimate that God knows

exactly what we need and when to intervene in our lives even before we realize it ourselves. He understands exactly how to gain our attention and give us a lesson that will lodge in our hearts.

- Understand that God will continue to wash away our pride in many different ways, often beginning with very small things and matters. God often uses “the little” to declare His great purposes, whether it be fish and bread from a little boy, a dab of clay placed on a man's eyes to heal, or something as ordinary as people's dirty feet. Whatever God asks of us, no matter how small or ordinary, learn to responsibly give it to Him in faith. If we give him nothing, He has nothing of us to use, but if we give Him even “our little,” like a pair of feet, He can take “our little” and make it everything.

- Come to appreciate and embrace this reality: Know that whenever and however God intervenes in your life, it is out of His great love for you and everyone. Even when the disciples were being less than Christ-like over who was to be the greatest among them—remember the words of John that introduce this account: “Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

- Be aware that there are plenty of opportunities in our daily lives for washing away our pride and for figuratively washing others' feet—at home, school, work, church and in our community. Our role is to duplicate the active nature of Christ in taking on the role of a servant. Strangers may be easier to humbly serve than those we know, especially those we know who have wronged us.

Most importantly, remember the words of Jesus as we choose to heed His call of “Follow Me” and willingly embrace His role of a loving servant. “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” GN

Learn More

How can we become the kind of giving, serving people God wants us to be? What are the key tools to making this kind of spiritual transformation a reality in our lives? We've prepared a new booklet, *Tools for Spiritual Growth*, to help you in just this way! Download or request your free copy today!



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Lessons From the Parables

“Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant”

Jesus Christ gave two parables, of the minas and the talents, that hold crucial lessons about what He expects us to do with what He's given us. Will we learn those lessons? *by Darris McNeely*

As I write this article it's the first week of January, the beginning of a new Western calendar year when many people resolve to take an inventory of their life and try to do better with their priorities, planning and possessions over the next year. Yet *every day* is a good suitable time to take stock of life and ask ourselves how we are doing with what we've been given.

One day God will ask each of us this question. We'd better have a good answer!

Life-changing resolutions can begin on any day of the year. We've all heard the saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." This saying, though trite and overused, is actually quite true. Thank God we have an opportunity each day to start over, learn a lesson, get back on our feet and try again!

But what does this have to do with the parables of Jesus Christ?

A lot, actually. We can see this in two major parables He gave as instruction to us to examine our stewardship of the life we've been given, both physical and spiritual.

In these two parables we see the key to understanding what our lives in Christ should be all about. We are here to prepare for life in the age to come. We have to start each day with that understanding. And that's where these two crucial parables come in.

The parable of the minas

As Jesus approached Jerusalem just days before His death, He sensed the crowds were expecting the imminent appearance of the promised Kingdom of God. Jesus knew it wasn't going to appear at that time. So to prepare them—and His followers through the ages—for that reality, He began a parable about a nobleman traveling far away “to

receive for himself a kingdom and to return.” In this story Christ is the nobleman, and the “kingdom” is the Kingdom of God over which He will reign at His return to the earth.

We find this parable in Luke 19:11-27, with a similar parable of the talents recorded in Matthew 25:14-30. In each case we have a story of servants being given a sum of money, and at the return of their master (Jesus Christ) an accounting is required.

In Luke's account 10 servants are each given one mina, and in Matthew's three servants are given five, two and one talent respectively.

Both terms here, talents and minas, referred to substantial sums of money in

In these two parables we see the key to understanding what our lives in Christ should be all about.

the culture of that day. The lesson is that God gives us something of considerable value and expects good stewardship and a return on what He has given. And here is a primary lesson: Christ speaks in these two parables about money, but He is really talking about *something far more important*—the elements of spiritual character.

The money, talent or mina, is only the vehicle He uses to teach a far greater lesson. At the end of the day Christ is more interested in what we do with our *spiritual* “minas” and “talents” than anything else.

These parables reveal that this physical life serves as preparation, a training ground, for something far greater than this life. Our life now is meant to prepare us for our part in the coming Kingdom of God. How we live and use the talents and minas—the gifts, aptitudes, abilities, means and

opportunities we're given in this life—is critical. This is the big issue of life.

Balancing the necessary and unnecessary

Some possessions are necessary to our well-being, while others are not so necessary—but often consume our money and our time. It's balancing out the necessary with the not-so-necessary that's critical.

When I read these two parables, I have to put myself in the picture as someone who has been given something by God to preserve, promote and return.

