

The Good News

January-February 2002

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

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What Next in the Middle East?

Harry Potter and the Bible • Why Does Evil Exist? • A War of Two Worlds
What Is the Abomination of Desolation? • Spiritual Warfare Behind the Scenes

You need to understand what is prophesied yet to happen in the Middle East. Whether you realize it or not or understand it or not, events there are destined to affect the lives of every person on earth.

Why does the Middle East so often dominate the headlines? One obvious answer is oil, the lifeblood of modern economies. Without oil to run factories, heat homes, fuel transportation and provide energy and raw materials for thousands of uses, the economies of many nations would grind to a halt. The crucial importance of oil alone ensures that the Middle East will remain in the headlines for years.

But there's more that keeps the Middle East in the news. It is the birthplace of the world's three great monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Too often it has not been just their *birthplace*, but their *battlefield*, with their adherents warring against each other for control of territory they considered holy.

Nowhere are these conflicts more obvious than in Israel, and specifically in Jerusalem. If you've never been to Jerusalem, it's hard to imagine how so much history, religion and culture can collide and stand in literal heaps. Nowhere is this more evident than at the Temple Mount, flash point for many a conflict over the centuries.

The site first came to the attention of Israel's King David, who bought a threshing floor and built an altar on it, intending it for the site of the temple (1 Chronicles 21-22). The Temple Mount is so named because it is the location of the temples built by David's son Solomon (destroyed by the Babylonians ca. 587 B.C.) and its replacement built by Zerubbabel in the time of Ezra, which was later enlarged by Herod the Great (and ultimately razed by the Roman emperor Titus in A.D. 70).

Here Jesus of Nazareth worshiped, taught and confronted the money changers, scribes, Pharisees and other religious authorities. After His death and resurrection, Christianity was born in the temple's shadow. His followers continued to worship and teach there for several more decades until the legions of Rome crushed a Jewish rebellion and carted away most of the Jewish population they hadn't killed. A later Jewish rebellion, in 132-135, led to a Roman decree that no Jew was to set foot in Jerusalem, on pain of death.

Centuries later, in 638, Muslim Arabs took the city. In 691 Muslims built the Dome of the Rock on that same Temple Mount, enclosing the spot from which, Muslims believe, Muhammad ascended to heaven. Today Muslims consider it the third-holiest site in Islam, after Mecca, where Muhammad was born, and Medina, where he found refuge and died.

Several more centuries passed before the Crusaders captured Jerusalem, slaughtered Muslim and Jew alike, and converted the Dome of the Rock into a church. Their hold on the city lasted less than a century before Muslims recaptured it. It changed hands three more times before Muslims took control of Jerusalem and held it from 1244 to 1917, when the Ottoman Empire lost its hold in World War I and the city came under British administration.

In 1948 the modern state of Israel was born, and in the 1967 war the Israelis gained control of all of Jerusalem, though leaving the Temple Mount under Islamic authority.

Today one can watch Muslims praying at the Dome of the Rock atop the Temple Mount, Jews praying at the Western Wall barely a stone's throw away and Christians praying along the Via Dolorosa and at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher a few hundred yards to the north and west. And all around one sees the rubble of the centuries of conflict over this holy place.

Who will write the next chapter in the history of this troubled city? Believe it or not, the final chapters are already written—prophesied centuries ago in the pages of the Bible. Ominously, they mesh remarkably well with today's headlines. In this issue we provide you with an overview of the headlines of tomorrow. We hope you'll study these articles carefully.

—Scott Ashley

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Table of Contents

Cover Feature

The Middle East in Prophecy

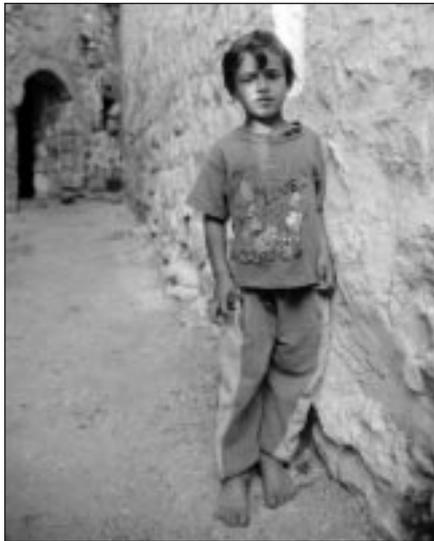
As waves of suicide bombers and other bloody attacks by Palestinians bring the predictable Israeli retaliations, the peace process in the Holy Land appears all but dead. It seems that no one—neither the principals in the struggle nor outside powers—has been able to broker a peace. Are the circumstances ripe for still another power to assert itself, fulfilling Bible prophecy? 4



Will another power make a play in the Middle East? 4

Just What Is the Abomination of Desolation?

In Jesus Christ's best-known prophecy, He spoke of a coming "abomination of desolation," spoken of by Daniel the prophet" in Jerusalem. What does this mean? In this prophecy, knowing the past can help us understand the future. 8



How political correctness hides sobering realities 14

Spiritual Warfare Behind the Scenes

Is something at work behind the scenes that we're not seeing? What's at the heart of the age-old conflicts that plague the world? Unknown to and unrecognized by most, a great spiritual struggle shapes today's world scene. . . . 10

Seeing the World Scene Realistically

As we see the world aligning itself along political, ethnic and religious lines, the West's obsession with political correctness hides sobering realities most would rather not think about. Such shortsightedness could prove dangerous if not fatal. . . . 14

A War of Two Worlds

What's behind the Islamic extremists' war against the West? What is it that fuels their hatred? A look at history helps us understand the answers and see where recent trends may be taking us in this war of two worlds. 16

Harry Potter and the Bible: Occult Fantasy in Perspective

A fictional boy named Harry Potter has taken the literary world by storm. Youngsters are reading his books by the millions. The fictional young wizard appears to have bewitched a generation. Do parents see the entire picture? 19

Why Does Evil Exist?

Chilling terrorist attacks, gruesome murders and assaults, bloody wars and uprisings that assault our senses and sensibilities—why do they exist? Why can't we eradicate them? Is something at work that we're failing to see? 22

Isn't It About Time You Read the Book?

Many people own at least one Bible. Every year it's a perpetual best-seller. But, for far too many, the Bible simply gathers dust on a table or shelf. If it is what it claims to be—the very Word of God—isn't it time you read it? . . . 25

Who Was Jesus Christ?

More than a billion people claim to be Christian, to be followers of Jesus Christ. But what does "Christ" mean? When Jesus claimed to be the Christ—the Anointed One, the promised Messiah—what did He mean? 28



What's the biblical perspective on witchcraft? 22

Regular Features

- World News and Trends** *An Overview of Conditions Around the World 12*
- Letters From Our Readers** *Readers of The Good News share their thoughts 30*



The Middle East in Prophecy

by Darris McNeely

Another wave of gruesome bloodshed has stained the soil of the Holy Land. It seems that no one—neither the principals in the struggle nor outside political or religious powers—has been able to broker a peace. Are the circumstances ripe for still another power to assert itself, fulfilling Bible prophecy?

A brutal attack on a civilian bus and a devastating wave of suicide bombings—some directed at Israeli teenagers in Jerusalem—has once more riveted the world’s attention on the ever-volatile Middle East. Such tragic news, combined with the war against terrorists in Afghanistan, makes us rightly wonder when or even *if* this troubled area will ever see peace, and what such events may mean for the entire world.

Are events in those areas propelling us to the biblical Armageddon, ever closer to the end of civilization?

A few days before Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, He and His disciples sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem from the east. He had just foretold the destruction of the temple that stood majestically before them just across the Kidron Valley. Still reeling from His words, His disciples asked Him: “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).

Jesus then gave what has come to be known as His Olivet prophecy. In it He outlined a series of trends and events that would occur from that time onwards and eventually lead up to His return. Then Christ gave a specific sign that would indicate the very end of this age, a time when Jerusalem would be surrounded by armed forces: “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies,” He said in Luke’s account, “then know that its desolation is near” (Luke 21:20).

When that happens, He continued, those in Judea (the modern state of Israel) should flee to the mountains. Those days, He explained, would be filled with vengeance because from that time forward end-time biblical prophecies found throughout the Bible would rapidly be fulfilled. It would be a time of unimaginable distress as Jerusalem is surrounded and occupied by foreign armies (verses 21-24).

Some will point out that events surrounding the Roman siege and capture of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 fulfilled aspects of Christ’s prophecy. However, some of Jesus’ specific

predictions show that its primary fulfillment would take place shortly before His return.

Where are we headed?

Where are events in the Middle East taking us? Are we seeing the stage set for this prophecy’s fulfillment? While the war against worldwide terrorism grabs most of the headlines, we need to be aware of other events behind the scenes. Although we can’t be certain how end-time events will play out, many recent trends seem to indicate we may be closer to the end than perhaps we had realized.

The war in Afghanistan and continuing turbulence throughout the region underscore the volatility of the current situation. The massive divide between Western culture and values and those of many Islamic nations argues that lasting peace will remain elusive for a long time. Meanwhile, a growing worldwide recession reminds us that the West remains heavily dependent on Middle East oil as the lifeblood of its economies.

Eruptions of violence continue between the Israelis and Palestinians in spite of repeated calls for peace. Formal and informal peace talks alike have broken down, and a negotiated settlement between the two sides, barring outside intervention, seems as unlikely as ever.

A year of tragedy

More than a year has passed since Palestinians launched the current *intifada*, the latest round of killings, bombings and suicide attacks in Israel. Hundreds of Palestinians and Israelis have since lost their lives. The latest suicide bombings were particularly gruesome in part because of their intended victims—the scores of Israeli teenagers who regularly packed a popular Jerusalem outdoor mall every Saturday night after the Sabbath.

Other incidents have been equally senseless and tragic, like the four Palestinian schoolchildren killed shortly before the Jerusalem suicide bombings when one of them apparently kicked an unexploded shell, causing it to detonate. We can perhaps recall the terrible scene months earlier of a Palestinian father caught in the crossfire between troops, trying to shield his son from the

gunfire before the young boy was killed.

Maybe we remember the news of the Israeli doctor, Mario Goldin, who specialized in helping relieve the pain of both Jews and Arabs. He was slain last April while visiting patients in a Palestinian-controlled area. The list of tragedies and missed opportunities in the region goes on and on.

After the most recent attacks, Israel adopted the stance that the current Palestinian leadership cannot be trusted to end the

The report conjectures that the conflicts could take one of three courses. One is continued war without resolution. The second is the rise of a regional power that would impose a peace on the area. The third possibility, and the one that could fit in with Bible prophecy, is that a stronger *outside power* would “impose empire on the region.”

The article goes on to say that “*the only option is the third option: direct intervention*

even contemplate such a move. Yet such action, if it were to occur, would likely come from another source.

Why?

Here we must turn to the Bible for prophetic understanding.

Armed conflict in Jerusalem

The answer begins in the longest prophecy in the Bible, in Daniel 11. Two forces, identified as the *king of the South* and the *king of the North*, are described as warring back and forth with each other over a prolonged interval (see “The North-South Struggle for the Middle East,” page 7).

In verse 40 we read of events “*at the time of the end*,” when the king of the South will attack the king of the North, provoking such a furious counterattack, one “like a whirlwind,” that the king of the North will succeed in overwhelming many countries. Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia will fall before him (verses 42-43).

The prophecy also says he will enter the Glorious Land (verses 40-41). Here we find a prophecy of an army supporting the king of the North entering the Holy Land, including Jerusalem, to establish his control “between the seas [the Mediterranean and Dead Seas] in the glorious holy mountain [Jerusalem]” (verses 43-45, KJV).

This setting also fulfills Christ’s specific statement regarding an “abomination of desolation.” In Matthew 24:15-16 Jesus 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.” Christ’s warning to flee to the mountains connects this to the same event mentioned in Luke 21:20, where armies also are prophesied to surround Jerusalem.

The end-time abomination of desolation will be a replay of an event that occurred long before Jesus’ birth during the reign of the Seleucid Syrian ruler Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) in 167 B.C. (Daniel 11:31). That episode was a partial fulfillment of a greater event to come, the one to occur at the end time according to Christ’s prophecy (see “Just What Is the Abomination of Desolation?,” page 8).

Another forerunner of end-time events

Some would maintain that Jesus’ prophecy was fulfilled during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 66-70, when the armies of Titus surrounded Jerusalem and ultimately sacked the city and destroyed the temple. The rituals of the temple ceased



The Scriptures reveal that an outside power will intervene in the ancient Holy Land during the last days, probably to impose a forced “peace” because of the unending strife.

violence and negotiate in good faith. The leaders of the two sides, Israel’s Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat, find themselves locked in an uncertain and deadly conflict. The eventual outcome may be far different from what either could foresee or desire.

Modern imperialism

In August, only a few weeks before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the respected Stratfor Global Intelligence Co. issued a report on its Web site analyzing a line of conflict stretching from the Balkans to the Caucasus and then on to Jerusalem. The report made the connection that these areas were part of the old Ottoman Empire, which collapsed after World War I. Just as that Turkish empire imposed its version of peace on the peoples of that area, a new peacemaking effort is being discussed by modern powers, including the United States and several Western European countries, for imposing a similar “peace” on this region of age-old ethnic conflicts.

by an outside force intended to impose order throughout the former Ottoman Empire” (emphasis added).

This would be an enormous task. It may be achievable, but it would stretch the military capabilities of today’s largest military alliance, NATO, to the limit. The quantity of troops needed to impose a “pax NATO” on this region of the former Ottoman Empire would be staggering.

History also has shown that any country that places troops in the Middle East runs a grave risk of having them attacked by terrorists. The 1983 bombing of a military barracks in Beirut that killed 241 U.S. marines is a case in point.

Where could a military force come together that would be large enough to impose order in today’s Middle East? What power would dare muster the political and moral will to stop the fighting between Israelis and Arabs to bring peace to the world’s most critical hot spot?

Today the United States would seem to be the only world power large enough to



and remain inactive to this day.

However, this partial fulfillment of Luke 21:20 was also only a forerunner of the end-time fulfillment that is yet to come. Remember, Christ's Olivet prophecy was in response to the question, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). His comments about the abomination of desolation and armies encompassing Jerusalem were made to indicate specific signs that His *second coming* would be imminent.

When we see armies again surrounding Jerusalem, possibly in an effort to guarantee peace in the area, the stage will be set for the final fulfillment of the abomination of desolation. A man called the "man of sin" and the "son of perdition" is described in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. He "opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

Antiochus Epiphanes' first abomination in the Jerusalem temple area and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies were only forerunners of the final fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy about an abomination of desolation in the temple area during an occupation of Jerusalem.

The Scriptures reveal that an outside power will intervene in the ancient Holy Land during the last days, possibly to impose a forced peace because of the volatile and seemingly unending strife surrounding Jerusalem and the Middle East.

Islamic unrest and oil

Biblical prophecy predicts the rise of a new superpower, an end-time coalition of nations modeled on the ancient Roman Empire, that will play a significant role on the stage of world events. In time this union of nations will become so powerful that all other nations will have to deal with it. Is it possible that out of the present European Union a vastly different power, unlike any seen in history, will develop to fulfill these biblical prophecies?

European nations have increasingly inserted themselves into peacemaking efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A few months ago the European Union was instrumental in negotiating an Israeli-army pullout from Beit Jala, a predominantly Christian Palestinian suburb of Jerusalem. The deal to withdraw was brokered by the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Italy.

This was a milestone for European diplomacy in the Middle East. It's also no

coincidence that Germany, the most powerful nation in the EU, hosted a summit of Afghani tribal leaders in November and December to hammer out a postwar government and power-sharing arrangement for Afghanistan. Nor is it a coincidence that it has been announced that EU troops will form the peacekeeping force there.

The entire Western world has a strategic interest in the Middle East because of its oil, the lifeblood of Western economies. In the Gulf War, only a decade ago, many Western powers banded together to prevent Iraq from dominating other oil-producing nations and to ensure the free flow of oil to the rest of the world. Many European nations in particular are heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil, having little or no domestic supplies of their own.

Other factors will no doubt come into play at some point. Recent events have shown not only the presence but the strength of Islamic fundamentalist movements in such major oil-producing states as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Analysts worry, and rightly so, that growing Muslim extremism could lead to a more-widespread movement that could repeat events of 1979, when Islamic religious unrest toppled the shah of Iran and instilled a fundamentalist Islamic government in one of the region's major oil-producing countries.

Should Islamic-fundamentalist unrest spread and engulf such politically moderate but strategically crucial states as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan or Pakistan, oil supplies to the West would be threatened. Western powers could easily find themselves in the position of either using force to access those supplies or seeing their economies wither and die.

Trigger of end-time events?

In such a scenario, the oil spigot could easily be used as a major weapon against the West—perhaps the way Daniel predicted the end-time king of the South could "push at" the end-time king of the North (Daniel 11:40, KJV).

Many other Bible versions translate this as "attack." The Hebrew conveys the sense of "ram at." So this prophecy may actually indicate several possibilities that could trigger this end-time invasion of the Middle East by a European-based power: intolerable economic or other pressure, a military strike, terrorist action or some combination of the three.

