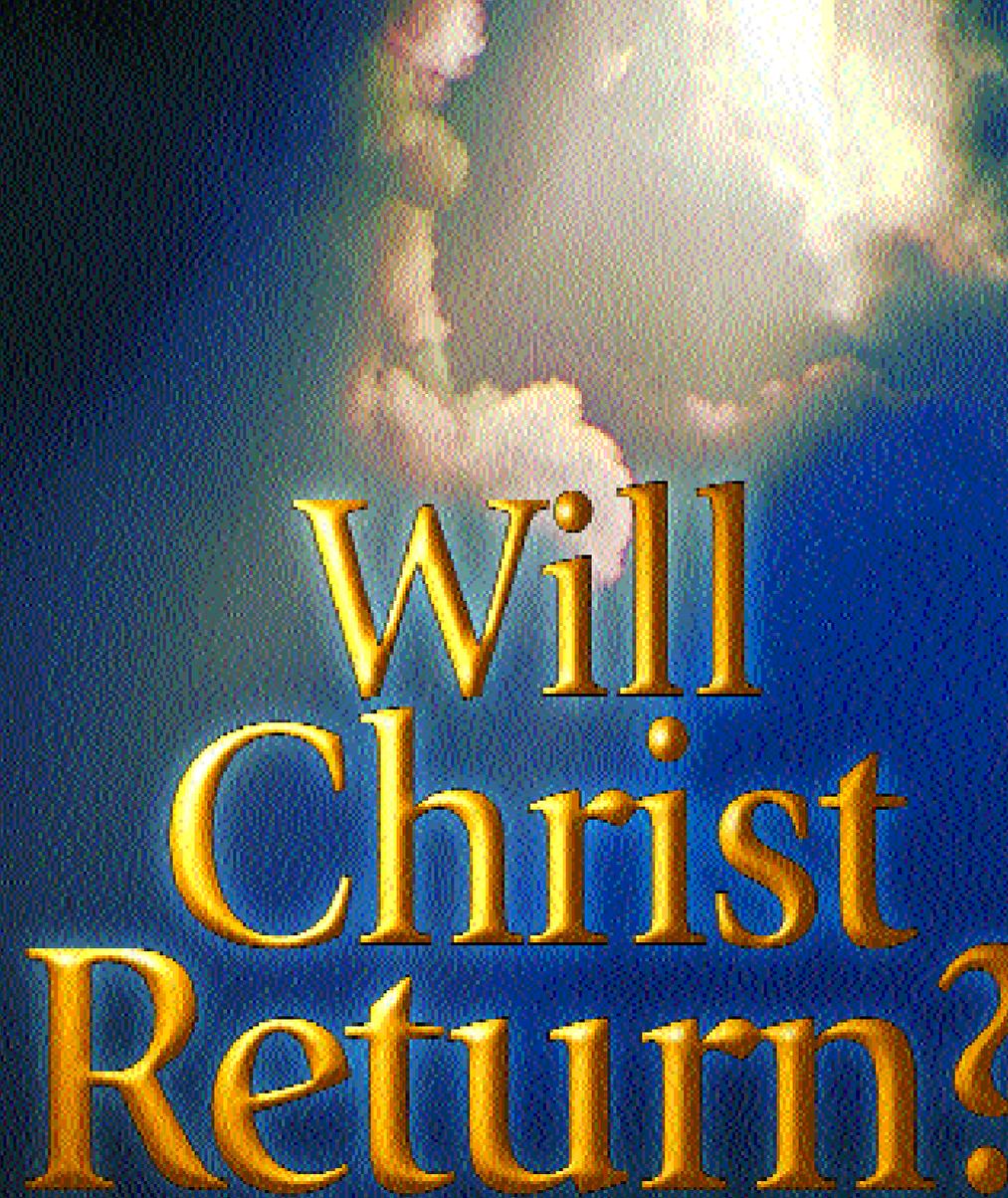


The Good News



Will
Christ
Return?

*Armageddon • Should You Keep the Festivals Jesus Observed?
Archaeology and the Book of Judges • Why Will Christ Return?*

Can Civilizations Collapse?

The average schoolchild in the Western world learns at some point in his curriculum about the fall of the Roman Empire. The image of a once seemingly invincible world power disintegrating into dust troubles us when we think of our own complex world. Is it possible that civilization as we know it could suddenly collapse?

The intricately enmeshed global society man has built may be far more vulnerable than we think. It's a world where, as they say, a butterfly flapping its wings on one side of the planet can cause a hurricane on the other side. How fragile is a civilization?

In the last century European archaeologists sifted the sandy soils of the Euphrates flood plain in search of lost cities. The ruins they found were at one time at the heart of civilization. Those cities were filled with art and literature and agricultural abundance. There, in today's Iraq, the archaeologists discovered the ruins and artifacts of once-proud Assyrian and Babylonian cultures.

The effect on those romantic travelers was perhaps different from what it would be today. After all, they were living in an era of faith in *their* civilization, of pride in *its* achievements. The powerhouse nations of Western Europe dominated the world's trade and industry in the bustling 19th century.

We live in a world far less certain of its moorings, not nearly as confident of its future. A modern visitor to those same sands of Iraq might conclude that the civilization we know could end up the same way as those of old: as a pile of windswept rubble. We could find our civilization as fragile as the Assyrians or Romans found theirs to be.

In all of this can we find a source of assurance about the future? Is there any comfort to be found for this anxiety over civilization?

There is, but not before some tragedies that must occur. In a book as old as those Middle Eastern ruins, the One who can give comfort says that in fact He has played a role in the downfall of arrogant civilizations: "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks" (Isaiah 10:12). "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isaiah 13:19).

Yet God confirms that He will play a role in the future of ancient peoples. A time will come when "Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, 'Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance'" (Isaiah 19:24-25).

How is it that the God who punishes civilizations to the point that their glory disappears will restore them in peace and harmony?

The answer is all bound up in the truths explained in this issue's lead articles about the prophesied return of Jesus Christ. God purposes a grand design in all that He does and allows. He reminds us of His control with these words: "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'" (Isaiah 46:9-10).

Can *our* civilization collapse? Without a doubt. Will it be restored in such a way that peace and prosperity are guaranteed? That is the message of the Bible, the ultimate good news.

—David Hulme

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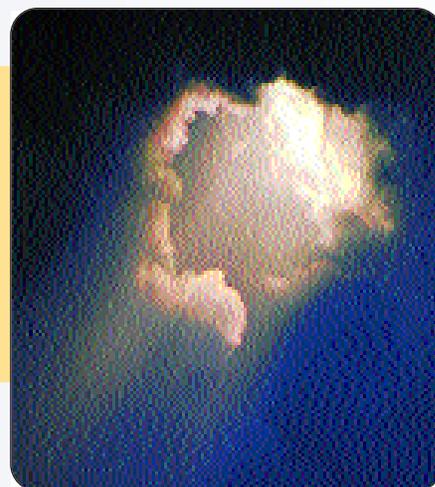
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Will Christ Return?

*Do you believe in the return of Jesus Christ?
Should you believe in it? What difference does it make?*

by David Treybig

Will Jesus Christ return? As we approach the dawn of a new millennium, interest in a prophesied future is surging. Most people do not believe Jesus Christ will return to earth. Considering that Christians are a minority of inhabitants of the world, this fact is obvious. What is surprising is that in the United States, where the majority of the population professes Christianity, only some six out of 10 believe in the second coming.

Those who do believe that Jesus will come again are further divided over whether it will be a literal return. Many think that good people, through the leadership of the church, will bring about a utopian age, making it unnecessary for Jesus to actually come down from heaven. From this perspective, many believe He will return only symbolically.

Numerous books have been written and bought by people searching for authoritative information on Christ's return. But Jesus repeatedly said that no one would know the day nor hour of His second coming (Matthew 24:36, 50; 25:13). Of course,

that hasn't prevented many from trying their hand at prediction. Many well-intentioned religious figures have set dates, prophesying Christ's return at various times over the centuries. Those dates have all passed without the great event taking place.

Was the promise of Jesus' return simply an empty pledge, a vain attempt to foster hope in weak people who need the crutch of the hopeful expectation inherent in the gospel message? Was Jesus merely a great leader who imparted to mankind lofty humanitarian ideals?

Or can we believe in the literal return of Jesus Christ?

The plan from the beginning

Before we consider His second coming, we need to better understand Jesus' first coming. Let's be clear about one thing: Jesus Christ's first coming was not a reaction to failed policy. God did not send Jesus to earth as part of an improvised plan to overcome the unforeseen sin of Adam and Eve.

On the contrary, as the apostle Paul explained, God's "purpose and grace" was "given to us in Christ Jesus *before time*

began” (2 Timothy 1:9, emphasis added throughout). His first coming was not an afterthought.

Keeping this in mind helps us understand why Jesus is spoken of as having been “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8) and “fore-ordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20). God’s plan existed from the beginning. Isaiah described God as “declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:10). God and Christ knew exactly what They were doing.

Only a few weeks after Jesus’ crucifixion, the apostle Peter began preaching about Christ’s second coming. In his first recorded sermon, Peter said, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before” (Acts 3:19-20). Christ had just completed His first stay on earth and Peter was already speaking of another. How did Peter know Jesus would come again?

Peter continued speaking of Christ, “whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (verse 21). Peter knew that the prophets had spoken of this event from the beginning; the Old Testament contains many prophecies of the Messiah.

Because they had seen the fulfillment of the prophecies of Jesus’ first coming, Peter and the other apostles had a sound basis for believing the prophecies regarding His second. Nearing the end of his physical life, Peter emphasized this important truth in two letters that are preserved in the Bible. These works are recognized as his formal and final statement of belief preserved for posterity.

A more sure prophetic word

Notice Peter’s inspired words: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were *eyewitnesses* of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word *confirmed*, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:16-19).

When Peter spoke of the first coming of Jesus, the “transfiguration,” which Peter had witnessed (Matthew 17:1-2), gave him confidence that his Master was the Son of God. God the Father’s spoken approval of Jesus at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5) had the effect of confirming “the prophetic word” (2 Peter 1:19). This had implications for the second coming. Peter had seen the glorified Christ as He will be at His return.

Prophecies of Christ

Isaiah prophesied extensively of Christ’s first and second comings. Many of Isaiah’s words do not apply to Christ’s first coming. For example, he foretold a time during which earth’s inhabitants will “go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily” (Isaiah 2:19).

Zechariah spoke of an era when “the LORD shall be King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9).

Daniel was another prophet God used to reveal Jesus’ second coming. Through a remarkable dream given to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, God revealed there would be four world-ruling empires followed by a fifth: the Kingdom of God (Daniel 2). Years later, when King Belshazzar assumed the Babylonian throne, God gave Daniel a similar dream with additional details about this fifth kingdom, including the return of Christ to rule the earth.

Notice how Daniel described his vision: “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an *everlasting* dominion, which *shall not pass away*, and His kingdom the one *which shall not be destroyed*” (Daniel 7:13-14).

Jesus did not fulfill these prophecies during His first stay on earth. He *announced*, but did not establish, the Kingdom of God.

An angel further explained that “the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom *forever*, even forever and ever” (verse 18).

Jesus did not fulfill these prophecies during His first stay on earth. After He came in the flesh, He *announced*, but did not establish, the Kingdom of God. On trial before Pilate, He said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Even though Jesus acknowledged that He was born to rule (verse 37), He was referring to a time yet future.

Signs of His coming

The disciples understood Jesus would come again. They often asked questions about this future event. In

the Olivet prophecy, so called because Jesus spoke these words from the Mount of Olives, He described conditions that would be prevalent before He would come again (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).

These conditions included false Messiahs usurping Jesus' role and position, wars, famines, diseases, earthquakes and persecution of those who would truly follow Christ. In an age characterized by lawlessness (disregard of God's eternal law), Christ said the gospel of the Kingdom of God would be preached in all the world before His second coming (Matthew 24:14).

Very few people understand that Christ's message, the gospel, includes His return and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Many believe the gospel is only a message about Christ's life, concerning His actions on earth after His first coming. Sadly, the wonderful truths surrounding His second coming are largely overlooked or dismissed as allegorical. The commission to preach the *same gospel* Jesus taught has been given to the Church of God (Matthew 28:19-20). (For additional information on this subject, request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.)

How Christ will return

A good place to begin understanding how Christ will return is to note how He left. After a discussion with His disciples concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), we read that "when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white

apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come *in like manner* as you saw Him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:9-11).

Though Jesus will return in a way similar to His departure, there is one distinction about His second coming that Jesus Himself (Revelation 1:1) revealed to John: "Behold, He is coming with clouds,

Very few people understand that Christ's message, the gospel, includes His return and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. The wonderful truths surrounding His second coming are largely overlooked.

and *every eye will see Him . . .*" (verse 7). Jesus' return will be a public event; *everyone* will see Him.

Besides the spectacular sight of the returning Christ, the apostle Paul identifies other miraculous events that will accompany this historic event. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And

thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

More details are in Revelation 11:15-19: "Then the seventh angel sounded: and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!' And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: 'We

give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.' Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail."

This passage of Scripture confirms that the second coming will not be a secret occurrence. Everyone will be able to see Christ; an archangel will announce His return; a trumpet will sound. When these things happen, God's people who are alive on earth will be made immortal along with those who are simultaneously resurrected from their graves (1 Corinthians 15:51-53), all rising in the air to meet Christ.

Christ's plan of action

When Jesus returns, the world will not be a tranquil, peaceful place. Of the conditions just before His return, Jesus said, "If that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive*; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:22, New English Bible). Jesus will return to a world on the brink of self-destruction and annihilation.

The Bible further reveals that, instead of welcoming Jesus at His return, the first thing the nations will do is literally *fight* Him. Revelation 9 describes how

Why can't we know when Christ will return?

Jesus plainly stated that no one can know the day or hour He will return (Matthew 24:36, 44; 25:13; Acts 1:6-7). We may recognize the general period when conditions are right for Him to return (Matthew 24:32-33), but no person will be able to determine the day.

