

The Good News

March-April 2002

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

Can You Believe the Bible?

The Exodus Controversy • Are We Missing the Message From God?
A World Without the United States • Seven Reasons Why Jesus Was Born

William Ramsay didn't set out to prove the Bible's accuracy. In fact, the young Oxford graduate and budding scholar set sail in 1879 from England for Asia Minor convinced that, based on his university studies, the New Testament—and the book of Acts in particular—was largely a hoax. After all, his professors had taught him that the Bible had been written much later than it claimed to be, so its stories had been fabricated long after the fact and weren't to be taken seriously.

The focus of his work was ancient Roman culture. But the more he dug into it, literally and figuratively, the more he came to see that the myriad of tiny details in the book of Acts—place names, topography, officials' titles, administrative boundaries, customs and even specific structures—fit perfectly with newly discovered historical and archaeological finds. He was gradually convinced that, to use his own words, "in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth."

Contrary to all his earlier education, he was forced to conclude that Luke, the author of Acts, was "a historian of the first rank" and that "not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense . . . This author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

In an outstanding academic career Ramsay was honored with doctorates from nine universities and eventually knighted for his contributions to modern scholarship. He shocked the academic world when in one of his books he announced that, because of the incontrovertible evidence he had discovered for the truthfulness of the Bible, he had become a Christian. Several of his works on New Testament history are considered classics.

When confronted with the evidence of years of travel and study, Sir William Ramsay learned what many others before him and since have been forced to acknowledge: When we objectively examine the evidence for the Bible's accuracy and veracity, the only conclusion we can reach is that the Bible is true.

The evidence from archaeology is only one proof of Scripture's accuracy, and that's the focus of several articles in this issue. We offer you a sampling of the evidence that's available—documentation showing that details of the people, places and events described in the Bible, many of them mentioned only in passing, have been verified by archaeologists and historians. Many excellent books have been published in recent years that verify the dependability of Scripture, and no doubt more will follow as new discoveries come to light.

This time of year marks two of the greatest events recorded in the Bible. The first was God's miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The second was God's miraculous deliverance of humanity from enslavement to sin and death through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus of Nazareth.

Did these events really happen? The first was so powerful that it passed into the national consciousness of the Israelites for thousands of years. The second was so powerful that many of its eyewitnesses, the original disciples, proclaimed it even though they were tortured and killed—not one of them taking back a single word. They chose to suffer a cruel death rather than deny the truth of what they had witnessed.

What are the implications of these events for you? All the evidence in the world does us no good if we are not willing to believe the Bible enough to put it to the ultimate test—that of *doing what it tells us to do*.

James, the half brother of Jesus, reminds us that mere belief is not enough, because even the demons believe. Instead he tells us we must put our beliefs *into action* if we are to please God (James 2:19-26).

In *The Good News* we regularly offer articles such as those in this issue to help build your faith. But be sure that you don't neglect the articles that show you how to put your faith and belief into action. God is interested to see how you *respond* to the truth He makes known to you. Ultimately that is the far more important test.

—Scott Ashley

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The Bible: Myth or History

by Scott Ashley

You've read the articles. You've watched the reports and listened to the stories. Routinely they allege or at least suggest that the Bible isn't really believable.

By now everyone knows, they imply, that the Bible's stories could not have happened the way they are written. After all, plenty of reporters, professors and scientists tell us such is the case—that the Bible is mostly myth.

But is it? Or is a different myth being foisted off on us?

Surveys show that belief in the Bible is declining at an astounding rate. According to pollster George Gallup: "As recently as 1963, two [Americans] in three viewed the Bible as the actual word of God, to be taken literally, word for word. Today [1999], only one person in three still holds to that interpretation" (George Gallup Jr. and Michael Lindsay, *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs*, 1999, p. 36).

Only two years later, in 2001, the Gallup poll showed that only 27 percent of Americans—barely one in four—still believed the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and literally true in every respect.

In other countries belief that the Bible is the true Word of God is far lower. A 1991 survey found that only 25 percent of the Irish, 20 percent of Italians, 13 percent of Britons, Norwegians and Dutch and 10 percent of former



"In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came," says 2 Kings 15:29. The fierce monarch's portrait, carved in stone, was found in his palace at Nimrud 26 centuries later. He is one of many biblical figures whose existence has been proven by archaeological discoveries.

Many people will tell you that the Bible is only a collection of fables, but they're not telling you the whole story. Can you believe the Bible? The implications are enormous.

West Germans believed the Bible was absolutely true and should be taken literally. A 1999 poll in Britain indicated that fewer than half its respondents believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Even more startling, 14 percent said they knew nothing at all about Him. More than one in five believed He was "just a story." Almost half of those polled had never attended a church service.

What's behind these trends? Only a generation ago the common view among most Americans, and much of the Western world, was that the Bible is literally true—and the direct revelation of God and of His will. Now why do so many people, including many professing Christians, distrust or disbelieve what the Bible says?

A shift to unbelief

For many centuries people simply assumed that

everything in the Bible was true. But then, from the late 1600s through the 1800s, a series of scientific discoveries came to light that many assumed contradicted the Bible. In reality they didn't contradict the Bible, but only common assumptions religious leaders and other people had made about the Bible (for in-depth details, request or download our free booklets *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org).

However, the damage caused by these false assumptions had been done, and the Bible had been discredited in the eyes of many. In the mid-1800s Charles Darwin proposed the theory of evolution, which many intellectuals quickly latched onto as a way to explain the existence of a creation without a Creator. His theory quickly found fertile ground and paved the way for a widespread belief in a creation without a Creator.

It wasn't long before many intellectuals, particularly those teaching in European universities, began to "deconstruct" the Bible. They soon concluded that, among other things, the books of the Bible couldn't have been written by their reputed authors—and, for that matter, the Bible couldn't have been written until hundreds of years after their lifetimes. All in all, they decided, the Bible's stories and characters were simply a collection of myths and legends pieced together by writers many centuries after they supposedly happened.

For them the Bible was only a collection of ancient fables no different from the timeworn myths of any other ancient tribal history. Sadly, their thinking not

Critics formulate their own myths

only persists to our day but permeates the curricula of many universities. Students are saturated with these ideas by professors who aggressively promote an anti-Bible bias. That bias now pervades the mass media and most of the scientific community.

Richard Dawkins, professor of zoology at Oxford University, is an aggressive proponent of evolution whose contemptuous view of the biblical creation account is typical of those who dismiss the Bible as being the inspired truth of God.

"Nearly all peoples have developed their own creation myth," he writes, "and the Genesis story is just the one that happened to have been adopted by one particular tribe of Middle Eastern herders. It has no more special status than the belief of a particular West African tribe that the world was created from the excrement of ants" (*The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*, 1986, p. 316).

So which is it? Is the Bible the revelation of man's Creator, as it claims to be? Is it an accurate history of ancient peoples—men and women who lived long ago whose stories were recorded for us—or is it a patchwork collection of fables?

Critics of the Bible have long ridiculed its value as a historical document. For decades many vehemently argued that the Hebrew Scriptures couldn't be what they claimed to be since, according to these critics, the art of writing dated back only to about 1000 B.C.—around the time of Israel's King David.

Anything earlier than a few centuries B.C., they argued, was unreliable oral tradition at best and wildly exaggerated mythmaking at worst. Thus they could safely dismiss the entire Old Testament as any sort of reliable historical document. The events of Genesis, the Exodus from Egypt, King David and his exploits, stories of armies and empires, the kings of Israel

and Judah and so much more—all, they said, were nothing but fable.

Although critics of the Bible still abound, fewer and fewer are willing to make the same arguments on those same grounds. Why? The evidence grows daily that the modern-day mythmakers were wrong—spectacularly wrong.

Empires emerge from the sands of time

Rather than accept the Bible's witness as true until proven wrong, critics took the position that the Bible is *untrue* until proven otherwise—a way of thinking that, regrettably, permeates the minds of many scholars and thinkers to this day. But is their bias justified?

Evidence for the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible began to surface virtually the instant archaeologists started to scratch the surface of the biblical lands in the mid-1800s.

One of the earliest of these scientific explorers was the American Edward Robinson. He identified the location or ruins of literally hundreds of biblical towns and cities by a remarkably simple method:

The evidence grows daily that the modern-day mythmakers were wrong—spectacularly wrong.

An Ancient Inscription Proves King David Was Real

For many years some critics have asserted that many biblical figures, including King David, are nothing more than myth. But in 1993 a dramatic find again forced Bible critics to retreat. A team of archaeologists digging in northern Galilee "found a remarkable inscription from the ninth century B.C.E. [before the common era, or B.C.] that refers both to the 'House of David' and to the 'King of Israel'" ("David Found at Dan," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April 1994, p. 26).

This discovery was sensational enough to make the front page of *The New York Times*. The inscription also shows that Israel and Judah were important kingdoms in the ninth century B.C., disproving the position of scholars who claimed Israel and Judah were never nations of significance and even disputed that there had ever been a united monarchy under David.

Although this is one more piece of evidence that refutes the arguments of those who have rejected biblical history, we must realize it is impossible to verify every biblical event through archaeology. Much of the original evidence no longer exists. Many perishable materials have long since disappeared. Looking for physical evidence of a particular person is like looking for a needle in an enormous haystack.

In spite of those difficulties, David joins many other kings of Israel and Judah whose names were recorded in inscriptions that have been

found from neighboring nations, among them Ahab, Ahaz, Ahaziah, Hezekiah, Hoshea, Jehoiachin, Jehu, Joash, Manasseh, Menahem, Omri, Pekah and Uzziah.

We must keep in mind the relatively small amount of the archaeological record that scientists have uncovered. Excavations will, without a doubt, continue to uphold the events of the Bible. In spite of the relative paucity of evidence that has been uncovered, that which has been found has supported the Bible.

British historian Paul Johnson observes a shift in thinking concerning even the most ancient events recorded in the Bible: "... The science of modern archaeology and historical philology actually provides verification of the most ancient biblical texts. Whereas... throughout the nineteenth century and almost up to the Second World War, systematic criticism of the Old Testament texts tended to destroy their historicity, and to reduce the Pentateuch, in particular, to mere myth or tribal legend, the trend over the last half-century has been quite in the opposite direction. The Flood, for instance, has been restored to history. Archaeological discovery provides now a firm historical background to the patriarchal

society described in the Book of Genesis" (Paul Johnson, *The Quest for God*, 1996, p. 12).

(The text of the preceding article is excerpted from *Is the Bible True?* For your free copy, see the box on page 7.)



Some Bible critics have gone so far as to question the existence of biblical figures such as King David. This inscription, found at the biblical city of Dan and referring to the dynasty founded by David, silenced many outspoken doubters.

He simply talked to the Arab inhabitants, who had preserved the traditional names of the locations in their own tongue for centuries! Subsequent excavations at many of these sites have proven they were correct; the names were indeed passed on accurately over many generations.

Shortly after Robinson's first forays into the Holy Land, English, German and French excavators began to explore ruins in what is today Iraq. Their finds were staggering. They uncovered not only the great cities of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires mentioned in the Bible, but palaces and monuments of the very kings recorded in the Scriptures. Some even contained accounts of military campaigns that matched the Bible's, as well as carvings depicting the actual battles. (See "The

Mighty Assyrian Empire Emerges From the Dust," below.)

A lost people emerges

Another major shock to those who maintained that the Bible was myth was the 1876 discovery of proof of an entire empire that had been lost to history. Though they are mentioned 47 times in the Bible, many scholars had come to regard the Hittites as simply a fable.

However, the discovery of inscribed clay tablets at a Turkish site led to an excavation that uncovered a fortified citadel, five temples, enormous stone sculptures and a room containing more than 10,000 tablets.

Says archaeologist and author Randall Price: "Once they were finally deciphered it was announced to the world that the Hittites

had been found! [The site] had in fact been the ancient capital of the Hittite empire . . . The rediscovery of this lost people, one of the most outstanding achievements in Near Eastern archaeology, now serves as a caution to those who doubt the historicity of particular biblical accounts" (*The Stones Cry Out*, 1997, p. 83).

By no means are these the only people and empires mentioned in the Bible whose existence has since been proved by the archaeologist's spade. As more sites have been explored, many more peoples and even *specific individuals* recorded in the Scriptures have been verified as real.

Proof that biblical figures were real

As recently as a decade ago, some argued that Israel's most famous king, David, was

The Mighty Assyrian Empire Emerges From the Dust

Perhaps archaeology's most dramatic find among the treasure troves of the past was the remains of the ancient Assyrian Empire.

Assyria first appears as an empire early in the second millennium B.C. The remains of a ziggurat, or temple tower, from that era still stand near the site of its ancient capital.

In the ninth century B.C., Assyria developed into an aggressive and powerful empire. By this time, about 40 years after the reign of Solomon, Israel had split into two distinct kingdoms—Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12:16-24). Led by able and ruthless monarchs, the Assyrians began to menace and eventually conquer their neighbors. They eventually subjugated the whole of the Fertile Crescent from Mesopotamia to Egypt. According to the Bible, by the late eighth century they crushed the kingdom of Israel and invaded the southern kingdom of Judah, conquering its major cities and besieging its capital, Jerusalem (Isaiah 36:1-2).

Did this really happen, or is it a fable? Remember, many scoffers at one time disputed even the existence of the Assyrian Empire. But it was no myth. As the debris of centuries was removed from Nineveh, the capital, dramatic proof of the Assyrian invasion was laid bare.

Assyrian records of these events quote King Sennacherib of Assyria boasting of his devastating invasion of Judah: "Forty-six of [Hezekiah's] strong walled towns and innumerable smaller villages . . . [I] besieged and conquered . . . As for Hezekiah, the awful splendor of my lordship overwhelmed him" (Erika Bleibtreu, "Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, January-February 1991, p. 60).

By the time of Jesus

Christ and the apostles, no physical evidence of Nineveh could be seen. Lucian of Samosata (A.D. 120-180), a Greek writer, lamented: "Nineveh has perished. No trace of it remains. No one can say where once it existed" (Magnus Magnusson, *Archaeology of the Bible*, 1977, p. 175). Such a lack of visible remains led some scholars of the 19th century to express skepticism that Nineveh or any part of the Assyrian Empire even existed, much less dominated a significant part of the world.

Indeed the only historical source in those days that verified the existence of the empire was the Bible. The Old Testament histories and prophecies spoke about Assyria. Jesus proclaimed the existence of Nineveh as a historical fact (Matthew 12:41).

Yet some scholars disputed the testimony of Jesus and the prophets; that is, until "one spectacular decade in the middle of the nineteenth century . . . [when] Austen Henry Layard and Paul Emile Botta

rediscovered in northern Iraq the ancient remains of three Assyrian cities [including Nineveh] and evidence of the military panoply that had crushed all resistance from the Tigris to the Nile. The Assyrian empire . . . in all its awesome power had been resurrected through archaeology" (Magnusson, p. 175).

The skeptics were silenced. There was nothing they could say. The excavations at Nineveh and other cities in the area yielded a staggering wealth of evidence that confirmed many details of the Bible account.

(This article is excerpted from *Is the Bible True?* For your free copy, see the box on page 7.)



"And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them," reads 2 Kings 18:13. This relief from Sennacherib's place at Nineveh shows the Assyrians' furious assault on the Jewish stronghold of Lachish. Assyrian troops advance on ramps leading to the city walls, from which the desperate defenders shoot arrows and hurl stones and firebrands. At lower right, prisoners leave the city, passing impaled captives. Many such discoveries verify the Bible's startling historical accuracy.

but a myth. The record of the Bible wasn't good enough, they insisted; proof of his existence must be found elsewhere.