Iraq and possibly other Islamic countries—not to mention terrorist groups—are actively pursuing building or buying

nuclear devices. Pakistan already has them. The Muslim countries of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Sudan are known to already have or be actively developing deadly biological and chemical weapons. Several of these countries also continue to call for the forcible Muslim conquest of Jerusalem.

Ironically, because of U.S. peacekeeping efforts in the region, many Islamic countries—including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan—are heavily armed with the latest American-made fighter jets, tanks and other military hardware, ensuring that the next round of all-out warfare likely will be bloody indeed.

A divided and dangerous world

During the past year we have witnessed an unrelenting escalation in the Middle East conflict between Jews and Palestinians. Then came the attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and reports of terrorist attacks planned across Europe.

The realization that ours is a divided and dangerous world dawned on many people, along with the realization that the Middle East—and Israel and Jerusalem in particular—is at the center of much of that division and danger.

Jerusalem will remain a "cup of drunkenness" and "a very heavy stone for all peoples" for the foreseeable future (Zechariah 12:2-3). Yet eventually, according to Bible prophecy, this situation will lead to the intervention of a new and dreadful power, whose land route to modern Israel would come from north of Jerusalem, intervening in and assuming control over much of the Middle East. This will be one of its major steps toward achieving world domination. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Where are world trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about the geopolitical scene in the time of the end? For more information on these and other



prophecies, request our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

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The North-South Struggle for the *Middle East*

In ancient times, kings of the two great river-valley civilizations—Mesopotamia and Egypt—dreamed of controlling the entire Middle East. Invariably their path to imperial conquest ran north and south through the Holy Land, the narrow land bridge between Eurasia and Africa through which trade and military traffic had to flow.

Whether it involved Babylonian, Assyrian or Persian emperors from the north or Egyptian pharaohs from the south, the threat to the inhabitants of this crucial strip of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea was almost constant.

Throughout the course of history, rule over the Holy Land has often changed hands, the inhabitants being at times autonomous but usually subject to some great regional power.

Around 536 B.C., in the third year of the reign of Persian emperor Cyrus the Great, an angel delivered to the Hebrew prophet Daniel a prophecy of what would happen in years to come (Daniel 10:1, 14). At that time Persia under Cyrus was the dominant power in the Middle East.

Daniel was told of three more prominent rulers of Persia (Daniel 11:2) who did indeed arise. The prophecy further mentioned the rise of a ruler of great dominion whose kingdom would be divided into four parts (verses 3-4). Combining this with another prophecy of Daniel, in chapter 8, we find that the anticipated ruler, foretold 200 years in advance, was Alexander the Great. In fact, after his death Alexander's Greek Empire was partitioned into four kingdoms, each ruled by one of his generals, the two major dominions being Egypt under Ptolemy to the south of Judah and Greater Syria under Seleucus to the north.

The remainder of Daniel 11 focuses on the north-south divide. It details events in the reigns of successive Seleucid and Ptolemaic rulers—referred to as the king of the North and king of the South respectively—with the Holy Land passing back and forth between them several times. Receiving the most detail is the reign of an evil Seleucid Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes, though he wouldn't arise until more than 350 years after Daniel prophesied!

Antiochus was a "tyrannical oppressor who did his utmost to destroy the Jewish religion altogether" (Gleason Archer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1985, Vol. 7, p. 136). He instituted laws that forbade the practice of the Jewish religion under penalty of death. Those who held fast to God's commandments were often brutally murdered. As predicted by Daniel, he desecrated the temple by erecting a massive statue of the pagan god Zeus in it and offering swine on the altar (Daniel 11:31). Daniel's prophecy then shifts to New Testament times. In 65 B.C. the Romans took possession of Syria, and the Roman state thus became the kingdom of the North. Rome also later annexed Judea.

Verses 36-39 appear to show the Roman emperor proclaiming himself divine and later honoring and expanding the power of a previously unrecognized "god" in a high religious office, the former occurring early in the succession of Roman emperors and the latter commencing with Constantine the Great in the fourth century. The honoring of this false religion would progress through various resurrections of the western part of the Roman Empire until the end time.

That brings us to the next verse: "At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him . . ." (verse 40, emphasis added). But who will the northern and southern powers be at the end of the age? The western part of the Roman Empire has been revived numerous times in Europe—by Justinian, Charlemagne, Otto the Great, Charles V, Napoleon

and the Hitler-Mussolini Axis. At the 1947 Treaty of Rome, which brought the European Economic Community into existence, the signers were, according to former NATO secretary-general Henri Spaak, "consciously recreating the Roman Empire once more."

Thus it appears that today's European Union, which traces its roots to that starting point, is paving the way toward the final revival of the Roman Empire that the Bible elsewhere prophesies. It will be led by a dictator of whom Antiochus Epiphanes was a forerunner.

But what about the *southern* ruler? Though the East Roman, or Byzantine, empire continued until 1453, Egypt was separated from this northern power during the Arab conquest of 639 to 642 and became an integral part of the Muslim world. Thus the caliph of Islam became the king of the South, eventually ruling from Baghdad over a huge

empire stretching from southwest Asia all the way across North Africa, including the Holy Land.

The struggle between north and south never really abated. The Muslims were repelled by Charlemagne's grandfather from taking control of Europe in 732. The 11th through 13th centuries saw the Crusades, launched by European Christendom in the north to regain the Holy Land from the Muslim powers of the south.

From around 1250 Egypt was ruled by Mamluk sultans until the Ottoman Turks seized it in 1517. The land then remained part of the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years. The north-south struggle then broke out again when Napoleon

attempted to militarily wrest Egypt, Palestine and Syria from the Turks. But the British aided the Turks in repelling him.

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire toward the end of World War I in 1917, Egypt became a British protectorate. In 1937 it finally gained its independence. Then, in World War II, the north-south struggle erupted yet again, when Axis forces tried to take over the whole of North Africa and the Middle East. The Allies, though, prevented them from doing so.

After the war Egypt became a key member of the fledgling Arab League in 1945. In 1948 the Arab League jointly attacked the newly formed state of Israel. Later, from 1958 to 1961, Egypt, Syria, Yemen and the United Arab States were merged into one political union, the United Arab Republic. In 1965 the Arab Common Market was founded.

These events may merely represent the *beginnings* of an Arab confederacy prophesied in Psalm 83. Dedicated to wiping out Israel, it comprises "the tents of Edom [including Palestinians and some of the Turks] and the Ishmaelites [Arabs in general]; Moab [central Jordan] and the Hagarites [north Arabians]; Gebal [a mountain region of Jordan], Ammon [the environs of Amman, Jordan], and Amalek [a branch of Edomite Palestinians]; Philistia [the Gaza Strip] with the inhabitants of Tyre [southern Lebanon]" (verses 5-7).

It seems, then, that the final king of the South will be the leader of a coming Muslim confederation encompassing at least several Arab nations as indicated in Daniel 11. When the king of the North invades the Holy Land, he will conquer Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia, though "Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon"—the ancient names for what is today Jordan—"shall escape from his hand" (verses 40-43).

As we've seen from Daniel 11:40, at the time of the end the king of the South will act against the northern ruler. What might provoke this action? Perhaps it will involve European overtures of peace toward the Jews (see "Just What Is the Abomination of Desolation?," page 8).

—Tom Robinson



Just What Is the Abomination of Desolation?

In Jesus Christ's best-known prophecy, He spoke of a coming "abomination of desolation" in Jerusalem. What does this mean? In this prophecy, the past helps us understand the future.

by Tom Robinson

In His most detailed prophecy of the end time, Jesus said, "... When you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . . , then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16). What was He talking about?

The longest and most precise prophecy of the Bible, Daniel 11, recorded in advance what would occur in the empires and nations that would vie for control of the Holy Land for centuries to come. It describes, in astounding detail, rulers and

Antiochus Epiphanes was a forerunner of the end-time king of the North, the world dictator the book of Revelation refers to as the "beast."

other people who lived long after Daniel's prophecy and several centuries before Christ.

For much of the prophecy these kingdoms were Syria to the north, ruled by descendants of Seleucus, one of the generals of Alexander the Great, and Egypt, ruled by descendants of another of Alexander's generals, Ptolemy. (See "The North-South Struggle for the Middle East," page 7. You can learn more details in a good Bible commentary or from our free booklet *Is the Bible True?*)

An evil ruler arises

Eventually the prophecy describes a Seleucid ruler named Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes. Daniel 11:21 states, "And in his [Seleucus IV's] place shall arise a vile person, to whom they will not give the honor of royalty." Most Syrian officials, tired of the excesses of the Seleucid rulers, backed the usurper Heliodorus, who had poisoned the previous king.

"But," the prophecy explains of Antiochus, "he shall come in peaceably, and

seize the kingdom by intrigue" (verse 21). By a show of what some historians have called "Roman manners" and a great deal of flattery, he enlisted the aid of neighboring King Eumenes II of Pergamum and officials at home in forcing out Heliodorus and obtaining the throne in 175 B.C. The next verse explains that all those who opposed Antiochus would be swept away and broken—and they were.

At this time Syria ruled over the Holy Land. Included in those "swept away" is one referred to as "the prince of the covenant" (verse 22). This is

apparently a reference to a Hellenistic Jew who changed his name to the Greek form Jason, appointed by Antiochus as replacement high priest over the Jewish worship system. He was dropped from that position by Antiochus only three years later in favor of another Hellenizing (that is, Greek-culture-promoting) apostate named Menelaus.

As verses 23-24 show, elements of the Jewish leadership made a "league," a treaty or similar agreement, with Antiochus, and at first he entered "peaceably" into the Holy Land with only a small force.

What did this league, or covenant, entail? The apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees, although not Scripture, provides us with history of the period. "In those days went there out of Israel wicked men, who persuaded many, saying, Let us go and make a covenant with the heathen that are round about us . . ." (1 Maccabees 1:11, KJV).

Continuing in a paraphrased version of the account: "... For our refusal to associate with them has brought us nothing but

trouble.' This proposal appealed to many people, and some of them became so enthusiastic about it that they went to the king and received from him permission to follow Gentile customs. They built in Jerusalem a stadium like those in the Greek cities. They had surgery performed to hide their circumcision, abandoned the holy covenant, started associating with Gentiles, and did all sorts of other evil things" (verses 11-15, Today's English Version).

Still, even the apostatizing factions did not *wholly* abandon the Jewish worship system—at least not yet.

In any event, Antiochus soon betrayed the Jewish leaders by taking from the rich and giving to the poor, yet only as a temporary ploy to gain support among the Jewish masses (Daniel 11:24).

Antiochus vents his fury

Then notice what was to happen in 168 B.C. after the king defeated Egypt: "While returning to his land with great riches, his heart shall be moved against the holy covenant; so he shall do damage and return to his own land" (verse 28).

As 1 Maccabees records, he set himself against the Jews, massacred many of them and plundered the temple at Jerusalem before returning to Syria (1 Maccabees 1:20-28).

Antiochus then embarked on a second venture into Egypt, unsuccessful this time because a Roman fleet forced him to give up his fight and return the island of Cyprus to Egypt (Daniel 11:30). "... Therefore he shall be grieved, and return in rage against the holy covenant, and do damage. So he shall return and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant" (verse 30).

Antiochus vented his fury on the Jews, yet he accorded special favor to those among



them who rejected their religion.

As 1 Maccabees explains: “When the soldiers entered Jerusalem, their commander spoke to the people, offering them terms of peace and completely deceiving them. Then he suddenly launched a fierce attack on the city, dealing it a major blow and killing many of the people. He plundered the city, set it on fire, and tore down its buildings and walls. He and his army took the women and children as prisoners and seized the cattle. Then Antiochus and his forces built high walls and strong towers in the area north of the Temple, turning it into a fort . . .” (1:29-33, TEV).

Antiochus rejects God’s laws

Then came the worst. Daniel’s prophecy warned of Antiochus: “And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation” (Daniel 11:31).

The book of 1 Maccabees gives us details: “Antiochus now issued a decree

“They were even ordered to defile the Temple and the holy things in it. They were commanded to build pagan altars, temples, and shrines, and to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there. They were forbidden to circumcise their sons and were required to make themselves . . . unclean in every way they could, so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses and would disobey all its commands. The penalty for disobeying the king’s decree was death.

“The king not only issued the same decree throughout his whole empire, but he also appointed officials to supervise the people and commanded each town in Judea to offer pagan sacrifices. Many of the Jews were ready to forsake the Law and to obey these officials. They defiled the land with their evil, and their conduct forced all true Israelites to hide wherever they could” (1:41-53, TEV).

The temple defiled

Then it happened: “On the fifteenth day

sacred books or who obeyed the Law was put to death by order of the king. Month after month these wicked people used their power against the Israelites caught in the towns. On the twenty-fifth of the month, these same evil people offered sacrifices on the pagan altar erected on top of the altar in the Temple” (verses 55-59, TEV). Indeed, pigs, declared unclean in God’s law (Deuteronomy 14:8), were offered over His own altar.

The account in 1 Maccabees continues: “Mothers who had allowed their babies to be circumcised were put to death in accordance with the king’s decree. Their babies were hung around their necks, and their families and those who had circumcised them were put to death” (1:60, TEV).

Yet, as horrible as this was, some still resisted. In fact, 1 Maccabees reports: “But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. Very great wrath came upon Israel” (1 Maccabees 1:62-63, New Revised Standard Version).

Yet many in the resistance lived. The account continues with the rise of the Hasmonean priestly family of Mattathias, including his son and successor Judas Maccabeus, who would not compromise with paganism. In the end, the efforts of these patriots and their followers were in large measure responsible for eventually pushing the Syrians out.

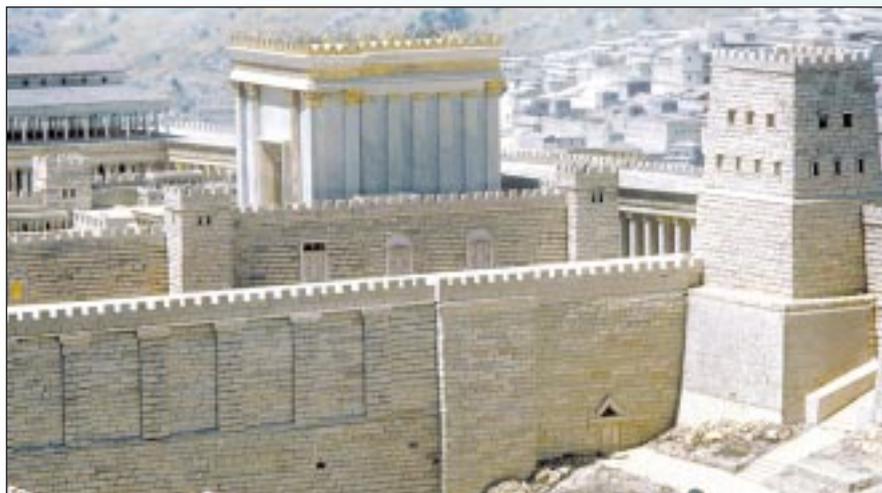
Later prophetic fulfillment

Now, with all of that as history, consider Christ’s warning about the abomination of desolation. When He gave it, hadn’t this part of Daniel’s prophecy been fulfilled almost 200 years earlier, as we’ve seen? Certainly. So Daniel’s prophecy, according to Jesus, must have a *dual* fulfillment.

Jesus revealed to us the time for this prophecy’s ultimate fulfillment in Matthew 24 when He explained what would immediately follow it: “For then there will be *great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.* And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (verses 21-22, emphasis added throughout).

This recalls another part of Daniel’s prophecy, which says that in the end time “there shall be a time of trouble, *such as never was since there was a nation,* even to

Continued on page 24



Antiochus Epiphanes, depicted on a coin at left, was the first to partially fulfill Daniel’s prophecy. The Roman general Titus partially fulfilled it again in A.D. 70 when he demolished the Jerusalem temple, shown in a model above. Another fulfillment is still to come.

that all nations in his empire should abandon their own customs and become one people. All the Gentiles and even many of the Israelites submitted to this decree. They adopted the official pagan religion, offered sacrifices to idols, and no longer observed the Sabbath.

“The king also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. He ordered them not to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or wine offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days.

of the month Kislew in the year 145” (verse 54, TEV), which corresponds to 167 B.C., “they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar” of the temple (verse 54, KJV). This was apparently a pagan altar with an image of the Greek chief god Zeus set up atop the temple altar. After all, to the Greek mind the God of the Hebrews simply equated to the chief god in the Greeks’ pantheon.

We are further told: “Pagan sacrifices were offered in front of houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law which were found were torn up and burned, and anyone who was caught with a copy of the



Spiritual Warfare Behind the Scenes

Deeply entrenched religious issues are at the heart of the war on terrorism. They are inflamed by a power greater than either the worldwide terrorist network or the combined military might of the United States, Britain, the rest of NATO and Russia. You need to understand what that power is.

by Don Ward

The earth's geopolitical landscape shifted dramatically with President George W. Bush's September declaration of war against terrorism. Even one who regularly watches the news may be unaware of how dramatic the shift was.

After the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the nations of NATO invoked the alliance's Article 5, which states that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

Several Arab states voiced their support of America's war on terrorism. But most were long on rhetoric and short on substance as the coalition developed.

