

The Good News

September-October 2009

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

Suffering

How It Began, How It Will End

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Can You Know God's Plan?



In early October my wife and I will join thousands of other Christians in a weeklong celebration. We'll gather at locations from Argentina to Australia, from Canada to Cameroon, from Malawi to Mexico, in a biblical observance that's been around for at least 3,400 years.

Although it will be a family time, with lots of family activities, greeting old friends and making new ones, our primary focus will be on *learning more about God*. We'll hear a number of biblically oriented messages and presentations addressing *what God is doing*—right now, in the near future and throughout the history of mankind.

The celebration in which we'll be participating is the biblical Feast of Tabernacles. Most who identify themselves as Christian have never heard of it. Although this feast is mentioned several times in the Bible, many have probably read right over the words with it never registering.

Yet Jesus Christ Himself observed this Feast, even risking death at

Only a few realize that these biblical festivals are a teaching tool God uses to reveal His plan.

the hands of His enemies to travel to Jerusalem to keep it (John 7:1-14). The apostle Paul thought God's festivals so important that he left the fledgling church in Ephesus, telling them, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem" (Acts 18:21).

So why has so much of Christianity ignored the biblical festivals? Most take the position that these celebrations were only for the Jewish people or ancient Israelites—though God Himself proclaimed them "the feasts of the LORD" and said, "These are My Feasts" (Leviticus 23:2, emphasis added throughout). God tells us they are *His* feasts, not those of some particular cultural, religious or ethnic group.

Some think these have no relevance at all to Christians. Yet the apostle Paul, using language plainly showing he was referring to another of God's biblical feasts, told the mostly non-Jewish Christians in Corinth, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Are we missing out on a message from God? *Yes*. By ignoring His biblically mandated celebrations and observances, *we have lost sight of what God is doing*.

Only a few realize that these biblical festivals are a *teaching tool* God uses to reveal the great plan He is working out with human beings here below. For example, the first of God's annual festivals is the Passover, when God directed that a lamb be slain (Exodus 12:3-14; Leviticus 23:4-5). What did this signify?

John the Baptist recognized that Jesus was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)—making it possible for us to be saved from eternal death. Paul understood that Christ was "our Passover, [who] was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The first and most foundational step in God's plan of salvation, "foreordained before the foundation of the world," was that we could be redeemed by "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-20). Similarly, God's other festivals go on to reveal the other major steps in His great plan through which He is working with mankind.

In this issue we examine how God's feasts reveal how He will at last bring about the kind of world for which man has always hoped and dreamed—a world in which suffering will be no more.

Visit our Web site at www.ucg.org/feast if you'd like to learn more about the upcoming Feast of Tabernacles. Perhaps we'll see you there!

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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Suffering

How It Began, How It Will End

by Roger Foster

Our world is wracked with evil and misery. But why? From where did it originate? Why is it so pervasive? And most importantly, does God plan to do something about it?

The Bible tells us that God created human beings in His own image and gave us the privilege to manage—to “have dominion over”—the rest of His earthly creation (Genesis 1:26-28). Yet we find that many aspects of human life here on earth are not yet completely under our control.

Human suffering is a prominent example. That a loving, all-powerful God—as described in the Bible—would allow terrible human anguish to go on perplexes many people. Some even use human suffering as justification for denying God’s existence.

Of course, we need to realize that suffering became a possibility when God created beings with free will—able to choose right or wrong. He could have made preprogrammed robots incapable of choosing wrongly; but devoid of free will, such creatures would also have been incapable of a genuine relationship with Him as He desired—just as we desire to have with others.

So much of human anguish is the result of people making wrong choices with the free will given them. They hurt others as well as themselves, and God is at this time allowing us to learn important lessons from hard experience. Here are a couple of scriptural examples of God allowing people to learn by consequences:

“Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will *suffer* hunger” (Proverbs 19:15, emphasis added throughout). Also, “A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again” (verse 19, New International Version).

A major scriptural principle sums up

what these examples teach: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; *for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Galatians 6:7).

Warfare is the prime example of humanity reaping what we sow. Millions have been maimed and killed, even systematically murdered, in war. Consider just one modern example.

In the first half of the 20th century, Adolf Hitler’s use of bold, calculated deception and unbridled lust for power led to the global tragedy of World War II. One of the darkest chapters of that war was the premeditated Nazi extermination of 6 million Jews in what is now called the Holocaust. The genocide he unleashed is a classic example of man’s heartless inhumanity to man.

This historical example gives us only a glimpse of the incredible anguish, suffering and death that human choices and actions can cause. No period in human history has been exempt from such afflictions, often occurring on a colossal scale.

How did the world come to be so mired in suffering? And what does God intend to do about it?

The great deceiver

The most active contributor to human suffering is one of the first personalities introduced in the Bible. Masquerading as a cunning serpent, he is the grand architect of delusions. God calls him what he is, an *adversary* (Satan) and a *slandering accuser* (the devil), who has greatly influenced the world in a variety of ways.

The Bible refers to him as the “ruler of this world,” the “prince of the power of the



Photos, from left: Corbis Digital Stock, iStockphoto

air” and “the god of this age” (John 12:31; Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4). How did this twisted being come to exist?

In His discussion with the patriarch Job, God refers back to the time “when I laid the foundations of the earth” (Job 38:4). On that occasion, “all the sons of God [referring to the angelic host] shouted for joy” (verse 7). Here we see that God had created the angels even before He made the earth.

But one of those angelic beings rebelled against God. With his slander he convinced a third of the other angels to also become God’s adversaries (Revelation 12:4). As a result, “they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, *who leads the whole world astray*. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him” (verses 8-9, NIV).

God’s purpose for giving us only temporary life in our fleshly body *is to provide us the time and opportunity we need to develop the same character God has*.

Those who succeed in developing godly character will receive the gift of eternal life as God’s perfected family of sons and daughters (Ephesians 3:14-19; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18). Those who accept the gift of salvation thanks to the atoning sacrifice and spiritual help of Jesus Christ will receive greater power than even Satan and his band of fallen angels. As the apostle Paul wrote: “Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?” (1 Corinthians 6:3).

Throughout the Bible we read of Satan’s antagonism toward this plan for humanity’s salvation. He is motivated by intense hatred because he understands what God has in store for us. That is at least one reason why Satan and his fallen angels are constantly seeking to lure human beings away from God’s truth. *They do not want God’s plan for mankind to succeed*, so they actively oppose it.

One of Satan’s most powerful tools is *deception*. Revelation 12:9 speaks of “the great dragon . . . called the Devil and Satan, *who deceives the whole world*.” His massive deceptions have led mankind to follow him rather than the true God. Suffering caused by sin is one of the consequences.

Why people’s minds are spiritually blind

That pattern began with Adam and Eve, who chose to believe and follow Satan

rather than God. God gave them freedom of choice, just as He gives it to us. But at the present time God has not opened most people’s minds to comprehend that choice.

A persistent trait of human nature consistently interferes with the relationship that all peoples and nations have with God. It arises from the natural pressure that our selfish, fleshly impulses and desires exert on the choices we make.

As the apostle Paul explained to Christians in the ancient city of Ephesus, “*we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind*, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Ephesians 2:3). As a result, we approach life from a fundamentally selfish point of view.

Paul also explained to the Christians in Rome: “For the mind-set of the flesh [*which responds to fleshly desires*] is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God’s law, *for it is unable to do so*. Those whose lives are in the flesh [that is, without additional spiritual help] are unable to please God” (Romans 8:6-8, Holman Christian Standard Bible). The deceptive pulls of the fleshly mind are too powerful.

The “Spirit” mentioned by Paul is God’s Holy Spirit. He describes it as “a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7, New Revised Standard Version).

He also says to those who become fully committed to God’s teachings, “it is God who works in you *to will and to act according to his good purpose*” (Philippians 2:13, NIV). The Holy Spirit is the divine power that *enables* the servants of God to recognize and subdue the selfish, harmful inclinations of the flesh.

Paul’s implications are clear! Without assistance from God—through the power of His Spirit—no human being is capable of correctly perceiving and effectively applying the principles of love and responsible behavior that the Scriptures teach. Without this help, all will persist in contributing to misery and suffering within themselves and among others.

The natural *motivations* of all human beings are *mixtures* of good and evil—with the evil consistently spoiling the good. That’s what Paul had to see in himself and that’s what has to be changed in each of us. (See “How Paul Described His



Thinking Before Conversion.”)

That’s why Paul tells us: “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who [always] does good, no, not one’” (Romans 3:10-12).

The prophet Jeremiah explained this so clearly: “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing” (Jeremiah 10:23-24).

Recognizing our need for God’s guidance—and yes, His correction, as Jeremiah did, is the first essential step in really understanding God and His teachings.

Hardness of heart and its consequences

Paul further described the mind-set of people of his time in terms that are still applicable to humanity as a whole: “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their *ignorance* and *hardness of heart*. They have lost all sensitivity [especially to biblically morality] and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity” (Ephesians 4:18-19, NRSV).

At the core of those motivations is a *selfishness* that distorts people’s thinking and

shapes people’s choices. Millions of people choose to smoke cigarettes even when they know that smoking is harmful. What begins as a choice often becomes an enslaving addiction.

Such addictions are but the tip of the iceberg of the hurtful human choices that lead to suffering—for which God is often blamed. In reality, they illustrate why humanity’s *hardness of heart* is such a serious obstacle to meaningful change in the right direction.

Interestingly, the word *heart* in the Scriptures rarely refers to that organ that pumps blood through our bodies. More often it refers to a *state of mind*, to how people think and feel—especially to the motivations that affect their choices and actions. Currently humanity’s “heart”—state of mind—is to react to God’s laws with disbelief and hostility, not understanding that they define the love that all peoples and nations should have for one another.

That hostile state of mind will continue until the return of Jesus Christ. God is now allowing humanity to reap what it sows. He is permitting individuals and nations to try every possible way of life, regardless of how contrary it may be to His principles.

He also has set a time when Jesus Christ will return to earth to establish a godly world government that will enforce His righteous principles and change humanity’s way of

The natural motivations of all human beings are *mixtures* of good and evil—with evil consistently spoiling the good.



How Paul Described His Thinking Before Conversion

Does the apostle Paul’s description in Romans 8:6-8 of human resistance to God’s principles apply to you and me?

Absolutely! What Paul learned about himself is exactly what *we* must learn about ourselves.

From childhood Paul believed in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. But he—like all other human beings—was naturally inclined to be *overly confident* of his own opinions and self-discipline.

He explains, “If others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! For I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real Jew if there ever was one!

“What’s more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault” (Philippians 3:4-6, New Living Translation).

Paul had observed the letter of God’s law with a devotion rarely seen. But like all people—sincere or not—he was woefully unaware of how far-reaching his self-deception had become. Only after being shown that he was persecuting people who really were living by the principles that he thought he was defending did he understand his spiritual blindness.

“I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful [*Paul never lacked sincerity, zeal or dedication*] and appointed me to his service, *even though I was formerly a*

blasphemer [of Christ’s name], *a persecutor* [of people living a godly life], *and a man of violence*.

“But I received mercy because I had acted *ignorantly in unbelief*, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the *faith and love* that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—*of whom I am the foremost*” (1 Timothy 1:12-15, NRSV).

In complete sincerity Paul had believed that *persecuting* people with beliefs distinct from his convictions—*causing them to suffer* and even having some of them put to death—was justifiable and pleasing to God. Therefore, he presents himself to us as an example of one whose understanding of God’s will and purpose was woefully incomplete. He had not grasped how wrong he could be.

He came to see that instead of being righteous, he was persecuting people more righteous than he was. This he did because of his ignorance of what really matters to God. It wasn’t the Holy Scriptures—which Paul had sincerely attempted to practice—that distorted his understanding. Rather it was *the prejudice* by which he had *interpreted* those biblical teachings.

Naturally, we are *no different!* And we would be foolish to think that we are! Only those who surrender their will to God and let Him transform their thinking and behavior (as He did Paul’s) will cease being contributors to the combined suffering of the whole world.

thinking. Then vast, sweeping changes will occur in God's relationship with all peoples on earth. They will learn how to think with the same principles that God relies on to guide His reasoning—the principles taught in the Scriptures.

At that time, "many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3). The

who are willing to change their thinking and way of life. Under the ideal conditions of that time, most people will evidently repent, surrender their lives to God and receive His Holy Spirit.

Since only the spiritually converted servants of God will be resurrected from the dead at the first resurrection, what happens to the rest of the dead?

Here is the answer: "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (verse 5). The fact that they will live again is important. They will be the second group to be reeducated and given an opportunity to have their minds, hearts and understanding transformed.

At that time billions of people who will have lived and died—with little understanding of either their selfish thinking or God's plan to resurrect them—will be brought back to life

and given a wonderful opportunity to reform their ways and thinking.

That is why the apostle Peter wrote: "The Lord is not slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. *He does not want anyone to be lost*, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives" (2 Peter 3:9, NCV).

And God's plan includes two major blocks of time—one starting with Christ's second coming and another a thousand years later—to make that desire a wonderful reality.

Learning where wrong choices lead

In His master plan, God's highest priority is to develop in every willing person the same traits of *character* and *self-discipline* that He and His Son Jesus Christ exhibit in their thinking, choices and actions. During the various stages of His plan, those who *willingly* commit to obeying Him are to receive everlasting life as His glorified children. The forgiveness of their sins through Jesus Christ's sacrifice is a crucial aspect of that plan.

But a crucial aspect of our developing that godly character is to learn to love God and His ways above all else. And to do that we must learn, through personal experience,

the sorrow and suffering that sin—rejecting God's ways—brings.

We must all learn the folly of choosing our own ways—which too often reflects *Satan's* ways—over choosing to obey God and His way. God wants us to understand that every change we make in our lives in the direction of obeying His laws brings improvement into our lives, while every action that takes us further from His laws brings damaging consequences, often including suffering.

Indeed, this is why the world is filled with suffering today. God wants man to learn the lessons of where wrong choices and the wrong way of life lead—so we will loathe that way and never want to go there again.

The end of suffering

From the beginning, God's long-term goal has always been to prepare sons and daughters to whom He could give eternal life as His glorified children.

But He first created man mortal, subject to death. In doing so He made sure that eternal life would not be extended to those who, even under the most favorable circumstances, stubbornly refuse to accept His law defining godly love. "For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14, NRSV).

When God's plan is complete, *no suffering* will remain!

Here is the apostle John's description of those final results: "Then I saw [in a vision from God] a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away . . . And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God . . .

"There will be *no more death or mourning or crying or pain*, for the old order of things



attitudes and thinking of the whole world will be transformed!

The different stages of God's recovery plan

The Bible reveals that those changes are to occur in two distinctive time periods. The first begins at Jesus Christ's return to earth as its King of Kings. A second will begin a thousand years later—with the resurrection of all who have died without establishing an obedient relationship with God.

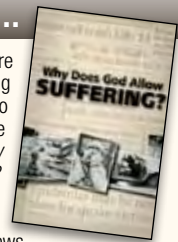
At Christ's return, there will be millions of weary and distressed survivors of the prophesied time of "more trouble than there has ever been since the beginning of the world until now" (Matthew 24:21, New Century Version). It is with these people and their children that the first massive transformation of human behavior and character will begin and continue for a thousand years.

Who will assist Jesus Christ in implementing the promised changes? Revelation 20:6 gives us the answer: "Blessed and holy is *he who has part in the first resurrection*. Over such the second death has no power, but *they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.*"

Those raised to eternal life in this first resurrection will help Jesus Christ teach and transform all of the living human beings

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has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true’” (Revelation 21:1-5, NIV).