Why won't God let us know the day? Perhaps it is because, if we knew the time, we would lose our focus. The Scriptures teach us that we must be continually centered on this reality. Jesus told us to be alert, spiritually awake, aware and diligent (Matthew 24:42-44; 25:13; Mark 13:33, 35, 37; Luke 21:34-36).

Even though the everyday routines of life will always require our attention, Christ told us to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33) and pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). We are not to lose sight of that future reality.

—David Treybig

enormous armies will be mobilized in the end time, gathering for a showdown against each other in the Holy Land. However, as Christ returns they will instead face off to battle against Him. This will take place at Jerusalem's Mount of Olives, where He will first set foot on earth (Zechariah 14:1-4).

The apostle John recorded a vision of Jesus at His return. Shocking to the sensibilities of some, it clearly identifies Christ as prepared to wage war.

"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and *makes war*. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the *fierceness and wrath of Almighty God*. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:11-16).

This picture is strikingly different from the loving, peaceful demeanor most often associated with Jesus. Since the purpose of the Kingdom of God is to bring about peace for the world (Isaiah 9:7), why does it begin with warfare? After all, one third of mankind will have already been killed in the events leading up to Christ's return (Revelation 9:15, 18).

Why a battle at the end of the age?

To find the reason for this battle, we go back to the Garden of Eden. From the beginning God gave mankind instructions that would produce happiness and eternal life (Genesis 3). Swayed by Satan's deceptive advice, Adam and Eve rejected God's instructions. They chose to decide for themselves how to live.

This largely unaltered pattern continues throughout Bible history. God gave the ancient Israelites His laws and encouraged them to obey so they could be blessed (Deuteronomy 30:19). They decided otherwise, as most people have today.

With the exception of a few who genuinely love God, demonstrated by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3), most reject God's straightforward teachings in the Bible. Many mistakenly believe that Christ kept the law for us, therefore we no longer need to obey it.

Reflecting such misguided perspectives, a 1994 U.S. survey of 1,200 people ages 15 to 35 "found that most of those polled could name no more than two commandments, and as the essayist Cullen Murphy wrote, "They weren't too happy about some of the others when they were told about them'" (John Leo, *U.S. News & World Report*, Nov. 18, 1996, p. 16). Such an attitude and approach were prophesied by Jesus when He said, "Lawlessness will abound" (Matthew 24:12), culminating in the terrible events leading up to His return.

But, after Christ defeats the gathered armies, the Kingdom of God will be established on earth. This government of God will be based on His eternal, unchanging law (Micah 4:2; Romans 7:12), which will provide the foundation for a worldwide program to reeducate everyone in God's ways. Of this time God

When Jesus returns, the world will not be a tranquil, peaceful place. Of the conditions leading up to His return, Jesus said, "If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive . . ."

also says, "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:27, New International Version).

What Jesus Christ expects

The Scriptures are plain regarding the promise of Jesus Christ's second coming, but keeping a clear vision of this remarkable future is a challenge. What can we do to hold onto this perspective and make it the core of our lives?

Notice Jesus' instructions in Mark 1:14-15: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent, and believe in the gospel.*'"

Believing the gospel of the Kingdom of God and repenting of disobedience to God's law are the foundation of our relationship with God. By practicing the faith

of the Bible, our lives are ingrained with this perspective. Our daily prayers should include appeals for God's Kingdom to come (Matthew 6:9-10).

God gives us reminders of Christ's return and His wonderful Kingdom. Observing Holy Days revealed by God reminds us how His Kingdom will be established and all of mankind given the opportunity to be part of it. The weekly Sabbath and the annual Feast of Trumpets keep us mindful of the second coming of Jesus Christ and His prophesied rule on earth. (If you are interested in knowing more about these Holy Days, write for our free booklets *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

Focus on Christ's return

God's people have long anticipated the Messiah's reign. Joseph of Arimathea, the disciple who asked Pilate for Jesus' body after His crucifixion, was described as "a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43). To the Thessalonians Paul wrote: "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patient

waiting for Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5, King James Version).

James reminds Christians to "be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:7-8).

Hebrews 9:28 also promises: "To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time." These scriptures show us that Jesus expects us to conduct our lives with the expectation of His return foremost in mind.

Will Christ return? He placed His own credibility on the line. Because He promised, "*I will come again*" (John 14:3), we can have absolute confidence that He will return. Because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), this prophecy *will* be fulfilled. Christ *will* return. *GN*

Why Will Christ Return?

Many churches understand and teach that Jesus Christ will return. Far fewer know why He will return and what will happen when He arrives.

by Robert Dick

As we approach the year 2000, some observers expect to see the greatest American religious revival of this century, if not in the history of the United States.

A range of opinion about what the coming years will bring exists among theologians and observers of religion in the United States and other Western Christian societies. Some believers of the Bible speculate whether the year 2000 will mark the return of Jesus Christ.

Between now and the last year of both the 20th century and the second millennium, you will see a steady flow of material from religious circles pondering whether we are about to witness the second coming.

Meanwhile we see a growing movement among Messianic Jews. In a world of Judaism that rejects Jesus Christ, several hundred thousand Jews do accept Him as the promised Messiah and anticipate His return, possibly within the decade. Other Jews, who don't accept Jesus, still look forward to a Messiah, a conquering champion who will come to restore Israel to its former greatness and at last bring peace. They base their beliefs on hundreds of prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament.

Many scholars recognize the pattern of the week established at creation and enshrined in the Ten Commandments: six days of human labor followed by the Creator's seventh day of rest. They see that the Bible speaks of a 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ, a Sabbath rest for mankind (Revelation 20:1-6; Hebrews 4:1-11).

They are familiar with the Bible chronology that shows 4,000 years before the time of Christ and another 2,000 years since then, indicating that we are approaching 6,000 years of biblically recorded human history. They wonder whether God's weekly pattern will also extend to human history—whether God has made six millennial days for mankind and one millennial Sabbath for Himself and His purpose. If so, man's six millennial days are seen to be rapidly drawing near their end.

A loaded question

In this curious mix of expectation and apprehension, of

some Christians anticipating the imminent second coming and Jews looking forward to the Messiah, a fundamental question emerges for believers in Jesus' return: *Why* will He return?

The answer isn't mystical or obscure. In fact, it's quite plain when we just look. The Bible gives the answer, although it's not popularly accepted.

God inspired the prophet Hosea to write: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you . . ." (Hosea 4:6).

Here we see an important principle at work. God cuts off understanding when we cut off *our willingness* to understand. This is the straightforward message of Hosea 4:6. God says people are destroyed *for lack of knowledge*. Why do they lack knowledge? Because they have *rejected* knowledge. The problem isn't that the knowledge is not available or that it's unclear; it is that the knowledge is *rejected*.

Biblical description of Christ's return

Throughout the Bible, scripture after scripture describes Christ's return. These verses reveal what will happen when Christ ultimately returns to earth.

Jesus Himself said His second coming is certain. After describing the earth-shaking events that will precede His return, He adds: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:30-31).

The apostle Paul further describes this gathering of the elect: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Paul explains that at Christ's return "the dead in Christ will rise first." Accompanying them will be those "who are alive and remain": the faithful followers of Christ who are alive at that time. What else happens at the time of this resurrection, and what happens to Christ's followers who are still alive?

Paul gives more details in 1 Corinthians 15. “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but *we shall all be changed*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and *the dead will be raised imperishable*, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and *this mortal must put on immortality*” (verses 50-53, New American Standard Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Paul is clear about this resurrection: The dead are to be raised imperishable, and Christ’s faithful followers who are alive at the time will be changed. God will instantaneously transform them from perishable to imperishable, mortal to immortal. Those in this resurrection, and those who are “changed,” will be “raised in incorruption,” “raised in power,” “raised a spiritual body” (verses 42-44, New King James Version). God gives them eternal life *at Christ’s return*, not before His return.

Kingdom of God on earth

Notice what the apostle John says about this event: “Blessed and holy is

the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. This is the same “great sound of a trumpet” of which Christ spoke, as we read earlier. It is the same “trumpet of God” and “last trumpet” that Paul said will accompany the dramatic raising of the dead and transformation of the living faithful followers of Christ to immortal spirit life, as we also read. This mighty blast announces that the Kingdom of God—the heart and core of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:14-15)—has at last become a reality.

The truth lost

This and similar scriptures have been in the Bible for 2,000 years or more. It is not terribly difficult to understand them. Some have even become part of popular culture. For many years singers have referred to the time of the second coming as “when Gabriel blows his horn.” This and similar references are understood from the many mentions of the trumpet sound that will accompany Christ’s return.

Why doesn’t Christianity embrace the biblical picture of a kingdom coming to *earth*, introduced at the return of Christ with the sound of the last trumpet? Why is this not commonly understood or taught in churches?

It isn’t that it cannot be seen in Scrip-

ture. It is the same “great sound of a trumpet” of which Christ spoke, as we read earlier. It is the same “trumpet of God” and “last trumpet” that Paul said will accompany the dramatic raising of the dead and transformation of the living faithful followers of Christ to immortal spirit life, as we also read. This mighty blast announces that the Kingdom of God—the heart and core of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:14-15)—has at last become a reality.

These statements correctly explain what the Bible teaches about the Kingdom of God. Such knowledge and understanding *are* available. However, many times the lack of understanding comes from a *wrong motive*—recognized or unrecognized—that blinds the mind. Among traditional Christians, could something be blocking this understanding of God’s Kingdom?

In Protestant theology, belief in the return of Christ could be compared to a vestigial organ. In scientific terms, a vestigial organ is a part of the body that is believed by biologists to have once had a specific function, but now no longer serves a useful purpose.

What, then, will be the *purpose* of Christ’s return? What good will it do?

Different views of the resurrection

Conventional theology has no good reason or explanation for Christ’s return and a resurrection. After all, if you and I possess an immortal soul, why do we need a resurrection? You can’t bring back to life something that doesn’t die. So why do you need a resurrection when there’s nothing to resurrect?

If we are

Why doesn’t Christianity embrace the biblical picture of a kingdom coming to *earth*, introduced at the return of Christ with the sound of the last trumpet? Why is this not commonly taught in churches?

he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6). He adds that God makes those in this resurrection “a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they shall rule on earth” (Revelation 5:10, Today’s English Version).

The people who will be resurrected to eternal life at that time will rule *on earth*, not in heaven! Why? Because the Kingdom of God is established *on earth* at Christ’s return. Notice Revelation 11:15: “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of *this world* have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’”

According to John, this happens when

ture. It comes down to the simple fact that *people do not wish to embrace it*.

Read what the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge* says about the Kingdom of God: “According to Scripture, the kingdom of God in its real and ultimate constitution does not belong to the present age, is not the result of a simple, natural, process of cosmic development. It is a kingdom from heaven, manifesting itself in a world of sin,—a fountain of life gushing out into the desolation of death; and its object is to shape human life according to the divine image in Christ.

“It develops itself in conflict with a false kingdom and religion, whose head is the prince of the world. Before Christianity or Christ finally overcomes the false and opposing elements, a consum-

judged at the instant of death and the immortal soul is consigned to heaven or hell, why would we need a resurrection? The body is buried and decays; the soul continues. What, then, is the useful purpose in reviving the body later?

These questions illustrate only a few of the problems with traditional explanations. Revelation 20:11-13 shows clearly that many resurrected people will be judged after Christ's return, not at their moment of death when this life is over. If immortality is inherent within us, why wait hundreds or even thousands of years after death for the judgment? To resolve this and other contrasts between their teachings and the Bible, early theologians came up with *limbus patrum*, *limbus infantum* and various other forms of limbo, or purgatory—none of which is found in the Bible.

Where, in these traditional teachings, is there a need for the Kingdom of God? Where is the need for the return of Jesus Christ?

It is fascinating to read theologians' explanations for the reason for the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead in view of their beliefs about the immortal soul. At best they feebly attempt to force something that cannot be denied make some sense in their structure of beliefs. The most sensible view—although it makes little sense—is that the body died and the soul lived, and, since they both did good or bad together, the resurrection is to reunite them to either enjoy heaven together or suffer in hell together.

Views of the Kingdom of God

The Roman Catholic Church constructed a theology that made *it* the Kingdom of God, thereby fulfilling the coming of the Kingdom in itself.

In doing so, it removed the need for Christ's return to establish a kingdom. The *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, continuing with its explanation of the Kingdom of God, explains: "In an earlier period this kingdom was identified with the Church. The Roman Catholics regarded it as the visible Church, ruled by a visible representative of Christ . . ." (p. 1246). Catholic theology made the church the Kingdom of God, with the vicar (one who sits in the place of) of Christ, the pope, as the head of that supposed kingdom.

The leaders of the Reformation took an opposing view to the Catholic Church's claim to be the Kingdom of God. They developed a new interpretation. As *Schaff-Herzog* explains: "The Protestants, looking upon its ideal side, regarded it [the Kingdom] as the Christian institution of salvation." So the Kingdom of God came to be defined not as a church, but as salvation. If one accepted Christ, he was considered to be in a saved condition. If he were saved, he was considered to be part of the Kingdom. The collective group of saved believers became the Kingdom of God.

The encyclopedia continues: "But the more recent theology has given to the idea [of the Kingdom of God] a broader significance; namely, that it designates redeemed humanity with its divinely revealed destiny manifesting itself in a religious communion or the Church, a social communion or the State, and an aesthetic communion, expressing itself in forms of knowledge and art" (ibid.).

This was written in the late 1800s. By that time the Kingdom of God had been further redefined; now it was community, church and state combined with the development of the arts and aesthetics so that all things beautiful and good flowed together and melded to make up the Kingdom—a rather ethereal definition of the Kingdom of God.

Overlooking the obvious

Bible scholars have identified more than 300 prophecies of the first coming of Jesus Christ in the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the other prophets. But how can churches preach about those 300 prophecies, yet miss the hundreds of additional scriptures that teach us about Christ's *second* coming and the establishing of God's Kingdom?

