

The background of the cover is a composite image. The upper portion shows a vast galaxy with a bright central core and a spiral structure, set against a dark field of stars. The lower portion shows the curved horizon of Earth from space, with blue oceans and brownish-green landmasses visible. The text is overlaid on this background.

The Good News

July-August 2006

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

Our Amazing **Spaceship Earth**

Page 4

Can You Believe Both the Bible and Evolution? **10** • Is the New Testament a Fraud? **16**
What Motivates Ahmadinejad? **14** • Gambling: Why It's a Bet Nobody Wins **20**



Like many of you, I grew up in the early years of the space race. I remember as a boy sometimes standing in my backyard at night looking up with a flashlight, flicking it on and off, sending my own secret code out into the faraway stars. I was sure that somewhere up there some intelligent being would notice my little flashlight beam and recognize it as a friendly greeting from planet earth.

I assumed there must be millions of inhabited earthlike planets scattered through the heavens. After all, the movies and TV programs of the time routinely showed beings from outer space visiting our planet or our spacemen meeting other life-forms as they explored the galaxy.

For decades now, most scientists have assumed that uncountable planets inhabited by uncountable life-forms are scattered across the universe, just waiting for us to make contact with them or vice versa. Yet after we've spent years of effort and billions of dollars on projects

After we've spent billions listening for signals indicating intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, all we have detected is—nothing.

like the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) listening for signals indicating intelligent life, all we have detected is—*nothing*. Not a single sound anywhere indicating intelligent life out there. *Nothing*.

Could we really be all alone in the universe? In recent years several intriguing and important books have asked that question, among them such works as *The Creator and the Cosmos*, *Rare Earth*, *Nature's Destiny* and *The Privileged Planet*. They're fascinating reading. Written by authors from across the ideological spectrum, they essentially reach the same startling conclusion: *We shouldn't be here*.

Mathematically, it's simply impossible. When we consider the hundreds of factors required to produce life or a planet capable of sustaining life as we know it—factors as diverse as the decay rates of elements and the distance of a planet's orbit to its sun—and multiply them by the scientific and mathematical odds of those factors being right, it just doesn't work. *We shouldn't be here*.

For example, the honored British astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle calculated that the odds of only *one* factor necessary for life coming together by chance—the enzymes needed to perform the chemical functions needed to produce the most simple living creature—were one in 10^{40,000}. That's mathematical shorthand for 10 followed by 40,000 zeros, enough to fill roughly seven pages of this issue. For perspective, mathematicians consider any probability of less than one in 10⁵⁰ to be impossible.

We shouldn't be here. Yet here we are. And not only are we here, note the authors of *The Privileged Planet* (one of whom is interviewed in this issue), we are *perfectly positioned for scientific discovery of the universe around us*.

This sheds a whole new light on Romans 1:20: "From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God" (New Living Translation).

Do you want to know whether God exists? Go outside and look up into the night sky, He says. None of that came together by itself, out of nothing. Look around you at the beautiful planet that sustains us, He says. It also didn't come together by chance, out of nothing.

The evidence is mounting that there is only one valid scientific explanation for our existence—and the One who made us designed it all so that we would "have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God."

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

The Good News (ISSN: 1086-9514) is published bimonthly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 555 Techcenter Dr., Milford, OH 45150. © 2006 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Milford, Ohio 45150, and at additional mailing offices. Scriptural references are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

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

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

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

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

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

NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

United States: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax: (513) 576-9795 Web site: www.gnmagazine.org E-mail: info@ucg.org
Canada: United Church of God—Canada, Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada
Phone: (905) 876-9966, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (905) 876-0569 Web site: www.ucg.ca
Bahamas: United Church of God, P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: (242) 324-3169 Fax: (242) 364-5566
Martinique: Eglise de Dieu Unie—France, 127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France
Spanish-speaking areas: Iglesia de Dios Unida, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax: (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org

EUROPE

British Isles: United Church of God, P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England
Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 020-8386-1999 Web site: www.goodnews.org.uk
France: Eglise de Dieu Unie—France, 127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France
Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten, Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany
Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637
Italy: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy
Phone and Fax: (+39) 035 4523573 Web site: www.labuonanotizia.org E-mail: info@labuonanotizia.org
Netherlands: P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands
Scandinavia: Guds Enade Kyrka, P.O. Box 3535, 111 74 Stockholm, Sweden
Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 Fax: 0046 0142 10340 E-mail: sverige@ucg.org

AFRICA

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

PACIFIC REGION

Australia and Papua New Guinea: United Church of God—Australia
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202
Fax: 07 55 202 122 Web site: www.ucg.org.au E-mail: info@ucg.org.au
Fiji: United Church of God, P.O. Box 11081, Laucala Beach Estate, Suva, Fiji
New Zealand: United Church of God, P.O. Box 22, Auckland 1015, New Zealand
Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763
Tonga: United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 2617, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

ASIA

Philippines: P.O. Box 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines Phone and fax: +63 82 224-4444
Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444 Web site: www.ucg.org.ph E-mail: info@ucg.org.ph
All except Philippines: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax: (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org

ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.
Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax: (513) 576-9795 E-mail: info@ucg.org

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

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

Table of Contents



Amazing discoveries show earth is designed for life 4

Cover Feature

Our Amazing Spaceship Earth

Scientists have spent multiple years and many billions of dollars searching for life elsewhere in the universe, only to find that earth alone not only teems with life, but seems to be expressly designed for life. A growing body of evidence indicates that an amazing intelligence seems to be behind it all. What is that intelligence telling us? 4

Our Privileged Place in the Universe

The Good News interviews Dr. Jay Richards, coauthor of *The Privileged Planet*. Dr. Richards presents an intriguing argument—that not only is earth perfectly designed for life, but also for discovery of the universe. 8



What's behind the Iranian push for nukes? 14

Can You Believe Both the Bible and Evolution?

A number of the world's mainstream religions have come to accept Darwinian evolution as the explanation for our existence. But does Darwinism really square with the Scriptures? Can we believe both? 10

What Motivates Ahmadinejad?

Iran's president Ahmadinejad appears intent on developing nuclear weapons. In the West he is portrayed as a madman, but few realize the real motivating force behind his dream of triumphant Islam. 14

Is the New Testament a Fraud?

Recent books and movies have portrayed the formation of the New Testament as "history's greatest cover-up." Is it part of a conspiracy, or is it a true and accurate picture of Jesus Christ and His apostles? 16

Gambling: Why It's a Bet Nobody Wins

Compulsive gambling can and does destroy lives just like drug addiction and alcoholism. The growth of gambling by leaps and bounds is one more sign of the moral decline currently gripping many nations. 20

Fasting: A Spiritual Power Tool!

Three earlier articles in this series have covered prayer, Bible study and thinking or meditation. Along with those tools for spiritual growth, we need to frequently combine this fourth tool—fasting. 22

A Place Called Megiddo, Part 2

In last issue's article we raised the question of how today's political leaders could be deceived to fight Christ at His second coming. Could something at the ancient site of Megiddo lead to an answer? 25



Lessons from history from the site of Armageddon 25

Regular Features

World News and Trends	An overview of conditions around the world.	12
God, Science and the Bible	News from the world of science about God and the Bible.	19
Beyond Today	Television and radio log.	24
Letters From Our Readers	Readers of The Good News share their thoughts	28
Questions and Answers	Answers to readers' questions	29
Youth Focus From Vertical Thought	A Long Time From Now in a Galaxy Far, Far Away	30

Photos (from top): photo illustration by Shaun Venish/NASA, Newscom/LPI Photo/Mohammad Kheirkhah, Scott Ashley Cover, photo illustration by Shaun Venish/NASA

Our Amazing Spaceship Earth

Scientists have spent multiple years and billions of dollars searching for life elsewhere in the universe, only to find that earth alone not only teems with life, but seems to be expressly designed for life. An amazing intelligence seems to be behind it all. What is that intelligence telling us?

by Mario Seiglie

Have you ever dreamed of traveling through space? The prospects sound exciting to most people. Amazingly, we are *already* traveling through space—but without being aware of it! Planet earth can correctly be compared to a giant spacecraft carrying on board more than 6 billion people and billions more animals and plants. American scientist Buckminster Fuller coined the fitting term “Spaceship Earth” to describe our planet.

We are truly hurtling through space on this giant spacecraft called earth—at the incredible speed of 65,000 miles per hour! This is far faster than man’s speediest aircraft. At the same time, this space vehicle is spinning at more than 1,000 miles per hour. Every year we complete an entire circuit around the sun—a journey of more than *half a billion miles!*

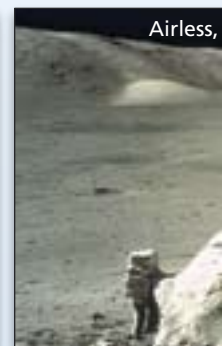
Yet perhaps the most amazing aspect of our voyage is *we don’t feel the trip at all*. Certainly as we travel in a car at 50 miles per hour, we can sense the velocity and see the scenery go by. But the paradox is, once we get out of the car and sit down, everything on the ground seems at rest—yet we are still traveling at an incredible speed through space.

If we finish our life’s journey with an average life span, we will have traveled around the sun some 76 times, and completed a trip of more than *38 billion miles—the equivalent of traveling several times to the planet Pluto and back!* All of this without ever feeling the velocity or being aware of the trip itself.

This is just one of the incredible features of our remarkable spaceship.

Our privileged planet

In the last 30 years scientific discoveries have undermined the idea, once popular among some scientists and scholars, that we live on an unexceptional planet. This idea was summarized in the view of the late



astronomer Carl Sagan (of the famous TV series *Cosmos*), who spoke of “the *delusion* that we have some *privileged* position in the Universe” (*Pale Blue Dot*, 1994, p. 7, emphasis added throughout).

We have come quite far from the similar notion posed by philosopher Bertrand Russell that humanity is merely, as he put it, “a curious accident in a backwater” (*Religion and Science*, 1961, p. 222). As scientific discoveries have accumulated, planet earth has turned out to be not a backwater region, but instead a *very privileged* planet.

Astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez and philosopher Jay Richards recently wrote a book about the latest scientific findings that refute Sagan’s assertion that we live on an insignificant planet. They aptly titled the book *The Privileged Planet* (an interview with Dr. Richards begins on page 8).

Instead of a universe once thought to be possibly teeming with life, more and more scientists are now realizing the rare qualities of our terrestrial globe. Cosmologists Peter

Ward and Donald Brownlee recently wrote the book *Rare Earth: Why Complex Life Is Uncommon in the Universe* to explain some of our planet’s unique features and how difficult it would be to duplicate these conditions on some other planet.

Similarly, the influential science textbook *Earth* begins its introduction with a section titled “the uniqueness of the planet Earth” (1986, p. 3). So many factors have to be just right to duplicate the feats of our amazing Spaceship Earth that hope is slowly fading of ever finding intelligent life on other planets.

“From the seventeenth to the twentieth century,” explain Drs. Gonzalez and Richards, “many expected to find intelligent, even superior life on the Moon, Mars, and other planets in the Solar System . . . Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, despite PR blitzes from Martian-life enthusiasts, the search has moved from the planets to a few obscure outlying moons. At the same time, the aspirations have been substantially downgraded”

(*The Privileged Planet*, 2004, p. 253).

What are some of the remarkable features of our Spaceship Earth? Let's explore some of these characteristics so we can appreciate how carefully crafted it is. We can then ask, *Could all these precise conditions be only a lucky accident?* Hand-in-hand is another crucial question: *What is the ultimate purpose of our life's journey through space?*

Portholes to see beyond Spaceship Earth

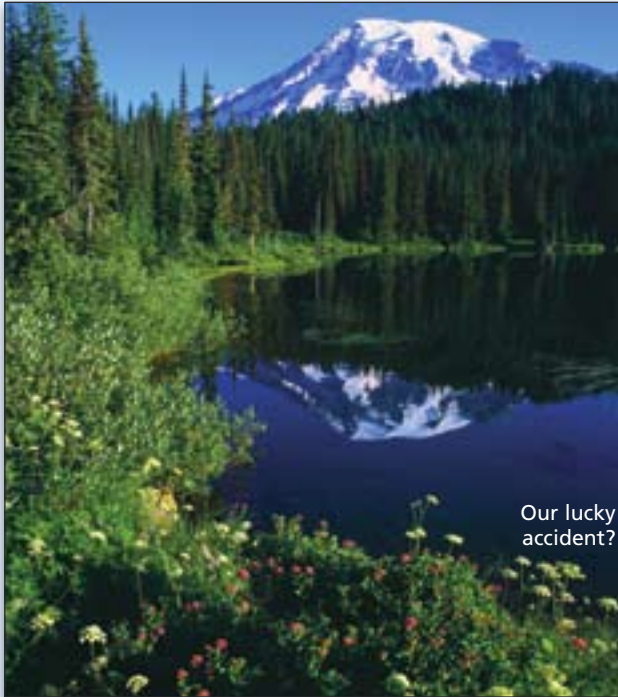
As every spaceship has a porthole to view



waterless wastes of the moon



radiation-soaked deserts of Mars



Our lucky accident?

oxygen for human beings and animal life and carbon dioxide and nitrogen for plants. It also provides the proper air pressure for living things, and the outer edge of this translucent shell is composed of an ozone layer that protects life from harmful ultraviolet rays.

Strange as it may sound, this canopy even comes equipped with a protective force field! It sounds like something out of the TV series *Star Trek*, but it's true. We have a magnetic field generated by the spinning iron core at the center of our planet that

laws. Although no one is seen physically aboard our spaceship who manages the system, our planet faithfully obeys the programmed, finely tuned commands of the myriad of physical laws and completes its year-long journey around the sun, dutifully returning to its starting point only to begin yet another circuit.

What keeps the earth in its orbit? It is mainly the gravitational force of the sun that keeps the planet on its circular path.

Truly, as the Bible says about our invisible and omnipotent God, "He hangs the earth on nothing" (Job 26:7). That "nothing" is outer space, and the earth is able to "hang" suspended on nothing through the unseen force of gravity.

In this cockpit, although not seen, are the equivalent of hundreds of elaborate dials, each regulating an aspect of our planet's features. Each dial has been carefully calibrated to permit life to flourish on the planet. You can't see the great Engineer who set up the system, but you can measure the precision of every setting—and each one is just right!

When Sir Fred Hoyle, the renowned British astrophysicist and mathematician, examined the different settings that regulate our planet and the rest of the universe, he marveled:

"A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a *superintellect has monkeyed with the physics, as well as the chemistry and biology* [of the universe], and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature . . . The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question" ("The Universe: Past and Present Reflections," *Engineering and Science*, November 1981).

Professor Robin Collins compares the earth's precise settings in this way: "I like to use the analogy of astronauts landing on Mars and finding an enclosed biosphere, sort of like the domed structure that was built in Arizona a few years ago.

"At the control panel they find that all the dials for its environment are set just right for life. The oxygen ratio is perfect; the temperature is seventy degrees; the humidity is fifty percent; there's a system for replenishing the air; there are systems for producing food, generating energy, and disposing of wastes.

"Each dial has a huge range of possible settings, and you can see if you were to adjust one or more of them just a little bit, the environment would go out of whack and life would be impossible" (quoted by Lee

Truly, our planet is not some lucky accident since the evidence shows it was carefully designed to be *inhabited* by mankind and all other forms of life.

the outside, so our atmosphere acts in the same way.

In fact, we have a much better window than an ordinary spacecraft. Our "window" on this Spaceship Earth is not limited to a certain viewing area, but actually covers *the entire planet*. It is like having a porous crystal 430 miles thick that allows everyone aboard to have a full view of everything outside our planet and yet still blocks out the airless outer space.

Some planets are covered in thick clouds that make it impossible to see out. But our atmosphere enables us to view and discover the universe around us. Our earth is thus an exploration vessel.

The transparent canopy covering the planet also houses a renewable supply of

deflects damaging cosmic rays and deadly solar winds. Without these features, life here would not be possible.

Last but not least, this marvelous canopy contains an automatically adjusting "curtain" to shade the terrestrial orb from too much light hitting its surface. This delicate shroud is formed by clouds, which act as moving shades that cover some 60 percent of the earth's surface at any given time.

What's in the cockpit?

What if we enter the cockpit of Spaceship Earth? What do we find?

Incredibly, no pilot is aboard, but instead we find an "autopilot" system governed by carefully adjusted physical

Grasping the Vastness of Our Universe

How vast is our universe? The distances in space are so great that we can only use the speed of light (186,000 miles per second) traveling *for one whole year* (a light year, about 5,879,000,000,000 miles) to measure them!

Robert Jastrow, a former head of NASA's Goddard Center, once used a clever comparison to help us grasp the immensity of the universe.

"An analogy," he says, "will help to clarify the meaning of these enormous distances. Let the sun be the size of an orange; on that scale of sizes the earth is a grain of sand circling in orbit around the sun at a distance of 30 feet; the giant planet Jupiter, 11 times larger than the earth, is a cherry pit revolving at a distance of . . . one city block; Saturn is another cherry pit two blocks from the sun; and Pluto, the outermost planet, is still another sand grain at a distance of ten city blocks from the sun.

"On the same scale the average distance between the stars is 2000 miles. The sun's nearest neighbor, a star called Alpha Centauri, is 1300 miles away. In the space between the sun and its neighbors there is nothing but a thin distribution of hydrogen atoms, forming a vacuum far better than any ever achieved on earth. The galaxy, on this scale, is a cluster of oranges separated by an average distance of 2000 miles, the entire cluster being 20 million miles in diameter.

"An orange, a few grains of sand some feet away, and then some cherry pits circling slowly around the orange at a distance of a city block. Two thousand miles away is another orange, perhaps with a few specks of planetary matter circling around it. That is the void of space" (*Red Giants and White Dwarfs*, 1990, p. 15). And this is nothing compared to the space between galaxies!

Yet to God, the entire universe is not that impressive. He says He stretches the entire heavens "like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in" (Isaiah 40:22). So as vast as the universe appears to be, it's not nearly as awesome as our great God, who created it for His own pleasure and purpose.



Thousands of galaxies appear in this photograph taken by the Hubble Space Telescope.

Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*, 2004, p. 130).

