



The Good News

March-April 2005

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

Why Does God Allow Disasters?

The Tsunami: Foretaste of Things to Come? • God, Science and the Bible
What Does It Mean to Be Redeemed? • Are We Living in the Time of the End?

God and the Tsunami



It's amazing what short attention spans we have. Only two months ago Indonesia was shaken by the second-largest earthquake ever recorded, and the resulting tsunami claimed some 300,000 lives. The death toll was the greatest from an earthquake in almost 500 years.

Yet the story quickly disappeared from the headlines throughout much of the world and is rapidly fading from memory. All too often our unspoken approach is if something doesn't directly affect us, it might as well have not happened. I can't help but be reminded of another recent major disaster, the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. Those memories also quickly faded, and lessons we might have learned were all too soon forgotten.

The January-February issue of *The Good News* was already at the printer when the earthquake and tsunami struck, so we weren't able to say anything about it in that issue. Perhaps that's just as well, because out of millions of words written about the disaster

Now, two months removed from this tragedy, perhaps we can look at it more objectively and consider God's perspective.

I have yet to see anyone address it from an accurate biblical perspective (apart from our Web site and monthly newsletter, *World News and Prophecy*).

Now, two months removed from this tragedy, perhaps we can look at it more objectively and consider God's perspective. The first two articles in this issue do just that. (We also hope you'll request our free booklet *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*, which explains this enigma in much greater detail.)

Among the many reactions to the tsunami devastation were quite a few questioning God's existence or even arguing that this proves He *doesn't* exist. Is that possible?

The Good News is dedicated to two simple propositions. They are: (1) We have a divine Creator, and (2) the Bible is His inspired Word. In line with that, we're starting a new feature, "God, Science and the Bible."

One of the mainstream media's greatest failings is in reporting on scientific discoveries that relate to God and the Bible. Depending on what and how much you read, you may regularly see articles supporting Darwinian evolution. But how often do you see reporting that reflects the other side of the issue?

Where do you read about findings that pose major problems for evolution? How many times have you read of scientific discoveries that clearly point to a Creator or that verify the truthfulness and accuracy of the Bible?

Judging by what we see in most TV, newspaper and magazine coverage, you'd think there weren't any. But the fact is, such reports appear quite regularly. They simply don't get much publicity in a world that all too often doesn't want to acknowledge God or may be openly hostile to the idea that we have a Creator.

We hope you'll enjoy the news items we report in this issue. We doubt that you've seen most of them anywhere else. If you're a parent or grandparent, share them with your children or grandchildren. You'll find them to be a healthy antidote to the indoctrination they may be receiving in their school or college.

This is one of the ways in which *The Good News* strives to better serve our readers, providing information to help you better make sense of our world. If we can help in other ways, please let us know.

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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Table of Contents



Searching for answers amid the devastation 4

Cover Feature

Why Does God Allow Disasters?

On TV newscasts and in newspapers and magazines we have seen in living color the “what”—the deadly waves, the devastation, the anguish, the results. But what about the “why”? How do we make sense of indiscriminate destruction on this scale? Why did God allow this disaster? Could the tsunami be His will? If so, how? And why? 4

The Indian Ocean Tsunami: Foretaste of Things to Come?

Most of us have probably heard that the Bible talks about natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts and famine. Where do catastrophes like the deadly Indian Ocean tsunami fit in the long train of prophetic events? 8



A harvest ceremony that teaches about Jesus Christ 22

Australia: An Underappreciated Nation

Australia paid a heavy price fighting alongside Britain and the United States in World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm and Iraq. The world might be very different without her contributions. 14

What Does It Mean to Be Redeemed?

The Bible speaks quite often of redemption, a concept rightly bound up with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But what does it mean? Who does the redeeming? What are we redeemed from, and at what cost? 18

‘The Son of Man Will Be Three Days and Three Nights in the Heart of the Earth’

Jesus Christ plainly said He would be entombed for three days and three nights. But how can this be reconciled with a late Friday burial and a Sunday morning resurrection, which total only a day and a half? 20

The Wave Sheaf: How an Ancient Ceremony Foreshadowed Jesus’ Role

The Old Testament describes many ceremonies that sound quite odd to us. Yet the wave-sheaf offering, one unusual ceremony, teaches us about a crucial aspect of Jesus Christ’s role in mankind’s salvation. 22

Are We Living in the Time of the End?

A Newsweek report notes that more scholarship has been devoted to the study of end-time biblical prophecies in the past 30 years than in the previous 300. Is there a way to tell if we are nearing the end? 25

Horses That Keep the Sabbath

It’s been said that the relationship between humans and horses is one of the most ancient and mutually beneficial relationships ever between man and animal. For Linda Henderson this has certainly proven true. 30



A powerful bond that benefits man and animal 30

Regular Features

World News and Trends	<i>An overview of conditions around the world.</i>	12
God, Science and the Bible	<i>News from the world of science about God and the Bible.</i>	16
Television and Radio Log	<i>Station listings and times for Good News/Tomorrow TV and GN Radio.</i>	24
Letters From Our Readers	<i>Readers of The Good News share their thoughts.</i>	28
Questions and Answers	<i>Answers to readers’ questions.</i>	29

Why Does God Allow Disasters?

The Indian Ocean tsunami stunned people the world over. How can we make sense of this horror? Does God's Word give us any guidance?

by Bill Bradford

A youth of 9 named Muklis sat talking about the tsunami that swept his father and mother into the sea. He had vainly attempted to save his father. He later found his mother dead after the waters receded. Although both his parents perished, his 6-year-old sister Siti escaped harm.

Thousands of children like them in Indonesia and other Asian nations have been orphaned by these waves of destruction. What is to happen to them? Who will raise these children to adulthood? Will life here ever be close to normal again?

Nothing like it

No one had seen anything like it. Colin Powell, then U.S. secretary of state, had witnessed the worst of natural disasters and war, but said he had seen nothing to compare to this. The tsunami killed outright more than 280,000 people living in a dozen nations around the Indian Ocean and many others visiting the area from 36 nations. Still more died in the aftermath.

The grief is incomprehensible. In the immediate aftermath, one doctor saw inconsolable grief, ranging from hysteria and stupor to catatonia. It was simply too much for the mind to grasp. One woman who lost her entire family said she wished she had died in the tsunami too.

The stories go on and on. The numbers give staggering scope to this tragedy, but behind each number is mind-numbing grief for the survivors. Some will never recover from the effects.

Somehow such a mammoth event just doesn't fit into our version of life, our worldview. We desire a secure and safe life, but when death strikes in such proportions to an unsuspecting part of the human race, with what seems to be such callous disregard to young and old alike, we are nagged with questions that undermine our confidence in our world.

It is interesting that in the weeks follow-

ing the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, various media accounts warned of future events that could easily occur with even worse loss of life.

We were informed of the volcano in the Canary Islands that could drop half a mountain into the Atlantic Ocean and conceivably cause a 160-foot wave to engulf the eastern coast of the United States. Then there is the slow buildup of pressure in a massive magma chamber underlying Yellowstone National Park that would destroy all life for hundreds of miles around if it explodes.

Theologians attempt explanations

This is all bigger than us. So we turn to the only concept big enough for us to associate with such power—God Almighty. We need not assign blame



Such a mammoth event just doesn't fit into our worldview. We desire a secure and safe life, but when death strikes in such proportions with such callous disregard to young and old alike, our confidence in our world is undermined.

to a country, an evil dictator, weapons of mass destruction or even the weather. When the ground beneath our feet shakes, we begin to see that we have focused so much on "civilisation's potential to destroy the planet that we have forgotten that the planet also has an untamed ability to destroy civilisation too" (Martin Kettle, *The Guardian*, Dec. 28, 2004).

In Australia, where I live, several theo-

logians have entered the picture with their explanations. Philosophy seems inadequate to deal with the magnitude of this monster wave and is virtually silent on the subject.

This tsunami is becoming the new benchmark for measuring the impact of natural disasters. So how do we now explain the world we live in? How can we reconcile such merciless horror with an

unwavering belief in a good and beneficent Creator? Is God involved in this or not? Many theologians have attempted various explanations.

The Anglican dean of Sydney, Philip Jensen, provoked a storm of protests among religious leaders of all faiths when he characterized the tsunami as “a warning of God’s judgment.” *The Australian* newspaper reported that the chief executive of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, Amjad Mehboob, said that it could not

have happened unless it was God’s will.

There were dissenting views as well. A Catholic dean, a senior rabbi and the president of the Hindu Council of Australia said that they do not see God as causing natural disasters or using them to punish the wickedness of victims. Dean Jensen felt that his statement had been taken out of context as writers and commentators also took umbrage with his view.

There is no doubting Dean Jensen’s meaning, however, as it seems he is associating the tsunami with God’s judgment. When asked if the tsunami was the will of God, he replied:

“Yes, the will of God in this world involved his creation of this world, but it also involves his judgment upon the sinfulness of humanity and it also involves his salvation of people through the death and resurrection of his son. And so all the beautiful things we see in this world are an expression of his creative goodness to us and all the disasters of this world are part of his warning the judgment is coming, and both these things should focus our mind on the death and resurrection of his son and how he saved us.”

In questioning Jensen’s explanation, the Jan. 4 editorial page of *The Australian* said:

“It seems more than 140,000 people, of many religious faiths, and none, have died in the most appalling international disaster. Any idea their deaths were due to their individual failings, or that they died as a warning to the rest of us, defiles the memories of tens of thousands of men and women, and the most innocent of children.”

Is this punishment from God?

We have already seen in living color the “what”—the event, the damage, the carnage, the anguish, the results. It is now time to ask “why?” How do we now make sense of it all? Why did God allow this disaster? Could the tsunami be His will? If so, how? And why? What could possibly be His purpose?

Perhaps we should consult God Himself and ask if He sends natural disasters to punish people. Consider the illustration in Luke 13:1-5 where Jesus was told of a recent horrifying incident. The Roman governor Pilate had worshippers killed while they were offering sacrifices at the temple.

Perhaps the bearers of the story wanted Jesus to take a position on the injustice of Pilate’s action. Jesus chose to make a more important point. He asked them: “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

Christ reinforced His point with the example of an accident in which 18 people were killed when a tower collapsed on them. “Do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem,” Jesus asked, because they were at the wrong place at the wrong time? His emphatic answer again was “No!” He made the more relevant point that *everybody is in the same boat*. We are all going to perish if we don’t repent. This is His message.

While some are indeed “worse sinners” than others, we cannot say that, in this age of man, God is in the business of specifically punishing the more sinful and giving leniency to the less sinful.

Does God correct nations?

We should also ask if God has ever threatened a nation because they were wicked. Indeed there are examples where God has decreed the demise of those who continue to transgress His law. A clear example is the ancient city-state of Nineveh. God sent Jonah to tell its citizens



Wars: The Chief Man-made Disaster

Man-made catastrophes are a little easier to explain because we can identify the cause. Wars are the classic example of man-made disasters. If we want to compare what we have done to ourselves with what nature has done to us in recent centuries, we are going to find that we have been much more destructive to ourselves. In the 20th century the conservative estimate is that, with the two world wars, the ethnic and political purges of Stalin, Hitler and Pol Pot, the Chinese revolution and other conflicts in nations too numerous to mention, people killed 130 million of their fellow human beings.

Consider, for instance, more recent civil strife that usually doesn’t get much of the world’s attention. One million were killed in the Congo, 1 million in Rwanda and 2 million in southern Sudan (not including the recent conflict in the Darfur region). Any one of these far outstrips the Indian Ocean tsunami that took some 280,000 lives.

Jesus Christ, being a prophet, spoke of the dangerous situations that would be the ongoing experience of man. Wars are in the forefront. “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places,” He said. “All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:7-8).

The Bible tells us that it will get worse before it gets better.

Revelation 6 indicates that a fourth of the population of the world will be killed as a result of the devastating trends and events symbolized by the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (verse 8). In many ways these four horsemen represent the worsening conditions of human life due to what man has done to himself. (If you have Internet access, you can download our recent issues of *The Good News* magazine where we explain these four horsemen.) In one of the final onslaughts, a 200-million-man army will go out to kill a third of mankind (9:15-18). All of this began with a departure from God where man chose not to listen to Him.

that they needed to change their barbarous ways or they would be destroyed in 40 days. The whole city heeded Jonah's message and repented.

God's nation of Israel knowingly departed from Him in a systematic and deliberate manner. The Creator was very involved with the Israelites and they became a great nation as a result of God's direction and blessing. They had agreed in a covenant at Mount Sinai to follow the one true Creator God (see Exodus 24). They may not have been as barbaric as Nineveh, but they were certainly more accountable. They knew the outcome of disobedience before they even began their long relationship with God.

Then there are the Amalekites, on whom God decreed punishment for heartlessly ambushing the helpless stragglers at the rear of the Israelite column as they came out of Egypt (1 Samuel 15:2; Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

To say that God never exercises judgment on nations and peoples is not true. He has done it in the past and He has promised in the Bible that He will do it in the future. In fact, the time is coming when the hand of God will be felt in a greater way than ever before on all nations—fulfilling His purpose to bring the entire world to recognize Him. (For further understanding, please request or download our free booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.)

But it is a far cry from that to saying that every hurricane, cyclone, earthquake, tsunami, shipwreck, train wreck, auto accident, building collapse and ethnic purge is the specific will of God to punish people.

A part of the natural order?

How do we explain the recurring natural disasters and accidents that happen in this world? And how do we reconcile this with an intelligent God who on occasion intervenes in the affairs of this world? Why does God allow innocent victims to suffer?

The apostle Paul captures a realistic picture of the way things are on our planet. In his discourse about God and Christ to the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill (Acts 17:24-31), Paul speaks of God who made the world and is Lord of heaven and earth.

He says that as a consequence of living, we should seek God as He is not far from each one of us. Paul adds: "In Him we live and move and have our being." He is suggesting a dependence on God much more than most human beings are willing to seek. Again, though natural disasters with their indiscriminate loss of life may indicate to some that God does not care, Paul insists that God is not far from each one of us.

God has so ordered things in our present world to make us realize that we need Him much more than we are currently willing to acknowledge. Paul didn't say that God created a perfect world where accidents and disasters don't occur.

History has led us to conclude that, although the earth is a very beautiful and bountiful place that supplies all our needs, it can also be a dangerous place where there are no guarantees. There are tectonic plates that move from time to time causing earthquakes and tsunamis to happen.

We need to look to God a lot more than we do. Yet we tend to think that we don't need God because this world appears to be mostly friendly and safe.

All nations affected in the end time

Jesus Christ, the Son of God and greatest prophet who ever lived, warned us about the condition of the world at the end of this age. He foretold that conditions would worsen to the point where all nations would be affected—well beyond mere isolated catastrophes affecting a few. To grasp the magnitude of what this might be like, consider World War I and World War II, both of which engulfed many nations. Yet Bible prophecy tells us that the scope of end-time events will be even greater.

The local conflicts that in the past affected only their immediate areas now affect the entire world. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, has at times impacted the economy of the entire world. For decades now it has drawn the major powers into efforts to find a solution. Similarly, the war on terrorism and the subsequent war in Iraq have polarized the nations. The Balkan wars in the last

Are the Thousands Who Perished in the Tsunami Lost Forever?

What is the ultimate fate of the almost 300,000 men, women and children who lost their lives in the Indian Ocean tsunami?

Many who died were Buddhists who accept neither God nor the Bible. The majority of those who perished were Muslims whose religion teaches that Jesus was a prophet, but explicitly denies that He is the Son of God and Savior of mankind.

The Scriptures clearly state that belief in and acceptance of Christ is the *only* route to salvation—that "there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, New International Version; compare John 14:6).

So what is the fate of these thousands who died in this disaster, many of whom knew little or nothing about Jesus Christ during their lifetime? Does the Bible give us any answers?

Confronting a quandary

The Scriptures clearly reveal that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Yet a great many believe that unless a person confesses faith in Jesus as personal Savior in this present lifetime, he or she will have no further opportunity for salvation.

So we are faced with a quandary: What happens to those who have been

deceived (Revelation 12:9) and, simply through ignorance, have no understanding of God, His plan or His way of life? And what about those who, in this disaster or in centuries past, lived and died without ever so much as hearing the name of Jesus Christ? Are they eternally lost? What is their fate?