That seems to be the essence of these two parables. We are given a life on this earth with a certain number of years to live it out. Some are born to greater advantage than others. Some who start with very little use their resources and amass great fortune and accomplishment. Others who start with great wealth and advantage squander it and often quickly burn out in a sad and tragic

loss. Then there are the many of us in the great middle class of life—given a little better than average start.

But it's how we finish that's important. What we do along the way determines the finish, and a lot of life is learning to make the best of what we've been given. As we read these two parables we learn we can grow a life, develop gifts and talents and accomplish significance.

A key lesson of these parables is that God expects us to gain a measurable increase in our lives. Look at the procedure we see in the stories. In Luke 19 we see that the nobleman “called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas [one each], and said to them, ‘Do business till I come’” (verse 13).

In verse 15 the story zooms into the future with the return of the nobleman and an accounting of the disbursed funds “that



Jesus Christ's parables of the minas and the talents show that He expects us to act on what we've been given and that He will hold us accountable for it.

he might know how much every man had gained by trading.” Three people’s stories are told. One gained tenfold and another fivefold. They were diligent servants who took what was given, worked hard and saw an increase. Their reward is described as rulership over cities in the age to come.

However, one person took his mina and hid it in a piece of cloth, doing nothing. He expressed fear of the nobleman and said he looked on him as a stern businessman gaining from the work of others. In the end the one mina was taken from the unprofitable servant and given to one who had done more through his effort.

In this story there is the lesson that we all have been given something with our life and that there is expectation of increase. We have to *do* something. The slothful servant who hid his mina has it taken from him. He was given something, but because he chose not to use it, “even what he has will be taken away” (verse 26).

In the judgment we will be evaluated on what we have done with what we’ve been given in our life. The big takeaway here is that we all have been given a gift through life itself. If we live and can read these words and come to understand their meaning, it brings hope. God who has given us life not only expects growth, but offers the help to make that growth happen. And He is not finished with us!

The parable of the talents

When we look at the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, we see a similar story

where servants are given “goods” of a wealthy man who travels to a far country. One is given five talents, another two and another one. At his return he learns that the ones given five and two have doubled their charge, but the servant given one had dug a hole in the ground and buried it, gaining nothing.

Again, the reward given to those who increase their talent is praise from their master and rulership “over many things.” They are ushered into the joyful future he has prepared for them. Their master’s key thought of praise here is: “You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (verse 23).

And what happens to the one who did nothing? His talent is taken from him and given to another with a statement similar to what we saw before: “From him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (verse 29).

All of us start out with “something.” We all have “skin in the game,” as the saying goes. And we must use and develop what we have or we’ll lose even what we started with. The road to success begins with the understanding that we must progress.

And that brings us back to the question of how we are doing with what we’ve been given. Life is a very serious matter. We walk this earth as living beings created in the image of God. This life is a preparation and training ground for a far different life in the age to come. Once we come to this understanding, God expects us to act accordingly and live each day with that goal and purpose in mind.

What should we learn?

The two parables we’ve been considering, stories Christ told to convey eternal spiritual truths, are foundations on which we build a life of meaning and significance. God has given you at least one “talent” or “mina,” the gift of life. You also have talents, abilities, skills and means to use to create and fashion a productive life in service to the One who gave you everything, including life itself.

Christ is the nobleman who is off in a far country receiving a kingdom. He will return, and there will be a day of accounting or judgment. I know we don’t like to

hear about a “judgment.” Our modern minds are not conditioned to think that our actions and thoughts are known to God and that one day we will stand before Him to give an accounting.

The good news is what is built into both these parables. It is that “talents” and “minas” are both symbolic of all that God gives to us that can be directed to His purpose in our life as we allow Him to mold and shape us into something useful to His glory and Kingdom.

One of the layers of meaning in these parables is that God gives His servants spiritual “talents”—gifts, abilities and skills—to help traverse this life toward the age to come. This comes through the power of the Holy Spirit, which God gives to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

This Spirit is a transforming power to lift our life to something meaningful. It allows us to change our life and become like God as He intends. The resolutions we make to change a habit and become a better person show a right motive. The key is finding the right method or plan. God gives us the plan in the Bible. We have to start with the right tool to bring about any lasting change.

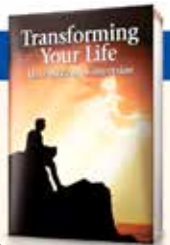
So how are you doing?

Consider the lessons of the parables of the minas and the talents. God has blessed you with a life to serve Him and, through the pages of Scripture, a priceless understanding of great eternal truths. And He offers so much more if you’re willing to put into practice what you learn.

