Modern Christianity's Forgotten Roots
From the Publisher

Reading the Book

The Bible is a great piece of English literature, say many who read the beautiful Shakespearean cadences of the King James Version of 1611. I recall one devoted teacher of English literature drawing my attention to the wonderful use of language in a passage in James 3 on the problems wrought by the human tongue.

It’s commendable to appreciate fine literature, but when it comes to real knowledge of the Bible beyond a superficial grasp of its content, little can be said for most people in the Western world. Yet we claim this book as a foundation of our Western heritage. In the United States, thought by many to be an unusually religious nation, surveys reveal a lack of some of the most basic biblical knowledge, even among those who lay claim to the name “Christian.”

It has been said that only four of 10 churchgoers can identify the man who betrayed Jesus Christ, and that many cannot list the first four books of the New Testament. In Europe lies an area known as “the North German plain of irreligion,” stretching from Germany through Scandinavia. There the Book of books attracts little serious attention in everyday life, yet that is the Europe tourists flock to in appreciation of magnificent cathedrals, churches and religious art.

Is the Bible itself destined to become no more than a mildly interesting religious artifact, like the buildings and paintings of a bygone age? Does it hold any relevance in a postmodern world? Some would say yes, citing the United States as an example of commitment to biblical values.

A few years ago I interviewed a man whose name is synonymous with surveys, George Gallup. We discussed the state of religious belief in the United States. I asked whether it was true that America is a religious country.

He said, in effect, that it depends on how you ask the question. If you’re asking about religious affiliation, 98 percent will fill in the blank with the name of a denomination. Dig a little deeper and ask about regular church attendance, and you are down to 42 percent. But, when it comes to whether a person’s everyday actions are affected by his religious convictions, we are dealing with less than 10 percent of the population.

It was an enlightening finding about an ostensibly religious nation. Perhaps it says something, not just about the state of knowledge, but about Americans’ understanding.

The Bible makes extraordinary claims about its authorship and its value to humanity. For example, the apostle Paul wrote to his fellow laborer Timothy that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Here are words that bear careful examination. The assertion is that Scripture contains words inspired by God Himself. Further, this passage claims that the Hebrew Bible, of which Paul was speaking at the time, was good for discovering truth, improving life and building character, and imparting knowledge of the right way to live. The Bible provides the man or woman who would seek God the platform from which to serve Him and humanity. We celebrate the lives of those who give of themselves to serve others. Certainly we should be thankful for their service and example. But should such good works be so remarkable? The Bible teaches us that they are our duty.

This issue of The Good News is focused in part on the Word of God as our guide to life. In a world adrift from its moral moorings, lost in a sea of relativism, it is vital that we discover the safe harbor of God’s Word.

—David Hulme
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*Photos: © 1997 PhotoDisc, Inc.  Cover: Photo illustration by Shaun Venish*
Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th-century Danish writer and religious philosopher, wrote that the “Christianity of the New Testament simply does not exist.” He questioned how popular Christianity had strayed so far from the way of life described and practiced in the Bible.

Is it possible that today’s Christianity is fundamentally different from the teachings of the apostles? Some scholars and serious students of the Bible have recognized and acknowledged that the practices of the early Church varied greatly from those of today.

Norbert Brox, professor of early church history at the University of Regensburg, Germany, describes the viewpoint of the early Church: “Thus the first [Christian] communities were groups that formed within Judaism. . . . Christians believed as before in the God of Israel: their Bible was the Bible of the Jews . . . They continued to observe (as Jesus did) the Jewish practice of temple worship and law (Acts 2.46; 10.14), and gave outsiders the impression of being a Jewish sect (Acts 24.5, 14; 28.22), not a new religion. They themselves probably also simply thought of themselves as Jews” (A Concise History of the Early Church, Continuum, New York, 1996, p. 4).

How did this transformation in the practices of Christianity come about?

Major shifts in Christianity

Some within the Christian congregations, representing themselves as faithful ministers of Christ, gradually began to introduce heretical teachings even in the time of the apostles. Paul described such men and their methods: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness . . .” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

These teachers appeared to represent Christ at a time when the masses of humanity lacked any significant education. To the unschooled believers of that time, their teachings probably seemed reasonable; they sounded right. Yet these teachers were really instruments of deception in Satan’s hands, used to lead others astray. Many may not have even realized their own errors and misguided motives.

Over time the damage was done. The apostle John, apparently the last survivor among the 12 original disciples, wrote of one false minister who had risen to power within the Church. This man was boldly rejecting John’s emissaries and excommunicating faithful
members (3 John 9-10). With John’s writings, the books and letters that would form the New Testament were complete. With his passing, however, reliable eyewitness accounts of events and changes in the Church largely ceased. We are left with confusing and contradictory accounts for the next several centuries.

**Persecution leads to changes**

Part of the lack of information about this time stems from persecution of the Church. Under Emperor Nero (A.D. 54-68), Christians in Rome were blamed for burning the city, and many were killed. Later the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96) demanded that all citizens of the empire worship him as a god. Christians and Jews alike who, in obedience to God’s commandments, refused to comply with the edict were vigorously persecuted. For several centuries waves of persecution engulfs Christianity and Judaism.

In the first and second centuries Jews revolted against Roman rule. The second rebellion in particular brought persecution of Jews and Judaism. Emperor Hadrian (117-138), upon capturing Jerusalem, razed it and built a new city that Jews were forbidden even to enter. He also banned circumcision and observance of the Sabbath.

Professor Brox describes the effect on the Church: “The Jewish Christians in Palestine had been driven out in the First Jewish War (66-70) but then had returned to Jerusalem; however, after the Bar Kokhba revolt, the Second Jewish War against the Romans (132-135), they had to leave the land because, as Jews, they had been circumcised, and all Jews were now banned on pain of death. So for the moment that meant the end of this [Jerusalem] church” (Brox, p. 19).

From the scanty historical records it appears that, to avoid punishment, a significant number of Christians began to avoid identification with Judaism during this time of intense persecution of Jews. The more visible portion of Christianity began a significant transition from the teachings of the apostles to an anti-Jewish religious philosophy. Former practices held in common with Judaism rapidly began to wane as new customs crept into the Church. Few summoned up the courage to face continual persecution for remaining faithful to the customs handed down by the apostles of Christ.

### The Passover-Easter debate

The church historian Eusebius, reporting on the Council of Nicaea (325), describes a debate going back to the second century between Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John who urged Christians to continue to keep the Passover as a memorial of Christ’s death, and Anicetus, bishop of Rome (155-166), who advocated a celebration of Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday. Later, bishop Victor I of Rome (189-199) issued an ultimatum that all were “to follow the Sunday practice of the Roman church and most other churches” (Brox, p. 124, emphasis added throughout).

At Nicaea the new custom of Easter won out over Passover. The Roman emperor Constantine decreed that those who refused to follow the Roman church’s lead were heretics and to be excommunicated.

His resulting letter showed the depth of his feelings regarding practices he considered “Jewish.”

“It appeared an unworthy thing,” he wrote, “that in the celebration of this most holy feast [Easter] we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul . . . Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd: for we have received from our Savior a different way . . .

“Strive and pray continually that the purity of your soul may not seem in anything to be sullied by fellowship with the custom of these most wicked men . . . All should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand, avoiding all participation in the perfurred conduct of the Jews” (Eusebius, Life of Constantine 3, 18-19, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Hendrickson, Grand Rapids, 1979, second series, Vol. 1, pp. 524-525).

### Constantine endorses ‘Christianity’

Constantine’s reign as emperor (306-337) dramatically changed the direction Christianity would take. Under his rule, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, and he was baptized (albeit on his deathbed).

But what was the nature of the Christianity he endorsed?

By now, much had already changed. Charles Guignebert, professor of the history of Christianity at the University of Paris, observes: “Contemplate the Christian Church at the beginning of the fourth century, therefore, and some difficulty will be experienced in recognizing in her the community of Apostolic times, or rather, we shall not be able to recognize it at all . . .” (The Early History of Christianity, Twayne, New York, 1927).

Consider also British historian Paul Johnson’s findings regarding Constantine: “He himself appears to have been a sun-worshipper, one of a number of late-pagan cults which had observances in common with the Christians. Thus the followers of Isis adored a madonna nursing her holy child; the cult of Attis and Cybele celebrated a day of blood and fasting, followed by the Hilaria resurrection-feast, a day of joy, on 25 March; the elitist Mithraics, many of whom were senior army officers, ate a sacred meal. Constantine was almost certainly a Mithraic, and his triumphal arch, built after his ‘conversion’, testifies to the Sun-god, or ‘unconquered sun.’

“Many Christians did not make a clear distinction between this sun-cult and their own. They referred to Christ ‘driving his chariot across the sky’: they held their services on Sunday, knelt towards the East and had their nativity-feast on 25 December, the birthday of the sun at the winter solstice. During the later pagan revival under the Emperor Julian many Christians found it easy to apostasize because of this confusion; . . . Constantine never abandoned sun-worship and kept the sun on his coins . . .

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**Emperor Constantine** dramatically changed the course of Christianity when he made it the official religion of the Roman Empire.
The True Origins of Christmas

Constantine’s reign also marked the transformation of a major pagan festival into Christianity’s major holiday—Christmas. Notice how this came to pass: “. . . About the year 330, the Church in Rome definitely assigned December 25 for the celebration of the birth of Christ . . . The choice of December 25 was influenced by the fact that the Romans, from the time of Emperor Aurelian (275), had celebrated the feast of the sun god (Sol Invictus; the Unconquered Sun) on that day.

“December 25 was called the ‘Birthday of the Sun,’ and great pagan religious celebrations of the Mithras cult were held all through the empire. What was more natural than that the Christians celebrate the birth of Him Who was the ‘Light of the World’ and the true ‘Sun of Justice’ on this very day?” (Francis X. Weiser, Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1952, p. 60-61).

Owen Chadwick, former professor of history at Cambridge University, gives additional details: “The high point of the Christian cult of the sun as a symbol of light was the making of Christmas Day. No one knew exactly when Jesus was born in Bethlehem . . . Many of his ecclesiastical arrangements indicate that he wanted a state Church, with the clergy as civil servants. His own role was not wholly removed from that of the pagan God-emperor—as witness the colossal heads and statues of himself with which he littered his empire—though he preferred the idea of a priest-king.

“How could the Christian Church, apparently quite willingly, accommodate this weird megalomania in its theocratic system? Was there a conscious bargain? Which side benefited most from this unseemly marriage between Church and State? Or, to put it another way, did the empire surrender to Christianity, or did Christianity prostitute itself to the empire?” (A History of Christianity, Atheneum, New York, 1976, pp. 67-69).

From Sabbath to Sunday

Constantine’s affection for sun worship led him to formalize a change in the weekly day of rest for Christianity. “In 321 Constantine introduced Sunday as a weekly day of rest for the society which he had Christianized as part of his religious policy, and on it no work was done . . . The rest from work on the Christian Sunday was derived from the Jewish sabbath commandment, with which Sunday intrinsically had no connection . . . So the present-day Sunday ultimately arises out of the Christian Lord’s Day or day of resurrection through the state legislation of late antiquity” (Brox, p. 105).

Warnings of Change in the Church

Is it possible that Christianity may have been radically transformed in previous centuries? Surprising as it may seem, both Jesus Christ and the apostles warned of changes that would come in the Church. Were these empty warnings, or did Christ foretell a subtle yet deadly threat to the religion that bears His name?

Notice the ominous tone of His warnings to His followers: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). He explained: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ “ (verses 21-23).

Jesus knew that some would feign obedience to His teachings, but their actions would reveal their motives. “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” He asked them (Luke 6:46, emphasis added throughout).

How would this be possible? Shortly before His death, Jesus described to His disciples the trends that would begin in the near future and culminate before His yet-future return to earth. He warned of false teachers who would “rise up and deceive many” (Matthew...
celebrated by cutting green branches and hanging little lights on them, and presents were given out in the god’s name. Sol’s weekly festival Sol-day—Sunday—became the Christian Sabbath…” (John Romer, Testament: The Bible and History, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1988, pp. 230-231).

To expand the universal church’s power and influence, clergy welcomed many new converts—and many new practices—into the church. Professor Guignebert describes this process: “Now at the beginning of the fifth century, the ignorant and the semi-Christians thronged into the Church in numbers... They had forgotten none of their pagan customs... The bishops of that period had to content themselves with redressing, as best they could, and in experimental fashion, the shocking malformations of the Christian faith which they perceived around them...

“[Properly instructing converts] was out of the question; they had to be content with teaching them no more than the symbol of baptism and then baptizing them en masse, postponing until a later date the task of eradicating their superstitions, which they preserved intact... This ‘later date’ never arrived, and the Church adapted to herself, as well as she could, them and their customs and beliefs. On their side, they were content to dress their paganism in a Christian cloak” (p. 208-210).

Guignebert describes the resulting bizarre synthesis that now formed Christianity: “The ancient festivals [are now] kept as holidays and celebrated in the country parts, and the Church can only neutralize their effect by turning them to account for her own profit. There is nothing stranger, from this point of view, than the instructions given by Gregory the Great to the monk Augustine, his missionary to England.

“He is to transform the temples into churches, after they have been ceremonially cleansed; and to replace the devil-sacrifices by processions in honor of some saint, with an offering of oxen to the glory of God, and the distribution of the flesh among the congregation. Moreover, the king of East Anglia, Redwald, after his baptism and Christian confession, is careful to keep opposite the altar in his church at which mass is celebrated, another altar where the sacrifices demanded by the ancient gods are carried out” (p. 214).

He observes: “It is sometimes very difficult to tell exactly from which pagan rite a particular Christian rite is derived, but it remains certain that the spirit of pagan ritualism became by degrees impressed upon Christianity, to such an extent that at last the whole of it might be found distributed through its ceremonies” (p. 121).

What does God say?

During these early centuries, Christianity radically transformed. Ecclesiastical leaders ignored God’s instruction. They disregarded God when He warned: “Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way... Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deuteronomy 12:30-32).

The apostles understood God’s instruction and steadfastly resisted the kind of changes that later infiltrated the Church. After all, this instruction was part of “the Holy Scriptures,” the only Bible they had at the time (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Although many blatantly non-Christian practices were toned down in later centuries, even a cursory research into many practices still popular reveals their roots.

But what is equally regrettable is that, by abandoning the practices of Jesus and the apostles, so many are missing out on a fuller understanding of true Christianity. There are still Christians who faithfully follow the practices and teachings of Jesus and the apostles who enjoyed the blessing of discerning God’s great plan for men and women everywhere. They have discovered the “narrow” way of life that few find (Matthew 7:14).

RECOMMENDED READING

Many people are surprised to discover the true teachings and practices of Jesus Christ and the apostles. The United Church of God offers several booklets explaining biblical truths discussed in this article. Request your free copies of The Gospel of the Kingdom, What Happens After Death?, Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest and God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. Please contact us at the telephone number or address in your country—or the country nearest you—on page 2.

24:11). Many of these would claim to come in His name and represent Him (verse 5), yet they would teach a different message. Many would fall prey to their deceptive teachings, Christ warned.

Notice that the deception would center on His person. They would rightly say Jesus was the Christ, yet deceive many. The issue turns on obedience to Christ (Luke 6:46). Worshiping Jesus Christ should always be accompanied by keeping the commandments of God. These deceptive trends would include “false christs and false prophets [who] will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24). So great will be their beguiling powers and teachings, said Jesus, that even those firmly grounded in biblical truth would be in danger of being led astray.

Did this great work of deception begin in the Church as Jesus prophesied? Yes, it did. The apostle Paul issued this sad prediction to the congregation in Ephesus: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30).

Echoing Jesus’ words about those who would distort His words to teach lawlessness—disobedience to the instructions in God’s law—Paul observed that “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” (2 Thessalonians 2:7) and will continue until Christ puts an end to it at His return (verse 8).

The apostle Peter also warned of this deceitful influence at work in the early Church. “But these were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).

In the same way the apostle John cautioned the brethren in the Church, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Considering these warnings and statements, we would do well to examine the roots of Christianity and see whether these trends did, in fact, influence the Church and possibly what you believe!

—Scott Ashley

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Tells the book of Acts is an eyewitness account of the development of the first three decades of the Church, from just after Christ’s death until about A.D. 60. Chapter 2 records the beginning of the Church, when God sent His Spirit to some 120 followers of Jesus Christ.

Many readers of the Bible are familiar with the miraculous events of that day—of how Christ’s followers were assembled together when the house was filled with the sound of a mighty wind, and what appeared to be tongues of fire came on those gathered there. Another dramatic miracle occurred as those people, now filled with God’s Spirit, began to speak in the languages of those gathered there in Jerusalem so that all could understand their words.

Often overlooked in this account is the day on which these events occurred—the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1), also called the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:16), one of the festivals God had commanded for His people many centuries before (Leviticus 23). In giving these festivals, God said that “these are My feasts... , the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times” (verses 2, 4). God told His people these festivals were to be “a statute forever throughout your generations” (verses 14, 21, 31, 41).

**Festivals in the early Church**

The Gospels show that Jesus Christ kept these same festivals (Matthew 26:17-19; John 7:10-14, 37-38). Both the book of Acts and Paul’s letters show the apostles keeping these festivals during the decades after Christ’s crucifixion (Acts 2:1-4; 18:21; 20:6, 16, 27:9). Most churches teach that these festivals were “nailed to the cross,” that they were somehow annulled when Christ died. Yet the unmistakable record of the Bible is that the early Church continued to observe them as they always had, but with greater grasp of their spiritual significance.

Speaking of one of these God-given feasts, the apostle Paul even urged the church in Corinth—a mixed group of gentile and Jewish believers—to “keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8). What religious festival could Paul be referring to? The Feast of Unleavened Bread, of course.

He further explained to them the significance of Passover (verse 7) and gave them detailed instructions on how to properly observe this ceremony (1 Corinthians 11:23-28).

These many references in the Gospels, Acts and Paul’s epistles prompt an obvious question: Since Jesus, the apostles and the early Church kept these festivals during the first three decades of the Church, from just after Christ’s death until about A.D. 60, why aren’t they taught and observed in churches today?

**God’s weekly Holy Day also observed**

The Gospels and the book of Acts are equally clear that Christ, the disciples and the early Church kept the weekly Sabbath—from Friday evening to Saturday evening, the seventh day of the week—as their day of rest and worship (Mark 6:2; Luke 4:16, 31-32; 13:10; Acts 13:14-14; 18:4). Jesus even called Himself “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28).

It was Jesus Christ’s custom to go to the synagogue every Sabbath to worship (Luke 4:16). Contrary to the teaching of those who say that Paul abandoned the Sabbath, it was his custom, too, to go to the synagogue every Sabbath (Acts 17:1-3), using the opportunity to teach others about Jesus Christ.

The weekly Sabbath is another of God’s festivals, like those mentioned earlier. It is, in fact, the first of His feasts listed (Leviticus 23:1-4). It is included in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), although it was created long before Sinai (Genesis 2:2-3) and commanded and enforced even before the Ten Commandments were formally given (Exodus 16:23-30).

As with God’s other feasts, the true Sabbath is ignored by the overwhelming majority of churches. Rather than keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week as God commanded, most churches observe the first day of the week—Sunday—a day nowhere commanded in the Bible as a day of worship. Why? If we are to observe any day as a weekly day of rest and worship, shouldn’t it be the same day Jesus Christ and the apostles kept?