Saudi Arabia granted the United States permission to use one of its bases but stated that it would not permit the United States to launch attacks on Muslims from Saudi soil. Pakistan granted the United States permission to use its airspace and eventually granted the United States permission to use an air base. But the United States still needed support from countries in Central Asia that border Afghanistan and from Russia. Support from this region was needed to buffer Russia and China.

Russia has dropped objections to the expansion of NATO eastward and may be rewarded for its cooperation by being accepted into NATO. During his attendance at the eighth annual European Union–Russian Summit in Brussels, Russian president Vladimir Putin stated that “step by step the partnership between Russia and the EU is gaining momentum.”

Mr. Putin also declared his willingness to take “an entirely new look at the expansion of NATO,” should the alliance develop into a “political organization,” with Moscow “involved in that process.”

Central Asian oil fields

The United States' interest in Central Asia extends far beyond its war on terrorism. Central Asia is the repository of one

of the world's largest oil reserves. One field alone has estimated recoverable reserves of 10 to 30 billion barrels. Thus the importance of this region to the industrial nations is great. Afghanistan has long served as the principal crossroads in this region, so the geopolitical implications of who controls Afghanistan are incalculable.

With the development of the coalition against terrorism, and with Russia's move toward the West, China was left scrambling to try to regain her political bearings, not knowing whether to support the war or join in with the Muslims or raise the heat over Taiwan. Eventually China at least voiced support for the war on terrorism.

In the meantime, Israel, with the greatest knowledge and experience in fighting terrorism, was told to sit on the sidelines and cheer for the coalition. But many voices and parties in Israel objected to nonparticipation, especially as the United States made overtures to Islamic nations that previously have supported terrorist actions against Israel.

Ancient seeds of strife

Here, in the Holy Land, is the heart of the conflict. Terrorists claim that attacks against America are justified because of her support of Israel and to drive the infidels out of their sacred lands. But the age-old family feud between the sons of Abraham, provoked by the real author of evil, the devil, is the real reason people are willing to kill themselves to murder others.

Bible prophecy reveals that Abraham's son Ishmael (and, by implication, his descendants, the Arabs) “shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren” (Genesis 16:12).

The enduring nature of this hostility against Israel by Ishmael's descendants, as described in this ancient history, suggests its catastrophic climax may come at the end of the age. Another passage indicates

the descendants of Ishmael and surrounding nations could enter into a covenant for the destruction of Israel.

“They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.’ For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot” (Psalm 83:3-8).

Many Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias will show that the peoples mentioned here include today's Palestinians, Arabs and Jordanians, among others.

Major religious differences

No one can properly understand the age-old hatreds among peoples unless they understand the spirit world. Most if not all people believe in some higher power. That is, they believe in the existence of an unseen world. Most religious people believe there is one supreme deity and that their ultimate reward is eternal life in some form. However, the perceived road to eternal life is not the same for all religions.

The teachings and practices of the world's religions vary greatly. Islam, Judaism and Christianity all have a different view of the nature of God. To some degree Christianity has its roots in Judaism, in the sense that both accept the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God. The Jews still look for the prophesied Messiah. Christians believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah and Son of God. Muslims view Jesus as a great prophet, but they do not view Him as the Son of God.

God, as each of these religions interprets God, is the ultimate arbiter of good and evil. So the determination of good and evil

is a spiritual matter. Thus good and evil must be revealed to humankind.

So how does the Supreme Deity of the universe reveal His will to human beings? Christians and Jews believe that God inspired the prophets who then faithfully recorded the Word of God in the form of the Bible, the written Word of God. Muslims believe that the archangel Gabriel revealed the words of Allah to the prophet Muhammad.

If the same God inspired both the Bible and the Koran, why is there such a variance in the definition of good and evil? And why is there such a difference in how the followers of those two books view the process of salvation?

War has spiritual roots

President Bush has stated that the war on terrorism is not against Islam but against evil, insisting that this is not a religious war. On the other hand, Islamic fundamentalists have proclaimed *jihad*, or holy war, against America. Both sides claim they are fighting against evil. Islamic fundamentalists openly state that they are fighting against the Great Satan, which they define as the United States of America.

What is this war really about? For that matter, what are all wars really about? Based on the rhetoric of our day, it seems logical to assert that war has to do with the battle of the ages—that is, the great war between good and evil. In nearly all the wars that have ever been waged, both sides proclaim that they are fighting a righteous war and that God is on their side.

To understand the origin of war and terrorism, one must understand who God is, what He is and what His purpose is—and the corollary to that, which is who man is, what he is and what his purpose is.

The answer is that God, who is spirit, is our Creator and Father. He created human beings for the purpose of bringing them into a relationship with Him that would allow them to be born into His family as glorious spirit beings like Him. But, as we shall see, a lesser spirit being rebelled against God and His plan for bringing sons and daughters into His family.

Before God created human beings, He created the angels to help Him bring sons and daughters into His family (Hebrews 1:14). God created the angels, including three mentioned in the Bible named Michael, Gabriel and Heylel (the latter rendered “Lucifer” in Isaiah 14:12), for specific purposes. Since God is righteous and perfect in all His ways, He cannot be the

author of evil. So God created the angels perfect and gave them free will to choose whether they would be the servants of God or of iniquity (Ezekiel 28:15).

One of the angels, Heylel or Lucifer, along with a third of the angels, rebelled against God and tried to take over His throne (Revelation 12:3-4; Isaiah 14:12-15). This event marked the initial battle between the forces of good and evil. From this event forward, Satan has tried to subvert and thwart God’s great purpose of bringing sons and daughters into His family.

God created the first human beings, Adam and Eve, without sin. That is, in their initial state He created them neutral with freedom to choose good or evil. God told Adam and Eve to look to Him for the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). But they decided to determine for themselves what is good and what is evil and thus cut themselves off from God (Genesis 3:22-24) and in effect submitted themselves to *Satan’s* dominion.

Satan thus became the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and to a large degree controls the kingdoms of this world (1 John 5:19). In one of Satan’s temptations of Christ, he offered Him this world’s kingdoms if Christ would bow down and worship him (Matthew 4:8-10). This temptation reveals Satan’s objective and strategy: He is filled with an insatiable quest and desire to be worshiped.

The objective: Obscure the true goal

We should never forget that Satan is the author of sin and death (John 8:44). His purpose is to subvert and thwart God’s plan for bringing sons and daughters into His family. Satan knows that, if he can deceive human beings into worshiping him, they will deny the great Creator God and Father, thus losing out on salvation.

Furthermore, Satan knows that Jesus Christ will come back to earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So the devil has devised a plan of deceiving the world into worshiping *him* instead of the true Messiah. At the end of “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4), Scripture seems to indicate he will possess an individual who will sit in the temple of God proclaiming that he is God. All the peoples of the world, except those whose names are written in the book of life, will worship him (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:8).

Moreover, Satan knows that Jesus will return to Jerusalem. He knows God has established Jerusalem as the spiritual capital of the world, and the focal point of the

world’s wars will eventually be that city.

One must never forget that Satan is the source of evil and that one of his age-old strategies is to divide and conquer. Sadly, the nations that form the coalition against terrorism and those who foster and perpetrate terrorism are all pawns on Satan’s great chessboard of deception.

The storm before the calm

Christ said: “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there shall be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:6-8).

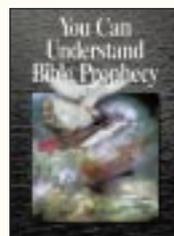
Bible prophecy reveals that at some point the Holy City, Jerusalem, will be divided and trodden down by the nations (Revelation 11:1-2). But the good news is that Jesus Christ will take over the kingdoms of this world and usher in a new age of peace for all nations (verse 15).

No matter how just a war might seem in the minds of human beings, and regardless of how they seek to justify their cause, this world will never know peace until its peoples look to the true source of peace. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Only He can bring peace to the world.

So, regardless of what any political or religious leader says, the war on terrorism is a spiritual war. It is war for the hearts and minds of men, women and even children. Indeed the geopolitical landscape has changed, but this is simply one more ugly scene in Satan’s montage. Christ will come again and defeat the military might of the world and establish an everlasting kingdom. Only then will the nations learn war no more (Isaiah 2:4). **GN**

Recommended Reading

How will the world finally find peace? What will happen before that finally comes to pass? Be sure to request your free copies of *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to learn the answers.



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



World News and Trends

An Overview of Conditions Around the World

The euro: Europe's crucial new reality

The biggest currency experiment in history has begun: The euro is now the official common currency of 12 European nations: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, the Republic of Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

Starting Jan. 1 more than 300 million people in Europe began the adjustment to the new money in their pockets, wallets and purses. During two months of transition, Europeans may use old national currencies alongside the euro. However, after Feb. 28 only the euro will be accepted as legal tender in the 12 nations.

For most Europeans the initial change will be limited to getting used to new coins and bills. For the first time in the history of the European Union (EU), citizens of participating countries will be able to make quick, clear price comparisons across national borders. Within the 12 nations it will no longer be necessary to exchange money when visiting other countries.

Much less noticeable than the highly visible exchange of banknotes will be the inevitable realignment of national sovereignty resulting from the euro's introduction. Control over national currency has always been vital to a country's national sovereignty.

With the euro, however, monetary policy cedes to the European Central Bank (ECB), which as a supragovernmental agency already determines key interest rates and will set money-supply levels for all 12 countries in the euro zone. The national banks of those nations are in essence now mere vassals of the ECB, implementing its policies on a national level.

The sovereignty issue is one of the main reasons some in noneuro EU countries such as Britain are reluctant to join the

"From January 2002, the euro will be far more than the single currency for Europe. It will contribute to a common European identity [and] foster peace."

monetary union. There is no question that exchanging the British pound sterling for the euro would mean a loss of independence for the United Kingdom.

The other key element in influencing the value of national currency remains in the hands of each national government: economic policies. Critics of the euro have warned for several years that the euro may experience difficulty in becoming a stable hard currency unless economic policy is coordinated among euro countries in the same way that monetary policy is determined by the ECB, for, after the euro's introduction, there will be no return to national currencies without irreparable damage to the European Union.

The question, then: What nation will supply the steady hand needed to guide the economic policies of the euro zone to

monetary stability? If this currency experiment is successful, the inevitable result will be more political sovereignty transferred from the 12 national governments to the European Union.

Indeed, when it was announced in December that the euro had won the International Charlemagne Prize for 2002 (a prestigious award normally given annually to people or groups seen as most greatly contributing to European unity), prize-committee spokesman Walter Eversheim said: "From January 2002, the euro will be far more than the single currency for Europe. It will contribute to a common European identity [and] foster peace."

Unknown to most people, however, these moves toward forging a European superstate will not lead to peace but ultimately the opposite. To understand the biblical significance of these developments, read the cover article "Who Will Be the Next Superpower?" in the May-June *Good News* and request our free booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Sources: *The Daily Telegraph* [London], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.)

Underage sex in Britain

According to a government-funded study of sexual habits in Britain, the average age at which British teenagers first have intimate relations is 16, the lowest level ever recorded. Analysis of the available data indicates that a third of teenagers indulge in illicit sexual relationships *before* they reach 16. This government study went on to show that one in three underage teens engages in sexual activity.

Millions of pounds of tax money have been spent in dealing with this problem, which naturally results in countless unplanned pregnancies and helps send rates of sexually transmitted disease soaring.

The human cost to society in needless suffering is incalculable. Competent sex education is important in dealing with the dilemma, but even that can prove counterproductive if it is not accompanied by sound moral teaching from the Bible. If you do not yet have a copy, please request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*. (Source: *The Sunday Times* [London].)

The perils of going it alone

A feature article in *USA Today*, quoting a recognized authority, catches one's eye. It said: "With the increase in the divorce rate, the increase in the age at which people first get married and with our increasing longevity, the experience of being single is now one of the most widely shared experiences of adulthood." So says Bella DePaulo, visiting professor of psychology at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Nearly 10 percent of Americans live by themselves. If you add those who are cohabiting, whether in college dorms or elsewhere, the ranks of the singles swell even more: from 38 million in 1970 to 82 million in 2000. Singles constitute about 40 percent of the U.S. adult population.



In Genesis 2:18 God makes it clear that "it is not good for the man to be alone." This is the wisdom of our Creator, who knows us better than we know ourselves. So the lonesome Adam woke up from a deep sleep to find Eve standing by his side. God joined them together in marriage and thus set the divinely intended social pattern for humanity.

The tragic fruits of not heeding our Creator's advice are apparent all around us. Suzanne Fields, columnist for *The Washington Times*, recently reviewed a book called *The Broken Hearth* by William Bennett. She summed up an aspect of his

"Those who do not marry are having sexual relations at an earlier age, and contracting sexually transmitted diseases at much higher rates, cohabiting in unprecedented numbers, and having a record number of children out of wedlock."

worrying assessment of our social plight today: "Those who do not marry are having sexual relations at an earlier age, and contracting sexually transmitted diseases at much higher rates, cohabiting in unprecedented numbers, and having a record number of children out of wedlock."

Of course, not everyone needs to marry to live a happy and moral life. Undoubtedly single life will work out better for a relatively small minority. But, if men and women follow God's laws, marriage is by far the best option for most people if they want reasonable health, happiness and a longer life. To learn more, please request our free booklet *Making Life Work*. (Sources: *USA Today*, *The Washington Times*.)

European Union loses £2.5 billion annually to fraud, mismanagement

The European Union (EU) constitutes a huge bureaucracy, much of it based in Brussels. According to *The Sunday Times*, a recent auditor's report revealed that last year the EU lost the equivalent of £15 for every family in Europe because of fraud and mismanagement. Two years ago a similar report led to European commissioners being forced out of their positions because of allegations of fraud and corruption.

In spite of promises from Italian president Romano Prodi to transform the European Commission into a "modern efficient administration that has put its house in order," the 15-member court of auditors reported that "the situation is unchanged." The public is left to figure it out. (Source: *The Sunday Times* [London].)

Watch the oil chessboard

"Is there any man, is there any woman, let me say any child here that does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry?" So asked Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), U.S. president during World War I.

This presidential observation is probably more true of the squabbles over black gold than any other material substance in the modern world. Even the present conflagration in Afghanistan is no exception. According to an article in *The Guardian*, "Afghanistan is as indispensable to the regional control of oil in Central Asia as Egypt was in the Middle East."

Afghanistan's northern neighbors contain abundant oil reserves that may prove critical to world supplies. The American military presence in Afghanistan is not only a crucial strategic blow against terrorism but may have another major benefit: the opportunity to secure ready access to Central Asian oil reserves as a countervailing measure against too much dependency on Islamic nations in the volatile Middle East.

As an editorial in *The Washington Times* points out: "Americans depend on fossil fuels for much of their material prosperity, even though much of that fossil fuel comes from unfriendly Islamic states in the Middle East. Almost 60 percent of American oil is shipped from overseas—Americans annually pay Saddam Hussein nearly \$4 billion for the 700,000 barrels of oil that he provides them."

Therefore, the recent Russian-American cooperation against terrorism may also work to America's long-term advantage in securing adequate oil reserves. Russia is *not* a member of OPEC and therefore has the option of dragging its feet in reply to requests for substantial cuts in oil production.

The Times recently reported: "Russia [is] where oil output is increasing in leaps and bounds. The world has forgotten the contribution of Russian oil to global energy supply." Of course the Russians are as concerned about oil reserves as the Americans. A *Daily Telegraph* feature article recently observed: "For all the talk of international alliances and the future of Afghanistan, the real concern for Moscow is cementing its control of the oil supply."

America wants to build one or more oil pipelines in Central Asia. It has already invested \$30 billion in developing oil in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Suddenly these faraway countries, difficult for most of us to spell and pronounce, take on an important role in our welfare. *The Telegraph* article continued: "Washington is now proposing a \$3 billion pipeline from Azerbaijan, on the Caspian Sea, through Georgia to Turkey's Mediterranean Coast. U.S. companies could build a similar pipeline from Central Asia through Afghanistan to Karachi at half the cost, if the next Afghan government can guarantee its security."

Let's not forget China. *The International Herald Tribune* reported that in September "Prime Minister Zhu Rongji of China was in Moscow meeting with his Russian counterpart and signing off on a \$1.7 billion feasibility study for a proposed 2,400-kilometer pipeline that by 2010 would deliver 30

"Americans annually pay Saddam Hussein nearly \$4 billion for the 700,000 barrels of oil that he provides them."

million tons of oil to Chinese refineries each year." China's fast-growing economy of the past several years has created a voracious and expanding appetite for energy, and oil is one of the main sources.

Watch the oil chessboard as nations seek to secure their supplies and control world prices to their national advantage. Wars have been fought over oil, and the strivings over black gold may give us valuable clues as to how certain aspects of Bible prophecy may be fulfilled. (Sources: *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* [all London], *The Washington Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*.)

—John Ross Schroeder and Melvin Rhodes

Seeing the World Scene Realistically

by Melvin Rhodes

Many readers are familiar with the old Hans Christian Andersen fable about the emperor's new clothes. The story was told about a none-too-bright emperor in medieval times who was visited by a tailor. The tailor told the emperor about a miracle cloth that was the most expensive and best-quality fabric ever produced. The miracle was that only the wise could see it.