Paul understood God’s wonderful and merciful plan. And with God’s inspiration he made a critical declaration that should inform our perspective on why God allows suffering in this present time. In Romans 8:18-23 he stated, as should we: “I con-

sider that *our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (NIV).

May God speed that day! It will lead into the time when all mankind joins in this marvelous future and when suffering will ultimately be no more! **GN**

What Job Learned by Suffering

The name *Job* means “persecuted” or “object of scorn.” Job’s story begins with a challenge to Satan’s argument that no one will obey God unless his selfish motives are being satisfied. So “the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?’” (Job 1:8).

Job was the ideal person for God to use to disprove Satan’s assertion that human beings can be motivated only by satisfying their selfish, greedy desires.

“So Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a [protective] hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!’” (verses 9-11).

Intending among other purposes to disprove that contention, “the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.’” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD” (verse 12).

By permitting Job to *suffer unjustly*, God was allowing him to learn one of the most important lessons that anyone could ever learn! But we also see that God routinely allows righteous people to be tested.

“The LORD is in His holy temple, the LORD’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The LORD tests the righteous” (Psalm 11:4-5). Also, “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:10). Job was no exception.

Now let’s consider some of the highlights of Job’s ordeal.

Job had “seven sons and three daughters” and “his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East” (verses 1-2).

Satan’s attack on Job led to the death of his 10 children and the destruction of all of his property and wealth. “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (verse 22).

Next Satan “struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (Job 2:7). Job became filled with self-pity: “Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?” (Job 3:11). Still he refused to sin or blame God.

Job’s three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar—came to “mourn with him, and to comfort him” (Job 2:11). But little comfort were they! Eliphaz reasoned: “Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off?” (Job 4:7). Zophar chided: “Do you not know this of old, since man was placed on earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment?” (Job 20:4). Similar arguments fill most of the book of Job. But those arguments

are rejected not only by Job but also by God at the book’s conclusion.

Throughout his ordeal Job’s attitude was, “I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live” (Job 27:6, NIV). His confidence in his own judgment seemed solid.

But just because Job was innocent of sin did not mean that his relationship with God was perfect or that His ongoing faithfulness was certain if life went on as usual. He still had some things to learn. He lost sight of the purpose of life and failed to see that God could have a legitimate reason for allowing his suffering.

While Job refused to take his own life, he pleaded with God to simply let him perish—an attitude of hopelessness. God responded, “Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like his? Then [let’s see you] adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you” (Job 40:8-14, NIV).

Job had complained that he could see no reason for God to allow a righteous person to be afflicted by evil people. So God challenged Job to offer his solutions. Job had none! In that regard he was no different from the millions of people today who complain that God is not fair but have no workable alternatives to offer.



Finally Job’s discussions led him to see that God knows what He is doing and is able to finish what He has started! He responds to God: “I know that you can do all things; *no plan of yours can be thwarted*. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you *but now* my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:2-6, NIV).

God has revealed only a basic outline of how He plans to eliminate the problem of evil and all the suffering it causes. He has not yet explained all of the details. We do not always know why God allows certain things and prevents other things, as His thoughts and ways are higher than ours as heaven is above the earth (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Job had to learn to trust God even in difficult times. God expects us to reach that same conclusion!

What's Wrong With Our Governments?

by Jerold Aust

Democratic societies fervently promote their favorite candidates at election time yet are almost always disappointed when they fail to come through on their promises. Why does it seem this never changes? What's the fundamental problem with human government?

New York City has long had a problem with United Nations diplomats who park wherever they want and claim diplomatic immunity when ticketed for breaking the parking laws. In one recent five-year period, diplomats racked up more than 150,000 unpaid tickets resulting in over \$18 million in unpaid fines.

Here we see a microcosm of how human governments are often weak and inefficient and what is essentially wrong with human governments.

Raymond Fisman, research director of the Social Enterprise Program at Columbia Business School, and Edward Miguel, associate professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley, wrote an illuminating book about economics and governments titled *Economic Gangsters: Corruption, Violence, and the Poverty of Nations*.

In their book they observe: "The central lesson from New York City's parking travails with diplomats is that reformers of government institutions—whether local officials or World Bank hotshots—must be aware that values and social norms can undermine their attempts at change.

"In other words, altering the law is unlikely to be sufficient *in the presence of a pervasive culture of corruption*. Corrupt behavior is *deeply engrained in culture and no small matter to root out*" (2008, p. 120, emphasis added throughout).

Another sobering assessment of human governance comes from Dr. George Friedman, founder and CEO of Stratfor, one of the world's leading private intelligence and forecasting firms. In his 2009 book *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century*, he states: "What I have tried to do in this book [is] to sense the twenty-first century with geopolitics as my primary guide. I began with the permanent: *the persistence of the human condition, suspended between heaven and hell*" (pp. 250-251).

Human government at its best begs for



The ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires all fell—and for good reasons.

wisdom from above. The ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires, like many human governments before and since, all fell—and for good reasons.

The history of the world is largely a chronicle of failed human governments. What is the common denominator to the fall of human governments? Just what is wrong with human government?

Do we need government?

Government has been with us in some form

or another since the beginning. When Adam and Eve walked in the Garden of Eden with God, *He* was their government. Adam and Eve then bore children, starting with Cain and Abel. While the children were being raised, their parents constituted *their* immediate government.

From Genesis to Revelation you always find government—poor government in the hands of men, good government when administered by God.

The Bible also shows that, when speaking of human government, a system promoting self-government within law is best—at least when based on true guidance from the Bible (1 Corinthians 11:31). If all governed themselves based on God's laws, human governments would not only run smoothly, but they could last for centuries.

The Bible's record about government describes God governing Israel as its king until the Israelites demanded a human king like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:4-7; 12:12). God gave them what they asked for, but He strictly warned them what they would face with human government—its inherent weaknesses, its capricious control of them and its extravagant ways (8:11-22).

Jesus instructed His disciples about human leadership: "You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them" (Mark 10:42, New Living Translation). The rulers of that day—like today—loved to dominate, manipulate and control their subjects.

Study the monarchical governments of Israel and Judah in the Bible. You'll find that very few were acceptable to God. It all depended on the human leader or king.

In a few cases the kings were righteous, such as David, Hezekiah and Josiah. During their rule, the people lived in relative peace and prosperity—though there were still major problems.

But the vast majority of the leaders were evil, such as Ahab and his cruel queen, Jezebel. Under such rulers the people suffered abuse and oppression. In fact, godly people had to literally hide themselves to avoid persecution and even martyrdom (1 Kings 18:4; compare Proverbs 29:2).

Throughout history, self-serving and abusive rulers have been far more common than those devoted to the good of the governed. In light of this sad record, would societies be

better off with *no* government?

Can societies exist with no government?

Government must exist, if for no other reason than to avoid anarchy (the lack of any form of order and cohesion). However, government is more than an absence of anarchy. It provides, or at least *should* provide, services to and for its constituents, the people it professes to serve. Dictatorships, autocratic leaders and even oligarchies provide governance, but they can make life miserable for the people.

At the end of the book of Judges, God says that everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). There was no human king in Israel at that time, and people abused the personal freedom they had. Indeed, personal freedom within a society can be harmful if it is not balanced by maintenance of order for the common good.

The fact is, human societies need government. Government exists for our benefit (1 Peter 2:13-15), and it will benefit us most if it's oriented to service and sacrifice.

God, knowing human tendencies and weaknesses, instructed Israel in how its kings were to exercise righteous leadership. He said of each:

“When he sits on the throne as king, *he must copy these laws on a scroll for himself* in the presence of the Levitical priests. He must *always keep this copy of the law with him and read it daily* as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the LORD his God by obeying all the terms of this law.

“This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. This will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel” (Deuteronomy 17:18-20, NLT).

God directed Israel's leaders to lead His people based on His holy, liberating laws. He knew that if they failed to learn and follow good leadership instruction, they would act as the kings of the nations around them did—as selfish, self-serving autocrats.

What's the underlying problem with human rule?

So what is it that causes human governments to fail?

“Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one.” Such was the assessment of the early American political thinker and revolutionary Thomas Paine.

A major problem with human government is its *humanness*. When people remain ignorant of their own humanity, they remain blinded as to why human governments fail. Most people see nothing beyond their human nature and they assume, erroneously, that their human nature is good.

Jesus Christ, speaking of the people of His day, addressed this universal problem: “And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; *for the hearts of this people have grown dull.*”

““Their ears are hard of hearing, and *their eyes they have closed*, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them”” (Matthew 13:13-14).

Incredibly, the 6.8 billion people on this planet do not grasp the answer to what's wrong with human beings. And we have suffered for this lack of knowledge for millennia.

Human nature, the Bible reveals, is a mixture of good and evil. Jesus knew the hearts of human beings, stating: “If you then, *being evil*, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13).

The apostle Paul revealed why human beings could not, on their own, love God or obey His laws, His Ten Commandments: “For the mind-set of the flesh *is hostile to God* because it *does not submit itself to God's law, for it is unable to do so*” (Romans 8:7, Holman Christian Standard Bible).

Starting from the human side, there is no way to bridge the gap between God's will, His way and His laws and the human way of thinking and acting. Only God can initiate and bring about such a connection. It is God the Father who calls human beings to His Son Jesus Christ, and Jesus then works with those whom the Father calls (John 6:44).

Until God works with us, drawing or calling us to Christ's help to overcome predominantly evil ways of thinking and acting (Jeremiah 17:9), we will continue in our evil ways (Romans 1:20-25).

This is precisely and specifically what's wrong with human beings who make up human governments. It's our nature—our selfish, self-serving, shortsighted human nature—that brings on the downfall of nations.

God foretold problems of human leadership

When the ancient Israelites demanded a king, God made clear through His prophet

Samuel that this would lead to serious consequences:

““This is how a king will treat you,’ Samuel said. ‘The king will draft your sons into his army and make them run before his chariots. Some will be commanders of his troops, while others will be slave laborers. Some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, while others will make his weapons and chariot equipment.

““The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own servants. He will take a tenth of your harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants.

““He will want your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but the LORD will not help you.’

“But the people refused to listen to Samuel's warning. ‘Even so, we still want a king,’ they said. ‘We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will govern us and lead us into battle.’

“So Samuel told the LORD what the people had said, and the LORD replied, ‘Do as they say, and give them a king.’ Then Samuel agreed and sent the people home” (1 Samuel 8:11-22, NLT).

A huge problem with human government is that *human beings run it*. But another factor is at work here that few understand.

Behind the scenes

“As long as there are sovereign nations possessing great power, war is inevitable,” wrote the brilliant physicist Albert Einstein. Why is this so? Why do human governments so regularly lead their nations into war?

The Bible reveals that subtle and mysterious invisible powers are at work on this earth. Read it yourself in Ephesians 6:12. Since people are blinded to this invisible spirit world, they assume that all problems arise from natural human motivations.

The Bible paints a very different picture. It reveals that Satan the devil, leader of these evil unseen spirit forces, is so powerful that Scripture calls him “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is the one the world unknowingly bows before. The Bible also calls him “the mighty prince of the power of the air . . . the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God” (Ephesians 2:2, NLT). As such, he power-

Incredibly, the 6.8 billion people on this planet do not grasp the answer to what's wrong with human beings.

fully influences mankind to do evil.

Jesus Christ knew human nature and what is behind it. Notice how He rebuked His self-righteous accusers: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

The world does not know what lies behind human nature and our many resulting problems. If people did, this article would be unnecessary! But one day all people will come to understand this, when God's Kingdom is established on earth and Jesus Christ transforms their thinking (Hebrews 8:10-12; Romans 12:2).

Would God's government be an improvement?

"The best government . . . desires to make the people happy, and knows how to make them happy," wrote the English abolitionist and member of Parliament Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1824.

So who could do a better job at this—God or human politicians?

We've all seen the track record of human governments. How, then, would government differ under God? First, God's government would be far better for us *because God is perfect* (Matthew 5:48)—no more relying on badly flawed human beings!

Second, God *truly cares for us*. He deals with human beings from a position of godly love, of outgoing concern for us (1 John 4:7-10). He did, after all, give His only Son to die for humankind that we may live; He didn't send Him to condemn us (John 3:16-17).

Third, with God at the helm of human societies, He *will deal fairly with human beings*, without partiality and with no biases. Isaiah 11:2-4 says of Jesus Christ, the coming head of God's government on earth, that "He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide

by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth."

Jesus Christ, having lived and died as a human being, understands all that we go through because He has experienced it Himself (Hebrews 4:15). For this reason the Father "has entrusted all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22, New International Version).

Fourth, the world will be governed according to God's perfect "law of liberty" (James 1:25), called that because it truly sets mankind free from the suffering, pain and sorrow that results from sin. King David said that this law "is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7). Obeying it will transform our lives.

We could go on and on, but you get the picture. God's government on the earth over humanity would be an infinite improvement over any government formed by human beings. God and Christ Jesus aren't political. Remove politics, add God's righteousness, wisdom and perfection, and you have the formula for a government that will truly transform the world.

How human government will be replaced

We now know *why* human government will be replaced. Human governments are made up of human beings who are inherently selfish, deceitful and lustful for power. Put two or more human beings together running government and often it only magnifies the problem exponentially.

God says we should not put our trust in human beings, all of whom have flawed human nature: "Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help" (Psalm 146:3). People can build some *limited* trust with us. But only God can be *completely* trusted. We certainly should not be so naive and gullible as to believe everything human politicians promise.

No human governments can properly administer sound, beneficial governance that works for the good of everyone. This is why God the Father will send Jesus Christ His Son as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to transform government on earth forever (Revelation 19:16).

At Christ's return, He will dispatch the governments of the earth, their end-time leaders, and the great confederation of armies that will mass in the Middle East.

First He will gather them to Armageddon (Revelation 16:14, 16)—the area surrounding the hill of Megiddo in northern Israel—and there allow Satan and the demons to lure them to Jerusalem "to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (verse 14; compare Joel 3:9-

16). Christ will defeat these gathered forces. And then Satan and his demons will themselves be removed from the scene (Revelation 19:19-20:3).

This is how the forces that oppose God will be taken out, clearing the path for Christ's glorious reign of peace and prosperity.

A perfect government to be established

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

It will stand forever because it will be a *perfect* government. Remember the famous prophecy of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, in Isaiah 9:6-7: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and *the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

"Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."

Human nature, which is today patterned after Satan's selfish nature, is what's wrong with human government. Because we are selfish, deceptive and untrustworthy, it shouldn't surprise us that our governments turn out to be the same. But that *will* change, for God promises to transform our nature with our full cooperation to one of following His loving government of peace and prosperity (Micah 4:1-7). May God speed the day when His perfect and transforming rule over all nations will finally begin! **GN**

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In spite of our best efforts, we remain plagued with long-term problems that threaten to overwhelm us. Why can't we find answers to our problems? What's the solution? The Bible reveals the truth—the glorious good news of the coming Kingdom of God. Request or download your free copy of *The Gospel of the Kingdom* today to learn about the exciting future God has in store for us!



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America, Israel and Iran: Where are we headed?

As Iran moves inexorably toward constructing nuclear weapons, Israel grows ever more concerned about Iranian intentions. According to London *Financial Times* columnist Philip Stephens: "No one watches events in Iran more closely than Israel. Tehran has long been the abiding preoccupation, some would say obsession, of political discourse in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem" ("Israel Struggles to Adapt to a Changing Picture of Iran," July 3, 2009).