Resolve today to use your life as God intended—as a period of preparation, a training ground, for the coming Kingdom of God. Focus on the spiritual qualities of a life that can be successful in both this life and the glorious future God holds out for you! **GN**

Learn More

How do you start to build the kind of life God intends for you? Where can you turn to learn what it’s all about? How do you find the first steps? We’ve put together a guidebook that puts it all together for you. It’s called *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, and a free copy is waiting for you. Download or request it today!



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“Why the Massive Decline in America’s Prestige?”

I thoroughly enjoyed your January-February 2014 issue. Your two articles “Why the Massive Decline in America’s Prestige?” and the “What’s Behind America’s Growing Dependency Society?” were, in my opinion, extremely accurate and foreboding of things to come.

These problems were many years in the making and coincide with the moral decline of the country as a whole. The warning signs were always there, but we as a nation chose to ignore them. Ultimately a great reckoning will awake us. My question is: Who will lead us through these dark times? The problems are so monumental that it would take a leader anointed by God Almighty to effectively guide the country through this mess. Sadly, I don’t see this happening anytime soon.

G.J.B., Hamtramck, Michigan

Ultimately only the return of Jesus Christ can save America and the world. Many prophecies of the Bible assure us that His second coming will finally bring the peace and prosperity mankind has sought for so long. Those problems will only be solved when mankind begins living under God’s laws rather than doing what seems right in our own eyes.

“God Is Calling—Will You Answer?”

I received my first issue of *The Good News* yesterday and read some of the articles last night. I’ve been thinking about the article “God Is Calling—Will You Answer?” There is so much good to say about just this one single article, so I’ll settle with saying that it woke me up to the real truth about my relationship with God and has helped me to come back into focus. Thank you so much for doing the work of God. You are all truly blessed. I look forward to a wholesome and enriching relationship with *The Good News*, and in turn with God as a result of your work.

L.R.T., Fulton, Missouri

The Good News and booklets

I am writing to let you know how much your work has meant to me. I was introduced to your magazine several years ago by a friend in Christ. It has taught me more about how to have a relationship with God than anything else. It has also taught me the importance of understanding how modern events and Bible prophecy go hand in hand. I know now that it is very important to be a well-informed Christian.

I now understand so much more about pleasing God with my thoughts and actions. It is not good enough to go to church and to read the Bible sporadically. It is about eating, breathing, drinking and living the Word of God. It is about working hard to develop a relationship with God and to come to know Him intimately through His Word and daily prayer. It is a very frightening world out there, and to rest in God is the only real comfort. You have a wonderful ministry and are performing the great commission to the utmost.

K.B., Gaylord, Michigan

I’ve been going through some trials and I started to feel spiritually dead. So

I prayed and asked God not to let me fall. Today I received your free offer. Our God truly does answer prayers. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, and God bless you always.

J.H., Hurst, Texas

Thank you for your magazines and other literature that you have sent me. I know it is so important to be informed about the events that are just ahead and how they will affect everyone on this earth. Thankfully I am able to inform others about your publications.

Reader from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Beyond Today in Australia

I really liked your episode of *Beyond Today* titled “72 Hours to Chaos.” It was a really useful topic and is truly important to a lot of people I know. People in this world are troubled, and they need to hear what you are preaching. It is both helpful and interesting. Thank you for having such relevant material available.

Viewer from Queensland

Thank you kindly for sending me *The Good News*. Being a pensioner, having it sent free is such a blessing. I look forward to the magazine arriving in the mail. I have kept all the issues that you have sent so that I can refer back to them when need be. I watch your program *Beyond Today* every Sunday. It refreshes my knowledge of God’s Word. It has a clear, precise and accurate message, which certainly shows respect for our Father in heaven. You help people to understand the message that God wishes us to know.

Viewer from Australia

Spreading the true gospel

Here is my donation as promised. You may expect more following the 1st and the 15th of every month going forward. It may not be much (as I am a housewife), but it will be all I can spare. Thank you for changing my life.

S.H., Camarillo, California

Centering on December 25

I am one of the very appreciative and ardent readers of *The Good News*. I do, however, have one comment. You have repeatedly criticized the fact that it is universally accepted that Jesus’ date of birth is Dec. 25, celebrated each year with unnecessary worldly frills. I totally agree that the frills have gotten out of hand, but your constant hammering on the fact that Christ was not born on Dec. 25 and that the Sabbath should be on Saturday and not Sunday is “much ado about nothing.” Our main objective is to follow the guideline of morals and the difference between right and wrong, not a tiny difference between possible correct or incorrect dates that were established thousands of years ago.