The emperor asked to see the cloth. When the tailor pulled it out of his bag, there was,

As the world aligns along political, ethnic and religious lines, the West's obsession with political correctness hides sobering realities most would rather not think about.

of course, nothing there. But the emperor, not wanting to appear ignorant, professed his admiration for the cloth and ordered a new suit for himself.

Some time later the emperor sported his new suit as he went out in a procession. Everybody in the empire had been told about the new miracle cloth, and the crowds lining the route shouted out their approval—except for one little boy. When the emperor and his entourage passed by, he exclaimed, “The king doesn't have any clothes on!”

Once the obvious was stated, the crowds saw the truth of the boy's remarks, and the emperor was ridiculed.

Political correctness is like the emperor's new clothes. Not wanting to seem unwise, the vast majority of people go along with it, few thinking for themselves and questioning the prevailing thought. As the apostle Paul wrote of a previous age, those who professed to be “wise” became “fools” (Romans 1:22). This was the fate of the fabled emperor. For the rest of us, political correctness could prove dangerous if not fatal.

Historic continuum

The attacks of Sept. 11 were the worst single terrorist action against any nation ever, but they are part of a historic continuum. Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu aptly described the goal of the forces of Islamic fundamentalism as “a war to reverse the triumph of the West.”

Herein lies a paradox. Although Western

culture and the Western economic system are making inroads into even the remotest parts of the world, Western influence and power have declined in another sense since World War II.

The dominant Western powers of the last two centuries have been the United Kingdom and the United States, fulfilling the prophecies in Genesis 48 and 49 that foretold Joseph's supremacy “in the last days” (for more details request our free booklet *The United States and Britain*

in Bible Prophecy). No other two nations were so influential in the last two centuries. Before World War II the British Empire was the preeminent power in the world; since World War II the United States has dominated.

In 1945, after their triumph over the Axis powers, it seemed as though the two nations would remain the major powers forever. But shortly after the end of the war the British started dismantling their empire. Within two decades almost all of it was gone.

Other empires were also coming to an end as European nations handed over political control of their former colonies to new indigenous leaders, many of whom quickly became despotic tyrants. In some cases, terrorism was used against the ruling Western colonizers, forcing them into retreat.

My wife and I lived through the terrorist war in Rhodesia, which resulted in Rhodesia's defeat and the birth of Zimbabwe. Political correctness saw this change as progressive, but in reality it was another milestone in the war to reverse the triumph of the West.

Progress or regress?

Recent decades have witnessed a paradox. While the West has since 1945 been in obvious political and military retreat, Western culture has become more pervasive as booming world trade and modern communications have spread American influence into every region.

With the changing political climate after

World War II, many people viewed this period of decolonization as progressive. Political correctness derided the empire and applauded the newly independent nations that replaced it.

Such thinking, however, has obscured a significant reality that bears on the events of Sept. 11. The fact remains that for the better part of 200 years the British kept the lid on some of the major tensions that have come to dominate recent headlines.

Hindus and Muslims lived in comparative harmony on the Indian subcontinent during the time of the British Raj. Today Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan are enemies, both armed with nuclear weapons that could annihilate each other.

Similarly the British Mandate of Palestine between the two world wars tried to keep the lid on Arab-Jewish tensions after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. When the British withdrew, the region immediately plunged into the first of many post-World War II conflicts.

The same pattern has followed in other hot spots such as Sri Lanka and wide swaths of the Middle East and Africa.

Wild winds of anarchy

American historian John Truslow Adams wrote a prophetic passage in his 1940 book *The British Empire (1784-1939)*. Writing when the British Empire and Commonwealth were already at war with Nazi Germany while America remained neutral, he warned that “the possible overthrow of the British Empire would be a catastrophe scarcely thinkable. Not only would it leave a vacuum over a quarter of the globe into which all the wild winds of anarchy, despotism and spiritual oppression would rush, but the strongest bulwark outside ourselves for our own safety and freedom would have been destroyed” (p. 358).

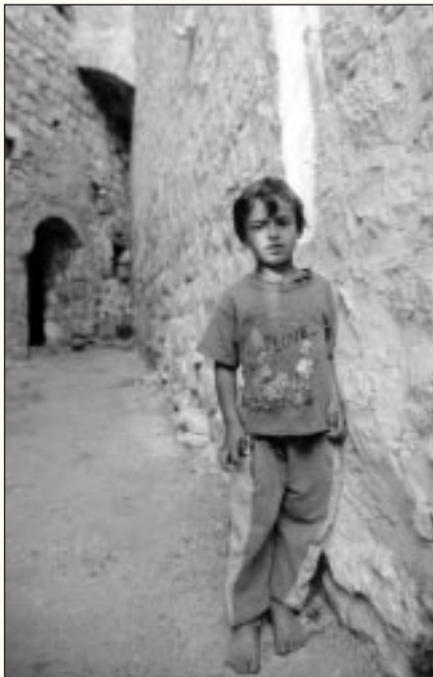
Adams accurately predicted what would happen as not only Britain, but later the United States itself, withdrew from colonial possessions. For indeed it wasn't long before “the wild winds of anarchy” rushed into the vacuum.

Jesus Christ, in answering His disciples' question, “When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and

of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3), had prophesied an increased frequency of war between ethnic groups as “nation [would] rise against nation” (verse 7).

The Greek word translated “nation” here is *ethnos*, referring to what we would today call ethnic groups. Ethnic conflict has always existed, but in times past large multinational empires largely subdued it. The end of these empires in the 20th century, however, led to a quadrupling in the number of nations and a proliferation of ethnic conflict.

The increased chaos and confusion of the last 50 years has largely resulted from the end of the empires that previously dominated the globe. As the West retreated, ethnic and religious tensions surged to the fore.



The present crisis can best be described as a war between militant Islam and secularism.

In Rwanda in 1994 the Hutu and the Tutsi fought each other in a civil war that killed a million people and created another million refugees. In what was Yugoslavia, the Bosnians, Serbs, Croats, Albanians and Macedonians have fought one war after another since Yugoslavia fell apart in 1991.

In Spain, Basque separatists have long conducted a terror campaign to try to gain their independence. In Iraq we've seen Iraqi forces use poison gas against Kurds. In the former Soviet Union we've seen Chechens fighting against Russians. None

of these wars has been nations fighting nations. They've been ethnic groups fighting other ethnic groups, just as Jesus foretold

A religious war

Osama bin Laden has called the current conflict a “war between Islam and atheism.” Ten years ago Saddam Hussein described the Gulf War as a conflict between Islam and Christianity. Neither terminology is correct. The West can hardly be called Christian anymore, but neither is it atheist, because most people—in America, at least—still hold to some religious beliefs.

The present crisis can best be described as a war between militant Islam and secularism. It is, however, the continuation of a conflict that follows 14 centuries of on-again, off-again wars between Islam and Christianity.

As the West has secularized, it has become more tolerant of other religions. Changes to immigration laws have encouraged the immigration of millions of people from Islamic countries into the liberal Western democracies.

Significantly, not one of the 56 countries that are members of the Islamic Conference allows Westerners to settle and become citizens, unless they first marry a native Muslim and convert. In many Muslim countries Christian proselytizing is forbidden by law, and those who engage in it can be expelled or imprisoned.

In the eyes of many Muslim leaders, Christianity and Western secularism are not compatible with Islamic values. Could it be that the West has made a mistake in supposing that they are? Political correctness maintains that all peoples can be successfully brought together in the American melting pot. But what if this is wrong?

American columnist Cal Thomas recently wrote: “One sees many white, Anglo-Saxon, mostly Protestant members of Congress and others on television today vouching for the ‘peaceful’ nature and intent of Islam. Oprah Winfrey has done a show on ‘modern Muslim women’—none of whom would be allowed to dress in contemporary clothing, be educated, or even appear on television if they lived in radical Muslim states.”

Mr. Thomas asked Sudanese Episcopal bishop Bullen Dolli what he thought about contemporary Islam. “‘It is a militant religion,’ he tells me and laughs at those who serve as its character witnesses.” Continuing: “Bishop Dolli was in Washington recently. He attempted to warn Congress and anyone

else who would listen of the dangers posed by Islam, especially in its militant form.”

Sudan is a frontline state in the present-day conflict between Islam and Christianity. Others include Nigeria (where Muslim mobs burned down 12 churches in the city of Kano on a recent Sunday morning, killing hundreds), the Balkans, Chechnya, Indonesia and the Philippines. Pakistan's small Christian minority was attacked at the end of October when gunmen opened fire on a church service, murdering 16 worshipers.

Alarming, Pakistan's former intelligence chief Hamid Gul warned that, if credible Muslim leaders declared *jihad*—essentially holy war—against the United States, “Muslim youths will again come to fight. The Americans will light a fire from Morocco to Mindanao . . .”—in other words, from northwest Africa to the Philippines (Julian Manyon, “Blood and Fundamentalism” *The Spectator*, Sept. 22).

Demographics foretell trouble

We also should remember that most Islamic countries have a rapidly growing population, 60 percent or more of which is under age 25. Outside of the prosperous Persian Gulf states, “this means that there is a large supply of young men with few career prospects, whose lives have no meaning except dreams, violence and religion” (Bruce Anderson, “Damping Down the Haystack,” *The Spectator*, Sept. 22).

In a September *New York Times Magazine* column titled “This IS a Religious War,” American columnist Andrew Sullivan warned, “Individual faith and pluralism were the targets Sept. 11, and it was only the beginning of an epic battle.”

Daniel 11:40-44 warns of a conflict just before Christ's return between the “king of the South” (apparently a leader of Islamic nations) and the “king of the North” (a leader of some of the Western powers). It is a continuation of a historic struggle that has gone on for more than 2,000 years.

Changing demographics have been factors here. The rise of Islam as a world force is partly because of a high population-growth rate.

“In the long run . . . Mohammed wins out,” analyzes one author. “Christianity spreads mainly by conversion, Islam by conversion and reproduction. The percentage of Christians in the world peaked at about 30 percent in the 1980s, leveled off and is now declining,

Continued on page 31

A War of Two Worlds

What's behind Islamic religious extremists' war against the West?

by Howard Davis

A few days after the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, I called my father at his home in northern Minnesota to get his opinion: "Was this as bad as Pearl Harbor?"

"Far worse," he said. "When I saw the second tower collapse, I said 'I'm watching the beginning of World War III.'"

My father is not given to overstatement. On the day after Pearl Harbor, the submarine on which he served fired the first U.S. torpedo in World War II. He was an 18-year-old radioman on the sub in Guam, bombed that day by the Japanese air force. He has never stopped talking about his war experiences.

But World War III?

Is the Western world really fighting a war on a par with the two greatest wars of the 20th century?

Consider. In the crisis that ignited the First World War in the spring of 1914, the assassination of Austrian Archduke Ferdinand quickly brought belligerent alliances into conflict. A generation later Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939, plunging the world into war on a scale never before seen. In both cases, clearly visible tensions had built for years. Nations had amassed armies, many were entangled in a web of alliances, and war was obviously inevitable.

Somehow today is different. The United States is the world's only superpower, dwarfing other nations in military might. Yet the attack on New York and Washington caught Americans completely by surprise.

Even months later the memories of the burning 110-story World Trade Center towers disintegrating before our eyes on television are vividly surreal, and the devastation to the world's financial epicenter so complete, it seems natural for politicians, pundits and priests to invoke biblical language to describe the horror of the events.

News anchormen adopted the descriptions of biblical prophecy. Referring to the final battle between God and the armies of Satan toward the end of the book of Revelation, CBS anchorman Dan Rather said downtown New York "looks more like Armageddon than Gotham."

Indeed, talk of God filled America

immediately after the event as never before in memory.

Somehow the vocabulary of God has become interlaced in the daily news with descriptions of mass murder, terror, suicide martyrdom and war between the United States—which terrorists refer to as the Great Satan—and what President George W. Bush calls evil itself.

The Armageddon prophecy

People in the Western world are suddenly much more interested in Bible prophecy, particularly descriptions of the end time. Sales of Bibles are dramatically higher since Sept. 11. Multitudes are suddenly fascinated by the symbols, the global scale and the descriptions of mass tragedies in many Bible prophecies. These sound like a religious version of their evening newspapers.

Perhaps the most horrific prophecy in the Bible is what is referred to by many as the Battle of Armageddon, when vast armies, one numbering 200 million (Revelation 9:16), are predicted to assemble to fight against the returning Jesus Christ in a climactic military battle in the Holy Land.

The Bible says: "The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates And I saw three unclean spirits . . . spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (Revelation 16:12-16).

"Armageddon" is the Greek form of the Hebrew *har Megiddo*, meaning "Hill of Megiddo," an ancient fortification overlooking the great northern plain in the modern state of Israel.

The prophecy, then, is of future events beginning in the lands east of the Euphrates River and ending in the state of Israel. Actually, while armies will gather at Megiddo, the front lines of the final battle itself will meet at Jerusalem, as other prophecies show. This battle will represent the culmination of mankind's struggles with evil and spiritual powers called "demons."

Armageddon has come to be synonymous

with massive devastation and God's final intervention to forcibly end the violence of a developing global war involving terrifying weapons of mass destruction.

Is there any connection between the attack in New York and Armageddon? Has something happened in recent events that could lead to such a titanic battle?

Warriors of God

In late October, six weeks after the attack, I visited the site of the twin towers of the World Trade Center. As I gazed at the astonishing destruction, with these greatest tributes to economic splendor reduced to absolute desolation, the Bible's descriptions of the end-of-the-world civilization seemed appropriate.

We live in an amazing time in which God is on the lips of those on both sides of the new world war. In one hour some 4,000 American, British, Israeli and German citizens, and many from other nations, were incinerated or pulverized by Islamic terrorists under the spell of Osama bin Laden, who had been brainwashed to believe their act was the highest will for them ordained by Allah.

Like events written in Bible prophecy thousands of years ago, the horrors in New York and Washington are centered in conflicts about God in the Middle East.

The day after the attack, President Bush proclaimed a "crusade" against terrorism. Arab reaction was shock and dismay, even among those friendly to America. Mr. Bush never used the term *crusade* again, and for an important reason. If misused, the term could wreck his efforts to create and sustain an alliance with friendly Muslim governments to carry out a successful war against terrorism.

Crusade, to the Muslim, means Christians invading Muslim lands and killing Muslims in the name of God. To stay the diplomatic damage, President Bush was quick to reverse his language. He said later that the terrorism tactics of Osama bin Laden no more represent true Islam than the Crusades represented the teachings of Jesus. But, to understand the nature of the threat to the world, we must understand that we have entered a period

of profound and violent conflict between two different cultures, concepts of God and, above all, religions.

Crusades aren't forgotten

To Muslims the Crusades are the most abhorrent period in more than 1,300 years of the history of Islam. Arab culture has never forgotten, nor intellectual fundamentalists forgiven, the wholesale slaughter of Muslims by white Europeans during the Crusades.

Of the First Crusade's conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, organized by Pope Urban II, a knight named Raymond of Aguilers gave an account of the slaughter in the city: "Piles of heads, hands, and feet were to be seen in the streets," he wrote. He then exulted in the Christian soldiers joyfully killing 10,000 on the Temple Mount alone: "In the Temple and the porch of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins."

"Indeed," he said, "it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of unbelievers since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies."

Today more than one billion Muslims and their clerics, from Morocco on the Atlantic North African coast to the Philippine Islands in the Pacific Ocean, do not forget the eight Crusades lasting into two centuries. It may seem bizarre to the people of the Western world that Muslims keep this conflict alive in their minds as though it were yesterday. The invasions of Italian, French, German and Norman English soldiers under the behest of the papacy in the Middle Ages are current frames of reference for Arab reaction to American foreign policy.

As author James Reston writes in his book *Warriors of God*, "what to one religion is glory became disgrace and shame to another." The slaughter at Jerusalem "was a memory no Muslim could forget. If the city itself still stank six months later from the carnage, the memory still stank ninety years—and nine hundred years—later" (2001, p. 73).

Continual war with the infidels

Many Islamic youths, from young schoolchildren to university students, are taught a specific Muslim perspective of the historic meaning of the European invasion and slaughter of Muslims 900 years ago. They are taught to theologize today's conflict as part of the continual war by the infidels to take Muslim land. They perceive

the Crusaders' establishment of the Roman Catholic government centered in Jerusalem, called the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, as simply the ancestor of the Western imperialist state of Israel.

Both, they are taught, were established illegally, unjustly and against the will of Allah. They are taught that they are now fighting these same people to wholly take back their sacred land invaded by today's American and Christian proxies, the modern Jews. In their view, behind the Jews stands the Great Satan, the United States, which they see as the world's greatest evil power, a threat to the very existence of Islam.

The Palestinian radical fundamentalists have constantly called for religious war—*jihad* or "struggle"—to expel Western infidels from Jerusalem and the Holy Land. But, largely unnoticed by the public before Sept. 11, a new form of *jihad* was being created by radical fundamentalist terrorists directed against all religions, beliefs and ways of life deemed contrary to Islam.

