



# The Good News

January-February 2003

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

## The End of the World

What Does the Bible Say?

Will Civilization End in Global Cataclysm? • The Debt Trap: How to Break Free  
Proof of Jesus' Existence? • The Coming Clash Between Europe and America

**K**ilotons and megatons. Civil-defense drills. Blaring air-raid sirens. “Duck and cover.” The Berlin Wall. ICBMs. The Cuban missile crisis. Backyard bomb shelters. For those of us who grew up in the 1950s and ’60s, the end of the world was serious business.

Anthrax. “Dirty” bombs. Sarin gas. Holy war. VX. Nuclear “suitcase” bombs. Suicide bombers. Armageddon. The end of the world is serious business again today.

Many hoped the threat of nuclear war would disappear when the Soviet Union collapsed more than a decade ago. But that hope proved to be in vain. Now we have more nuclear-armed armies than there were in the ’50s and ’60s, many of them in dangerously unstable places.

At least when only a few major powers had nuclear arms, we could bet that cooler, more rational heads would prevail. Each side knew that using weapons of mass destruction could invite annihilation.

Not any more. In our new age of uncertainty it seems only a matter of time before rogue nations or terrorists get their hands on nuclear materials. Many *already* have deadly biological and chemical weapons—and not only the will but also the *willingness to use them*. Our world is perhaps more dangerously unstable than ever.

Jesus Christ, in a major prophecy He gave shortly before His death (recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21), listed signs to look for that would precede His return and the end of this present age of man. They read much like today’s headlines: religious confusion and deception, wars and rumors of wars, ethnic unrest, famines, disease epidemics, earthquakes, other natural disasters and more (Matthew 24:1-8, 29). Ultimately, Jesus said, these horrors will build to a crescendo in a time of “great tribulation” so dangerous and devastating that, without God’s intervention, humanity would face extinction (verses 21-22).

Why does God reveal what’s going to happen? One reason is so we can be *motivated to change*. God doesn’t want us to be caught on the wrong side of events as they unfold. Some will be, and they will suddenly be trapped like an animal caught in a snare (Luke 21:34-36).

When will this momentous time be? “But of that day or hour no one knows . . . but the Father alone,” said Jesus (Mark 13:32, New American Standard Bible). Because no one can know the exact time beforehand, Jesus warned that we must be diligent and alert to our spiritual condition, making sure our priorities are right.

“Take heed, *keep on the alert*; for you do not know when the appointed time is,” He warned (verse 33, NASB). His point is that even though we will have general indications that the end of this age is approaching, we don’t know exactly when the end will be or how quickly final events will unfold once they begin, so we must be prepared *at all times*. We must not wait until the world is crashing down around us to turn our lives in the right direction. Lest we not get the point, He repeated the warning twice more in verses 35 and 37.

In Matthew’s account of this prophecy, Jesus illustrated—with the lesson of those who lived in Noah’s time—the importance of setting our spiritual houses in order: “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

Noah labored for decades to build a giant vessel. Although his actions were a clear warning of what must shortly come to pass, no one other than his immediate family paid much attention. The people of Noah’s day went about their lives as usual, ignoring the growing danger.

And then the rain started to fall.

—Scott Ashley

*The Good News* (ISSN: 1086-9514) is published bimonthly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 555 Technecenter Dr., Milford, OH 45150. © 2003 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Milford, Ohio 45150, and at additional mailing offices.

Publisher: United Church of God, an International Association  
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Scriptural references in *The Good News* are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

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Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 1487140.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to  
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# Table of Contents



Does the Bible predict the end of the world? 4

## Cover Feature

### The End of the World: What Does the Bible Say?

For generations people have read the Bible and concluded that the world will come to an end. Now statesmen and scientists echo these ancient biblical prophecies. Will the world come to an end? And if so, how? What signs will indicate that it is imminent, and what, if anything, does God expect us to be doing to prepare for that time? . . . . . 4

### Will Civilization End in Global Cataclysm?

Bible prophecies speak of stars, hail and fire and "a huge mountain, all ablaze," falling to earth. Could these be describing unimaginably devastating cataclysms such as meteor storms, asteroids or comets striking earth? . . . . . 8



To whom or what can you look for safety? 11

### Coming Calamities: Does God Offer Protection?

We live in a dangerous world in perilous times. It seems that everywhere we look we see escalating brutality and violence. Where is it leading? Does God promise protection in such times? And for whom? . . . . 11

### The Coming Clash Between Europe and America

As the United States concentrates its attention on its war on terror and possible war with Iraq, a new threat is emerging of which most Americans are oblivious—a rising competing superpower in Europe. . . . . 16

### The Debt Trap: How Do I Get Free?

Have you lost your job or found yourself or your family mired in debt? How can you get out from under the debt burden? Certain keys can be a big help. The solution isn't hard to understand, but it does take effort. . . . 18

### Surprising Archaeological Find: Proof of Jesus' Existence?

An ancient artifact discovered in Jerusalem bears the inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Could this be the same James mentioned in the New Testament who was the half brother of Jesus of Nazareth? . . . . . 20



Does this ancient artifact prove Jesus was real? 20

### Patriotism: The Good, the Bad and the Biblical

Patriotism: It's a powerful word that stirs up all kinds of images and emotions, yet it often escapes a precise definition. What's good and bad about patriotism? And, more important, what is God's view of patriotism? . . . 25

## Regular Features

<b>World News and Trends</b>	<i>An Overview of Conditions Around the World</i>	14
<b>Profiles of Faith</b>	<i>James: Half Brother of Jesus</i>	22
<b>Letters From Our Readers</b>	<i>Readers of The Good News share their thoughts</i>	29
<b>Just for Youth</b>	<i>Christianity Isn't for Wimps</i>	30

# The End of the World

## What Does the Bible Say?

For centuries people have read the Bible and concluded that the world will come to an end. But will it? If so, how? What do the Scriptures teach about the end of the world?

by Noel Hornor

**N**early two millennia ago the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth asked Him a question that has intrigued people ever since: “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3, King James Version).

People in every generation since have wondered about this. Will the world literally end? If so, how? Why? And when? What does the Bible really say about this

crucial and disturbing question?

Religious people aren't the only ones asking these questions. In recent decades people from many walks of life have expressed concern about the possibility of the end of the world as we know it. Politicians, educators and scientists foresee the potential

destruction of our world from a *number of causes*—including nuclear warfare, environmental disaster, planetary pollution, overpopulation, killer diseases and collision with a comet or asteroid.

### Potential devastation from the sky

Although some of these possibilities are unlikely, others present a real threat. Based on the increasing number of gigantic impact craters discovered in recent years, scientists believe that a collision between earth and a killer asteroid is inevitable.

What would be the result of such a violent encounter? “An asteroid only a kilometer across would create cosmic havoc by impacting on the earth,” writes Michio Kaku, professor of theoretical physics at City College of New York. “. . . The shock wave would flatten much of the United States. If it hit the oceans, the tidal wave it created could be a mile high, enough to flood most coastal cities on earth” (*Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century*, 1997, p. 317).

In 1908 a meteor or comet exploded over a remote area of Siberia. Though it was relatively small, with an estimated diameter of only about 50 yards, it flattened 1,000 square miles of forest, felling 80 million trees. The energy released by that celestial missile is estimated to be about equal to that of a large hydrogen bomb. The resulting tremors were recorded as far away as London. (To learn how such events might tie in with Bible prophecy, see “Will Civilization End in Global Cataclysm?,” beginning on page 8.)

### The increasing nuclear threat

Experts generally agree that, of all possible means of destroying humanity, nuclear weapons pose the greatest threat.

And the genie cannot be put back in the bottle. Austrian theologian Ulrich Kortner put it this way: “The nuclear threat . . . constitutes not a temporary, but rather an *irrevocable global threat*. The actual possibility of *an end to all life* is now a constituent part of our reality” (*The End of the World: A Theological Interpretation*, 1995, pp. 229-230, emphasis added).

Some sober scientists go even farther, saying that nuclear annihilation is inevitable. The late Carl Sagan, perhaps the world's best-known scientist before his death in 1996, wrote that “the development of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems will, sooner or later, lead to

global disaster” (*Cosmos*, 1980, p. 328).

With the Cold War ended, the probability of all-out nuclear war between countries has lessened for the time being, but the continuing addition of more nations to the nuclear club ratchets the threat back upward.

If North Korea has successfully developed nuclear weapons—as it has strongly hinted it has done—the nuclear club of nations now totals 10. More than 50,000 nuclear weapons exist in the world, many in dangerously unstable places. No one dares dismiss the idea that terrorist groups, if they can get their hands on nuclear devices, will use them in pursuit of their deadly aims.

Optimistic scientists believe that, thanks to continuing discoveries in science and technology, the nations will realize they must cooperate and work together to develop a unified global civilization. However, admits Dr. Kaku, “in the background always lurks the possibility of a nuclear war, the outbreak of a deadly pandemic, or a collapse of the environment” (p. 19).

#### Is time running out?

Some political leaders have expressed aloud their worry about the possible end of civilization. Former U.S. president Ronald

Reagan expressed concern that Armageddon may occur in our generation. His defense secretary, Casper Weinberger, observed: “I believe the world is going to end—by an act of God, I hope—but every day I think time is running out” (quoted by Reginald Stackhouse, *The End of the World*, 1997, p. viii).

Former French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing commented on the state of humanity: “The world is unhappy because it doesn’t know where it is going and because it senses that, if it knew, it would discover that it was heading for disaster” (ibid.).

Former U.S. vice president Al Gore speculated on the longevity of the world: “Two world wars, the Holocaust, the invention of nuclear weapons, and now the global environmental crisis have led many of us to wonder if survival . . . is possible” (*Earth in the Balance*, 1992, p. 366).

Indeed, experts from many fields share the concern that we could see the end of civilization as we know it. These concerns have created an age of anxiety, especially in a world where so little seems certain anymore.

Many others, however, say there is no need to be concerned about the world ending. They point to epidemics of end-time panic that have raged in the past. They list many

failed past predictions regarding the end of the world.

Such criticism is justified to a point. Doomsday predictions have abounded for centuries; date-setters have been wrong many times. The problem with most of these prognostications was that, though well intentioned, the specific chronological details were the ideas of men who badly misinterpreted information in Scripture.

Is there a source to which we can go for reliable information? There is! That one reliable source is the Bible—what it *really* says.

Many people today have a vague idea that the Bible says something about the end of the world. Does it? Most certainly!

#### The end of an age

Although we do not know the time, one thing we know for sure is that the Bible prophesies the end of the world as we know it. But what does that mean?

When Jesus’ disciples asked Him about “the end of the world,” they weren’t talking about “world” in the sense of our physical planet, the earth. The Greek word translated “world” is *aion*, from which we get the English word *eon*. The two mean essentially the same thing—an age, an epoch, an era (see “The Time of the End—The End of What?” on page 6).

Christ’s followers well knew the many prophecies of the Old Testament that foretell the coming age of the Messiah. Our present time, the time of human rule on earth under the deceptive sway of Satan (1 John 5:19), is

Experts from many fields share the concern that we could see **the end of civilization as we know it**. These concerns have created an age of anxiety, especially in a world where so little seems certain anymore.

## Noah and Our Time—A Sobering Parallel

Jesus Christ used the example of Noah to reveal attitudes that would predominate near the end: “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

This is history and prophecy working together. The meaning is clear: The problem with people in Noah’s day would prevail again just before Christ’s second coming. Back then God seemed far away, virtually unconcerned about human activities on earth, and life appeared to go on as it always had. This is also the mind-set of the end time (2 Peter 3:3-6), with people unconcerned as to their true spiritual condition and blind to God’s impending judgment.

The key to the example Christ gave is to understand that people can be so concerned about the cares of this life that they neglect to seek their Creator (Matthew 6:33; Luke 21:34-35). It happened before, and it is happening again.



The apostle Paul commented to Timothy about other ungodly attitudes and activities that would characterize the last days: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

This perfectly describes the dominant attitude and outlook of our age. Such attitudes will prevent the vast majority of humanity from believing God and the biblical warning signs until all havoc breaks loose. Like the people in Noah’s time who laughed at him and ridiculed his building of an ark, the end of this age will come when the overwhelming majority is unprepared.

(Adapted from the booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* Download or request your free copy at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org) or from any of our offices listed on page 2.)

described by the apostle Paul as “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4).

Another Greek word translated “world” in the New Testament is *kosmos*, which denotes the ordered world around us—that is, not the physical planet we live on but man’s society and geopolitical dominion. This is what will end.

Paul and the other apostles understood that, at the end of this age, man’s corrupt civilization will be swept away and a new era will dawn at the return of Christ. Peter described this change as one in which “times of refreshing” will come from God the Father through Jesus, who will return from heaven when “the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:19-21, New International Version).

This transition from man’s *misrule*—which is, in reality, the unrecognized rule of Satan—to Christ’s divine reign in the Kingdom of God was at the heart of the messages of the biblical prophets as well as the gospel Jesus taught. (For more information, request our free booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *Is There Really a Devil?*)

Scripture proclaims that the present age—the civilization and societies we know today—will terminate in a cascade of unimaginable destruction and violence that will climax at the return of Christ. In the New Testament alone, more than 300 verses refer to these events.

### Signs of the end time

When Jesus’ disciples asked about the end of the age (Matthew 24:3), He responded by

listing several warning signs. The first would be massive religious deception, including religious teachers who, while claiming to represent Him, would not follow His teachings but would deceive many through a counterfeit Christianity.

He also said there would be many wars and other conflicts between nations and ethnic groups. He also spoke of famines, massive

## Our awesome scientific and technological advancements have bequeathed to this and future generations a heritage that lacks a guarantee of human survival.

disease epidemics and earthquakes.

The problem with trying to precisely predict the end from these signs is that these trends and conditions have been with us in varying degrees from the first century until now. This helps explain why end-time fervor has arisen repeatedly for two millennia.

Many believe that man’s development of modern weaponry with the ability to annihilate human life is a sure sign of the last days. As for this destructive potential being a sign of the end, Jesus did say that “if that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive*” (Matthew 24:22, Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Our awesome scientific and technological advancements have bequeathed to this and future generations a heritage over which hangs the ultimate sword of Damocles. Indeed, without miraculous intervention from God the human race has no assurance of survival.

However, we should realize the sobering fact that, no matter when the end of the age comes, people will be living at that time who will dispute the possibility of the world ending. Under inspiration of God, the apostle Peter tells us that “scorners will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’” (2 Peter 3:3-4).



Regardless of *when* it occurs, there will be people who express disdain even as the very time approaches. No matter how difficult things look, some will assure everyone that man has everything under control. Tragically, such assurances will do nothing but provide a false sense of security, leading

## The Time of the End—The End of What?

The Bible speaks of “the time of the end.” But exactly what will come to an end? Jesus Christ contrasted “this age” with “the age to come” (Matthew 12:32). The word translated “age” in this passage is the Greek word *aion* (from which we derive the English word *eon*), signifying “a period of indefinite duration . . . marked by spiritual or moral characteristics” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Age”).

Paul contrasted the age “which is to come” (Ephesians 1:21) with the world we know, which he called “this present *evil age*” (Galatians 1:4). Spiritually and morally, this age and the age to come are opposites.

To properly understand the two, we must realize that *this is not God’s world*. God is not the author of the broken homes, shattered marriages, violence, racial and ethnic hatred, governmental corruption, greed, pollution, depression, disease and persecution and the resultant suffering we see around us. Paul pinpoints the cause of these sorrows: “*the god of this age*” (2 Corinthians 4:4), none other than Satan the devil.

How great is the influence of this being? The apostle John tells us that “*the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*” (1 John 5:19). All of humanity is influenced by the thinking, attitudes and actions of this wicked being and his evil cohorts, the demons. John further warns that Satan’s deceptive power is so great that he “*deceives the whole world*” (Revelation 12:9).

Satan’s influence is as immense as it is pervasive. Odd as it may sound, one of Satan’s greatest areas of influence is religion, where *his* ideas, not God’s, dominate. Paul warns Christians of Satan’s deceptive power even within Christianity: Just as “Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light,” so do his representatives masquerade as

“ministers of righteousness” and “apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Paul warns those who would live godly lives that they must constantly struggle against unseen spiritual influences dominating the world around them. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of *this age*, against spiritual hosts of wickedness . . .” (Ephesians 6:12).

Under Satan’s influence, the world has its own “wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:20-29), a way of thinking that considers the God of the Bible and His way of life as “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 2:14). As a result, mankind does not recognize that it is man’s collective rejection of God and His ways that has brought the suffering and sorrow that permeate the world.

When Scripture mentions “the time of the end” or “the end of the age,” it is referring to the coming end of the present *evil age*. This age—in reality the age of Satan—will draw to an end, to be replaced by the age of God’s rule over and guidance of all of humanity.