In 1993 that proof emerged when Israeli archaeologists discovered an inscription that referred to the royal dynasty David founded. Recorded on a monument some 150 years after David's death, the inscription commemorates the victory of the king of Damascus over the forces of Israel and their king, who was "of the house [dynasty] of David" (see "An Ancient Inscription Proves David Was Real," page 5).

Over the years dozens of artifacts and inscriptions bearing the names of individuals mentioned in the Bible have been uncovered. In 1982 a cache of 51 ancient baked-clay seals that were used to bind

"The remarkable find proved that one of the oldest portions of the Bible was obviously in use at a time well before the critics maintained it had been written!"

papyrus or parchment scrolls was uncovered in a Jerusalem excavation. One bore the impression of the seal of "Gemariah [Gemariah] the son of Shaphan." This same "Gemariah, the son of Shaphan," was a scribe in the court of Judah's king Jehoiakim as mentioned in Jeremiah 36:10-12, 25-26.

In 1975 another hoard of seals emerged, apparently uncovered in unauthorized digging in Jerusalem. One bore the name of Ishmael, the man who assassinated Gedaliah, the governor appointed by the Babylonians after they destroyed Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:25).

Even more surprising, another seal bore the name "Berekhyahu [Baruch] son of Neriyahu [Neriah] the scribe." This man was none other than "Baruch the scribe," trusted friend, confidant and scribe of Jeremiah the prophet (Jeremiah 36:4-32; 43:1-6; 45:1-2).

As if that were not astounding enough, another seal in a private collection in England was found to bear not only Baruch's name but a fingerprint along one edge—apparently *Baruch's own fingerprint* from when he impressed his seal into the soft clay some 2,600 years ago!

These are only a few of the finds that prove specific people mentioned in the Bible—many only in an incidental way—were indeed real and lived at the exact time and in the exact location in which the Bible places them. A complete list of such finds

would fill many pages of this magazine.

Other finds foil critics' claims

What about the critics' assertion that the Bible couldn't have been written when it claimed to be because the ancient Hebrews didn't know how to write at that time? This assumption was demolished in 1979 when, in the course of excavating a tomb in Jerusalem from the seventh century B.C., archaeologists discovered two tiny gray cylinders.

The objects turned out to be silver foil amulets covered with delicately etched Hebrew characters. When deciphered they were found to contain most of the words of the blessing recorded in Numbers 6:24-26. This remarkable find proved that not only did the ancient Hebrews know how to write

centuries earlier than critics said they did, but one of the oldest portions of the Bible was obviously in use at a time well before the critics maintained it had been written!

What does this mean for you?

One by one the claims of the critics have fallen as new archaeological discoveries have come to light. These finds have repeatedly demonstrated the truthfulness of the Bible. This article has touched on only a few of the discoveries that verify the biblical record; many books and articles have been published that catalog many more. (Be sure to also read "The Exodus Controversy" beginning on page 8 and our interview with archaeologist Bryant Wood beginning on page 12. Also, our 24-article series "The Bible and Archaeology," published previously in *The Good News*, covered dozens of finds in detail.)

We can be sure that even more evidence will emerge as the sands of time continue to be sifted in that ancient land. As the distinguished Jewish archaeologist Nelson Glueck eventually came to conclude, "no archaeological discovery has ever been made that contradicts or controverts historical statements in Scripture" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1979, Vol. 1, p. 31).

But what does this mean for you?

It's bad enough that so many people are drifting away from belief in the Bible, as noted at the beginning of this article. But an equally disturbing trend is the growing

number of people who *claim* to believe the Bible but know little of what it says or reject its authority over them.

Could you fall into this category?

Predictions of our age?

Ironically, at a time when the Bible is more widely available than ever before, fewer and fewer people are willing to put it to the ultimate test of its accuracy—by actually *accepting* and *living by* its instructions.

When it comes to open-mindedness to biblical teaching, the book of Acts commends the Bereans, who "received the word with all readiness, and *searched the Scriptures* daily to find out *whether these things were so*" (Acts 17:10-11, emphasis added throughout). Paul urged the Thessalonians to "*test all things; hold fast what is good*" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). God wants us to be *sure* of our beliefs, that they are rooted and grounded in His Word!

We shouldn't be surprised, though, that so few are willing to put the Bible to the test by putting it into practice. Jesus Himself prophesied that, just before His return, people would have the same mind-set that characterized Noah's day. They would be "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage"—going about their everyday lives blissfully unaware of their Creator and the growing danger—"until the day that Noah entered the ark, and . . . the flood came *and took them all away . . .*" (Matthew 24:37-39).

In other words, Jesus warned that people of our modern world also would be living comfortably and normally, with no growing sense of concern or alarm, *until they*

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Recommended Reading

Archaeology is only one of the proofs that the Bible is historically accurate and the inspired Word of God. What does other evidence show us? Be sure to request your free copy of *Is the Bible True?*



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The Exodus Controversy

Did the Exodus really happen? Did God deliver the ancient Israelites from Egyptian slavery as the Bible describes? Contrary views have generated much publicity, but the facts of the Bible's side of the argument are seldom told.

by Mario Seiglie

It seems that every year, especially around the spring Passover season when Jews and many Christians commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egypt, newspapers and magazines publish articles questioning the validity of the biblical account of the Exodus.

Last year, for example, *The Los Angeles Times* ran a front-page story reporting that a liberal rabbi in the Los Angeles area caused quite a stir when he shocked his congregation by stating he had his doubts that the Exodus ever took place.

"The truth is," explained Rabbi David Wolpe, "that virtually every modern archaeologist who has investigated the story of the Exodus, with very few exceptions, agrees that the way the Bible describes the Exodus is not the way it happened, if it happened at all" (April 13, 2001).

Perhaps you have read such articles and wondered whether you can believe the Bible. After almost 200 years of archaeological research in Egypt and Israel, why do so many challenge the Exodus account? The stakes are not small, as the critics well

"The exodus is the most significant historical and theological event of the Old Testament because it marks God's mightiest act in behalf of his people."

— Eugene Merrill

know. If the narrative of the Exodus is not factual, then the trustworthiness of biblical revelation is indeed seriously undermined. Therefore it is essential that our evaluation of the evidence be accurate and fair.

Christ affirms the Exodus

First, let's make sure we have a clear picture of the biblical perspective. We find that Jesus Christ affirmed the biblical account of the Exodus as true, and He based some of His teachings on it. Reminding His countrymen that God had miraculously provided food for them during 40 years in the wilderness, He said: "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.



Sunrise from the traditional site of Mount Sinai reveals a stark, desolate landscape. Did the Israelites really wander 40 years in the desert as the book of Exodus describes?

This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:49-51).

Jesus staked His reputation, authority and credibility on the Exodus account's reliability—on His confidence that the Israelites actually did eat manna in the

subsequent Old Testament revelation . . . In the final analysis, the exodus served to typify that exodus achieved by Jesus Christ for people of faith so that it is a meaningful event for the church as well as for Israel" (*Kingdom of Priests*, 1996, pp. 57-58).

Limits of archaeology

Many critics who doubt the historicity of the Exodus share a problem: overreliance on what archaeology can prove. Archaeology is, in fact, a limited and imperfect area of study in which the interpretation of findings, as archaeologists readily admit, is more of an art than a hard science.

Archaeologist Edwin Yamauchi points out the limits of this science when he explains: (1) Little of what was made or written in antiquity survives to this day; (2) few of the ancient sites have been surveyed and a number have not even been found; (3) probably fewer than 2 percent of the known sites have been meaningfully excavated; (4) few of these have been more than scratched; and (5) only a fraction of the fraction that have been excavated have been published and data made available to the scholarly world (*The Stones and the Scriptures*, 1981, chapter 4).

Considering not only the limits but the

positive side of archaeology, it is remarkable how many biblical accounts have been illuminated and confirmed by the relatively small number of sites excavated and finds uncovered to date. Even though, regrettably, some professionals go out of their way to present a distorted picture of what archaeology does reveal, it does provide some of the strongest evidence for the reliability of the Bible as credible and accurate history.

Evidence destroyed

A major challenge in reconstructing an accurate view of history is that, through the ages, most negative or embarrassing evidence was never written down or was intentionally destroyed by later rulers. In fact, the Bible stands in marked contrast to most ancient literature in that it objectively records the facts about biblical personalities, whether good or bad.

When new kings ascended the throne, they naturally wanted to be seen in the best light. So in many nations they covered up or destroyed monuments and records of previous monarchs. This pattern of expunging earlier historical evidence can be repeatedly seen in Egyptian monuments and historical records. For example, after the Hyksos rulers were expelled from Egypt, the Egyptians erased the records of that humiliating period so thoroughly that some of the names and the order of the Hyksos kings remain uncertain.

Some time later Pharaoh Thutmose III destroyed virtually all records relating to Queen Hatshepsut, the previous ruler, whom he despised. Visitors to her famous temple can still see where Thutmose's workmen carefully chiseled away her image from the walls of the structure. A few decades afterwards the ruling priests eliminated virtually all possible traces of the teachings of Pharaoh Akhenaten, who had introduced what they considered to be heretical Egyptian religious reforms.

So it should come as no surprise that the ancient Egyptians would not have wanted to record or even remember what was perhaps their greatest humiliation—the national devastation that occurred when their Israelite slaves won their freedom and Egypt's might proved powerless to stop them. This attitude is not limited to the past. Even today some of what went on during the two world wars is still hotly debated by historians on both sides of the issue.

It seems too much to hope for, then, that a proud and powerful nation such as Egypt, whose rulers were considered gods, would record that their mighty army was ignomin-

ously crushed by a band of virtually unarmed slaves who had a more powerful deity on their side. This would have embarrassed them in front of the entire known world. It's more natural to believe they simply licked their wounds and tried to cover up all traces of this humiliating national episode, especially since they are known to have done this on other occasions.

Bias against the Bible

Besides these limits of archaeology, an additional problem exists that is seldom noted—the ever-present scholarly bias. It takes only a brief reading of archaeological journals to witness how alive and well human nature is among many of the experts. Differing opinions can stimulate public accusations that are envious, arrogant, spiteful and even hateful.

Radio commentator Dennis Prager made an insightful comment about Rabbi Wolpe's skepticism of the Exodus account noted earlier: "According to the [*Los Angeles Times*] article, most archaeologists . . . do not believe the biblical Exodus occurred. That most archaeologists conclude from the alleged lack of archaeological evidence that Jews were never slaves in Egypt and the Exodus to Canaan never took place tells us *something about these individuals*, but *nothing* about the Bible or the Exodus.

"What does it tell us? That most of these archaeologists have the same bias against traditional religious beliefs that most academic colleagues have. Ten years ago, Dr. Robert Jastrow, . . . founder of NASA's Goddard Institute . . . , wrote about this in his book, *God and the Astronomers*. Jastrow described a disturbing reaction among his colleagues to the big-bang theory—*irritation and anger*: Why, he asked, would scientists, who are supposed to pursue truth and not have an emotional investment in any evidence, be angered by the big-bang theory?"

"The answer, he concluded, is very disturbing: many scientists do not want to acknowledge anything that may even suggest the existence of God. The big-bang theory, by positing a beginning of the universe, suggests a creator and therefore annoys many astronomers. *This anti-religious bias is hardly confined to astronomers. It pervades academia, home to nearly all archaeologists*" (*The Jewish Journal*, April 20, 2001, emphasis added).

Uphill battle for believers

When it comes to the Bible, archaeologists and biblical scholars categorize themselves into two groups: minimalists and

maximalists. The minimalists (also called *deconstructionists* of the Bible) generally hold the view that the Bible is full of myths and is therefore unreliable. So they vigorously try to refute any evidence that supports the biblical account.

Professor and archaeologist Anson Rainey says of the minimalists: "Their view that nothing in biblical tradition is earlier than the Persian period [538-332 B.C.], especially their denial of the existence of a United Monarchy [under Saul, David and Solomon], is a figment of their vain imagination . . . Biblical scholarship and instruction should completely ignore the 'deconstructionist school.' They have nothing to teach us" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, November-December 1994, p. 47).

The maximalists, on the other hand, believe the biblical accounts have solid historical and archaeological backing. Long a minority among archaeologists, their numbers are growing, since it seems that every year discoveries are found that support, rather than refute, the biblical narrative.

Archaeologist Bryant Wood is an example of a biblical maximalist who is slowly turning the tide in favor of the biblical evidence. He argues that the archaeological data for the Exodus fall into place if the event is dated back to 1450 B.C., the approximate date the Bible indicates for the Exodus. He mentions that the documented evidence of foreign slaves at that time in Egypt could well include the Israelites. He also adds that archaeological indications of the destruction of Canaanite cities some 40 years afterward support the account of Joshua's conquests (an interview with Dr. Wood begins on page 12 of this issue).

But Dr. Wood goes against the current. Although he sits in the forefront of archaeological digs and is excavating what he believes is the biblical city of Ai, he notes that he can't get his research published in serious archaeological journals because of an ingrained anti-Bible bias.

The tide of scholarly opinion on the Bible has shifted several times in the past centuries. During the later part of the 19th century there was much skepticism of the Bible, but in the 20th century, thanks to astonishing archaeological discoveries supporting the Scriptures, the tide turned somewhat in its favor.

U.S. News & World Report religion writer Jeffery Sheler observes: ". . . The spirit of post-Enlightenment skepticism unquestionably continues to dominate the biblical academy. But it is skepticism seemingly less rigid and dogmatic than it

has been at times in the past . . . There are many scholars of a decidedly ‘secular’ nature who nonetheless appreciate the possibility of realities, some which are represented in the Bible, that are beyond the scope of nature and of a natural explanation” (*Is the Bible True?*, 1999, p. 14).

The biblical evidence for the Exodus

How do these factors affect the debate over the Exodus?

Although not apparent at first glance, the biblical account of the Exodus contains many tiny details that place it within a distinct historical and chronological context. Those who ignore this evidence refuse to give the biblical record a fair hearing.

For instance, in the events leading up to the Exodus, the book of Genesis records that Joseph’s brothers sold him for 20 shekels to slave traders who took him from Canaan to Egypt (Genesis 37:28). Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen notes some of the flaws in the logic of those who reject the biblical Exodus or assign it to unnamed writers

many centuries later. He notes that the price of 20 shekels is “the price of a slave in the Near East in about the 18th century B.C. . . . If all these figures were invented during the Exile (sixth century B.C.) or in the Persian period by some fiction writer, why isn’t the price for Joseph 90 to 100 shekels, the cost of a slave at the time when that story was supposedly written? . . . It’s more reasonable to assume that the biblical data reflect reality in these cases” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April, 1995, p. 52).

The date of the Exodus can be accurately calculated since the Bible mentions in 1 Kings 6:1 that the fourth year of Solomon’s reign was “the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt . . .”

Surprisingly, there is scholarly agreement about the dates of Solomon’s reign, placing his fourth year in the 960s B.C. Subtracting 480 years takes us back to a date for the Exodus in the 1440s B.C.

Another biblical reference to date the Exodus is found in Judges, where Jephthah

tells the Ammonites that Israel had been in the land for 300 years (Judges 11:26). Again, there is acceptance among the experts that Jephthah’s victory over the Ammonites took place around 1100 B.C. This would place the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan near 1400 B.C., precisely 40 years after the Exodus. Thus both biblical dates for the Exodus agree.

In spite of this biblical evidence, most minimalist scholars believe the Exodus took place around 1260 B.C., a date that contradicts the biblically derived dates by almost two centuries. Minimalists generally give three main reasons for this later date of the Exodus: (1) the mention of the Israelites’ building of the city of Rameses (Exodus 1:11); (2) the archaeological evidence that no sedentary population lived in the Transjordan and Negev regions between 1900 and 1300 B.C.; and (3) the widespread devastation of cities and towns of central Canaan during the 1260s B.C.