The Bible gives the answers to these questions—answers that reconcile all the scriptures about life and death, judgment and mercy, forgiveness and salvation. However, we need to pay close attention to what it says, because the truths that it actually reveals *directly contradict* what most people have been told that it says!

The Bible speaks of several different resurrections of the dead. It reveals that the "first resurrection," the resurrection of Christ's true followers, will take place at His return to earth (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16; Revelation 20:4-6).

But it also teaches that "*the rest of the dead . . . small and great*" also are to be resurrected from the grave. Who are they? These are the majority of humankind, all those who have ever lived and died over thousands of years of human history never knowing God's truth. They are to stand before God and, *for the first time in their lives*, have the full truth of the Scriptures opened to their understanding (Revelation 20:4-6, 11-12).

For the vast majority of mankind, this will be the *first* time their eyes will be truly opened to God's wonderful truth. This will be the first time they will come to know mankind's Creator, His Word and His way of life! Most will then willingly reject their sinful ways, committed mostly in ignorance when they knew little or nothing of God and His ways.

decade involved many countries. Nothing is done in a corner anymore.

And now, for the first time in modern history, a natural disaster has impacted a dozen nations bordering the Indian

man-made disasters. And when humankind finally reaches the point of wanting God to be actively involved in our lives, the Old Testament prophets speak of that time as a world in which natural disasters such as

How do we explain the recurring natural disasters and accidents that happen in this world? And how do we reconcile this with an intelligent God who on occasion intervenes in the affairs of this world? Why does God allow innocent victims to suffer?

Ocean. And there is hardly a country in the world that hasn't come to the aid of those nations. Jesus understood the reach of conditions that would exist at the end of the age. The prophesied events of which He spoke would impact every nation in the world. The multinational scope of the tsunami ought to tell us that we are fast approaching the end of this age as spelled out in Jesus Christ's prophecies.

Jesus spoke of calamities increasing in frequency and intensity, building to a terrible climax—a time of great tribulation so severe that no flesh would live beyond it unless God personally intervened (Matthew 24:21-22). Yet God promises that He *will* intervene in human affairs at a time when man is about to destroy himself.

We are also assured that God will send Jesus Christ a second time as King of Kings to rule over mankind and do what man couldn't do for himself. And that is to transform the very nature of man so that he won't continue killing himself with

this will no longer plague mankind.

Do we blame God?

This brings us to the question about the time we live in before this new age arrives. Where was God in the tsunami? Why did He allow it? It is the same question that was asked in all natural disasters of the past, and certainly asked in the last century by the Jewish people: "Where was God in the Holocaust?"

Religion today sees God as involved now, present everywhere, and doing His work to save human beings. This worldview would make Him ultimately responsible for everything that happens to us—which is not an easy position to accept or defend.

Rather than asking, "Where was God in the Holocaust?," we ought to ask: "Where was *man* in the Holocaust?" Indeed, what was mankind's responsibility in two world wars, or in our many killing fields, or in our many other self-inflicted horrors?

Aren't we really describing a world that has left God, rather than the other way around? God is not the issue here! The human condition is the real issue, and this is the message we should be receiving.

Yet we continually resist this message. We can't go it alone and we need God a lot more than we are willing to admit.

God in His wisdom knows that it will take many more reverses to reduce our stubborn independence and transform it into total reliance on Him. So Jesus Christ tells us in His prophecy of the end time that it will get worse before it gets better (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Frankly, we will come to the end of our rope. Then and only then will we be willing to humble ourselves and accept the involvement of a loving and compassionate God.

Our theological explanations don't fit the reality

Religions that claim to be speaking for God have it all wrong. They begin with the premise that God is working through all these different religions in the world. Most in the West focus on the Christian religion. If God is trying to save us through mainstream Christianity, then why are we getting further and further away from Him? The correct conclusion is that we ought to take a good look at ourselves rather than always examining God.

The truth is that a lot of our beliefs about God are our own concoctions. Mankind as

Continued on page 11

If they sincerely acknowledge their errors and repent, then they also may be glorified and receive eternal life. This is not a "second chance" theology, as some might assume, but truly their *first* real opportunity to *fully comprehend* God's truth and then act on it *with genuine understanding*.

An opportunity for all humanity

In Matthew 11:21-24, Jesus explained that many godless people who lived and died in ages long before His time would have repented if only they had experienced Christ's preaching and miracles the way people of His day had. Moreover, He said that it would be "more tolerable" in the coming last judgment for the men, women and children who lived and died in ignorance than for those of His day who openly rejected Him.

But how could this be if those long-dead people were already condemned without hope of redemption? The fact is *they never had an opportunity, with a full comprehension of repentance, to be saved*. But one day, God promises, He *will give them* that opportunity.

Truly "God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34, NIV). He has made provision for all people ultimately to have an opportunity to enter a relationship with Him that can lead to glorified, eternal life.

This is why Jesus said: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which *all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice*, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29, New American Standard Bible).

"Judgment" in this passage refers to *an opportunity to understand* as

opposed to the act of sentencing. This time of judging or *deciding* the future of those who have not yet had an opportunity to understand God's plan and purpose, whether they be small or great, is mentioned in Revelation 20:11-12, cited above.

This biblical resurrection to judgment (a time for *sorting out* and *deciding*, not for automatic condemnation) is a time when God's tolerant mercy will finally be evident to all who are willing to face up to and repent of their former sinful ways.

Though the Bible doesn't reveal many specifics about this resurrection—once more to a temporary physical life—Ezekiel 37, the famous prophecy of the valley full of dry bones, provides a vivid description of it.

The wonderful truth of the Bible is that all those who perished in this enormous tragedy are not lost to God. They are His children, and in His own time and according to His plan, He will give them (and the billions more like them) the opportunity to learn His wonderful truth and receive His priceless gift of salvation. He truly is a God of love, "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

(Adapted from the free booklet *This Is the United Church of God*. For a more complete explanation of what happens to the billions who have died without ever knowing about God, Jesus Christ and the Bible, request our free publications *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* We thoroughly explain this wonderful truth in greater detail in both booklets.)



The Indian Ocean Tsunami: Foretaste of Things to Come?

Where do major catastrophes like the Indian Ocean tsunami fit in the long train of prophetic events?

by John Ross Schroeder

For several weeks after the disaster, newspapers and magazines regularly devoted several pages to the ongoing effects of the deadly tsunami that struck Dec. 26. Poignant accounts of tragic personal losses of family and friends put a human face on mounting death-toll statistics. Encouraging stories of incredible heroism and a groundswell of sympathy, expressed in generous contributions from countries all over the world, reminded us that we are our brother's keeper.

Inevitably many religious leaders reacted with a desire to give both their followers and the general public a philosophical framework in which to deal with these unacceptable events. Some responses might be rather surprising.

The title of one article was "If This Was an Act of God—What Was God Thinking?"

The archbishop of Canterbury, in an article in the Jan. 2 *Sunday Telegraph*, wrote: "The question—'How can you believe in a God who permits suffering on this scale?' is therefore very much around at the moment, and it would be surprising if it weren't—indeed, it would be wrong if it weren't. The traditional answers will get us only so far."

Assessing responsibility properly

This disaster struck when the last issue of *The Good News* was already at the printer, too late to address it in that edition. But with the added perspective of the passing of time—and with often-unrealized factors since coming to light—we can better assess the meaning of the tragedy and how those factors relate to biblical prophecy. Due to space limitations, we can only cover a few of these factors.

While this was a natural disaster, human culpability in the high casualty toll is greater than most had originally imagined. As one commentator cannily observed, "The Almighty might have His critics over the tsunami, but the actions of human-

kind made it worse."

That particular writer, environment editor Geoffrey Lean, went on to explain: "In the past, the shores of the Indian Ocean have been protected from tsunamis, tidal waves and the angry seas stirred up by cyclones and typhoons by a double barrier of coral reefs and mangrove swamps. The solid barriers of the reefs broke up and slowed down the waves while the tangled roots and dense vegetation of the mangroves absorbed much of their remaining energy.

"Yet both have been increasingly destroyed [by man] over the past 50 years, leaving coasts, and their people, defenceless" (The Independent on Sunday,



The Bible is a book full of prophetic warnings. They apply to us individually and directly if we persist in failing to acknowledge that God created a moral universe and fail to govern our actions accordingly.

Jan. 9, emphasis added throughout).

According to Mr. Lean, only about a third of the world's coral reefs are still healthy, with up to one fifth already destroyed. Fishing (using dynamite), pollution, quarrying for construction materials and global warming (a disputed point) have been named as the primary culprits. Mangroves have also been cut down and removed in favor of tourist resorts and shrimp farming.

Specific areas still protected by healthy coral reefs and mangroves sustained much less damage to property and much less loss of human life. The islands of Diego Garcia and the Maldives, isolated and vulnerable in the Indian Ocean but ringed

by coral reefs, serve as two examples.

A feeble warning system

The British *Sunday Times* stated: "Scientists feared such a catastrophe was looming. So why were there no warnings?" (Jan. 2). A *USA Today* editorial said: "On the day a tsunami killed 140,000 people, scientists and government officials scattered across the Pacific and Asia had inklings of an impending disaster in time to save lives. Yet even in this age of instant global communications, the message never reached those in peril" (Jan. 7).

Bureaucratic bungling was partially to blame. Also the Indian Ocean area has no sophisticated warning system like the one

wealthier countries encircling the Pacific Ocean have created for their protection. Holiday time was yet another factor.

American geophysicist Dr. Stuart Weinstein was in his Hawaiian office when the instruments in the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center revealed the massive Indian Ocean quake. Dr. Weinstein's duties embrace 26 nations around the Pacific Rim. But there was no contact book, plan or emergency telephone links for



spreading the alarm for the Indian Ocean area of Southeast Asia.

Nonetheless, everyone available began telephoning what numbers they could muster in the endangered areas. But it was Christmas Day in Hawaii and the day after in Southeast Asia. A lot of people were away from their desks. Telephones rang and rang with no answer. A very few who finally did come to the phone listened a little while and then hung up. Somehow the message didn't get through to them. Finally, Dr. Weinstein broke down and cried because he knew what would inevitably happen.

The ignorance factor

Nonetheless, many lives still could have been saved even in the last minutes before the tsunami struck had people known what to do. When people saw the tide suddenly retreating back into the ocean area, a few knew to run the other way to as high a ground as possible. Some heeded their

shouts of warning and followed. Many, however, stood around to watch the curious sight only to be engulfed by a fast-moving wall of water minutes later.

We should learn crucial lessons from this! *Ignorance of warning factors spared no one.* Similarly, ignorance of Bible prophecy will undoubtedly prove disastrous in the coming biblical day of visitation.

The Bible is a book full of prophetic warnings. They apply to us individually and directly if we persist in failing to acknowledge that God created a moral universe and fail to govern our actions accordingly.

His Word tells us that in ancient times mankind had become exceedingly wicked in both thought and action (Genesis 6:5). To preserve a tiny remnant of humankind and to protect His plan and purpose for humanity, God destroyed all except Noah and his family in a great flood. But first, there were 120 years of merciful warning.

The New Testament calls Noah "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). But instead of acting on Noah's words of warning, his generation likely only made fun of a preacher who would build a giant boat on dry land—that is, until it began raining for days and days and wouldn't stop. Some of

these people no doubt finally believed God and His prophet, but it was far too late.

We know from Scripture exactly how much time they had from when God decided to act. Had they really repented while there was still time, the Flood wouldn't have happened. The inhabitants of ancient Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching and they were spared. God is no respecter of persons.

Scripture says that "God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built" (1 Peter 3:20, New International Version). The Bible doesn't say whether Noah told his contemporaries exactly how much time they had remaining. But he must have told them in general terms that their days were numbered. Today we ourselves don't know how many months or years remain on the clock—how much time we still have to get our act together.

Peter warns our generation

In principle the warnings of Noah apply

today in our modern age. The apostle Peter wrote: "First of all, you must understand that *in the last days* scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this "coming" [of Christ] he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3-4, NIV).

Cynics are usually sinners as well. Jesus Christ Himself said behavior just before the time of His second coming would parallel human conduct in the days of Noah.

At least in principle, God warns the modern descendants of ancient Israel in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 of what will happen if they go astray from Him and His laws. The overall message is one of cause and effect. (If you don't understand who these descendants are today, please request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Later God raised up the Hebrew prophets to warn the people of Israel and Judah. But with few exceptions, neither nation heeded these warnings from the Creator.

Ezekiel, a priest of God taken captive by the Babylonians when they conquered Judah, was specifically chosen by God as a watchman for the house of Israel (Ezekiel 3:1, 4, 5, 7, 17)—which had already gone into captivity a century before. So His prophecies would have to be fulfilled at a *later* time—logically during "the latter days" or end time.

As a result of its sins, the northern kingdom of Israel went into captivity, followed by the kingdom of Judah around 135 years later. Many Old Testament prophecies are dual in nature, meaning they have a preliminary *initial* fulfillment, followed by a *primary* fulfillment later.

According to Jesus Christ's words in Luke 21:22, most will see this *primary* fulfillment during the time of the end. (To understand more fully, please request our free booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. These two publications will help you better understand where the world is headed.)

Jesus Christ delivered His longest prophecy to His disciples not long before His crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. Recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, He spoke of key trends and events that would precede His return to earth—one of which was "nations . . . *in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea*" (Luke 21:25, NIV).

Then, near the end of the first century, the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, outlining world events during the time of the end. This long prophecy, too, foretells that natural disasters will play a major role in human affairs in the end time.

Intensified natural disasters

According to information reported by BBC News online, global disasters in general are on the increase. Late last year the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) released its statistical survey in association with the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters at the University of Louvain in Belgium.

The BBC stated: “Events including earthquakes and volcanoes, floods and droughts, storms, fires and landslides killed about 83,000 people in 2003, up from about 53,000 deaths 13 years earlier, the ISDR said.” The BBC report also said that “254 million people were affected by natural hazards last year—nearly three times as many as in 1990” (Sept. 17, 2004).

The ISDR observed: “Not only is the world globally facing more potential disasters but increasing numbers of people are becoming vulnerable to hazards” (ibid.). An earlier BBC News online report warned that “giant tsunamis, super volcanoes and earthquakes could pose a greater threat than terrorism” (Aug. 9, 2004).

Please note that the disturbing results of

these surveys and the resultant observations were all released *before* the giant quake and tsunami that rocked nations surrounding the Indian Ocean a few months later.

Summing up the scene

Journalists are not statisticians or experts in monitoring natural disasters. They can only report what scientists and geophysicists tell them. Often the writer’s role is one of summing up, tying things together or putting events in context. Columnist Sharon Wright did exactly this for Britain’s *Daily Express*:

“Flooding chaos could become a way of life for all of us—because the impact of the merciless weather *has to be seen in the context of extreme natural phenomena across the world*. One by one over the past

This disaster could be a genuine turning point if we truly mended our way of living. But barring a real national repentance, this tsunami is only the beginning of sorrows.

12 months, events have been falling into place like the pieces of a deeply disturbing jigsaw puzzle.

“Rivers across Britain are bursting their banks. There’s no snow [yet] in the Alps . . . Bears near St. Petersburg are refusing to hibernate. Rain in the Sahara sent a plague of locusts to Africa . . . The list is long and very soon may become endless” (Jan. 14).

In addition, a record *eight* hurricanes lashed Atlantic islands and coastal regions in 2004 and the Canadian arctic became so warm last summer that Eskimos reported seeing wasps there for the first time ever. Extremes in weather may be becoming the norm.

The book of Revelation’s warnings

The final book of the Bible speaks of major end-time happenings when natural disasters occur in extremes. The time of the end is not a normal time. Revelation talks of gargantuan events with massive numbers of people perishing as a prelude to the second coming of Jesus Christ. We may be on the verge of entering these troubling and tragic times. (Please request or download our free booklet *The Book of*

Revelation Unveiled to better understand these coming events.)

Scientists and politicians speak of improved warning systems to lessen the loss of life when disasters do occur. One can applaud any workable protective measures that human beings can implement for themselves. Ultimately, however, our only sure protection is in the hands of the Eternal God.

