

# The Good News

January-February 2004

M A G A Z I N E O F U N D E



## The Horsemen of Revelation

Are You Feeling Overwhelmed? • The New (Anti-Semitic) World Order  
America's Culture War • 2004: The United States Faces Powerful Challenges



I remember quite clearly when I first heard the term *four horsemen*. I was in eighth grade, and “new math” was coming into vogue. Our math teacher apparently was having a tough time helping a class of rambunctious, attention-challenged eighth-graders grasp the finer points of the concept.

Much to his relief, four of us finally caught on. He promptly dubbed us “the four horsemen.” At the time I thought it was a compliment. Several years later, when I came to understand the biblical significance of the term, I wasn’t sure what to think.

I’ve long wondered about the connection in his mind. Perhaps, this being his first year out of college and being stuck with trying to teach math to junior-high students, he felt the end of *his* world was imminent. I certainly wouldn’t have blamed him. And, now that I think about it, he lasted only that one year at our school.

But the four horsemen of the Bible—or, as they are often called, *the four horsemen of the Apocalypse*—are no trivial matter. They are deadly serious, and according to the Bible their disastrous ride marks four overlapping waves of catastrophe, spiritual and physical, that

### The four horsemen of the Apocalypse are no trivial matter. Their disastrous ride marks four overlapping waves of catastrophe that devastate the world.

devastate the world in the time leading up to Jesus Christ’s return.

Who are these four mysterious horsemen found in Revelation 6? What do they represent? Should we take them seriously?

Many people misunderstand the first of the four, and thus become totally confused about the most important trends prophesied to overtake the earth before Christ’s second coming.

But maybe we shouldn’t be surprised that so many misunderstand this first horseman. After all, as you’ll learn in this issue of *The Good News*, he represents the very thing billions of people are victims of—*false religion*, particularly *false Christianity*.

Does this sound surprising to you? It’s certainly a jarring concept, but it shouldn’t be. After all, Jesus Christ Himself clearly told His followers—and us today—that *many* false teachers and religious figures would arise, claiming to represent Him, and would *deceive many*.

He repeats this warning *three times* in one prophecy alone—the major prophecy He gave shortly before His death (recorded in Matthew 24) in which He explained to His disciples the major trends that would dominate the period leading up to His return. Those sobering warnings clearly should get our attention!

In fact, Christ’s prophecy is key to understanding the identity of these four horsemen. Jesus clearly told us what they portend; those trends are represented symbolically by the four horsemen of the book of Revelation—where many additional details of end-time events are spelled out for us *if* we’re willing to understand and accept what it says.

It’s difficult to properly understand end-time events and where they are headed without an understanding of what these four horsemen represent. To help you better grasp these prophecies, and to see their clear meaning from the pages of the Bible, in this issue of *The Good News* we’re beginning a series of articles that will cover the meaning of each of these four horsemen in great detail.

If you want to understand Bible prophecy as it applies to our age and the times ahead, few things could be more important to you. We hope you’ll study this article series carefully and prayerfully.

—Scott Ashley

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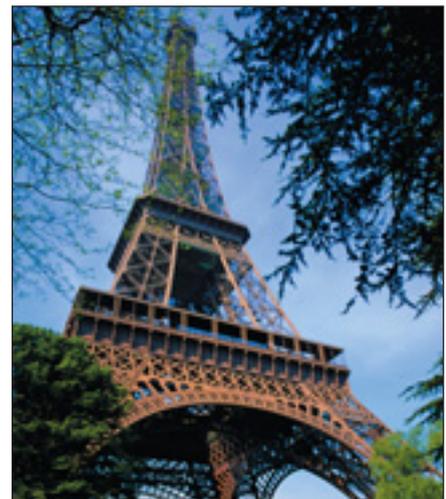
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The “four horsemen of the Apocalypse”—this latter term being the Greek name for the book of Revelation—have intrigued Bible readers for centuries. What do they represent? The implications for mankind are staggering. In this first article of a series, we introduce the overall prophecy and look in detail at the first horseman.

Visions of Judgment

# The Horsemen of Revelation

by Darris McNeely

**F**ew sights are as stirring as a scene of horsemen galloping across a landscape. Moviemakers use such scenes to add drama, mystery and power to their stories.

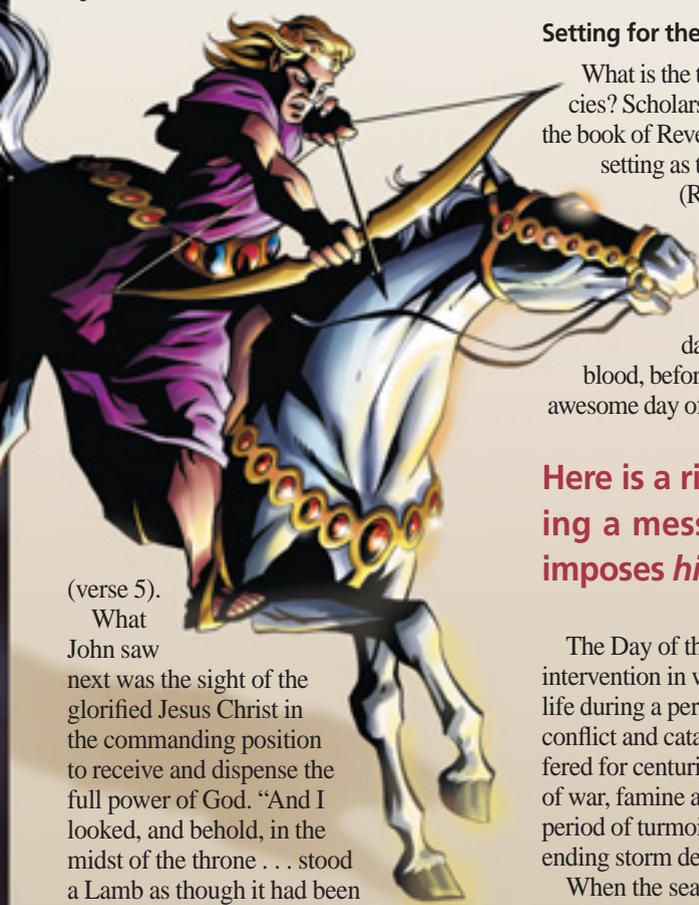
In Revelation 6, Christ uses four horsemen to represent the first four of seven seals He opens from the scroll in His hand. These images have intrigued generations of Bible scholars and students. Thundering across the prophetic landscape, these dramatic images cast a pall of terror on the world.

What is their meaning for our troubled and uncertain world? Do these ominous riders foretell a coming wave of calamity for the earth’s inhabitants? Let’s look and see.

## Mankind's destiny hanging in the balance

To understand the seals in Revelation 6, we first need to examine chapter 5. John is experiencing a vision of the throne of God when he sees “in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals” (Revelation 5:1).

No one in heaven or earth is able or worthy to open the scroll and reveal its contents. John bemoans the absence of anyone capable of opening the scrolls. But a voice from one of the elders around the throne says: “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals”



(verse 5).

What John saw next was the sight of the glorified Jesus Christ in the commanding position to receive and dispense the full power of God. “And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as though it had been slain . . . Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne” (verses 6-7).

What follows from this awesome scene of angelic praise is the stirring anthem to Christ's role in the plan of God. The four living creatures and 24 elders sing a new song. “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals,” they proclaim in unison.