Let’s consider whether these reasons are grounds for a date that contradicts the Bible.

Jericho: Does the Evidence Disprove or Prove the Bible?

The ancient city of Jericho lay about six miles from the Jordan River and about 10 miles northwest of the Dead Sea, 670 feet below sea level and about 3,500 feet below Jerusalem, 17 miles away. A large gushing spring and the fertile plain surrounding the city earned it the distinction “the city of palm trees” (Deuteronomy 34:3; 2 Chronicles 28:15). A major east-west road ran next to the city, intersecting with the Jordan at a ford nearby, making Jericho a strategic crossroads.

The city had already been occupied for many centuries before the Israelites arrived. It had an inner wall and an outer fortified wall, several feet thick, enclosing about nine acres of land. To the Israelites entering the Promised Land, Jericho presented a major obstacle.

According to the Bible, Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan in the springtime and then celebrated the Passover on the plains outside Jericho, eating some of the fresh grain of the land since it was harvest-time (Joshua 3:15-17; 5:10-11). For seven days the Israelites marched around the city, accompanied by priests blowing trumpets. On the seventh day, after their seventh circuit around the city, the priests blew their trumpets, the people shouted, and the walls of the city, as the old song goes, came a-tumblin’ down.

“Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city . . . with the edge of the sword” (Joshua 6:20-21).

Only Rahab, who had hidden the Israelite spies (see “Rahab: From Harlot to Heroine,” page 26) and her family were spared from the destruction (Joshua 6:17, 22-26). The Israelites burned the city and all that was in it (verse 24). Over later centuries other peoples occupied, built on and abandoned the same site many times. Eventually it grew into a huge mound of earth and rubble several dozen feet high.

In the 19th and 20th centuries several organized excavations were carried out at the site. The most notable were those of the British archaeologists John Garstang (1930-1936) and Kathleen Kenyon (1952-1958). Garstang found fallen city walls, burned stores of grain and evidence of destruction of the city by fire, all of which he dated to about 1400 B.C.—right in line with the biblical chronology of the city’s destruction.

Kathleen Kenyon found much of the same evidence—collapsed walls, stores of grain and an ash layer from a massive conflagration. However, she reached a completely different conclusion. Rather than supporting the biblical account, her finds at Jericho, she said, *disproved* the biblical story. Why? She dated the city’s destruction to around 1550 B.C., meaning the site had been abandoned and therefore there was no city for the Israelites to capture at the time of the conquest.

Her statements had a major impact on the scholarly world. Many



Today the mound of ancient Jericho (in the background) is surrounded by the modern city of the same name. Springs keep the area lush in an otherwise-desert environment.

hailed her findings as proof that the Bible was historically unreliable, that it couldn’t be trusted. The only logical conclusion, agreed the scholars, was that its supposed historical annals were but myth fabricated much later in Israel’s history. This became the accepted reality, entrenched in archaeological and academic circles.

Kathleen Kenyon died in 1978. However, detailed reports on her find-

The city of Rameses

Many archaeologists assume the city of Rameses was named after Rameses II, a famous Pharaoh who was a great builder. Yet the term Rameses simply means “born of the god Ra” (or Re) and had been used in monuments centuries before the time of Pharaoh Rameses II. The Bible itself mentions the same name when it speaks of Joseph’s sojourn in Egypt, hundreds of years before the reign of Rameses II:

“And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded” (Genesis 47:11). So the argument that Moses lived in the 1200s because the Israelites helped build a city with the name Rameses is not convincing.

In fact, Manfred Bietak, the excavator of Rameses (Tell el-Daba), has determined that the name of the site at the time the Israelites were there was at first Rowaty, and then later changed to Avaris. The name Rameses was not used until the city was

rebuilt by Rameses II in the 13th century. Thus the use of the name Rameses in Exodus 1:11 and Genesis 47:11 is a case where a later biblical writer updated the text to reflect the changed name of the city, as we see in some other biblical passages. We have the same situation with regard to Pithom, the other store city named in Exodus 1:11. That name was not in use until the Saite Period, ca. 600 B.C.

Evidence for settlements

The second argument against the traditional date for the Exodus is based mainly on the work of archaeologist Nelson Glueck in the 1930s, which failed to find evidence of permanent settlements in the Transjordan and the Negev regions between 1900 and 1300 B.C. This region should have shown a sizable presence of Edomites, Ammonites and Moabites at that time, since the biblical account mentions their strong opposition to the Israelites.

However, more-recent excavations have shown many settlements in the area that

Glueck did not find. Archaeologist John Bimson notes that “Glueck’s initial conclusions were definitely wrong [indeed he later retracted them], and it is disappointing to find scholars citing them as if they were still valid evidence. All too often the 13th century date for the Exodus has been perpetuated by the baseless repetition of outmoded views” (*Biblical Archaeological Review*, September-October 1987, p. 44).

Widespread destruction

The third argument used to date the Exodus to the 1200s B.C. is the archaeological evidence for the destruction of several Canaanite cities during this period. Scholars believe this took place when Joshua invaded and conquered Canaan.

Yet, if the traditional 1400s date for the Exodus is maintained, the archaeological evidence seems to fit much better, for destruction levels in Canaanite cities such as Hazor and Jericho also date to the 1400s.

If Joshua conquered Canaan after 1400,

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ings at Jericho weren’t published until 1981-1983. Several years later, when archaeologist Bryant Wood—then a visiting professor at the University of Toronto—examined her findings, he was surprised to find that “Kenyon’s analysis was based on what was *not* found at Jericho rather than what was found” (“Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April 1990, p. 50).

He realized she had based her dating on the fact that she did *not* find a particular kind of imported pottery found at other sites in the Near East—thus Jericho must have been unoccupied at the time. The problem, Dr. Wood learned, was that she had excavated in a poor section of



The mound of Jericho is a barren hill scarred with trenches and pits from many excavations over the years. Visitors can still see the fallen mud-brick walls that date to Joshua’s conquest.

town in which the inhabitants could not have afforded to buy and use such imported pottery.

More surprising still, he discovered that Kathleen Kenyon actually *had* found indigenous pottery that dates precisely to the time of the biblical conquest of the city but inexplicably ignored it. She also overlooked the fact that her predecessor, John Garstang, had found painted pottery

from the time of the conquest. Egyptian amulets he found at a nearby cemetery also indicated the site was regularly inhabited from several centuries before until right around the biblically derived date of the city’s fall. Thus there was no occupation gap as she had supposed.

In spite of such major problems with her conclusions, Kenyon’s view remains entrenched in the minds of many to this day. Yet in reality what Kenyon, Garstang and other excavators have found at Jericho correlates *precisely* with the account in the book of Joshua. They found collapsed walls, not walls that were *broken* down from the outside but that had *fallen* down (Joshua 6:20). The walls had not fallen inward, but *outward*, creating a ramp of fallen bricks by which the Israelites “went up into the city, every man straight before him” (same verse).

The unusually large stores of carbonized grain found in the ruins showed that the city had endured only a short siege, which the Bible numbers at seven days (verses 12-20), and that the grain had been recently harvested (Joshua 3:15). Also, because grain was a valuable commodity almost always plundered by conquering forces, the large amount of grain left in the ruins is puzzling—but consistent with God’s command that nothing in the city be taken except valuable metals to be used for the treasury of the LORD (Joshua 6:24).

The city had also been burned, exactly as the Bible records (same verse). As Kathleen Kenyon herself noted: “The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire, and every room was filled with fallen bricks, timbers, and household utensils; in most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt, but the collapse of the walls of the eastern rooms seems to have taken place before they were affected by the fire” (Wood, p. 56). As she observed, the walls had collapsed *before* the city was burned—again, exactly as the Bible states.

Archaeology—subject as it is to archaeologists’ decisions, interpretations and even biases—is admittedly not an exact science. Yet, when viewed objectively, the evidence uncovered at Jericho precisely fits with the biblical account. Rather than disproving the Bible, when findings from Jericho are correctly interpreted, the exact opposite is the case. In all aspects of the biblical account that can be verified by archaeology, the evidence from Jericho supports the accuracy of the Bible in every detail.

—Scott Ashley and Jerold Auld

Bryant Wood, Ph.D.

The Bible vs. Modern Scholarship

Interview by John Elliott

The Good News: Dr. Wood, there is considerable debate about the timing of the Exodus, the destruction of Jericho and the conquest of the Promised Land. When do you date the Exodus, and why?

Bryant Wood: I would date the Exodus to the mid-15th century [B.C.] based on the internal chronological data in the Bible—primarily 1 Kings 6:1, which says that the Israelites left Egypt 480 years before Solomon began to build the temple. Solomon began to build the temple around 970 B.C. plus or minus a few years. If you go back 480 years, it takes you to about 1450, to the date of the Exodus.

There are supporting scriptures. One is Judges 11:26, which refers to the fact that the Israelites had been in the land for 300 years at the time of Jephthah, and Jephthah would date around 1100, although we can't be precise about it. So you go back 300 years and it would put you around 1400 for the time of the conquest.

We have some chronological or genealogical data in 1 Chronicles 6, where genealogies are listed, and one that seems to be complete—Heman the singer, where his genealogy is traced from the time of Moses down to the time of David. There are 18 generations. Then if you add one to Solomon that would make it 19. Assuming a generation is approximately 25 years, you come up with 475, which pretty well matches the 480 figure.

The point is that all the chronological indications in the Old Testament support this earlier dating of the mid-15th century

for the time of the Exodus and the late 15th century for the time of the conquest.

Scholars have come up with an alternative date which is sometimes referred to as the “late date” of the Exodus, around 1270, with a conquest of 1230, but that is simply a scholarly construct; there is no biblical basis for it. They base their view on Exodus 1:11, which says that the Israelites built the store cities of Pithom and Rameses. Rameses is the name that was given to a place in the 13th century, but that city existed earlier under a different name.

So I believe it was simply an updating of a name to something that was more familiar. But these scholars say they think it is the name of the place at the time the Israelites were building it—and so, based on that, they would say that the Exodus should be dated to the 13th century.

GN: Why is the correct dating of the destruction of Jericho important?

BW: Dating is very important in archaeology because you have to correlate your archaeological findings with the Bible. And the only way you can do that is by, No. 1, knowing the dates of things in the Bible and, No. 2, knowing the dates for the archaeological findings so that you can match them up. Many of the so-called disagreements between archaeology and the Bible are because of improper dating of things—either biblical events or the archaeological finds. So dating is absolutely critical to correlate archaeology and the Bible.

GN: British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon excavated in Jericho in the 1950s and concluded that the biblical account was wrong. Why is her 150-year miscalculation

so critical to understanding the events of the Bible or proving them?

BW: Well, that was her error in her dating of the destruction of Jericho. She dated it to 1550 B.C. when in fact she should have dated it to 1400 B.C. When you make an error like that then you don't properly correlate with the events of the Bible. By dating the destruction 150 years before Joshua, she said that there was no evidence to support the biblical event.

Again, it's crucial to get your dating correct if you're trying to make a correlation. In fact, because of that error she said that the Bible was wrong, and this became the No. 1 example of archaeology's showing that the Bible was wrong and that there was no conquest. In fact, when you do the proper interpretation of the evidence and get the correct dating, the opposite is the case.

Jericho provides detailed evidence that supports the accuracy of the Bible. In fact, the evidence found at Jericho shows that the Bible was an eyewitness account and couldn't possibly have been written at a later time to explain some ruins there.

GN: Can you tell us briefly about Ai, the second city the Bible records as being destroyed in the conquest?

BW: Ai is the second big problem with regard to the conquest in biblical archaeology and biblical history because the site that scholars have identified as Joshua's Ai was not occupied during the time of Joshua. It was occupied much earlier in the Early Bronze period, when it was a very large urban center.

It was destroyed about 2400-2300 B.C. and then lay abandoned in the Middle



Bryant Wood was born in Endicott, N.Y., and is a graduate of Syracuse University. He earned an M.A. in biblical history (University of Michigan, 1974) and a Ph.D. in Syro-Palestinian archaeology (University of Toronto, 1985).

In 1989-90 Dr. Wood was visiting professor in the department of Near Eastern studies at the University of Toronto. He is currently director of the Associates for Biblical Research, Landisville, Penn., and editor of its quarterly publication *Bible and Spade* (ChristianAnswers.Net/abr/abrhome.html). He also serves as adjunct professor at Biblical Theologi-

cal Seminary in Hatfield, Penn., Evangelical School of Theology in Myerstown, Penn., Faith Theological Seminary in Los Angeles, Lancaster Bible College in Lancaster, Penn., and Toronto Baptist Seminary in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Dr. Wood's extensive archaeological fieldwork includes serving at sites and surveys in Jordan and Egypt. Since 1995 he has been director of the Khirbet el-Maqatir excavation in Israel. Dr. Wood is a specialist in Canaanite pottery of the late Bronze Age. He is author of *The Sociology of Pottery in Ancient Palestine: The Ceramic Industry and the Diffusion of Ceramic Style in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (1990) as well as numerous articles on archaeological subjects published in academic journals.

Bronze period and the Late Bronze period. It was reinhabited in the Iron Age I period around 1100 B.C. So there was a huge gap in occupation, and, no matter when you want to date the Exodus and conquest, it has to fall somewhere between those dates. So, quite clearly, it can't be Joshua's Ai if you put any stock in the biblical account.

But secular scholars will say, "Well, we believe that's Ai and we believe the biblical story was made up to explain these ruins and that the event never happened." My organization, the Associates for Biblical Research, has been doing fieldwork in Israel since 1979 searching for the real Ai, as it were, and in 1995 we began working at a site that is one kilometer west of et-Tell, the site scholars claim is Joshua's Ai. The name of the site is Khirbet el-Maqtar. At that site we have found a fortress that dates to the time of Joshua. We have evidence that it was burned by fire about 1400 B.C., which is, of course, what the Bible tells us in Joshua 8.

The topography of the area matches exactly what we read in the Bible. We have details given about an ambush force being hidden on the west, a hill to the north, and various details that are given in Joshua 7 and 8 that match perfectly with our site and the area around it. We feel quite strongly that we have found the site of Joshua's Ai.

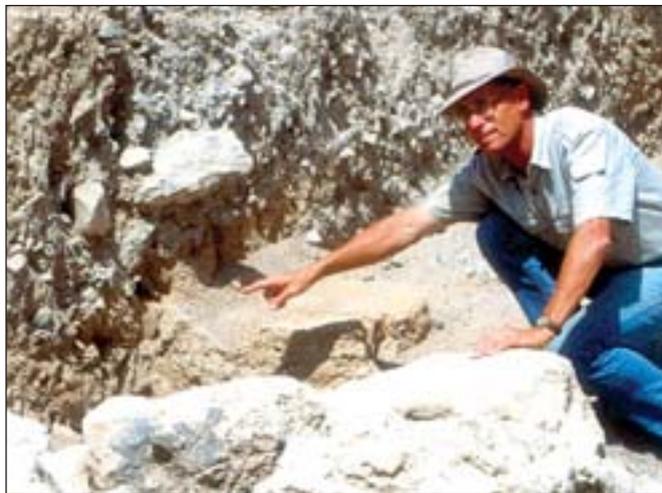
The et-Tell site probably is the site of Abraham's Ai mentioned in Genesis 12:8, when it says Abraham pitched his tent on a hill with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. So probably that was Ai of Abraham's day. The name Ai means "the ruin" in Hebrew, and the Arabic name et-Tell also means "the ruin." So that would seem to be the origin of the name, this big Early Bronze Age ruin that's there. And then, when this little fortress was built one kilometer to the west, that same name was applied.