Natural Disasters: A Biblical Perspective

Following are points we should keep in mind concerning the biblical perspective on tragedies, regardless of their scale or circumstances:

1. God has said in Bible prophecy that natural disasters would grow in frequency and intensity as the end of the age approaches—to shake people out of their complacency and lead them to seek Him (Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:25-26; Revelation 6:12; 11:13; 16:18).
2. In His design for the world, God allows many events to run their course according to “time and chance” (Ecclesiastes 9:11), so that many tragedies are, for those affected, accidental and unforeseeable.
3. Those who die in accidents or natural disasters are not necessarily greater sinners than those who survive (Luke 13:1-5).
4. Personal tragedies or calamities are not necessarily the result of one’s sins (John 9:2-3).
5. Natural disasters or accidents should humble us, helping us to see our dependence on God to sustain and deliver us (Revelation 16:8-11).
6. Natural disasters have sometimes been the direct judgment of God on a rebellious humanity (Genesis 6:6-7, 11-13, 17; 18:20; 19:24-25).
7. Some natural disasters are made worse by man’s poor judgments (Proverbs 14:12) and age-long rejection of God and His laws, resulting in worsening environmental and climatic conditions.
8. God is a truly loving God who is working out a great plan for all humanity (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4; 1 Corinthians 15:22-24).
9. Converted Christians who die in natural disasters will be resurrected to immortality in the first resurrection at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-52;

1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 20:4-6).

10. Non-Christians who die in natural disasters, those who never had a genuine understanding of God or real opportunity for eternal salvation, will be raised in the second or general resurrection to live again in the flesh with their first real opportunity to learn God’s way, repent and be saved (John 5:28-29; Matthew 12:41-42; Revelation 20:5).

11. The multitudes of humanity who are raised in the second or general resurrection will experience joyful and abundant life under the rule of the Kingdom of God (Ezekiel 37:12-14).

12. The sufferings experienced now in “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4)—this era of man’s self-rule under the influence of Satan the devil—are writing a lesson of experience about what it means to live in a world cut off from God and His ways.

13. We don’t know all the reasons God brings or permits specific calamities or why particular people are made to suffer by them, but we should trust that in God’s omniscience and ultimate wisdom He knows how to work out what is best for everyone in the end (Romans 8:28; 1 Timothy 2:4).

14. Jesus Christ will eventually return to usher in the rule of the Kingdom of God (Revelation 11:15; Daniel 7:14), under which natural disasters will no longer plague mankind.

15. When all humanity is at last glorified, there will be no more pain, suffering or sorrow (Revelation 21:4).

16. All the sufferings of this brief present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory we will ultimately experience for all eternity to come (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

—Tom Robinson

Jesus Christ urges us to pray that we would be worthy to escape the effects of these end-time events and to stand before Him at His return (Luke 21:34-36). Many of the psalms encourage us to trust in our Creator for protection.

The tsunami a turning point?

A page-one newspaper headline asked: "Could the Tsunami Disaster Be a [positive] Turning Point for the World?" (*The Independent*, Jan. 4). Fifteen respected British shapers of public opinion addressed this question.

More than half were cautiously optimistic and guardedly hopeful. But a substantial minority said things like: "Sadly, I don't think it will happen," "We have been here before," "I think most people will simply forget," "It was the same after Sept. 11" and "I don't believe in altruism."

This disaster could be a genuine turning point if we truly mended our way of living. But barring a real national repentance in many nations, this tsunami is only the beginning of sorrows. Only a few weeks later it had largely disappeared from media headlines in most countries. There were some hopeful signs of American repentance after 9/11, but in most cases they turned out to be very temporary.

In Hosea 6:4, God described our fleeting forays into righteousness as like the fast-disappearing "early dew that disappears" (NIV). They don't turn out to be permanent. Real repentance involves genuine sorrow and true confession to God coupled with a turning away from evil.

You can turn from your sins regardless of what your neighbor or the nation does. The clear lesson throughout Scripture is simple: *You are responsible for yourself.* **GN**

Recommended Reading

How much do you understand of what Bible prophecy reveals about the end time? Does the Bible talk about natural disasters such as great earthquakes, volcanoes and floods? You need to understand! Request or download our free booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. Also, to understand the way of life God wants us to begin living, request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*. It's a good first step to learning God's definition of true righteousness.



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Disasters

Continued from page 7

a whole is insisting on doing what "seems right" to us (see Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). So God, allowing us to learn from our mistakes, permits us to do what we want. But doing our own thing is a road that won't take us to the vision prophesied in the Bible of a world of unimaginable blessings from God—a world without natural or man-made catastrophes.

God has told us through Jesus Christ's prophecies that He will yet come to our rescue and establish the utopian world that we all, when we were young, hoped would be out there.

Has your church told you that lately? Has your church even suggested that God is soon going to reveal Himself in a very powerful way? Has your church hinted to you that turning to God with real heartfelt repentance is the way Jesus Christ said we should respond to disasters such as this?

The message of this publication is different from those you'll read or hear elsewhere. We are seeking to help everyone grasp why things are the way they are. And we continually speak and write of the *only* solution.

Your part in the solution

Part of the solution would be for you personally to turn to God out of a pure heart. You would find that He is willing to be closer to us than we could possibly imagine. If mankind as a whole would turn to God and make the hard decision to obey Him, the world would find that God would draw closer to them as well. But you don't have to wait for everyone else. As King David wrote in Psalm 145:18, "The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth." **GN**

Recommended Reading

Regardless of what others may think or do, you can turn your life around. You can begin to understand God's little-understood plan for you, your loved ones and all humanity. For starters, please request or download *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*, *What Is Your Destiny?*, *Making Life Work* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. These free booklets will open your eyes and bring a new and refreshing perspective to your life!



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World News and Trends

An Overview of Conditions Around the World

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

EU member endorsement of constitution focuses on Britain

Ten EU member countries will be holding referenda to ratify the new European constitution. All others will ratify it in their parliaments. Hungary and Lithuania have already done so.

In a major feature article, the *Financial Times* evaluated the likelihood of a positive vote in all 10 nations. While some qualified misgivings were expressed about expected passage in a few of these countries, the United Kingdom received the only outright negative evaluation. The article tersely stated: "Opinion polls predict a no vote."

This is not at all surprising to those who understand what the Bible foretells for Europe and the national origins of the British people. (To understand further, request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.) The Channel gap between Britain and Europe is psychological as well as geographical.

Nonetheless, both the European Union and Britain's Labour government plan a massive effort to turn the tide. In fact, the EU is forming a "rapid reaction force" to influence Britons and convert them to European constitution supporters before the expected vote in the first half of 2006.

Britain's minister for Europe, Denis MacShane, expressed the Labour government's point of view: "The government has a secret weapon up its sleeve. These are the facts on Europe. For years people have just heard the myths, propaganda and the anti-European arguments from the

"For years we have just heard the myths, propaganda and the anti-European arguments from the isolationists. Now the facts about Europe will be put to the people and I'm confident they will not want to isolate Britain from Europe."

isolationists. *For eighteen months* the facts about Europe will be put to the people and I'm confident they will not want to isolate Britain from Europe" (emphasis added throughout). A massive effort is obviously being planned.

The following questions should be asked: Will Britain finally approve the European constitution and perhaps eventually embrace the euro as its currency as well? And if it does, what will that do to the United Kingdom's special transatlantic relationship with the United States?

Britain's national newspapers are divided on these issues. The *Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph* and

two or three tabloids basically support the euro-skeptics. The others either come down on the side of approval of the EU constitution or are divided in their opinions. Curiously, one popular tabloid has opened a new office in Brussels to "expose the waste, greed, corruption and hypocrisy at the heart

of the European Union" (*Financial Times*).

To comprehend the ultimate significance of these momentous events, request our free booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Sources: *Financial Times*, *The Times* [both London].)

Germany's growing jobless rate

According to BBC News, "Germany's unemployment rose above the psychologically important level of five million last month." Even more disturbing is the percentage figure of 12.1 percent, the highest since the Weimar Republic during the Great Depression. These figures were confirmed by the German Federal Labor Agency.

A recent report by Britain's *Sunday Times* said that the "New Europe [was] threatened by Germany's failures." After all, Berlin represents the

EU's largest economy and so the country has been taken to task for setting a poor economic example. A big drain on financial resources has been the necessary funding of the former East Germany as it gradually recovers from the decaying effects of 45 years of communism.

If the unemployment figures should continue to worsen in Germany, some media observers will soon be talking about a possible recurrence of the '20s and '30s plus the potential resurfacing of German angst. Unprecedented economic woes were among the forces that thrust Hitler into power in 1933. (Sources: BBC News online, *The Sunday Times*.)

United States faces growing threat from 'nuts with nukes'

Three years before 9/11, columnist and author Peggy Noonan wrote of "nuts with nukes"—dictators and terrorists to whom the normal processes of rational thinking don't apply.

"When you consider who is gifted [with the ability or means to acquire weapons of mass destruction] and crazed with rage . . . when you think of the terrorist places and the terrorist countries . . . who do they hate most? The Great Satan, the United States," she wrote (*Forbes ASAP*, November 1998).

In a January 2005 column she revived her phrase about "nuts with nukes," again commenting on how dangerous a world we inhabit. As if on cue, in early February the spokesman for Iran's powerful Supreme National Security Council, Ali Agha Mohammadi, vowed that it will never scrap its nuclear program, which it insists is for peaceful purposes.

Barely a week later, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami promised "a burning hell" for any aggressor against his country. Meanwhile, European Union negotiations with Iran to halt its nuclear work were at a standstill, and it appeared that the issue may go to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions against Iran.

Almost simultaneously, North Korea publicly stated that it possesses nuclear weapons and will not return to the six-nation talks aimed at shelving

its nuclear-weapons plans. North Korea's foreign ministry said that it needed the nukes for self-protection against "gangsters" such as the United States and that "only powerful strength can protect [North Korea's] justice and truth."

A few days earlier, North Korea had threatened to turn U.S. bases "into a sea of fire" should war break out on the Korean peninsula, and to "thoroughly" wipe out those who would aid the United States—presumably South Korea and Japan, hosts of U.S. bases. While an estimated 1 to 2 million North Koreans have starved to death in the last decade, the paranoid dictatorship fields an army of almost

North Korea's foreign ministry said that it needed the nukes for self-protection against "gangsters" such as the United States.

1.2 million troops, the fifth largest in the world.

No wonder Jesus Christ said of the time of the end: "For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive . . ." (Matthew 24:21-22, New International Version).

To understand where these trends may be leading, request our free booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *Forbes ASAP*, Associated Press, Reuters, WorldNetDaily.)



Is the United Nations becoming passé?

We're hearing less and less of the United Nations since the Iraq war, perhaps primarily due to the routing of many insurgents, alleged UN graft and corruption and the recent Iraqi elections. Astute geopolitical analysts have pointed out the ineffectiveness of the United Nations, especially in light of 9/11 and the military coalition that scattered the forces of Iraqi tyrant Saddam Hussein.

Media observers have stated that Germany and especially France used the UN as a front to cover their economic activities shared with Saddam and

as a forum to make bold statements against the United States. Now their silence and the silence of the UN are deafening and instructive.

History has a way of making its point. So has the United Nations become passé, a political anachronism? Whatever the answer, the Bible does show that many of the nations of the world will work together in the future to further their insatiable ambitions in a frightening new geopolitical structure (Revelation 14:8; 18:3, 21-23). Only a returning Jesus Christ will save humanity from their arrogant designs (Revelation 11:17-18). To learn more, request our free booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.

Anti-semitism: Frightening increase in Europe

How bad is anti-semitism in Europe? Back in 2002 *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote that "in Europe, it is not very safe to be a Jew." More recently Natan Sharansky, an Israeli government minister, released a report recording the number of anti-Semitic incidents as increasing by 20 percent in 2004. Recently both President Jacques Chirac of France and Germany's Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder have publicly condemned anti-Semitism.

The American State Department blames "disadvantaged and disaffected Muslim youths as increasingly responsible alongside traditional far-right groups" (Sources: *The Washington Post*, *The Economist*).

Pacific island states in deep trouble

We don't often think of Fiji, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and other small Pacific island nations as having serious economic and social problems. Many are thought of as vacation and holiday paradises. Yet Australia is trying to help these tiny islands combat crime, tribalism, corruption, prostitution, the spread of HIV/AIDS, serious economic problems and other ills. Of course, not every island is as deeply affected as some others.

The Times published a story showing how "a number of Pacific states[...] . . . long-term domestic anguish threatens to become a problem for the entire region" (Dec. 15, 2004). According to this article, Australia has put together a multimillion-pound rescue package involving sending police and an administrative staff, particularly to Papua New Guinea. (Source: *The Times* [London].)

Iraq: Prelude to Mideast democracies?

Fatima Ibrahim, a Kurdish widow, expressed her feelings of liberty after voting in the first democratic elections in the past 50 years: "Now I feel that Saddam is really gone." She lost her husband, father and brother under Saddam's reign, never hearing from them again.

Returns on the watershed Iraqi election differed. Well over half of all eligible Iraqis voted, which of itself is astounding considering the insurgents' murderous threats. The insurgents also learned their heinous tactics failed. The Iraqis are to be commended for trading danger for freedom.

The prospects of a functioning democracy in Iraq must give Syria and Iran pause. Syria is supportive of the Iraqi insurgents; Iranian insurgents aren't discouraged from crossing the Iran-Iraq border. Jordan's king appears moderate to the election as does Egypt.

Is it possible that democracy could spread throughout the Middle East? The odds are against it, based on religion and a 4,000-year-old culture.

Bible prophecy indicates that an end-time "king of the South" (Daniel 11:40) will head up a likely Islamic confederation that will attack the forming European-centered superpower, leading to a great end-time conflagration. To learn more, request our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Source: Associated Press.)

New risks from homosexual sex

Health officials in New York City have issued warnings about two new strains of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) affecting homosexual and bisexual men.

The first, lymphogranuloma venereum, or LGV, is a form of chlamydia known for two decades in the tropics, but which in recent months jumped to Europe and now to New York. Among other things, it can cause permanent damage to the bowels and increase the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C and other STDs.

On the heels of that disturbing announcement came one even more troubling—word of a rare and aggressive form of HIV/AIDS in one man that is resistant to most drugs and progresses rapidly to full-blown AIDS in a matter of a few months.

Some had predicted that this deadly development was only a matter of time, as the AIDS virus is well known for its ability to mutate—a primary reason that no effective vaccine has been developed.

With the development of powerful (and extremely expensive) drugs in the 1990s, many developed a false sense of security, thinking that AIDS was no longer such a deadly threat and, if infected, they could continue life pretty much as usual. Many homosexual men reverted to unprotected sex with many partners, as evidenced by increasing rates of syphilis, chlamydia and other STDs.

The man infected with this latest deadly strain illustrates the problem health officials face in trying to keep the disease under control. The man admitted to having had hundreds of sexual partners, many in sexual marathons fueled by methamphetamine, a powerful illegal stimulant.

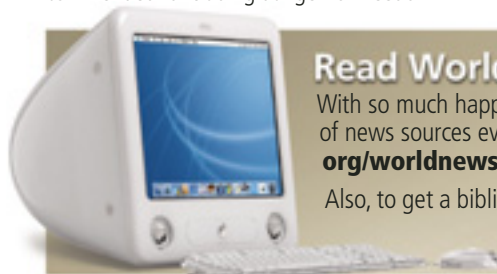
Patrick McGovern, executive director of Harlem United Community AIDS Center, explained that "people become hypersexual when they're using crystal [methamphetamine], but crystal by itself can limit your ability to function sexually. So people combine it with something like Viagra, that lets them keep going for hours." Dennis DeLeon, the president of the Latino Commission on AIDS, said men using such drugs commonly have sex with 10 to 20 partners in a single night. Methamphetamine "is a drug where they just lose count," he said.

Such depraved practices bring to mind the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 1:24, where he notes that because men reject the idea of a great Creator and Lawgiver, God "has given them up to their own vile desires, and the consequent degradation of their bodies" (Revised English Bible). (Sources: Associated Press, *Newsday*, *The New York Times*.)