How can some ignore, as they preach that the Kingdom of God is already here, Isaiah's statement that a time will come when a lion and a wolf will lie down with a lamb and a calf, and a child will lead them? (Isaiah 11:6). In today's world, children who lead lions are eaten by lions. Lambs who dwell with wolves become food for wolves. Children who play near nesting places of cobras are bitten by cobras and die, unlike the promise in Isaiah's prophecy (verse 8).

The Kingdom of God is not already here. The knowledge of God does not fill this earth "as the waters cover the sea" (verse 9). The world is not a place of peace, and peace does not reign on God's "holy mountain" (verse 9). Jerusalem has been a city of violence ever since the days of Isaiah. The prophecies of the Kingdom of God do not fit our day.

In rejecting the understanding of Jesus Christ's return to earth to rule as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16), modern Christianity also unwittingly rejects the very message that He brought: the gospel, or *good news*, of the coming Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:11).

We see the basic message of Scripture through the pages of the Bible. The world is *not* a good place, and it will *never* be a good place until Christ comes and makes it so. In spite of the best efforts of humanity, the best product that humans can create is a temporary and uneven peace. We see the atrocities continue among the Bosnians and Serbs, Kurds and Iraqis, Hutus and Tutsis. There can be no such thing as world peace as long as mankind rules the world.

Why God will intervene

Another part of that basic biblical message is that God loves people enough to have given His Son for them. But it

RECOMMENDED READING

To better understand God's plan for humanity, please request *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Both booklets clearly explain what the Bible teaches about God's plan. For your free copies, contact us at the number or address nearest you on page 2.

would be a grievous error to confuse His love with tolerance of sin. God's Word makes plain that He will not tolerate sin forever. God has made it plain throughout His Word that He is patient and forgiving. He has made it equally plain that His patience does have a limit. We have a God who loves us dearly, so dearly that He gave His Son, His most precious possession, for us. But it is foolish to mistake that patient, forgiving love for a blind indulgence. God has made it plain throughout His Word that the day will come when His forbearance reaches its end.

His early disciples wondered, as we do, about the return of their Master. "Tell us," they said, "When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). Christ's reply must have stunned them. The signs of His coming would not be pleasant, He said. "It will be a time of great distress; there has never been such a time from the beginning of the world until now, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive . . .*" (verses 21-22, New English Bible).

No part of the Word of God is free from the simple, blunt statements that God's forbearance of sin will one day end and He will intervene to stop it. As Jesus said, He *must* intervene to save us from ourselves, to keep mankind's sin, anger and hatred from erasing all life. Such is the world humanity has built as the result of rejecting God's knowledge.

But there is a hope-filled conclusion to the matter. God has always provided mankind with an optimistic view of the future. No matter how dreadful the message of the prophets, they always included the ultimate good news of God's answers to man's problems.

Christ revealed God as a loving Father to us, His children. A parent will put up with a child's arrogance, rebellion and hostility for only so long before correcting him. That does not mean the parent hates the child; it shows he wants the best for his son or daughter. We are God's children. That He must chastise us does not mean that He does not love us as dearly as it is possible to love us. But that love does not mean that He ignores our wrongdoing.

God gives the ultimate answer for the problems of mankind. That answer is in the messages of the biblical prophets, the heart of Jesus Christ's teaching and the writings of the apostles. It is the coming of the Kingdom of God. **GN**

Belief in Christ's Imminent Return Shook Europe a Thousand Years Ago

Belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ and the dawn of a new age has existed since the days of the apostles. Nearly 1,000 years ago an interpretation of prophecies in the book of Revelation led to a belief that spread throughout Europe that Christ would soon return to earth.

Johann Lorenz Mosheim, a reputable historian of ecclesiastical history, recorded the mood as Europeans neared the year 1000. In his *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History* he writes:

"Innumerable examples and testimonies show that immense superstition flourished everywhere throughout the Christian world. To this were added many futile and groundless opinions, fostered by the priests for their own advantage. Among the opinions which dishonoured and disquieted the Latin churches in this century, none produced more excitement than the belief that the day of final consummation was at hand. This belief was derived in the preceding century from the apocalypse of John [the book of Revelation], xx.2-4; and being advanced by many in this century it spread all over Europe and excited great terror and alarm among the people.

"For they supposed St. John had explicitly foretold that after a thousand years from the birth of Christ, Satan would be let loose, Antichrist would appear and the end of the world would come. Hence immense numbers transferring their property to the churches and monasteries, left all and proceeded to Palestine, where they supposed Christ would descend from heaven to judge the world. Others by a solemn vow consecrating themselves and all they possessed to the churches, the monasteries, and the priests, served them in the character of slaves, performing the daily tasks assigned them; for they hoped the supreme Judge would be more favourable to them, if they made themselves servants to his servants.

"Hence also whenever an eclipse of the sun or the moon occurred, most people betook themselves to caverns, rocks, and caves. Very many also gave a large part of their estates to God and the saints, that is, to the priests and monks. And in many places, edifices both sacred and secular were suffered to go to decay, and in some instances actually pulled down from the expectation that they would no longer be needed. This general delusion was opposed indeed by a few wiser individuals, yet nothing could overcome it till the century had closed" (translation by James Murdock, 12th edition, Ward, Lock & Co., London, pp. 339-340).

To this day, 1,000 years later, we can see evidence of the reemergence of this long-ago zeal. One of the most common inscriptions on bequeathments to the Catholic Church in the middle to late 10th century began with the words: "The end of the world now being at hand . . ." Then would follow the bequeathment of land, of homes, of estates, of personal wealth.

What impact will belief in Christ's return have on society as we approach the year 2000? One thousand years ago religious fervor led some to actions they likely wouldn't have considered under other circumstances. Jesus Himself prophesied that, shortly before His return, misguided religious zeal will again lead people to acts and attitudes with tragic consequences (Matthew 24:4-5, 9, 11, 23-26).

—Robert Dick



An Overview of Conditions

The real significance of Hong Kong



The Hong Kong handover is being interpreted in at least two ways. One says that, although the Union Jack came down, the British can still hold their heads high. After all, the stunning display of ceremonial pageantry was never better, and the 150-year rule from London produced one of the most productive and successful island societies on earth. This positive assessment was by far the majority view.

But then veteran journalist and British historian Paul Johnson took aim and fired. A *Daily Mail* editorial published his stinging national rebuke: "The surrender of the free colony of Hong Kong to the totalitarian Communist government—euphemistically termed a 'handover'—is one of the most humiliating episodes in British history." At no time before has Britain handed a colony over to a communist state.

"All the rest of our colonies were meticulously prepared for independence, by setting up model parliaments, training their politicians in democratic usages, and by providing a judiciary professionally educated on British lines to maintain

"The surrender of the free colony of Hong Kong to the totalitarian Communist government—euphemistically termed a 'handover'—is one of the most humiliating episodes in British history."

the rule of law," Mr. Johnson observed. He described the fall of Hong Kong as a "heavy and far-reaching diplomatic defeat." Those who understand the origin and destiny of the British peoples will appreciate the significance of Paul Johnson's pronouncements. (Sources: *The Daily Mail*, *Time*.)

Trouble with remnants of an empire

Even after the recent loss of Hong Kong, Britain still bears residual responsibility for 180,000 people in its remaining dependent territories. Most are racked by troubles of one kind or the other. Arguments over sovereignty persist in Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. Drugs and money-laundering plague the Caribbean. Montserrat is threatened by a periodically erupting volcano. One report describes the fabric of this island society as in terminal decay. Even Barbados, popularly known as Little England, is contemplating whether to continue with the queen as head of state and whether to declare itself a republic.

At the peak of empire in 1897, Great Britain held sway over 400 million people and about a third of the globe. Since

then the United Kingdom has dropped from first to fifth among the remaining colonial powers. Surprisingly, the United States is first, with eight territories, ruling nearly four million people, followed by France. Britain's colonial fate accords with many Bible prophecies written 2,500 years ago. (News sources: *The Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The International Herald Tribune*.)

Cousteau's environmental warnings

With the recent death of French underwater explorer Jacques Cousteau, the environment has lost one of its greatest champions. He had just completed a 400-page autobiography in whose pages he warned that environmentally speaking "our survival is only a question of 25, 50 or perhaps 100 years." This long-time nurturer of the natural world wrote that "unrenewable resources are being squandered. Waste is building up, goods are vanishing while rubbish thrives."

Mr. Cousteau minced no words in his criticisms of politicians, scientists and national leaders: "With their pesticides and their pollution, their toxic discharges and the certainty of mutual destruction . . . , scientific experts have hidden the harsh reality: They will decide whether we live or die."

Over the past generation we have seen too many men of Cousteau's stature fade from the world scene. In Isaiah 3, God said He would take away "the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder; the captain of fifty and the honorable man, the counselor and the skillful artisan, and the expert enchanter" (verses 2-3). And in their place? "I will give children to be their princes [rulers] and babes shall rule over them" (verse 4).

But why would God do this? He would allow these things to happen to apportion punishment for national sins (some of which are described in these pages), particularly of those nations that have most successfully spread Bibles around the world and therefore should know better. (News sources: *The Times*; *The Man, the Octopus and the Orchid* [Mr. Cousteau's autobiography].)

The high cost of immorality

Even if AIDS or HIV infections are not considered, the United States leads all other nations in the rate of sexually transmissible diseases, according to health-care experts representing the Institute of Medicine, affiliated with the National Academy of Sciences.

In 1996 sexually transmissible diseases accounted for five of the 10 diseases most commonly reported to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Although most of these diseases can be cured, without treatment they can lead to birth defects, infertility, cancer and other major health problems.

In addition to the health and social costs, these diseases cost taxpayers \$10 billion annually in direct costs such as Medicaid payments and indirect costs from higher health premiums. Such are the staggering costs to individuals and society for disobedience to God's Commandments, including His laws forbidding sexual activity outside of marriage. (News source: *The New York Times*.)





t i o n s A r o u n d t h e W o r l d

Supergerm resists antibiotics

Health researchers are studying something they hoped they would never see, a deadly staph bacterium that can resist every drug in science's infection-treatment arsenal.

The bacterium, *staphylococcus aureus*, is the cause of most hospital infections, including pneumonia and blood poisoning. In America alone some two million such infections develop every year.

Physicians had not faced the possibility of widespread, untreatable bacterial infections since penicillin came into general use in the 1940s. Since then, bacteria have shown a seemingly relentless ability to develop resistance to antibiotics. For example, by the 1950s almost half of known strains of *staph aureus* had grown resistant to penicillin. Scientists successfully

Researchers fear that this new strain of bacteria could claim many lives in the years it takes to develop new effective antibiotics.

gained the upper hand again with the introduction of methicillin in the 1960s, but in the 1970s some strains of staph had become resistant to this drug as well. Vancomycin, the last drug known to be effective against these other antibiotic-resistant strains, had proved effective for 30 years.

Discovery of this antibiotic-resistant strain prompted an instant worldwide alert among scientists and researchers. "We have a situation which is very worrisome," commented Fred Tenover, laboratory chief for the hospital-infections branch of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The newly isolated strain showed resistance to the last line of antibiotic defense for certain strains of bacteria. "If we're climbing the ladder," said Mr. Tenover, "we're almost to the roof."

Dr. Robert Haley, former head of the CDC's hospital-infections branch, added, "I can't emphasize enough: This is a major turn for the worse in the fight against infection."

Researchers fear that this new strain could claim many lives in the years it takes to develop new effective antibiotics. (Sources: *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Chicago Tribune*.)

Divorce's long-term effect on children

The impact on children of divorce is cumulative and long-lasting, according to psychologist Judith Wallerstein, author of a quarter-century research study on the subject.

According to her research, divorce is harmful to children's ability to deal with the challenges of the teenage and early-adult years and affects their efforts to form their own romantic relationships well into their 20s and 30s.

Miss Wallerstein began her research in the 1970s just as the American divorce rate began to soar upward. At the time, she noted, divorce was commonly viewed as a "transient, minor upheaval in the life of a child." Her research followed 131 middle-class children for 25 years, beginning just as their parents' marriages broke up. "Unlike the adult experience," she concluded, "the child's suffering does not reach its peak at the breakup and then level off. The effect of the

parents' divorce is played and replayed throughout the first three decades of the children's lives."

We should not find it surprising that God, who desires a family relationship with humanity, says, "I hate divorce" (Sources: *The Washington Post*; Malachi 2:16, New International Version.)

South Africa still in trouble

An article in a major newsweekly characterized South Africa as emerging from "a post-apartheid slump with a high-growth budget and Olympian hopes." Yet the country is suffering not only from the wounds of the past, but from growing societal problems. Every day, on average, brings 300 robberies, 65 murders and 66 rapes. Also in 1996 some 2.4 million people were diagnosed as HIV-positive, a rise of about one third between 1995 and 1996.

Just as serious, in one sense, is that "3,000 policemen were investigated last year," and "25 percent of the upper echelons of the police force have criminal records." The government will have to act courageously if it is to rid the nation of rampant crime, corruption and maladministration. Some encouraging signs are emerging. For instance, the cabinet recently decided that murderers, rapists, robbers, hijackers and drug traffickers must serve at least 15 years in prison for a first violation. If implemented, this policy will be a considerable improvement on the past. (Sources: *Time*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Times*, *The Star & South African Times International*.)

America leads in child murders

America has the highest rate of childhood murders and suicide of the world's 26 wealthiest nations, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The United States accounts for almost three quarters of homicides of children in advanced nations. For children 14 and younger, the U.S. suicide rate is double that of other industrialized nations.

Agency statistics show that the recent epidemic of violence impacting younger children is almost exclusively an

The United States accounts for almost three quarters of homicides of children in advanced nations.

American trend. Juvenile crime rates in the United States for the last decade have far outstripped adult rates. In comparison, statistics from other countries show no homicides involving children less than 15 years old.

The centers did not offer an explanation for the enormous gap between murder rates of children in America compared with those of other countries. Other researchers and criminologists attribute these tragedies to a growing number of unsupervised children, families in which both parents work outside the home, high divorce rates and a tolerance of violence. (Source: *The Washington Post*.)

—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley



Does Prophecy Tell Us When Christ Will Return?