This is not unique, because there are other ruins in the area of et-Tell that have retained that same name, Ai, in the modern Arabic name. There are maybe half a dozen sites in the vicinity of et-Tell that have maintained that name that were occupied in various periods. So this is another major breakthrough, to come up with the evidence to support Joshua 7 and 8, because Jericho and Ai were the two problems that scholars always pointed to and said: "Oh, look, we've got the archaeology here that

disproves the Bible. Therefore there was no conquest." But we think we've solved those problems now. We have the evidence to show that, yes, there was a conquest.

GN: How vast is the gulf between the maximalists—the scholars who think the Bible is true—and the minimalists, who reject it as a historical account?

BW: It's pretty big. It depends on the scholar and what time period you're talking about. I would be considered an ultramaximalist because I would take the Bible literally from Genesis onward as far as the historical reliability is concerned. Others, like Bill Dever, for example, who is a purely secular scholar, would consider himself a maximalist because he believes the Iron Age or kingdom period of Israel is historically accurate. But he would not believe that anything prior to that is historically accurate. Yet he considers himself a



Archaeologist Bryant Wood points out remains of a fallen mud-brick wall in the ruins of ancient Jericho. Dr. Wood has extensively analyzed the findings from several excavations at the site and concluded that they correlate precisely with the biblical account.

maximalist because there are those who would say that even in the Iron Age period the biblical account is not reliable and accurate. So those would be the minimalists. So there are different shades of views.

GN: So the maximalist for one period could be a minimalist for another?

BW: That's right. So the gap between myself, an ultramaximalist, and a minimalist is huge because they would discount anything before about 900 B.C. They would say anything prior to the divided kingdom is myth and legend. There never was a David, Solomon or Saul. Those people never existed; there was never an Israelite kingdom in that period.

They would discount all of that and, of course, everything before it.

GN: How could that gap be bridged?

BW: It will probably never be bridged. I think there are people who are so biased that they will never accept the historicity of the Bible. It's much like the creation-vs.-evolution debate. It doesn't matter how much evidence you bring to disprove evolution, scholars will cling to it because they've rejected the idea of a divine Creator. They simply will not accept that as an option, so they're going to cling to evolution no matter what.

We have a similar situation with regard to Old Testament history. There are people who are so biased against the Bible that they will never accept it as literal history. I think that's a spiritual battle that's going on, a spiritual problem. That's what's at issue. They've rejected God, they don't want to have anything to do with God or the message of the Bible, and so they're always

going to discount it and find reasons not to believe. Even though the evidence may be very powerful and straightforward, they'll explain it away or reject it.

GN: What kind of walls do you see hindering the publishing of some of the findings that would prove the Bible's history to be true?

BW: That's very difficult because there's a strong anti-Bible bias in the academic journals that publish archaeological findings. There again, it depends on what it is you're publishing. If you're publishing something on the Iron Age, the time of the kings of Israel and Judah, they [the journals] are comfortable with it. But,

when you get into the earlier periods, they're very uncomfortable.

So it's very difficult to publish anything in an academic journal dealing with the historicity of the period of Judges or Joshua or the Exodus or any of those earlier periods because in academia it's an established fact that this whole time period is legendary. Because it's very difficult to get anything published, you have to go through other avenues and outlets. There are some other possibilities. Israeli journals and *Biblical Archaeology Review* will publish conservative materials, but that's kind of a popular journal rather than an academic journal. It's a big challenge to get conservative material published for the earlier biblical periods. **GN**



World News and Trends

An Overview of Conditions Around the World

The rebirth of English Catholicism

Protestantism has generally dominated England since the reign of King Henry VIII and his famous break with the pope. But Catholicism is making big gains without much notice.

Consider, for example, the three major British political parties. The top leaders of the Conservative and Liberal parties are both Roman Catholics. Labour's Prime Minister Tony Blair's wife is Catholic, and, though an Anglican himself, it is said that he usually worships with a Catholic congregation.

Generally speaking, the most influential mainstream Christian voices in the British Isles call themselves Catholics. As a prominently placed editorial in *The Times* of London observed: "That English Catholicism should flow back after centuries of withdrawing, irrigating areas it had long since departed, should underline the danger of seeking to predict the tidal eddies of the sea of faith."

Said *Times* columnist Mary Ann Sieghart: "The acceptance of Catholics in the most exalted positions in the British establishment has been as speedy as it has been silent. People have barely noticed the change."

The country has not had a Catholic queen since 1688. In fact, it is constitutionally illegal for a prince of Wales to marry a Roman Catholic. *The Independent on Sunday* reminded Britons that "according to the 1701 Act of Settlement, no Catholic can ascend the throne, and the act also bars the heir to the throne from marrying a member of the Roman Catholic Church." But political pressure has mounted to make judicial amendments.

To understand the underlying significance of these trends and events, request our free booklets *The Church Jesus Built* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. (Sources: *The Times*, *The Independent on Sunday* [both London].)

The Chinese nuclear threat

A feature article authored by *Times* reporters Roland Watson in Washington, D.C., and Michael Binyon in Moscow states that "China will have 100 long-range nuclear missiles pointing

"China will have 100 long-range nuclear missiles pointing at the United States by 2015."

at the United States by 2015, according to American intelligence analysts." The new missiles will be mobile and hard to target.

Plans for this accelerated Chinese nuclear buildup are thought to be occasioned by the controversial American missile-defense shield, the development of which has been seriously questioned primarily by Russia and China. The theory is that 100 missiles launched at one time would overwhelm the planned U.S. defense system.

After the Cold War it is easy to forget that we live in a world under constant threat of a nuclear holocaust. In spite of past arms agreements, many of these weapons still exist either in

readiness or in reserve, and many more are on the drawing boards. If you would like to understand their frightening role in biblical prophecy, write for our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* (Source: *The Times* [London].)

Berlusconi and the new Rome

A recent *Times* editorial noted that "Italy deserves to be a major player in the European Union. The size of its population and its record as a founder member provide it with potential authority." The Italian prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, has set out his vision for a strong Europe and flatly said that he is a "Euro-enthusiast" and that Italy's European credentials were beyond question.

Signor Berlusconi wants Europe to be "strong and to speak with one voice." He is his own foreign minister, having recently stated: "Given the importance I attach to Italy's foreign policy, I decided to conduct it myself." Should Germany and France show signs of shirking their European quest, the Italian leader stands ready to steer Italy into any vacuum in leadership.

The Independent reported that Mr. Berlusconi will insist that Gianfranco Fini, leader of the postfascist National Alliance Party, "should sit on a convention on the future of Europe." Also the prime minister recently fired Renato Ruggiero, the centrist Italian official residing in Brussels, in a further move to imprint his rightist policies on the European Union. (Sources: *The Times*, *The Independent* [both London].)

The rise of the right in Europe

A swing to the right threatens to sweep across Europe, whose economic prospects in 2002 look uninspiring. Germany's troubled economy may even spawn a right turn in that country. The "Munich marvel," Edmund Stoiber, woos the nation's voters, and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder may face a tough challenge in September's elections. Bavaria has remained relatively prosperous while the rest of Germany has suffered a slump.

Many European states either already have center-right governments in power or rightist elements are threatening to unseat unsteady socialist administrations. *The New York Times* summed up: "From Spain to Scandinavia, European politics is drifting to the right. As the economy slows, political parties stressing law and order and stricter controls on immigration are gaining ground, and mainstream conservative politicians are becoming more popular."

Italy is a case in point. As a UPI story put it: "Emboldened by electoral victories and high popular support, Italy's political right wing is taking steps that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago: battling the country's powerful labor unions, cutting back its generous pension system and even considering someone named Mussolini to head what once was the dominant Fascist party. Italy's right wing is more powerful now than it has been since wartime Fascist leader Benito Mussolini was overthrown in 1943." (Sources: *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* [all London], *The New York Times*, *United Press International*.)



An epidemic of casual teen sex

Statistics on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in Britain are so alarming as to be almost unbelievable. Except for *Times* writer Carol Midgley's reputation for accuracy, and the reputation of the *Times* itself, one might question their validity.

Concerning the STD problem in London, Ms. Midgley said that instances of gonorrhea have increased by 74 percent in men and 75 percent in women since 1995. Syphilis in men has risen by 211 percent in three years.

Chlamydia is an infection that produces few symptoms but remains a major cause of infertility and ectopic pregnancies if

Instances of gonorrhea in London have increased by 74 percent in men and 75 percent in women since 1995. Syphilis in men has risen by 211 percent in three years.

not treated fairly promptly. Since 1955 chlamydia has been diagnosed in 87 percent more women and 120 percent more men, reported Ms. Midgley, "and it is thought that one person in ten is now infected, often without knowing it . . . The rise is most virulent among girls 16 to 19, who recorded a 141 percent rise and who face a possible future without children."

Dr. Thomas Stuttaford confirms Carol Midgley's assessment in his regular medical briefing in *The Times*, adding that "last year saw the highest number of new diagnoses of HIV in this country recorded so far."

We pay a bitter and sometimes permanent price for the temporary pleasures of illicit sexual activity. How much better to teach our children that the sexual relationship in marriage is worth waiting for.

Carol Midgley visited a West London center for sexual health while researching her article. Even the advice proffered there was faulty: "We have to encourage young people to go for quality not quantity with sex." In other words, restrict oneself to fewer partners. However, any illicit sex is still a game of Russian roulette. For the best possible advice, request our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Making Life Work*. (Source: *The Times* [London].)

HIV increase afflicts former communist bloc

Coinciding with World AIDS Day (Dec. 1), UNAIDS and the World Health Organization issued updated statistics on the relentless spread of the deadly disease.

Globally, 40 million adults and children are infected with HIV, AIDS or both. No sign of a slowdown is in sight in the numbers of people contracting the virus, with an estimated five million new cases added in 2001. The worst-affected continent is Africa, where more than 28 million people are afflicted. More than two million were expected to die of AIDS in 2001.

"HIV is spreading rapidly throughout the entire Eastern European region," warned Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS. "It is unequivocally the most devastating disease we have ever faced, and it will get worse before it gets better." The BBC reported that in some areas one third of women seeking prenatal care tested HIV-positive. In Russia, intravenous drug use is the biggest cause of the spread of HIV.

Sadly, AIDS is a disease of ignorance. It can be stopped. Living within God's moral laws would stop the virus's spread in its tracks.

The Bible teaches that sex should be confined to a husband

and wife within marriage. Leviticus 18 lists sexual practices that people should not indulge in, some of which encourage the spread of the AIDS virus. The Seventh Commandment commands us to abstain from any sex outside of marriage. A loving God gave us these laws so we could avoid physical and emotional harm. Sadly, HIV and AIDS are sure to spread—as long as mankind denies the living laws of a loving God. (Source: BBC.)

Crime rises significantly in China

Even 15 years ago a visitor would generally find China a country that prided itself on its law-abiding orderliness, with few incidents of crime. But now even official government publications have admitted that the incidence of crimes is vastly increasing. A huge black market in illegal firearms is emerging, with criminals selling a whole range of weaponry—everything from grenades to automatic assault rifles.

An increasing number of police officers are killed while on duty. An unwelcome surge in organized crime is often the culprit in the rising demand for illegal firearms. Gangs perpetrate kidnappings and armed robbery and run the mushrooming sex industries in Chinese cities. (Source: *The Economist*.)

Good news about Britain's rivers

According to a recent report from government scientists, rivers in Britain are probably cleaner than they have been since the Industrial Revolution. They are apparently cleaner now than at any time on record, and wildlife is beginning to thrive. Black otters, salmon and birds are enjoying certain river waters once again. Realistically, conditions are far from perfect, but huge investments in environmental protective measures are having a positive impact. (Sources: *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Mail* [both London].)

Why bad news in *The Good News*?

Speaking of the state of the world just before His return, Jesus Christ said our planet will experience "a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again" (Matthew 24:21, Revised English Bible).

The United Church of God, whose members and supporters provide the financial backing for *The Good News* and other publications, proclaims the good news of the imminent return of Jesus of Nazareth. This section of the magazine reports on some of the consequences of human behavior leading to the

The world is filled with bad news. Yet the future holds incredible promise: Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God.

very conditions Jesus described: a dangerous world of chaos, confusion and apprehension in which man faces the terrifying possibility of extinction (verse 22).

The world is filled with bad news. Yet the future holds incredible promise: Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God (Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 11:15), ushering in a time of peace, prosperity and plenty during which all people will at last learn to live God's way of life. This truly is good news on which you can stake your future.

—John Ross Schroeder and Melvin Rhodes

A World Without the United States

by Melvin Rhodes

Imagine the unimaginable: The president, in the White House, the vice president, at the National Observatory, and all Cabinet members, in their respective agency headquarters, are killed in a terrorist attack on downtown Washington. So are all members of Congress, except the few who happen to be out of town.

“What happens to the Republic? At the moment, the answer is alarming: chaos.”

So began a disturbing article in the Dec. 10 *Washington Post*.

Continuing, the writer added: “The Sept. 11 attacks and subsequent release of anthrax on Capitol Hill have left many lawmakers and constitutional experts concerned that the federal government does not have adequate succession and continuity plans in place to recover from a catastrophic terrorist attack on Washington.”

Pause for a moment and consider: What would the world be like without America? Can you imagine what our lives might be like without the superpower on which the world relies so much?

A world without America

The world has not been the same since Sept. 11. The possibility of an even deadlier terrorist attack on Washington in the foreseeable future cannot be ruled out. If such an attack were to take place, it is difficult to imagine how the United States could continue to be the leader of the free world. The consequences would be unimaginable—except that the Bible prophesies such a time.

The biblical book of Revelation reveals that the world will come under the domination of a union of 10 “kings” (rulers or heads of state) immediately before the return of Jesus Christ (Revelation 17:12-14). What could precipitate the transfer of dominance from the United States to this European-centered group of nations, which “will give their power and authority” to a leader the Bible calls “the beast”?

Since World War II the United States has been the undisputed leader of the Western world. Before the United States, the British Empire was the world’s leading power for well over a century. The United States and

Great Britain share similar values. Nobody alive can remember a time when one of these nations was not the major force in the world.

Certainly neither the United States nor Britain has been a perfect world leader. But it is equally certain that domination by other nations would have made the world an entirely different place. A look at fairly recent history well illustrates this.

Before the supremacy of the English-



speaking powers, the major Western player was France, whose King Louis XIV (1643-1715) vainly declared, “I am the state.” The concept of the divine right of kings was essential to centralized state power. Before France, Spain was dominant. “His Most Catholic Majesty,” the king of Spain, saw himself and his country as instruments of God in spreading the faith of the “one true catholic church” to the four corners of the earth. If people did not willingly convert, then there were other means of persuasion.

England and her colonies were to struggle against these forces of despotism for more than 250 years, from the time of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) until the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, when Napoleon’s dreams of world conquest were finally defeated. A century later Germany’s kaiser and later Hitler made further attempts at world conquest. Japan was also set on imposing her will on the world. Afterwards, Russian and

Chinese communism threatened the peace of the planet.

For most of this time a “multitude of nations” (Genesis 48:19), biblically prophesied though rarely recognized as such, was the primary force that defended liberty. After Pearl Harbor that was to change, with the United States taking over from Great Britain and its Commonwealth associates the role of the leading military power. However imperfectly, both Britain and America based their political, economic and religious systems on the value and freedom of the individual.