The United States finds itself drifting somewhere in the middle—at times confusing Israel with ambiguous announcements from administration leaders. Recent declarations from leading figures in Washington, D.C., have seriously worried Israel's leaders.

For example: "The US would extend its 'defence umbrella' across the Middle East to defend its allies against a nuclear-armed Iran, Hillary Clinton, the Secretary of State, said yesterday [July 21] . . . Mrs Clinton, speaking at a meeting of [Asian] foreign ministers . . . said that acquiring nuclear weapons would not make Iran more secure" (Richard Parry, "Clinton Says US Would Arm Its Allies Against a Nuclear Iran," *The Times*, July 22, 2009, emphasis added throughout).

Such declarations tend to cause Israel to believe that America is going soft on the stark possibility of a nuclear Iran.

The Wall Street Journal's report from Jerusalem stated that "a simmering dispute between the U.S. and Israel over Iran's nuclear program burst into the open on Monday [July 27], as U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, on a visit to Israel, called for continued diplomatic engagement with Tehran, while Israeli officials repeatedly warned of a possible military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities" (Yochi Dreazen, "U.S., Israel Split on Iran," July 28, 2009).

Earlier in July, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden "signaled that the Obama administration would not stand in the way if Israel chose to attack Iran's nuclear facilities . . . 'Look, Israel can determine for itself—it's a sovereign nation—what's in their interest and what they decide to do relative to Iran and anyone else,' [Biden told ABC's *This Week* in an interview broadcast Sunday July 5]. He added that this was the case, 'whether we agree or not' with the Israeli view" ("Biden: Israel Can Chart Own Course on Iran," *USA Today*, July 7, 2009).

Meanwhile, "the head of Mossad, Israel's overseas intelligence service, has assured Benjamin Netanyahu, its prime minister, that Saudi Arabia would turn a blind eye to Israeli jets flying over the kingdom during any future raid on Iran's nuclear sites" (Uzi Mahnaimi and Sarah Baxter, " Saudis Give Nod to Israeli Raid on Iran," *The Sunday Times*, July 5, 2009).

Recent internal events in Iran temporarily complicated the possibility of any Israeli air strikes. For a while it looked as if more reasonable Iranian voices, opposed to the fanaticism of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and supreme leader Ayatollah Ali



Khamenei, might moderate the country's approach to Israel, America and Britain. But the massive popular reaction to this seriously questionable election result has since been ruthlessly crushed by the Iranian government.

Subsequently the recently chosen, more moderate Iranian vice-president was forced to resign. At the same time, as reported in *Scotland on Sunday*, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards stated, "If the Zionist regime [Israel] attacks Iran, we will surely strike its nuclear facilities with our missile capabilities" (Parisa Hafezi and Ali Akbar Dareini, "Hardliners Tighten Their Grip on Iran," July 26, 2009).

Finally, according to the *Scotland on Sunday* article, "Iran has repeatedly threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, conduit for about 40 per cent of globally traded oil." If this threat is actually carried out, it's hard to see how the West would not take

North Korea joins with Burma

In meeting recently with Asian foreign ministers, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "spoke of unconfirmed reports of co-operation between Asia's two most stubborn dictatorships, Burma and North Korea . . . She warned of the dangers posed by a relationship between the two governments" ("Clinton Says US Would Arm Its Allies Against a Nuclear Iran," *The Times*, July 22, 2009). The unspoken fear is that North Korea might share some of its nuclear secrets with Burma.

Remember that we are dealing with a North Korea that already has nuclear arms. In late May, North Korea tested an atomic weapon apparently as powerful as the one dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945.

These rogue dictatorships are testing the will of the West to resist their provocative efforts. The nuclear club is expanding, and no one knows the identity of the next member. (Sources: *The Times*, *The Guardian* [both London], *The Wall Street Journal*.)

immediate military action.

The Middle East is a powder keg that threatens to explode at almost any time. Hostile attitudes and violent events in this troubled region are impacting the entire world. You need to understand where these continual Middle Eastern conflicts—"wars and rumors of war"—are taking us. Request or download our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *The Times* [London], *Scotland on Sunday*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*.)

Drug-resistant malaria poses enormous threat

Travelers to Southeast Asia run the risk of contracting malaria, a miserable disease that is becoming resistant to available drugs. The anti-malaria drug Artemisinin is becoming less and less effective in treating the disease. This could be incredibly devastating to dozens of countries and millions of people.

As Bloomberg News reports: "Malaria is becoming resistant to the most powerful drugs available in Southeast Asia, as the World Health Organization races to stop the spread of the strain that could be 'disastrous' for global malaria control" (Simeon Bennett, "Malaria Strain Resists Drugs, May Threaten Millions, Study Says," July 30, 2009).

The same article continues: "Treatments derived from artemisinin, the basis of the most effective anti-malaria drugs, took almost twice as long to clear the parasites that cause the disease in patients in western Cambodia as in patients in northwestern Thailand, according to a study published . . . in the [July 30, 2009] *New England Journal of Medicine*.

"Malaria is becoming resistant to the most powerful drugs available . . . That could be 'disastrous' for global malaria control."

"The delay in parasite clearance times shows the drugs are losing their power against the disease in Cambodia, the study said. The failure of artemisinin-based treatments would be 'disastrous' for global efforts aimed at curbing the death and disease wrought by the malady."

Malaria strikes about 250 million people each year and kills more than 880,000, making it the third-deadliest infectious disease behind AIDS and tuberculosis.

Most people assume that medical science will shield us from potential epidemics. But the fact is, we are far more vulnerable than we suppose. Jesus Christ warned that in the end time, the human race would increasingly suffer from "pestilences"—plagues and infectious diseases (Matthew 24:7). (Source: Bloomberg News.)

U.K. teenagers told they have “right” to a good sex life

According to the British *Daily Mail*, the United Kingdom’s National Health Service (NHS) “is telling school pupils [mainly teens] they have a ‘right’ to an enjoyable sex life and that it is good for their health. A Health Service leaflet says experts concentrate too much on the need for safe sex and loving relation-

Parents to get no say about sex education

“Parents will be given barely any say in the content of sex education classes under [British] Government plans to make the subject compulsory for children as young as five” (Laura Clark, “Parents ‘Will Have No Say’ Over Sex Education in Schools,” *Daily Mail*, July 20, 2009).

According to the report, this subject will become mandatory for primary and secondary schools. The article went on to state that “there is a different agenda at work to undermine the role of parents and to tear down moral standards.” (Source: *Daily Mail* [London].)

Young Britons view Bible knowledge as old-fashioned

According to a recent report in *The Daily Telegraph*, “Knowledge of the Bible is in decline in Britain, with fewer than one in 20 people able to name all Ten Commandments and youngsters viewing the Christian holy book as ‘old fashioned,’ a survey [from Durham University] said today” (Harpreet Bhal, “Britons Lack Knowledge of Bible: Survey,” July 12, 2009).

Brian Brown, a visiting fellow at Durham University’s St. John’s College, responded with this statement: “We have got to recognise that it (the Bible) is the foundation of our society, upon which our whole culture has been based. To understand it [our culture] . . . you do need an understanding of the Bible.”

If you would like to increase your own knowledge of God’s Word, why not request our free, 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*? You can download the lessons online at www.ucg.org/bsc or request mailed lessons at www.ucg.org/litreq. (Source: *The Daily Telegraph* [London].)

ships, and not enough on the pleasure it can bring. But family campaigners last night [July 11] condemned the guidance, saying it encouraged underage sex and could increase rates of sexually-transmitted diseases” (Daniel Martin, “Pupils Told They Have a ‘Right’ to a Good Sex Life,” July 12, 2009).

“Steve Slack, director of the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health at NHS Sheffield, . . . added that as long as teenagers are fully informed about sex and making decisions free of peer pressure as part of a caring relationship, *they have as much right as an adult to a good sex life*” (ibid., emphasis added throughout). The tragic results of this type of teaching are manifestly clear: “About 40,000 teenagers become pregnant every year in the UK—the highest level in western Europe. More than half end in abortion” (ibid.).

We should all consider the advice of the late American historians Will and Ariel Durant, which applies both to young people and the adults influencing them. “No one man [or woman], however brilliant or well-informed, can come in one lifetime to such fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or institutions of his society, for these are the wisdom of generations after centuries of experiment in the laboratory of history.

“A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; and if he is unchecked by customs, morals, laws, he may ruin his life [or hers] before he matures sufficiently to understand that sex is a river of



“Sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group.”

fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group” (*The Lessons of History*, 1968, pp. 35-36).

If you would like help in educating teenagers to the real dangers of premarital and extramarital sex, introduce them to a sound biblical approach with our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*. (Source: *Daily Mail* [London].)

Drivers + cell phones = dangerous combination

As far back as 2003, a study by the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis estimated that cell phone use while driving caused 6 percent of all U.S. vehicle crashes and 2,600 deaths each year (David Teater, “How Many More Must Die?” *USA Today*, July 29, 2009). That’s about 50 deaths per week.



Cell phones now outnumber registered vehicles, 270 million to 254 million. Currently, 21 states and the District of Columbia bar the use of cell phones for “novice” drivers—but it has to be quite a trick for police officers to determine who is a novice and who isn’t.

David Teater, senior director for transportation initiatives at the National Safety Council, tells his story about the death of his 12-year-old son who was killed by a woman who ran a red light while using a cell phone. “Epidemiological studies show drivers using cell phones are four times more likely to crash. Brain scan studies show that a phone conversation reduces brain activity required for driving by 37%” (ibid.). Drivers plus cell phones can equal a dangerous combination. (Source: *USA Today*.)

Binge drinking afflicts young people

Every year alcohol abuse kills about 5,000 young people under age 21 and is a contributing factor in some 600,000 injuries and 100,000 incidents of sexual assault among young men and women attending college in America. Underage drinking often consists of binges. One university reported that alcohol-related treatment has increased nearly 85 percent during the past three years (John McCardell, “Teach Drinking,” *The Atlantic*, July-August 2009).

If you would like some useful information about how to combat almost any addiction, request or download our free booklet *Making Life Work*. Also download our free reprint article “Alcoholism” at www.ucg.org/reprints. Several other articles on addictions from *The Good News* can be found at www.GNmagazine.org/issues/gn73. (Source: *The Atlantic*.)

How Can You Make Sense of the News?

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Afghanistan: What's Behind a Seemingly Unwinnable War?

Many on both sides of the Atlantic are saying the Afghan conflict—which has already lasted twice as long as World War I—is unwinnable. Why are the allies finding it so difficult to win this war in a backward third world country?

July 2009 turned out to be the worst month of the Afghan conflict for both British and American fatalities. For the British, who have the second-highest number of troops serving in the country, the death toll in Afghanistan has now surpassed the total lost in Iraq.

Proportionate to population, Britain, Canada, Denmark and Estonia have each lost more men there than the United States. Understandably, the war is increasingly controversial, with opposition at home mounting. The Netherlands is withdrawing troops next year, with Canada leaving in 2011.

“The graveyard of empires”

Ironically, the month of the highest number of British casualties coincided with the 200th anniversary of Britain’s first involvement with the country of Afghanistan.

“In 1809 a (British) diplomat named Mountstuart Elphinstone led Britain’s first fact-finding mission to Afghanistan. In a land filled with strife and [divided] by independent factions, he met an elderly tribal leader and tried to convince him of the benefits of a firm central government.

“The leader’s response? ‘We are content with discord, we are content with alarms, we are content with blood,’ the Afghan replied. ‘But we will never be content with a master’” (Stephen Tanner, “Indomitable Afghanistan,” *Military History*, August-September 2009).

The country has often been called “the graveyard of empires.” In recent times, the Soviets were defeated after a decade of military involvement in Afghanistan. Over the long course of history, Darius the Great, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane and more recently the British in the 19th century and Soviets in the 20th

all invaded Afghanistan. None was able to subdue the country and govern it as other nations have been governed.

So what makes Western nations today think they can succeed where others have failed?

“After eight years of disheartening warfare, it is tempting to see NATO’s mission as a repeat of past misadventures in the Hindu Kush. The Soviets lost even though they had more troops than NATO has today, a more powerful Afghan army and were supported by a cadre of motivated Afghan communists” (“Hold Your Nerve,” *The Economist*, July 18, 2009.)

The same article continues: “For America Afghanistan is a war of necessity; it is from there that Osama bin Laden ordered the attacks of September 11th, 2001. For many European allies, though, it is less vital—a war of solidarity with America, a war of choice. Such operations quickly turn unpopular when they go badly, and governments tend to inflate their aims. Gordon Brown, the British prime minister, talks of promoting ‘an emerging democracy.’”

For the United States, it is clear that a lot is at stake in Afghanistan. Failure to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda will send a clear signal that America is losing the war against Islamic extremism, which will open up the country for further attacks at home.

Other disastrous consequences, *The Economist* says, would include: “the return of the Taliban to power; an Afghan civil war; the utter destabilisation of nuclear-armed Pakistan; the restoration of al-Qaeda’s Afghan haven; the emboldening of every jihadist in the world; and the weakening of the West’s friends.”

A bigger problem than Afghanistan

For the British, the war is considerably

more complex due to its long history in the region.

More than 60 years ago, the British withdrew from South Asia when they gave independence to the nations of India, Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Burma (Myanmar). Any involvement they had had in Afghanistan during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th was simply because they ruled India and the Afghans had been causing trouble in the border areas. The British kept a military garrison stationed at the head of the Khyber Pass until 1947.

Interestingly, *The Book of Knowledge* encyclopedia’s entry on Afghanistan begins with these words: “Land of wild tribesmen, barren and trackless, Afghanistan lies in a jumble of mountains between Russia, Persia [Iran] and Pakistan” (1954, Vol. 1, “Afghanistan,” p. 46).

Afghanistan’s geographical location has been a crucial factor in its history. For two centuries it was a buffer state between Czarist Russia and British India. Neither power wanted the other there, which helped Afghanistan maintain its independence.

The Economist continues: “Britain’s ambition to be a global ‘force for good’ comes at a cost. As America’s best friend, with privileged access to intelligence, it feels compelled to take part in America’s wars. As the most capable militarily of NATO’s European members (together with France), it helps to rally others.

“But fighting in Afghanistan is not just about prestige. With its large population of Pakistani origin, it has much at stake in helping to maintain the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan. London has been attacked by al-Qaeda more recently than New York.”

Herein lies the real problem—*Pakistan*, not Afghanistan.

And it goes even deeper than that.

Britain’s immigration problem

The Economist is correct in stating that Britain has a “large population of Pakistani



Due to Britain's liberal immigration policies, London is one of the most vulnerable cities in the world, as well as a major hotbed of Islamic extremism.

origin.” Due to Britain’s historical and colonial links to Pakistan, and Pakistan being part of the British Commonwealth, a million or more people of Pakistani descent now live in Britain.

This was not the case in 1947 when Britain gave independence to India and Islamic Pakistan.

The presence of so many people from the Indian subcontinent has complicated Britain’s relationship with the area. It has also made the country highly vulnerable to Islamic extremism.

Some commentators have said that London is one of the most vulnerable cities in the world, as well as a major hotbed of Islamic extremism. “Churchill would not have permitted British citizens to call for attacks on the nation, as some Islamic preachers do,” wrote Irwin Stelzer in London’s *Daily Telegraph* (“A Lesson From History That Goes Unheeded,” July 15, 2009).