This age to come—when, as the Bible explains, the Kingdom of God will govern the earth—will be ushered in by Jesus Christ at His return. To better understand this major prophetic theme and these events, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. They will help you better understand the unimaginably better world God has in store beyond our present age.

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people to foolishly continue to trust in human ability rather than in God.

### As the end approaches

However long it is until the actual end of the age, one theme the biblical writers emphasized is that *it draws nearer every day*. Paul warns us that “*now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed*” (Romans 13:11).

And salvation is certainly important to keep in mind as everything falls to pieces around us. The end of the world as we know it, though it includes many catastrophes on a

Christ will reward those who do so.

### Focus not on timing but preparation

It is not a question of *whether* the world—man’s corrupt civilization—will end. God’s Word says *it will*. Our chief concern should not be *when* it will end. Jesus said it would be impossible for men to precisely calculate this ahead of time (Matthew 24:36, 42, 44).

Instead, our main focus should be to seek God to be *spiritually prepared* for the times that are coming. “*But keep on the alert at all times,*” said Jesus, “*praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man*” (Luke 21:36, New American Standard Bible).

The Bible describes believers as living in a state of expectancy, in a state of tension, between two worlds. We live in the present world, which we know will end, while we look for the world to come with the return of Christ. “*So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him*” (Matthew 24:44, NIV).

We need to seek God in heartfelt repentance and faith, leading to baptism by God’s true ministers so we can receive God’s Spirit



## The end of the world as we know it is not all bad news for mankind. It includes good news too. God will intervene before it is too late.

scale never seen in history, is not all *bad news* for mankind. It includes *good news* too. God will intervene before it is too late (Matthew 24:21-22). The alternative is not only the destruction of human civilization but the annihilation of the human race itself.

The only wise action for anyone who understands what is coming is to turn to God with repentance and obedience (Acts 3:19). Indeed, “*now [God] commands all people everywhere to repent*. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed [i.e., Jesus Christ]” (Acts 17:30-31, NIV).

When Jesus comes in power and glory, He will rebuke the world for its sins. This is part of the message proclaimed from the beginning of the true Christian Church. On the day of the Church’s founding, the apostle Peter exhorted his audience, “*Be saved from this perverse generation*” (Acts 2:40).

This is the message the Church is still commissioned to proclaim. How were the people to be saved? Peter urged them to *repent*—to turn from their own sinful, selfish ways and to seek God’s ways—and to be baptized (Acts 2:38). At His second coming

(Acts 2:37-39). Then we are to remain faithfully obedient while awaiting Jesus’ return. For “*he who endures to the end shall be saved*” (Matthew 24:13).

Jesus never said the Christian calling would be easy. On the contrary, He said it would be challenging (Matthew 7:13-14). The reward, though, is great, far beyond anything we can imagine. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

What does Bible prophecy reveal about the future of our planet? To learn more, request the free booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. To understand Satan’s influence on our world, request *Is There Really a Devil?* If you’d like to learn how you can begin building a right relationship with God, request *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. All are yours free for the asking.



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# Will Civilization End in Global Cataclysm?

Does the Bible prophesy great natural disasters? If so, what will they be? You need to understand!

by Scott Ashley

If you ever doubt that our planet could be devastated by a collision with a killer asteroid, go outside some evening and look up at the moon. It should change your thinking.

Even with the naked eye, massive scars from such collisions are clearly visible. With a telescope or binoculars, the number of impact craters is too great to count. You'll see newer craters within older ones, and larger ones that have no doubt obliterated dozens if not hundreds of smaller ones. It looks as if someone or something has used our planetary neighbor for cosmic target practice.

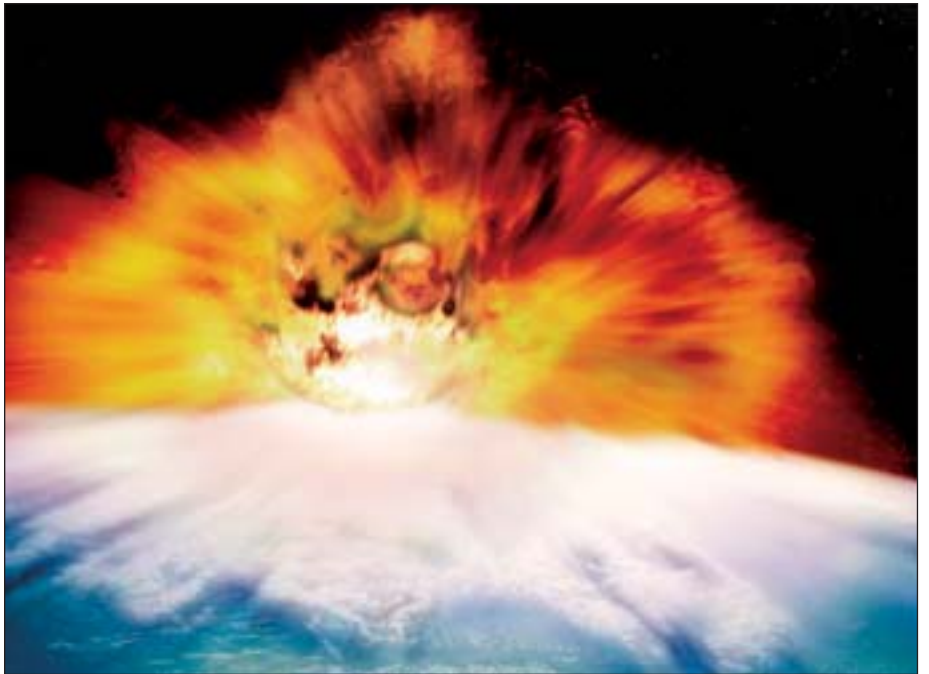
Keep in mind that the moon is a much smaller target than planet earth. Our world has no doubt seen its own share of devastating collisions, but erosion (because earth has an atmosphere with water and weather and the moon doesn't) has erased most of the damage. However, a few notable scars, like Arizona's Meteor Crater, are still plainly visible.

In recent years scientists have begun to discover previously hidden impact craters on our planet. The sheer vastness of some defies the imagination. For example, the Chicxulub crater, remnants of which are buried deep below the surface of the Yucatan Peninsula and beneath sediments in the Gulf of Mexico, is estimated to be *more than 110 miles across*.

The devastation such an impact could cause is nearly unimaginable (see "A Blast From the Past" on page 9). The event that formed the Chicxulub crater—an asteroid or comet that slammed into earth—is commonly thought to have been responsible for the extinction of most of the dinosaurs.

Would the result be any different today? "Some researchers forecast that as many as a quarter of the world's population could succumb to a deteriorating climate following an [asteroid] impact in the 1-1.5 kilometre size range," writes Bill McGuire, an expert on geological hazards and professor of geohazards at University College, London. "Anything bigger and *photosynthesis stops completely*. Once this happens the issue is not how many people will die but *whether the human race will survive*" (*A Guide to the End of the World*, 2002, pp. 164-165, emphasis added).

But *could* it—and *will* it—happen again?



**"The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea . . . A third of the living creatures in the sea died . . ."**

Although the biblical writers didn't have the scientific background or terminology to talk about comets, meteors and asteroids, many Bible prophecies of the end time appear to describe a scenario at one time considered unthinkable—a meteor storm striking the earth.

## Stars fall to earth

The book of Revelation, in a time described as "the great day of [God's] wrath" because of mankind's continuing rebellion against Him (Revelation 6:17), describes a series of unimaginably destructive events that will devastate the planet before Jesus Christ's return. One, recorded in verse 13, is quite specific: "And *the stars in the sky fell to earth*, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind" (New International Version unless otherwise noted, emphasis added throughout).

This clearly appears to be a description of a cosmic meteor storm. Several times a year the

earth, in its orbit around the sun, passes through bands of cosmic debris—particles of dust and ice left in the trails of comets many eons ago. This produces the annual Perseid, Leonid and Geminid meteor showers in August, November and December. Occasionally these generate spectacular streaks and fireballs, with dozens, sometimes hundreds, of meteors visible each hour.

But the prophesied storm of the book of Revelation is different. Rather than small particles that burn up harmlessly from friction as they enter earth's atmosphere, these are large enough to fall to earth, striking it with a frequency compared to fruit falling from a tree shaken by a strong wind. The event is so frightening that earth's inhabitants flee into caves, rocks and mountains, crying and pleading for shelter from the terror and devastation raining from the sky (verses 15-17).

## Meteor storms and asteroid strikes?

But this is only the beginning of terrors.

Another series of horrifying events, known as the seven trumpet plagues, quickly follows. Notice the description of the first of these plagues:

“The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came *hail and fire* mixed with blood, and *it was hurled down upon the earth*. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up” (Revelation 8:7).

No human being in historical times has witnessed and recorded such an event, so we have to turn to our imaginations or the fantasies of Hollywood filmmakers to visualize such an occurrence. Certainly a meteor storm would appear to a first-century writer like “hail and fire.” The reference to blood here may be an attempt to describe the colored smoke trails that meteors leave as they flame through the atmosphere.

The temperatures they generate—hot enough to incinerate the stone and metal of which most meteoroids are composed—would certainly start massive fires. With enough meteors, falling as if in a hellish hailstorm of flame, great conflagrations could indeed erupt to destroy a third of the planet’s vegetation.

Notice the description of the next plague: “The second angel sounded his trumpet, and *something like a huge mountain, all ablaze*, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed” (verses 8-9).

This sounds very much like an expansion of the previous disaster. “A huge mountain, all ablaze,” is a perfect first-century description of an enormous asteroid entering earth’s atmosphere.

The effects described in this passage are also consistent with an asteroid strike. Its heat would vaporize millions of tons of seawater (and every living thing in it) while the force of its impact would stir up ocean sediments over much of the world and choke off aquatic life,

disrupting the planetary ecology. Massive tsunamis—tidal waves miles in height—would drown ships, boats and coastlands the world over.

### “A great star, blazing like a torch”

But that’s not all. The next plague appears to describe yet another disastrous collision with a body from outer space. “The third angel sounded his trumpet, and *a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky* on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter” (verses 10-12).

The falling of “a great star, blazing like a torch,” appears to be a description of another asteroid or comet impact, and the result—the poisoning of a third of the planet’s freshwater—is consistent with the massive ecological damage that would result from such a strike. Huge amounts of ash, pulverized soil, rock and debris would first be lifted into the atmosphere, then settle on lakes, rivers and streams, rendering many of them undrinkable.

The reference to “wormwood” can be confusing until we understand that the original Greek word used here, *apsinthos*, refers to the absinthe plant, which is “both bitter and deleterious” and “figuratively suggestive of ‘calamity’ . . .” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Wormwood”).

The last part of verse 11, “many people died from the waters that had become bitter,” emphasizes that this catastrophe makes much of the earth’s freshwater bitter and poisonous, killing those who drink it.

### The devastating aftermath

The descriptions in verse 12 are consistent with the aftermath of such devastating meteor impacts. “The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third

of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.”

If the verses we’ve been examining are indeed descriptions of collisions with asteroids, these violent encounters will wreak unimaginable devastation. Millions of tons of earth will be blasted into the sky. Smoke, ash and soot will cover entire continents and encircle the earth. Huge swaths of the sky will be blotted out, just as verse 12 describes.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this is the kind of scenario many scientists believe brought the demise of the dinosaurs. Collisions with asteroids, they reason, filled the sky with so much smoke and debris that a “nuclear winter” set in, blocking out the sun and turning much of the planet into a frozen wasteland on which only a few creatures could survive. This, they tell us, is how hundreds of species, unable to endure in such a devastated environment, became extinct.

Jesus Christ, in a prophecy of the same events, summarizes this terrifying time this way: “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, *nations will be in anguish and perplexity* at the roaring and tossing of the sea. *Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken*” (Luke 21:25-26). Matthew’s account of the same prophecy adds again that “*the stars will fall from the sky . . .*” (Matthew 24:29).

### Earthquakes to shake the earth

Jesus said that another sign of the approaching end of man’s age would be “earthquakes in various places” (verse 7). Other prophecies tell us that some of these earthquakes will surpass any others seen in human history.

In Revelation 6:12-14 the apostle John sees in vision a coming earthquake so powerful that “every mountain and island was removed from its place.”

## A Blast From the Past

How destructive could an asteroid strike be? What would it be like? Bill McGuire, an expert on natural catastrophes and professor of geohazards at University College London, describes the events that created the Chicxulub crater, buried deep beneath the Yucatan Peninsula and Gulf of Mexico and discovered only recently:

“Here a 10-kilometre [6-mile] asteroid or comet—its exact nature is uncertain—crashed into the sea and changed our world forever. Within microseconds, an unimaginable explosion released as much energy as billions of Hiroshima bombs detonated simultaneously, creating a titanic fireball hotter than the Sun that vaporized the ocean and excavated a crater 180 kilometres [112 miles] across in the crust beneath.

“Shock waves blasted upwards, tearing the atmo-

sphere apart and expelling over a hundred trillion tonnes [metric tons] of molten rock into space, later to fall across the globe. Almost immediately an area bigger than Europe would have been flattened and scoured of virtually all life, while massive earthquakes rocked the planet. The atmosphere would have howled and screamed as *hypercanes* ripped the landscape apart, joining forces with huge tsunamis to batter coastlines many thousands of kilometres distant.

“Even worse was to follow. As the rock blasted into space began to rain down across the entire planet . . . the heat generated by its re-entry into the atmosphere irradiated the surface, roasting animals alive as effectively as an oven grill, and starting great conflagrations that laid waste the world’s forests and grasslands and turned fully a quarter of all living material to ashes.

“Even once the atmosphere and oceans had settled

down, the crust had stopped shuddering, and the bombardment of debris from space had ceased, more was to come. In the following weeks, smoke and dust in the atmosphere blotted out the Sun and brought temperatures plunging by as much as 15 degrees Celsius [27 degrees Fahrenheit]. In the growing gloom and bitter cold the surviving plant life wilted and died . . .

“Life in the oceans fared little better as poisons from the global wildfires and acid rain from the huge quantities of sulphur injected into the atmosphere from rocks at the site of the impact poured into the oceans, wiping out three-quarters of all marine life” (*A Guide to the End of the World*, 2002, pp. 159-161).

Especially sobering is how closely these descriptions—scorching flames, enormous conflagrations, suffocating darkness and poisoned water and atmosphere—parallel events prophesied in the book of Revelation.

Several chapters later, we read in Revelation 16:18-20: “Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. *No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake . . . Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.*”

Apparently, this quake will be so powerful that the location of the islands and mountains within the scope of John’s vision will be drastically shifted—perhaps the world over. Clearly this is a period of great geologic upheaval. Some islands may simply disappear, swallowed by the ocean. Some mountains and even mountain ranges may likewise be laid low.

### Deadly quakes a real possibility

Earthquakes can be incredibly deadly and destructive. The most deadly quake in history, in China in 1556, killed a staggering 830,000 people. The 20th century saw 10 devastating earthquakes that each killed more than 50,000 men, women and children. The worst was a 1976 catastrophe that took up to 655,000 lives, also in China. The other most-deadly temblors struck Japan, the Soviet Union, Italy, Peru, Pakistan and Iran.

Other devastating quakes in the last century hit India, Chile, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico, Armenia, the Philippines, Turkey, Taiwan, Mexico and the United States.

Earthquakes in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas are so common that they aren’t considered unusual. Not so widely known is that many other major U.S. cities are at risk for major earthquake damage. A Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) study released in 2000 identified Anchorage, Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, Las Vegas, Reno, Salt Lake City, Albuquerque, St. Louis, Memphis, Atlanta, Charleston, New York, Newark and Boston as cities facing the greatest potential financial damage.

Since earthquakes generally occur along fractures in the earth’s crust—known as fault lines—past tremors are a strong indicator of future earthquake activity. All of these areas are at risk for future devastation. And no doubt many more faults and tectonic stresses will be caused by the impacts mentioned earlier, some that may even tilt the earth off its present axis.

Consider Isaiah’s description of how the earth will be rocked and laid waste during this coming time of great earthquakes: “. . . The foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; *so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion* that it

falls—never to rise again” (Isaiah 24:18-20).

### Volcanic eruptions predicted?

The same fault lines that are the source for many earthquakes are also the location of some of the world’s potentially most deadly volcanoes.

Early on the morning of May 18, 1980, a moderate earthquake below Washington’s Mount St. Helens triggered an astounding series of events. The north side of the mountain, already bulging because of pressure from magma building up below it, began to collapse in a massive landslide that quickly covered 23 square miles.

The mountainside then exploded, expelling 600-degree ash and debris at speeds of more than 300 miles per hour, covering 230 square miles. Some eight billion tons of material blew out over the surrounding area and into the atmosphere. For miles around, the ash turned bright daylight to darkness. Dust from the eruption, blasted 80,000 feet into the stratosphere, encircled the planet twice.