**Other differences in practice**

We find other differences in teaching and practice as well. Many churches teach that obedience to God’s law is no longer necessary, that Christ kept it for us or it was “nailed to the cross” with Christ. This is directly contrary to Christ’s own words (Matthew 4:4; 5:17-19) and the teaching and practice of the apostles (Acts 24:14, 25:8; Romans 7:12, 22; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Following Christ’s example, the apostles powerfully preached about Jesus Christ’s return to establish the coming Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 21:27, 31; Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23, 31). But Paul warned that, even in his day, some were already preaching “a different gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6).

We see much confusion in churches about what the true gospel is. Most view the gospel as a message about Christ’s birth, life and death, but without really understanding why He came and why He had to die, and without proclaiming the message of God’s Kingdom that Christ Himself taught (Mark 1:14-15).

Similarly, Jesus and the apostles did not teach that the righteous ascend to heaven at death (John 3:13; Acts 2:29, 34), and they understood that man does not possess an immortal soul (Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Matthew 10:28).

Nowhere do we find popular religious holidays like Christmas approved in the Bible. The only time “Easter” is mentioned in the Bible (Acts 12:4, King James Version), it is a blatant mistranslation of the Greek word for Passover. Lent and its practices are nowhere found.

These are some of the major differences between the Christianity of the time of Christ and the apostles and that commonly practiced today.

—Scott Ashley
Rediscovering Christianity:
Scholars Have Second Thoughts

For centuries an ingrained bias has influenced scholars' and theologians' views of both the Old and New Testaments. Some are now realizing and correcting that error.

He bases his view on several points, one being that “historical context demonstrates how thoroughly Jewish—one might even say 'essentially Jewish'—were Jesus and the first Christians” (p. 53).

John T. Pawlikowski, a professor at Catholic Theological Union of Social Ethics, in Chicago, says about the Old Testament: “It is now becoming increasingly apparent to biblical scholars that the lack of a deep immersion into the spirit and content of the Hebrew Scriptures leaves the contemporary Christian with a truncated version of Jesus’ message. In effect, what remains is an emasculated version of biblical spirituality” (p. 31).

What was left out
But surely, you say, biblical students learn about the entire Bible in depth, don’t they? These scholars tell us otherwise. In fact, they reveal that many are not taught much about the largest portion of the Bible, the Old Testament. Admitting to the weaknesses of his professional education, Presbyterian minister David Read says, “I remember in my early days as a preacher being forced to reconsider the assumption that the New Testament gospel of God’s grace had replaced the Law as the center of a living religion and therefore presumably rendered most of the Old Testament obsolete” (p. 66).

He asks: “Have I been encouraging certain false assumptions and misrepresentations that have been part of the homiletical diet in a great many Protestant churches? There is, for instance, the simplistic picture of the Judaism of Jesus’s contemporaries as a religion of harsh legalism dominated by a law whose regulations, ever expanding, were ruthlessly enforced by a kind of super-clergy known as Pharisees” (pp. 64-65).

Sadly, many such misunderstandings...
abound. These statements and others like them grow out of a deepening recognition that bias toward the religion of the Jews in New Testament times has plagued traditional Christianity almost from inception, one early anti-Jewish teacher being Marcion.

Marcion, prominent in influence in the second century, misinterpreted the God of the Old Testament as heartless and irreconcilable with the New Testament’s God of mercy. In his misinformed zeal, he became convinced that the church was mistaken in aligning itself with the religion, literature and practices of the Jews.

Although ecclesiastical leaders subsequently denounced Marcion’s teachings and affirmed the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, Marcion’s extreme views spread, century after century, planting poisonous seeds: first of Judeophobia and later, as we have seen in our time, anti-Semitism.

The seeds of today’s change

Today’s trend to openness, which according to Pawlikowski originated about 30 years ago, has borne results such as the following: “The removal from mainline Christian educational texts of the charge that Jews collectively were responsible for the death of Jesus, that the Pharisees were the arch enemies of Jesus and spiritually soulless, that Jews had been displaced by Christians in the covenantal relationship with God as a result of refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah, that the ‘Old Testament’ was totally inferior to the New and that Jewish faith was rooted in legalism while Christian religion was based on grace. This phase is substantially complete as far as it goes for most of the mainline churches” (pp. 29-30).

Pawlikowski also observes, “The claimed total opposition to Torah which theologians, especially in the Protestant churches, frequently made the basis for their theological contrast between Christianity and Judaism (freedom/grace vs. Law) now appears to rest on something less than solid ground” (p. 32).

We should also look at the apostle Paul and whether his teaching and example were in competition with Christ’s, as Bultmann and others have insisted.

The law’s spiritual intent

When members of the early Church observed the law of God, they did so with deepened understanding. That was because they were intimately familiar with the teachings of both Jesus and Paul—that it is possible to fulfill the law in the Spirit, according to its spiritual intent. Their teaching was not that God’s law was done away. For example, Paul says that “the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4).

The International Critical Commentary more clearly explains the relevance of Romans 8:4, as well as showing its connections with the Hebrew Scriptures: “God’s purpose in ‘condemning’ sin was
that His law’s requirement might be fulfilled in us, that is, that his law might be established in the sense of at last being truly and sincerely obeyed—the fulfillment of the promises of Jer 31:33 and Ezek 36:26.”

The commentary has a footnote to Jeremiah 31:33 that clarifies an important misunderstanding many have about this passage. It first references the following: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The footnote then explains that this passage “is often misunderstood as a promise of a new law to take the place of the old or else as a promise of a religion without law at all. But the new thing promised in v. 33 is, in fact, neither a new law nor freedom from law, but a sincere inward desire and determination on the part of God’s people to obey the law already given to them (‘my law’).”

**Telling words**

Those scholars who are rectifying their misconceptions perpetuated by their churches should be applauded. As they sort through their misunderstandings of Judaism, Jewishness and the Old Testament religion, they are beginning to see the entire Bible in a new light. Through these scholars’ efforts, some may arrive at a significant turning point in theological understanding: that the scriptures of the Old Testament and the apostolic writings of the New, rather than contradicting each other, complement each other.

If the evidence of and reasons for anti-Jewish leanings are accepted, and the logical conclusions and practical lessons drawn, then popular Christianity’s understanding of the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, could be dramatically altered. Would it, however, become “the faith once delivered,” for which Jude instructs us to “earnestly contend”?

Realistically, we still have a long way to go before a correct view of the essential Jewishness of Jesus and the early Church can be achieved. Some recent ecclesiastical writings still have the earlier misguided assumptions in place, and they reappear in certain denominations’ texts.

It seems that the scholars who have exhibited the courage to turn away from the theological faults of the past have not yet taken their thinking to its logical conclusion. For that reason their writings sometimes reveal a willingness to cling to aspects of their former teaching.

Meanwhile, teachers who understand the truth and who are unhampered by bias and misconception need to speak that truth: the truth that Christ kept the law and that Paul taught Jew and gentile alike to imitate his actions and practices as he imitated those of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). This is the Christianity that Jesus Christ and the early Church practiced, the Christianity plainly laid out in the Bible. This is the Christianity that has God’s blessing!

Over the centuries the Church of God has consistently held to an unerring belief... Continued on page 16

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Scholars Take Up Paul’s Cause

A new willingness is evident among scholars to admit that the traditional characterization of Paul as a rebel against the law is deeply flawed.

In his book Paul and the Jewish Law, Dutch Reformed scholar Peter Tomson identifies three common but erroneous ideas about the apostle to the gentiles.

The first mistaken assumption he mentions is that the center of Paul’s thought is an attack on the Jewish religious practices of his day. The second assumption is that the law revealed through Moses no longer had any practical meaning for Paul in his everyday life. The third assumption is that to understand Paul one need not consult Jewish literature, but only Greek works.

Tomson explains that the first notion appears nowhere in literature before the Protestant Reformation. Thus for almost 1,500 years we find no evidence that Paul’s writings were considered an attack on the law.

Of 1 Corinthians, for example, Tomson says it “is not only remarkable among Paul’s letters for its ‘legal’ and ‘Jewish’ character, but it appears very much to reflect Paul’s own thinking and was recognized as such in the early church” (Paul and the Jewish Law, p. 69). Later Tomson says this epistle is “a letter replete with practical instruction...The Law is affirmed as an authoritative source of practical teaching...” (p. 73).

David Wenham, an Oxford University professor, in his book about the relationship between Jesus and Paul (Paul: Follower of Jesus, or Founder of Christianity?), reveals a Paul at one with his Master. One of the book’s reviewers says one of its most important contributions is in revealing that “the wedge often driven between Jesus and Paul is a figment of scholarly imagination.”

Wenham assesses Paul’s view of himself: “Paul saw himself as the slave of Jesus Christ, not the founder of Christianity. He was right to see himself in that way. The importance of this conclusion, if it is broadly correct, is great. It has implications for our understanding of the Gospel traditions, for our understanding of early Christianity, and for our understanding of Paul.

“If the primary text that Paul is expounding in his writings is the text of Jesus, then instead of reading Paul’s letters in isolation from the Gospels, it will be important to read them in light of the Gospels—not falling into naive harmonization, but recognizing that Paul was above all motivated by a desire to follow Jesus” (p. 410).

For evidence of that desire of Paul to follow Jesus—the One who said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17)—we need only to read Romans 13:8-10: “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, all are summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

Nothing in Paul’s writings—about himself, Jesus Christ or the Church—justifies calling Paul a rebel.

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David Hulme
An Overview of Conditions

The Middle East: Ticking toward disaster?

According to veteran journalist Robert Fisk, “the West is ignoring all the signs that the Middle East is about to explode.” To him and some other observers, the Oslo peace process is long dead. He believes “a war is not far away” and writes that “almost anyone in the Middle East will tell you this.” And yet he says: “Almost no one in the United States or Europe believes it.” Americans and Europeans simply talk of a “low point in the peace process.”

It was back in April that Israeli commentator Hemi Shalev wrote in Maariv, an Israeli paper, that “more and more people, including those who should know, are starting to believe that an enormous explosion is unavoidable. If the Americans do not succeed in stopping the deterioration at the last moment, and if the leaders do not come to their senses before it is too late, the region will go up in flames and the historic act of conciliation will sink into rivers of blood, both ours and theirs.”

Intelligence reports indicate that Israeli commandos have undergone intensive training for “snatch raids” in search of terrorists in Palestinian territory—one of which ended disastrously in early September with the deaths of 12 Israeli commandos—and there is talk of a possible “reinvasion.”

Even more frightening in the longer run are persistent reports of further weapons development in Iran and Syria, to not mention the intentions of Iraq. For instance, the American commander in the Persian Gulf “gave a stark warning that Iran might be closer to developing nuclear weapons than had previously been assessed.” Gen. Binford Peay “predicted that Iran could be a nuclear power by the turn of the century.” Though he declined to be pinned down on an exact year, the U.S. Gulf chief nonetheless warned that the time “is coming sooner.” Also, Israel has long persisted in her warnings about Iranian weapons-development potential.

Reports are also extant that, “with peace talks deadlocked for more than a year, Syria has been accelerating its missile programme and building new launch pads.” (Sources: The Independent on Sunday, The Jewish Chronicle, The Times of London, emphasis added.)

Pope reminds Europe of its Christian roots

The pope is from Poland, the first non-Italian pontiff for more than 400 years. Some observers believe that John Paul II helped precipitate Eastern Europe’s break on the communist stranglehold when he visited Poland early in his Vatican reign.

Then recently the pope returned to Poland for meetings that could influence events in Europe. The Los Angeles Times reported: “In an extraordinary gathering, Pope John Paul II brought seven European presidents together, telling them during an open-air mass in Gniezno attended by 250,000 Poles that a wall of economic and political selfishness as divisive as the Communist-era Berlin Wall threatens unity in Europe. The presidents from Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania and Ukraine later had a private meeting with the Pope.”

Apparently this is the first time a pope has met with so many presidents of countries at once. John Paul’s private comments to them were believed to reinforce the importance of Europe retaining its identity.

Also seen as particularly significant were the observations of Germany’s President Roman Herzog: “What links us in Europe is the Christian roots, our common culture. This is why I see all the nations that want to join the community joining in.” No one should forget the pontiff’s remarks during mass: “Europe will never achieve authentic unity if its Christian roots are ignored.”

Unlike in the United States, the secular and the religious are not necessarily seen as separate entities in Catholic Europe. The church is viewed as having a strong role to play in uniting Eastern and Western Europe. The pope sees Europe as one entity “from the Atlantic to the Urals.” (Sources: The Associated Press, The Los Angeles Times)

Gay movement continues to make inroads

This summer some 250,000 people converged on central London to celebrate the 26th annual Gay Pride Festival. All three major British political parties sent their warm regards.

One newspaper reported that “homosexual campaigners for more rights were given a double boost... when the Church of England edged towards accepting the ordination of gay priests and the government made clear that the age of [homosexual] consent was being lowered to 16.”

At the same time some government officials were advocating that the legal smoking age be raised to 18.

Fortunately, among all the politically correct voices commenting on the homosexual scene there are a few dissenting voices. One such is Daniel Farson, author and a homosexual himself, who wrote: “This Government, headed by a church-going Christian, is engaging in political correctness of the worst sort. It is driven by the aggressive gay lobby. And it will do untold damage to the vulnerable young.”

British columnist and author Leo McKinstry made the following sensible observations about the gay-rights agenda: “This agenda, including calls for gay marriages, gay sex education in schools and a lower age of consent, is based on the concept that every form of sexual behaviour is valid and
should be respected, no matter how promiscuous or bizarre. This outlook is the dominant creed of our age. But it has damaging consequences for our society.

“Take marriage and the family. In the brave new world of gay rights, no moral distinction is made between the sacrifices involved in bringing up children within a stable relationship and irresponsible hedonism. Both are presented as just different lifestyle choices. Such a disastrous message is now given out to schoolchildren.” (Sources: The Sunday Times, The Times of London, Daily Mail; emphasis added.)

**Resistant staph found in America**

A deadly strain of antibiotic-resistant staph bacteria was recently identified in a Michigan man, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This find follows on the heels of a similar discovery of drug-resistant staph in Japan earlier this year. Both strains showed an intermediate level of resistance to vancomycin, one step away from immunity to the antibiotic long considered to be the last line of defense in the medical arsenal.

Many strains of staph bacteria inhabit the planet. They are the collective cause of 13 percent of hospital infections in the United States, some two million cases each year leading to 60,000 to 80,000 deaths annually. The bacteria spread on exposed surfaces such as clothing, equipment, walls and floors, and thus can be passed to patients. To deal with the problem, many hospitals strictly isolate their weakest patients and carefully regulate use of their most powerful antibiotics lest additional strains of staph mutate and develop resistance to the drugs.

Although doctors successfully treated the cases in Michigan and Japan with other antibiotics, concern is growing in the medical community over the lack of alternative drugs to treat such infections, considering that it often takes years to successfully develop and test new antibiotics.

Scientists expected such a staph strain to eventually appear in the United States. “The timer is going off,” commented William Jarvis, medical epidemiologist with the CDC. “We were concerned it would emerge here, it has emerged here, and we are concerned we’re going to see it popping up in more places.” (Source: The Associated Press.)

**Record number of Americans in jail**

The number of adults in U.S. jails, on probation or parole has soared upward 131 percent, those in jail jumping 100 percent, those on parole rising 134 percent and those on probation increasing 61 percent. The total represents 2.8 percent of the American adult population.

Although women make up only 6.3 percent of the prison population, they account for an increasing number of the incarcerated, said the report. Nearly 75,000 women were serving prison sentences in 1996, a 9.1 percent increase over the previous year. More than 650,000 women were on probation and 79,000 on parole. Officials attribute much of this increase to mandatory sentencing for drug offenses.

Although four of every five arrests are of men, the number of women involved in criminal activity is increasing at a much higher rate. While the number of men arrested rose 12 percent between 1986 and 1996, the number of women arrested rose by an extraordinary 38 percent. (Sources: Associated Press, USA Today, The Washington Post.)

**Britain’s violent-crime rate equals America’s**

According to recent reports, British muggings and other robberies and sexual assaults on women rival U.S. rates. England and Wales lead European crime statistics on car theft, burglary and general violence. European statistics show a 31 percent increase in crimes in England and Wales as recorded by police between 1987 and 1995, easily leading the rest of Europe. Somehow Scotland has escaped this grim increase, showing a 4 percent increase over the same period. A recent wave of muggings has particularly alarmed authorities.

Not much more than a generation ago Britain was the most civilized, relatively crime-free society on earth. What has happened?

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**El Niño to affect worldwide weather?**

In 1982-83, “El Niño,” a warming of waters in the eastern Pacific that researchers believe leads to changing global weather patterns, is believed to have been responsible for 2,000 deaths and $13 billion in damage. Some scientists caution that the El Niño now developing could be even more severe in its effects on world weather in coming months.

The El Niño weather pattern typically recurs every three to five years, bringing extremes of storms and flooding in some areas and drought in others. Scientists blame this year’s developing El Niño weather pattern for recent dry weather in Australia, where poor germination and early growth for winter grains portend a low winter wheat harvest. El Niño is also expected to bring drought conditions to Indonesia, Thailand, India, Pakistan and much of the African continent.

At the same time, El Niño is expected to bring wetter weather and flooding to Peru, Uruguay and southern Brazil. Excessive rains in Argentina have already caused flooding and planting delays. (Source: U.S. Wheat Associates newsletter)

—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley

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

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—John Ross Schroeder and Scott Ashley
Australia is truly at the proverbial crossroads. Popularly referred to as the land “down under,” it is the only continent that is a single country.

At the dawn of a new millennium, as they begin to celebrate 100 years of political independence from Great Britain, Australians are contemplating an uncertain future, looking to Asia more than to the mother country and the United States. This redirection will impact not only Australia itself, but Britain and America, in the years to come.

Australia’s international priorities reflect the ever-changing world scene, particularly when it comes to economic and political power.

At the turn of the 20th century, after more than a century of British colonial rule, the Commonwealth of Australia was established in 1901 as a dominion of the British Empire, alongside Canada, soon thereafter to be joined by New Zealand and South Africa.

Discovered by British sea captain James Cook in 1770 and originally designated as a penal colony, Australia has played an important role in history, disproportionate to her small population (now about 18 million). This important “gate,” a prophesied blessing given to some of the descendants of Abraham by Almighty God (Genesis 22:17; 24:60), has proved of vital strategic importance to Britain and the United States for over a century.

Australia aids its mother country

Before independence, Australian troops fought alongside other British imperial troops in the Sudan in 1896 and against the Boers in South Africa from 1899 to 1902. After independence, they were to play an even greater role in the two world wars.

From the beginning of World War I, in 1914, Australia contributed greatly to the efforts of the British Empire and Commonwealth in defeating the Central European empires and their allies. Its political leaders universally supported the war effort, and the nation was positive and upbeat throughout the war, psychologically and physically prepared for the conflict.

Some 330,000 Australian troops served in the Allied war effort. About 60,000 died, and 165,000 were wounded. When taking into account Australia’s small population at that time, it can truly be said that few nations made an equivalent sacrifice.

Some believed there was little need for Australia to get involved in the first place, since she was thousands of miles away from most of the conflict. In the words of Winston Churchill, it was as though some ancient ancestral voice were calling them to action—and they all came.

Members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) made their greatest sacrifice in the Dardanelles campaign in 1915. The day of the landing at Gallipoli, April 25, became a day of national reverence still honored by Australians three generations later.