In contrast, most continental-European nations historically have placed little value on individual freedom; they have subscribed instead to variants of Louis XIV’s famous dictum emphasizing strong central government at the expense of individual liberty. In Western Europe this has been tempered since World War II during America’s period of supremacy.

A post-Anglo-Saxon world is frightening to contemplate. Whoever takes over as the dominant power will not share the values of the United States and Britain. Maybe some of those principles would remain, but certainly not all.

How it might happen is a topic for another discussion. But, for the moment, imagine the unimaginable—Washington gone. What would happen?

Who would lead the West?

“The West” is an all-encompassing term that goes back to the Western Roman Empire. When the military and political empire collapsed in the fifth century, the church became the empire. As historian Paul Johnson put it in his 1972 book *The Offshore Islanders*: “The Church was the continuation of the empire.” He added: “Politics and religion were inseparable.”

The Roman Empire was the fourth empire of Daniel’s vision of Daniel 2 and one of the four beasts of Daniel 7. For 12 centuries, from the time of Emperor Constantine (306-337), when the Roman church became the state church, until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the Catholic Church was a powerful force in the history of the West.

During the Protestant Reformation, England broke with the church of Rome. Theoretically it was now free to act independently of Rome. But, until its ascendancy was fully realized, England had to defend herself against continental Catholic powers that were willing to use force to subdue her. In the course of time Britain became the dominant Western power. Her multitude of nations girdling the globe were to become the defenders of the West against the French emperor Napoleon and Germany's kaiser and Hitler. America was to continue that role as the leader of the free world.

What, then, is the West?

To people in Britain and the United States, as well as the peoples of northwestern Europe, the emphasis is on freedom of the individual, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, democracy, human rights, economic freedom and property rights. Neither country has been perfect in these areas, but this is where most people would put their emphasis.

But, in a wider sense, the West comprises all the nations that can trace their history and culture back to the nations that were once part of the Western Roman Empire. England and some other countries of northwestern Europe separated themselves from the Western church in the 1500s. These states went on to embrace democratic systems of government, with emphasis on basic freedoms for individual citizens. Most of the other Western nations, however, maintained their loyalty to the "mother church" and, until well into the 20th century, retained strictly hierarchical, monarchical forms of government.

But their common cultural heritage goes back to Rome. Interestingly, the 1957 Treaty of Rome began the long and arduous process of bringing most of these nations back together in the European Union.

These nations make up the majority of Western nations. They have tacitly recognized the American leadership of the West since 1945. But, if America were to suffer devastating setbacks, what would these nations do? Would they sit back and let themselves be defeated by the forces of militant Islam, a force that has threatened them previously in their history? Would they wait and see if somebody else replaced the United States as leader of the "free world"? What is the free world, anyway?

Uppermost in their minds would be the

need to preserve their independence, economic well-being and way of life. Western nations are trading nations. They depend on trade, business and the prosperity of the capitalist system. Never mind freedom of religion or freedom of the individual. Historically, those values became important only during Britain's and America's preeminence. With America gone, who would care about such expensive niceties? The security of the state would be of paramount importance.

Jobs and the economy would be next on the list.

Daniel 11 states that, at the time of the end, a powerful force known as the king of the South will push against or attack the king of the North (verse 40). This threatens the security and prosperity of those under the king of the North. They react with massive military force, suggestive of advanced technology, which is not possible without wealth.

The United States and Canada are presently in alliance with the other Western nations. But they will not be a part of the 10 nations that come together in the prophesied revival of the Roman Empire. These nations most likely will come from the same geographical area as the nations that made up the original Roman Empire, nations that have signed the Treaty of Rome, the economic union that is rapidly being transformed into a political and military union.

An ever-closer union

In recent months some of these countries have made a dramatic and unprecedented change—the replacement of their national currencies with one multinational currency, the euro. Of the 15 European Union (EU) nations, 12 have become a single market to a greater degree than ever before. At the same time, the 15 are busy negotiating with 10 other European nations that are likely to be members of the EU by 2005. France and Germany have proposed a new European constitution that would also unite the EU nations politically.

Militarily, a significant step has been taken as a direct consequence of the events of Sept. 11. To the surprise of everyone concerned, all 15 members of the EU agreed to send troops as part of the international security force for Afghanistan. This is unprecedented. Three of the 15 are neutral countries. Never before have all 15 agreed on anything militarily. This is a reflection of the dramatic shift that has changed thinking around the world

since the terrorist attacks on America.

At the present, most of the nations of the EU are also members of NATO, the military alliance that links North America and Western Europe.

After Sept. 11 the United States asked NATO to invoke Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. This enables any member country to claim the military support of other members when attacked by a nation from outside the alliance. Originally this was intended to help any European nation attacked by the Soviet Union or its allies. Article 5 had never before been invoked. It is of supreme irony that the first nation to request the invoking of Article 5 was the United States, until now the ultimate guarantor of the freedom of the other member states.

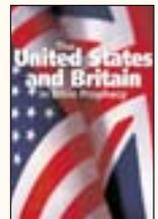
It has often been said since the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington that the world will never be the same. Yet it will be some time before the implications and consequences will be fully realized.

Sept. 11 is frequently compared to the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, America's second-biggest loss of life in one day. That attack awoke a sleeping giant, the United States. By the end of the war less than four years later, America was the world's greatest military power.

Could it be that one of the consequences of Sept. 11 will be the awakening of another sleeping giant, the European Union, out of which will rise the final resurrection of the Roman Empire? We shouldn't rule out this possibility. Make no mistake about it, the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation concerning the rise of a new end-time super-power *will* come to pass. It's our responsibility to watch world trends and events so we will not be caught unprepared. **GN**

Recommended Reading

What does the Bible prophesy about our geopolitical scene at the time of the end? Never before has mankind so needed to understand the eye-opening truths you'll discover in the free booklets *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. Request or download your free copies today!



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

Are You Putting Off Your Salvation?

Even though they've come to understand the truth of God, many put off baptism for years. But is that really acceptable to God? Should you delay your baptism?

by John Ross Schroeder

Recently a colleague and I talked to a gentleman who told us that he had waited to be baptized for several years. Yet circumstances had somehow sidetracked his intentions. Now he is finally ready to earnestly consider taking this vital step towards conversion.

Others attend church for years with a desire for baptism somewhere in the back of their minds while continuing to entertain doubts about making a lifelong commitment.

Part of the problem for many is a lack of *biblical perspective* on the subject. A helpful way to gain that perspective is to look at examples of people in the Bible confronted by their need for baptism.

Paul's experience

The apostle Paul hadn't always been a Christian. Far from it! In fact, he had violently persecuted Christ's true followers (Acts 22:4-5; 26:9-11). His life was headed in the wrong direction, away from God's promise of eternal life. Spiritually, he was on a one-way trip to nowhere.

But on Paul's way to Damascus—ironically, on a mission to persecute Christians—God mercifully intervened, stopping him in his tracks and granting him repentance. Shortly afterwards Christ sent Ananias to instruct the future apostle in the right path.

Perceiving Paul's repentance, Ananias asked him: "And now *why are you waiting?* Arise and *be baptized*, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16, emphasis added throughout). Paul had flagrantly transgressed God's law, even to the extent of being partially responsible for putting Christians to death. But a merciful God gave him the opportunity to put his sins behind him, leaving them in the bottom of the baptismal pool where they belonged.

God can do the same for you. No matter what wrongs you have done in the past, you can put them behind you and rid yourself of the guilt that plagues so many.

What do you need to do? The only requirements are faith and *true repentance*—being genuinely sorry for your sins and firmly determining to follow God's way

of life as summarized in the Ten Commandments. The apostle Peter called this godly sorrow "*repentance to life*" (Acts 11:18). The result is an abundant life now as never before (John 10:10), as well as the first major step toward eternal life in God's Kingdom.

Of course, the salvation process requires doing "works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20). This means giving up habits that the Bible shows are wrong while committing to a life of obeying God's law. (To better understand repentance, be sure to read "What Is Repentance?" in the November-December issue or the booklets offered at the end of this article.)

The road to eternal life

Many, and hopefully you as a reader of *The Good News*, have already given up many of their old ways. They've begun the process of repentance, jettisoning old pagan practices along the way. For years they have been reading the Bible and other material.

Yet they hesitate to take the necessary step of baptism—their passport to everlasting life in the Kingdom of God. The apostle John wrote: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life" (1 John 5:12). Those words can be a little scary and demand positive action.

The book of Acts is a window into the life of the early New Testament Church. One of its most prominent themes is baptism. Does the historical record reveal much delay and endless procrastination, or is repentance followed by baptism as a matter of course?

After the historic Day of Pentecost, when the Church was founded, Peter's first sermon convicted members of his audience of their sins. His listeners immediately sought a way out of their dilemma, and God mercifully provided it. "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let *every one of you* be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38).

The role of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the seed of eternal life that leads us to salvation. Other passages

show that God gives His Spirit to the repentant person after baptism by the laying on of hands by His true servants (Acts 8:14-18). Then, through that Spirit, Jesus Christ begins to live His life in us (see Galatians 2:20).

The New Testament record shows that "those who gladly received his [Peter's] word *were baptized*, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42).

Those who were baptized continued in the Christian life, obeying God and fellowshiping with others on the Sabbath day.

Continuing the story flow, how did those early audiences react when they heard the true gospel preached? "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, *both men and women were baptized*" (Acts 8:12).

The Ethiopian eunuch

Later Philip encountered the Ethiopian eunuch (the treasury minister in the Ethiopian queen's government) reading the book of Isaiah in the Scriptures. After Philip had thoroughly explained the truth of God, this official asked him: "*What hinders me from being baptized?*" (Acts 8:36). Today many might ask themselves the same question.

Philip replied: "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch responded, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (verse 37). (We should note that many other scriptural passages make it clear that true belief should always include repentance and obedience.)

But then what happened? Did Philip recommend delaying the ceremony? Not at all. "And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him" (verse 38). Since baptism pictures the death of the old sinful man (see Romans 6:3-6), the consistent New Testament example of baptism is one of total immersion in water. This takes but a second or two. Considering the symbolism of baptism—death and burial of the old man in a watery grave—being sprinkled

and baptizing those too young to understand baptism's significance are not in keeping with the biblical example and teaching.

The day of your baptism

How did the Ethiopian eunuch react to his baptism? Luke tells us that after Philip left the scene the Ethiopian "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). It was probably the happiest day of his life. His past sins were forgiven and behind him forever. He could look forward to a transformed life, basking in the knowledge of God by studying the Scriptures in ever-increasing understanding made possible by God's Spirit.

The day of your baptism is not a day of suffering and sadness. Have you ever noticed the facial expression of a bride on her wedding day? A big smile graces the face of blissful happiness and great joy.

Both marriage and baptism are rites of passage into a different and much better way of life. The former, on the human level, is for this physical life, but the latter constitutes an important step toward living forever in God's eternal Kingdom.

Your personal circumstances important

We should note here that baptism is not for those with no understanding of the law of God. As part of this sacred rite, we enter into a covenant with God in which we promise to strive to obey His law for the rest of our lives. This is repentance—turning our lives around to obey God. But we must first understand what God requires of us before we commit to it.

In the examples above of Paul and the 3,000 Jews baptized when the New Testament Church began, they all had a background of instruction in God's commandments. So did the Ethiopian eunuch, because the Jewish religion—it may surprise some to learn—was commonly practiced in his home country.

The Good News magazine reaches its readers on many levels. Some are already truly converted Christians well on their way to the Kingdom of God. For them this article will be a timely review and reminder.

Many others may have received only a few issues, and much of this biblical knowledge might be entirely new to them. It may even strike them as strange, depending on their previous understanding. These readers may need more time before even considering baptism—time well spent in studying the Bible. To assist you in your study we provide not only the articles in *The Good News* but many free supplementary booklets offered in every *Good News* issue.

If you are new to the truth of God, you need to study and receive instruction in God's commandments and foundational truths. Eventually you can make an informed decision on an eternal commitment to God.

If you haven't already, perhaps you will enroll in our free *Bible Study Course*, 12 helpful lessons that explain the plan of God from Genesis to Revelation. Several highlight the importance of becoming a Christian, repentance, baptism and the role of the Church in the convert's life.

However, the primary focus of this particular article is for those who are unnecessarily delaying baptism based on ideas or feelings that are not supported in Scripture. Paul told Timothy to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12). Without baptism this becomes impossible. Baptism is a command of God, part of His plan of salvation. So why not take the plunge?

Personal counsel

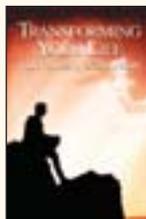
Lack of repentance or faith is the only valid reason for delaying baptism. But many of you have already taken significant steps in that direction. If you understand and seek His truth, God will grant you even deeper repentance. So why put off what the Bible calls "the baptism of repentance" (Acts 13:24). Why delay your start down the road to eternal salvation? Indeed, as Paul tells us in Acts 17:30, God "now commands all men everywhere to repent."

If you would like to discuss these spiritual matters further, we can help you arrange a private appointment with a United Church of God minister. In confidence he would be glad to explain repentance, baptism and any other biblical subjects in much more detail.

Remember what Ananias told Paul nearly 2,000 years ago: "*Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized.*" **GN**

Recommended Reading

Not everything about water baptism can be covered in one brief article. Other questions should be addressed, such as how old should one be and who should baptize? To round out your understanding of this important biblical teaching and related doctrines, we offer you two revealing booklets, *Transforming Your Life* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. Both publications are yours free for the asking.



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

Who's Behind The Good News?



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

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

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

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

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, write or call us at the addresses listed inside. Visitors are always welcome.



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Are We Missing the Message of God?

How well do we understand the meaning behind Christ's sufferings? Do we appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

by John Ross Schroeder

Why did Christ come? Jesus entered our world for more than one reason, but perhaps His chief purpose was to save us from our sins, reconciling us to God the Father.

Most believers comprehend something of Christ's sacrifice. But, often, real depth of understanding is missing. We can be thankful that the biblical writers can help us fill this gap.

How well do we grasp the nature of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins? Do we deeply comprehend the suffering and the agony He endured for our sake?

Christ wants every Christian to fully appreciate what He went through for our sins to be forgiven. To help us grasp the supreme importance of His sacrifice, let us accompany Jesus on His journey to Jerusalem—not in a geographical or chronological sense, but mentally and

Matthew 26:53). But He did not. The biblical record shows that temptations, frustrations and obstacles punctuated His ministry.

One of the most destructive first-century errors was the false teaching that Jesus "did not come in the flesh" (1 John 4:1-3). Many adopted the belief that Christ was not really a human being in the fullest sense, that He didn't suffer the temptations to sin that we all experience, that He was not really one of us.

Although the apostle John condemned this heresy in the strongest of terms and the biblical record repudiates it, sadly it persists to this day.

While unequivocally affirming His divine identity, the Gospels also present a very human Jesus who continually had to deal with the frailties of other human beings. Time and time again Christ asked

a strong sense of mission (Luke 2:49-52). By age 12 He was speaking of God as His Father and showing a strong conviction to occupy Himself with His Father's will. He knew He had a great purpose.

Some 20 years later, when He was with His 12 disciples, Mark recorded that "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31).

Christ soon discovered that the 12 were not fully able to grasp this knowledge.

They were not yet converted. They apparently still looked to Him as one who, as the Messiah, would immediately deliver the nation from Roman rule. In any event, Jesus had to rebuke Peter for letting himself be used by Satan to try to divert the true Anointed One from His ultimate purpose (verses 32-33).

Jesus faced near-total rejection from the religious establishment. "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). Humanly, He would have liked to receive some empathetic encouragement from those closest to Him.

