



The
Good News

September-October 2003

A M A G A Z I N E O F U N D E R S T A N D I N G

COMING:
Heaven
ON
Earth

Same-Sex Marriage: Does It Meet With God's Approval? • Hope for Homosexuals
African Genocide • The Biblical Festivals That Teach Us About Jesus Christ

Heaven on Earth?



Heaven on earth? The idea seems a bit preposterous. After all, our planet is anything but heavenly right now, with wars and terrorism dominating the news in many areas around the globe. The steady, deadly march of AIDS continues to decimate entire countries, while poverty, oppression and corruption grind down the lives and hopes of millions more. Environmental destruction, overpopulation, pollution, social disintegration and crime guarantee plenty more problems for years to come.

In spite of years of mankind's best efforts at addressing these chronic problems, our solutions always seem to come up woefully short.

But we certainly are not without hope. *The Good News* is a magazine of hope—of hope for how you can solve your problems and begin turning around your life right now, as well as understanding how these crises that afflict humanity will ultimately be resolved once and for all.

Is an earthly paradise possible? Believe it or not, it's more than a possibility. It's a *certainty!*

In Matthew 24:21-22 Jesus explained why He must return, and when—at a time when human folly will have brought mankind to the brink of extinction. "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," Christ explained. "*If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive . . .*" (Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

How will Jesus return? Revelation 19:16 describes His triumphant return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He returns as a majestic ruler who will rescue humanity—the supreme King who will establish a kingdom, the Kingdom of God, on earth.

Daniel 7:14 plainly tells us that He will reign over a literal world-ruling kingdom: "Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, *that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him*. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed."

Many Bible prophecies describe how the entire earth will be transformed under His loving, righteous reign. Let's notice a few:

"Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD . . . He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Micah 4:2-3).

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:6-9).

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it . . . They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them" (Amos 9:13-14).

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water . . ." (Isaiah 35:5-7).

Yes, heaven on earth will one day become a reality! This issue of *The Good News* will help you better understand how that will come about.

—Scott Ashley

The Good News

September/October 2003 Volume 8, Number 5 Circulation: 456,000

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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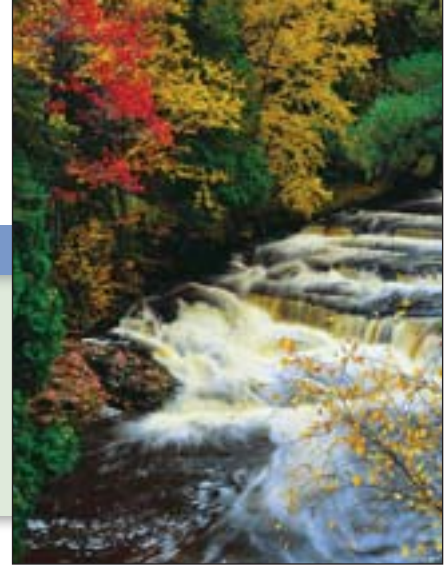
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Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 1487140.

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

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Coming: Heaven on Earth!

The latest research of science and the Bible shows God has big plans for planet earth.

by Howard Davis

Marge, an elderly friend I'd known since childhood, had never visited my family since we moved to Portland, Oregon. Living in Minnesota, she was familiar with the modest terrain of the American Midwest from living there her entire life.

Seeing the snowcapped summit of Mt. Hood and the mile after mile of cascading waterfalls plunging off cliffs along the Columbia River Gorge, a thought occurred to Marge.

A woman of deep religious conviction and beliefs, Marge was transfixed by a particularly stunning waterfall cascading amidst the lush undergrowth of the Pacific Northwest forest. Then she exclaimed, "Who wants to go to heaven when you can live in a place like this?"

It makes you wonder about heaven and earth, a place like this.

Which would you choose?

Sometimes places on earth do seem more beautiful than the descriptions of heaven in the popular culture of literature and religion.

If you had a choice between the popular conception of heaven or an earth of peace and marvelous beauty, which would you choose? Would you choose to live forever within a world community of peace, endless

prosperity, unblemished radiant health, surrounded by friends, boundless opportunity for creativity and stimulating personal challenge? That would seem like heaven on earth! And chances are you'd want to be first in line to sign up.

Hold on to that thought. If you take a look at the latest thinking in science about the earth's unique place in the universe, and many statements in the Bible largely ignored today by churches, you should come to the conclusion that God has big plans for this planet—plans bigger than most of us can imagine.

In fact, if you believe the biblical book of Revelation, you will come to the conclusion that God is planning to relocate heaven.

It tells us that God is moving *here*.

A planet perfect for life

Based on the science fictions of Hollywood and other wishful thinking, you might think that there really is evidence of life and higher intelligence somewhere else in the universe. From the unproven ideas of Charles Darwin 150 years ago to his intellectual descendants of today, some scientists with an agenda to manipulate the public continue to push ideas about biological life elsewhere in the universe.

But after countless billions of dollars spent in astrophysics, experimental biology,

astronomy, space research and hundreds of space missions including some to the moon, Mars, Venus and Jupiter, not one shred of evidence that biological life exists anywhere in the universe, *except on earth*, has been documented.

Neither is there even a hint of actual scientifically obtained evidence that a higher form of material intelligence exists anywhere beyond our planet, though scientists have diligently sought it for decades—for instance, searching the heavens for intelligent radio signals.

Now many scientists are asking a number of appropriate questions. In a universe perfectly structured with chemical properties and physics determining all the processes of matter and energy, why do intelligent beings exist only here on earth? Honest scientists are forced back into the deepest philosophical questions of "Why man?" and "Why here?"

Two recent developments in scientific studies are leading more scientists to the conclusion that the entire universe was designed *specifically to support human life here on planet earth and nowhere else*.

The first development is the recognition that the universe is structured so that all the trillions of interrelated elements can be combined in a particular way, at a particular place and at a particular time to create biological



Sights in the beautiful Columbia River Gorge, above, prompted a visitor to exclaim, "Who wants to go to heaven when you can live



in a place like this?" Her comment wasn't far off the mark, because God promises to transform our planet into an earthly paradise.



Scientists are discovering that many factors had to be perfect for life to exist on planet earth. Its distance from the sun, temperature range, speed of rotation, interaction with the moon and other planets and even the angle of its tilt are perfectly balanced for life.

life on earth—with man the transcendent physical and biological expression of life.

The second development is the recognition that it is literally impossible for the universe to exist and man to be as he is *by chance*—without an intelligent designer.

Based on the latest scientific evidence, it is increasingly apparent that the universe was created to support human existence, and that the center of development of any life in

Yet the more scientists consider what they see in the countless galaxies, the more they appreciate how the combination of earth's surface conditions, distance from the moon and sun, and chemical makeup are so mathematically impossible there is no reason to believe biological life exists anywhere else. In all the universe, the conditions for life are absolutely perfect right here, right now, for life on planet earth.

“As we look out into the universe and identify the many accidents of physics that have worked together for our benefit, it almost seems as though the universe must have known that we were coming.”

(Freeman Dyson, physicist and professor at the Institute for Advanced Study)

the universe is right here on our sparkling blue orb.

Perfect environment for life and human beings

“... In a universe that could have been utterly hostile to the needs of life,” writes Michael Corey in his recent book *The God Hypothesis*, “we have found that precisely the opposite state of affairs is actually the case, namely, that the universe literally caters to the needs of living organisms in thousands of different ways” (2001, p. vii).

Perfectly positioned 93 million miles from our modest yellow star, the earth's temperature range perfectly enables the billions of chemical reactions that allow biological life to continue. Varying only about 150 degrees, life exists in only a tiny slice of our solar system's temperature range—which varies from -459 degrees Fahrenheit (-273 degrees Celsius) on the dark side of interplanetary space to over 27,000,000 degrees Fahrenheit (15,000,000 degrees Celsius) at the sun's core.

All elements of our planet's position and chemistry are perfectly suited for life. The

speed of the earth's daily rotation on its axis, the annual elliptical path around the sun, its tilt (which causes the seasons) and the amount of gravitational pull create the perfect environmental stage for life.

“The earth's gravitational interaction with the moon is also very delicately balanced as far as life is concerned,” says Dr. Corey. “If it were any greater, the resulting tidal effects on the earth's atmosphere, oceans, and rotational period would have been too great. Yet, if it were less, orbital obliquity changes would have caused severe climatic instabilities throughout the earth's various ecosystems” (p. 126).

Performing 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on the stage of planet earth is an unknowably complex symphony of countless trillions of chemical reactions throughout the environment. Billions of chemical reactions in your body every minute of every day are made possible when thousands of trace elements and compounds mix, combine and break up as you breathe, eat and digest your food.

All these reactions require a temperature in a range from 32 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit (0 to 43 degrees Celsius) so the chemical elements and compounds are found in the appropriate solid, liquid or gaseous forms to work.

Each reaction is perfectly preprogrammed in your genes found in a sequence of the 3 billion letters of your chromosomes. Each instruction set is found in every one of the 40 trillion cells in your body. Each instruction process requires the perfect mixture in an abundant environment of water, oxygen and myriad other chemicals.

Every atom and molecule of the chemistry of life is perfectly selected. Consider, for example, nitrogen compounds and molecules. They are required parts in proteins—the basic structures of your flesh—bones, blood, muscles, etc.

Of more than 110 elements in the universe, “no other element could possibly take its place, and indeed, if the molecular properties of nitrogen were only slightly different, proteins and nucleic acids could never have formed,” says Dr. Corey (p. 119).

Perhaps even more amazing is oxygen, a rare element elsewhere in the universe. “The amount of oxygen in the atmosphere also appears to be optimal for the existence of life. Had it been much greater, plant and other combustible materials would have burned too easily, but had it been less, animals wouldn't have had enough oxygen to breathe” (p. 127).

Ozone, a reactive oxygen compound, forms a protective layer high in the atmos-

phere surrounding the earth. “Had it been much greater, the earth’s surface temperature would have been too low,” Dr. Corey writes. “On the other hand, had it been significantly less, the earth’s surface temperature would have been too high, and there would have been too much harmful ultraviolet radiation at the surface” (p. 127).

Some scientists think the structure of the universe appears full of “accidents” with a purpose. More than 30 years ago physicist

Designer in order for so many scientists to be openly talking about Him. Indeed, lengthy discussion about the possible existence of God can be found in many otherwise nontheistic treatises . . .” (p. 23).

While some scientists are able to see through their discoveries to the great Intelligence behind the universe, they don’t know *why the universe exists*, and *why man* is the centerpiece of intelligent design.

Only God Himself can explain why



Sometimes places on earth do seem more beautiful than the descriptions of heaven in the popular culture of literature and religion. Which would you choose?

Freeman Dyson wrote that “as we look out into the universe and identify the many accidents of physics and astronomy that have worked together for our benefit, it also seems as though the universe *must in some sense have known that we were coming*” (“Energy in the Universe,” *Scientific American*, September 1971, p. 59, emphasis added).

It appears, based on science, that man on earth is the very centerpiece of the development of the universe in both intelligence and design. As Dr. Corey points out: “The size of a human being turns out to be the geometric mean between the size of a planet and the size of an atom . . . This seems to place humanity squarely in the middle of the cosmic hierarchy of objects” (p. 141).

Only God knows why

Today in science there is a growing acknowledgment of a Master Planner and plan behind the existence of man and the universe.

Dr. Corey observes: “It doesn’t take a genius to see that the evidence must be *overwhelmingly* in favor of an Intelligent

human life on earth appears to be the center of complexity in all the universe. It is on this question that the Bible is utterly unique, inspiring and without equal in giving man the answer to “Why man, why here?”

What God says in the Bible is startling and provocative for both science and religion—including the Christianity practiced by most churches.

It comes down to this: The Bible begins with the statement that “God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Why was this done? To “make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (verse 26). This first book of the Bible tells us that God organized all the immense complexities of the heavens, and the details of planet earth, *to set up a home for man*.

What a fascinating development! Science and the Bible reach the exact same conclusion on this most important issue—why man exists and why the universe is as it is! The universe, according to both science and the Bible, is actually structured for man’s existence.

What comes next is even more exciting. But science knows nothing about what God

plans to do with this planet in the future.

Relocating heaven

The idea that good people are going to go to heaven to be with God forever is the most widely held view among Christians about what happens after death. But those who seriously study the Bible know that this was not the teaching of Jesus or the early Christian Church (see John 3:13; Acts 2:34), but was adopted much later.

Christ always promised His obedient followers that they would “inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). But the Bible also shows God is going to come and dwell *on earth*.

Read this about how heaven is moving to earth: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a beautiful bride prepared for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, ‘Look, *the home of God is now among his people!* He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them’” (Revelation 21:1-3, New Living Translation, emphasis added).

While most people today do not take this passage as saying God will spend the future on earth, early Christians did.

Scientifically, it only makes sense. Science knows that earth is utterly unique, utterly beautiful, and utterly alone as a home for intelligent physical life in the universe.

But we are not alone among the intelligent spiritual life.

An invisible God of fathomless intelligence obviously designed the universe, which according to astronomers’ best estimates stretches out some 15 billion light years. By some recent estimates a staggering 70 thousand million million million—seven followed by 22 zeros—stars are visible through telescopes from earth.

Recommended Reading

Only a few truly understand the astounding, encouraging message of the gospel—the *good news*—that Jesus Christ taught. It is a message of how both mankind and our entire planet will be transformed under His rule. Do you understand that message? Request or download our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to learn more. And to discover your part in it, be sure to read *What Is Your Destiny?*, also free for the asking.



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Our universe encompasses such immensity of powers, energies and physics that we moderns can express our wonder of it all no better than King David did 3,000 years ago when he wrote: "The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship" (Psalm 19:1, NLT).

From our home on this planet in a corner of the universe, we perceive God behind the scenes, on another level of existence, upholding the universe we see. His realm of being

understand that his future and potential are all in the hands of the only living God, the eternal spirit Creator.

In Christ's first coming, God showed us through Him the nature of what man is to ultimately become, a person of ultimate character and divine perfection. As the Gospel of John records, the Word of God "became human and lived here on earth among us . . . We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us—one



The first book of the Bible tells us that God organized all the immense complexities of the heavens, and the details of planet earth, to set up a home for man.

is not temporary like ours—in the flesh of atoms, molecules, water and ever-changing proteins. God's existence is spirit, eternal, of divine perfection and indescribable power.

Why did He decide to come here? Why this particular spot in the universe?

How did the 6,000 years of human history in its infinite complexity, variety, tragedy and triumph, ugliness and beauty, futility and eternal purposes come to be the world as we know it?

God gives the answers in the Bible. It's because He has designed our earth to continue as is until "it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay" (Romans 8:21, NLT). So it will be!

The heavenly Kingdom first

It is here on earth that you and I must discover the meaning of life revealed by God in His Word. Though created in God's image, we must understand our complete inability to proceed in our future without the power of God's love, the light of His law and faith in God and the hope He reveals for the future. It is here that man was created to

gracious blessing after another" (John 1:14-16, NLT).