Spectacular as this eruption was, it was only a shadow of supervolcanoes of the past. The volcanic explosion that formed the strange landscapes of Yellowstone National Park, for example, left behind a huge collapsed crater some 50 miles across and spewed ash that covered portions of 16 states.

“If this last cataclysm occurred today it would leave the United States and its economy in tatters and the global climate in dire straits,” writes Professor McGuire. “The eruption scoured the surrounding countryside with hurricane-force blasts of molten magma and incandescent gases—known as *pyroclastic flows*—with a volume sufficient to cover the entire USA to a depth of 8 centimetres [3.15 inches]” (pp. 101-102).

Anyone who has visited the park and seen its hundreds of scalding hot pools, geysers and steam vents knows that the mighty forces that led to that unimaginable explosion are still at work underground—just as they are in many other places around the globe.

Will the earth experience major volcanic eruptions at the time of the end? The same internal stresses that produce earthquakes also create volcanic eruptions. If the earth is to be wracked by its greatest earthquakes ever as described in the prophecies we read earlier, it’s hard to imagine that this *won’t* trigger major volcanic eruptions across the globe.

While the biblical writers lacked the scientific background to understand volcanoes, they seem to be mentioned in several places in the Bible—including several prophecies—using other terminology. One that appears to describe volcanic events is in Joel 2:30-31: “I will show wonders in the heavens and on

the earth, *blood and fire and billows of smoke*. The sun will be *turned to darkness* and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.”

Many other prophecies of the time of the end speak of fire, smoke and great darkness over the earth, which are characteristic of volcanic activity as well as the other cataclysmic events mentioned earlier.

### What should you do?

For centuries people have read such passages in the Bible and concluded that, yes, the world as we know it will end. While not referring to the physical planet itself ending, the age of man—“this present evil age,” as Paul calls it in Galatians 1:4—most assuredly will end, and in a series of catastrophes unparalleled in all of human history.

As Jesus described it, the culmination of man’s age will be unlike anything the world has ever seen—a time of “*great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.*” He notes that, without God’s intervention to cut short these events, “*no one would survive*” (Matthew 24:21-22).

God will finally intervene and at last establish an everlasting Kingdom of peace and safety, but only after mankind has learned through painful experience that it’s not wise to live in ways that, in effect, thumb one’s nose at our Creator.

Are you willing to learn that lesson now and receive protection from these coming disasters? At the end of Joel’s prophecy of the time of the end are these encouraging words: “And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls” (Joel 2:32).

But you don’t have to wait that long. Why not get serious about your relationship with your Creator now? **GN**

## Recommended Reading

What does Bible prophecy reveal about the dangerous times ahead? If you’d like to learn more, request the free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy and Are We Living in the Time of the End?* To better understand how to develop a right relationship with God, please request *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, also free.



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# Coming Calamities: Does God Offer Protection?

Where will you be when terror strikes the nations? Does God offer safety for anyone? Will He care about you when your fellow man doesn't?

by John Elliott

**W**e can scarcely describe our state of affairs better than a recent article in Britain's *Independent on Sunday*: "If you go to the opera you risk being taken hostage. If you go on holiday you might be blown up. If you stop for petrol you could be shot by a sniper. Open a letter—does it contain anthrax? What's going on these days? Where will the next outrage be?"

The message is clear: *We live in a dangerous world.*

Yet these aren't the worst possibilities. As more nations upgrade their stockpiles of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, the likelihood of unfathomable terrors



## Uneasy nations sense the need to build political, military and economic coalitions in an attempt to bring stability to an increasingly uncertain world.

unleashed on Western countries continues to increase.

Religious fanaticism and extremist governments grow more threatening. In response, uneasy nations sense the need to build political, military and economic coalitions in an attempt to bring stability to an increasingly uncertain world.

It's no wonder people increasingly feel uncertainty and unease. In the post-Sept. 11 world, simpler and safer times seem to be gone forever.

### Danger from those with little to lose

The 1,400-year struggle between Christianity and Islam is heating up in many places around the world, bringing armed conflict and civil war. Citizens in several European nations are increasingly favoring extreme-right political candidates who advocate action to alleviate their fear of foreigners. Solutions to ethnic rivalries are creeping back into politics at levels not seen since World War II.

Meanwhile, several smaller nations have attempted to expunge ethnic groups from

within their borders—including Iraq, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and the former Yugoslavia. In other countries the brewing confrontations between diverse populations are nearing flash points.

Historically, small underdog groups have shown that they will resort to desperate measures. Terror emanates from little groups more commonly than from larger nations because, in their view, they have so little to lose and potentially much to gain by unleashing destruction on civilization in unpredictable and inhumane ways.

Consider the potential of their exploiting the caches of thousands of chemical and biological munitions of the former Soviet Union that were warehoused near its perimeter. The breakup of the U.S.S.R. meant that small independent states inherited many of its deadly weapons. Exactly how many exist—and where they all are—is unknown. These often backward and impoverished countries are cash-poor, with many potential buyers lining up for their weapons of mass destruction. This concern doesn't even address the former Soviet Union's *nuclear* weapons.

Regional skirmishes and isolated outbreaks of terror may not seem to be high risks for the world's population at large. However, we're already seeing that these specific incidents may draw the larger powers into attempting radical solutions for the threats and other problems they face. Christ's end-time prophecy warns that a period of "great tribulation" will come suddenly on the whole world. The flash point will be an occurrence in the Middle East (Matthew 24:15-21).

The Bible teaches that events will mushroom into a global melee with several powers fighting for control. The loss of life from the resulting wars, famines and pestilence is forecast in the book of Revelation to include a great part of the world's population. (For more understanding of these end-time events, please request our free booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled.*)

### Why is this happening?

The escalating collapse of ethics and morals in many countries is a symptom of a deeper sickness and out-of-control internal problems. Many in our self-centered world seem hell-bent on living any way they please. Our societies stifle anyone who opposes their self-serving appetite. People weigh in for a bigger slice of the pleasure pie. They seem willing to do anything in their lust for power, possessions and prestige. Meanwhile, traditions, customs, culture and laws based on the Bible are casually cast aside.

At almost every turn we see an escalation of brutality, violence, slander, theft and sexual perversion. In Western civilization this is matched with a determined effort to remove any mention of God and His standards from public life.

The apostle Paul warned of an age like ours when he wrote that "there will be *terrible times in the last days*. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love,

unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God . . ." (2 Timothy 3:1-4, New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

God's Word has forecast this slide into lawlessness and moral depravity since ancient times. Vivid descriptions of where it ultimately leads are mentioned widely throughout the Scriptures. More and more we live in societies that, the Bible forewarned, "*parade their sin like Sodom*; they do not hide it. Woe to them! *They have brought disaster upon themselves*" (Isaiah 3:9, NIV).

Right on the heels of the prophesied degeneration of this era comes escalating worldwide violence and terror unlike anything we have ever seen. Jesus Christ warns that "it will be a time of *great distress*, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and *will never be again*. If that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive . . .*" (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible).

This devastating time will climax with the

Or will you summon the spiritual courage to swim upstream and uphold God's way of life?

Throughout the Bible this one theme is constant: God blesses the righteous and lets the sinners suffer the consequences of their rejection of Him. The reason involves the very purpose for which God created man in the first place. Each person, at some point, must choose one of two ways. Either we choose the way of selfishness, the mentality of Satan the devil (John 8:44; Galatians 5:19-21), or we



## Jesus Christ warns that "it will be a time of **great distress**, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and **will never be again.**"

intervention of Christ's second coming—to *save mankind from annihilation*.

### What about you?

If global turmoil escalates to such proportions in your lifetime, what will happen to you?

Don't think it *couldn't* happen. The last century saw two world wars that took the lives of tens of millions, not to mention countless smaller conflicts that killed and maimed millions more. Even now the seeds are being sown for the next worldwide inferno. Will you be swept away to suffer the same fate as the lawless and ungodly?

choose and live a way of selflessness and concern for others that expresses God's mind and character (Galatians 5:22-23).

Most of humanity has chosen the way that comes most naturally to us, the way that "is hostile to God" and "does not submit to God's law" (Romans 8:7, NIV). But, while many have been offered the opportunity to learn God's way and begin living it, only a few have embraced the godly way of thinking and living exemplified by Christ and followed by the apostles and the saints (Matthew 7:13-14; 22:14).

Meanwhile, a man-made religion bearing

the name of Christianity has permeated Western civilization for millennia and successfully masked many fundamental biblical truths. In addition to fostering fables and unbiblical rules and traditions, it has spawned violence, bloodshed and wars since its inception. The Bible prophesies that at the time of the end a great false religious system, symbolized prophetically as a prostitute, will sit atop an alliance of nations that will bring the world to the brink of annihilation (see Revelation 17).

But amid the political, moral and religious confusion around us are people whom God has chosen to be different. They form an early crew of "fellow workers" and spiritual children that His Word refers to as "saints" and "firstfruits" (Philippians 4:3; Romans 16:15; James 1:18). Those who have received and are guided by God's Spirit have a spiritual Father; they are spiritual children of His divine family. They are coheirs with Christ of the Kingdom of God and will rule with Him over the people of earth after His return (Revelation 5:10; 20:4).

Regrettably, terrible times will come before that day arrives. During this ominous period all who choose to live selfish and ungodly lives will face head-on the disasters spelled out in the book of Revelation and in other biblical prophecies.

But what about those who follow the will of their heavenly Father? Will they fare any better during the perilous times ahead?

The honest answer is twofold. On the one hand, Jesus warned His followers they would suffer persecution (Matthew 10:17-18). But the type of persecution He spoke of is not that of being sucked along with humanity into a vortex of war to be lost along with the masses. Rather, He described a form of courageously serving God in the face of the world's animosity (John 15:20).

Martyrs down through the ages have been singled out for persecution—primarily by human leaders (religious and secular)—

## Who Is Given Protection?

**W**ho will escape the worst of the Great Tribulation during the prophesied dangerous times ahead? Is it some particular group or denomination? Will those who study the prophecies of the Bible have a greater advantage? Does knowing about God's plans bring any special favor to a person?

The Bible is plain that it's not knowledge or self-devised religion that makes a difference with God. Rather, it is the performing of His will in our lives and our sincere acceptance of Christ's sacrifice for our past sins that binds us to Him (Matthew 7:21-23; Galatians 1:4).

What should a person who desires protection from the coming Great Tribulation be focusing on and doing in the meantime? Surely the Christlike people with God's Spirit guiding their thoughts and actions will continue their focus on loving and serving God and humanity as their reason for being.

Here are some passages, one from the Old Testament and one from the New,

that give us spiritual directives to be concentrating on each day.

"Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger" (Zephaniah 2:3).

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore [be alert to your spiritual condition], and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36).

Those God chooses will be spared the horrible calamities of the climax of this age of Satan's world—those intimately close to God and His way of living. "He sets on high those who are lowly [humble], and those who mourn are lifted to safety" (Job 5:11).

for their rejection of a society in moral and religious collapse (Matthew 24:9; Hebrews 11:35-40). Paradoxically, God also promises protection for His spiritual children.

### God loves His own

Throughout the Scriptures those whom God has chosen to be “His own special people” (1 Peter 2:9) have had His eye and ear on them. God calls these people in advance of the rest of humanity to be the “firstfruits” of billions whom He will ultimately include in His plan and bring into His family (James 1:18).

An example of God’s care even in the midst of martyrdom is found in the book of Acts, where Stephen proclaimed God’s truth to a hostile crowd (Acts 6-7). His message incited a lethal reaction from his audience, which stoned him to death.

But a closer reading of the story shows that God was supporting Stephen throughout the ordeal, from inspiring his words and actions to miraculously making his face seem like that of an angel. As Stephen died, God reassured him with a dramatic vision showing the Father and Son in heaven. Clearly, Stephen would live again through the resurrection of the saints at Christ’s return. In spite of his dire circumstances, how encouraging this whole event must have been to Stephen!

Jesus and the Father are partners with those They have called to be the firstfruits of the divine family. God is faithful to His people and promises He will be with them. “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

In the Father’s ultimate wisdom, some become martyrs for the sake of the Kingdom of God, to be resurrected later. Yet other believers’ lives are miraculously spared now. Either way the life of a saint is precious to God. He has a purpose for every true Christian.

### Who will be spared?

Just as God warns of the consequences of unrighteous conduct, He promises blessings for those faithful to His commandments and teachings. Consider some specific prophecies of events that will happen in the coming time of the Great Tribulation:

“And there shall be a *time of trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time *your people shall be delivered*, every one who is found written in the book [of life]” (Daniel 12:1).

“Say to the righteous that *it shall be well with them*, for they shall eat the fruit of their

doings. Woe to the wicked! *It shall be ill with him*, for the reward of his hands shall be given him” (Isaiah 3:10-11).

A passage in Revelation indicates that God plans to spare His people, granting them His protection during the 3½ years of tribulation and wrath that will come on humanity (Revelation 12:14). This is affirmed in other prophecies (see Zephaniah 2:3; Revelation 3:10).

Jesus’ dark prophecy about the climactic events that will rip the world apart just



**“Say to the righteous that *it shall be well with them*, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! *It shall be ill with him . . .*”**

before His second coming is prefaced with a positive statement to His followers: “Pray that *your flight* [their *escape*] will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, *but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened*” (Matthew 24:20-22, NIV).

### Will you be spared?

At a time known only to God, this present society will complete its irreversible, self-destructive path that will take it to the brink of annihilation. God’s true followers will not be part of that process, not be part of that mentality and not be part of that society. Rather, they will identify with a different kingdom (Hebrews 11:13-16) and long for the setting up of the righteous government of Christ on earth. They are those God will be closely involved with, whatever their circumstances may be.

A passage in Luke’s account of Christ’s end-time prophecy highlights the primary hope of God’s people: “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because *your redemption draws near*” (Luke 21:28). In this context, that

redemption means eternal spirit life in the Kingdom of God, the primary goal of every true Christian. (To learn more about that Kingdom, please request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.)

But will you be one of those God is using for His purpose? Will you repent of humanly devised religious beliefs and traditions purporting to please God while actually rejecting Him, His commands and His ways?

The times ahead are forecast to wake us up to the truth. We need to be deadly serious about our dedication to doing the will of God in our lives from here on!

Referring to God and His awesome power (Hebrews 12:29), Isaiah the prophet was inspired to ask: “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isaiah 33:14).

These questions impact every person alive at the beginning of the prophesied Great Tribulation. The answer follows in the next verses: “He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands,

refusing bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil: He will dwell on high; his place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; bread will be given him, his water will be sure” (verses 15-16).

Shouldn’t you follow Christ’s instruction in Luke 21:34-36 and ask God to bring you to a right spiritual condition, striving to yield to His guidance, so that He will consider you worthy to escape these calamitous things that are coming on the world and to stand before Him at His return? **GN**

### Recommended Reading

You need to understand where this world is headed—and where you will fit in the events that lie ahead. As this article shows, it’s literally a matter of life and death! To learn what your Creator expects of you and to begin living in a way that will please Him, please request the free booklets *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Road to Eternal Life*.



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[www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org)



# World News and Trends

## An Overview of Conditions Around the World

by John Ross Schroeder

### World opinion judges the United States

**H**ow does the rest of the world view the United States? With decidedly mixed feelings, according to results of a survey of 38,000 people in 44 countries released in December by the Pew Global Attitudes Project.

"Despite an initial outpouring of public sympathy for America following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, discontent with the United States has grown around the world over the past two years," begins the report. "Images of the U.S. have been tarnished in all types of nations," including longtime allies, poor countries "and, most dramatically, in Muslim societies."

While America and its citizens have a considerable reservoir of goodwill and are viewed favorably by a majority in most countries surveyed, compared to survey results from two years ago, favorable views of the United States have fallen in 19 of the 27 countries

where comparable data are available. Critical views were especially strong in Germany and France, where huge majorities oppose U.S. military intervention to depose Saddam Hussein in Iraq (see "The Coming Clash Between Europe and America," beginning on page 16).

The report also notes that "true dislike, if not hatred, of America is concentrated in the Muslim nations of the Middle East and in Central Asia, today's areas of greatest conflict." Among supposed U.S. allies, 75 percent of Jordanians, 69 percent of Pakistanis and Egyptians and 55 percent of Turks held unfavorable views of the United States.

While the United States "is nearly universally admired for its technological achievements . . . in general, the spread of U.S. ideas and customs is disliked by majorities in almost every country included in this survey."