Jesus repeated the prophecy of His approaching death in Mark 9:31, "but they [the disciples] *did not understand* this saying, and were afraid to ask Him" (verse 32, emphasis added throughout). Because of His acute understanding of the purpose of His last visit to Jerusalem, He had to make that final journey to His beloved city virtually alone.

The last journey to Jerusalem

"Now it came to pass that when the [general] time had come for Him to be received up [crucified], that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Jesus was determined to carry out His mission. Nothing and no one would deflect Him from His purpose.

Satan had already tried and failed (Matthew 4:7-11), but now the pressure would increase. It would be in this city

How well do we grasp the nature of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins? Do we deeply comprehend the suffering and the agony He endured for our sake?

emotionally, as He approached the time when He would complete the fulfillment of the basic purpose of His humanity.

Subject to the human condition

But we should first understand an important principle derived primarily from the four Gospels, the biographical accounts of Christ's life. When Jesus entered the world as a human being, He did not rearrange the lives of others for His own convenience. Nor did He do so to suit His divine purposes, great and important though they were. True, certain Old Testament prophecies had to be fulfilled, but beyond these necessary occurrences He subjected Himself to the rough and tumble of "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4).

He undoubtedly could have asked His Father to repeatedly intervene in circumstances on His own behalf (compare

people whom He had healed not to say anything that would focus attention on Himself in a nation in which the religious establishment was hostile to His message. The Bible shows that in most instances their excitement and enthusiasm got the better of them and, against His wishes, they quickly spread the news of what had happened.

At times Jesus needed periods alone or with His closest disciples, but the crowds usually managed to find Him. Again Jesus did not use the miracle-working power His Father gave Him to manipulate people and events for His own purposes, however important they were. He almost always responded to the needs of the people. He did not seek to please Himself (Romans 15:3).

A strong sense of mission

From early in His ministry Jesus had

that Christ would allow Himself to be put to death for our many sins, making it possible for us to be reconciled to God the Father.

Jesus' final date with destiny as a human being had been much on His mind throughout His ministry.

Yet even His own brothers could not grasp His situation. When He was in mortal danger from the religious authorities, His brothers foolishly advised Him to show Himself "openly . . . to the world" (John 7:4). Then John noted that "even His brothers did not believe in Him" (verse 5).

Jesus' reply to them is instructive. "*My time has not yet come*, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil" (verses 6-7). This world, He said, breaks God's holy law with impunity and does not like to be reminded of its sins.

Yet this Gospel account tells us that no one up to that time had been successful in arresting or harming Him "for His hour had not yet come" (John 8:20). But Jesus knew full well that when the appointed time did arrive He would experience a violent, premature death—yet a death that was profoundly significant for the future of all mankind.

A fate foretold

Humanly, Jesus was no different from the rest of us. He didn't want to die (Matthew 26:39). But, unlike most of us, He knew well in advance the time and circumstances that would surround His death.

He knew the exact mode of execution—one of the most cruel and painful methods ever devised by men, the Roman crucifixion (John 12:32-33). In His travels He had no doubt seen the gruesome spectacle of men dying by crucifixion. Such

executions were intended to be a public deterrent to challenging Roman authority.

Psychologically, this advance knowledge was no comfort to Jesus. In fact, it had the opposite effect. As His fate drew near He lamented: "*Now My soul is troubled*, and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour" (verse 27).

Do we, 2,000 years later, truly grasp the depth of Christ's sufferings for our sake? Do we realize what our sins, collectively and individually, did to this sinless and vibrant young man, our Savior, in the prime of His human life?

Not only the humiliation, the terrible

not even stay awake. They were not much help, but the Father strengthened Him by sending an angel (Luke 22:43). Then, with fixed determination and renewed resolve, He said to the disciples, "Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer [Judas Iscariot] is at hand" (Mark 14:42). His suffering continued with the humiliation and scourging that soon followed.

Later, in the last few moments of His human life, "Jesus cried out with a loud voice . . . , 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matthew 27:46). Though sinless, Jesus at His death took on Himself all the sin of all humanity for all time. The awful penalty had to

Do we truly grasp the depth of Christ's sufferings for our sake? Do we realize *what our sins did* to this sinless and vibrant young man in the prime of His human life?

beatings and the crucifixion itself, but the mental anguish He suffered was agonizing. This was to be no ordinary death. Jesus knew He had to take the sins of the whole world—past, present and future—on Himself. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Christ's agony at Gethsemane

Arriving at the Garden of Gethsemane and taking Peter, James and John with Him, Jesus asked the other disciples to wait while He prayed. "Then He said to them: 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.' He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will'" (Mark 14:34-36).

At the time of His greatest agony up to that time, His most trusted friends could

be paid. In the end of this great trial, Christ had to bear the weight of our sins *absolutely alone*.

Christ's sacrifice was an act of supreme selflessness under the most difficult of circumstances. He willingly chose to give His life for us. This was heroism in the highest degree possible. That is why Christians must never take His sacrifice for granted. We must not forget the ultimate price Jesus paid to blot out our sins. Our appreciation for His sacrifice must endure forever.

Annual reminder of Christ's sacrifice

How important does God the Father consider Jesus' sacrifice? The Scriptures tell us that He has worked out a marvelous plan to remind us year by year of this most important act in all history. The explicit instructions Jesus Himself gave, along with those of the apostle Paul, show that the annual Passover should be one of the most significant dates on the calendar

The Enduring Importance of *Christ's Sacrifice*

" . . . You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

" 'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.' This He said, signifying by what death He would die" (John 12:32-33).

" . . . You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold, from your aimless conduct . . . , but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh

but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

of every Christian. When we observe it, as Paul wrote, we “proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

In a figurative and spiritual sense and to a small degree, Christians have to walk the path to Jerusalem with Jesus every year. We are reminded of the part our own sins played in His death by crucifixion.

Paul tells us that, before we participate in this annual reminder, we must examine ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5), knowing we must grapple with “the sin which so easily ensnares us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Following Christ’s example and instructions, Christians partake of a small piece of unleavened bread followed by a sip of wine, the symbols Christ gave to remind us of His sacrificed body and shed blood (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The annual Passover observance is also a reminder of our sacred covenant with God—that, as He willingly gave His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for our sins (John 3:16-17), so we have willingly surrendered our lives to Him to obey His will (Romans 6:6-13).

As the year progresses, other articles in *The Good News* will provide instruction on other observances rehearsing the steps that follow in God’s plan. But the reminder of and acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice, marked by the annual Passover, will always be the crucial first step. **GN**

Bible

Continued from page 7

were overwhelmed by catastrophe.

Paul, too, wrote that in the end time people would have their minds focused on *self* rather than on God and His Word. “But mark this,” he warned. “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be *lovers of themselves*, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, . . . not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*—having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:1-5, New International Version).

Paul states that in the final “terrible times” people would focus not on God but be wrapped up entirely in *themselves*. Ironically, he pointed out, they would have a “form of godliness” while “denying its power.” People want to be *thought of* as basically good, but they don’t want to dig into God’s Word to find what it takes to actually *be* good.

This mind-set, says Paul, will ultimately lead to disaster for the majority of mankind. He tells us that a great end-time religious system and leader will arise that will captivate virtually the entire earth (2 Thessalonians 2:1-9). The majority—perhaps even you if you are not careful—will be taken in, ensnared in its trap. Why? Because “*they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved*” (verse 10).

Does it matter?

Does it matter whether the Bible is true? Absolutely. Without it we are left clueless as to where we came from, why we are here and where we are going. Without the Bible we can only stumble in the dark and search in vain for answers to these questions.

Jesus Christ promises to return to teach humanity God’s way of life. At that time, says the biblical prophet Isaiah, “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). No longer will people doubt and scoff at God’s Word. Yet, to those who willingly and humbly seek God and His guidance now, He promises they will reign forever with Christ in His world-ruling kingdom (Revelation 5:9-10; 20:6; 22:5).

But before then a time is coming when the overwhelming majority of mankind will follow a path to disaster because of disbelief in and ignorance of the Bible.

Will you be the exception? **GN**



Many great men and women have read the Bible and based their lives on it. Abraham Lincoln called it “the best gift God has ever given to man.” George Washington stated that “it is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.” What was it that these great men came to understand? What did they discover that you don’t know? Isn’t it about time that you read God’s instruction manual for us?

We invite you to join us in the new *Good News Bible Reading Program*. In this revealing, in-depth course we’ll read through the entire Bible, book by book, in less than three years. We’ll cover the background, history and authorship of each book, discussing the time in which it was written, its major themes, the many intriguing people whose lives the Bible records for us, and the crucial lessons God wants us to learn. You’ll learn a great deal from the optional reading material we’re preparing for you and gain the kind of in-depth insight you learn from the articles in *The Good News*.

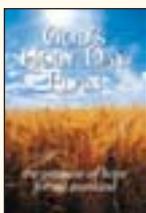
You can find this Internet-based program at www.ucg.org/brp. You’ll find a monthly reading schedule, enlightening commentary and supplementary material to help you gain the most from your reading.

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Recommended Reading

Many of our readers may not have heard much about the Passover, when we are instructed to commemorate Christ’s death annually. If you would like to learn more, request our free booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. It includes a comprehensive chapter about the Passover, followed by other chapters thoroughly explaining God’s other annual festivals. To learn more about who Jesus of Nazareth was and the enormous significance of His death, please request your free copy of *Who Is God?*



We also offer two supplementary booklets, *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Road to Eternal Life*, which discuss the significance of Christ’s sacrifice and what it means for you. All four publications are yours free for the asking.

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Seven Reasons Why Jesus Was Born

The Gospels tell us Jesus died in the spring at the time of the Passover. But why did He have to die? To understand, we need to realize why it was Jesus' destiny to enter this chaotic, sin-sick world.

by Donald Ward

Scholars and theologians, ministers and teachers have long pondered the meaning of the life and death of the teacher from Nazareth. Jesus Christ was born and lived on earth for a little more than three decades. But *why* did He come? Few realize that ultimately there was no other option—Jesus *had* to be born!

God's great plan for mankind included the necessity of a savior, a redeemer of mankind. Here are seven reasons, leading up to the greatest of all, that Jesus the Messiah, the very Son of God, had to be born.

1 Jesus had to be born because of mankind's sin.

God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a beautiful environment that supplied their every need. In the Garden of Eden our original human parents found food plentiful, animals tame and a loving teacher—God Himself—accompanying them and teaching them everything they needed to know.

If Adam and Eve had obeyed God, they

could have bridged the gap between mortality and immortality; they had access to the tree of life. They had every advantage, so what went wrong? Adam and Eve did what every other human being has done: *They sinned. They disobeyed God.*

God gave our original human parents the gift of free choice. He gave them the ability to decide whether they would obey Him, and they missed the mark. God allowed Satan, in the form of a serpent, to attempt to subvert God's will for mankind (Genesis 3:1-4). The devil appealed to Eve's vanity, convincing her she could be as God Himself, "knowing good and evil" (verse 5).

Satan, in a blatant lie, told Eve she didn't

have to depend on God for anything. Satan posed as the liberator, offering Eve instant gratification. Eve was willingly deceived by this appeal to her vanity, so she ate the forbidden fruit and presented the same fruit to her husband. Adam then also ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (verse 6).

Why did Satan's deception of Adam and Eve mean that Christ had to be born? The Savior had to be born because mankind, after the sin of Adam and Eve, would have been eternally lost—cut off from God—had not Jesus come to earth and allowed Himself to be sacrificed to save mankind from its sins, which began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

2 Jesus had to be born because God wanted to reveal His own character to humanity.

God wanted to reveal His righteous character to Adam and Eve and to all of mankind so they could become like Him in mind and spirit.

God created our two original parents in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). Accordingly, God instructed them to exercise their free will by urging them to look to Him as the revealer of good and evil. God gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to embrace His divine wisdom.

Tragically, Adam and Eve followed the father of lies, Satan, and both ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This wrong choice, this rebellion against their Creator, severed their close relationship with Him. God cast them out of the Garden of Eden, cutting off their access to the tree of life, which was symbolic of God's Holy Spirit (Genesis 3:22-23).

Why did God's desire to reveal His

character to mankind mean Jesus had to be born? Jesus had to be born because Adam and Eve failed to carry out God's mandate to glorify Him in their lives. It was left for the Son of God, thousands of years later, to ultimately fulfill the divine revelation of God's character and purpose for man.

3 Jesus had to be born to remove the sins of humankind through a perfect sacrifice.

Noah and the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—offered sacrifices to God. God asked Abraham, the father of the faithful, to sacrifice his son Isaac as a test of faith and obedience. Though God intervened to stop Abraham from actually going through with it, Abraham's willingness to give up his son foreshadowed the role of God the Father, who "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" as a sacrifice for our sins (John 3:16). Isaac, in offering no resistance, was a forerunner of Jesus, who willingly and obediently offered His life's blood for the sins of the world.

Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, God revealed through His faithful servant Moses a religious system that included animal sacrifices and offerings. "... Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle ... so you shall make it" (Exodus 25:8-9).

God instructed His people during this time to set up in the wilderness the tabernacle, the tent that was the forerunner of the temple. God filled the tabernacle with His glory (Exodus 40:34-35). God's Spirit in this earthly tent pointed forward to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the minds and hearts of Christians.

Why did the need for a perfect sacrifice mean that Jesus had to be born? It was because the earlier, physical sacrifices were imperfect. They could not take away the penalty for sin (Hebrews 10:4).

God instructed the Israelites in the need for sacrifice, but they had access only to

Jesus Christ was born and lived on earth for a little more than three decades. But *why* did He come? Few realize that ultimately *there was no other option!*

physical forerunners of the ultimate sacrifice, which would come later in the form of Christ Himself. God instructed His people to participate in the physical rituals of animal sacrifices *not* because they were sufficient to remove people's sins, but because of the lessons they taught—that sacrifices were necessary because of mankind's sins.

Jesus had to be born because, without the true sacrifice, humanity was doomed. All would die, with no hope beyond the grave.

4 Jesus had to be born for mankind to have a Mediator.

Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant. Under the New Covenant, God replaced the sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood with the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Himself. "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Hebrews 8:6).

But what were the terms of the New Covenant? God explained that "this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (verse 10, quoting Jeremiah 31:33).

The law written on the believer's heart under the terms of the New Covenant is the immutable spiritual law of God. Paul wrote that this law, summarized by the Ten Commandments, is "holy, and the commandment holy and just and good . . . For we know that the law is spiritual . . ." (Romans 7:12-14). This law serves as the basis for the covenant agreement. Psalm 19:7 tells us that "the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul."

The understanding that Jesus is the mediator between God and mankind makes it easier for us to comprehend that the ministry of Christ is an administration superior to the Levitical priesthood.

This understanding lets the believer purge his conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). Upon acceptance of the terms of the New Covenant, the believer is imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit so God can write His laws on the believer's heart and mind (Hebrews 8:8).

Why does the need for a mediator mean Jesus had to be born? It is because the priesthood, staffed by the Levites, as revealed in the Old Testament, was imperfect. It was only a forerunner. Jesus had

to be born because the salvation of mankind requires something better.

5 Jesus had to be born to provide the promised Seed of Abraham.

God promised Abraham that through his (Abraham's) "seed," or descendants, all nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:14-16).

Through faith in God and His name, people of all nations have access to God's mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation with God the Father. God does not show favoritism (Acts 10:34). Indeed, His plan of redemption includes all people of all races, of all national and ethnic groups. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28-29).

The key word here is *heirs*. Through Christ, believers become sons of God (Romans 8:14). "And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ . . ." (verse 17).