Everything—*everything down to the tiniest details*—is "adjusted" just right for us to live comfortably on this planet. We get a glimpse of the marvelous Designer who set up the whole system when the Bible speaks of "the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who *formed* the earth . . . Who *did not create it in vain*, Who formed it *to be inhabited*" (Isaiah 45:18).

Truly, our planet is not some lucky accident since the evidence shows it was carefully designed to be *inhabited* by mankind and all other forms of life.

The spaceship's engines

What drives this craft and propels it through space? There are "twin engines" aboard, one pushing the planet forward and the other keeping it spinning and fueling its interior heat.

The centripetal force caused by gravity keeps the globe in its orbit. When an object reaches a certain speed and is spun by centripetal forces, it stays in a stable circuit around the center. This is what the earth does when orbiting around the sun. And our planet's distance from the sun, though

varying slightly, is perfect for life—not so close to the sun that we would all burn up, nor so far that we would freeze.

The second engine is deep inside the earth itself. There, the fuel is decaying radioactive elements that heat the planet and drive plate tectonics. Geologists Frank Press and Raymond Siever call this "a gigantic but delicately balanced heat engine fueled by radioactivity" (*Earth*, p. 4).

"Not only does plate tectonics help with the development of continents and mountains, which prevent a water world," adds astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez, "but it also drives the Earth's carbon dioxide–rock cycle. This is critical in regulating the environment through the balancing of greenhouse gases and keeping the temperature of the planet at a livable level . . .

"This radioactive decay also helps drive the convection of the liquid iron surrounding the Earth's core, which results in an amazing phenomenon: the creation of a dynamo that actually generates the planet's magnetic field" (quoted by Strobel, pp. 182-183).

Surely, as Proverbs 3:19 says: "The LORD by *wisdom founded* the earth, by

understanding He established the heavens."

The passenger cabin

What about the passenger cabin? How well designed is it? We find the earth provides all the comforts a space traveler could desire—abundant and delicious food, plenty of water, gorgeous and entertaining scenery, a comfortable climate, challenging work and plenty of room to have a family.

Our planet is a veritable Noah's ark of animals and plants traveling on its timeless journey through space. It is a self-contained unit with renewable resources that can last, if properly taken care of, for potentially thousands of years into the future.

To keep the temperature comfortable for the passengers, the planet remains in orbit at just the right distance from the sun and is designed with an optimum tilt of 23.5 degrees.

"If the earth had been tilted as much as 45 degrees instead of what it is," notes Fred Meldau, "temperate zones would have torrid zone heat in the summer and frigid zone cold in the winter. On the other hand, if the axis of the earth were vertical to the plane of its orbit, January and July would have the same climate and ice would accumulate until much of the continents would be ice-covered six months and flooded the other six months" (*Why We Believe in Creation Not in Evolution*, 1972, pp. 27-28).

Psalms 104:24 says: "O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In *wisdom* You have made them all. The earth is *full* of your possessions."

A protector fleet of spaceships

Not only does our terrestrial vessel have a magnetic force field and renewable resources, but it also has a number of accompanying spacecraft to stabilize and protect it.

The first of these is our moon. It is a veritable workhorse. Not only does it shield our planet from taking some meteorite hits, but it stabilizes earth's vital tilt. Just as a clock has counterbalancing weights, so the moon acts as a counterbalance to the earth, keeping the planet's tilt carefully adjusted to allow the four seasons of the year. This tilt permits the sun's rays to uniformly heat the globe, much like a rotisserie slowly roasts a chicken.

The moon, along with the sun, also regulates our tides. The earth's tides help circulate the water in the oceans and sweep away waste products from the coasts.

"If the moon were half as far away, or twice its present diameter," adds Fred Meldau, "great tides would wreck most of our

harbors . . . If the moon were smaller and farther away, it would not have sufficient pull on our tides to cleanse our harbors or adequately rejuvenate (with oxygen) the waters of our oceans” (p. 31).

Also remarkable is the relative size and placement of the moon with respect to the sun. The sun is 400 times larger than the moon but also 400 times farther away—an arrangement that produces perfect solar eclipses when viewed from earth.

This extraordinary phenomenon has revealed crucial scientific facts about the composition of the sun and other stars, as well as providing concrete evidence of Einstein’s theory of relativity (again illustrating how our earth is set up to allow us to make scientific discoveries about the universe).

Yet the moon is only the first of Space-ship Earth’s protector fleet. The two gas giants, Jupiter and Saturn with their strong gravitational pulls, also help shield the planet by functioning as giant vacuum cleaners, sweeping the solar system of dangerous comets and asteroids.

Astronomers witnessed a stark example

have supernovae exploding at a fairly high rate. In our galaxy, those dangerous places are primarily in the spiral arms, where there are also hazardous giant molecular clouds. Fortunately, though, we happen to be situated safely between the [Milky Way’s] Sagittarius and Perseus spiral arms” (quoted by Strobel, p. 169).

This clear zone is a good vantage point for viewing our own galaxy and the rest of the universe—once again demonstrating the way our exploratory spaceship is set up for cosmic discovery.

Asking some tough questions

We can learn a great deal from examining the universe with telescopes or viewing life through a microscope, but even with the best scientific instruments we will never find the ultimate purpose of *why* we are traveling through space or what the meaning of our existence is.

All we can infer from the precise natural laws and the fine-tuned features of our planet is that the earth was optimally designed for life and for scientific under-

standing. Even a skeptical astrophysicist such as Stephen Hawking admits as much on the matter of life. “Wheeler agrees with Hawking and Carter,” writes John Boslough, “that our own universe is *uniquely fine-tuned to produce life*, even if in just one small, lost corner” (*Stephen Hawking’s Universe*, 1985, p. 125).

Our purpose on earth revealed

Who—or what—put forth all this effort to create the earth and have us live here? This is something science cannot answer. And yet it is *the ultimate question*. For the full answer we must turn not to the first witness of God as a Creator, the book of nature, but to the second witness, the book of Scripture. It was inspired by the very Creator God of the universe, the Grand Designer.

Here we learn that this Spaceship Earth comes equipped with a manufacturer’s instruction manual, letting us know the purpose of our existence and trip through space.

Why was man created on the earth? God reveals the answer in the very first chapter of that instruction manual, the Bible: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in *Our image*, according to *Our likeness*; let them have *dominion* over the fish of the sea . . . over *all the earth*’” (Genesis 1:26).

Here we see that we are made in God’s image and were placed on earth to learn to administer it. Unknown to most people, God’s *ultimate purpose* is to share His incredible powers and immortality with us! As the Bible says, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Astonishing as it sounds, we are to be part of the *God family*, with God as the Father and Jesus Christ as our elder brother!

Notice what Romans 8:29-32 says: “For whom He [God the Father] foreknew, He also predestined to *be conformed to the*

Continued on page 27

Even with the best scientific instruments we will never find the ultimate purpose of *why* we are traveling through space or what the meaning of our existence is.

of such protection in 1994 when Jupiter took a hit as the Shoemaker-Levy 9 comet broke apart due to Jupiter’s gravitational pull and smashed into its atmosphere.

As the book *The Privileged Planet* notes: “The existence of a well-placed moon, of circular planetary orbits . . . of the outlying gas giants to sweep the Solar System of sterilizing comets . . . all these and more are profoundly important for the existence of complex life on our planet” (p. 256).

The neighborhood

Not only is Spaceship Earth just the right distance from the sun to have a temperate climate, but its solar system is in an excellent neighborhood of stars. It lies between two spiral arms of the Milky Way galaxy, far away from the dangerous galactic core or the spiral arms, and is in what astronomers call a “safe zone.”

“Certainly, our type of galaxy optimizes habitability,” explains Guillermo Gonzalez, “because it provides safe zones. And Earth happens to be located in a safe zone, which is why life has been able to flourish here . . .

“Places with active star formation are very dangerous, because that’s where you

standing. Even a skeptical astrophysicist such as Stephen Hawking admits as much on the matter of life. “Wheeler agrees with Hawking and Carter,” writes John Boslough, “that our own universe is *uniquely fine-tuned to produce life*, even if in just one small, lost corner” (*Stephen Hawking’s Universe*, 1985, p. 125).

After surveying the astronomical and biological evidence, biochemist Michael Denton comes to this conclusion: “Four centuries after the scientific revolution science has provided no significant evidence that any alternative life is possible . . . Scientific exploration has found no token of another life, no shred of evidence for something other than ourselves or of our type of life as it exists on earth.

“On the contrary, science has revealed a universe stamped in every corner, riven in every tiny detail, with an overwhelmingly and all-pervasive biocentric [life-centered] and anthropocentric [human-centered] design” (*Nature’s Destiny: How the Laws of Biology Reveal Purpose in the Universe*, 1998, p. 380).

So here we are, traveling on this spaceship called earth, and everything we see

Recommended Reading

Can you really know whether a Creator God exists? Can you prove it? If so, why did He create you and me? Does He have a plan for us, and if so, how can we learn what that plan is? What does He reveal about the future of the human race? These are crucial questions, and never have the answers been more important! To discover the answers, request or download *What Is Your Destiny, Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Your free copies are waiting for you!



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

www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

A Good News Interview With Dr. Jay Richards

Our Privileged Place in the Universe

Interview by Mario Seiglie

Dr. Jay Richards of the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based scientific think tank on intelligent design, is coauthor of the 2004 book *The Privileged Planet*. He is currently research fellow and director of Acton Media at the Acton Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Dr. Richards has a Ph.D. in philosophy and theology from Princeton Theological Seminary, a Th.M. from Calvin Theological Seminary and a M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.

The Good News: Dr. Richards, what inspired you the most to write *The Privileged Planet*?

Jay Richards: The book started when Guillermo Gonzalez and I first met in 1999. I noticed he was an astronomer at the University of Washington and I was at the Discovery Institute in Seattle, so I called him. Eventually we formulated a hypothesis: If you go through the list of the important things needed for habitability, do they contribute to the best conditions overall for scientific discovery?

It was that idea that intrigued us because we knew that if it was right, there would be a fundamentally new type of design argument that could be made. It would focus not only on the idea that the universe is designed for complex life, but that it was designed for discovery as well.

GN: What was the most amazing discovery you found in the research for your book?

JR: There probably was nothing as intriguing as the eclipse illustration itself with all the coincidences of size and position that have to be just right—if only because everyone is familiar with the idea of eclipses, and most people who have experienced eclipses have, frankly, a spiritual experience. It has been used in Western art for centuries.

But second to that was this increasing series of discoveries that eclipses were just the tip of the iceberg. There were all these other examples that no one had ever even considered in which these things line up, such as the discovery of the type of atmo-

sphere we have to the type of galaxy we are in, to our location within the galaxy.

All of these different, somewhat unrelated factors disclosed this intriguing pattern that suggests what I call conspiracy rather than coincidence.

GN: How have the arguments presented in your book fared in the scientific community?

JR: The arguments have actually fared very well. The book came out in 2004 and was reviewed in prominent publications such as *Nature*. For the most part, it has been reviewed respectfully.

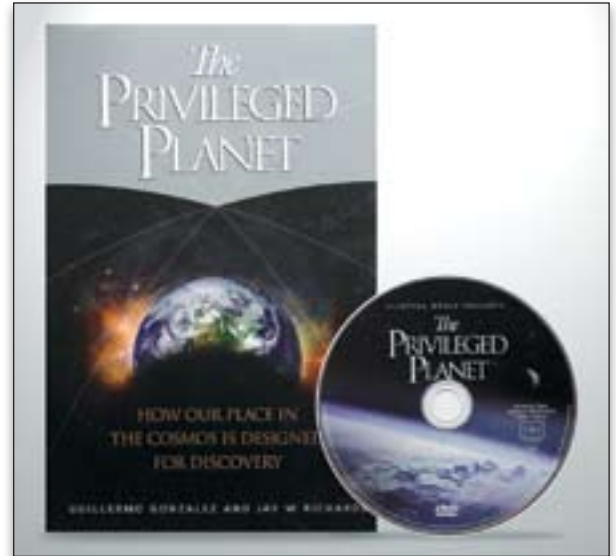
Needless to say, people who are opposed to design have for the most part attacked it. But they haven't been able to attack any of the actual arguments we've made. We had our motives attacked or superficial objections that we deal with in detail in chapter 16 of the book itself. We have been quite pleased no one has yet found any obvious errors in our argument.

GN: How has the book been accepted by the general public?

JR: The book has been very favorably received—especially when taking into account the documentary film *The Privileged Planet*, based on our book, which has allowed a much larger group of people to be aware of the subject than the book itself. The film has been shown on many PBS stations and TBN. It has been translated into many languages, including Mandarin Chinese.

GN: I heard astronomer Hugh Ross say there are now 323 parameters or scientific laws that have been discovered and that scientists are adding many more every year. Would you agree with that statement?

JR: I wouldn't necessarily disagree, but it's very hard to give an extensive list of all the things you need for life because



People who are opposed to design have for the most part attacked the book. But they haven't been able to attack any of the actual arguments we've made.

you have to tease out those things that are dependent on each other.

For instance, it's important to be in a particular location within the galaxy because that determines in part how many heavy elements or metals are available to build earth-like planets. So you could make location one factor and what is called metallicity [the proportion of the planet's matter composed of elements heavier than hydrogen and helium] another factor, but they are actually dependent.

So you can't add them up as if they were independent factors. We prefer to focus on those factors that are well nailed down and are independent of each other. We take a more minimal approach whereas Dr. Ross takes a more maximal approach in terms of coming up with as many factors as you can. All you need are 15 parameters before you use up the resources that chance has within our galaxy.

GN: Can any purpose be discerned about the universe from your research on

The Privileged Planet?

JR: We believe you can discern a clear purpose within this evidence from astrobiology. It doesn't come so much from noticing that earthlike planets are rare. Our argument is not based on probabilities per se, but upon a pattern. And it's this pattern of an overlap between the conditions for life and scientific discovery that is so intriguing.

You discover that the rare places of the universe where observers like ourselves can exist are also the best places overall for a wide range of scientific discoveries.

You discover that the rare places of the universe where observers like ourselves can exist are also the best places overall for a wide range of scientific discoveries. That's the sort of thing you would expect if the universe was designed for discovery. It is not what you expect if you had a universe purely as the result of impersonal forces with no purpose.

So it's that pattern between life and discovery that argues for purpose and triggers the design inference.

GN: What new discoveries have been made lately about our planet and space?

JR: Several new extrasolar planets have been discovered since our book came out. They continue to confirm what we argue—that there are all sorts of ways that planetary systems can arrange themselves.

There are some theories that essentially say there are going to be certain types of planets in one part of the solar system and another type of planet in the other part of the solar system. And every extrasolar planet we discover seems to contradict that and show there are many other ways planets can arrange themselves than we could have imagined. So that suggests things have to be fine-tuned very carefully.

GN: Could you comment on the Dover, Pennsylvania, case banning teaching intelligent design in school and how damaging it has been to the theory?

JR: Well, of course, the Dover decision hasn't done anything to the arguments for design. The evidence of design is based on the natural world. A federal judge can't do anything about the evidence from nature. He also has no jurisdiction in defining what constitutes science, although he thinks he does.

But obviously, the Dover decision was a problem for intelligent design, in part because it led to the perception that intelligent design is just religion dressed up as

science. I think that is a perverse claim because any argument that is based on public evidence, evidence from astronomy or biology, is a public argument. It can't be dismissed as parochial or religion.

The idea that the evidence for design has a theological or religious implication is certainly true, but virtually every discovery we find in origin science is going to have

some kind of theological implication. Darwinism has theological implications. Using Judge Jones' criteria, a whole lot of what we talk about in natural science would be disallowed.

GN: What is most needed to strengthen the intelligent design movement?

JR: What is needed to strengthen the intelligent design movement at this point is more basic research on the ground. Intelligent design will succeed when many people see how fruitful it is for opening up new lines of research in the natural sciences.

I think, frankly, the philosophical arguments are there and the evidence is there for design, but scientific ideas usually succeed not by proving their case but by showing they are fruitful and lead to interesting new lines of research.

Because of the hostility to intelligent design, unfortunately much of that research has to take place off the radar screen. The problem is that the second a researcher publishes an article that argues for design, forces on the other side do everything they can to destroy the editor who allowed it and the researcher who published it. But I think that, in the end, attempts to silence the voices will not succeed

GN: How much headway is being made?

JR: There is a lot of headway being made by way of research. A lot of that has to be done behind the scenes. There are high-level research meetings taking place around the country and the rest of the world.

Since the Dover case, a lot of people have contacted those of us involved in the intelligent design movement and said they have been in the natural sciences for years and have been following this focus and are sympathetic to it. These were people we didn't know and were under the radar. I don't think an overactive, zealous judge in Pennsylvania is going to determine the outcome of this debate.

GN: How long do you think the Darwinian evolutionary paradigm will last, and can intelligent design successfully replace it?

JR: I think intelligent design will not so much replace Darwinism as it will capture everything that is true in that preceding theory. So there is nothing in the Darwinian explanation that will be lost within the intelligent design framework. It is just that the power of natural selection will be seen as it is, explaining rather trivial factors. It's real, but it doesn't explain the *arrival* of the fittest so much as the *survival* of the fittest.

Of course, the intelligent design theory is much broader than just biology. It encompasses cosmology, physics and even economics and the social sciences.

The materialists say in economics, wealth can't be created, it's just moving around physical stuff, whether gold bullion or property. But we know wealth gets created—human beings interacting with the created order are able to transform matter into new things. We take sand and make computer chips and fiber optic cable. It is just what you expect if we were created in a purposeful universe.

The Christian would say that if we were created in the image of God, we participate in His creativity and are able to create new things and wealth. The materialist has really no way of accounting for that.

I do think Darwinism as a prevailing theory within biology will, 50 years from now, be seen to have the status of Marxism or Freudianism. We will be surprised that people found the Darwinian explanation so satisfying and compelling for so long.

GN: Any final comments to our readers?

JR: I want to reiterate the point that arguments for design are common property. If you are a Christian, you will be open to the arguments for design. But they don't rest on a narrow, theological assumption. You can't consider whether the universe is designed, or look at a bacterial flagellum, or look at the argument of the privileged planet, without asking or answering the question about how to interpret Genesis 1.

Nevertheless there are profound and encouraging implications of the evidence for design for Christians because they have always believed God reveals Himself in two books—in the book of nature and in the book of Scripture.