M.D., Belmont, California

One of our personal correspondents has already addressed your concerns in an e-mail. However our free booklet Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe? explains why Dec. 25 is simply not Christ’s birth date. It also shows why it is so important to understand this truth (see Deuteronomy 12:29-32). As this booklet clearly shows, the biblical and historical evidence shows that Jesus Christ was born in the autumn.

It saddens me to realize how completely we have been hoodwinked. Your work is very much needed. It is life-changing and lifesaving. Please send a copy of the booklet entitled *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

E.M., Bastrop, Louisiana

God’s seven annual Sabbaths

I never knew that God had annual festivals that we need to observe, which have great significance. This is an eye-opener, and I am grateful that I took your *Bible Study Course*. Keep on with the good works because you are enabling so many lives to be saved, people who couldn’t afford to pay for these booklets that you send free of charge. I would like to know more about the annual Sabbaths.

L.O., Loughborough, England

We have mailed our free booklet God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. This publication covers all seven of God’s annual festivals and

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I really enjoy *The Good News* magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

- K.T., Good News magazine Facebook fan



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Questions & Answers

Q: In 1 Corinthians 11:26, what exactly did Paul mean by “for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”?

Reader from the Republic of Ireland

A: Paul is speaking in 1 Corinthians 11 of the observance Jesus instituted on “the night in which He was betrayed” (verse 23). The Gospel accounts make clear that this was the Passover (Luke 22:8, 11, 15)—with Jesus revealing new significance to the occasion, the partaking of the bread and wine signifying the acceptance of His sacrificial death. In fact, Paul earlier in 1 Corinthians 5:7 says that “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”

Passover was an annual occasion, coming on the 14th day of the first month on the Hebrew calendar (Leviticus 23:5). As a youth, Jesus Himself observed the Passover annually with His family at the specified time: “Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover” (Luke 2:41). He continued this yearly practice with His disciples, as is evidenced by the four Passovers of His ministry recorded in the Gospel accounts, ending with the last one, the night before He was killed.

After Christ’s death and resurrection, the early Church continued to observe the annual festivals listed in Leviticus 23. For example, Luke records that Jesus’ followers met to observe the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

The Passover was likewise still observed, but now as a memorial to Christ’s death—He being the true Passover Lamb. Even in secular society, it is customary to observe memorials on an annual basis. Moreover, this being the Passover, it was already an annual occasion observed on the same day each year on the Hebrew calendar.

There is nothing to indicate that Christians might arbitrarily choose to partake of the bread and wine representing Christ’s sacrifice at some time other than the time decreed in the Bible—the time of Passover at the beginning (that is, in the evening) of the 14th day of the first month on the Hebrew calendar.

When Paul said “as often as” you partake of the bread and wine symbolically, he did not mean *as often as you choose to of yourself*, as many think. He simply meant *whenever or every time* Christ’s followers actually *did* partake of them as part of the Passover ceremony—which was once a year on the night Christ was betrayed. The New Living Translation says, “. . . every time you eat this bread and drink this cup” (emphasis added).

In summary, notice this paragraph from our Holy Day booklet: “The Bible specifies the yearly observance of the Passover, and history records its annual celebration as the practice of the early Church. Passover, as a memorial of Christ’s death, is to be observed annually rather than whenever or however one chooses, just as all the other annual festivals are to be kept once a year. Neither Jesus Christ nor His apostles indicated that we should change when or how often we observe any of God’s festivals” (p. 17).

This free booklet, *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Man-*

kind, also contains the equivalent modern calendar dates for the annual festivals (see pages 28 and 29). Request or download your free copy.

Q: In Acts 2:46 we read that new Christians were “breaking bread from house to house.” Was this a daily communion ceremony they participated in? A friend insists that it was.

D.O., County Cork, Ireland

A: Even today the expression “break bread” means to eat a meal. Bread is often synonymous in Scripture with food in general, as it has historically been the principal sustenance and a common feature at meals. And with bread in particular the custom until more recent times was to tear a loaf into smaller portions for all to eat. This is seen in scriptures such as Luke 9:16-17, where Jesus broke the bread into pieces before feeding the five thousand. Note that “broken pieces” were left over.

Furthermore, Jewish meals of Christ’s day customarily began with a blessing over bread and then a breaking apart of that bread for distribution. As *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament* states of the breaking of bread in Acts 2:42 and 2:46, “It would rather seem to be implied that this referred to the participation of their ordinary meals. The action of breaking bread was commonly performed by the master or head of a family immediately after asking a blessing” (note on verse 42).