Many countries see the export of sleazy American culture, such as music, movies and other entertainment that wallows in violence, sex and materialism, as significant threats to their families and children, and this no doubt contributes to increasing negative views toward the United States. As Proverbs 14:34 tells us, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

Not coincidentally, the survey also found that 80 percent of Americans interviewed thought that moral decline was a significant problem for their nation. The big question is whether they have the heart and will to reverse it.

For a biblical perspective on these trends and where they are ultimately leading, please request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: The Pew Research Center, Associated Press.)

### Echoes of an old German nightmare: The Weimar Republic

**N**iall Ferguson, professor of political and financial history at Oxford University, set out a chilling scenario in Britain's *Sunday Times*. His opening words were: "As Chancellor [Gerhard] Schröder grapples with a seriously sick economy, he is making the same mistakes which led to the 1930s crisis that opened the door for Hitler."

Just how bad are Berlin's economic woes? In the last decade only Switzerland and Japan had poorer performing economies in the developed world. German unemployment is 8.3 percent in the workforce and predicted to reach one in 10. As an overall assessment *The World in 2003* [published by *The Economist*] said: "Germany, once the country of the post-war

#### "As Schröder grapples with a sick economy, he is making the same mistakes which led to the 1930s crisis that opened the door for Hitler."

economic miracle, is acquiring a reputation as the sick man of Europe, with low growth, high unemployment and an unwillingness to contemplate the sort of changes that might get it out of its current difficulties."

Comparisons with the old financially disastrous Weimar Republic are rife in the British and European media. "Hidden jobless[ness] takes Germany back to the level of the Weimar era," wrote Tony Paterson for *The Sunday Telegraph*. He reported that "public fury

### War, famine, disease: Africa's endless afflictions

**T**he four horsemen of the Apocalypse are already riding roughshod over much of Africa. Summing up, 28 million Africans find themselves HIV-positive—nearly 10 percent of the adult population. Corruption remains endemic in many African countries, stifling economic, social and political development. Thirteen million Africans face starvation. Drought is a continualcrippler, and the continent is engaged in constant military conflict.

Six weeks ago the promise of peace among some of Africa's most deprived countries—the Congo, Sudan and even Burundi—seemed possible. But as *The Scotland on Sunday* observed: "Now all bets are off again. The Sudanese government has pulled out of negotiation . . . The Congo deal, like so many before it, is floundering . . . And in Burundi there is business as usual: shelling of civilian suburbs."

has spilled into the streets of Berlin with demonstrations of health workers, teachers, builders and lorry [truck] drivers."

*Bild* (a German newspaper) ran a simple headline, "We've Had Enough," expressing the frayed emotions of the unemployed. Part of the problem is high wages. Actually, "Britain's hourly labour costs are 30 percent lower than they are in Germany" (*The World in 2003*).

*The Guardian's* correspondent in Berlin reported that the "German tax rise evokes Weimar comparison." Another *Guardian* headline tells us that "Europe's most powerful banking sector is on red alert—German money machine grinds to a halt." *The*

Africa is a lesson in how dreams can turn to dust. Even slavery survives and thrives in parts of this suffering continent, along with outbreaks of genocide in Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia and the Congo.

Commenting on Southern Africa's food shortage, *The Economist* stated that "bad weather, and bad rulers, are making millions of people hungry." *Time* magazine's Atlantic edition concurs: "War, bad government and AIDS are feeding a deadly drought across Southern Africa."

When it comes to bad governance, Zimbabwe takes the cake. Food aid goes to those who support the government, leaving opposing citizens in danger of starvation. White farmers who could help are deprived of their land by government edict. "Like a roaring lion and a charging bear is a wicked ruler over poor people," Proverbs 28:15 reminds us.

It is hard to envision how anyone or anything except the coming Kingdom of God can turn Africa around. No wonder Jesus Christ told us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come." (Sources: *The Scotland on Sunday*, *The Economist* [both London], *Time*, *The Washington Times*.)

*Mail on Sunday* also calls Germany the "sick man of Europe"—talking of "debts, dole queues [welfare waiting lines] and industry in crisis."

In reality, conditions are nowhere near as bad as the skyrocketing inflation that plagued the Weimar Republic in the late '20s and early '30s when the proverbial wheelbarrow full of marks would not so much as buy a pound of butter. Nonetheless, the German economy bears close watching. Totalitarianism in the form of Hitler's Third Reich emerged out of economic frustrations. (Sources: *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The World in 2003*, *The Guardian*, *The Mail on Sunday* [all London].)



## Iran's latest long-range missile threat

Israel's prime minister, Ariel Sharon, has strongly suggested that after Iraq the United States should turn its attention to Iran. Though the Iraqi story tends to dominate the news, readers of *The Good News* should be alert to the activities of a Middle Eastern state that is clearly a part of the "axis of evil."

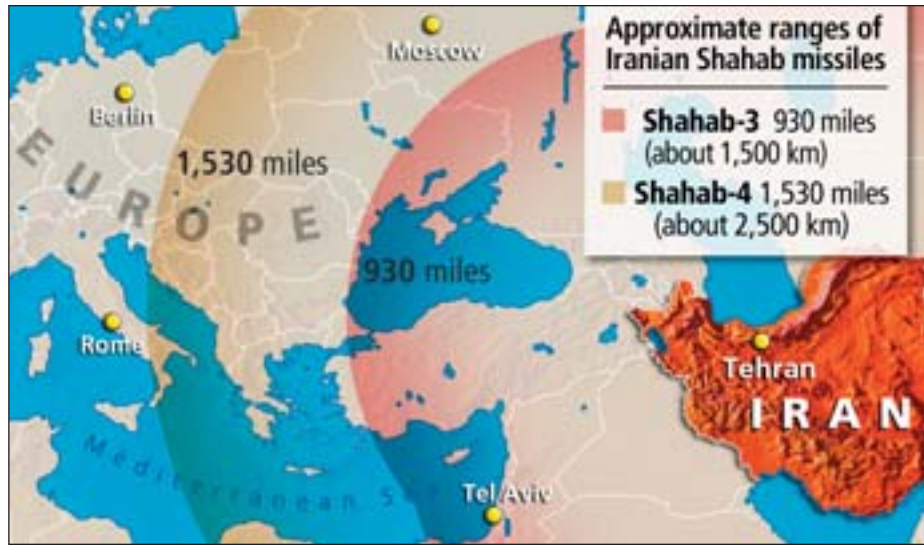
Philip Sherwell, the foreign-affairs correspondent of *The Sunday Telegraph*, has not neglected Iranian affairs.

In a recent feature article, he tells us that "Iran has been supplied by Russia with powerful new technology and parts for long-range missiles that will put Israel and the whole of the Middle East—including British and US forces in the region—within its reach." Africa and parts of southern Europe will also be reachable.

Successful desert test firings were conducted this past summer with Russian and North Korean scientists in attendance. Western and Israeli intelligence has also established that China is making a crucial contribution to the Iranian missile program. We don't live in a world of friendly nations.

Much of end-time Bible prophecy will find its fulfillment in the Middle East. Predicts Dudley Fishburn, editor of *The World in 2003*, "With Saddam Hussein gone by the end of 2003, the Middle East will become a sharply better place." Yet in his general assessment Mr. Fishburn writes that 2003's headlines "will be dominated by war, the Middle East and recession."

The Mideast is destined to host Armageddon—an area that will be replete with armies and weapons of the deadliest kind—culminating in a great battle array that will bring Jesus Christ back to earth before we destroy ourselves (see Matthew 24:21-22; Revelation 16:14-16). To better understand what is coming, please write for our free booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Sources: *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The World in 2003*.)



## Reality television hits new lows

Perhaps America's most bothersome Achilles' heel lies squarely in the area of its sore neglect of the values set down in the pages of the Bible. So-called reality television programs seem to be in the process of gradually replacing the usual fictional fare on television. Somehow the viewing public thinks it needs to see real policemen in the dangerous act of arresting actual violent criminals or highway patrolmen corralling genuine reckless speed demons on the road.

Far more damaging, however, is the appetite for viewing scenes involving, as an example, real wives battling their husbands' mistresses on live TV with a moderator walking around with a microphone in his hand. Many other unspeakably repugnant exercises in human depravity could also be mentioned.

Once the public decides to go down this road, it will take an increasing amount of sleaze to satisfy viewers' base appetites. Remember King Solomon's observation that "the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" (Ecclesiastes 1:8). Human beings tend never to be satisfied. When their attention is focused on depravity, the path downhill is swift and sure.

Human beings, made in the image of God, are asked to perform debasing stunts on television—some even involving public nudity—just to win prizes. Apparently five reality-TV shows have reached the top-20 list in popularity. Some of their scenes defy the imagination and should offend the sensibilities of any nation that calls itself Christian.

More than any other time in her history, America needs the support of the Ten Commandments—to rediscover their meaning as well as to rekindle the fear of not keeping them—to receive God's forgiveness made possible by Christ's sacrifice. A good start on an individual basis would be for every American to request a free copy of our 80-page booklet titled simply *The Ten Commandments*. Every home in the country should have a copy. Nothing threatens our national security more than our casual disobedience to the royal law of God. (Source: *USA Today*.)

## Hostility and our children's health

"Hostile kids who mistrust others are much more likely than their peers to develop physical symptoms linked to diabetes and heart attacks in the future, a pioneering new study [conducted at the University of Pittsburgh] suggests," says *USA Today*.

Psychology tends to affect biology. More and more scientific studies are affirming and confirming the commonsense proverbs and the Christian way of life found in the pages of the Bible. Solomon said: "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). And the apostle Paul advises: "... Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Behavioral pediatrician David Schonfeld of the Yale Child Study Center declared that "angry kids are often in a high-stress 'fight or flight' mode because they think people are out to get them." Frankly, many are taught to be angry by parental example.

On the positive side, teaching children how to manage their anger and resolve disputes by reason and diplomacy may well lengthen their lives. This is accomplished both by example and patient biblical instruction. Those who may want to follow up on this theme should request our free booklet *Making Life Work*. (Source: *USA Today*.)

## Selling weapons to unstable governments

Britain is far from the only Western nation to sell arms to some of the most unstable countries. However, a fairly recent investigative report by *The Independent on Sunday* revealed that the United Kingdom has unabashedly marketed its military hardware to nations embroiled in ethnic conflicts and civil wars.

For instance, "Britain sold arms worth tens of millions of pounds to India and Pakistan last year, before the Kashmir crisis reached boiling point." Angola and Kenya were also recipients of British military wares, as were several unstable former Soviet republics.

During a tour of the African continent earlier this year, Prime Minister Tony Blair commented: "We cannot ignore these conflicts because sooner or later they end up on your doorstep." Often overlooked, however, are that Western arms have been marketed to nations in which serious potential conflicts are already apparent.

The predictable comeback: "If we don't sell them these arms, other nations will." This is a good example of the conundrums countries get themselves into through greed and lack of foresight. International affairs have gone awry. We suffer if we do and we suffer if we don't. These are catch-22 situations.

Only God can sort out the world in its present state. Man has had his chance and failed miserably. Our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* shows how we will finally emerge from our great global problems. (Source: *The Independent on Sunday* [London].)

# The Coming Clash Between Europe and America

While the United States is focused on its war on terror and its conflict with Iraq, new threats continue to emerge of which Americans are largely oblivious.

by Melvin Rhodes

An intriguing article in the November issue of the Boston-based *Atlantic Monthly*, "The End of the West," warns that "the next clash of civilizations will not be between the West and the rest but between the United States and Europe—and Americans remain largely oblivious."

This stark warning comes from Charles Kupchan, a professor at Georgetown University and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is also author of a new book, *The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century*.

## Conventional wisdom off the mark

Dr. Kupchan's article begins by describing the popular perception of the United States:

"The American era appears to be alive and well. The U.S. economy is more than twice the size of the next biggest—Japan's—and the United States spends more on defense than the world's other major powers combined. China is regularly identified as America's next challenger, but it is decades away from entering the top ranks.

"The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington certainly punctured the sense of security that arose from the end of the Cold War and the triumph of the West, but they have done little to compromise U.S. hegemony. Indeed, they have reawakened America's appetite for global engagement. At least for the foreseeable future, the United States will continue to enjoy primacy, taking on Islamic terrorism even as it keeps a watchful eye on China.

"That encapsulates the conventional wisdom—and it is woefully off the mark. Not only is American primacy far less durable than it appears, but it is already beginning to diminish. And the rising challenger is not China or the Islamic world but the European Union, an emerging polity that is in the process of marshaling the impressive resources and historical

ambitions of Europe's separate nation-states."

## The rising European superpower

Updating Americans on developments in Europe, Dr. Kupchan continues:

"The EU's annual economic output has reached about \$8 trillion, compared with America's \$10 trillion, and the euro will

Hungary, the Czech Republic, and at least four other countries are expected to join in 2004), it will become a formidable counterweight to the United States on the world stage. The transatlantic rivalry that has already begun will inevitably intensify. Centers of power by their nature compete for position, influence, and prestige.



**"Can the Europe-American marriage be saved? . . . It isn't difficult, in the style of a divorce lawyer, to itemize grounds for separation between Europe and America."**

(Nicholas Fraser, "Le Divorce," *Harper's Magazine*, September 2002)

soon threaten the dollar's global dominance. Europe is strengthening its collective consciousness and character and forging a clearer sense of interests and values that are quite distinct from those of the United States. The EU's member states are debating the adoption of a Europe-wide constitution (a move favored by two thirds of the union's population), building armed forces capable of operating independently of the U.S. military, and striving to project a single voice in the diplomatic arena.

"As the EU fortifies its governmental institutions and takes in new members (Poland,

"The coming clash between the United States and the European Union will doubtless bear little resemblance to the all-consuming standoff of the Cold War. Although military confrontation remains a remote prospect, however, U.S.-EU competition will extend far beyond the realm of trade.

"The U.S. Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank are destined to vie for control of the international monetary system. Washington and Brussels will just as likely lock horns over the Middle East. Europe will resist rather than backstop U.S. leadership,

perhaps paralyzing the World Bank, the United Nations, and other institutions that since World War II have relied on transatlantic cooperation to function effectively.

“An ascendant EU will surely test its muscle against America, especially if the unilateralist bent in U.S. foreign policy continues. A once united West appears well on its way to separating into competing halves. For the moment America remains largely oblivious to the challenges posed by a rising Europe” (pp. 42-44).

Since Dr. Kupchan wrote his article, it has become clearer that 10 more nations, not just seven, will join the EU in 2004, only 14 months from now, bringing the number of members to 25. The European Union, already the world’s biggest trading system, is well on the way to rivaling American economic dominance.

### Growing anti-Americanism

A driving force behind the push for European unity is anti-Americanism. Disillusionment with, even fear of, U.S. foreign policy—seen as increasingly unilateralist, with the American president often depicted by cartoonists as a cowboy—has fed a determination that Europe should be a superpower to rival the United States.

Describing European reaction to the U.S. effort to seek allies in its war on terror, Dr. Kupchan observes: “Germany’s Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer . . . cautioned Washington that ‘alliance partners are not satellites.’ The *Berliner Zeitung* [newspaper] lamented that far from renouncing its go-it-alone ways [after Sept. 11], the United States had ‘used the opportunity to strengthen its selfish superpower position.’

“‘Never has a president of the United States been so foreign to us,’ the newspaper proclaimed in an editorial, ‘and never have German citizens been so skeptical about the policies of their most powerful of allies.’”

The German justice minister in September outrageously compared George Bush to Adolf Hitler. Though the comments soon led to her resignation, they do show the hardening of many Europeans’ attitudes toward the United States and its leadership.

Dr. Kupchan notes that European leaders also increasingly call for greater integration and more power to offset America’s long-held military and economic strength. “The French used to be alone in looking to the EU as a counterpoise to America, but the other members have now joined in,” he writes. “Tony Blair has asserted, ‘Whatever its

origin, Europe today is no longer just about peace. It is about projecting collective power.’

“Germany’s Chancellor Gerhard Schröder called ‘for a more integrated and enlarged Europe’ to offset US hegemony. According to Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, the EU’s executive body,

**“For months it has felt as if Europeans and Americans are not so much close allies as different species. The historic bond of common cause, intensified by Sept. 11 . . . has dissolved into incomprehension and distrust.”**

(J.F.O. McAllister, *Time*, Oct. 21, Atlantic edition)

one of the chief goals of the union is to create ‘a superpower on the European continent that stands equal to the United States.’ Goran Persson, the Prime Minister of Sweden, a country that long ago renounced power politics, recently remarked that the EU is ‘one of the few institutions we can develop as a balance to US world domination.’”

### Biblical prophecies of a European superpower

Serious Bible students have long known that the Bible prophesies the emergence of a new superpower that will dominate the world for a brief time shortly before the return of Jesus Christ and His establishment of the Kingdom of God.