The Ayatollah Khomeini proved to Muslim fundamentalists that radical terrorism could be coupled with public demonstrations and manipulation of public opinion through the news media to topple Islamic governments allied with the United States. His son Ahmad Khomeini said in late 1991 that, "as long as Islam exists, U.S. hostility exists, and as long as U.S. hostility exists, the struggle exists." Armed struggle must extend beyond the Middle East, he said, "because the struggle against Israel is a war against the U.S. and Europe with no short end" (Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America*, 2001, p. xvi).

This moves *jihad* far beyond the scope of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, this Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, which has emerged in the last 35 years, represents a profound threat to the continued existence of the Western way of life. It is directly responsible for the recent attack on America.

From Saladin to bin Laden

The teaching of personal struggle against evil, *jihad*, is central to Islam. It is found in the Koran, which Muslims view as the holy scriptures revealed by Allah to Muhammad. The greater *jihad* for each individual is a "jihad of the heart," as Reston writes, "against his

Armageddon and Divine Intervention

In an age of ever-increasing violence and horrifying acts of terrorism, bewildered people ask: *Where is God? Why did the Almighty not intervene and prevent the outrages of Sept. 11?*

Those events were so unexpected, so awful, as to cause some people to even doubt God's existence.

For the believer in God, these humanly devised traumatic events are seen as forerunners to Armageddon, a biblical term applied to the Old Testament prophet Joel's description of the end-time battle between God and evil men and the climactic conflict between good and evil related in the book of Revelation. This fearsome word refers to a future time of worldwide upheaval, as seen through the eyes of the biblical prophets, when man's chaotic and conflicting experiments with self-rule will come to a swift and dramatic end.

The name itself, taken from Revelation 16:16, comes from two words, *har* ("mountain" or "hill" in Hebrew), and *magedon* or *Megiddo*, Hebrew for "to cut off". Two kings of Judah, Ahaziah and Josiah, died by the sword at Megiddo (2 Kings 9:27; 23:29).

Armageddon is used to describe a horrendous time when the forces of evil will, for a while, be given free rein. How near are we to that apocalyptic time described by Christ—a time when, "unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]" (Matthew 24:22). Jesus' words are a stark warning for humanity. Thankfully, He stated in the same verse that "for the elect's sake those days will be shortened"—that is, for the sake of His chosen followers, those who have chosen to follow Him.

Indeed, God cares for all humanity, "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

We can rest assured that God isn't about to abort His rescue operation to save mankind from annihilation. The prophet Isaiah was inspired to give us God's answer as to whether He will intervene as He has promised: "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 . . .'" (Isaiah 46:9-10).

God will intervene and stop humanity from destroying itself. But first mankind must learn that rejecting God's way of life, as so clearly and repeatedly spelled out in His Word, doesn't pay. Rebellion against God leads man to the abyss, to Armageddon. But, thankfully, man's Creator will put a stop to it all. God's Word, from Genesis to Revelation, confirms this fact.

—Gerhard Marx

sinful inclinations.” It is a “jihad of the tongue,” he continues, and a “jihad of the hand,” which prohibits him “from committing abominable acts.” It is the believer’s obligation to dedicate his entire life to wrestling with and overcoming lust, injustice and the commission of any evil acts at the personal level.

The outwardly directed *jihad* is an obligation just as binding, many Muslims believe. Each individual Muslim must strive with the infidel who attacks the faith or defies the will of Allah.

Jihad involves war against any individual or nation that would attempt to convert Muslims away from the true worship of Allah and any nation that would steal or desecrate Muslim fatherlands—especially the birthplace of Islam in Saudi Arabia or Jerusalem, where Muslims believe Muhammad ascended to heaven. *Jihad* is directed against those who overtly blaspheme Allah and deny Muhammad as his prophet.

Osama bin Laden was a principal organizer of the *jihad* against America. His followers have compared him to the greatest of Islam’s liberators, Saladin, who led the *jihad* against the Crusades. But Saladin never advocated suicide or mass murder of innocent women and children—a sin according to the Koran.

Saladin vs. the West

After the invasion of the First Crusade, the Muslim sultans from Cairo to Baghdad sought revenge. They called for a *jihad* against the infidels of the West, what Reston says was “the jihad of the sword for slaying idolaters and especially Trinitarians.”

By consolidating the caliphates of Damascus and Cairo into one power, the Kurdish leader Saladin emerged strong enough to systematically challenge the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem with its ring of brilliantly engineered Norman fortresses and castles scattered throughout the Holy Land.

In 1187 Saladin proclaimed a *jihad*, and Muslim fighters poured in from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Saladin systematically took apart the Latin Kingdom by liquidating the fortresses. By September 1187 Saladin was ready to take back Jerusalem. Within a few weeks the walls were breached.

Saladin was amazingly merciful, in dramatic contrast to the Crusaders of the previous century. His humanity became renowned to his contemporaries and later ages. He ordered the execution of only the Templars, who had controlled the Temple Mount, and set a huge number free for payment of money or out of leniency. He would

probably have prevented thousands more from entering slavery had it not been for treachery by those professing Christianity.

Saladin was neither a mass murderer for political objectives nor a terrorist in the sense of Osama bin Ladin.

Radicalizing of Islam

In the 1970s, as wealth from the oil boom flowed into the region, a significant number of intellectual youths in the universities of Egypt and Lebanon and elite families of Saudi Arabia turned to radical teachers of Islamic fundamentalism. It was in reaction to the encroaching influence of alcohol, sexual immorality and material consumption that they sought to return to earlier teaching. They began listening to university professors who said Islam was being destroyed through corruption by the West.

Specifically, Islamic instructors preached in fiery sermons the idea that the culture of the United States was a satanic power intent on redefining life without obedience to the law of Allah and Islam. American culture was accused of being the direct cause of Muslim corruption from the inside out, leading Muslims to become apostates, no longer obedient to Allah and Muhammad the prophet.

“In Islamic law, apostasy is a capital crime,” writes Yossef Bodansky, and all radical Muslims agree “that the United States and Western civilization must first be evicted from their midst” before Muslim lands can be pleasing to Allah (*Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America*, p. xvii).

In their theology, radical Muslims consider the United States their greatest challenge in the battle of ultimate good against evil. America and the culture of the West represent an idolatry of materialism and decadence that will rob Muslims of eternal life in paradise by leading them to follow this idolatrous path in this life and reap everlasting punishment in the next.

Armageddon on the doorstep?

On Sept. 11 a battle began over the future of the Middle East, global peace and the relationship between Islamic countries with the West that will profoundly affect the future of everyone alive.

This war is centered on the most profound concepts of values, good and evil. It is also about whether Western nations can eradicate terrorism (now primarily a war of genocide against Americans and Israelis everywhere) and about the future

of the global economy—in short, all the elements important to humanity’s success and security.

These are dangerous times, even scary times.

Jesus Himself said His disciples should not give their lives to corruption, lust and love of money. Islam says the same. But Christ forbade hate and murder, a commandment obeyed by neither traditional Christianity nor Islam.

But, whether from the Western nations with their history of Crusades or Muslims with their history of *jihad*, Jesus Christ’s teaching is the only way out: “Love your enemies . . . Do good to those who hate you,” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 5:44; 22:39).

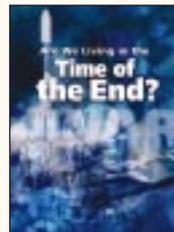
If that doesn’t happen—and prophecy indicates it won’t before Christ’s return—then Armageddon awaits, because God will not permit either the sinners of Christianity or Islam to thwart His plan to establish the spectacular Kingdom of God to rule the earth.

Jesus Christ was a realist. For that reason He gave His beloved friend John, in the book of Revelation, the vision of the future battle now commonly known as Armageddon. It will come if the nations don’t respond to God’s teaching as found in the Bible.

In fact, the world appears to be on the brink of events that may lead to a period spoken of in the Bible as “the time of the end,” when virtually all the nations of the world will be drawn into a scenario of conflict undreamed of even a few short months ago. In this maelstrom of conflict, the relevance of Bible prophecy will become ever clearer and more important than ever before. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Did you know that God tells us what will happen at the time of the end? Ask for the free booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. You’ll find you can understand what the Bible says, giving you insight about what will happen in the future. Be sure to request your free copies today.



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The Bible and Harry Potter: Occult Fantasy in Perspective

by Tom Robinson and David Treybig

Millions of youngsters are enthralled by the adventures of the fictional young wizard Harry Potter. Is this a harmless children's diversion, or is there potential danger here?

British author J.K. Rowling is taking the children's world by storm. Her series of books featuring the fictional character Harry Potter are selling as fast as they are produced. After the first four books of her seven-book series appeared, her fans couldn't get enough. In November, amid fanfare and expectations of huge financial success, Warner Brothers released the movie *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, based on her first book.

What is this story that has mesmerized so many young readers? The books, set in Britain, chronicle the life of a boy named Harry Potter, son of wizard parents who were killed by the evil wizard Lord Voldemort. When he turns 11, young Harry is invited to attend the prestigious Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to develop the powers he inherited from his parents. Each book describes a year at the Hogwarts academy.

Innocent fun?

Many people describe this story as simply innocent fun—noting J.K. Rowling's great literary style and celebrating the fact that the books do encourage children to read.

But not everyone agrees. Given the books' presentation of the occult as a positive, virtuous way of life, some parents and educational and religious groups have been at odds with those who believe the books are appropriate reading material for impressionable young minds. A few toy retailers have refused to stock Harry Potter merchandise because of its connection with occult sources.

In all fairness to the Harry Potter books, it should be noted that, while Harry and his friends are labeled as wizards and witches and learn to use wands and cast spells, much of their resemblance to actual witches is superficial. The Harry Potter stories are set in a make-believe world that



The Harry Potter books and movie have proven extremely popular among a generation of youngsters. In the fictional series Harry, depicted above in the movie, is a young wizard learning to use his powers.

includes flying cars, chocolate frogs, gnomes who ruin gardens, mer-people, unicorns and the like.

In the stories, those who have magical ability do not receive it from spirit forces. Rather, it is presented as an innate ability they are born with (sort of like the old TV shows *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie*).

Indeed, the whole tenor of the stories is more that of an alternate universe. They are set in a crazy, bizarre fantasy world created in the series' author's vivid imagination. For example, the "magic world" has its own banking system, newspapers, postal system, schools, jobs and more. Harry Potter becomes a champion at quidditch, a fictional sport played on broomsticks that is as popular in the magical realm as pro football is in America.

In this alternate reality a class of people

is presented as having supernatural powers—akin to science-fiction shows in which alien peoples have certain powers, such as Mr. Spock being able to perform a "Vulcan mind meld" on *Star Trek* or Luke Skywalker using "the Force" in *Star Wars*.

On that note, there does seem to be a craving in many people's psyche for occult fantasy, and Hollywood is there to cash in on it. Besides the Harry Potter movie, December saw the premiere of the sword-and-sorcery epic *The Lord of the Rings*, and the next *Star Wars* movie is slated to be out later this year.

As far as literary value goes, the stories just mentioned, including Harry Potter, present such themes as the battle between good and evil, the struggle of the individual against overwhelming odds and the development of character and courage, even justice and mercy.

What, then, is the danger here? To understand, we must look at what God has to say about actual witchcraft and sorcery—and why.

God's perspective

In working with ancient Israel, God consistently condemned witches, witchcraft and all things associated with the occult. In Exodus 22:18 God gave these blunt instructions: "You shall not permit a sorceress ['witch,' King James Version] to live."

Although some subsequent generations misapplied these prohibitions, even to the point of putting innocent people to death, there was a good reason for their inclusion in the Bible. The occult takes people away from the true God and exposes them to the often-unrealized dangers of a sinister spirit world.

In Deuteronomy 18:9-12 God adds: "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those [pagan] nations. There shall not be

found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium [‘consulter with familiar spirits,’ KJV], or a spiritist [‘wizard,’ KJV], or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an *abomination* to the LORD . . .” (emphasis added throughout).

A closer examination of the Hebrew word *toebah*, here translated “abomination,” can help us understand the depths of God’s disgust with these practices. According to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the word *toebah* means “‘abomination; loathsome, detestable thing’ . . . *Toebah* defines something or someone as essentially unique in the sense of being ‘dangerous,’ ‘sinister,’ and ‘repulsive’ to another individual . . .”

“When used with reference to God, this nuance of the word describes people, things, acts, relationships, and characteristics that are ‘detestable’ to Him because they are contrary to His nature. Things related to death and idolatry are loathsome to God . . . People with habits loathsome to God are themselves detestable to Him . . . *Toebah* is used in some contexts to describe pagan practices and objects” (1985, “Abomination”).

Fundamentally, the occult and all things associated with it represent a way of life that undermines and competes with the godly character God wants His servants to develop. Those who seek God are instructed to place *Him* first in their lives. The first of the Ten Commandments requires allegiance to God: “I am the LORD your God who brought you out the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. *You shall have no other gods before Me*” (Deuteronomy 5:6-7).

God, of course, has the power to right wrongs, judge people and ultimately offer eternal life. By contrast, what the occult offers is contrary to what God wants to give to us.

Some people argue that witchcraft is real and that it has inherent power. Why shouldn’t we, they reason, use it for good purposes? God long ago responded in advance to these questions, stating: “For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you” (Deuteronomy 18:14). God has revealed a different

and better path for those who would follow Him.

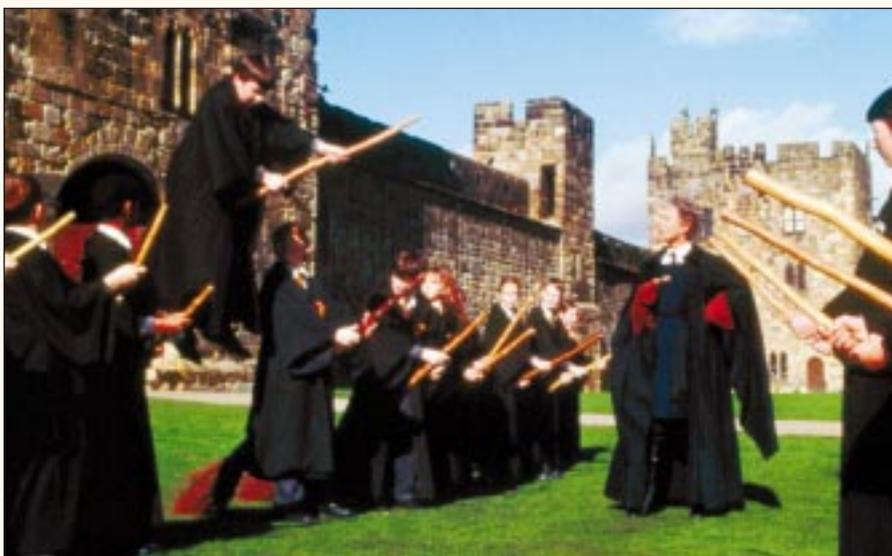
The Bible reveals that getting involved in “sorcery” (“witchcraft,” KJV) is a “work of the flesh”—one of the evil ways to which human beings are naturally attracted apart from the knowledge of God (Galatians 5:17-20).

The practice of witchcraft is particularly offensive to God. It is openly defying Him. As He put it, “Rebellion is as the sin of

him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse” (verses 13-14). God obviously was not pleased with Saul for delving into the deceptive world of the occult.

Behind the magic

One question that often comes up in regard to the above story is whether the conjured being was truly the deceased prophet Samuel. The Bible repeatedly



In a scene from the Harry Potter movie, one student's broomstick proves tough to control in a broomstick-flying class at the witchcraft academy. A wise old wizard, Professor Dumbledore (right), heads the school for budding young wizards and witches.

witchcraft” (1 Samuel 15:23). Dabbling in the occult provokes God to anger (2 Chronicles 33:6).

A particularly revealing example is found in the life of ancient Israel’s King Saul in 1 Samuel 28. When faced with an army of Philistines, Saul decided to consult a medium—“that hath a familiar spirit” (verse 7, KJV)—one thought to have the ability to communicate with the dead. He asked the woman to conduct a séance for him, to conjure up the deceased prophet Samuel—and a supernatural encounter with the spirit world did indeed occur. Yet the chain of events turned out disastrously for Saul, and in the ensuing battle “Saul and his three sons died, and all his house died together” (1 Chronicles 10:6).

What was the reason for Saul’s death? “So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and *also because he consulted a medium for guidance*. But he did not inquire of the LORD; therefore He killed

describes the current state of the dead as one of unconscious “sleep” (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 2 Peter 3:4). This means that there is no such thing as ghosts as they are commonly defined—the spirits of the dead still wandering the earth. But there certainly *are* spirit beings who can appear as ghostly apparitions. The Bible calls these beings *unclean spirits*, or *demons*. They are fallen angels, spirit beings who have rebelled against God under their leader, the archdemon Satan the devil.

As noted above, a medium is one who consults with “familiar spirits.” Are these dead people? No. For we have seen that there is no consciousness in death.

Consider this question also: Why would God impose the death penalty for communicating with dead friends and relatives if that were really possible? One scholar explains: “The reason the death penalty was inflicted for consulting ‘familiar spirits’ is that these were ‘evil spirits,’ or fallen angels impersonating the dead . . . God

hardly could have prescribed the death penalty for communicating with the spirits of deceased loved ones if such spirits existed and if such a communication were possible.