To this scene is now added the voice of many angels, perhaps numbering into the hundreds of millions, all loudly proclaiming, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (verses 11-12).

With a thundering crescendo the next stanza arrives from “every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them . . . saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!’”

Such is the scene that stands as a prelude to the opening of the seals. The fate of mankind rests in God's hands, and His patience is at an end. Christ alone is pronounced worthy to open the seals that announce God's judgments on the nations. The destiny of humanity is not a matter of chance or whim, but has been spelled out in the seals that He opens.

### Setting for the horsemen's ride

What is the time setting of these prophecies? Scholars offer divergent opinions, but the book of Revelation itself reveals the time setting as the prophetic “Lord's day” (Revelation 1:10), elsewhere called “the Day of the Lord.” Notice how the prophet Joel described this period: “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD” (Joel 2:31).

**Here is a rider who *appears* to come in the name of and bearing a message of peace. But he is a conqueror, one who imposes *his* version of peace on the world.**

The Day of the Lord begins with God's intervention in world affairs to spare human life during a period of unparalleled global conflict and catastrophe. Mankind has suffered for centuries from the combined impact of war, famine and disease, but no previous period of turmoil will compare to this age-ending storm described in Revelation.

When the seals open before John, he sees the first four uniquely pictured. Four ominous horsemen arise in an eerie sequence. To better understand what these horsemen represent, let's look at another key prophecy Jesus Christ gave during His ministry.

### The gathering storm

Jesus' disciples were visiting Jerusalem with Him. After admiring the temple's buildings, they crossed the Kidron Valley, climbed the Mount of Olives and paused to ask Christ for signs of His coming and the end of the age (Matthew 24:1-3).

Jesus gave four signs that correspond with the first four seals of Revelation 6: “Take heed that no man deceive you. For *many*

*shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.* And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For *nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places.* All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:4-8, King James Version, emphasis added throughout).

Here Jesus reveals an overview of trends and conditions from the first century until the end of the age. Take note of the four significant developments He foretold: Religious deception, war, famine and disease.

As this and later articles in this series will show, humanity has long suffered from the effects of these four signs. But nothing in history will compare to the catastrophes unleashed at the opening of the seals by the Lamb. The unprecedented devastation brought by the opening of the four seals will set the stage for the return of Christ as King of Kings.

Let's now look more closely at what John saw.

### The first seal: Conqueror on a white horse

As the first seal opens, John writes the following: “Now I saw when the Lamb opened

one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, ‘Come and see.’ And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer” (Revelation 6:1-2).

White is a symbol of purity and peace. Here is a rider who *appears* to come in the name of and bearing a message of peace. But he is a conqueror, one who imposes *his* version of peace on the world.

Possibly this rider will even bring about a pseudo peace, a condition described by the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:3: “For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them . . . And they shall not escape.”

Some confuse this rider with Jesus Christ, whom Revelation 19 shows riding a white horse at His second coming. But a careful examination reveals important distinctions. Christ is wearing “many crowns” at His return, not just a single crown as worn by this first horseman. And instead of wielding

a bow, Christ is brandishing a sword with which He strikes the nations.

To be consistent with Christ's statements in Matthew 24, we must conclude that this rider represents not Jesus, but instead *false teachers* who appropriate His name while corrupting His plain teaching and leading many into destructive heresy.

Remember His warning: "Take heed that

## This rider represents not Jesus, but instead *false teachers* who appropriate His name while corrupting His plain teaching and leading many into destructive heresy.

no one deceives you. For many will come in My name . . . and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5).

### A different gospel takes root

It didn't take long after Christ's death for a "different gospel" (Galatians 1:6) to invade the Church, causing division and confusion. The apostles were forced to deal with this problem, as evidenced by their writings to the Church.

Paul warned the elders of the congregation at Ephesus to beware of false teachers: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 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 20:28-30).

As the apostle Peter neared the end of his life, God compelled him to give a stern warning about the apostasy that he saw looming on the horizon.

The second chapter of his second epistle is a powerful rebuke of those who would bring false teaching into the Church: "But there 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).

He went on to say, "*Many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed*" (verse 2). Peter calls the Church's doctrine the "way of truth." It is like a trail of truth along which the faithful have always walked. Christ called it a narrow and difficult way that few find (Matthew 7:13-14).

### The Church corrupted by deception

Near the end of the first century the apostle John, last of the original 12 apostles, saw a rapid escalation in the heresy and persecution that was plaguing the Church. During the reign of Roman Emperor Diocletian a virulent strain of antagonism was unleashed on Christians. For a time, the government even exiled the aged apostle to the Aegean island of Patmos. It was there that he

received the book of Revelation in vision.

The three epistles bearing his name reveal the mounting tension in the churches and John's desire to warn the members of the devastating impact of false teaching. He wrote of their individual and collective responsibility to examine those teachers who presented themselves as spiritual guides and experts.

He knew it was easy to claim divine authority and thereby deceive people into following ideas that were spiritually destructive. "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).

We see the apostles warning of the corruption of the true faith brought by Jesus Christ. Jude summed it up perfectly when he wrote of the need to "*contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3).

Within decades, the truth of God was gravely corrupted by false teachers. The result was teachings that no longer resembled the gospel brought by Christ. In Galatians 1:6, Paul had to reprimand the Galatians for "turning away . . . to a *different gospel*." (To learn more about the apostasy that corrupted Christianity, and Christ's repeated warnings of it, be sure to read "Many False Prophets Will Arise and Deceive Many," beginning on page 26.)

From the teachings of these corrupters evolved a church bearing Jesus' name, but vastly different in doctrines and practices from the Church we see in the New Testament. In fact, two vastly different "Christian" faiths were now locked in a struggle—the true followers of Jesus' teachings and the

## What Did the Early Church Believe and Practice?

The book of Acts records eyewitness accounts of the early Church from Christ's resurrection until about A.D. 60. Chapter 2 records the beginning of the Church.

This special event began when the place in which the apostles and other disciples were gathered suddenly was filled with the sound of a mighty wind and "tongues, as of fire," that appeared to alight on them. They went out and almost immediately began to speak to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem, for these events occurred on the biblical Feast of Pentecost. Miraculously, the apostles' preaching was comprehensible to all people from many lands so that all understood their words in their own language.

Often overlooked in this account is the significance of these events occurring on the *Day of Pentecost* (Acts 2:1). This was one of the festivals God commanded for His people many centuries before (Leviticus 23). In revealing these festivals, God exclaimed, ". . . These are *My feasts* . . . the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations . . ." (verses 2, 4). Then God proclaimed them to be "a statute forever" (verses 14, 21, 31, 41).

The Gospels show Jesus keeping the same festivals (Matthew 26:17-19; John 7:10-14, 37-38). Both the book of Acts and Paul's letters show the apostles observing these festivals long after Christ's crucifixion (Acts 2:1-4; 18:21; 20:6, 16; 27:9). This is the example they set for us.

Today, however, most churches teach that these festivals were somehow annulled by Christ's death. Yet the unmistakable record of the Bible is that the early Church

continued to observe them long after His death—but with a greater grasp of their spiritual significance.

Speaking of one of these God-given feasts, the apostle Paul urged the Church congregation 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).