Before Gallipoli, in the early months of the war, Australian troops had captured neighboring German New Guinea from the enemy, and the Australian vessel Sydney had sunk the German cruiser Emden near the Cocos Islands.

Later in World War I Australians fought valiantly in some of the fiercest battles in France and also in Palestine, where the Australian cavalry contributed to the defeat of Turkish forces.

World War II threatens

World War II saw similar sacrifice, though this time Australia itself was directly threatened. The northern city of Darwin was bombed by Japanese aircraft, and intense fighting took place on the island of New Guinea.

Before the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor that extended World War II to the Pacific, Australians were already supporting the British in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The Royal Australian Air Force contributed greatly to the defense of the British Isles during the Battle of Britain. The Australian Navy operated in the Mediterranean, and Australian troops fought in
the long North African campaign. The successful Allied defense of Tobruk would not have been possible without Australian troops.

Australia’s greatest wartime setback took place shortly after Pearl Harbor, when 15,000 Australian troops became prisoners of the Japanese after the fall of the British-ruled island of Singapore, a major turning point in World War II and in the history of the British Empire.

It was the greatest defeat the empire had suffered in modern history. Psychologically, it was devastating, made worse because seemingly invincible Europeans had been defeated by Asians, who at that time were erroneously perceived as backward. It foreshadowed the withdrawal of the colonial powers from Asia and the ascendancy of the Asians themselves, even though the British did retake Singapore near the end of the war.

Some 30,000 Australians died in World War II, and 65,000 were wounded. So, once again in proportion to their small population, Australians made an enormous contribution to the Allied effort, suffering substantial losses.

Australia shifts its focus

World War II also saw Australia changing direction. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, realizing that Great Britain was preoccupied in Europe, Australian Labour prime minister John Curtin declared: “I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free from any pangs about our traditional links of friendship to Britain.”

Australia was to remain under the British crown and a member of the British Commonwealth, but her defense priorities were now with the United States, which would emerge after World War II as the greatest power in the world. In February 1942 Curtin defied British prime minister Winston Churchill by insisting that Australian troops, victorious in the Middle East, should return to Australia for home defense rather than go to Burma to support the British against Japan.

Australia, long important to Britain with its huge empire in the Far East, now became equally important to the United States. Gen. Douglas MacArthur made his headquarters first in Melbourne and then in Brisbane. The Australian Navy assisted in the American victory in the Battle of the Coral Sea, and the two nations fought alongside each other in numerous battles throughout the Pacific War.

A country transformed

Both world wars boosted Australia’s economy, which didn’t do so well during the Great Depression of the early 1930s. Australia’s population at that time actually declined, with emigration exceeding immigration for the first and only time in its history.

Australia’s economy changed dramatically toward the end of World War II, with greater industrialization and a lessening of the importance of agricultural production. Affluence followed for most Australians in the postwar years, giving them one of the highest standards of living in the world.

The nation was to change even more after victory in the Pacific. In 1946 immigration policies were altered. Instead of looking to Great Britain and Ireland for most of its newcomers, Australia encouraged massive immigration from mainland Europe for almost 30 years. The ethnic composition of the country shifted with the arrival of some 100,000 new people a year. It was to be transformed even more dramatically after 1973 when the “white Australia” policy, introduced in the first decade of this century, was ended and preference was given to Asians seeking to enter the country.

Ties with Great Britain continued to weaken, though Australians continued to remain loyal to Queen Elizabeth as queen of Australia. In the mid-’60s, when the British people themselves were enamored of socialism and many people tired of the royal family, a British cartoon at the time showed the queen’s husband, Prince Philip, commenting to his wife: “Never mind, dear. You’re still top of the pops in Australia.”

The British national anthem, “God Save the Queen,” was shared by Australians until a few years ago, and the Union Jack still remains a part of the Australian national flag.

Trade ties with the United States and Japan became more important than those with Britain, especially after Britain entered the European Common Market in 1973. Australians and New Zealanders fought alongside the United States in Vietnam, as...
they had done in Korea. The difference in Vietnam was that Britain was missing.

**Strengthening ties with Asia**

From the 1970s until the present, ties with Asia have become increasingly more important to Australians as their trade with the continent to the north has boomed. The century that began with heavy emphasis on ties with Britain, changing to close relations with the United States in the middle of the century, is ending with a commitment to Asia, reflecting changing power structures on the world scene.

Australia’s last Labour government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Paul Keating, announced its intention to remove Queen Elizabeth as Australia’s head of state. This would show Australia’s friends in Asia that her future was with them and that Australia now was an Asian country and not an outpost of a European colonial power.

This was not the whole story. A previous Labour government, under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, was dismissed in 1975 by the queen’s representative in Australia, the governor-general, a move that rekindled republican sympathies in a country that in the 1920s had been radical.

Anti-British sentiment also increased when Great Britain joined the Common Market. The mother country began to trade more and more with other European nations and less with Australia and New Zealand. Despite the fact that Australian farmers were left with diminished export markets, most of them, as supporters of the Australian Country Party, remain committed to Australia’s constitutional monarchy.

Another factor in Australia’s shift of orientation is the country’s dramatic demographic change. During the last 50 years Australia has effectively changed hands. Once dominated by people of mostly British and Protestant descent, Australia’s large Irish Catholic community has played an increasingly important role in the last few decades. Now descendants of postwar European immigrants are more powerful. Soon those of Asian descent will also be members of the Australian establishment.

**Political change**

All these factors contribute to the cries for a republic. Americans should note that many Australians do not want a republic on the American model. Australian politicians like a stronger form of centralized government and so will likely opt for simply replacing the queen with a local figurehead, probably a government-appointed senior politician. Of course, not all Australians are keen to see a republic created. A substantial number still retain a considerable loyalty to the British crown.

This may, however, foreshadow instability in the next century. It’s hard to find a former British territory that has changed to a republican form of government and has successfully preserved traditional freedoms and the rule of law. The Commonwealth has its share of unstable nations that are fairly frequent victims of military coups and dictatorships, with the seemingly inevitable corrupt politicians.

Australians, who have enjoyed more than 200 years of stability under the crown—including almost a century of independence under their present constitution, the third-oldest written constitution in the world—may find they suffer problems similar to other Commonwealth nations if and when they dispense with the services of the House of Windsor.

They may also find that their cultural identity changes. Severing the final tie with the mother country at a crucial time in the nation’s history may lead to an increasing Asianization of the nation. Looking ahead, one wonders just how Australia can avoid becoming an Asian nation in every sense of the term, rather than a Western nation in Asia.

Meanwhile, economic problems in Australia are leading to defense cuts. It is doubtful that Australians today would be able to contribute substantially to any major conflict as they did in two previous global wars.

Australia, a country of great importance to the English-speaking world for more than a century to whom we in the Western world owe so much, is changing rapidly in a direction that emphasizes the erosion that has taken place in the unity of the former Allied powers, the nations of the British Commonwealth and the United States.

Some may see these developments as progress, but history and prophecy suggest otherwise. The weakening of ties between the nations of the English-speaking world, an alliance that has preserved the freedoms of the Western world throughout this century, is further proof that God is breaking the pride of their power (Leviticus 26:18-19), a prophesied punishment for the sins of the people. GN

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**Scholars**

Continued from page 11

in the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice solidly expressed in the true Christian’s obedient way of life. You can know from the Bible itself what the faith once delivered is, regardless of the direction in which particular scholars and denominations go. Write for our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and find out. (See page 2 for our address in your country or the country nearest you.) GN

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**Back to (All) the Bible**

The Roman Catholic examination of anti-Judaism has produced a wealth of commentary. The following details from official Vatican statements are significant with respect to some scholars’ reevaluation of their view of Christ and the law.

From Within Context: Guidelines for the Catechetical Presentation of Jewish and Judaism in the New Testament (1986): “The dynamic reality that is Jewish Law should never be depcted as ‘fossilized’ or reduced to ‘legalism’ (p. 66)” (Removing Anti-Judaism From the Pulpit, p. 88, footnote).

The same footnote, cited immediately above, quotes another source, Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nosta Aetate (4), December 1, 1974: “The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition founded upon it must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism, with no appeal to the love of God and neighbor (cf. Dt 6:5; Lv 19:18; Mt 22:34-40).”

In another stunning statement, the Jesuit scholar Robert Daly writes: “The doctrine that God’s covenant with Israel has been abrogated and rendered worthless by the new covenant in Jesus Christ is no longer, at least not in the Roman Catholic and similar traditions, an acceptable Christian position” (Removing Anti-Judaism, p. 52).

As some scholars come to such conclusions, what is the implication for other scholars and members of their churches? Will they now realize that some of the bedrock teachings of most churches are in jeopardy if they take their newfound views of God’s law to their logical conclusion?

—David Hulme
The Yoruba people of West Africa have an old saying: “However far the stream flows, it never forgets its source.” But, we may ask, have the people of the United States forgotten the source of their blessings?

The United States observes the national holiday of Thanksgiving, dedicated to remembering the many blessings America enjoys: hills and plains filled with mineral riches; fertile soil that grows endless crops of grain; waters teeming with fish; pastures feeding millions of head of livestock; forests for building homes, schools, hospitals and industrial complexes; two long borders on oceans providing transportation, food and natural barriers for defense.

There is more, of course. But, when we ask ourselves how we have been blessed, another question should come to mind: How grateful are we for these blessings? And, perhaps more crucial, do we remember the real source of these blessings?

Although Thanksgiving Day is an American institution, any country derives the benefits from following the biblical principle of always being thankful to God for His bountiful blessings.

The origins of Thanksgiving

The first Thanksgiving celebration, in 1621, lasted three days. Plymouth Colony’s Governor William Bradford, issued a thanksgiving proclamation, and for three days the Pilgrims feasted with their Indian guests on wild turkey and venison.

Days of thanksgiving were celebrated sporadically until President George Washington proclaimed a nationwide day of thanksgiving on November 26, 1789. He made it clear that the day should be dedicated to prayer and giving thanks to God.

Due credit for finally establishing Thanksgiving Day as a lasting national holiday goes to Sarah J. Hale, editor and founder of the Ladies’ Magazine. Her editorials and letters to President Abraham Lincoln resulted in Lincoln’s proclamation, in 1863, designating the last Thursday in November as a national holiday of thanksgiving. Later, in 1941, Congress adopted a joint resolution setting the date on the fourth Thursday of November.

For 376 years, and with few exceptions, this holiday has been kept. But what does it mean to us? Do we truly show our gratitude to God for His bountiful blessings, or are they merely something we’ve come to take for granted?

The rigors of pilgrimage

America is a nation of immigrants. In the New World, settlers sought spiritual and economic renewal. America represented an opportunity to escape war, despotism, material want and religious persecution. The New World was a place to avoid some of the problems of the Old World.

But the earliest settlements of New England were not established easily. The first permanent settlement had its origins in the restlessness of a small, devoutly religious group of Englishmen living in the Netherlands. Since they felt that their only hope was withdrawal from the established church, they were called Separatists.

Persecution had forced them to flee to Holland in 1609. Yet, after a decade in the Netherlands, the English Separatists were eager to move again. Holland’s society was hospitable and tolerant, but it was too densely settled for the Separatists, who desired to remain apart from the world. William Bradford, in his History of Plymouth Plantation, explained why the Separatists moved from Holland: “But that which was more lamentable, and of all sorrows most heavy to be borne, was that many of their children . . . were drawn by evil examples into extravagant and dangerous courses, getting the reins off their necks and departing from their parents. Some became soldiers; others took upon
Humility and Thankfulness Go Hand in Hand

Abraham Lincoln, anguish by the ravages of civil war, declared a “Proclamation of a National Fast-Day” on March 30, 1863. The U.S. Senate requested President Lincoln to set apart a day for national prayer and humiliation. Here is part of that proclamation:

“Whereas, it is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord:

“And inasmuch as we know that by his divine law nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven.

“We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and our national reformation as a whole people? no other nation has ever grown; but grown in numbers, wealth, and power as we have.

“Deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these multiplied and enriched and strengthened with unbroken success, we have become too intoxicated with the blessings of peace, union, and harmony to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us:

“Whereas, it is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord:

“And inasmuch as we know that by his divine law nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven.

“We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us:


—Jerold Aust

James Russell Lowell wrote an introduction to The Works of Abraham Lincoln, State Papers, 1861-1865 (edited by John H. Clifford and Marion M. Miller, The University Society, New York, 1908, Vol. 6). In it Lowell describes the terrible conditions facing the Union and Mr. Lincoln. He especially addresses the notion that from that time forward the South and North would experience increasing difficulty feeling at ease and comfortable with one another. It was a sad time.

Note part of the “Proclamation of Thanksgiving” that President Lincoln delivered October 20, 1863: “It has pleased almighty God to prolong our national life another year. Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do hereby appoint and set apart the last Thursday of November next as a day which I desire to be observed by all my fellow-citizens, wherever they may then be, as a day of thanksgiving and praise to almighty God, the beneficent Creator and Ruler of the universe.

“And I do further recommend to my fellow-citizens aforesaid, that on that occasion they do reverently humble themselves in the dust, and from thence offer up penitent and fervent prayers and supplications to the great Disposer of events for a return of the inestimable blessings of peace, union, and harmony throughout the land which it has pleased him to assign as a dwelling-place for ourselves and for our posterity throughout all generations” (ibid., p. 166).

These expressions of praise, thankfulness and humility can guide us in the late 20th century, as some presidents of this century have reminded us. How far have we come as a society since President Lincoln’s formal proclamation?

Modern signs of ingratitude

Sadly, much of society has strayed from the moral and religious underpinnings that characterized America’s earlier years. Hedonism—“If it feels good, do it”—has become a way of life for many. Tales of the first Thanksgiving are often told, but not as recently as other holidays. As theONDAC and the SCA report, much of today’s society has passed over the lessons of the past. We are often so busy with our own problems that we forget to be thankful for what we have. This is a sad state of affairs.”

—James Russell Lowell

Modern signs of ingratitude

Sadly, much of society has strayed from the moral and religious underpinnings that characterized America’s earlier years. Hedonism—“If it feels...
good, do it”—has become the order of the day, continually evidenced in the entertainment media and modern culture. Self-oriented social fragmentation is replacing a once-common outlook of concern about our personal example and the welfare of others. Increasingly, the prevailing attitude is epitomized by the saying, “I’ve got mine; you get your own.” These attitudes are pervasive, corrupting the lives of our children, our future leaders.

President Lincoln issued a timeless warning: Our greatest enemy is not beyond our shores, but the enemy within. On January 27, 1838, he warned his fellow Americans with these words: “All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

“At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide” (Don E. Fehrenbacher, Abraham Lincoln, Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858, Literary Classics of the United States, New York, 1989, pp. 28-29).

The unrealized link

One of the greatest basic weaknesses of human nature is that of ingratitude. The Bible has much to say about it.

After their Exodus from Egypt, the ancient Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness until the earlier, faithless generation died out. In the book of Deuteronomy, God through Moses reminded members of the new generation of the importance of obedience if they were to learn from the sad example of their parents. They were exhorted to remember God’s law and their parents’ lack of obedience to it. The law was to be repeated in their hearing lest they forget God’s requirements and be cursed.

Moses repeated God’s Ten Commandments to Israel (Deuteronomy 5). God expressed His sorrow that Israel simply didn’t have the heart to obey Him consistently: “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Lack of obedience to God may indicate ingratitude. If we acknowledge that God’s standards are superior to ours, but we fail to obey them, we indicate our lack of understanding, our personal weakness or a willfulness to disobey. All may demonstrate our lack of gratitude for what God has given us. An attitude of thankfulness, on the other hand, can help counteract this weakness.

God warned Israel about the all-too-human weakness to give oneself, not Him, credit for what one has.

We see these principles clearly brought out in Scripture. In Deuteronomy 8 God addresses the importance and blessings of gratitude and strongly cautions us to avoid the curses of ingratitude. “Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers” (Deuteronomy 8:1).

Moses reminded the people of how God had so carefully taken care of them in the wilderness. He miraculously fed them with manna 40 years, but also reminded them that “man shall not live by [physical] bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD” (verse 3). Their garments didn’t wear, nor did their feet swell, during those 40 years in the wilderness (verse 4).

Biblical warning against ingratitude

Since God was bringing His people Israel into a fertile, productive land, filled with “brooks of water, of fountains and springs, . . . a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey” as well as mineral wealth, they should have been grateful (verses 7-9).

God warned them about the all-too-human weakness to give oneself, not Him, credit for what one has.

“When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God . . . , then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth’ . . .

“Therefore, it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God . . . you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 8:10-20, emphasis added).

This warning against ingratitude is not for ancient Israel alone. Lack of gratitude to God is all too common across the ages! The apostle Peter exhorts his readers not to forget God’s blessings and promises so freely given them (1 Peter 1:2-7).

Gratitude plays a major role in any kind of right relationship with God!

The blessings of gratitude

Most people overlook a simple fact recorded thousands of years ago: “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1). All our blessings come from God, but our actions don’t always acknowledge this wonderful truth.

To its credit, America has set aside Thanksgiving Day for annually reflecting on national blessings. Of course, we should all be thankful every day of every year, but there is certainly nothing wrong with a special day every year to remind us that we should continually be thankful.

In 1621 Plymouth Colony—made up of refugees seeking religious freedom in the New World—observed the first day of Thanksgiving to honor the God who had preserved their lives through a harsh winter, then blessed them with a good summer and a plentiful fall harvest. On October 20, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving Day to be an American national holiday, a time during which he called on all its citizens to thank the great God who bestowed such great bounties on them.

All nations would do well to remember the wise axiom of the Yoruba people of West Africa: “However far the stream flows, it never forgets its source.” May all peoples of the earth remember to give thanks to God, from whom all blessings flow (James 1:17). GN
ank out alien organs dripping in glowing alien blood.” This cheery invitation greets children 7 and under from the box of a toy called Dissect-an-Alien. It’s part of the popular Mad Scientist line of playthings made by one of the nation’s largest toy manufacturers.

Toys aren’t what they used to be

Have you noticed what kinds of toys your children have been playing with lately? How are some of the new types of games and toys affecting them?

Toy manufacturing and marketing has boomed into a multibillion-dollar business. Toy makers not only follow the trends; they start them. Electronics and vivid graphics have added a new dimension to our children’s toys.

But, with all that is available, are our children better off?

Benefits of playtime

When most of us reminisce about our childhood, we cannot help but think about our play with siblings, friends, pets and toys. I smile when I think about hiking to a waterfall in the woods with my dog or playing catch with my brother. On wintry Sunday afternoons, I remember playing chess for hours with my father.

Whether we had many toys or only a few, we all remember our favorite teddy bears, dolls, model cars or construction sets. Through toys children experiment, explore, express and discover themselves. They give their toys life, character, abilities and talents. With their imagination they project themselves into their play. Through make-believe they build a bridge with adulthood and look forward to growing up.

Play is important for a child’s development. It is one way children learn about the world around them. How they relate to and play with toys helps them learn skills such as dexterity and hand-eye coordination.

By buying children war toys, the message parents send children is that it is appropriate to fight and solve problems violently.

Playing with other children helps a child with social development. He (or she) learns how to get along with, tolerate and share with other kids. By interacting with others, children learn how to solve problems.

Survival of the funnest

The first toys could well have been natural objects such as sticks, fir cones, seed pods, bones and smooth, round stones. Since then, dolls, balls, spinning tops and pull toys have become the basic playthings of many cultures.