Yet Jesus said most of humanity would not learn these lessons. Our civilization, governments, cultures and religions *don't want* God to come to planet earth. Instead they will bring a disaster on the world from which Jesus Christ promised He will return to save mankind.

Shortly, the powers of the universe shall rip open the skies above the earth, and the divine realm of the spirit will be made manifest at the return of the glorified Jesus Christ.

Perhaps sooner than any of us know, the 1,000 years of a divinely ruled government of Christ over the earth will come. The Son of God is preparing to move out of heaven soon (to learn more about these events, be sure to read "God's Harvest Feasts: His Assurance of Hope for Mankind," beginning on page 8).

Christ is planning to make earth His home. Later, the eternal Father will descend and dwell here, too, in the New Jerusalem being prepared in heaven even now.

Are you prepared to welcome Them? **GN**

Who's Behind The Good News?



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

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

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

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

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God's Harvest Feasts: His Assurance of Hope for Mankind

Despite the enormous problems facing humanity today, mankind has great hope for the future. Proof of that hope lies in God's harvest celebrations laid out in the Bible.

by **Jerold Aust**

Imagine yourself standing on the most luxurious landscape on earth: fields brimming with rich, dark soil; green pastures that swell to nearby hills and sweep down into broad meadows where cows, horses and sheep graze in contentment and peace; hedgerows, strong and thick, interspersed with groves of scattered trees—some deciduous, some evergreen and many of them fruit trees.

Picturesque cottages dot the landscape. Distant villages are filled with children playing in the streets, grandparents sitting under their fruit trees sharing stories, laughing and singing songs with their families.

Barley, wheat and cotton fields are uniformly planted like a patchwork quilt. Terraced hillsides are planted with vines, mulberries, figs, oranges, lemons, tangerines, cherries and other delicious fruits, so heavily laden that they sometimes ripen before they can be picked.

On a rising knoll not far away, you see a scene of even more ravishing beauty. Lush gardens, orchards and groves of shade trees—among which wind silvery streams—surround a village on a hill. As you enter this

that one day this earth will become a worldwide Garden of Eden. This limited imagery can't begin to compare with the stunning beauty of that coming day.

Are you preparing for that day? God is. And so are His people.

The Feast of Tabernacles, a biblical celebration kept in the autumn in the northern



seasons in Deuteronomy 16: "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed" (verse 16). The entire family generally observes the festivals of God, including women and children (see Nehemiah 8:1-12).

These three festivals symbolically portray humanity's salvation in successive stages. Each stage involves greater numbers than its predecessor. Let's explore these in their biblical order.

The early harvests

The first harvest season, the barley harvest, is the smallest, yet in a significant sense the greatest.

Generally referred to as the Passover season, it includes the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is the first spring harvest and is a lighter one, as the ripened barley is a relatively lighter-weighted grain than wheat.

Within the Passover/Unleavened Bread season is the wave-sheaf offering (Leviticus 23:10-14). This is where the significance of the lighter harvest comes into play: It represents only one man, the Son of man—Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of the wave-sheaf offering, as He was accepted by God after His resurrection on the very day the wave-sheaf offering was waved before God for its acceptance before the barley harvest could begin.

Just as the first of the annual harvest seasons began with the wave-sheaf offering, the first harvest of humankind for immortality in God's Kingdom began with Jesus Christ. Without this important beginning, the following two harvest seasons could never come about. Humanity's salvation is absolutely dependent on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 12:23-25).

The second harvest festival is called the Feast of Pentecost, this being the Greek

God has promised and guaranteed that one day this earth will become a **worldwide Garden of Eden.**

luxurious park setting, you hear the voices of nightingales, goldfinches and thrushes while aromatic odors and colorful flowers captivate your senses.

It is just another perfect day in paradise. In fact, it *is* paradise—*God's paradise on earth*. This is a place of rest, a safe place, *the* place where you can commune with God without any obstructions, restrictions or threats.

If you were there today—and someday you likely *will be*—you might think you had died and gone to heaven! But in fact, this is even better. To human beings, this setting will be a paradise, a new Garden of Eden on this planet.

In truth, God has promised and guaranteed

hemisphere, at the end of the harvest season, helps to illustrate and prefigure that wonderful, utopian world tomorrow foretold in dozens of Bible prophecies.

God is the author of this great fall feast. To understand this feast and its significance is to understand the great hope and future God has in store for humankind.

Three harvest seasons of humanity

God's seven biblical festivals are contained within the three major harvest seasons of the Holy Land: the barley harvest, the later spring wheat harvest, and the great ingathering late summer and fall harvest.

God identifies the three major harvest



The festivals of the Bible are timed around the harvest seasons of the Holy Land—spring, late summer and autumn. A close study of their symbolism reveals how God is carrying out His plan to gather a harvest of humanity into His soon-coming Kingdom.

word for “fiftieth,” as the festival was held 50 days from the wave-sheaf offering, counting the wave sheaf as day one (Leviticus 23:15-17). In the Old Testament this festival is called the Feast of Harvest, Feast of Weeks or simply Firstfruits (Exodus 23:16; Deuteronomy 16:10; Numbers 28:26).

This feast represents the harvesting of the firstfruits in God’s plan for humanity—including the Old Testament saints and those who throughout history have been part of the New Testament Church Jesus founded. The spiritual fulfillment of this Feast of Firstfruits began when God sent His Spirit to the original members of His Church—which, significantly, happened on the very day of the Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

This harvest of the human firstfruits continues until the return of Christ Jesus, when they are resurrected to eternal life as immortal spirit beings (1 Corinthians 15:50-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). This is why the members of God’s true Church are repeatedly called “firstfruits” in the Scriptures (see Romans 8:23; 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:15; James 1:18; Revelation 14:4).

So far we have seen that the biblical harvest festivals represent the resurrection of Jesus Christ to immortality, followed by God’s calling of those whom He places within His Church, who will be resurrected to immortality at Christ’s return.

If we were to stop at this point, we would remain ignorant of the significance of God’s final harvest festival: the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16). The very name gloriously defines the purpose of this great feast and offers the greatest hope to an otherwise hopeless humanity. How tragic it is that so

few people understand and keep these feasts, and so remain ignorant of God’s great plan and purpose for us!

The fall harvest season’s festivals

God’s Word likens Him to a farmer who patiently tends His crop, waiting for the right time to harvest. Notice James 5:7:

God’s Word likens Him to a farmer who patiently tends His crop, waiting for the right time to harvest.

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. *See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain*” (emphasis added throughout). In His case, the “precious fruit of the earth” means human beings who will receive His wonderful gift of eternal life as members of His spirit family (for more details, request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*).

As wonderful as God’s master plan of salvation as depicted through these three harvest seasons is, there is an end to His harvesting of humanity. That last season is fittingly summarized as the Feast of Ingathering.

The events signified by this final festival season are the great hope of humanity, including the multiple billions of people who died in vain, without hope, without a future. The numbers resurrected during this time of salvation will be staggering.

This harvest season actually includes four different festivals, all of them with distinct meaning. They are the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast

of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

Beginning of the world’s transformation

The Feast of Trumpets is the first of the four festivals in this season (Leviticus 23:24). In the Bible, trumpets were used to sound an alarm of imminent war. And indeed, as the events depicted by these

days unfold, the world will be gripped by devastating warfare (Matthew 24:6, 21-22; Revelation 6:4; 9:1-21).

But the sounding of trumpets depicts something else too—Jesus Christ’s return to earth at the last trumpet to save, not destroy, humankind (Revelation 11:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

If Christ did not intervene in human affairs at this point, tyrannical leaders would destroy the earth and humanity with it. “The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, *and should destroy those who destroy the earth*” (Revelation 11:18).

Again, Jesus is returning to save, not destroy, humanity. The Feast of Trumpets marks the first step God takes to ensure this great hope for humankind.

Daniel shows that God will not allow human governments to rule indefinitely. Christ will return to set up a world-ruling kingdom far greater than any human governments. “And in the days of these kings the

God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; *it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever*" (Daniel 2:44).

The second festival within this season is the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27-32). It signifies another astounding event—the removal of Satan and the demons from their unseen, unrecognized rule over humanity (Revelation 20:1-3). As with evil human governments, so with evil spiritual influence: God removes all evil so the earth can receive God's peace.

Now we come to the third festival of this season, the Feast of Tabernacles. Next in the sequence of prophesied biblical events is the rule over the earth of Jesus Christ and the resurrected saints, given immortality at Christ's return (verses 4, 6). Just as the Feast of Tabernacles was a time of joy and plenty in ancient Israel, so will the time it pictures—the millennial rule of Jesus Christ—be a time of joy and plenty for all of humanity.

Consider some of the astounding changes Christ will institute on earth as foretold in the Scriptures. Human beings will rebuild the places devastated by war and neglect (Isaiah 58:12). Effort that once went into creating weapons and munitions will now be channeled into peaceful, productive uses and humanity will no longer learn war (Micah 4:3).

People will enjoy private property and feel secure, unthreatened by governments or others who would steal from them (Micah 4:4). As people learn the advantages of living according to God's laws and way of life, peace and the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9). With Satan gone, even wild animals will have a peaceful temperament (Isaiah 11:6-8).

The deserts will blossom like a garden of roses (Isaiah 35:1-2). The hills will appear to melt as fruit trees and vineyards ripen and bend to the ground with fruit. The plowman

will overcome the reaper, the treader of grapes him who sows seed (Amos 9:13).

For 1,000 years, Christ will turn the earth into a worldwide garden of Eden. As Ezekiel 36:35 says: "This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited" (compare Isaiah 51:3).

Christ's glorious Kingdom will be unprecedented in the annals of human history. This 1,000-year period will not end His righteous, peaceful rule, but will be preparatory to the events signified by the following biblical festival we call the Last Great Day.

The White Throne Judgment

Next in the order of biblically prophesied events, we see that Revelation 20:11-13 speaks of the White Throne Judgment, the time of salvation for all those as yet unconverted from the time of Adam and Eve until the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The White Throne Judgment is depicted by a separate Holy Day that immediately follows the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:36, 39). This separate festival represents another distinct period that offers great hope for humanity, when all those many billions who never had their opportunity for salvation will finally receive it.

Revelation 20:6 refers to the resurrection of God's faithful servants to immortality at the return of Jesus Christ as the "first resurrection." A parenthetical inset in verse 5 explains that "the rest of the dead" are resurrected at the end of the thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints.

The "second" resurrection is different in that it is a resurrection to temporary physical life, not to immortal spirit life, as is clearly described in Ezekiel 37:1-14. Billions of people will be resurrected to round out God's great hope for humanity and conclude God's great ingathering feast season. They will then have an opportunity to repent, receive God's

Spirit and ultimately His gift of salvation too (to learn more, request our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*).

Hope for the future guaranteed

Know this: The future of humankind, as portrayed by the fall festival season, including the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day, has already been guaranteed. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the facts that ensure this.

The three major harvest seasons reveal to us God's master plan for saving all humanity through all ages. Although humanity faces increasing troubles on the horizon, God has not left us, or the billions who will follow us, without protection and great hope.

The fall Holy Day season guarantees the greatest hope for all mankind, a Feast of Ingathering when God sets His hand to save the remainder of humanity, numbering in the billions. If you would like the privilege of experiencing a foretaste of this time now, see "Why Not Join Us for the Feast Jesus Kept?" We hope you'll join us in enjoying this feast as a preview of the coming world tomorrow. **GN**

Recommended Reading

To gain additional insight into God's plan for the salvation of mankind and how the world will finally be transformed under Jesus Christ's rule, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, *The Gospel of the Kingdom, You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. You'll discover much more about the amazing good news of the future revealed in Bible prophecy!



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Why Not Join Us for the Feast Jesus Kept?

Jesus of Nazareth, His apostles and the early New Testament Church never kept Christmas or Easter. But they did keep the Feast of Tabernacles, a biblical festival that celebrates Christ's coming reign over the earth. In fact, when He returns, all nations will observe this festival (Zechariah 14:16-19). But you don't have to wait until then. You can observe it with us this year, Oct. 11 through 18, at any of these locations:

Argentina; Australia (Frederick Henry Bay, Tasmania; Merimbula, New South Wales; Noosa, Queensland); **British Isles; Cameroon; Canada** (Horseshoe Valley, Ontario; Kelowna, British Columbia; Mont-Sainte-Anne, Quebec; Regina, Saskatch-



ewan; St. John's, Newfoundland); **France; Germany; Ghana** (Accra; Elmina; Kumasi); **Guatemala** (Antigua; Esquipulas); **Italy; Jamaica; Kenya; Malawi; Mexico; New Zealand; Peru; Philippines** (Baguio City; Davao City; Iloilo City); **Rwanda; St. Lucia; South Africa; Togo and Benin; Tonga; United States** (Bend, Oregon; Branson, Missouri; Escondido, California; Hagerstown, Maryland; Jekyll Island, Georgia; Kerrville, Texas; Lahaina, Maui, Hawaii; Lexington, Kentucky; Panama City Beach, Florida; Steamboat Springs, Colorado; Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin).

For more details, visit www.ucg.org/feast.

'I Hope We've Learned Our Lesson...'

"One day we were neighbors, and the next day the massacre began." That's how the survivor of a tribal massacre described the shocking turn of events that led to the murder of 18 of her family members. Her tragic story cuts to the heart of humanity's inability to find lasting peace.

by Joel Meeker

If it weren't for the sign outside the gate, the Catholic Church in Ntarama would seem little different than other churches in Rwanda. The rectangular red-brick building topped by a corrugated-tin roof is similar to churches in many countries in East Africa.

But in April 1994 horrifying events occurred that turned this church into a genocide memorial site. The sign in front of the church says in French, English and the local Kinyarwanda dialect that nearly 5,000 people were murdered on this site—many in a single day.

Scars on the landscape

Ntarama is an hour's drive on rough dirt roads from the country's capital, Kigali. The drive is impressive. Rwanda is a stunningly beautiful country of lush, green mountains and verdant lake and river valleys.

With one of the highest population densities in Africa, virtually every bit of arable land is under cultivation. Yet on the drive out to Ntarama we saw abandoned houses and fields lying fallow. Fulgence, the taxi driver, explained that the vacant areas are the result of the violence of almost a decade ago when the region's population was decimated.

We parked in the center of the village and began walking toward the fenced church compound. A man and woman who had seen us arrive walked up with the keys to the gate.

The sign in front of the church says in French, English and the local Kinyarwanda dialect that **nearly 5,000 people were murdered on this site—many in a single day.**

They introduced themselves as Pacifique Rutaganda and Dancille Nyirabazungu and explained that they were survivors of the attack at the church. Now they are state-appointed guides and caretakers of the site.

Through my friend Jean-Marie, who could translate from Kinyarwanda into French for me, I asked them to tell me what had occurred, to help me understand



Genocide survivor Dancille Nyirabazungu talks with a visitor outside the church in Ntarama, Rwanda, where nearly 5,000 men, women and children were murdered in 1994. To the side of the church is a shelter housing the bones of many of the victims (inset).

how something like this could happen.

Understanding the division

I had already read some background on the events of 1994. Especially useful was Philip

Gourevitch's 1998 book *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*.