Paul was obviously referring to keeping the biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread (see Leviticus 23:6; Deuteronomy 16:16). Paul similarly explained the Christian significance of the biblical Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7; Leviticus 23:5) and gave instructions on how to properly observe this ceremony in the Church (1 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Such passages prompt an obvious question: Since Jesus, the apostles and the early Church kept these days, why don't churches teach and observe them today? After all, Paul directly tied the feasts to Jesus, His purpose and His sacrifice for mankind (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The Gospels and Acts are equally clear that Christ, the disciples and the early Church kept the weekly Sabbath on the seventh day of the week as their day of rest and worship (Mark 6:2; Luke 4:16, 31-32; 13:10; Acts 13:14-44; 18:4). It was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue on Sabbath days 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 this

tarnished followers of a spiritually corrupt, counterfeit Christianity!

Over the centuries, persecution from the Roman authorities took its toll. This counterfeit church further compromised the faith under threat of death from the state.

Roman Emperor Constantine combined the power of the state with the ecclesiastical structure and authority of the false church. This created a union of church and state with the ability to create order by squelching dissent. Thus, Constantine and succeeding Roman emperors allied themselves with a deceptive religious system represented by the symbolic white horse of peace. Their mission was to conquer, in the name of Christ, all those who opposed them.

### A final great deception to come

Christ's prophecy of false teachers coming in His name, claiming He is the Christ but deceiving many, indeed came to pass. Church history is largely a story of teachings and practices of the counterfeit Christianity, with its system of beliefs and practices fundamentally different from what the early New Testament Church believed and taught. The story of those who held to or at times recaptured the essence of true Christianity is not easy to follow through history.

## In Our Next Issue

What is the meaning of the second horseman—the blood-red horse and its rider? Don't miss part two of this eye-opening series in the next issue!

Today those who strive to practice the teachings that Christ put into His Church are few in comparison to the thousands of churches that call themselves Christian but are in fact descendants of the counterfeit movement begun in the first century. Christ said that "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it . . . Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Yet even for these few, there is danger from a coming deception—Satan's end-time effort to defeat and enslave humankind.

Christ's Olivet prophecy progresses, in concert with the book of Revelation, toward the final events before His return. He said, "For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). Even the elect, the people of God who "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17), will be susceptible to this great deception.

The apostle Paul spoke of this time of deception in 2 Thessalonians 2. This prophecy of a "man of sin" to arise before Christ's return stands out within Paul's writings.

This end-time deception is led by a figure "who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped" and who will even sit "in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." In Paul's day, this opposition to the law and doctrine of God was already at work. But before the coming of Christ it will expand "according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders" (verses 3-9).

This "son of perdition" matches the description of the figure described in Revelation 13 as a "beast," one of two beasts in this section, this one with two horns like a lamb and speaking like a dragon (verse 11).

This person acts in tandem with the first beast (verse 1), actually causing people to worship the first beast with great adulation (verse 12). "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived" (verses 13-14).

What is this talking about? Here we find the description of Satan's final attempt to engineer a system based on his lying words of deceit and confusion. That it involves false religion is obvious from all the markers we have seen in the New Testament Scriptures.

A man claiming to be God, in the temple of God, performs signs with the intent of persuading men to worship a system that appears to be doing good for the world. This is the final resurgence of a system God calls "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Revelation 17:5).

His allure will likely lie in bringing about a peaceful solution to a world crisis where no one else has succeeded. The world will wonder in amazement at the ability of this system to impose a "peace" that will seemingly bring security in which the world can prosper economically. It will be a global

*Continued on page 23*

God-ordained assembly to teach others about Jesus as Savior and Messiah.

Of course, most people and churches ignore the biblical seventh-day Sabbath. But why? Shouldn't we observe a weekly day of rest and worship as God commands (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), and shouldn't it be the same day that Jesus and His apostles kept?

A closer examination of the Scriptures reveals many other differences between the

## A closer examination of the Scriptures reveals many other differences between the teachings and practices of Jesus and His apostles and what is commonly taught.

teachings and practices of Jesus and His apostles and what is commonly taught. For example, the belief that obedience to God's law is unnecessary is directly contrary to Jesus' own words (Matthew 4:4; 5:17-19) and the teachings and examples of His apostles (Acts 24:14; 25:8; Romans 7:12, 22; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Jesus and the apostles never taught 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 that would spend eternity in either heaven or hell (Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Matthew 10:28). Rather, they followed earlier Scripture passages in referring to death as being like an unconscious sleep in which the dead await a future resurrection (compare

Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Daniel 12:2-3; John 11:11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:6, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

Nowhere in the Bible do we find any mention of, or hint of approval for, today's popular religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Though the Greek word *pascha* is once incorrectly translated "Easter" (Acts 12:4, KJV)—and that only in one Bible translation—this is a flagrant *mistranslation*. *Pascha* always means "Passover," never Easter!

Instead of approving such celebrations rooted in paganism, God condemns them even when they are used in attempts to worship Him (compare Deuteronomy 12:29-32; 1 Corinthians 10:19-21).

These are some of the major differences between the Christianity of Jesus and the apostles and the Christianity commonly practiced today. But don't simply take our word for it. We encourage you to follow the example of the Bereans (Acts 17:11) and look into your Bible to see whether today's popular beliefs and practices agree with what Jesus and His apostles practiced and taught.

(Adapted from the booklet *The Church Jesus Built*. Download or request your free copy at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org) or from any of our offices listed on page 2. To learn more about these subjects, be sure to request our free booklets *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Really Matter Which Days We Keep?*, *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest, Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* and *What Happens After Death?*)



# America's Culture War: Threat to Homeland Security?

While the U.S.-led war on terror continues worldwide, another war—of colliding cultures—heats up in the courts of America. Where will this lead the country? Could this war be a greater threat than terrorism?

by Darris McNeely

Last month U.S. President George W. Bush traveled to Great Britain for a controversial state visit. His goal was to restate his case for the war against terror in general and the invasion of Iraq in particular. He spoke of the historic ties between America and Britain, particularly during the 20th century battles of aggression on the European continent. As expected, he was greeted with loud protests from those who do not share his vision of the mission he articulates for the United States and Britain in the world.

While he was abroad, the Massachusetts supreme court handed down a landmark ruling which stated that homosexual couples have the right to marry. By a 4-3 decision, the court not only bypassed federal courts, but also all other state and federal legislative bodies, to decree a new definition of marriage.

By this ruling the court declares that marriage is no longer defined as a union between a man and a woman. With one decision, likely to be followed by other states, the divine institution of marriage has been legally redefined by human beings. Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney has vowed to fight this ruling with an amendment to the state's constitution.

Not only is this decision undemocratic—having been made by judges rather than citizens' elected representatives—it is *ungodly*. It raises itself against and above the laws of God regarding the sacred marriage covenant between a man and a woman given by Him at creation.

The homosexual marriage debate is another battle in an ongoing war that weakens the moral fabric of society. This war, a clash of cultures, threatens the long-term survival of the United States as much as does the war on terror—indeed, more so.

It is vital that you understand the extent of this war and where it will lead. It may be too late to reverse the outcome, but we can be forewarned of its consequences and pray for our merciful God to stay His hand of judgment.

## Battle lines being drawn

History chronicles the efforts to fashion the world according to various religious or political ideologies. Most of these ideologies center on creating a governmental structure that establishes universal peace and freedom. The yearning of individuals to live peacefully, free from oppression of any sort, is universal. People, and the nations they create, hunger for the freedom to live as they choose.