You should also read carefully Acts 27:33-38, where bread was broken after giving thanks in the process of having a meal for nourishment, with those partaking receiving enough to eat.

It is this same meaning intended in Acts 2:46, where if the rest of the verse is understood in context it is clearly referring to a meal. This verse states that they attended the temple daily and then returned to their private homes to share a meal. The New Century Version renders this, “They ate together in their homes, happy to share their food with joyful hearts.” The Good News Translation states, “They had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts.”

As with all Jewish meals, the Passover meal likewise included the blessing and breaking of bread—in this case, unleavened bread as a required part of the ceremony. During the Passover meal before His death, Jesus incorporated the blessing and breaking of bread into a new Christian observance of Passover. On this occasion, observed once each year on the same night, the breaking of unleavened bread symbolizes Christ’s sinless body being broken as an important aspect of His sacrifice for our sins.

Yet the common phrase “breaking bread” still referred to eating meals generally, as it did in Acts 2:46. Interestingly, this custom is preserved for us today in the commonly used English words “company” and “companion.” These are derived from the Middle English *compainoun*, which came from the Old French *cumpaignon*, literally “one who breaks bread with another,” from the Latin *companis*, meaning “together with” (*com*) + “bread” (*panis*), or someone with whom you were sharing bread or meals.

Holy Days as well as how to observe them. God gave us these annual Sabbath days to observe along with the weekly Sabbath (see Leviticus 23:1-4). The early New Testament Church observed them all.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (14th edition) states: “There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic fathers . . . The first Christians . . . continued to observe the Jewish festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which these festivals had foreshadowed. Thus the Passover, with a new conception

added to it of Christ as the true Paschal Lamb, continued to be observed . . .” (1947, Vol. 7, “Easter,” p. 859).

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Christianity & Capitalism

Do They Go Together?

Recently Pope Francis slammed capitalism and the free market, advocating redistribution of wealth and other steps to level out incomes between rich and poor. What does the Bible say about Christianity and capitalism? *by Mike Kelley*

Last November, after barely eight months in office, the Catholic Church's Pope Francis launched a firestorm of controversy with his recent dictum, *Evangelii Gaudium*, or "The Joy of the Gospel."

Probably no religious writing in recent history has raised the eyebrows—and ire—of so many for its controversial views on economics and balance of economic power in society. While Catholics do not consider it commanded teaching from the Vatican, the papal exhortation nonetheless spells out the views of the current pope and thus commands respect from Catholics worldwide.

Evangelii Gaudium begins with Francis comparing the joy of receiving the Christian faith and the joy of missionary activity. He calls for reforms in the Catholic Church's missionary outreach—among them a greater emphasis on evangelizing efforts and a renewed call to help the poor.

But the exhortation does not stop there. Francis goes on to call for greater income equality, redistribution of wealth, and fundamental changes to the economic order. This statement from section 204 underscores his concern: "We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market." And he calls for action "beyond a simple welfare mentality" that "attacks the structural causes of inequality."

He goes on to call for a redistribution of wealth and reform of economic structures that would ensure greater equality of income and opportunity. The rich, he says, should share their wealth and calls for a

new commandment: "Today we also have to say 'thou shalt not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality."

Pros and cons weigh in

Economists, politicians and pundits from both the left and right have lauded or attacked the pope's exhortation. Some called parts of the document "pure Marxism" and suggested that someone else may have written the papal document for him.

Writing for the conservative *Townhall* magazine, John Goodman commented that a search of almost any introductory economics textbook would fail to turn up the terms "survival of the fittest," "trickle down theories," or "powerful feeding on the powerless," which he termed "slurs used by the left to cast aspersions on free markets and pro-growth markets" ("Papal Economics," Dec. 21, 2013). He went on to maintain that free-market economics, far from being a detriment to society, are the single greatest cause of the prosperity millions enjoy today.

Those on the left, predictably enough, lauded the document. In the *Guardian*, a popular liberal newspaper, Jonathan Freedland said, "Francis could replace Obama as the pin-up on every liberal and leftist wall" ("Why Even Atheists Should Be Praying for Pope Francis," Nov. 15, 2013). *The New Republic* praised Francis' stance on economic issues, while attacking his—and the Catholic Church's—views on abortion and homosexuality.

Even prominent Catholics differed in their reaction, some wondering if the pope has

gone too far. Robert Sirico, a Catholic priest who cofounded the liberty-oriented Acton Institute and authored the book *Defending the Free Market*, says in a YouTube video response that while Francis is not motivated by political beliefs, he fails to note that economic prosperity over the past century is largely the result of free market economics.