This European-centered “beast” power, as the Bible terms it, is the final resurrection of the Roman Empire, one of the four great gentile empires of Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7) that have largely dominated civilization through the centuries—and will again just before Christ’s return. All of these empires were to have a great impact on the 12 tribes of Israel. The resurrected Roman Empire will have a negative impact on their descendants today, among whom are the British and American peoples.

Revelation 17 gives us more details about this coming superpower: “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour [a prophetic reference to a short time] as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb [Jesus], and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings . . .” (verses 12-14).

While describing an end-time union of 10 leaders who will ally themselves with

an even greater leader, also called “the beast,” this passage makes it clear that the final political, economic and military integration of Europe will significantly differ from the present configuration of the European Union. The final union will consist of only 10 nations, or perhaps 10 groups

of nations, each headed by a single leader.

The European Union has been a long time developing. After World War II the battered countries of Europe were determined that, after two European-centered world wars in less than 30 years, the nations of Europe would never again fight each other. Germany and France in particular resolved to build a new and different Europe.

Previous attempts at European union have always involved conquest of European peoples. Hitler and Napoleon are examples in the last two centuries of attempts to restore the Continent’s unity, lost when Rome fell in A.D. 476. Conquering other nations against their will by definition involves conflict. Having learned from the past, the nations of Europe say they are committed to voluntary union, a potentially far more powerful alliance than those that have preceded it.

Yet already the drive for peace has given way to a drive for power. Dr. Kupchan explains: “For most of the postwar era,

*Continued on page 28*

## Recommended Reading

This article briefly discusses some of the many prophecies of geopolitical events that are shaping the world before Christ returns to rule the earth. To understand what the Bible reveals about this time, be sure to request your copy of *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. To understand what the Bible foretells about the United States, Britain and other major Western nations, request *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Both booklets are yours free for the asking.



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# The Debt Trap: How Do I Get Free?

How can you escape the debt burden? The solution isn't hard to understand, but it takes effort.

by Robert Dick

**D**id you lose your job in the economic downturn after Sept. 11, 2001? Were you already out looking for a new job, a casualty of the stumbling high-tech sector? Are you a victim of the continuing wave of manufacturing jobs exiting your nation for countries with lower pay and benefit scales? Are you chronically underemployed, sitting in a go-nowhere job?

Or, unlike any of these, have you been comfortably employed but lulled by the go-go decade of the '90s into spending more than you make?

If you are in any of these categories, you probably are all too familiar with debt—sometimes staggering debt. During 2001 Americans owed more than \$700 billion in credit-card debt alone.

Consider a piece of timeless wisdom—“The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Proverbs 22:7, emphasis added throughout). If you



**The average American household of three owes more than \$7,000 in credit-card debt.**

are in debt, you *are* a servant, like it or not. When King Solomon wrote the biblical book of Proverbs, it was true literally—debts were paid by the physical labor of the one who owed. Today the arrangements may be different, but the emotional burdens are not—weariness, depression, constant worry and uncertainty about the future, to name a few.

How do you get out from under the burden of debt? The keys aren't difficult

to understand, but they do take commitment.

According to a survey taken by Opinion Research Corp. International of Princeton, New Jersey, and sponsored by the Consumer Federation of America and Bank of America, Americans in particular may have been sobered recently into taking a more serious look at personal debt. The survey results show that since Sept. 11, 2001, one third of Americans are more interested in personal savings,

and a quarter are more interested in paying down their debts. Conversely, 36 percent were less interested in luxury purchases.

Have you considered joining those who are getting their financial houses in order? If so, a few time-tested steps can make a major contribution toward your debt-free life.

**Step 1: Spend less or make more.** As a freeway commuter during the '90s, I regularly tuned in to a variety of radio financial advisers during the drive home. One crusty host had been through it all—success, failure, good times, hard times. His was the voice of practical experience. To listeners with seemingly impossible debt, his advice was predictably consistent—“work more or spend less.”

Sometimes there is no gimmick, no strategy and no pain-free formula for getting out of debt. The answer is a *change in lifestyle*. Work more. Spend less. It may not be enjoyable, but the reward can last a lifetime.

My wife and I spent the first seven years of our marriage getting out from under the debt incurred by going to college, getting married and starting a family. For seven years we agreed to spend less. Like millions of others who chose this route, we have never regretted the decision.

You may find after examining your income and outgo that your indebtedness leaves you owing more than you make each month. Or, as someone wryly observed when looking at the month's bills, “I can't figure out why there are always days left over at the end of the money.”

Making more is probably your only option. Consider a part-time job as a way of getting out from under debt. Set the goal of eliminating your current debts, and drop the second job when you reach the goal. Sometimes additional income is the *only* practical way to get back to zero.

**Step 2: Make yourself worth more.** The spend-less-or-make-more formula doesn't address everyone's problem. What if your regular job is a dead end? You can see that your salary won't rise that much over time, but your needs will. What then? Obviously a short-term, part-time job won't solve the problem.

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

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Consider *making yourself worth more*.

Every job has a market value. If yours is low, why not train to do something that pays better? Consider getting the training necessary to land a better-paying job. Education may be the single biggest step you ever take to improve your financial situation.

Once you have the training and that new job, will the bigger paycheck be the solution to your financial problems? Not automatically. Making money is one thing, but *managing* money is another. The prosperity of the '90s lulled many people making excellent salaries into ever-increasing debt. Between 1996 and 2001, credit-card debt in America rose by 46 percent! During the decade of the '90s, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Americans' saving rate, as a proportion of disposable income, dropped from an average of 7.8 percent in 1990 to 1.0 percent during 2000. *Making* money isn't the same as *managing* money.

Considering that the average credit-card debt is more than \$2,400 for every man, woman and child in the United States, managing revolving credit is probably an excellent place to start getting your financial house in order.

### Step 3: Eliminate credit-card debt.

Have you ever considered how much you give away each year in credit-card interest? According to recent reports, the average American household of three owes more than \$7,000 in credit-card debt. With an interest rate of 14 percent—which is middle of the road for credit cards—you give away the equivalent of a new 36-inch stereo TV or a new washer and dryer every year. If you carry a card with a 20 percent interest rate, you give away the equivalent of a new deluxe side-by-side refrigerator in annual interest.

Consumer debt allows you to have something now, when you don't have the cash, but it also makes the item cost more—often a *lot* more. Saving for expensive items is hard at first, but those who do it find it gets easier, and in the end you have more to show for it.

How do you start eliminating credit-card debt? If you are in deep credit-card debt because you cannot control the impulse to use the cards unwisely, then pay cash whenever you can or, better yet, save up for a purchase and pay by check when you have saved the full amount. With an interest-bearing account you will actually make a small amount of money in the interim period.

Most savvy credit-card users have already learned to play the move-money-to-the-low-introductory-rate-credit-card game, but this is just a Band-Aid. Sooner or later you still have to eliminate the debt.

If you cannot control credit-card usage, *stop*

*carrying credit cards*. If you *can* control usage it is still wise to carry only one or two, preferably those that offer a benefit such as an annual rebate on purchases or airline frequent-flyer miles. Smart credit-card users carry cards for the convenience of not having to carry cash. Even smarter, they avoid paying interest by paying the full balance due each month.

Of course, it should be mentioned that the convenience of avoiding cash can today be accomplished with a debit or check card,

## Have you considered joining those who are getting their financial houses in order? If so, a few **time-tested steps** can make a major contribution toward your debt-free life.

by which money is paid directly out of your checking account.

**Step 4: Learn to budget.** The leap from getting out of debt to staying out of debt usually starts with a budget. There is no substitute for a sound balanced budget when it comes to managing money. At the same time there seems to be a natural resistance to doing it. "Why budget?" you may say. "I'm getting by. It's nothing great, but I'm making it."

A realistic manageable budget is the first step toward accumulating a positive net worth. The previous steps help you get out of debt, but budgeting helps you take the next step—*staying* out of debt.

Guidelines for setting up a budget are available from literally scores of sources. Check your library or the Internet. You will turn up several. One excellent workbook, *Building Wealth*, is available through the Federal Reserve at (800) 333-4460, extension 5354 (in the United States), or it can be downloaded from the Internet at [www.dallasfed.org/htm/wealth](http://www.dallasfed.org/htm/wealth). You can also request our free booklet *Managing Your Finances*, which contains valuable information on setting up a family budget.

A good budget will also help you begin to build a rainy-day fund for those unforeseen emergencies that hit everyone sometime in life. Financial planners, consumer credit organizations and debt counselors consistently advise holding three to six months' worth of living expenses as a personal emergency fund. If you are currently mired in debt, this may sound like mission impossible, but you *can* do it. Realize getting out of debt and staying out of debt is a step-by-step process. Take one step at a time and you'll get there.

**Step 5: Make God your partner.** Let me offer one more step not commonly found in guides to eradicating debt, though it is neither new nor unusual. *Make God your partner*. The Maker of the universe is the best financial partner you can have.

Around 500 B.C. the Jewish remnant that had returned from captivity in Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem lost its focus. God became an afterthought as these people worked hard to make a comfortable living for themselves.

God had to remind them of a great truth through the prophet Haggai: "Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you

clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes'" (Haggai 1:5-6).

All the wealth of the last two decades of unprecedented prosperity has not created greater personal wealth for everyone. It has, as statistics clearly show, created unprecedented *personal debt* for many. Solomon, the richest man in the world during his day, said, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

His expression, "Cast your bread upon the waters," has become popular as a way of expressing the need to look outside ourselves and share with others. As contradictory as it may sound, learning how to get out of debt often comes in part by *learning how to share*. There is a surprising financial wisdom that comes by learning to look outside ourselves.

Take five steps and you can have a new walk. Most of us have learned somewhere in life how easy it is to become a slave to debt. The steps necessary to free ourselves aren't difficult to understand, but they do take *commitment*. Once committed to the challenge, you will find the results liberating—and the reward will be one that lasts a lifetime, usually even longer. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

What advice does the Bible offer about debt, money, wealth, financial priorities and our approaches to them? Discover a wealth of timeless biblical principles and instruction in the free booklet *Managing Your Finances*. You'll also find practical, down-to-earth biblical guidance for many areas of life in another free booklet, *Making Life Work*. Request your free copies today!



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# Surprising Archaeological Find: Proof of Jesus' Existence?

Have scholars found firm evidence of the existence of Jesus Christ, His earthly father and one of His half brothers? An intriguing find bears their names.

by Mario Seiglie

First it was the name of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate found in a monument in Caesarea, Israel, in 1961.

Then came the discovery in 1990 in Jerusalem of an ossuary, a burial box for bones, bearing the name of Caiaphas, the high priest who condemned Jesus. Just recently it appears the most spectacular of all archaeological finds relating to Jesus has surfaced.

Another ossuary has come to light, this one bearing the names of Jesus, James and

Professor Lemaire examined it. In fact, although Mr. Golan had read the inscription, he hadn't connected it with the biblical Jesus.

The dealer told Mr. Golan that the box had come from a burial site in southern Jerusalem where a bulldozer had accidentally uncovered a site containing tombs and bone boxes dating to the time of Jesus and James.

Much to the disappointment of archaeologists and scholars, the box was not excavated by a trained archaeologist from the spot

rule out the possibility. A team of experts from the Geological Survey of Israel examined the box and the inscription under a microscope and found no evidence of modern tools or tampering. Like the rest of the box, the inscription, though wiped clean in parts, has a thin sheen of particulate matter formed on it called a patina. This particular patina shows that it developed in a cave environment and that it is consistent with an age of 2,000 years.

By its very nature the artifact can be dated to within a few decades. Such bone boxes were in use from about 20 B.C. to A.D. 70, when according to Jewish custom the dead were first sealed in caves or rock-cut tombs, then their bones later transferred to a limestone bone box after the body had decayed.

Professor Lemaire further narrowed the dating by verifying that the inscription was in a cursive style used only in the few decades before A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Thus the inscription fits the style used around A.D. 62, when James, Jesus' half brother, died.

Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, which announced the discovery, explained that the inscription was reviewed by Joseph Fitzmyer, one of the world's foremost experts on first-century Aramaic and a preeminent Dead Sea Scrolls editor. Professor Fitzmyer was at first troubled by the spelling of the word for brother, because it was a plural form used centuries later. But further research yielded the same form in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls and on another first-century ossuary. "I stand corrected," Professor Fitzmyer said.

A putative forger would have to know Aramaic better than Professor Fitzmyer, which seems rather unlikely. "To my mind," wrote Mr. Shanks, "this is one of the strongest arguments for the authenticity of the James inscription" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, November-December 2002, p. 33).

## Many factors pointing in one direction

"It seems very probable," Professor Lemaire concludes, "that this is the ossuary of the James in the New Testament" (*ibid.*).



**This rather plain 20-inch limestone burial box for bones, bears on its side a inscription identifying it as having belonged to Joseph, brother of Jesus." The style of the inscription dates it to around A.D. 62, the year James, brother of Jesus, was martyred. The box was apparently unearthed in Jerusalem.**

*ossuary, a remarkable "James, son of*

Joseph, three of the most prominent people in the New Testament. The ancient Aramaic words inscribed on the limestone box state that it belonged to "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus."

In late October André Lemaire, a specialist in ancient inscriptions and professor at the Sorbonne in Paris, announced the discovery of the stone container with the extraordinary script. An Israeli collector, Oded Golan, had purchased the box from an Arab antiquities dealer more than a decade ago. Mr. Golan had not thought the artifact important until

where it had rested for the last 2,000 years. Instead it was surreptitiously removed and sold on the antiquities market (as is the case with a high percentage of archaeological finds in the Holy Land). Regrettably, this prevents the examination of the box in its proper archaeological context and the elimination of any possibility of fraud.

## Strong evidence for authenticity

Yet fraud seems rather unlikely. Before the announcement of the discovery, the limestone box was subjected to rigorous scientific tests to

What makes the case that this is indeed the ossuary of Jesus' half brother so convincing is the combination of factors that point in the same direction. Dr. Lemaire notes that Joseph (Hebrew *Yosef*) and Jesus (*Yeshua*, or Joshua) were common names in the A.D. 60s and James (*Ya'akov* or Jacob) less so, but a brother would not ordinarily be named in an inscription unless he were prominent. Dr. Lemaire says the likelihood of *more than one person* named James with a father named Joseph and a prominent brother named Jesus in that precise time period is minuscule.

"It is one thing to have scattered probabilities," explains John Meier, professor of New Testament at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and an authority on first-century Palestinian Judaism; "it's another thing to have lines of probabilities all converging at one point" (UPI report, Oct. 25).

Mr. Shanks stated that the "clincher" for him was the naming of the brother of the deceased. Of some 800 bone boxes discovered, 233 have inscriptions on the outside. Of these, few are inscribed with the name of a brother—only one other in Aramaic. Mr. Shanks said if one accepts the theory that the deceased was a prominent person associated with him—rather than simply associated because the brother presided over the secondary interment—the probability that the inscription refers to Jesus of Nazareth seems overwhelming.

### The life of James

Who was James? Let's consider the

intriguing story of this half brother of Jesus.

We first read of James in the New Testament as one of Jesus' half brothers (Jesus was born of Mary, miraculously begotten of God the Father through the Holy Spirit while Mary was a betrothed virgin, as explained in Matthew 1:18-25). Yet Mary and her husband, Joseph, later had other children. In Matthew 13:55-56 we see that some residents of Nazareth asked: "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers *James*, *Joses*, *Simon*, and *Judas*? And His sisters, are they not all with us?" (emphasis added throughout).

During Jesus' life, the Bible candidly reveals that His half brothers did not believe in Him as Savior and Messiah (John 7:5). Yet, after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His half brother James (1 Corinthians 15:7), who then became a prominent believer. In Acts 1:14 James is pictured, along with his other brothers and his mother, Mary, as original members of the Church. This was the same group that received God's Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

James later became an apostle and leader of the Jerusalem congregation. He played a prominent role in the conference of Acts 15 (see verses 13-21). Paul later visited James in Jerusalem where he oversaw the elders there (Acts 21:18). In Galatians 2:9 Paul refers to James as a "pillar" of the Church, and in 1 Corinthians 9:5 he mentions that "the brothers of the Lord" were married, which apparently included James. (More of James' life is detailed in "James: Half

Brother of Jesus," beginning on page 22.)

James also wrote the New Testament epistle that bears his name (James 1:1). Another brother, Judas or Judah (Matthew 13:55), wrote the short epistle of Jude (Jude 1).

### The death of James

The death of James, the Lord's brother—not to be confused with the two original apostles named James (see Matthew 10:2-3)—is not mentioned in the New Testament. But Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, does record it.

He writes: "Festus [the Roman procurator] was now dead, and Albinus [his successor] was but upon the road; so he [Ananas II, the high priest] assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 20, chap. 9, sec. 1).