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Australia: An Underappreciated Nation

World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm and Iraq.

Only one nation has fought in all these wars from beginning to end—Australia.

by Melvin Rhodes

Each time I visit Australia, I have the same thought: “If I were 30 years younger, I’d move here!”

In fact, we almost did. Forty years ago my father had wanted to take advantage of the assisted-passage program offered by the Australian government, through which British people could move to Australia for just 10 British pounds. What finally put him off the idea was Australia’s presence in Vietnam. He did not want to lose any of his six sons fighting a war he strongly opposed.

But many Australians did die in Vietnam. Australians also made the ultimate sacrifice, dying in great numbers, particularly in World War I and World War II. The country also sent its soldiers to Korea and more recently to the first Persian Gulf War. Australians now serve alongside their American and British allies in Iraq.

It’s ironic: Australians inhabit the one continent that has not experienced war, yet their record in fighting for freedom is second to none—especially when you consider the country’s relatively small population. Australia is the only nation in the world that fought in World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam and the two Persian Gulf conflicts against Iraq from beginning to end. When it comes to the ongoing defense of the Western world, Australia truly is an underappreciated country.

Australia is a relatively new country. British settlement of the island continent did not begin until after the United States was formed as an independent nation. The first European settlers sailed into Botany Bay in 1788.

Throughout the 19th century they continued to come until, at the dawn of the 20th century, Australia became an independent nation, one of the dominions that formed the nucleus of the British Commonwealth. As *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* puts it: “A British dominion and a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations, it had become the most important monument to the British Empire in

the Southern Hemisphere” (15th edition, *Macropaedia*, 1976, “Australia,” p. 399).

In writing of the character of the Australian people, the encyclopedia states: “The long struggle by these settlers to tame the Australian Outback helped to form the tough and independent character of modern Australians just as the struggles of the pioneers and frontiersmen helped to mold the national character of the United States” (p. 403).

Together with Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, the dominions played an incredible role in helping Great Britain during the two major conflicts of the 20th century.

Isolated some 12,000 miles from London via the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal, and 7,000 miles from the United States, the Australians could easily have stayed out of the 1914-18 war against Germany and the other Axis Powers. But Australians volunteered in the hundreds

of thousands to fight. Tens of thousands of them died.

Sea, a crucial crossroads between Europe and the Middle East. April 25—the day of the ANZAC landing there at Gallipoli—came to be honored as a day of national reverence.

Yet even before that, Australian forces had captured German New Guinea and the German cruiser *Emden* was sunk by



Australians inhabit the one continent that has not experienced war, yet their record in fighting for freedom is second to none.

Australians help Great Britain

After relying on Britain for defense during most of the 19th century, Australia was to more than pay Britain back in the conflicts of the 20th. Colonial troops had already fought alongside the British in the last two decades of the 19th century, in both the Sudan and the Boer War. But in World War I, 330,000 Australians were to serve—60,000 of whom did not return. An additional 165,000 suffered wounds. Few nations paid such a heavy price.

The Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) played a key role in the 1915 campaign in the Dardanelles, the narrow straight in western Turkey linking the Mediterranean Sea with the Black

the Australian navy. After the Dardanelles campaign, Australian troops fought in many bloody battles in France. In the Holy Land, Australian cavalry helped British forces defeat Turkey, leading to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

In World War II, Australia again came to Britain’s aid, long before Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor threatened Australia itself. Again the Australians made a heavy sacrifice. Around 30,000 of them died in World War II; another 65,000 were injured.

In the 27 months that the British Empire and Commonwealth fought Germany before America entered the war, Australians played a major role in helping the British avoid defeat. During the Battle of Britain, when the United Kingdom was fighting for its very survival, the Royal Australian Air Force was active in

defending the skies over the island nation.

At the same time, the Royal Australian Navy operated in the Mediterranean, helping to win the Battle of Cape Matapan in 1941. Australian troops fought in North Africa against Rommel's Afrika Korps, with Australians playing the greatest role during the Allied defense of Tobruk in late 1941. Australians suffered heavy losses in the Allied defeats in Greece and Crete, as well as in the Allied victories in the Levant. All of this was prior to Pearl Harbor, which changed the country's priorities.

Australia assists America

After Pearl Harbor, Australia was to



The magnificent Sydney Opera House, overlooking Sydney's harbor, is a symbol of Australia's place among the modern Western nations. At left, an Australian soldier stands watch while on duty in Iraq. Australia has been a strong military ally of Britain and the United States.

look to the United States as its principal ally in the Pacific theater. As World War II Prime Minister John Curtin declared: "I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free from any pang about our traditional links of friendship to Britain."

Two months later, emphasizing this change of direction, after losing 15,000 men in the fall of Singapore, Prime Minister Curtin insisted that Australian troops recalled from the Middle East should return to Australia itself and not be used in Burma as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wanted. Four days after the fall of Singapore, the northern Australian city of Darwin was bombed by Japanese planes.

U.S. General Douglas MacArthur placed his headquarters in Australia, while the Australian navy assisted in the victorious Battle of the Coral Sea in May

of 1942. After that, Americans and Australians were to fight together in many of the battles of World War II. Australia's role, though secondary, remained very significant. After 1942 the British Royal Navy was no longer Australia's protection against invasion or foreign attack.

Following World War II, Australia was to look more to the United States than to Britain, forming the ANZUS treaty with America and New Zealand. Australia sent troops to Korea and Vietnam. More recently, Australians have fought in both Persian Gulf conflicts. Additionally, they supported Britain in the only successful anti-insurgency war of modern times,

fought in Malaysia in the 1960s. More recently, Australia has helped end regional conflicts in East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

But it's not only in the fight for freedom that Australians have been prominent. Australia is also a caring and compassionate nation that is actively involved in helping its neighbors. After the Dec. 26 tsunami, Australia, geographically almost as big as the United States but with only 19 million

residents, pledged more aid than any other single nation. Australians were among the first to arrive with material help, alleviating the suffering of tsunami survivors.

The source of Australia's blessings

Australia truly has been blessed. It has often been called the "lucky country." But luck has nothing to do with the tremendous blessings of this great land.

The preamble to the Australian constitution begins: "Whereas the people of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania, humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God . . ."

Indeed, it is God who gave this land to the original British settlers, as part of the promised blessing to the descendants of Joseph, the favorite son of the biblical

patriarch Jacob, whom God renamed Israel.

Through Jacob, God revealed that Joseph's two sons were to grow into "a multitude of nations" (Genesis 48:19), a prophecy that was fulfilled in the British Empire and Commonwealth, and a "great" single nation, the United States of America.

As descendants of Abraham, these nations were to be a blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3). Joseph was further told that his descendants would be a "fruitful bough" (Genesis 49:22). Australia and America have been two of the most productive agricultural nations on earth, helping to feed the world's hungry and poverty-stricken peoples.

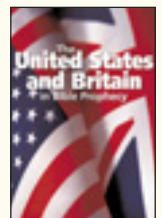
These nations, along with Great Britain and the other nations of the British Commonwealth, were also to play a military role "in the last days" (Genesis 49:1).

Verses 23-24 describe this role: "With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob" (New International Version). In other words, God—whether acknowledged or not—has played a major hand in these nations' victories.

Australia is an underappreciated country. But the great God who gave Australians their wealth and their strength is also underappreciated, even in Australia. The world needs to give thanks for Australia and also for the God who gave this land its many blessings. **GN**

Recommended Reading

How did Britain rise from a small island nation to create the greatest global empire the world has ever seen? How did the United States grow from a backwater colonial possession into the most powerful single nation the world has ever known? Why have Britain's other former possessions such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand played major roles in the freedom and prosperity of the modern world? Believe it or not, you can find the surprising answers in the pages of your Bible! Request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to understand the eye-opening truth!



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God, Science and the Bible

News from the world of science about God and the Bible



by Mario Seigle, Tom Robinson and Scott Ashley

Archaeologists discover biblical Pool of Siloam

In a surprising discovery, Israeli archaeologists, checking a site before the Jerusalem municipality started installing a sewage pipe, stumbled upon what appears to be the remains of the biblical Pool of Siloam, connected to Jesus Christ's miraculous healing of a man blind from birth.

The incident, recorded by the apostle John, tells of Jesus anointing the eyes of the blind man with clay and then saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (John 9:7).

On Dec. 23, 2004, archaeologists Eli Shukron and Ronny Reich announced the find to be quite certain. "The moment that we revealed and discovered this four months ago, we were 100 percent sure it was the Siloam Pool," said Shukron. "We know today that the Siloam Pool is connected to the Temple Mount. There is a road that connects the two elements. The entire system is clearer today" ("Archaeologists find traces of 'Miracle' Pool," Associated Press, Dec. 23, 2004)

In fact, they found that water still flowed from a channel to this large 50-meter pool, of which 10 meters have already been excavated.

Why are the excavators so sure about the find? For one, historical records indicate the pool's approximate location, and

this site fits that. They also discovered pottery pieces, a stone bottle cork and biblical-era coins cemented to the pool's structure, the earliest of which date to around 50 B.C.

Until now, another pool from the Byzantine era was thought to be the Siloam pool. The Gihon Spring was the source that filled both pools. "We have yet

to discover how the water reached the [newly discovered] pool," says Shukron. "We have the Hezekiah tunnel, we have the pool. When we have made further excavations we will have answers" (ibid.).

Although more research is needed to fully authenticate the find, it certainly appears another precise biblical location will be confirmed by archaeology.



Since its recent discovery in Jerusalem, archaeologists have been excavating the biblical Pool of Siloam, left. Progress is slow due to modern buildings and construction partially overlaying the area. An artist's conception, above, shows what the pool may have looked like during the time of Jesus Christ.

First-century burial confirms Gospel details

For years scholars have puzzled over a curious detail mentioned in the Gospel of John concerning Jewish burial practices in the first century. In describing the entombments of Jesus Christ (John 20:7) and His friend Lazarus (John 11:44), John writes of both men having had their bodies wrapped with a linen cloth for burial, but with a separate, smaller cloth wrapped around their heads.

While archaeology has confirmed many details of the Gospels, ancient fabrics are very fragile and decay completely within a few decades unless preserved under extraordinary circumstances. However, in the spring of 2000, a set of extraordinary circumstances led to a once-in-a-lifetime discovery for several archaeologists.

That morning Israeli archaeologist Shimon Gibson and Professor James Tabor of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, with some of Dr. Tabor's archaeology students, happened on a first-century Jewish tomb in Jerusalem's Hinnom Valley that apparently had been plundered only the night before. They immediately notified the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) of the crime and, since Gibson worked for the IAA, they received permission to enter and examine the pillaged tomb.

Most tombs in the Jerusalem area, of which more than a thousand are known, were plundered long ago. A few, however, have remained intact over the centuries. This had been one of the few. Now it had been broken into and

pillaged for artifacts that could perhaps be sold on the antiquities market.

Inside the multilevel tomb the group found the remains of several ossuaries, small limestone boxes that had held the bones of Jewish men and women who had been entombed there. Regrettably, they had been shattered by the thieves, who then stole fragments that apparently bore the names of those whose bones had been contained in the ossuaries.

The most important find, however, remained undisturbed in one of the tomb's small chambers. "In the third level [of the tomb], which is the lowest level, we found . . . the skeleton of a person with a burial shroud still over his shoulders," reported Dr. Tabor. But even more remarkable, the man's body had been wrapped with two pieces of fabric—one around the body and a separate, smaller piece around the head, just as described in John's Gospel.

Small samples of the fabric were radiocarbon dated to the first century—the time during which Jesus lived. Clearly John had faithfully and accurately recorded this detail of Jewish burial practices from the first century.

Due to the find's importance, announcement of the discovery was postponed until scientific analysis could be completed and material prepared for publication.

How had the fabric been preserved all those centuries? Through a geological fluke, a crack in the limestone from which the tomb had been carved had drained ground moisture away from that one particular chamber, leaving it dry and protected—and leaving us evidence that the Gospels indeed are an accurate historical record of real first-century events. (Source: lecture by Professor James Tabor, International Symposium on Archaeology and the Bible, Jan. 14.)

DNA evidence prompts famous professor to renounce atheism

In December 2004, a famous atheist and academic startled the scholarly world when he made the announcement that he had accepted the existence of God, largely due to his study of DNA.

"What I think the DNA material has done is show that intelligence must have been involved in getting these extraordinary diverse elements together," said Professor Antony Flew, 81, of the University of Reading, United Kingdom. "It could be a person in the sense of a being that has intelligence and a purpose, I suppose" (Richard Ostling, "Leading Atheist Now Believes in God," Associated Press report, Dec. 9, 2004).

Professor Flew is arguably the best-known atheist in the academic world of the last 50 years. He helped set the agenda for atheism with his paper "Theology and Falsification," considered the most widely reprinted philosophical publication of the last half century. "Flew is one of the most renowned atheists of the 20th century . . .," says the atheist writer Richard Carrier. "So if he has changed his mind to any degree, whatever you may think of his reasons, the event itself is certainly newsworthy" ("Antony Flew Considers God . . . Sort of," December 2004, www.infidels.org).

Professor Flew mentions that his mind began to change for the existence of God and against

atheism over the last year. One line of evidence that became a clincher was the biological investigation of DNA. He says in the video "Has Science Discovered God?" that DNA evidence "has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce [life], that intelligence must have been involved."

He later wrote to Richard Carrier, "My one and only piece of relevant evidence [for belief in God] is the apparent impossibility of providing a naturalistic theory of the origin from DNA of the first reproducing species."

According to the Associated Press report, Professor Flew's "current ideas have some similarity with American 'intelligent design' theorists, who see evidence for a guiding force in the construction of the universe." In an interview in the Winter 2004 issue of *Philosophia Christi*, the journal of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, Professor Flew said, "I think that the most impressive arguments for God's existence are those that are supported by recent scientific discoveries . . . I think the argument

to Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than it was when I first met it."

The Sunday Times of Britain also stated: "Darwin's theory of evolution does not explain the origin and development of life to Flew's satisfaction. 'I have been persuaded that it is simply out of the question that the first living matter evolved out of dead matter and then developed into an extraordinary complicated creature,' he said. The article went on to explain that Professor Flew is, in his words, "following the argument wherever it leads. The conclusion is—there must have been some intelligence."

While Professor Flew is quick to state that he doesn't view God as a personal being who interacts with mankind, he nonetheless apologizes for the effect his atheistic views had on others. The article quotes him as saying: "As people have certainly been influenced by me, I want to try and correct the enormous damage I may have done" (Stuart Wavell and Will Iredale, "Sorry, Says Atheist-in-Chief, I Do Believe in God After All," Dec. 12, 2004).

Although late, the apology is welcomed.

Did you know that...

In 1961 an Italian expedition excavating Caesarea Maritima in Israel found this stone slab bearing the name of Pontius Pilate, the Roman administrator who condemned Jesus Christ to death. The inscription also gives his title as "prefect of Judea." Pilate governed the province of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36.



Critical thinking outlawed in schools?

On Jan. 13, a federal judge ordered the removal of disclaimer stickers placed on high school biology textbooks in Cobb County, Georgia, that encourage students to think critically in considering the theory of evolution (Associated Press, Jan. 13).

The stickers were applied in accordance with a 2002 decision by the Cobb County Board of Education after some 2,300 parents signed a petition opposing the new textbooks, complaining that they taught evolution as a fact with no mention of any alternative theories.

The disclaimer stickers read simply: "This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered" (quoted by Discovery Institute News, Jan. 13).

But one parent, Jeffrey Selman, along with five other parents and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), brought a suit against the school board in the case of *Selman v. Cobb County School District*, arguing that the stickers violate the "separation of church and state" supposedly mandated by the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the

U.S. Constitution, which states that Congress shall make no law establishing a religion.

U.S. District Judge Clarence Cooper has decided in favor of the plaintiffs in the Selman sticker case, declaring: "By denigrating evolution, the school board appears to be endorsing the well-known prevailing alternative theory, creationism or variations thereof, even though the sticker does not specifically reference any alternative theories . . .

