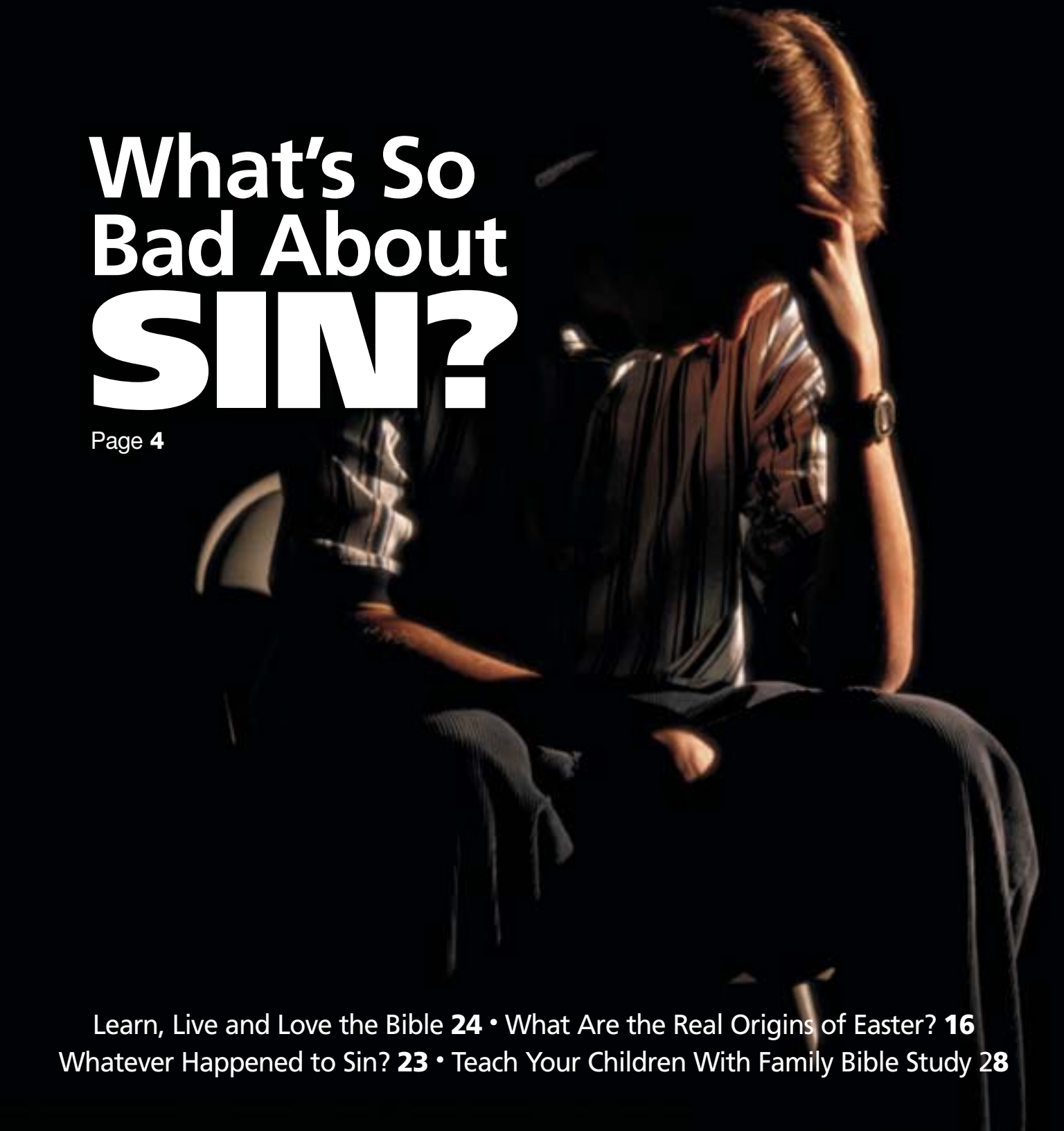
March-April 2006

The Good News

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



What's So Bad About SIN?

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A Perfect Family

The mission of *The Good News* is to put in plain words the wonderful promise of our Creator to solve the enormous problems confronting us every day. His solution is not only effective, it is also comprehensive. He will begin to fully implement it by sending His Son Jesus Christ back to earth to correct every human problem we now face.

But Jesus won't do it alone! Today He is diligently working, with His Father, to prepare more sons and daughters of God to serve under Him in His coming Kingdom. He makes an amazing promise to those who mature spiritually to the point that He can trust them to follow His instructions.

He promises, "To him who overcomes I will grant *to sit with Me on My throne,* as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21, emphasis added throughout). God

God will begin to fully implement His solutions by sending His Son Jesus Christ back to earth to correct every human problem we now face.

Himself adds another very personal promise: "I will be a Father to you, and *you shall be My sons and daughters,* says the LORD Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18).

The apostle Paul was exceedingly enthusiastic over this plan to create a divine family, exclaiming, "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom *the whole family* in heaven and earth is named, that He would *grant you,* according to the riches of His glory, *to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,* that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, *may be able to comprehend* with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; *that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"* (Ephesians 3:14-19).

In this issue of *The Good News* we feature several articles aimed directly at helping you gain that comprehension of what God has planned.

We begin with the most basic challenge that anyone who seeks to be a child of God must face—confronting the issue of sin. A follow-up article explains how we can begin the process of reconciling with God.

Dealing with sin in the manner that God would have us face it requires a clear understanding of how He defines the term. So another feature article contrasts the popular views of right and wrong prevalent in our society today with how the Bible defines sin. Emphasis is placed on understanding the "spirit of the law" as we begin applying biblical principles in the way we live.

To please God, we also need to rightly understand His will—what He wants from us—as we learn the way of life He wants us to pursue. Helpful tips on how to become better acquainted with what the Bible really teaches and how to involve your whole family in that learning process are covered in two additional articles.

We also explore the meaning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, one of the festivals by which God reveals His long-term plan to gather the vast majority of all people who have ever lived into His family. He is the perfect Father who is thoroughly engaged in a process of building His perfect family—a family of righteous sons and daughters to whom He has promised eternal life.

—Roger Foster, Senior writer

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I remember when my uncle and aunt informed me that their son, one of my younger cousins, had been murdered. I was stunned. That event brought home to me, in a very personal way, how appalling an unlawful, sinful act like murder really is.

My cousin and I weren't that close, having grown up almost a decade apart in different states. But we *were* kin, and that was important! Such a tragedy wasn't supposed to happen in my family. But it did!

His murder was incredibly sobering to me. And in my cousin's immediate family it created an emptiness that could never be filled.

Perhaps many of you reading this article can recount a similarly tragic story. Murder is much more than just a bad event. Besides being a crime, it is a heinous *sin.* It is a direct affront to the God who created us.

Yet many people today are embarrassed when "sin" is brought up in a conversation. This is puzzling since they witness the terrible results of it all around them, every day.

The contradictory distaste for sin in conversation

Excluding even the mention of sin from polite conversation is becoming increasingly common these days. But expressing an opinion about crime is perfectly acceptable—proof of civic concern.

Yet, when considered fairly, crime and sin are both violations of similar laws established to safeguard people and their property. Human laws that define criminal acts and their penalties usually enjoy broad public support.

So why doesn't divine law that defines sin receive the same support? As most of us are probably aware, we will likely enter testy waters if the relationship of human law to divine law is brought into a discussion.

One reason may be that human law deals mostly with unacceptable *actions*—leaving motive to investigators and courts. But *divine* law often addresses *motive* right up front. And that touches some people where it hurts—right in the heart.

Many holding to the popular mantra that we should always "be tolerant" of everyone's opinions often contradict themselves by insistence that introducing "sin" into a discussion is *intolerable.*

One factor that is too often overlooked is the fact that crime and sin are essentially the same thing—*the violation of law.* Divine law and criminal law deal with mostly the same issues, though from slightly different perspectives.

Of course, it is the shock factor of any type of violation that catches and holds our interest. Regardless of how a violation is categorized —criminal or sinful—sensational incidents grab our attention much more quickly than those whose consequences are less conspicuous.

For example, sensational murders of young women who are abducted and raped draw frenzied news media coverage. In Western nations, days or even weeks of cable television coverage may be devoted to such high-profile incidents.

Disregard for rule of law

As appalling as these incidents are, they only scratch the surface of the pervasive human disregard for laws. The United Nations' oil-for-food scandal and America's Enron debacle are high-profile examples of how greed sometimes motivates even highly successful people to ignore the rule of law.

But such notorious incidents are only the tip of the iceberg. The National Center for Victims of Crime reported that in 2002, the most recent year for which it published statistics, 23 million people were crime victims in the United States. Of these, 17.5 million were victimized by property crimes and 5.3 million by violent crimes.

These staggering statistics in only two broad categories of criminal behavior show how willing many people are to violate the rights of others. This general disregard for the rule of law—often fueled by a mind-set of "nobody can tell me what to do"—is escalating alarmingly.

At the root of this growing problem is raw, uncontrolled *selfishness.* How human beings *think*—with selfish desires, emotions and feelings dominating too many of their decisions—makes both crime and sin so difficult to combat.

The real solution to this all-too-common human weakness must begin ultimately *in the mind.* Neither crime nor sin can be stopped completely so long as selfish disregard for the well-being of others remains so dominant in human thinking.

Importance of rule of law

The rule of law is a major foundation of any society. The stability provided by rule of law has given Western nations in particular the capacity to make incredible advances, accompanied with both economic and social stability, to a degree that no nations ruled by the caprice of men have been able to maintain. Good laws serve to level the playing field in both our relationships and our activities. They set standards for everyone to meet.

But for the rule of law to work, effective law enforcement is essential. There are two paramount aspects of good enforcement, and both begin in the home.

Education is the first step. It should begin with every child as soon as he or she is born and continue through the entire education system

Shocking Levels of Violence in Personal Relationships

In the realm of personal relationships, documented evidence provides one example of a serious sin which clearly demonstrates the widespread lack of respect for the rights of others. Statistics gathered on domestic violence against women, represented below by just U.S. figures, should shock us.

- At least one in three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime.
- Nearly 25 percent of American women report being raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner or date at some time in their life, according to the National Violence Against Women Survey, conducted from November 1995 to May 1996.
- Thirty percent of Americans say they know a woman who has been physically abused by her husband or boyfriend in the past year.
- In the year 2001, 588,490 American women—well over half a million—were victims of nonfatal violence committed by an intimate partner.
- Intimate partner violence is primarily a crime against women. In 2001, women accounted for 85 percent of the victims of intimate partner violence (588,490 total) while men accounted for approximately 15 percent of the victims (103,220).
- While women are less likely than men to be victims of violent crimes overall, women are five to eight times more likely than men to be victimized by an intimate partner. (Source: http://endabuse.org/resources/facts/).

These statistics show that abusive behavior against the very individuals who should be receiving the most love, concern and respect is stunningly common. Intimacy is plagued with love-hate relationships. Statistics on child abuse only add to this bleak picture of our inability to show even this most basic level of self-discipline.

Photos: Getty Images, Photos.com (inset)

What's So Bad About SIN?

Crime and "murder mysteries" may seem harmless on TV or in movies or books that are easily forgotten. It's different when it happens in real life—illustrating how painful and horrible sin really is. What's at the heart of the problem?

by Roger Foster

Crime and sin are both violations of similar laws established to safeguard people and their property.

until the child becomes an adult.

Law-abiding attitudes are *learned,* not inherited at birth. A child who grows up in an environment of commitment to respecting and honoring the rights of others—with the right example of parents and teachers reinforcing what is taught in this regard—is much more likely to make such behavior a personal lifelong habit.

Enforcement, including the effective capture and punishment of offenders, is the second step. Fear of punishment is a great deterrent to temptation—*if* the punishment is fairly, swiftly and effectively administered. But if enforcement is so lax that crime does indeed "pay," crime naturally grows.

It's important to realize that the mere *existence* of law does not guarantee *observance* of law. Effective rule of law requires commitment from most citizens to respect, obey and support the enforcement of their laws. If that support isn't there, lawlessness prevails.

The root of the sin problem

The real problem lies deep within man. The finest laws ever devised have not and cannot fully stop human beings from exploiting and abusing each other. And that is just as true with divine laws as it is with human laws. Laws merely define abuse and exploitation and establish penalties for the most serious infractions. But law alone is not enough!

Once we understand the limitation of law in eliminating either crime or sin, we can begin to have a realistic picture of the only solution that makes sense—somehow we must deal directly with the nature of man. And that solution is possible only with the help of our Creator.

The apostle Paul puts it this way: "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, *in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"* (Romans 8:3-4, New American Standard Bible, emphasis added throughout).

The problem is *spiritual* because the most basic requirement or intent of a law—whether civil or spiritual—is to ensure that we treat others with the same degree of respect that we would like to receive from them. And the fundamental *enemy* of law is the selfishness that is so ingrained within us. Therefore, only a spiritual solution will work.

The word *spiritual* refers to those aspects of life that are not physical but are nevertheless very real. For instance, *attitudes* are real. People have attitudes. Yet an attitude cannot be weighed in a test tube or viewed under a microscope. Each of us, however, has experienced the chilling impact of someone else's wrong attitude—and wished we could change it.

But since our selfishness and self-seeking attitude can't be treated with medicine or surgically removed in a hospital, the issue of *sin* comes directly into the picture.

Sin, according to its most basic definition, is the transgression of law—*God's law* in particular. The apostle John states this explicitly: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, *sin is lawlessness"* (1 John 3:4, New International Version).

Lawlessness, as described by man's Creator, implies more than just ignoring behavioral restrictions. It also implies *undisciplined attitudes.* It covers *the way the mind works,* what comes from the heart.

Lawlessness that begins in the heart is the very essence of sin. The more our sinful, selfish nature controls our behavior, the less we will be able to enjoy good relationships with others and our Creator.

Law-abiding attitudes are *learned,* not inherited at birth. A child who grows up in an environment of commitment to respecting and honoring the rights of others is much more likely to make such behavior a personal lifelong habit.

Why is sin bad?

Again, why is sin so bad? It's bad *because it hurts.* It hurts *you.* It hurts *me.* It separates friends and destroys relationships. It leads to violence, addiction and untimely death. It locks us in our own prisons of heartbreak, suffering, misery and fear. It *never* bears good fruit. That's why God hates it. And that's why you and I should hate it too.

If we object to crime, we should also object to sin! As noted earlier, crime and sin are essentially the same. Both are violations of law. The only difference lies in *whose* law is being violated.

Those who disdain even the mention of sin may not believe in God or might actually be expressing resentment for the rule of law. They insinuate that God should not "stick His nose" into their personal life. Essentially, they want to be able to live as they please with as few restrictions on their selfish inclinations as possible.

Why this hostility toward God's role in determining the laws we observe? Paul explains: "Those who live according to the sinful nature *have their minds set on what that nature desires;* but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

"The *mind of sinful man* is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; *the sinful mind is hostile to God*. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those *controlled* by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Romans 8:5-8, NIV).

In other words, people naturally resist the idea that a supreme Authority exists who declares absolutely what is right and wrong.

How does God determine sin?

Maybe you've heard the comment, "Everything I enjoy is either sinful or fattening!" An underlying assumption in this remark is that if anything is pleasurable, God considers it to be a sin. That notion is amazingly prevalent.