Eusebius, a fourth-century church historian, records even more of the details of James' death: "Conducting him [James] into a public place, they demanded that he should renounce the faith of Christ before all the people; but contrary to the sentiments of all, with a firm voice, and much beyond their expectation, he declared himself fully before the whole multitude, and confessed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, our Savior and Lord.

"Unable to bear any longer the testimony  
*Continued on page 27*

## Controversy Over the Term 'Brother'

One long-debated issue that has resurfaced with the recent ossuary discovery is whether James was really the half brother of Jesus. To maintain the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary (which holds that Mary remained a virgin even after Jesus' birth and had no more children), Roman Catholics teach James was only a "cousin" of Jesus.

Yet the biblical evidence points to James being a half brother, not a cousin, of Jesus, since Mary was his mother and Joseph his father. The Bible does not call Jesus the *only* son of Mary; it calls Him the *firstborn* son. "Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her *firstborn* Son. And he called His name Jesus" (Matthew 1:24-25, emphasis added throughout).

Note also that the word *know* is the biblical euphemism for Joseph and Mary having sexual relations as husband and wife after Jesus was born.

The Gospels consistently show that Joseph and Mary had children other than Jesus. For instance, Mark 6:3 says: "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?"

Also, Paul calls James "the *Lord's brother*" (Galatians 1:19). The term used here for "brother," *adelphos*, means a brother, not a cousin. Paul uses a different Greek word that means "cousin," *anepsios*, in Colossians 4:10: "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the *cousin* of Barnabas." So the idea that James was a cousin of Jesus has no biblical basis.

Another line of argument is presented by the Greek Orthodox Church, which also believes in the perpetual virginity of Mary but holds that James was Joseph's son by

a supposed previous marriage, making him merely Jesus' *stepbrother*, having no immediate blood relation. Yet a close blood relation seems implicit in the distinction "brother of Jesus." And again, the idea of children by previous marriage is also contradicted by Matthew 1:24-25, which calls Jesus Mary's *firstborn* son and states that Joseph "knew her" after Jesus was born.

Corroborating evidence is found in Psalm 69, a psalm written by Israel's King David



"James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus," reads this inscription.

but widely recognized as messianic in content—prophesying the suffering of Jesus. David prefigures Christ lamenting, "I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother's children" (verse 8)—showing that Jesus' brothers were children of Joseph and Mary, not just of Joseph by a previous marriage.

Moreover, when Joseph fled to Egypt before the massacre of the young boys in Bethlehem, an angel appeared to Joseph and told him, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother; flee to Egypt . . ." (Matthew 2:13). It's apparent that the only ones in that family were Joseph, Mary and Jesus. No other brothers or sisters were there from a supposed previous marriage of Joseph. Jesus was clearly the firstborn son, and later Joseph and Mary had several other sons and daughters.

# James

## *Half Brother of Jesus*

by Jerold Aust

**W**hile James grew up in the same house with Jesus in Nazareth, he was miles apart from Jesus' thinking for the early part of his life.

James did not grow up a believer (John 7:5). Though Jesus and James had the same mother, Jesus was the son not of Joseph, as James was, but of God the Father Himself—a fact that wouldn't fully sink into James' mind for years. It wasn't until Jesus' resurrection and His appearance to James and the disciples that James finally really understood who his half brother was.

After Jesus' instructions recorded in Acts 1:4, James accompanied the apostles, the women who had followed Jesus, his mother and his brothers to the upper room, where they prayed and waited patiently for the gift of the Holy Spirit (verse 14). James was present when God sent the Holy Spirit to the small group, at which point the New Testament Church was born (Acts 1:14; 2:1).

From Jesus' resurrection on, James gave himself entirely to God and soon became an important figure in the early Church. His role was so important that Peter told others to report to James of his miraculous release from prison (Acts 12:17; Galatians 1:19). He apparently became the overseeing pastor of the Jerusalem church, because in Acts 15:13-21 we see him making the final declaration during this early ministerial conference.

The apostle Paul, after his conversion, met with Peter and James before seeing any of the other apostles (Galatians 1:18-19).

Later we see James advising Paul, and Paul then

acting on that advice (Acts 21:18-26).

### The family of Jesus

Jesus grew up in a sizable family that included four half brothers—James, Joses, Simon and Judas (who would later write the epistle of Jude)—and “His sisters,” showing there were at least two (Matthew 13:55-56).

Because the names of Christ's brothers are passed down to us in their Greek forms, it's easy to lose sight of how typically Jewish Jesus' family was. Jesus Himself was Jewish (Hebrew 7:14), because both Mary and Joseph were descended from the Israelite tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38). Jesus' Hebrew name *Yeshua* (or Joshua)—the same as the Israelite hero who conquered the Promised Land—means “God is salvation” (see Matthew 1:21).

The name of Jesus' mother, Mary, is a shortened form of *Miriam*, the sister of Moses and Aaron. Joseph (*Yosef* in Hebrew), Jesus' stepfather, was ultimately named for the Hebrew patriarch Joseph, one of the 12 sons of Jacob and father of the Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

As for Jesus' half brothers, James is the anglicized Greek form of the Hebrew *Ya'akov*, or Jacob, the same name as that of the Hebrew patriarch who was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. Joses is another form of *Joseph*. Simon's Hebrew name was *Simeon*, the name of another of Jacob's sons and father of one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

The Hebrew name of Judas (or Jude) was *Yehudah* (rendered Judah in English), the name of another of Jacob's 12 sons, from which the word *Jew* is derived. The popularity of these names is evident in that all of them are used, often repeatedly, for other

people mentioned in the New Testament.

### James sees the light

Throughout Jesus' ministry His half brother James, along with the other three brothers, didn't give Jesus the respect due Him (John 7:3-5). It appears they thought He was not thinking clearly, and perhaps they wanted Him gone from their home (Mark 3:21, 31-35). James and Jesus' other brothers showed Him no honor, which saddened Jesus, who spoke from personal experience when He said, “Only in his hometown, *among his relatives and in his own house* is a prophet without honor” (Mark 6:4, New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

Even at His death Jesus entrusted the care of His mother, Mary, not to His half brothers but to His disciple and close friend John (John 19:26-27). As *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* explains: “A bond of fellowship had . . . been established between John and Mary that was closer than her nearer blood relationship with her own sons, who up to this time had regarded the course of Jesus with disapproval, and had no sympathy with his mission. In the home of John she would find consolation for her loss, as the memories of the wonderful life of her son would be recalled . . .” (1979, “Brothers of the Lord”).

However, after Jesus' resurrection James and his brothers joined the company of believers, now convinced Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah and Son of God (Acts 1:14). A special appearance by Jesus to James, mentioned only in 1 Corinthians 15:7, probably played a major part in James' change of heart.

When James wrote his epistle some 30

years later, his humility is evident by the way he saw himself: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). James identified himself as the *servant* of Jesus rather than as a close relative.

He was not willing to boast that he was half brother of the Son of God. He may also have remembered how shamefully he had treated Jesus by rejecting Him in previous years. Jude identified himself similarly, while also identifying himself as a brother of James (Jude 1).

### The epistle of James

In many ways James’ epistle resembles Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, loaded as it is with encouragement and filled with gems to help build Christian character.

The second-century writer and historian Hegesippus referred to Jesus’ brother as James the Just and characterized him as zealous for the law of God. Many statements from James’ letter prove Hegesippus was right; it represents a book of Christian proverbs that cover subjects that touch many aspects of Christian life.

Hegesippus wrote that James’ knees resembled those of a camel because the skin on his knees became callused from spending hours each day in prayer. We can’t know for sure whether this description is accurate, but we do know that James encouraged Christians to pray faithfully. He cited the example of the prophet Elijah: “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:17-18). James preached what he practiced and practiced what he preached.

Indeed, James was crystal-clear about another subject fundamental to true Christianity—that a Christian must prove his faith by his actions—“works”—and that works perfect one’s faith. “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only,” he wrote (James 2:24).

Today we might say “put your money where your mouth is” or “talk is cheap; prove your words by your actions.” Jesus said people would recognize His disciples by God’s love expressed through them (John 13:35). Similarly, James said Christ’s disciples would prove their faith by their works (James 2). *Talking* about Christianity is one thing. *Acting* on it is quite another. James lived by his brother’s teachings and taught other Church members to do the same.

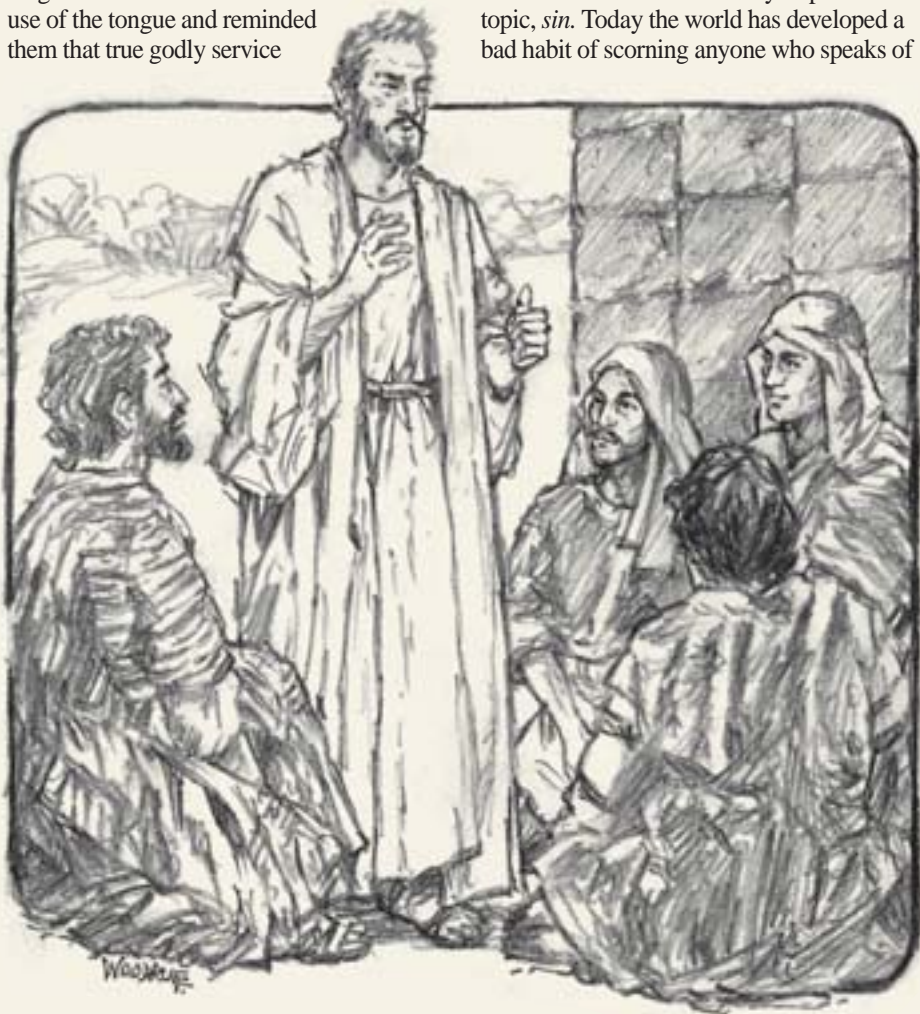
### Themes of James’ epistle

James wrote his countrymen—the 12 scattered tribes of Israel (James 1:1)—giving

practical instruction about Christian life. He taught about wisdom and careful use of the tongue and reminded them that true godly service

unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).

James addressed a crucially important topic, *sin*. Today the world has developed a bad habit of scorning anyone who speaks of



*James apparently became the overseeing pastor of the Jerusalem church, because in Acts 15:13-21 we see him making the final declaration during this early ministerial conference.*

consists of active love and purity (verse 27). He wrote at length about *patience*—patience in trial (verse 2), patience in good works (verses 22-25), patience under provocation (3:1-7), patience under oppression (5:7), patience under persecution (verse 10). The foundation of patience, he wrote, is the knowledge that Christ will come to right all wrongs (verse 8).

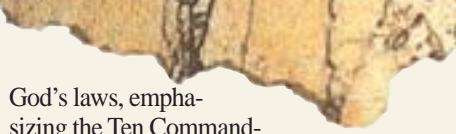
He taught godly wisdom. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him,” he wrote (James 1:5). When we ask, we must believe beyond any doubt that what God has promised He will deliver. God is pleased to freely give to anyone who truly believes He is able to deliver on His promises. “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting,” James wrote, “for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind . . . He is a double-minded man,

sin. Yet God scorns anyone who refuses to stand against it. James tells us how sin develops and where it leads. It begins with lust, the desire to have or do something we should not have or do (James 1:14). If we don’t control our thoughts, our desires eventually develop into sinful actions. When such desires are full grown—when they start controlling us rather than our controlling them—sin ends in the ultimate penalty of eternal death (verse 15).

### True religion revealed

The epistle of James presents many problems to those who hold to the view that Jesus taught we no longer need to keep God’s laws, or that those laws were somehow abolished at Christ’s death and resurrection. But, if anyone knew how Jesus lived and what He taught and believed, it was James, a member of Christ’s own household.

James repeatedly upholds the need to keep



God's laws, emphasizing the Ten Commandments. He refers to God's law not as something unnecessary or optional, but as "the royal law" (James 2:8). He specifically mentions several of the Ten Commandments, then calls them "the law of liberty" (verses 11-12).

Why that designation? Because James understood that only by obeying God's laws can mankind experience *true freedom*—freedom from want, sorrow and suffering, from the degrading and painful consequences of sin. He encourages each of us to be a "doer of the law" (James 4:11).

James drew an analogy of looking into a mirror to make his point about the importance of God's Ten Commandments. "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and *continues in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a *doer of the work*, *this one will be blessed in what he does*" (James 1:23-25).

In other words, said James, we should look into the perfect law of liberty and evaluate where we stand in relation to God's holy, spiritual laws, which help us understand what sin is (Romans 7:7, 12). When we look into a mirror and scrutinize our physical appearance, we may see a smudge on our face or a hair out of place. Yet, if we put the mirror away, we tend to forget our imperfections rather quickly because they are no longer visible to us. James shows how this physical analogy reflects an empty Christianity that requires nothing of us beyond mere belief (James 1:26-27).

James tells us that God's law shows our *internal* imperfections—those of the heart and mind. God's perfect law of liberty, including the Ten Commandments, is like a spiritual mirror we can look into and see ourselves for what we are. We must never put this mirror away; we must keep it ever in mind to motivate us to deal with our imperfections. James was saying, in effect, that we can't simply *talk* Christianity; we must *live it*. Mere talk accomplishes nothing. (To learn why God's law and the need to change are so important, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.)

### James' living faith

Not long after writing his epistle, James was martyred in Jerusalem in A.D. 62. According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, James was accused by the high priest and condemned to death by stoning (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 20, chap. 9, sec. 1). Eusebius, a

## Faith and Works

**M**artin Luther, initiator of the Protestant Reformation and founder of the Lutheran Church, described James' letter as an "epistle of straw." His characterization was far from accurate. On the contrary, James' is an epistle of great depth.

Anyone who carefully studies James 2 can plainly see that James teaches that Christian faith is more than mere good thoughts. He demands that a Christian believer *prove* his faith by his actions.

Some scholars think Luther judged James' letter inferior to Paul's epistles because—in Luther's view—Paul taught faith without works: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28). Luther's misguided assumption was that Paul was enlightened on the subject of faith and saw no need for works while James was not enlightened because he advocated the need for works.

Luther failed to see that Paul never contradicted James. How could he? They both followed Jesus Christ's teachings in exactly the same way, as we can see when we put together the scriptures on the topic to better understand it.

Let's understand how Paul and James thought alike on the subject of faith and works. Paul understood that salvation is a gift from God and not something we can earn by our efforts. Yet he also knew that faith is proven—demonstrated to be genuine—by our works. Notice how he put it in Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand *that we should walk in them*."

In fact, Paul said almost the same thing as James when he wrote, "For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the *doers* of the law will be justified" (Romans 2:13; compare James 1:22-25).

Paul was on the same page with James, especially on the vastly misunderstood subject of faith and works. Both apostles taught that a disciple's faith is proven and perfected by his works.

fourth-century church historian, adds details of James' death. He states that the scribes and Pharisees took James to a public place, the top of a wing of the temple, and "demanded that he should renounce the faith of Christ before all the people . . ." But, rather than deny Jesus, James "declared himself fully before the whole multitude, and confessed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, our Savior and Lord" (*Ecclesiastical History*, 1995, pp. 75-76).

Hegeppus tells us that at this point "they went up and threw down the just man [from the temple height], and said to each other, 'Let us stone James the Just.' And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall, but he knelt down and said, 'I entreat thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' [thus following his brother's example to the last]. One of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom" (quoted in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, November-December 2002, p. 32).