Yet we also see the field littered with the wreckage of countless failed designs to create or impose such a world. In America today the battle between those who desire to maintain a religious foundation to the laws of the nation and those who want a society free of religious influence is reaching a critical level. This is where the battle lines are drawn.

These issues are worthy of our examination in light of what the Bible says about the role of God in the public life of any nation. Both sides need to heed what the eternal Creator says about His law and truth. Neither side will escape the judgment God will bring on a world that has both ignored and forgotten the basis for true liberty and freedom.

## Religious freedom under attack?

The recent controversy over the Ten Commandments in Alabama highlighted an ongoing battle, largely in the courts, over the separation of church and state in the public life of America. For refusing to obey a federal court order to remove a granite monument inscribed with the Ten Commandments from the state judicial building, Judge Roy Moore was recently removed from his post as chief justice of the Alabama supreme court.

In refusing to remove this monument, Judge Moore defied a federal judge's order, a very dangerous precedent for any magistrate. However, his supporters remained outraged by the lack of respect for the religious roots of the U.S. legal system, which they saw symbolized in this drama. His action fed the flames of a hotly debated issue in American public life. Many people, of



*In recent months a federal judge ordered the removal of this display of the Ten Commandments from an Alabama state building. Meanwhile, gay-rights activists like these marching in a gay pride march (right) celebrated U.S. and Massachusetts Supreme Court decisions legalizing homosexual acts and same-sex marriage.*

differing religious persuasions, are deeply concerned about the erosion of both the moral foundation of the nation and their freedom of religious expression.

America has now reached the bizarre point where judges have discerned in the U.S. Constitution prohibitions against public display of the Ten Commandments while simultaneously finding constitutional rights to homosexual sex, gay marriage and dismemberment of unborn babies.

John Adams, second president of the United States, is famously quoted as saying the U.S. Constitution “was made only for a moral and religious people” and “is wholly inadequate to the government of any other” (quoted by William Federer, *America's God and Country*

*Encyclopedia of Quotations*, 1996, pp. 10-11).

Adams' friend Thomas Jefferson, who authored the Declaration of Independence and later became the third American president, wrote: "The Christian religion is the best religion that has ever been given to man and I as Chief Magistrate of this nation am bound to give it the sanction of my example" (quoted by David Limbaugh, *Persecution: How Liberals Are Waging War Against Christianity*, 2003, p. 320).

Judge Moore is not the only religious

America in 2004 is a divided country when it comes to interpreting the laws of the land in light of changing morals. The 2000 presidential election exposed a nation broadly divided into two cultures. One is generally rural, conservative and religious, while the other is mostly urban, liberal and secular. Those in the former tended to vote for Republican George W. Bush while the latter group leaned in favor of Democrat Al Gore. It appears that the 2004 election will continue to highlight the

creating vast social change by striking down laws dealing with issues of religion, sex and gender. The effect is nothing short of a consistent and persistent attack on God and His laws.

Legalized abortion continues to be a major issue driving ever deeper into the rift of American society. In 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court, in the landmark *Roe v. Wade* case, overruled many existing state laws by declaring that abortion was a constitutional right. This became the de facto law of the land in spite of the fact that the Constitution says nothing about abortion or the so-called "right to privacy" on which the justices made their decision.

Since then more than 40 million abortions have been carried out in spite of opposition, debate and many attempts by state legislatures to restrict this "legal" infanticide.

Former President Ronald Reagan was on record as opposing abortion and on this issue aligned himself with millions of Americans who feel abortion is murder and a blight on society. Abortion is legal in America only because of *Roe v. Wade*. Neither state legislatures nor the U.S. Congress have enacted a law that legalizes the procedure. It is "law" only because of the Supreme Court ruling.

In June 2003 the Supreme Court issued another landmark ruling involving a Texas law that forbade two persons of the same sex from engaging in intimate sexual conduct. In *Lawrence v. Texas* the court in effect declared any state law forbidding sex between homosexuals to be invalid and unconstitutional.

Speaking for the majority opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy said homosexuals "are entitled to respect for their private lives. The state cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime" (*Los Angeles Times*, "Bans on Gay Sex Ruled Unconstitutional," June 27, 2003).

Justice Antonin Scalia spoke for the minority, saying the court "signed on to the so-called homosexual agenda" and that its ruling "effectively decrees the end of all morals legislation" (*ibid.*). By court decree the United States, like Canada, is legalizing marriage between homosexual partners. Scalia's warning has come to pass in November's Massachusetts supreme court ruling regarding gay marriage.

### Courts restrict religious freedom

Judicial activism in determining the moral law of the land is alarming many who see this as contrary to what the framers of the Constitution intended. It is also seen as a deliberate attack on religious values in American society.



## America has now reached the bizarre point where judges have discerned in the U.S. Constitution prohibitions against public display of the Ten Commandments while simultaneously finding constitutional rights to homosexual sex, gay marriage and dismemberment of unborn babies.

official to come under attack for publicly affirming his personal faith. U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, an openly religious man, is the target of many who feel his deeply held religious convictions make him unsuitable for the nation's top legal post.

Mr. Ashcroft, a former U.S. senator and an evangelical Christian and political conservative, is constantly accused of overstepping civil liberties in enforcing the Homeland Security Act. This unwarranted criticism is not surprising given the complexity of today's political and social environment and the needs of fighting the war on terror. Libertarians are concerned that American civil liberties not be sacrificed as terrorists are hunted within American borders.

differences between these two Americas.

### Supreme Court overturns longtime moral standards

In his recent book *Persecution*, best-selling author David Limbaugh highlighted the depth of this rift in the legal arena of courts and judges. Mr. Limbaugh tells the story of increasing discrimination against religion and religious expression in American society.

In presenting his case he chronicles numerous examples in the courts, mainstream media, Hollywood entertainment, public education and the private sector. This process is especially clear in the courts, where great strides have been made in

In 2000 the Supreme Court decided a case involving public prayer in a school before a football game. A chaplain gave a prayer over the school's public-address system. Some students were upset and sued. In *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, the court struck down a school district policy that allowed student prayer before activities. The court said students should not have to face "personally offensive religious ritual."

David Limbaugh writes in his book: "Chief Justice William Rehnquist got to the real nub of the problem when he commented on the majority's overt antipathy toward religion in public life, an antipathy—as this case alone shows—that has permeated the highest reaches of our judicial system.

"Rehnquist wrote: 'But even more disturbing than its holding is the tone of the Court's opinion; it bristles with hostility to all things religious in public life. Neither the holding nor the tone of the opinion is faithful to the meaning of the Establishment Clause, when it is recalled that George Washington himself, at the request of the very Congress which passed the Bill of Rights, proclaimed a day of "public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God.'"

Limbaugh comments, "This case dealt a significant blow to religious freedom by holding that a public school . . . violated the Establishment Clause" (*Persecution*, pp. 23-24).

The Establishment Clause is the section of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." In the area of public education, this statement against federal support of religion has been interpreted to some extreme ends.

Doing so has systematically removed much of the Judeo-Christian teaching on which the educational structure was founded. Mr. Limbaugh goes on to say that the void left by removal of religious influences has been filled with other values. "While the education establishment vigorously opposes the dissemination in schools of any value or belief that can be remotely traced to the Bible, it affirmatively endorses other values that many Christians find repugnant. Public schools are replete with values-laden curricula, from sex education and sexual orientation instruction to notions of self-esteem and death education" (p. 4).