Since the days of the apostles, people have predicted Jesus Christ's return. Does Bible prophecy indicate when this long-awaited event will at last come to pass?

by Mario Seiglie

Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" With these words, the disciples urged Jesus Christ to tell them what events or conditions would mark the time of His return and the replacing of human rule with His divine rule in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:3).

Although He explicitly told His followers that they would not know the exact time of His return (verses 36, 44), He did say that some signs that His return was imminent would be unmistakable. He noted that, just as a fig tree leafing out is a sure sign of the coming summer, "so you also, when you see all these things, know that [My return] is near—at the doors!" (verses 32-33).

Christ warned that prophecy is a subject to be handled with care (verses 23-26), lest we be deceived (verses 4-5, 11). Unfortunately, many sad events have occurred from His time onward when sincere but gullible people, led by wrong interpretations of prophecy, took paths leading to ridicule or self-destruction. It seems that every year we see and hear such tragic stories reported.

Sad legacy of shattered hopes

This is nothing new. Back in the first century two such cases were recorded in Acts 5. Gamaliel, a rabbi, mentioned two false prophets who arose and led people to believe they were guided by God. He said: "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed" (Acts 5:36-37).

In the last 2,000 years numerous men and women have claimed to be prophets, messiahs or holy teachers and have deceived many. So it is natural for some to become suspicious about prophecies and avoid them. Yet this can easily lead to falling into the opposite ditch, where many disregard or ignore prophecy.

Make no mistake about it: Prophecy *does* have an important purpose in the Bible. But we are to avoid the pitfalls of becoming so engrossed in prophecy that we interpret every newsworthy event as an end-time signal and the opposite extreme of dismissing virtually every occurrence on the world scene as inconsequential.

Proper view of prophecy

Referring to Christ's first coming, Peter mentioned that fulfilled prophecy should serve to strengthen our hope and faith in prophecies that are as yet unfulfilled. "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts . . ." (2 Peter 1:19).

Here Peter compares Bible prophecies to a light that provides visibility until the final coming of God's Kingdom, brought by Jesus Christ to earth. When this occurs every eye will see His glory as a great light (Matthew 24:27, 30; Revelation 1:7).

God in His Word gives us a broad outline and sequence of prophetic events, but many specifics are unclear. Some things can be seen clearly, but others are still beyond our view at this point in history.

In other words, there is a framework of prophecy that is reliable, but it can be counterproductive to try to interpret every detail.

So what is this framework of prophecy? Among the many prophecies of events leading up to Christ's return are various major prophetic conditions that can be confirmed and identified historically. As Peter said, we "do well to heed" them.

First condition: Man's ability to annihilate life

The first of these certain prophecies deals with a specific condition described by Christ that would be present only as the end time draws near. He said to His disciples: "It will be a time of great distress; there has never been such a time from the beginning of the world until now, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive*; but for the sake of God's chosen

it will be cut short” (Matthew 24:21-22, New English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus warned that a time would come when the destructive capacity of mankind would be so awesome that all life could be erased from earth. This is what makes the time of “great distress” so terrifying, unequaled in human history.

Mankind has been fighting wars since the dawn of history but never before had the ability—with rocks and clubs, bows and arrows, cannons and automatic weapons—to wipe out all of humanity and fulfill this prophecy. This changed in 1945 with the detonation of the first atomic bombs and with the subsequent development of hydrogen bombs. With thousands of nuclear weapons at its disposal, mankind now has the frightening ability to destroy life from the planet many times over.

This situation *never* existed in history until the latter half of this century. Man has never been a great caretaker of the earth, but never before did he have the capacity to utterly destroy all living things. But Christ predicted that, left unchecked, mankind would do exactly that, and this is one of the reasons He must intervene to save mankind.

Of the last days the Bible says: “The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy *those who destroy the earth*” (Revelation 11:18). Only in recent decades has humanity had the fearful capacity to “destroy the earth”!

Second condition: Modern Israel

The second condition that must exist before Christ’s return concerns the existence of the nation of modern Israel.

The survival of the religion and culture of this ancient people, which witnessed the rise and decline of such great civilizations as Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, goes against the odds. A secular Jewish historian of the 19th century, Heinrich Graetz, stated that “a nation which has witnessed the rise and decay of the most ancient empires, and which still continues to hold its place in the present day, deserves the closest attention.”

Max Dimont, a Jewish historian, relates

an anecdote about Napoleon, the French emperor in the 1800s. He once passed near a synagogue and heard weeping inside. He asked, “What is this crying?” He was told it was the Jews weeping over the destruction of their temple. Impressed, Napoleon said, “A people that longs so much for its city and its Temple are bound to restore them one day!” (Thomas Ice and Randall Price, *Ready to Rebuild*, Harvest House, Eugene, Oregon, 1992, pp. 23-24).

That prediction has partially come to pass. Now the Jews—descendants of the ancient kingdom of Judah—are in possession of Jerusalem, and their “weeping” takes place on the western side of the Temple Mount, at the retaining wall of the vast platform Herod the Great constructed to support the rebuilt temple. There, at the Western Wall, many Jews still cry and bemoan the loss of their temple and pray for its restoration. Thus the place is also sometimes aptly called the Wailing Wall.

Sacrifices offered and ended

Prophecies in the books of Joel, Zechariah and elsewhere in the Bible imply an organized, significant Jewish presence in and around Jerusalem before

God in His Word gives us a broad outline and sequence of prophetic events, but many specifics are unclear. Some things can be seen clearly, but others are still beyond our view.

the second coming of Jesus Christ. Daniel 12:11 seems to indicate that Jewish sacrificial rituals will be renewed and then disrupted before Christ’s return. Jesus Christ Himself warned, “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matthew 24:15-16).

The abomination of desolation, described several times in Daniel 8 to 12, deals with the defiling of the sacrifices and the holy place in Jerusalem. For such prophecies to be fulfilled, at least an altar in a “holy place” is needed if a temple is not actually built.

Before the 20th century this seemed like an impossibility. The Jewish people had been scattered for almost 2,000 years, and the Ottoman Empire was in control of the land. Jews did not have the military power,

unity or backing of most of the world to return to their former land. Many books were written about the overwhelming odds against Zionism, the attempt to reestablish a Jewish homeland.

Yet it happened. Once the fledgling nation formed in 1948, it still appeared the Jews would never control all of Jerusalem, and the more-populous Arab nations surrounding Israel determined they would never allow it. Yet, in the 1967 Six Day War, Israel took possession of the divided city.

The Israeli government, however, to defuse further religious tension, decided that the Temple Mount—the area where the temple had stood and animal sacrifices were offered—should remain under the control of Muslim authorities.

Attempts to rebuild a temple

One of the little-known facets of this story has been the Jews’ many attempts in the last 2,000 years to rebuild their temple, which was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, and reinstitute sacrifices.

After its first-century destruction, Jews began to settle Jerusalem again. Seven synagogues were built at the foot of the

Temple Mount. In 117 the Roman emperor Hadrian granted permission to rebuild the temple. Yet, two years later, the emperor reversed his edict and ordered that Jerusalem be rebuilt as a Roman colony.

In 132 a revolt broke out among the Jews under the leadership of Simeon bar Kokhba, who was accepted by many as the Messiah. The uprising lasted for three years. Here again an attempt was made to rebuild the temple, but Hadrian’s victory dashed hopes at that time.

The next attempt to rebuild the temple was in 363, when the Roman emperor Julian gave the Jews permission to begin construction of a temple. He even provided funds and building materials. Incredibly, according to historians at that time, just as they were about to begin, a powerful earthquake struck and destroyed the whole project.

One author explains: “The stones were

piled and ready. Costly wood had been purchased. The necessary metal was at hand. The Jews of Jerusalem were rejoicing. Tomorrow—May 20, 363 A.D.—the rebuilding of the Temple would begin! . . . Suddenly, and without warning . . . , the streets of Jerusalem trembled and buckled, crushing two hundred years of hope in a pile of dust. No longer would there be any possibility of rebuilding the Temple” (Philip C. Hammond, “New Light on the Nabateans,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April 1981, p. 23).

The next chance to rebuild came in 614, when the Persians captured Jerusalem from the Byzantines. Since the Jews helped them in their undertaking, the Persians granted the Jews permission to rebuild the temple. Yet work soon came to a halt when the shah changed his mind and rescinded his edict.

Then, in 638, Arabs under the banner of Islam conquered the city, and, with the exception of a few years, Arabs or Turks governed Jerusalem from that time forward. After the defeat of the Turks (who were allied with Germany) in World War I, Britain governed the area under mandates from the League of Nations, and then the United Nations, until the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

For those many centuries the Temple Mount was a bastion of the Islamic faith, and Jews were banned from worshiping in that area. An Islamic shrine was constructed on the spot upon which many authorities believe the sacrifices once took place. It now stands as one of Islam’s holy places.

It was impossible for Christ’s prophecy to be fulfilled while the Arabs and Turks held dominion over the city. But Israel’s regaining of control over Jerusalem in 1967 helped set the stage for this prophecy, too, to come to pass.

Preparations under way

What has happened since then? One book on the subject states: “Whether the Temple is viewed only as a national symbol, a rallying point for Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, or seen as a prophetic hope essential to the fulfillment of the mission of Judaism, since the liberation of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, the possibility of rebuilding has existed. While some attempts were made after 1967 to organize rebuilding discussions, it was not until . . . the Palestinian uprising [in

1987] that Temple rebuilding movements began to visibly organize . . . [One source stated that] ‘all Jewish history as far as we’re concerned is one big parenthesis until the Temple is returned. Life without the Temple is not really living’” (Ice and Price, p. 99).

In Ezra 3 we see that, after the destruction of their first temple, returning Jews offered sacrifices in the appropriate location decades before the second temple was constructed. A modern revival of the sacrificial system would, therefore, be possible without requiring that a temple be constructed.

Today Muslim religious authorities control the Temple Mount, the “holy place” that Christ referred to in His prophecy. Some of the conditions necessary for fulfilling that prophecy are not yet in place.

Since 1989, however, organized efforts have begun to prepare for the building of a temple. Several Jewish groups have been publicly organized to carry out this plan. One is called The Society for the Preparation of the Temple, which publishes a bimonthly journal on the subject.

Another group, which focuses on producing priestly garments and utensils for the temple service, is the Temple Institute. So far 53 of the 103 necessary instruments have been built. There are also architects and engineers who have prepared blueprints for the temple. Displays have been established in the United States to promote these ideas.

Another widely publicized group is the Temple Mount Faithful. Led by Gershon Salomon, a professor of oriental studies at Hebrew University, its goal is to take the Temple Mount from the Arabs and rebuild the temple there. It would be, in his words, “a Temple that will be again a center of religious, national, spiritual and moral life for Israel.”

From 1990 on members of this group have tried to place the first stone of the temple on the Temple Mount, but to no avail. Israeli police and Muslim authorities have prohibited their attempts.

However, at this point in history only a relatively small minority of Jews believe it is their responsibility to rebuild the temple, apart from direct divine intervention. Modern Israel is largely secular; it would take a dramatic increase in religious fervor to arouse enough support for restoration of the temple or renewal of sacrifices to begin.

That is how matters stand at the moment. Of course, these conditions

could change rapidly in the volatile political climate of the Middle East.

Third condition: A new power on the world stage

The third condition that we do well to heed deals with the latter revival of the Roman Empire, prophesied extensively in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

The prophet Daniel, interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a colossal human image, spoke of a series of “kingdoms” to arise on the world scene. The first of these kingdoms, said Daniel, was the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar himself (Daniel 2:28-38). It was to be followed by three other kingdoms (verses 39-40). Comparing history with other Bible prophecies, we can understand that these four kingdoms were, in order, the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greco-Macedonian and Roman empires.

Speaking of the fourth and final kingdom, the Roman Empire, Daniel said that it would be “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” (verse 40). Rome indeed proved to be more dominant and enduring than its predecessors, swallowing up their remnants in a reign that lasted for centuries.

However, Daniel also revealed some fascinating prophetic details about this kingdom. He said that the legs and feet of the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream represented this kingdom, later shown to be the Roman Empire. The image had feet and toes composed “partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron.” This indicated that “the strength of the iron shall be in it,” but also that “the kingdom shall be divided” and “partly strong and partly fragile.” Also, “just as iron does not mix with clay,” the components of this kingdom would not adhere firmly together for long (verses 41-43).

Then, says Daniel, “in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . . ; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (verse 44).

This is clearly a prophecy of the Kingdom of God, brought into reality on the earth by Jesus Christ at His return. It is only then that “the kingdoms of this world [will] become the kingdoms of our Lord

Continued on page 31

Armageddon: The End of the World?

by Jerold Aust

What does the Bible really say about Armageddon? It tells us that the last great battle of man's age will take place in the Middle East. The armies will gather at a place Scripture calls Armageddon. So, not surprisingly, Armageddon has come to portray our worst nightmare: the end of the world.

Some Bible scholars claim that Armageddon is predicted to terminate society as we know it. More-detailed speculations speak of it as a battle of cataclysmic proportions, possibly a nuclear war that will annihilate mankind. Even Ronald Reagan, the former U.S. president, spoke of Armageddon in such terms. That Armageddon is named in the Bible (Revelation 16:16) and that it serves as the prelude to "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (verse 14) deserves our concern and attention.

The meaning of Armageddon

The word *Armageddon* can be traced to Megiddo, a significant fortified town in Palestine in ancient times. Most scholars think *Armageddon* comes from *harmegiddon*, meaning "hill of Megiddo." The area has quite a history. Excavations of Megiddo have revealed 20 layers of occupation dating from the fourth millennium B.C. to about 450 B.C. The site is about 18 miles south-southeast of the Port of Haifa in northern Israel and about 55 miles north of Jerusalem.