The book of nature is God's general revelation of Himself and the book of Scripture is God's personal revelation of Himself. If both of these are true revelations, then we should expect in the long run to see both revelations agree with each other. **GN**

Can You Believe Both the Bible and Evolution?

A number of the world's mainstream religions have come to accept Darwinian evolution as the explanation for our existence. But does Darwinism really square with the Scriptures?

by John Ross Schroeder

Are we the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve or did God guide our journey into existence by the forces of evolution? The wisdom of this world, particularly in Europe, is increasingly embracing the idea that we can accept both the teachings of the Bible and the theory of evolution. But are they really compatible?

Wrote Clive Cookson in the *Financial Times*, “The Vatican, which often appeared ambivalent in the past, has recently gone out of its way to affirm the compatibility of evolutionary science with the Bible” (Dec. 23, 2005, emphasis added throughout).

Many clergymen believe in evolution

A movement known as the Clergy Letter Project, signed by 10,000 ordained ministers and priests in America, stated: “We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests. To reject this truth or to treat it as ‘one theory among others’ is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children” (ibid.).

It is astonishing to fully realize the grip that the concept of evolution has on increasing numbers who also profess to believe in God and presumably His Word. And yet at the same time growing numbers of competent scientists are becoming outspoken critics of Darwinism.

As the Australian molecular biologist and medical doctor Michael Denton, himself an agnostic, has written, evolutionary theory “is still, as it was in Darwin’s time, a highly speculative hypothesis entirely without direct factual support and very far from that self-evident axiom some of its more aggressive advocates would have us believe” (*Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, 1986, p. 77).

Even some who support intelligent design (ID) somehow conceive of it as also compatible with Darwinism. *The Economist* put it this way: “But if God has a plan

for the world and everyone in it . . . then it is much easier to imagine evolution occurring under divine guidance than as a result of random mutation and the survival of the fittest.”

Many believe that God has used the evolutionary process of natural selection to accomplish His ultimate purpose for the human family.

Even the noted paleontologist and agnostic Stephen Jay Gould saw fit to state, “Either half of my colleagues are enormously stupid or else the science of Darwinism is fully compatible with religious beliefs—and equally compatible with atheism” (“Impeaching a Self-Appointed Judge,” quoted in *Dawkins’ God*, 2005, p. 80).

This approach—believing that a divine being guided the evolutionary process—is called *theistic evolution*. But according to what we find in the Bible, has God ever worked that way? The title of this article is: “Can You Believe Both the Bible and Evolution?” It could just as well have been titled “Can You Believe Both *God* and Evolution?”

Who made a man from dust?

Since there is so little understanding about what Scripture actually says on this subject, let’s make the consistent biblical position very plain and clear. The human creation account begins in the first chapter of the very first book of the Bible.

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth’” (Genesis 1:26).

Here Scripture draws a clear distinction between man and the animal world. Previ-



Many believe that God has used the evolutionary process of natural selection to accomplish His ultimate purpose for the human family.

ous passages plainly show that mammals, birds and fish were definitely *not* created in the image of God (verses 20-25). Only man shares that awesome distinction and for a grand purpose. (To understand further, please request or download our free booklet *Who Is God?*)

God first states His intention to create human beings and then He does it. “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; *male and female He created them*” (verse 27).

More details are revealed in the second chapter. “And the LORD God formed man [Adam] of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

The biblical narrative is in sharp contrast to those who believe that evolution has shaped dust into humanity. In essence this

belief amounts to idolatry since evolution has been put in the place of God.

The narrative continues with the creation of Eve. “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man’” (Genesis 2:21-23).

The account shows that sex was created by God, *not* by evolution as so many scientists seem to claim. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (verse 24).

The Psalms confirm creation

Other books in the Bible, like the Psalms, confirm the Genesis account of the human creation. Consider the human eye. We may ask, who designed the first eye? How could the eye possibly be the product of an accidental mutation? How could aeons of gradual change produce an eye—an astoundingly complex organ that needs all of its highly integrated parts to function?

The psalmist gives the credit to God. “He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? *He who formed the eye, shall He not see?*” (Psalm 94:9).

What did King David say about his own origins? “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). He attributed his existence directly to God and went on to describe how the Creator knew all of his parts even while he was in his mother’s womb (verses 15-16).

David asked the crucial question: “*What is man that You are mindful of Him . . . ? You made him a little lower than the angels . . .*” (Psalm 8:4-5). He goes on to tell us how man has been given rule over the earth, including the flora and the fauna (verses 6-8).

Columnist Mark Steyn, writing in the British *Spectator*, said this pivotal passage “accurately conveys the central feature of our world—our dominion over pretty much everything else out there.” He adds that the writer of this psalm “captured the essence of our reality better than your average geneticist” (“O Come, All Ye Faithless,” Dec. 17, 2005).

Jesus Christ and Paul believed in man’s creation

Notice what Jesus Christ Himself said: “But from the beginning of the creation,

God ‘made them male and female’” (Mark 10:6). Then in Matthew’s parallel account Christ asks the question: “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’ . . . ?” (Matthew 19:4).

Christ’s question underscores the importance of reading and believing the Bible—and in this case especially the creation accounts in the early chapters of Genesis.

When the apostle Paul confronted the blatant idolatry of the philosophers of Athens on the Areopagus, adjoining the Athenian Acropolis, he told them that “the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth . . . *From one man* He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth” (Acts 17:24, 26, New International Version).

All generations of human beings came from one man—and that man was named Adam. Paul adds, “And so it is written [in Genesis]: ‘*The first man Adam became a living being*’” (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Paul also understood the order in which the first man and first woman were created. “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:13). And as surprising as it may seem, He also wrote: “For man [Adam] did not come from woman, but woman [Eve] from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Corinthians 11:8-9, NIV).

Since all of their descendants were born of a woman (verse 12), Paul could not have written this passage unless he implicitly believed in the Genesis account.

Drawing the obvious conclusions

There is simply no way of reshaping the Bible into a book that also somehow supports the theory of evolution. If we are brave enough to accept the creation account at face value, then theistic evolution becomes impossible to believe. We cannot believe both the Bible and evolution. Both Old and New Testaments consistently support the account of the divine creation of Adam and Eve.

Logically, what we are obliged to do now is to examine the evidence for the authority and authenticity of the Bible, along with God’s existence, and compare them with the viability of the theory of evolution. If you would like to seriously pursue these lines of thought, we invite you to request or download our free booklets *Is the Bible True?*, *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* **GN**

The Good News on the Web



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

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

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



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



While you’re there, be sure to take a

look at our sister publications, *Virtual Christian Magazine* (available only on the Internet at www.vcmagazine.org) and *World News and Prophecy*. You’ll find them filled with helpful articles much like those you enjoy in *The Good News*.



Discover a wealth of information today—visit us on the Web at:

www.gnmagazine.org

Surveying a seriously troubled world security landscape

The world is now grappling with a number of unresolved conflicts not only with certain rogue nations, but with murderous terrorist groups as well.

The recent annual assessment of The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) is not very encouraging. General Director John Chipman firmly stated: “Many parts of the world are engaged in brutal combat . . . Overall the dangerous triptych of Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran continues to dominate the security agenda as do the wider, iconic problems of terrorism and [nuclear] proliferation” (*The Guardian*, May 25, emphasis added throughout).

The Middle East, where we see a resurging Taliban problem in Afghanistan, continued crippling loss of life by insurgencies in Iraq, and a stubborn Iran seemingly determined to acquire nuclear weapons in violation of the nonproliferation treaty it has signed, dominates world security concerns. But in fact the global security landscape threatens to boil over in the year ahead when crucial tipping points could come together resulting in several simultaneous crises around the world.

Among them are China’s continued military expansion and aggressive hunt for oil, the undisguised nuclear ambitions of North Korea, the explosive Palestinian problem and increasing violence in Southern

Asia and parts of Africa such as the Sudan.

Apparently China wants to build a navy that will challenge America in the Pacific. The Chinese military buildup has become obvious, including an additional deployment of 300 J-10 fighter jets. China has also expressed great interest in buying land-attack cruise missiles from Russia.

Realistic assessments of China’s military budget show that defense outlays now approach 3 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product. IISS leader John Chipman stated, “[Military] expenditure is on a sharp upward trend and will remain so in view of popular and elite support for accelerated defense modernization and because of China’s increasing capacity to sustain spending at a high level without noticeably undermining other developmental goals.”

The Chinese military trajectory is no secret, nor is the country’s continuing designs on Taiwan.

The IISS also stated that North Korea now has “enough plutonium to build between five and 11 nuclear weapons.” Consider noted historian Niall Ferguson’s report in *The Sunday Telegraph*: “In 2002, the North Koreans restarted their nuclear facilities at Yongbyon (which had been closed under the US-North Korean agreed framework of 1994) with the clear intention of enriching uranium. Since

then they have been busy producing weapons-grade plutonium” (June 4).

The Western world, even along with Chinese and Russian participation, has engaged in periodic diplomacy supplemented with generous economic sweeteners. But as Mr. Ferguson concludes, North Korea “shows no sign of renouncing their nuclear ambitions.”

The latest report (by writers of the *Financial Times* stationed in Washington D.C. and Seoul) is truly frightening. “North Korea is preparing for a possible test of an intercontinental ballistic missile with the potential to hit the US, according to Washington officials. A senior official said that there were ‘enough indications’ to suggest that Pyongyang was getting ready to fire a Taepodong-2 missile from a launch pad in North Korea.”

There is, of course, a possibility that Kim Jong Il, the North Korean dictator, is simply indulging in a dangerous bluff hoping to create some sort of an international crisis.

As Jesus Christ foretold, the time before His return would be one of “wars and rumors of wars” (Matthew 24:6). His description sounds remarkably like our day! (Sources: *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Guardian* [both London], *Financial Times*.)

The Republic of Ireland searches for its moral compass

Until recent years one got the distinct impression that Eire or the Republic of Ireland was somewhat immune from some of the social problems that have generally dogged our Western world. Now it appears that Ireland is experiencing some of the West’s disturbing trends with a vengeance.

Many Irish teenagers did not realize that it was illegal for a girl under 17 or a boy under 15 to be sexually active with partners. As one teen said, “Most of my friends would be fairly sexually active, from about 13.” A reporter observed that “explicit sex acts go on both inside and outside the teen disco” (*Sunday Independent* [Eire], June 4).

A recent legal technicality permitted a convicted pedophile to walk free. A virtual tsunami of public anger spread throughout the republic. Various parents commented that “children are definitely in danger” and that “Ireland is a haven for pedophiles.” Schoolteachers stated that “dangerous liaisons and dance halls are the real sex educators.”

The Republic of Ireland is rapidly waking up to some of the dangers inherent in our present Western way of life. (Source: *Sunday Independent* [Eire].)

The United States as world policeman

Notwithstanding the fact that the United States is the world’s only remaining superpower with a military budget that is the envy of many nations, American resources are far from unlimited. Some observers already feel that the nation’s human and financial resources are becoming dangerously overstretched.

Earlier this year the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff bluntly stated: “We are in a critical time in the history of this great country and find ourselves challenged in ways we did not expect. *We face a ruthless enemy intent on destroying our way of life and an uncertain future*” (*The Guardian*, Feb. 15, emphasis added).

The American military brief has been dubbed “The Long War.” Naturally the main focus is Islamic terrorism. The United States expects and plans for a *generation* of anti-Islamist conflicts. But Washington’s military commitments embrace many megaproblems far more widespread than the daily threat of world terrorism.

America is not finished with its commitments overseas in the wake of World War II, which ended more than 60 years ago. Nearly 70,000 U.S. troops are still stationed in Europe. More than 68,000 remain in Japan. Nearly 70,000 are still in South Korea following the Korean conflict of the early 1950s. Qatar and Bahrain together have nearly 10,000.

Figuring in Iraq, with well over 100,000 U.S. personnel in harm’s way, American military commitments abroad in both men and weaponry are truly staggering. The total global picture stands at about 350,000.

According to military officialdom, “The US will work to ensure that no foreign power can dictate the terms of regional or global security.”

That is truly a tall order! Given the reactions we see on television and read in newspapers and magazines, do Americans have the staying power to endure the sacrifices that will inevitably be required by growing domestic and foreign tensions? Can America continue

“We face a ruthless enemy intent on destroying our way of life and an uncertain future.”

to remain the world’s policeman indefinitely?

Closer to home, the United States appears to be losing support in its own backyard of Latin America. Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia are trying to take their countries out of the shadow of North America while looking abroad to China.

Did you ever ask yourself why the United States became a world superpower with Britain standing by its side as a loyal ally in most instances? Our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* explains just who the English-speaking peoples are descended from and where they are headed according to Bible prophecy.

The Bible reveals that enormous troubles lie not far ahead and that the Middle East and Europe will become even more the focus of future headlines and problems. To better understand, request or download our free booklets *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* (Source: *The Guardian*.)

Proposed "Sexual Orientation Regulations" threaten traditional marriage in Britain

According to a recent report in *The Daily Telegraph*, "New governmental proposals could require clergy to bless homosexual 'weddings' or face prosecution, the Church of England said yesterday" (June 10). These new Department of Trade and Industry proposals (labeled Sexual Orientation Regulations or SOR) are apparently designed to protect homosexual men and women from discrimination with regard to goods, services and facilities on the basis of their sexual orientation.

It is understood that religious schools "could be required to teach that homosexuality was of equal value to heterosexual marriage and if ministers of religion were not properly protected they could be open to legal action" (ibid.).

To give the Anglican Church its due, on the whole its leaders have responded to these new governmental proposals with diplomacy, courage and conviction.

For instance, the church's information pack states: "Christians of course earnestly desire the repentance and salvation of homosexuals. However, the Bible is

clear that *the only right sexual relationship for which we were created, is a relationship between a man and a woman in the context of a legitimate marriage.*

Religious schools "could be required to teach that homosexuality was of equal value to heterosexual marriage."

Consequently, there are times when Christians need to be free to discriminate against homosexuality in order to be constant and clear . . . in teaching that the Bible says homosexual practice is sinful" (Anglican Web site, emphasis added).

The British government wants these new regulations to become the law in England and Wales by October. However, it has formally asked if there should be any exceptions to protect religious groups.

According to the Anglican information pack, "The regulations have been described by some leading Christian figures from across denominational lines as representing an even greater threat to Christian liberty than had been posed by the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill."

Christians should pray fervently that the final outcome of the proposed legislation will make provision for ministers and others to obey God's laws without suffering legal penalties. (Sources: *The Daily Telegraph* [London], the Anglican Church Web site.)

European Union not yet united

"The sky is clearing up . . . the thunderstorm clouds of the last year are slowly disappearing," Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik told a news conference after two days of talks in Klosterneuburg abbey near Vienna over the weekend of May 27-28. The talks produced fresh consensus on the need for EU treaty changes to be agreed on at least before 2009 (EUobserver.com).

There are numerous biblical and secular road signs on the global fast lane to a world-dominating confederation of nations (the fall of which is described in Revelation 18). The world is temporarily blinded to this coming great power, though the Bible specifically reveals its coming emergence (Revelation 13 and 17).

Scripture shows that a future Europe-centered confederation will rise above all other geopolitical powers. Europe will revive its roots, apparently in a final version of the Holy Roman Empire. This process has been in the works for years. To learn more, request or download our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.

Don't forget avian flu

Experts tell us that from the viewpoint of public health, Avian flu is the number one threat facing humanity. "When we think of major threats, the first to come to mind are nuclear proliferation, rogue states and global terrorism. But another kind of threat is lurking, one from nature, not human—an avian flu pandemic. *An outbreak could cause millions of deaths and threaten the security of governments around the world*" (*International Herald Tribune*, June 7, emphasis added).

Did you ever take a moment to imagine the heart-breaking decisions physicians would be forced to make should we face a serious outbreak of avian flu? Who do they try to save and in what order—the medical and emergency personnel who can help others survive rather than the average person? The young over the old? Mothers with young children over the middle-aged?

Why earthquakes?

The Bible tells us that in the end times, there will be earthquakes in various places (Matthew 24:7). Although earthquakes likely have shaken our planet as long as it has existed, it appears that more numerous intense earthquakes have happened over the past century.

Jesus Christ said earthquakes, along with other natural disasters, would cause human suffering until His second coming. A final globe-girdling earthquake greater than any before is prophesied to shake the entire earth immediately before Christ returns (Revelation 16:18).

Recently in Bantul, Indonesia, a 6.3-magnitude earthquake killed more than 6,200 people, injured 30,000 more and destroyed 135,000 houses across Java Island (Associated Press report, June 2). The world's largest archipelago is Indonesia, located on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes that ring the Pacific Basin. There are 76 volcanoes in Indonesia alone, the largest concentration in the world.

The Supreme Designer has built the earth in such a way that tectonic plates can morph and, on occasion convulse, creating dramatic shifts of the earth's surface. Over time such geologic movements redistribute and recycle minerals crucial to keeping the earth habitable for plants, animals and people. At the same time earthquakes can cause great human suffering and, in some cases, encourage human beings to turn to God. This is one prophetic reason that earthquakes occur (Revelation 16:17-21).

Can you foresee the enormous numbers of people who may have to be quarantined? Can you imagine not being able to leave your dwelling to go to work or get groceries? Homes could very well become temporary prisons. The very people who keep our water and electrical power running may not be able to go to work. Did you ever consider that possibility?

Recent incursions of the virus into kinds of animals not previously infected may be an indication that the virus could soon mutate into a form easily transmissible to and between human beings. Most experts think that if the virus gets into the human family it will spread first from Southeast Asia. An infected person could board a plane in someplace like Bangkok and be in Chicago or London the next day. We need to think about what may lie ahead of us. (Source: *International Herald Tribune*.)

How Can You Make Sense of the News?

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





What Motivates Ahmadinejad?

The president of Iran appears intent on developing nuclear weapons and has repeatedly threatened to wipe Israel off the face of the earth. In the West he is at times portrayed as a madman, but few realize the real motivating force behind his dream of triumphant Islam.

It's difficult to comprehend, but could a 5-year-old boy who went missing more than 11 centuries ago be the cause of the world's next nuclear conflict?

Adherents of Shia Islam believe that leadership of the Muslim religion was transferred from Muhammad to his son-in-law and then down through a series of descendants. Shiites refer to each of these successors as an "imam"—Arabic for "leader."