Mr. Gourevitch explains how the two largest tribal groups in Rwanda are the Hutu and the Tutsi tribes. Many researchers today believe that they did not actually begin as distinct ethnic tribes so much as economic entities. Under the precolonial Rwandan

monarchy, the king was Tutsi and Tutsis were favored for government posts. But the barriers between the groups were porous. It was possible for a Hutu who succeeded financially to officially become a Tutsi.

When European colonial powers arrived, however, they hardened the division, going so far as to issue ethnic identification cards in 1934 labeling each person as either Hutu (85 percent of the population), Tutsi (14 percent) or Twa (pygmies, 1 percent). Hardening the tribal divide meant the path to advancement was closed to Hutus, since the European colonizers employed Tutsis to rule the country and discriminated against the Hutus when it came to educational and career opportunities (pp. 56-57).

In 1957 Hutu intellectuals signed a *Hutu manifesto*, stating that, as the majority of the population, the Hutus should govern. In 1959

violence broke out as organized groups of Hutus attacked Tutsis. The European military officer in charge took the side of the Hutus against the Tutsis, allowing the violence to continue and even pushing the “revolution” forward by suddenly and unilaterally replacing Tutsi village chiefs with Hutu chiefs in 1960.

In January 1961 the Europeans convened Hutu leaders, abolished the Rwandan (Tutsi) monarchy and declared Rwanda a republic. The Europeans then pulled out, declaring Rwanda independent in 1961 (pp. 60-61).

From that time on, unscrupulous politicians of the Hutu majority brandished the contrived threat that the minority Tutsi tribe was plotting the resubjugation of the Hutus. Through the 1960s and ’70s they organized periodic attacks, declared in “self-defense,” that killed many thousands of Tutsis.

Fear of this shadowy, fictional menace kept the Hutu politicians in power. With each attack on Tutsis, some escaped into neighboring countries and a small, rather weak resistance force formed in Uganda. This in turn fueled Hutu Power propaganda about the Tutsi menace.

In the early 1990s the Hutu Power movement began preparations for a sort of “final solution” that would completely eliminate the Tutsi presence in Rwanda. Radio and newspapers increasingly disseminated Hutu Power propaganda. By early 1994, tension was building palpably in the country.

On April 6, 1994, Rwandan (Hutu) President Habyarimana’s plane was shot down over Kigali, killing him and all aboard. The Hutu Power movement immediately blamed the attack on the Tutsis, though it now seems more probable that he was eliminated by the Hutu Power movement itself, which had begun to see him as an obstacle to its plans.

The president’s death provided a convenient and powerful rallying cry to attack all Tutsis, again in “self-defense.” The violence broke out almost immediately throughout the country, as many Hutu villagers followed the call of their tribal leaders to kill all Tutsis.

“Don’t worry, we will go to the church”

This is where Dancille and Pacifique picked up their story. Pacifique said his family members knew from past experience that when the violence began they needed to find a safe place to hide. His father, who had survived the killings in 1959, told him, “Don’t worry, my son, we will go to the church.” Church buildings had been respected places of safety in 1959.

As the events of 1994 began, hundreds, then thousands of Tutsis from miles around took refuge in the Ntarama church and on

the grounds. They waited three days in the church, afraid to go out at all.

Dancille told me that on April 14 some soldiers arrived, asking why the Tutsis were fleeing. “The [Hutu] militia” was the reply. “We will protect you here,” said the officer. “Call all other Tutsis you know and tell them to come here.”

Dancille said they all felt a sense of relief that the danger was over. More Tutsis came in. But the next day, four buses of militia and soldiers of the presidential guard arrived.

The refugees huddled in the church with the doors barred. Then it happened: Men armed with sledgehammers knocked holes in the walls, then tossed in hand grenades through the holes, killing and maiming many and stunning the rest. Others then broke open the doors, whereupon militia and regular soldiers armed with rifles, clubs, machetes and even bows and arrows killed every man, woman and child they were able to find still alive inside.

Dancille and Pacifique were among the few who, in the confusion, survived by running

Human nature is flawed. What seems natural and right to us is often not. And so, generation after generation, human beings reap the bitter crop of harmful decisions.

out the back door. Dancille said, “When you are so panicked, you don’t even think of your own children; you just run.” She told me she lost her husband, her two children, her mother-in-law, father-in-law, two brothers-in-law and others—18 family members in all.

Pacifique lost his father, mother, sister and two brothers. His oldest daughter, age 6, was also killed. His wife received a machete blow to the head and suffers from psychiatric problems to this day. They had to hide in fields and holes in the ground for a month until the soldiers finally stopped hunting Tutsis.

Dancille continued, “These people became like animals. The [Hutu Power] government was responsible for this: One day we were neighbors, and the next day the massacre began.”

“I hope people have learned their lesson”

Dancille and Pacifique showed us around the church and grounds. The church had been left much as it was following the violence. As a testimony to the magnitude of the genocidal attack, the bones had not been removed and buried, but rather left on the floor.

There were piles of bones in the church and flour sacks full of bone fragments in the church and surrounding buildings. I was shown a mud-brick building with walls and metal roof blackened on the interior from

fire. The people hiding inside had been burned alive.

In a makeshift shelter next to the church building, skulls and leg bones of victims were displayed on bamboo platforms. There were, I estimated, about 300 skulls in neat rows; some showed clear signs of having been crushed by blunt-force blows.

The magnitude of what I was seeing and the obvious evidence of such cruel violence made



the whole scene rather surreal. It didn’t seem possible that this could really have happened, as if it all somehow came from another world. But sadly, it did indeed come from this world—the same one in which you and I live.

Summing up her thoughts on these atrocities, Dancille stated: “I hope this will never happen again. I hope people have learned their lesson.”

Have we learned anything?

Rwanda in 1994 was not the first time, nor the last, that people would attempt genocide, much less commit the standard brutality of “routine” warfare. How can human beings come to the point of committing such horrible acts on other human beings? Have we truly learned our lesson? Will humankind ever learn its lesson and forever cease such violence and atrocities?

The Bible tells us that in the beginning, the first man and woman lived in an earthly paradise, the Garden of Eden. Their continued enjoyment of this paradise hinged on their obedience to their Creator—on following the instructions He gave them on how to live their lives happily. God told them that not abiding by His laws would bring them death.

The biblical account shows that Adam and Eve’s stay in paradise did not last long. Satan, in the guise of a serpent, appeared on the

scene and tempted them. He told them they didn't need to heed God's instructions, that they could do better making their own decisions and that there would be no death penalty for doing so.

Further, he told them that disobedience to the Creator's command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would actually have *good* results for them, not bad. The tempter told them: "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5).

By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve signaled that rather than listen to God's instructions, they were choosing to decide for themselves how to live, how to make decisions and how to solve their problems. Consequently, they had to leave the garden paradise and were hindered from access to the instructions and laws of their Creator.

The result? The first child ever born, Cain, ended up murdering his own brother—rather like what happened in Rwanda on a much greater scale thousands of years later. The history of humanity, often written in blood, is the continuing result of Adam and Eve's choice to reject God.

Why can't we make right decisions?

The Bible says that human beings, apart from the instructions of God, don't know how to make decisions that will have the desired result of happiness and fulfillment. The prophet Jeremiah put it this way: "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). We human beings simply don't know how to make the decisions that will bring us complete fulfillment and happiness.

Proverbs 14:12 explains it another way: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." What may *seem* to the human mind to be right and proper under given circumstances may well end in suffering and eventually even death.

We've all experienced this on a small scale, perhaps in our social lives, our marriages, raising our children or in the workplace. We make decisions we thought would have good results, only to experience the opposite effect because we lacked some important elements of understanding.

This has been true throughout human history. At the extreme, war, subjugation, domination and even genocide have been attempts by people to find security or prosperity for themselves at the expense of others. The results have been suffering on an unimaginable scale. Of course, often even

the "winners" pay a terrible price for these flawed decisions.

Romans 3:10-18 describes the human race as a whole this way: "There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one."

"Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit"; 'the poison of asps is under their lips'; 'whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'"

This sums up the cause of human problems and suffering, on the personal level as well as on the national and international scenes.

The spiritual heart of the problem

Have you noticed how, even in our lifetime, year after year in nation after nation, new solutions are proposed for old problems—scourges such as crime, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, terrorism and war? But the problems are never completely solved, are they? There may be apparent progress on some issues, but the core problems always remain with us. Why is it always this way?

Because, as the Bible indicates, *we don't know where to look for the root of the problem* and for true solutions.

The problem lies *within the human mind and spirit*. Our natural way of doing things tends to go the opposite way from God's way. In Isaiah 55:8-9 God says through His prophet: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

As long as humanity is not willing to learn a new way of thinking—*God's way*—it is doomed to repeat its own errors. Romans 8:7 tells us that "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (New International Version).

Human nature is flawed. What seems natural and right to us is often not. And so, generation after generation, human beings reap the bitter crop of harmful decisions.

Saving us from ourselves

Will we ever "learn our lesson" as Dancille Nyirabazungu hoped? Happily, the Bible says we will! Our Creator will not leave us in this seemingly hopeless situation. He will intervene and *save us from ourselves*.

Jesus Christ foretold that just before His promised return to earth, people following

their flawed human nature will take human life to the very brink of extinction. In Matthew 24:21-22 Jesus said: "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 . . .*" (Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Just before Jesus' return some people will be committing atrocities on a greater scale than at any preceding time—to the point that no human life would survive if God did not intervene. But, thankfully, He *will* intervene.

The crucial change that saves the world

Revelation 11:15 records a wonderful announcement to be made at the return of Jesus Christ: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever.'"

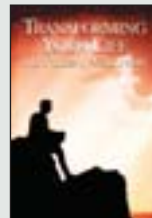
When the Messiah, Jesus Christ, returns to earth to take the reins of human government, a great change will occur everywhere. The crucial element of that change will actually occur at the heart of the problem—in the hearts and minds of human beings. There must be a deep change in the way we think and act, in our system of values and our goals. Our Creator will accomplish this by a change in our hearts.

The prophet Ezekiel was allowed a vision of what a wonderful change that will be. Through Ezekiel, God foretold: ". . . I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell

Continued on page 29

Recommended Reading

Would you like to learn more about how the world will be transformed under Jesus Christ's rule? That good news was at the heart and core of His message—a message explained in our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Also, to learn how you can begin to change your life now—as the whole world will eventually experience—request our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. To provide help in understanding these and other major themes of the Bible, we offer our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, also free. We hope you'll request and read these important materials today.



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World News and Trends

An Overview of Conditions Around the World

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

Turkey: An American ally no longer?

For more than half a century the United States has enjoyed good diplomatic relations with Turkey. More often than not over the decades, this strategically located nation has helped the United States deal with various crises overseas. Furthermore, Turkey is the only Islamic country with a respectful, cooperative working relationship with Israel.

Now the Justice and Development Party (known in the Turkish language as AKP) threatens to move the nation in the direction of an Islamic state.

AKP played a major role in the parliament's recent passage of laws that, in the words of Daniel Pipes, "dramatically reduc[ed] the political role of the country's armed forces." Dr. Pipes, a Middle East expert, goes on to explain that "what might seem like bureaucratic wrangling has such potentially profound importance

because the Turkish armed forces have long been Turkey's main bastion for political moderation and close relations with the United States and Israel."

Despite official protests that the AKP is not essentially religious and has no desire to impose Islamic law on the country, observers like American journalist Robert Kaplan suggested that this Turkish party could "usher in an Islamic version of the Protestant Reformation."

What are some of the key events that have led us to the present crossroads in Turkish national life? Author Andrew Boyd helps explain: "In some Muslim countries (first and foremost in Turkey; later, notably in Iran) this century saw a movement towards religious toleration and a separation of religious authority from government. Now, in many places, a backlash against

this secularism has brought a surge of Muslim fundamentalists; modernizing policies are branded as alien 'westernizing' ones. A dramatic example was the 1979 revolution in Iran" (*An Atlas of World Affairs*, 1998, p. 95, emphasis added).

Now, nearly 25 years later, is Turkey about to join Iran as a fundamentalist Islamic nation? And must the European Union (EU) share in the responsibility for the present Turkish plight? Greece, an EU member, has continually quarreled with Turkey over the Mediterranean island of Cyprus and has successfully lobbied against Turkish desires for membership in the EU. In spite of U.S. urging to open its doors to Turkey, the European Union has a habit of delaying Ankara's requests for membership, citing human-rights violations.

These recent developments in Turkey are sobering because the stakes are enormous. Washington's relationship with Ankara was already somewhat strained by the decision of the Turkish parliament to stay out of this year's war in Iraq. If things continue in the present direction, both the United States and Israel may see an important, strategically placed ally become another potential enemy in this crucial region. (Sources: *New York Post*, *An Atlas of World Affairs*, *The Sunday Telegraph* [London].)

Israel's security fence disturbs U.S. Mideast aspirations

Israel is in the process of constructing a long security fence to help keep suicide bombers from infiltrating from the West Bank. Equipped with electronic sensors and surveillance cameras, the fence is flanked by coils of barbed wire and deep ditches on each side. At a few strategic points particularly vulnerable to attack, the fence becomes a concrete wall 20 feet high.

Eighty miles of this strategic fence are nearing completion, including a section around parts of Jerusalem. Proposed sections would surround the northern tip and parts of the southern sector of the West Bank.

The Palestinians claim that in reality the fence constitutes a land grab on the part of Israel because it doesn't in all places strictly follow Israel's borders from before the 1967 Six-Day War. Israel, having lost hundreds of its citizens to suicide bombers in recent years, argues that it desperately needs the fence to prevent further such attacks. A similar fence in the Gaza area has been successful in this regard.

Recently the United States has entered the picture by threatening to withhold millions of dollars in economic aid unless Israel reconsiders its present course. According to Roland Watson, reporting for *The Times* in Washington D.C., "President Bush has been persuaded that if left unchecked, construction of the 370-mile barrier was a threat to the Middle East peace process." One proposal being considered is deducting dollar-for-dollar any funds Jerusalem uses to fund the security fence east of the 1967 boundaries between Israel and the West Bank.

President Bush's father actually carried out a previous threat to withhold an American aid package in the billions when Yitzhak Shamir, the then-Israeli

prime minister, refused to cease settlement activities in the West Bank. The U.S. Jewish vote reacted by defecting to the Democrats on a wholesale basis in 1992, partially contributing to the loss of the presidency to Bill Clinton.

In spite of its single superpower status, the United States still needs friends and allies among the nations of the world. And Israel, a tiny nation in a very dangerous neighborhood, relies on U.S. support. Both can ill afford these arguments with a longtime, trusted ally. (Source: *The Times* [London].)

Iran threatens Israel with missile

According to the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Iran claims to have conducted final tests on a missile capable of reaching Israel and U.S. forces in the Middle East, and is poised to deploy the weapon. The claim, confirming an earlier Israeli allegation, is certain to heighten tensions with the United States, amid allegations from Washington that Iran is making rapid progress in a clandestine program to build nuclear warheads.