The four terrorists who attacked the London subway and a bus on July 7, 2005, killing 52, were all homegrown young men of Pakistani descent. Videotaped

statements by two of the suicide bombers said their attacks were retaliation for British involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Pointedly, none of the fatalities suffered by the British military in Afghanistan have been of Pakistani descent or even bore a Muslim name. There is some resentment among British people at demonstrations against the war. This is particularly the case when demonstrations—by Muslims mostly of Pakistani

origin—are held as bodies are brought home in coffins covered by the Union Jack.

It makes little sense to people that British boys are dying to fight Islamic militants in Afghanistan when the British government continues to allow people into the country from that part of the world—some of whom are likely to be militants themselves! However, it’s not politically correct to voice this opinion or discuss it in the media.

Immigration is strictly one-way

The fact is, for all the denial about any “clash of civilizations,” the conflict in South Asia clearly shows that there is one. And not just in South Asia.

Afghans don’t want foreigners—whom they consider infidels or nonbelievers—on their soil. They are a fiercely independent people. It’s a high-risk country for Western visitors, civilian or military.

But so are some other countries, including some Islamic nations.

There are 57 nations in the Islamic Conference. These are nations with a predominant or significant Islamic population.

They have regular summit meetings. *Not one* of these countries allows Westerners to move into their countries, work and, given time, become citizens.

But liberal Western nations take in people from all over the world, thinking that they will all adapt and that everybody will live happily ever after.

Immigration is purely *one-way* traffic—into the West from other nations. Some in the West may move from one Western country to another. Some will accept work contracts in third world countries, but they will never be offered citizenship. One reason, surely, is because most countries do not think that everybody moving in will adapt. They fear a clash of cultures—a clash of civilizations!

It’s not a question of equality. The Bible says that “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34) and He “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings” (Acts 17:26). As Afghanistan itself shows, mixing different ethnic groups is problematic. The nation never has been able to function with any form of centralized authority due to divided tribal loyalties. Could the same happen in Britain or America?

“It can’t happen here”

In a July 10, 2009, article titled “It Can’t Happen Here,” American conservative columnist and author Pat Buchanan began with an analysis of China’s problems with the Islamic Uighurs in the western part of that country. China has been moving majority Han Chinese into the Uighur province in an effort to quell rebellion and subdue the native Uighurs.

The locals clearly resent this and fear for their own separate identity. Civil disturbance has been the result, with hundreds dead as China has clamped down. China’s fear is that what happened in the former Soviet Union could happen in China—the breakup of the nation along ethnic lines.

Buchanan explained: “The larger issue here is the enduring power of ethnonationalism—the drive of ethnic minorities, embryonic nations, to break free and create their own countries, where their faith, culture and language are predominant. The Uighurs are such a people.



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"Ethnonationalism caused the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913, triggered World War I in Sarajevo, and tore apart the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. Ethnonationalism birthed Ireland, Turkey and Israel.

"Ethnonationalism in the 1990s tore apart the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and broke up Czechoslovakia, creating two-dozen nations out of three. Last August, ethnonationalism, with an assist from the Russian Army, relieved Georgia of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

"Russia has its own ethnic worries in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia, whose Moscow-installed president was nearly blown to pieces two weeks ago and where a Chechen convoy was ambushed last week with 10 soldiers killed.

"The ethnonationalism that pulled Ireland out of the United Kingdom in 1921 is pulling Scotland out. It split the Asian subcontinent up into Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Iran, Iraq and Pakistan are all threatened.

"Persians are a bare majority against the combined numbers of Azeris, Kurds, Arabs and Baluch. Each of those minorities shares a border with kinfolk—in Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Iraq and Pakistan.

"Turkey has fought for decades against Kurd ethnonationalism.

"If one were to wager on new nations, Kurdistan and Baluchistan would be among the favorites.

"And Pashtun in Pakistan outnumber Pashtun in Afghanistan, though in the latter they are the majority."

It would appear that multiculturalism and, in particular, the mixing of very different religions, is not working wherever you look in the rest of the world.

Yet Western intellectuals would argue that it works in the liberal democratic West. But does it really? In conclusion, Buchanan writes:

"Without the assent of her people, America is being converted from a Christian country, nine in 10 of whose people traced their roots to Europe as late as the time of JFK, into a multiracial, multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural Tower of Babel not seen since the late Roman Empire.

"The city farthest along the path is Los Angeles, famous worldwide for the number, variety, and size of its ethnic and racial street gangs.

"Not to worry," he concludes, tongue in cheek. "It can't happen here." Or in London, Toronto, Sydney, Paris or Amsterdam!

It should be noted that the attacks of 9/11, 7/7 (the suicide bombings in London) and even the April 2007 mass shooting at Virginia Tech by a deranged South Korean student who killed 32 would not have happened were it not for liberal immigration policies that have deliberately overlooked cultural and religious differences.

"It can't happen here"

All these factors have contributed to American and British involvement in Afghanistan. The Taliban's role in the events of Sept. 11, 2001, led directly to America's involvement. The British are there to support America but also to root out Islamic extremists from the area who train second- and third-generation British Muslims to return to their British homeland to inflict terror on the population.

Ironically, just as I was writing the final paragraphs of this article, the BBC's news service reported an antiterrorist operation in Australia, another country whose troops are fighting in Afghanistan. Authorities there arrested several Islamic extremists of Lebanese and Somali descent who were planning an attack on a military barracks just outside Sydney. Australia is another country whose liberal immigration policies have directly led to threats like this one.

The problems stemming from the Afghanistan conflict cannot be resolved until changes are made at home, in the United States, Britain and other Western nations. Reforming immigration and citizenship policies is only one step these countries need to make if they are to retain their cohesion. Far more important to their long-term survival is that they return to their Christian and biblical roots.

The real problem for the West is not in South Asia—it's at home! **GN**

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The Biblical Festivals That Reveal God's Plan of Salvation

by Jerold Aust

Sin has cut humanity off from God and brought the ultimate penalty of death. But God has a plan to heal the broken relationship and save mankind. That plan is revealed in a series of annual reminders—the festivals of God found in the Bible.



Why do 2 billion Christians remain blinded to God's plan to redeem and save humankind? Remarkably, you can know that plan!

Starting with the first human couple in the Garden of Eden, humanity has sinned against God—violated His law. Indeed, with the exception of Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life of obedience, all human beings have sinned and have earned the ultimate penalty of death (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

But God has provided a way for humanity to be delivered from that fate. He has set in motion an awesome plan to restore human beings to a right relationship with Him so that they may dwell with Him in joy forever. That plan is found in the pages of the Bible.

We must understand, however, that the message contained in the Bible is like a *giant jigsaw puzzle*. It is solvable, but not without the framework.

If you have ever put together a big jig-

saw puzzle, you first established the framework, made up of the straight edges of the puzzle, so that the rest of the puzzle could be more easily filled in.

God's framework for this prophetic jigsaw puzzle is a succession of important steps outlined in Scripture. These steps are commemorated annually in a series of festivals. Indeed, the biblical festivals reveal and map out the way God intends to save you and the rest of mankind.

God's system of annual feasts

A system is a group of interacting and interdependent elements forming a complex whole. For example, the human body is made up of a number of systems, each a group of functionally related organs. Likewise, the salvation of humankind is accomplished through a systematic plan entailing steps portrayed in seven annual festivals.

There are three harvest seasons in the land of Israel. Each of these seasons is accompanied by special festivals God instituted that outline His plan for "harvesting"

human beings for salvation in His family (see Exodus 23:14-17; Deuteronomy 16:16).

With the early spring barley season comes the Passover and the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread. With the later spring wheat season comes the Feast of Harvest or Firstfruits, also known as the Day of Pentecost. And with the late summer and fall ingathering season come four festivals—the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles, and the Eighth Day, now referred to as the Last Great Day.

The three harvest seasons of the year show the major framework of the periods in which God intends to save mankind. And contrary to what many believe, today is *not* the only day of salvation.

God's annual festivals or feasts, and the Holy Days of rest and worship among them, are listed in Leviticus 23. In stepwise progression, each builds on preceding ones, making the sum greater than the individual parts. Understand what these feasts portray and you will understand God's master plan of salvation.

Sadly, most who profess to be Christians today do not observe God's festivals, typically calling them "Jewish" feasts and claiming they are obsolete. Yet God said they are *His* feasts (verse 2). And He commands that they *still be observed*—even in the New Testament (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 5:8). Because people do not observe these festivals as God commands, they do not understand their meaning. Obeying God's commands would give them better understanding (Psalm 111:10).

Passover, the first step

The Passover is the first feast in the cycle. It represents the crucial first step in God's plan to save mankind—without which the other steps would not be possible.

God revealed the Passover festival to the ancient Israelites during the process of freeing them from captivity in Egypt (Exodus 12). In it the Israelites brushed their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificial lamb (verse 7). This sacrifice was symbolic

There are three harvest seasons in the land of Israel. Each season is accompanied by special festivals that God instituted to outline His plan for “harvesting” human beings for salvation in His family.

of the later shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ as the “Lamb of God” and “our Passover” to take away sin and its penalty (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7).

Without the fulfillment of the Passover feast, there would be no salvation. Yet Christ’s Passover sacrifice itself does not accomplish our salvation, nor does our acceptance of it. Rather, this makes salvation possible.

Remission or forgiveness of sins comes through Jesus’ shed blood when one repents (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:22; Acts 2:38). Through acceptance of His blood in faith we are justified, or made right, with God the Father (Romans 5:9). Yet salvation itself is accomplished through Jesus’ resurrected life: “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (verse 10).

Nevertheless, the reconciliation that comes through accepting Jesus’ Passover sacrifice clearly provides a foundation for salvation.

In observing this festival today, we do not sacrifice a lamb but partake of the unleavened bread and wine of Passover as symbolic of Christ’s sacrificed body and blood as He instructed (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

The next festival shows how we should live following the acceptance of the sacrificial death of our Passover, Jesus Christ.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is vitally important to a Christian’s salvation; it shows us what God expects of us *beyond* accepting Jesus’ shed blood for forgiveness.

Leaven is an agent, such as yeast, that causes bread dough to expand and rise during baking. God commanded that for the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, leaven is to be removed from our homes and not eaten—and we are to

instead eat unleavened bread during this period (Leviticus 23:6).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul applied the symbol of leaven to sin (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). Conversely, he explained



that *unleavened bread* represents sincerity and truth—righteousness and holiness (verse 8).

God set aside seven full days, the number seven representing completion and perfection in Scripture, for His followers to remember that *He* is holy, and that *we* should become holy as He is (1 Peter 1:16), striving to put sin out of our lives. Yet we can only do this with the guidance and help of Jesus Christ.

The ancient Israelites departed from Egypt during the Days of Unleavened Bread, following a pillar of cloud and fire. The One the Israelites knew as God was in that cloud (Exodus 13:21). And this divine Being who accompanied them later came to the earth as Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).

It is also important to note that when the Israelites later came to the Promised Land, they were to present a special grain offering on the first day of the week during the Feast of Unleavened Bread—a sheaf of the firstfruits of the barley harvest, which was waved before God for His acceptance (Leviticus 23:9-14).

This represented Jesus Christ as the initial firstfruits of salvation (1 Corinthians 15:23)—who was accepted in heaven this day after being resurrected during the festival.

Our ultimate example of living the unleavened life is Christ, and we must follow Him in faith to salvation and eternal life. Yet this is actually possible only through what is pictured in the next festival.

Pentecost, the Feast of Firstfruits

Pentecost is the New Testament term for the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, which was also called the Feast of Harvest or Feast of Firstfruits. The word *Pentecost* means “fiftieth,” as the Israelites were to count 50 days starting with the day of the wave-sheaf offering during the Feast of Unleavened Bread—so that the last day of the count would be the day after seven complete weeks, when a new grain offering was to be brought (Leviticus 23:15-16).

This offering was also to be a firstfruits offering waved before God, taken from the wheat harvest and baked into two loaves of bread (verses 17, 20; Exodus 34:22). Symbolized here are the faithful believers whom God calls the firstfruits of all His harvests (James 1:18). Romans 8:23 says these have “the firstfruits of the Spirit.”

According to Acts 2, it was on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus’ death and resurrection that His followers *received God’s Holy Spirit* with a miraculous display of divine power. Thousands more were then converted on this day, also receiving the Spirit upon repentance and baptism.

Modern professing Christians acknowledge the fulfilled promise of the gift of



God’s Spirit to humankind on this occasion. However, many effectively deny the power of it, not understanding that one must *obey* God to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 5:32). And receiving the Spirit in turn *enables further and sustained obedience* (compare Romans 5:5; 1 John 5:3).

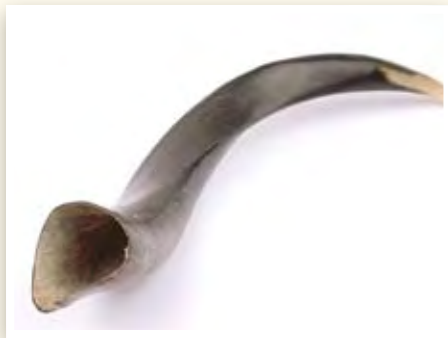
This is part of the great meaning of

Pentecost, along with the fact that God's people of this age are counted as the *first-fruits* of salvation—in anticipation of other fruits to follow in the age to come.

Pentecost is the last of the spring festivals—the last of those that portray events relating to the time of Christ's first coming and the present age. The feasts that follow in the autumn in the land of Israel look ahead to His *second* coming.

The Feast of Trumpets

As mentioned earlier, the great ingathering harvest in Israel came in late summer and early fall. It was celebrated with the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles (Exodus 23:16; Deuteronomy 16:16), but the



festival period actually commenced with the Feast of Trumpets two weeks earlier.

On this day there was a “memorial of blowing of trumpets” (Leviticus 23:24). This represents the time of the coming of the Messiah to take over the rule of the world, as Jesus will do when He returns (Revelation 19:11-21; 12:10; compare Zechariah 14; Isaiah 11:1-10).

Jesus' second coming will be heralded by *supernatural trumpet blasts*. During a period known as “the day of the Lord” and “the great day of His wrath” (Revelation 6:17), God will bring judgment on the rebellious nations of the earth. Revelation 8-9 presents the cataclysmic circumstances that will follow the blowing of six successive trumpets.

Revelation 11:15 then describes the blowing of the seventh trumpet, when this world's governments are transferred over to the rule of the returning Christ. It is also *the time of the rewarding of God's saints*—His faithful servants of this age (verse 18). They will, *at this last trumpet*, be *resurrected from the dead* (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16)—at last receiving ultimate salvation from death through transformation into immortal spirit beings.

The seventh trumpet also heralds further

judgment on those who remain defiant, who persist in destroying the earth and its inhabitants (Revelation 11:18).

Jesus Christ, through the meaning of the Feast of Trumpets, directs His attention to saving His people as well as the rest of humankind (Revelation 19:11-21), breaking the power of the world's leaders and humbling the nations to the point that they will accept His intervention and rule.

But the major obstacle to mankind learning God's ways will still have to be removed, and that is pictured in the next occasion God instructs us to observe.

The Day of Atonement

The next of God's appointed times is a solemn day of drawing near to Him through fasting (Leviticus 23:26-32). On this day, the Israelites were to sacrifice a goat to represent the Lord, the high priest was to take its blood into the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle (the only time he went in during the year) and he was to confess the people's sins over a live goat, which was then driven off into the wilderness (Leviticus 16).

The sacrifice of the first goat, representing the Lord, along with the high priest taking its blood into the Most Holy Place signified the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His intercessory work as High Priest. This was to bring *atonement*—a word meaning “at-one-ment” with God. Yet further atone-



ment was required through the driving away of the second goat. What does this symbolize?