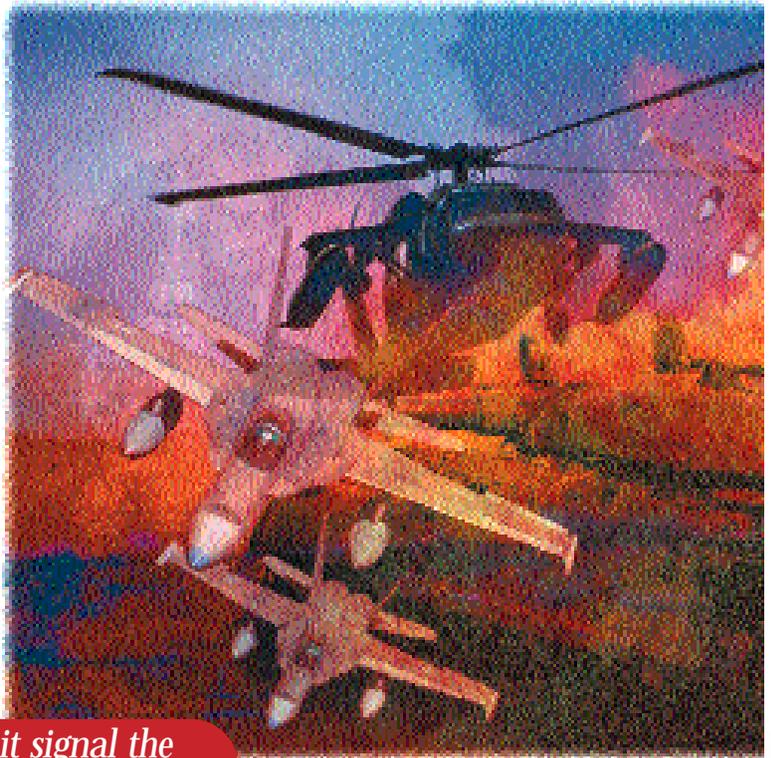
What is the biblical Armageddon? Does it signal the end of the world? When and where will it take place?

Megiddo's strategic location gave it greater importance than its size would suggest: a mere 13 acres within the city's ancient walls during the time of Solomon. Megiddo overlooked the narrow entrance to Israel's northern mountains from the Plain of Megiddo—also known as the Valley of Esdraelon, or Jezreel—a level expanse some 20 miles long and 14 miles wide.

Northern Palestine, especially the area of the Plain of Megiddo, was militarily important because it guarded part of the easiest route across the Fertile Crescent, which stretched from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Throughout ancient history, the great powers of Mesopotamia—Assyria and Babylon—contended with Egypt for control of this area.

The territory of the ancient kingdom of Israel was at the crossroads of three continents—Africa, Europe and Asia.

Bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea and on the east by the Arabian Desert, this relatively small area between sea and desert was the strategic land link between the three continents. So important, so desirable, so coveted was this



narrow land bridge that ancient armies frequently and regularly battled for control of it.

In modern times the Arabian Desert has been prized for its great oil reserves. In ancient times parts of the territory of Israel were coveted for their militarily crucial passes. Megiddo guarded one of those passes. More than 200 battles have been fought at or near there (Alan Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981, Vol. 12, p. 551). One scholar calls the area "the battle ground of the centuries" (Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1966, p. 89).

What about the future of Megiddo, or Armageddon? Does the Bible reveal anything about this strategically vital area?

Prophecy of Armageddon

Although Armageddon is mentioned in the book of Reve-

Famous Battles at Megiddo

Through the Valley of Jezreel many armies have marched and fought, from the days of Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III to Napoleon and, in this century, General Edmund H.H. Allenby. Allenby's decisive victory at Megiddo in 1918 forced the Turks to relinquish control of Palestine to the British. Thereafter he was often referred to as Allenby of Armageddon.

One of the earliest battles near Megiddo was between Thutmose III and a Canaanite coalition under the leadership of the king of Qadesh in 1482 B.C. (James B. Pritchard, Ed., *The Harper Atlas of the Bible*, Harper & Row, New York, 1987, p. 41). This battle displayed the tactical genius and daring of Thutmose III, who, rejecting his officers' cautious advice, decided to march his army single file through the narrow pass. His enemy was caught by surprise. The next day, at first light, Thutmose led a forceful charge in the center of the enemy's front line. The Canaanites broke and ran, and Megiddo was subsequently placed under siege. Six months later it capitulated (ibid.).

Deborah and Barak sang a song of praise to God (Judges 5), extolling Him for helping Israel defeat the Canaanite army and Sisera near Megiddo (verse 19). The battle area was at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo, and Scripture says the Canaanites were swept away by the suddenly swollen waters of the Kishon River (verses 19-21).

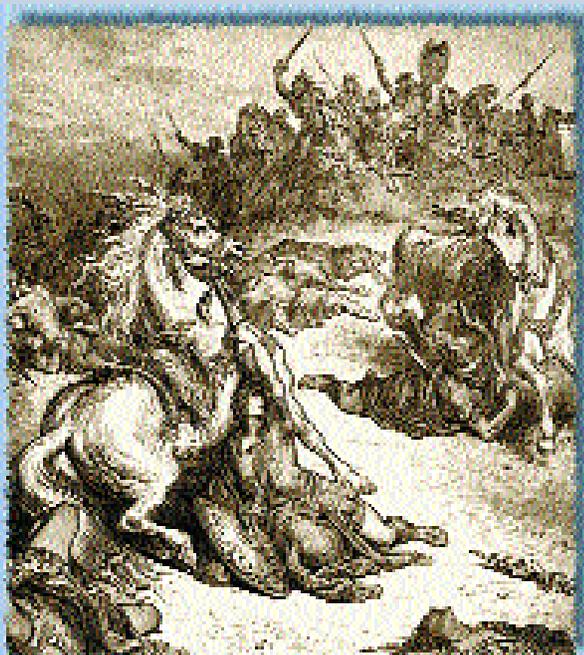
Gideon, a later hero of Israel, defeated the Midianites (Judges 7) in the Valley of Jezreel (Judges 6:33),

also known as the Plain of Esdraelon, or Megiddo.

Two great Israelite disasters took place near Megiddo: the deaths of King Saul (1 Samuel 31:8) and King Josiah (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:22-24). Pharaoh-necho, leading his army from Egypt to Carchemish to battle the Babylonians, was confronted by Josiah, who was killed in the ensuing battle.

Under Tiglath-pileser III (ca. 745-727 B.C.), Megiddo became the capital of a province in the Assyrian Empire. Later the Romans stationed a legion at or near Megiddo, giving the name Legio to the general area. Legio became so well known that both Eusebius and Jerome used it as a point from which to measure distances to other regional locations.

—Jerald Aust



The death of King Saul and his armor-bearer after a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Philistines near Megiddo as depicted by the 19th-century artist Gustave Doré.

lation (“And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16), Scripture says nothing about armies actually attacking each other there. It does indicate, however, that armies assemble on the Plain of Megiddo, apparently using the large, level area as a staging ground to prepare for a great battle. But who is being gathered, who is gathering them, and for what purpose?

Those being gathered appear to be two political and military coalitions—“the kings of the earth and of the whole world” (verse 14) and “the kings from the east” (verse 12), from east of the Euphrates River. These leaders aren't necessarily “kings” as we use the word today; the original word means ruler, leader or commander. We might use descriptions like president, prime minister, chairman, chancellor or general to refer to such leaders today.

At that point in history, many heads of nations will have banded together to support the mighty “beast” power mentioned in Revelation 17. In describing this confederation of peoples, nations and rulers as a beast, God is likening this enormously powerful alliance to an animal driven by ungodly instincts and motivations.

Those comprising this alliance “are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast” (Revelation 17:12-13). The book of Revelation shows that demonic spirits performing miraculous signs will influence these leaders to gather “to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . to the place called Armageddon” (Revelation 16:13-16).

Why will the armies of these nations gather at Armageddon? Apparently these military powers will invade the Middle East for a showdown over who will control the world.

However, instead of fighting each other, they will turn on the returning Messiah, Jesus Christ, to fight Him!

We don't normally think of people actually daring to go to war against God. People war against other people. But the Bible reveals that men will actually try to fight the returning Jesus Christ. These end-time dictators and demagogues covet rulership of the world, and they hope to succeed through their immense armies and destructive weapons—weapons powerful enough to destroy all life from the planet.

God knows that, unless He sends Jesus Christ to intervene in human affairs at that critical juncture, “no living thing could survive” (Matthew 24:22, New English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Satan and Armageddon

Behind the scenes another powerful leader

figures prominently in gathering the armies to Armageddon. Satan, as “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), will have deceived all nations (Revelation 12:9). As the adversary of humanity (1 Peter 5:8), his avowed purpose is to deceive and destroy the human family. The massive armies that will arise in the end time will, to him, seem the ideal vehicle for accomplishing such incredible destruction (Isaiah 14:12, 17).

But what the nations won’t know, and Satan won’t accept, is that God *allows* him to deceive such arrogant leaders into thinking that this decisive battle will enable them to take control of the world!

God Himself will enter into battle with those deceived nations bent on destruction (Zechariah 14:1-3). God will prove that *He* is all powerful, not Satan nor those whom he deceives. And God will not allow man to completely destroy himself (Matthew 24:22).

With this background, we can better understand the purpose of Armageddon when we read how the armies will be gathered “to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14).

The prophet Zechariah also describes this climactic time: “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming . . . For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem . . . Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east” (Zechariah 14:1-4).

Military forces gather

The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* offers another insight into Armageddon: “It is surprising that no one has suggested taking *magedon* as deriving from the secondary sense of the Hebrew *gadad* that means ‘to gather in troops or bands.’ The simple way in Hebrew to make a noun from a verb is to prefix a *ma* to the verbal form. Thus we have *maged*, ‘a place of gathering in troops,’ and the suffix *o*, meaning ‘his,’ yielding ‘his place of gathering troops.’ This is almost equivalent to the expressions in vs. 14, 16—‘to gather them (the kings and their armies) for the battle on the great day of God Almighty’—and would allude to the prophetic expectation of the gathering of the nations for judgment” (Johnson, p. 552).



Megiddo was at the crossroads of several ancient invasion and trade routes (indicated in blue) in ancient Israel. Megiddo overlooks the Plain of Megiddo, which Bible prophecy indicates will be the gathering place of massive armies just before Christ’s second coming. Those armies will fight the returning Jesus Christ near Jerusalem.

In Joel 3:9-10 God depicts these rulers and their preparation for invasion and warfare: “Proclaim this among the nations: ‘Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up [to Jerusalem, verses 12, 16, 17]. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong.’”

The prophecy indicates that the leaders will disrupt societal needs, converting facilities for manufacturing agricultural implements to produce armaments and munitions.

The armies will gather near Armageddon, almost filling the surrounding plain, and continue their deployment throughout other areas of the Holy

Land. But the actual battle will take place some 55 miles south of Armageddon, around Jerusalem.

In truth that great battle will not be much of a contest. God will allow the armies to gather at Armageddon so that, in the end, there will be no question that He rules supreme. By permitting Satan, his demons and deceived human leaders to stir up nations to pit their massive forces against Him, God will allow those armies who would resist Christ’s rule to close in on Jerusalem—only to be destroyed in their battle against Him.

Armageddon, therefore, becomes a symbol of a great battle, not between mighty nations and military alliances, but between the forces of good and evil. That

climactic battle will be fought at and around Jerusalem.

The battle is joined

The Bible describes that time of earth-shaking events as “the day of the LORD” (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Jeremiah 46:10; Zechariah 14:1)—the time during which God will intervene in human affairs to put an end to man’s rebellion against Him.

Continuing the prophecy recorded in Joel, God says: “Let the nations be awakened, and come up [to Jerusalem] to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put

as humanity’s Savior and Deliverer, its King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16). Mankind will recognize the futility of rebellion against God.

The prophet Malachi also spoke of God’s supreme authority: “For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles [nations]; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 1:11).

God will at last be acknowledged as Supreme Ruler of mankind. For millennia

Sadly, there is simply no other way for mankind to learn its lesson. God must finally step in, intervening in human affairs to force peace on this foundering world (Revelation 19; Zechariah 14; Joel 3).

Christ will replace this world’s social, economic, political, educational and religious systems and build a world based on God’s ways (Daniel 2:44-45).

How to understand mankind’s future

God has given to mankind several annual festivals that unlock the mystery of our future. For example, the Feast of Trumpets foreshadows the return of Jesus Christ “with a great sound of a trumpet” to vanquish the armies gathered against Him (Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 11:15).

The symbolism of the Day of Atonement reveals that Christ will bind Satan, preventing him from influencing humanity (Revelation 20:1-3).

The Feast of Tabernacles depicts 1,000 years of peace and prosperity that will envelop the earth and its inhabitants (Revelation 20:4-5; Isaiah 11).

The Last Great Day signifies the time when all who didn’t know the true God will be resurrected to learn His truth and receive their opportunity for salvation (Revelation 20:11-12; Ezekiel 37).

Armageddon is not the end of the world. It’s a gathering place for enormous armies, God’s summons for deceived human leaders to enter into a decisive battle with Him at Jerusalem.

Rather than marking the annihilation of mankind, Armageddon is the preface to 1,000 years of peace and prosperity for all. Humanity will live on, for what begins at Armageddon establishes Christ as supreme ruler on earth and over all nations. The earth will then become immersed in peace and prosperity in the Kingdom of God. *GN*



The Plain of Megiddo, also known as the Valley of Esdraelon, or Jezreel, stretches into the distance in this view of northern Israel. The highlands of northern Israel are to the right. Megiddo historically controlled access to a vital pass through these mountains.

in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:12-14; compare with Revelation 14:15-19).

Jesus Christ will deal with these massive armies at His return: “Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations . . . He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (Revelation 19:15). Birds gather to feed on the remains of those who war against Jesus Christ (verses 17-18, 21).

Apparently the carnage isn’t limited to the area immediately around Jerusalem. Revelation 14:20 indicates that it will extend for some 200 miles.

Armageddon: prelude to peace

Jesus Christ will finally be recognized

Satan—the god of this world—has palmed himself off as the god of mankind (2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:14). However, God has prophesied that one day He will fulfill His plan for mankind, for which He created the earth.

When this happens the human family will enjoy unprecedented peace and unparalleled prosperity on earth. This peace has been promised to mankind for thousands of years (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2; Isaiah 11:1-10).