In their effort to remove school prayer and other religious values and expressions from the school environment, the courts engage in lofty and erudite language to defend the modern interpretation of the Establishment

Clause. The same reasoning is used to order removal of a monument containing the Ten Commandments from a public building.

### A sound foundation undermined by evil

The U.S. Constitution is a noble document, forged by wise and understanding men

James Madison, known as "the father of the Constitution" and the fourth president of the United States, wrote in *The Federalist 51*: "If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over



**Marchers protest on the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. Their signs show the estimated numbers of abortions performed during particular years. Since the 1973 decision legalizing abortion, more than 40 million unborn have been killed.**

who searched centuries of law codes to write the visionary legal foundation for a new nation. It can even be demonstrated that in the political writings of the Founding Era (1760-1800), that generation cited the Bible more often than any other source (Limbaugh, p. 312).

Yet the First Amendment, however understood, is only the writing of men and does not carry the same weight as the Word of God. When the judges of a nation hold their opinions and reasoning in higher regard than the Bible, in time there will come a divine judgment of terrifying proportions. God says, "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

The apostle Paul said men "did not like to retain God in their knowledge," becoming "haters of God." Those with that attitude deserve the "righteous judgment of God" (Romans 1:28-32). If America is to retain its lofty status as the world's most powerful nation, it would do well to heed this warning.

It is plain that the governmental mechanisms established to ensure liberty are now being used to undermine the remaining values of faith and virtue in the nation's legal codes. The framers of the Constitution understood the need for a system of checks and balances to restrain human nature in government.

men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself" (quoted by Limbaugh, p. 319).

This ideal state has never been achieved. It could be argued that representative democracy has come closest. Yet even there, as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill observed, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others that have been tried from time to time."

In 1 Samuel 8 we find the story of the ancient nation of Israel rejecting God as their ruler and demanding a king like all the other nations. Samuel the prophet warned them of the problems that would eventually arise.

He foretold the ultimate downfall of every human form of government when he pointed out that the people inevitably would "be his [the king's] servants" (verse 17). In other words, human government inevitably regresses from serving the people who establish it. And when any government fails to serve the good of its people and places itself above the will of God, it is on the slippery slope of decay and decline.

### Has popular culture defeated religion?

The French historian Alexis de Tocqueville toured America during the 19th century. He observed the unique religious nature of the

people. He wrote: "For the Americans the ideas of Christianity and liberty are so completely mingled that it is almost impossible to get them to conceive of the one without the other . . . Religion . . . must be regarded as the first of their political institutions . . . I do not know whether all Americans have a sincere faith in their religion—for who can search the human heart?—but I am certain that they hold it indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions" (*Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, p. 316).

If America is a religious nation, why has its society seen such overwhelming transformation of its foundational institutions? For years observers have chronicled the decline of morality in the popular culture. Politicians, clergy and business executives, to name only a few, have come under the withering satire and denigration of movies, music and television. Marriage and traditional family and gender roles have been redefined before the catatonic eyes of a public amused into a near-comatose state.

The past 40 years have seen great social changes take place in the United States. But where were the churches in all of this? Why hasn't religion, with all its megachurches and modern marketing techniques, stirred the country to another "great awakening"? Could it be that they have been asleep and that they lack the true power of the Holy Spirit?

In the wake of the impeachment and sex scandals of former President Bill Clinton in 1998, Paul Weyrich, a leader of the Christian political movement Moral Majority, wrote in the *Washington Post* that conservative Christians had "lost the culture wars." His words implied that religion does not exert a strong or life-changing influence on the national scene. This may seem contradictory in light of the public's perception of the influence of churches and religion.

Polls indicate 80 percent of Americans believe in God. Yet Gallup polling shows church attendance has actually declined since the 1960s and has remained level since 1980 with no appreciable growth. Two thirds of the population may claim membership in a church but that does not always translate into attendance, much less actually living in accordance with church teachings.

Some evidence suggests that Americans tell pollsters they attend church when they really don't. A recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly* quoted John Stackhouse Jr., a teacher of theology and culture: "Beginning in the 1990s a series of sociological studies has shown that many more Americans tell pollsters that they attend church regularly than can be found in church when teams

actually count" (May 2003, p. 34).

For those who do attend, what do they believe and how does that translate into a living faith? Sociologist Alan Wolfe has written a book titled *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith*. His conclusions, after traveling the country interviewing and observing churches and members, are enlightening and sobering. He says that American religion has become

**"The Christian religion is the best religion that has ever been given to man and I as Chief Magistrate of this nation am bound to give it the sanction of my example."**



—Thomas Jefferson

mainstream enough to look like the popular culture of the land. He concludes that American culture has triumphed over religion.

If so, then the power to halt societal decline does not rest in religion. It has lost its power. Wolfe says: "In the United States, culture has transformed Christ, as well as other religions found within these shores. In every aspect of the religious life, American faith has met American culture—and American culture has triumphed."

On matters of fundamental biblical doctrine, things have dramatically changed. "Talk of hell, damnation, and even sin has been replaced by a nonjudgmental language of understanding and empathy. More Americans than ever proclaim themselves born again in Christ, but the lord to whom they turn rarely gets angry and frequently strengthens self-esteem . . . Far from living in a world elsewhere, the faithful in the United States are remarkably like everyone else" (pp. 2-3).

Many large popular evangelical churches do not systematically teach or clearly define their doctrines, because they want to attract the unchurched, the large mass of middle America who claims no attendance or affiliation. In a theological "catch 22," Wolfe states, "Evangelical churches lack doctrine because they want to attract new members. Mainline churches lack doctrine because they want to hold on to those declining numbers of members they have" (p. 87).

**Are you willing to pay the price?**

To benefit from faith, we must be willing

to pay the price of repentance, commitment and conversion. If one wants inner peace, God's blessing and a strong, resilient, free country, there must be a turn to God and a true faith unlike any experienced before.

For the United States to experience a turnaround that will reverse its cultural and moral slide, there must be a recognition that change cannot take place without a transformation from the values of the society to the values of the Kingdom of God.

With God's help we can change ourselves, but we cannot change the world. Only God can do that, and the Bible shows us this will not happen until the return of Jesus Christ. Until then the message of the Kingdom is preached and those who seek it must strive to live by its values. That is a daunting task in today's world. The teachings of Christ shed an embarrassing light on those whose work mirrors the kingdom of darkness. And make no mistake about it: Darkness fights back to extinguish that uncomfortable light.

It is time for Americans to recognize the grave danger gathering on the horizon. In the immediate aftermath of the deadly Sept. 11 attacks, America experienced a brief revival in religious interest and church attendance—yet it quickly faded.

It may be too late to change the course of the nation and its drift from its longtime moral foundations. But it is not too late for you, the individual citizen, to turn to God in heartfelt repentance.

In Ezekiel 18:27 and verses 30-31, God through His prophet says: ". . . When a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive." To our nations today, the Almighty still speaks: "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin . . . Get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die . . . ?" **GN**

## Recommended Reading

What's behind America's startling rise from a ragged collection of backwater colonies to global superpower in two short centuries? And what's the significance of its precipitous moral decline? The Bible gives us some incredible indications of where these trends are leading. You need to understand the remarkable story behind America's ascent to greatness and its prophesied decline as brought to light in our eye-opening free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Download or request your free copy today!