If the world knew that vast numbers of demons—powerful evil spirits led by the rebellious archangel now known as Satan the devil—truly existed, that they hold sway over the earth and that their avowed purpose is to debase and destroy humankind, people might well turn to God to save them.

The reason they don't is obvious when you understand it. Satan, as the god of this

Humanity has willingly turned from God and come under Satan's dominion and the powerful sway of his deception.

age (2 Corinthians 4:4), has blinded them from this fact. He has deceived the whole world, palming himself off as an angel of light, which he once was. He is now our adversary, who walks the earth like a roaring and devouring lion (Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 1 Peter 5:8).

Humanity has willingly turned from God and has come under Satan's dominion. Jesus said, “Their eyes they have closed” (Matthew 13:15). Although Satan is ultimately responsible and accountable for mankind's blindness, we still have a responsibility in this great deception. We can repent and change.

The Day of Atonement is the appointed time for *celebrating the removal of Satan and the demons from the world scene* (Revelation 20:1-3; Isaiah 14:16-17). With Satan's expulsion, human beings can truly experience “at-one-ment” with God, as God intends (John 17:20-21). Indeed, God will remove all forces that have set themselves to destroy His plan, which is to expand His family through the salvation of billions of human beings.

The Day of Atonement is also a reminder of Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice. Following Jesus' return, His sacrifice will begin to be applied to the world at large, as all are led to accept it in repentance, being no longer under the influence of the devil.

For the first time in the history of mankind, we will fully experience peace on earth, with God's will for people no longer being resisted by Satan.

The Feast of Tabernacles

Finally, what God had promised through the ages, to bring peace on earth (Luke 2:14), will arrive. Isaiah 9:6-7 foretold both the first and second comings of the Messiah in stating: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder . . . Of

Continued on page 29

How Will God Judge the World?

by John Ross Schroeder

Judgment remains one of the most misunderstood subjects in all the Bible. Many think of it almost wholly in terms of condemnation or damnation. But is that really how God will judge His human creation? On what basis will He render a final verdict?

If you or I were to seriously harm another person (hypothetically speaking), in the Western world we would be brought before a judge and jury to receive an appropriate punishment. The prosecuting attorney would emphasize the tragic condition of the innocent victim, and the defense lawyer would point out any extenuating circumstances in a plea for the perpetrator. Motive would be argued by these two lawyers.

Any witnesses would be called to testify either for or against the accused. The judge would disallow inappropriate testimony. Finally the jury would retire to consider the case in private. In due time, if they had been convinced by the prosecutor's arguments, they would return to court with a guilty verdict. The sentence would be handed out by the judge on a later date.

This oversimplified fictional scenario pretty much sums up the way in which many conceive of the subject of judgment—usually with undue emphasis on the final verdict and sentencing. The popular concept runs very negatively.

But what does God's inspired Word teach? The rendering of "eternal judgment" in the Bible is a far more serious matter than, say, ruling on the petty misdemeanors that normally characterize a *Judge Judy* courtroom. Our final destiny is seriously at stake! Just what does Scripture say regarding God's judgment of the world?

God is the Judge

In pleading for any righteous individuals in wicked Sodom, the patriarch Abraham asked God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25). There were not even 10 righteous persons in Sodom, but God spared "righteous Lot" (2 Peter 2:7) and his two daughters from the catastrophe that followed.

The New Testament also tells us that "God [is] the judge of all" (Hebrews 12:23). Jesus Christ revealed that God the Father is "Lord



of heaven and earth" (Matthew 11:25). As always, He remains the ultimate authority, presiding over the entire universe and everything in it, visible and invisible. Our eternal destiny is in His capable hands.

Yet the Father delegates the awesome responsibility of judging human beings to His beloved Son: "For the Father judges no one, *but has committed all judgment to the Son*" (John 5:22, emphasis added throughout). This is because Jesus actually lived as a human being Himself (verse 27), showing God's eminent fairness. Of course, Jesus is of the same mind as the Father, declaring, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30).

The context of this passage shows that the resurrection from the dead intersects with Christ's coming judgment: "Most assuredly I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (verse 25). Everyone who has died will hear Christ's voice (verse 28).

Humanity will be resurrected from the dead. We have Christ's absolute guarantee preserved in His inspired Word to mankind. The resur-

rection *will* occur! And numerous passages link this with a time of coming judgment.

The plan of salvation

God planned His whole creation. He thought things out well in advance. Human beings figure prominently in the awesome future God is working toward. He made men and women in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27) with the ultimate goal of bringing them into His divine family. People have sinned, but God's purpose is to redeem and save them.

The Bible reveals God's master plan of salvation. It begins and ends with Jesus Christ. Notice what the apostle Paul stated: "He [the Father] raised Him [Jesus] up from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:20-21).

Earlier in this chapter Paul told the Christians at Ephesus, "He [the Father] made known to us his secret purpose, *in accordance with the plan* which he determined beforehand in Christ, *to be put into effect when the time was ripe*; namely that the universe, everything in heaven and earth, might be brought into a unity with Christ" (verses 9-10, Revised English Bible).

Judgment is a major part of that divine plan. "Eternal judgment" follows the "resurrection from the dead" in the listing of six major biblical doctrines that lay a foundation for going on to perfection in Hebrews 6:1-2. It begins with those whom the Bible calls the firstfruits of God (Romans 8:23; James 1:18; Hebrews 12:22-23).

These relative few are privileged to be made aware of God's plan of salvation well in advance of the vast majority of mankind. They will be in the first and better resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:23; Hebrews 11:35). God the Father and Christ the Son are laboring to bring the firstfruits to eternal glory (Hebrews 2:10). As we will see, judgment plays a major role in that work of salvation.

Judgment begins with the Church of God

The apostle Peter firmly stated: "*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not*

obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17). Then Peter asks, "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?" (verse 18).

Does this passage then mean that truly converted Christians will just barely make the first resurrection into God's family? Not at all!

The word "scarcely" is translated from the Greek adverb *molis*, meaning "with difficulty" (Strong's no. 3433). In fact, the few other uses of this word in the New Testament indicate the meaning to more specifically be "with such difficulty as to seem that success would be unlikely." Indeed, Christ said that the way to salvation is a narrow and difficult path (Matthew 7:14). Yet even what is impossible for men is possible with God (Matthew 19:26).

One of the overriding principles of sound biblical study is that we search out all the relevant scriptures bearing on a particular subject. In his second letter Peter points out a number of Christian attributes that we should all be developing: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

He then concludes: "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election *sure*, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10-11). This majestic event occurs at the time of the first resurrection when Christ returns to planet earth (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

In the meantime, the Church is going through a period of judgment—which means a time of evaluation and of disciplinary consequences for disobedience. Such helpful chastening is part of the difficulties a Christian must endure (Hebrews 12:7). In stating what he did in 1 Peter 4:18, Peter was referring to Proverbs 11:31: "If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner?"

Awaiting a future judgment

Indeed, what about the ungodly and the sinner in today's world—including those who cavalierly cast aside the Ten Commandments with little regard for the hurt and destruction they cause themselves and others? Clearly such rebellion carries grave consequences. But are such people—most of humanity, in fact—lost forever with no hope of salvation?

The apostle Paul was inspired to write in the Bible of converted Christians: "But God

demonstrates His own love toward us, in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). Would not our just and merciful God also demonstrate His love to other sinners in desperate need of real repentance and His merciful forgiveness? God gave His Son because He loved the whole world (John 3:16).

Peter points out, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, *but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish* but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). This is the loving nature of our God who is filled with mercy. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Paul writes of "God our Saviour, *whose will it is that all should find salvation and come to know the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:3-4, REB). A false, satanic gospel has denied many people access to the truth of God.

Jesus Christ said: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth [crucified], *will draw all peoples to Myself*" (John 12:32). Christ is going to straighten out this world in His coming reign on earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords with the assistance of the resurrected and transformed saints (Revelation 20:4).

That is why God is calling them as the "firstfruits" of His divine family during this age of man: "Of his own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18).

Many more will be called to salvation during Christ's millennial reign and just on beyond. A future second resurrection to judgment will occur just after the Millennium (Revelation 20:5, 11-12). For the most part, this future judgment will *not* be to condemnation or damnation. Other scriptural passages strongly indicate that the majority of all those who have ever lived will be given the opportunity for salvation—and most will gladly accept it.

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14, which describes this time. The resurrected Israelites described in this passage think their hope is lost—that they are cut off from God (verse 11). But their Creator *will give them hope*. They will have their opportunity for salvation, and most will receive the Holy Spirit and be saved (verse 14). Centuries after Ezekiel wrote this prophecy, the apostle Paul firmly stated, "All Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

This is true judgment—godly evaluation of human existence with righteous discernment and great mercy (see Isaiah 11:3-4; James 2:13). Unlike a human judge of this world, *our Judge loves us!* He gave His life for us!

As we might expect, there will be a stubborn few who simply will not repent and turn from sin even after God has given them every opportunity. Even then, however, the permanent penalty will *not* be everlasting punishing in the fires of hell. The Bible teaches that the wages of sin is *death* (Romans 6:23)—the diametric opposite of life.

After burning up in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14), they will simply cease to exist. This is the second death (Revelation 20:14). You can learn much more by requesting or downloading our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

God's magnificent purpose for humanity

The awesome result of our Creator's activities on this earth lies "in *bringing many sons to glory*" (Hebrews 2:10)—the Greek term here includes daughters as well. As the apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23, God accomplishes His plan in stages: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. *But each one in his own order.*"

God is enlarging His family in His own way and according to His own timetable. Many assume that today is the only day of salvation and that the ultimate judgment for humanity at large is determined solely by what happens in this life.

The Bible, however, reveals something far different. The first resurrection represents the *firstfruits* of God's salvation. Judgment for them occurs in this life. But a much larger group, representing the greater part of all who have ever lived, will be offered salvation *some 1,000 years later*. They will go through their judgment period then. For only then, in that great later harvest of mankind, will they receive their opportunity for everlasting life in the Kingdom of God. **GN**

To Learn More...

Does God have a plan He is working out, a timetable He is following? What will happen in that plan, and in what order? If you'd like to learn more about how the festivals of the Bible reveal how God will ultimately offer salvation to all who have ever lived, request or download our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. And to learn more about what God has in store for your future, be sure to also request *What Is Your Destiny?*

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How Can We Find the Pathway to Peace?

by Gerhard Marx

“Peace” and “goodwill toward men!” announced the chorus of heavenly messengers at the time of Jesus Christ’s birth. But where is the evidence of this peace among humanity, as also foretold by Isaiah and other prophets? What went wrong? Will humanity ever experience this peace?

When the prophet Isaiah wrote of a future benefactor of the world, he had no idea that nearly 2,500 years later and 2,500 miles away his words would be set to music in a grand oratorio—*The Messiah* by German-born composer George Frideric Handel.

When performed for charity in Dublin in 1742, *The Messiah* was an immediate success, falling on receptive ears in Ireland and England. The impact of Handel’s music, especially this monumental work, is evidenced by the 3,000 admirers who attended his funeral in Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey in 1759. And of course the impact has been felt far and wide since.

Unlike many popular visionaries, Isaiah’s words highlight the coming of a Messiah, a great event to benefit all mankind. Not least among the benefits to follow the Messiah’s appearance will be genuine, lasting peace, as reflected in the prophet’s encouraging words so well known and often sung in *The Messiah*: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be

called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, *The Prince of Peace*” (Isaiah 9:6, King James Version, emphasis added throughout).

When the Messiah did appear on earth in the person of Jesus Christ (“Christ” being the Greek-derived term for Messiah), He taught and practiced the way of peace as no one before or after Him. Yet Christ’s first coming did not leave this present world a legacy of perpetual peace. At the time of Jesus’ birth, a chorus of heavenly angels announced, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14). But now, 2,000 years later, where is this universal peace, as also proclaimed by Isaiah? What went wrong? And will we ever see it actually come?

Only a dream?

The people of the earth have seen little true peace, even though the name of Christ is esteemed. The Holy Land has for centuries seen war after war, conflict after conflict. The only periods of peace in that embattled area seem to be the intervals leading up to the next

armed conflict—as attested to by five wars in modern Israel’s brief 60-year history.

Much of the world can only *dream* of peace, and only the Messiah could make that dream a reality. “The way of peace they have not known” is Isaiah’s divinely inspired assessment of man’s typical behavior (Isaiah 59:8). This sobering statement is echoed by the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

History verifies this assessment of human conduct throughout the ages. Left to our own devices, people seem utterly incapable of keeping the peace. The past century witnessed innumerable bloodstained episodes of strife and war, and the 21st is continuing that trend. The world has rejected the peace God so freely offered.

The promise of peace

How have human beings put aside peace? They have rejected Jesus Christ and His message, disregarding the way to reconciliation, respect and cooperation He taught and exemplified. But help is on the way. God will keep His promise by sending the Prince of Peace to earth a second time (Hebrews 9:28) to at last inaugurate the long-hoped-for utopia.

So peace is surely coming, but the world at large will have to wait a little longer to experience it. Yet not everyone has to linger on a waiting list to find peace. Some are called to embrace peace now, well ahead of the rest of



humankind, as the emissaries of God's way of life.

To those who accept this special calling, Jesus Christ promises: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; [but] not as the world gives . . ." (John 14:27). The real peace Christ offers is genuine and "surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). It is yours for the asking!

Christ offers, on an individual basis, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to embrace peace today rather than waiting for the universal calm and accord that will dawn when God intervenes mightily in world events.

Yet living a life in which peace is foremost in our minds isn't easy. In a chaotic age engulfed in turmoil and strife, finding the pathway to peace requires skill and initiative and has to be pursued in humility. It can, however, be achieved!

The prize for peacemakers

The world tends to elevate its military heroes. Many visitors down through the years have seen the Duke of Wellington's massive monument in St. Paul's Cathedral in London with its impressive list of his victorious battles. Few tourists have failed to notice the sky-high victory column of the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim Palace or the towering monument to "Braveheart" William Wallace near Stirling in Scotland.

True, these men of renown registered impressive military achievements in this age of man. But greater conquests than the spoils of war—the accomplishments of peace—are too lightly esteemed.

"Peace has her victories," noted the 17th-century poet John Milton. King Solomon, a scholar in his own right, reflected on this theme: "He who is *slow to anger* is better than the mighty, and he who *rules his spirit* than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32). Gaining the victory over our own base instincts is a worthy accomplishment, said Solomon—and so it is viewed by our Maker.

Notice God's words to Solomon, who on becoming king requested wisdom and understanding to better serve his people: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you" (1 Kings 3:11-12).

God heard and acted on Solomon's

request. This king would be blessed with a reign of peace in an otherwise bloodstained, violent age. In the eyes of our Creator, esteem and honor go to those who seek the well-being of others.

Good intentions and praise of peace are not in short supply. Yet a genuine, heartfelt desire to work out matters peaceably among nations or in our personal relationships all too often goes begging.

The God-inspired Scriptures make it clear that Christ's first coming—beyond His sacrifice for the sins of the world—served to invite a group of people from many nations to individually embrace a life of peace now (John 14:27; 16:33).

Surprising to some, Jesus Christ did not come 2,000 years ago to establish pervasive peace for one and all. The promise of peace for the world in general is for *a time yet future* when the Prince of Peace Himself will force an end to war (Revelation 2:27). Beginning at that time Christ will teach the way of peace to one and all—assisted by converted individuals already trained as messengers of peace (Revelation 5:10).