President Bush included Iran among the infamous "axis of evil" nations, along with Iraq and North Korea. We have warned our readers about Iranian intentions from time to time in *The Good News*. Although both the European Union and the United Nations have pressed Iran to allow nuclear inspections, there is little evidence that the Islamic nation has heeded.

If you would like to understand both the past and future of this severely troubled area, request or download our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: *The Guardian*.)

The knowledge explosion

According to the August issue of *Discover* magazine: "In the 1990s some library scientists concluded that our stockpile of information doubles every seven or eight years. A recent study at the University of California at Berkeley found that between 2000 and 2002, the total information of the world doubled. In many fields, such as life sciences and space technology, knowledge is accumulating at speeds that are impossible to keep up with."

The prophet Daniel was told that knowledge would be increased during the time of the end (Daniel 12:4). This almost appears as an understatement now. Regrettably, the most important type of knowledge—the knowledge of God—is not doubling and trebling every few years or so. Mankind has a habit of suppressing biblical knowledge. Even in free nations like the United States and Britain, where Bibles are available everywhere, secularism is stunting the spread of true biblical information.

You can swim upstream against these secular currents by enrolling in our free 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* and requesting or downloading our free booklet *How to Understand the Bible*. (Source: *Discover*.)





Australia: Neighborhood policeman in Asia?

The Middle East is far from the only area on the globe troubled by serious conflicts. Reporting for *The Financial Times*, correspondent Anna Fifield assessed the "Land Down Under" in terms of the current situation in Asia. She began by noting that Australian soldiers were recently dispatched to the Solomon Islands as a peacekeeping force to restore order and stability to the island archipelago troubled by five long years of conflict.

"Alarmed by the rise of instability and Islamic fundamentalism among the near neighbours," Fifield

stated, "Canberra is adopting an increasingly interventionist stance that aligns it closely with Washington in the war on terror."

Another recent bombing in Indonesia seems to support the necessity of the current policy. After all, the first bombing in Bali last year killed 89 Australian tourists. And despite protestations to the contrary, ties to predominantly Muslim Jakarta have been troubling.

Increasingly the new economic and financial infrastructure emerging in Asia apparently excludes full Australian participation. The Land Down Under is increasingly viewed as "a white outpost more attuned to the interests of America and the United Kingdom" (ibid.). One professor of Asian studies at Adelaide University noted that "Australia is now

increasingly perceived in Asian capitals as a self-appointed deputy to the U.S."

According to Fifield, "The unresolved question is whether—and at what cost—Australia can align itself with Anglo-Saxon partners on the other side of the world without jeopardising its position among its neighbours in Asia."

This raises an even more fundamental long-term question. Why did Australia willingly send its soldiers halfway around the world to fight in two world wars alongside Britain and the United States? Why is it supporting American policy now? The underlying answer is found in our full-color booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: *The Financial Times* [London].)

Why liberate Liberia?

Where in the world is Liberia? And why is America interested in this tiny country on Africa's west coast?

Freed American slaves settled Liberia back in the early 1800s. There has been a connection between the United States and Liberia since that time.

Well over 100,000 men, women and children have died in Liberia during the past 15 years in conflicts between the government and revolutionaries. The world community and some European nations, together with Liberians, have appealed to the United States to resolve the political differences and to stop the wholesale carnage.

The Economic Community of West African States

has become involved and sent Nigerian soldiers to quell the violence around the capital, Monrovia. Some Liberians think such interference will only result in



looting and stealing their women. Sending poor soldiers into the battle might also encourage pillaging.

Though the nation's tyrannical leader, Charles Taylor, has stepped down as president and gone into exile, the conflict between the warring factions remains unresolved. And with no electricity, little food and water, and deadly diseases spreading, little Liberia needs help.

But why should America help? Why is the United States interested enough to send troops to Liberia? America is the only superpower on the globe at this time, a superpower that sends goods, services and military forces to protect and relieve the downtrodden, something so deeply entrenched in its history that the word *America* is synonymous with helping others.

America has its own problems, to be sure, but it still strives to help and lift up the underdog. America remembers its historical connections. World public opinion still counts for something as well. Still, the United States must be careful not to overextend its

Well over 100,000 men, women and children have died in Liberia during the past 15 years.

God-given power and wealth, which are finite.

The infinite factor in America's ability to help others rests in Almighty God, as acknowledged by America's founding fathers in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." After 227 years, America still carries this belief abroad, and the world is much better for it. To understand the biblical foundation of America's power and freedoms, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: *The Washington Post*.)

Will Catholicism become the religion of the EU?

The leaders of the Roman Catholic Church leveled harsh criticism at the Charter of Fundamental Rights adopted by the European Union in December 2000. At the time, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, a close aide to the Pope, said the charter failed to take adequate account of the "historical and cultural roots of Europe, in particular Christianity, which represents Europe's soul and which still today can inspire Europe's mission and identity."

In March of this year, Cardinal Ratzinger, the prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (successor to the medieval Inquisition), said that it was regrettable that "God and our responsibility before God" had not been "anchored in the European constitution."

Many European politicians do not want religious clerics to determine their future. They understand that history has a way of repeating itself. For nearly 2,000 years European leaders had either been crowned by the pope (as in the case of Charlemagne, Otto the Great and Charles Hapsburg) or been given its blessing (as was Napoleon, who took the crown from the pope and crowned himself). Cardinal Ruini was correct in his assessment that Europe's roots are Catholic, a tradition that can still powerfully influence Europe's mission and identity.

Will Europe eventually become like another Roman Empire of old? If so, will it also be blessed by the Vatican, transforming it into a modern revival of the Holy Roman Empire? Some European Parliamentarians have already suggested this thought. But more importantly, a number of biblical prophecies support it. To learn more, request or download our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. (Source: Zenit News Agency.)



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Also, to get a biblical perspective on major events, visit www.ucg.org/commentary for a weekly commentary on the trends and events shaping our world.

Same-Sex Marriage: Does It Meet With God's Approval?

The gay agenda is steadily gaining ground in Western nations, with same-sex marriage finding acceptance. But what does the Bible say—and why? And what's at the root of same-sex attraction?

by Melvin Rhodes

The U.S. Supreme Court's June decision striking down state laws banning homosexual acts between consenting adults was the latest victory in the cultural war between those advocating full acceptance of homosexuality in public life and those opposed on various grounds.

It followed decisions announced earlier in the month from Britain that a law banning the promotion of homosexuality in schools would be repealed and a stunning announcement from Canada that an Ontario appeals court had ruled that refusing same-sex couples the rights of marriage was discriminatory.

A similar decision is now pending in the Massachusetts Supreme Court, with major implications for the other 49 American states—which are constitutionally obligated to recognize the actions of all other states. With two European countries already allowing it, and several others allowing civil unions, same-sex marriage is a major and growing issue.

Nor is this only a secular issue. In August the U.S.-based Episcopalian Church shocked many of its members by approving its first openly homosexual bishop and giving local dioceses the option of deciding whether to perform same-sex marriages.

How did marriage begin?

Marriage is a constant theme throughout the Bible, as we might expect it to be. After all, the Bible is largely about human relationships, and none is so fundamental as marriage.

At the beginning, when God created Adam, the first man, He said: "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). God created for him a female companion, Eve, meaning "life" or "living," for "she was the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20).

God's plan for the male and female sexes is then clearly instituted: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). In joining them as man and wife, the Creator of mankind instituted



In recent years same-sex couples have increasingly pressed for the legal option of entering a full marital union.

marriage. In the next verse Adam and Eve are clearly described as a married couple: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (verse 25).

Thousands of years later we see the covenant relationship between God and the nation of Israel, whom He had chosen, likened to the marital relationship (Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:14).

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ reinforces the special relationship between a husband and wife: "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

He stated further: "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to

divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (verse 8). Clearly, marriage between a husband and wife was intended to be for life.

Following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul wrote extensively on marriage. In his epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 5, he compares the marital union of a husband and wife to the relationship between Christ and the Church.

He writes: "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her . . . that He might present her to Himself a glorious church . . . So husbands ought to love their own wives . . ." (verses 23-28).

Later we see, at the very close of the Bible, a time still ahead when Jesus Christ returns and marries His Bride, the Church (Revelation

19:7). In these scriptural references we see a totally committed relationship between Jesus Christ and His true followers, the Church.

The Western crisis in marriage

Today we live in an age in which commitment within marriage has become rare, especially in the richer Western world. For centuries the laws of Western nations relating to marriage were very strict. Divorce was not usually permitted.

In the last century, however, we have seen dramatic changes in laws relating to marriage. Among the most significant were the no-fault divorce laws passed in most of the Western democracies a little over 30 years ago. These laws contributed greatly to the trivialization of marriage, making it easier for a husband or wife to walk away from that commitment.

At the same time, the availability of the birth control pill made it quite acceptable for unmarried couples to live together, as suppos-

edly there were now no negative consequences to sex outside of marriage. These major societal shifts further diminished the marital relationship even as they encouraged a vast rise in premarital sex and adultery.

In turn, these were—and still are—promoted as “alternative lifestyles,” with mass media constantly depicting temporary relationships without commitment as fun and faithful marriage as tedious. The tragic result was an explosion of terrible consequences—broken homes, abandoned children, depression, crime, substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases that remain with us today.

Another major shift in sexual attitudes

In the “anything goes” atmosphere of the 1960s and 70s, it was only a matter of time before other lifestyles would become accepted.

Before 1973 American psychiatrists considered same-sex attraction (homosexuality) as abnormal behavior and offered treatment accordingly. But a decision that year reversed this long-held stand. No longer was same-sex attraction classified as abnormal.

Similar decisions had already been made in other Western nations. In a span of 30 years, people practicing homosexual acts would go from being considered criminals by society to being accepted, if not fully embraced, by much of the heterosexual community.

In recent years same-sex couples have increasingly pressed for the legal option of entering a full marital union. Two European countries, Belgium and the Netherlands, already have laws permitting such marriages. Several other European countries allow civil unions, which give same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual couples without a legal marriage. The American state of Vermont also permits same-sex civil unions.

Following the June Ontario appeals court decision that ruled in favor of same-sex unions being equal to heterosexual unions, the Canadian government announced that it would legislate same-sex marriages into law in the near future. In the United States, Massachusetts appears likely to make a similar decision in favor of same-sex marriages. It seems only a matter of time before the whole country follows suit.

It should be noted that, in the United States at least, it is the courts that have made these changes possible rather than the voters, as polls consistently show that a majority of Americans do not support same-sex marriage. Federal and state lawmakers wouldn't risk the ire of voters on this issue, and even Canada is

simply following a decision of the court.

As with so many of the liberal social reforms of the last four decades, the courts have played a leading role in changing society, with activist judges sometimes arbitrarily creating new rights and law where none were previously spelled out.

While many on both sides of the argument will claim that this is a worldwide issue, the fact remains that this is essentially a Western



The Word of God approves *only one* sexual relationship: that between a husband and wife within marriage.

phenomenon, thereby further widening the gap between the rich Western democracies and the poorer nations.

The fault lines are also spreading throughout the Western religious world, with major international church denominations facing increasing division over this issue and that of the ordination of homosexual clergy.

Does the Bible offer guidance?

Why doesn't the Bible mention same-sex marriages? The answer is simple—no such institution existed when it was written! No matter how bad some of the societies described in the Bible were, they never went so far as to have same-sex marriages.

Make no mistake, the Word of God approves *only one* sexual relationship: that between a husband and wife within marriage. You can search the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation looking for the existence or approval of such alternative relationships as living together and same-sex marriage, but there is none. Certainly there are accounts of fornication, adultery and same-sex relationships, but they are always in the context of *sin*, which is the breaking of God's law (1 John 3:4).

And yes, some of God's most faithful servants committed sins in the sexual area—and the Bible duly records the painful consequences their actions had on them and others. These servants of God allowed themselves to be unduly influenced by the society around them, just as Christians can be today.

So why does our Creator forbid all sexual relationships outside of marriage? Does He not want us to have what some consider to

be fun? Does God not want those who are attracted to the same sex to have the same happiness, commitment and sense of fulfillment that is achievable within a committed, lifelong, heterosexual marriage?

In John 10:10 Jesus Christ states, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” God wants us to be happy, to live fulfilled and joyful lives.

That is precisely why He gave us the Ten Commandments, some of which deal with the family relationship. It is also part of the reason He instituted marriage. Within the framework of a stable, committed marriage, people can find a sense of loving security. Children especially need this when they are brought into the world.

So why can't gay couples have it too? Some argue that they also deserve the happiness of a stable and committed marriage. And in this age of AIDS and many other terrible diseases, shouldn't we encourage same-sex partners to remain faithful to one another, just as we do heterosexual couples through the institution of marriage?

Sex and the Bible

In the Bible, marriage is always between

a husband and wife. There are no scriptural accounts of same-sex marriages, even though homosexual relationships were common and sometimes encouraged in the Greco-Roman world of early New Testament times (although an exclusively homosexual orientation was considered an aberration even in that society, which understood the necessity of heterosexual marriage for the production and raising of children).

Pagan gentile society notwithstanding, both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible clearly condemn sexual acts between members of the same sex. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination,” says Leviticus 18:22.

Why does the Bible forbid such behavior? God created the first two human beings male and female, bound them as husband and wife in a sexual union and instructed them to have

He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

This tells us that God’s creation was “very good,” including His creation of the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve. Even their naked bodies were physically perfect, created differently, but also perfectly, to complement each other and to bring additional human beings into the world, in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28). Adam was pleased with his new companion, to whom he remained married for a very long time, until death. He was clearly attracted to her—they gave birth to many children.

What we learn from these passages is that a man should naturally be attracted to the female body. As Adam and Eve were the only two people living at this time, they could walk around unclothed without any sense of shame or embarrassment.

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible clearly condemn sexual acts between members of the same sex.

children (Genesis 2:24-25; 1:28). The biblical account of our first human parents makes it clear that God ordained the marriage of Adam and Eve, creating the family union of a man and a woman.

God designed this union to stabilize and protect male-female and parent-child relationships with love and security. It was also designed to serve as a pattern or model of the relationship God wants to have with His people (Ephesians 5:23-33).

There is no question that male-female attraction is God’s intended design. Homosexuality, on the other hand, is a developmental disorder that leads to actions and lifestyles diametrically opposite to the male-female design.

When Adam and Eve rejected God’s instructions and determined to do things their own way, they set humanity on a course that every human being since has chosen to follow. Consequently, as a result of man’s rejection of God, men and women are experiencing an array of confused or conflicted interpersonal relationships—including homosexuality. Although homosexuality may feel “natural” to people who have same-sex attraction, it in fact reflects a yearning that God intended to be met within the natural male-female family context, with parents providing the proper natural affection and approval their children need.

Man and woman: A perfect creation

When God created Adam and Eve, “they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). Additionally, we read that “God saw everything that

God intended men to be attracted to women, and vice versa. When a man is not attracted to women, something has gone wrong in the natural development of his mind, as this is not the way God intended things to be.

Causes of same-sex attraction

It is common today for men who consider themselves gay to say that they were born that way, but there is no convincing evidence for this. Homosexuality is not caused by a “gay gene,” or identical twins would always both be gay—and they usually aren’t.