"How are we to respond to his warnings about mere temporary responses to poverty . . . with the demonstrable benefits that we see accruing to the poorest of the poor . . . which were made possible by markets globalizing?" (Acton.org, Nov. 27, 2013). How, he asked, can the pope ignore the reality that millions have greater access to jobs and health care, and have risen out of poverty because of the globalization of markets?

To Francis' concern about the dangers of "markets that are unhampered," Sirico asks, "Where are these unhampered markets?"—pointing out that markets everywhere are bounded with regulations of every sort.

All of this raises very important questions about Christianity and economics. Is it God's will that poverty be eradicated in this present age? If not, what is Christianity's responsibility to the poor? Does the Bible espouse any one economic system?

Why has God not eliminated poverty?

Poverty and income inequality are as old as mankind. It may surprise you to learn that the Bible has much to say about poverty, the distribution of wealth, and other economic matters.

"The poor will never cease from the land," Moses was inspired to write in Deuteronomy 15:11. Jesus Christ Himself seemed to echo that reality when the subject of His anointing for burial came up shortly before His trial and death. Asked by His disciples why He approved the use of expensive oil for His anointing rather than having it sold and the money given to the poor, Christ may have



shocked the disciples with His answer: “The poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always” (John 12:8).

We know that a powerful and loving God could eradicate poverty at any time. Yet He has not chosen to do so thus far. Is there a reason? The surprising answer is that a time is coming when God *will* eradicate poverty—but more about that later. The fact is that our Creator has not chosen to do so in *this present world*.

Yet the Bible is replete with instructions on how to properly treat those less well off.



It’s difficult to make a case that Christ condemned wealth or legally acquiring it. He did teach, however, that wealth and the pursuit of wealth can be a snare that distracts us from the pursuit of righteousness.

Students of the Bible know that more than 3,000 years ago God began dealing with one nation, ancient Israel. That nation of 12 tribes that descended from Abraham was an agricultural society, and it was given one of the most fertile areas of the Middle East as a result of promises God made to Abraham (Genesis 12:7; 13:14-15).

Those with large landholdings tended to be better off, while many small farmers eked out a modest living. Those without land or marketable skills often found themselves in poverty. But God did not forget the poor of the land and in His laws made provision for them.

For example, God provided a food supply for the poor to gather, telling landowners: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of

your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not clean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them to the poor” (Leviticus 19:9). It’s noteworthy that the poor had to put forth the effort to gather the food for themselves. They couldn’t just go to a warehouse and claim it or have it delivered to them.

It was also widely understood that family members took care of other family members. And if a woman lost her husband, her children were responsible for taking her in and caring for her.

Jesus’ teaching and examples

Jesus Christ lived and taught in an area that was under crushing Roman oppression. During His ministry, He taught and showed by His personal example the right attitude toward those less well off.

Matthew’s gospel records a time early in Christ’s ministry when more than 5,000 men, plus thousands of women and children, flocked to Him to hear the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Many came from considerable distances, and at the end of the day, rather than send them away hungry, Jesus miraculously fed them from five small loaves of bread and two fish. Read about it in Matthew 14:13-21. Not long afterward He repeated the miracle, this time with a

slightly smaller group of 4,000 men, plus women and children.

Each of the Gospel accounts relates dozens of miraculous healings that Christ performed, mostly of poor people. Matthew alone relates many of these acts of compassion. Jesus cleansed lepers (Matthew 8:1-4), healed a paralyzed man (Matthew 9:1-6), gave sight to two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31), and even cast demons out of the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28).

Christ certainly showed compassion for the poor, a compassion He taught to His disciples and by extension to us, both by word and example. Just before His betrayal and death, He summed up what our attitude should be toward those suffering from sickness, isolation and poverty: “In as much as you did it unto one of the least of these

my brethren, you did it unto Me” (Matthew 25:40).

Christ’s disciples didn’t forget those examples, and carried on His example of mercy and compassion. Notice Acts 3:2-9. The apostle Peter didn’t have gold and silver to give to a lame man who asked for alms. But he was able to give the man something of far greater worth, telling him, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (verse 6).

The New Testament teaching is clear. Today God is not performing such dramatic miracles before the public through His people (though He still does miraculously heal, and we should pray for that). But when we see needs and have the ability to do something to help, it is our duty to respond. That’s what our Savior commanded.