The personal touch

What is this peace that Jesus Christ taught 2,000 years ago and that He will teach to the whole world at His return? It is, first and foremost, *a way of life*. It is a state of mind—*God's mind in us*. It is a mind living in harmony with the Word of God, the Bible.

As Psalm 119:165 tells us, "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble." Those who put into practice Christ's teachings about peace will focus their minds on *loving* others rather than *taking advantage* of them. They will place the well-being of other people equal to, or even higher than, their own wants and needs. Because of this, "nothing causes them to stumble."

Christ has shown us in God's Word the way to peace. But how much do we make that way an integral part of our lives? We may not be able to bring our influence to bear on the world at large in any compelling way, but we can successfully heal a soured relationship.

To practice peace, as exemplified by Christ, we have to be at peace with ourselves and firmly believe that a peaceful approach is the only practical avenue to healing hurts and building amicable, friendly relationships. Embracing Christ's way of peace pays valuable dividends.

No one ever set a better example than Jesus Christ. He reached out to make peace with the Samaritan woman, as recorded in John 4.

At that point in history, relations between the Jews and Samaritans had deteriorated such that they were no longer on speaking terms with each other. Worse yet, this state of affairs was accepted as normal.

But Christ would have none of it. As a result of His desire to heal broken bonds, He made it clear that salvation would be made available to Samaritans as well as Jews. Later His stirring parable of the good Samaritan raised the anonymous Samaritan—viewed as among the most despised social class by Christ's audience—to a position of honor and respect. Jesus' message? All men and women are of equal potential in God's sight, and He had come that all might ultimately experience the peace and salvation that can come only through God.

Pathway to peace

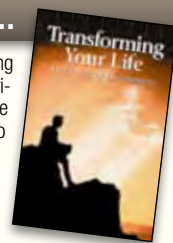
Of the Prince of Peace, the apostle Paul wrote, "And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near" (Ephesians 2:17). Our Savior included *all* who were willing to pursue peace. No one is barred from emulating Him as a messenger of peace. Making peace is an art, and we have Christ's example and His teaching to guide us.

The lesson for us is that we must build strong bonds and heal relationships where they have been bruised and broken. A personal touch from you is of paramount importance. Someone out there *needs you*—requires your example as a peacemaker—just as the world at large needs the Messiah.

Isaiah's prophecy of a benefactor, stirringly presented in Handel's oratorio, materialized in part 2,000 years ago in the first coming of Jesus Christ. Of course, this prophecy will find ultimate fulfillment in the age to come. Yet the Prince of Peace will work in us today if we embrace Him and His teachings. Remember His promise, "Peace I leave with you!" Why not take Jesus Christ up on that promise and accept His invitation to be a messenger of peace? **GN**

To Learn More...

Will the world ever see lasting peace? Is there a way to experience peace in your life? Where and how do you start? Be sure to request or download the booklets *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Both are yours free for the asking!



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Self-Control: Governing Your Life by the Power of God

In this series of articles on the fruit of the Spirit, we have come to the last of the nine virtues—self-control. Of all the things we have to govern in this life, self is often our greatest challenge!

by Don Hooser

The 21st Winter Olympics are scheduled for February 2010 in Vancouver, British Columbia. For most athletes hoping to compete, that date is now *extremely near!* They know that to be the best in any sport, they must train for many years.

The apostle Paul compared life to a race. He wrote: “Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must *run* in such a way that you will *win*. All athletes practice strict *self-control*. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an *eternal* prize.”

“So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step . . . I *discipline* my body like an athlete, *training* it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

In the greatest of all races, the race for eternal life, *everyone* can be a *winner*. Thankfully, there is no need to compete with another person. In fact, we should be coaches and cheerleaders for one another! But Paul said “run in such a way”—as an Olympic athlete competing for a gold medal.

Those of us who want the “*eternal prize*” should ask ourselves some questions:

- Am I as dedicated and zealous as an Olympic athlete?
- Do I study the Holy Scriptures as much as any athlete studies how to perform well in his sport?
- Am I quick in seeking advice (through prayer and Bible study) from my Coach?
- Do I stay focused on my long-range goal?
- Am I willing to make sacrifices to reach my goal?
- Am I determined to *endure to the end*—to cross the finish line of life—and to *never quit*? (Matthew 24:13).

We probably can’t say *yes* to all those questions every day. *But we surely must be heading in that direction.* This requires taking charge of our lives—the final listed

aspect among “the fruit of the Spirit.”

Self-control: last but not least

Paul listed nine godly virtues that constitute the fruit of God’s Spirit—the inward and outward effect of having the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. They are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, *self-control*” (Galatians 5:22-23).

What a stark contrast they are to the actions of man’s sinful nature that Paul listed in the previous three verses!

(Where the New King James Version has “self-control,” the earlier King James Version used the word “temperance,” meaning self-restraint. Today, however, this word usually has the narrower sense of *moderation* or, when referring to alcoholic drinks, total *abstinence*. Therefore, as commonly understood today, temperance is only a small part of self-control.)

Is the sequential order of the nine godly virtues significant? The first listed, love, is clearly the most important (1 Corinthians 13:1-2, 13). Is self-control, then, last because it’s *least* important? On the contrary, self-control is extremely vital. Paul emphasized it alongside “righteousness . . . and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25).

Perhaps self-control is listed last as the capstone—since it takes a lot of self-control to *exercise the other eight* virtues! It takes a lot of self-control just to “bridle” one’s *tongue* (James 1:26; 3:2). Maybe Paul was thinking of love and self-control as the two great bookends for the set.

Clearly these nine virtues work together and support each other. Consider *long-suffering*, which is the opposite of *short-tempered*. Many people are ruled by their *feelings* and can’t control their *anger*. In fact, one measure of maturity is *emotional control*. Some adults still have temper tantrums!

The best form of self-control may be fleeing

We all face temptations to sin—all our

lives. When confronted with temptation, we must strive, as far as possible, to get away from it—*flee!* Even if you think you have a lot of self-control, don’t put it to the test unnecessarily.

Consider some of the things we are told to flee: “Flee” from a “stranger” (a teacher of lies), “flee sexual immorality” (as Joseph had to literally flee, Genesis 39:12), “flee from idolatry,” flee “all kinds of evil,” “flee also youthful lusts” (John 10:5; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:10-11; 2 Timothy 2:22).

We need self-control to avoid not only outright evil but also *too much of the good things*. Proverbs 25:16 cautions: “Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit.”

People often lack the self-restraint to stop when they should. People overeat, overdrink, overspend and overindulge in lots of things. We must rule over our appetites rather than letting our appetites rule us. Overindulgence can lead to intoxication and/or addiction. In either case, the person is then really out of control!

Self-control often means resisting sexual temptations, a subject addressed many times in the Bible. Tragically, standards of morality and modesty are plunging around us. Sexual sins are especially damaging—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually (1 Corinthians 6:13-20).

Because of lust, even smart people do stupid things. Just think of all the prominent people who’ve been caught cheating on their spouses! They may be “ruling” over *many* people, but they fail to rule their *own* lives. They trade integrity for instant gratification, and everyone loses.

Jesus and the apostles made it clear that God holds us strictly accountable for even sinful *thoughts* as well as sinful actions. We must wage spiritual warfare, “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Jesus said, “Whoever looks at a woman

to lust for her has already committed *adultery* with her *in his heart*” (Matthew 5:28). We should follow the example of Job, who said, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl” (Job 31:1, New International Version).

And women need to understand how easily they can be partly responsible for men sinning in their minds. When a woman is exposing parts of her body that only her husband should see, others can be tantalized and tempted. Women who want to please God should “resolve this, not to

and “theocracy” (government by God).

From these Greek roots we see that *egkrateia* essentially means power or strength within. But *whose* power?

Even apart from God’s direct help, some people have relatively strong character. Their good habits may be the result of good upbringing plus wisdom gained from experience—perhaps combined with innate determination. But we shouldn’t confuse this with the erroneous New Age claim that everyone has a reservoir of righteous power deep within himself just waiting to be tapped.

Paul plainly said that “the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it *does not submit itself to God’s law*, for it is *unable to do so*” (Romans 8:7, Holman Christian Standard Bible). Thus, the normal human mind by itself is *not capable* of being in *complete submission to the law of God!* Therefore, we need “power within” that comes from God!

Jesus said, “The spirit [one’s attitude] indeed is willing but the flesh [human willpower] is weak” (Matthew 26:41). For example, 11 of Jesus’ disciples *intended* to stick by Him, but when things got really scary, they all deserted Him (verse 56).

Therefore, “self-control” can be somewhat misleading. Effective self-control is not ultimately *self controlling self*. To have truly effectual control over our lives, we need *God’s* power to be in control.

“Power from on high”

Just before Jesus’ ascension to heaven, He said to His disciples, “You shall *receive power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). Luke 24:49 adds that the disciples were to wait in Jerusalem until they

received this “power from on high.”

Indeed, 10 days later when 120 of Christ’s disciples were together observing the annual festival of Pentecost, suddenly “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” and God’s power was spectacularly demonstrated (Acts 2:1-4).

A vast crowd of people gathered about, and Peter explained to them what a person must do to receive God’s Spirit: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the

name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

What are the benefits of having the Holy Spirit? There are many, but of crucial importance is that it enables *spiritual understanding*—the capacity to truly *understand the Bible* (1 Corinthians 2:9-11, 14).

Then, once we have spiritual “knowledge,” we must add “self-control” (2 Peter 1:5-8). In other words, God’s Spirit imparts the strength of character to *apply* and *live by* that knowledge. And as it *transforms* us, we can increasingly see the effects or “fruit” of having God’s Spirit within us.

The aim of discipline through discipleship

What is the purpose of parental discipline? It should be to teach a child to exercise *self-discipline*. The self-discipline gradually becomes a good habit that is valuable throughout life.

Jesus Christ wants you to be His *disciple*. He said, “If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31, Good News Bible). Therefore discipleship includes learning the self-discipline of obedience. And that has great rewards! Choose to follow Christ—choose to be His disciple!

Jesus also said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Jesus was not suggesting penance, asceticism or a monastic life. But very often, we need to say *no* to selfish desires in order to say *yes* to God’s will.

God will not take away a person’s free will to make choices in life. But as long as you keep inviting Him into your life, He will empower you “to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Philippians 2:13, NIV).

Two proverbs draw a stark contrast between not having self-control and the priceless value of having it. The first says, “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28, NIV). He is defenseless and doomed to defeat.

The second states: “It is better to be patient than powerful. It is better to win *control over yourself* than over whole cities” (Proverbs 16:32, GNB).

As with all of us, certainly your biggest spiritual enemy has been yourself. But take heart. With God’s great help, you can increasingly conquer the enemy!

Each of us must rule over self before we can, as promised to those who overcome in Revelation 3:21 and 20:6, reign with Christ in His Kingdom! **GN**



“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control,” says Proverbs 25:28. He is defenseless and doomed to defeat.

put a stumbling block [a temptation] or a cause to fall [into sin] in our brother’s way” (Romans 14:13).

Is willpower powerful?

The Greek word translated “self-control,” *egkrateia*, is derived from two other Greek words—*en* and *kratos*. *En* means “in” and *kratos* means “strength” or “power.” From *kratos* we get such English words as “democracy” (power or rule by the people)

Television Log

All channels and times listed are for cable TV unless stated otherwise. For additional information and the most current airing times, or to download or view programs online, visit www.BeyondToday.tv.

UNITED STATES

Alaska
Anchorage ch. 18, Fri 4 p.m.

Arizona
Prescott ch. 13, Sun 5 p.m.; Sat 3:30 p.m.
Prescott Valley ch. 13, Sun 9 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.
Tucson ch. 72, 120, Sun 9:30 a.m.
ch. 73, 98, Sat 9:30 a.m.

Arkansas
Fayetteville ch. 18, Sun 10 a.m.; Wed 6 p.m.; Sat 9 a.m.

California
Anaheim (west) ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Clayton ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.
Concord ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.
Costa Mesa ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Cypress ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Danville ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.
Eureka ch. 12, Fri 8 p.m.
Fountain Valley ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Garden Grove ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Hayward ch. 28, Tue 10 p.m. (monthly)
Hemet ch. 3, Fri 2:30 p.m.
Huntington Beach ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Lafayette ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.
Livermore ch. 26, Fri 4 p.m.
Los Alamitos ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Marin County ch. 26, Wed 7 p.m.; Thu 1 p.m.
Martinez ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.
Midway City ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Modesto ch. 26, Thu 8:30 p.m.; Fri 6 p.m.
Monrovia ch. 16, 98, Tue, Thu and Sat 4:30 p.m.
Novato ch. 71, Tue 9:30 p.m.
Orange ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Orinda ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.
Palo Cedro DCA cable link, Thu 10 a.m.
Pasadena ch. 56, Sun 6 a.m. & 6 p.m.
Petaluma ch. 26, Sun 9:30 a.m. & 3 p.m.; Wed 6 p.m.; Sat 2:30 p.m.
Pleasant Hill ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.
Rossmoor ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.
Sacramento ch. 18, Mon 6:30 p.m.
San Diego ch. 18, 19, 23, Mon 5 p.m.
San Francisco ch. 29, Sun 9:30 a.m.
San Jose ch. 15a, Sun 10:30 a.m.
Santa Clara ch. 15a, Wed 4:30 p.m.
Santa Rosa ch. 30, Sun 7:30 p.m.; Sat 10:30 a.m.
Stanton ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.
Walnut Creek ch. 26, 2nd & 4th Mon 8 p.m.
Westminster ch. 3a, 6, Sun 12:30 & 9:30 p.m.

Georgia
Cornelia ch. 4, Sun 6:30 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.

Hawaii
Hilo ch. 53, Sun 10 a.m.; Thu 7:30 p.m.

Idaho
Boise ch. 11, Wed 7:30 p.m.

Illinois
Arlington Heights ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Bartlett ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Brookport ch. 2, Sun 2 p.m.
Buffalo Grove ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Chicago ch. 36, times vary
Des Plaines ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Elk Grove Village ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Glenview ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Golf ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Hanover Park ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Hoffman Estates ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Lincolnwood ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Metropolis ch. 2, Sun 2 p.m.
Morton Grove ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Mt. Prospect ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.

Naperville ch. 17, Sun 10 a.m.
Niles ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Normal ch. 20, Sun 9 p.m.
Northbrook ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Palatine ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Park Ridge ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Prospect Heights ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Rolling Meadows ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Romeoville ch. 6, Sun 9 a.m.
Schaumburg ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Skokie ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Springfield ch. 4, Wed 12 a.m., 8 a.m. & 5 p.m.
Streamwood ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Wheeling ch. 35, Wed 6:30 p.m.
Wilmette ch. 19, Wed 6:30 p.m.

Indiana
Bloomington ch. 3, Sun 9:30 p.m.
Evansville ch. 7, Mon 5:30 p.m.; Tue 6:30 p.m.
 Ft. Wayne ch. 57, Sun 8:30 a.m.
Valparaiso ch. 99, Tue 8:30 p.m.

Iowa
Des Moines ch. 17, Sun 11:30 a.m.

Kentucky
Owensboro ch. 72, Sun 8 a.m. & 7 p.m.
Paducah ch. 2, Sun 2 p.m.

Massachusetts
Boston ch. 22, 23, 83, Sun 7 a.m.; Wed 10 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.
Cambridge ch. 22, 23, 83, Sun 7 a.m.; Wed 10 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.
East Longmeadow ch. 5, Sun 11:30 a.m.
Greenfield ch. 17, Tue 6:30 a.m.; Sun 6 p.m.
Palmer ch. 12, Tue 11 p.m.
Worcester ch. 13, Thu 10 a.m.