Those who see life this way should be pleasantly surprised to discover what God really wants us to experience in this life. He certainly didn't frame His law to deprive us of enjoyment.

Notice how Jesus Christ saw His role in teaching God's will to humanity: *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

Living abundantly! Is that really what God wants us to experience in life? If so, then why does He tell us so many things we are *not* to do?

Explaining that is a lot like a master sculptor explaining how to carve a magnificent statue of a horse from a solid block of stone. He might say that he simply chips away everything from that block of stone that doesn't look like a horse.

In the same way, God tells us that we should exclude from the way we live everything that doesn't contribute to our living fully and abundantly. As a loving Father, He knows what will harm us. He always has our well-being in mind.

The apostle John clearly understood this. That's why he explained: "And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. *God is love,* and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4:16, NASB). Also, "The one who does not love does not know God, *for God is love"* (verse 8, NASB). How simple! How plain!

God gives us fundamental principles—laws—for abundant living, all established

on the foundation of putting love (outgoing concern for others) into all of our relationships. Notice how emphatic Jesus Christ was in making this point clear:

"Then one . . . asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, '*"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."* This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets'" (Matthew 22:35-40).

These two simple principles—loving our Creator and loving each other—are the basis of every teaching and command of God. They tell us how to chip away everything that doesn't contribute to living an abundant, fulfilling and rewarding life.

The unseen consequences of sin

Some would no doubt argue, "If God's ways are so beneficial, why doesn't everyone follow them all the time?" The problem is that the consequences—the end result—of many of our choices *may not be obvious enough at first* for us to recognize how damaging they'll be in the long run. We could avoid many pitfalls if only we would first learn what God teaches and then *trust* Him enough to *follow* His advice.

God, however, has given us the freedom to choose the path we wish to walk! He urges us to choose the right path—but He won't make that choice for us.

He explains, "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, *that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you . . ."* (Deuteronomy 30:15-16, NASB).

But He doesn't *force* us to live that way. If we refuse to follow His advice, the Bible reveals that we will surely have to face the consequences: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8, NIV). God is concerned primarily with the ultimate outcome of our life.

In the short term, ignoring His instructions may seem the easiest and most enjoyable way to live (especially in a society duped by man's adversary, the devil—Revelation 12:9). But not in the long run. That is why believing and trusting God is so crucial.

For example, "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing rather to suffer affliction* with the people of God *than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,* esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Why is sin so bad? It's bad *because it hurts.* It hurts *you.* It hurts *me.* It separates friends and destroys relationships. It leads to violence, addiction and untimely death. It locks us in our own prisons of heartbreak, suffering, misery and fear.

Those *passing pleasures of sin* can be very tempting. As the psalmist wrote: "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked . . . They are free from the burdens common to man . . . They say, 'How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?'

"This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning . . . When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; *then I understood their final destiny"* (Psalm 73:2-17, NIV).

It is our "final destiny" that counts. God wants us to see *beyond today*—to take the time to reevaluate the way we live. We all have stepped off the path that God tells us to walk: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Jesus Christ came to help us get back on the right path—for our own good.

We all need to reevaluate where we are in our relationship with God and correct our course. "For 'He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him *turn away from evil* and do good; let him *seek peace* and pursue it'" (1 Peter 3:10-11).

No exceptions

There are no exceptions! Jesus explained this very clearly: "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but *unless you repent* you will all likewise perish'" (Luke 13:1-3).

God wants us to not be so foolish. So by the hand of James He sends us this advice: "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:12-15, NASB).

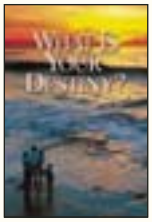
Why is sin so bad? It leads to a short, painful, temporary life compared to the eternal life God wants to give each of us.

He will not give eternal life to anyone who refuses to put the brakes on his or her selfish desires and foolish impulses. Only those who repent of such foolishness and begin building the self-control—the self-discipline—that God's law teaches can be trusted with that greatest of all gifts.

God asks you to compare your heart and behavior to the fullness of His teachings and make that choice. He hopes you will choose to build good character rather than pursuing the temporary, empty pleasures of sin.

If you have known someone who, like my cousin, became the victim of a violent crime, then you know personally the tragic effects of sin. Let that motivate you to take God's description of sin seriously. Resolve to learn and walk the path of a law-abiding person, respectfully abiding by the laws of both God and man. The rewards are infinitely better than the alternative! ***GN***

Recommended Reading



How can you begin to make the right choices in life? What does it take, and what does God expect of you? What help does He promise, and where does it ultimately lead? Discover the answers to these and many more crucial questions in our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion.* If you'd like to learn more about how God's law spells out a way of life that brings blessings for all concerned, be sure to also request *The Ten Commandments.*

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World News and Trends

An Overview of Conditions Around the World

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

Who and what is Hamas?

Political observers were stunned when the Islamic group Hamas won a landslide victory in the Jan. 25 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, putting it at the helm of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and throwing peace prospects into turmoil. So who and what is Hamas?

Hamas is an acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya* ("Islamic Resistance Movement"). In Arabic, the word *hamas* is typically defined as "zeal" or "warlike strength and bravery." Ironically, *hamas* is also a Hebrew word meaning "violence."

The slogan of Hamas is: "Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Qur'an its constitution: Jihad is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes."

Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, established in Gaza in 1946. Hamas officially formed in 1987. It carried out its first suicide bombing in 1993. Due to its attacks against civilian targets including buses, supermarkets, shopping areas, hotels and restaurants, Hamas is listed as a terrorist organization by most Western nations, including the United States and the European Union.

Since the current wave of Palestinian violence began in September 2000, Hamas has launched more than 400 attacks against Israelis, killing almost 400 and injuring more than 2,000. Of these attacks, the most deadly were 52 suicide bombings, including two by women.

In 1988 Hamas published its 9,100-word charter. This declaration of the organization's fundamental principles illustrates why peace is unlikely to break out anytime soon in the Middle East. Some excerpts:

"Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it."

"Our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious."

"The Islamic Resistance Movement . . . strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine."

"The Islamic Resistance Movement is one of the links in the chain of the struggle against the Zionist invaders."

"There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavors."

"In face of the Jews' usurpation of Palestine, it is compulsory that the banner of Jihad be raised."

"The Prophet [Muhammad], Allah bless him and grant him salvation, has said: 'The Day of Judgment will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews, when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say, "O Moslems, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him."'"

The slogan of Hamas is: "Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Qur'an its constitution: Jihad is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes." (Sources: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wikipedia, the Hamas Charter as translated by the Avalon Project at Yale Law School.)

China: An epidemic of "free love"

One female Chinese journalist said: "I express my freedom through sex . . . It's my life and I can do what I want." Human beings get themselves into big trouble by unlawfully doing whatever they wish, regardless of the unrealized horrendous consequences that inevitably follow sooner or later (see Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

A recent survey by a Shanghai medical researcher showed that rates of sexually transmitted diseases are going through the roof in China, with HIV infections rapidly growing among young people. Such are the unpleasant, unwanted side effects of illicit sexual behavior.

Premarital sex used to be relatively rare even in Beijing as late as 1989 (15 percent), but it has since jumped to 70 percent of the capital's residents, according to a sociologist at the Chinese Academy of Social Scientists. (Source: *Time* magazine.)

Teen girls pass boys in stupid behavior

Reversing decades-long trends, teen girls are smoking marijuana and cigarettes and drinking alcohol at rates higher than teen boys, according to the White House's director of National Drug Control Policy, John Walters.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health notes that 1.5 million 12- to 17-year-old girls started drinking alcohol in 2004 compared to 1.28 million boys. The 2004 figures, based on a survey of 70,000 families, are the most recent available.

In the same age range, 730,000 girls started smoking cigarettes compared to 565,000 boys. Regarding drug usage, 675,000 girls started using marijuana compared to 577,000 boys and 14.4 percent of girls and 12.5 percent of boys misused prescription drugs.

A well-known ad campaign years ago told women, "You've come a long way, baby!" in encouraging them to smoke a particular cigarette brand. Sure enough, rates from cancers caused by smoking soon rose to rival cancer rates in men. It seems ever-younger girls are getting the message that they can do whatever they want without suffering the consequences. Sadly, real life doesn't work that way. (Source: Associated Press.)

Marriage and money; divorce and debt

Many studies have documented the benefits of marriage. But who would have thought that marriage actually promotes wealth? And who would have thought that divorce brings on poverty?

"Marrying for money, it turns out, works. A study by an Ohio State University researcher shows that a person who marries—and stays married—accumulates nearly twice as much personal wealth as a person who is single or divorced. And for those who divorce, it's a bit more expensive than giving up half of everything they own. They lose, on average, three-fourths of their personal net worth" (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* Jan. 18).

In spite of criticism of marriage as an outmoded institution, and people's growing willingness to divorce (or never marry in the first place), the facts speak for themselves. Perhaps society should take an unbiased look at the Bible. It tells us that God encourages marriage, and for a number of good reasons: procreation, sharing, service, sacrifice and building our children's future, to name a few.

Now we discover that marriage also pays off financially. No wonder Proverbs 18:22 tells us, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD." To learn more about the blessings marriage brings, request our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension.* (Source: *Seattle Post-Intelligencer.*)

Photos.com

Resurrecting a 'dead' EU constitution

Several months ago the French and Dutch peoples decisively rejected the European Union's proposed constitution in referendums. Yet according to an article in *The Sunday Telegraph,* the European Commission "effectively insists that the provisions of the Charter [of Fundamental Rights] be enshrined in all new EU legislation."

Said Chris Heaton-Harris, a Conservative MEP (member of the European Parliament) from Britain: "This shows that the Commission has no intention of taking any notice of the voters in France and the Netherlands, who decisively rejected their blueprint for a federal super state." Brussels bureaucrats were further accused of cherry-picking certain parts of the proposed constitution and sending them through the back door.

Liam Fox, Conservative British shadow foreign secretary, firmly stated, "I have repeatedly made clear my fear that the EU is determined to ignore the results of the two referenda and instead press ahead with the implementation of many elements of the constitution treaty."

British journalist William Rees-Mogg recently underscored Conservative Party concerns with a feature article appropriately titled "Wake Up! The EU Is Stealing Our Freedom" (*The Mail on Sunday*). He firmly stated: "One of the principles of the 'dead' constitution was a serious move towards a federal criminal justice system for Europe. A single European criminal justice system would be a huge victory for Eurofederalism and a huge defeat for British justice."

Most do not even notice decisions giving "Brussels the right to introduce harmonised criminal law across the [European] Union, which all member states are required to adopt." Mr. Rees-Mogg went on to explain that "piece by piece, the Eurofederalists have been taking over powers that the constitution would have given them."

This is not how true democracies are supposed to function. But it is exactly how some bureaucracies tend to further their agendas. (Source: *The Sunday Telegraph, The Mail on Sunday* [both London].)

Does Europe need a superman?

British Prime Minister Tony Blair makes a speech about Europe every six months or so. All of these talks praise the growing value of U.K. membership in the European Union. But the British electorate instinctively resists European influence and would now easily defeat any referendum on joining the euro currency.

Although the "dead" constitution is gradually being implemented through the back door, the general feeling of the electorate in many member states is that the EU is at best treading water rather than moving dynamically forward.

One British journalist, Charles Nevin, seems to have put his finger on the future, writing, "As I believe the Romans used to put it, what's lacking is big unifying ideas and symbols, something to rally around, something uniquely European, something that will send pride surging into our European hearts."

Later in the article Mr. Nevin said something almost prophetic: "It is easy to see the advantages of having an emperor who is also a god possessed of the power to end your life with the downward flick of a thumb." This is what the German nation unwittingly voted for in 1933. Continuing, Nevin mused about the legendary Holy Roman Emperor Charles the Great (A.D. 742-814), usually known as Charlemagne—head of one of the periodic historic revivals of the old Roman Empire.

Although the article was somewhat tongue in cheek, it reminds one of the stark biblical prophecies about the darkening future of Central Europe. Both the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation foretell a cruel dictatorship coming in Europe. The crucial benchmark will be the very last revival of ancient Rome with not one but two principal figures ruling the roost.

"What's lacking is big unifying ideas and symbols, something to rally around . . ."

The Bible calls the political leader the Beast and the religious leader the False Prophet. They will not be ordinary politicians or bureaucrats who gradually rise to power in the process of time, but two charismatic men who will sway the world to their deadly agenda with their words and actions. Resistance will not be tolerated, and those who persist in opposition will be martyred.

Does that seem impossible? Remember that just over 60 years ago Europe was ruled by an elected dictator, Adolf Hitler. But his 12-year reign (1933-1945) of terror and murder (against minority groups in particular) was only a forerunner of what is foretold to come. To understand more, please request or download our two free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *How to Understand Bible Prophecy.* (Sources: *The Independent* [London], *Financial Times.*)

Catholic Church weighs in on intelligent design

In January, an article in the official Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* labeled as "correct" the recent decision by a Pennsylvania judge that intelligent design should not be taught as a scientific alternative to evolution.

"It is not correct from a methodological point of view to stray from the field of science while pretending to do science," wrote Fiorenzo Facchini, professor of evolutionary biology at the University of Bologna, in the Jan. 16-17 edition, implying that intelligent design is unscientific. "It only creates confusion between the scientific plane and those that are philosophical or religious" (*The New York Times,* Jan. 19)

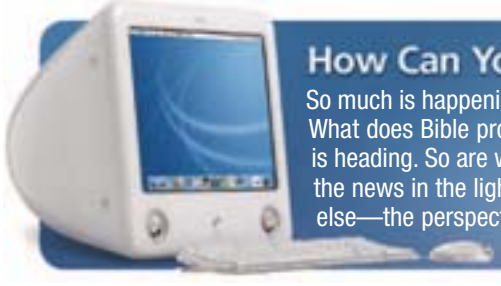
Dr. Francisco Ayala, professor of biology of the University of California, Irvine, and a former Dominican priest said: "He is emphasizing that there is no need to see a contradiction between Catholic teachings and evolution. Good for him" (ibid.)

Interesting. Why would the church, any church, give credence to a secular faith that opposes creationism?

Is intelligent design really unscientific? The argument is that it can't be proved through the scientific method. Of course, evolution can't be proved either—as it supposedly happens over eons, thereby preventing observation. Thus evolution is a *theory* that for many scientists seems to fit the facts.

In reality, however, it does not fit so well. From a mathematical probabilities standpoint, such things as the design and orderliness of the universe, the way our planet is fine-tuned for the existence of life and the astoundingly intricate design of the eye coming about by chance are impossibilities. (To learn more about this debate, request our free booklets *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* and *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*)

There is, in fact, no greater scientist than the God who created and sustains the universe, our planet and its biosphere. Why do some scientists insist on separating hard science from religious faith—especially when such scientists show their faith in evolutionary "science," a hypothesis that, again, has never been proved? (Source: *The New York Times.*)



How Can You Make Sense of the News?

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

Our World Is Rapidly Changing—in Ways Foretold by Bible Prophecy

Bible prophecy shows that we should keep an eye on Europe and the Middle East. Ongoing developments in both areas are rapidly reshaping our world in ways foretold centuries ago.

by Melvin Rhodes

It wasn't long into the new year before radical Islam was again dominating the news around the world.