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[www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org)



# World News and Trends

## An Overview of Conditions Around the World

by John Ross Schroeder

### The tragedy of today's British youth

Following World War I (the Great War of 1914-1918), novelist Ernest Hemingway termed the returning, war-weary soldiers "The Lost Generation." The British media is beginning to use that phrase to describe the current plight of U.K. teenagers.

Whether it's obesity, alcoholism, drug abuse, illicit sex, illegitimacy, abortions or smoking, statistics generally place these young people at the top of the list.

Recently the British Medical Association (BMA) released a devastating report on teenage health. *Times* health editor Nigel Hawkes summed up the sad situation: "Britain is breeding a generation of adults that will tend to be infertile, obese and prone to mental illness . . . Tomorrow's adults are overweight, smoke and drink too much, and have rising levels of sexual infection and mental illness" (Dec. 9).

Vivian Nathanson, head of science and ethics at the British Medical Association, said: "Young people in Britain are increasingly likely to be overweight, indulge in binge drinking, have a sexually transmitted infection and suffer mental health problems."

Further, the number of British girls indulging in underage sex has doubled in 10 years' time. One in four who have reached ages 15 and 16 smokes and about a third have experimented with marijuana. Early teens are consuming alcohol as never before, with more than a third relating that they got drunk for the first time at 13 or under.

No wonder the BMA predicts that "today's teenagers are condemning themselves to years of poor health and an early death" (*Daily Mail*, Dec. 8).

It was Israel's King Solomon who perhaps first

uttered that thought in the Hebrew Bible. He said: "Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?" (Ecclesiastes 7:17). The obvious implication in his question is: Why not alter your behavior in advance and live as long as possible? Prevention is far more effective than medical cures. Write for our free booklet *Making Life Work*. (Sources: *The Times*, *Daily Mail* [both London].)

### The real roots of Anti-Semitism

Paul Johnson is a noted British historian and an astute journalist. *The American Spectator* recently published his insightful feature article about anti-Semitism in its October issue. In it he showed how "anti-Semitism was at the heart of [Karl] Marx's philosophy. He expanded it from a hatred of the Jews into a general hatred of capitalism."

This *Spectator* article was written to counter the false notion, so prevalent today, that left-wing anti-Semitism is a new phenomenon provoked by the conduct of the state of Israel. Mr. Johnson stated that "anti-Semitism goes back to the third century B.C., and the first incident seems to have occurred in Egypt, in the Greek trading city of Alexandria. It was provoked by the Jewish refusal to make religious compromises in accordance with the prevailing culture . . ."

Prior to his concluding remarks, Mr. Johnson observed that "in the early twenty-first century anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism blended together, forming a continuum of hate. This conjunction was not new. Hitler had argued that 'international Jewry' controlled America and justified his 'final solution' after he declared war on the U.S. in December, 1941. This theme was then taken up by Arab extremists after the formation of Israel . . ."

For more information, please see "The New (Anti-Semitic) World Order," beginning on page 14 of this issue. (Source: *The American Spectator*.)

### American teen culture horrifies adults

The disturbing movie called *Thirteen* shows how media influence has destabilized teenage minds and emotions. *The Sunday Telegraph* (Dec. 7) recently reported: "A lot of people in America, especially parents, have been horrified by this film. This is because of the harsh reality that is teenage modern life. Today a lot of teenagers . . . will try drugs. They will have underage sex. They will wear tight, sexually provocative clothes and have piercings."

" . . . These have become the outward symbols of a generation desperately trying to find its place in society." (Source: *The Sunday Telegraph* [London].)

### Parts of Europe lurch to the right

Switzerland is the latest European nation to move right. Christopher Blocher's far-right freedom party (SVP) won an unexpected victory in recent general elections. The SVP garnered 27 percent of the overall vote, outdistancing any other political party.

Switzerland's recent rightward move highlights a gradual trend in Europe. Recent years have seen Austria, Holland, France, Denmark and Germany take a turn to the right in varying degrees. "According to official estimates there are more than 10,000 neo-Nazis active in Germany and about 45,000 members of extreme right-wing organizations" (*The Guardian*, Sept. 16).

Italy could be next. Interesting indicators of an Italian move to the right are already present. Alessandra Mussolini (the photogenic granddaughter of the fascist dictator who ruled Italy from 1922 to 1945) recently formed a new breakaway party she called "Freedom of Action" or *Liberta d'Azione*. Used in a political context, the word "action" in Italian is traditionally associated with right-wing movements.

Another party leader, Gianfranco Fini, recently praised Benito Mussolini as "the greatest statesman of the 20th century." Yet on a visit to Israel he also labeled his fascist rule as an "absolute evil." These words apparently motivated Ms. Mussolini to opt out of Mr. Fini's political party.

Reporting from Rome, correspondent Richard Owen simply stated that "Mussolini has been 'rehabilitated' as the country is caught up in a wave of nostalgia" (*The Times*, Nov. 21). One Italian citizen said: "You just cannot cancel out history. I still remember my parents singing fascist songs." Writing some two weeks later, Mr. Owen related that "there is a growing tendency to 'rehabilitate' Mussolini, with historians offering revisionist accounts of his rule" (*The Times*, Dec. 1, emphasis added).

On a more practical level, this winter the Italian government infuriated Britain "by proposing that foreign policy powers be ceded to Brussels" (*The Guardian*). These European political movements bear watching not just due to the massive tragedies of the 20th century, but also because of what the Bible foretells for much of Europe. Please request our free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *The Guardian*, *The Times* [both London].)

### The era of suburban megachurches

A curious trend in large church construction has been building up in America for the last several decades. First appearing in the 1950s, huge mega-churches began to spread across California and the Bible Belt in the '80s. The trend has continued into the new century, expanding into other areas of the United States.

The concept of super-large churches can include

large auditoriums or amphitheaters, giant office complexes distinguished by crosses, gyms and playing fields of various kinds.

A growing number of these megachurches are nondenominational in outlook and embrace a mixture of conservative and liberal religious values. While supporting the Ten Commandments and decrying abortion, they may simultaneously accept Darwinism and reject creation. This modern approach to church construction is apparently bringing in the large numbers. But is bigger always best in the biblical sense? (Source: *The Financial Times* [London].)



## Geneva peace plan rocks Israel

An unofficial "Geneva Accord" was recently signed by Yossi Beilin (now a private citizen of Israel but formerly a prime architect of the Oslo Accords of 1993) and former Palestinian Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo. This peace plan has gained global attention partially because U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell apparently agreed to meet with these two principal parties. Three million copies were printed with the goal of delivering one to every Israeli home. Israel's government and the Palestinian Authority had no direct part in these proceedings.

One particular aspect of this unofficial accord has inflamed many Israelis, including Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Mr. Sharon called the whole accord "the Swiss golden calf." The key sore point involved the ceding of the sacred Temple Mount to the Palestinians.

Noted columnist Charles Krauthammer summa-

rized the offending part: "Beilin gives up the ultimate symbol of the Jewish connection and claim to the land, the center of the Jewish state for 1,000 years before the Roman destruction [A.D. 70], the subject of Jewish longing in poetry and prayer for 2,000 years since—the Temple Mount. And Beilin doesn't just give it up to, say, some neutral international authority. He gives it up to sovereign Palestine . . . This is not a treaty; *this is a suicide note* . . . That it should get any encouragement from the United States or its secretary of state is a disgrace" (Nov. 28, emphasis added).