The 12th of these imams was born in 868 or 869. A few years later, in 874, he disappeared without a trace, bringing an end to Muhammad's lineage. The Shiites believe that this boy, the 12th imam, survived, "that he merely withdrew from public view when he was five and that he will sooner or later emerge . . . to liberate the world from evil" (Matthias Kuntzel, "A Child of the Revolution Takes Over: Ahmadinejad's Demons," *The New Republic*, April 24).

Some refer to him as the Mahdi, meaning "divinely guided one." In Shiite ideology—dominant in Iran and Iraq—"legitimate Islamic rule can only be established following the reappearance of the Twelfth Imam" (ibid.). As Christians wait for the second coming of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God over the earth, Shiite Muslims await the Mahdi's return to make Islam the dominant—and eventually *only*—religion throughout the world.

Shiite beliefs shape Iran

Because most people in the West do not take religion seriously, it's almost impossible for Westerners to understand the power of religion in the Middle East. In Islamic countries, politics and religion are inseparable.

The Shiites have been waiting patiently for the 12th imam for more than a thousand years, but that patience has run out, at least in Iran. In 1979 the overthrow of the pro-Western shah of Iran led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a theocratic state where the clerics held supreme power under the Ayatollah Khomeini.

"Khomeini . . . had no intention of waiting. He vested the myth with an entirely new sense: The Twelfth Imam will only emerge when the believers have vanquished evil. To speed up the Mahdi's return, Muslims had to shake off their torpor and fight" (ibid.).

Influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood of the 1930s, Khomeini "agreed with the Brothers' conception of what had to be considered 'evil': namely, all the achievements of modernity that replaced divine providence with individual self-determination, blind faith with doubt, and the stern morality of sharia [law] with sensual pleasures" (ibid.).

Khomeini believed that all that is bad in the world comes from the West,

They feel it their duty to bring chaos to the world. Out of this chaos will come a clash of civilizations that will then lead directly to the return of the 12th imam.

especially America, which he designated "the Great Satan."

"Twelvers," as this largest group of Shiite Muslims are sometimes called, believe Islam must triumph over the West before the 12th imam will appear. They feel it their duty to bring chaos to the world. Out of this chaos will come a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West that will then lead directly to the return of the 12th imam.

Thus the Tehran regime is clearly not about to enter into any agreement of substance with the West. Any treaty is only going to be used by the Iranian leadership to play for time, as President Ahmadinejad has openly boasted of doing in his drawn-out negotiations with the European Union.

As the *New Republic* writer Matthias Kuntzel asks, "Why should an Iranian president engage in pragmatic politics when his assumption is that, in three or four years, the savior will appear?" (ibid.).

Iranian threats to eliminate Israel

One of President Ahmadinejad's stated

goals is the total destruction of the Jewish state of Israel. Yet this isn't new in Iranian thinking.

"In December 2001, former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani explained that 'the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything.' On the other hand, if Israel responded with its own nuclear weapons, it 'will only harm the Islamic world. It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality.'

"Rafsanjani thus spelled out a macabre cost-benefit analysis. It might not be possible to destroy Israel without suffering retaliation. But, for Islam, the level of damage Israel could inflict is bearable—only 100,000 or so additional martyrs for Islam" (ibid.).

Israel is a small country that could be essentially wiped out with just one nuclear missile, whereas the Islamic world is spread across many countries on three continents. Even if Israel retaliated with its entire nuclear arsenal, it would merely harm the Islamic community of nations, not destroy them. This was the thinking of Iran's former "moderate" president.

The new Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is even more radical. At a November 2005 theology conference he emphasized that "the most important task of our Revolution is to prepare the way for the return of the Twelfth Imam" (ibid.).

An ancient failed attempt to exterminate the Jews

This is not the first time that a powerful leader has tried to exterminate the Jews. Seventy years ago Adolf Hitler succeeded in exterminating 6 million Jews. If Iran succeeds in a nuclear strike against Israel, once again the world could see 6 million Jews wiped out!

This is not even the first time an Iranian

leader has tried to wipe out the Jews. Almost 2,500 years ago many Jews lived in the ancient Persian Empire, whose modern successor state was renamed Iran after World War II. In the Old Testament book of Esther we read an account of an attempt to totally annihilate the Jews.

The story takes place in 484 B.C. during the reign of the Persian king Xerxes I, who was king from 486-465 B.C. The biblical name for Xerxes was Ahaseurus.

the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage.” Haman realized that it wasn’t just Mordecai who was a problem, but that all the Jews would do as he did (verse 6). So he devised a plot to wipe them out.

After things started to unravel, Haman’s family warned him not to tackle the Jews: “When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his wise men and his wife Zeresh said

days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.”

Jesus Christ will intervene in world affairs to stop humanity from destroying itself in the kind of nuclear conflict that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is threatening. Not only is the Iranian president intent on destroying Israel, but he also wants to rid the world of America and Britain, the leading infidel countries, so Islam can triumph over all nations.

Islam on the rise, the West in decline

Amir Taheri, a former executive editor of *Kayhan*, Iran’s largest daily newspaper, who now lives in Europe, wrote in Britain’s *Daily Telegraph* newspaper April 16: “In Ahmadinejad’s analysis, the rising Islamic ‘superpower’ has decisive advantages over the infidel. Islam has four times as many young men of fighting age as the West, with its aging populations.”

He notes that young Shiite boys are taught to develop two qualities. “The first is *entezar*, the capacity patiently to wait for the Imam to return. The second is *taajil*, the actions needed to hasten the return.”

Mr. Taheri goes on to explain that, in President Ahmadienijad’s thinking, “the Imam’s return will coincide with an apocalyptic battle between the forces of evil and righteousness, with evil ultimately routed. If the infidel loses its nuclear advantage, it could be worn down in a long, low-intensity war at the end of which surrender to Islam would appear the least bad of options. And that could be a signal for the Imam to appear.”

He had this to say about Iran’s nuclear program: “Moments after Ahmadinejad

Continued on page 27



Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks in front of a picture of Islamic revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini at his mausoleum in Tehran during a June 3 ceremony marking the 17th anniversary of Khomeini’s death.

One of his predecessors, Cyrus the Great, had defeated Babylon, where the Jews had been taken as captives, in 539 B.C. Soon afterward he gave the Jews permission to return to Judah, which was within his empire. Many returned, but many did not. (In fact, as a result of the Babylonian captivity around 2,600 years ago, some Jews still live in Iran though many have left under the present fundamentalist Islamic regime.)

When Xerxes’ wife, Queen Vashti, refused to honor him, he divorced her and later chose Esther, a Jewess, as her successor. Esther had been brought up by her uncle, Mordecai. According to the biblical account, the king appointed a man named Haman to the second-highest position in the land, what we today would call prime minister.

Esther 3:2 states that “all the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so

to him, ‘If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him’” (Esther 6:13).

They might have been aware of God’s promise to Abraham regarding him and his descendants: “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you” (Genesis 12:3). Through Mordecai and Queen Esther, God delivered the Jewish people from genocide.

Haman failed to exterminate the Jews. Hitler, though he did kill vast numbers, also failed in his genocidal efforts. Similarly, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s stated goal of wiping out the Jews of Israel will also fail. God will ultimately deliver the Jewish people from this as He has delivered them many times before.

In Matthew 24:22 we read the words of Jesus Christ, the real Messiah who is soon to return to this world: “And unless those

Recommended Reading

What are the roots of so much conflict in the Middle East? Why is there so much hostility toward Israel and the West? It’s almost impossible to understand without a firm grasp of what the Bible reveals about these ancient antagonisms. You need to learn how it will all play out—culminating in the return of Jesus Christ, the true Messiah, to rule the earth!



To discover the exciting truth, request or download your free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* today!

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

www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

Is the New Testament a Fraud?

The *Da Vinci Code* and similar works have portrayed the formation of the New Testament as “history’s greatest cover-up.” Is it part of a conspiracy to deceive humanity, or is it the divinely inspired, true and accurate picture of what Jesus and His apostles said and did in the first century?

by John Ross Schroeder

The *Da Vinci Code* book and movie, as well as other similar works, have raised many questions about the early Church.

For example, Princeton University religion professor Elaine Pagels recently stated: “What I find interesting about [*The Da Vinci Code*] is that it raises a very important question. If they—meaning the leaders of the Church—suppressed so much of early Christian history, what else don’t we know about? . . . I think it’s a really important question because the answer means a great deal” (*Secrets of the Da Vinci Code*, *U.S. News and World Report* special edition, 2006, p. 36).

Why such public interest?

Why have readers and moviegoers taken this work of fiction as seriously as if it were nonfiction? Why have the book and film captured the imagination of the general public? Yes, the book is a “good read” and the film features Hollywood favorite Tom Hanks in the leading role. But is there something far more significant behind the obvious reasons?

Noted *Daily Mail* columnist Melanie Phillips put her finger on a point we should not overlook. In unraveling its fictional mystery, the book takes advantage of our built-in inclination to want to discover the true meaning of life. As Ms. Phillips puts it, “There is a profound spiritual hunger in the Western world which, for a variety of reasons, the Church is no longer able to assuage” (April 10).

As the years whip by and we go about fulfilling our routine day-to-day duties in a continual cycle, it’s natural for us to begin to wonder somewhere along the way if there is any real meaning to life. Ms. Phillips goes on to say: “This quest for meaning furnishes the never-ending popular desire to know whether or not the Bible was true.”

The trouble is, so many people never seem to get around to reading and studying the Bible for themselves. Instead, too many put their trust in what movies, other books, academics, politicians and other supposed experts say *about* the Bible. Often the supposed experts today have never read or

studied it either. So we should never consign this supremely important task to others! (see Acts 17:11).

Why not blow the dust off your Bible and begin to read and study its contents for yourself?

What the Bible says about itself

Since *The Da Vinci Code* questions accepted events in the biblical world of the first century, this article will concentrate on the credibility of the New Testament. Yet the Old Testament does bear heavily on the accuracy of the New.

Fully one third of the New Testament consists of quotations from or allusions to passages in the Old Testament. The New Testament mentions the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies including those concerning the birth, ministry, messiahship and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself, referring to the Old Testament—the only “Bible” available at the time—stated that “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). It’s interesting to note that the Old Testament nowhere foretells a human marriage of the Messiah to come, yet many other aspects of His life are clearly prophesied (compare Luke 24:25-26).

The Jewish community was entrusted “with the very words of God” (Romans 3:2, New International Version). Its official representatives of Jesus’ day bore responsibility in religious matters (Matthew 23:2-3) until the time that “the kingdom of God [would] be taken away from [them] and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43)—a reference to the New Testament Church of God (compare 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Jesus would shortly build and establish His Church through His chosen apostles (Matthew 16:18-19; 18:18). In due time they would record their experiences in what would become the New Testament.

The apostles and the New Testament canon

Since *The Da Vinci Code* controversy revolves around questioning the truth and accuracy of the New Testament, we need to understand how the books were selected.

Which books were inspired by God to be a part of His Word?

Our English term “canon” is an anglicized form of the Greek word *kanon*, meaning a rod or ruler. The Bible could not be canonized without proper standards. The New Testament itself shows that the apostles themselves participated in *the beginnings* of this process to a much greater extent than is generally believed.

The apostle Paul tells us that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles (who authored most of the books of the New Testament) and the prophets (who authored the books of the Old Testament), with Jesus being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

Jesus gave a major role in the formation and teachings of the Church to the apostles, telling them, “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18).

Peter’s contribution to canonicity

Near the time of Peter’s martyrdom, he became even more deeply concerned about the preservation of the apostles’ teaching. “For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you *always* of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent [body], to stir you up by reminding you” (2 Peter 1:12-13, emphasis added throughout).

Now carefully consider the key passage that follows in verse 15: “Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you *always* have a reminder of these things *after my decease.*” How could this possibly be accomplished except by deliberate preservation of a written work?

Then he continues the theme of reminding the brethren of basic doctrinal truth in chapter 3: “Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the Holy Prophets [in the Old Testament], *and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior* [the beginnings

of the New Testament]” (2 Peter 3:1-2).

Peter’s closing words make it clear that he fully realized what constituted written Scripture up to that time, and it was not just the Old Testament:

“Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (verses 15-16, NIV).

Thus, Peter obviously equated the apostle Paul’s letters with Scripture—and not only that, but the clear implication is that these letters most probably already existed in a copied, collected, and distributed form. Perhaps they were even in Peter’s hands as he wrote these words.

Peter’s two letters were written to “God’s elect, . . . scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1, NIV; compare 2 Peter 3:1). Except for Galatia, these are not exactly the same places that Paul originally addressed most of his letters to. Yet the clear implication of the concluding verses of Peter’s second epistle is that Paul’s letters (again, most likely in a collected form) were by then reaching the same places to which Peter was writing.

Paul’s contribution to canonicity

Consider the circumstances in Paul’s second and final letter to Timothy just prior to martyrdom. “For I am already being poured

out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure [death] is at hand” (2 Timothy 4:6). Among his final instructions to the young evangelist were: “Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments” (verse 13).

The late British scholar F.F. Bruce commented on this passage: “What the parchments were which Paul so anxiously desired Timothy to bring we cannot be sure, but it is a reasonable guess that they contained portions of Holy Scripture” (*The Books and the Parchments*, 1963, p. 12). Surely copies of Paul’s own letters would have been included as well.

He was a literary man who wrote many letters, some of which were not included in the New Testament canon. Since he wrote this final letter to Timothy under the pressure of imminent execution, it is inconceivable to think that Paul would not have taken steps to see that his letters would be preserved for future generations of the Church.

Some have even pointed out that the “cloak” Paul mentions is likely not a reference to an item of clothing to keep him warm, but rather a cover or folder in which the parchments were held. The Greek word could denote either. In English, we have the similar term “jacket,” which can apply to either a coat or a book cover.

Paul’s letters, it should be noted, provide an early witness to Christ’s teachings. Much has been made of the supposed time gap of 40 and more years between Christ’s preaching and the time the Gospel accounts were written. N.T. Wright, bishop of Durham

in the Anglican Church, comments: “Scholars used to be quite dogmatic on the dating of the gospels, but the more scholarship has gone on the less we can be as sure as we thought. What is more, the gospels are dependent in turn on traditions that are very early indeed . . .

“The once-fashionable scholarly tradition of pushing the gospels later and later and regarding their contents with more and more scepticism has been radically undermined from several angles” (*Decoding Da Vinci*, 2006, p. 18).

The witness of Paul to some of the major events has been overlooked in contemplating the usual time scenario. Some scholars estimate that Paul began writing letters less than 20 years after Christ’s crucifixion. Some date Galatians, thought to be his first letter, as early as A.D. 48—only 17 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Since Paul’s letters rarely quote from the four Gospel accounts or other New Testament books (1 Timothy 5:18 quotes Luke 10:7), most of his letters apparently predate these other New Testament writings. Yet Paul’s letters clearly corroborate the message of the four Gospels.

For example, his letters reveal that before Christ was betrayed, He instituted the New Testament Passover ceremony with the new symbols of bread and wine (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and witnessed a good testimony before Pontius Pilate (1 Timothy 6:13). Paul also confirmed that Christ died by crucifixion, was buried and rose again by a resurrection from the dead (Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5; Philippians 2:8)—after which

The New Testament: From Oral Testimony to the Written Word

During His ministry Jesus Christ promised, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Mark 13:31). Did He keep this promise in spite of the time interval between His spoken words and when they were actually recorded in writing?

Neil Lightfoot has a Ph.D. from Duke University in North Carolina. He serves as professor of the New Testament at Abilene Christian University in Texas. In his book *How We Got the Bible* he notes the perspective of the early Church and how that affected the formation of what would become known as the New Testament:

“When the church of Christ was first established it had no thought of a New Testament. Its Bible was the Old Testament and its new teachings were based on the authority of Christ as personally mediated through the apostles.

“Soon, inspired men began to put in writing divine regulations both for churches and individuals. It was inevitable that these written instructions would become normative . . . Thus Paul’s letters were carefully gathered into a single whole: next came the collection of the four gospels, and then all the others followed” (2003, p. 156).

But what about the time interval between the oral and written word? Why the delay? Were Christ’s true sayings distorted in the intervening years?

Our answer to these questions must not overlook God’s Spirit, but instead emphasize Christ’s promise that the Holy Spirit “will teach you all things and

will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26, NIV).

What a promise to the apostles! And as New Testament scholar David Ewert commented on this passage, “The New Testament is the written deposit of these words of Jesus . . . God, however, was at work in the church and watched over His word” (*From Ancient Tablets to Modern Translations*, 1983, p. 125).

Humanly speaking, however, we seek rational, natural explanations. First, in the beginnings of the early Church the very presence of the original apostles minimized the need for written records. They were all eyewitnesses. Secondly, traditions were often transmitted orally. Jesus often said: “You have heard . . .” (Matthew 5:27). And how many times did He say, “He who has an ear, let him hear”?

So one would expect the sayings of Jesus to be passed on by word of mouth. Often traditions would be told and retold in easy-to-remember fixed forms. Also, an apostle like Matthew may well have taken down notes during Christ’s ministry on earth. This apostle had been a tax collector used to keeping written records. Perhaps Jesus even assigned him the task.

At the end of the day, however, the crux of the matter lies in our faith to believe that Christ kept His promises that His words would never pass away and that the Holy Spirit would bring everything He had taught the apostles back to their minds for later teaching and accurate recording. Though not without an enormous amount of historical evidence, true Christianity remains a religion of faith.

He ascended into heaven (Ephesians 4:9-10).

John's final Gospel and Revelation

Clearly both Peter and Paul, who died around A.D. 67-68, were martyred before the final books of the New Testament were composed. However, the resurrected, living Jesus Christ made sure one key apostle would remain alive to complete the New Testament. Apparently primarily for this reason, John would outlive Peter (John 21:18-23).

The full understanding of the gospel and "things to come" had not yet been revealed (John 16:13). The Gospel of John, the book of Revelation and perhaps the letters of 1, 2 and 3 John were yet to be written.

Notice F.F. Bruce's assessment: "Towards the end of the century, John, perhaps the last surviving companion of Jesus in the days of His flesh, records his reminiscences of his Master's life and teaching, together with his meditations on them, in such a way as to supplement the earlier gospels" (p. 107). This explains why his Gospel is so different from the other three. Writing much later, John was in many respects filling in the gaps, so to speak.