When visiting a toy store in Russia, I was fascinated to see how universally boys and girls are attracted to animal shapes, puppets, dolls, and miniature cars, trucks and tractors.

At ancient burial sites, animal figures have been found that appear to have been made for no purpose other than to play with. For example, Persian wheeled pull or push toys carved from white limestone into the shapes of animals date from the 12th century B.C. Clues to the nature of many old toys have been found on ancient vases and reliefs, which often picture hobbyhorses, carts, hoops, balls, tops and musical instruments.

Toy makers have found models such as GI Joe (a perennial best-seller) or Rambo—or characters from the current space, war and adventure movies—to be hot-selling items. Toy firearms that discharge lasers and fake bullets sell exceptionally well.

Violence, the occult, repulsion

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Toys that are disturbing to many parents, like The Blaster, casually offer a child a way to blow up the world. With push buttons and a handgrip with vast firepower, this toy is advertised to help its operator...
violently. If we give impressionable children toys that imply that war or hostility appropriate to fight and solve problems toward violence, produce exaggerateding. War toys can desensitize children and generally demonstrate more belligerence when they play with miniature weapons of destruction.

Sending a deadly message

By buying children war toys, the message parents send them is that it is appropriate to fight and solve problems violently. If we give impressionable children toys that imply that war or hostility is acceptable, then we send them the message that it is all right to act out feelings using weapons.

On the other hand, the prophet Isaiah speaks about a time during which man will no longer learn war and violence. In those days, erstwhile combatants “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4).

The huge increase in the popularity of electronic games assaults our children with violence. The National Coalition on Television Violence studied 95 Nintendo video games and found that 83 percent feature violent themes, with 58 percent spotlighting war games. The study discovered that children ages 8 through 10 are 80 percent more likely to fight among themselves after playing with interactive laser weapons.

In addition, video games can produce stress, are inherently frustrating and promote obsessive, even addictive, behavior. They also tend to isolate children from other people. Children scream at a video game because it won’t do what they want it to. They may throw down the controls in rage or yell at people who come near them and break their concentration. If playmates are involved, they may yell at each other or end up fighting because of the game.

A mother commented that the family’s video-game unit turned her two children, ages 10 and 8, into “animals.” She said her 10-year-old “can’t stop playing once he starts.” The 8-year-old becomes frustrated, hostile, angry and violent when he plays. The two fight and argue with their friends over Nintendo.

Toying with the occult

Along with violent toys, children and adolescents experiment with the occult—question the value of any toy your child asks for. How will he or she benefit from a particular toy? What will your child learn?

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Toying with the occult

Along with violent toys, children and adolescents experiment with the occult—question the value of any toy your child asks for. How will he or she benefit from a particular toy? What will your child learn?
Joseph was a dreamer—and one whose dreams came true. In a lifetime filled with extraordinary extremes, he never lost his trust in God. The story of Joseph is a saga of sacrifice, of one sent ahead by God to preserve life and restore and reconcile those who followed.

Joseph had many uncommon experiences, to say the least. An honorable existence among honorable men is much easier than a crusade that blazes a path seldom traveled. Yet Joseph, even as a young man, was moral and honorable when those around him were debauched. Surely a young man who strives for righteousness will immediately reap the rewards of living a godly life. Or do trials plague even the righteous? Do matters go awry when one least expects?

Joseph’s mother was Rachel, the great love of his father, Jacob. Even working seven years to obtain Rachel as his wife seemed to Jacob as “but a few days.”

In time Joseph and his brothers would become the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel. But Joseph, the 11th son of Israel (Jacob), soon became his father’s favorite. Sibling rivalries and jealousies brought the young man Joseph considerable trouble.

At 17, Joseph was a delight to his father. Genesis 37 records that Jacob dearly loved Joseph, more than he loved his other children (Genesis 37:3). As a token of his affection, he gave Joseph a richly embroidered coat, a “coat of many colors” (King James Version).

The gift of the coat didn’t endear Joseph to his brothers. They knew he was their father’s favorite, so, seemingly inevitably, his brothers began to hate him. He contributed to their jealousy and hatred through his naïveté and inexperience. Family strife followed sibling rivalry.

God knows “the end from the beginning” (Isaiah 46:10). God inspired Joseph to have two dreams that had a common meaning. When he revealed the first dream to his brothers, they didn’t appreciate it. “Please hear this dream which I have dreamed,” said Joseph. “There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf” (Genesis 37:6-7).

The symbolism of his brothers’ sheaves bowing down to his sheaf was not lost on his brothers: “Shall you indeed reign over us?” they asked incredulously (verse 8).

The second dream’s imagery included not only his brothers, but his parents: “Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me” (verse 9).

When Joseph told his father and brothers of his night vision, his father rebuked him: “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” (verse 10).

His brothers envied Joseph, but his father Jacob reflected on his son’s dreams. In earlier years he, too, had received a dream from God (Genesis 31:10).

With this background, we now see Joseph’s life take a turn for the dramatic.

Where jealousy leads

One day Jacob directed Joseph to seek out his brothers to see how they and their sheep were faring. Following his father’s instructions, he traveled far searching for them. The brothers, seeing Joseph approaching in the distance, concocted a hasty plan: “Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, ‘Some wild beast has devoured him.’ We shall see what will become of his dreams!” (Genesis 37:19-20).

But Joseph’s oldest brother, Reuben, immediately reacted in hopes of sparing Joseph’s life: “Let us not kill him. Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him” (verses 21-22).

When Joseph arrived, he was shocked as they stripped off his multihued coat and lowered him into a pit (verses 23-24).

Seeing a caravan approaching, Judah, one of the older brothers, also saw a way
to spare young Joseph’s life: “Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh” (verse 27). So his brothers sold Joseph for 20 pieces of silver.

To provide themselves an alibi in the eyes of Jacob, they conceived a deception: They killed a goat, smeared some of its blood on Joseph’s beautiful coat, then sent the blood-stained garment home to their father. When Jacob saw the coat, he tore his clothes and mourned many days for his favorite son. He refused to be comforted, “for I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning” (verse 35). None of the sons dared reveal the truth to their grief-stricken father.

Blessings and disasters

Sometimes a disaster can turn out to be a blessing in disguise, especially if God is working out events (Romans 8:28). Learning to trust God is to learn one of the great lessons in life.

After the caravan reached Egypt, the slave traders sold Joseph to a high officer of Pharaoh, an Egyptian named Potiphar (Genesis 39:1). Then things began to look up for young Joseph: “The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man . . . And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority” (Genesis 39:2-4).

At this time Joseph’s life took another unexpected turn. The Bible records that “Joseph was handsome in form and appearance” (verse 6) to the point that he caught the eye of his master’s wife.

“Lie with me,” she said (verse 7). But Joseph refused: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (verse 9).

But she persisted, daily attempting to seduce the righteous Joseph. But he was steadfast in character and continued to refuse. Then one day, when Joseph entered the house, not realizing the other servants were outside, Potiphar’s wife grabbed him. “Lie with me,” she demanded. But he left his garment in her hand and fled from the house (verses 10-13).

The Bible elsewhere advises us to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18). This Joseph did, setting an outstanding example to young people of both sexes of resisting such pressure.

Potiphar’s wife then devised a plot to protect herself, accusing Joseph of attempted rape and holding his garment as supposed evidence. Joseph found himself thrown into the Pharaoh’s prison (Genesis 39:14-20).

Things now looked bad for this righteous young man. Although Joseph obeyed God, he had gone to prison. First his brothers had sold him into slavery, and now he had again lost his freedom. But God does not abandon those who trust in Him.

“But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph’s authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper” (verses 21-23).

One might observe that Joseph could not stay out of trouble for long. But we could also note that Joseph could not stay away from blessings, either. Joseph was blessed almost immediately after being imprisoned.

And he wasn’t finished with interpreting dreams.

The butler’s and baker’s dreams

Two of the Pharaoh’s servants, a butler and a baker, offended the Pharaoh and were also imprisoned. Both had troubling dreams while there. The day after their dreams, they appeared sad. Joseph noticed their fallen countenances and spoke to them. Both explained they had had dreams but didn’t know what they meant.

Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please” (Genesis 40:8).

The butler told Joseph his dream; Joseph recognized that the dream meant the man would be restored to his former position in just three days.

But Joseph refused: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (verse 9).

But she persisted, daily attempting to seduce the righteous Joseph. But he was steadfast in character and continued to refuse. Then one day, when Joseph entered the house, not realizing the other servants were outside, Potiphar’s wife grabbed him. “Lie with me,” she demanded. But he left his garment in her hand and fled from the house (verses 10-13).

The Bible elsewhere advises us to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18). This Joseph did, setting an outstanding example to young people of both sexes of resisting such pressure.
Sometimes our problems are not resolved just how and when we expect. If disappointments occur, we have to learn to exercise faith and patience.

Pharaoh’s dreams

Pharaoh himself then had two dreams. The first involved seven fat cows and seven gaunt cows. The gaunt cows ate the fat ones (Genesis 41:1-4).

In his second dream Pharaoh saw seven heads of healthy, plump grain and seven thin, blighted heads of grain that grew up after and devoured the healthy grain (verses 5-7).

Pharaoh was troubled by his dreams, but none of his staff could interpret them. Then the butler remembered his experiences with Joseph and recounted them to the ruler. Pharaoh immediately had Joseph brought from the prison and recounted both his dreams. Joseph explained that God, not he, could reveal the dreams’ meaning: Egypt would experience seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.

Joseph advised Pharaoh to plan well: “…Let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt . . . to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain . . . Then that food shall be a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine” (verses 33-36).

Pharaoh recognized the wisdom of Joseph’s advice. It didn’t take him long to decide who should become his new administrator: Joseph himself. “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?” (verse 38).

Thus Joseph went from prisoner to second in command in the kingdom of Egypt!

Pharaoh told him: “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you” (verses 39-40). Joseph, now 30, was chief administrator over an

Joseph the governor

Joseph made an extended trip throughout all of Egypt, surveying the land and its resources (verse 46). As God had revealed, there were seven plentiful years. Crops were so bountiful that he stopped recording the grain brought in for storage, “for it was immeasurable.”

During this time of abundance, two sons were born to Joseph and Asenath, the wife given him by Pharaoh. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh (“causing to forget”), “for God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” In choosing a name for his second son, Ephraim (“I shall be doubly fruitful”), he thought: “For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction” (verses 51-52).

Joseph’s two sons were to be prominent in Israel’s history because Jacob, their grandfather, counted them as his own sons: “And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine” (Genesis 48:5). From then on they would be counted with the tribes of Israel.

After the seven years of plenty, famine struck Egypt and the surrounding lands. Because of the measures instituted by Joseph, Egypt had food after the surrounding nations’ supplies were depleted. “So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands” (Genesis 41:54-57).

At this point, Joseph’s life took yet another unexpected turn.

Joseph the reconciler

Through these twists and turns, God had not lost sight of Joseph or his family, whom He had determined to spread far and wide on the earth (Genesis 28:10-15).

As the famine worsened, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. They came to the official “who sold [grain] to all the people of the land,” not knowing that this man was the very brother they had sold into slavery more than a decade before. “And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth” (Genesis 42:6). Joseph’s earlier dreams of his family bowing to him (Genesis 37:10) were coming to pass, as was his desire to be reconciled to his family.

At first Joseph didn’t make things easy for his brothers. He accused them of being spies (Genesis 42:9), then used this ruse to force his brothers to promise they would bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, to him (verse 15). The brothers began to argue among themselves as they realized this sudden turn of events might be divine retribution for the way they had treated Joseph years earlier.

They argued in Hebrew before Joseph, thinking he was an Egyptian and wouldn’t understand their language. Watching their fear and anxiety became unbearable for Joseph, who “turned himself away from them and wept” (verse 24).

Joseph gave his brothers the grain they sought and sent them on their way. Nine brothers returned home, leaving Simeon behind to guarantee that they would return to Egypt with Benjamin. They remained there until Jacob instructed them to return to Egypt for more grain (Genesis 43:1-2).

This time Judah pleaded with Jacob to allow Benjamin to accompany them to Egypt. Jacob reluctantly gave in, realizing this was the only way they could get Simeon back and buy more grain.

When the brothers arrived in Egypt, they once again found themselves before Joseph. When they presented Benjamin to him, Joseph was again overwhelmed with emotion and retreated to his private chambers before returning to his brothers (Genesis 43:29-31).

The plot thickened when Joseph gave his brothers as much food as they could carry back to Jacob. But this time Joseph had his servants place his personal silver cup in Benjamin’s sack (Genesis 44:2). After they left, Joseph sent his servant to overtake them and examine their sacks of grain and foodstuffs.

When they found Joseph’s silver cup in Benjamin’s sack, the brothers were horrified! All they could do was to return to Joseph and plead for their lives (verses 14-34). They explained to Joseph that, if they didn’t return with Benjamin to their father, their father would surely die.

Finally, after Joseph was satisfied that his brothers had learned the lesson of their former treachery, he was unable to keep his identity a secret any longer. He commanded his servants to leave the room and began to weep openly. He revealed his secret to his brothers: “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” (Genesis 45:3).

But his stunned brothers didn’t know how to react. They were, after all, still in the Egyptian official’s home and presence,
and Joseph could have punished them however he chose.

**One sent ahead**

The forgiving Joseph reassured and comforted them. “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God . . .” (Genesis 45:4-8).

It was God, through Joseph, who brought about the reconciliation of Jacob’s father and brothers, preserving their lives. In the process, God used him to save many thousands of Egyptians, as well as peoples from surrounding countries, from hunger (Genesis 41:56-57).

**Joseph the restorer**

Now reconciled to his brothers, Joseph turned his attention to his father, Jacob.

“Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph: “God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, . . . you and your children, your children’s children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine’”” (Genesis 45:9-11).

So Joseph’s brothers set out for home. When they came to their father, they told him some shocking news: “Joseph is still alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt” (verse 26). Jacob was overwhelmed that his favorite son was not only still alive, but governor of Egypt!

Jacob and his family loaded up their belongings and headed to Egypt. On the way, Jacob offered sacrifices to God.

Appearing in a vision, God told Jacob not to fear to go into Egypt, that He would make of him a great nation there (Genesis 46:2-4). In Egypt Pharaoh welcomed the members of Jacob’s family. He also offered them the choicest property in the land of Goshen (Genesis 47:1-6), the part of Egypt in which they settled.

God used Joseph to reconcile Jacob’s family and their descendants, allowing His purpose and plan for the children of Abraham to be carried out. This plan had begun with Abraham and was passed on through his son Isaac and then in turn to the grandson Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel.

God’s promise was that Israel would become a great nation bearing his name. The sons of Israel became a prolific people within a powerful gentile nation. From the 70 who came to Egypt with Jacob, “the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:1-7).

But Joseph’s life had much in common with someone much greater.

**Joseph and Jesus**

Joseph’s experiences were much like those of his coming Savior, Jesus Christ. Like Jesus (John 8:42-47), Joseph was persecuted for telling the truth. Like Jesus (Luke 22:2), Joseph was marked for death, as Joseph’s own brothers plotted to kill him. Like Jesus (Ezekiel 37:15-28), Joseph was a reconciler and restorer. And, like Jesus (Isaiah 11:1-5; Amos 9:11-15), Joseph was a skilled and wise administrator.

Like Joseph, but in a much greater way (Genesis 45:5), Jesus was similarly sent ahead to save mankind: “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly . . . While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6, 8).

Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of Joseph’s role as reconciler, restorer and the one sent ahead “to preserve life,” to “preserve a posterity for you in the earth” and “to save your lives by a great deliverance” (compare Genesis 45:5, 7 with Romans 9:27-29; 8:20-21; John 3:16-17).

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**Is Life Fair?**

How is it that one can sometimes suffer for obeying God? God’s rationale for allowing His faithful to suffer is summed up in Jesus’ life and death. Though Jesus never sinned, He voluntarily gave up His own life that humanity would be saved (Romans 5:6-8). There must be a good reason for this.

The apostle Paul fills in more of the story: “And being found in appearance as a man, He [Jesus] humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

In the letter to the Hebrews, we read that “without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins” (Hebrews 9:22), that “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (verse 28), and “at the end of the ages, [Jesus] has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (verse 26).

God’s path to eternal life is quite different from man’s way. Man looks on this life as a survival of the fittest. God views life as survival of the humblest. It is God’s will that all mankind be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). For a human being to think humbly, he must recognize his inherent weaknesses and what he is in the sight of God. God raises up those who humble themselves “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:10).

The book of Proverbs teaches us that humility precedes honor (Proverbs 15:33). Jesus is mankind’s perfect example of a humble way of life. Humility is not the world’s way, but it is God’s way (John 14:27; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Corinthians 4:12). In the world, when a person honors and obeys God and His laws, he will be thought odd and ridiculed for it (John 15:20). But in the world to come that same person will be honored by God and Christ (Revelation 2:26; 3:12, 21).

Life is not fair if you look at life from the world’s perspective. But, if you view your physical life from God’s perspective, contrasting a few decades of physical existence with an eternity of vibrant, fulfilling living, then this life is strikingly reaest in a brighter light. Our lives take on greater dimensions and scope: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). In this new context, life is fair, redefined as the beginning of everlasting life.

Joseph understood that in this physical existence life is not fair. But he possessed spiritual vision that helped him to actively obey God and remain faithful under the most trying conditions. When we are guided by God’s comforting Spirit and remain focused on the hope of eternal life, we learn, as Joseph did, that ultimately “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

—Jerold Aust

November/December 1997 25
Biblical scholarship has taken note of fairly recent claims made on behalf of 2,000-year-old papyrus fragments in the Magdalen College Library at Oxford, England. Perhaps the most ancient fragments of the New Testament in existence, to some observers this papyrus supports the contention that Matthew’s Gospel is an eyewitness account.

Named Magdalen GR 17, this discovery may change the way the New Testament itself is viewed by some scholars. Because the handwriting reflects a style current in the first century before Christ, but which may have died out during the middle of the first century after Christ, some scholars say they have good reason to believe that parts of the New Testament were written much earlier than liberal modern scholarship had supposed. If this dating is accurate, the inescapable conclusion is that the four Gospels were composed by authors who remembered Jesus Christ from personal experience or knew eyewitnesses who remembered Him.

German papyrologist Carsten Peter Thiede made this important discovery in 1994. Professor Thiede is director of the Institute for Basic Epistemological Research in Paderborn, Germany. He is a lecturer at the University of Geneva, Switzerland (since 1978), and a life member of the Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London.


**GN:** Your book, *The Jesus Papyrus*, concerns itself with the reliability and authenticity of the very origins of Christianity. Do you believe that your discoveries have helped prove that the book of Matthew was written as soon as 20 or 30 years after the crucifixion?

**CPT:** Yes. In fact, the redating of those papyrus fragments would show that the Gospel of Matthew must have been written some time before the mid-60s of the first century. You see, those fragments are copies; they are from a codex [an early manuscript book], which means that there must have been scrolls before the codex was written. And one of those scrolls must have been the original Gospel of Matthew. So we definitely reach a period before the mid-60s for the original Gospel of Matthew.

**GN:** Do you believe that the New Testament is essentially an eyewitness account and not a second-century version of an oral tradition?

**CPT:** The Gospels are accounts that go back to the time of the eyewitnesses. I don’t think there can be any historical doubt about this, irrespective of papyri. There are numerous reasons—historical, textual, critical, literary, historical reasons—for a dating of the Gospels to the period of the eyewitnesses.