“There is no moral reason for God to outlaw, on pain of death, the human desire to communicate with deceased loved ones. The problem is that such communication is impossible, because the dead are unconscious and do not communicate with the



living. Any communication that occurs is not with the spirit of the dead, but with evil spirits” (Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection?*, 1997, p. 168).

It is the same with all occult practices. If someone could move an object with his mind by some innate telekinetic power within himself, why would using it merit the death penalty? Such a power could certainly be used for good—just like using your muscles to help someone in need. If we could fly like Superman through mental power, why would it be evil to do so? The real answer is that such things are *humanly* impossible—and that to truly perform them requires the help of demons, whether the occult practitioner is aware of it or not.

Some witches today practice “black magic.” They are essentially satanists who know their powers are derived from demons. Yet there are also so-called “white witches”—adherents of Wicca who believe their powers are derived from within or from “positive spirit forces,” including spirit forces within nature. Yet for the most

part they are simply deceived. For in this case, too, any real supernatural power they manifest is demonic in origin. That’s why *all* witches would have merited the death penalty under God’s legal system. His Word reveals that it’s *all* bad—it *all* involves communion with demons.

Indeed, Satan, the wicked fallen spirit who has deceived human beings from the beginning of man’s history (Revelation 12:9), is the real power behind the occult. Our question should be: With whose power and authority will we align ourselves—that of Satan or God?

The real danger

Now back to Harry Potter. As stated earlier, he and his fictional friends bear only superficial resemblance to actual witches—of black *or* white magic. Indeed, the primary fault in these stories is a *misidentification* of a fictional concept as witchcraft. So just what is the danger in that?

One immediate problem is that the witches in the story *are* taught to use spells, incantations, magic potions and charms—at least in name. Though they are represented as operating in an entirely different manner from true witchcraft—and mature readers will recognize that it is all possible only because it occurs in a wholly fictional world of the imagination—nevertheless the glorifying of such practices in a fictional world can have a crossover into reality.

If we are not careful, we can be lulled into a greater acceptance of such practices in the real world. This is particularly true for young children, who have a hard time separating fantasy from reality. Even when children get a little older, they are still extremely impressionable.

No doubt some children, influenced by fantasy stories, will be attracted to participate in the occult. Perhaps some innocent Harry Potter devotees will succumb to the notion that witchcraft is noble and later seek to become Wiccans or join covens. They will, of course, discover that it is not at all like what is portrayed in the stories, but by then they will have become immersed in it.

Or consider children who, fed on a steady diet of supernatural fantasy, begin to believe that they need to find their own “power within”—and begin unwittingly communing with demons.

Though no one likes to spoil children’s participation in activities that are popular and fun, we parents must have the courage

to properly guide our children—even if it means resisting widespread public opinion in the process. When our children’s emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being is threatened, *we have a God-given responsibility not to look the other way.*

God charges parents with the responsibility of teaching their children His values (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Parents need to warn their children against the falsehood of the occult.

Yet here lies perhaps the greatest danger of all. So many parents are so devoid of God’s truth that they themselves believe it is possible for people to have supernatural powers deriving from their own minds. They themselves do not understand that such powers are demonic in origin. How, then, can they be expected to warn their children of the danger of stumbling headlong into spiritism?

Besides their own parents, many other figures that children look to for guidance—teachers, parents of friends, celebrities and the like—are all confused too. As victims of, and participants in, a society that is drifting farther and farther from God, they only perpetuate the error. As time goes on, more and more of our children are experimenting with the spirit world.

If you have never realized the actual power behind the occult, it’s important that you study God’s Word and prove this for yourself. For it is His Word that reveals the truth.

Given the choice between the two great value systems this world offers—God’s or Satan’s—why not choose the one that offers your children the greatest reward? Why not select the one for you and your children that leads to eternal life? Don’t your children deserve the best? **GN**

Recommended Reading

Why does God warn us to be on guard against a supernatural being called Satan the devil? Who is he? How does he influence us? Why does God’s Word call him the enemy of mankind? To learn more, request our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?*



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

Why Does Evil Exist?

In the wake of the New York and Washington, D.C., suicide bombings, we need to find a plain answer to this great question.

by Bill Bradford

Skeptics ask a valid question of believers: How can a loving God allow evil to exist? The believer in turn asks a valid question of moral relativists: How can you say something is evil when you deny absolute good or evil, arguing that good and evil can be defined only by what each person thinks?

Philosophers, religious thinkers and criminologists have long sought rational explanations to these important questions.

What is evil? From where did it come?

The Bible clears up these mysteries for us and provides a solution for the evil that is so widespread and entrenched in the world.

Did God create evil?

The Bible consistently explains evil as rebellion against God and His way of selfless, outflowing love for others—His way of *giving*. Evil is self-absorbed and uncaring of others, the way of *getting and taking*.

God's way of life is expressed in His law of love, and evil is the *violation* of that law. Thus evil is synonymous with *sin* (1 John 3:4), which is *contrary* to God. Any calamity that He allows or brings is actually done out of love.

But, some might argue, isn't all evil God's fault? The reasoning goes like this: Since God created everything, and evil exists, then God must be the author of evil.

Yet the Bible paints a picture in which God, in the beginning, created perfect surroundings for the first man and woman to live in. "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was *very good*" (Genesis 1:31, emphasis added throughout). That included man. How, then, did evil come into the picture?

The story tells us that a cunning "serpent" introduced evil into God's perfect creation. But Genesis 3:1 seems to say that God created the serpent, too, so that doesn't really answer the question. Maybe there is some force equal to or greater than God that is beyond His control. Or maybe God isn't good after all.

There is a better answer, a biblical one. We have seen that God made everything good, without the presence of evil. Yet, in doing so, He created man with *moral*

freedom—with the ability to choose between good and evil. God did not create evil. He created us with *free will*. That is the framework for the existence of evil.

Free moral choice

But, since God is good, why didn't He create man unalterably good? He *could* have made us without the ability to choose. But that would have defeated His reason for creating us in the first place. God made us with free moral choice so we could develop His attributes of character, *becoming like Him* and having a relationship with Him.

God's overall plan was to create something special. His long-term purpose was to create additional members of His divine family, of which the Genesis creation was only the first step. To eventually achieve this creation, the development of divine character was essential to His plan. Hence the need to create human beings as free moral agents.

His choice, then, was to create beings with freedom. Without freedom they would never sin. But without freedom they would never have the opportunity to choose their own future; they could not have imagination, and they could not love others or appreciate love when it was shown toward them.

The highest of God's creation would then be as robots, which do not choose right or wrong, love or hate. God created us with the ability to *choose* love, hate or any feeling or attitude in between. It is only with free choice that we can attain to the love that God Himself possesses, the most important of all divine character traits. God *is* love!

When God created man, He began the process of bringing forth children in His image (Genesis 1:26; compare 5:1-3). We cannot force our *own* children to love us or do what is right. We can teach them these virtues and hope they will choose to follow them in spite of the negative evil influences they encounter. We can also enjoy a trusting and close relationship with our children, and we want that to continue long after they are grown.

When God embarked on His ambitious plan to create children for Himself who would have to choose to return His love, He also knew the risks. He was aware that

they could choose an alternative way of life. He knew that there was a choice that existed between good and evil.

Yet man was not the first created entity to whom God gave such a choice.

When only God (the Father and the Word, John 1:1) existed, there was no evil. Yet long before the time of Adam and even before God created the heavens and earth, God created millions of spirit beings with free moral choice—the angels. His intention was to produce beings who would accept His way and live like Him forever.

But one of the most powerful spirit beings would disappoint Him.

Origin of evil

Ezekiel 28 begins with God addressing the "prince of Tyre," a human ruler of that ancient city-state along the Lebanese coast. But, starting in verse 11, the message shifts to the "king of Tyre," and it quickly becomes apparent that no human being is meant. Rather, the subject becomes the spiritual power behind the throne, the primary influence on the earthly ruler, for this power is specifically called a cherub, an angelic being (verse 14).

God tells him, "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you" (verse 15). This angel, then, was part of God's *perfect* creation. Yet, because he had freedom to choose, he had the capacity to choose evil. We read here that "iniquity," or lawlessness, was, at some point, found in him. This was the first recorded instance of evil.

Isaiah 14 includes a similar description when God addresses the "king of Babylon." But this message, too, switches to the spiritual power behind the throne. Starting in verse 12, this entity is called Heylel (*Lucifer* in Latin), meaning "Light-Bringer"—for at first he was a vessel of the light of God's truth. Yet, as verse 13 shows, he began to imagine evil in his heart.

No one knows how long it took for this being to develop the way of evil in his heart. In any case, the philosophy he developed was all about *self* and what he could *get*. In essence, he was the first moral relativist. He denied absolute good and evil as

defined by God and chose to define good and evil for himself. Eventually, he considered how he could be exalted above everyone else and acquire everything in existence, replacing God as ruler of all creation. Thus God changed his name to Satan, meaning "Adversary."

God did not create Satan. Rather, God created this angelic being as the "seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezekiel 28:12). But he developed pride in his beauty (verse 17). He corrupted his wisdom by getting caught up in his own self-importance. This was *his choice*. So he *turned himself* into Satan.

Verse 16 says that he became filled with violence within. He ascended into heaven to exalt his throne (Isaiah 14:13). Revelation 12:2-3 speaks of this fallen angel as a dragon who draws a third of the stars (angels, Revelation 1:20) with him. Satan induced one third of the created angelic beings to turn against God.

How? Satan is also called the "devil," translated from a word meaning "slanderer." Jesus said of him, "When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

One can only imagine what he told the other angels. He probably expressed some dissatisfaction with the way God did things and implied that someone like himself would be better. He likely explained to the other angels that they could do better for themselves by adopting the way of rebellion rather than love. He no doubt aroused suspicion toward God through his criticism. Perhaps they felt they couldn't trust God anymore and proceeded to the fatal step of violence to overthrow Him.

The third of the angels who followed Satan chose to oppose God and adopt the devil's philosophy that promoted self above others. In doing so they became *demons*, evil spirits. God did not put the evil in their minds, nor did He introduce evil to Lucifer. Lucifer was free to follow God's way of love, or to consider the alternative. God didn't force him to go His way. He permitted him to ponder and finally choose the way of evil.

God cast Satan and his demons out of heaven. They fell to earth like lightning (Luke 10:18). The next we see of Satan is his appearance to Eve in the Garden of Eden as the serpent.

Man embraces evil

This brings us to the next question: Why was man exposed to the evil? As mentioned above, God was creating His

own children through mortal human beings. They had to have free moral choice.

Thus the issue of evil once again had to be faced—and the sooner the better. God created two special trees in the Garden of Eden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The first symbolized acceptance of God's way. The latter represented a rejection of God's instruction and deciding good and evil for oneself, which, of course, will always lead to selfish attitudes and actions, the same wrong way of life Satan had followed.

It didn't take long for the devil to present his alternative way of evil to Eve, who in turn influenced her husband. The devil appealed to Eve by suggesting that God was not telling her the whole story and that both she and her husband could do much better for themselves by adopting the other way of life.

She persuaded Adam to take of the forbidden fruit against his better judgment. Adam knew better since the apostle Paul made it plain that he was not deceived (1 Timothy 2:14). Sadly, Adam and Eve made the fateful choice to follow Satan. So Satan became the ruler of this world (John 12:31) and the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). Thus God allowed our first parents to disobey Him. But He would use this incident to help fulfill His great plan to bring human beings into His divine family.

The choice our first parents made is why we see so much suffering, violence and killing in the world. When Lucifer chose to follow the alternative way of taking, the end was inevitably violence toward God. Once Adam and Eve chose to reject the way of life God revealed to them and to determine right and wrong on their own, the world was set on the path of serving the self at the expense of other people. This would mean suffering for all humanity down through the ages.

An immediate example of the consequence of Adam's and Eve's decision was that their son Cain murdered his brother Abel, setting a course mankind would follow from that point forward. Our civilizations have been wracked by war because someone wanted to have something or be someone greater than he was. The incessant inflicting of harm has never abated.

But why would God allow such suffering? God's intent is for His children to choose His way of love forever and never consider turning against Him. To ensure this, they must experience the consequences of choosing wrongly. The ultimate consequence is eternal death, because God

will not permit evil to persist in a universe He rules (Romans 6:23). Thankfully, Jesus' death redeems us from that fate if we repent of the devil's way of life.

However, we must understand that there are consequences to sin. Sin means a lot of misery along life's way. God created us so we can experience pain temporarily for a good purpose. We learn through pain that what we do is not good for us. A little suffering because we do something minor saves us grief and anguish later if we learn the lesson and have the sense to avoid doing something major.

Yes, the suffering in this world is incalculable. But the pain we experience during this age of man's self-determination is far less than the consequences there *would* be if we rebelled as glorified beings in the future Kingdom of God. Furthermore, Paul explained that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" if we remain faithful (Romans 8:18).

Consider also: Why did Christ have to suffer? Jesus, the one through whom God the Father created the universe (Ephesians 3:9), came to earth as a human being and subjected Himself not only to death, but suffered enormously on our behalf. Why?

Pain in ourselves and pain in the Body of Christ brings home to us one important truth: *This* is what sin causes. Any transgression of God's holy and righteous law will eventually cause someone to suffer.

We must come to know absolutely that no way other than the perfect way of love as defined by God's law will ultimately work.

Dealing with the cause

In the new millennial world God promises to usher in, the first cause of evil, Satan the devil, will at last be removed. Revelation 20 describes the time when God will seal him in a bottomless abyss, followed by 1,000 years of peace under the rule of Christ.

In this coming age God's way of love will be taught, and the devil won't be allowed to influence man. At that time war will no longer be taught or tolerated, and the Creator will guide all men, women and children into His way of life without Satan influencing them to reject God's offer of salvation. Of course, human nature will still be there to overcome, but, in the millennial age to come, the devil will have been banished before that new era even begins.

Why can't God remove Satan now? He could, but He won't, not until humanity has written the lesson of hard experience for

what He considers sufficient time. Thankfully, that time appears to be nearing its end.

Ultimately God will remove evil altogether. None will be allowed in the new heavens and new earth described in Revelation 21 and 22. But this requires that every being of free choice either decide ultimately never to sin again or be taken out of the picture forever.

What is to guarantee no future rebellion beyond that? The first answer is pain. Yes, suffering. All who will live forever in the Kingdom of God must know without question that any violation of God's law will result in pain somewhere, somehow. They all will have come to grips with the understanding that their choice to violate God's law resulted in the death of Christ, who also suffered in this world.

The second answer is that all people one day will face the goodness of God that He demonstrated through Jesus Christ. Many have tried to achieve this kind of goodness but couldn't. You and I have caused suffering to others, sometimes deliberately or unknowingly, but we *have* caused others either mental or physical anguish. We finally begin to realize this when our minds are opened to the goodness God showed by sending His Son to die for us.

We cannot ever find this level of goodness in other human beings (Romans 5:6-8). To be convicted of our own sin, we must come face to face with the sacrifices God and Christ made for others who are so obviously undeserving of them. It is this compelling example of undeserved love from our Creator that brings us to the point that we never want to perpetrate any kind of evil on others.

In the end, those in God's family will nevermore consider evil as an option, and pain and sorrow will be no more (Revelation 21:4). God in His wisdom permits evil in our time to accomplish this grand purpose. **GN**

Recommended Reading

There is much more to learn about this crucial subject. Please send for our free booklets *Is There Really a Devil?* and *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* to better understand the reasons that God allows evil and suffering.



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Abomination

Continued from page 9

that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered . . . And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake . . ." (Daniel 12:1-2).

So this awful period of tribulation occurs at the end of this present age, just before Christ's return when He will resurrect His faithful followers (1 Thessalonians 4:15-16). Indeed, Daniel was told that "from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up," 1,290 days—a little more than 3½ years—would elapse until, apparently, the resurrection of Daniel and the rest of the saints would occur (Daniel 12:11, 13).

Lessons from the first fulfillment

We can learn a great deal about this end-time prophecy from the original abomination of desolation Daniel predicted. Antiochus Epiphanes was a forerunner of the end-time king of the North (see "The North-South Struggle for the Middle East," page 7), the world dictator of the book of Revelation refers to as the "beast." No doubt this end-time ruler will employ the same deceit and underhanded methods that marked the reign of Antiochus and many of his successors, such as Hitler.

Furthermore, it appears from what we've seen and other scriptural indications that the end-time ruler, to accomplish his ends, will feign overtures of peace to the Jews of the modern nation of Israel. This might help explain why the end-time "king of the South," evidently an Islamic Arab power, will act against the final beast power (Daniel 11:40).

What other parallels do we see? Part of the "abomination" of Antiochus involved the cessation of the daily temple sacrifices (verse 31). Yet Daniel's prophecy makes it clear that sacrifices will *again* be ended in conjunction with the abomination of desolation to come (Daniel 12:9-13). For this prophecy to be fulfilled, it appears that sacrifices will again be instituted and an altar rebuilt before the return of Jesus the Messiah.

In another parallel, Antiochus defiled the ancient holy temple when he erected an idol of the pagan god Zeus and sacrificed swine there. The end-time abomination may also involve an idolatrous image at a *new* temple. What we know for certain is that within the "temple of God" there will

be an actual *person* who claims to be God in the flesh.