John himself comments as an early eyewitness near the conclusion of his Gospel: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

Then at the very end of the book he repeats his personal testimony as an eyewitness. "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we [plural, meaning other Church members] know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24; compare 1 John 1:1-3).

Further, John is specifically told by Jesus to write the book of Revelation, what to include in it and to whom it was to be sent (Revelation 1:9-11). It is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ," which God the Father imparted to Him (verse 1). Christ personally revealed it to the apostle John.

Its conclusion includes a severe warning to those who would either add to or take away from this final book of the New Testament (Revelation 22:18). The book thus has a ring of finality to it, and in principle its warning certainly applies to the entire Bible. God's Word must be respected (Isaiah 66:2; Proverbs 30:5-6).

Sound scholarly testimony

Guiding His apostles and their successors,

why did Jesus Christ include certain books and not others? What has been called "apostolicity" is the major standard. Each and every New Testament book was either composed by an apostle of Christ or a very few close associates.

"So we find Mark, the companion and interpreter of Peter, committing to writing . . . the Gospel as Peter habitually proclaimed it . . . and Luke, the companion of Paul, writes in two books [Luke and Acts] for Gentile readers a narrative for the beginnings of Christianity from the birth of John the Baptist up to Paul's two year residence in Rome" (Bruce, p. 107).

Dr. Peter Head is the Sir Kirby Laing research fellow at Tyndale House in Cambridge. In addition to his research activities, he teaches the New Testament in the Faculty of Divinity. He categorically states: "None of the non-canonical gospels offer any independent information about Jesus which is of any substance . . . Our conclusion must be that *there are no realistic alternatives to our four gospels if we are looking for historical information about Jesus*" (*Is the New Testament Reliable?*, 2003, p. 17).

Luke was not only a physician (Colossians 4:14), but also a scholarly and highly skilled historian who wrote both his own Gospel account and the book of Acts. Notice that he prefaces his Gospel account with an explanation of his careful and methodical approach to the task:

"Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, *having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first*, to write to you *an orderly account*, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:1-4).

Is the Bible believable?

The late professor F.F. Bruce was a highly competent Bible scholar who primarily focused his lifelong studies on the New Testament. He wrote in the preface to the fifth edition of *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*: "The grounds for accepting the New Testament as trustworthy compare very favourably with the grounds on which classical students accepted the authenticity and credibility of many ancient documents" (1975, p. 5).

Later in this book he continued: "The evidence of our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence

for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning" (p. 15).

Dr. Peter Head concurs with F.F. Bruce's testimony: "The wealth of material undergirding the text of the New Testament becomes overwhelming . . . Documentary evidence for the New Testament is much stronger than for any comparable works from the ancient world" (*Is the New Testament Reliable?*, pp. 8, 10).

The biblical record is supported in many small details by archaeological finds. Inscriptions, seals, tombs, historical records and other artifacts verify the existence of almost 70 individuals listed in the Bible, many of whom are mentioned only in passing.

Countless other discoveries such as cities, towns, customs and titles of government officials have been discovered that bear witness to the fact that the books of the Bible were indeed written when they claim to have been. (A compilation of 24 *Good News* articles titled "The Bible and Archaeology" may be downloaded at www.gnmagazine.org/archaeology.)

William Ramsay is one noted scholar who initially dismissed the New Testament as a historical fabrication. The young Oxford graduate had been taught by his professors that the Bible was written much later than it claimed to be and thus shouldn't be taken seriously. But after years of study and travel in the Holy Land and Asia Minor trying to disprove Scripture, Ramsay came to an inescapable conclusion: The New Testament narrative "showed marvelous truth."

Over his long academic career Ramsay was honored with doctorates from nine universities and eventually knighted for his contributions to scholarship. At one point he shocked the academic world by announcing that the incontrovertible evidence he had discovered over his years of study compelled him to become a Christian. He went on to write several books that are considered classic works on New Testament history.

A ring of truth

In the words of another highly respected Greek and biblical scholar, William Barclay: "Without question the books which are Scripture and which are truly the word of God *have about them a self-evidencing quality*. They carry their uniqueness on their face. To read them is to be conscious of being brought into the presence of God and truth and Jesus Christ in a unique way" (*The Making of the Bible*, 1961, p. 74).

That is one reason it is so important to read and study the Bible for yourself! **GN**

God, Science and the Bible

News from the world of science about God and the Bible

by Mario Seiglie, Tom Robinson and Scott Ashley

Major evolutionary premise fails in real-life test

Charles Darwin's theory of "sexual selection"—that females of a species choose to mate with males having the best genes—has been held up as a fundamental pillar of evolution in classrooms and science texts for well over a century. Many generations of students have been taught that this is the way evolution works.

After all, from an evolutionary standpoint, it makes perfect sense—females should mate with the highest-quality males of their species to best ensure the survival of their offspring, and this leads to ever-stronger, ever-smarter, ever-improving members of the species, driving the process of evolution ever onward.

There's just one problem: *It's not true.* Researchers have proved that while the theory may sound good, things don't work that way in real life.

The *Wall Street Journal*, in a May 5 article titled "Darwin Revisited: Females Don't Always Go for Hottest Mate," summarizes findings from some research projects designed to test Darwin's hypothesis.

In a 24-year study spanning multiple generations of collared flycatchers (a bird species), Swedish researchers found that females who mated with prime-quality males ended up with fewer and less-attractive offspring. The reason? "The studs were so busy mating they had no time to raise offspring, causing their health and fecundity to suffer. Homelier birds were better dads, raising sons who had more mating success."

In other words, the results were the opposite of what evolutionary theory would have predicted.

Crickets are another notable exception to Darwin's theory. Female crickets mate with nearly any male, making no attempt to choose the "best" available. In so doing, "they increase the genetic diversity of their offspring, improving the chances that some will survive no matter what pathogens and enemies the kids encounter."

The behavior of species as diverse as crickets, peacocks and red deer, among others, reveals flaws in Darwinian evolution.

The *Wall Street Journal* article also points out that "other females are not as enamored of sexy traits as [the] theory claims. While big-antlered red deer are busy fighting each other to show a female who has the best rack, the doe sneaks off to mate with less well-endowed stags. Female red-winged blackbirds are not easily impressed, either. Having the most macho plumage has no detectable effect on how many offspring a male sires."

The article cites Stanford University biologist Joan Roughgarden as saying: "In a number of species, reproductive behavior does not conform to Darwin's theory of sexual selection. The idea that females choose the genetically best males is wrong. Instead of choosing mates who will increase the genetic quality of their offspring, females make choices that will increase their number of offspring."

The article also highlights a significant problem with Darwin's ideas about sexual selection—namely, "it fails to explain the persistence of, shall we say, homely males." In other words, if females do indeed choose to mate with males who have the most genetically desirable attributes, "then after enough generations every peacock should have a tail to die for. But they do not. Every flock has studs and duds."

If you would like to learn more about the seldom-discussed flaws in the theory of evolution, and to discover what the scientific evidence really reveals, be sure to request or download a free copy of our eye-opening booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*



"Missing link" discovered?

Proponents of evolution have proclaimed a fossil discovery announced in April (originally found in 2004) as the long-sought "missing link" between water- and land-dwelling creatures. The new species, remains of which were found on Ellesmere Island in the Canadian Arctic and are claimed to date to 375 million years ago, has been named *tiktaalik*.

"It shows you that one of the great gaps, one of the basic steps in evolutionary past, is from water to land," said University of Chicago biologist Neil Shubin, coleader of the discovery team. "It shows in exceptional detail what features evolved and changed at that time period" (*Christianity Today*, June 2006).

The *New York Times*, in an April 6 front-page story headlined "Fossil May Link Fish, Land Animal," hailed the supposed missing link for its characteristics that "anticipate the emergence of land animals," thus making it "a predecessor of amphibians, reptiles and dinosaurs."

Note the use of such phrases as "*May Link*" and "*anticipate the emergence*." It's important to keep in mind that facts in a situation like this are in short supply, and evolutionists (and Bible believers) interpret such findings according to their beliefs. Because evolutionists so desperately want to find "missing links" in the fossil record, they often jump to unwarranted conclusions.

The Coelacanth species of fish is a case in point. Paleontologists had long

been aware of coelacanth fossils from Devonian-period strata supposedly 359 to 416 million years old (interestingly, the same period to which the *tiktaalik* "missing link" is dated) and thought it to be extinct for the last 65 million years.

Because of its bony fins, coelacanth was itself thought to be a "missing link," with the bony fins thought to enable it to "walk" on the muddy bottom of bodies of water. At least that was the common assumption until, much to paleontologists' surprise, a *live* specimen of the supposedly extinct fish was netted by a fishing boat off the coast of South Africa in 1938!

Further research turned up dozens of coelacanths off the coasts of several countries. Films made of coelacanths swimming showed that their peculiar lobed fins were used for maneuvering underwater and not for walking.

While detailed studies of *tiktaalik* need to be made (and released for critical analysis), an initial look at the bony structures of this supposed missing link show similarities to coelacanth and other fish—bones that are not designed for weight-bearing legs.

When all is said and done, this fossil discovery merely represents a new fish genus and species. As for the bony fins, "We already know some fish use their fins to prop themselves out of the water," said Casey Luskin of the Discovery Institute, a Seattle, Washington-based educational foundation that promotes intelligent design. "Catfish do that, but they are clearly not evolving into land animals."

Gambling: Why It's a Bet Nobody Wins

Compulsive gambling can and does destroy lives just like drug addiction and alcoholism. It is just one more sign of the moral decline currently gripping many nations.

by John Ross Schroeder

Simply living from day to day involves a certain degree of risk-taking. We've all heard the expression, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." And sometimes the stakes are high. The pioneering Americans who conquered the Western frontier risked much in pursuit of land and settlement.

But these courageous pioneers were willing to work and wait for the eventual realization of their material goals. They invested great time and effort. They didn't expect something for nothing in some kind of get-rich-quick scheme.

Today, pursuing instant success is becoming a pervasive part of Western culture. Patience and anticipation of the satisfying rewards of hard work are not as evident as they once were. The growing menace of gambling is but a symptom of the times. Witness all the lotteries, horse and greyhound racing, sports pools and the like.

But today's gambling—expecting instant windfalls to solve stubborn financial problems—is both foolhardy and dangerous. Except for a few people, instant monetary gratification is but an illusory dream. It does happen, but instant "rags to riches" is a rare occurrence. Yet many continue to gamble in the vain hope that they will magically be one of the favored few who strike it rich.

Gambling problem in the United States

The enormous growth in commercialized gambling in the United States illustrates the magnitude of the problem. Twenty years ago, only two states had commercialized gambling. Now it's grown to include every state except Hawaii and Utah. Many state governments have gotten into the act, using various forms of gambling to generate revenue.

According to a press release from the American Gaming Association, in 2005 "the 455 commercial casinos in 11 states generated \$30.29 billion in gross gaming revenue, . . . an increase of nearly 5 percent over 2004 revenue totals." The same press release noted that gambling spending in Las Vegas



Studies show gamblers going without food and clothes, resorting to theft and other illegal activities to get money for the gambling habit.

exceeded \$6 billion, and in Atlantic City, New Jersey, it surpassed \$5 billion.

The overall picture is sobering. Senior citizens in New Jersey are a case in point. According to the Morris County, New Jersey, *Daily Record* (June 13), a poll by Fairleigh Dickinson University and The Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey found that nearly one in four senior citizens in New Jersey who gambles has a gambling disorder, and three of every four New Jersey seniors gamble. The findings indicate that some 340,000 of New Jersey senior citizens could have a gambling problem.

The stakes are high, too, since "the survey found senior citizens with gambling problems spend \$14,300 per year in casinos and \$1,160 per year on lotteries." Statistics indicate that well over half of American adults participate

in legal gambling. A much greater concern is the fact that millions of Americans are problem gamblers, many on a lifetime basis.

Even more disturbing is the fact that 20 percent of the nation's youths are taking up the habit, according to the National Gambling Impact Study Commission. The availability of online gambling has added to the dimensions of the overall problem.

The problem in Britain

In the words of U.K. journalist Olivia Stewart-Liberty, "A British gambling revolution is in the cards." She concluded that "in the end, everyone's on a losing streak."

Her assessment is borne out by grim statistics. According to a front-page article in *The Independent* succinctly titled "Gambling Nation" (May 25), Britons spent £50 billion

on gambling last year. It also noted there are 370,000 problem gamblers now, with a total of 700,000 anticipated within five years in the United Kingdom.

Further, the article states, there has been a 41.3 percent rise in the number of people asking for help with gambling addictions. The betting on the World Cup in Germany is estimated at £1.3 billion. The article summed up the problem this way: "Britain is experiencing an unprecedented boom in betting."

Britain is the betting capital of Europe, with money spent on gambling having increased from £7.6 billion to almost £50 billion in the last several years. This explosion raised Britain to a notorious third in the world, just behind the United States and Japan.

Good advice from Australia

Australians have urged Britain to think twice before it eases its gambling laws. They've been there, done that.

In 1997 Australia liberalized its gambling regulations—with the result that 82 percent of all adults now gamble, about 40 percent at least once a week. Australia now has some 300,000 problem gamblers, the highest per capita in the world, says Anna Gizowska in *The Sunday Telegraph*.

One addicted Sydney businessman admitted to more than one suicide attempt. He said: "Gambling in Australia is becoming an epidemic. It almost ruined my life. My gambling addiction cost me everything: My family, my kids, my home, my business, my investments. They've all gone. I lost everything" (ibid., Oct. 17, 2004).

The statistics tell the story. "There are more than 170,000 gaming machines in Australia to cater for its 19 million population—triple the number of machines in Europe with a population of 520 million" (ibid.).

The burgeoning human cost

Religious writer Paul Richards reported that "studies show gamblers going without food and clothes, resorting to theft and other illegal activities to get money [for the gambling habit] and suffering high rates of family breakdown" (*The Church of England* newspaper, Oct. 29, 2004).

According to *San Francisco Chronicle* writer Susan Gluss, "Economist Earl Grinols, author of *Gambling in America: Costs and Benefits*, studied the rates of crime, bankruptcies, lost workdays, domestic violence, illness, divorces and more, in counties with—and without—casinos. Even using conservative estimates, he found that social costs of gambling outweigh benefits 3 to 1 . . .

"Just one pathological gambler costs

society about \$11,000, says Grinols. He estimates the annual cost of gambling to the U.S. economy at between \$40 billion and \$50 billion, nearly half the cost of drug abuse. The bottom line: Gambling takes far more than it gives.

"Entire communities can suffer. Although casinos create a host of new jobs at first, those gains are typically offset by layoffs and poor sales in area businesses. Restaurants lose customers to the casino's bars and cafes. Dollars spent by townsfolk on, say, refrigerators, cars, or clothes disappear into a slot machine vacuum."

Missouri is a case in point. Gambling tax revenue brought \$242 million in 2002. But Casino Watch, a group opposed to gambling, argues that "the state lost more than double that amount—a whopping \$572 million—in gambling-related business failures, crime, unemployment, social service costs and more."

On the other hand, when South Carolina banned slot machines in 2000, two thirds of its Gamblers Anonymous groups disbanded within six months due to drastic drops in members needing those services.

Gluss sums up the problem: With gambling, "we all pay the social and financial consequences. Dearly" ("Backlash on Betting: Addiction Is Only Part of Gaming's Heavy Social Cost," Oct. 24, 2004).

Applying the biblical principles

Although the Bible does not mention the term *gambling* by name, the Christian principles are clear and plain. Compulsive gambling for stakes that make a difference is a violation of the Tenth Commandment forbidding coveting. (We are not talking here about a private poker game among friends for matchsticks or dimes.)

This commandment forbids greed and covetousness (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Indeed the apostle Paul labels covetousness as a form of idolatry—putting something else in the place of the true God.

Contrary to the advice of a popular actor in the role of a Wall Street baron in a popular movie several years ago, greed is not good. The kickback is far too high a price to pay. Simply put, we should be willing to work for what we earn and not increase our own wealth with the intention of depriving others.

The biblical proverbs, mainly written and compiled by King Solomon, are replete with admonitions that place the desire for riches and wealth in a proper, godly perspective. Taken together, they advocate patience, diligence, hard work and trust in God as preparatory steps toward success.

Here are 12 of them:

- "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing" (Proverbs 10:2).
- "He who has a slack hand becomes poor; but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (Proverbs 10:4).
- "The labor of the righteous leads to life" (Proverbs 10:16).
- "The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22).
- "He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows frivolity is devoid of understanding" (Proverbs 12:11; compare 28:19 below).
- "Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase" (Proverbs 13:11).
- "Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure with trouble" (Proverbs 15:16).
- "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty; but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty" (Proverbs 21:5).
- "The borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7).
- "Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven" (Proverbs 23:5).
- "He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough" (Proverbs 28:19; compare 12:11 above).
- "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me" (Proverbs 30:8, King James Version).

These biblical principles, expressed in differently worded proverbs, show us how to handle our material blessings in ways that lead to a better life, both materially and spiritually.

Gambling is not the answer to our material woes. God is! He teaches us a way of life that includes planning, hard work and real enjoyment. **GN**

Recommended Reading

A more complete account of how we can implement biblical laws and principles is found in our free booklets *Making Life Work* and *The Ten Commandments*. Also, if you are in debt (or even if you are not), ask for our free companion booklet *Managing Your Finances*. Following its advice will put you on the road to getting out of debt and taking control of your money. All are available in print or online free for the asking!



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

Fasting: A Spiritual Power Tool!

Three earlier articles in this series covered prayer, Bible study and thinking or meditation. Along with those spiritual tools, we need to frequently combine this fourth tool—fasting.

by Don Hooser

The only thing most people know about fasting is that it can be a way to lose weight. But there's much more we need to understand about fasting than that.

The Bible has much to say about this very important but oft-neglected spiritual key. God desires and expects His followers to fast. Jesus Christ was asked why His disciples did not fast like other religious people. He replied with a short parable explaining that it was because He was still present with His disciples. He stated that after He was no longer among them (referring to His impending return to heaven), "then they will fast" (Matthew 9:14-15, emphasis added throughout).