Now, no historian would say that all four Gospels were written by eyewitnesses. Not even the earliest Church historians claimed as much. For example, Mark’s Gospel was written—according to a reliable very early tradition—by a companion, a disciple of the apostle Peter, who *was* an eyewitness. So you have a secondhand eyewitness account. Luke says in his Gospel and in Acts that he wrote on the basis of eyewitness accounts. He interviewed eyewitnesses and collected written material on the basis of eyewitness accounts, and from this he wrote his own historical Gospel.

The only two Gospels that may be in the strict sense of the term eyewitness Gospels are Matthew—because he, according to a reliable tradition, was in fact the disciple Levi Matthew—and the Gospel of John, where the author himself and his epilogue at the end of the Gospel both say quite clearly that this was an eyewitness who wrote that Gospel.

So we can say that all four Gospels and the book of Acts were written during the eyewitness period—during the time when eyewitnesses were there, could comment on the text, could correct what was written, could refute it or accept it.

**GN:** How important is the science of papyrology in determining the authenticity and age of biblical texts?

**CPT:** Papyrology is a very important science as far as estab-
lishing the safe-keeping of the oldest records is concerned. There is nothing older as far as the New Testament is concerned, or indeed classical literature, than the oldest papyri. Establishing them, rediscovering them, analyzing them, translating them, making them available to textual critics—to New Testament scholars in our case—is absolutely vital.

In that sense, papyrology is a determining factor in the analysis of the origins and dating of the New Testament, but one should always admit at the same time that you could study the historicity of the New Testament without papyrology. It’s one of many elements, but it’s not as though without papyri you couldn’t analyze the New Testament.

**GN:** Do you think that The Jesus Papyrus strikes quite a blow for the trust-worthiness of the Gospel accounts and the traditions surrounding them?

**CPT:** Yes, indeed. It’s an important supplement to the archaeological and historical material which we already have. The reason some people call that papyrus “The Jesus Papyrus” is in fact because those tiny scraps, three of them, contain no fewer than four different sayings of Jesus. Seven times Jesus plays a role on these three tiny scraps, and they correct in a very decisive manner the majority assumption of modern New Testament scholarship as to the origins of the Gospels as historical texts.

**GN:** How can a few verses in Greek from the book of Matthew really prove that the whole book was written during the lifetime of eyewitnesses?

**CPT:** Such an assessment depends on the date of the script and on what is actually on the fragments. People would usually talk mainly about the date, but perhaps more important in order to understand what it really all means is what’s on the fragments. Those three fragments contain passages from chapter 26 of Matthew’s Gospel. There are two other fragments which belonged at one stage to the same codex—to the same original book—and they are now in Barcelona, Spain, with passages from chapters 3 and 5. At one time in Egypt [where all the fragments were discovered] they were part of the same book; now the fragments are split between Barcelona and Oxford.

Those Barcelona fragments are not quite as important as those in Oxford, because there is less textual information in them, but the important thing is that they belong to chapters 3 and 5 of Matthew’s Gospel. So, with fragments from chapters 3, 5 and 26, you can show that these fragments originally did not belong to an early source of the Gospels, but to a complete, full, finished Gospel.

And, if you can date a codex copy of a finished Gospel to the mid-60s, that of course means that the complete Gospel must have been earlier still. In other words, we do date back to the eyewitness period with those particular fragments.

**GN:** Based on some of your discoveries, would you say, then, that there is no real gap between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith—that the four Gospel accounts are reliable historical documents?

**CPT:** Contrary to popular opinion, the Gospels do claim to be historical documents and were expected to be understood as historical documents. Luke says so in quite unmistakable terms, and the others say it less directly.

What the Gospels are about is, first of all, telling the story of the historical Jesus. In fact, Luke says, to paraphrase his prologue, “Theophilus, you are already a believer, you are beginning the first steps on your way of faith, and now I’m writing this Gospel, dedicating it to you, so that you have the historical groundwork and basis for your faith.” This means that faith is an element of the Gospels, but the historical aspect of who Jesus was and what He did is of equal importance.

What a Gospel says, particularly Luke in his prologue, is a statement made by a historian who wants his work to be understood as part of classical historical writing. It’s the same technique and attitude that was displayed by any Roman or Greek historian of the time: the combination of a message with its historical basis. They commonly employed this technique, and Luke was no exception.

Tacitus, for example, is a Roman historian who mentions Jesus and Pontius Pilate. He wrote the history of the Romans in Britain, a work called Agricola. But, first of all, Agricola is a work about the achievements and the greatness of his own father-in-law, Agricola; hence the title of that book. No historian today would say because he praises the achievements of Agricola, who was the procurator of Roman Britain at the time, that it cannot be reliable history.

This combination of a message, like Tacitus praising the glory of the achievements of a father-in-law with sober historical writing, was no contradiction in terms at the time, and this is the attitude displayed by the Gospels.

**GN:** Aside from papyrology, what other arguments are there to show that the Gospel of Matthew was written before A.D. 70, the date of the fall of Jerusalem?

**CPT:** The fall of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the temple, in A.D. 70 is

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**These papyrus fragments of Matthew’s Gospel are thought to date from near the middle of the first century, indicating that the book is indeed an eyewitness account of Christ’s life.**

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Aside from papyrology, what other arguments are there to show that the Gospel of Matthew was written before A.D. 70, the date of the fall of Jerusalem?
martyred after the fire of Rome. None of these events is mentioned in the book of Acts: the death of James, Peter or Paul.

The only sensible explanation is obvious to historians: The book of Acts was written before 62. This, of course, means that the Gospel of Luke must be earlier still, and the Gospels which he used, Mark and Matthew, must be even earlier. So that’s a historical and chronological assessment derived from the text itself.

Let me give you one other example from the Gospel usually regarded as the latest, John. Most people would say this dates to the late first century. Now, consider the archaeological facts we have here and there. For example, in John 5:1 he says: “If you want to see where Jesus did this miracle, then go to the Pool of Bethesda; it’s still there.”

The pool was rediscovered—exactly the way he described it—earlier this century, but it had been destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans. So this account must have been written and was never changed before the year 70. No one after 70 could have written that there still is a pool in Jerusalem called Bethesda. So we have, for the Gospel of John, a historical, archaeological yardstick that indicates it was written before the year 70. And this is only one example of many.

You could go on through the Gospels without any papyrus; you would find argument after argument, pointer after pointer—archaeological, historical, literary, cultural, linguistic—for a date of all the Gospels and Acts before A.D. 70 and indeed much earlier.

**GN:** You mention in your book that Matthew Levi was an important customs official. Is there any doubt in your mind that he wrote the Gospel of Matthew?

**CPT:** From papyrology you can’t prove or disprove that Levi Matthew wrote the Gospel of Matthew. Even if everyone accepts that the redating of the papyrus at Oxford is correct, and all the consequences do point to a date of Matthew’s Gospel in the late 50s at the latest, then we still couldn’t prove via this avenue that Matthew was the author.

However, there are those indications in early history about the authorship of that Gospel, and they all, without any exception, agree that Levi Matthew was the author of the Gospel.

If you accept this, then of course you will find additional information. For example, there are a number of very long speeches in Matthew’s Gospel. You may wonder where they come from. Modern critical theologians would say they were all put together decades after the event, basically invented from scraps of information here and there.

Anyone taking classical history seriously would ask why anyone should make that assumption. If we believe that there was an individual, Matthew Levi, who also was a disciple and who was a tax official in Galilee, we know that such a person would be capable of writing shorthand. This was part of his professional skills. People like him at this time in Galilee, Palestine, Egypt, Rome and Greece knew shorthand.

The most probable scenario is that Matthew was there, an eyewitness who made shorthand notes of what Jesus said. The first complete Gospel—and I think that’s one of the very few areas where there is almost unanimous agreement—is Mark. When Matthew got it, he could use his own shorthand notes of the sayings and incorporate them into his improved, enlarged, augmented version of Mark’s Gospel. Thus we have the Gospel of Matthew, which includes all those long speeches missing from Mark.

So the simple answer, the historical answer—and most historical answers are simple and straightforward—is that Matthew could very well have been the author of that Gospel. There are many more arguments in favor of Matthew’s authorship than there are against it.

**GN:** As noted in your book, we live in an age consumed by doubt, but desperate for certainty. You also stated: “There is a general weariness with secularism and its aversion to clear morality.” Do you believe that helping establish the validity and authenticity of the New Testament text is critical to restoring a basis for a moral revival in the Western world?

**CPT:** Thank you for this question! My straightforward answer would be yes. One of the problems with the present attitude of most New Testament scholars and theologians toward the reliability or trustworthy-ness of the Gospels is that they become available to change in tastes of any era. The spirit of the times is more important than the Holy Spirit, to put it in a nutshell. No ethical or moral direction follows from a collection of texts that is interpreted as very subjective, that could have been collected in the late first or the second century but for that matter might as well have been collected in the 19th or 20th century.

Indeed, some theologians treat the texts as though they are 19th- or 20th-century documents and interpret them as such. But, if you have documents that go back right to the period when those events all happened, then our attitude to those texts must change. They suddenly become historical documents of the very period where these people walked and lived and preached and were killed.

Jesus Christ says that there are certain things we should do or should not do, particularly if we want to be His followers. So, if that’s something we must take seriously, as being reported by people who knew and saw and heard Him, then we cannot escape the consequences.

This of course means that in a period where yardsticks disappear one after the other very quickly, and people are looking for points of reference and orientation, the Gospels have once again become and will remain yardsticks for moral and ethical values in society at large and in our own personal lives.

**GN:** Is there a question I haven’t asked that might prove helpful to our readers?

**CPT:** I would like to say that, in order to understand the historical background of the gospel, one doesn’t have to be a papyrologist, one doesn’t even have to be a historian. All it takes is to read the text very carefully. Look at what the Christians in Berea did in Acts 17. They searched the Scriptures day by day to find out if what Paul and Silas were saying was true.

Paul also said, “Examine all things; hold fast that which is good,” at the end of his first letter to the Thessalonians. We are told to examine everything. That’s what we should do. Paul wasn’t speaking to classical historians or to papyrologists. He was speaking to the whole community of the Thessalonians, so we can understand this and follow it as eternally valid advice.

Let us go back to the texts, read them carefully, forget about all we think or assume that we already know, forget about our prejudices and our biases, scholarly or otherwise, and we’ll make an enormous amount of discoveries ourselves, understanding why those texts are what they really are—historical documents of the first century with Jesus Christ in its center. **GN**
Toys

Continued from page 21

owns Children’s Palace, the second-largest toy-store chain in the United States, stated that playthings featuring the grotesque “are selling quite well. They seem to be part of what we see as a larger trend aimed at little boys for gross kinds of stuff.”

The Toy Manufacturers Association sees no harm in such toys. “When it comes to grossness, we firmly believe that the decision to buy the toys should be made by the parents.”

Even though it comes from a perspective I strongly disagree with, that’s good advice, parents. The TMA couldn’t have said it any better. The decision to purchase such toys is up to you. As parents, we should closely monitor and evaluate the kinds of toys our children play with. We should make it clear to our offspring that we, as adults, will help choose their toys.

How is it that children are so knowledgeable about lust for certain kinds of consumer goods? It is no coincidence that children’s television programming is often little more than one long advertisement for toys. Your children are a lucrative market, enticing pro-war entertainment. Advertising classroom instruction in exciting, stimulating war toys—the equivalent of 18 days of little more than one long advertisement for consumer goods? It is no coincidence that war-toy sales increased 700 percent in five years like this is effective; war-toy sales by the parents.”

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The toy industry has made many of their wares too complicated. Simplicity should top the list of things to look for in a toy.

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College when he studies physics.

The other kinds of toys are as follows. How will he (or she) benefit from a particular toy? Will his or her imagination be directed toward wholesomeness? What will she learn? Will it help solve problems? Will it help him use his mind?

Will the toy help him interact with others? Will it help her refine her skills or explore and discover things about herself and the world around her? There are many creative, peaceful toys that will stretch your child’s imagination while giving hours of fun.

Classic construction sets such as those made by Tinker Toys, Lego, Lincoln Logs and Erector are excellent choices. They help a child imagine a structure, then build it. A simple microscope—or chemistry or electronic kit—with which you can guide a child in learning about the physical creation is also a good choice.

When planning a purchase, consider how an item could be used by the whole family to help bring parents and children together to play and talk. One problem with many electronic games is that children retire to their own little world and tune out everything and everyone around them.

Parents are often irritated and repulsed by a game’s sounds, or they may not have the faintest idea how to play it. If children spend too much time playing with electronic games, they tend to get bored easily and aren’t interested in developing relationships with others.

Sports toys are wholesome. Many parlor games promote discussion. Pictionary, for example, teaches children to follow rules, take turns, learn new words and communicate with symbols.

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The play’s the thing

Children want to play. Toys are perfect for play. In our busy world, we often abdicate our responsibilities as parents by using toys as a crutch to entertain our children while we do something else. Children respond favorably to parents and friends who interact with and pay attention to them. Playtimes can be fun and educational and can nurture familial ties.

Make your precious children’s early years an experience they will treasure. In the world of the future, there will be the right kind of play with the right kind of toys, for “the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets” (Zechariah 8:5). GN
When 16-year-old Molly offered to help clean her grandparents’ attic, she never dreamed that going through old boxes and suitcases would be so much fun. In one large trunk she discovered several old photograph albums filled with pictures her grandparents had saved since they were teens. Curious about the photos, one of a tanned young man sitting on top of a horse and another of a young woman wearing a cheerleader’s uniform, Molly asked her grandfather about when and where the pictures had been taken.

“I was surprised how little I really knew about my grandparents,” Molly says. “Until I asked my grandfather about these photos, I had no idea that he used to take riding lessons when he was a teenager or that my grandmother had been a cheerleader for her high school’s football team.”

Curtailing the generation gap

Molly is fortunate to have been able to deepen the relationship she has with her grandparents. But, for many teens, maintaining a close connection with their grandparents is not easy, especially during the adolescent years of experiencing so many new things.

“The generation gap often widens at this time,” says Helen Kivnick, Ph.D., professor of social work at the University of Minnesota with a special interest in the role of grandparents. “Instead of seeing their grandparents as people with their own unique experiences and viewpoints, teens may see their grandparents simply as their parents’ parents.”

At times you may feel as though you have nothing in common with your grandparents. Says 17-year-old Erin: “My grandmother doesn’t have the faintest idea about the newest fashions or movies I’m interested in. It’s hard to know what to talk about with her.”

Your grandparents may be equally unsure what to say to you. “When my grandchildren were younger, all I had to do to make them happy was sit them on my lap and tell them a story,” says a grandmother of four teens. “Now, when the kids talk on and on about actors and musicians I’ve never heard of, it makes me wonder where I fit into their lives.”

Other obstacles can stand in the way of your developing a strong relationship with your grandparents. One difficult situation is a serious illness of a grandparent. “Visiting their grandparents in the hospital, seeing them sick and out of sorts, can be really terrifying for teens,” Dr. Kivnick says. “Often they’re confused about how they should act, or they may feel powerless to do anything to help.”

Distance is another common obstacle. Retirement to another part of the country, your parents moving across the country because of a job transfer, or divorce—all can separate you from your grandparents.

After her parents divorced, 15-year-old Brenda moved with her mother and brother to another state. “My paternal grandparents live in the city my family lived in before my parents got divorced,” she explains. “Since we moved a year ago, I’ve been able to visit Grandpa and Grandma only once, and that was only for two days because I had to get back to school.”

What grandparents offer

Although a close grandparent-grandchild bond is not always easy to maintain, it is worth pursuing. One of the greatest aspects of the relationship with a grandparent is the emotional support you can receive from it.

“Because your parents are responsible for raising you, they can’t always be supportive of your behavior,” says Nancy Schlossberg, Ed.D., professor emerita at the University of Maryland. Grandparents, on the other hand, “can provide stability for the teen who is going up and down emotionally and can act as a neutral adult with whom to talk.”

Since they are a living family history, your grandparents can provide you with
a better understanding of your parents and your family background.

“Talking to my grandparents about what my father was like when he was a teen helps me understand why Dad reacts the way he does when I do certain things,” says Randy, 15.

And Marcia, 17, says, “Asking my grandmother what it was like to immigrate as a child to the United States gave me a new appreciation for what my great-grandparents did to try to make a better life for succeeding generations.”

Not only can you learn a lot about your family’s background, but your grandparents can make history come alive.

“Grandparents often represent a world that teens don’t know much about,” Dr. Kivnick says. “It’s the opportunity for a firsthand connection to periods in history that may otherwise be completely foreign.”

Your grandmother and grandfather may be able to give you a firsthand account of what it was like to live during World War II, an account of what families did for entertainment before television was invented, or a vivid description of your hometown before shopping malls and freeways.

A close relationship with grandparents can also provide you a realistic picture of older generations. “Not all grandparents are white-haired, bent over and walking with a cane,” Dr. Schlossberg says. “There are many grandparents who are relatively young. A lot of grandparents are working and involved with careers and have very active lives. The grandparent relationship gives teens a realistic picture of the aging process, that life is not over until it’s over.”

If your grandparents suffer from poor health, you can learn from that situation. “Spending time with those who are seriously ill or dying, although it can be uncomfortable, can help you develop empathy and the ability to put yourself in another person’s shoes,” Dr. Kivnick says. “Being with someone during the months or weeks that he or she is dying not only offers you a sense of what that experience is like, but it’s also enormously comforting for the person who’s dying, and it allows you to make a valuable contribution.”

**Strengthening the bond**

Although there are obstructions that can challenge the development of a strong bond between you and your grandparents, they don’t have to prevent it. One of the important things you can do is focus on who your grandparents are and your connection to them, rather than that they belong to an older generation. Realize that certain issues and feelings are shared by people of all ages.

“Even though there are tremendous differences in the way that teenagers and grandparents look in terms of wrinkles, hair color, style of clothing, music tastes and so forth, there are many underlying commonalities,” Dr. Schlossberg says. “Certain emotions—your hopes and dreams, your disappointments and fears, relationship issues and identity struggles—cut across generations and have nothing to do with age.”

For example, people of all ages can experience identity crises. Suppose your grandfather recently retired and is having to confront the issues of who he is and what he is going to do with the rest of his life. That may be the same issue you are coming to grips with as you contemplate high-school graduation and a job or college choice.

Even though 40 or more years may have passed since your grandparents were teenagers, don’t assume they can’t remember what it was like to be young or that their experiences were different from what you’re going through today. Ask your grandparents how they met each other and what they were thinking at the time. Find out whether they had a hard time understanding their own parents when they were teens. Ask them what growing up was like for them and to describe some of their memorable experiences.

“You may be surprised to discover that your grandparents were concerned about many of the same issues when they were teens that you are concerned about today and that they can relate to how you are feeling,” Dr. Schlossberg says.

If your grandparents suffer from poor health, don’t let being at a loss for words keep you apart from them.

“In most cases, it’s not necessary for you to act in any special way around grandparents who are ill, as much as it is that you simply be yourself,” says David Elkind, Ph.D., a child-development professor at Tufts University. “Your grandparents are interested in you as a person and who you are deep down inside.”

Telling them about your school projects and other activities or even sharing your views on a news event are ways you can make them feel part of your life.

**The importance of keeping in touch**

If your grandparents live far away, stay in touch by writing letters, making occasional telephone calls and exchanging photos by mail. Realize you don’t have to wait until you have big news to write or call them. Just phoning them to tell them that you care about them is certain to make them happy.