What is the truth? As most homosexual males and some lesbians can only remember same-sex attractions, even when very young, we can conclude that their early development was affected in some way that led to a different sexual orientation.

Research has shown that the basic common cause of homosexuality, whether male or female, is an emotional detachment from the parent of the same sex (see interview with Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, page 20). This causes insecurity about the child’s own masculinity (or femininity) and makes the forming of friendship bonds with those of the same sex much more difficult, frequently leading to painful rejection. Often added to this in the case of boys is a mother who overly compensates, giving the son too much female affection and fawning over in the early stages of his life.

Deprived of normal male love and affection, the boy starts out in life with a desperate longing for what is a legitimate unmet need. The inevitable attraction to the same sex in itself is not a sin. Later on, however, that need

often becomes sexualized—leading to sinful homosexual acts with other boys and men. At the same time, the smothering love and affection he received from his mother often will have contributed to a rejection of women as a source of love.

This developmental tragedy often takes place within the first two or three years of childhood. Typically, in the first year, a baby bonds with the mother as she gives birth to the child and then breastfeeds and generally nurtures him. After the child is weaned, the father must play a more prominent role.

This is the time when sexual identity is formed. If the father is absent, or unwilling or unable to fulfill his role, then the child will feel rejection—and the basis on which homosexual feelings can develop will have been laid.

Note the importance of *perception*—either of the lack of loving affection or of rejection. In some cases a father truly may be affectionate and loving to his son, but the boy may not perceive it and instead develops feelings of rejection.

Or, in a family of several boys where the father is so busy with work or other things that he fails to spend any time with them, all are neglected, but only one may turn out to have homosexual tendencies. This is the one who perceived rejection, perhaps because he was more sensitive than the others.

Struggle for those dealing with same-sex attraction

Sadly, these tendencies and unmet needs remain. Because this lack becomes a part of one’s mental and emotional makeup at such an early age, it should be understood that exclusively same-sex attraction is seldom a voluntary, conscious choice.

Homosexual *acts*, however, just like heterosexual acts, *are* a voluntary choice. While the attraction may be there in a way that is *not* a matter of choice, it *is* one’s choice to dwell on or entertain thoughts that can lead to sin. Jesus Christ pointed out that mentally entertaining thoughts of illicit sexual acts is itself a sin (Matthew 5:27-28).

Paul urged Christians to be aware of the spiritual struggles in which all of us are engaged, emphasizing our need to discipline our thoughts and bring “every thought into captivity” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). James, Jesus’ half-brother, wrote that mentally dwelling on temptations typically leads us into lust and sin, so we must short-circuit the process before sin results (James 1:14-15; compare 4:8).

Some give in to their same-sex attraction later on in life and enter the gay lifestyle. Others, often due to religious beliefs, try

to fight their desires and overcome them. These people are often called *strugglers*, reflecting the reality that it is a lifetime struggle. Another term increasingly used is *healers*, recognizing that they are seeking



This is where churches and individual Christians can help. Those who struggle with same-sex attraction not only battle with their unnatural sexual desires every day of their lives, they also have to do so in secret. Sometimes they seek help from others. Typically, they will either go to their church pastor or priest, seek psychological help or talk to a close friend. All three choices are problematic. Seeking help from the wrong person can lead to even greater withdrawal and a deepening fear of sharing with anyone.

Some church pastors may overreact when the problem of same-sex attraction is brought to them. This can push the person seeking and needing help into further isolation, even to the point of feeling rejected by God. Some people have made things worse by betraying the confidence of the individual out of misguided concern for others in the congregation.

Seeking professional psychiatric help can also be a problem for struggler-healers. Since the American Psychiatric Association's change of policy on homosexuality 30 years ago, most of those seeking help today will not be encouraged to change, but rather to reaffirm their same-sex feelings and embrace the gay lifestyle.

Sharing the problem with a friend can often end a friendship, as most men cannot handle a confession of homosexual feelings. Another obvious complication is the possibility of physical feelings developing toward the friend. While this is a problem that will need to be

Research has shown that the basic common cause of homosexuality, whether male or female, is an emotional detachment from the parent of the same sex.

emotional healing for their condition. A combination of both terms (struggler-healer) is appropriate.

Many people with same-sex attraction experience social isolation and emotional pain as they struggle to cope with their lives. Some endure a struggle between coping with their homosexuality and remaining faithful to their religious beliefs. For many, it is a lonely, secret struggle that can sometimes involve excruciating pain.

Some give in to their same-sex attraction and enter the gay lifestyle. Others, in spite of their pain, continue to struggle, often in isolation, to remain faithful to their religious beliefs. In recent years, a number of social and religious organizations have recognized the need to help and support these individuals who struggle to be faithful to their religious convictions, although the work of these organizations has often been viewed as controversial.

resolved, it should not rule out helping someone struggling with same-sex attraction.

Since the root cause of such attraction is rejection causing emotional detachment, someone struggling with this problem will find further rejection devastating. Not having had a close, loving relationship with the father in early childhood, there is a great need for such a relationship with another male. This need should be met in a nonsexual relationship with a heterosexual male who wants to help.

The apostle James wrote: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). It should be possible for Christians to share their problems with other Christians, expecting help and encouragement in return, even when their problem is one of unresolved homosexual desires and feelings.

Sadly, most people who struggle with this

problem will say that the response to sharing is usually negative. They soon learn to shut up and keep their problem a secret. Many, through discouragement, have even given up on trying to live God's way and have sought solace and acceptance in the gay community.

However, this is never the answer for a Christian. Christians realize that God gave us His laws because He cares for us. Certain sexual relationships are forbidden because they can never satisfy and lead to great emotional pain from which God wants to spare us.

The apostle Paul wrote: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18). This is not just a warning against sexually transmitted diseases. It is also a warning against all the emotional damage that results from unfulfilling relationships based on sex, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Sadly, this lack of fulfillment for homosexuals often leads them into more and more sin, in a desperate and futile attempt to find the love they never thought or felt they received as a child.

Encouraging lessons from ancient Corinth

We learn from the apostle Paul's letters, preserved in the New Testament, that some people in the Corinthian church had come out of this homosexual lifestyle to become truly converted Christians.

Corinth was a port city in which all kinds of sexual and other vices were all too common, and notice that Paul warns the Church members there against slipping into such sins. "Do not be deceived," he wrote. "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites . . . will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). The separate references to "homosexuals" and "sodomites" in Greek refers to different roles taken in homosexual couples.

We should note that in Paul's writings here, he condemns not only homosexual acts, but fornication and adultery as well. Too many Christians are quick to turn a blind eye to their own heterosexual sins while quickly condemning homosexual acts on the part of others.

It cannot be emphasized enough: *All* sexual acts outside of a biblically sanctioned marriage are a sin. The apostle James put it well when he wrote, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). So gay-bashing—attacking gays or singling out homosexual behavior as the worst sin—is unjustified.

In the following verse of 1 Corinthians 6, those struggling with same-sex attraction can read some very encouraging words from Paul:

Continued on page 22

Hope for Homosexuals

Interview by Melvin Rhodes

The Good News: What is homosexuality and how do you define it?

Joseph Nicolosi: Homosexuality is a developmental disorder. It has nothing to do with sex. It's really the person's search for belonging—what we call the three "As"—attention, affection and approval. These are the normal, emotional, affectional needs, which have been sexualized.

GN: In your book *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, you use the expression "non-gay homosexual." What exactly is meant by that?

JN: Well, we make a distinction between *homosexual* and *gay*. Unfortunately, too many people think they're synonymous and that's due to the success of the gay activists who have sold people on the idea that to be homosexual means they're automatically gay.

But there is a population we're concerned with, in particular, whom we call the non-gay homosexual, which is to say they have same-sex attractions, they have same-sex feelings, and they even engage in same-sex behavior, but they do not identify with the gay sociopolitical identity. They see themselves as having heterosexual values and want to live a heterosexual life.

GN: Is it possible to change from homosexual to heterosexual?

JN: Yes. There are many studies that show many men and women do come out of homosexuality. We see more and more of the evidence, more and more of those studies; and if the person is highly motivated there is a very good chance that he or she can come out of homosexuality.

GN: How do you help someone who wants to change?

JN: They have to begin to understand the origins of their homosexuality. It's not about sex. These are *emotional* needs, and in therapy you direct the client to address these emotional needs. These needs usually go back to the father—not having enough of the father's love, enough of the father's affirmation, and they begin to get these needs met in more authentic ways, ways that really transform a person rather than the sexual, which is a kind of repetitive and nonproductive attempt at meeting those emotional needs.

GN: How long does the treatment take and does it last?



Dr. Joseph Nicolosi is a clinical psychologist. He is the president of NARTH, the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, a 1,000-member organization. Dr. Nicolosi has successfully treated thousands of patients to help men transition from homosexuality to heterosexuality. He is author of several books, including *Parent's Guide to*

Preventing Homosexuality and *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*.

He has spoken at hundreds of conferences worldwide and has appeared on hundreds of radio and television programs around the world as the preeminent authority on reparative therapy. He also heads the Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic in Encino, California.

JN: Usually the therapy is about two years. We're talking about once a week. And long-term studies show it does last. In fact, these people, once they have learned certain skills and insights, actually continue to get better long after they terminate therapy.

GN: What other sources and support are available?

JN: We at NARTH [National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality] have a national referral list of therapists around the country who see homosexuality as a developmental disorder and as a treatable condition. Someone can call our main office to see if there is a therapist available for them. Besides the professional assistance, we have ministries for ex-gays like Exodus International and a few other ministries around the country.

GN: What are the basic causes of homosexuality?

JN: The basic cause of male homosexuality is an emotional detachment from the father or the father figure and that becomes the foundation of insecurity about the person's own masculinity and his desire to make that male connection, that male bonding. When that is frustrated, the male homosexual finds that he can do it through sex, but, of course, sex does not give the quality of attachment that is necessary.

GN: Are there any other contributing factors?

JN: One of the things that we are seeing that contributes is sexual child abuse. About one third of the men in therapy with me report having been sexually molested as little boys by older males—which would include an adolescent male—and that is

much higher than the average population. Many studies show sexual molestation between a boy and an older man as being the history of gay men.

GN: Do genetics play a role?

JN: There's been a lot of talk in the media about genetics or the biological origins, but none of those studies have really proved anything conclusive. There seems to be, what we *concede* to be, what we call a *temperamental disposition*. This is to say that the boy has a temperamental, sensitive, introverted and artistic side, but we need a family environment to really take that temperamentally vulnerable boy and push him in the direction of homosexuality.

GN: In your book you use the term "gender identification." Please explain what this is and why it's important.

JN: Gender identification is for a boy to really gender identify with masculinity and for a girl to really develop her gender identity, which is to say her femininity.

These are fundamental traits of human nature. There is so much talk today about how a person can develop without the definitions or without the parameters of gender, but that is not true. We all need gender as a fundamental support to our personal identity. That is the foundation of the homosexual problem and in the course of treatment that is exactly what we focus in on as being the target to develop.

GN: How do parents sometimes thwart this natural process?

JN: Boys need to be supported and affirmed in a masculine identity. Even though the boy or girl is biologically "hard-wired," to use a term, to be male or female, they still need the active support

and encouragement of the family.

Boys need masculinity to be affirmed by the family, by the mother and father, and likewise for the girl in terms of her femininity, especially by the same-sex parent—that is to say, the father for the boy and mother for the girl.

GN: In your book you state that an absent father is not the primary cause of homosexuality. Rather, it is the boy's defensive detachment against male rejection. What is defensive detachment?

JN: Defensive detachment is really the psychological armor, barrier or defense of the personality which keeps homosexuality alive. You might see defensive detachment as a sort of cell that protects the person and also protects the homosexuality inside. It's an anticipation of being hurt and rejected by other men. And this comes from the earlier rejection by the father.

The predicament of the male homosexual is that he is *sexually attracted* to men but, because of his defensive detachment, keeps an *emotional distance* from them. It prevents him from getting what he really wants, which is to have those *emotional* needs met. So the focus of therapy is to get him to drop that defensive detachment so he can allow himself to experience the healing benefits of non-sexual, intimate male relationships.

GN: Is it desirable for fathers to be warm and affectionate with their sons?

JN: It is more than desirous. It is *essential*. Fathers have to be warm and physically demonstrative. We encourage fathers to hug and to kiss and to wrestle and to have physical contact with their boys because when we listen to these homosexual men, they are so starved for male contact. All of them report almost without exception, "My father never touched me." "My father never hugged me." "My father never kissed me."

GN: Does divorce play a role in causing homosexuality?

JN: In a general sense yes, but in a specific way no, if the father continues to keep a relationship with the son. We say in a general way yes, because the family structure is designed to really enhance all the members of the family, especially the children.

Someone once said what makes a young man spend time with a little boy is when the woman he loves has that little boy. In other words, it's really his relationship with the mother that connects him with the son. Most fathers who are young men in their mid-to-late 20s aren't really going to spend time with a little boy unless there is a relational context, meaning the woman in the center keeps the relationship there.

GN: What percentage of Americans are homosexual?

JN: To be clearly homosexual, we believe it's 1½ to 2 percent—at most 2½ percent. We've been hearing 10 percent for the last 50 years, but that was due to the Kinsey study—and it turned out that Kinsey himself was a homosexual. Actually, Alfred Kinsey was a sadomasochist who derived sexual pleasure from receiving pain, which is another story in itself. This is the man that influenced generations through his Kinsey Institute and his biography just came out revealing all this stuff.

Anyway, it's really not 10 percent—it's 2 percent. But even though we say that about 2 percent are exclusively homosexual, we are assuming more homosexual experimentation is acted out, especially with young and adolescent people.

GN: Are there comparatively more homosexuals today than, say, 100 years ago?

JN: Again, we make the distinction between homosexual behavior and true homosexual orientation. I think homosexual orientation is still the same but I think there is more homosexual behavior. Also, we are seeing more homosexuals take a more overt role in the culture. We are seeing them more readily on television and in movies.

GN: What research led to the legalization

All of them report almost without exception, "My father never touched me." "My father never hugged me." "My father never kissed me."

of the gay lifestyle and homosexual acts?

JN: You mean the 1973 decision by the American Psychiatric Association? That was not scientific; that was purely a political decision. It happened in one day. It was motivated out of compassion. The idea was that by normalizing homosexuality, these people would not have to suffer social ostracism and social criticism. While that was a good intention, you don't compromise science for a sociopolitical end, which is what happened.

GN: Is lesbianism caused by the same factors?

JN: Basically, yes. There are some complicated factors but, basically, lesbianism, just like male homosexuality, is really rooted in an emotional breach between the daughter and the mother.

GN: What can a Christian male heterosexual do to help a Christian struggling with homosexuality?

JN: I think we as Christian men need to

realize that these are not simply degenerate, perverted people, but they are basically individuals who are seeking basic, authentic emotional needs that were frustrated in childhood and have developed into a sexualized pattern.

We need not to condone homosexual behavior but to be supportive of those Christians struggling with homosexuality and try to give them the understanding and support and the *emotional* connection that we can offer them, which will help them in the healing process.