"While evolution is subject to criticism, particularly with respect to the mechanism by which it occurred, the sticker misleads students regarding the significance and value of evolution in the scientific community" (quoted by Creation Safaris, Jan. 13).

So while the disclaimer sticker contains no mention of God, the Bible or creation, it is considered religious for merely telling people to critically consider evolution—and because those behind the sticker believe in God.

"This is a bizarre decision from the standpoint of constitutional law," remarked Dr. John West, associate director of Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, a leading think tank researching scientific challenges to Darwinian evolution.

"After ruling that the school board had a legitimate secular purpose for creating the textbook sticker [i.e., fostering critical thinking], and acknowledging the fact that there are scientists who criticize modern evolutionary theory, the court nevertheless

declared that the sticker is unconstitutional because some citizens might mistakenly believe that the sticker was intended to advance religion—even though the judge admits it wasn't . . .

"It's unfortunate that the judge apparently has such a low view of the intelligence of his fellow citizens. If the judge can figure out that the school district adopted the sticker to advance the legitimate secular purpose of promoting critical discussion of evolution, why couldn't the citizens of Cobb County?" (quoted by Discovery Institute News).

On the other side, Michael Manely, the lawyer representing the parents opposed to the stickers, said, "This is a great day in history and a great day for freedom in our nation." He also said that Cobb County students will now "be permitted to learn science unadulterated by religious dogma" (quoted by Answers in Genesis, Jan. 20).

But the sad fact of the matter is that the decision really means that Cobb County students are to be *ravaged* by dogma—being force-fed unquestioning faith in Darwinian evolution through an environment where free inquiry and critical thinking is not allowed to even be suggested, much less practiced.

On Jan. 17, the school board decided to appeal Judge Cooper's ruling, viewing it as "unnecessary judicial intrusion into local control of schools" (Associated Press, Jan. 18). It is taking the case to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta.

What Does It Mean to Be Redeemed?

Redemption is rightly bound up with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. How should we understand the scope of its meaning?

by John Ross Schroeder

Human beings have an innate desire to rid themselves of guilt when they know they have done wrong. There is nothing like a clear conscience. It is always an important moment when an individual admits to God the sins he or she has committed.

King David of Israel said: “When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me . . . [Finally] I acknowledged my sin to You . . . I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin’” (Psalm 32:3-5).

What should happen with this heartfelt confession to God is very important. In another psalm of repentance after he committed two capital sins, David said to God: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

Another aspect of repentance—a firm resolve to turn away from sin—must accompany admission of guilt. When that really happens, we can absolutely count on forgiveness from God. Why is this so? Why does God then bind Himself to completely and totally forgive all transgressions of His great spiritual law—no matter how serious?

All Christians know the answer to that question is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said: “For God [the Father] so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish [eternally], but have eternal life” (John 3:16, New American Standard Bible).

Understanding Christ’s sacrifice

To help us better comprehend the various aspects of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Bible uses several practical metaphors—usually concepts we already understand fairly well. For instance, Scripture goes to the law courts for comprehension of the legal term “justification.” But it is to the

marketplace that we must go to understand Christ’s sacrifice in terms of the concept of “redemption.”

With regard to Christ’s shed blood, redemption essentially means *deliverance from death by means of payment of a very high price*. The imagery emerges from the marketplace. To redeem is to *buy back*, whether as a purchase or a ransom price.

The Old Testament is very much an essential part of God’s Word to mankind. It shows that although ancient Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was national in scope, God’s deliverance is also very personal.

The patriarch Jacob testifies to this fact.

Word” mentioned in John 1:1-3 and verse 14. (To fully understand this truth, please request our free booklets *Who Is God?* and *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.)

We understand from the New Testament that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 8:11). Therefore they had to be redeemed in advance by Christ’s sacrifice, looking ahead to it.

“Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Peter 1:10-11, King James Version).

King David of Israel was also the beneficiary of many instances of personal deliverance from many difficulties and problems during his turbulent reign as ruler of the 12 tribes. In one of his many heartfelt prayers, he asked his Creator to “draw near to my soul, and redeem it” (Psalm 69:18).

In another of David’s most poignant psalms, he wrote: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who

The Role of God the Father

Jesus called His Father “Lord of heaven and earth” (Matthew 11:25). Think about what those words mean. They tell us that the Father is the Supreme Ruler over the whole universe!

In the introductory portion of his letter to the Church members at Ephesus, the apostle Paul makes it crystal clear that it is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

The Father is the subject of the first chapter of Ephesians as Paul explains how He relates to Jesus Christ along with the magnificent benefits we all draw from that divine relationship.

God the Father is an essential part of the salvation process. It is to the Father that we must be reconciled. Repentance is toward God. It was He who initiated the salvation process and He is the One who calls us out of this world. He gave His only begotten Son so that we may have eternal life in the Kingdom of God (John 3:16).

Paul wrote: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace *through the redemption* that is in Christ Jesus whom God [the Father] set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God [the Father] has passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Romans 3:23-25).

Many overlook the role of God the Father in the whole process of redemptive salvation. Yet Jesus once said: “I work and My Father works.” He also stated to His disciples after His resurrection: “I ascend to My Father and Your Father, and My God and your God” (John 20:17, New American Standard Bible).

Together these two divine Beings, the Father and the Son, direct their efforts towards preparing many sons and daughters for eternal glory in the Kingdom of God (Hebrews 2:10).

In blessing the sons of his son Joseph, he referred to “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel [Messenger] *who has redeemed me from all evil* . . .” (Genesis 48:15-16, emphasis added throughout).

Most probably this “Angel” (note the capital letter “A,” and the Hebrew word simply means “messenger”) was none other than the preexistent Jesus Christ or “the

forgives all your iniquities [sins], who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction” (Psalm 103:2-4). David looked ahead to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, having been inspired by God to write passages in the Psalms that foretold events that would happen on the cross about a thousand years later.

The benefits that David mentions in this passage are all bound up in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Bought and paid for

In the Old Testament, *redemption*, as earlier noted, is often a marketplace term. One could reclaim a field, which had been lost to creditors, perhaps by a bankrupt brother. It could be *redeemed* or bought back for him (see Leviticus 25:23-25).

In a similar manner Jesus Christ redeemed us from the effect of our sins, buying us back by paying a very steep ransom price. All of us were kidnapped spiritually by Satan the devil (the arch-adversary of God and humanity), but the blood of Christ more than covers the ran-

National Deliverance from Egyptian Slavery

God sent a message to His ancient peoples through Moses and his brother Aaron. “Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God . . .’” (Exodus 6:6-7).

What is the background to this inspiring promise of commitment to God’s people? The ancient Israelites lived in Egypt for more than two centuries. After the patriarch Joseph died, persecution soon set in and the growing family of Jacob (whose name had been changed to Israel) cried out to God for deliverance from their enslavement.

God heard these prayers by preserving and protecting the infant Moses, and then seeing to it that he grew up as a part of Pharaoh’s privileged household. Moses needed specialized training for the incredibly challenging task God had in store for him. He was educated in all the worldly wisdom of the Egyptians and “was mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22). Then when Moses was 40, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave and had to flee into the desert.

It would be another 40 years before Moses was sufficiently tried, tested and spiritually qualified to lead the Israelites out of the land of Egypt under severe circumstances and stubborn resistance.

This period of time in the wilderness was an exercise in humility—entirely away from all the previous grandeur and privileges of the Egyptian royal court. It worked very well. Moses became the most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3). He didn’t even feel adequate for the job for which God had painstakingly prepared him.

Nonetheless, this national deliverance from Egyptian slavery prefigured our own personal redemption from sin. Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). If you would like to understand the vital connection, please request or download our free booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

som price in full. Several New Testament passages explain this basic truth.

The apostle Paul stated: “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20, New International Version). The apostle Peter tells us just how high this price was. He wrote that “you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Jesus was absolutely and totally sinless! He died for our sins. He took them all on Himself. “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:28).

Our Savior said that He came “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). And Paul adds, “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

Obtaining “eternal redemption”

The book of Hebrews tells us that “with His own blood He [Christ] entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). This biblical passage introduces us to the concept of *eternal* redemption. That means its effects run on and on into the future—encompassing everlasting life in God’s family and Kingdom.

Even though our past sins are forgiven by means of the blood of Christ, an important aspect of our redemption lies in the future. Ultimately, even the Passover service “finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16, NIV).

The testimony of the apostle John enters the picture from the final book in the Bible. He quotes the 24 elders (powerful angelic beings residing in heaven) as singing a new song about Christ to His Church. “. . . You were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10, NIV).

This scripture marries our redemption from sin by Christ’s blood to our future role as rulers assisting Him during His coming 1,000-year reign (Revelation 20:1-4).

Jesus Himself spoke of these future events in the prophecy He gave to His disciples on the Mount of Olives shortly before His death. “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your

heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:27-28).

Paul also wrote of this same time in the future when He said, “Do not grieve the [Holy] Spirit of God, by [which] you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). This occurs at the second coming of Christ when the firstfruits of God, those who have faithfully served Him over the centuries, will be resurrected to eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). (More understanding of this intriguing truth can be found in our free booklet *What Happens After Death?*)

But during this present age, the world plunges deeper and deeper into moral and political chaos and danger. The apostle Paul acknowledged this when he wrote: “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the [Holy] Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption [or sonship], the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:22-23).

Summing up our salvation

Redemption cancels out our sins through the blood of Christ and also looks forward to the day when our physical bodies will be transformed from flesh into spirit (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). Redemption is eternal in its effects. It ultimately means everlasting life in the Kingdom of God. But never forget what King David said: “Blessed is he [or she] . . . whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1).

There are many aspects of our salvation that space prevents us from explaining in any one article. That is why we publish several booklets on the subject in addition to our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, all of which go into many of these matters in much greater depth.

Transforming Your Life: the Process of Salvation and *The Road to Eternal Life* both explain repentance, water baptism and how we may receive God’s Holy Spirit and enter into everlasting life. *You Can Have Living Faith* expounds the role of faith in the salvation process. *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* covers the sacrifice of Christ in much greater detail. Please request or download these four free booklets as well as ask to enroll in the free *Bible Study Course*.

Finally, please let us know if you would like to counsel with a United Church of God minister in your area. He would be glad to answer your questions and help you to embrace God’s way of life. **GN**

'The Son of Man Will Be Three Days and Three Nights in the Heart of the Earth'

Jesus Christ plainly said He would be entombed for three days and three nights. Can this be reconciled with a "Good Friday" crucifixion and burial and an "Easter Sunday" resurrection, which allows for barely a day and a half in the tomb? Or do the Gospels spell out a surprising, simpler solution that fits perfectly with what Jesus foretold?

by Scott Ashley

In Matthew 12:38, some of the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign to prove He was the Messiah. "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you," they told Him (New International Version).

But Jesus responded that the only sign He would give was that of the prophet Jonah: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (verse 40).

Traditional view doesn't fit

But how can we fit "three days and three nights" between a Friday afternoon crucifixion and entombment just before sundown and a Sunday morning resurrection at sunrise? This traditional view allows for Jesus to have been in the tomb for only a day and a half.

Some believe that Christ's statement that He would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" does not require a literal span of 72 hours. They reason that any part of a day can be reckoned as a whole day.

Thus, since Jesus died in the afternoon and was entombed just before sunset, they think the closing few minutes of that Friday constituted the first day, Friday night was the first night, Saturday was the second day, Saturday night was the second night, and a few minutes at dawn on Sunday morning made up the third day.

But where, then, is the third night? Even if a few minutes of daylight late on Friday and another few on Sunday morning constitute "days," this interpretation fails to explain how only *two* nights—Friday night and Saturday night—can

somehow be the *three* nights of which Jesus spoke.

In fact, Scripture is plain that Jesus *had already risen* before Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early Sunday morning, arriving "while it was still dark" (John 20:1-2). So in reality, *no* parts of Sunday could be counted as a day, as Jesus was *already resurrected* well before the break of dawn.

Jonah 1:17, to which Jesus referred, states specifically that "Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." We have no biblical basis for thinking that Jesus meant only two nights and one day, plus part of another day. If Jesus were in the tomb only from late Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning, then the sign He gave that He was the prophesied Messiah *was not fulfilled*.

So which is it? Is something wrong with Christ's words, or is something wrong with the traditional view of when and how long He was in the tomb?

Let's carefully examine the details from the Gospels. When we do, we uncover the real story of how Jesus' words were fulfilled precisely.

Two Sabbaths mentioned

Notice the sequence of events outlined in Luke 23. Jesus' moment of death, as well as His hasty burial because of the oncoming Sabbath that began at sundown, is narrated in verses 46-53. Verse 54 then states, "That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near."

In Jewish society of that time, heavy cooking and housecleaning were done on the day before a Sabbath in preparation for it. Thus the day before the Sabbath came to be called "the preparation day" or simply "the preparation." The biblical

Sabbath falls on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. According to Bible reckoning, days begin at sunset (Leviticus 23:32; compare Genesis 1:5, 8, 13), so all weekly Sabbaths start Friday evening at sundown.

Based on these facts, many people have assumed that it is the weekly Sabbath mentioned here, and that Jesus was therefore crucified on a Friday. But two types of "Sabbaths" are mentioned in the Scriptures—the regular weekly Sabbath day, which fell on the seventh day of the week, and seven annual Holy Days (listed in Leviticus 23), Sabbaths that could—and usually did—fall on days of the week other than the regular weekly Sabbath day.

Was the day after Jesus was crucified a weekly Sabbath, or one of these annual Holy Days?

John 19:31 clearly states that this approaching Sabbath "was a high day." This term does not refer to the weekly

Recommended Reading

What you have read in this article is only part of the story. This article shows the biblical proof that Jesus wasn't crucified on Good Friday, nor was He resurrected on Easter Sunday. So how did Easter come to be such a popular holiday if Jesus wasn't resurrected on that day? And how did such curious symbols as rabbits and brightly painted eggs come to be associated with the day? To discover the rest of the story, request or download our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*



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

Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset), but in this context to the first day of Unleavened Bread, one of God’s annual Holy Days (Exodus 12:16-17; Leviticus 23:6-7). A number of Bible commentaries, encyclopedias and dictionaries will confirm that John is not referring to the weekly Sabbath here, but rather to one of the annual Sabbaths.

According to the biblical calendar, in that year this high-day Sabbath fell on a Thursday (meaning it began on Wednesday night at sunset). We can confirm this by looking at the details in the Gospel accounts—which show us that *two* separate Sabbath days are mentioned.

Luke 23:55-56 tells us that the women, after seeing Christ’s body being laid in the tomb just before sundown, “returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils” for the final preparation of the body.

They would not have done such work on a Sabbath day, weekly or annual, since it would have been considered a Sabbath violation. This is verified by Mark’s account, which states: “Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices [which they could not have purchased on a Sabbath day], that they might come and anoint Him” (Mark 16:1).

The women had to wait *until this Sabbath was over* before they could buy and prepare the spices to be used for anointing Jesus’ body. Then, Luke 23:56 tells us that, after purchasing and preparing the spices and oils on Friday, “they

rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment”—which means they had to have acquired the spices *before* that Sabbath on which they rested. This *second* Sabbath mentioned in the Gospel accounts is the regular weekly Sabbath, observed from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

By comparing details in both Gospels—where Mark tells us the women bought spices *after* the Sabbath and Luke relates that they prepared the spices *before* resting on the Sabbath—we can clearly see that *two different Sabbaths* are being discussed here.

The first, as John 19:31 tells us, was a “high day”—the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—which, in A.D. 31, fell on a Thursday. The second was the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. (To see these events spelled out day by day, see the chart below.)

Sign of the Messiah

After the women rested on the regular weekly Sabbath, they went to Jesus’ tomb early on the first day of the week (Sunday), “while it was still dark” (John 20:1), and found that He had already been resurrected (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:1-3). Jesus was not resurrected at sunrise on Sunday morning. When Mary Magdalene arrived “while it was still dark” she found the stone rolled away and the tomb already empty!