Does this mean we literally sell all that we have and distribute it to poor people around us? Many will point to Christ’s encounter with a rich young ruler as proof that income redistribution is the duty of all Christians. But let’s take a close look at Matthew 19:16-23. Christ told the rich young ruler to “sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (verse 21).

When the young man went away sorrowful “because he had great possessions,” Christ used it to illustrate the point that it is often difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. He didn’t tell His disciples to proclaim a gospel of income equality, but to understand that devotion to material wealth can be a major hindrance to spiritual growth.

Indeed, the young man here was placing his wealth before God, which is precisely why Jesus told Him to give it away. This wasn’t a rule for every person, for some are able to possess wealth while maintaining proper perspective and living by love toward God and neighbor.

The early Church was characterized by wide spreads of income. Some Christians were wealthy and powerful, as was the case with Philemon, to whom the apostle Paul wrote. Others, such as Philemon’s slave Onesimus, were certainly much poorer. Yet Paul never condemns wealth. His concern was for people’s spiritual, not physical, wealth.

Does the Bible reveal a proper economy?

The Bible reveals that God has much to say about money and wealth. Many of the most famous personalities of the Bible were clearly quite wealthy. Genesis 13:1 tells us that “Abraham was very rich in livestock, in



silver, and in gold.” His son Isaac inherited much of his father’s wealth and increased it. Genesis 30 relates how Isaac’s son Jacob was blessed with vast herds of cattle, sheep and camels, so many that he had to come up with a method for distinguishing his large herds from those of his uncle, Laban.

Centuries later, King David became wealthy during the time of peace he was able to bring to Israel. But it was his son Solomon who became one of the richest men of all time. We find a detailed account of Solomon’s wealth and power in 1 Kings 4.

When God gave Israel the Promised Land, it was to be divided up so families received property portions relative to their size (Numbers 26:54, 33:50-54). Even if land ownership changed hands due to economic or other hardship, title to the land reverted to the original families every 50 years (Leviticus 25:10, 13-17). This provided for a generally even playing field economically, and prevented individuals from permanently amassing huge amounts of land at the expense of others.

It’s clear that God does not condemn wealth or the acquisition of wealth. The fact of wealth means inequality of income. Many today accept that fact but attack the methods used to attain wealth. Throughout history, much wealth has been attained through trade, business and investing. Are these activities wrong? Notice what Jesus Himself taught about the value of increasing wealth through proper investments.

Shortly before His death, Christ gave some final teachings to His disciples. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30, He tells of a man taking a trip to a distant country. Before he leaves, he apportions his goods to each of three servants, with the understanding that they will try to increase what they are given.

Those who received five talents and two talents (a talent was about 6,000 denarii, probably ten years’ average wages at the time) went out and through various business dealings managed to double their money. A third servant, who received only one talent, dug a hole in the ground and hid it.

What did the wealthy man do on his return? He praised the actions of the two servants who had doubled their money. But his reaction to the lack of return of the third servant was far different. “You wicked and lazy servant . . . you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my return I would have received back my own with interest” (verse 27).

It’s difficult to make a case that Jesus

condemned wealth or legally acquiring it. He did teach on several occasions, however, that wealth and the pursuit of wealth can be a snare that distracts us from the pursuit of righteousness. What this parable teaches is that we should exercise and build on our spiritual talents, skills and abilities, which to God is infinitely more important than our material wealth.

The Bible does make a case for a liberty-oriented economy—what we would today call true capitalism or, perhaps better put, private property and free exchange.

What then are we to make of the time when the early New Testament Church practiced a communal economy? Notice this in Acts 2:44-45: “Now all who believed were together and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”

Does this teach that Christians should practice a communal economy and way of life? First of all, we must understand that this was a completely voluntary sharing of resources (see Acts 4:32–5:4)—not to be confused with a communist system wherein shared ownership is mandatory, amounting to theft of private property.

Secondly, this was a temporary circumstance during a time of persecution and of thousands of new converts in Jerusalem, many from foreign lands who were remaining for a while to learn from the apostles. Sharing took care of an immediate need. The account in Acts shows that these disciples were soon scattered to other regions (Acts 8:1, 4). Later writings give us no indication that this short-term experience with communal living lasted very long.

Universal prosperity will come

For centuries, mankind has tried various systems to arrive at prosperity for all and the elimination of poverty. Monarchies, socialism, Marxism, fascism—all have failed. So-called capitalism, too, despite some free-market benefits, has left millions in its economic wake—being a system of government overregulation and cronyism in which government colludes with business.