Armageddon, while a symbol of the destruction of the forces of evil, is also a prelude to humanity’s salvation. It is then that human misrule will come to an end. At Armageddon the greedy, power-mad demagogues of that time will be gathered into one place so that Christ can put an end to the misery they have wrought on mankind.

Armageddon signals the end of fear, pain, destruction and untimely death.

RECOMMENDED READING

To learn more about the incredible future God has prophesied for humanity, request your free copies of the two booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Contact us at the phone or address in your country—or the country nearest you—listed on page 2.

Should You Keep the Festivals Jesus Observed?

Jesus observed the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles and the other festivals that God gave to Israel. Should you follow His example? Are those sacred festivals still applicable for Christians?

by Roger Foster

Some of our readers may be surprised to learn that the United Church of God, an International Association, observes the same religious festivals that Jesus observed. Why would we follow His example in the matter of which days we keep?

One obvious reason is that Jesus Christ was the perfect model of how a Christian should live. Equally important is our conviction that religious practices should be founded directly on what the Bible approves. The only religious festivals commanded or approved in the Bible are the ones Jesus kept. But are these the only reasons, or is there more to this story?

Jesus Christ observed the festivals God gave to ancient Israel. Christians, of course, are expected to follow His example, to “walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6). One reason Christ observed the festivals is that they are relevant to His message, the *gospel* of the Kingdom of God. By observing them we can learn much about God’s plan to grant eternal life to those who become His sons and daughters through Jesus Christ. This is what gives these festivals their Christian importance and significance.

At one of these festivals a city newspaper reporter once asked me, “Why does your church observe the Feast of Tabernacles, a Jewish festival?”

I had the opportunity to explain that the occasion is not a festival for Jews alone, but for all humanity. This is one of God’s own festivals for the benefit of the human race. She later wrote an article complimenting the church for bringing a truly family-oriented convention to her city.

The Feast of Tabernacles, observed annually in September and/or October, is indeed a family festival. It has a distinct atmosphere, presenting abundant opportunities for close cooperation and communication

among family members. It reflects what God is doing to create a family for Himself, His own children. He says to those called to be Christians: “I will be a *Father* to you, and you shall be *My sons and daughters*, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18, emphasis added throughout). God seeks a family relationship and calls on us to become a part of that family!

The harvest of the children of God

The festivals of the Bible are closely linked to the harvest seasons of the Holy Land, where Jesus Christ spent His human life. Jesus often compared what God was doing through Him to a harvest. For example, Christ said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. 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 [ripe] 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 4:34-36).

Here Jesus links the idea of a harvest to His work of bringing humanity into a relationship with God that leads to eternal life. The festivals are not just memorials of what happened to ancient Israel, nor are they meaningless ritual. They were given to reveal major aspects of Jesus’ role in securing the redemption and salvation of all humanity. They are all about the work of Jesus Christ. That is why we keep them.

God’s marvelous master plan

Few realize that God has a master plan He carefully follows. His actions are not random or capricious. He formulated that plan before He created the heavens and earth. He began revealing important aspects of it with our first human parents, Adam and Eve. Let’s examine what the Bible says

about that fascinating plan and how the festivals that Jesus observed reveal the order in which God’s magnificent blueprint for mankind will be accomplished.

When did God conceive His plan for creating mankind and offering us eternal life? Paul tells us that he became “a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised *before the beginning of time*” (Titus 1:1-2, New International Version).

Time, of course, is measured by the movement of the earth and the other heavenly bodies in space. Paul is telling us that before God created the universe He envisioned human beings and a way for them to receive eternal life. The salvation of mankind is not a new idea with God.

Later, when God evicted Adam and Eve from the garden paradise of Eden, after they had succumbed to the serpent’s influence and sinned, He told the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15).

In Adam’s and Eve’s presence, God revealed to Satan, “that serpent of old” (Revelation 12:9), that the time would come when a descendant of the very woman he had just deceived would crush his deceptive leadership over mankind. But first he would be allowed to strike (by crucifixion) a temporarily disabling blow to the promised Messiah.

God had a clear picture of the future. His plan included the death and resurrection of the Son of God, who was also to be the Son of Man—with God as His Father and the woman, Mary, His mother.

Is it any wonder that God began revealing more details of His plan to Moses at the

time He selected ancient Israel as His special people? That was why God commanded the observance of His festivals with their dual meanings. Some of them represent truly historic events that occurred at the founding of ancient Israel as a nation. But they all represent the much more important relationship of all human beings to the mission of the Messiah (Colossians 2:16-17). That has always been their primary focus.

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

For example, the killing of the

The biblical Holy Days all represent the much more important relationship of all human beings to the mission of the Messiah. That has always been their primary focus.

Passover lambs was the first event in the spring festival season. It represented an important occurrence in Israel's exodus from Egypt. But it also represents the death of a much later "Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36). The apostle Paul makes this plain by telling us that "*Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*" (1 Corinthians 5:7). The purpose of the Passover from the beginning was to represent the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

That supreme sacrifice is the foundation of the Christian faith. It reflects the all-encompassing love God has for His creation and His great concern for the ultimate well-being of every human being (John 3:16). On the last evening before He was crucified, Christ told His disciples, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15-16). When Jesus returns to establish His Kingdom in its fullness on the earth, He will again participate in the Passover ceremony with His disciples, those who faithfully follow His teachings and example.

The children of Israel were delivered from their Egyptian oppressors during the festival that follows the Passover ceremony. The Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrates that deliverance. In the New Testament, Israel's rescue from Pharaoh's armies at the Red Sea is compared to a Christian's deliverance from eternal death, because of sin, through the sacrifice of Christ at baptism. "Moreover, brethren,

I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers [ancient Israel] were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

The Feast of Pentecost

According to Jewish tradition, the Israelites received the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone at the time of Pentecost. It was then that God

made a covenant with them. A special relationship between God and the community of the Israelites was sealed, and they became the "congregation of God" of that time. But that relationship served as a type, or a forerunner, of a far more important relationship that would be established on a later Day of Pentecost.

Luke, author of the book of Acts, writes: "And being assembled together with them, [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'" (Acts 1:4-5).

Here is what happened: "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . ." (Acts 2:1-4).

This was the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecies of Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Ezekiel 36:26-27. God promised to make a new covenant with the community of faithful believers. He promised to write His laws on their hearts and minds with His Holy Spirit, instead of on tablets of stone, as in the time of Moses. It was on this Feast of Pentecost that the Church of God—the Christian community of faithful believers imbued with God's Spirit—was born.

Next we come to the festivals Jesus kept later in the year, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. These festivals represent earth-shaking events that will forever change the course of human history and show what the Messiah is *yet to accomplish* in harvesting the sons and daughters of God.

The Feast of Trumpets

The Feast of Trumpets, or Rosh Hashanah, begins the new Jewish civil year. But it is also the first day of the seventh month of the sacred calendar. It pictures the beginning of a new era, the end of the age of Satan's influence and the beginning of the age of the Messiah. God instructed Moses that "in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation" (Leviticus 23:24).

Why remember the blowing of trumpets? What relationship do trumpets have to God's master plan and the mission of the Messiah?

The Bible reveals the significance of trumpets: The blowing of trumpets will announce the return of Jesus Christ!

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

Paul clarifies even more what will happen at the conclusion of the blowing of trumpets that will announce Christ's return: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

Few events—pictured here by the Feast of Trumpets—could be more significant to Christians than those that occur at the

blowing of the trumpets at Christ's return. That is when Christians, living or dead, receive immortality and eternal life.

The Day of Atonement

On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) a special sacrifice was made in ancient Israel to reconcile the Israelites to God, to figuratively cleanse them of their sins. "This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls [by fasting], and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord" (Leviticus 16:29-30).

This was done to make sure that even sins committed in ignorance were figura-

tively cleansed through an atoning sacrifice. Some 1,500 years later the book of Hebrews further explained the significance of God's instructions regarding events that took place on that day: "But into the second part [of the tabernacle] the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing" (Hebrews 9:7-8).

Why was the "Holiest of All," that inner room of the tabernacle that symbolized direct access to God, not opened to the entire congregation "while the first tabernacle was still standing"? It was because the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ had not yet been made. Only His sacrifice, not the sacrifice of animals,

could atone for the sins of the whole nation—and of all mankind.

The apostle John wrote: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2, New Revised Standard Version).

God knows that people sin for two basic reasons. First, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4, NRSV). That is, most are unaware of their sin. Second, they are "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their

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Why the Early Church Observed the Biblical Festivals

Why do some Christians keep the biblical festivals that most of mainstream Christianity patently rejects? Most churches celebrate Easter and Christmas, although the Bible and the example of the apostles and early Church show that we should observe other annual days of worship.

The correlation between the harvest festivals Jesus observed and what He has already done or will do to harvest the sons and daughters of God is made clear in the Scriptures. The first three festivals, representing what He has already done, are undeniably linked to Him. Once we see that pattern established, the significance of the remaining festivals becomes obvious. They continue to reveal God's great purpose and plan for the salvation of mankind.

The Bible and other historical records of the apostolic era confirm that the original Christian Church continued to observe the same festivals Jesus observed. In regard to the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, the apostle Paul wrote to the congregation in Corinth, "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:7-8, New International Version).

Paul here instructed the Corinthians, a predominantly gentile congregation, to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread with a renewed understanding of its relationship to Christ and the sincerity of their confidence in the truths they had learned.

On another occasion we are told that Paul "was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16). We have already seen that Christ's disciples were all in Jerusalem observing Pentecost when God gave them the Holy Spirit, thus founding the New Testament Church (Acts 2:1, 4). No indication is to be seen in the New Testament that the apostles or their converts ever observed any religious cel-

ebrations except those that Jesus Christ Himself observed.

The practice of observing these festivals was preserved well into the fourth century. However, in 325 a significant debate over the Passover, known in history as the Quartodeciman controversy, erupted. Because of the intense anti-Semitic sentiment of that era, the Council of Nicea agreed to abandon the observance of the Passover because of its association in people's minds with the Jews. That decision was met with fierce opposition from congregations and church leaders from the eastern portion of the Roman Empire. They vigorously resisted abandoning the example and practice of Jesus and the apostles.

Eusebius, an early church historian, recorded their reaction. "But the bishops in Asia were led by Polycrates in persisting that it was necessary to keep the custom which had been handed down to them of old. Polycrates himself in a document which he addressed to Victor and the church of Rome expounds the tradition which had come to him as follows. 'Therefore we keep the day undeviatingly, neither adding nor taking away, for in Asia great luminaries sleep, and they will rise on the day of the coming of the Lord, when he shall come with glory from heaven and seek out all the saints. Such were Philip of the twelve apostles . . . There is also John, who lay on the Lord's breast . . . , and there is also Polycarp . . . All these kept the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the gospel, never swerving, but following according to the rule of the faith'" (Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, English translation from the original Greek by Kirsopp Lake, Vol. II, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1926, pp. 505, 507).

Unfortunately, by abandoning the festivals Jesus observed and eventually turning to pagan celebrations such as Easter and Christmas, the majority of professing Christians lost an important part of their heritage. Lost, at the same time, was the wonderful understanding of how God will harvest all mankind, bringing His sons and daughters into His Kingdom and sharing with them the wonderful gift of eternal life.

—Roger Foster

Archaeology and the Book of Judges

by Mario Seiglie

Previous issues of *The Good News* have examined archaeological finds that illuminate sections of the five biblical books of Moses and the book of Joshua. In this issue we focus on a tumultuous time in ancient Israel's history, the era covered by the book of Judges.

During this period of more than 300 years, God periodically raised up judges to rescue and rule over Israel as the Israelites struggled with indigenous peoples over control of the land.

Judges begins by describing the settlement of the Israelite tribes in Canaan. The aged Joshua distributes the territory among the tribes. A short while later he dies at the age of 110 (Judges 2:8). Then comes a period during which faithful elders who had lived over from Joshua's time governed Israel. When they died, no leader immediately succeeded them. A dangerous political void existed.

Many among the younger generation, born in the land of Canaan, had largely forgotten the miracles accomplished during Moses' and Joshua's time. "When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).

The new generation found itself surrounded by many Canaanites who adhered to their own popular religion. Instead of eliminating this foreign influence, as God had commanded, in many instances the Israelites simply coexisted with those holding false beliefs. God had warned them what would occur if this situation were allowed to continue: "Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: 'I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, "I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars." But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, "I will not drive them before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you"' (Judges 2:1-3).

During this period of more than 300 years, God periodically raised up judges—we find at least 12 of them described in the biblical account—to rescue and rule over Israel as the Israelites struggled with indigenous peoples over control of the land. Judges ruled simultaneously with each other in various regions of Israel. The surviving Canaanites frequently attacked and reconquered territory taken by the Israelites.

What does the archaeological evidence reveal about this time?

A change in cultures

The extensive scientific evidence points to a gradual change from a Canaanite building-and-pottery culture to a less-advanced Israelite cultural style.

Charles Fensham, a professor of Semitic languages, argues that "archaeology has shown that [around] 1200 B.C. certain cities in Palestine were demolished. A flowering culture of Late Bronze [Canaanite] was obliterated. The new developments . . . were of a lower culture than the preceding. The break is thus obvious and points to seminomadic groups in process of settling down. This evidence is clearly to be connected with the



The religion of the Canaanites held great appeal for the early Israelites. Shown are a statuette of Baal, left, the weather god, and a fertility figurine. The Baal figure apparently originally held a lightning bolt in its hand.

invading Israelite tribes” (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982, Vol. II, p. 1158).

This is consistent with the biblical record, which shows that the Israelites, initially slaves in Egypt and culturally impoverished, at first simply took over the existing Canaanite cities as they conquered them. God had told them, “So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

Gradual replacement

The book of Judges indicates that this cultural change was gradual. “And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out” (Judges 1:28). The Canaanite culture survived for many years until the Israelites finally replaced it.