When we consider the details in all four Gospel accounts, the picture is clear. Jesus was crucified and entombed late

on Wednesday afternoon, just before a Sabbath began at sunset. However, that was a high-day Sabbath, lasting from Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset that week, rather than the regular weekly Sabbath that lasted from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

Since Jesus was entombed in the late afternoon just before sundown, according to His own words He would have been resurrected at around the same time three days and nights later. He remained in the tomb from Wednesday at sunset until Saturday at sunset, when He rose from the dead. While no one witnessed His resurrection (which took place inside a sealed tomb), to fit His words and the biblical evidence it had to have happened three days and three nights later, near sunset on Saturday.

This time line perfectly accommodates three full nights (Wednesday night, Thursday night and Friday night) and three full daylight periods (Thursday, Friday and Saturday). This is the *only* time that fits Jesus’ own prophecy of how long He would be in the tomb. And, as we have seen, it fits perfectly with all the details recorded in the Gospels.

We can be assured that the entombment period Jesus gave as proof He was the Messiah was exactly the duration He foretold. Because most people do not understand the biblical Holy Days Jesus Christ and His followers kept, they fail to understand the chronological details so accurately preserved for us in the Gospels. **GN**

The Chronology of Christ’s Crucifixion and Resurrection

Tuesday:	Wednesday:	Thursday:	Friday:	Saturday:	Sunday:
Jesus Christ ate an evening Passover meal with His disciples (at the beginning of Nisan 14, Jewish reckoning) and instituted the New Covenant symbols (Matthew 26:26-28). Jesus was then betrayed by Judas, arrested and during the night brought before the high priest.	Jesus was crucified and died around 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50). This was the preparation day for the <i>annual</i> , not weekly, Sabbath, which began at sunset (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). Jesus’ body was placed in the tomb just before sunset (Matthew 27:57-60).	This was the high-day Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:4-7). It is described as the day after the “Day of Preparation” (Matthew 27:62).	The high-day Sabbath now past, the women bought and prepared spices for anointing Jesus’ body before resting on the weekly Sabbath day, which began at sunset (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56).	The women rested on the weekly Sabbath, according to the Fourth Commandment (Luke 23:56; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus rose near sunset, <i>exactly three days and three nights</i> after burial, fulfilling the sign of Jonah and authenticating Jesus’ messiahship.	The women brought the prepared spices early in the morning <i>while it was still dark</i> (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Jesus <i>had already risen</i> (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:2-3; John 20:1). He did not rise on Sunday morning, but near sunset the day before.

The Wave Sheaf: How an Ancient Ceremony Foreshadowed Jesus' Role

The Old Testament describes many ceremonies that sound quite odd to us. Yet everything God does is for a purpose. The purpose of one ceremony, the wave-sheaf offering, was to teach us about one aspect of Jesus Christ's role in mankind's salvation.

by Larry Neff

On the first day of the week following Jesus' death and resurrection, an unusual and significant event occurred.

As Mary Magdalene was standing by His empty tomb, Jesus appeared. He called her name and then, as she apparently went to take hold of him, said to her, "Do not cling to Me, *for I have not yet ascended to My Father*; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'" (John 20:17).

But later the same day, as she and the other Mary "went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them saying, 'Rejoice! And they came and *held Him by the feet* and worshiped Him'" (Matthew 28:9).

Many have probably read these words, but without paying that much attention to exactly what Christ said or the significance of what must have happened between these two episodes. For Jesus to later the same day allow His disciples to hold onto him, He must in the interval have *ascended to the Father*. What was the significance of this?

The answer is revealed in the comments of New Testament writers and in a little-understood Old Testament ceremony that prefigured the purpose of His ascension.

But before we examine that symbolic ceremony, we need to understand why the common belief that Jesus rose from the dead at sunrise on the first Sunday after He was crucified is inaccurate. Let's notice the biblical account of what really happened that morning.

"Early on the first day of the week, *while it was still dark*, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.'

"Then Peter and the other disciple set out



The biblically ordained festivals are related to the harvest seasons in the Holy Land. They reveal the sequence of events and the key elements of God's salvation plan.

and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

"Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed" (John 20:1-8, New Revised Standard Version).

Before sunrise came that Sunday morning, Jesus *had already been resurrected!* He was already gone from His tomb! His resurrection had actually occurred near or at sunset the previous day as the weekly Sabbath day was ending (for detailed proof, be sure to read "The Son of Man Will Be Three Days and Three Nights in the Heart of the Earth," beginning on page 20). Therefore, the first day of the week (Sunday) is *not*

the anniversary of His resurrection.

Jesus, the first of the "firstfruits"

But on that Sunday morning a significant event *did* occur. It was on that day that Jesus ascended to the Father to be *accepted formally as the first* to be raised from the dead in God's *spiritual harvest* of humanity. In doing so He opened the way for all of us to have the *opportunity for eternal life*.

Paul understood this connection clearly: "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: *Christ, the firstfruits*; then, when he comes, those who belong to him" (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, New International Version).

Jesus Christ's preeminence as *the first* of a larger body of "firstfruits" is incredibly significant. The apostle John, referring

to a particular segment of God's faithful servants, describes them as "redeemed from among men, being *firstfruits* to God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4).

What relationship do "firstfruits" have to God's great plan of salvation? Why does James 1:18 say of those who are called to salvation in this present age, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be *a kind of firstfruits of His creatures*"? Why first? Especially, why is Jesus distinguished as the *first* of the firstfruits to be resurrected from the dead?

and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age" (Matthew 13:38-40).

Only the good fruit of God's spiritual harvest receives eternal life. This is the reason that all of the biblically ordained festivals are related to the *harvest seasons* in the Holy Land. Their purpose is to reveal to God's faithful people the proper sequence of events and the key elements of His salvation plan—His "harvest" of human beings to eternal life.

In the early spring, God commanded two festivals that teach us about His plan

instituted. It had been observed by the Jews for more than a thousand years. Remarkably, *its explicit purpose was to symbolize the importance of Christ's presentation of Himself to the Father* at that exact time on that exact day to be accepted as the *first* of the "firstfruits" resurrected from the dead to eternal life.

The original "wave-sheaf" offering

Each year in the spring, ancient Israel was not allowed to eat any of the new grain harvest until the commanded *wave-sheaf*

How Were Original Biblical Practices Replaced in Christianity?

At sunrise every Easter Sunday, millions of people assemble to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ who—according to what they have been taught—was raised from the dead at that exact time almost 2,000 years ago.

Yet very few of them will realize that associating Christ's resurrection with the rising of the sun on that morning is not supported by the Bible. The scriptural texts state explicitly that Christ had *already risen* from the dead and was *already gone* from the tomb *before* the sun began to rise—"while it was still dark" (John 20:1)—on that first day of the week.

The departure from understanding what actually occurred on that Sunday morning to what so many believe today is rooted in changes in Christianity that began not long after its founding. Initially Christianity was viewed as simply a sect of Judaism, a protected religion in the Roman Empire. However, after Jewish revolts in Judea in A.D. 67-70 and 132-135, Jewish practices—many of which continued in the early Church—came to be viewed with hostility throughout the Roman Empire. Many early Church members began to abandon these practices, including observance of the biblical Sabbath and festivals.

When Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the process accelerated. In trying to create a universal—i.e., catholic—church, church leaders started making concessions to the pagans who were being forced to accept belief in Jesus Christ by the Roman government. Those concessions established a precedent for introducing into the

Christian religion a multitude of nonbiblical traditions and practices.

Over time these trends transformed the celebrations and ceremonies of Christianity. Biblically ordained festivals were either demoted in importance or dropped altogether. Nonbiblical traditions, such as the association of Christ's resurrection with a Sunday morning sunrise service, gained widespread acceptance and replaced the biblical festivals formerly observed.

Celebrations related to sun worship were some of the most popular festive occasions in the Roman Empire before Christianity became the official state religion. To placate these former sun worshippers, who refused to abandon completely their pagan ceremonies, church bishops decided to permit the celebrations to continue by merely changing their names and then linking "Christian" events or personalities to them.

This massive acceptance of nonbiblical traditions is a historical fact that can be verified in almost any encyclopedia of general knowledge. One only has to look up the names of today's popular celebrations or traditions.

Regrettably, this dilution of biblical teachings with nonbiblical tradition has obscured much of what Jesus actually has done and is doing for us to make salvation available. The Easter sunrise service is just such an example. It diverts attention away from what *really* happened on that first Sunday following Jesus' crucifixion.

—Roger Foster

God teaches using harvest analogies

The Bible uses several analogies that compare salvation and God's Kingdom to a *harvest*. For example, Jesus said, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white *for harvest!* And *he who reaps* receives wages, and *gathers fruit for eternal life*, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (John 4:35-36).

The *fruit* that is important to God is that which is gathered *for eternal life*—those who become the children of God!

In explaining His parable of the wheat and the tares (i.e., weeds), Jesus said: "The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, *the harvest* is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered

for mankind. The first consists of the Passover—the same day on which Jesus Christ was put to death as a sacrifice for our sins. The second immediately follows, the Days of Unleavened Bread that represent His role in helping us remove sin from our lives (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Jesus died and was placed in a tomb just before sundown (Luke 23:50-56)—immediately before the beginning of the *annual "high day"* (John 19:31) that commenced the Days of Unleavened Bread, which began at sunset.

Three days and three nights later—near sundown on the afternoon of the weekly Sabbath (Saturday)—Jesus was resurrected. The next day—on the first day of the week (Sunday)—He appeared to Mary and some of His disciples just before He ascended to the throne of the Father in heaven.

Let's now examine a unique ceremony that was being carried out in the temple *at the very time Jesus was ascending to the Father*. It was a ceremony that God had

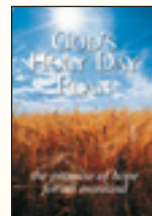
offering was offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread. It was to be offered in conjunction with the daily morning sacrifices for that day and a special unblemished sacrificial lamb "of the first year." The timing of the regular morning sacrifice was at 9 a.m.—the third hour of the day.

Continued on page 27

Recommended Reading

Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost are only three of God's seven annual festivals that teach us about the life and mission—past, present and future—of Jesus Christ. The other four teach us about the incredible role He will play in future events when He returns to earth. If you'd like to learn more, request the

eye-opening booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. A free copy is waiting for you!



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Arizona

Phoenix ch. 24, 98, Sundays 4 & 5:30 p.m.; Wednesdays 6 p.m.
 Prescott ch. 13, Tuesdays 1 p.m.; Wednesdays 6 p.m.
 Prescott Valley ch. 13, Sundays 9 a.m. & 3 p.m.; Mondays 9 a.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m. & 3 p.m.; ch. 73, 74, Sundays 8 & 10 a.m.; Saturdays 8 & 9:30 a.m.
 Tucson

Arkansas

Mena ch. 19, Sundays 2 p.m.

California

Alamo ch. 26, Thursdays 9:30 p.m.; 2nd and 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
 Berkeley ch. 26, Mondays 10 a.m.
 Chatsworth ch. 34, Fridays 10:30 p.m.
 Clayton ch. 26, Thursdays 9:30 p.m.; 2nd and 4th Thursdays 7:30 & 9:30 p.m.
 Concord ch. 26, Thursdays 9:30 p.m.; 2nd and 4th Thursdays 7:30 & 9:30 p.m.
 Danville ch. 26, 2nd and 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
 Dublin ch. 26, Fridays 4 p.m.
 El Cerrito ch. 26, Mondays 10 a.m.
 Eureka ch. 10, Fridays 7 p.m.
 Fremont ch. 6, Mondays 11:30 a.m.
 Hayward ch. 28, Tuesdays 10 p.m.
 Lafayette ch. 26, Thursdays 9:30 p.m.; 2nd and 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
 Livermore ch. 26, Fridays 4 p.m.
 Marin County ch. 26, Tuesdays 10:30 p.m.
 Martinez ch. 26, 2nd and 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
 Menlo Park ch. 77, Mondays 6 p.m.
 Moraga ch. 26, 2nd and 4th Thursdays 7:30 & 9:30 p.m.
 Newark ch. 3, Mondays 11:30 a.m.
 Novato ch. 71, Tuesdays 7:30 p.m.
 Orange County ch. 3, Sundays 11 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.; ch. 6, Sundays 11:30 a.m. & 8:30 p.m.
 Orinda ch. 26, 2nd and 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
 Palo Alto ch. 77, Mondays 6 p.m.
 Pasadena ch. 56, Sundays 6 a.m. & 6 p.m.
 Pleasant Hill ch. 26, 2nd and 4th Thursdays 7:30 p.m.
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 San Diego ch. 23, Saturdays 6 a.m.
 San Francisco ch. 29, Sundays 11 a.m., Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 San Jose ch. 15A, Wednesdays 4:30 p.m.
 Santa Clara ch. 15A, Wednesdays 4:30 p.m.
 Santa Rosa ch. 72, Sundays 6 p.m.; Saturdays 3 p.m.
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Connecticut

New London ch. 24, Tuesdays 6 p.m.

Florida

Tampa ch. 19, Sundays 9 a.m., Thursdays 12 noon
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Illinois

Arlington Heights ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Aurora ch. 6, 10, Tuesdays 10:30 p.m.
 Bartlett ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Bristol ch. 6, Tuesdays 10:30 p.m.
 Buffalo Grove ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Chicago ch. 36, times vary
 Des Plaines ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Elk Grove Village ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Glenview ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Golf ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Hanover Park ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Hoffman Estates ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
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 Prospect Heights ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Rolling Meadows ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Romeoville ch. 6, weekdays 6 p.m.
 Schaumburg ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Skokie ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Streamwood ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Wheeling ch. 36, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.
 Wilmette ch. 19, Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.

Indiana

Bloomington ch. 3, Sundays 9:30 p.m.
 Ft. Wayne ch. 57, Sundays 12:30 p.m.

Iowa

Iowa City ch. 18, Tuesdays 12:30 p.m.; Fridays 5:30 p.m.

Kentucky

Hopkinsville ch. 23, Thursdays 12 noon; Saturdays 10 a.m.
 Paducah ch. 2, Tuesdays 4 p.m.; Thursdays 10 a.m.

Maryland

Frostburg ch. 19, Tuesdays 2 p.m.
 George's Creek ch. 19, Tuesdays 2 p.m.
 Keyser ch. 19, Tuesdays 2 p.m.

Massachusetts

Cambridge ch. 22, Sundays 10 a.m.
 Shrewsbury ch. 33, Wednesdays 10 p.m.; Thursdays 7 a.m.

Michigan

Ann Arbor ch. 17, Thursdays 4 p.m.
 Grand Rapids ch. 25, Tuesdays or Wednesdays 11 a.m.
 Kalamazoo ch. 19, Sundays 8:30 a.m.
 Midland ch. 3, Thursdays 12:30 p.m.
 Portage ch. 19, Mondays 8:30 a.m.; Tuesdays 2 p.m.; Thursdays 6:30 p.m.
 ch. 2, Sundays 11:30 a.m.

Minnesota

Traverse City ch. 6, Sundays 7 p.m.
 Austin ch. 15, Sundays 9 a.m.
 Blaine ch. 15, Sundays 9 a.m.
 Centerville ch. 15, Sundays 9 a.m.
 Circle Pines ch. 15, Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 7 p.m.
 Eagan ch. 15, Sundays 9 a.m.
 Ham Lake ch. 15, Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 7 p.m.
 Inver Grove Hts. ch. 15, Sundays 9 a.m.
 Lexington ch. 15, Sundays 9 a.m.
 Lino Lakes ch. 15, Sundays 9 a.m.
 Rochester ch. 10, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays 7:30 p.m.; Sundays 10:30 a.m.
 Spring Lake Park ch. 15, Sundays 9 a.m.
 Willmar ch. 18, Wednesdays 9:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.

Missouri

Jefferson City ch. 3, Mondays 5 p.m.
 St. Charles County ch. 18, Saturdays 10 p.m.; Sundays 8 a.m.

Montana

Billings ch. 7, Sundays 6 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m.
 Helena ch. 11, Sundays 3 p.m.

New Mexico

Albuquerque ch. 27, Saturdays 3 p.m.

New York

Brooklyn ch. 34, 67, Sundays 10 a.m.
 Hauppauge ch. 20, Saturdays 7:30 a.m.
 Long Island ch. 20, Sundays 6:30 a.m.
 Manhattan ch. 56, Sundays 7 a.m.
 Rochester ch. 15, Saturdays 5:30 p.m.