By that He meant that *all of His future disciples would fast*. Why? Because we need fasting with prayer to help us maintain a close relationship with God and Jesus Christ. And there are other major spiritual benefits of fasting, as we shall see.

When Jesus spoke to His disciples about *how* to fast, He clearly was expecting that they *would* fast (Matthew 6:16-18). He did not say "if you fast" but "when you fast." And note that in this chapter, Jesus emphasizes fasting as much as praying and doing good works.

Fasting is mentioned prominently in the Old and New Testaments. The biblical record of who fasted is a virtual "who's who" of the Bible and includes Moses, David, Elijah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, Anna and Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul engaged "in fastings often" (2 Corinthians 11:27).

What is fasting?

In a sense, everyone fasts. When we are in bed asleep, we go without any food or drink. That is fasting. That is why the first meal of the day is called *breakfast*. However, when people speak of fasting, they usually mean a longer period of time of deliberately choosing not to eat and drink. It can be for a whole day, part of a day or more than a day.



Godly fasting is poles apart from hunger strikes used to gain political power or draw attention to a personal cause. Fasting liberates us from slavery to our appetites while we focus on the true "Bread of Life," Jesus Christ.

A health fast is any temporary restricted diet that is supposed to have certain health benefits. But this article addresses fasting for one's *spiritual* health, which involves abstaining from food and drink while spending a lot of extra time in prayer and Bible study (Exodus 34:28; Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9).

Ideally, we should spend most of the waking part of a fast period praying, studying and reflecting. If this is not possible, at the very least we can do that during the extra time when we ordinarily would be eating.

Misunderstandings about fasting

A healthy person who is not perspiring much can go without food and water for about three days before the body begins

to be stressed. And a healthy person can go without food for several days if he is drinking water. Thus, the amazingly long 40-day fasts by Moses, Elijah and Jesus Christ (Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8; Luke 4:2) were possible only by God's supernatural intervention.

How long we might safely fast depends on our individual health. If you are unsure about your health limitations, it would be wise to get a medical checkup, and we strongly advise it. Then start with a meal or two before gradually increasing to a full day fast—being alert to the beginning of any adverse effects.

However, we shouldn't consider mere discomforts—including feeling hungry, thirsty and less energetic—as "adverse effects." For most people, a headache is



simply a symptom of withdrawal from regular caffeine consumption. It's wise to taper off from caffeinated beverages before beginning a fast.

Another option is a *partial* fast such as that mentioned in Daniel 10:3. Here one takes in only as much food and/or water as necessary to be safe and spends extra time in prayer, Bible study and meditation. This, too, can be very profitable spiritually.

Fasting is unpopular in a culture of instant self-gratification. People tend to think that every day they need three large meals plus snacks. In a culture of continual feasting, it seems there is no place for fasting! From that standpoint alone, fasting is good for character building—developing self-discipline, commitment, moderation and better eating habits.

Important reasons for fasting

Fasting is an important part of building a right and strong relationship with God (Luke 2:36-37; Acts 13:2).

Godly fasting is poles apart from hunger strikes used to gain political power or draw attention to a personal cause. Fasting liberates us from slavery to our appetites while we focus on the true "Bread of Life," Jesus Christ (John 6:48-51, 63). When fasting, we make a small self-sacrifice to focus on our Savior's awesome sacrifice and plan for us.

By nature we are egocentric (self-centered), and must work at becoming God-centered. A major purpose of fasting is to learn humility—to better understand how great God is and how weak, sinful and needy we are. King David understood this when he wrote, "I humbled myself with fasting" (Psalm 35:13).

God delights in humble hearts. He said in Isaiah 66:2, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (New International Version). In Matthew 5:3 Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus made it clear that if we fast to show off—to "appear to men to be fasting"—we are hypocrites and will have no reward from God (Matthew 6:16-18). Jesus did not mean that it is always wrong to tell someone you are fasting. Often there is a practical need to tell someone, like your spouse. Jesus was talking about the necessity of right *motives and attitudes*.

Jesus spoke a parable in which a proud Pharisee bragged to God, "I fast twice a

week" (Luke 18:9, 12). The man imagined himself to be already humble and was proud of it! Fasting with such a conceited attitude is worthless.

God wants us to "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). When we fast, we increasingly feel hungry and physically weak. In addition to reinforcing the fact that God is the One who sustains us and supplies all our needs, an important lesson of this is that we rapidly become weaker spiritually when we neglect the nourishment of prayer, Bible study and all other efforts to be God's spiritually transformed sons and daughters.

The Bible has only one command regarding fasting. God's people are commanded to fast on the Day of Atonement from sundown to sundown (Leviticus 23:27-32). Interestingly, this fast day is listed among God's spiritual Feast days in this chapter.

Besides the ordinary personal benefits of fasting, the Atonement fast has prophetic significance. To learn about the meaning of the Day of Atonement and its accompanying fasting, please request our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

Secondary purposes of fasting

Besides the primary purposes of worshipping God, drawing closer to Him, humbling ourselves and growing spiritually, it is appropriate to have secondary purposes in fasting as well—beseeching God in prayer for His help with one or more serious needs for ourselves or for others.

When God has not answered prayers for a certain need, try fasting with prayer. In one instance when Christ's disciples could not cast out a demon, He told them that "this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:14-21). Proper fasting often results in significant spiritual breakthroughs. While we rely on the spiritual tools of prayer, Bible study and meditation on a daily basis, we occasionally need the *power tool* of fasting.

There can be many reasons to fast, such as a personal problem, a difficult-to-overcome sin, facing a major decision, a Church crisis, a threat of danger, the need to change someone's attitude, or expressing thanksgiving, among others. For a very enlightening study, use a Bible concordance and look up all the passages that contain the words *fast*, *fasted* and *fasting*. Read why they fasted, what they

were praying about and what God did as a result of the fast.

However, we must never view fasting as pressuring God to get what we want (Isaiah 58:3). God wants us to pray about our problems, but not to try to dictate the solutions. Our attitudes should be like that of Jesus Christ when He prayed, "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

It is fine for a group such as a church congregation or circle of friends to decide to fast together concerning an urgent matter. When his country was being invaded, King Jehoshaphat "proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah" (2 Chronicles 20:1-3). At the preaching of Jonah, "the people of Nineveh believed God [and] proclaimed a fast" (Jonah 3:5).

To beseech God for His protection, Ezra proclaimed a fast for all the exiles returning to Judah (Ezra 8:21-23). Esther requested that all the Jews in Shushan fast so that they would be spared from genocide (Esther 4:16).

Isaiah 58:1-12 is a profound passage that contrasts right and wrong attitudes in fasting. It clearly shows that fasting must not be a mere ritual. Fasting should teach us to be *willing to sacrifice* in many ways in the service of others. How many are we willing to sacrifice to "undo . . . heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free . . . to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him?" (verses 6-7).

God's Word exhorts us to "stand fast in the Lord" (Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:8). Here the English word "fast" means *firmly fixed* or *steadfast*. From what the Bible teaches us about fasting, we see that people who sincerely and regularly fast and pray to God will very likely "stand fast in the Lord"! **GN**

Recommended Reading

How can we build a right relationship with God? What kind of relationship does God want with you? What should the spiritual tools of prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting lead to? The answers to these questions lead to one of the great questions of all time—namely, what is the purpose of life? You need to read *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. A free copy is waiting for you!



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

www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

Television Log

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

Arizona	
Phoenix	ch. 24, Mondays 5:30 p.m.
Prescott	ch. 13, Sundays 6:30 a.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m.
Prescott Valley	ch. 13, Sundays 9 a.m. & 6 p.m.; Mondays 9 a.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m. & 3 p.m.
Tucson	ch. 73, 98, Sundays 8 a.m. ch. 72, 97, Saturdays 10 a.m.
Arkansas	
Fayetteville	ch. 18, Sundays 10 a.m.; Wednesdays 6 p.m.; Saturdays 9 p.m.
Mena	ch. 19, Sundays 8:30 a.m.
Mountain Home	ch. 7, 22, Sundays 9 a.m.
California	
Alamo	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Berkeley	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Chatsworth	ch. 34, Sundays 2:30 p.m.
Clayton	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Concord	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Danville	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Dublin	ch. 26, Fridays 4 p.m.
El Cerrito	ch. 26, Thursdays 9 p.m.
El Sobrante	ch. 26, Thursdays 9 p.m.
Emeryville	ch. 26, Sundays 8 a.m.
Eureka	ch. 10, Fridays 7 p.m.
Fremont	ch. 27, 29, Tuesdays 6:30 p.m.
Hayward	ch. 28, Tuesdays 10 p.m.
Hemet	ch. 3, Fridays 3 p.m.
Hercules	ch. 26, Thursdays 9 p.m.
Lafayette	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Livermore	ch. 26, Fridays 4 p.m.
Marin County	ch. 26, Tuesdays 10:30 p.m.
Martinez	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Modesto	ch. 26, Thursdays 8:30 p.m.; Fridays 4 p.m.
Monrovia	ch. 16, 98, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays 4:30 p.m.
Moraga	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Novato	ch. 71, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Oakland	ch. 26, Sundays 8 a.m.
Orinda	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Palo Cedro	DCA cable link, Thursdays 10 a.m.
Pasadena	ch. 56, Sundays 6 a.m. & 6 p.m.
Petaluma	ch. 26, Sundays 8 p.m.; Fridays 4 p.m.
Piedmont	ch. 26, Sundays 8 a.m.
Pittsburg	ch. 26, Thursdays 12 midnight
Pleasant Hill	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Pleasanton	ch. 26, Fridays 4 p.m.
Redding	ch. 11, Sundays 11:30 a.m.
Richmond	ch. 26, Thursdays 9 p.m.
Rossmore	ch. 26, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Sacramento	ch. 18, Thursdays 6 p.m.
San Diego	ch. 23, Thursdays 10 p.m.
San Diego (North)	ch. 19, 23, Sundays 3:30 p.m.
San Francisco	ch. 29, Sundays 9 a.m.
San Jose	ch. 15A, Wednesdays 4:30 p.m.
San Rafael	ch. 26, Tuesdays 7 p.m.
Santa Clara	ch. 15A, Wednesdays 4:30 p.m.
Santa Rosa	ch. 72, Sundays 7:30 p.m.; Saturdays 10:30 a.m.
S. Pasadena	ch. 6, Thursdays 4 p.m.
Van Nuys	ch. 25, Sundays 2 p.m.
Verdugo Hills	ch. 20, Thursdays 9:30 p.m.
Walnut Creek	ch. 6, Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
Colorado	
Boulder	ch. 43, Fridays 1 p.m.
Florida	
Tampa	ch. 19, 20, Sundays 12:30 p.m.; Saturdays 1 p.m.
Georgia	
Cornelia	ch. 4, Sundays 2 p.m.
Hawaii	
Lanai	ch. 13, Fridays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 7 a.m.
Maui	ch. 52, Fridays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 7 a.m.
Molokai	ch. 13, Fridays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 7 a.m.
Idaho	
Boise	ch. 11, Wednesdays 7:30 p.m.
Coeur d'Alene	ch. 19, Fridays 8 a.m.
Illinois	
Arlington Heights	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Bartlett	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Buffalo Grove	ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Chicago	ch. 36, times vary
Des Plaines	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.

East St. Louis	ch. 18, Saturdays 5:30 p.m.
Elk Grove Village	ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Glenview	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Golf	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Hanover Park	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Hoffman Estates	ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Lincolnwood	ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Morton Grove	ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Mt. Prospect	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Naperville	ch. 17, Sundays 10 a.m.
Niles	ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Northbrook	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Palatine	ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Park Ridge	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Prospect Heights	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Rolling Meadows	ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Romeoville	ch. 6, Sundays 9 a.m.
Schaumburg	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Skokie	ch. 4, Fridays 3 a.m., 11 a.m. & 8 p.m.
Springfield	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Streamwood	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Wheeling	ch. 35, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Wilmette	ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
Indiana	
Bloomington	ch. 3, Sundays 9:30 p.m.
Elkhart	ch. 99, Mondays 4:30 p.m.
Evanville	ch. 7, Mondays 5:30 p.m.
Ft. Wayne	ch. 57, Thursdays 2 p.m.
Valparaiso	ch. 99, Tuesdays 8:30 p.m.
Iowa	
Des Moines	ch. 15, Sundays 11:30 a.m.
Iowa City	ch. 18, Tuesdays 12:30 p.m.; Fridays 5:30 p.m.
Kentucky	
Hopkinsville	ch. 23, Wednesdays and Fridays 11 a.m.
Murray	ch. 19, Sundays 8 p.m.
Owensboro	ch. 52, Sundays 8 a.m. & 7 p.m.
Paducah	ch. 2, Thursdays 3:30 p.m.
Massachusetts	
Amherst	ch. 12, Tuesdays 9 p.m.
Boston	ch. 22, 23, 83, Sundays 7 a.m.; Wednesdays 10 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.
Cambridge	ch. 22, 23, 83, Sundays 7 a.m.; Wednesdays 10 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.
Greenfield	ch. 17, Tuesdays 4 p.m.; Wednesdays 10:30 a.m.
Palmer	ch. 15, Sundays 12, 2:30 & 8 p.m.
Shrewsbury	ch. 33, Wednesdays 10 p.m.; Thursdays 7 a.m.
Worcester	ch. 13, Thursdays 10 a.m.
Michigan	
Ann Arbor	ch. 17, Thursdays 4:30 p.m.
Grand Haven	ch. 22, Mondays 4 p.m.
Grand Rapids	ch. 25, Tuesdays or Wednesdays 11 a.m.
Kalamazoo	ch. 19, Sundays 8:30 a.m.
Midland	ch. 3, Fridays 5:30 p.m.
Mt. Pleasant	ch. 3, times vary
Traverse City	ch. 2, Sundays 11:30 a.m.
Minnesota	
Albert Lea	ch. 6, Sundays 9:55 a.m.
Austin	ch. 6, Sundays 7 p.m.
Blaine	ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Burnsville	ch. 14, Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 4:30 p.m.; Saturdays 4:30 a.m.
Centerville	ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Circle Pines	ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Eagan	ch. 15, Sundays 6:30 a.m.; Mondays 12:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 9:30 p.m.; Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.; Thursdays 3:30 p.m.; Fridays 12:30 p.m.; Saturdays 9:30 a.m.
Ham Lake	ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Inver Grove Hts.	ch. 15, Sundays 6:30 a.m.; Mondays 12:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 9:30 p.m.; Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.; Thursdays 3:30 p.m.; Fridays 12:30 p.m.; Saturdays 9:30 a.m.
Lexington	ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Lino Lakes	ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Litchfield	ch. 10, Sundays 2 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 1 p.m., 7 p.m.; Wednesdays 1 a.m., 3 a.m., 8:30 a.m.; 6:30 p.m.
Minneapolis	ch. 75, Mondays 6:30 p.m.
Rochester	ch. 10, Sundays 10:30 a.m. &

Spring Lake Park	7:30 p.m.; Saturdays 7:30 p.m.
St. Charles	ch. 14, Sundays 1 & 9 a.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.
Wabasha	ch. 20, Sundays 2 p.m.; Wednesdays 3 p.m.
Willmar	ch. 20, Sundays 2 p.m.; Wednesdays 3 p.m.
Winona	ch. 8, Thursdays 8 a.m. & 5 p.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m.
Missouri	
Cape Girardeau	ch. 5, Sundays 9 a.m.
Jefferson City	ch. 3, Wednesdays 6 p.m.
Springfield	ch. 26, Sundays 8:30 a.m.; Wednesdays 7 p.m.; Saturdays 8:30 a.m.
St. Charles	ch. 18, Sundays 8 a.m., Saturdays 10 p.m.
St. Louis	ch. 18, Saturdays 5:30 p.m.
Montana	
Billings	ch. 7, Sundays 6 p.m.; Saturdays 11 a.m.
Helena	ch. 11, Sundays 3 p.m.
Missoula	ch. 7, Sundays 11 a.m.
Nevada	
Carson City	ch. 10, 26, Wednesdays 7:30 p.m.
Reno/Sparks	ch. 16, Wednesdays 7 p.m.
New Hampshire	
LaConia	ch. 25, 26, Sundays 7:30 a.m. & 4:30 p.m.
New Jersey	
Newark	ch. 19, Sundays 10 p.m.
New Mexico	
Albuquerque	ch. 27, Fridays 2:30 p.m.; Saturdays 7 p.m.
New York	
Binghamton	ch. 4, Thursdays 5:30 p.m.
Brooklyn	ch. 56, 69, Sundays 10 a.m.
Canandaigua	ch. 12, Sundays 2 p.m.
Long Island	ch. 20, Thursdays 9:30 a.m.
Manhattan	ch. 57, Sundays 7 a.m.
Olean	ch. 6, Thursdays 9:30 p.m.
Oneonta	ch. 23, Mondays 6 p.m.; Wednesdays 9 p.m.
Queens	ch. 35, Mondays 10:30 a.m.
Rochester	ch. 56, Sundays 10 p.m.; Thursdays 4:30 p.m.
Woodbury	ch. 15, Tuesdays & Thursdays 8 a.m.
North Carolina	
Charlotte	ch. 21, Saturdays 2 p.m.
Durham	ch. 8, Tuesdays 6 a.m.
Greensboro	ch. 8, Wednesdays 3 p.m.; Saturdays 6 a.m.
Hickory	ch. 3, Sundays 7 p.m.
North Dakota	
Bismarck	ch. 12, Sundays 2:30 p.m.
Fargo	ch. 12, Tuesdays 10:30 a.m.
Ohio	
Athens	ch. 23, Sundays 7 p.m.; Wednesdays 7 p.m.
Bryan	ch. 12, Wednesdays 10 a.m. & 3 p.m.
Cincinnati	ch. 18, Sundays 10:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 10 p.m.; Thursdays 11 p.m.; Saturdays 6:30 a.m.
Cleveland West suburbs	ch. 21, Sundays 11:30 a.m.; Thursdays 7 p.m.
Dayton	ch. 12, 23, Tuesdays 4 p.m.; Fridays 2:30 & 7 p.m.
Defiance	ch. 5, Sundays 12 noon; Thursdays 6 p.m.
Fairborn	ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
Greenville	ch. 3, Thursdays 8 p.m.
Oberlin/Wellington	ch. 12, Sundays & Saturdays 9 a.m.
Trotwood	ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
Urbana	ch. 1, daily 8 a.m., 2 p.m. & 11 p.m.
Vandalia	ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
Xenia	ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
Oregon	
Ashland	ch. 15, 31, 95, Sundays 2 p.m.
Eugene	ch. 29, Mondays 12:30 a.m. & 12:30 p.m.
McMinnville	ch. 11, Tuesdays 8 p.m.; Wednesdays 12 noon
Oregon City	ch. 21, Mondays 8 p.m.
Portland	ch. 22, Sundays 7:30 p.m.
Salem	ch. 23, Sundays 12:30 p.m.; Fridays 2 p.m.; Saturdays 11:30 a.m.