Under the Old Covenant, God chose a physical people, Israel, to set the example for other nations (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). Israel, being unconverted and subject to the frailties of humanity, failed. But the Israelites were forerunners of a converted, *spiritual* Israel, which includes believers of every ethnicity and nationality (Galatians 3:27-29; 6:15-16; Romans 2:28-29).

Jesus had to be born to provide the promised spiritual fulfillment of the Seed of Israel. Jesus, quite appropriately, was a literal, physical descendant of Abraham. He was Abraham's Seed, through whom all nations of the world would be blessed.

6 Jesus had to be born for God to make His Spirit available to all humankind.

Not only did Jesus have to be born, but He had to pay the penalty for our sins through His own death, then be resurrected to ascend to the Father as our High Priest. Only then would humanity at large be able to receive and benefit from the incredible gift of God's Holy Spirit.

"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33).

On the Day of Pentecost, only a few weeks after Jesus died and was resurrected,

God poured out His Spirit on the few assembled followers of Jesus. Peter, who was among that early gathering, summarized what we must do to receive the Spirit of God. He powerfully proclaimed, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (verse 38).

Why was Jesus' physical birth essential to His followers' receiving of the Holy Spirit? Because no one is worthy to receive the Holy Spirit, and we must be begotten of God through His Spirit to receive eternal life.

Jesus' death—His ultimate sacrifice—made possible the forgiveness of sins, which in turn enables us to look forward to living and reigning with Christ in the Kingdom of God. Without Jesus' birth, none of this would be possible.

Through Christ, God has restored that which was lost in the Garden of Eden: access to a right relationship with God and access to the tree of life. Through the sacrifice of Christ, God has made possible this right relationship with mankind. "As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

God has made it possible for all mankind—every person—to come voluntarily into an intimate relationship with Him. This could not have been possible, in God's great plan, without the birth and subsequent sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

7 Jesus had to be born for God to redeem mankind.

The salvation of mankind was dependent on Jesus coming to earth and living a perfect life, then dying as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world—for every disobedience, by every man and woman who has ever lived, to God's righteous laws.

All of this is another way of saying that Jesus had to be born because He is our Redeemer. God in His infinite mercy foreordained His plan of redemption for sinful mankind through Christ (1 Peter 1:20). Jesus was declared to be "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" to redeem humanity (Revelation 13:8).

But why does sin require a redeemer? The Bible shows us that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23), and "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Therefore, all have earned the death penalty for sin. People speak of human

“rights,” yet the only real right anyone has earned is the right to eternal death.

But God has made allowance for sinners to be redeemed, or bought back, from the death penalty by a redeemer. Romans 5 calls Jesus “the second Adam,” in contrast to the first, the original man. The first Adam brought sin into the world (verse 12). The second Adam—Jesus Christ—brought redemption, reconciliation and the hope of eternal life (verses 6-10).

Since the wages of sin is death, redemption requires the sacrificial death of the Redeemer.

God promised a redeemer

God promised a redeemer to Adam and Eve even before He cast them out of the Garden of Eden. After the Creator confronted our first parents with their sins, He spoke to Satan, who appeared in the form of the serpent. He told him, “. . . I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15).

What is the meaning of this prophecy, and what does it have to do with the redemption of humanity?

As Walter Kaiser Jr. writes in his book *The Messiah in the Old Testament*: “Genesis 3:15 has commonly been called the protoevangelium (the ‘first gospel’) because it was the original proclamation of the promise of God’s plan for the whole world . . . The ‘seed/offering’ mentioned in this verse became the root which the tree of the OT [Old Testament] promise of a Messiah grew. This, then, was the ‘mother prophecy’ that gave birth to all the rest of the [messianic] promises” (1995, p. 38).

In this great prophecy, “woman” can refer to Eve, the mother of all living, who was present in the garden. “Woman” in prophecy can also symbolize Israel—the physical nation or the *spiritual* Israel, the Church of God (Revelation 12:1, 6, 13; compare Genesis 37:9-10).

In this particular prophecy, then, we should consider that through the woman Eve, the mother of all living, will come the “woman” Israel. Revelation 12 pictures a child being born of the woman Israel. The nation gives birth to this child through an *actual* woman. Thus we have here also a picture of Mary, the mother of Jesus: “. . . A woman . . . being with child . . . cried out in labor and in pain to give birth . . . And the dragon [Satan] stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born” (Revelation 12:1-4).

With this background in mind, we can see the prophecy becoming clearer. The Seed of woman (Christ) bruises the head of Satan by eventually nullifying his influence (Romans 16:20). In the meantime, however, the devil wages war against Jesus.

Satan attempted to “devour” the woman’s child by influencing Herod to order the murder of all male children age

Jesus Christ lived on earth for a little more than three decades. But why did He come? Few realize that ultimately there was no other option!

2 and younger in Bethlehem, and Satan eventually instigated Jesus’ crucifixion.

However, Satan’s scheme backfired, for the death of the Son of God provided mankind with a redeemer.

History of redemption

Redemption is a prominent theme throughout the Bible. God, in His love and mercy, is long-suffering, not willing that any should ultimately perish (2 Peter 3:9). He wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of His truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

Because sin results in death—physical and eternal death—and the promised redeemer had not yet been born, God in days of old revealed to Moses a religious system based on animal sacrifices and offerings.

Israel came into God’s presence through sacrifices the Levitical priesthood offered at the tabernacle and later the temple. However, these sacrifices could never provide redemption for sins to enable worshipers to receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:1-4). They could provide only a temporary ceremonial cleansing that represented the genuine cleansing to come through Christ’s sacrifice.

Lacking the heart and mind for true obedience, Israel as a whole neglected its promise to obey God and keep His commandments. Instead, the Israelites gradually placed far more importance on the sacrificial laws and their oral traditions. Obedience from the heart became far less important than physical sacrifice and ritual.

By the time of Jesus’ life on earth, the Israelites were placing more emphasis on their own oral tradition than on the law of God. Jesus asked the Pharisees, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? . . . In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:3-9).

God gave the ancient Israelites His great, immutable spiritual law. But at the same time He gave them a temporary physical system for worshiping Him. The spiritual law revealed to people the basis for conducting their affairs with God and their fellow man (Matthew 22:35-40). The physical system of rituals served mostly to remind them of their sinful nature and the

need to be clean and without spot or blemish when they came into God’s presence.

This physical dimension was temporary, however, until the promised Redeemer would come and pay the ultimate price for sin (Hebrews 9:9-12).

Jesus the Messiah is the promised Redeemer. He had to be born for humanity to be redeemed from sin.

As we noted earlier, Peter summarized what we must do to be redeemed: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Through Christ’s blood God forgives our sins, and by Christ we receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:12-15).

Through Christ, God has restored that which was lost in Eden—access to the tree of life. Moreover, repentant people have become the temple of the living God. “As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (2 Corinthians 6:16). Yes, God has made it possible for all people to enter an intimate relationship with Him—which is why Jesus had to be born. **GN**

Recommended Reading

You have just read some of the reasons that Jesus Christ came to earth. You may now realize that Jesus’ life and teachings affect your life and actions in ways you had never before imagined. You can learn further crucial knowledge, direct from the Bible, by writing for our free booklets *Who Is God?* and *What Is Your Destiny?* Don’t put it off. Request your free copies today!



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Rahab

From Harlot to Heroine

by Jerold Aust

For 40 long, rigorous years, Moses—under God’s direction—led the Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness. God had delivered them from Egypt, helped them cross the Red Sea on dry ground and supernaturally defeated the enemies who tried to thwart their path to Canaan.

Now (around 1400 B.C.) Israel was about to enter the land God promised to the nation. God had transferred the mantle of Israel’s leadership to Joshua, an able, faithful and courageous leader. Before Israel entered Canaan, Joshua sent a reconnaissance party of two men to spy out the land just west of the Jordan River, paying special attention to the formidable city of Jericho.

It didn’t take the pair long to reach Jericho, a bustling, fortified city strategically situated in the fertile plains of the Jordan valley. To avoid being noticed, they blended with the busy pedestrians outside the great city walls. It was difficult not to be visibly impressed with Jericho’s massive fortifications. Still, the spies’ primary job was to take mental notes of the city’s layout and fortifications. Instantly they realized that these impressive man-made barriers would never be breached or destroyed unless God miraculously intervened for the Israelites.

The incredible events that followed include an encouraging lesson involving a woman who had lived an ungodly life. Without a doubt Rahab the harlot helped save the lives of the Israelite spies, which in turn set Israel on the path to

conquering Jericho and moving into the Promised Land.

Responding to God

What do we know about Rahab, who played such a pivotal role in the fall of Jericho? *Halley’s Bible Handbook* suggests she may have been a temple prostitute, which in Canaanite eyes was an acceptable line of work (2000, p. 190). Rahab and her family lived within the outer city wall. Her house was apparently *part* of the wall. It is possible that the house doubled as an inn since the spies were sought there. Besides her infamous profession, it appears that Rahab engaged in less-questionable labor as well. Either raising or buying flax, she dried it on her rooftop and made linen from it.

The whole city had received news about the miraculous events and conquests of the wandering nation of Israel, yet Rahab was the only resident of Jericho who resolved to fear and obey Israel’s God. This she did even before she had the opportunity to interact with the spies from Israel. Although the Canaanites had many gods, she had enough understanding to realize that the God of Israel was no ordinary Canaanite deity.

Upon entering Jericho to determine its strength, the spies conferred immediately with Rahab. The ensuing conversation revealed her understanding of the true God and her determination to help His chosen people.

When the king of Jericho heard that spies from Israel had entered his city, he immediately sent soldiers to Rahab’s house. Word

got to Rahab that the king’s men were coming to investigate her and her two guests. Understanding the gravity of the situation and moving with haste, Rahab hid the spies under the drying flax on her rooftop. There she made a covenant with them: She would help them to safety; they, in turn, had to spare her and her family.

The spies then negotiated their side of the agreement: She had to keep their location a secret along with helping them to safety. Moreover, she was required to gather all of her father’s family under her roof and identify her house by hanging a scarlet cord from a window.

The deal struck, God afterward gave Jericho into Israel’s hands by flattening its walls. Yet, incredibly, Rahab’s house was left standing. As had been agreed, Rahab and her family were delivered. They made their home with Israel from that day on.

But the story doesn’t end there, as we’ll see.

Through faith and courage

Surprisingly, Rahab is one of two women named in Hebrews 11 as examples of godly faith. The other is Abraham’s wife, Sarah. Few would question Sarah’s inclusion. She exemplified, in most respects, what are generally considered Christian values and qualities. But Rahab? Why would the holy, righteous God include the name of a harlot as one of His faithful saints?

God, we must realize, shows His great mercy and power through human weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9). Out of

Rahab's weakness she was made strong in faith—through the power of God. The record of her deeds provides sufficient scriptural evidence for why God included her in the faith chapter: "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Hebrews 11:31).

Many people would not risk their lives for family and friends. Yet Rahab risked her life to protect "enemy" spies. Rahab focused on the godly mission of the spies and her realization that they represented the God of Israel. Rahab didn't believe just in the *existence* of God, she literally *believed* what He revealed. That is, she believed it was He who was bringing Israel into the Promised Land. Risking her very life, she had no more evidence to go on than the reports from others that somehow, in some way, the God of Israel had given His people great victories over more-powerful foes.

Rahab stated confidently: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

"And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Joshua 2:9-11).

Rahab was here living by faith and not by sight, for, though she saw none of these events actually happen, she had faith to believe that Israel's God was more powerful than all others and would take care of her and her family too.

Rahab's faith and conviction gave her the courage to look death in the face—and live. As Proverbs 28:1 tells us, "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion." Courage is born from unwavering faith, as Rahab demonstrated.

The merciful and patient God

We can learn a powerful lesson from Rahab. Her example demonstrates living faith in a forgiving and merciful God.

We should note, however, that Rahab's response to God was not perfect. She lied to protect the spies' whereabouts. Sadly,



Rahab hid the spies under the drying flax on her rooftop. There she made a covenant with them: She would help them to safety; they, in turn, had to spare her and her family.

some will use this to excuse lying when, in their determination, it's for a good cause. However, God's law makes it clear that lying is never acceptable (Leviticus 19:11; Proverbs 12:22). We should bear in mind that Rahab is commended for her *faith*, not her lying—and realize that her faith was not yet educated, so to speak.

It may even be that Rahab did not yet fully understand the sinfulness of her past way of life. But she did know she had lived apart from the true God and now believed He would receive her if she would serve Him. No doubt this fact would later lead her to a committed life of obedience to God.

No, God did not condemn her for not telling the truth about the spies' whereabouts; He commended her for hiding His courageous representatives. The apostle James later wrote: "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" (James 2:25)—her works being a natural response to her faith. Had she known the truth about lying, this verse would likely read differently. But she acted in the best way she knew—and a merciful and patient God proclaimed her a heroine of faith.

Rahab also showed a deep devotion to those close to her. Considering the terrible destruction about to befall the great city of Jericho, Rahab could easily have thought only of her own safety, ignoring the welfare of others. Yet her agreement with the spies was that they should guarantee not only *her* safety but that of her entire family. Rahab's faith, courage and concern for others saved her family and herself.

"But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, 'Go into the harlot's house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her.' And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel . . . And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, *because she hid the messengers* whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho" (Joshua 6:22-25; see also verses 17-21).

Yes, the Israelites received Rahab and her family into the nation of Israel. Over time, she would have learned the laws of God and come to serve Him more

completely, repudiating the mistakes of her past. Indeed, being of Canaan and a former prostitute, she *must* have convincingly changed her life to have been able to marry a prominent Israelite.

Messianic hope

Surprisingly, Rahab married Salmon, the son of Judah's tribal leader. From this marriage would come their son Boaz, a faithful man of God. Boaz would marry Ruth (of the *book* of Ruth), and their son Obed would be the father of Jesse, the father of King David. From David would descend the Savior of all mankind, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5-6, 15-16; Ruth 4:21-22; 1 Chronicles 2:10-15). Amazingly, then, a former prostitute of Canaan would become what every Israelite woman hoped to be—a mother in the line of the Messiah.

In fact, Rahab experienced the messianic hope in an especially personal way—finding deliverance, physical and spiritual, through the mercy of God. Rahab's story represents what God has in store for those in non-Israelite nations (the gentiles), who are also promised God's salvation (Acts 2:21; Romans 9:22-26). Her conversion reminds us that one day God will write His laws on the hearts and minds of all mankind, converting all peoples (Hebrews 8:11).

A transformed life, like that experienced by Rahab, is there for you if you follow the apostle Peter's instruction: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

If a common harlot of Canaan could become an uncommon saint of faith and courage and receive the privilege of motherhood in the line of Jesus Christ, then surely nothing is impossible with God (Matthew 19:26). Rahab's amazing story is a lesson for us all. **GN**

Recommended Reading

What is faith? How can you build a loving, trusting relationship with God like the faithful men and women recorded in the Bible? To learn how you can develop such a relationship with your Creator, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*.



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Exodus

Continued from page 11

This would have given the Israelites time to eventually take over much of the land during the 300 years of the judges. The Bible is clear that there were many cities the Israelites didn't conquer during Joshua's time or even during the time of the judges (Joshua 13:1; Judges 3:1-6). The archaeological record does support such a gradual process.

Dealing with the present findings, archaeologist Randall Price concludes: "... The signs of widespread destruction at certain sites should not be considered as archaeological evidence against the biblical chronology and for a late date for the Conquest [by Joshua]. These destructions better fit the period of the Judges, during which ongoing warfare was commonplace" (*The Stones Cry Out*, 1997, p. 147).