Amazingly, scholars have recently announced an incredible discovery—what appears to be the actual limestone box in which James' bones were entombed after his death (see "Surprising Archaeological Find: Proof of Jesus' Existence?," beginning on page 20).

As the younger half brother of Jesus, for years James had trouble believing Jesus was the very Son of God. But Christ's crucifixion and resurrection changed all that. Seeing the one he knew so well killed and then raised to life again was a life-transforming experience for James. No longer was he miles apart

from Jesus; now he was truly a *spiritual* brother to Jesus, bound to Him through faith and God's Spirit.

James finally came to realize that Jesus had given His life for him. When the time came, James confidently and faithfully gave his life for the brother he had once rejected.

James taught about faith, telling us that true faith is demonstrated by what we are, how we live and what we do. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also," he wrote (James 2:26).

His life and death were a shining example of what it means to live—and die—by true faith. Of course, that is not the end, for James the Just will be brought back to life at the resurrection of the just when Christ returns, when he will continue to follow His brother's perfect example through all eternity. May we all do the same. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

What is faith? How can you experience a loving, trusting relationship with God? To see how you can develop such a relationship with your Creator, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*. Learn from the pages of your Bible the keys to true, living faith!

Also, to better understand the need to change and why God's law is so important, please request your free copy of the booklets *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Ten Commandments*.

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# Patriotism: The Good, the Bad and the Biblical

Patriotism is a powerful word that stirs up memories, emotions and images. Yet it often escapes a precise definition. From God's point of view, what is patriotism?

by Don Hooser

**P**atriotism is a complex and sometimes controversial subject. People have different ideas about what it is and how to express it. My own concept of patriotism used to be rather narrow: Love my country, be a good citizen and enjoy patriotic music. But the subject is much broader than that.

Perhaps no human being's subjective opinion about patriotism is really that important. But, for anyone who believes in God and that He "created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), the perspective of the Creator should be *all* important.

So what does God think? Should we be patriotic? If so, how? Are patriotism and Christianity compatible? Would Jesus Christ be patriotic if He were on earth today?

Before addressing these questions, let's review the concept of patriotism.

The term *patriot* comes from the Greek root word *pater*, meaning father. A patriot is generally defined as one who loves, supports and defends his fatherland, the country of his nativity or residence.

Patriotism represents the qualities and conduct of a patriot. The idea of patriotism originally was an attachment to the surrounding land—merely a love for the climate, scenery, agriculture and native people. With the establishment of national boundaries, governments and ideologies, patriotism came to mean loyalty and support of one's own country.

## Patriotism can be unifying or divisive

Consider the example of the United States of America. What makes it remarkably united in spite of being composed of such diverse peoples? What power begets *E pluribus unum*, meaning "Out of many, one"—a motto found on the great seal of the United States? Part of the tie that binds Americans is patriotism. How and why American patriotism developed so strongly during the short history of the country is a fascinating study.

Clearly, patriotism had dwindled before the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, when it revived noticeably as an understandable source of comfort and strength. After all, one

of the surest ways to be unified is to have a common enemy.

Yet an upsurge in patriotic expression inevitably becomes divisive in some ways. People resent feeling pressured to conform to someone else's brand of patriotism. People are hurt by judgmental finger-pointing: *If your ways are not like my ways, or your political*



Some people are expressive of their patriotism in public ways—displaying their nation's flag, celebrating national holidays, singing their national anthem . . .

*views are not like mine, you are unpatriotic.*

Some people express their patriotism in public ways—displaying their nation's flag, celebrating national holidays, singing their national anthem, cheering a candidate—and usually expect everyone else to do some flag-waving. Other people are more private and may think of such exuberance as superficial, childish or pretentious. If they are law-abiding citizens, pay their taxes and contribute to their community—if, for example, they occasionally donate blood—they may think they are patriotic enough. Some would ask: If I love people, obey the laws and pay my taxes, do I really need to love my government?

Much of the divisiveness comes not so much from patriotism itself but from its abuse. Patriotism should not be a club to browbeat others into conformity with a political view or as a tool of emotional manipulation. It shouldn't be a means to justify bad proposals or condone evil action—nor as a method of wrapping oneself in the flag to excuse mistakes and wrongdoing.

## Patriotism vs. nationalism?

Although definitions of patriotism vary, many observers regard patriotism as positive and nationalism as negative. Patriotism can be easily confused with nationalism, partly because the patriot and the nationalist often use the same words to express their feelings. So nationalism can easily be mistaken for patriotism.

It's important to understand the distinction—because all too often, when people believe they are being patriotic, in reality they have crossed over the line into chauvinistic nationalism.

A nationalistic person usually expects patriotic citizens to always agree with their nation's government. But a truly free, democratic country not only permits dissenting

views but cherishes this freedom as a strength. Many who point out faults in the system are quite patriotic. In fact, constructive criticism is a valuable patriotic contribution. This freedom is a priceless privilege, sadly abused by those whose motives are not in their country's best interest.

For the patriot, love of country is like love of family—involving caring, devotion and affection. A nationalist may claim to love his country primarily because it is the best country in the world. Ideally a patriot has more of an unconditional love for his country because it too is his "family," even though it is not perfect or the most powerful or the "best." Just as

family members feel a willing obligation to help each other, patriotism includes a sense of responsibility to assist one's country.

A patriot is *proud* of his country in a benign sense in that he respects it. Patriots are devoted to causes greater than themselves. A nationalist, on the other hand, usually identifies with causes as *extensions* of himself. A nationalist—sometimes called a superpatriot—can be fanatical. The nationalist usually views contrary opinions and other cultures as threats.

The most important distinction is that rightly expressed patriotism is in line with God's law, wherein He commands us to love others, while nationalism crosses the line into exclusive superiority, which is ungodly. God loves all people (see John 3:16), and so must we. Worse still, nationalism can be a mask for what amounts to idolatry, violating the First Commandment—"You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3).

Nationalism has many characteristics in common with religion. The No. 1 priority of nationalists may be their nation, government or ideology. But putting anything higher than God is idolatry and breaking the First Commandment. Anyone engrossed with nationalism often has a shallow relationship with God.

### Godly leaders were patriotic

Many biblical figures—patriarchs, kings, priests, prophets and apostles—were clearly patriotic. They demonstrated their patriotism by love of country and caring for the welfare of the people. For instance, Moses pleaded with God not to destroy the Israelite nation after one of its many rebellions against Him (Deuteronomy 9:6-29). Nehemiah showed concern for his native land, so much so that he mourned, wept, prayed and fasted for it (Nehemiah 1:4). He even left the comfortable position of being one of the king's officials to travel to Jerusalem and help rebuild God's temple.

Esther and Mordecai risked their lives to save the Jewish people of their day. Daniel prayed and fasted with sackcloth and ashes for the restoration of the nation of Israel, the city

of Jerusalem and the temple (Daniel 9:1-19).

Each patriotic leader was passionate about helping to save his country, especially from captivity and destruction. God Himself has never stopped being a patriot for His people, showing mercy as a protector from physical harm, as we see most dramatically in passages like Revelation 3:10, 12:14 and 18:4.

The New Testament relates the apostle Paul's obvious attitude of self-sacrificing love for his country and countrymen: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1) and "I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren [if it would save my brethren], my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites . . ." (Romans 9:2-4). Paul yearned for spiritual salvation and eternal life to come to his countrymen.

### The example of Christ

Jesus Christ, too, was a patriot. He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34). As He drew near Jerusalem, "He saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19:41).

Christ also said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). That's exactly what Jesus did. Although He had a loyal attachment to His earthly homeland and a special love for His countrymen, He obviously loved all human beings. Paul speaks of "God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). God would have us all follow that example and *love everyone*—even our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

True patriotism includes "tough love," a willingness to warn people of the disastrous consequences of continuing in their evil ways. This is similar to the role of a watchman as described in Ezekiel 3 and 33. Jesus said what we *need* to hear, not just what we *want* to hear. His mission was not to make people *feel*

good, but to try to get them to *be* good and *do* good—for their own benefit and salvation, because He loves all people.

However, people—especially false religious leaders—hate to be corrected. They don't like a patriotism that includes constructive correction. Before long, Christ's own countrymen killed Him.

### Jeremiah's unpopular patriotism

Perhaps the most dramatic example of true patriotism is that of the prophet Jeremiah. Incredibly, although he deeply loved his country and countrymen, he was branded as unpatriotic.

God chose Jeremiah to bring His messages of warning primarily to the nation of Judah. However, this Hebrew prophet was not just a dispassionate messenger. Knowing the disasters that would happen if the people didn't repent, he continually expressed a personal passion to save his country. Jeremiah exhorted, begged, pleaded and even threatened—often with weeping—for his countrymen to repent. He said, "O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved" (Jeremiah 4:14).

But the people didn't want to hear about their sins or any prophecies of impending punishment for wrongdoing. They wanted to hear only about how good they were, about how they were God's chosen people, how they would never suffer defeat.

Jeremiah became unpopular, to say the least. He was hated, ridiculed, persecuted and almost killed. But what grieved this prophet the most was that his people wouldn't, for their own good, listen to his warnings from God and repent. He lamented: "For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; astonishment has taken hold of me . . . Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jeremiah 8:21; 9:1).

At times Jeremiah suffered despair and depression because of the stressful burden of preaching to hostile audiences of his own countrymen. After the torture of painful

## Allegiance and Idolatry

Most U.S. citizens happily recite the traditional American pledge of allegiance, which reads, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands: one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Some people are conscientiously opposed to reciting the pledge. Those opposed on religious grounds say making such a pledge is idolatry, since there should be no allegiance except to God.

Also, most religious people do not view allegiance to country as a sole, absolute or ultimate allegiance. They are merely declaring to which country they are pledging their national allegiance. Most people have many allegiances—to one's spouse

and family, the company one works for, one's school, certain charitable organizations, one's church and God.

Much of the time allegiances don't conflict with each other. When they do, the person must decide which takes precedence. Of course, the greatest allegiance should be toward God, who said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). Any allegiance that supersedes allegiance to God is idolatry. As Peter and the other apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

The words "under God" were added to the American pledge of allegiance by the U.S. Congress in 1954. This addition should make it even clearer that this pledge is expressing an allegiance that is *under* one's allegiance to God.

confinement in stocks, he sank into depression (Jeremiah 20:2). He complained to God about being forced into becoming a prophet and that his preaching wasn't doing any good (verse 7). He even cursed the day on which he was born (verse 14), complaining that he wanted to give up (verse 9).

But Jeremiah realized he couldn't stop trying to warn the people even if God had allowed him. He said, "But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (verse 9).

Judah was his country, and its citizens were his people. He knew blessings would come only if they obeyed God and that they would suffer terribly if they continued in the path of disobedience. He simply had to keep trying. This was true patriotism.

However, the Jewish populace wanted to hear only flag-waving boasting. After all, they were God's special people, the good and the great. They convinced themselves that God was on their side to protect them unconditionally. Only their nation had the temple of God, so how could He possibly allow it to be destroyed?

The kingdom of Judah didn't want to hear any correction or gloomy predictions that might undermine national morale. Instead, the people wanted a cheerleader to tell them only what was reassuring and politically correct. Judah's hypocritical leaders and citizens, thinking they were patriotic, were actually nationalistic in the worst sense of that term. On the other hand, Jeremiah was a real patriot who wanted only the best for his country and countrymen.

### God's prophecies and promises

The Bible foretells that in the end time we can expect to see more-frequent and more-fierce wars (Matthew 24:6). Prophecies in the book of Revelation tell us that shortly before Christ's return a political, economic and religious power bloc will arise that will demand total allegiance. Just as the Roman

emperors for centuries demanded that they be worshiped, in the end time *worship* of this power and its dictator will be enforced (Revelation 13:4-15).

How should we prepare for the terrorism, treachery and tyranny of the last days? By turning to God, living by His Word and trusting Him to protect and provide for us.

Then each citizen can seek to better understand the will of God and how to express proper patriotism toward his country. Some religious people mistakenly think God's will requires isolation to the extent of becoming unaware and unconcerned about what is happening in the world. This type of cocooning tends to inhibit them from being friendly, loving and helpful to anyone except those in their group.

But Jesus said that we should be a Christ-like role model, and that the light of this example would not be hidden (Matthew 5:14-16). Normally Jesus didn't wait inside a synagogue for others to come to Him. He was out among the people doing good works. Christ set us the perfect example in all things, including proper patriotism.

### Seek a higher citizenship

Once a person has submitted his life to the Creator, he has continuous access to the most powerful instrument for good that exists. That instrument is vastly underestimated and underused—*prayer* to the God of the universe.

More good can be accomplished through believing prayer—for one's family, friends, church, nation and world—than with all the political action, mighty military machines and other human efforts put together (Matthew 7:7-11; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 John 3:22; Hebrews 4:16).

The apostle Paul wrote, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). "Our" refers to those who have fully submitted to God through true repentance and have become a part of His Church. Their citizenship records reside in heaven. Their names are written in the Book of Life.

God's people have dual citizenship. It is noble and right to be patriotic toward our earthly nation, but we also should have a higher and more fervent patriotism for our heavenly Kingdom, which will be established on earth at the return of Christ. He tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

For those who sincerely seek to become Christians, the wisest decision they could possibly make is to take the necessary steps to attain that heavenly citizenship. **GN**

## Proof

*Continued from page 21*

of the man, who, on account of his elevated virtue and piety was deemed the most just of men, they . . . slew him . . . But, as to the manner of James's death, it has been already stated in the words of Clement, that he was thrown from a wing of the temple, [to be stoned] and beaten to death with a club" (*Ecclesiastical History*, 1995, pp. 75-76).

### Names of other biblical figures found

Although the evidence so far points to the listing of Jesus, James and Joseph on the newfound ossuary as being the same persons mentioned in the New Testament, it cannot be proven with *absolute* certainty. Perhaps testing methods yet to be developed will be carried out that can further confirm the find.

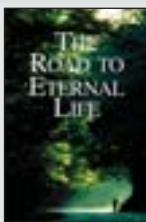
In the meantime, the find nevertheless appears to be powerful evidence for the accuracy of the Gospel accounts and the literal existence of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, and His earthly family.

And by no means is this find unique; the existence of many biblical figures has been proven by archaeological finds. So far biblical names that have been positively confirmed include Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa, Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, David, many of the kings of Judah and Israel, and even Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch. Many of these finds have been discussed in our 24-part series "The Bible and Archaeology" available on our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

Jesus once said, "If these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:40). He spoke of His disciples' testimony, but it is interesting that, through the discoveries of archaeology, there are stones that are now figuratively crying out as witnesses to the authenticity of the biblical account. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

How can you develop a right relationship with your Creator and your fellow man? What does God tell you to do? Learn the scriptural answers in our free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life*, *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Ten Commandments*.



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### Recommended Reading

Is the Bible credible? Can you—and should you—trust what it says? Is it only a collection of myths and stories, as so many people assume? You need to understand the truth! Request your free copy of *Is the Bible True?* This free booklet examines the Bible from the perspectives of science, history, archaeology and prophecy, comparing the evidence for and against its being what it claims to be, the Word of God. Is it really? Few questions could be more important for you and your future!



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# Coming Clash

Continued from page 17

politicians sold [European] integration to their constituents by arguing that it offered the only way for Europe to escape its bloody past. But the younger generation of Europeans has lived through neither World War II nor the Cold War, and therefore has no past from which to escape. As a result, a new political discourse is emerging—one that sees integration as a vehicle for *enhancing* Europe's power and *achieving*, rather than checking, international ambitions" (emphasis added).

## The new Roman Empire

The Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957 by the six original members of what was the European Economic Community (EEC). This took place in what was once the capital city of the Roman Empire and is still the spiritual home of one of the world's biggest religions.

Henri Spaak, former secretary-general of NATO, later remarked on the signing in a BBC documentary: "We felt like Romans on that day . . . We were consciously recreating the Roman Empire once more."

The six original members—Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg—were joined by Britain, Ireland and Denmark in January 1973. Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden and Finland have since joined, and now 10 new members—eight of them former communist countries in Eastern Europe, plus Malta and Cyprus—are due to join in 2004. Others are trying to get in but have not yet qualified.

At first the British did not want to join. Five years later they were knocking at the door but were refused entry by France's President Charles de Gaulle, who no doubt remembered the words of wartime ally Winston Churchill, who told him that whenever Great Britain had to choose between Europe and the sea it would "always choose the sea."

President De Gaulle questioned Britain's commitment to the organization and said he

believed Britain's entry would allow American influence to sneak in through the back door. His successor, Georges Pompidou, took a different line. He wanted Britain admitted as a further counterweight to Germany, which had become the dominant member of the club.

The British have long been ambivalent toward the EU, with many Britons still opposing membership. The British, together with Denmark and Sweden, remain outside the new European common currency, the euro. The present British government remains committed to the euro in principle but lacks the support necessary to win a promised referendum on the issue. The British are even less enthusiastic for a political union of member countries.