“The Israelites had lived in Egypt as enslaved [people], and then spent 40 years as seminomads before entering Canaan; this makes it unlikely that they brought a distinctive material culture into Canaan . . . At the end of the Late Bronze Age and the start of the Iron Age, around 1200 B.C., a major change occurred in settlement patterns [in Canaan] . . . While we do not believe the new settlements mark the *arrival* of the Israelites, we are still happy to call them ‘Israelite’ settlements. This is because, in our view, the Israelites had been in the land for some two centuries by 1200 B.C. and were therefore involved in the changes that took place at that time” (John Bimson and David Livingstone, “Redating the Exodus,” *Biblical Archaeological Review*, September-October 1987, pp. 52-53).

Here, then, is additional evidence from archaeology that appears to confirm the biblical account. It shows a

The First Mention of Israel

During most of the last century, many liberal critics believed the history of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament was little more than the fabrication of later Jews from around the sixth century B.C. For instance, they believed there was no solid evidence of Israel being a nation at the time of the events described in the biblical book of Judges.

Yet, in 1896, British archaeologist Sir Flinders Petrie found evidence of Israel's existence as far back as 1200 B.C., precisely the time of the events in Judges. In the ruins of an Egyptian temple, he discovered a monument that narrated the military victories of Merneptah, an Egyptian pharaoh. In this beautifully carved pillar, dated around 1207 B.C., the monarch mentions the nation of Israel.

For this reason the monument, technically termed a stele, is called “the Israel Stele.” It can be seen in the Cairo Museum. On it Merneptah recorded his victories in Canaan and mentioned Israel as one of his vanquished enemies. This would place the battle during the time of the judges of Israel, when Israel was continually being attacked and invaded by nearby peoples and then liberated by the judges God chose and used to deliver His people.

In the last two lines of the text, the stele mentions four of Merneptah's defeated foes in Canaan: “Ashkelon has been overcome. Gezer has been captured. Yanoam was made non-existent. Israel is laid waste, [and] his seed is not.”

The reign of Merneptah is dated around 1212-1202 B.C. By recording his victory over Israel, Merneptah shows that during this time the Israelites were already in possession of the central portion of the land.

Of the other places mentioned on the monument, Ashkelon was one of the coastal cities of the recently arrived Philistines. Gezer and Yanoam were in the lowlands, still under the possession of the Canaanites. As recorded in the Bible, Gezer was not conquered by the Israelites under Joshua. “Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwell in Gezer among them” (Judges 1:29). Thus Merneptah's statement corroborates that this city was not in Israelite territory.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia sums up the findings: “Among Merneptah's conquests in Syria-Palestine is Ysr'r (Egyptian for Ysr'l), clearly recognizable as ‘Israel’ . . . Thus the Israel Stele provides a terminus ad quem [limit from which to date] for the presence of the Israelites in Palestine . . .” (Eerdman's, Grand Rapids, 1986, Vol. 3, p. 324).

—Mario Seiglie

gradual supplanting of Canaanite culture by Israelite settlers.

Worship of Baal and Asherah

After Joshua's generation had died out, “the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths” (Judges 2:11-13).

Why the seemingly irresistible tendency for the Israelites to worship Baal over Yahweh? Again, archaeology sheds

much light on the Canaanite religion and helps us understand the deadly allure the indigenous religious practices held for the Israelites.

In 1929 excavations began in Ras Shamra (the ancient port town of Ugarit) in northern Lebanon. This work continues. The remains of a palace discovered in the first year of excavation yielded a library containing hundreds of ancient documents that provided a wealth of information about the Canaanite religion. What did these tablets reveal? “The texts show the degrading results of the worship of these deities; with their emphasis on war, sacred prostitution, sensuous love and the consequent social degradation” (*The New Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1982, p. 1230).

Forbidden worship

The pagan religion was enticing to the Israelites for two primary reasons. First, it was not as morally demanding as the biblical religion. Second, the Israelites fell victim to a superstitious respect for the gods that supposedly controlled the land of the Canaanites.

“The Canaanite religion was completely different from the Israelite. So far, no evidence has been found in Canaanite culture of a series of rules of conduct similar to the Ten Commandments . . . It was a great temptation for the Israelite invaders to respect the existing gods of the land which were regarded as being responsible for the country’s fertility. In addition, the worship of these gods was much less demanding than the rigid Israelite laws and rituals. Consequently, many of God’s people yielded to this temptation. The result was a gradual moral decline of the nation” (*The Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Lion Publishers, 1983, p. 153).

Recognizing the great danger to fledgling Israel, God insisted that His people destroy every aspect of the degenerate native religion. “According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe my judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 18:3-4).

“And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire [be sacrificed] to Molech . . . You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination . . . Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants” (verses 21-25).

Sexual perversion as religion

The corruption found expression in grotesque cultic sexual practices. “The pagan world of the ancient Near East worshipped and deified sex.” So intertwined were sex and religion that “the term ‘holy ones’ [was used] for its cult

prostitutes” (*Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, Abingdon Press, 1971, p. 79).

Although the details are crude, they reveal why biblical proscriptions against the Canaanite perversions are so pervasive. “[A] ritual involved a dramatization of the myth . . . [and] centered in sexual activity since the rainfall attributed to Baal was thought to . . . fertilize and impregnate the earth with life just as he impregnated Asherah, the goddess of fertility, in the myth. Canaanite religion, then, was grossly sensual and even perverse because it required the services of both male and female cultic prostitutes as the principal actors in the drama.

“Unlike the requirement in Israel, there was no one central sanctuary. Baal could be worshipped wherever there was a place especially visited by the numinous presence of the gods. These places were originally on hills (hence, ‘high place’) but later could be found in valleys or even within the cities and towns” (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, Baker Book House, 1987, pp. 160-161).

Infants sacrificed to Molech

Included in these Canaanite practices was child sacrifice, described in the Bible as having children to “pass through the fire to Molech” (Jeremiah 32:35). The Ras Shamra tablets also mention the god Molech. Some unrighteous kings in Israel instituted the practice of sacrificing infants to Molech. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, denounced this ghastly ritual. “For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight,” and “they have built the high places of Tophet [related to Molech worship] . . . to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart” (Jeremiah 7:30-31).

In the ancient Phoenician city of Carthage—part of the Canaanite culture—some 20,000 urns containing the remains of sacrificed children were found. The archaeologists at the site apprise us that “the Carthaginian Tophet is the largest of these Phoenician sites and indeed is the largest cemetery of sacrificed humans ever discovered. Child sacrifice took place there almost continuously for a period of nearly 600 years” (Lawrence Stager and

Samuel Wolff, *Biblical Archaeological Review*, January-February 1984, p. 32).

Kleitarchos, a Greek from the third century B.C., described this sacrifice as the heating up of a bronze statue with outstretched arms. Infants placed into these red-hot arms quickly perished.

Struggle for a nation’s heart

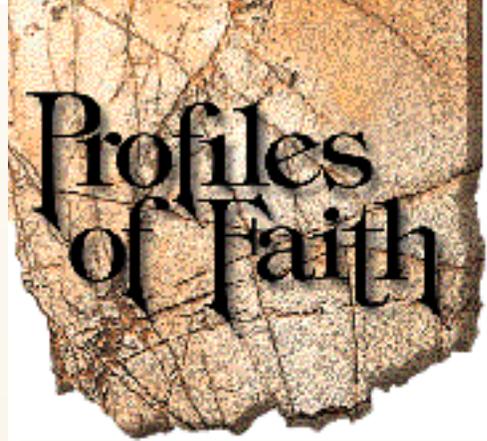
Obviously, God did not want the Israelites to destroy their own offspring. When righteous kings such as Josiah ascended the throne, they obeyed God and abolished the practice. “And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom [in Jerusalem], that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech” (2 Kings 23:10).

Some might think the prophets were overly harsh in condemning the Canaanite religion. Yet now, with detailed evidence of Canaanite practices found by archaeologists in this century, it is clear why the prophets were uncompromising.

“The prophets and chroniclers tended to be thought of as men who, in their zeal for Yahweh and their anger against foreign religions, had probably gone too far,” writes one author. “This objection was leveled at the Bible right up to the present day . . . With us it is accepted as a matter of course that every half civilized community controls the morality of its citizens. But in Canaan in those days the cult of sensuality was regarded as the worship of the gods, men and women prostitutes ranked as ‘sacred’ to the followers of the religion, the rewards for their ‘services’ went into the temple treasuries as ‘offerings for the god.’

“The last thing the prophets and chroniclers did was to exaggerate. How well founded their harsh words were has only become fully understood since the great discoveries of Ras Shamra . . . What temptation for a simple shepherd folk, what perilous enticement! . . . Without its stern moral law, without its faith in one God, without the commanding figures of its prophets, Israel would never have been able to survive this struggle with the Baals, with the religions of the fertility goddesses, with the Asherim and the high places” (Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, Bantam Books, New

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Gideon

When a Few Make a Majority

by Jerold Aust

The book of Hebrews lists Gideon among the heroes of faith in Israel's history (Hebrews 11:32). The exploits of men like Gideon, who lived more than 3,000 years ago, are recorded because "whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The incident in his life most familiar to Bible readers was a spiritual exercise in overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

In the book of Judges we see that God was preparing Gideon for battle against numerically overwhelming odds: "You have 32,000 soldiers, Gideon, and that's far *too many* to do battle with the Midianites. I don't want anyone to think you'll win the coming battle by your own might. Tell your army that, if any among them are fearful, they are free to go" (Judges 7:2-3, paraphrased).

Gideon did as God instructed. He offered his men an honorable discharge from their duties, and 22,000 quickly disappeared over the horizon, headed for home.

Gideon looked around. One moment he thought he could count on 32,000 Israelite volunteers, the next he was left with only 10,000. Considering that the Midianite army numbered at least 135,000 (Judges 8:10), Gideon's diminished force

might have been cause for concern.

Gideon's shrinking army

Gideon was in for another shock. God told him: "Gideon, you still have too many men to fight the Midianites. Take your remaining men down to the water and let them drink. There's more sorting to do, and those I select will do battle. But the rest, like those before them, should also return home" (Judges 7:4, paraphrased).

Ten thousand Israelites welcomed a cool, refreshing drink of water. The overwhelming majority—9,700—got down on their knees, placed their mouths to the water and drank. A relative handful, 300, crouched and scooped water to their mouths with their hands.

These 300, God said, would make up his army (Judges 7:4-8). God hand-picked Gideon's army: 300 men whose most distinguishing characteristic was not in proving themselves as mighty men of valor, but that they drank water from a position different from the others.

From 32,000 to 300, Gideon's army became only a fraction of what it had been. Surely God knew what He was doing, didn't He? Gideon might have wondered whether they *all* might be better off going home. Had God forgotten that Gideon's little band of soldiers would face an experienced army outnumbering them 450 to one? From all appearances,

this situation made no sense.

God explained to Gideon His purpose for allowing him such a small army to battle the physically and numerically superior Midianites. He was not about to allow Israel to be able to boast that her own strength had saved her (Judges 7:2; 1 Corinthians 1:27-29). That honor would go to God alone. But God would work through Gideon.

What led up to this fateful situation?

Least likely to succeed

Among the judges who ruled Israel, Gideon was one of the most faithful and brave. Yet, when God appointed him to save Israel from the Midianites, his comments at the time showed that he considered himself the least likely to succeed: "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15). Yet God's angel spoke to the contrary: "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!" (verse 12).

Is this a biblical oxymoron? Was God blind to Gideon's fear and uncertainty? Not really. Looking to the future, God saw Gideon's character after God inspired, bolstered and worked with him. God already viewed Gideon as a mighty warrior, although Gideon





He was, after all, hiding in the winepress while threshing his crop of wheat for fear of the Midianites when the angel appeared to him (Judges 6:11).

Haven't we found ourselves in similar situations?

Many centuries later the apostle Paul wrote that God is more concerned with our spiritual strength than our physical power. Paul illustrated this with his own example, revealing that he had requested that God heal him from a physical debilitation. However, God's response to Paul showed that He would not heal him; it would ultimately be better for Paul and others that he not be healed.

"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in [your human] weakness' . . . For when I am weak, then I am [spiritually] strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). God understands the human heart and mind, that it is all too easy for us to take credit for what is really God's doing. When we recognize that, God can use us more effectively, as both Paul and Gideon learned.

As far as Gideon was concerned, he was the least likely to become successful, especially as a warrior trying to lead a quarreling and bickering nation of Israelites.

Proofs of God's intentions

Gideon requested proof from God that He would be with him. Gideon cooked meat and bread and presented them to God's messenger. The angel told Gideon to place them on a rock, out of which fire devoured the food.

Emboldened by this event, Gideon sent messengers to the surrounding Israelite tribes to raise an army against the Midianites. But apparently he soon had second thoughts and desired more reassurance from God. God patiently allowed Gideon to choose his own proofs of God's promises.

Gideon first requested that, when he left the wool of a sheep out overnight on the threshing floor, God would allow the dew to moisten only the wool, leaving

the surrounding ground dry



But, just to make sure that God had performed the miracle, Gideon made another request of God—this one, in Gideon's mind, more difficult. He asked God to reverse the miracle and allow the dew to moisten only the surrounding ground, leaving the wool dry.

Gideon knew the wool would absorb the dew more easily than the hard ground of the threshing floor, making this an even greater miracle. Again God did as Gideon requested (Judges 6:39-40). Gideon was convinced. This was proof enough for him to trust in God's calling.

The enemy delivered

Gideon must have taken heart when 32,000 fellow Israelites answered his call for help against the Midianites. Then he was likely bewildered as God scaled down the army from 32,000 to 10,000, then further to only 300.

God reassured Gideon: "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand" (Judges 7:7). To reassure Gideon further, God told him to go with his servant to the enemy camp at night to "hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp" (verses 9-11).

A formidable sight appeared to Gideon's small army, for "the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude" (verse 12).

But Gideon and Purah, his servant, did as God instructed. They stealthily made their way to the edge of the enemy encampment, where they overheard an amazing exchange between two soldiers. "I have had a dream," said one. "To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed." His companion responded, "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp" (verses 13-14).