Michigan
Ann Arbor ch. 17, Thu 4:30 p.m.
Grand Haven ch. 22, Mon 4 p.m.
Grand Rapids ch. 25, Tue or Wed 11 a.m.
Kalamazoo ch. 95, Sun 9 & 9:30 a.m.
Michigan City ch. 99, Tue 8:30 p.m.; Thu 7 p.m.
Midland ch. 3, Tue 5:30 p.m.
Mt. Pleasant ch. 3, times vary
Petoskey ch. 2, Sun 11:30 a.m.; Fri 5 p.m.
Redford ch. 12, Mon 6 p.m.
Traverse City ch. 2, Sun 11:30 a.m.; Fri 5 p.m.
Ypsilanti ch. 17, Thu 4:30 p.m.

Minnesota
Albert Lea ch. 13, Sun 10:30 a.m.
Austin ch. 13, Sun 10 a.m.
Blaine ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.
Bloomington ch. 16, Wed 10 p.m.; Thu 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.
Brooklyn Center ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
Brooklyn Park ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
Centerville ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.
Circle Pines ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.
Crystal ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
Eden Prairie ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 5:30 p.m.
Edina ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 5:30 p.m.
Golden Valley ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
Ham Lake ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.
Hopkins ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 5:30 p.m.
Lexington ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.
Lino Lakes ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.
Litchfield ch. 10, Sun 2 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 12:15 p.m., 7 p.m.; Wed 3 a.m., 8:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.
Maple Grove ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
Minnetonka ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 5:30 p.m.
New Hope ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
New Ulm ch. 72, Sun 5 p.m.; Thu 10 a.m.;

Fri 7 p.m.
ch. 14, Thu 9 a.m.
ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
Plymouth ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
Richfield ch. 15, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 5:30 p.m.
Robbinsdale ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
Rochester ch. 10, Sun 10 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.; Sat 10 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.
St. Charles ch. 20, Sun 2 p.m.; Wed 3 p.m.
Spring Lake Park ch. 14, Sun 1 & 9 a.m.; Sat 5 p.m.
Wabasha ch. 20, Sun 2 p.m.; Wed 3 p.m.
Winona ch. 20, Sun 2 p.m.; Wed 3 p.m.

Missouri
Cape Girardeau ch. 5, Sun 7:30 a.m.; Tue 6:30 p.m.; Thu 12:30 p.m.; Fri 7:30 p.m.
Jackson ch. 5, Sun 7:30 a.m.; Tue 6:30 p.m.; Thu 12:30 p.m.; Fri 7:30 p.m.
Jefferson City ch. 3, Wed 6 p.m.
Poplar Bluff ch. 54, Tue 4 p.m.
Springfield ch. 26, Sun 8:30 a.m.; Wed 7 p.m.

Montana
Helena ch. 11, Sun 3 p.m.
Missoula ch. 7, Sun 11 a.m.

Nevada
Carson City ch. 210, Sun 2:30 p.m.; Sat 9:30 a.m.
Reno/Sparks ch. 216/16, Wed 6:30 p.m.

New Hampshire
Laconia ch. 25, 26, Sun 7:30 a.m. & 4:30 p.m.

New Mexico
Santa Fe ch. 16, Sun 10 a.m.; Mon 6:30 p.m.

New York
Binghamton ch. 4, Thu 5:30 p.m.
Bronx ch. 70, Mon 3 p.m.
Brooklyn ch. 56, 69, Sun 10 a.m.
Canandaigua ch. 12, Sun 2 p.m.
Long Island ch. 20, Mon 10 p.m.
New York ch. 57, Sun 7 a.m.
Oneonta ch. 23, Mon 6 p.m.; Wed 9 p.m.
Queens ch. 35, Tue 8 p.m.; Thu 3 p.m.
ch. 56, Sun 10 p.m.; Thu 4:30 p.m.
ch. 115, Sat 3 p.m.

North Carolina
Charlotte ch. 21, Sat 1 p.m.
Durham ch. 18, Wed 7:30 a.m.
Hickory ch. 10, Sun 11 a.m.
Raleigh ch. 22, Tue 6:30 p.m.

North Dakota
Bismarck ch. 12, Sun 2:30 p.m.
Fargo ch. 12, Tue 10:30 a.m.

Ohio
Athens ch. 23, Sun 7 p.m.; Wed 7 p.m.
Brunswick ch. 21, Tue 7 p.m.; Wed 12:30, 4:30 & 8:30 a.m.; 2:30, 6:30 & 9:30 p.m.
ch. 4, Sun 11:30 a.m. & 8:30 p.m.; Mon 8:30 p.m.
ch. 18, Sun 10:30 a.m.; Tue 10 p.m.; Thu 11 p.m.; Sat 6:30 a.m.
Bryan ch. 8, Sun 2:30 a.m.; Tue 9:30 a.m.; Wed 11 p.m.; Sat 2:30 p.m.
Dayton ch. 12, Sun 11 a.m.; Wed 7 p.m.
Defiance ch. 5, Sun 12 noon; Thu 6 p.m.
Fairborn ch. 6, Sun 5:30 p.m.
Greenville ch. 3, Thu 8 p.m.
Huber Heights ch. 6, Sun 5:30 p.m.
Oberlin/Wellington ch. 12, Sun & Sat 9 a.m.
Springfield ch. 6, Sun 5:30 p.m.
Trotwood ch. 6, Sun 5:30 p.m.
Urbana ch. 1, daily 6 a.m., 10 a.m. & 7 p.m.
Vandalia ch. 6, Sun 5:30 p.m.
Wash. Court House ch. 3, Wed 2 p.m.; Sat 10 a.m.
Xenia ch. 23, Sun 5:30 p.m.

Oregon
Eugene ch. 29, Tue 2 p.m.

McMinnville ch. 11, Sun 5:30 p.m.; Wed 8 p.m.
Medford ch. 15, 95, Sun 5 p.m.
Monmouth ch. 17, Sun 11 a.m.
Portland ch. 22, Sun 7:30 p.m.; Thu 8 p.m.
ch. 23, Sat 4 p.m.
ch. 23, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Fri 2 p.m.; Sat 9 a.m.

Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh/Moon Twp. ch. 21, 14, Sun 12 & 2 p.m.

Rhode Island
Entire state ch. 14, Fri 10:30 a.m.

Texas
Austin ch. 11, Mon 8:30 p.m.
Dallas ch. 14B, 74, Sun 12:30 p.m.; Thu 9:30 p.m.
Del Rio ch. 19, Sun 9 a.m.; Wed 5 p.m.
El Paso ch. 15, Mon, Fri, Sat 1 p.m.
Fort Worth ch. 28, Tue 5:30 p.m.; Thu 1 p.m.
Longview ch. 26, Tue 2 p.m.; Sat 9 p.m.
San Antonio ch. 20, Mon 10:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.

Virginia
Charlottesville/Albemarle County ch. 13, 14, Wed 10 p.m.
Hampton Roads ch. 71, 74, Sun 10 a.m.

Washington
Bainbridge Island ch. 12, Sun 9:30 a.m., 6:30 p.m., 11 p.m.; Sun-Sat 1 a.m.; Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat 5 a.m.; Tue, Thu 5:30 a.m.
ch. 77, Wed 5 p.m.
ch. 13, Sun & Tue 8:30 p.m.
ch. 22, 29, Sun 9 a.m.; Thu 10:30 p.m.
ch. 14, Sat 5:30 p.m.
ch. 11, Sun 11 p.m.; Mon 5 p.m.; Sat 11 a.m.

Everett
Kennewick
Olympia
Spokane
Vancouver

West Virginia
Morgantown ch. 3, Mon, Wed & Fri 3 p.m.; Sat 10 a.m.

Wisconsin
Beloit ch. 12, Thu 6:30 p.m.
Eau Claire ch. 96, Sun 2 p.m.
Kenosha ch. 14, Sun & Mon 7:30 p.m.
Madison ch. 4, Sun 12:30 p.m.
Milwaukee ch. 96, Mon 2 p.m.; Tue 7 p.m.; Wed 2 p.m.
ch. 19, Sun & Sat 1 p.m.
Stevens Point ch. 96, 984, 984-1, Mon 5 & 9:30 p.m.; Tue 10 a.m. & 3:30 p.m.
ch. 96a, 981d, 98a, 980d, Sun 8:30 a.m.; Sat 9 a.m.
ch. 14, times vary

CANADA

Nationwide
Vision TV, Sun 7 p.m. (PST)
Star Choice Digital ch. 399, Sun 10:30 a.m. (EST)

Alberta
The Christian Channel Telus ch. 158, Sun 8:30 a.m.

British Columbia
The Christian Channel Telus ch. 158, Sun 7:30 a.m.

Manitoba
The Christian Channel MTS ch. 21, Sun 9:30 a.m.

New Brunswick
The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sun 11:30 a.m.

Newfoundland and Labrador
The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sun 12 noon

Northwest Territory
The Christian Channel Northwestel ch. 226, Sun 8:30 a.m.

Ontario
The Christian Channel Rogers ch. 396, Sun 10:30 a.m.
The Christian Channel Cogeco ch. 186, Sun 10:30 a.m.

Saskatchewan
The Christian Channel SaskTel ch. 282, Sun 8:30 a.m.



Could the Dollar Fall?

by **Beyond Today** host Darris McNeely

Could the dollar be challenged and replaced by another world currency? Will something that until recently was “unthinkable” become a reality? The global financial slump is challenging long-held assumptions.

Several recent headlines in London’s *Financial Times* illustrate a continuing thought among world financial leaders. The first headline said, “Brazil and China Eye Plan to Axe Dollar.” “China Attacks Dollar’s Dominance” read another. A third spoke of “De-Dollarization and the Ending of America’s Financial-Military Hegemony.” Another spotlighted the lack of confidence in American financial leadership: “Dollar Falls as Geithner [the U.S. Treasury Secretary] Hails Recovery Hopes.”

Warning shots are being fired across America’s bow. Many want an end to the era of the dollar as the world’s reserve currency. If that happens, your financial world will be forever altered.

Could this happen?

The United States is now the world’s largest debtor nation (\$10.6 trillion). And China owns more of that debt than any other nation—more than \$800 billion. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao has publicly expressed “worries” over China’s significant holdings of U.S. government bonds, which ties China to America’s good times and its bad times.

China is concerned that the U.S. Treasury bills (T-bills) and bonds it holds will lose much of their worth if the dollar is devalued or the financial crisis does not turn around.

By calling for the creation of another reserve currency, China, Russia and other nations seek insurance for their economies against the problems generated when one country’s economy goes bad. They also seek to end American dominance over the world economy. America’s decline and China’s rise fit their geopolitical ambitions.

Ending the dollar’s role in the world economy is not an easy matter. *The Wall Street*



Journal stated: “The technical and political hurdles to implementing China’s recommendation [to create a new standard world currency to replace the dollar] are enormous, so even if backed by other nations, the proposal is unlikely to change the dollar’s role in the short term.

“Central banks around the world hold more U.S. dollars and dollar securities than they do assets denominated in any other individual foreign currency. Such reserves can be used to stabilize the value of the central banks’ domestic currencies” (“China Takes Aim at Dollar,” March 24, 2009).

Will the dollar’s reign soon end?

Before the dollar, the British pound sterling formed the underpinning of the global economy. It took two world wars and several decades for the world standard to shift from the pound to the dollar. Since the end of

World War II, the dollar has been king.

Although the current financial problems ignited in America have led to a global meltdown, it will take more than what we’ve experienced so far to topple America from its current role. That is not to say this could not or will not happen.

Creating another world currency requires several factors to be in place. Research analysts at the private intelligence agency Stratfor outlined what those factors would be:

“As to a world beyond the dollar, the issue is that a reserve currency is not decided upon; it creates itself. Two things are needed to create a reserve currency. First, there must be sufficient liquidity to support a global system. That requires a central bank with an enormous amount of autonomy from a state government, and the U.S. Federal Reserve is unparalleled on this count. Not even the European Central Bank can compete.

“Second, the economy upon which the currency is based must be large enough to withstand fluctuations caused by other economies buying and selling its assets in massive amounts. Again, the United States is the only economy that potentially could qualify.

“Part and parcel of any replacement of the U.S. dollar would be a large-scale abandonment of U.S. T-bills as the core of Chinese currency reserves, which—as the conventional wisdom holds—would force intractable economic problems upon the United States. But a closer look reveals that this is not the case.

“First, selling U.S. T-bills en masse simply is not possible. Every seller requires a buyer, and the volumes at hand cannot be exchanged quickly. Second, starting down that road would cause the value of the securities in question to plummet, destroying the savings the Chinese have been building up for years. The so-called ‘nuclear option’ really is not an option at all” (“China’s Calculated Currency Rhetoric,” March 25, 2009).

China has its own problems. The huge middle class created by their recent boom is

beginning to experience layoffs and financial setbacks. The ruling Communist Party cannot afford discontent from this segment of its society. Once people have tasted materialism, they won't go back. For now it's in China's interest to blame a foreign power (America). It deflects attention from the home front.

Yet clearly, China is playing a very dangerous geopolitical game with calls for a new reserve currency.

What would it mean for Americans?

Since the end of World War II, the dollar has been the dominant world currency. For most living Americans, this is the world into which they were born. This is all they have known. Americans enjoy one of the world's highest living standards due to the stability and wealth created by America's dominant economic role.

So what would it mean for the American consumer if the dollar were no longer the world's reserve currency?

Everything Americans import would cost more—*everything*. Americans would have to buy the new currency in order to trade in world markets. Last year's \$4-per-gallon gasoline would quickly look like a bargain.

The credit market would collapse. Investors would flee toxic assets, further locking up the economy.

The U.S. Federal Reserve would print more money to combat the credit squeeze, with the likely result being hyperinflation, meaning higher prices for available goods. Remember the stories of Weimar Germany after World War I when it took a wheelbarrow full of money to buy a loaf of bread? Not pretty.

American power and influence in the world would seriously decline. Little understood today is the role of the economy in shaping and controlling world events. The dollar's place in the world adds incalculable weight to American influence. With the dollar diminished, that influence would be reduced substantially. Russia and China

are waiting for their turn to assume that power, but they would certainly meet with competition from the European Union.

Big losers from the fall of the dollar would include Japan and Latin America. Because they hold much of America's debt, China and the oil-rich Persian Gulf states would also see huge losses. Israel and Egypt would suffer as well because of massive amounts of American aid they would lose. What this would mean to the Middle East calculus is unknown, but Egypt could be destabilized as a result.

World politics would be altered. The vacuum of power created would be contested. The EU, which stands to gain from the fall of the dollar, would be among the chief contenders. China would no doubt make a play as well, but a number of factors would hinder its bid. Stability would arise from the potential period of chaos with another power becoming the global economy's main engine. America's time in the sun would be over.

American lifestyles would change radically. The end of cheap oil, low interest rates and deficit spending would mean a lower quality of life and higher taxes. What this would mean to the social fabric of the nation is unknown. But Americans' way of life would dramatically change.

This last point speaks to the character of the American people. Do they have the same qualities that helped a prior generation survive the upheaval of a Great Depression and World War II?

America losing the pride of her power?

Those pushing to create a different world are no doubt working hard to bring about the demise of the dollar and the end of America's dominant role in the world. In *The Good News* we have spoken before of America's prophesied loss of "the pride of [its] power" (Leviticus 26:19). While military might is what we think of first in this regard, economic factors are also important here. The dollar losing its reserve currency

status would radically change America's leading role in the world.