Ironically, as Dr. Kupchan points out, "Britain's decision to enhance its leadership role in Europe is moving the EU more quickly toward self-reliance. London for years kept its distance from the Continent, but Prime Minister Tony Blair has altered course, orchestrating the EU's push on the defense front and working to take his country into the euro zone. 'We must be wholehearted, not halfhearted, partners in Europe,' Blair told Britons late last year, warning them that 'Britain has no economic future outside Europe.'"

Britain even called in October for Europeans to directly elect a president of Europe.

## Germany at the heart of Europe

Another motivating force behind European unity is a fear of Germany, intensified since German reunification after the collapse of communism in the East. After suffering in three wars with Germany in 75 years, France in particular is committed to a European Union in which Germany is contained by the other members. The British, meanwhile, are determined that Europe will stay on course with America. However, neither France nor Britain is likely to lead the new Europe, as the *Atlantic Monthly* article shows.

Dr. Kupchan states that "Germany's growing comfort with leadership is strengthening the union's political will. As part of its post-war policy of reassurance and reconciliation, Bonn for decades treaded lightly on diplomacy and defense. Since 1999, however, when the seat of government moved back to Berlin, symbolizing a renewed self-confidence, Germany has been actively guiding the EU's evolution, marking out a pathway for building a federal Europe."

We should note that Germany has the biggest population in the EU and is by far the largest single economy. Within the EU, Germany is the biggest trading partner of each of the member nations, giving the country a great deal of clout.

## Growing differences with America

Differences between Europe and America are real and growing. Although Britain supports the United States in its opposition to Iraq, many EU members are vocally critical of America's foreign policy in the Middle East. "Trade disputes are heating up, especially over steel and agriculture," writes Dr. Kupchan. "Despite America's defection from the Kyoto Protocol, the EU moved forward with more than a hundred countries participating, leaving Washington a lonely and, from all appearances, an environmentally irresponsible bystander. Last year EU member states took the lead in voting the United States off two UN commissions—payback for America's unilateral ways."

The reality for the future, he says, is that, "as the EU continues to rise, its economic and political interests are likely to collide frequently with those of the United States, intensifying the ill will."

With America preoccupied with the war on terror and problems in the Middle East, its citizens and leaders pay little attention to developments in Europe, developments that, in the course of time, ultimately will be of greater consequence to the United States than terrorism or Iraq. **GN**

## 'The Last Days of the Atlantic Alliance'?

In a later article published in the *London Financial Times* on Nov. 17, Dr. Kupchan predicts that the NATO summit held later that week would not hide the reality that these are "The Last Days of the Atlantic Alliance," as the title of his article puts it.

Contrasting the excitement in Washington at the last enlargement of NATO with the deafening American silence at NATO's invitation to seven more former communist countries to join, Dr. Kupchan points out that NATO's "founder and primary patron, the US, is losing interest in NATO. The result is a military pact that is . . . of diminishing geopolitical relevance."

Three developments have contributed to this, claims Dr. Kupchan. "First, Europe's own success obviates the need for its American guardian . . . Second, the two sides of the Atlantic are drifting apart politically . . . Third, US priorities are shifting away from Europe . . ."

Although Dr. Kupchan thinks the NATO alliance will exist on paper for at least the

remainder of this decade, the reality is that it has outlived its usefulness. ". . . The US is losing interest in NATO," he explains. "The result is a military pact that is hollowing out and of diminishing geopolitical relevance."

". . . The US and Europe are thus parting ways, bringing to an end their close strategic partnership . . . The EU must now ready itself to shoulder more responsibility for its own defence."

Somewhat ominously, Dr. Kupchan warns that "the EU's prospective members in central Europe must realise that their future security, as well as their economic well being, rests with the EU. Accordingly, they should get behind the union's push on the defence front, instead of quietly resisting the EU's efforts in the hope of keeping NATO in the lead."

Once again, shifting alliances and changing priorities are bringing about the final realignment of nations that will lead to the prophesied fulfillment of end-time events.

# Letters From Our Readers

## **Devoured *The Good News***

I was traveling the approximately 100 kilometers from Cape Town to Wellington in the Boland. We stopped at a truck stop for cool drinks and I picked up my first *Good News* there. I devoured it at the first opportunity. I read it from cover to cover, starting with the editorial, which was so powerful. I find the style and standard of writing and research top quality. You are right on top of everything. The insights are spot on and totally relevant to everyday living.

*C.S., Cape Town, South Africa*

## **“Smoking and Health”**

I am writing about your November-December issue article on smoking. It was a wonderful article and very helpful. As a former smoker, I can understand how difficult it can be to stop such an addictive habit. But with God’s help it is possible. I am glad to see a Christian ministry publish an article on the impact of smoking on society and the health problems associated with it. I wish I had seen an article before I let smoking harm my health.

*C.D., Ronda, North Carolina*

I just read your article about quitting smoking. I have to say that it is the best article I have read on the subject. I will give it to my husband tonight. He is a smoker and wants to quit. Hopefully, it will inspire him to quit for good.

*Reader on Internet*

## **Circumcision: A biblical key to health?**

The article “Vibrant Health: The Crucial Biblical Keys” in the November-December issue listed circumcision as one of these keys. Yet there is no mention in the Scriptures that males should be circumcised for health reasons. Perhaps a reference to male circumcision being considered by some as a health or hygiene issue would have been defensible, but to raise it to the level of a crucial biblical principle of health is biblically incorrect.

*A.C., Brisbane, Queensland, Australia*

*We acknowledge that we overstated the case by listing circumcision as a crucial biblical principle of health. At the same time, there is a body of scientific and medical evidence on the benefits of male circumcision as a health issue. Much information about circumcision, both pro and con, can be found on the Internet,*

*with medical professionals on both sides of the issue. Several sites that support circumcision as a matter of health include the following:*

*www.rj.org/beritmila/Articles%20and%20Links.html*

*www.circumcisioninfo.com/*

*www.users.dircon.co.uk/~vernon/G\_Weiss/index.html*

*www.personal.usyd.edu.au/~bmorris/circumcision.shtml*

## **“Was Christ Born on Christmas Day?”**

We cannot thank you enough for your bold exposure on the truth about Christmas. Years ago we became grieved about certain aspects of the holiday and never knew why until some people challenged us to look into it ourselves. A trip to a dusty library revealed the truth and ruined Christmas for the librarian who had come along on the journey with us.

At this time of year our family comes up against offense and persecution from family, friends and mostly other Christians who cannot possibly understand why we would not celebrate “Jesus’ birth.” As a family counselor I see the effects of children being lied to by parents. When parents teach Dec. 25 as an actual event, children believe this lie; and I wonder how many children grow up and reject God or anything else they are told by parents unconsciously because of being lied to.

Your article will certainly be making its rounds in our life and city, as it is the most concise, well-written exposé that we have ever come across. Praise to you again for your boldness to print the truth.

*R.R., Lloydminster, Saskatchewan, Canada*

## **“The Prince of Peace”**

I received my first issue of *The Good News* two weeks ago and I found it very interesting. I am a student of the University of Zimbabwe and wanted to thank you for sending me the magazine. I found the article entitled “The Prince of Peace” very useful. With all the wars that are going on, especially here in Africa, I was beginning to wonder what would happen to end all these wars and bring lasting peace to the world. As for us in Zimbabwe, we are not at war, but our economic and social environment is currently unstable, making it difficult for Zimbabwean individuals to have personal peace. Now I have read about the Prince of Peace and have come to realize that there is hope after all.

*T.T., Harare, Zimbabwe*

## **“Ghouls, Ghosts and Goblins”—Halloween**

I was thrilled to see your article “Ghouls, Ghosts and Goblins” in your September-October issue. It was well-written, with excellent background and history of this morbid and depressing day. We have several neighbors, family members and coworkers who don’t understand why we don’t celebrate this day. This article came in useful when the conversation came up. This is one day about which information is obviously lacking. Many people, even Christians, don’t see the harm. I appreciate that you had the courage to shed some light on a day that has a very dark side.

*C.H., Seneca Falls, New York*

I wanted to write and say that I really liked your article “Ghouls, Ghosts and Goblins.” I may be only 12 years old, but I read your magazine. Thank you for your article. Maybe more people will understand what Halloween really is.

*C.D.B., Corbett, Oregon*

## **Born-again atheist**

I appreciate receiving the free issues of your wonderful Christian magazine, even though I’m a born-again atheist. I find it hard to believe in a God who allows things like 9/11 to occur, or Bosnia, or the Arabs and the Jews killing each other. I was born and raised a Congregationalist but now consider myself a lapsed Protestant who believes the Ten Commandments are 10 nice suggestions, well worth following whenever and however possible.

*P.J.K., Winnebago, Wisconsin*

*We understand your concerns, and you certainly aren’t alone. The reasons God allows such tragedies to occur are spelled out in our free booklet Why Does God Allow Suffering? We recommend that you write for it, along with The Ten Commandments and Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?, also free. They offer a much-needed perspective in understanding the questions that concern you.*

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

# Christianity Isn't for Wimps

Most people think being a Christian is easy. But the surprising truth is that the real Christianity of the Bible is challenging and difficult. Do you have the courage and conviction to be a real Christian?

by David Treybig

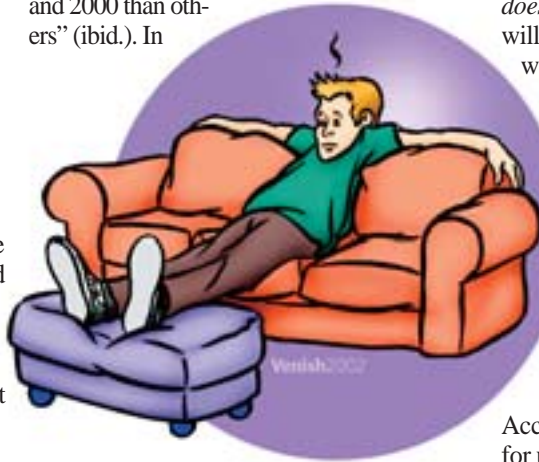
**T**he little tract said it was easy. All I had to do to become a Christian was accept Jesus. I didn't have to do anything else. According to the little booklet, Jesus did everything for me when He died for my sins; there was nothing that I had to do in return. The text said that, if I accepted Him into my life, good things would happen to me and I would be guaranteed eternal life. It concluded by asking, "Won't you accept Jesus into your heart right now?"

Perhaps you've read or heard the same message. It's readily available through friends and many churches, on restaurant counters, at bus stations and just about anywhere else one could imagine. But is being a Christian that easy? Is Christianity simply the acceptance and celebration of what Christ did for us? Is nothing expected of us in return?

As a young person, how can you determine what God wants you to do? In this article we look at what the Bible itself says about Christianity. I hope you have the courage

(Jane Lampman, "Charting America's Religious Landscape," Oct. 10, 2002). In Europe the trend of abandoning Christianity is even more pronounced. Many church buildings sit empty.

While immigration likely affects the above-noted percentages in the United States, one additional fact stands out: "Socially conservative denominations grew faster between 1990 and 2000 than others" (ibid.). In



narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and *difficult* is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14, emphasis added throughout).

Later in this same chapter Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does* the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then

I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who *practice lawlessness!*'" (verses 21-23).

These scriptures explain that being a Christian is *difficult*—that doing God's will and obeying God's law are *also* prerequisites for entering the Kingdom, not just acceptance and celebration. Now, please don't misunderstand.

Accepting and celebrating what Jesus did for us is important. But the Bible expects much more of us. For example, it teaches us that we must be baptized (Acts 2:38), live a life of helping others (Galatians 6:10) and follow certain God-ordained practices, such as the observance of His Holy Days—annual celebrations of His great plan to reconcile humanity to Himself (and these are not the holidays observed by the world at large, see Leviticus 23). There is far more to Christianity than *just* accepting and celebrating Christ.

## Paul helps us understand the difficulty

To add to our understanding of the challenge of being a Christian, let's consider some of the apostle Paul's writings. In Romans 7 Paul commented on the struggle he was having with sin: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (verses 22-25).

## If Christianity is so easy, why don't more people become Christians? Could it be that some suspect something is wrong with the message?

to read what it says and follow its advice.

Let's begin with a thought-provoking question: If Christianity is so easy, why don't more people become Christians? After all, who in his right mind would turn down free benefits like winning the lottery, getting a tax refund or, in the case of Christianity, living forever? Could it be that some suspect something is wrong with the message? Let's begin with a quick survey of the state of Christianity in general.

### Survey of Christianity

*The Christian Science Monitor* recently reported that between 1990 and 2000 "the overall increase in religious affiliation [in America] did not keep pace with the rate of US population growth (8.8 percent compared to 13.2 percent)," and "the proportion who classified themselves as Christian dropped from 86 percent to 77 percent"

other words, the greatest appeal came from the *more-challenging* Christian denominations.

Along similar lines, many have wondered why more women than men attend church. In general, men appear to be less attracted to religion than are women.

Putting modern trends into historical perspective, we have to ask why Christianity grew so rapidly in the early centuries, even in the face of intense persecution, and why it seems to be floundering today—especially when so many parts of the world enjoy religious freedom.

### The key: Jesus' teaching

Looking for an accurate explanation of the nature of Christianity, our best resource is Jesus Himself. In His famous Sermon on the Mount, considered to be the fundamental summary of Christianity and how we should conduct ourselves, Jesus said: "Enter by the

Later Paul likened his effort to receive eternal life to the training of a runner. Using this analogy, he wrote, “. . . I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (2 Corinthians 9:27). In 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 Paul described the efforts of Christians to honor God as *spiritual warfare*.

In these passages Paul acknowledged he was struggling to do what he knew he should do and realized he needed Christ’s help to live as God intended. With this realization he declared: “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). He gave his own life to God to be used for God’s honor and purpose.

### Understanding works

Keep in mind one important caution in your understanding of the effort God expects of those who seek Him. Struggling to live a Christlike life does not *earn* us salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly explains that “by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is *the gift of God*, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” No amount of good works, no amount of effort on our part, will earn us eternal life. The opportunity to live forever is a *gift* bestowed upon us by God through His great mercy.

The fact that eternal life is a gift, however, does not negate God’s expectations of us. As the passage in Ephesians 2 continues, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (verse 10). The struggles we undertake to do good when others around us are doing evil are part of God’s plan for perfecting His

people. We build righteous character when we struggle against our human nature and the urge to retaliate against others who mistreat us. It is in this crucible of struggle that God sees who we are and what we are becoming.

In God’s desire to see us develop into mature, principled Christians for His Kingdom, He realizes we need challenges along the way. Just as weight lifters build muscle by lifting weights, we build spiritual character through actual spiritual challenge, not by watching someone else practice Christianity.

### Character is crucial

How? By resisting temptation when we encounter it. When others cheat on exams or in the preparation of papers, it takes effort by people striving to be Christians not to do the same. When others choose to have sexual relations before marriage, it takes courage and character to obey God and resist the desire to do likewise. When others break the Sabbath or skip church services, it takes character to do what God commands. When young people see hypocrisy in the church or in other adults, it takes character to obey God anyway. Then there is peer pressure. Resisting it is difficult as well.

Building righteous character through resistance to sin is so precious in God’s sight that character will be the basis for our reward in God’s Kingdom. As Jesus explains in Revelation 22:12, “I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.” Simply stated, eternal life is a gift, but we are rewarded according to our works.

Given the challenge of being a Christian, some may feel discouraged—as though this struggle is more than they can bear. Yet, under these circumstances, God promises to help. As Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Our human effort coupled with God’s help makes it possible for us to set positive examples for those around us. This is precisely what Jesus had in mind when He said we are to be lights to this world (Matthew 5:14-16).

Christianity is not a spectator sport. It is not a matter of simply watching others do what is right, nor is it solely a matter of learning and accepting what Christ did for us. Instead, those of us who desire to be Christians must be *actively* involved in obeying God and doing His work. As Hebrews 12:14 admonishes us, “*Pursue* peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”

Christianity isn’t for wimps. It takes effort; it means work. Holiness must be *pursued*. We hope you have the courage to pursue it. **GN**



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### Recommended Reading

Where should you start if you’re determined to become a serious Christian? We can’t think of a better place than a summary of what God expects of us. You’ll find it in *The Ten Commandments*, a free booklet that explains why God’s commandments are so important and a crucial part of the solution to humanity’s problems. You should also request *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* to better understand the hows and whys of becoming the kind of person God wants you to be.



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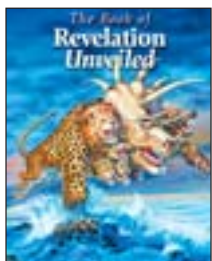
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