Woodburn	ch. 11, Sundays 9 a.m.
Pennsylvania	
Pittsburgh	ch. 21, times vary
York	ch. 16, Sundays 8:30 p.m.; Mondays 4:30 a.m. & 12:30 p.m.
Rhode Island	
Entire state	ch. 14, Fridays 10:30 a.m.
Tennessee	
Chattanooga	ch. 46, Fridays 11 a.m.
Texas	
Arlington	ch. 16, Mondays 1:30 p.m.
Austin	ch. 11, Mondays 6 p.m.
Dallas	ch. 148, 74, Sundays 12:30 p.m.; Thursdays 9:30 p.m.
Del Rio	ch. 19, Sundays 9 a.m.; Wednesdays 5 p.m.
El Paso	ch. 15, Fridays 1 p.m.
Fort Worth	ch. 28, Tuesdays 5:30 p.m.; Thursdays 1 p.m.
Longview	ch. 10, Wednesdays 10 p.m.; Fridays 12 noon
Virginia	
Hampton Roads	ch. 71, 74, Sundays 10 a.m.
Washington	
Everett	ch. 77, Wednesdays 5 p.m.
Kennewick	ch. 13, Sundays 6 p.m.; Tuesdays 8:30 p.m.
Olympia	ch. 22, 29, Sundays 9 a.m.; Thursdays 10:30 p.m.
Spokane	ch. 25, Sundays 7 p.m.
Vancouver	ch. 14, Saturdays 5:30 p.m.
West Virginia	
Morgantown	ch. 11, Sundays 1 p.m.; Tuesdays 3:30 p.m.; Thursdays 12 noon; Fridays 8 p.m.
Wisconsin	
Beloit	ch. 12, Thursdays 6:30 p.m.
Eau Claire	ch. 11, Sundays 2 p.m.
Kenosha	ch. 14, Sundays & Mondays 7:30 p.m.
Madison	ch. 4, Sundays 4:30 p.m.
Milwaukee	ch. 96, times vary
Oshkosh	ch. 2, Mondays 4 p.m.; Tuesdays 2 p.m.; Fridays 1 p.m., Saturdays 8 p.m.
Stevens Point	ch. 3, Mondays 10:30 p.m.; Tuesdays 10 a.m. & 3:30 p.m.
West Allis	ch. 14, times vary

Radio Log

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

Nationwide	
XM Satellite Radio	170, Sundays 8:30 a.m. (EST)
Internet Radio	live365.com, Sundays 9 a.m. (PST)
Alabama	
Birmingham	1070 AM, Sundays 7:30 a.m.
Arizona	
Douglas	930 AM, Saturdays 10:30 a.m.
Globe	1240 AM, Saturdays 10:30 a.m.
Sierra Vista	1470 AM, Saturdays 10:30 a.m.
Tucson	940 AM, Saturdays 10:30 a.m.
California	
San Diego	760 AM, Sundays 6 a.m.
Florida	
Orlando	540 AM, Sundays 6:30 a.m.
Indiana	
Indianapolis	1070 AM, Sundays 7 a.m.
Louisiana	
New Orleans	870 AM, 105.3 FM, Saturdays 9:30 p.m.
Michigan	
Lansing	88.1 FM, Sundays 7:30 a.m.
Montana	
Helena	101.9 FM, Mondays 8 p.m.; Fridays 8:30 p.m.; Saturdays 8 a.m.
New York	
Buffalo	930 AM, Sundays 6:30 a.m.
Oklahoma	
Tulsa	740 AM, Sundays 8 a.m.
West Virginia	
Wheeling	1170 AM, Fridays 8:15 p.m.



A Place Called Megiddo, Part 2

In last issue's article we raised the question of how today's political leaders could be deceived to fight Christ at His second coming. Could something at the site of Megiddo lead to an answer?

by Darris McNeely

Megiddo (or Armageddon), an ancient city in northern Israel and site of some of the world's earliest battles, is mentioned in Revelation 16:16 as the gathering place for the armies of the kings of the earth prior to the return of Jesus Christ.

It will be a time of global struggle for world dominion involving the armies of the Beast power and armies from beyond the Euphrates River. They will move toward Jerusalem and the prophesied "battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Revelation 16:14).

How could this happen? What will bring the world to this day of battle and judgment? More importantly, how can you avoid the same deception that will grip our world, sending it careening into battle against God Himself and threatening to, as stated in Matthew 24:22, bring all life to an end? This will be a time unlike any we can imagine, and it's critical that you understand the times to avoid the trap of deception.

In Revelation 16:15, right at the peak of the narrative, Jesus Christ injects a warning: "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

In Revelation 19:8 we are told that the Bride of Christ, the Church, will "be arrayed in fine linen . . . for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." Before one can engage in righteous acts, he or she must be able to discern between righteousness and unrighteousness. On that point, we can return to the site of Megiddo and learn a lesson about how our world has developed.

Megiddo's sacrificial altar

In the lowest excavation levels of the huge mound at Megiddo, archaeologists uncovered a large sacrificial altar about 29 feet (nearly nine meters) around.

Within this area, called the sacred precinct, are the remains of a large temple, which indicates the importance of this part of the city. Large concentrations of animal bones and ashes have been found in the vicinity. Scholars also think that this altar saw the most insidious form of sacrifice in the ancient world—human beings.

tious dances before assembled crowds.

To the beat of drums and other musical accompaniment, the chants of priests and the increasing cries of the enthralled citizens, these rituals would inflame the passions of all present and end in a mass orgy of sexual activity for everyone assembled. This was done in the belief that it would



At the lowest levels of the ancient site of Megiddo, the biblical site of Armageddon, lies a large sacrificial altar (round structure at left). The debased worship practices of the Canaanites included such abominations as child sacrifice.

The chief deity worshipped on this altar would have been the Canaanite god *Baal*, thought to be ruler of the earth. His worship was connected to nature, especially rainfall. Baal supposedly controlled thunder and lightning, and his blessing on the land was considered essential for soil fertility and successful crops.

The inhabitants of Megiddo would have been addicted to the seductive forms of worship associated with Baal. The worship would have included animal sacrifice, ritualistic meals and licentious dancing. Sacred prostitutes lived in the temple buildings and at prescribed times would perform licen-

ensure fertility for the crops and the well-being of the populace.

Asherah was the female consort of Baal. She and her colleagues dealt in sex and war, and her shrines were temples of legalized vice. In some manifestations she appears in fantastic bloody orgies of destruction, butchering people young and old, while wading ecstatically in human gore up to her knees.

Versions of this goddess have been found throughout Canaan, adding to the evidence that human sacrifices were offered at places like Megiddo.

It's no wonder that God gave instruction

to the Israelites to wipe every vestige of such religion from the land when He gave them their inheritance. Yet the story of ancient Israel reveals that they rarely obeyed God's every instruction.

The gods of Canaan—Baal and Asherah—were a perpetual snare for the Israelites. The extent to which Israel embraced the worship of Baal is seen in the dramatic clash between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, not far from Megiddo (1 Kings 18).

It's difficult to understand how a people could be led by religious and political fervor to carry an infant to an altar, hand the child to a priest and then stand by to watch it burned in a blazing cauldron of fire—all in the name of a god.

Yet it happened at Megiddo as a routine part of life, accepted by everyone as necessary for the well-being of their society. The pagan idolatry of the land reached its lowest form with this readiness of people to sacrifice their own children. The gods people worship determine the morals and values of those people.

The gods people create with their own minds and hands are a poor substitute for the God who revealed Himself to Abraham and Moses. Those pagan gods led the Canaanites and later the Israelites into destruction and captivity. History shows that any culture that practices child sacrifice to its gods of convenience eventually falls from power and is eclipsed.

Continuing struggle between good and evil

Megiddo serves as a symbol of the age-old struggle between good and evil. The struggle echoed in Elijah's stirring words: "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). In our modern world not everyone bows down to gods of stone or wood. We are too sophisticated for that. We have fashioned gods of money, power, celebrity and status.

Instead of idolatry, which prophets like Elijah railed against, we have formed with our own hands a neo-pagan worship called relativism.

Instead of one God, there are many gods one may worship. Instead of one way, clearly defined by the one true God, the common belief today is that there are many ways to access a spiritual life and worship the deity. Instead of "traditional values," many subscribe to the philosophy of "different strokes for different folks." The great issue of our

time is whether there is one God, one way and one law—not two or more.

In 45 years the West has gone from the idea that "God is dead," proclaimed loudly from the pages of a leading newsweekly, to the present where we have created the multicultural gods of diversity.

In our supposed enlightenment, we think there is no source of revealed truth to which we can appeal as a standard of righteousness. Every religion is as good as any other. Every culture is equal. Every man can decide for himself what is right and what is wrong. This falsely makes human beings equal to God and is the essence of idolatry.

It's the problem God found with ancient Israel when He said through the prophet Isaiah: "Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope; that say, 'Let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it.' Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:18-20).

This describes not only ancient Israel but also our world today. We cannot distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, because we have forgotten God and abandoned His spiritual law.

We are a people who do not want to admit that God has a sovereign claim on our lives and who are unwilling to submit to Him in obedience. What Paul wrote applies to our society: "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 1:28).

A culture is "debased" when it sacrifices its children and their future in the fires of idolatry. Our people do the same today when we "sacrifice" our children through abortion, thus offering them up to our self-made god of personal convenience (the reason for abortions more than 90 percent of the time).

When abortion on demand is justified as a right and made possible by whatever human statute is legally required, we are seeing a society turned inside out, incapable of telling right from wrong, unable to discern righteous judgment.

It's little wonder that judgment has fled when the prime consideration in evaluating a candidate for America's highest court, the Supreme Court, is his or her willingness to uphold the "right" to abortion. That is a

sad commentary on American culture, and unless the nation awakens to the gravity of this unconscionable tragedy, it will go the way of ancient Israel.

Back to Megiddo

Jesus Christ's statement in Revelation 16:15 shows a key to avoiding the end-time deception that inspires the armies of the world to gather in Megiddo. You will know how to discern righteousness based on the "commandments of God and . . . the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17).

The deception that grips today's world prevents understanding the true gospel of the Kingdom of God. It also prevents the world from knowing Christ's real personality.

The image of Jesus presented to today's world is not the Christ of the Gospels. He is not fully understood by religionists today, and that is why, at His return as King of Kings in full glory, He will not be recognized. Mankind's resistance to God will increase to the point that they will fight to the death, not knowing they do the work of the real Baal, the god of this world, Satan the devil (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The idolatry that shoves the true God out of the picture leads to a self-deification, where man decides what is right and wrong, something that is the prerogative of God alone. So it has been since the beginning of the human family. This idolatry of the self will find its final and supreme expression at a place called Megiddo, in the last battle of the great day of God Almighty.

Don't be too sure that you are clothed with the proper garments of righteousness. Examine your values in light of Christ's teachings and make sure you love His commands more than the spirit of this world. Only then can you be sure to escape the deception of the time of the end. Your eternal life depends on it! **GN**

Recommended Reading

Is there a sure way to know what lies ahead for our world? Where should we look for answers? How will future events affect you and your loved ones? We've prepared an exciting, eye-opening booklet, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, to help you understand what is going to take place in the days ahead. You can't afford to be without this priceless knowledge—request your free copy today!



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

www.gnmagazine.org/booklets

Spaceship Earth

Continued from page 7

image of His Son, that He might be the *firstborn among many brethren* . . . He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us *all things*?”—including the vast universe outside our atmospheric window (see also Hebrews 2:5-13; Deuteronomy 4:19).

This is very good news indeed!

So we have an incredible potential, and this life is just the first stage of our cosmic journey. As the apostle Paul again says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are *not worthy* to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Moreover, God designed this journey for us to learn not only physical properties of the universe, but to develop spiritual character by applying the biblical principles to accept Christ’s sacrifice for our sins, to overcome trials and to successfully manage our life and our family. This will lead to eventually inheriting eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

As God the Father says about this first stage for mankind, “He who *overcomes shall inherit all things*, and I will be his God and he shall be *My son*” (Revelation 21:7).

This wondrous earth, which regrettably has been largely mismanaged, polluted and bloodstained by mankind, will one day be renewed and beautified when Jesus Christ returns as King of Kings and His true followers from this age rule with Him. Earth will then become a gleaming jewel of peace and happiness, and ultimately, the place where the New Jerusalem will set its foundations (Revelation 21:2-3).

Yes, we have a wonderful future. Just as the earth and the universe have been carefully crafted, so God has planned the purpose of our lives. But we still have free choice, and God respects us so much that He allows us to make our own mistakes and learn from them. Yet He wants us to acknowledge Him as our wonderful Creator and Father and then submit to His wonderful laws.

Are you willing to discover the truth of your Creator’s plan for you—and to *act* on that truth? If so, it will truly turn your life around—after all, His incredible plan and His righteous laws were designed just as carefully as everything else we see around us. If you do so, then you can be sure that your long journey through space will not have been in vain! **GN**

Ahmadinejad

Continued from page 15

announced ‘the atomic miracle’, the head of the Iranian nuclear project, Ghulamreza Aghazadeh, unveiled plans for manufacturing 54,000 centrifuges, to enrich enough uranium for hundreds of nuclear warheads. ‘We are going into mass production,’ he boasted.

“The Iranian plan is simple: playing the diplomatic game for another two years until Bush becomes a ‘lame-duck,’ unable to take military action against the mullahs, while continuing to develop nuclear weapons . . .”

“While waiting Bush out, the Islamic Republic is intent on doing all it can to consolidate its gains in the region. Regime changes in Kabul and Baghdad have altered the status quo in the Middle East. While Bush is determined to create a Middle East that is democratic and pro-Western, Ahmadinejad is equally determined that the region should remain Islamic but pro-Iranian.

“Iran is now the strongest presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, after the US. It has turned Syria and Lebanon into its outer defenses, which means that, for the first time since the 7th century, Iran is militarily present on the coast of the Mediterranean. In a massive political jamboree in Tehran [in April], Ahmadinejad also assumed control of the ‘Jerusalem Cause’, which includes annihilating Israel ‘in one storm’, while launching a take-over bid for the cash-starved Hamas government in the West Bank and Gaza.”

Mr. Taheri also points out that Tehran has “reactivated Iran’s network of Shia organizations in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Yemen, while resuming contact with Sunni fundamentalist groups in Turkey, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco.”

Islamic fundamentalism in a variety of forms is spreading from country to country with no successful reverses. The latest country to come under the control of fundamentalists is Somalia, whose capital city, Mogadishu, fell to militants in early June.

Militant Islam is a powerful force that seems destined to grow greater and to bring increasing turmoil around the world. Among the adherents of Shia Islam the expectation of the Mahdi is feeding their zeal toward the fulfillment of apocalyptic events.

The Shiites expect a messiah. One will come, but not the one they think they are preparing for! **GN**



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

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

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

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

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



For additional information, visit our Web site:

www.ucg.org

Response to fatherhood articles

This month's *Good News* magazine is wonderful. The articles about fatherhood are so needed in today's world. My daughter-in-law has just divorced our son and six children are involved. And I know quite a few families with children who would benefit from reading these articles. I appreciate your ministry.

Mrs. T.S., Cleveland, Texas

I continue to enjoy your magazine *The Good News*. I was particularly moved by the articles on missing fathers and single parents (May-June issue). In the days when children need family stability more than ever, it seems they are getting less and less. It would be great if all parents could read your articles and act on them, but I fear that if they did, they would take no notice of them.

C.B., Darwen, England

Thank you for the May-June issue. It is packed with vital ideas and tools that, if applied, can help us (your readers) to make a success out of our lives. Please convey my appreciation to the writers and the staff for helping me. The lead articles give us needed information about the role of fathers in rearing children to grow up into courageous adults. Helping us men to realize our roles in teaching children is important to improving the world.

J.M.M., El Dorado, Arkansas

Thank you for the May-June issue as it hit home to me. When I was age 2, my mother and father divorced and my father and stepmother raised me. My faith fell a little short until I married. I had faith, but did not get serious about it until I was around 50. I am now going on 74 with many questions still. I have been blessed with a good and faithful wife. Your magazine helps.

F.H., Lower Burrell, Pennsylvania

"The Da Vinci Code, Christianity and the Bible"

I enjoyed the article "The Da Vinci Code, Christianity and the Bible" in the May-June issue and congratulate you on printing it. However, I believe you have given Constantine too much credit in establishing Sunday as the Christian day of worship. It was already established as the day for Christians to assemble long before he was born.

K.S., Dallas Texas

Why not request our free booklet Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest? It reveals how Sunday was substituted as the weekly day of worship and also gives many biblical proofs showing why we should observe the Saturday Sabbath.

"Behind the Headlines"

"Behind the Headlines" by Melvin Rhodes (on the dangers of radical Islam to Western societies) is very interesting. It is important to realize that the threat lies within Western societies and these threats are homegrown. Western societies were once anchored in the Judeo-Christian heritage, but are now losing their time-tested values, having fallen prey to neoliberalism, which is undermining the very foundation of Western democracies. They must change their decadent lifestyles and be prepared to sacrifice some of their freedoms for the common good in facing future perils.

D.S., Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Appreciates Creation or Evolution booklet

I want to commend your marvelous and comprehensive analysis of the Bible and world events in your magazine. I have been a subscriber for some months and found your Bible exposition simply breathtaking. Your analysis in the booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* was unique. You completely demystify the evolution myth with Bible evidences that prove things contrary to the theory of evolution. Well done!