God had inspired these men to inform Gideon precisely of what God would do for him. "And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, 'Arise, for

the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand'" (verse 15).

The plan was simple but brilliant: Gideon divided the 300 men into three groups, equipped each of the men with a trumpet and a pitcher covering a lighted torch. He instructed them, "When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, 'The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!'" (verse 18).

When they were in place surrounding the Midianites' camp, Gideon and his small army blew their trumpets, shouted their battle cry, broke their pitchers and held their torches high. "When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the [enemy] army fled to Beth Acacia . . ." (verse 22).

In the dark the Midianites panicked at the tumult of shouting, trumpet blasts and breaking pitchers and the sight of torches surrounding them. In their terror and confusion they fought and killed each other. Gideon's men emerged unscathed.

The judge who refused to be king

In spite of his fame, Gideon remained humble. When he had routed the Midianites, the Israelites wanted him to rule as a king over them. Gideon's memorable and faithful words: "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you" (Judges 8:23).

Gideon's words speak well of his character. He knew that all human rulership will eventually fail, that God's rulership is the only lasting answer to mankind's problems. Perhaps he understood that the time is coming during which this will become reality: Jesus Christ will reign on earth in the Kingdom of God.

Gideon knew that only God could exercise fair judgment on mankind. The book of Judges recounts a sad litany of how inadequately man rules himself.

The book of Judges concludes with, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Some have assumed that this implies that a human king was the best answer to Israel's backsliding during the days of the judges. This is not true. God makes this clear through the prophet Samuel when the Bible picks up the story of ancient Israel's history: "Then all the elders of



Gideon first requested that, when he left the wool of a sheep out overnight on the threshing floor, God would allow the dew to moisten only the wool, leaving the surrounding ground dry. God did as Gideon requested.

Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, 'Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations.' But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' So Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them'" (1 Samuel 8:4-7).

Judges 21:25 is not advocating a human king as the solution for Israel's problems throughout the time of the book of Judges. Coupled with Samuel's experience in dealing with carnal, unconverted people, it does help us see that humans, in rejecting God's rule over them, are incapable of rightly gov-

erning themselves.

Apparently Gideon understood the ultimate importance and safety of having *God* as man's Ruler. He knew this was a far better outcome than being forced to endure the unpredictability and subjectivity of human nature and ingrained vanity and selfishness of human leaders. Gideon knew that God is always merciful, patient and just toward human beings; human beings are seldom so.

Gideon's humble, visionary attitude made of him a conqueror before God and a hero in the eyes of his countrymen. Gideon's example proves to us that, through the faithfulness of a few, many can be delivered and become conquerors. With God the outcome doesn't depend on human might and strength (Zechariah 4:6), because a few plus God is better than a majority without Him! **GN**

Archaeology

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York, 1980, pp. 286, 289).

Thus the periodic backsliding of Israel into Baal worship described in the book of Judges is a realistic depiction. The description draws support from the archaeological finds that document the struggle for the soul of Israel. God persevered in sending His messengers to warn His people of the dangers of Baalism. An apt description of this struggle was penned by Nehemiah:

"And they took strong cities and a rich land, and possessed houses full of all goods, cisterns already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations.

"Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them; and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers [judges] who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies . . . Yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies" (Nehemiah 9:25-28).

A nation's early years

The book of Judges is not just documentation of ancient victories and heroic acts. It represents a realistic description of a fledgling nation that began to assimilate the perverse culture of its defeated foes. The book candidly reveals Israel's struggle—not always successful—against the barbaric Canaanite religion. It explains Israel's frequent relapses and resultant humiliating defeats at the hands of its enemies. Through it all one constant factor shows through: God, who is concerned about the moral and spiritual life of His people.

Future issues of *The Good News* will examine additional archaeological finds that confirm and help us understand the biblical record. **GN**

Festivals

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ignorance and hardness of heart” (Ephesians 4:17-18, NRSV).

Immediately after Christ’s return, Satan’s influence over mankind will be suspended for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-2). This will fulfill what God earlier predicted to Satan in the presence of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15). With Satan banished and his deceptive, destructive influence removed, Christ will begin dispelling the ignorance of mankind and removing its spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). At that time “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14).

Christ’s atoning sacrifice will then be made available to all people on earth. God’s intent, as expressed in John 3:17, will be accomplished: “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

The Day of Atonement was instituted to remind us that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is not only for individual Christians in this present age but, after He returns, for cleansing all of mankind of all sins. That atonement paves the way for Him to gather all peoples into His Kingdom during the 1,000 years when Satan is restrained from confusing and misleading them (Revelation 20:2-3). The Day of Atonement thus has a clear Christian theme.

The Feast of Tabernacles

Then we come to the Feast of Tabernacles. The first time this festival is mentioned in the Bible it is called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16). It was the great autumn harvest festival that people from all corners of the nation came together to observe. All during the harvest season they set aside animals and produce especially for this week of rejoicing. Everyone enjoyed an abundance of food, drink and fellowship. It was also a commemoration of the peace and safety God had promised if they would diligently obey Him. Notice the instructions they were given:

“But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round

about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you . . . And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates . . .” (Deuteronomy 12:10-12).

This festival is a celebration of God’s guidance, protection and blessings for His people. Jesus Christ will give those same blessings even more abundantly to the whole world when He returns and establishes His reign on earth. What ancient Israel was able to enjoy for one week at the end of the fall harvest merely represented what Jesus Christ will bring to all mankind when He assumes the role of King of kings and Lord of lords.

The joyful Feast of Ingathering represents the time during which God will gather the great harvest of humanity into His family. It will be the time “all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob’” (Romans 11:26). But this prophecy applies not only to Israel. All people will turn to God.

The prophet Daniel makes this clear: “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days . . . Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

One final feast

Just as Jesus Christ’s 1,000-year reign on earth (Revelation 20:4) is followed by another time characterized by amazing events, so is the Feast of Tabernacles followed by another festival depicting those events (Leviticus 23:34-36). Revelation 20:11-13 describes a time during which all people who have ever died without hearing of Jesus Christ or learning God’s way of life will be resurrected and given their opportunity to receive eternal life.

The dead of all the ages—people like the queen of Sheba, inhabitants of ancient Nineveh and the people of Christ’s time—will be resurrected together (Matthew 12:41-42). That resurrection of multiple

millions of people back to physical, perishable life is detailed in Ezekiel 37:1-14. These are “the rest of the dead” spoken of in Revelation 20:5.

God’s plan as depicted in these festivals is all-encompassing. Through this wondrous design, all people will enjoy the opportunity to learn God’s truth and come to repentance, because God “desires all men to be saved” and is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). This is the time for the vast majority of human beings to be brought back to life to receive their opportunity for salvation. Thousands of millions of humans will receive the gift of everlasting life.

Festivals kept today

Jesus Christ set us an example by observing the biblical festivals, not because they were traditions of the Jewish people, but because, from the beginning, they represented His personal role in bringing the children of God into His spiritual family.

His apostles, walking in His footsteps, continued observing the same festivals. A considerable portion of Christianity observed them for centuries after His death. Looking into the future, we find a continuation of the same pattern. The prophet Zechariah tells us that attendance at the Feast of Tabernacles will be required of all peoples after Christ returns (Zechariah 14:16).

Today there are still Christians faithfully observing the same festivals Christ kept. These annual occasions were instituted to keep God’s people, in all ages, aware of the key aspects of the mission and work of the true Messiah. They are, indeed, *Christian festivals*. GN

RECOMMENDED READING

For a more comprehensive explanation of what Christians should know about the festivals that reveal the essentials of God’s plan, write for our free booklets *God’s Holy Day Plan* and *What Is Your Destiny?*

If you would like to speak to a minister about God’s festivals and how they should be observed, please contact us at the telephone number or address in your country—or the country nearest you—on page 2.

Prophecy

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and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).

But is something wrong with this sequence of events? Surely the Kingdom of God wasn't established in the days of the ancient Roman Empire (See "Why Will Christ Return?," p. 8). Jesus Christ is not enthroned as the supreme ruler of the world (1 John 5:19). Was Daniel wrong about the timing of these events?

Understanding Daniel's prophecy

The answer is to be found when we examine other prophecies that speak of this fourth kingdom. We learn that the Roman Empire, far from being forever gone and forgotten, is destined to rise yet again!

The apostle John, nearing the end of his life, was given an astounding vision by Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1) of what would happen during the remainder of human history. Like Daniel, John was inspired to write of the events leading up to Christ's second coming. Revelation 19 describes His glorious return to earth, culminating in the overthrow and destruction of "the kings of the earth, and their armies," a great false religious leader, and something called "the beast" (Revelation 19:19-20).

This "beast" corresponds to the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire, seen in symbol by Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted by Daniel. Both the beast seen by John and the image explained by Daniel will exist and be destroyed by Jesus Christ at His return. Prophecy thus indicates that the beast power and the Roman Empire are one and the same.

An empire to rise again

Revelation 17 gives us additional details to help us understand the nature of this empire and how it could exist both anciently and at Christ's return. This chapter describes a "scarlet beast . . . having seven heads and ten horns" (verse 3). It is described as existing at one point in time, then not existing, then existing again (verses 8, 11). This gives us the key to understanding these sometimes-puzzling prophecies. The Roman Empire existed in the past, it does not exist now, but it will rise to exist again.

Verse 10 helps us understand that the

seven heads of the beast represent "seven kings" who rule over a span of time. A study of European history shows that, beginning with Justinian in 554, various kings, emperors, dictators and other rulers have, with varying degrees of success, periodically revived the grandeur and might of the Roman Empire since the original empire's fall in 476. These prophecies of Daniel and Revelation indicate that the empire will rise again.

The image interpreted by Daniel had feet and toes of iron mixed with clay. In Revelation 17 we see what the 10 toes of mixed iron and clay represent. The 10 toes correspond to the 10 horns of the beast seen by John. "The ten horns . . . are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings . . ." (verses 12-14).

Now the picture becomes clearer. Just before Christ's return 10 "kings"—the original Greek indicates *rulers*, not specifically kings—will unite in a political, economic and military alliance. Some will be stronger than others, just as iron is stronger than clay. Because they represent various nationalities and cultures, they will be divided in ways other than in their allegiance to the beast. The power and authority that come from their confederation will last only a short time before they make the fatal mistake of resisting Christ at His return, at which time they will be crushed and destroyed (see "Armageddon: The End of the World?," p. 17).

It is likely, then, that a group of 10 leaders, through alliances or other arrangements, will give rise to a union that will fulfill these end-time events. Daniel's prophecy indicates that these leaders will preserve their cultures and languages, so it will not be one totally integrated group of states, such as the United States, but 10 individual political and cultural entities politically and militarily united for a common purpose.

Some question whether the current moves to unify European countries are in any way related to this prophesied power. It is interesting to let history show the roots of the movement. Michael Elliot of *Newsweek* recently reported: "In January 1957, six nations signed a treaty on the site

of the ancient Roman Capitol, and brought into being the European Economic Community . . . An aide to Paul-Henri Spaak, the then Belgian foreign minister, remembers that his boss said, 'Do you think that we have laid the first stone of a new Roman Empire?' Recalls the aide, 'We felt very strongly we were Romans that day' " ("Don't Spoil a Success," *Newsweek Magazine*, international edition, January 29, 1996, p. 40).

At the least, the idea of beginning a new Roman Empire was on the minds of the founders of this organization of nations. It has continued to prosper as barriers to integration tumble one by one and greater cooperation and unity in economic and military affairs come about. Time will tell where these trends will lead—and how quickly.

Where are we now in prophecy?

Where does this leave us? With mankind possessing the capacity to destroy life in several ways, with Israel in control of Jerusalem and a desire among some Israelis to restore the temple and sacrifices, and with strong and determined efforts afoot to unify the nations of Europe, we would do well to heed the warnings of biblical prophecy and not ignore its connection with world conditions. Of course, these are by no means the only prophecies to watch, but they provide a framework within which to view the future.

The Bible is full of God's precious truths for a distracted and unbelieving world. These truths include biblical prophecy. Jesus Christ predicted His Church would be faithfully proclaiming the true gospel—or good news—of His coming Kingdom as a witness to all nations until it would be fully accomplished. After this, He said, "the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). *GN*

RECOMMENDED READING

Do you know what "Kingdom of God" means? Does it exist now? Is the Church the Kingdom? How can we enter it? These and many other questions are answered in our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Please request your copy by contacting us at the address or telephone number in your country—or the country nearest you—listed on page 2.

Who Are We?

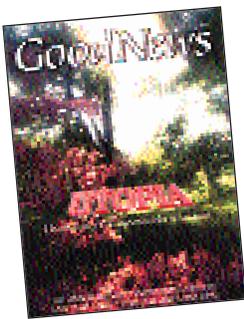
Who is behind *The Good News* magazine?

Many readers have wondered who we are and why we provide *The Good News* free to anyone who requests it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by people—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people share 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). *Gospel* means “good news,” and from this *The Good News* gets its name.

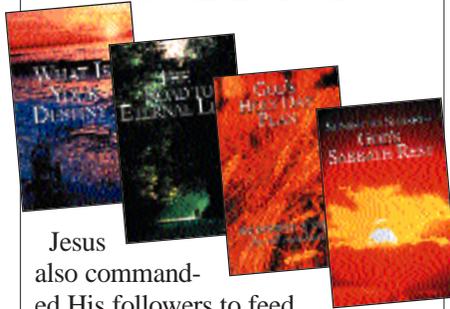


The message Jesus brought truly is good news: the answer to all mankind's problems. Through the pages of *The Good News* and various booklets we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten the very survival of humankind.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, teaching the truth of God's purpose and plan

for mankind as taught by Jesus Christ.

Jesus also told His followers, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). He freely shared this message with us; we freely share it with all who ask.



Jesus also commanded His followers to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17). To fulfill this command, 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, write or call the addresses listed inside. Visitors are always welcome.

Using an ordinary fax machine, you can dial **(818) 294-0818** and get instant information on a wide range of topics. A complete menu of choices guides you through how to



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access to general information, back issues of *The Good News*, booklets and more.

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