Several editorial cartoons—originally published in a Danish newspaper last September and later reprinted in several newspapers across Europe and in other parts of the world—led to violence in a number of nations. In Islamic countries, rioters burned embassies as Europeans were threatened and attacked. Dozens of people were killed as Muslims vented their anger at depictions of Muhammad, the founder of Islam, in the cartoons.

Ironically, the reaction to the cartoons forced two earlier threats to the West off the television screens.

After more than a year of silence, the world's most wanted man once again made his presence known Jan. 19. Osama bin Laden's latest audiotape, played on the Qatar-based al-Jazeera television network, warned that further attacks on the United States are being planned.

The warning message came while much of the world's attention focused on Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has called for the destruction of Israel, the United States and Britain and appears determined to see his country acquire nuclear weapons regardless of consequences.

In response, France's president Jacques Chirac made it clear that he would not hesitate to use French nuclear weapons against any nation threatening France with weapons of mass destruction. "France, said Mr. Chirac, regarded its nuclear weapons as part of Europe's ultimate defense, as well as its own," observed the U.S. edition of the *Financial Times* on Jan. 20.

In other words, France would use its nuclear force to defend Europe from any government-sponsored threat emanating from the Islamic world!

Radical Islam flexes its muscles

Mortimer Zuckerman, editor in chief of *U.S. News & World Report,* described the growing danger from Iran in his Jan. 30 column in the magazine. "Iran today is the mother of Islamic terrorism," he wrote. "Tehran openly provides funding, training, and weapons to the world's worst terrorists, including Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and it has a cozy relationship with al Qaeda.

This final revival of the Roman Empire is the domain of the "king of the North" that will clash with the "king of the South" at the time of the end—a clash of civilizations as Islam and Europe collide.

"It has given sanctuary to major al Qaeda terrorists, including senior military commander Saif al-Adel, three of Osama bin Laden's sons, and al Qaeda spokesman Suleiman Abu Ghaith. It supports many of the barbaric terrorists in Iraq who are murdering innocent civilians in order to destroy Iraq's fragile hold on democracy.

"Through its 900-mile border with Iraq, Iran is flooding its neighbor with money and fighters. It is infiltrating troublemakers into Afghanistan, supporting terrorism against Turkey, sustaining Syria, and had a hand in the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia.

"Iran today is in the grip of yet a new wave of extremists. Its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is a revolutionary firebrand who has directly threatened the West. In his own words, 'We are in the process of an historical war between the World of Arrogance [i.e., the West] and the Islamic world.'"

In a further development, less than a week after Osama bin Laden's latest tape was aired, Palestinians ousted the ruling Fatah party from power in the first election in a decade, giving the militant group Hamas a landslide. Hamas is pledged to use military force to destroy the nation of Israel.

In a sober Jan. 28 editorial, *The Washington Post* pointed out that "elections in Iran, Iraq, Egypt and now the Palestinian territories have resulted in the defeat of secular and moderate parties and the rise of Islamic parties hostile to U.S. interests."

Public opinion across the Middle East is turning more radical, more anti-American and more anti-Western in general.

A crucial Bible prophecy

The stage is increasingly being set for the final conflict between the kings of the North and South prophesied in Daniel 11:40-45. The kings of the North and South in ancient times were the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties that succeeded Alexander the Great, ruling primarily over what are now Syria and Egypt. Their repeated clashes negatively affected the Jews who lived between them.

Bible prophecy shows that at the time of the end, just before the second coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, 10 "kings"—leaders of nations or groups of nations—will come together to form a new world superpower (Revelation 17:12-13).

In Daniel 7 we read a prophecy of much of the known world being dominated down through the centuries by four great empires—Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome (Daniel 7:1-8). The last was to be revived repeatedly down through history, culminating at the time of the end with a final union of these 10 "kings" who

"will give their power and authority to the beast" (Revelation 17:13), a supreme political and military figure.

This final revival of the Roman Empire is the domain of the "king of the North" that will clash with the "king of the South" at the time of the end—a clash of civilizations as Islam and Europe collide.

Exactly who these individual leaders will be remains to be seen. But events in both Europe and the Islamic world appear to be leading inexorably toward the fulfillment of these end-time prophecies.

***In London, British Muslims condemn editorial cartoons** depicting Muhammad, founder of Islam. The cartoons, which first appeared in a Danish newspaper and were later reprinted in several countries, sparked worldwide protests. Other signs, not shown, read: "Europe you will pay, your 9/11 is on its way," "Slay those who insult Islam," "Europe is the cancer, Islam is the answer," "Behead those who insult the prophet," "Freedom go to hell," "As Muslims we unite and are prepared to fight" and "Be prepared for the real holocaust," among other things.*

Newscom/Bruno Vincent/Getty Images

Massive change in recent decades

Look at how much the world has changed in the last few decades.

Just before World War II, the British Empire was the world's only superpower. Yet by the end of that conflict Britain was bankrupt and exhausted, unable to retain control of its vast empire. The United States and the Soviet Union had emerged as the dominant military forces in the world, the two superpowers that would rival each other for the next 45 years.

At the same time, Germany and Japan lay in ruins.

Today, the Soviet Union no longer exists while Japan is the second-largest single economy in the world after the United States. Germany ranks as the third-most-powerful economy on its own, but it is also the world's biggest exporting nation and the leader of the 25-nation European Union (EU), which is now the world's biggest trading bloc.

The British Empire, victorious and intact at the end of World War II, no longer exists. Gone, too, are the French and other European empires. Succeeding them are many new countries across Africa and the Middle East that didn't even exist in 1945.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, more new nations came into existence across Asia, many of them Muslim-dominated countries that have added to the growing strength of Islam. Defeat at the hands of Islamic militants in Afghanistan contributed to the collapse of the old U.S.S.R.

As we see, the world has changed dramatically in the decades since World War II. Significant changes are taking place even now, and still greater changes are prophesied to take place in the immediate years ahead.

America finds fewer and fewer friends

The United States has been the dominant nation of the latter half of the 20th century, but today America finds itself increasingly isolated.

The following quote appeared on the front page of the U.S. edition of the *Financial Times* on Jan. 12. "Britain is in many, many ways the only friend America has got," said the director-general of Britain's biggest business lobbying group, the Confederation of British Industry.

He was lamenting the possible cancellation by the United States of a military contract with a British company that was worth $2.4 billion. He added the words: "[British Prime Minister Tony] Blair personally takes the heat everywhere he goes because of that and we don't see very much coming back." Even Great Britain, it would appear, is increasingly disillusioned with the United States.

One day later the same paper published an article titled "Afghan Mission Threatens Dutch Coalition." The Netherlands, liberated by American, Canadian and British troops from German occupation in World War II, has been a loyal supporter of the United States in the ensuing six decades. But in January considerable public animosity arose to the idea of Holland sending troops to help out in Afghanistan.

Growing antagonism toward the United States brings to mind a prophecy in Deuteronomy 28:25 referring to the nations descended from ancient Israel, predominant among them today being America: "You shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth." (See our eye-opening booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* for more details.)

Financial clout lacking

Lest you think everything will return to normal after the Bush administration leaves office, ponder the following statement from the book *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order* by French writer Emmanuel Todd, a 2002 bestseller in both France and Germany:

"After every defection of one of America's allies during the diplomatic crisis that preceded the war on Iraq, Washington was unable to force compliance or exact retribution for one simple reason: America no longer has the economic and financial resources to back up its foreign policy objectives. Due to trade surpluses, the real money has piled up in Europe and Asia,

while financially speaking America has become the planet's glorious beggar" (p. xxi).

Put simply, every month Americans buy more than they sell—and then have to borrow the money back again just to stay afloat! That's no way for a superpower to conduct itself. This is not going to change with a different administration in Washington. Eventually, as with Britain 60 years ago, economic reality will hit and the United States will no longer be able to maintain superpower status. Another nation or group of nations will step in to fill the gap.

America's relative economic decline was highlighted on the last business day of 2005 by CNN International, a CNN affiliate that is broadcast from London and seen across Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

Looking back at the past year on the world's stock markets, the commentators highlighted the fact that Germany and France saw their stock markets grow by 25 percent and Britain's by 16 percent while the Dow (America's industrial market) was actually down by almost one percentage point (0.6%). Not surprisingly, in a year that saw a big rise in the price of oil, the Arab 50 stock markets grew by a staggering 75 percent. The world's wealth is moving away from the United States!

Threatening U.S. interests just a few days into the new year was a report that China was considering diversifying its foreign currency reserves. Any move away from the U.S. dollar would pose a serious concern. In a worst-case scenario, the dollar could go into free fall.

One reason for America's growing budgetary problems is the continuing strife in the Middle East and especially the war in Iraq.

Not only is America increasingly isolated, the country is also increasingly dependent on the goodwill of other nations, many of whom have been enemies in the not-too-distant past. "He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him" is another prophecy found in Deuteronomy 28:44—one that describes America's economic situation today.

Another successful terrorist attack on America by Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda would only add to America's economic woes and further erode its leadership role. Just the airing of the Bin Laden tape with its threats of another terrorist attack on the United States was, according to some analysts, the major factor that sent the U.S. stock market plummeting on Jan. 20.

The growing American-European rift

As the United States declines, Europe rises. The 25-nation EU, which expanded from 15 countries to 25 only two years ago, is soon to expand again. Bulgaria and Romania are set to become members within the next year. Turkey and Ukraine have applied for membership, and other smaller nations in the Balkans are interested.

Apart from three members exempted at the beginning, all new member nations are required to adopt the euro as their currency as soon as they comply with the fairly rigid rules on monetary discipline.

The euro has rapidly emerged as a serious rival to the U.S. dollar on the world's currency markets. Many nations around the world now diversify their foreign currency holdings, keeping some of their assets in euros rather than dollars. The euro is currently up to a little over $1.20.

In one important respect, though, the United States still leads—Washington remains the world's foremost military power. The United States is the leading nation in NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which has dominated the Western world for more than 55 years. But will NATO last?

In the last decade NATO has changed considerably, adding new members from Eastern Europe and spreading its wings into other parts of the world, notably Afghanistan. Ironically, it is Afghanistan and the wider war on terror that threaten the cohesion of the Atlantic alliance.

By agreement, the United States is to withdraw some of its military personnel from Afghanistan, to be replaced by British, Canadian and Dutch troops. At least that's the plan. But growing hostility to the plan in Holland could still wreck it.

If that happens, NATO as a united military force will effectively be dead, with its members unable to agree on where to go from here—or exactly what needs to be done to fight the growing threat of Islamic terrorism.

NATO's three English-speaking powers—the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada—will have separated themselves from the nations of continental Europe, a rift essentially ending the world's oldest and most effective military alliance. NATO would perhaps continue on paper, but that's all.

A coming clash of civilizations

With this in mind, it's interesting to note the final paragraph of the *Financial Times'* Jan. 6 editorial comment on the French threat to use nuclear weapons against any state-sponsored terrorism, a thinly veiled threat against Iran: "This is not the first time France has suggested some eventual 'Europeanizing' of its deterrent. So far this has not gone down well with its non-nuclear European partners, some of whom are allergic to anything nuclear.

"Others would prefer to stay tucked under the US shield. But, if ever the Nato link between the US and Europe were to snap, they might change their mind. That would leave [fellow nuclear power] Britain out on a nuclear limb, for its reliance on US nuclear missiles prevents it ever making such a 'European' offer."

If NATO splits, Europe will be going its own way. France will provide its nuclear force; Germany will be the banker. Then, out of the EU we could see the 10 nations or leaders emerge that will form the final political-military union prophesied in the Bible as the revival of the Roman Empire, the end-time "beast" power.

These trends appear to be set on a collision course with the rising tide of radical Islam.

On the Dec. 25 airing of PBS' news discussion program *The McLaughlin Group,* U.S. commentator Pat Buchanan made a rather insightful observation: "The London subway bombings and the French riots were the beginning of a clash of civilizations between Europe and Islam."

The outcry and violence over the publication of cartoons depicting Muhammad only underscores the hostility of many Muslims toward the West. This growing clash of civilizations is leading us toward prophesied end-time events foretold long ago in the pages of your Bible. ***GN***

Recommended Reading

Where are current trends taking us? Does Bible prophecy give us any indication? Where do Europe, the English-speaking nations and the Middle East fit in what the Bible reveals about the future? To help you better understand, the writers and editors of *The Good News* have put together several eye-opening booklets. Be sure to request or download your free copies of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy, You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* to gain the crucial biblical understanding!

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Jesus Wasn't **Crucified on Friday**—or **Resurrected on Sunday!**

How can we fit three days and three nights between a Friday afternoon crucifixion and an Easter Sunday sunrise? The fact is, we can't. So what is the truth about when Jesus was crucified and resurrected?

by Scott Ashley

About one billion Protestants and another billion Catholics believe that Jesus Christ was crucified and entombed on a Friday afternoon—"Good Friday"—and raised to life again at daybreak on Easter Sunday morning, a day and a half later.

Yet when we compare this to what Jesus Himself said about how long He would be entombed, we find a major contradiction. How long did Jesus say He would be in the grave? "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).

The context in which Jesus Christ said these words is important. The scribes and Pharisees were demanding a miraculous sign from Him to prove that He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. "But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah'" (verse 39).

This was the *only* sign Jesus gave that He was the promised Messiah: "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"* (emphasis added throughout).

Traditional timing doesn't add up

The Gospels are clear that Jesus died and His body was hurriedly placed in the tomb late in the afternoon, just before sundown when a Sabbath began (John 19:30-42).

By the traditional "Good Friday–Easter Sunday" timing, from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown is one night and one day. Saturday night to Sunday daybreak is another night, giving us two nights and one day.

So where do we get another night and two days to equal the three days and three nights Jesus said He would be in the tomb?

This is definitely a problem. Most theologians and religious scholars try to work around it by arguing that any part of a day or night counts as a day or night. Thus, they say, the final few minutes of that Friday afternoon were the first day, all day Saturday was the second day, and the first few minutes of Sunday morning were the third day.

Sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

The trouble is, it doesn't work. This only adds up to three days and *two* nights, not three days and *three* nights.

Also, John 20:1 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."

Did you catch the problem here? John tells us *it was still dark* when Mary went to the tomb on Sunday morning and found it empty. Jesus was *already resurrected well before daybreak.* Thus He wasn't in the tomb *any* of the daylight portion of Sunday, so none of that can be counted as a day.

That leaves us with, at most, part of a day on Friday, all of Friday night, a whole

Centuries-Old Documents Show Evidence for a Wednesday Crucifixion

Did you know there is additional historical evidence for a Wednesday crucifixion? Although it was a minority position in the early centuries of Christianity and ran against the prevailing teachings of the Church in Rome, some early historical documents nonetheless acknowledge a Tuesday night Passover, a Wednesday afternoon crucifixion and a Saturday sunset resurrection.

Around the year 200, a document purporting to pass on apostolic instruction, called the *Didascalia Apostolorum,* mentions that the last Passover of Jesus Christ and His disciples was on a Tuesday night. It should be noted that the timing mentioned in the document corresponds to the biblical method of counting time—i.e., the week started with Sunday as the first day and the days began at sunset.

This document states: "For when we had eaten the Passover ***on the third day of the week at even*** [Tuesday evening], we went forth to the Mount of Olives; and in the night they seized our Lord Jesus. And the next day, which was the ***fourth*** of the week [Wednesday], He remained in ward in the house of Caiaphas the high priest" (emphasis added throughout).