Dr. Merrill adds: "... Signs of major devastation in the period from 1400 to 1375 would be an acute embarrassment to the traditional view because the biblical witness is univocal that Israel was commanded to annihilate the Canaanite populations, but to spare the cities and towns in which they lived. And the record explicitly testifies that this mandate was faithfully carried out. The only exceptions were Jericho, Ai, and Hazor" (*Kingdom of Priests*, p. 73).

We find, then, that the archaeological evidence better fits the traditional date of the Exodus backed by the Bible.

Recent discoveries

Another argument that the Exodus never occurred is that there are no signs that the Israelites wandered in the Sinai desert for 40 years. However, we must remember that during the Exodus the Israelites were forced to live nomadic lives. No longer did they reside in villages with sturdy houses and artifacts that could have survived as evidence. Instead, in the wilderness environment every item had to be used to its fullest capacity and then, if possible, recycled. Also, the portable tent encampments during those 40 years would have left few or no traces that could be found 3,400 years later, especially in the shifting desert sands.

Interestingly, recent satellite infrared technology has revealed ancient caravan routes in the Sinai. George Stephen, a satellite-image analyst, discovered evidence in the satellite photographs of ancient tracks made by "a massive number of people" going "from the Nile Delta straight south along the east bank of the Gulf of Suez and around the tip of the Sinai Peninsula." He

also saw huge campsites along the route, one that fits the description given in the book of Exodus (Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, p. 137).

Could this evidence be a coincidence? If nothing else at least it shows that a large number of people could be sustained in the same region and on the same path as that taken by the Israelites during the Exodus.

The sturdy anvil

We have covered only some of the evidence for the biblically derived date of the Exodus. It seems that every year more discoveries are made that confirm the existence of biblical persons and places. But the skeptics know what is at stake, and in this world of growing unbelief they will not be deterred from striking at the foundations of Christianity and Judaism.

Although almost 200 years old, a statement by 19th-century writer H.L. Hastings regarding skeptics' attacks on the Bible holds true: "For eighteen hundred years, skeptics have been refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today as a solid rock . . . The skeptics, with all their assaults, make about as much impression on this book as a man with a hammer would on the Pyramids of Egypt.

"When a French monarch proposed persecuting Christians, an elderly advisor told him, 'Sir, the Church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.' So the hammers of the skeptics have been pecking away at *this book* for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures. If this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers have all tried their hand at it; they have all died and yet this book lives on."

As with the rest of the Bible, the Exodus account remains a mighty witness to a God who cares about His people and intervenes in human affairs to carry out His plan. **GN**

Recommended Reading

Can you believe the Bible? Is it, as it claims to be, the actual Word of God? This article has covered some of the evidence. Where else can we look for proof that it is true? What do archaeology, astronomy and other sciences have to tell us? Be sure to request your free copy of *Is the Bible True?*



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Letters From Our Readers

The Bible and Harry Potter

I applaud you for taking on the subject of Harry Potter because I feel that a lot of parents are not aware of the negative themes and images in these books. I have been doing some research myself, and I'm coming to question the Pokemon craze as well. My main impetus in writing this letter is because a lot of kids read Harry Potter and are also involved in trading Pokemon cards, which are filled with occult themes. My hope is that, as parents become more aware of the messages and themes of Harry Potter and Pokemon, they will discourage their children from partaking of them.

G.B., Eureka, California

Please remove me from your mailing list. The blather about Harry Potter was just too much.

K.K.S., Tucson, Arizona

We received animated and interesting comments on all sides of the Harry Potter issue. Our aim was to treat it fairly while pointing out potential dangers—to help parents evaluate the matter. For a more thorough evaluation of the Harry Potter phenomenon, see the book What's a Christian to do With Harry Potter? by Connie Neal. For those not that familiar with the biblical side of witchcraft and spiritism, request our free booklet Is There Really a Devil?

Comments about The Good News

I want to keep the November-December issue on my coffee table along with other special publications regarding the historic and tragic times we are living through. In fact, what struck me was reading about Palestinians praying in thanks for another successful suicide bombing attack. I immediately thought of the article "Whose Prayers Does God Hear?" I hope this article has proved beneficial to many.

L.D., Kernersville, North Carolina

Thank you very much indeed for sending me *The Good News*. I found it very useful and very knowledgeable. I am a philosophy student, and I can firmly say that I got many things from your *Good News* that I didn't find in any of the philosophy books.

S.T.H., Pakistan

Precisely four hours ago I got my first

copy of *The Good News*. I love the quality of the paper and printing and, most important, the contents. I would have loved to download some of the contents, but we are more than 24 people on one single computer, so my access time is limited.

E.D.G., Nigeria

The Good News on radio

On Dec. 22 at about 9 p.m. I was listening to WWL 870 and faintly heard a program on Christmas celebration. Is a tape of that program available?

R.D., Waupun, Wisconsin

You can listen to or download The Good News Radio Program about Christmas from our Web site at www.ucg.org/radio/. A condensed transcript of the program is included in the December issue of our Virtual Christian Magazine at www.vcmagazine.org. You may also want to request our free booklet Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?

Read the Book

I am a reader of your wonderful magazine. I have had a few years of hard times, and nothing seems to be going right in my life. However, I am beginning to read again and have enrolled in your *Bible Study Course*. I am hungry for the knowledge. I also read the article "Isn't It Time You Read the Book?" in the January-February issue. It really made me realize I have gone away from God and just maybe this is why so many things have gone wrong in my life.

A.J., Rome, New York

You are back on the right track and on your way out of your difficulties. Our free booklet Transforming Your Life may be of further help.

Bible Reading Program

Thank you for offering a program that will enable me to read the entire Bible within a few years. I believe that reading the entire Word of God is important; it has been a goal of mine for several years. I took the liberty of taking a sneak preview of your Bible Reading Program on the book of Genesis. I liked what I read. Will you put the supplementary reading material on your Web site?

M.S.C., Alexandria, Virginia

I am interested in your upcoming Bible Reading Program. Please let me know when it will start. I work for the Postal Service and noticed the announcement on the back of one of your publications.

D.L., Internet

The Bible Reading Program was launched Feb. 1 at www.ucg.org/brp. The daily schedule is posted on our Web site, and the first month's program is also available for downloading in PDF format. We do plan to make available most, if not all, of the supplementary reading material online. Readers looking at the HTML version will find a link to take them directly to the supplementary material, much of which is already on our Web site in our literature library at www.ucg.org/articles/booklets/.

Readers seek to attend church services

I thoroughly enjoy your *Good News* literature. I enjoyed the booklet about Christmas and Easter, and I don't celebrate them anymore. I think it is so sad that so many people who read the Bible do not understand God's rules and practices for man. Please tell me where there is a United Church of God congregation near me.

P.B., Pennsylvania

I found a copy of *God's Holy Day Plan* in a thrift store and read it with much interest. I was blessed by some of the truths that came to light and would be grateful if you could provide me with more literature or the name of fellowships in my area where I could study the Scriptures. I am realizing that the faith once delivered to the saints has all but been lost in this present age and I am wanting to find that narrow way that leads to life.

L.G., Fox Island, Washington

We appreciate reader interest in attending our church services, being baptized or contacting a minister. Our reader-services staff and personal correspondents gladly communicate with all who request help.

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

Who Was Jesus Christ?

In the first part of answering this question, we examined Jesus' identity as the Christ. But what about the rest of Peter's statement, ". . . the Son of the living God"? We address that in this second part of "Who Was Jesus Christ?"

by Tom Robinson

As addressed in the previous article in this series, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (verse 16)—which Jesus affirmed (verse 17). We examined the significance of Jesus coming as the Christ, the Messiah. But how are we to understand His being the Son of God?

To some of Jesus' day, "Son of God" was simply a title for the messianic king of the line of David. For, when God promised David that He would establish a perpetual dynasty through his descendants beginning with Solomon, God said, "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son" (1 Chronicles 17:13).

"This remarkable statement," notes *The Nelson Study Bible*, "affirmed that the dynasty of David had such an intimate relationship with God that its kings would be considered God's sons in an extraordinary way" (note on verse 13).

But was Jesus simply a special royal heir of David?

It is vital that we understand the truth. John wrote: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15). He further explained that "only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" can live a godly life of overcoming sin (1 John 5:5, New International Version). Indeed, John said, "whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23).

So Jesus' identity is of supreme importance. It is essential, therefore, that we study who He was—who He *is*. As we will see, He made some rather surprising statements about His identity.

The only begotten

The issue is further clouded by Scripture's reference to the angels of the spirit realm as "sons of God" (Job 38:7). Even Adam, the first man, was a "son of God"

(Luke 3:38). In both cases, God is "Father" through producing these beings through an act of creation. Converted Christians, spiritually begotten through the Holy Spirit, are also referred to as "sons of God" (Romans 8:14, 16), a fact we will examine more in another article in this series.

Yet Jesus said He was God's "*only begotten* Son" (John 3:16, emphasis added throughout). The apostle John still called Him that even long after there were many Spirit-begotten Christians in the world (1 John 4:9). Clearly, then, Jesus' identity as the *only begotten* Son of God was unique.

Today, many understand that this crucial aspect of Jesus' unique identity is to be found in His virgin birth. They are certainly on the right track. Let's notice what happened.

When Christ's mother, Mary, was betrothed to Joseph but still a virgin, an angel announced to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called *the Son of God*" (Luke 1:35).

When Mary miraculously became pregnant, an angel assured Joseph, ". . . That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20). Jesus, then, had a human mother but no immediate human father. Rather, God the Father was directly His Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is true of no other person who has ever lived. According to Luke 1:35, this is why Jesus was called the Son of God.

Furthermore, it should also be recognized that Jesus' conception was not only physical, but He was begotten to a *spiritual* life empowered by God the Father through the Holy Spirit. Although converted Christians are spiritually begotten of God at some point in life—after they repent of having lived in opposition to Him—Jesus' spiritual conception as God's Son happened at His physical conception, which again makes

Him unique. At no point was Jesus ever *converted* to God's way of righteousness, for, though He would grow in spiritual wisdom (Luke 2:40-52), He was never *unconverted*. He was, from conception, the perfect Son of God.

Making Himself God?

Jesus' claims of being the Son of God were too much for many in His day. They accused Him of blasphemy when He "said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). In fact, Jesus provoked them all the more by saying things such as "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). Again, the Jews cried blasphemy "because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (verse 33). They saw His claim of an intimate family relationship with God as placing Himself on the same level as God—and that, to them, was impossible.

But was Jesus actually claiming to be God? Let's examine the possibilities.

We clearly see hints that Jesus existed even before His human conception. Referring to an event that occurred before the creation of mankind, Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Yet was Jesus really around thousands of years before His own birth? And, if so, might He not have been as one of the angels, which would of course be quite remarkable in itself?

The clearest revelation came when Jesus was directly asked, "Whom do You make Yourself out to be?" (John 8:53)—and was then challenged over His age in regard to His claim of knowing something that Abraham had thought almost 2,000 years before. "Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?'" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (verses 57-58). Then the astonished crowd tried to stone Him to death (verse 59).

Why did His statement so incense the crowd? Not only was He claiming preexistence, He was claiming to be God! *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains: "I am" implies continuous existence, including existence when Abraham appeared. Jesus was, therefore, asserting that at the time of Abraham's birth, he existed. Furthermore, I AM was recognized by the Jews as a title of deity. When God commissioned Moses to demand from Pharaoh the release of the Israelites, he said, "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exod. 3:14). [One scholar] states that "the phrase harbors within itself the most authentic, the most audacious, and the most profound affirmation by Jesus of who he was" (1981, Vol. 9, p. 99).

This amazing truth is revealed elsewhere in the New Testament as well. Of God, the "Rock" of Israel in the Old Testament (compare Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:2), the apostle Paul explained, "That Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Yet how could this be? And who, then, is God the Father?

In the beginning

To help explain, the apostle John began his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made . . . And *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14).

Paul confirmed that God "created all things through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:9; compare Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus, then, was no mere man or angel. He was *God*, along *with* the Father.

The many scriptures that refer to God the Father and Jesus the Son, who is also God, help us to understand that together They constitute a *family*—the *God* family. That family, at present, has two divine members—God the Father and another called the Word, who became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. (As mentioned earlier, we will examine the role of converted Christians as members of the family of God in a future article.) As our free booklet *Who Is God?* explains in more detail, various scriptures do show that there is only one God, but

the one God is the *God family*.

Within that family the Father is preeminent. Jesus said, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Jesus explained that He serves as the Father's *spokesman*: ". . . I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught [or instructed] Me, I speak these things" (John 8:28). And "I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak . . . Whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak" (John 12:49-50).

It was in this capacity that Jesus could function as the "Word" of God—speaking and carrying out what the Father instructed Him, even commanding the universe into existence (Psalm 33:6).

No, Jesus Christ did not appear on the scene just in New Testament times. He was the "LORD" who interacted with people throughout the entire Old Testament. Yet what of the Father? *He* was, it may come as a surprise, generally unknown to mankind before Christ came in the flesh. In fact, one of the reasons Jesus came to earth was to *reveal* the Father (Matthew 11:27; John 1:18; 17:25-26).

To see this more clearly, consider that, although Abraham walked and talked with God, and Jacob wrestled with Him (see Genesis 18; 32:22-32), John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time." Jesus Himself told the Jews that they had "neither heard His [the Father's] voice at any time, nor seen His form" (John 5:37). Yet God had spoken the Ten Commandments to all Israel (Exodus 20:1).

This all makes much more sense when we realize that, though there are distinct references to the Father in the Old Testament (as in Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13), it was Jesus Christ who interacted with mankind as God on the Father's behalf.

God with us

No wonder Jesus was to be called Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), "which is translated, 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:23).

At His incarnation (coming in the flesh), the Word "emptied" Himself of the glory and might He had had as God with the Father (Philippians 2:7, New Revised Standard Version). For as a man, He explained, "I can of Myself do nothing" (John 5:30)—nothing supernatural of Himself, that is—and "the Father who dwells in Me does the works" (John 14:10).

Yet, although Jesus was no longer omnipotent while in the flesh, He was still *God*—the same divine *Person* who had created the universe. So others rightfully *worshipped* Him (Matthew 2:11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33). While human Jesus certainly was *more* than just a man, being *Immanuel*, God made flesh. But He was human in the fullest sense, for "in *all things* He had to be made like His brethren . . . For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15).

Just like the rest of us, Jesus, who constantly referred to Himself as the Son of Man, fully experienced life in the human flesh and was subject to all of its temptations—feeling the pulls of the flesh and of Satan's spiritual broadcast of wrong moods and attitudes (compare Ephesians 2:2). Yet Jesus never gave in and, thus, *never sinned* (1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

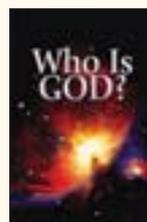
As the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29; Revelation 5:6), the sinless Jesus, our very Creator, laid down His life to pay the death penalty for the sins of all mankind, becoming a sacrifice for us so we could live eternally (John 3:16; Isaiah 53:1-12). In love for us, He died an agonizing death by crucifixion.

Yet that was not the end of the story. Before His death He had prayed to the Father, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5).

Thus, three days and nights after His burial, Jesus was *resurrected* to divine spirit life—restored to His former glorified state, again with inherent divine power (Colossians 2:9; Romans 1:4). And we are still to worship Him, even as we worship the Father (John 5:23). **GN**

Recommended Reading

This article has touched on only a few of the Scriptures relating to who and what Jesus was before His human birth. To learn more about the nature of Jesus Christ and God the Father as revealed in the Bible, request our free booklet *Who Is God?*



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



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