North Carolina

Charlotte ch. 21, Saturdays 2 p.m.
 Greensboro ch. 8, Sundays 10 a.m.

North Dakota

Fargo ch. 12, Wednesdays 5 p.m.

Ohio

Akron ch. 23, Sundays 6:30 a.m.
 Centerville ch. 23, Fridays 2:30 a.m.
 Dayton ch. 12, Tuesdays 2 p.m.; Fridays 6 a.m.
 ch. 23, Fridays 2:30 p.m.
 Defiance ch. 5, Sundays 11 a.m.
 Enon ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
 Fairborn ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
 Trotwood ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
 Vandalia ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.
 Xenia ch. 23, Sundays 5:30 p.m.

Oregon

Eugene ch. 11, Mondays 6 p.m.; Tuesdays 6 a.m.; Thursdays 12 midnight; Fridays 6 p.m.

McMinnville

ch. 11, Tuesdays 8 p.m.; Wednesdays 12 noon
 Oregon City ch. 11, Mondays 9 p.m.
 Portland ch. 21, Sundays 9 p.m.; Mondays 9 p.m.; Thursdays 8 p.m.
 ch. 11, Sundays 6 p.m.
 Salem ch. 23, Sundays 11 a.m. & 9 p.m.; Mondays 7:30 p.m.; Tuesdays 6 p.m.; Wednesdays 3:30 p.m.; Thursdays 12 noon; Fridays 6:30 p.m.
 Springfield ch. 11, Mondays 6 p.m.; Tuesdays 6 a.m.; Thursdays 12 midnight; Fridays 6 p.m.
 ch. 11, Sundays 9 a.m.

Rhode Island

Entire state ch. 14, Sundays 8 a.m.; Fridays 10:30 a.m.

Texas

Austin ch. 11, Mondays 6 p.m.; Thursdays 6 p.m.
 Corpus Christi ch. 10, Sundays 5 & 8 p.m.; Mondays 3 p.m.; Thursdays 9:30 p.m.
 Dallas ch. 14B, Sundays 10:30 p.m.; Tuesdays 9:30 p.m.
 ch. 19, Sundays 9 a.m.; Wednesdays 5 p.m.
 El Paso ch. 15, Mondays 1 p.m.; Thursdays 3 p.m.
 Houston ch. 17, Thursdays 12:30 p.m.
 Laredo ch. 2, Thursdays 7 p.m.
 Longview ch. 10, Wednesdays 10 p.m.; Fridays 12 noon
 ch. 20, Sundays 8 p.m.; Tuesdays 6 p.m.
 San Antonio ch. 19, Sundays 9 a.m.; Wednesdays 5 p.m.

Virginia

Hampton Beach ch. 71, 74, Sundays 10 a.m.

Washington

Bellevue ch. 29, 77, Tuesdays 4 p.m.
 Olympia ch. 22, 29, Sundays 9 a.m.; Mondays 12 noon; Thursdays 3 p.m.; Fridays 8:30 a.m.
 ch. 29, 77, Tuesdays 4 p.m.
 Seattle ch. 14, Saturdays 5:30 p.m.
 Spokane ch. 11, Sundays 1 p.m.; Wednesdays 12 noon; Thursdays 7 a.m.
 Vancouver

West Virginia

Morgantown ch. 3, Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 3 p.m.; Saturdays 5 p.m.

Wisconsin

Beloit ch. 12, Thursdays 6:30 p.m.
 Eau Claire ch. 11, Sundays 2 p.m.
 Kenosha ch. 14, Mondays 7:30 p.m.; Thursdays 5:30 p.m.
 ch. 4, Sundays 10:30 a.m.
 Madison ch. 96, Mondays 7:30 p.m.; Tuesdays 6 p.m.
 Milwaukee ch. 3, Mondays 10:30 p.m.; Tuesdays 10 a.m. & 3:30 p.m.
 Stevens Point

Radio Log

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Nationwide

XM Satellite Radio 170, Sundays 8:30 a.m. (EST)

Arizona

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

California

San Diego 760 AM, Sundays 6 a.m.

Florida

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

Indiana

Indianapolis 1070 AM, Sundays 7 a.m.

Louisiana

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

New York

Buffalo 930 AM, Sundays 6:30 a.m.

Oklahoma

Tulsa 740 AM, Sundays 8 a.m.

Tennessee

Memphis 600 AM, Sundays 9 a.m.

Virginia

Norfolk 850 AM, Sundays 10 a.m.

West Virginia

Wheeling 1170 AM, Mondays 12:30 a.m.

Are We Living in the Time of the End?

A Newsweek report notes that more scholarship has been devoted to the study of end-time biblical prophecies in the past 30 years than in the previous 300. A series of novels based on biblical end-time prophecies have sold more than 9 million copies. Is there a way to tell if we are nearing the end?

by Gary Petty

A resurgence of fascination with biblical prophecy has spawned religious debate over interpretations of the visions of Daniel, Jesus Christ's prophecy of the end of the age shortly before His crucifixion and the apostle John's mysterious images in the book of Revelation.

However, there are practical concerns behind these intriguing curiosities. People want to know about the future. We are living in turbulent times. Many are concerned about the state of the world, and some discerning souls are turning to the Bible—the prophetic passages in particular—for solace and insight.

A Newsweek article titled “The Way the World Ends” states: “Of all the books of the Bible, none has fired the imagination of the West more than the last, the mysterious Apocalypse [or Revelation]. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the Whore of Babylon, the deceitful Antichrist—these are just a few of the powerful and troubling images that Revelation injected into Western art and consciousness.

“Its prophecies have been of even greater consequence: the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth, the Battle of Armageddon and the promise of a new heaven and earth have justified numerous wars and revolutions and inspired utopias and religious sects of every sort” (Kenneth Woodward, Nov. 1, 1999).

How can we understand biblical prophecy? Are there rules to the strange images and predictions? Where do we even start?

A pivotal passage

Let's begin by looking at divine predictions given to the prophet Daniel in the sixth century before Christ.

Daniel was a young Jewish man who had been taken captive by the Babylonians. According to Daniel 2, the Babylonian ruler, King Nebuchadnezzar, had a disturbing dream and decided that it possessed a hidden message. He called his astrologers and sorcerers together and commanded that they tell him the meaning. Of course, by their own human power they couldn't.

God, however, revealed to His servant Daniel the dream and its meaning. The

gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

“You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was



We are living in turbulent times. Many are concerned about the state of the world, and some discerning souls are turning to the Bible—the prophetic passages in particular—for solace and insight.

Creator looks out across the expanse of time, understands what humanity will do and determines how He will intervene in human history to bring about His ultimate plan for mankind.

Daniel appears before the king and proceeds to proclaim that Nebuchadnezzar's dream involved an image of a man. We pick up the story in verse 32. Daniel tells the king: “This image's head was of fine

found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

Daniel continues: “This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the



Looking to listen to something different? Tune in to *The Good News* radio network for our dynamic half-hour program airing in major U.S. cities! Join host Gary Petty

To download or listen to programs online, visit www.ucg.org/radio.

as he and guests explore current trends and biblical truths and teachings with the kind of fresh, in-depth perspective you get in *The Good News* magazine.

heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold.

“But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.

“Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

“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.

“Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (verses 32-45).

God reveals the meaning

The image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream may seem unfathomable, except that God, though Daniel, reveals the meaning. This simple prophecy supplies a major framework for many prophecies throughout Scripture. Nebuchadnezzar’s image concerns four great empires, beginning with Babylon. From our historical vantage point today the elements of the prophecy become clear.

The Babylonian Empire was followed by three other empires. First came the Persian Empire that destroyed Babylon’s rule. The Persians were, in turn, conquered by the Greeks under Alexander the Great. The Greek Empire eventually was gobbled up into the Roman Empire.

All this was recorded centuries before it came to pass. Fulfilled prophecy proves the divine inspiration of the Bible! But all of the prophecies of Daniel 2 *aren’t just for the past*. He foretells that the fourth empire

will exist at a time when the Messiah comes to rule the earth.

Let’s go back and reread verse 44: “And in the days of these kings [the 10 kings represented by the toes of the image] 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.”

Here is a vital key to understanding end-time biblical prophecy. Before the Messiah comes to rule over God’s Kingdom on the earth, there must first be a revived fourth kingdom, a resurrected Roman Empire, involving 10 rulers.

When will the Messiah return?

Did you know that between a fourth and a third of the Bible is prophetic? Much of that information is concerned with what it calls “the end time.”

It seems that many generations have thought that they were living in the time just before the return of Christ. The *Newsweek* article mentioned earlier states: “In the 12th century, for example, the Crusaders saw the recapture of Jerusalem from the Muslims as a defeat of the Antichrist. Christopher Columbus set sail thinking his voyage to India would hasten the return of Christ to earth.

“For the same reason, Oliver Cromwell readmitted Jews to England after the English civil war, thinking his victory would establish the New Jerusalem on British soil. Isaac Newton wrote a book on biblical prophecy, hoping to prove that ‘the world is governed by providence.’ In Puritan New England, America’s greatest theologian, Jonathan Edwards, studied John’s Apocalypse and calculated that the millennium of Christ’s kingdom on earth would begin in the year 2000.”

Jesus prophesied, as recorded in Matthew 24:22, that unless He returns to intervene, *all humanity will be destroyed*. This horror is precariously possible with modern nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. The Messiah won’t return until many prophesied events take place first—things like world wars, disease epidemics on a global scale and a rise in natural disasters.

No one knows the exact time of Christ’s return. Jesus Himself said, “Of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”

Jesus Christ’s focus: Be prepared

Jesus also commanded His followers to be aware of events and how they relate

to prophecy. Just after saying that no one knows the day or hour of His return, He told His disciples, as recorded in Mark 13:33-37:

“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.

“Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.

“And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

Christ’s instructions to watch mean more than just being aware of events. His followers are to be *spiritually prepared* for His return. In Luke 21:34-35 Jesus says:

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Will you be ready?

Are you being prepared for the return of Christ? Are you living your life in complete dedication to God and His ways? Is your religion a social club or a dynamic force of change in your life? The purpose of *The Good News* radio program and magazine is to challenge you to go to God and have Him change your life.

Why were you born? There is a big difference between grasping your future, and simply going on the way you have been. The choice is up to you. **GN**

Recommended Reading

We certainly live in troubling times. The world is filled with war, terrorism, unrest, poverty, corruption, crime, natural disasters and the like. Are these signs that we are in the prophesied time of the end? You need to understand what the Bible reveals about end-time events. Request our eye-opening booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* to understand what it all means.



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

Ceremony

Continued from page 23

At the time that the ancient Israelites first took possession of the land of Canaan, God told Moses to instruct them: “When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to *wave the sheaf* before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; *the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath*” (Leviticus 23:10-11, NIV).

The particular “day after the Sabbath” referred to here is the Sunday that fell during the Days of Unleavened Bread. As we have seen, Jesus rose from the dead near sunset on the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread and appeared to His disciples the next morning—the exact same Sunday mentioned here.

This passage describes the same offering that was being waved before God in the Jewish temple at the same hour on the same Sunday that Jesus ascended to the Father. Christ’s presentation of Himself to the Father as the real “wave sheaf” had been planned long before as a vital aspect of God’s plan of salvation.

The phrase “on your behalf” (verse 11) is striking in regard to what the wave-sheaf offering symbolized when it was lifted up and waved before God by Israel’s high priest. It represented *Jesus Christ, offered up on our behalf*.

The Father accepted Him as our perfect Sacrifice, declaring Him “the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). As our resurrected High Priest, He ascended to the Father to present Himself on our behalf, the perfect and unblemished Sacrifice for our sins.

At that time He was accepted by the Father as the first Son of all of the future sons and daughters of God (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). He will forever be the preeminent Son of God within the family the Father is building (Ephesians 3:14-15).

This official acceptance of Jesus Christ as the first sheaf of the harvest, as the Captain or Author of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10), was necessary before the rest of the spiritual harvest could begin, just as in the physical parallel (see Leviticus 23:14).

The other “firstfruits” in God’s harvest

All of the symbolism of the physical wave-sheaf offering was fulfilled in reality by Jesus “that He might be the *firstborn among many brethren*” (Romans 8:29).

Paul explained that “he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and *through him to reconcile to himself all things*, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:18-20, NIV).

The Sunday on which the wave-sheaf offering was made is also the day on which a count of seven full weeks is to begin. “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. *Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath*; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD” (Leviticus 23:15-16).

This count of 50 days brings us to another biblical festival, this one in late spring—the feast of *Pentecost* (Acts 2:1), which means “fiftieth” in the Greek language. One of the Hebrew names for this festival means *the Feast of Weeks* because it occurs after a full count of seven weeks, at the time when “the *firstfruits* of wheat harvest” gets fully underway (Exodus 34:22).

This spring harvest period is symbolic of all of those who are being called and prepared for entering the Kingdom of God in “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4). They are the additional “firstfruits” that God is calling to salvation at this time by giving them His Holy Spirit.

As Paul explains, “We ourselves, *having the first fruits of the Spirit*, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, *waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body*” (Romans 8:23, New American Standard Bible).

The richness of meaning found in the festivals of Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost far exceed the imagined meaning of the Easter sunrise service. These biblical festivals, when observed and rightly understood, have the advantage of reminding us at the right season every year of many essential details relating to God’s plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

No wonder Paul wrote this instruction for Christians regarding Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed *Christ, our Passover*, was sacrificed for us. 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.” **GN**

Who’s Behind The Good News?



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

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

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

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

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



For additional information, visit our Web site:

www.ucg.org



Letters From Our Readers

“Is the United States Still a Moral Nation?”

I have just finished your article on whether the United States is still a moral nation. You did a good job of unraveling a tangled misrepresentation of the morals issue. And the article truly brings the issue to the feet of the reader, compelling him to action. I appreciate the research and the crafting.

C.M., Arizona

World News and Trends

I wish to continue receiving *The Good News*. My favorite section has been “World News and Trends.” It gives me the opportunity to know current issues all over the world in just two pages. But please include stories about African countries and South American countries in subsequent editions of your magazine.

T.I., Nigeria

The Word of God online

I could not sleep and was on the computer doing some research. I had grown tired and the thought came to mind to look up God’s Word. So I typed in “Jesus Christ” and found there were 18 million choices to choose from.

I selected yours and for the next two or three hours, I have been reading your Bible study program. It has easily provided me with a few hours of complete enjoyment and fulfillment. I am a believer with no doubt of whom my Creator and Lord and Savior are. But like most people, I am not as dutiful about reading as I should be. I have renewed ambition and desire to further understand our Father’s desire for our lives. Thanks for this wonderful opportunity to study the Word of God online.

C.A.H., Internet

Understanding the Bible at last

I want you to know that I have learned more about the Bible in the last year and a half than I learned all my life before. And I’m 78 years old. Thanks to you people, I’m very committed to it and I read at least two hours a day. Before I never understood a thing that I read. You have taught me how to look up the Scriptures and fully understand what I am reading.

D.B., Wadsworth, Ohio

Australasian readers

Enclosed please find my card to receive *The Good News*, which I started to read at my doctor’s office. I also would like to receive the booklets mentioned in other copies of the magazine. I believe we must as Christians really understand these things, especially in relation to the rise of Islam and wars around the world—like those involving the Middle East and the United States.

Reader, Mentone, Victoria

It is great that you continue to distribute *The Good News* of Jesus Christ to all parts of Australia and the Oceania region, including Papua New Guinea (PNG). Despite PNG being regarded as a Christian nation, reading and studying deeper into God’s Word is lacking. By reading thoroughly and diligently through your inspirational *Good News* magazine and booklets, I found the information to be convincing and containing great truths. I was thus motivated to distribute some copies of my magazines to friends who developed the interest to study them as well.

Reader, Papua New Guinea

Thank you very much for all your magazines which I always find interesting, informative and stimulating. I have particularly enjoyed your booklets *Creation and Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* and *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* They have often been a topic of animated discussions with my friends.

Reader, Leabrook, South Australia

Ethiopian reader

I appreciate your tireless efforts in publishing *The Good News* and distributing it for the readers who are keenly interested. It is very helpful in teaching Christians how to understand the Bible, how to give answers to questions in the Bible and how to practice it in our daily lives.