Paradoxically, the text goes on to mention that Jesus was crucified on a Friday—showing great confusion about the dates, for the biblical account clearly states that Christ was crucified on the day following that Passover meal. Nonetheless, the document demonstrates that Passover was then understood by some to have been on Tuesday evening, which would place the crucifixion on the next day, Wednesday.

Epiphanius (A.D. 367-403), the bishop at Salamis, wrote that "Wednesday and Friday are days of fasting up to the ninth hour because, *as Wednesday began* the Lord was arrested and on Friday he was crucified." As we can see, even though the prevailing view was that Friday was the day of the crucifixion, Wednesday was known as the day of Christ's arrest. (Remember that with a week based on days reckoned from evening to evening, Wednesday—that is to say, the fourth day of the week—began at sunset on Tuesday.)

By the fifth century, Easter Sunday celebrations were widespread. However, a church historian of the time named Socrates notes in a section of his history titled "Differences of Usage in Regard to Easter" that some Christians celebrated the resurrection *on the Sabbath* rather than on Sunday. As he put it, "Others in the East kept that feast on the *Sabbath* indeed."

Bishop Gregory of Tours (538-594), although himself believing in a Sunday resurrection, noted that many believed Jesus rose *on the seventh day of the week,* stating, "In our belief the resurrection of the Lord was on the first day, and *not on the seventh as many deem."*

So rather than a monolithic acceptance of the Good Friday–Easter Sunday scenario, there was confusion about the timing of Christ's crucifixion in early centuries. Moreover, these historical records show that a minority of Christians during that time understood the biblical timing of a Tuesday evening Passover, a Wednesday crucifixion and a late Saturday afternoon resurrection.

—Mario Seiglie

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—still *at least a full day and a full night short* of the time Jesus said He would be in the tomb.

Clearly something doesn't add up. Either Jesus misspoke about the length of time He would be in the tomb, or the "Good Friday–Easter Sunday" timing is not biblical or accurate.

Obviously both cannot be true. So which one is right?

Understanding God's time is the key

The key to understanding the timing of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection lies in understanding God's timetable for counting when days begin and end, as well as the timing of His biblical festivals during the spring of the year when these events took place.

We first need to realize that God doesn't begin and end days at midnight as we do—that is a humanly devised method of counting time. Genesis 1:5 tells us quite plainly that God counts a day as beginning with the evening (the night portion) and ending at the next evening—"So the evening [nighttime] and the morning [daylight] were the first day." God repeats this formula for the entire six days of creation.

In Leviticus 23, where God lists all of His holy Sabbaths and festivals, He makes it clear that they are to be observed "from evening to evening" (verse 32)—in other words, from sunset to sunset, when the sun went down and evening began.

This is why Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, followers of Jesus, hurriedly placed His body in Joseph's nearby tomb just before sundown (John 19:39-42). A Sabbath was beginning at sundown (verse 31), when work would have to cease.

Two kinds of "Sabbaths" lead to confusion

As John tells us in verse 31: "Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies [of those crucified] 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 hasten death], and that they might be taken away."

In the Jewish culture of that time, the chores of cooking and housecleaning were done on the day before a Sabbath to avoid working on God's designated day of rest. Thus the day before the Sabbath was commonly called "the preparation day." Clearly the day on which Christ was crucified and His body placed in the tomb was the day immediately preceding a Sabbath.

The question is, *which* Sabbath?

Most people assume John is speaking of the regular weekly Sabbath day, observed from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. From John's clear statement here, most people assume Jesus died and was buried on a Friday—thus the traditional belief that Jesus was crucified and died on "Good Friday."

Most people have no idea that the Bible talks about *two kinds* of Sabbath days—the normal weekly Sabbath day that falls on the seventh day of the week (not to be confused with Sunday, which is the *first* day of the week), and seven *annual* Sabbath days, listed in Leviticus 23 and mentioned in various passages throughout the Bible, that could fall on *any* day of the week.

Because traditional Christianity long ago abandoned these biblical annual Sabbath days (as well as the weekly Sabbath), for many centuries people have failed to recognize what the Gospels plainly tell us about when Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected—and why "Good Friday–Easter Sunday" never happened that way.

Most people fail to note that John explicitly tells us that the Sabbath that began at sundown immediately after Jesus was entombed was one of these *annual* Sabbath days. Notice in John 19:31 his explanation that "that Sabbath *was a high day"*—"high day" being a term used to differentiate the seven annual Sabbaths from the regular weekly Sabbath days.

So what was this "high day" that immediately followed Jesus Christ's hurried entombment?

The Gospels tell us that on the evening before Jesus was condemned and crucified, He kept the Passover with His disciples (Matthew 26:19-20; Mark 14:16-17; Luke 22:13-15). This means He was crucified on the Passover day.

Leviticus 23, which lists God's festivals, tells us that on the day after the Passover a separate festival, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, begins (verses 5-6). The first day of this Feast is "a holy convocation" on which "no customary work" is to be done (verse 7).

This day is the first of God's annual Sabbaths. This is the "high day" of which John wrote. Several Bible commentaries, encyclopedias and dictionaries note that John is referring to an annual Sabbath here rather than the regular weekly Sabbath day.

Passover began at sundown and ended the following day at sundown, when this annual Sabbath began. Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples, then was arrested later that night. After daybreak the next day He was questioned before Pontius Pilate, crucified, then hurriedly entombed just before the next sunset when the "high day," the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, began.

Leviticus 23 tells us the order and timing of these days, and the Gospels confirm the order of events as they unfolded.

Jesus crucified on Wednesday, not Friday

Several computer software programs exist that enable us to calculate when the Passover and God's other festivals fall in any given year. Those programs show that in A.D. 31, the year of these events, the Passover meal was eaten on Tuesday night and Wednesday sundown marked the beginning of the "high day," the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Jesus, then, was crucified and entombed on a *Wednesday* afternoon, not on *Friday.*

Can we find further proof of this in the Gospels? Yes, indeed we can!

Let's turn to a seldom-noticed detail in Mark 16:1: "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him."

In that time, if the body of a loved one was placed in a tomb rather than being buried directly in the ground, friends and family would commonly place aromatic spices in the tomb alongside the body to reduce the smell as the remains decayed.

Since Jesus' body was placed in the tomb just before that high-day Sabbath began, the women had no time to buy those spices before the Sabbath. Also, they could not have purchased them on the Sabbath day, as shops were closed. Thus, Mark says, they bought the spices *after the Sabbath*—"when the Sabbath was past."

But notice another revealing detail in Luke 23:55-56: "And the women who had come with [Christ] from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. *And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment."*

Do you see a problem here? Mark clearly states that the women bought the spices *after* the Sabbath—"when the Sabbath was past." Luke tells us that the women prepared the spices and fragrant oils, after which *"they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment."*

The Biblical Chronology of Jesus Christ's
Crucifixion and Resurrection

Tuesday:	*Wednesday:*	*Thursday:*	*Friday:*	*Saturday:*	*Sunday:*
Jesus Christ ate an evening Passover meal with His disciples (at the beginning of Nisan 14, biblical 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.	Jesus was crucified and died around 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50). This was the preparation day for the annual, not weekly, Sabbath, which began at sunset (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). Jesus' body was placed in the tomb just before sunset (Matthew 27:57-60).	This was the high-day Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:4-7). It is described as the day after the "Day of Preparation" (Matthew 27:62).	The high-day Sabbath now past, the women bought and prepared spices for anointing Jesus' body before resting on the weekly Sabbath day, which began at Friday sunset (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56).	The women rested on the weekly Sabbath, according to the Fourth Commandment (Luke 23:56; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus rose near sunset, exactly three days and three nights after burial, fulfilling the sign of Jonah and authenticating the sign He gave of His messiahship.	The women brought the prepared spices early in the morning while it was still dark (Luke 24:1; John 20:1), finding that 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 near sunset the day before.

So they bought the spices *after* the Sabbath, and then they prepared the spices *before resting on* the Sabbath. This is a clear contradiction between these two Gospel accounts—unless *two* Sabbaths were involved!

Indeed when we understand that *two different Sabbaths* are mentioned, the problem goes away.

Mark tells us that after the "high day" Sabbath, which began Wednesday evening at sundown and ended Thursday evening at sundown, the women bought the spices to anoint Jesus' body. Luke then tells us that the women prepared the spices—activity which would have taken place on Friday—and that afterward *"they rested on the Sabbath* [the normal weekly Sabbath day, observed Friday sunset to Saturday sunset] *according to the commandment."*

By comparing details in both accounts, we can clearly see that two different Sabbaths are mentioned along with a workday in between. The first Sabbath was a "high day"—the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which fell on a Thursday. The second was the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. (To see these events spelled out in day-by-day detail, see the chart above.)

The original Greek in which the Gospels were written also plainly tells us that two Sabbath days were involved in these accounts. In Matthew 28:1, where Matthew writes that the women went to the tomb "after the Sabbath," the word *Sabbath* here is actually *plural* and should be translated *"Sabbaths."* Bible versions such as Alfred Marshall's Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, Green's Literal Translation Young's Literal Translation and Ferrar Fenton's Translation make this clear.

When was Jesus resurrected?

We have seen, then, that Jesus Christ was crucified and entombed on a Wednesday, just before an *annual* Sabbath began—not the weekly Sabbath. So when was He resurrected?

John 20:1, as noted earlier, 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." The sun had not yet risen—*"it was still dark,"* John tells us—when Mary found the tomb empty.

Obviously, then, Jesus was not resurrected at sunrise on Sunday morning. So when did this take place? The answer is plain if we simply read the Gospels—and Jesus Christ's own words—and accept them for what they say.

"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,"* said Jesus (Matthew 12:40).

As we have proven, Jesus was entombed—placed "in the heart of the earth"—just before sundown on a Wednesday. All we have to do is count forward. One day and one night brings us to Thursday at sundown. Another day and night brings us to Friday at sundown. A third day and night brings us to Saturday at sundown.

According to Jesus Christ's own words He would have been resurrected three days and nights after He was entombed, at around the same time—near sunset. Does this fit with the Scriptures? Yes—as we have seen, He was already risen and the tomb empty when Mary arrived "while it was still dark" on Sunday morning.

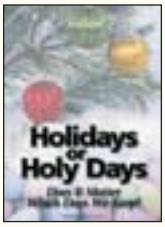
While no one was around to witness His resurrection (which took place inside a sealed tomb watched over by armed guards), Jesus Christ's own words and the details recorded in the Gospels show that it had to have happened three days and three nights after His burial, near sunset at the end of the weekly Sabbath.

Try as you might, it is impossible to fit three days and three nights between a late Friday burial and a Sunday morning resurrection. The Good Friday–Easter Sunday tradition simply isn't true or biblical. But when we look at all the details recorded in the Gospels and compare them with Jesus' own words, we can see the truth—and it matches perfectly.

The words of the angel of God, who so startled the women at the empty tomb, are proven true: "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).

Let's not cling to religious traditions and ideas that aren't supported by Scripture. Be sure that your own beliefs and practices are firmly rooted in the Bible. Are you willing to make a commitment to worship God according to biblical truth rather than human tradition? ***GN***

Recommended Reading



What you have read here is only part of the story. For how did Easter come to be such a popular holiday if Jesus wasn't resurrected on Sunday? And how did such curious symbols as rabbits and brightly painted eggs come to be associated with the day? To discover the rest of the story, request or download our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* And to learn about the true biblical Holy Days Jesus and the apostles kept, be sure to read *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind,* also free for the asking.

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www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

Scott Ashley

What Are the **Real Origins of Easter?**

Millions assume that Easter, one of the world's major religious holidays, is found in the Bible. But is it? Have you ever looked into Easter's origins and customs and compared them with the Bible?

by Jerold Aust

Easter is one of the most popular religious celebrations in the world. But is it biblical? The word *Easter* appears only once in the King James Version of the Bible (and not at all in most others). In the one place it does appear, the King James translators mistranslated the Greek word for *Passover* as "Easter."

Notice it in Acts 12:4: "And when he [King Herod Agrippa I] had apprehended him [the apostle Peter], he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people."

The Greek word translated *Easter* here is *pascha,* properly translated everywhere else in the Bible as "Passover." Referring to this mistranslation, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible* says that "perhaps there never was a more unhappy, not to say absurd, translation than that in our text."

Think about theses facts for a minute. Easter is such a major religious holiday. Yet nowhere in the Bible—not in the book of Acts, which covers several decades of the history of the early Church, nor in any of the epistles of the New Testament, written over a span of 30 to 40 years after Jesus Christ's death and resurrection—do we find the apostles or early Christians celebrating anything like Easter.

The Gospels themselves appear to have been written from about a decade after Christ's death and resurrection to perhaps as much as 60 years later (in the case of John's Gospel). Yet nowhere do we find a hint of anything remotely resembling an Easter celebration.

If Easter doesn't come from the Bible, and wasn't practiced by the apostles and early Church, where *did* it come from?

If Easter doesn't come from the Bible, and wasn't practiced by the apostles and early Church, where did it come from?

Easter's surprising origins

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, in its entry "Easter," states:

"The term 'Easter' is not of Christian origin. It is another form of *Astarte,* one of the titles of the Chaldean goddess, the queen of heaven. The festival of Pasch [Passover] held by Christians in post-apostolic times was a continuation of the Jewish feast . . . From this Pasch the pagan festival of 'Easter' was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, *as part of the attempt to adapt pagan festivals to Christianity"* (W.E. Vine, 1985, emphasis added throughout).

That's a lot of information packed into one paragraph. Notice what the author, W.E. Vine—a trained classical scholar, theologian, expert in ancient languages and author of several classic Bible helps—tells us:

Easter isn't a Christian or directly biblical term, but comes from a form of the name *Astarte,* a Chaldean (Babylonian) goddess known as "the queen of heaven." (She is mentioned by that title in the Bible in Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:17-19, 25 and referred to in 1 Kings 11:5, 33 and 2 Kings 23:13 by the Hebrew form of her name, *Ashtoreth.* So "Easter" *is* found in the Bible—as part of the pagan religion God condemns!)

Further, early Christians, even after the times of the apostles, continued to observe a variation of the biblical Passover feast (it differed because Jesus introduced new symbolism, as the Bible notes in Matthew 26:26-28 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Moreover, Easter was very different from the Old Testament Passover or the Passover of the New Testament as understood and practiced by the early Church based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles.

And again, Easter was a pagan festival, originating in the worship of other gods, and was introduced much later into an apostate Christianity in a deliberate attempt to make such festivals acceptable.

Easter symbols predate Christ

How does *The Catholic Encyclopedia* define Easter? "Easter: The English term, according to the [eighth-century monk] Bede, relates to Eostre, a Teutonic goddess of the rising light of day and spring, which deity, however, is otherwise unknown . . ." (1909, Vol. 5, p. 224). *Eostre* is the ancient European name for the same goddess worshipped by the Babylonians as *Astarte* or *Ishtar,* goddess of fertility, whose major celebration was in the spring of the year.

The subtopic "Easter Eggs" tells us that "the custom [of Easter eggs] may have its origin in paganism, for *a great many pagan customs,* celebrating the return of spring, *gravitated to Easter"* (ibid., p. 227).