The apostle Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, foretold this "son of perdition." Notice verses 3-4: "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [of Christ's return] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that *he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*" (emphasis added).

Christ will destroy this religious leader at His second coming (verses 5-8), but not before he has deceived many with "power, signs, and lying wonders" (verses 9-12).

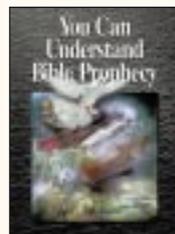
Also, just as the original abomination of desolation marked the beginning of a period of unparalleled horror and misery, so will the final one begin the time of the greatest horror ever, the coming Great Tribulation.

We can be thankful that God promises to send His Son back to earth to save mankind from self-annihilation in this coming horrible time of mass deceit and destruction. We can also thank God for the wonderful example of those who stood fast—who would not compromise with God's way—and the awesome hope of the return of Christ, of resurrection to eternal life and of the establishment of His glorious Kingdom on earth.

Indeed, as world events march ever closer to the fulfillment of these prophecies, let us draw closer to God in faith, trusting Him to see us through even the worst of times, knowing that we aren't left without foreknowledge to help us better understand end-time events. **GN**

Recommended Reading

The Bible reveals many more details about end-time events and the major trends that will lead up to Jesus Christ's return. To learn more, be sure to request your free copies of the booklets *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.



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Isn't It About Time You Read the Book?

The Bible makes the remarkable claim of being the inspired Word of God, the divine instruction for men, women and children everywhere. Shouldn't we learn what it has to say?

by Tom Robinson

The Bible is the one book owned by more people than any other—and is the most-printed piece of literature of all time. Even today it remains a perennial best-seller. No other literary work has been translated into as many languages and dialects.

Yet Bruce Barton called it the book nobody knows—and rightly so—because for most people the Bible generally goes unread, much less studied. It simply rests on a shelf or table collecting dust. Why would so many people own a book they don't take the time to read?

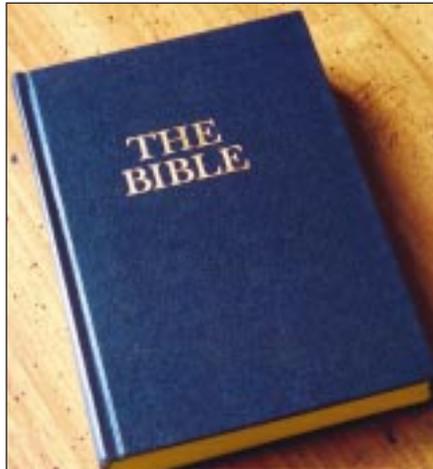
Some people see the Bible as a sentimental heirloom, something to be passed from one generation to the next but otherwise quaint and out of date. Others view it as the traditional standard by which to judge right and wrong. Few, however, feel the need to *check up on what it says*. They trust that their parents, religious leaders and others have already summed up what's in it.

Still others believe the Bible to be full of errors, inconsistencies and contradictions. For them it's nothing more than a curiosity.

Many view the study of the Bible as a cumbersome and tedious chore someone would do only as a duty to an overbearing God. Then there are those who believe that time so spent would be wasted since there is no way to understand all that spiritual mumbo jumbo. Worst of all, if they perhaps *did* come to some greater understanding—such as finding a principle of God they had been unaware of—it would be just one more bothersome religious declaration or requirement.

The instruction manual

Why do so many think this way? It's because they have not *known* God. They have not come to understand who He is. Failure to read and study the Holy Scriptures with the right *approach* has resulted in all kinds of wrong ideas about our Creator. It is also why so many misunderstand the very *purpose* of the Bible. But, if we



will honestly and sincerely open our minds, we can indeed know that purpose.

Let's consider a modern-day analogy. What would you do if you just bought a new VCR and wanted to learn how to program it? You could just experiment by randomly pushing buttons. But that might result in setting the wrong date or time or causing some other malfunction. The smarter move would be to *read the instruction manual*. It would tell you not only how to program and maintain the unit, but even explain exactly what it was designed to do.

How can we find out what God designed us, as human beings, to do? The vast majority of people have simply experimented by in effect pushing a lot of wrong buttons. The result? Nothing less than all the problems that threaten to overwhelm us! But there is a way out of our troubles and confusion. That way is made plain through *the instruction manual* for mankind, the Holy Bible. Our manufacturer, the Creator God, gave it to us to tell us how to live and why He created us.

Notwithstanding accusations of scriptural inaccuracy and contradictions, *the Bible, in its original form, is the absolute truth*. Although many have disregarded it as ancient, outdated literature, it is in fact the inspired, *living* Word of God.

The Bible is the only book that has accurately prophesied, centuries in advance, the

world conditions and growing turmoil of our century and beyond. Of all books, the Bible alone has unerringly foretold the rise and fall of specific nations and empires and the destiny to which our present civilization is running headlong to embrace.

No literature conceived by human thought has ever accomplished the like. None ever could. Rather, such amazing prophecies are proof that the Bible contains God's own instructions, His holy and inspired Word.

True and lasting solutions

The Holy Scriptures are the *foundation* of *true* knowledge. They are God's revelation, which we are incapable of comprehending fully without divine assistance. Though man has sought solutions to his problems for thousands of years—through science, philosophy, religious tradition and even the occult—he has utterly failed in finding them. Why? Because he has refused to *study* and *obey* this written revelation from his Creator, the only source of lasting solutions to human woes.

Let us never disdain or ignore this most precious gift, for the Bible reveals that God is *love* (1 John 4:8, 16), that His primary, defining characteristic is concern for others. That is the basis of all the instruction He gives in the Bible.

The Bible clearly attests that God's desire is for all of us to lead happy, abundant and fulfilled lives. He has no desire to lord it over us as some cruel tyrant. We need to realize that the instructions He gives are *for our good*; they protect us from harm and are the only sure way to peace and happiness.

God wants our lives to be full of interesting and gratifying experiences. Once we begin to understand His written revelation to mankind, we will find that studying it is one of the most fascinating and rewarding journeys we could ever take.

Why so misunderstood?

Before examining how to understand

the Bible, let's consider why so many have so greatly misunderstood it. Ask 10 people what the real message of the Bible is and you'll probably get just as many answers. Few seem to agree on what the Bible means.

The primary reason for the confusion and misunderstanding is something already mentioned: People don't usually read God's Word carefully. Instead they carelessly accept the opinions of others. But the Bible warns against such an approach (see Jeremiah 17:5).

Further, Revelation 12:9 informs us that "the great dragon . . . , that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, . . . *deceives the whole world.*" Yes, as hard as it may be to believe, the majority of mankind has followed Satan into dangerous religious and spiritual error.

None of us likes to admit he is wrong. We tend to resent it when someone points out that our beliefs may be off base. We hold to the values and principles we have long accepted, not stopping to consider that usually our beliefs, like most people's, were instilled long before we were mentally equipped to properly evaluate what we were learning.

Conflicting beliefs can't all be right

In the present Babylon of religious confusion, not everyone can be right (see Revelation 17). People differ on who God is, what writings comprise His revelation to mankind, even what day He considers holy. They disagree on who represents God, how to worship Him and a host of other crucial questions. Clearly *some people have to be wrong.*

Do you have the courage to admit that one of these people might be you? If you hold beliefs you haven't really proven from the Bible, then don't you think God would expect you to reconsider your viewpoints?

The apostle Paul wrote under divine guidance that all Scripture is profitable for positive teaching as well as correction and reproof (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The Bible is a great spiritual mirror. It reveals defects in our thinking and behavior, reflecting how we *really* are, not how we *imagine* ourselves to be. The Bible reflects how *God* sees us.

Rather than acknowledging their faults and changing, many try to read their own interpretations into the Bible. Instead of yielding to God's revealed truth, most people attempt to bend His divine will to accommodate their own.

The consequences are staggering.

Because man has chosen to go his *own* way, society brings wretchedness and misery upon itself. As a whole, the human race has *rejected* the sound, biblical knowledge that would have prevented the chaotic conditions we face. No wonder God tells us, "My people are *destroyed* for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6)—for lack of true, *spiritual* knowledge.

The path to biblical understanding

Now maybe we can see why so many people don't understand the Bible. They use the wrong *approach*. Rather than submit to the revealed will of God, many fear what *other people* will think of their beliefs and practices. But rest assured God will not allow *anyone* to ignore Him indefinitely. We would do well to realize this and begin to earnestly *study* His Word with the right approach.

What should our attitude be toward the study of God's Word? The Almighty says: "You will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you *search for Me* with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:12-13, emphasis added throughout).

He further tells us, ". . . This is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite [repentant] in spirit, *who trembles at my word*" (Isaiah 66:2, New Revised Standard Version).

God tells us we must set our hearts to truly *seek* Him. We must have proper *fear* or *awe* of, and the deepest *respect* for, His holy Word. Each of us must come before the Holy Scriptures in humility, ready to learn and live by what they tell us.

Do we have this basic approach? Without it we cannot even begin to truly understand spiritual truth. That's because proper fear of God in an obedient attitude is the *starting point* for learning His incredible way of life. God makes this abundantly clear: "The fear of the LORD is the *beginning* of wisdom; a good *understanding* have all those who *do His commandments*" (Psalm 111:10).

Here we find a profound principle: If we want to really understand why God gives us certain requirements in His Word, then we should begin *obeying* them from the heart. Everything will soon begin to make sense, more so than you could ever imagine (see John 7:17).

Separating truth from falsehood

Another aspect of our approach must be to bear in mind God's warning that, in our age of religious confusion, many would

"turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to *fables*" (2 Timothy 4:4). According to God's Word, many traditional religious beliefs are not based on sound biblical truth.

We shouldn't assume that our *own* religious heritage is free from error. Neither should we blindly believe what we read in any religious magazine, even *The Good News*. Rather, we are to believe *the Bible*. We invite you to hold our articles up to the standard of God's Word, for the Bible itself instructs us to "*prove* all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21, King James Version).

How do you do that? In the New Testament the people of Berea heard Paul teaching something quite different from anything they had ever learned. Initially they didn't know whether he was a servant of God or a false prophet. So what did they do? They "received the word with all readiness [without prejudice], and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out whether these things were so*" (Acts 17:11).

It is just as vital that we endeavor to free *our* minds from prejudice and past assumptions. Then we, too, must search the Scriptures to find out what they *really* say.

Beginning a study program

How should you begin? Several time-tested Bible-study methods have proven to be helpful. One is to simply *read through the Scriptures* book by book, fixing the context of verses clearly in mind.

Another is to do *word studies* to find out what various expressions mean. A word study is an examination of many or all of the verses that contain a specific word or phrase from the original Hebrew or Greek. (However, keep in mind that many times the same English expression has been used to translate different Hebrew or Greek expressions, which can be confusing.)

Helpful tools for Hebrew and Greek word studies would be concordances such as *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, expository dictionaries such as *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* and Bible computer software.

You should also read the Bible for *inspiration and encouragement*. The book of Psalms and chapters 5–7 of Matthew—known as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—are inspiring sections of Scripture.

Perhaps the best way to fully grasp biblical truths, though, is to study *specific topics*. Many people assume or reason an entire belief or doctrine from a single

Keys to Unlocking Understanding of the Bible

Recognize that the Bible is inspired. The entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the inspired Word of God. When studying, keep in mind that He inspired the words you are reading; God is directly speaking to you through them (2 Peter 1:21; Philippians 2:5; John 6:63). For further evidence, please request our free booklet *Is the Bible True?*

Plan time for study. It's easy to let everyday concerns interfere, so schedule study time and try to maintain it. Over time you will look forward to this daily experience (Ephesians 5:15-17).

Pray for understanding. Before you even begin, ask God to guide and show you His will. Remember that it is the Creator who gives true understanding through His Word. You cannot gain it on your own (Psalm 119:33-40; Proverbs 3:5-8; Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Keep an open mind. Be willing to admit when you are wrong and change, even if it means letting go of a long-held belief or tradition. If you can successfully apply this one principle, you will be far ahead in the race for spiritual truth (Acts 17:11; Isaiah 8:20).

Seek instruction and correction. Approach the Bible with a teachable, humble attitude. The Word of God judges our innermost thoughts. It can show us who we really are. It can reveal every flaw in our character. So be ready to heed its correction (Jeremiah 10:23-24; Isaiah 66:1-2, 5; Romans 8:6-9; Matthew 5:48).

Let the Bible interpret itself. If something seems confusing or even contradictory, let clear biblical passages shed light on those you find difficult to understand. Scriptures do not contradict each other; they complement each other. Also, to properly understand a verse in the Bible, don't force your personal point of view into it. Instead use the context and other relevant scriptures to find the correct meaning (2 Peter 1:20; John 10:35; 17:17; Isaiah 28:9-10).

Study topics. Concentrate, at various times, on one subject, doctrine or book. Use a concordance or other study aid to put together all the scriptures relevant to a subject. This will allow you to see all that God has to say about a particular topic (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV). For help getting started, send for our free *Bible Study Course*.

Read the whole Bible. Go through the Bible from cover to cover. By reading every section of the Bible, you give yourself a broad familiarity and perspective that will help you shed preconceived ideas

about doctrinal subjects. Our Bible Reading Program (available at www.ucg.org.brp/) provides a convenient schedule for accomplishing this and other goals.

Take notes. Jot down notes and explanatory comments in your Bible or a notebook. This will help you remember key ideas or related scriptures. Some people use a marking system, with colors or symbols, to keep track of key verses by categories (doctrine, correction, prophecy, etc.). This can help you save time when looking for a particular section of Scripture.

Use study aids. Many Bible study aids are useful. They can provide valuable historical background or point you to other scriptures that add clarity to what you are reading. Aids include concordances, lexicons, dictionaries, maps and commentaries. However, always keep in mind that such resources are not Scripture and can be wrong.

Review and meditate. Take time to ponder what you have been learning. If something seems hard to understand, take some time to consider its meaning, using what you have already learned as the starting point. Reflect on what the Bible is saying and on how you can apply the verses in everyday life (Psalm 1:1-3; 119:97-99; 139:17-18).

Seek guidance. It is always best to seek help from qualified people in any field of study. God has commissioned His servants to guide people into a fuller understanding of His Word. If you have questions, feel free to contact us. We have literature available on a wide variety of biblical subjects (Proverbs 11:14; Nehemiah 8:8; Acts 8:30-31; 18:26; Romans 10:14-15).

Prove God right. Put God's Word to the test by practicing the things you are learning. Acknowledge how His ways bring positive change in your life. The best way to determine that God's commands and teachings bring true peace and blessings is by living them (1 John 3:22; John 10:10; 8:31-32; Malachi 3:10).

Hold fast. Once you have proven something to be true, don't allow yourself to be lightly convinced out of it. While new evidence may overturn your previous conclusion, this must be the product of serious study in God's Word. And always beware, because false teachers can lead you astray. Ask God to help you remain true to His teachings (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Timothy 3:13-15; Colossians 1:22-23; Psalm 119:10-16).

scripture. But that is generally not the way to understand God's Word. Biblical teachings are best understood in the light of *all* the scriptures on the subject.

Unlike most books, the message of the Bible is, in some ways, like a jigsaw puzzle. Only when all the pieces are arranged properly can a clear picture emerge. Consider the example of Jesus Christ, who quoted dozens of relevant scriptures from all parts of the Old Testament to make His points. The first chapter of Hebrews draws pertinent passages from Psalms, 2 Samuel, Deuteronomy and Isaiah—an example of what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:15: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

To fully understand what the Bible has to say on any given subject, we must look up *all* the verses that bear on that topic. Then, rather than human interpretations

of God's Word, we will have God's *own* explanation of what He means. (To aid you in your studies, the publishers of *The Good News* have prepared more than two dozen free booklets covering virtually all the foundational doctrines of the Bible. For a complete list of available publications, visit our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org/.)

Join us in a book-by-book study

We hope we have piqued your interest to start your own journey of discovery through the Holy Scriptures. We recommend you send for our free 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, which follows the subject-study method.

For a survey of the entire Bible, we invite you to join our new day-by-day Bible Reading Program, which you can find on the Internet at www.ucg.org.brp/. This program covers the entirety of the Holy Scriptures within three years, starting in February

2002 with one of the most fascinating of biblical books, Genesis. Through the Bible Reading Program you'll learn about the background and author of each book, the many intriguing people whose lives the Bible records for us, and the crucial lessons God wants us to learn. We welcome you to join us in this new program.

Through studying the Word of our loving Creator, and learning to follow His instructions, the otherwise unanswerable questions of human existence will be answered. Wonderful and awesome mysteries beyond your imagination, hidden from ages past (see Colossians 1:26), will be unlocked and opened to you. You may well find that your outlook on life will be altered, because you will learn the very meaning of life, the reason for which you were born, the way our Creator wants us to live. It's all waiting for you in the pages of God's inspired Word, the Bible! **GN**

Who Was Jesus Christ?

We know His name. But what does the title “Christ” mean? What did it signify to Jesus’ contemporaries? What expectations did it invoke? Did Jesus of Nazareth meet them, and was He truly the Christ?

by Tom Robinson

In the north of the nation of Israel sits a lush location of springs and a waterfall called Banyas. Known in Roman times as Caesarea Philippi, it was here that Jesus of Nazareth asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15).