GN: How can ministers help?

JN: By first of all being educated as to what homosexuality is, knowing that there is a population of non-gay homosexuals that we really need to reach out to. The pastor needs to have resources—therapists he can refer to whom he trusts, ministries for ex-gays that can be supportive, books and materials that he can recommend. That's an obligation the pastor has, I think.

GN: In the last few years, AIDS has become primarily a heterosexual problem internationally. In the United States it still affects gays disproportionately. Why is that?

JN: AIDS affects gays disproportionately because of the behavior that they engage in, behaviors that will spread AIDS. Anal intercourse is *the* way of spreading AIDS. And there is a great deal of sexual

promiscuity and a lot of reckless self-deceiving, self-destructive impulses in gay men and they are killing each other.

Paradoxically, all this talk about homophobia and hatred toward gays—when you think about it, who is really killing gays? Other gays! A very sad irony is that they are killing each other through a behavior that should be associated with love. Paradoxical, isn't it?

GN: How important are religious beliefs and church affiliation in overcoming homosexuality?

JN: I think it is very important. The majority of people who come to us are Christian. The church means something important to them. God is a living, powerful force in their lives. I think that their Christian foundation is a sound support as a motivator—not only in terms of right and wrong, but it actually gives them strength in the process of overcoming homosexuality.

A very interesting thing I have observed

over the years is that many of the men, almost without exception I would say, become more religious in the course of therapy. Even if they began not particularly religious, at the end of two years, with all the soul searching and really digging deeply into deep issues, they *become* more religious.

GN: What can wives do to help?

JN: I think wives, number one, have to understand what is going on, what the husband is really looking for, and have to be supportive of the husband's attempts.

She needs to understand that he needs close male friendships and she might feel threatened by that. Especially if the husband has betrayed her trust in the past, it will be difficult for her to really trust it will be a friendship and nothing more. She has to be educated, she has to be informed, and she has to be supportive of his healing process.

GN: Does pornography play a role in leading people toward homosexuality?

JN: I really think it does. I think that pornography on the Internet is exacerbating the problem. It is not only increasing homosexuality, but it is entrenching those who are already dabbling with homosexuality.

In other words, the greater exposure to pornography is making the healing process more difficult. We see this—men who are still looking at the porn are going to move slower in therapy than those who do not have it in their lives.

GN: You said they need close male relationships. How can men struggling with homosexual feelings have a close male relationship without those feelings becoming sexual?

JN: Well, he's going to have those feelings. No doubt about it. And he shouldn't be afraid of those feelings but he has to learn how to translate those feelings into authentic friendship.

One of the questions I often ask a man just beginning therapy, I will say to him, "Have you had the experience of being sexually attracted to a guy but when you got to know him as a person and a friend, the sexual attraction disappeared?" And they almost always say, "Yes." And I ask, "Why do you think that was so?"

They have no answer for it. Because they have translated the mystique and there is no more sexual energy there. It is now a friendship and when you develop that kind of brotherly feeling, the idea of having sex is absurd. That's exactly the process they have to go through time and time again until all men seem like just other guys and there is nothing sexual about them. **GN**

Same-Sex Marriage

Continued from page 19

"And such *were some of you*," he notes. "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (verse 11).

"And such *were some of you*" is in the past tense. The implication of this is clear: There were people in this Greek-speaking congregation, in a part of the world where homosexual acts were typically considered normal, who came out of their homosexual practices upon repentance and were able to overcome their desires.

What happens when society rejects God?

Although homosexuality is common to all cultures, it is in the Western democracies that the gay movement is most vocal. This was not the case even 50 years ago. This could mean that there are more people with homosexual leanings today than there were then, although militant gays would argue that it simply reflects progress made by them in gaining societal acceptance.

The truth, however, is that the greater numbers can easily be explained by the fact that the traditional family has progressively broken down in the last four decades with easier divorce and greater promiscuity. Absent or distant fathers are more common now than ever before, creating conditions in which the factors that may lead to homosexuality can flourish.

Writing to the church in Rome, Paul wrote a passage of Scripture that is quite applicable today. He showed a certain progression that takes place in human thinking that flows from man's rejection of God.

"... Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves . . .

"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which

are not fitting" (Romans 1:21-28).

What this passage shows is that man progressively moves farther and farther away from God's way of thinking when he rejects the Bible. Our societies testify to this fact. Since the theory of evolution gained popularity a century and a half ago, Western nations have progressively distanced themselves from God. Now the thinking of most people is warped, not based on and often not even taking into consideration godly values or biblical teaching.

The theory of evolution—and its attendant arguments that there is no such thing as a Creator and that the Bible is merely a collection of myths—has affected man's thinking to the point of acceptance of gay marriage. It has taken a long time, yes, but the link is there. When people believe that human beings are nothing more than highly evolved animals, there is no basis for saying "no" to same-sex marriage—and many other things as well.

When God's Word has been rejected by government and banished from schools and public life, anything is acceptable. After gay marriage, can we expect to see pressure to legalize group marriage, incest and pedophilia? After all, the same rationale the U.S. Supreme Court used in striking down state laws against sodomy also applies to these sins.

Collectively, Western society is heading down the same road as ancient Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities that God destroyed for their varied sins—one of which was homosexuality, Sodom giving its name to *sodomy*. Yet individually, everyone has the opportunity to *repent and come out of* this society's sliding standards and morals, to embrace *God's way* and fight, with His help, against any tendencies that do not conform to His law. This is the only way to true happiness and fulfillment. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Our Creator, in His Word, repeatedly tells us that His laws are given for our good, that they will bring blessing when obeyed and prevent the painful consequences that come from ignoring and flaunting them. To learn how these laws could transform our world and show us the way to truly abundant living, request our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Making Life Work*.

Those who are struggling with same-sex attraction (or would like to help someone who is) can request a free subscription to *Anchor: A Publication of Hope for Individuals Struggling With Homosexuality* by visiting its Web site at www.anchorhelp.com.

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

www.gnmagazine.org

The Biblical Festivals That Teach Us About Jesus Christ

Few people are aware of the seven festivals God reveals in the Bible. Even fewer are aware that they center around and teach us a great deal about Jesus Christ and His role in God's plan for all mankind.

by Mario Seiglie

The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts" (Leviticus 23:2). Sounds impressive, doesn't it? God Almighty saying in Scripture, "*These are My Feasts.*"

Yet for most of traditional Christianity, these "feasts of the LORD" are thought to have been kept only by the Jews and are deemed meaningless for Christians. New religious holidays have been substituted that supposedly center on Jesus Christ.

How did all this come to be? What is the true meaning of these "feasts of the LORD"? Do they have anything to do with Jesus Christ, or is their symbolism limited only to long-ago events? If we truly want to find the answers in the manner God instructs us, then we should follow the advice He inspired: "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

The Bible gives us a good example of how to examine a belief to see if it is correct. When the apostle Paul traveled to Berea, he taught the Bereans certain things that must have been surprising to them. But they didn't close their minds or reject them. Instead, they were willing to give them a fair hearing by carefully examining the Scriptures.

What was the result? We read in Acts 17:11-12 that these men and women "were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed . . ."

So in examining the feasts of the Bible, will we give them a fair hearing as well? Do the Scriptures reveal whether these feasts teach us important truths about Jesus Christ?

The Passover: A Christ-centered feast?

The Passover is the first of God's annual feast days mentioned in Scripture. It commemorates the greatest event in the people of Israel's history—their miraculous liberation from Egypt. The second book of the Bible, Exodus, is dedicated to narrating this history. Observant Jews have been celebrating

this feast for more than 3,400 years.

But is this feast *only* to celebrate the Israelites' departure from Egypt? Does the New Testament have anything to say about the occasion?

this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Jesus then instituted the new symbols that represented not the sacrifice of a lamb, but



The apostle Paul described the festivals of the Bible as shadows of things to come, prophesied events in which Jesus Christ will play the central role.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus Christ coming to the Jordan River to be baptized, he exclaimed, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

In the Bible the lamb is a symbol of the Passover because a lamb was slain at the beginning of the Passover and eaten that night. The Israelites knew the blood of the lamb had protected them from the death of their firstborn on that first Passover night they kept in Egypt (Exodus 12:12-13).

In the New Testament, the Gospels record that Christ kept the Passover with His disciples several times. On the night before His death, Jesus knew He was fulfilling the symbolism of the Passover lamb in voluntarily giving His life for the sins of the entire world.

Notice Luke 22:14-16: "When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat

His *far greater* sacrifice. The Passover symbols would now represent Christ's *complete* sacrifice—the unleavened bread representing His sinless body that was beaten for us, and a sip of wine signifying the lifeblood He would shed to wash away our sins.

From then on, this feast took on a much greater new meaning to the Church. Instead of being abolished, this feast now revealed its true, ultimate meaning. The disciples now realized the Passover lamb was only *the physical forerunner of that perfect sacrifice* which was Jesus Christ. Now they would keep this feast with far greater significance and comprehension.

Paul explains the Christian Passover

Some 25 years after Christ's death, the apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian congregation—composed of believing Jews and gentiles alike—about the Passover:

“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed *Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*” (1 Corinthians 5:7, emphasis added throughout).

Paul understood this ancient feast of the Passover had now revealed its true meaning with Christ’s sacrifice. It was part of God’s plan for all of mankind that Jesus would come and sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world—and the Passover anticipated it.

So, far from being obsolete, the Passover was revealed to have a vastly important meaning for Christians, with Jesus Christ being at its very center.

The apostle Paul explained this new understanding of the Passover to the Corinthian brethren when he instructed them on how to observe it: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed [Passover night] took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’

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

So in the New Testament, the Passover becomes an annual reminder and symbol of Christ’s sacrifice for all of us.

God’s feasts reveal the future

The apostle Paul clearly understood that these biblical feasts were harbingers of what was to come in God’s master plan of salvation.

In a passage frequently misunderstood by many, Paul shows these feasts of the Lord were “shadows” of things *to come*—not of things *that have already happened*.

He warned the brethren not to be intimidated by some who were questioning their manner of keeping God’s feasts, as well as the Sabbaths, new moons, and eating and drinking. He said, “So let no one judge [criticize or condemn] you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come . . . Let no one cheat you of your reward . . .” (Colossians 2:16-18).

Paul was combating a group of ascetics who were introducing several strange doctrines, including worshiping angels (verse 18) and abstaining from wholesome food and drink (verse 21). He told the brethren to ignore them and continue observing what he had taught (and he certainly taught keeping

the Passover, as we have seen). Regrettably, the Colossian brethren had been cowed by these self-righteous intruders and were starting to shy away from observing these feasts.

So Paul mentions how important they are, as foreshadowing coming events in God’s plan for mankind. These events have not been completely accomplished so far, and many are still in the future.

Even the Passover’s symbolism was not completely fulfilled with Christ’s sacrificial death. Jesus Himself said He will again take the Passover with all the believers in God’s Kingdom (Mark 14:24-25; Luke 22:15-16)—an act that represents the ultimate triumph of His sacrifice when all believers join Him in His Kingdom.

The Days of Unleavened Bread: Is Christ at the center?

What about the Days of Unleavened Bread? Are they obsolete, solely an Old Testament symbol? Or are they also glorious shadows of things to come?

In the Old Testament, the Days of Unleavened Bread were understood to be a memorial of what occurred after the Passover night, when all the Egyptian firstborn died.

The next morning the Israelites packed their belongings and traveled to a nearby gathering place, ready for departure. That evening, they left Egypt by night. “It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:42).

Before that evening, one last thing occurred: “And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves” (verse 39).

This feast of the Lord is clearly spelled out in Leviticus 23:6: “And on the fifteenth day of the same month [as Passover] is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread.”

What does this feast have to do with Christ? What does it teach us about Him?

Unleavened bread—bread made without leaven—is mentioned in the Bible as something pure and unpolluted. All the grain sacrifices to be burned were to be made without leaven. “No grain offering which you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the LORD made by fire” (Leviticus 2:11).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul explains the spiritual symbolism of unleavened bread. Rebuking the Church members in Corinth for their acceptance of sin, he tells them: “Your glorying is not good. Do you not

know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

Yes, as Paul states, it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that removes our sins, and so we become “unleavened” in a spiritual sense. So, again, Jesus Christ is the focus of this feast of the Lord. The shadow of this feast points to what Jesus would do for all of us in cleansing us of sin and helping us to live sin-free lives.

Paul told the Corinthian brethren that they should continue to keep this feast that followed the Passover. “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (verse 8).

We see, then, that the *spiritual* meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread was revealed. Its deeper significance wasn’t ultimately found in what had occurred in the Old Testament, but in Jesus Christ, the sinless one, who purged our sins and gave us a chance to be spiritually “unleavened” before God. As the apostle Jude noted, Jesus “is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you *faultless* before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).

So Jesus Christ is at the center of this second feast of the Lord, too. He makes it possible for us to be spiritually “unleavened” before God.

Pentecost: Is Christ at the center of this feast?

In the Old Testament, the Feast of Pentecost is called the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22). This is because Leviticus 23:15-16 mentions counting seven weeks (or Sabbaths) or “fifty days” from the day the wave sheaf was offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Thus the feast acquired the name of “fiftieth,” which is what *Pentecost* means in the Greek language of the New Testament.

In the New Testament, 50 days after Christ had been resurrected, the first Christians were celebrating Pentecost, one of the feasts of the Lord. And, as recorded in Acts 2, what a day that was! On it they received the Holy Spirit from God. Suddenly the Old Testament Feast of Weeks had taken on a new meaning for them. The shadow of this feast had now become a reality! Pentecost would become the Church’s anniversary of the receiving of God’s Spirit.

Jesus Christ revealed the significance of this feast by sending the Holy Spirit to His brethren in the faith. He had told them, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem

The 'Feasts of the Lord' in the Book of Acts

Regarding the feasts of the Lord, it is very instructive to study the history of the first 30 years of the Christian Church recorded in Scripture. What Holy Days did they keep? It's surprising how many of "the feasts of the Lord" are found in the book of Acts.

The first mention of God's feasts in the book of Acts is found in Acts 2:1: "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." This day of Pentecost is one of God's feasts found in Scripture.

Then in Acts 12, two of "the feasts of the Lord" are mentioned—the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:3-4). Peter was miraculously freed from his chains at that time, and the Church rejoiced over this liberation. Many would have remembered that during this day, the Israelites were also freed from their Egyptian bondage.

Later Luke, in describing his travels with Paul, mentions sailing after the Days of Unleavened Bread were over, showing they had stayed to observe them in Philippi before continuing their trip (Acts 20:6).

Moreover, Luke records Paul "hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16). If these feasts were only for the Jews and abolished for Christians, they certainly would not have been mentioned as important for Paul and his party.

Finally, we see Luke mentioning another feast, the Day of Atonement, in their travels: "Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over . . ." (Acts 27:9). "The Fast" is referring to the Day of Atonement, the only day in Scripture commanded by God to be observed with a fast (Leviticus 23:27).