The subtopic "Easter Rabbit" states

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that "the rabbit is a pagan symbol and has always been an emblem of fertility" (ibid.).

Author Greg Dues, in his book *Catholic Customs and Traditions,* elaborates on the symbolism of eggs in ancient pre-Christian cultures: "The egg has become a popular Easter symbol. Creation myths of many ancient peoples center in a cosmogenic egg from which the universe is born.

"In ancient Egypt and Persia friends exchanged decorated eggs at the spring equinox, the beginning of their New Year. These eggs were a symbol of fertility for them because the coming forth of a live creature from an egg was so surprising to people of ancient times. Christians of the Near East adopted this tradition, and the Easter egg became a religious symbol. It represented the tomb from which Jesus came forth to new life" (1992, p. 101).

The same author also explains that, like eggs, rabbits became associated with Easter because they were powerful symbols of fertility: "Little children are usually told that the Easter eggs are brought by the Easter Bunny. Rabbits are part of pre-Christian fertility symbolism because of their reputation to reproduce rapidly" (p. 102).

What these sources tell us is that human beings replaced the symbolism of the biblical Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread with Easter eggs and Easter rabbits, pagan symbols of fertility. These symbols demean the truth of Christ's death and resurrection.

Easter substituted for Passover season

But that's not the entire story. In fact, many credible sources substantiate the fact that Easter became a substitute festival for the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. (To learn more about what this Feast represents, see "What Does the Feast of Unleavened Bread Mean for Christians?" beginning on page 18.)

Notice what *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* says about this transition: "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 those festivals foreshadowed . . .

"The Gentile Christians, on the other hand, unfettered by Jewish traditions, identified the first day of the week [Sunday] with the Resurrection, and kept the preceding Friday as the commemoration of the crucifixion, irrespective of the day of the month" (11th edition, p. 828, "Easter").

Easter, a pagan festival with its pagan fertility symbols, replaced the God-ordained festivals that Jesus Christ, the apostles and the early Church observed. But this didn't happen immediately. Not until A.D. 325—almost three centuries after Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected—was the matter settled. Regrettably, it wasn't settled on the basis of biblical truth, but on the basis of anti-Semitism and raw ecclesiastical and imperial power.

As *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* further explains: "A final settlement of the dispute [over whether and when to keep Easter or Passover] was one among the other reasons which led [the Roman emperor] Constantine to summon the council of Nicaea in 325 . . . The decision of the council was unanimous that Easter was to be kept on Sunday, and on the same Sunday throughout the world, and 'that none should hereafter follow the blindness of the Jews'" (ibid., pp. 828-829).

Those who did choose to "follow the blindness of the Jews"—that is, who continued to keep the biblical festivals kept by Jesus Christ and the apostles rather than the newly "Christianized" pagan Easter festival—were systematically persecuted by the powerful church-state alliance of Constantine's Roman Empire.

With the power of the empire behind it, Easter soon became entrenched as one of traditional Christianity's most popular sacred celebrations. (You can read more of the details in our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*)

Christianity compromised by paganism

British historian Sir James Frazer notes how Easter symbolism and rites, along with other pagan customs and celebrations, entered into the established Roman church:

"Taken altogether, the coincidences of the Christian with the heathen festivals are too close and too numerous to be accidental. *They mark the compromise which the Church* in the hour of its triumph was compelled to make with its vanquished yet still dangerous rivals [the empire's competing pagan religions].

"The inflexible Protestantism of the primitive missionaries, with their fiery denunciation of heathendom, had been exchanged for the supple policy, the easy tolerance, the comprehensive charity of shrewd ecclesiastics, who clearly perceived that if Christianity was to conquer the world it could do so only by relaxing the too rigid principles of its Founder, by widening a little the narrow gate which leads to salvation" (*The Golden Bough,* 1993, p. 361).

In short, to broaden the appeal of the new religion of Christianity in those early centuries, the powerful Roman religious authorities, with the backing of the Roman Empire, simply co-opted the rites and practices of pagan religions, relabeled them as "Christian" and created a new brand of Christianity with customs and teachings far removed from the Church Jesus founded.

The authentic Christianity of the Bible largely disappeared, forced underground by persecution because its followers refused to compromise.

Easter does not accurately represent Jesus Christ's suffering, death and resurrection, though it appears to do so to those who blindly accept religious tradition. In fact, it distorts the truth of the matter. Easter correctly belongs to the Babylonian goddess it is named after—Astarte, also known as Ashtoreth or Ishtar, whose worship is directly and explicitly condemned in the Bible.

The ancient religious practices and fertility symbols associated with her cult existed long before Christ, and regrettably they have largely replaced and obscured the truth of His death and resurrection.

When confronted with these facts about Easter, many professing Christians might raise this question to justify its continuance: *With hundreds of millions of well-meaning Christians observing Easter, doesn't this please Jesus Christ?*

Yet He has already answered this question in Matthew 15:9: *"In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."* How will you choose to worship Him—in spirit and in truth, or in fraud and in fable? ***GN***

Recommended Reading

Surprised by what you've learned in this article? If you'd like to learn more about the surprising origins of today's major holidays, request or download your free copy of *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* If you'd like to discover how the early Christianity of Jesus and the apostles was replaced over time with something quite different, be sure to read *The Church Jesus Built,* also free for the asking.

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What Does the Feast of Unleavened Bread Mean for Christians?

Central to our understanding of the biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread is the realization that the resurrected Jesus Christ lives His life in every individual Christian.

by Vince Szymkowiak

Growing numbers of Christians around the world are discovering and celebrating the biblical festivals outlined in Leviticus 23. By looking at the symbolism associated with these days, they are coming to view them in light of the life and mission of Jesus Christ.

After all, Jesus Christ Himself commenced the acting out of the plan of salvation by becoming our sacrificial Passover lamb. As the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (compare Isaiah 53:7-9; 1 Peter 1:18-19). Furthermore, Jesus started His Church on another of these festivals, the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2). He must have considered them important.

During the spring of the year (March-April in the northern hemisphere), immediately after Passover and before the Feast of Pentecost, falls another biblical feast—the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-8; Exodus 12:17-18). Here we'll take a brief look at the greatest event to have ever taken place during this feast—and what it means for Christians today.

The greatest among several great events

Some might say that the Exodus from the slavery of Egypt, which also took place immediately after Passover during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Numbers 33:3), was the greatest event to have ever happened during this spring festival.

Others might view the crossing of the Red Sea, which is traditionally assigned to the last day of Unleavened Bread, as another of the great festival events. This crossing signified that Israel was, at long last, finally free from Egyptian domination. Freedom was then a reality. Later, after Israel entered the Promised Land, the miraculous conquest of Jericho took place over the seven days of this same feast.

Other great Unleavened Bread events involved rededicating of the people of God to their Creator. Two examples are recorded in 2 Chronicles. Chapters 29 through 31 describe the religious reform led by King Hezekiah, and chapters 34 and 35 tell of another reform through King Josiah. These chapters reveal the tremendous excitement and joy God's people felt as they recommitted themselves to Him (see 30:21-23 and 35:17-18).

But one other event that took place during the Days of Unleavened Bread is much greater in its ultimate impact than any of these wonderful events. That event is the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

When was Jesus Christ resurrected?

We know that Jesus was crucified on the day before a Sabbath, as John 19:31 tells us. While most people assume that the Sabbath mentioned here was the regular weekly Sabbath day (observed Friday sunset to Saturday sunset), John plainly tells us that this particular Sabbath "was *a high day"*—a term used for the seven annual Holy Days that were part of God's festivals.

A careful reading of the Gospels shows that this "high day" was the first day of Unleavened Bread, which was a Holy Day (Leviticus 23:2, 6-7) that could fall on any day of the week.

Jesus remained in the grave for *three days and three nights* just as He had promised (Matthew 12:40). It is impossible to reconcile Jesus' statement in Matthew 12 with the idea of a Friday afternoon crucifixion followed by a Sunday morning resurrection. (See "Jesus Wasn't Crucified on Friday—or Resurrected on Sunday!" beginning on page 13.)

Three days and three nights from the time of His entombment, just before the beginning of the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread, brings us to the sunset at the end of the weekly Sabbath, still during the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, as the time when Jesus was resurrected.

In actuality there was no Sunday morning resurrection. But on that Sunday word spread quickly that the tomb was empty and that He had appeared first to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18) and then to other followers.

The greatest event in human history

Now, if *we* were followers of Jesus in Jerusalem at the time of His crucifixion and then were told that He had been resurrected, what would be the topic of our conversation for the rest of the spring festival? What would be in *your* thoughts? Undoubtedly we would all be thinking about the greatest event to have ever taken place in the history of humanity, the very statement of the angel: "He is risen!" (Matthew 28:6-7).

These Days of Unleavened Bread marked a turning point in the way the spring festival was to be celebrated down through the ages.

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Yes, Christians would still recall the Exodus, the coming out of Egypt, as a type of redemption from sin and release from the bondage of Satan. There would still be an emphasis on eating unleavened bread as a physical reminder that we are to become spiritually unleavened by removing sin from our lives.

But at the very center of it all—at the very core of the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was the all-encompassing truth that Jesus was raised from the dead during the spring festival!

Jesus repeatedly emphasized the importance of His own resurrection. During the last supper, He told the disciples that He would soon be betrayed, but He also told them that He would live again: "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19). He had just promised them that Christians would not be left as orphans (verse 18)—that is, spiritually unprotected and totally vulnerable to the power of Satan.

He stated that both the Father and He would live in the hearts and minds of Christians by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (verses 20-26). Since the resurrected Jesus Christ now lives in us, we are given the strength to conquer our sins. This new life, now made possible by the living Christ, empowers us to overcome "the sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1).

The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5:8, encouraged the mostly gentile church there to "keep the feast, not with old leaven . . . but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Symbolism of Unleavened Bread

Part of God's instruction for the Days of Unleavened Bread is to put leavened bread products out of our homes (Exodus 12:15-16). The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5:8, encouraged the mostly gentile church there to "keep the feast, not with old leaven, *nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness* [lingering sinful attitudes], but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"—a clear reference to the Feast of Unleavened Bread (emphasis added).

Paul recognized that the unleavened bread of this Feast is symbolic of sincerity and truth, which should be hallmarks of the life of every Christian. He also understood that leaven during this time symbolized sin, and this Feast pictures our need to make every effort to eliminate it completely from our lives.

The truly great story about the Days of Unleavened Bread is the story of the resurrected Christ living His life in those of us who have truly repented of living in sin and have received the Holy Spirit! This empowers us to overcome sins in a way that previously was simply not possible.

Yes, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a festival that helps us to focus on replacing sin with righteousness. But the only real way to put sin out of our lives is to put Jesus Christ *into* our lives! We are promised that we can truly put sin out of our lives because Jesus Christ lives within us (compare Galatians 2:20; Romans 7:23–8:4).

What it takes to overcome sin

Paul tells us in Romans 13:12 that we are to "put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light" (New International Version). He then lists the "deeds of darkness" as sins such as revelry, drunkenness, lewdness, lust, strife and envy. Then in verse 14 he shows the way to conquer such sins: by being clothed "with the Lord Jesus Christ" (NIV).

In our struggles against sin, not only during the Days of Unleavened Bread but throughout the entirety of our lives, we can choose to fight on our own strength or we can surrender our will to God and rely on the power of the risen Christ who lives His life in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. With this kind of power working against our sins, the very "power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10), we can say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (4:13).

We can struggle all alone, or we can rely on the power of the only One who never once sinned, Jesus Christ. He tells each of us as sinners, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). He encourages us to place our yokes and burdens on His powerful shoulders to find spiritual rest, saying, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (verses 29-30).

He promises that His faithful followers will never perish, nor will anyone be able to take them from His hand, because it is He who gives eternal life (John 10:27-28). We follow His instructions by coming to Him so that we may have life (John 5:40).

Jesus Christ lives again in us

Yes, Paul reminded Christians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Yet he was in no way preaching a works-based salvation, for in verse 13 he explains that "it is God who works in you both to will [that is, to have the desire to overcome] and to do [to act on that desire] for His good pleasure."

Embedded in the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread is the belief that central to our overcoming sins is the realization that the resurrected Jesus Christ lives His life in each one of us.

Indeed, as Paul also said, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:17). And he further stated: "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).

It is the resurrection of Christ, and His living again in Christians to empower them to remove the leaven of sin from their lives, that gives these spring festivals—the Passover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost—such a deep and lasting meaning. Isn't it time you looked more deeply into the meaning of these biblical festivals and what they teach us about the life and mission of Jesus Christ? ***GN***

Recommended Reading

The Bible reveals seven annual festivals, several of which are mentioned in this article. The Gospels, the book of Acts and Paul's epistles show that Jesus Christ, His apostles and the early Church observed them. What about you? How much do you know about these Holy Days of God and what they teach us about His plan? Request or download your free copy of the eye-opening booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*

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Scott Ashley

Reconciliation:
The True Path to Healing and Salvation

Someone has already shown the way to a harmonious relationship with not only our Creator, but also our fellow men and women. So where and how do we start on this path to reconciliation?

by John Ross Schroeder

As human beings, we were created to develop deep, long-lasting relationships with one another. When those bonds are severed through misunderstandings and perhaps abuse, we feel incomplete, isolated and without purpose.

But how does one begin the healing process? Human empathy can prove very helpful and is often essential to positive progress. The one providing the empathy, however, is sometimes limited in his or her capacity to completely understand and identify with the wounded spirit. King Solomon wrote, "The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?" (Proverbs 18:14).

Who will help us?

So who should be our ultimate comforter and helper? Who can transcend the limited scope of human help? Who can encourage us out of our dejections and point us toward the healing and salvation we desire?

The truest consolation available comes from an individual always willing to help, One who Himself has experienced painful rejection and even betrayal. The Scriptures show that He was "rejected by men" and "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). He even knew what it was like to face rejection by His own people. "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

Knowledge of this "Man of sorrows" who is unique among all who have ever lived—understanding that He suffered the most brutal sort of rejection and betrayal and successfully overcame them—can bring us much closer to the healing we are seeking.

But how can we reconstruct broken bonds and rebuild right relationships? How can we be reconciled first to our Creator and then to our fellow men and women?

Scripture tells us that God desires a positive relationship with us, but it also tells us that *"your iniquities* [sins] *have separated you from your God"* (Isaiah 59:2, emphasis added throughout). To fulfill His great purpose and to reconcile human beings to their Creator, the penalty for breaking God's law had to be paid. Someone had to redeem humankind and reconcile us to God the Father.

Enter Jesus Christ into the world

The experiences Jesus Christ went through have been crucial in helping Him understand the serious difficulties we human beings experience during our lives. As Hebrews 4:15 tells us, "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."

God's intervention in our lives is the only path to the true reconciliation with our fellow man that is so essential for our emotional and mental health.

Ironically, at perhaps the most dramatic moment in human history—His crucifixion—Jesus cried out to His Father, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). His quoting of Psalm 22:1 occurred at the very time that the enormous gulf between God and man was about to be bridged.

But on account of what Jesus Christ represented to God for those few brief moments—the sin-bearer for all of humanity—"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Sin—biblically defined as the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4, King James Version; Psalm 51:1-3)—is a major barrier to reconciliation and rebuilding right relationships with God and other people. So Jesus took the sins of humanity on His shoulders.