B.F., Ethiopia

Reaching Egyptian youth

I just wanted to encourage you that your work gets a lot of people to Jesus Christ in my country. I saw many of the Egyptian youth touched by your words and their hearts moved to the right way. I am praying to God to see your magazine in the Arabic language one day. I am sure it will be a

great project for the ministry of God.

W.W.R., Cairo, Egypt

Brazilian reader’s questions

One day by chance I linked up with the United Church of God Web site and found the rich material that is available all over the world, and amazingly, totally free. I just want to know a little more about you. Are you an evangelical or Catholic church (as we know it here in Brazil) or some other denomination?

K.F., Brazil

We are neither Catholic nor Protestant nor even evangelical in the usual sense. Our name, the United Church of God, an International Association, signifies that we are united in our commitment to faithfully follow the way of life and the mission of the Church revealed and established by God and His Son, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Scriptures. To understand our mission and key activities, please request or download our free booklet This Is the United Church of God.

Attending a United congregation

I am a new believer as I have read the Bible for the first time. From what I have read, most Christian churches fall short of the commandments of God. Yours is the first and only church that I have found that agrees with what I believe to be the truth. I am looking for a church here in the Colorado area that I might attend. Can you help me find a real Bible-believing church here?

P.B., Colorado

The United Church of God welcomes to its church services anyone who wishes to worship in peace and to learn more about the Bible. The Church has hundreds of congregations around the world dedicated to serving God and doing His work. If you would like to talk to one of our pastors, please contact the appropriate regional office listed in the editorial staff box on page 2 of this magazine. We have several congregations in Colorado.

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



Questions & Answers

Editor's note: Our answer to the question about the Trinity in the last issue generated quite a few additional questions. Since most of the questions revolved around the same basic points, for space reasons we have chosen to publish one representative letter in which those questions were asked so we can give a considerably more detailed response to that letter.

We thank all of those who wrote us with questions. If you would like more detailed information, please request our free booklet *Who Is God?*, which contains two chapters on the Trinity and the nature of the Holy Spirit. If you have further questions, feel free to write to our office nearest you from the list on page 2. We look forward to continuing to serve you.

Q: I am disappointed by your denomination's teaching about the Trinity in the last issue and find your reasons for rejecting the concept less than satisfactory. It is indeed one of the not-so-easy-to-grasp things of God.

Your selected passages highlight that the Spirit of God is just a wind, or a power, some inanimate thing that can be poured out and quenched, etc. But that's not the whole picture. Jesus refers to it as the Counselor who can only come and will come when Jesus leaves the earth, and that that was to be our great comfort (John 16:7).

Furthermore there are numerous places where the Holy Spirit is described in his activity with verbs such as help, dwell, is being sent forth, bears witness and searches all things, just to name some. Sounds like a person to me! Lastly, a personal favorite and quite appropriate here: "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26).

K.A., Pasadena, California

A. We appreciate your question. The current concept of a Trinity has been around for many centuries, and so most people look at the Scriptures through this lens, whether consciously or unconsciously. It's interesting to consider how the original writers of the Bible viewed the Holy Spirit. As noted

in our previous answer, the concept of the Trinity was not agreed upon until hundreds of years after the Bible was written and long after the apostles had died.

Let's first address why some scriptures appear to refer to the Holy Spirit as a masculine personage. Many people assume that the Holy Spirit is a person based on references to the Spirit as "he," "him" and "himself" in the New Testament. This confusion arises from the use of gender-inflected pronouns in the Greek language (a difficult concept to understand for those who speak only English).

Greek, like the Romance languages (Spanish, French, Italian, etc.), invokes a specific gender for every noun. Every object, animate or inanimate, is designated as either masculine, feminine or neuter. The gender is often unrelated to whether the item is indeed masculine or feminine.

For example, in French the word *livre*, meaning "book," is of the masculine gender and is referred to by a pronoun that would be equivalent to the English pronoun "he." And in Spanish, *mesa*, or "table," is in the feminine. Clearly, although these nouns have gender, their gender does not refer to books and tables *actually being* male or female. In the English language, in contrast, most nouns that do not refer to objects that are male or female are referred to in the *neuter* sense, with the pronoun "it."

We might note that in the Hebrew language, in which the Old Testament was written, the word translated "spirit," *ruach*, uses *feminine* pronouns. But the Holy Spirit clearly is not a woman.

In Greek, both *masculine* and *neuter* words are used to refer to the Holy Spirit. The Greek word translated "Counselor," "Helper" and "Comforter" in John chapters 14-16 is *parakletos*, a masculine word in Greek and thus referred to in these chapters by Greek pronouns equivalent to the English "he," "him," "his," "himself," "who" and "whom."

Because of the masculine gender of *parakletos*, these masculine pronouns are grammatically correct in Greek. But to translate these into *English* as "he," "him," etc., is grammatically *incorrect*.

For example, you would never translate a particular French sentence as "I'm looking

for my book so I can read him." While this grammatical construction makes sense in the French language, it is wrong in English. In the same way, to suppose on this basis that the Holy Spirit is a person to be referred to as "he" or "him" is incorrect.

There is no theological or biblical justification for referring to the term "Holy Spirit" with masculine pronouns, even in Greek. The Greek word *pneuma*, translated "spirit" (but also translated "wind" and "breath" in the New Testament), is a grammatically *neuter* word. So, in the Greek language, pronouns equivalent to the English "it," "its," "itself," "which" or "that" are properly used in referring to this word translated into English as "spirit."

Yet, when the King James Version was produced in 1611, the doctrine of the Trinity had already been generally accepted for more than 1,000 years. Thus the translators of that version, believing the Holy Spirit to be a person, usually (and incorrectly) chose *masculine* rather than *neuter* pronouns when referring to the Holy Spirit in English.

However, this wasn't always the case. Notice that in some passages in the KJV the translators *did* use the proper neuter pronouns. Romans 8:16, for example, says: "The Spirit *itself* [not *himself*] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Similarly, Romans 8:26 says "the Spirit *itself* [again, not *himself*] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Another example is Matthew 10:20, where Jesus says: "For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father *which* [not *who*] speaketh in you." Another is 1 Peter 1:11, which refers to "the Spirit of Christ *which* [again, not *who*] was in them . . ." The KJV translators did use the proper neuter pronouns in these verses.

Regrettably, later translators of the Bible have gone further than the King James translators in referring to the Holy Spirit as masculine rather than neuter. Thus the Holy Spirit is almost always referred to as "he" or "him" in modern versions. This reflects not linguistic accuracy, but the incorrect assumptions or doctrinal bias of Bible translators.

What about the second part of your

Continued on page 31

Horses That Keep the Sabbath

It's been said that the relationship between human beings and horses is one of the most ancient and mutually beneficial relationships between man and animal to ever exist on our planet.

For Linda Henderson, this has certainly proven true.

by Lynn Marshall

Those who observe God's Sabbath also ensure their animals rest on the Sabbath in respect to God's command of Exodus 20:10: "In it you shall do no work . . . nor your cattle."

In this context, the reference to "cattle" includes all domestic livestock. Not only does it mean "no work," but for a show horse it means to not compete in events on the Sabbath—defined in the Bible as the period from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday.

For people and horses competing in equestrian events, this presents a difficulty because so many horse events are scheduled on Saturdays. Here is how one Sabbath-keeper competes despite this challenge.

Linda Henderson is a United Church of God member who has competed at horse shows from Ohio to Florida for decades. There are no bigger or more prestigious shows in the United States than the Palm Beach, Florida, shows in the winter. Linda would often win when the shows were not on Saturdays, but could only manage runner-up when events were scheduled over the whole weekend.

At the big four-day events, beginning on Thursday and ending on Sunday, Linda would participate on the first two days, skip events on God's Sabbath and then show again on Sunday. She was rather successful in this.

On one such occasion she had a competitor criticize her for not showing her horses on Saturday. The barn the horses were stabled in would always have a sign on the stalls of her horses on Saturdays, which would read "rest."

A competitor once said, "Oh, yeah, Linda's horses keep the Sabbath, whatever that means!" And it stuck. She often has people ask her why she doesn't show on both Saturday and Sunday, and she explains. It is all part of her personal example and witness of God's way of life.

Apart from not competing on the Sabbath, a Christian may follow the example of Jesus Christ by getting up early at times

to maintain a relationship with God in prayer and Bible study. "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed" (Mark 1:35).

She did begin to look for another horse for her daughter and herself to take lessons on. She must have looked at 50 horses for that "animal babysitter" to help her through her illness.



Linda Henderson's love of horses has been a long passion. She feels the love she has shown to her horses has been more than repaid, especially during her long illness.

For Linda, this may mean rising long before sunrise as there are times she has to ship her horses early on Sunday for a show later that day when the other competitors have already done so on Saturday.

But, as Linda explains, this is important for her as she feels that without God's help she couldn't have accomplished what she has. The bottom line is that God's Sabbath is not a burden in competing. She has learned that she must be organized and also be satisfied with only participating in the events available to her.

Horses are therapeutic

In 1999 the bottom fell out of Linda's life when she began a long struggle with various health problems. Thinking her riding days were over, she sold her lovely mare and retired while still on top of her career.

One day she stopped to look at a horse trailer and the professional who ran the barn insisted she look at a quarter horse for sale that had hit hard times—like Linda. The horse had once been a big winner in youth classes, but the owners were now out of money and were forced to sell him.

What Linda saw was depressing to say the least. He was skinny; his feet were a mess; his coat was a mousy brown color and, to top it all off, he was lame.

She started to say "No, thank you" when "Tommy" made eye contact with her. A horse's eye is the porthole into his brain and attitude, and Tommy's eye told her a lot.

So Linda tried him, and from that first time she knew he was special—with a natural balance, lovely gait and a soft mouth very responsive to the bit. She bought him,

lame and all, and together with help from her vet and blacksmith and her trainer they put him back together again. And what a shock to them all! This transformed 16-hand chocolate chestnut with flaxen mane and tail was soon winning.

He wins whenever she shows him. The judges love him not only because of his presence, elegance and willing obedience, but also his lovely attitude. Linda considers him a gift from God, especially in her recuperation from illness. She has learned that these majestic animals have a positive effect on health and well-being.

A relationship that benefits both

Horses are uniquely designed to be ridden. They have a natural gap in their mouth exactly where the bit fits. Their back is designed to perfectly accommodate a human seat or saddle. They have nerve patches low down on their stomach exactly where a rider's lower leg hangs, and this uniquely assists control and communication of commands. And, of course, they are reasonably easy to train and have been domesticated for thousands of years.

Due to their gentle and accommodating nature, horses are used a lot for the disabled and handicapped. A horse will typically put out special effort for them. Some will shorten their stride to suit the rider or lean in one direction to balance a rider who is slipping to one side.

There is something about them that is relaxing and makes a person feel good. A famous saying among horse lovers goes, "There's something about the outside of a horse that's good for the inside of a man."

To Linda, simply stroking them, having them nuzzle her and breathe on her neck, and their very smell raises her spirits. Linda's doctor says her horses have probably kept her out of a wheelchair.

She believes God gave us these beautiful creatures to help us. If we take care of them, including giving them rest on the Sabbath, they will take care of us as well. **GN**

Trinity

Continued from page 29

question, where the Holy Spirit is described as apparently engaging in personal activity?

While at first this might seem to indicate that the Spirit is a distinct person, it doesn't really prove that at all. In the languages of Bible times, nonpersonal things were sometimes described in personal ways and as having personlike activities.

For example, in Genesis 4:10 God says to Cain: "What have you done? *The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.*" Here Abel's shed blood is described as having a "voice" that "cries out" from the ground. Yet clearly this is figurative language, as blood has no voice and cannot speak.

Similarly, in the book of Proverbs wisdom is personified as calling aloud and crying out (Proverbs 1:20-21). Proverbs 8 describes wisdom as crying out, standing on a high hill, calling to men, speaking, having lips and mouth, loving and being loved, having children and having accompanied and rejoiced with God. Yet obviously wisdom is not a person and does none of these things.

In Habakkuk 2:11 stones and timbers are described as talking to each other. In Psalm 65:13 pastures and valleys are said to shout and sing. Yet these things clearly do not happen literally.

At times the Bible applies such figurative language to the Holy Spirit, ascribing activity to it as though it were a person. Yet, as noted in our earlier answer, the Bible also describes the Holy Spirit in ways that show *it is not a person.*

In some cases where the Holy Spirit is described in a personal activity, we should understand this as God using the Holy Spirit as the *power* or *agency* through which He acts. Consider, for example, that if a man's hand takes hold of a book and lifts it, this does not make the hand a separate person. The hand is merely the agency through which the man is acting.

Even so, the Holy Spirit is the agency through which God—Father or Son or both—acts. Of course, the Holy Spirit is far more than a hand. It is the very power, mind and life essence of God—pervading infinity so that by it God is omnipresent.

The reference to the Holy Spirit as a Counselor or Advocate is a personification that provides a good analogy of part of the Spirit's function in the lives of true Christians. Yet, many passages show the Spirit as the power of God, not a separate person.

For example, in Matthew 1:20 we see

that the Holy Spirit is not a distinct entity, but God's divine power, the agency through which He worked. Here we read that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus continually prayed to and addressed God *the Father* as His Father and not the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:32-33; 11:25-27; 12:50). He never represented the Holy Spirit as His Father.

Jesus likewise never spoke of the Holy Spirit as a divine third person. Instead, in numerous passages He spoke only of the relationship between God the Father and Himself (Matthew 26:39; Mark 13:32; 15:34; John 5:18, 22; etc.). The Holy Spirit as a person is conspicuously absent throughout Christ's teaching. Of particular interest in this regard are Jesus' many statements about Himself and the Father, especially when He never makes similar statements about Himself and the Holy Spirit.

We should also consider that, in visions of God's throne recorded in the Bible, although the Father and Christ are seen, the Holy Spirit as a third person is completely absent. See, for example, Acts 7:55-56, Daniel 7:9-14 and Revelation 4-5 and 7:10. Jesus is repeatedly mentioned as being at the right hand of God, but no one is mentioned as being at the Father's left hand. Nowhere are three divine persons pictured together in the Scriptures.

Even in the final book of the Bible (and the last to be written), the Holy Spirit as a divine person is completely absent from its pages. The book describes "a new heaven and new earth" (Revelation 21:1) wherein "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them" (verse 3). Christ, the Lamb of God, is also present (verse 22). The Holy Spirit as a separate person, however, is again absent—another inexplicable oversight if this Spirit is the third person of a triune God.

This is why Paul states in 1 Corinthians 8:6 that "there is only one God, the Father, . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ . . ." without mentioning the Holy Spirit as a divine person.

We must not cling to long-held religious traditions if they contradict the Scriptures. Our beliefs must rest solidly on the teachings of the Holy Bible. Jesus said, "[God's] word is truth" (John 17:17).

Our free booklet *Who Is God?* contains much more information on the true nature of the Holy Spirit as explained in the Bible. It also addresses various other scriptures commonly thought to support the existence of the Trinity. We hope interested readers will request a copy. **GN**

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What Does Bible Prophecy Tell Us About the Time of the End?



For thousands of years people have been fascinated with predictions of the end of the world. If we look into the inspired writings of the biblical prophets and apostles, we find many prophecies that refer to the

time of the end. Should we take them seriously? Are world conditions such that the predictions could be fulfilled in our day?

Jesus Christ Himself talked of a future time so horrendous that no human beings would be spared "unless

those days were shortened" (Matthew 24:22). Did He have our time in mind?

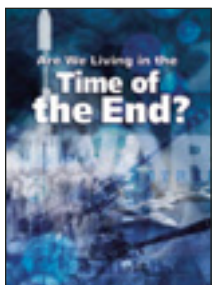
Many prophecies leave us in no doubt that

increasingly cataclysmic events will occur before God's direct intervention in human affairs. These terrifying prophecies will see their fulfillment at some future time. The crucial question is *when*.

This eye-opening booklet examines exactly what Jesus Christ, His apostles and the prophets of old really said about the intriguing days they refer to as the time of the end.

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