So we find not an inkling in the book of Acts—a chronicle of the first 30 years of Church history—that the feast days had been changed or abolished, or other days substituted in their place. Rather, they assumed a much greater meaning to the Christian community.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* confirms this, stating that "the first Christians . . . continued to observe the Jewish festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed" (11th edition, vol. 8, p. 828).

until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49; compare John 16:7).

God's Spirit plays a crucial role in the life of Christians today as it did then. When a person receives God's Spirit upon repentance and baptism, that Spirit begins a process of spiritual transformation in the person's life, a transformation the Bible calls *conversion* (to learn more, request or download the free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*).

Through this process, we shed our own way of thinking and living and allow Jesus Christ's attitude and way of life to guide everything we do. Paul described this life-transforming change in Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (King James Version).

Thus we see that Jesus is at the center of the Feast of Pentecost as well. Yet the ultimate fulfillment will only be realized after He returns to earth to establish God's Kingdom, when *all* will have access to God's Spirit. So this feast should still be kept as a memorial and a shadow until its purpose is completely accomplished.

Do we find the first-century Church continuing to keep Pentecost? In the book of Acts, we read of the apostle Paul hurrying to be in Jerusalem to keep this feast with the brethren. "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16).

Even in one of Paul's epistles in which he writes so much about the gospel message, he refers to his plans to remain in Ephesus to observe Pentecost with the Church members there before traveling to Corinth.

He writes: "I do not want to see you now

just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost" (1 Corinthians 16:7-8, New Revised Standard Version).

The Feast of Trumpets: Is this a Christ-centered feast?

The next biblical feast is referred to in the Bible as the Feast of Trumpets. It is "a holy convocation commemorated with trumpet blasts" (Leviticus 23:24, NRSV). God said when the trumpets were blown, "you will be remembered before the LORD your God, and you will be saved from your enemies" (Numbers 10:9).

Is the Feast of Trumpets also a shadow of Jesus Christ and His role in things to come?

In the New Testament, the symbolism of the trumpet is mentioned by Jesus. "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:30-31).

Often in the New Testament the sound of trumpets is tied to Christ's coming. Notice Paul's description of the resurrection of the dead at the time a great trumpet announces Christ's return: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

We find this again described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

So Christ will ultimately fulfill the symbolism behind the Feast of Trumpets. He is the center of this foreshadowing feast too. At His second coming, the trumpet shall sound, announcing the arrival of the King of Kings. Loud voices proclaim, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).

But until the sound of the trumpet is heard, this feast is still pointing to the future, and its meaning is still to be fulfilled—with Jesus at its center.

The Day of Atonement: Is Christ involved in its meaning?

Perhaps the most unusual of the biblical feasts is the Day of Atonement. In Old Testament times, it included an elaborate ritual described in Leviticus 16. The high priest was to present two male goats, the first of which was sacrificed for the nation's sins (verse 15). Then, after the sins of the nation were symbolically placed on the other goat, it was expelled into the desert to a life of wandering (verses 21-22).

What does the Day of Atonement reveal about Jesus Christ's roles? Is He also at the center of this feast?

The Bible is full of rich symbolism, and the New Testament Church quickly realized Christ in His first coming was at the center of the feasts of the Lord. Just as He was described as being "our Passover" and "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8), so they came to understand that He was at the center of the Day of Atonement. How? He fulfilled the role of the male goat slain for the sins of Israel and carried outside the camp (Leviticus 16:27).

We read in Hebrews 13 about the Day of Atonement, and Christ being symbolic of the male goat and other animals slain on that day as sin offerings. "For the bodies of those

animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate [of the city of Jerusalem]" (verses 11-12).

We should consider that while Christ has already been sacrificed, the atonement His sacrifice provides has not yet been applied to all of Israel. That will happen upon Israel's repentance at Christ's second coming.

Not only does the Day of Atonement depict Christ's sacrifice for sin and a true spiritual reconciling of the people with God, but Christ is directly involved in the symbolism of the other male goat that was cast out into the desert by a strong man (Leviticus 16:21).

The second goat, over which the sins of the Israelites were confessed, represented the *instigator* of those sins—none other than Satan the devil.

At Christ's second coming, He will instruct a powerful angel to bind Satan and cast him into a place of restraint for 1,000 years, exiling him from mankind just as the live goat was exiled from the Israelite camp on the Day of Atonement. "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:1-2).

So Christ plays a dual role in the symbolism of the Day of Atonement. He is sacrificed as the first goat for the sins of the people, the atonement of which is yet to be applied to all Israel upon the nation's repentance at His return. And He will also be involved, as King of Kings, in banishing Satan at that time to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Feast of Tabernacles:

How is Christ the center of this feast?

Next is the sixth biblical feast, the Feast of Tabernacles. In the Old Testament, it was kept to remind the Israelites of all of God's miraculous interventions during the 40-year period in the wilderness. "All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 23:42-43).

What does the Feast of Tabernacles have to do with Jesus Christ? Jesus is recorded to have kept this feast in John 7:2-36. The symbol of the tabernacle in the New Testament is rich with meaning.

During Christ's earthly ministry, the apostle John mentions that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Greek term for "dwelt" here actually means that He "tabernacled" among us. Just as Jesus Christ

as the Creator God of the Old Testament (John 1:1-3, 10; Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16) "tabernacled" with the Israelites in the wilderness, He now did so with His people in His physical life many centuries later.

The apostle Paul says that the Israelites in the wilderness all "drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4, New International Version).

At Christ's second coming, He will again "tabernacle" with those who are saved. He will dwell with His people for a thousand years, and this 1,000-year rule of Jesus Christ over the earth is the ultimate fulfillment of this feast.

"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

So Christ is definitely at the center of this feast too—as the ruler who "tabernacles" with His people for a thousand years.

The Last Great Day

The Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days. Then, on the eighth day, there followed another, separate feast day, the last of the biblical feasts (Leviticus 23:36).

What does this day have to do with Jesus Christ?

In John 7, an account of Jesus Christ's last Feast of Tabernacles on earth, we find Jesus declaring the significance of its conclusion. "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37-38).

He was talking about His return to earth, when He will freely offer the Holy Spirit to those who will believe in Him. Jesus died for all of mankind, but only a fraction have ever had the opportunity to know about Him and accept His offer of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Yet during Christ's 1,000-year reign, all of mankind will be offered God's Spirit. And beyond that, the Bible reveals there will come a future time when Christ will offer it to those who rise up in a resurrection of the dead from all past ages. In Revelation 20, we read what happens after the Millennium (pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles) is completed:

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the

dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (Revelation 20:11-12).

This period is also called the White Throne Judgment, and it is Christ who has been appointed to judge all of mankind (John 5:26-27; Romans 14:10). This does not mean immediate condemnation but a judgment *period*, since the Book of Life is opened—meaning an opportunity is opened to receive God's Spirit and have one's name written *into* it. The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:3 of those "who labored with me in the gospel . . . and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life."

So Christ will also carry out the central role of this final feast, that of lovingly and mercifully offering the multitudes of the unformed and the deceived an opportunity for conversion and salvation and to have their names inscribed in the Book of Life.

Thus, the seven feasts of the Lord are "a shadow of things to come," and Jesus Christ is at the center of all of them. Yet He has not brought them to ultimate fulfillment; that will only occur in the coming Kingdom of God.

Yes, Christ is our Passover, He is the Unleavened Bread that purifies us, the Giver of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the coming King whose arrival is announced by the blast of the trumpets, the one who banishes Satan for a thousand years, and who tabernacles with man as King of kings. Finally, He is to judge mankind and offer the great majority an opportunity to have their names written in the Book of Life.

This is why God's Church kept these feasts as shown in the New Testament (see "The Feasts of the Lord" in the Book of Acts" on page 25). This is why these holy feasts are still to be kept—to remind us of the central role Jesus Christ has in carrying out in the plan of God. Isn't it about time you started keeping them yourself? **GN**

Recommended Reading

Traditional Christianity has substituted its own days of worship for the biblical feast days that teach us so much about Jesus Christ and the future God has in store for the entire world. If you'd like to learn more about God's feasts, request or download your free copy of *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. To learn about the surprising origins of society's most popular holidays, request *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Really Matter Which Days We Keep?*



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

'Some Things Are Better Than Money'

An unexpected turn of events can sometimes teach us a valuable lesson.

by Rex Sexton

“Sixty-two and a half, who’ll give sixty-three? Will ya say sixty-three? SOLD for sixty-two and a half!” blared the words of the auctioneer over the loudspeaker. Bridgette turned around against the wall of old worn boards and buried her face in her hands. I tried to put my arm on my daughter’s shoulder to console her. When she looked up, I could see tears streaming down her cheeks from her big brown eyes.

“I only got barely a hundred dollars for my lambs, Dad,” she mumbled. “I won’t have enough money for the school clothes I had picked out.” She tried to hide her face in her arms so the other people around wouldn’t see her crying.

We were at Woody’s Auction just east of Woodland, Washington. It was late August, just before the school year started. Bridgette, 11 years old, was going into the sixth grade in just a few days. Back in April we had bought two newborn lambs for her to raise. Bridgette’s plan was to raise them during the summer and then sell them, using the money for school clothes.

The lamb market had been good for a month, with most butcher-ready lambs bringing almost a dollar per pound. The lambs were 100 pounds each the morning we loaded them in the trailer behind the minivan and drove to Woody’s. Bridgette had figured out exactly how to spend her anticipated \$200 on the clothes she wanted for school. It would be just enough.

When we brought the newborn lambs home in April, they were small and awkward, but cuddly and lovable. We made a pen in the garage out of refrigerator boxes and filled it with straw for them.

Bridgette had to mix powdered milk several times each day and feed them out of a soda bottle fitted with a large rubber nipple. She and her best friend Jeanne even slept in the pens for a few nights with the lambs so they wouldn’t cry.

After a few weeks the lambs became attached to Bridgette and, as the old nursery rhyme goes, they followed her wherever she went. They would run and play in the yard and eat grass. They loved to push with their heads against a hand or leg. We never had to keep them fenced in because they stayed

near the house waiting for Bridgette to come out and play with them.

One day, because it was so hot outside, she and Jeanne decided to give them a haircut with a pair of scissors. Needless to say, this didn’t work out too well. The lambs ended up looking like some sort of sculptured carpeting with random pieces missing. The entire family had a good laugh.

As the day to sell the lambs drew near, Bridgette spent lots of private time with them. They would nuzzle her and sit beside her in the grass. She mentioned



to her mother several times that she didn’t like to think about them being butchered and eaten. Her mother had grown up on a farm and raised many animals, so she was able to identify with what Bridgette was feeling and explain to her God’s purpose for farm animals.

The day before going to the auction I had called to see what recent prices were. The auctioneer mentioned that the buyers from the meat-packing houses had recently driven the prices up and he expected a good sale. What he didn’t know, however, was that on the same day we planned to sell our lambs, another large sale was scheduled in another city that would attract all the packing-house buyers. Buyers would be sparse at Woody’s.

As the lambs were ushered out into the sale pen and the auction started, I felt a sense of pride in my daughter and her summer’s work. I was sure this would be a great learning experience for her. But the price started low, about 40 cents per pound, and crept up rather slowly. I knew quickly that the meat buyers were absent.

Trying to comfort Bridgette as she cried, I had an idea. I would go to the high bidder

on the lambs, buy them back from him and take them to Salem the next week so Bridgette could get a better price. I saw him standing outside the old auction building—an old, worn barn that had been made into an auction arena. I approached him and explained the situation regarding my daughter and how she was sobbing. He didn’t answer, except to ask me to have my daughter come out to talk to him by his old red pickup truck.

Bridgette walked over to the truck and sat beside this kindly, gray-haired gentleman dressed in overalls who had bought the lambs. He was obviously an experienced grandfather. They talked for a while and she calmed down, then went back to our van.

The man then came over to me and explained what he had told her. “I knew she had probably grown attached to the lambs like my daughters used to do,” he explained. “So I asked her if it would make her feel better to know that I was not going to butcher the lambs, but that I just needed them to keep down the blackberries and brush on my place.”

He said that when he told her the lambs were not going to die but would have a long, happy life on his farm, everything changed. She was satisfied with the sale.

I went back to the van, opened the door, and sat in the driver’s seat. I then heard words that I will never forget: “Some things are better than money.”

At 11 years old my daughter had learned a lesson that so few people today seem to understand. Society at times sets up money as the only thing to strive for, the ultimate measuring stick of success and source of happiness. But money as a source of real happiness is a mirage. As wise King Solomon pronounced years ago, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

Bridgette was not able to purchase all the clothes she had picked out for school that year. Some days she had to wear her older things. But I’m sure that as she sorted through her closet in the morning, she occasionally thought of her lambs living a happy life just a few miles away. She no doubt whispered to herself, “Some things are better than money.” **GN**



Letters From Our Readers

“The Bible Was Right After All”

I want to thank you for the article “The Bible Was Right After All” in the July-August issue. It is rare to see a positive article on the big bang theory by a conservative Christian publication. Many make the mistake of assuming that the big bang is weak or anti-biblical and lump it into the category of naturalistic evolution. Thanks for not making that mistake.

G.M., Warrensburg, Missouri

“Noah’s Ark: Was It Possible?”

Recently I read an article about Noah’s Ark in *The Good News*. I’m afraid it gave rise to more questions than answers. The author makes the claim that “The ark did not need to carry every species, only every biblical kind.” He goes on to describe how hundreds of varieties of domestic pigeons derived from the rock pigeon. Isn’t this inadvertently supporting the evolutionary theory?

J.H., Internet

Within the genetic code for each “kind,” as the term is used in Genesis 1, great variety is possible. Consider the enormous variety unlocked in the selective breeding of dogs. This is not Darwinian evolution, but a phenomenon that God built into each distinct species. Remember dogs cannot breed with cats. Within each distinct species is the capacity for great variety, and it is to this that the author referred.

Growing in knowledge and truth

My wife and I, both in our 50s, believe that there has to be a superior force. We do not believe that things just evolved. Since receiving your magazine I have learned much with each issue. So much of the contents make perfect sense allowing for history as we know it. Neither my wife nor I are denominational. However, we both accept Christianity as we have learned it over the years. I would like to be a better human being and a better Christian.

R.J.B., Camberley, England

To confirm some of your basic beliefs, we recommend that you request our free booklet Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? and Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe? Also, to become a better Christian, you may wish

to request The Road to Eternal Life.

Cancel my subscription immediately

I rejected Christianity years ago. I decided to open my mind, however, and read your materials. Thank you for confirming what I knew all along: Christianity is a myth, promotes hatred and division, encourages hypocrisy and intolerance and robs those who cannot think for themselves. The Bible is 100 percent man-created. Please remove my name from your mailing list.

J.H., Greenville, South Carolina

We would hope that you would remain open-minded long enough to read the free booklets Is the Bible True?, Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? and Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe? We also recommend that you download from our Web site The Bible and Archaeology, a 24-part article series from The Good News documenting some of the hundreds of archaeological discoveries that verify the Bible’s astounding accuracy.

Please remove our address from your mailing list, effective immediately. We are appalled by the way your magazine twists the primary aspects of God’s Word. Your article on heaven is pure heresy.