If divorce has separated you and your grandparents, keep in mind that you and your grandparents didn’t get a divorce; your parents are the ones who divorced. You can still work at maintaining the close relationship you always had. If you tell your parents about any discomfort you might feel, they are bound to understand your need to maintain that relationship.

Like Molly, at the beginning of this article, you may think you know everything about your grandparents. But stop and think a minute. Do you know when and where they were born? Where did they live when they were growing up? Where did they go to high school and college? What did they study?

If you’re not certain of the answers to these questions, there’s a good chance you may not know your grandparents as well as you thought.

No other relationship in your life is quite like the one you have with your grandparents. Not only can you give them joy by sharing yourself with them, but you also can receive all the love they have to offer you. Make the effort to spend regular time talking with them.

“Older people need to know others value their insight,” Dr. Elkind says. “They want to be able to pass things on to the younger generation so that when they die they’re not completely dead, because part of them still lives.”

Give your grandparents opportunities to reminisce about their lives. Your own life will become richer in the process.

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**One of the greatest aspects of the relationship with grandparents is the emotional support one can receive from it.**
Does life have a purpose? Does it have real meaning? Is life anything more than a brief span on earth, with nothing but eternity on either side of this physical existence? This is the question of the ages, a riddle that has challenged humans since they came to be. Why am I here? Why do I exist?

Thousands of years ago King David looked up into the night sky and wrote down his thoughts regarding man’s relationship to his Creator: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?”

David wondered about the purpose of man just as we do today. Every one of us was created for a purpose, but few understand what that great purpose is.

What Is Your Destiny? will help you understand the incredible truth about your destiny! Write for your free copy at the address inside the front cover of this issue.

United Church of God
an International Association
Many think that Paul’s writings reject Sabbath observance as a Christian practice.

Did Paul uphold the Sabbath throughout the book of Acts but reject it in the books he wrote? Reading the epistles of Paul through the lens of the historical record of Acts can open new horizons of understanding. Let’s consider certain passages in Galatians, Romans and Colossians in the light of Luke’s perspective.

### Days, months, seasons and years

Let’s begin our examination of this aspect of the history of the early Church in the book of Galatians, usually recognized as Paul’s first epistle. Here many people assume that Paul is chastising the Galatians for Sabbath-keeping: “...How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years” (Galatians 4:9-10, emphasis added throughout).

But is Paul criticizing Sabbath observance here? Actually, Paul visited several cities within the region of Galatia (in what is today central Turkey) during his first journey. He wrote this epistle as a follow-up to that journey. Notice what Luke records in Acts 13 concerning this visit:

- Paul participates in Sabbath services at the local synagogue (verse 14).
- He notes the practice of reading the Scriptures “every Sabbath” (verse 27).
- Many gentiles beg Paul to preach to them “the next Sabbath” (verse 42).
- “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” from Paul and Barnabas (verse 44).

If one assumes that Galatians 4:9-10 condemns Sabbath-keeping, we must ask why Paul would respect Sabbath-keeping while visiting the Galatian churches, yet, after departing, write a letter reprimanding them for observing these same days?
The Good News
Expanded Edition

Locations Mentioned in Acts


Ephesus: Paul told the church in this gentile city that he was leaving to “keep this coming feast in Jerusalem” (Acts 18:21). Later, while in Ephesus, he wrote to the Corinthians with instructions for observing Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 10:16-17; 11:23-30). Paul later bypassed Ephesus, hurrying to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16).


Was Paul hypocritical? Did he change his mind? Was he confused?

The situation in Galatia

A closer look at the context, especially the verses preceding Galatians 4:9-10, will show that Paul was not addressing Sabbath-keeping at all. Many members of these churches had previously been engaged in religions that involved the worship of many false gods. Paul reminded them, “. . . When you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods” (verse 8). They were instructed not to “turn again” to their idolatrous practices of the past (verse 9).

Therefore, since Sabbath observance was not part of these idolatrous practices, Paul could not have been referring to Sabbath observance here. After all, one cannot turn again to that which he has never observed.

Galatia was part of the Roman Empire, in which observances and practices honoring pagan gods were attached to virtually every day, season, month and year. For instance, the first day of the week was devoted to the sun god. The first month of the year was devoted to Janus, the god of beginnings, from which January is named.

The spring season was devoted to the goddess Cybele and her male partner, Attis, in honor of whom a joyous spring resurrection festival was celebrated. The “days and seasons and months and years’” pinpoint idolatrous practices the Galatians had observed when they “did not know God.” Paul is not criticizing them for Sabbath-keeping or observing biblical festivals.

On the contrary, we learn from Acts 13 that the Sabbath was a powerful tool used by God to bring gentiles into the truth of the Bible. Verse 43 notes that Paul was followed by Jews and “God-fearing proselytes” (New American Standard Bible).

These devout “God-fearers” were gentiles who had not fully converted to Judaism. Paul preached the gospel “among those Gentiles who, sabbath by sabbath, went out to the Jewish synagogue . . . They did not accept circumcision and the obligation to keep the whole Jewish law . . . Some of them kept the Sabbath as a day of rest and observed the Jewish food laws. They were known as ‘God-fearers’” (F.F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1953, pp. 93-94, emphasis added).

Sabbath-keeping was common among the “God-fearers,” many of whom became the nucleus of the gentile churches.

Can you create your own Sabbath?

The book of Romans is often mentioned in discussing the role of the Sabbath in the early Church. Romans 14:5-6 states: “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it . . .”

At first glance this passage appears to say that observing the Sabbath, or any day of the week, simply doesn’t matter.

Most scholars agree that Paul wrote the book of Romans while visiting the Greek city of Corinth. Does Acts shed any light on Paul’s thinking while he was in Corinth?

Luke’s journal shows us that Paul, while in Corinth, “reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:1, 4). It is within the context of these actions that Paul wrote the book of Romans. As the book of Acts shows, regardless of what city Paul was in, Sabbath-keeping was his manner, habit or “custom” according to God’s commands (Acts 17:2).

The congregation in Rome included a mix of Jews and gentiles (Romans 1:14; 2:17). Romans 14 deals with food-related circumstances with which Christians were confronted. Personal eating and fasting practices that were not addressed in the Scriptures became a point of contention. For instance, Jews came from a religious background in which some chose to fast “twice a week” (Luke 18:12). Typically, one would not fast on the Sabbath because this was a weekly feast, not fast, day.

Romans 14 also discusses vegetarianism (verses 2-3), which had no biblical connection with Sabbath observance. Verses 5 and 6 are variously interpreted as referring to fasting, as was the Jewish custom, or avoiding meats on some days, as was the custom of some from a gentile, Roman background.

However, the Sabbath is not even mentioned in these verses, nor, for that matter, anywhere in this entire epistle. New Testament writers did not ambiguously cloak the Sabbath in phrases such as “one day.”

Paul explains that the issue involved observing “the day” in relation to one’s eating habits (verse 6). Those who fasted
or abstained from meats on particular days of the week gave thanks to God on those days, and those who ate every day of the week similarly thanked God for their daily bread. Romans 14:5-6 was not written to address Sabbath-keeping at all.

**Therefore let us keep the feast**

The book of Acts also discusses other aspects of Paul’s Sabbath-keeping behavior while visiting Ephesus, a gentle city in Asia Minor. He told the Ephesian church, “I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing” (Acts 18:21).

The Sabbath was a weekly feast, but God also commanded annual feasts—the “holy convocations” recorded in Leviticus 23 and mentioned throughout the Bible.

The Ephesian church was so well acquainted with these annual Sabbaths (feasts, or festivals) that Paul didn’t even need to name which one he referred to. Though feast days were also kept outside of Jerusalem, Paul stated that he needed to keep this one in Jerusalem.

Later, after returning to Ephesus, Paul wrote to the primarily gentile church at Corinth, telling the brethren there: “Therefore let us keep the feast…” (1 Corinthians 5:8). His comments make it clear that he is referring to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, described in Leviticus 23:6-8. As with the Galatians, the Corinthians had at one time been steeped in paganism (1 Corinthians 12:2). Now God’s Sabbath, feasts and law were part of their new form of worship.

Paul’s visit to Philippi, another gentle city, is recorded in Acts 20. Luke notes that Paul and his companions, including Luke, “sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread” (verse 6). If these feast days had not been observed outside of Jerusalem, there would have been no need to wait for the completion of this feast while in Philippi.

After visiting several other cities over subsequent weeks, Paul “decided to sail past Ephesus . . . for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost!” (verse 16). Because of frequent travel while visiting the congregations of Greece and Asia Minor, Paul, as we see in Acts, decides not whether but where to keep the feasts of God.

**Let no one judge you?**

Paul was under house arrest “in chains” in Rome after his third journey when he wrote to the Colossians (Colossians 4:3). While sailing to Rome, he warned others on the boat against sailing this late in the year, since “the Fast was already over” (Acts 27:9). The “Fast” was a term for the Day of Atonement, another annual sabbath appointed by God, which was observed by fasting, rest and worship (Leviticus 23:26-32).

Yet some conclude that, after this voyage, Paul rejected Sabbath and festival observances in his letter to the Colossians when he stated, “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come…” (Colossians 2:16-17). Is it Paul’s intention here to denigrate observing God’s festivals and sabbaths? Many think so while failing to recognize that, if this statement rejects the Sabbaths, then it also rejects eating and drinking, mentioned here in the same context.

Understanding the historical background helps us grasp Paul’s intent. This book was written to the “saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse” (Colossians 1:2) to combat heresy that was creeping into the church. Promoters of this heresy took an ascetic approach, criticizing and condemning anything pleasurable.

Their extremism was reflected in their criticism of the Colossian members who enjoyed the Sabbaths and festivals in the festive, joyous spirit God intended (Deuteronomy 16:11, 14-15). Paul told the Colossians not to let others judge them in “food and drink”—literally “eating and drinking” on these days—which ran counter to the self-denial and asceticism advocated by these heretical teachers.

Such practices, Paul said, were “according to the tradition of men . . . and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8). The phrase “tradition of men” is used only in Colossians 2:8 and Mark 7:8. Many years earlier Christ had told the Pharisees: “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men . . . All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:8-9). Now it was Paul’s turn to confront those who imposed their man-made traditions as though they were “commandments of God.”


God forbids worship of angels or veneration of anything or anyone other than Him (Exodus 20:3-6). Church doctrines are to be established by the commandments of God, not “the tradition of men.” The feast days are a shadow of wonderful things to come, not just earlier historical events, as some suppose.

When we come to fully understand the meaning of these days, we recognize that they portray what God has done, is doing and ultimately will do for all mankind.

**The Sabbath was made for you**

Even the few completed pages of my journal contained details I had forgotten concerning what was going on in my mind and life at the time I penned those pages. Likewise, Luke’s journal contains many reminders of the actions of Christians during the first 30 years of the Church.

God established His Church when He poured out His Spirit on Christ’s followers who were observing the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Throughout the ensuing years of the Church as recorded in Luke’s journal, with its share of ups and downs, we see that one thing remained constant: observance of God’s weekly Sabbaths and annual festivals.

God has graciously shared Luke’s journal with all who are willing to read it. This journal should never be forgotten, nor should the lessons it contains be disregarded. Acts confirms the words of Jesus Christ: “The Sabbath was made for man . . .” (Mark 2:27). It truly records the acts of the apostles—as they observed God’s Sabbaths and festivals. **GN**

**Recommended Reading**

To better understand the meaning and significance of God’s weekly Sabbath and Holy Days, be sure to request your free copies of Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest and God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind. Please contact us at our phone number or address in your country, or the country nearest you (see page 2).
What Is Godly Rulership?

What’s wrong with human rulership? Why are people so incapable of right governance?

by Peter Nathan

A vital part of the destiny of those whom God has called and with whom He is working is rulership. We are called to a future of rulership—assisting Jesus Christ in His reign in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 5:10; 20:4) and ultimately reigning over “all things” (Hebrews 2:6-8; Revelation 21:7).

What kind of rulership will we be involved in? We are all familiar with rulership in this day and age. Although we consider ourselves enlightened—and government today is, in general, considerably more responsive to the needs of the governed—it’s easy to see that human government is far from perfect. Tragic accounts of leaders plundering their national treasuries, intimidating and sometimes eliminating political rivals and abusing their positions for personal gain and aggrandizement are all too common.

The desire for rulership over others for all the wrong reasons is an ingrained part of human nature and an all too frequent part of the human experience. If the rulership we see exemplified in the world is the best we have to look forward to, the future doesn’t look reassuring.

The Bible has much to say about rulership from a human and a godly perspective. What are the differences in the perspectives, and how should those differences affect what we think and do?

Misunderstanding proper leadership

The disciples of Jesus Christ were far from perfect. Their initial view of rulership was typical of the way most people view it. We occasionally see their misguided notions come through loud and clear.

One such example is recorded for us in Mark 10:35-37, where two disciples came to Jesus, saying, “‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.’ And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ They said to Him, ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.’”

Christ, knowing what lay ahead for Himself and them, asked them to think about their question. “You do not know what you ask” (verse 38). “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

They responded that they were able (verse 39). Jesus said, “You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared” (verses 39-40).

James and John were the two disciples. When the other 10 heard what they were requesting, they were incensed. Why? Because they hadn’t thought of it first! Of course, Christ, able to understand their motivations, called them together and gave them something to think about.

“You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave [or ‘servant’] of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (verses 42-45, emphasis added throughout).

Biblical view of rulership

Christ demonstrated through His life and death what it means to humbly serve others (Philippians 2:5-8). He was the perfect example of serving and used this opportunity to explain a fundamental lesson in the differences between human and godly rulership.

The Greek word translated here as ‘ruler’ is the verb archo. This word is used only twice in the New Testament. The other time it is used of Christ Himself. We find that in Romans 15:12, which quotes Isaiah 11, a Messianic prophecy of Jesus Christ:

“There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to the Gentiles shall hope.”

So we have both a negative and a positive use of this word: the negative way in which mankind rules as opposed to the positive way in which Christ will rule.

In Greek, as in other languages, many verbs are related to nouns. The Greek noun arche is related to the verb archo and is used much more frequently than its verb form in the New Testament. To better understand the proper view of rulership, let’s examine scriptures that contain the word arche.

One example is found in 1 Corinthians 15:22-24, which describes events at and after Christ’s return.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule [arche] and all authority and power.”

Godly rulership is a gift, not a right, and it is to be used wisely, just as God expects all gifts to be used wisely in a way that is pleasing to Him.
So Christ, as part of His responsibility, is going to rule, but He is also going to be involved in putting an end to all other forms of rule, together with all the authority and power that go with it.

A similar passage in Ephesians 1:21 tells us that Christ has been placed “far above all principality [arche] and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”

Throughout the New Testament the word principality describes rulership. So Paul tells us that Christ has been placed above all rulership, not only in this world but in the world to come. All rulership will eventually be subservient to Christ.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians of our need to “put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11). But why do we need to put on God’s armor? Because “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities [arche, the form of rulership that exists in the world], against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (verse 12).

This form of rulership has been around for a long time. Jude 6 tells us its origins: “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, have sinned and gone to heaven, and are awaiting God’s ultimate judgment. Comparing Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12-17, we see that this angelic revolt originated far in the past when Lucifer, the great angel, rebelled against God and became Satan, the enemy of mankind (1 Peter 5:8). The angels that joined in his rebellion became the demons—unseen spiritual influences on mankind.

Jesus Christ was involved in establishing proper, godly rulership from the beginning (Colossians 1:16). But that rulership was corrupted by Satan and his demons, and now the world that they control operates according to their twisted, corrupt form of rulership (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19).

It was this form of leadership that Christ condemned and told His disciples “shall not be so among you” (Mark 10:42-43). Christ’s followers were not to exercise that form of rulership. Why? Because without God’s help we do not know how to rule over others.

Since humans have corrupted rulership, should we have no rulership? Not at all. We live in societies that have seen attitudes toward rulership transformed over recent decades. Because of the abuses of rulership, many have overreacted and want virtually no rulership over them; they don’t want anyone to tell them what to do.

God’s Word has much to say about right and proper leadership.

Should we have rulership? Colossians 3:15 tells us clearly that we should: “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts . . .” Here we have a different word translated “rule.” This word means literally “to act like an umpire.” So the peace of God—or, more properly, God’s Spirit from which that peace comes (Galatians 5:22)—is to rule in our hearts as an umpire, helping us in our decision making. That Spirit is to rule as a part of our innermost being, helping us come to godly decisions in our lives.

In a similar vein, Paul spoke to Timothy about the Holy Spirit, telling him to “stir up” that gift of God, “for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

Some modern translations, instead of using “sound mind,” translate this as “self-control” or “self-discipline.” God gives us the means by which we can rule ourselves according to the wishes of God, that we can exercise self-discipline so that control over

The Quest for Control

This world is a controlling world. The world has seen many rulers interested in controlling their peoples. Jesus noted that gentle leaders “lord[ed] it over” their subjects—and, not to be outdone, Jesus Christ’s disciples wanted the same opportunity for control!

To most humans, rulership is an opportunity for control over others. We see evidence of this far back in human history. In Egypt, for example, Thutmose II had a sister or half-sister, Hatshepsut, who ruled Egypt as pharaoh before him.

Her successor, after she disappeared from the scene, tried to eradicate all traces of her from Egyptian culture and history. Her name was obliterated from monuments and inscriptions. She disappeared from the annals of history extant at that time, some three millennia ago.

However, within the last 150 years Egyptologists and other historians have rediscovered her, and Hatshepsut’s name lives again. She is a curiosity of Egyptian history; people are curious as to why others felt so strongly about her that they tried to literally erase her name from history. Such are the lengths some have gone to in order to control others.

Jesus Christ offered a different perspective. In Matthew 10:28, He instructs His followers: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Like Thutmose II, some have tried to rewrite history, removing traces of others from the historical record. They can kill those who get in their way, they can destroy the body. God, however, reserves the right to resurrect that person, giving him or her eternal life, or to remove the very remembrance of any person in a way that Thutmose II was never able to do. He can truly remove all traces of that person forever, something man can never do.

Rulers do exercise control and have at times used their control to take the lives of others. Yet history shows that, in times of martyrdom, Christians stood before their executioners and awed them with the peace and the tranquillity with which they faced their deaths. Why? Because they knew that, ultimately, such rulers and executioners had no real control over them. The ultimate control of their lives rested in God’s hands alone.

—Peter Nathan
our life comes from within us through the indwelling of God’s Spirit. We then use the Holy Spirit to make decisions that are pleasing to God, and we don’t have to rely on external controls.

Qualifications for positions

But is that the only form of rulership that we need? Does this mean that each of us should have total independence from control by others? We find many descriptions of the kind of rulership God expects in the instructions to the early Church.

The apostle Paul realized that there has to be some form of governance even within the Church, the body of believers led by God’s Spirit (Romans 8:9, 14). He talks about some in the Church who have a responsibility of leadership.

He instructed his fellow minister Timothy that a “bishop” [or “overseer”] must be “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence” and that deacons likewise should be “ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Timothy 3:4, 12). There are qualifications for these positions because, as Paul explained, “if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” (verse 5).

He later instructs Timothy, “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 5:17).

Is Paul contradicting what Christ said about rulership? No, they do not contradict each other. So what is Paul talking about?