We have a very merciful Advocate in our Saviour, who, like the human high priests who preceded Him in that office, "is able to bear patiently with the ignorant and erring, since he too [was] beset by weakness . . ." (Hebrews 5:2, Revised English Bible).

Reconciliation requires genuine repentance and forgiveness on our part. But only God can absolve our sins and remove guilt and suffering, and this is only possible through the sacrificial death of His Son Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Symbols of reconciliation to God

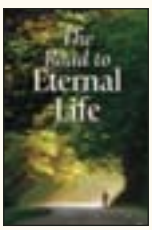
This forgiveness and reconciliation is depicted for us in Jesus Christ's final hours with His disciples. He observed the Passover with them the night before His death.

Paul recounts the events: "The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'

"In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Jesus said that the wine symbolized His blood, which He would "shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). God forgives our sins through Christ's precious blood, cleansing us so that we may be reconciled to God (1 John 1:7). Remember that "without shedding of blood there is no remission" of sins (Hebrews 9:22).

Recommended Reading



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In just one of its dimensions, the bread represented a new way of life based on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. "I am the bread of life . . . This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die . . . If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:48-51).

From resentment to reconciliation with others

Although the Bible shows that the first and great commandment is to love God, the second one is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). Reconciliation to God goes hand in hand with reconciliation to other human beings (Matthew 6:15).

Yet sometimes we bless God while simultaneously cursing men and women who are made in His image and likeness (James 3:9-10). We can't seem to let go of regrettable past occurrences involving others.

Only God through Jesus Christ can help us fully divest ourselves of past misfortunes. God's intervention in our lives is the only path to the true reconciliation with our fellow man that is so essential for our emotional and mental health. But our fellowship with each other has to be firmly based on a right relationship with God and Christ (see 1 John 1:3-7).

Paul wrote, "Through Him [Jesus Christ] we . . . have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18). God's Holy Spirit helps heal serious breaches between human beings. It is the Spirit of reassurance and reconciliation. It is the Spirit of tolerance and cooperation. It is the Spirit of mutual acceptance. It is the Spirit of love—of always sincerely wanting the best for others.

We receive the Holy Spirit from God after we have genuinely repented of our past sins, received forgiveness from Him and been baptized in water (see Acts 2:37-41).

The ministry of reconciliation

Then God will enable us to participate in *"the ministry of reconciliation"* (2 Corinthians 5:18) through which is delivered the "the word of reconciliation" (verse 19), aptly referring to Christians as "ambassadors for Christ" (verse 20).

This magnificent ministry has a personal element. It strongly relates to other human beings as well as to our Creator. True diplomacy, encouragement, forgiveness and friendship—made possible through His Holy Spirit, part of His own divine nature dwelling within us—are all important aspects of reconciliation.

The rewards for reconciliation are infinite! No human life is complete without it. ***GN***

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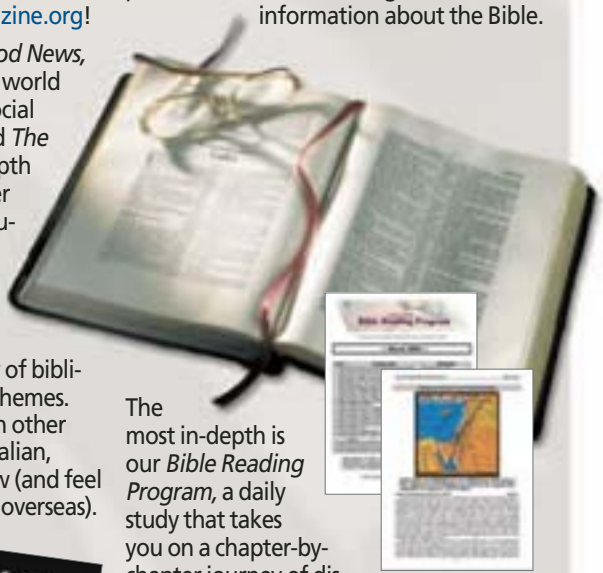

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Birmingham — 1070 AM, Sundays 7:30 a.m.

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

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

Florida
Orlando — 540 AM, Sundays 6:30 a.m.

Indiana
Indianapolis — 1070 AM, Sundays 7 a.m.

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

Michigan
Lansing — 88.1 FM, Sundays 7:30 a.m.

Montana
Helena — 101.9 FM, Mondays 8 p.m.; Fridays 8:30 p.m.; Saturdays 8 a.m.

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

Oklahoma
Tulsa — 740 AM, Sundays 8 a.m.

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

Whatever Happened to Sin?

It used to be common to hear messages condemning sin and warning of its consequences. Now most religious messages pass over the uncomfortable reality of sin to focus on "feel-good" themes. What is happening to Christianity—and is it missing a crucial part of Christ's message?

by Gary Petty

Most Americans claim to be religious, yet the nation flounders around for spiritual meaning. As reported in *USA Today,* researchers compiling the American Religious Identification Survey have discovered some profound shifts in attitudes towards religion.

One discovery is that many Americans are moving *away* from traditional Christianity. Adherents to Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are on the rise. Even the number of people claiming to be Wiccans, self-proclaimed witches, jumped from 8,000 in 1990 to 134,000 in 2001.

Barry Kosmin, one of the researchers involved in the survey, concludes, "More people see religious identity as a *recreational* option." Has religion become a recreational activity like a day at the beach or attending a baseball game? Has the nation drifted so far from its spiritual moorings?

In response to religious pluralism, mainstream Christianity is going through profound changes, with many churches becoming a sort of doctrinal pick-and-choose smorgasbord more in tune with pop culture, political correctness and accommodating personal lifestyles than the solid teachings of the Bible.

There was a time when ministers in most Christian denominations taught parishioners to fear sin and its consequences. Messages about sin and resulting judgment were known as "hellfire and brimstone" sermons. The preacher would describe the horrors of punishment in an everlasting hellfire and call on the audience to accept Jesus and save their souls.

American Protestantism is grounded in a history of religious motivation through the fear of unforgiven sin. In the mid-1700s the American colonies experienced the "Great Awakening"—a religious revival spurred by itinerant preachers. They crisscrossed colonies working audiences into frenzied crying and shouting by describing the torments of hell.

The spirit of the law exposes hatred and malice, covetousness and lust, which are aspects of the heart and mind.

While it's still possible to occasionally find tracts placed in restaurant restrooms or convenience stores proclaiming eternal damnation for those who refuse to turn to God, for the most part religion in American society has changed over the past century. A majority of ministries today center their message on God's mercy and love.

The extreme of fear religion has been replaced with a call that "Jesus loves you and accepts you just the way you are."

But what happened to sin? Our pluralistic society seems to believe that the greatest sin of all is to judge the actions of another person. Some have gone so far as to claim that anyone judging homosexual acts, abortion or premarital sex as sin is breaking Jesus' command to not judge.

Is God concerned with sin? If the Son of God came to earth as a human being to die as a substitute for us paying for our own sins (and He did!), then sin should be an important subject to those who profess to follow Jesus Christ. It surely is important to God.

In the quest to experience God's mercy, has the apostle Paul's teaching that "the wages of sin is death" been misplaced? Talking about sin isn't a popular message, but it's a very important subject to understand for those who want to know what separates us from God and destroys us mentally, physically and spiritually (see Isaiah 59:1-15).

To find real solutions to your problems and genuine healing of your heartaches, you will have to face what God says about sin in your life. You may have attended a church for decades, been baptized or even had a "born again" experience. But if you haven't faced up to and dealt with sin in your

Continued on page 30

PhotoDisc

Tools for Spiritual Growth

Learn, Live and Love the Bible

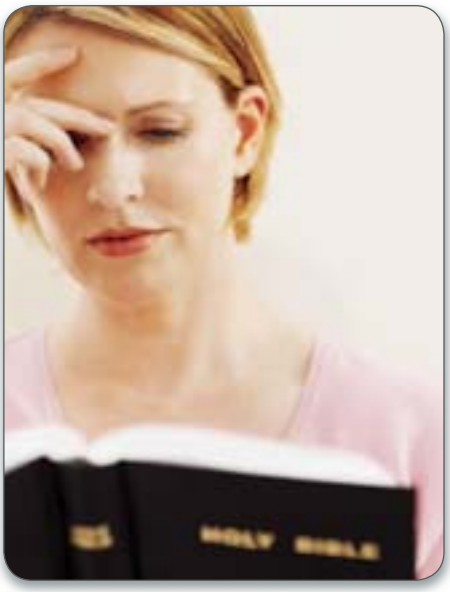
God's Word discusses several tools we can use to grow spiritually and build our relationship with our Creator. In this second article in a series on tools for spiritual growth, we examine the foundational tool of Bible reading and study.

by Don Hooser

The Bible is boring, I concluded. I was about 10 years old, had some reverence for the Bible and decided I should read it—from Genesis to the maps at the back. I didn't get very far.

I was proud of my progress until I almost crashed in chapter 5, a boring genealogical record. However, being a sequential person who hadn't learned when to skim or skip while reading, I struggled my way through, verse by verse. But then in chapter 10 I hit another genealogical record! At that point I gave up on the Old Testament.

At least I'll read the New Testament, I thought. Surely it would be more interesting. But the New Testament *begins* with a genealogical record! Though somewhat ashamed of my lack of spirituality and commitment, I gave up on reading the Bible. Based on my unfair sampling, I decided it was not very user-friendly.



God indeed *did* give us His revelation of what we need to know but could not learn on our own. It is a handbook for life that we call the Bible.

Then when I was 12, one of my younger brothers died. I began to think much more seriously about the meaning of life and about life after death. Looking back on it, I see how God gradually used that painful memory to begin to turn my life around.

The real turning point

But I didn't read the Bible until I was forced to. A required one-semester university course for engineering students was "Survey of the Bible." We were assigned to read a wide variety of selections throughout the Bible. That opened my eyes. I was fascinated and amazed at much of what I read!

I learned many impressive things about the Bible, including how it ranks right at the top among mankind's greatest works of literature. Even in secular writing, the Bible is quoted, knowingly and unknowingly, far more than any other book.

Also I came to appreciate the meaning of the *Judeo-Christian heritage*—the profound influence the Bible has had on Western civilization. Today one can buy whole books of quotes from many of America's founding fathers stating their strong beliefs in the Bible.

That class was the great turning point of my life. I soon began requesting publications (like those offered free in *The Good News*) that gave clear and wonderful explanations of virtually every subject and section of the Bible. A whole new world had opened up to me. I was discovering how valid and valuable the Scriptures are—how reliable and relevant they prove to everyday life. My perspective on everything changed—and changed for the better.

Above all, I was not only learning *about* God, I was coming to *know* God in a real and personal way. From then on when I read the Bible, it was *God talking to me!*

At the same time, I was studying a lot of science and math. It became clear to me that every detail in the universe is the result of perfect planning, engineering and construction—it could not have happened by accident! I figured that if the Bible is from God, it too must be absolutely perfect—and I set out to prove whether this is so.

Indeed, God has revealed Himself in two ways—His *words* (the Bible) and His *works* (the creation we see around us) (compare Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:20).

The Maker's instruction manual

Of all the earth's creatures, it's obvious that human beings are unique. We have magnificent minds with amazing intellectual capacities. Human minds also have spiritual potential and a hunger for spirituality. This is not surprising once we learn that "God created man in His own image"—in the image of God Himself—to have an intimate relationship with Him! (Genesis 1:27).

All physical life-forms are governed mainly by instinct, except for human beings. We need a roadmap—a guidebook for life—or else our intellectual and spiritual interests will go in all the wrong directions.

It makes no sense that God would create His masterpiece and then leave us in the dark as to why we are here. God indeed *did* give us His revelation of what we need to know but could not learn on our own. It is a handbook for life that we call the Bible.

The English word "Bible" is derived from the Greek word *biblion*—meaning "books." The Bible is a collection of 66 books—39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. These were composed by about 40 writers with different writing styles, living in 10 countries, over about 1,500 years!

However, miracle of miracles—in spite of the Bible's great *diversity,* there is astounding *unity.* It is consistent and coherent all the way through.

How could that be? It is because God inspired and directed every writer. Thus the real Author behind the scenes was always God (2 Timothy 3:16).

Stockdisc

So the Bible is also *one* book. It is *the* Book—the Book of books. Many religions claim to have a sacred book. But the *Holy Bible* is exactly that—*God's Book.* It is divine revelation to man and therefore the literal and actual "Word of God." It is *complete,* and God warns in the Old and New Testaments not to add to it or take away from it (Deuteronomy 12:32; Revelation 22:18-19).

In fact, the Bible even gives us myriad first-person quotes from God that are introduced by such words as "Thus says the LORD . . ."

One Bible in two parts

Ironically, many Christians ignore the Old Testament as being irrelevant, while most Jews reject the New Testament. Both views are wrong. *Together* the two testaments constitute the written Word of God. The New Testament cannot be properly understood without a foundational knowledge of the Old, and the Old Testament must be understood in the light of the New. They complement and complete each other.

Jesus Christ and the writers of the New Testament repeatedly quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures we call the Old Testament. For many years they were the only Scriptures the early Christian Church had. These Scriptures, as amplified by Jesus' own statements, were the basis for Christian teachings and practices. Later, by the time the apostle Peter wrote his second epistle, some parts of what became the New Testament were also being accepted as "Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).

Many people erroneously believe that during His ministry Jesus Christ criticized the Pharisees and other Jews for teaching and living by the Old Testament. Not so. Jesus scolded them for *not* living by the Scriptures! It was as if they had not even *read* the Scriptures, because Jesus repeatedly asked, "Have you not read . . . ?" Jesus also said, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9; see verses 5-13).

Today, Judaism is much the same. Plus, most of Christianity favors human religious traditions over the Bible, and many of those traditions are in conflict with the Bible.

What comes from God is perfect. The original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts of the Bible were infallible (although no human translation of those texts is perfect). The Bible is true and it is truth—the ultimate truth (John 17:17).

The Bible should serve as the foundation for all areas of knowledge. Harmony with the Bible is the ultimate filter or test of truth. If an idea or theory is in conflict with the Bible, it cannot be correct. The Bible is especially necessary for understanding the absolutes of life, such as what is good and what is evil.

New Testament Church vs. today's skepticism

Notice this emphatic statement by the apostle Paul: "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets" (Acts 24:14). True Christianity was called "the Way"—for it is *a way of life,* not just a belief.

And "the Law and the Prophets" here is a reference to what we call the Old Testament. So Paul said he believed *all things* in the Old Testament! Many "Christians" today don't believe everything in the New Testament, much less the Old Testament!

In today's world, the tragic trend is toward disbelief in and apathy toward the Bible. "Christianity" is increasingly disconnected from the Bible. Most professing Christians don't even read the Bible, and even fewer obey its teachings. Many of the beliefs and practices that they *assume* come from the Bible in fact *do not.*

Many people avoid reading the Bible—and some even hate it—because they know or suspect that it will correct them for sins and other habits they are not willing to give up.

We are also increasingly bombarded with skepticism and attacks against Christianity and especially Bible-based beliefs. Some claim only the "uneducated" would hold such beliefs. As Jude 18 notes, there will be "mockers" as the end of this age of man draws near.

All of this can be quite confusing and intimidating.