Also, according to an article in *The Times* (Nov. 30), this new unofficial peace bid even has the tacit support of British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Columnist Jeff Jacoby of *The Boston Globe* (Dec. 4) further commented: "The international applause greeting the so-called Geneva Accord—the unofficial Israeli-Palestinian 'peace' agreement formally presented in Switzerland this week is a vivid illustration of the world's contempt for the Jewish state." This astute journalist compared the unofficial agreement to the Munich Accord of 1938 when British Prime Minister

Neville Chamberlain proclaimed "Peace in our time" after appeasing Germany's Adolf Hitler by ceding Czechoslovakia to the Nazis.

The Middle East is still the earth's principal source of petroleum and, since 1948, home to the state of Israel—a primary target for world terrorism. This area is central to the fulfillment of many major biblical prophecies. You cannot afford to be in historical or prophetic ignorance of this part of the world. For further understanding, please request our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *The Times* [London], *The Boston Globe*.)

## The unending quest for God

According to a September 2003 Harris Interactive nationwide survey in America about how people view God, 48 percent thought of Him as a spirit that is able to take on human form; 27 percent as a spirit power that doesn't take on human form; 10 percent didn't believe in God at all and 9 percent thought of Him as a human being with a body (*USA Today*, Oct. 24, Atlantic edition). Although Americans are 10 times as likely as Europeans to attend religious services on a regular basis, there is still no general consensus about His nature in the United States.

Across the Atlantic, the British are generally much

**"People are reaching out in all directions in their attempt to escape from the seen world to the unseen world. There is a deep desire for spiritual moorings—a hunger for God."**

less precise in the way they express their views. In Britain we hear and read about the term "devout skeptics" as people steadily turn away from organized religion in the thousands. The personal God of the Bible seems very far from their thinking.

And yet famous pollster George Gallup Jr. explains: "People are reaching out in all directions in their attempt to escape from the seen world to the unseen world. There is a deep desire for spiritual moorings—a hunger for God" (*U.S. News and World Report*, special edition). This is true even of the secular world of Britain, Scandinavia and Europe—not only in America, which "has more churches, temples and mosques than any other country in the world."

But what does the Bible actually tell us about God? To find out, please be sure to request our free 72-page booklet *Who Is God?* (Sources: *The Times* [London], *U.S. News and World Report*, *USA Today*.)

## China now in space: Warning to the West?

Some astute observers believe that China's recent space shot has far more symbolic significance than just the first Asian entry into outer space. If ultimately successful, it's another feather in the Chinese cap—like that of hosting the 2008 Olympics.



British historian Andrew Roberts says that this space venture is another strong indication of "the dawn of a Chinese century" (*The Sunday Telegraph*, Oct. 19). To this historian, "It is high time that we woke up to the threat that an awakened Chinese empire poses for our present [English-speaking] global hegemony."

Napoleon once referred to China as "a sleeping giant" and then predicted that "when she awakes she will shake the world."

Beijing's \$100 billion trade surplus with the United States is not the only economic concern about China worrying the Western nations. In the last 10 years the Chinese economy has grown by an annual average of 10 percent (*The Times*, Oct. 20).

Present growth patterns indicate that it is poised to overtake France in 2004 and Britain in 2005 (*The Sunday Times*, Oct. 12).

If by mid century (as some are predicting) China should replace the United States as the leading global superpower, the world might be staring into the face of a new dark age of oppression reminiscent of the Third Reich.

The 2003 annual report of Amnesty International comments about China's performance: "Serious human rights violations continued and in some respects the situation deteriorated. Tens of thousands of people continue to be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association or belief. Torture and ill treatment remain widespread" (*The Sunday Telegraph*, Oct. 19). Of course, some China watchers pin their hopes on potential political and cultural reforms.

As we go to press, we may be seeing a substantial American policy shift towards China in the wake of China's new prime minister's visit to the United States. A front-page feature article in the *International Herald Tribune* tells us: "The Bush administration announced Monday that it was dropping the long-standing American policy of 'strategic ambiguity' about relations between China and Taiwan and clearly warned Taipei not to hold a referendum that could fuel the island's independence movement" (Dec. 9). (Sources: *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times*, [all London], *International Herald Tribune*.)

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# The New (Anti-Semitic) World Order

Anti-Semitism is nothing new. It's been around since ancient times. Even within living memory of the deaths of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust, anti-Semitism is back, with an increasing number of violent threats and attacks directed at Jewish targets.

by Melvin Rhodes

In the ancient world they were persecuted for refusing to worship pagan idols or the Roman emperor. Later they were blamed for the death of Jesus Christ. In the late Middle Ages they were accused of sacrificing Christian children at the annual Passover observance, an absurdly false accusation resurrected by the Nazis in the 1930s to suit their purposes.

Often resented because of their success and despised because of their religious differences, animosity toward Jews has been a consistent theme throughout their history.

What is so shocking today is how quickly anti-Semitism has revived after the slaughter of the Holocaust. Less than 60 years after the Allies liberated the emaciated survivors of the death camps, the descendants of the biblical tribe of Judah find themselves blamed for a whole array of ills including 9/11, the problems in the Middle East, international economic disorder and globalization.

"They're at it again: the Jewish conspiracy to take over the world is back in session. The former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed's recent claim that the modern-day Elders of Zion 'now rule the world by proxy' not only garnered loud applause at the summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), but most likely earned silent nods of approval worldwide.

"Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the oldest hatred has been making a global comeback, culminating in 2002 with the highest number of anti-Semitic attacks in 12 years," writes Mark Strauss in the British publication *The Spectator* ("Who Hates the Jews Now?," Nov. 22, 2003).

Why is this happening now, still within the living memory of Holocaust survivors?

## International hostility toward Israel

One of the primary reasons behind the growing anti-Semitism is international hostility toward the nation of Israel, the tiny Middle Eastern state that became the first Jewish homeland in almost 2,000

years when it was established in 1948.

"Just as historic anti-Semitism has denied individual Jews the right to live as equal members of society, anti-Zionism would deny the collective expression of the Jewish people, the State of Israel, the right to live as

likely to change. Even with the blessing of the UN at Israel's founding in 1948, immediately after the new nation was born armies from five hostile Arab neighbors tried to destroy her. Israel survived and, with later American help and support, has remained



an equal member of the family of nations," writes Mortimer Zuckerman, editor in chief of *U.S. News and World Report* ("Graffiti on History's Walls," Nov. 3, 2003, p. 44).

He continues: "Israel has become the object of envy and resentment in much the same way that the individual Jew was once the object of envy and resentment. Israel, in effect, is emerging as the collective Jew among nations."

Perhaps only immediately after the Holocaust and before the establishment of most independent Islamic nations could Israel have come into existence with the blessing of the then-smaller United Nations.

Today's UN has a large anti-Israel majority (with 39 predominately Muslim nations vs. a single Jewish state) that would never have sanctioned the birth of the Jewish state, and the UN's current anti-Israel bias is not

militarily strong, thus far able to fend off attacks by hostile military forces.

For its support of Israel, the United States is also viewed with hostility in the new anti-Semitic world order. A recent opinion poll conducted throughout the nations of the European Union showed that Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, was considered the world's foremost threat to peace. It ranked ahead of Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq and the United States—a group of nations Europeans essentially viewed as equal threats to the planet's safety and security.