Here again, as in his earlier instructions in this letter, a different word, proistemi, is translated “rule.” This word means “to be set over”—but in terms of presiding, protecting or guarding. Paul is not describing a position in which a person has the right of life and death over others, but one who is entrusted as a protector or a guardian, someone who gives aid, cares for and is concerned about others.

Consulting other translations may help us better grasp Paul’s intent in 1 Timothy 3. Several versions substitute the word manage for rule (see New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, Revised English Bible and New American Standard Bible). What Paul is talking about here is true godly leadership.

Instructions to the Church

Paul elaborated on these concepts to the congregations under his care. He wrote to the members in Thessalonica, “. . . We urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

The term over you is the same Greek word Paul used in writing to Timothy to describe the roles of elders and deacons. Paul was very aware that there would need to be some form of oversight in the Church. This oversight would not be controlling, but would function to care for, to protect, to act as a guardian of those within the Church.

We find a slightly different perspective on rulership in Hebrews 13:7, which tells us to “remember those who rule over you . . .” This is a different term from those discussed earlier and adds to our understanding. This word translated “rule,” hegeomai, means “to be a leader” or “to go before” to lead. Here we have another aspect of godly rulership. It involves being a leader—not in the sense of control, but as someone who has concern and care for those for whom he has responsibility.

In verse 17 we find the same term used again: “Obey those who rule [hegeomai] over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.” These instructions to obey and submit to those who have positions of leadership bring up an interesting concept. We see that this type of rulership is not a matter of the leader enforcing submission; rather, this is an act by the led to submit themselves.

This describes a different relationship from that condemned by Jesus Christ: of rulers lording it over those they rule. This describes a relationship of voluntarily submitting to those placed in authority, recognizing that they are in their positions for the benefit of others, “for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.”

To whom will they give account? Jesus Christ! They will be held accountable for how they exercised the authority they were given, how they nourished and cared for those entrusted to their care. Those in such positions do not have the final say. They are responsible to Jesus Christ, and they will receive reward or punishment based on how they handle their responsibility. “. . . They watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (verse 17).

Paul understood that any leader in the Church is to first follow Christ if he is to be worthy to have others follow his leadership. “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ,” he told the early Church (1 Corinthians 11:1).

What does God expect?

Paul describes this productive, beneficial kind of rulership as it should be exercised within the Church. “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:5). He notes that the members of the Church are all in this effort together, individually chosen by God (John 6:44, 65), and this should bring them together in a unified group.

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6-8).

Paul describes how these gifts—talents and abilities—should be used for the benefit of others. Those whose talent is “ministry”—serving—should use that ability to serve others. Those who give should give “with liberality”—generously, not expecting something in return. He who “leads” (the same word Paul used in 1 Timothy in describing those who are “set over”) is to lead with diligence.

All these are gifts and abilities given by God to individuals. God uses those gifts, and those given the responsibility of leadership are accountable to the One who gave them that gift. This kind of rulership is a gift, not a right, and it is to be used wisely, just as God expects all gifts to be used wisely in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Christ’s example of rulership

Matthew 2:6 cites a prophecy describing Christ’s first coming. God said that out of Bethlehem would “come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.” Here we see a different word, which sets the tone for all other words used to describe proper rulership. This particular word means “to feed,” “to tend the flock” or “to keep sheep”—to furnish pasture for food, to nourish, to cherish, to serve.

This is the kind of rulership that Jesus Christ will exercise when He returns to reign on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16). His goal will be the opposite of the goal of those who exercise the power of life and
death to control others. As Christ said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Christ will rule as a shepherd, taking care of and providing for the needs of His flock—humanity.

Christ will share this responsibility with others. In Revelation 2:26-27 Christ promises that “he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—he shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels.”

Most of us live in a power-hungry society. Humans want power, to influence and control others. Is Christ promising that, under His rule, humans will be dealt with by an iron club, smashing them to pieces?

Some, because of their defiant actions and attitudes, will have to be dealt with firmly. Prophecy shows that, rather than welcoming Christ at His return, many will actively resist and even fight against Him (Zechariah 14:1-3; Revelation 17:14; 19:19). After all, the natural human mind is hostile to God’s law and rule (Romans 8:7).

We find two sides to Christ’s rule described. On the one hand, He will no longer tolerate rebellion against God’s ways. But, on the other hand, the word rule is exactly the same word we read earlier in Matthew 2:6, which describes Jesus Christ as one who will shepherd, care for, feed and tend His flock.

Consider a shepherd’s purpose for a rod. Psalm 23:4 describes it: “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” A shepherd’s rod was used to help rescue a sheep out of difficulties, to pull it back to where it should be, not to destroy it! Those who will reign with Christ must have an attitude geared to being a shepherd—taking care of and being concerned for others, seeing that they’re fed.

Humanity will initially resist Jesus Christ’s rule. However, once people begin to recognize the many positive fruits of that reign, and as the heart of man begins to change, even the initially rebellious will respond to the pasturing and shepherding that will characterize Christ’s reign.

When Jesus Christ told His followers that they are not to rule over one another as gentiles rule, He was telling them that is not the kind of rule God wants—within His Church, within society or within His Kingdom.

Jesus Christ will not rule in that way. He will rule and lead as a life giver. He will offer the greatest blessing possible: eternal life in God’s Kingdom. GN

A Model for Human Relationships

Paul, writing to the church in Philippi, presents a model for human relationships that is beautiful and practical. “Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:2-4, New Revised Standard Version).

Then he describes the perfect example of this giving, serving attitude. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (verses 5-8, NRSV).

Jesus Christ, who before His human birth was part of the Godhead, with unimaginable power and splendor (John 1:1-4, 14), willingly gave that up for our sakes. He “emptied himself” of that glory and magnificence, was born as a physical, mortal human and humbled Himself to the point of enduring a cruel and bloody death so we could ultimately share eternal life in God’s family with Him (2 Corinthians 6:18).

For those sanctified—set apart for eternal life through Jesus’ sacrifice—He “is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters” (Hebrews 2:11, NRSV). This family relationship is made possible through Christ’s courageous surrendering of His own life.

Notice the key to this attitude: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3). This requires that we be willing to submit to one another, showing respect and honor to the other person.

Paul recognized this as a key to successful human relationships. We are to be continually “submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). The same principles of respect, honor and love combine to form a successful marriage relationship (verses 22-28). A successful marriage is based on each party’s willingness to submit to the needs and the well-being of the other, rather than seeking his or her own way.

Paul instructed the Philippians, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit . . .” (Philippians 2:3, NRSV). Those motivated by “selfish ambition” seek things for themselves. In their conceit, they want to be placed above others.

But, as Christ makes plain, that is not how His followers are to be. “. . . Whoever desires to be great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-45).

If we are to rule over or lead others in the way God desires, we must in reality be below them. We must be servants. Like Jesus Christ, we must be willing to care for the rest of the sheep of the flock, giving to them, shepherding, pasturing them—or “pastoring” them, as we derive that term today. These are truly the acts of a Christian life—submission and service to others.

A Christian does not control others, nor is he independent of others. As Christians, we are to be interdependent. We are to depend on one another, being mutually concerned about one another.

This voluntary attitude of submission to one another is a result of our calling, because we want to be in God’s Kingdom to help the rest of mankind. This is not a selfish motivation, to be there just for ourselves. It is because we want and are willing to help others be there also.

—Peter Nathan
Scripture shows that the Kingdom of God is yet to come, and the world will see an obvious, dramatic occurrence when it is established. Few religions, however, believe this.

The central theme of Jesus Christ’s message was the Kingdom of God. What did He teach about this Kingdom, and why is there so much confusion about it?

A king is a supreme ruler. An absolute monarchy, the undivided rule of a single person, is not a form of government familiar to most of us. Most people are more aware of the personal profiles of princes and princesses, along with exposés of their errors and excesses, than they are of the monarchy itself.

Fewer still are aware that the concept of a monarchy is to be found in the New Testament and that it has a direct connection to the future of mankind.

In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus Christ gave a model for people who wish to learn how to pray effectively. Most people know this passage as the Lord’s Prayer. But do they consider its content?

Twice in this prayer outline Jesus refers to the Kingdom of God. First is a plea for that kingdom to “come”; then follows an acknowledgment that God indeed has a kingdom. When we acknowledge that God has a kingdom, we also acknowledge that He is royalty.

Scripture shows that the Kingdom of God is yet to come, and the world will see an obvious, dramatic occurrence when it is established. Few religions, however, believe this. Few even acknowledge the word kingdom except in an ethereal sense.

What does the Bible have to say about the Kingdom of God?

**Kingdom theme in the Gospels**

The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible says this about the Kingdom of God: “The word ‘kingdom’ is found fifty-five times in Matthew; twenty times in Mark, forty-six times in Luke and five times in John. When allowance is made for the use of the word to refer to secular kingdoms and for parallel verses of the same sayings of Jesus, the phrase ‘the kingdom of God’ and equivalent expressions (e.g., ‘Kingdom of heaven,’ ‘his kingdom’) occurs about eighty times . . . These statistics show the great importance of the concept in the teachings of Jesus . . . There can, therefore, be little doubt that the phrase ‘the kingdom of God’ expresses the main theme of His teaching” (Vol. III, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 804).

Studying the preceding references to the Kingdom in the four Gospels gives us much understanding. Consider, for example, these points:

- The message Jesus commissioned His early apostles to teach is called the good news, or gospel, of the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:1-2).
- Jesus used the same words to announce the message His Church should broadcast through the ages: the good news of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 8:1).
- The Gospels frequently summarize Jesus’ teachings with the same terminology: “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14).
- Jesus equated gaining salvation with entering the Kingdom (Matthew 19:16, 23-24), and He explained the loss of salvation in terms of rejection from the Kingdom (Luke 13:28).
- The message of salvation is called the Word of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:19).
- The hope and comfort of a Christian are said to be in entering the Kingdom (Mark 10:15).
- The principal goal of a Christian is to seek first the Kingdom (Matthew 6:33).
- Righteous people are called sons of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:38).

**Duality within the office of the Messiah**

When Jesus’ impending birth was revealed to Mary by the angel Gabriel, the unborn child was declared to be the King of a kingdom (Luke 1:30-33). He is clearly the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah, the chosen leader who was to deliver God’s people both as Savior and King (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Shortly before His crucifixion, Christ entered Jerusalem in a triumphant procession during which citizens, as a high tribute, laid their clothing in His path along with branches cut from nearby trees. To grasp the significance of this event, we must review an ancient prophecy—Zechariah 9:9-10, a prophecy of a Messiah King who is also the Messiah Savior.

There can be little argument that Jesus Christ is our Savior or with the concept that He rules in our minds through the indwelling presence of God’s Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:15). Yet there is even more to Christ’s kingship than ruling in the minds of believers.

Many of Christ’s own countrymen, like their ancestors, expectantly waited for a kingdom to be brought by a Messiah King. The overwhelming
majority, however, missed the need for and significance of a Messiah Savior.

In a similar error, traditional Christian churches have long focused narrowly upon Jesus as Savior to the exclusion of His role as coming King.

**Christ knew He was King**

The bold prophecies of the Old Testament, combined with the Gospels and apostolic writings of the New, show that Christians ought to understand Christ both as Savior and as returning King (Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 11:15; Acts 1:1-11).

It was Jesus’ deliberate association of Himself with the prophecy in Daniel that inflamed the chief priests and settled the resolve of the Sanhedrin that Jesus must die (Mark 14:53, 61-65).

Jesus did not want His followers to expect an immediate kingdom (Luke 19:11-12), but He did purposefully cultivate their expectation for a kingdom in the future with Himself as its Monarch. The act of cutting and scattering tree branches that marked His entrance into Jerusalem shortly before His death was done as a tribute to the Messiah King in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy. This significance was not lost on the Pharisees (Matthew 21:1-11; Luke 19:28-40).

This teaching cost Jesus His life. When He was soon to become the Messiah Savior through His death and resurrection, He would not deny being Messiah King (John 18:33-37). When Pilate questioned Him about His kingship, Christ replied, “For this cause I was born” (verse 37).

This became the focus of the soldiers’ ridicule and torture (John 19:1-3). It also formed the closing argument of Christ’s accusers, who used this seditious charge to force Pilate into issuing the order to have Jesus put to death (John 19:12-16). The derisive comments made to Jesus as He was crucified further confirm He was killed because He claimed to be the Messiah King (Mark 15:31-32). Jesus’ kingship was clearly marked on the sign above Him as He died (John 19:19).

**Continuing Kingdom message**

Both Jesus and the writers of the New Testament had countless opportunities to sever links to expectations of a coming king and kingdom spoken of by the Old Testament prophets. But, rather than cut those links, Christ and His disciples deliberately built upon them.

Daniel 7:16, 18, 22 and 27 record the promise, not only of a kingdom, but that God would give believers a part of it. The words inheritance, inherit and heir in English translations of the New Testament are taken from Greek words meaning “a lot, or a portion,” and “to possess” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, pp. 300, 325). They are used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:2-21 and Ephesians 5:5 in the context of warning that habitual sins will prevent a believer from inheriting the Kingdom of God.

Paul again uses this language, in 1 Corinthians 15:50-52, a powerful reference to Christ’s return, revealing that flesh-and-blood believers must be changed to spirit to inherit the Kingdom. James wrote that God selects those who are rich in faith, although they may be poor in material possessions, to be heirs of the Kingdom (James 2:5).

Jesus, in Luke 12:31-32, connected His teaching with Daniel’s prophecy: “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Jesus Himself summarizes much of the teaching of the prophets and apostles: “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

The message of a kingdom to come is indeed central to the Bible. The power of God’s Kingdom is present and active in individual believers, as well as collectively in the Church, but the Kingdom has not yet come. It does not come until Christ does.

So it is with good reason that we pray, “Your Kingdom come.”

**Confusion About the Kingdom of God**

Erdman’s New Bible Dictionary, in discussing the Kingdom of God, traces views and interpretations of the concept of the Kingdom through history. The early Roman Catholic Church developed the belief that the Kingdom had already come in the form of the church. Its leaders were seen as leaders of the Kingdom; where the church spread its power and authority was viewed as synonymous with the boundaries of the Kingdom (Erdmans, Grand Rapids, 1962, p. 696).

“In their resistance to the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the Reformers laid chief emphasis on the spiritual and invisible significance of the kingdom and readily (and wrongly) invoked Luke xxii. 20f. in support of this.” Protestant churches continued this drift in a reaction to abuses of power and developed an emphasis upon social and community programs. “The coming of the Kingdom consists in the forward march of social righteousness and communal development” (ibid.).

The article concludes with the summation that returns to the duality of salvation and a kingdom. “In contrast to these spiritualizing, moralistic, and evolutionary interpretations of the kingdom, New Testament scholarship is rightly laying stress again on the original significance of the kingdom in Jesus’ preaching—a significance bound up in the history of salvation and eschatology [study of events surrounding Christ’s return]” (ibid.).

Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia concludes that neither the idea of a Kingdom of God without a Savior nor the idea of a Savior without a Kingdom of God “can stand on its own” and “each can be defended only at the cost of explaining away, often by dubious methods, the evidence for the other” (Vol. III, p. 804).


Zondervan’s Bible Encyclopedia concludes its article on the Kingdom: “Although the Kingdom was truly present in the ministry of Jesus, He also spoke of it as a future entity and told His disciples to pray for its coming (Matthew 6:10; cf. Luke 11:12) . . . By this manner of speaking, Jesus was referring to the age to come (Mark 10:30; cf. Luke 18:30) which was associated with the coming of the Son of man, the resurrection of the dead and the setting up of the eternal realm of bliss . . .” (Vol. III, p. 806, emphasis added).

—Cecil Maranville

**Recommended Reading**

Do you know what the Kingdom of God is? Does it already exist? How can we enter it? These and other questions are answered in our free booklet The Gospel of the Kingdom. Contact us at the address in your country—or the country nearest you—listed on page 2.
What Is Your Children’s Future?

Is the future of our children left to chance and circumstance? Their future is in your hands more than you think.

by Bill Bradford

As director of a summer camp for teens, I’ve noticed that when youngsters arrive at camp you can always spot the ones who are insecure in the camp environment. They are generally the ones who either withdraw and lag behind or act like bullies and begin to terrorize others. Both types are usually insecure for more or less the same reasons. Often they simply don’t have their future figured out yet.

For many young people, their identity—who they are and their vision of what they can become—is either practically nonexistent or distorted. As a result, many values that their parents thought they were imparting don’t seem to take root and become a permanent part of their children’s character.

This may not be all that noticeable at home, but when a young person arrives at camp it becomes apparent. The camper has to immediately interact with his peers, and how the youth feels about himself manifests itself almost immediately.

One of the major objectives at our summer camps is for young men and women to experience success. We feel it is vitally important that they have a clear picture of who they are and what they can become. Their future should be one of success.

Values make sense when young people see how those values can result in a bright future.

Summer camps provide an opportunity for youths to experience success in a group context. They live and function among their peers for the rest of their lives. If they are accepted and accomplished in the eyes of their peers, that acceptance goes a long way to set the pattern for a successful future. At our camps we help young people create the vision of their future. This strong vision, in turn, can be their guide when false values present themselves.

There is a proverb that says, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint…” (Proverbs 29:18). People will learn to restrain themselves if they are taught those values that spring from God’s inspired Word, values that will produce a bright and positive future for them personally.

Consequences of lack of vision

Many young people experience a sense of hopelessness. A clear vision of where they are going and who they are is distorted by powerful influences.

Some of these strong influences—such as peers, television and gangs—redefine the future and teach false values that lead our children to seek short-term, counterfeit objectives palmed off as success.

One of the strongest desires of any young person is to be accepted and approved by friends, to reach a certain significance among peers.

This is one of the reasons gangs are so alluring today. Gangs provide a quick and easy way to achieve acceptance by the group—usually by doing some harmful or evil act. This is a powerful influence because the individual is experiencing success—approval and acceptance from others.

It’s natural for young people to want to be accepted by friends and peers. But all too often a condition for that acceptance involves the temptation to lower standards taught at home or church.

Such temptation, and the pressure for acceptance, can be stronger than a teen’s conscience. The short-term payoff is achieving some status with friends, but the consequences may be destructive, detrimental habits such as smoking, alcohol and drug abuse and premarital sex. Peer pressure, along with the effects of some of these behaviors, often results in lower grades at school.

Parents need to realize, too, the powerful influence of television. Seemingly it is able to create an instant vision of what a person can become. In reality, however, it creates only imaginary worlds filled with people acting out what are usually unrealistic and fantasized stories. These scenarios come complete with values that can become the guiding light of unwary viewers. Television is a powerful tool that, if unchecked, will create a counterfeit vision for young people, along with a corrupt value path to take them there.

The power of positive pressure

However, group influence can also be positive. There are several deliberate strategies we put into action at summer camp. I ask our counselors, who have 10 to 12 young people in their dormitories, to work toward welding their dorms together into teams. We want to help those youths who lack confidence in what they can do, especially in front of their peers, to come out of their shell and experience success as part of a group.

Encouragement is the order of the day. No negative comments or put-downs are allowed. Any achievement in any activity, large or small,
is recognized. This is a rule.

The bully likewise soon experiences success and discovers that healthy acceptance and approval among peers is far superior to the cheap respect he craved and demanded from others through his aggressive behavior.

Other behaviors such as negative comments and insults, sloppy habits, bad language and dirty tricks are soon replaced with team effort. Such behavioral problems are dealt with privately without ridiculing or demeaning anyone.