What has not been tried is true economic liberty through *the government of God and God’s economic system*. While on earth, Christ’s mission was to preach the gospel (good news) of the Kingdom of God. This gospel foretold a time when Christ would return to earth to set up His Kingdom. Longtime readers of *The Good News* know this has always been the major focus of this magazine.

The good news is that the universal prosperity, greater equality of income, and lives free from want that Pope Francis writes about *will* come. But it won’t come through man’s political parties, papal encyclicals, the churches of today’s world or other human organizations. It won’t come through political movements calling for redistribution of wealth, for “taxing the rich” or a higher minimum wage.

Your Bible makes hundreds of references to that coming time of peace and prosperity unparalleled in human history. Bible prophecy foretells a time when Christ Himself will return to the earth to rule.

God’s Word gives us a few hints about the economy of this future Kingdom. It will be an economy that values and preserves private property rights, a hallmark of a capitalistic economic order: “Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4).

Those privately owned farms will produce abundant harvests: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it” (Amos 9:13).

This economic order will allow those who work and profit to enjoy the fruits of their labors, but it will also ensure a level economic playing field that gives everyone a just opportunity to prosper.

God will then pour out His Spirit on the nations, and people the world over will receive the loving character of God, meaning that the way of the world will then be to help others in need. This will be accomplished not through government taking from some to give to others, but through an internal change in the hearts of people everywhere to motivate them to generosity and showing true concern for their neighbors. Best of all, God invites you to be part of this exciting future! **GN**

Learn More

How will poverty and many other great problems of the human race eventually be eradicated? In His inspired Word God tells us how that will come about! Download or request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to learn the exciting answers!



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Are You Doing **the Most** With What You Have?

Are you always thinking your life would be better if only you had this or that? Perhaps you need to look closer at what you have and make sure you're making the most of it first! *by Dan Dowd*

It's a natural human trait to look for something better in life. Many people seek to be healthier, more attractive, wealthier, more popular, more influential, more talented, smarter—the list goes on. The grass is always greener somewhere else.

Russell Conwell was a Protestant minister and motivational speaker over a century ago who founded Temple University in Philadelphia. He became noted for one speech in particular called “Acres of Diamonds,” which has much to teach us in terms of appreciating and making use of what we have.

There are variations of Conwell's story, but the basics concern a farmer who desired to become rich and decided to hunt for diamonds. The farmer sells his land and begins traveling in search of areas that would be diamond rich. Sadly, after decades of fruitless searching, and having exhausted all his money, the former farmer drowns himself in a river.

Meanwhile, the new owner of his farm came across strange-looking stones in his fields. So unusual were they that he kept one on his fireplace mantel. A friend visited one day and saw the stone there, recognizing it for what it was—a huge uncut diamond. The new farmer was encouraged to collect these “stones” and sell them—which he did, becoming fabulously wealthy.

The lesson: The original farmer never bothered to look on his own land for the wealth he was seeking.

We should ask, then: Do we make the most of what we have first, or do we think, “If I only had this or that, my life would be better”?

The apostle Paul cautions us to be content with what God has already given us: “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to



be content” (Philippians 4:11).

Contentment doesn't only mean to make do; it can also mean to make use of what we have. What talents do we have that we can build on? It can be easy to ask God for something we think we need, but have we done the most with what He has already given us?

In the well-known parable of the talents, Jesus Christ reprimands the one who squandered his talent because he didn't value even the little he had been given (Matthew 25:14-30). Likewise, the farmer in Conwell's story didn't think he had anything to start with, and he missed the treasure right under his nose.

Jesus stated, “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (verse 34).

The diamonds were just temporary wealth, like many of the useful but ephemeral things we value in this life—cars, vacations, tablets, smartphones, etc. We have a greater treasure accessible through the pages of God's Word and through the calling by which God has reserved for us His Kingdom.

Are you ready to acknowledge that calling? What will you do now to make the most of what you've already been given? **GN**



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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?

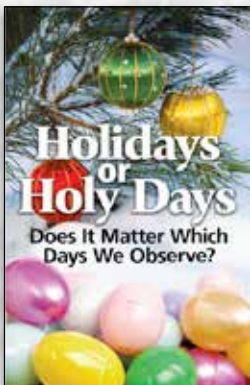
It may sound like an odd question to ask—but then it's truly odd that these symbols should have ever come to be associated with Jesus Christ's resurrection in the first place!

So what *do* these things have to do with Christ's resurrection? The plain answer is **NOTHING**.

So how did this strange association come to be? 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 importantly, 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 Observe?* will help you discover the surprising answers. For your free copy, visit our website or contact any of our offices listed on page 2. A free copy is waiting for you!



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