Just who was this man who had walked on water, calmed the storms, healed the sick, raised the dead and made such bold claims? “Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (verse 16). Jesus confirmed that Peter was correct (verse 17).

Jesus had previously revealed His identity to a Samaritan woman. “The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When He comes, He will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am He’” (John 4:25-26).

Later, when the Jewish authorities took Jesus into custody, the high priest ordered Him, “Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:63). Jesus affirmed, “You said it” (verse 64, Green’s Literal Translation).

How important is Jesus’ identity as the Christ? The apostle John later wrote that “he who denies that Jesus is the Christ” is a liar and the enemy of God (1 John 2:22). Of course, to meaningfully avoid denying that Jesus is the Christ requires knowing what the term means—and what being the Christ entails.

The Lord’s Anointed

The term *Christ* is an English derivative of the New Testament Greek word *christos*, which means “anointed.” The equivalent Hebrew word in the Old Testament is *mashiach*. This term is transliterated in the King James New Testament as *messias* (John 1:41; 4:25), a word that has come down into modern English, including many Bible versions, as “messiah.” Both *Christ* and *Messiah* mean “anointed” or “anointed one.”

What was the significance of anointing? *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* states: “In the Hebrew Bible, the term is most often used of kings, whose investiture was marked especially by anointing with oil (Judg. 9:8-15; 2 Sam. 5:3; 1 Kings 1:39; Ps. 89:20 . . .), and who were given the title ‘the Lord’s anointed’ (e.g., 1 Sam. 2:10; 12:3; 2 Sam. 23:1; Pss. 2:2; 20:6; 132:17; Lam. 4:20)” (Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan, editors, 1993, “Messiah,” p. 513, emphasis added).

Anointing, this source tells us, “was widely practiced in the ancient Near East; the Amarna letters [on clay tablets found in central Egypt] suggest that anointing was a rite of kingship in Syria-Palestine in the fourteenth century BCE [B.C.], and . . . [a story from the time of Judges] assumes its familiarity (Judg. 9:8, 15)” (“Anoint,” p. 30).

Yet, as this and other sources point out, it was not only kings who were anointed in Scripture. Israel’s *high priests* were anointed (Exodus 29:7; Leviticus 4:3, 5, 16), as were some *prophets* (1 Kings 19:16).

In biblical usage, anointing is an act of *consecration*—setting one apart for the holy work of God. It was symbolic of the pouring out of God’s Spirit onto someone (compare Isaiah 61:1; Romans 5:5)—representing God’s power and intervention to, in the cases cited, perform the duties of the office one was anointed to. Jesus Himself was “anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38).

Messianic expectation

When Jesus came on the scene, the Jews were expecting the arrival of a leader called the Messiah (Luke 3:15). They understood that this was the very time indicated by a prophecy recorded in Daniel 9:25 for the coming of “Messiah the Prince”—that is, the anointed ruler.

Yet confusion abounded over to whom

this term applied. “In the intertestamental period, messianic speculation included three messianic figures (the righteous priest, the anointed king, and the prophet of the last days)” (John Bowker, editor, *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, 1997, “Messiah,” p. 637).

Scripture contained many prophecies of a coming king and deliverer. Jeremiah wrote: “‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely . . .’” (Jeremiah 23:5-6; see Isaiah 9:6-7).

Jesus was this prophesied King (Luke 1:32-33). When Pontius Pilate asked Him if He were a king, Jesus answered: “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world” (John 18:37). Indeed, as explained in the previous article in this series, the good news—or gospel—that Jesus Himself proclaimed was the coming of the world-encompassing Kingdom of God to be ruled by Him under God the Father.

Prophet and priest

We see that God set Jesus apart to be king. But what about the biblical examples of anointing to the offices of prophet and priest? Does Jesus fulfill these roles too?

Concerning a messianic *prophet*, Moses, who had been the chief human prophet, lawgiver and judge over God’s people, foretold the coming of a prophet to replace him (Deuteronomy 18:18). This prophet was thought to be the one mentioned in Isaiah 61:1 as being anointed by God “to preach good tidings to the poor . . .”

Later Peter directly stated that Jesus was the expected prophet (Acts 3:20-23).

Jesus Himself explained that He was the anointed prophet of Isaiah 61, bringing good news—the gospel. He shocked listeners by announcing, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:17-21).

Thus, contrary to a view of the time that the Prophet and kingly Messiah were two different individuals (compare John 1:20-21), these two titles applied to the same person—Jesus of Nazareth.

Also, “belief in a *priestly* messiah, son of Aaron [that is, one assumed to be a descendant of Israel’s first Levitical high priest], who would arise alongside the Davidic messiah to save Israel, appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls . . . The mysterious figure of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18) provides a title for one who is at the same time both king and priest (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7)” (Metzger and Coogan, p. 514).

This was apparently a confused interpretation of Psalm 110. David here wrote, “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand . . .’” (verse 1) and “The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (verse 4). As shown in Jesus’ exchange with the Pharisees regarding this Psalm, it was commonly understood that the “Lord” to whom God here speaks is the Messiah (Matthew 22:43-44). And Jesus made clear that the Messiah was to be a descendant of *David*, as the Pharisees knew (verses 41-42, 45-46).

This did not indicate a separate priestly messiah but that the prophesied Davidic king would *also* be a priest—not, as Hebrews 7 explains, a *Levitical* priest descended from Aaron, but a priest who was even higher, referring to Jesus (verse 22).

Contradictory roles?

The Messiah, then, was to be priest, prophet and king. Yet, as far as was physically apparent, Jesus did not serve as priest or king. He did not restore Israel. Nor did He reign forever. When people actually tried to “take Him by force to make Him king,” Jesus slipped away into seclusion (John 6:15). He *was* later hailed as “King of the Jews,” but this label was meant to *mock* Him while He was brutalized and crucified. Jesus then died, as we know. Many in His day failed to comprehend how He could have been the Messiah.

But rabbinic teachings of the time, at least those derived from Scripture, should actually have helped. *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states: “Their interpretation . . . , as [author Alfred] Edersheim shows . . . , embraced ‘such doctrines as the premundane existence of the Messiah; his elevation above Moses, and even above the angels; his representative character; his cruel sufferings and derision; his violent death, and that for his people; his work in behalf of the living and of the dead; his redemption and restoration of Israel; the opposition of the Gentiles, their partial judgment and conversion; the prevalence of his law; the universal blessings of the latter days; and his kingdom’” (“Messiah,” 1966, p. 718).

Yet confusion reigned because some of the prophecies seemed to contradict other prophecies. The Jews did not understand how the Messiah could be a conquering king (Psalm 2) and yet, at the same time, a suffering, humble servant, despised by His people, who would die (Isaiah 52:13-15; 53:1-12). Therefore many rejected the prophecies of the suffering servant as applying to the Messiah, seeing this as figurative of Israel.

Others determined that *two* messiahs must come: “The Davidic messiah would be preceded by a secondary figure . . . [who] would be killed” (Bowker). Yet we should note that even this figure was commonly thought to be a military leader to immediately precede the messianic age under the Messiah descended from David. The Jews did not understand that the Messiah would serve as a sacrifice for sin (Isaiah 53).

The anticipation of two messiahs in the first century perhaps explains a question posed by John the Baptist. Though he had announced Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29) and heard a voice from heaven stating that Jesus was the Son of God (Mark 1:11), John, while in prison, sent messengers to ask Jesus, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3). Although this may have been mere frustration, it may also have been prompted by contemporary teachings about two messiahs.

Jesus answered: “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are

raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me” (verses 4-6). These were all prophetic earmarks of the glorious King of the messianic age. Jesus thus assured John that He was the one destined to fulfill all the prophecies about the Messiah.

Proof of messiahship

In opposition to the Roman occupation of the land of Israel, various would-be messiahs emerged, such as Judas the Galilean and Theudas, a Jew from Egypt (Acts 5:36-37). But they both fell. Even after the Romans later crushed Judea in A.D. 66, others arose but were likewise killed—not to rise again.

Jesus *also* died. But, unlike any other messianic claimant, He *did* rise again—three days later. He offered this fact as specific proof of His messiahship (Matthew 12:39-40). It proved who He was because it was the only way all the prophecies of the Messiah could possibly be fulfilled. He had to die to be the suffering servant sacrificed for sin. He had to remain dead for as long as He said He would to prove Himself a genuine prophet. And He had to be resurrected to serve as high priest and come again to rule as king.

His own disciples had not understood this even after He explained it to them (Luke 9:22, 44-45). But after His resurrection He appeared to two of them and said: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

Yes, the Christ—the Messiah, the Anointed One—is a central theme of the Bible. He has come. His name is Jesus. He lived as a human being and died by crucifixion. But God raised Him from the grave, and He will come again to rule the world, restore Israel, usher in everlasting peace and save all who will accept Him.

In the next article in this series, we will examine further claims Jesus made about His identity that were even more surprising to His listeners—and may be to you as well. In the meantime, please request and read our new booklet *Who Is God?* **GN**

Letters From Our Readers

Response to the November-December Good News

I want to say thank you for the excellent November-December issue of *The Good News*. This issue has increased my knowledge of the Muslim world and related topics more than the sum of all my prior knowledge concerning the same.

T.W.M., Moneta, Virginia

I would like to address this note to Bruce Gore, who was the author of the article "Where Was God?" in the November-December issue. I thought the article was well written and embraced the fact that mankind has free will and consequently this free will results in disastrous deeds that are done by some groups of people.

I have a real concern for the second-to-last paragraph of your article. If I interpret what you are saying correctly, you feel that when Jesus returns He will somehow give all people (even those who have died without knowing Jesus as their Savior) a second chance. I disagree with this premise and, reviewing your scriptural references, do not see how they support this position.

J.B., Internet

Interested readers can find a full explanation in our free booklets What Happens After Death? and God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. Both reveal a little-understood truth and show from the Scriptures the unsaved do not receive a second chance, rather that everyone will receive a first opportunity for salvation. Most people throughout history have never known or understood God's truth. Our Creator, as these booklets show, is fair to all humanity.

Why help developing countries?

I am writing about the article "How to Live on \$25 a Month" in the September-October *Good News*. In the article you ask what can we do to help poverty-stricken countries. I ask why do the people of America think they have the obligation to constantly send money and aid to foreign countries? We should instead be focusing on how to help and improve our own country.

It is my belief that a country should be

left to make its own political decisions. In this way if a country flourishes like America has, great, but if it suffers then it is up to that country to solve its own problems and not leech off another country like a parasite. I'm proud to live in America. This is a land created with the hard work, sweat and blood of our forefathers. Please remember how hard your ancestors worked to build the present economy, and don't be so fast to give it away to those who choose not to do the same. If I am sounding selfish by saying this, sorry, but each country has its own chance to grow and flourish. God bless America!

Lance Cpl. R.T., U.S. Marine Corps

It is true that individuals and nations alike are subject to the principle that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7; Job 4:8), and many suffer from their wrong choices or the wrong choices of others. However, Jesus Christ emphasized that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). The biblical obligation to love our neighbors mandates help and support within our means, whether personally or nationally.

God told ancient Israel to be a light and help to other nations. The New Testament consistently teaches the principle of extending a helping hand. The wealth of America is far more because of a special divine blessing than our own efforts, however important they have been. This is thoroughly explained in our free booklet The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.

Letters from around the world

All my consolation to the American people for the terrorist action against your country, which is an awful action against humanity. Whoever is responsible for that terrorism, Osama bin Laden, Iraq or Afghanistan, must be punished to be an example to all the devils who abhor humanity. I hope to continue having the Bible lessons, the coming issues of *The Good News* and all your publications.

M.M., Saudi Arabia

I have subscribed to *The Good News* and received my second issue yesterday. I am so much blessed by the articles that I read them all in one night. I have also

seen the offer for free booklets. The resources here are very limited, and that is why I want to ask you a favor in Christ. Please send me the booklets by mail as I don't have the computer to download them.

Pastor Z.Q., Pakistan

Right after I received a *Good News* magazine from a friend, I decided to respond to your offer of a free booklet. I was surprised at how much I didn't know about the Ten Commandments. Even though I am just 17, I plan on introducing my friends to *The Good News*. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to learn more about what you believe in. Giving out free booklets and magazines must cost quite a lot. You will be in my prayers.

A.S., Witbank, South Africa

I am a medical doctor currently employed at Port of Spain General Hospital. While working one night, I was introduced to your magazine by a nurse. I found the articles very touching and inspiring. I humbly request to subscribe to your magazine and look forward anxiously for a first copy.

R.S.J., Trinidad

Where to send donations?

I have enjoyed learning about the Bible with the help of your booklets and magazines. I think the United Church of God has got a great thing going, and I would like to help support it. I have almost your whole library of literature in my bookcase and haven't paid for a thing. Where can I send a donation? Again, thank you for providing such informative material.

R.K., Utopia, Texas

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Realistically

Continued from page 15

and will probably approximate about 25 percent of the world's population by 2025.

"As a result of their extremely high rates of population growth, the proportion of Muslims in the world will continue to increase dramatically, amounting to 20 percent of the world's population about the turn of the century, surpassing the number of Christians some years later, and probably accounting for about 30 percent of the world's population by 2025" (Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 1996, p. 65). Current population statistics bear out his predictions.

A different kind of Islam

Few non-Muslims are aware of a shift that has taken place within much of Islam in recent years. Compared to previous years, many mosques are now "under the control of Wahhabi imams, who preach extremism . . ." (Stephen Schwartz, "Ground Zero and the Saudi Connection," *The Spectator*, Sept. 22).

This trend has particularly affected many among the younger generation of Muslims, the generation from which the Sept. 11 suicide hijackers were recruited. "These Wahhabis . . . accuse their own fathers of heresy, sin and unbelief. And the young children of the immigrants . . . get exposed only to this one-sided version of Islam and are led to think that this is the only Islam" (ibid.).

Explaining Wahhabism, the same article says it is "a strain of Islam that emerged . . . less than two centuries ago. It is violent, it is intolerant and it is fanatical beyond measure. It originated in Arabia, and it is the official theology of the [Persian] Gulf states. Wahhabism is the most extreme form of Islamic fundamentalism, and its followers are called Wahhabis. Not all Muslims are suicide bombers, but all Muslim suicide bombers are Wahhabis."

The sect was founded by Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-92). "From the beginning . . . his cult was associated with the mass murder of all who opposed it. For example, the Wahhabis fell upon the city of Qarbala in 1801 and killed 2,000 ordinary citizens in the streets and markets."

Continuing from the same article: "Bin Laden is a Wahhabi. So are the suicide bombers in Israel. So are his Egyptian allies, who exulted as they stabbed foreign tourists to death at Luxor not many years ago . . . So

are the Algerian terrorists whose contribution to the purification of the world consisted of murdering people for such sins as running a movie projector or reading secular newspapers. So are the Taliban-style guerrillas in Kashmir who murder Hindus."

Interestingly, "Wahhabism is subsidized by Saudi Arabia," America's chief ally in the Gulf. Wahhabis are motivated by a similar conviction to what motivated the communists, who threatened the West during the Cold War: "the belief that the West was or is decadent and doomed."

By no means do such descriptions apply to all Muslims. Nor should all Muslims be judged by the actions of a few fanatical extremists. Nonetheless we mustn't let political correctness hide our eyes from the potential danger.

Contribution of liberalism

Liberal thinking has been a contributory factor to the West's crisis. Not only have the postwar, supposedly progressive policies on decolonization, religion and immigration played a role, but major contributors include the West's liberal moral laws, dating back to the sexual revolution of the '60s.

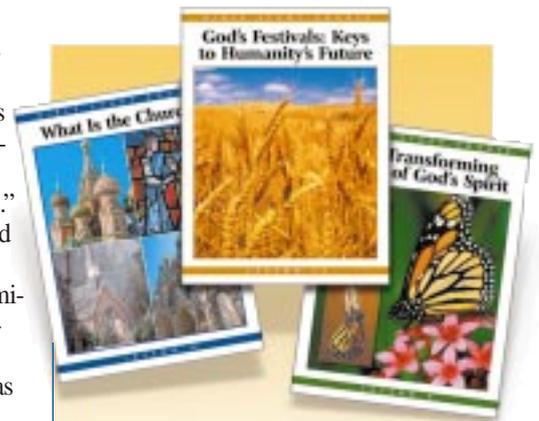
The "belief that the West was or is decadent and doomed" is a significant factor here. In spite of religious differences, there was a time when the rest of the world looked up to the United States, Britain and the European powers.

"Righteousness exalts a nation," Proverbs 14:34 tells us, "but sin is a reproach to any people." The rest of the world gets its impression of America from television, movies and music, much of which is heavily violent and sexual in content.

America's liberal, permissive society has been looked upon as progressive by the forces of political correctness. In response to ever-expanding freedoms, rates of sexual promiscuity and perversion, pornography, abortions, sexually transmissible diseases, divorce and broken homes have skyrocketed. The fruits are rotten to the core.

America's respect in the eyes of the rest of the world doesn't come through its military power. It will be helped only if the United States cleans itself up morally and its citizens become a godlier people.

Then God's promise in Deuteronomy 28:1 will come to pass: ". . . If you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, . . . the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth." **GN**



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