This is where you need courage. Be much more concerned about what God thinks than what any man thinks. Don't rely on someone else to tell you what the Bible says. Read it for yourself! Swim upstream. Be among the few who choose the "narrow gate" that leads to life, not the many who choose the easy "broad gate" that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

Keep this in mind. Noah preached the truth all the time he was building the ark, but only eight people believed and were saved from the Flood (2 Peter 2:5). Jesus Christ preached to multitudes for more than

How to Read, Study and Understand the Bible

Author Bruce Barton called the Bible *The Book Nobody Knows.* That is practically true, but *you can* know it.

How should you read and study the Bible? The overall answer is *any way that works for you!* Just do it! Starting something new seems strange and difficult. So new Bible students are the ones most likely to become discouraged and give up altogether.

What is important is to *get started* and then *stick with it.* Take the most interesting approach and begin to get familiar with the content. Whet your appetite and hopefully the Bible will be a big part of your diet for life.

Many books and articles offer helpful suggestions for Bible study approaches, and we recommend that you eventually read and consider them. But don't feel obligated to take a certain approach or to follow a rigid structure or to stick with an approach when you would rather switch to a different one.

For example, one approach is to read the Bible all the way through in chronological order to get an overview. It is good to do that eventually, but it's not necessary to start that way. You can go through the books in any order. Another popular approach is topical Bible study, studying all the scriptures on any one topic.

The publishers of *The Good News* offer an excellent booklet, *How to Understand the Bible,* to get you started. We also offer a free, eye-opening, 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* that gives a new student a very good foundation of understanding. All are yours free for the asking.

We're also in the process of producing a commentary on the entire Bible—the *Good News Bible Reading Program.* You can access it at www.ucg.org/brp.

It's also fine when part of your personal Bible study is reading trustworthy articles, booklets and books *about* the Bible that explain it accurately. Of course, any such sources should be compared against the Bible itself to make sure they properly represent the Bible's teachings (see Acts 17:11). Indeed, over the long run be sure that much of your study is reading the Bible itself so that you become thoroughly familiar with the content and context of the Scriptures.

As you can afford it, you may want to purchase various *Bible helps*—reference books and computer programs that provide assistance in your studies.

If you have difficulty reading, you can take advantage of the fact that the Bible and many books are now available as audio recordings.

Also be sure to avoid the classic mistake many people make. Don't start out with preconceived doctrinal ideas and try to find verses that appear to provide support and justification for those beliefs. Read the Bible with an open mind and see for yourself what it says. Have the attitude of Jesus Christ who said, "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Above all, seek to know the mind of God and His plan for your life. *Apply* what you learn in your life. Be a doer of the Word and use the Bible as a spiritual mirror to see how you need to change (see James 1:22-25).

Read the Bible. *Study* the Bible. *Live* the Bible.

three years, but His Church began with only 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). Be among the few who listen well. Then go do the right thing!

The Bible is "good news"!

The message of Jesus and the apostles was called "the gospel." The word *gospel* comes from the Old English *godspel,* meaning "good news." But good news of what? Most Christians could not tell you exactly.

It was "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14). So Christ preached the good news about His future return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and how human beings can become a part of that eternal Kingdom and family of God! It truly is a message of *hope* for all mankind (Romans 15:4).

We may think of the gospel as being in the New Testament, yet this message is also found throughout the Old. Indeed, all of the Bible is interrelated, so in one sense the gospel is the entire Bible. Scripture has a great deal of bad news about "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4), but the long-range news is wonderful—a soon-coming new world under the reign of Jesus Christ!

Keys to understanding the Bible

How can you get the most out of reading and studying the Bible? Following are some important keys.

Take time—*make* time—out of your busy life to devote to daily Bible reading. Make it a high priority. Many great and successful men and women have been dedicated daily Bible readers. Even some U.S. presidents followed this practice while occupying that enormously important office. If *they* made time for daily Bible reading, if *they* could fit that in, why can't you?

Reflect and think deeply about what you read, and consider how you will apply the lessons in your life. You cannot make a better investment of your time.

For understanding, pray for God's help. "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Matthew 7:7). Prayer and Bible study go hand in hand (you may want to review the first article in this series, "The Privilege and Power of Prayer," in the last issue of *The Good News*).

Be sure to take advantage of human and technical resources. When an Ethiopian official was reading the book of Isaiah, Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man responded, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:26-31). It helps tremendously to have Bible teachers show you where to look for answers to life's important questions. So we invite you to ask for help from United Church of God as well. We offer many free resources that are crucial for gaining a foundation of biblical understanding (see "How to Read, Study and Understand the Bible," page 25).

Note that the Bible can be understood on many levels. A person with no interest in God can read through the Bible and gain much understanding of history (His story!), human relationships and many other subjects. Scripture is full of great wisdom.

But to understand the Bible on a deeply spiritual level requires the reader to meet some important conditions. One key is a *humble, teachable attitude*—being receptive and responsive to God's instructions!

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all

Proofs of the Bible

God doesn't want blind faith. He wants you to have faith based on solid evidence. "Test [prove] all things; hold fast what is good," He tells us (1 Thessalonians 5:21). You can prove the divine origin, authenticity and accuracy of the Bible.

To help you prove whether the Bible is true and trustworthy, request our free booklet *Is the Bible True?* Many books available through Bible bookstores are also very helpful.

Some of the major proofs of the Bible's divine inspiration are:

Fulfilled prophecies. Many past events were prophesied in the Bible and came to pass exactly as foretold. It will be even more impressive to see future prophesied events happen exactly as promised. For more information, request our free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.*

Internal harmony. The Bible never contradicts itself! This is truly miraculous considering that it was written over the course of some 1,500 years by about 40 different authors! Some details in the Bible may seem to contradict at first glance, and many skeptics point to apparent discrepancies to try to disprove divine inspiration. However, several good books have been written that explain such alleged discrepancies, showing that when properly understood they are not contradictory. If there are a few that we can't readily explain, they merely show our human lack of understanding, not errors in the Bible.

Science. There is no conflict between true science and the Bible. (Evolution is a theory for *explaining* science, not science itself.) When science and the Bible seem to conflict, one or the other is not being correctly understood. The Creator God who inspired the Bible understands science better than all scientists put together.

Archaeology. This is the study of the material remains of past people's lives and activities. Many biblical sites have been found, and the amount of evidence confirming the biblical record is enormous. No archaeological discovery to date contradicts the Bible (though some mistakenly *interpret* some findings as doing so).

Promises and prayers. God gives us many promises in His Word. Seeing promises fulfilled is evidence of God's faithfulness. And God promises to answer prayers of His people, especially prayers that are in harmony with His will and promises. Answered prayer can strengthen one's faith in God and His Word more than anything else.

The Bible works! God's ways *work.* The Bible teaches countless practical principles for daily life. Just as nature teaches us about invisible physical laws, the Bible teaches that there are also invisible but absolute *spiritual* laws governing every aspect of human life. The better we understand all those laws and get in harmony with them, the healthier, happier and more successful we will be. God's ways work and they work well.

Great Themes of the Bible

The Bible is unified by profound themes running through it. Although it contains a number of major themes, here are three of the most important:

Jesus Christ. Not only does the New Testament give us the life and teachings of the Son of God, much of the Old Testament includes prophecies of His first and second comings (Luke 24:44). The greatest event of the past was Christ's first coming to earth as God made flesh. The greatest event in the future will be His second coming as glorified God in power and majesty. Although few understand this, Jesus Christ was the Creator and God in the Old Testament, acting on behalf of the Father (see John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:1-2; Colossians 1:13-16; 1 Corinthians 10:4). To fully understand, you will want to read the booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story.*

Love. "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). The two "great commandments" are love for God and love for neighbor (Matthew 22:35-40). The Ten Commandments and God's other laws show us how to love God and how to love other people. The Bible is a love story—God's love for the whole world and how all people must learn to love God and others in turn (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 5:3).

Salvation. "Jesus" means "God Is Salvation," and He came to "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The greatest set of miracles related in the Old Testament was the deliverance of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. That and all the other times that God rescued His people are symbolic of the miraculous spiritual liberation, conversion and transformation of those whom God calls out of their spiritual Egypt "into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). This is only possible because of the supreme sacrifice Christ made for us so our sins can be forgiven and we can be saved by His grace (Ephesians 2:8).

those who do His commandments" (Psalm 111:10). To really comprehend God's Word requires an attitude of deep reverence for Him and submission to His authority. God blesses readers with understanding when they are willing to *apply* and *obey* what they learn.

Consider the significance of what Jesus said in Luke 4:4: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."

It should first be observed that the purpose of God's Word is for us to *live by it.*

Second, this is what *strengthens and sustains us spiritually* as bread does physically.

Third, we should have an enquiring mind *hungering* for God's Word.

Fourth, Jesus included *every* word of God, not just *some* of the words of God.

Fifth, how can we live by the words of God if we have not read them?

Sixth, "you are what you eat." Ingesting the words of God can make us increasingly godly.

Even children can gain a remarkable understanding of the Bible, partly because they tend to have humble, teachable attitudes. Especially if you have children or grandchildren at home, be sure to read the article "Teach Your Children With Family Bible Study" beginning on page 28.

Also remember that God's thoughts are infinitely higher than our human thoughts (Isaiah 55:9-11). God's Spirit is essential to an ever-deepening understanding of spiritual truth and the power to live by that truth. Future articles in this series will cover the wonderful process for obtaining the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, for more understanding of this vital subject, request our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion.*

The Bible? Priceless!

God's revelation of how He will bring human beings into the Kingdom of God is a "treasure"—the "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:44-46; see also Proverbs 3:13-18). It is worth every sacrifice. God wants us to dig and seek and search with our whole hearts to enter His Kingdom.

One definition of "disciple" is "student," so God would have us all become students of Jesus Christ. Blow the dust off your Bible then. Open your Bible and open your heart to listen to what God has to tell you.

Be much more concerned about what God thinks than what any man thinks. Don't rely on someone else to tell you what the Bible says. Read it for yourself!

Bible reading is "profitable" for many reasons (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Berean believers were called "noble" because they "searched the scriptures daily," making sure that what was being preached to them conformed to its teachings (Acts 17:11, King James Version).

Bible study is a serious matter. The only reliable security we can have in this life is God. If we don't hear today, we can be gone tomorrow. What really matters is life after death. For that, we must become disciples and "doers of the word" (James 1:21-25). And any sacrifices we make in this life are tiny compared to the glorious everlasting life God is offering us (Romans 8:18).

The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119. How fitting that it is an extensive love song praising God for His Word and His laws! The writer said, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (verse 105). May His Word light your path!

Be enthusiastic and passionate for God's Word. Immerse yourself in it! With increasing understanding comes increasing satisfaction and enjoyment. Try it—you'll like it! And it will transform your life!

The following verse from Revelation 1:3 applies directly to the book of Revelation, but it is true of the entire Bible: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear [understand] the words of this prophecy, and keep [obey] those things which are written in it; for the time is near." ***GN***

Recommended Reading

The publishers of *The Good News* offer many free resources to help you get started in reading the Bible. Among them are *Is the Bible True?,* showing that the Bible is indeed the inspired Word of our Creator. *How to Understand the Bible* gives you practical guidance on how to get the most from your personal Bible study. And our free 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* will guide you through the most important teachings of the Bible. We also offer the online, in-depth *Good News Bible Reading Program* at www.ucg.org/brp. Use these resources for your own personal journey of discovery through God's inspired Word!

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

www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

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.

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

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought: the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of T*he Good News,* various booklets (also free) and our radio and TV programs, 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 worship services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address on page 2. Visitors are always welcome.

For additional information, visit our Web site:

www.ucg.org

Teach Your Children With **Family Bible Study**

The most important responsibility of parents is to pass along their spiritual faith and understanding to their children. Here are tips for how to teach God's words and ways to your children.

by Don Hooser

Timothy was blessed with something very valuable. The apostle Paul reminded him, "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15). Just think! Before reaching adulthood, Timothy was already familiar with the writings of God's instruction book! How much was that worth? Priceless!

Paul also reminded Timothy of "from whom you have learned" the Holy Scriptures (verse 14). What was that source?

It's quite obvious from reading 2 Timothy 1:5, where Paul wrote, "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice." His mother and grandmother had taught him God's Word and had been role models of faith!

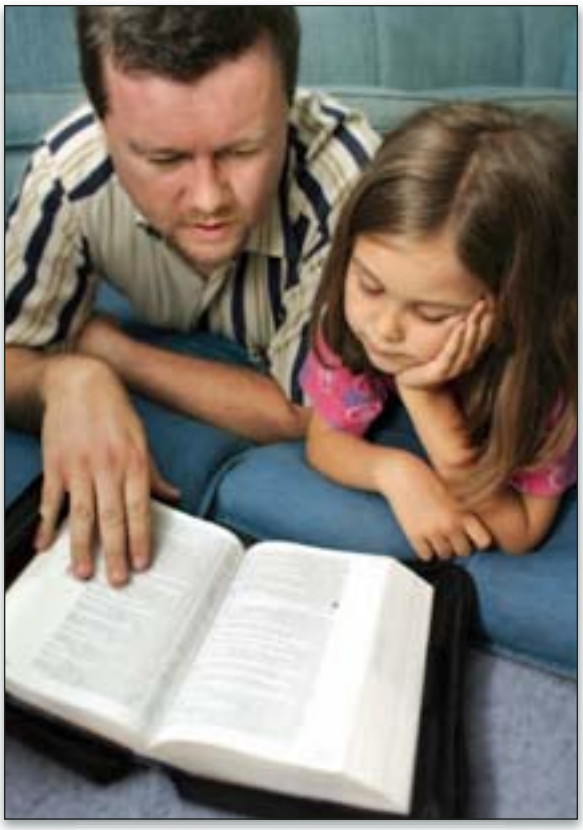
Parents have the primary responsibility for teaching God's words and ways to their children, and sometimes grandparents and other family members can help as well.

Concerning God's words, Moses was inspired to write, *"Teach them* to your children and your grandchildren" (Deuteronomy 4:9). Why is this so important? First, God's Word is the *most important subject* by far for our children! It should take priority over all the many other subjects we want our children to learn.

Secondly, childhood is by far the *best time* to start learning God's Word. Children are naturally more teachable and pliable then. As the saying goes, "As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined."

Most parents want to be good providers, as we are admonished in 1 Timothy 5:8. But God wants parents to provide much more than just the necessities for physical health. God wants us to provide the *spiritual* food for a godly life that will result in eternal life! Otherwise, we are guilty of spiritual child neglect.

My wife and I look back on a lifetime of joyous memories of when our three children were growing up. They include countless precious memories of those times spent in family Bible study and family prayer. Learn to do them with your children and you will be greatly inspired and rewarded even as your children are learning and growing spiritually.



God's Word is the *most important subject* by far for our children! It should take priority over all the many other subjects we want our children to learn.

Great guidelines in Deuteronomy 6

Now let's look carefully at God's instructions in Deuteronomy 6—for there is much more spiritual truth in the Old Testament, including this passage, than most people think. First notice verse 5: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." To successfully teach our children or grandchildren, we must fully love God's ways ourselves.

Continuing on in verses 6-7: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall *teach them diligently* to your children and shall *talk of them* when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (emphasis added). This passage tells us to teach God's truths and then talk about them—have interactive discussions with our children about how to live by those truths.