Mr. & Mrs. A.D., Brazil

We have received many pro and con comments on The Good News article, “Do Good People Really Go to Heaven When They Die?” Some readers had specific questions that we have addressed by sending a personal letter and/or the free booklet, Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach? We appreciate the opportunity to explain honest objections.

Reader from Zimbabwe

Since I got hold of your subscription form from a bookstore, I have never been happier and wiser. *The Good News* is so informative with well-researched articles and stories. Being a writer and journalist, I find your periodical very handy. Your magazine not only focuses on Christian matters, but backs up those with detailed accounts of historical and current world events, as prophesied in the Holy Bible.

R.K., Zimbabwe

Seeking the right church

There wasn’t any religion throughout my childhood or much of my adult life. God wasn’t any part of my family’s foundation. I am now receiving your *Bible Study Course* as well as *The Good News*. The magazine opened up many doors, entirely new, to me. Every word printed is read page by page. Every lesson is also devoured word by word! I send for all the recommended readings.

I have several things in my life that need work and I need help to change all of it. This will be accomplished through prayer and God’s power to help me become righteous. Finding the right church has been a very difficult task. Please, if you have any church near me, let me know the address.

D.S.A., Exira, Iowa

New donor

The Good News is a beacon of truth in a murky world, a well-balanced presentation of God’s Word and Christ’s purpose. Please accept the enclosed contribution towards expenses.

L.M., Royston, England

Question about tithing

My husband and I have been attending a United Church of God congregation since earlier this year. We definitely want to continue to be a part of this congregation and wish to begin tithing. We wondered if tithing is not done until we are members of the Church (meaning after baptism) or if it is appropriate at this time. At the very least we may submit donations to assist in the wonderful work you are doing to spread the good news. I would also like to request the booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?*

Reader from Illinois

Tithing is a way all people may express honor and gratitude to God for the abundant blessings He gives us. Our reader services staff has mailed the booklet you requested.

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).



Questions & Answers

Q: How do people truly know if God is calling them?

G.M., Republic of Ireland

A: Your question is important, because nothing is more important than God's calling. Consider the majesty and greatness of what it means. The apostle Peter referred to this magnificent calling in his first letter: "... You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him *who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10, emphasis added throughout).

Peter's inspired description of the Christian calling helps us to comprehend the majesty of God's salvation. This great calling is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins and the forgiveness He made freely available.

The apostle Paul underscored Peter's approach by describing the Church (those chosen ones whom God has called out of this world) as a spiritual building joined together and growing into a holy temple in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:20-22).

However, it is God the Father who initially calls His chosen ones out of this world of spiritual darkness into His marvelous light (John 6:44, 65). One of the signs that God

may be calling you is that you are beginning, however gradually, to truly understand the Scriptures with a depth and dimension that you never experienced before. You have begun to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 13:10-11).

If God is calling you, you also will have awakened to the need for change in your personal life, to bring it into line with the godly standards and values shown in the Scriptures—"to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1, New International Version). The Bible refers to this process as repentance. Luke called it "repentance to life" (Acts 11:18).

Obviously there is much more to this miraculous process of the Christian calling than we can cover here. To learn more, request our comprehensive booklet that explains how acceptance of that calling ultimately leads to salvation and eternal life in the Kingdom of God. This free booklet, *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, expounds these concepts in much greater detail. The title of the first chapter is: "Who Are God's 'Called, Chosen and Faithful' People?" We encourage all of our readers to request or download this crucial booklet.

Q: If we go to "sleep" after death, awaiting a resurrection, what happens to a person who is cremated?

T.D., Raleigh, North Carolina

A: The Bible does indeed use the analogy of sleep to describe the state of the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 15:51, etc.). Those who have died are totally unaware of the passage of time and feel no pain or sorrow (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). They will be "awakened" at the time of the resurrection. But this does not require that their physical bodies persist until that time.

Scripture reveals what happens to our physical bodies after death. Genesis 3:19 tells us that we will return to dust. If moisture and air are present, even our bones will eventually disintegrate. In the final analysis, there is no difference between the dust of decomposition and the ashes of cremation.

Neither will have any effect whatever on God's sure promise to resurrect *all* human beings in due course according to His plan and purpose (1 Corinthians 15:22; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:4-6, 11-14)—which must include those who have been cremated.

Faithful Christians will be resurrected with spirit bodies (compare 1 Corinthians 15:35, 45, 49). The rest of mankind who died in past ages, beginning with the nation of Israel, will be reconstituted in the flesh (see Ezekiel 37) before being offered immortality.

On the overall questions of death and the future, you'll find more details spelled out in our free booklets *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

African Genocide

Continued from page 13

in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God" (Ezekiel 36:26-28).

This passage speaks specifically of the future of the people of Israel, but God's promises will be extended to all humanity, because He wants all men to have that same change of heart and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4).

What a wonderful scene is painted in those words! The self-destructive ignorance of humanity will be replaced by the knowledge of God, by the way of love for God, for each other and for all of creation. These and other prophecies reveal how humanity truly will finally learn its lesson, and the reward will be peace and fulfillment for everyone on the earth. It is a future worth

waiting for with joyful anticipation!

Why not get a head start?

Not everyone, however, has to wait for the future to experience the change of heart promised in Ezekiel 36. God is calling some people now, earlier than most of the people on the earth, to learn a new way of thinking, a new way of life.

The Bible says that even though the old serpent of the Garden of Eden, God's adversary, Satan the devil, has seduced and deceived the whole world (Revelation 12:9), God is calling some now. He is opening their minds to understand the truth about what's going on here on earth and what will happen in the future.

In John 6:44 Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." At the present stage of human history, only those

who are called by the Father can truly come to Jesus Christ.

If this knowledge intrigues and excites you, it may be that God is calling *you* now and offering you the opportunity to experience the change of heart that occurs when He begins working in us. Why not explore this further and find out?

The publishers of *The Good News* offer many other free publications to help you learn what the Bible says about accepting God's calling. We also have trained ministers available to visit with you and answer your questions if you so desire.

One day humanity will learn its lesson the hard way. But then God will intervene to show mankind a much better way—*His* way. Then violence like that which occurred in Rwanda will forever be a thing of the past. That wonderful knowledge is truly *good news!* **GN**

Making Peace

What should you do when friends are at each other's throats?

by Ken Treybig

Meagan and Julia had been best friends. Now they wouldn't even speak to each other. After Ben spent time talking to Meagan, Julia was furious. Hadn't she made it clear to Meagan that she liked Ben? Every time Julia saw Meagan walking her direction, Julia would turn away and get busy with something else—making sure their eyes never met.

One time Meagan happened to see Julia first and realized their paths might cross. Then she saw Julia notice her and turn away and so knew she was being slighted by her former best friend. Now she was even more hurt and started watching for ways that she could slight or avoid Julia. Before long it was a full-scale war of wits. Was this friendship permanently on the rocks? Was there no way to save the relationship from the junk heap?

What would you do if you were one of these girls? Or what if you were friends with one or both of them and you were now caught in the middle? How could you avoid being a casualty on the battlefield of their personal war? Is there anything you could do to help defuse the situation and get them to be friends again?

Probably everyone reading this article has found himself or herself in some variation of this scenario at one time or another. How can such a sticky situation be resolved?

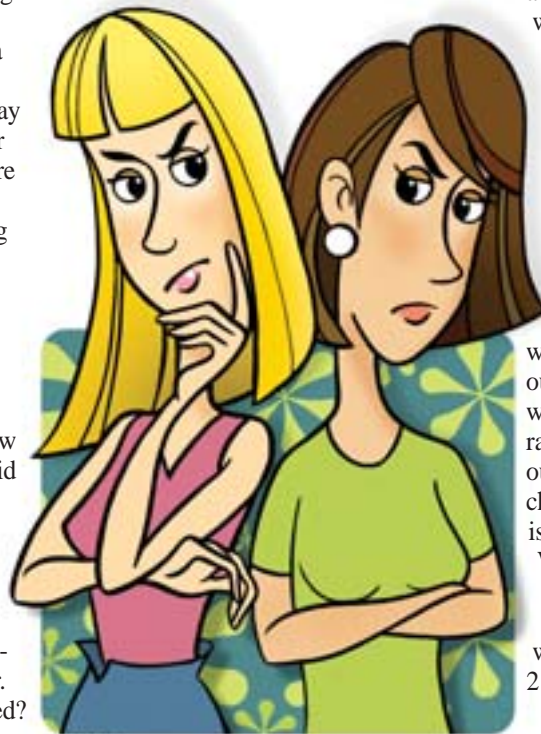
There is a short answer and a long answer to these questions. The short answer is that not every situation will be resolved in a positive way. Sometimes a person just will not be reconciled to someone he or she views as an enemy. However, many situations like this can be turned around. If we value our friends, it would certainly be worthwhile to make every effort to restore the friendship. In fact, according to God, we have an obligation to see if we can make peace.

Commanded to reconcile

From the very beginning, God showed His desire for human beings to have friends. When Adam was all alone in the world as the only human alive, God said, "It isn't good for man to be alone; I will make a companion for him, a helper suited to his

needs" (Genesis 2:18, Living Bible). God's intent is for human beings to have companions and friends. Of course, the friend and companion God made for Adam was Eve, who became his wife.

But in His teachings, Jesus showed that the intent to have and maintain friendships extends far beyond just one's spouse. Notice



How can you avoid being a casualty on the battlefield of personal wars between friends? Is there anything you can do to help defuse the situation?

His instruction in Matthew 5:23-24: "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and suddenly remember that a friend has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar and go and apologize and be reconciled to him, and then come and offer your sacrifice to God" (Living Bible).

Resolving a disagreement is so important to God that He included this instruction when He was explaining that even the feeling of hatred toward another is a spiritual violation of the commandment against murder (verses

21-22). A few verses earlier in the same chapter Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who make peace, saying they will be called the children of God (verse 9).

Keys to peacemaking

So if making peace is so important, what steps can we take to make peace with a friend who has something against us? Or what can we do to help two of our friends who are at odds with each other? At times it may seem the situation is hopeless and that reconciliation is impossible. However, one of the wonderful things about being human is the ability to change our minds when we are shown that our conclusion or position on an issue is not appropriate.

Changing our minds, though, is not an automatic response. We usually think we are right about our decisions, and once our feelings are hurt we tend to think the worst of the other person. Our minds will race to find real or imagined reasons why our feelings of hurt are justified. Therefore changing our minds, at least when conflict is involved, is not the easiest thing to do.

We must be willing to admit that our conclusions may not be the correct ones. In the Bible, God refers to this as a soft or willing heart or mind (1 Chronicles 28:9; 2 Chronicles 34:27).

So what can we do to make peace?

Here are some good strategies:

- **Apologize.** There are very few acts that do more to strengthen and heal a relationship than sincerely saying, "I'm sorry." If we have done something wrong that causes the problem in the relationship, we need to admit our fault. Most people learn from an early age to cover or deny faults. So readily admitting when we have caused someone hurt is a welcome change to many. Even if we think we have not done anything wrong and the person misunderstood us, we can still apologize for hurting their feelings. This

lets the other person know we realize they were hurt by whatever took place.

• **Reiterate the importance of the friendship.** Along with an apology, it helps to assure the other person of the value you place on the friendship. Knowing the other person values the friendship and is sorry for any harm he or she has caused to the friendship helps most people be more willing to follow the instruction the apostle

• **Be perceptive.** When people feel they have been slighted or hurt in some way, there is usually a change in their facial expression or tone of voice. Those changes, however, are often quite small at the start, so if you are not perceptive, you will let them go right past you. Then the hurt will usually begin to build in their mind and the walls of their defenses will grow higher and harder for you to overcome. The time to begin making

If we value our friends, it would certainly be worthwhile to make every effort to restore the friendship. In fact, according to God, we have an obligation to see if we can make peace.

Paul gives us. We are to forgive when someone asks for it, realizing God has forgiven us a huge debt by the death of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:32).

• **Help the person see another perspective.** If you are trying to heal a relationship between two friends, like the one described at the start of this article, providing another perspective can be a means to help restore the relationship. This is especially true if you have talked to both friends and know they still value the friendship. If you know the hurt was unintentional, try to help both parties come to see that fact. For example, in the scenario at the start, you could try to help Julia come to recognize that Meagan didn't begin the conversation with Ben—he started it. She didn't talk with him to hurt Julia's feelings. She was simply being civil and not rude to Ben.

• **Give the benefit of the doubt.** If you are the one who has been hurt, sometimes the best way to resolve the situation is to follow the advice of Proverbs 19:11, which says, "Those with good sense are slow to anger, and it is their glory to overlook an offense" (New Revised Standard Version).

Be a peace preserver

Let's consider one more point. Proverbs 18:19 says: "It is harder to win back the friendship of an offended brother than to capture a fortified city. His anger shuts you out like iron bars" (Living Bible).

Once people head down the mental path of thinking you have purposely hurt them, convincing them otherwise is an uphill battle. That means we would be much better off to prevent the offense in the first place—or at least limit how far down that path of thinking our friend travels. The sooner we can resolve the situation and restore the friendship, the better, as Matthew 5:25 illustrates.

So how can that be accomplished? Here are a few keys.

peace is when you first perceive the problem. The sooner you begin, the easier it will be.

• **Use humor.** When you see that someone is being hurt by an event or comment, sometimes turning the offending comment into humor, or directing the same comment toward yourself in a humorous way, can help others see the issue is not worth getting angry about. Obviously some have a greater gift for this than others, but humor can go a long way in relieving stress—including the stress that can come between friends in a relationship.

• **Use distraction.** Another tool that can sometimes blunt the pain of an offending comment or event is to quickly turn the attention to another subject or event. Not making a big issue of a small item that may be an irritation can help others not dwell on that item. You will need to continue to be perceptive, however, and if the person shows signs of being hurt by the event, it is better to address it than to just ignore it.

• **Seek resolution early.** If you find yourself in a situation where humor or distraction do not resolve the problem, but only mask it, and the other person is obviously bothered, you need to seek to resolve the issue as soon as possible. Often the longer a person has to "stew" over a hurt, the deeper the hurt goes and the harder the resolution. Once it's clear a person has truly been hurt and the peace really is shattered, you must begin to work to make peace instead of preserving it.

Being a peacemaker is a complicated subject—far beyond the scope of one short article. However, these points can help you at least get started down the road toward peace in your relationships. In doing so you will be following the example of Jesus Christ, whom Isaiah prophesied would be called the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). No wonder Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." **GN**



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Does life have a purpose? Does it have real meaning? Is life anything more than a brief span on earth, with nothing but eternity on either side of this physical existence?

This is the question of the ages, a riddle that has challenged human beings since they came to be. Why am I here? Why do I exist?

Thousands of years ago, the biblical King David looked up into the night sky and wrote down his thoughts regarding man's relationship to his Creator: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the

son of man that You visit him?"

David wondered about the purpose of man just as we do today. Every one of us was created for a purpose, but few understand what that great purpose is. *What Is Your Destiny?* will help you understand the incredible truth about *your* destiny! For your free copy, visit our Web site or contact any of our offices listed on page 2.

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