Our goal is to create an atmosphere in which right values pay off in the success the young people experience in the group environment. This offers a powerful incentive while it gives the young people a glimpse of the future. We want more than anything else for each camper to experience on a small scale what he can become through applying proper values and living life the right way.

Everyone wants success. Through these methods and strategies, we paint a picture, create a vision for our boys and girls. They begin to imagine the path they can walk that will lead them where they want to go, with better understanding of the values that will sustain them in their lifelong journey.

Challenge for parents

Can you do this for your children? If you are a parent, you have to make hard decisions. You have to sacrifice for your children. But you quickly learn that the price you pay is quite small in comparison to the wonderful results that can follow later.

Those of us who have worked at these camps have noticed the improvement in morale and hope in individual teens during the course of camp sessions. But I have also received reports that when they went home, within weeks or even days, some reverted to their old behavior and attitudes. The world they returned to became the dominant influence in their lives again.

At camp we strive to reinforce what we hope are the values youths are taught at home. Realistically, though, this isn’t
always the case. Maybe the values of the home aren’t taught correctly, or maybe they’re missing or neglected altogether. Our children are always learning values, either good or bad. If other influences prove to be more powerful than you as a parent, those influences will almost always become the teacher.

This, of course, is a dilemma for parents. What are you willing to do about it?

An example from history

The Bible contains a story about a man whose family grew into a powerful and successful nation. Although this tale is thousands of years old, it contains truths that are as applicable now as they were millennia ago.

God told Abraham what his children would become if he, Abraham, would change his life and do what God said. This was a powerful motivation, because every parent wants his children to have the best. Abraham listened and took God up on His promise that, if he would obey God and teach his children to obey, then God would make of him and his children the greatest nations on earth.

God would be their God and they would be blessed with national power and greatness such that even other nations would be blessed because of them. It was an extraordinary opportunity. You can read of these promises—which were passed from generation to generation—in Genesis 12, 15, 22, 26, 35 and 48.

Consider the effect this vision of their future had on these children as they heard—perhaps daily as they sat around campfires and walked in the fields—the promises of what they could become. Their destiny was painted for them by believing parents. The parents themselves had hope in their future and were blessed by God for their faithfulness and because they taught their children to obey Him.

Abraham passed this vision and these promises to his son Isaac, who in turn passed them to his son Jacob. You can imagine the effect of children growing up listening to the stories of their God-given destiny instead of the TV soaps and situation comedies that pollute the minds of so many youngsters today. Not that there weren’t serious problems and difficulties to surmount along the way, but, as a result of this vision, Isaac and Jacob obeyed God and were recipients of the same blessings promised to Abraham.

Keeping the future in sight

Perhaps most striking in this saga of Abraham’s family is the life of Joseph, a son of Jacob. Joseph was particularly influenced by the promises that God offered his great-grandfather Abraham. As an adolescent, Joseph was sold into Egypt with no hope of ever returning to his homeland and family. While in Egypt he was falsely accused and thrown into prison.

But through these trials Joseph never lost sight of who he was and what he could become, and he faithfully maintained his values under conditions that were far from favorable. All he had to sustain him were the promises of God he had grown up with and his belief and faith in God and what He had promised.

Without this vision Joseph undoubtedly would have lapsed into the flawed value system of Egypt and forsaken the true God. But with this vision he rose from spending time in prison to being named second in command of the most powerful kingdom of his age. God blessed Joseph with accomplishment and success in the face of extreme adversity, because he would not compromise his values.

As a parent, can you create an environment that will be a stronger influence than the forces of the world around you? Parents are in an unusual and ideal position to create the powerfully influential world, complete with right and positive values, that can counteract the inferior and counterfeit value systems so effective at influencing our children.

Unfortunately, many well-intentioned parents unknowingly abdicate their God-given right, position and responsibility to shape their children’s future. Sometimes incorrect or inadequate methods are used to instill values. Often parents simply don’t know what to do. Others are not willing to make some hard decisions or follow through on their commitments.

Positive steps

What can you do? Here are some ways you can start:

• Establish your purpose in life. Is it clear in your mind why you are on earth? Is that purpose the driving force in your life, and are you able to regularly express it to your children?

If you are not sure why you were born, consider Jesus’ words. He taught that the great purpose in life is for humans to enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). The Kingdom of God as Jesus described it is to become a member of the family of God. (To better understand this biblical truth, request your free copy of What Is Your Destiny? from the address in your country—or the country nearest you—listed on page 2.) Jesus Christ also gave the values of His Kingdom, values firmly based on God’s law. You can study them in the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of Matthew. These are the values of mankind’s future, values we are all destined to live by. Everything we do in this life to live by the values Jesus brought is part of our preparation for our role in the Kingdom He will establish when He returns to earth. This goal should change our lives.

If seeking the Kingdom of God becomes your major focus in life, you then have a powerful motivation to sustain your values in a world that so effectively undermines right values.

What are they learning from you?

• Examine your own values. Is your value system based on the actions and decisions of others? If so, why should you expect your children to differ from the world around them?

Consider, for example, that Jesus taught as one of the foundational precepts of the Kingdom of God, “Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37). It is a matter of righteous character to do exactly what you say you’ll do and be exactly what you say you are.

God doesn’t expect us to take oaths to confirm that we are telling the truth or to get us to commit to a particular course of action. We should simply be true to our word. We are to show consistently by what we are that our word is good.

Members of our family observe and learn from our actions more than from our words. Children in particular are quick to take note of hypocrisy. If they see parents paying only lip service to a principle and then violating it, children sooner or later will find an excuse to compromise sound principles they may have been taught.

On the other hand, if you the parent...
are seen to be sincere and will adhere to a principle to the point of personal sacrifice, you will inspire obedience in your child when the pressure is on him. Of course, this requires hard decisions and firm commitment.

**Positive feedback for children**

- **Make sure your children experience success.** Your children do many right things every day. Many times we focus on the wrong things they do and correct them when we notice their mistakes. But when they do something right—or even mostly right—it is equally important to notice that as well. As a parent, you want to reinforce the right things your children do in their lives.

  Spencer Johnson, M.D., in his 1983 publication *The One Minute Father,* encourages parents concerning their children to “catch them doing something right.” If kids are criticized constantly by parents for what they are doing wrong, they won’t associate success with their home experience. Success, not failure, is what we want them to repeat throughout their lives. Success, not failure, is what we want for their future. The environment you create in your home will go a long way to help your children visualize a successful future.

  You may have to change the way you view your child. I’m reminded of a story about Andrew Carnegie, who was at one time the largest steel manufacturer and the wealthiest man in America. He had 43 millionaires working for him at a time when millionaires were rare.

  A reporter asked Mr. Carnegie why he had hired 43 millionaires. He responded that those men had not been millionaires when they started working for him; they had become millionaires as a result of working for him. The next question was, “How did you develop these men to become so valuable to you that you have paid them this much money?”

  Andrew Carnegie answered that men are developed in the same way gold is mined. When gold is mined, several tons of dirt must be moved to obtain an ounce of gold. But one doesn’t go into the mine looking for dirt; one goes in looking for gold. He had learned to look for and develop the best qualities in those working for him.

  You might ask yourself what your children do right. If you follow a child-rearing pattern of constant criticism and correction, is it getting the desired results? Probably not. Instead, find what your offspring are doing right and tell them specifically what you like about them several times a day. Create this positive and encouraging environment in your home and you will likely find that you will have to correct less often. And, when you do give correction, it probably will be taken more seriously.

  At summer camp we make sure every day that teens are a success in the eyes of their instructors and peers. This positive feedback encourages them to apply the values they are taught to achieve success.

**Finding fulfillment**

- **Take time with each of your children every day.** Just like adults, our children want to say things that to them are important. When you give up your time to focus on your child, he will recognize that he is important to you. What is vitally important here is that your child is validated by you, not by someone outside your family who may influence him with values you don’t approve.

  A child left to himself seeks his own validation, often in ways that are destructive to others. We have noticed in our camps that some teens seek attention through insulting fellow campers, using foul language, breaking rules or generally making trouble. We take positive steps to help these teenagers because, too often, if they can’t find positive reinforcement of who and what they are, they will instinctively seek affirmation in negative ways.

  The right kind of self-worth is generated within a child by loving and principled parents. Improper self-worth can form when a child is left to contrive his own view of himself. You the parent are in the best position to create a vision of who your child is and where he is going. A powerful image is established in your child’s mind because of your approval, acceptance and love. This image is reinforced with the values he incorporates to achieve success in the context of your family.

  Parents must recognize that some children’s need for acceptance is quite strong, and they can’t take for granted that children are growing up secure and confident just because they have a home.

  Zig Ziglar, in his book *Raising Positive Kids in a Negative World,* refers to a study in which 60 schoolchildren were divided into three groups of 20 and given arithmetic tests daily for five days. One group was consistently praised for its performance; another group was ignored; those who were praised improved dramatically; those who were criticized improved also, but not so much; and those who were ignored hardly improved at all.

  Parents can learn lessons from this example. Give your children the attention they need. Look them in the eye. Don’t read a newspaper or watch television while you are talking with them. Convey genuine affection and interest. Listen intently to what they are saying. These actions convey the message that your child is important to you and you are deeply interested in what he says or how he feels. The greatest love is sacrifice. Give yourself to your children.

**Positive feedback for children**

Do your children have a bright future? If you leave it to the world around them to create their future for them, it is bleak indeed. If you help them create a vision of who they are and what they can become, experiencing success by employing right values, then their future is bright indeed. This vision has to be within them, and it has to be bright enough to protect them from the darkness outside.

Do you as a parent have a clear vision of your purpose in life? Does belief in that purpose sustain you to faithfully live by your values? God gives us the promise of the Kingdom of God and participation in the Kingdom as one of His sons forever. Not only that, but He is prepared to pass that promise on to your children just as the promises to Abraham were passed on to Abraham’s children. God’s promise is not just for us alone, “for the promise is to you and to your children . . .” (Acts 2:39).

Families who see and hear the purpose of God set before them daily, forming the basis for who they are and where they are going, make use of a wonderful structure to establish a bright future for their children. A picture is painted; a vision is cast; the future thus becomes real and attainable.

When children grow up on the sure promises of who they are and what they can become, they attain their lives to the picture painted for them. Their future is indeed bright.
Dorcas, a Faithful Disciple

In a dramatic miracle that energized the early Church, a woman was raised to life again. But did this momentous event overshadow an important lesson we need to learn?

by Joan Osborn

In the city of Joppa, Dorcas (or Tabitha), one of the disciples of the Lord, lay dying. In spite of the diligent care of the other disciples and perhaps physicians, she died. Her body was prepared for burial and laid in an upper room of the house. From the few brief words we have of this account in Acts 9:36-42, the events surrounding her death appear to have happened quickly.

The brethren in Joppa were saddened by this tragic turn of events. Having heard that the apostle Peter was in Lydda, a city close to Joppa, they sent for him to come to them. Perhaps they hoped he would attend to the funeral. Or perhaps they had heard of the healing he had performed at Lydda and hoped for another such miracle. Whatever their intentions, we read that Peter did come to Joppa. Then, in an amazing miracle, he was the instrument of God’s raising of Dorcas from the dead.

This momentous event was early in the history of the Church, sometime shortly after Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. This miracle—which had great impact on the people of the city of Joppa—“became known throughout Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.”

This miracle was important to the early Church. People could see Dorcas and speak with her after her return to life. She was a walking proclamation of the truth and power of God.

Example for Christians

When Peter arrived at Dorcas’s house, the widows of the church there surrounded him and began to show him the garments Dorcas had made for them. This tells us something about Dorcas as a Christian. She was one known for putting her beliefs into practice to help the people around her.

She gave of herself to help others in several ways. Consider how much time she must have spent helping others. Making clothes in the first century must have been time-consuming, to say the least. There were no sewing machines; a garment had to be cut and sewn by hand—if one could buy the material.

We are not given any details of how Dorcas made the many garments and tunics attributed to her. Is it possible she wove the material herself? Did she spin the threads or yarns? Whatever her starting point, Dorcas gave of her time to those for whom she made clothing. She understood what it meant to be a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), giving something valuable and precious: her time.

Another obvious talent

What about her talent? Not everyone can sew. Few possess enough patience to become an accomplished seamstress. The widows who were showing Peter the things Dorcas had made seemed proud of them; they were probably beautifully made. She had to be talented, and she used her talent to serve others.

We all have talents. Some can sing or play a musical instrument. Some are artistically endowed and can paint or draw. Some are gifted in what they can create with their hands, as Dorcas with the clothing she made. But she apparently had another talent any of us can cultivate: the ability to pay attention to and listen to others who need to talk about their problems, to share their burdens.

Acts 9:36 tells us something about Dorcas. She was a faithful disciple, “full of good works and charitable deeds.” Her deeds were so widely known that God inspired Luke to include them in the book of Acts.

We all have talents. Some are gifted in what they can create with their hands, as Dorcas with the clothing she made. But she apparently had another talent any of us can cultivate: the ability to pay attention to and listen to others who need to talk about their problems, to share their burdens.

Look more closely at Dorcas’s example. It was the widows of the Church who came to Peter, showing him the things Dorcas had made. Widows require special consideration, and Dorcas recognized this, doing “charitable deeds.” We do not

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Illustration by Krisi Skinner
Andrew Lloyd Webber has produced some remarkable stage musicals: *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Evita* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, to name a few. Another successful production is based on an Old Testament account: *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. It’s a true story that illustrates that God has always been concerned with the heart of man.

When adultery and divorce are so commonly accepted, it’s refreshing to see the main character in a musical reject a promiscuous invitation. In the musical, Joseph responds to Potiphar’s wife’s sexual advances by saying: “Please stop! I don’t believe in free love.”

The actual biblical text is much more specific. Genesis records Joseph’s words as, “How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9, New International Version). Joseph recognized this temptation for what it was: He knew the physical act of giving in to temptation would damage a spiritual relationship that God had held from the beginning to be sacred.

**God’s concerns haven’t changed**

From earliest history God has been concerned with mankind’s heart, thoughts, attitudes and motives. Even though the Old Testament represents about 77 percent of the body of Scripture, few people understand that the standards God expects of us today are the same as He has expected down through the millennia.

God is concerned with people and how they live. After all, how we live reflects our character. The heart of humanity has always been of primary concern with the Creator because God created man in His image. What God is—and what He teaches in Scripture—defines what is right.

Certain nagging questions have plagued mankind. What am I supposed to do? How should I act? What is “good”? What does it mean to be a good person?

God didn’t ignore these questions in the Old Testament, nor did He leave it for men and women to decide for themselves. In fact, He addressed these issues in the most forthright way imaginable.

**God’s judgment on human corruption**

The book of Genesis tells us that God, after some 1,600 years of recorded human history, was grieved and His own heart “filled with pain” at man’s wickedness. God saw that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5-6). Grieved that He had made man, God made an irrevocable decision: to drown virtually all land-based life on the planet in an enormous deluge: the great flood of Noah’s time.

God was concerned with man’s thoughts. He brought to pass the drowning of everyone except eight people, the family of Noah (2 Peter 2:5). In this great act God clearly distinguished between the evil thoughts of everyone on earth and the righteous life of Noah. He abhorred the one and accepted the other.

Early in recorded history God willed—on a massive scale—that a sore penalty be exacted for evil thoughts and lives, and that physical salvation would be afforded the few who remained righteous.

**Concern about human motivations**

Scripture demonstrates that God was concerned from early in mankind’s history with man’s heart, that God cared deeply about the spirit, or motivation, behind man’s actions.

This is demonstrated by such statements as “Do not hate your brother in your heart” (Leviticus 19:17, NIV) and “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

After recounting His Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5:6-21, God exclaimed, “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (verse 29).

King David knew well that God “searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts” (1 Chronicles 28:9, NIV).

David also grew to understand that no one could escape from the invisible presence of God (Psalm 139). In his repentance after his adultery with Bathsheba, David expressed the understanding that God was ultimately more concerned with “a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart” than with any physical penance he could undertake (Psalm 51:17).

Man’s innermost attitude and disposition have...
God is concerned with people and how they live. After all, how we live reflects our character. The heart of humanity has always been of primary concern with the Creator because God created man in His image. God has long concerned Himself with the morality of people. This was clearly demonstrated during Abraham’s time when judgment was exacted on five cities. Two of the cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, have become classic examples of the sinfulness of humans, typifying all that is perverse and decadent. God showed He would not forever overlook depraved attitudes and conduct. He concluded that the “sin [was] so grievous” in these cities that a prediction of even 10 righteous people living there was wildly optimistic and unrealistic (Genesis 18:20-32).

Once again God made a distinction concerning the morality and ethics of human conduct. In Sodom lived only one righteous man, Lot (2 Peter 2:6-7). God considered the evil of these cities sufficient to warrant their annihilation as a judgment on their sinful, corrupted residents.

The Old Testament: the foundation of morality

God is also concerned with man’s attitude toward his brother. In some cases the Old Testament scriptures stress this even more clearly than the New. Consider, for example, why murder is so abhorrent to God. The New Testament scriptures do not detail why premeditated murder is wrong. They do not explain what was behind God’s declaration in Exodus 20:13 that murder is a sin.

The Old Testament, however, holds the key. It’s not just that God detests the violent act. The real reason is revealed early in man’s history as a moral statement given to Noah.

Noah had personally witnessed a global watery judgment for man’s violent ways and cruel thoughts. God restated to him the spiritual reason behind the prohibition against murder: “And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.” God then explained what no text in the New Testament does similarly: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man” (Genesis 9:5, 6, NIV).

Man should not murder because human beings bear their Creator’s image. Each person bears a potential far greater than this physical life. To murder another is to attempt to negate God’s infinitely higher purpose for mankind.

The sacredness of human life

Consider another example related to the sacredness of human life where the New Testament does not explain a concept as clearly as the Old: How concerned is God with the unborn child? Where in Scripture would you go to find an answer to this question? Where would you find God’s concern with the Creator because God created man in His image?

Dorcas

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read that Dorcas sewed to support herself. Perhaps she made garments and gave them to whomever was in need.

Proverbs 31:20 says that the virtuous woman “extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hand to the needy.”

Many are the times that a simple phone call, card or visit is just the attention a person may need.

Loss of a friend

The disciples who sent for Peter implored him to come; the widows were weeping when Peter arrived. The people of Joppa obviously loved Dorcas. She had loved them and served them through her kindness, concern and generosity.

One writer put it this way: “The works of Dorcas were recognized in the feeling which the Christian community experienced when Dorcas was gone. They remembered her self-consuming service, her compassion, her faithfulness, her charity. They knew that they had lost their dearest friend. The picture of these people gathered about her in her room weeping does not describe people who are sorry for the things and service they have lost but because they had lost one whom they love” (Harold J. Ockenga, Women Who Made Bible History, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1962, pp. 224-225)

Dorcas gave time, talent and tender care to others. Because of this she is immortalized as someone “full of good works.” The apostle James would later write that good works are evidence of faith and that faith without such evidence is empty and worthless, of no benefit to anyone. Dorcas’s faith was proven by her good works directed at helping others.

The world is a busy place. Life is complicated. It often seems to take all our energy just to get ourselves through the day. But we need to remember the example of Dorcas. We can find many things we can do for others. They need not be as complicated as telephoning an elderly shut-in or providing a few food items to the needy or to a local charity.

We live in different times and different physical circumstances. But people still need our time, talent and tender care in whatever form we can give it to them. Let’s learn from the example of Dorcas; let us also be doers. GN