Teaching implies a concentrated focus on *family Bible study,* while "talking" implies casual discussions and comments about godly principles. As the rest of verse 7 shows, these "talks," often brief, can take place at any and all times of the day as we go about other activities. These many moments when we tie real-life experiences to God's point of view can benefit as much as the study times.

"When you sit in your house" means anytime the family is home. Take advantage of the time together! Children grow up fast. Stop and take advantage of opportunities whenever they arise because you may not see the same opportunity arise again to naturally and comfortably teach the same lesson.

"When you walk by the way" means use the time while you are walking or traveling to talk about meaningful things. Walking and doing things together outdoors can be a very inspiring time to observe and talk about the marvels of God's creation.

Riding together in the car can have advantages if your children wish to talk. Use such opportunities to talk with your children, keeping in mind that sometimes it is better if we are more attentive in listening than talking (and keep focused on driving, of course).

How might this work in practice? Someone (besides the driver!) can read something and then everyone can discuss what was read. You can play a recording of a sermon or a Bible study. You can discuss

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the subject of a sermon you just heard on the way home from church services. Riding to and from services is an especially good opportunity to further make the Sabbath day profitable spiritually.

"When you lie down" means at bedtime. This may be a good time of day for your family to have family Bible study. It may be the best time of day for family prayer, which is equally important. It is also a good time to discuss the events of the day. Young children love this—if for no other reason than to stay up a little later.

"When you rise up" suggests you begin right away each day to take advantage of opportunities to talk about God's values, virtues and way of life. For many families, the best time of day to have family Bible study may be before anyone leaves or the phone starts ringing. No one has his or her mind on a hundred other things. You gain food for thought for the rest of the day. You are putting God first even in the order of the day.

Deuteronomy 6:8 says of God's words, "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes." This means God's words should guide our behavior and our thoughts.

This relates to Hebrews 8:10—we want to help put God's laws into the minds of our children and "write them on their hearts." Another thing that helps internalize God's Word is memorizing key scriptures. Encourage your children to learn important verses while they have strong memories.

"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:9). Visual aids are useful, especially for young children. For example, many families display a plaque of the Ten Commandments in their homes to remind them of the importance of God's laws.

Family Bible study guidelines

Now for more about family Bible study. It can be valuable for a couple even when there are no children in the home, but it definitely should be a top priority when there are children.

The end and the means are both remarkably rewarding. The end or goal is the knowledge of God and "the words of eternal life" (John 6:63, 68). The means of achieving that goal is family Bible study, which can be and should be a *very enjoyable, interactive family activity* with excellent side benefits!

Some of the benefits are greater family togetherness, bonding and closeness. While learning to love God, families are also drawing closer to one another in love!

Another benefit is that we are subtly teaching our children to become readers and to love reading. Some of these same benefits come from families reading *anything* aloud together. With modern television, movies and videos, we no longer live in a print culture alone, but also in an image culture. Children are growing up not learning to read well and with little interest in reading. This holds major disadvantages for their futures.

With family Bible study, you have the benefits of reading the Bible and related materials together plus getting the spiritual knowledge, understanding and wisdom of God!

Some of the benefits are greater family togetherness, bonding and closeness. While learning to love God, families are also drawing closer to one another in love!

You can do it!

Some parents will feel inadequate or intimidated at the thought of leading in family Bible study. *Pray about this and rely on God!* With God's help, you can do it. Let Him use you in this ministry to your children. It's rather simple. First, set the example and let your children see you studying the Bible. Then follow the suggestions below for your own family Bible study.

How often will you want to have family Bible study? Deuteronomy 6 implies, if possible, every day that you are together. Regular renewal and daily direction are invaluable. It is doubly important to have family Bible study on God's Sabbath day.

How long should these sessions be? They need not be excessively long. Remember the child's shorter attention span and don't turn him or her off with overly long sessions. Around 15 to 20 minutes a day can be sufficient. What is more important is regular frequency. It forms a good habit, and many short lessons add up to a lot of time.

For very young children, it is usually best to learn a Bible story well yourself and then tell it in your own words. Or use Bible storybooks that are written more for your children's ages. With Bible storybooks, be careful in your selection. They vary considerably in the accuracy of the text and the illustrations and in how well they teach the major lessons. A poor selection could do more harm than good.

Cover a variety of topics with varied approaches

When you start reading the Bible to your children, use a modern, easy-to-understand translation. Pick out the parts that will be easily understood and especially profitable for them. Some of the most beneficial things to read are stories from the Old and New Testaments (with your comments about the lessons they contain), Christian living teachings, the book of Proverbs and all about God's laws and feast days.

When reading the Bible, you can paraphrase—"talk the book." Skip or change words that are too difficult for the child. Add extra words or sentences that will explain or amplify the meaning without distorting it.

Family Bible study can include things that are *related* to the Bible as well as the Bible itself. Publications such as those offered free in *The Good News* are an excellent reading resource when the children are old enough to understand and appreciate them. As children mature, our free magazine *Vertical Thought* (www.verticalthought.org) is available to help young people further their relationship with God.

You can use interesting sections from Bible reference books, including the maps and other graphics. You can use excerpts from books about the history and cultures of Bible times. On some occasions you may want to read stories and articles from non-biblical sources that teach certain morals or virtues.

Children learn more if the teaching is interactive and gets them involved in the subject matter. Encourage them to ask questions and make comments.

Many Bible games are available and helpful for teaching and learning the Bible. Some of them don't require making a purchase, and you can even make up your own. Making a game out of quizzing each other about the Bible can be fun while also reinforcing our memories.

For those with computers, there are more and more Bible-related software packages, including games (though they, like all Bible-related materials, need to be screened for accuracy and suitability).

Many Bible stories and other Christian stories have been recorded, both as audio readings and as video programs. You can supplement your own teaching by playing these for your children, if they are suitably presented.

There are so many wise and wonderful things to teach. Teach your children all

about God, His mighty works, His promises and prophecies, His laws and ways, His Holy Days, His great and merciful plan of salvation! Teach about Jesus Christ, including His life, teachings, sacrifice and His future coming to rule this world in love! Teach them how to love God and how to love people.

The book of Proverbs is full of simple, practical, easy-to-understand wisdom. Plus it is worded like a father speaking to his son, so it helps us as parents in learning a gentle, patient, loving approach. "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother" (Proverbs 1:8).

Make family Bible study a positive, pleasant time

Much of the success of family Bible study will depend on your children's attitude toward it and what kind of memories they have of it. So strive to make it into a relaxed, happy family tradition that they will cherish.

Parents who regularly lead in family Bible study consider it to be a great blessing for themselves. They experience great satisfaction and joy in those special times sharing the treasures of God's Word with their children.

Now a word to fathers. Many fathers have turned over most of the teaching and training of their children to the mothers. But when fathers are present, God wants them to take a major share in teaching and to gently take the lead, being careful with their approach.

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4, Revised Standard Version).

Our goal should be to inspire our children to have "the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). We need to teach our children that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is *profitable"* (2 Timothy 3:16).

The broader context of both of these passages speaks about how persecution and deceptive teachings will become worse at the end of this present age of man. To remain faithful to God during those trials, we and our children need to be prepared with the Word of God in our minds and hearts as our source of faith, wisdom and strength.

Those of us who are parents should consider our children as loaned to us from God. We must be the best stewards and teachers that we can be, for they also are God's children! When those precious children reach adulthood, may we be able to say to them, as Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15, *"From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures."* ***GN***

Sin

Continued from page 23

life, you're still not right with God.

A biblical definition of sin

But what is sin? The apostle John gives this definition: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). According to John, one of Jesus' closest disciples, sin relates directly to God's law.

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 7:7: "Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'"

God's law defines sin. Many have been taught that Jesus freed Christians from all law, but the apostle Paul, whose writings emphasize God's grace, clearly shows that *God defines sin by means of His law.* Without the knowledge of His law, there is no way to know what separates human beings from God and destroys their lives.

Some religious teachers preach that the gospel of Christ negates any need for laws—especially those contained in the Old Testament. But what is the relationship between the gospel message of Jesus Christ and the law of God?

Paul answers this question in 1 Timothy 1:8-11: "But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God . . . "

Thus, a biblical authority no less than the apostle Paul says that the law of God defines what is "contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel." Does this mean that the Christian's only duty is to observe the letter of biblical laws? No, as both Jesus and Paul stressed the importance of the spirit of the law as well.

The spirit of the law

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus plainly stated His position on the law: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19).

Jesus Christ taught that He didn't come to abrogate divine law. Rather, He came to *expound and exemplify the spiritual intent* of God's law (see Isaiah 42:21). Notice Jesus' words in Matthew 5:21-22: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

He continued: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (verses 27-28).

The spirit of the law isn't a list of wrong actions, but reveals the motivating thoughts and emotions that *cause* the actions. When we understand the spirit of the Ten Commandments, we realize that when someone commits murder, the sin had already taken root in the person's mind before the act. The spirit of the law exposes hatred and malice, covetousness and lust, which are aspects of the heart and mind.

Sin is a selfish state of mind seated in our natural desires. That's why Paul writes in Romans 8:7 that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."

To follow the spirit of the law, a person must first be willing to sincerely accept responsibility for the destructive actions, thoughts and emotions that God calls *sin*—and be willing to forsake them. This is the true repentance that results in God's merciful forgiveness! ***GN***

Recommended Reading

Is God active in your life, or are you somewhat like others who only pretend to be religious? The law of God exposes the sinful acts that separate us from our Creator. Are you ready to deal with the sin in your life by repenting and changing not only your actions, but also the way you think? Are you ready to find real, long-lasting solutions to your ongoing problems? Request our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion.* These two publications provide essential information on how to deal with sin in your life.

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

www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

Letters From Our Readers

"God's Guide to Sex"

Could you possibly send me another copy of the January-February issue? I was halfway through it and misplaced it and cannot find it! I want to share the message of abstinence with my children. We already teach this, but it is a great article. I enjoy this publication.

M.R., Internet

Thank you so much for your wonderful magazine. Something which distresses me greatly is the fact that my country has now been ordered by the Supreme Court to accept as law the union of same-sex marriages. How can a country survive when our rulers condone such abominations? This is not to mention abortions, sex shops, prostitution and the like. Truly we know why the world is smitten with AIDS and other STDs. What I cannot comprehend is that the churches have nothing to say. We truly are a nation that has lost its way. That is why I believe that only Jesus can rule this world with true righteousness.

A.P., Port Elizabeth, South Africa

"The Abortion Controversy"

I just read "The Abortion Controversy," and it really touched me. I had an abortion and as a result I can't have children. The deep depression that I sank into for years was only lifted by God Himself. I only wish that more women knew the pain that they would go through by having an abortion. I believe that most think that there will only be relief, but that is wrong. Thanks so much for the article and for reminding all of us that God loves us and forgives us.

C.T., Tennessee

"The Intelligent Design Revolution"

You no doubt saw or heard [noted evolutionist] Richard Dawkins on TV in his defense of natural selection. Personally I thought he put up a good smokescreen to avoid the real issues. Nevertheless, your article "The Intelligent Design Revolution" provided me with enough material to write to the BBC. It would be interesting if the BBC could be invited to produce a programme where Christian academics were able to challenge Dawkins' statements and give a proper balance to the issue instead of a one-sided one.

B.B., Warminster, England

Thank you for the article "The Intelligent Design Revolution" published in the January-February issue. Regarding the "anthropic principle," as a scientist and a Christian, I argue as follows: 1) We human beings are contemplating the universe. 2) The prevailing physical and chemical constants have allowed all life on earth and ourselves to evolve. 3) Different constants would have led to different outcomes. 4) The available evidence neither confirms nor denies the existence of intelligent design or of creation. 5) Science is the search for truth, as Linus Pauling wrote, to try to understand the available evidence.

J.S., Australia

We have allowed you to express your opinions in The Good News. *Now, why not return the favor by requesting and carefully reading our two free booklets* Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? *and* Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe? *These two publications will address the issues that you briefly summarized in your defense of the theory of evolution.*

The Middle East in Bible Prophecy

I gratefully acknowledge receipt of your booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy.* It is highly informative and very interesting. It covers the sons of Abraham, the coming of Islam, the creation of the modern Middle East as well as the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism.

It vividly brought to light some of the root causes of our modern-day conflicts. A point that you clarified that has had a strong impact on me is the fact that Ishmael is by nature a violent person even among his own kindred. The Bible says that he would live in hostility toward all his brothers. The analysis of the Middle East in relation to Daniel's prophecy is quite amazing. Congratulations on the depth of the research.

G.Y., Nigeria

Reader from Southeast Asia

I am a 16-year-old teenage boy living in Bangkok. I am the only Christian in the family, and since Thailand is a Buddhist country most of my friends are Buddhists. This makes it very hard for me in a lot of situations, but even so I am still keeping faith. The thing is that even though I label myself as a Christian, I do not know a lot about the Bible.

T.L., Bangkok, Thailand

Thank you for your courage and faithfulness! Why not enroll in our free 12-lesson Bible Study Course? *It truly makes the Bible come alive—as the next letter confirms.*

Bible Study Course

Thank you for the *Bible Study Course,* your magazine and the booklets that I receive. They have aided in my growth in knowledge of the Bible and God's plan for my life. I have used the *Bible Study Course* as an aid in our Bible study classes and the response has been overwhelming. I first thank God for directing me towards your literature, and secondly, I thank my grandfather who is 95 years old and has been a constant reader of your articles through the years, which led me to *The Good News.*

G.S., Nettleton, Mississippi

All about God's festivals

Thank you for everything I have received from the United Church of God. I really would like to get into all the feasts of God, starting with the Passover. Please help me with all I need to know about God's commandments, all of His festivals and when they should be observed.

V.B., Hamilton, Ohio

I have been receiving *The Good News* magazine for some time now. I had a friend who was talking to me about the festivals and a lot of other things. I am writing to see if you could send me information about a local church in my area.

T.J., Orlando, Florida

Interested readers can learn much more about God's festivals by requesting our free booklets Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Really Matter Which Days We Keep? *and* God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. *The dates of God's Holy Days and festivals for the next several years are listed in the latter booklet. A United Church of God congregation meets in the Orlando area and we are putting you in touch with the local pastor via a personal letter.*

How to help

Thank you for your magazine and Web site. It's good to see a church out there that is not constantly soliciting donations and wants to spread the gospel. I look forward to your publications as they help me to share my faith.

M.D., Internet

Thank you for your magazine *The Good News.* I have been getting it for most of the year and I agree with most of your articles. You don't seem to ask for money, and I do like that. But now I want to send you some money because you didn't ask. Maybe you should let me know what your needs are.

E.P., Limon, Colorado

Readers who would like to voluntarily contribute to spreading the gospel may make their checks out to the United Church of God. Our U.S. mailing address is P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, Ohio 45254-1027. Addresses of our offices in other countries are listed on page 2.

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

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

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

POP QUIZ

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

2 True or False? *Easter* gets its name from an ancient fertility goddess, *Ishtar.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Too many people go through life thinking they are honoring Jesus Christ through popular celebrations such as Easter. But are they? What does the Bible say? Before you celebrate Easter again, why not consider what Jesus Himself thinks about this holiday? If we're going to have celebrations in His name, don't you think it's time we considered His point of view?

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