For one, America's crippling foreign debt would get worse with decreased ability to finance the burden. In time the country would be at the mercy of those holding its obligations, with little room to maneuver. Economic enslavement to other nations would be on the horizon.

However, it's unlikely that this will happen immediately. China and several Arab states hold too many dollar-denominated instruments to see this change. As mentioned, they would lose too much. Right now the United States is too big, too rich and too powerful for them to allow it to fail. There is too much at stake on the global scene.

That does not mean things couldn't change—and change quickly—but the proper circumstances have to be in place.

It will not happen until the God of heaven *allows* it to happen. God has blessed America with its wealth, power and resulting prestige. He will move to change that when it fits *His timing* for His great plan for all the nations.

Until then we have days to live and many lives to touch. We have character to develop and mistakes to correct. We have days to love those close to us and, above all, time to discover God and His attention to the details of eternity, history and our lives. Make the most of the time while you can. **GN**

To Learn More...

Is the world's most powerful nation ever—the United States of America—overlooked in Bible prophecy? The answer is an emphatic *No*. But few understand how the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and other major nations are identified in prophecy. What lies ahead for them? You need to know! Be sure to request or download your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.



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Biblical Festivals

Continued from page 19

the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

As pictured in the Feast of Trumpets, Jesus will take over the rule of this world (Revelation 11:15). Satan will be deposed and incarcerated, as shown in the Day of Atonement (Revelation 20:1-3). Then *Jesus and His resurrected and transformed saints will reign on the earth over all nations for 1,000 years*, a millennium (Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6).

During this 1,000-year messianic reign over physical nations of the earth, Christ will live with humankind. This is celebrated in the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, referring to tents or temporary dwellings (Leviticus 23:33-43).

For the duration of this festival, God's people live in temporary dwellings, recalling in part the time when God “made the children of Israel dwell in booths” following the Exodus (verse 43). In fact, God Himself also dwelt in a tabernacle in journeying with the Israelites through the desert.

Yet this Feast also looks forward to the wonderful, though temporary, conditions of the millennial age—which anticipates a permanent new heaven and new earth to follow (Revelation 21-22).

As previously noted, this festival was also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16), celebrating the great harvest of late summer and fall in the Promised Land.

This harvest depicted *the ultimate spiritual harvest of humanity* to come—the *later* fruits following the *firstfruits* of this age. The future harvest begins with those who live through the terrible events at the end of this age and into the millennial period. It then continues with their progeny throughout the 1,000 years, generation after generation.

Under the righteous rule of God, humanity will live in unprecedented peace and unparalleled health and prosperity (Zechariah 14:8-11; Isaiah 2:1-4; 11; 35; Micah 4:1-8; Amos 9:13-15). Ezekiel 36:35 says the environment will be like the Garden of Eden: “So they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’”

At that time, God will extend His New Covenant relationship to all mankind, beginning with Israel:

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,

says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for *all shall know Me*, from



the least of them to the greatest of them” (Hebrews 8:10-11).

These conditions will continue into the period pictured in the next festival, which comes at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, though distinct and separate from it.

The Eighth Day

On the day following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles—the eighth day—the Israelites were to observe a final Holy Day in the annual cycle God gave (Leviticus 23:36, 39).

Though a separate festival, the Eighth Day is connected to the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering because it further celebrates the future spiritual harvest of mankind, portraying events that will immediately follow the millennial reign of Christ and His resurrected and transformed saints.

The 1,000-year period of peace and prosperity for the entire global human family serves as a stepping stone to a vast increase in the late harvest of human lives. Revelation 20:5 says that “*the rest of the dead*” will live again when the 1,000 years are finished. This includes all people who lived but were not converted to God's way from Adam to Christ's second coming—which could number in the scores of billions.

They will be *raised to physical life and at last given the opportunity for salvation* during a period of judgment (compare Ezekiel 37:1-14; Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41-42; 1 Peter 2:12; Revelation 20:11-12). This is sometimes called the Great White Throne Judgment, as Revelation 20:11-12 describes the risen dead standing before such a throne.

The White Throne Judgment is not an instant sentencing but a period of evaluation and corrective measures spanning the new lifetime of those resurrected—paralleling the lifetime judgment of God's saints today, whom He wants to save, not lose (see 1 Peter 4:17; 1 Corinthians 11:31-32).

Sadly, not everyone will choose salvation. Those who ultimately refuse to repent will be destroyed in a lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8). But the vast majority of mankind will be saved—transformed into immortal spirit like those in the first resurrection.

Indeed, the whole creation will be transformed. The great beauty, peace and prosperity on earth during Christ's millennial reign will continue through the White Throne Judgment period. And after this, the present earth and sky will give way to, as mentioned earlier, a new heaven and new earth—at which time God the Father as well as Jesus Christ will dwell with glorified humanity forever (Revelation 21-22).

Solving the puzzle

Thus, God's festivals help us to solve the prophetic puzzle of how mankind is to be saved, bringing God's plan into focus.

From the harvest of Jesus Christ as the initial firstfruits, to the harvest of the rest of the firstfruits of this age and finally to the ultimate harvest of the remainder of mankind in the age to come, God's plan entails everyone, yet in a specific order.

And we are reminded of this plan each year through God's seven annual festivals, which come in accordance with the three major harvest seasons in the land of Israel.

What a great blessing and privilege it is to understand that God will ultimately offer salvation to everyone—and that we have the opportunity to live according to His calling today! **GN**

To Learn More...

There's much more to learn about the significance of and events associated with the festivals that God reveals in the Bible. If you'd like to learn more about God's plan for your and humanity's salvation, be sure to download or request your copy of our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.



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

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets

“A Lesson in Prayer”

Let me thank you for all the articles and publications. All of the things I read in *The Good News* are by far the most practical and easy to grasp—even if I don’t necessarily agree sometimes. Please forward a thank you to Gary Petty for his article “A Lesson in Prayer.”

Despite praying daily and some awesome prayer moments, the article allowed me to regroup and refocus how I pray and develop my conversations with God. So many people, including myself, have overlooked Jesus’ intent with the “model prayer.” If we only thought about what we are reciting when we are speaking the Lord’s Prayer. I’ve challenged myself to pray in conversational tone using this model prayer as a pattern.

G.S., Baldwinsville, New York

The article in which you break down each portion of the Lord’s Prayer was quite a revelation to me. Until I read this article, I had never realized its importance. It made me understand how true it was. Shortly afterwards I made peace with some family members. Previously I certainly was doing the devil’s bidding without realizing it. Thank you for helping me to understand better what the Lord expects of me. Now when I say the Lord’s Prayer, I no longer will just be mouthing words. Instead my heart will be speaking.

M.D., Ocala, Florida

Thank you for this wonderfully insightful article about prayer. I confess I am the “drone” you refer to. I must have recited this prayer many times. I just can’t believe I never figured out this was an actual outline or model for prayer. How simple and how wonderful—it just makes perfect sense.

Sometimes in prayer I stumble over my thoughts, repeat things over and over, but now I feel like one of those blind men in the Gospel accounts who asked to be healed—and was. I was blind; now I see. The best part about it is now I can teach my kids how to properly pray so they don’t stumble like I did.

J.Z.K., Augusta, Georgia

The Good News

We have recently been receiving *The Good News* and we find it a wonderful journal, giving positive tips on how to cope with life’s daily problems. It is so necessary in these anti-Christ times that we Christians stand up for our faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

D.H., Muenster, Germany

It’s been good news indeed to get to know *The Good News*. Last year when I was about to fill out one of your subscription cards, I wondered whether you would send the magazine to Iran or not. And I was in doubt if Iran’s postal service would cooperate in receiving a U.S.-based magazine. Now I am really happy to have the third issue at hand. I’m just married (about five months) and your supplementary publication *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* is our favorite.

A. & B., Iran

Thank you for continuing to send me *The Good News*. I really appreciate your professional reporting, especially when it highlights the relevance of God’s Word in our time as much as in ancient times. I really appreciate that you keep providing your service without asking for anything in return—the true Christian values in action. Please accept my donation towards the costs of printing and postage.

Reader, New South Wales, Australia

Many thanks for your continuous support in my search for salvation. I have been mentally wandering around for so many years. Your clarification is so wonderful. I look forward to receiving your magazine and can never put it down when I do receive it. Your literature is the calm amidst the storm. I hear so much religious confusion and yet it is soothing to know that there is one church out there that is so selfless in its works.

Reader, Victoria, Australia

I must emphasize that I await your splendid publication, *The Good News*, and truly enjoy every single article. I personally believe and am convinced by your explanation that Saturday is the true Sabbath according to the Bible.

Mrs. M.B., Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

*Other readers may wish to examine our explanation by requesting our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*.*

Reader advice for Israel

The way to peace everywhere is by dialogue and discussion, not by death and destruction. Israel should give up its nuclear weapons, agree to a two-state solution and stop building settlements on disputed land.

J.H.G., Isle of Man

*For the most part Washington would agree with you, but our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy presents a much more complex picture*.*

Reader appreciates Jesus Christ

Thank you so much for proclaiming the Word of God. I love all the booklets I have received from you and your free *Bible Study Course*. We need to get back to God in this country. So many have turned away from Him. Why, after Christ paid the ultimate penalty by dying for our sins? He loves us all!

S.B., Bessemer, Alabama

Beyond Today television program

I have found some of your programs really great, helpful and enlightening, especially the episode titled “Is Your Future Secure?” I hope that you’ll consider posting program transcriptions over the Internet.

J.V., Philippines

Regarding the United Church of God

How do I become a member of this church? I’ve been receiving your magazine for two years already. So far, considering all the different denominations I’ve attended, I find that this church fits what a church is supposed to be.

N.M., Internet

Just a word of thanks to let you know just how much I appreciate your booklets. I have learned more from them than all the time I’ve spent in church and Bible study. I think you people have it right, as it’s all in the Bible. I surely wish that we had a church nearby.

C.W., Tawas City, Michigan

I really don’t know how you received my name and address initially, but I’m glad you did. Please continue to send the *Bible Study Course*. I’ve lived in the Bible Belt for 10 years and have visited many churches. But they never felt quite right. But I’ve learned of a Church of God in the next county, so I plan on attending.

Y.Z., Columbia, South Carolina

I have recently been reading lots of your materials. My wife and I both grew up going to church. She grew up Catholic and I grew up Apostolic. She and I went our own way once we became adults and left church behind. We started going again about six months ago.

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Are you on Facebook? If so, visit our *Good News Magazine* page. See what other readers are saying. Find links to interesting articles and Web commentaries. Become a *Good News* magazine Facebook fan!

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

- K.T., Good News magazine Facebook fan



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Q&A



Questions & Answers

With John Ross Schroeder

Q: Regarding Lesson 8 of your Bible Study Course, how can water baptism be for the forgiveness of sins, as water cannot wash away sins? It is the blood of Jesus Christ that washes away sin. Baptism is really the burying of the old man as we symbolically die to the way we were, coming up out of the water as a symbolic resurrection of the new man.

E.P., England

A: You are right in stating that it requires the application of the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ to make the forgiveness of our sins possible. This is confirmed in Revelation 1:5: "From Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. *To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood*" (emphasis added throughout).

Revelation 7:14 further speaks of "the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

The New Testament abounds in scriptural passages affirming the majestic importance of Christ's sacrifice to cover our sins. Yet Ananias instructed Paul, after God had miraculously struck him down on the road to Damascus, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

As you have written, and as Paul explains in Romans 6:2-6, water baptism symbolizes the death of the old sinful, selfish man. But in a figurative sense it also pictures the washing away of our sins.

Notice Hebrews 10:22: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." These two washings, the blood and the water, work beautifully together. They are not in opposition. They

are not mutually exclusive. They are inclusive and in harmony—perfectly complementing one another.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 also helps us to understand that cleansing with water can symbolize washing away sins. God says: "Then *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you* from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

Still, only Christ's perfect sacrifice provides the spiritual mechanism for God to forgive our sins upon *repentance and faith* (see Acts 20:21; Romans 3:25). Although water baptism does not of and by itself forgive our transgressions of God's law, it remains one of the required steps in the salvation process.

The apostle Peter firmly stated, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). The second Gospel account clearly affirms, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

In Ephesians 5:25-27 Paul wrote that "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word . . . not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." God's Word itself plays its own role in keeping us spiritually clean.

Water cleanses and was therefore used figuratively and symbolically by Jesus Christ and His apostles to help illustrate the true conversion process. They taught spiritual principles by means of natural processes.

Several free booklets explain all this in further detail: *The Road to Eternal Life, Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *You Can Have Living Faith*. Download or request them at www.GNmagazine.org/booklets.

Want to learn the answers to our most frequently asked Bible questions? Visit us at www.GNmagazine.org/Bible-faq.

As I have received more and more of your material and begun to compare it with Scripture, I have been going through a lot of changes. I began asking questions of our minister on many things I have read from your publications. I am not really satisfied with the feedback.

Currently we do not attend a church. Some of my questions to you are: What do we do if there is not a Church nearby? If there is one, what do I do about my business since Saturdays are normally good business days? I am nervous and scared right now. I don't have anyone to come to for questions. I need guidance, and I just don't know what to do at this point in time.

R.B., Belleville, Michigan

We are very grateful for each inquiry about attending a United Church of God congregation. As a first step, please request or download our free booklets The Church Jesus Built and This Is the United Church of God. To honor specific requests, we normally forward the contact telephone number of our minister in the location nearest to where the reader resides.

Those who live outside the United States should write or otherwise contact our office in the country nearest to them. Addresses are listed on page 2 of every Good News magazine. Other free booklets that would be of help are You Can Have Living Faith, Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion and Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest.

Spreading the gospel

I signed up for your Good News e-letters because I realize how much more cost-

effective it is for you than postal mailing. However, if you ever discontinue your Good News magazine, it is going to be greatly missed by many more than just myself.

When I have finished reading them, I take them to a Christian-owned and -operated coffee shop. The local crowd there has become used to my leaving The Good News magazines on the tables and even looks for them when they arrive. Conversations often start as one of the patrons reads an article over a cup of coffee and then begins to share its contents with others at his table.

Many times we do not foresee how God will use our efforts wrought in faith. Thank you and God bless all of you for your faithful service.

T.V.C., Hurricane, Utah

I would like to make a donation to your church. I have been a subscriber to your publications for some time now and am happy to read them each month. Please provide me with an address where I can send my donation. Thank you for the wonderful articles that make my walk with our Savior more meaningful and God-inspired.

C.B., Indianapolis, Indiana

Our mailing address in the United States is listed below.

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Will the World Ever See a Time of **Lasting Peace?**



Today's headlines are filled with bad news—war, famine, natural disasters, governmental scandals and the like. With all this bad news, what kind of future can we look forward to?



Almost 2,000 years ago, a prophet came bringing a vital message for this world. That prophet was Jesus Christ, and His message was "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14). The word *gospel* means *good news*. But what was the good news Jesus Christ brought? What is the kingdom of which He spoke? And does it have anything to do with the problems that threaten us today?

Most people don't understand the truth about the Kingdom of God. Yet it is the central theme of the Bible—and truly the best news the world could ever hear!

In *The Gospel of the Kingdom* you can discover the truth of the surprising message Jesus Christ brought. This booklet shows you, from the pages of your Bible, exactly what that message is—and what it means for you. For your free copy, visit our Web site or contact any of our offices listed on page 2.

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