J.C.O., Nigeria

The Holy Spirit

Just wanted to see if you caught the wording on page 20 of the May-June issue. You said that there were only two members of the divine family, God the Father and Jesus Christ. Where does the Holy Spirit enter into the picture? It

seems to me that you can't incorporate the Father and the Son without also bringing in the Holy Spirit. I am not ridiculing you, as on the whole your magazine is very good.

H.F.K., Internet

Actually the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is not a person. For the biblical proof, please request or download our free booklet Who Is God? It contains two full chapters explaining the biblical truth about the Holy Spirit.

From error to truth

I am thrilled and greatly impressed with the obvious depth and intensity your Bible researchers display in all the publications. In every instance of expressing an interpretation or teaching of the Bible, a reference is made to the book, chapter and verse that justifies the position taken.

I am the son of a Southern Baptist minister. Having grown up in this environment, I had thought I was well-informed about the teachings of the Bible. However, after I started reading your many publications, I began reading the Bible as if I had never done so before. I felt sure that you had made some misguided judgments, but then there were the sources cited to justify the position taken. I asked myself how I had gotten so misled. I am very impressed with your teachings and they have me studying as I have never done so before.

L.G.W., Santa Rosa, California

I receive *The Good News* and order your booklets from time to time. I live in an orthodox Christian country, but I always knew that the real teaching of Christ is something different from a mix of pagan traditions and Greek philosophy. So I found in your materials real answers to my questions.

D.M., Ukraine

I live in Singapore and have been enlightened by your articles that enable people like me to come to learn the truth about Jesus Christ and His teachings. I have been a Catholic since birth, but I believe that it was through God's grace that He is slowly but surely on a daily basis revealing His truth to me. I am amazed at what I have come to comprehend in the space of one year.

M.A., Singapore

I am an Indian citizen working in Bangkok. I belong to the Syrian Orthodox Church of South India. I am a devout believer and want to improve my faith. The booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* opened up a whole new perspective on what we believe. I have gained a new viewpoint on some misunderstood issues like the Kingdom of God, Armageddon, Jesus' family and the concept of the Trinity. I will share the literature with other members of my family and friends, enabling them to look at our faith with more understanding.

N.V.G., Bangkok, Thailand

Thank you so much for the booklets that you are sending me. You don't know how much they have changed the way I see life and understand the Bible now. The problem is, how am I going to change my life, meaning from the traditional Christian way to God's way?

K.P., Georgetown, Guyana

We deeply appreciate the profound changes that are continually taking place in the minds of many readers all over the world. We realize that it takes a great deal of spiritual courage and godly diplomacy to actually put these biblical truths into effect in their lives. One particular booklet that should help a great deal is Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion. You can write for a free printed copy or download it from our Web site at www.ucg.org/booklets.

A nearby church?

I live in Elkhart, Texas, and would love to attend your organization, learn the absolutes of the Bible and be saved from the religious errors of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. You are too far away and all I can do is read from the Internet. Can you help us in this area?

R.H., Elkhart, Texas

I have been studying with you for a long time. I am disabled and want to thank you tremendously for helping me with my Christian walk. I wish you



Q: How does the evidence of life on earth millions of years ago equate with the Bible claim that God created life on earth recently by comparison?

N.J., Redruth, England

A: Could some forms of life, such as the dinosaurs, have been present in a world unfit for human habitation before the seven-day creation account in Genesis 1? If we carefully examine the first two verses in the Bible, we might be surprised at the possible conclusion.

We are introduced to the account of the creation of the earth in Genesis 1:1-2: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep."

The original Hebrew wording, compared with other passages of Scripture, has led some to conclude that a considerable time interval is indicated between these two verses. If such an interval is indeed intended, there is no discrepancy between the Bible record and scientific discoveries that indicate that the earth could be much older than a few thousand years. If, on the other hand, there is no such gap, then the earth itself must be only around 6,000 years old—which most scientists consider an impossibility.

Do other passages, as well as history, shed any light on this question?

Some scholars propose that Genesis 1:2 can or should be translated: "Now the earth *became* without form, and void . . ." as opposed to the common rendering "The earth *was* without form, and void . . ." Others dismiss this idea entirely. They assume the original Hebrew word *hayah* must be translated "was" and then assume the earth was originally created in this disorderly condition.

However, as can be seen from many Bible helps, both translations of the word *hayah* are possible. Only the context can determine which is correct.

Gleason Archer, professor of biblical languages, comments: "It should be noted in this connection that the verb *was* in Genesis 1:2 may quite possibly be rendered 'became' and be construed to mean: 'And the earth became formless and void.' Only a cosmic catastrophe could account for the introduction of chaotic confusion into the original perfection of God's creation. This interpretation certainly seems to be exegetically tenable" (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 1974, p. 184).

In a footnote Archer adds: "Properly speaking, this verb *hayah* never has the meaning of static being like the copular verb 'to be.' Its basic notion is that of becoming or emerging as such and such, or of coming into being . . . Sometimes a distinction is attempted along the following lines: *hayah* means 'become' only when it is followed by the preposition *le*; otherwise there is no explicit idea of becoming.

"But this distinction will not stand up under analysis. In Gen[esis] 3:20 the proper rendering is: 'And Adam called the name of his wife Eve, because she *became* the mother of all living.' No *le* follows the verb in this case. So also in Gen[esis] 4:20: 'Jabal *became* the father of tent dwellers.' Therefore there can be no grammatical objection raised to translating Gen[esis] 1:2: 'And the earth became a wasteness and desolation.'"

Some scholars also argue against translating *hayah* "became" instead of "was" in Genesis 1:2 because they assume this interpretation came about only

recently, after geology revealed the strata of the earth to be very old. Thus, they consider this explanation a desperate attempt to reconcile the Genesis account with modern geology.

The explanation that there existed an indefinite period between the initial beautiful creation described in Genesis 1:1 and the earth becoming waste and void in verse 2 has been called, sometimes disparagingly, "the gap theory." The idea was attributed to scholars Thomas Chalmers in the 19th century and to Cyrus Scofield in the 20th.

Yet the interpretation that the earth "became" waste and void has been discussed for close to 2,000 years. The earliest known recorded controversy on this point can be attributed to Jewish sages at the beginning of the second century.

The Hebrew scholars who wrote the Targum of Onkelos, the earliest of the Aramaic versions of the Old Testament, translated Genesis 1:2 as "and the earth was laid waste." The original language led them to understand that something had occurred that had "laid waste" the earth, and they interpreted this as a destruction.

The early Catholic theologian Origen (186-254), in his commentary *De Principiis*, explains regarding Genesis 1:2 that the original earth had been "cast downwards" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1917, p. 342).

In the Middle Ages the Flemish scholar Hugo St. Victor (1097-1141) wrote about Genesis 1:2: "Perhaps enough has already been debated about these matters thus far, if we add only this: 'How long did the world remain in this disorder before the regular re-ordering . . . of it was taken in hand?'" (*De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*, Book 1, Part 1, Chapter 6). Other medieval scholars, such as Dionysius Peavius and Pererius, also considered that there was an interval between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

According to *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, the Dutch scholar Simon Episcopius (1583-1643) taught that the earth had originally been created before the six days of creation described in Genesis (1952, Vol. 3, p. 302). This was roughly 200 years before geologists determined the earth to be far older than 6,000 years.

These numerous examples show us that the idea of an interval between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 has a long history. Any claim that it is of only recent origin—that it was invented simply as a desperate attempt to reconcile the Genesis account with geology—is groundless.

Perhaps the best treatment on both sides of this question is given by the late Arthur Custance in his book *Without Form and Void: A Study of the Meaning of Genesis 1:2*. Dr. Custance states, "To me, this issue is important, and after studying the problem for some thirty years and after reading everything I could lay my hands on pro and con and after accumulating in my own library some 300 commentaries on Genesis, the earliest being dated 1670, I am persuaded that there is, on the basis of the evidence, far more reason to translate Gen. 1:2 as 'But the earth had become a ruin and a desolation, etc.' than there is for any of the conventional translations in our modern versions" (1970, p. 7).

For further understanding of this issue, please request or download our free booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* The sidebar on pages 30 and 31, "Genesis 1 and the Days of Creation," sheds more light on this question.

had a church nearby. I visit you on the Web site often.

G.B., South Carolina

I wish to give my thanks for the subscription to *The Good News*. I've totally loved the one I received and the numerous booklets I now have. I've never seen anything like the *Beyond Today* TV series. I've watched nearly all the programs on your Web site. They need to be congratulated for their fine efforts. I have spoken to the pastor who comes to my state in Australia. I had a really nice talk with him over the phone for about an hour. He is one good, understanding man. So I'll be looking forward to attending a service.

P.B., Tasmania, Australia

In each case we try to put those who would like to attend a church congregation in touch with the nearest pastor or representative of the United Church of God. We do not have a congregation in every place that we would like. Jesus Christ asks us all to pray that the Lord of the harvest, God the Father, would send us more laborers (Matthew 9:37-38).

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

Do you recognize the title of the headline of this article? If you've seen any of the *Star Wars* episodes, you may recognize the scrolling words that appear at the beginning of the movie. But they aren't the same as the words here! The movie's introduction *actually* says, "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away . . ."

But think about those words for a minute. Have you ever wondered if something *is* going on in some distant galaxy? Could there really be people (or aliens) living out there, as suggested by science fiction? If so, did they already have advanced civilizations a long time ago, before we human beings on earth did?

Exploring the unknown

There is something in us that makes us wonder what might be on other worlds far from our earthly home. People *want* to explore things that are unknown, distant and mysterious. Did you know that the *desire* to search out the unknown and to live into the future is something God actually put into the hearts of human beings?

"Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). God's creation is so immense and awesome, and man *wants* to learn its deepest secrets, but he cannot. Even what he does know through modern technology is still minuscule compared to what is unknown.

moon and atom. And He created it all with a fantastic *plan* in mind. It did not evolve of its own accord, and neither did the life-forms within it (see Revelation 4:11; Isaiah 40:26; 42:5; Genesis 1).

This planet—this earth—is where God roughly 6,000 years ago created very special life-forms now called human beings. And of all the creatures God made, He fashioned them in His *own* form and image (Genesis 1:26-27). God made human beings with the ability to have children, who would naturally be born in the same form and image as their parents.

So why did God create people in His own image? He did so because He planned for them to one day become members of His own divine family!

About 2,000 years ago the Creator Himself came down to the earth to live as a man. He did so in order to be killed, to pay for human sins, to make it possible for people to become *immortal* and live *with* God as a member of His family *forever*. But did this same great sacrifice happen again, somewhere else? Or did it happen *only once*, and for *all*? Read Hebrews 9:11-12, 1 Peter 3:18, and Romans 6:9-10 for the answer. Didn't it therefore happen *only on this* unique planet?

Of all the countless billions of planets God has made, to which of them is the Creator *returning* to set up His Kingdom, and to live upon and reign forever? Read Matthew

A Long Time From Now In A Galaxy Far, Far Away...

There is an old saying: "Truth is stranger than fiction." And the truth about the purpose for this vast universe—as well as what really *will* happen far in the future—is more fantastic than any science-fiction plot! Can you imagine a long, long time from now—let's say a billion years—in a galaxy far, far away . . . and *you* being there? You should! Because you *could* be there at that time! Let's look at some facts that the very Creator of all these galaxies has revealed to us earthlings.

According to plan

God created the whole universe—every galaxy, star, planet,

24:30 and Revelation 1:5-8. Can *you* reign on the earth too, *with* Christ our Creator? See Revelation 5:9-10; Daniel 2:44 and 7:14, 18, 22, 27.

But what about God the Father? Will He remain up in heaven forever? What does 1 Corinthians 15:23-24 say? Doesn't even the Father Himself come down to live on *this* planet, where Jesus Christ has set up His Kingdom?

Revelation 21–22 shows that God will one day make the earth a "new earth" and then an enormous new city will descend upon it. And what is the name of the city? It is a *capital* city. Originally a capital in ancient history, it still is



Science-fiction movies portray intelligent life already living on other planets and in other galaxies. Could it be true? If not, then why did God create such a vast universe?

by Paul Luecke

today—and it will be the world capital during the Millennium, the 1,000-year reign of Christ. But notice what is described in these chapters about the incredible size of this city *after* the Millennium, when its new form is set upon the new earth.

Think bigger

So the earth will become and remain the *capital* or headquarters of God's Kingdom. But does all life then remain *only* on the earth for all eternity? Speaking of this Kingdom, Isaiah 9:7 says, "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end." This passage allows for the expansion of God's Kingdom to other planets, star systems and galaxies!

Could it be that God intends to *plant* life out there beyond the earth, like planting seeds in a vast garden? See Isaiah 45:18 and 51:16. Is such an expansion of His Kingdom part of what God wants to place under our care? Note Hebrews 2:5-8 and Romans 8:18-22.

If so, there is certainly plenty of room to grow. Astronomers estimate that there are more *galaxies* than the number of people who have ever lived and died through all human history! That would mean—in terms of numbers—perhaps a galaxy per person!

As spirit beings capable of instantaneous travel from any point to another, it would not be difficult for us to oversee other galaxies where God's King-

dom could be planted—even though our *home base* will always be this earth. By then you and I will be spirit beings in the family of God and will shine as brightly as the sun (Matthew 13:43).

Although we don't know the exact details of how God's Kingdom will continue to expand, we do know that His Kingdom is sure to come. It *will* happen!

In the meantime, what can you do besides dream? If you have grown up in the truth of God or are now beginning to understand the scriptural teachings presented in this magazine, it is likely that you are one of the few people in this world being *called* by God at this time to prepare for the return of Christ and the beginning of His Kingdom. And God's directive in this case is that you "make your own calling and election *sure*" (2 Peter 1:10-11). God will give those of us who respond to Him now the opportunity to teach and serve others in the future. Imagine teaching your classmates, cousins or even ancestors God's truth!

What else can you do? You should start *thinking bigger!* Being *different* from your peers now is *nothing* compared to what your future holds! (Romans 8:18). Do *everything* now with pleasing God in mind. He is the One whose plans include you—and perhaps *seeing* you one day actually *going* to that galaxy far, far away . . . **GN**



Want to Learn More?

If you like reading our articles for teens and young adults in *The Good News*, be sure to take a look at our companion magazine, *Vertical Thought*, at www.verticalthought.org.

This magazine is specially written for our younger *Good News* audience. Each issue is packed with helpful insight and eye-opening articles to help today's young adults get the most out of life—both now and in the future.

You'll uncover lots of fascinating facts, meet many interesting people, discover what's really going on behind the scenes in our world, learn answers to your questions and find practical, down-to-earth guidance on all kinds of subjects.

Visit www.verticalthought.org today!



www.VerticalThought.org

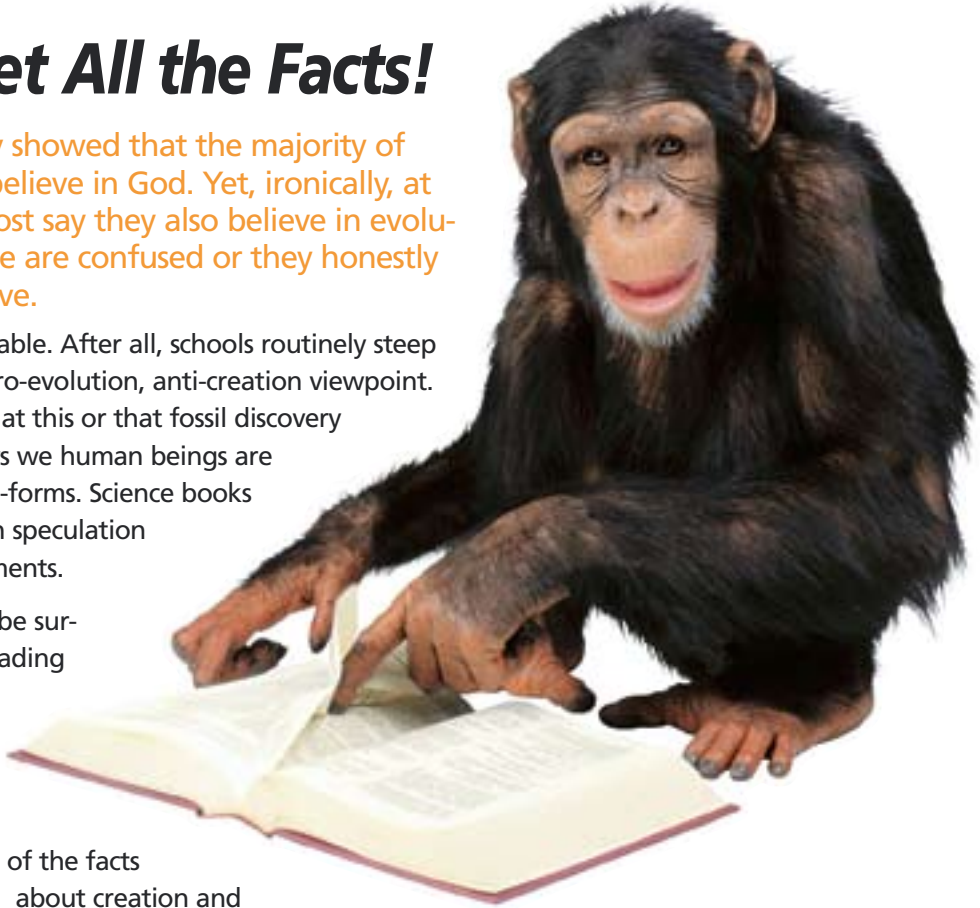
How Did You Get Here— Through Creation or Evolution?

You Need to Get All the Facts!

A recent U.S. survey showed that the majority of people say they believe in God. Yet, ironically, at the same time most say they also believe in evolution! Clearly many people are confused or they honestly aren't sure what to believe.

Such confusion is understandable. After all, schools routinely steep our children's minds with a pro-evolution, anti-creation viewpoint. We often see news reports that this or that fossil discovery "proves" evolution and shows we human beings are descended from primitive life-forms. Science books and textbooks are full of such speculation presented as dogmatic statements.

But what is the truth? You'll be surprised to learn what many leading scientists say!



We've prepared two booklets that address many of the facts

about creation and evolution—facts you'll seldom see discussed in the news or in scientific and educational circles.

Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* examine many eye-opening scientific findings. You'll find both booklets fascinating reading. Request or download your free copies today!



Visit our Web sites: www.gnmagazine.org and www.ucg.org/booklets

Reader Updates

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