It has long been fashionable for many intellectuals around the world to strongly dislike if not hate America. But now anti-Semitism is increasingly acceptable, loosely disguised as anti-Israeli sentiment.

Blaming all Jews for grievances against the nation of Israel has intensified even more

since the U.S.-led action in Iraq, viewed by many Muslims as an attack on Islam inspired by Jews. To many Americans, the war in Iraq is a part of the war on terror that began with the events of Sept. 11, 2001. But many Muslims believe the Jews, Mossad (Israeli intelligence) and/or the CIA were the real perpetrators behind the 9/11 attacks.

Various conspiracy theories—which many in the West also believe—claim that no Jews



**Deadly suicide-bomb attacks directed at Jewish synagogues that devastated two neighborhoods in Istanbul, Turkey, killed and maimed hundreds of people Nov. 15, 2003. At left, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom lays a memorial wreath in front of one of the damaged synagogues.**

reported for work in the World Trade Center that day, having been warned ahead of time by their own intelligence agents to stay away. (In reality, scores of Jewish-surnamed victims perished that terrible day). It's ironic that a substantial number of people in the Middle East rejoiced at the carnage on 9/11 but were soon attributing it to the Jews!

But it's not only developments in the Middle East that have intensified anti-Semitic feelings. Such tortured logic leads many to the conclusion that the Jews are responsible for virtually anything and everything that's wrong in the world.

Mark Strauss's *Spectator* article quotes the spokesman for Pakistan's Jamaat-I-Islami political party as complaining that "most anything bad that happens, prices going up, whatever . . . can usually be attributed to the IMF [International Monetary

Fund] and the World Bank, which are synonymous with the United States. And who controls the United States? The Jews do."

### Rising attacks on Jewish targets

Mr. Strauss's *Spectator* article was written just a few days after two deadly car-bomb attacks on synagogues in Turkey, a country with a majority Muslim population (though officially secular) that has had a long tradition of tolerance toward Jews going back through centuries of the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman Turks ruled a vast Mideast empire for centuries until it collapsed shortly after World War I. A century ago that empire was composed of 40 percent Turks, 40 percent Arabs, 10 percent Jews and 10 percent other ethnic groups. For years all seemed to live in harmony.

It was the breakup of this empire that led to the present problems in the Middle East, a region that was remarkably peaceful during the four centuries the Ottomans ruled Jerusalem (1517-1917). Only after World War I were the nations of Iraq and Syria created, with Israel, Lebanon and Jordan following in the aftermath of World War II. These new nations, with borders imposed by the victorious Western powers, have contributed greatly to instability in the region.

### Growing anti-Semitism in Europe

The bombings of the two Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath of Nov. 15 coincided with the burning down of a Jewish school in France. When the French president and prime minister visited the school soon afterward, both leaders condemned the return of anti-Semitism.

Yet this was just one of many anti-Semitic attacks in France in recent years. Often blamed on France's 5 million Muslims—mostly immigrants and the children, often unemployed, of those immigrants—there is also the possibility that people with extreme right-wing views may be contributing to this problem. France's far right is one of the biggest in Western Europe.

Austria's extreme right has also enjoyed considerable success in recent years. However, it is not just right-wing parties that are anti-Semitic. Left-wing parties have their own soft spot for anti-Semitism. One reason is anti-Israeli sentiment.

Quoting from left-of-center newspapers, Mr. Zuckerman expresses amazement in his *U.S. News and World Report* essay at what is being published in the democratic countries of Western Europe.

"In England, *The Guardian* wrote that 'Israel has no right to exist.' The *Observer* described Israeli settlements on the West Bank as 'an affront to civilization.' The *New Statesman* ran a story titled 'A Kosher Conspiracy,' illustrated by a cover showing the gold Star of David piercing the Union Jack. The story implies that a Zionist-Jewish cabal is attempting to sway the British press to the cause of Israel.

"In France, the weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* published an extraordinary libel alleging that Israeli soldiers raped Palestinian women so that their relatives would kill them to preserve family honor. In Italy, the Vatican's *L'Osservatore Romano* spoke of Israel's 'aggression that's turning into extermination,' while the daily *La Stampa* ran a page 1 cartoon of a tank emblazoned with the Jewish star pointing its big gun at the infant Jesus, who cries out, 'Surely they don't want to kill me again'" (pp. 45-46).

Other factors in today's anti-Semitism are antibusiness and, especially, antiglobalization views many on the left hold. Jews are seen as disproportionately successful in banking and business, which often leads to resentment and accusations of greed and taking unfair advantage of others. And as minorities perceived as having loyalty to Israel, Jews are often accused of being unpatriotic, a common accusation made against them since Roman times when Jews refused to worship the emperor or bow down to the Roman pagan deities.

And it is in Rome that we see the beginnings of today's anti-Semitism, 2,000 years later. As Karen Armstrong, an authority on fundamentalism, put it in her book *Islam: A Short History*: "Anti-Semitism is a Christian vice. Hatred of the Jews became marked in the Muslim world only after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent loss of Arab Palestine" (2000, p. 21).

### Christianity's Jewish roots

Jesus Christ, whose mother Mary descended from the tribe of Judah, was a Jew. This is often overlooked by many Christians, misled by centuries of propaganda that blames the Jews for the death of Jesus.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified to pay the penalty for our sins. For the sins of the whole world. For you and me. "And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world," wrote the apostle John (1 John 2:2, New Revised Standard Version).

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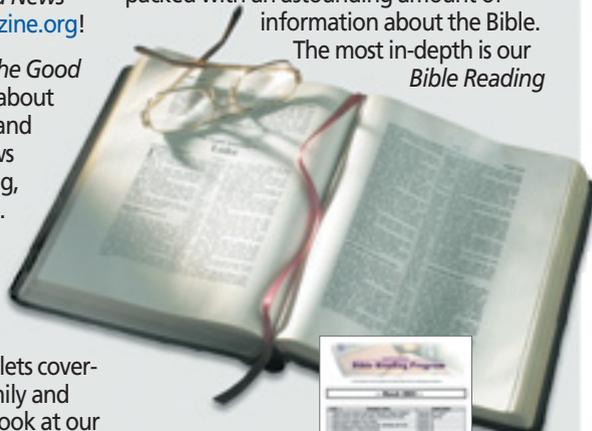


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His death was prophesied in the Old Testament. In the prophetic book of Isaiah we read: "He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities [sins] . . . He was led as a lamb to the slaughter . . ." (Isaiah 53:3-7).

The analogy of the lamb reminds us that the original Passover in the time of Moses represented the future death of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7). Just as the shed blood of the lamb smeared on the doorposts of the Hebrew slaves spared them from death at the time of the Exodus, so the shed blood of Jesus Christ saves us all from the penalties of our sins. The Bible shows a clear link between the ancient physical nation of Israel and the spiritual Israel of Christianity.

It was God's plan "from the foundation of the world" that Jesus Christ would be put to death (Revelation 13:8).

Yes, some of the Jewish religious leaders wanted Jesus Christ killed, even proclaiming, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25)—yet Jesus' request to the Father was that He forgive them for their ignorance (Luke 23:34). However, the fact remains that if only one other person had ever lived and that person was you, Christ would still have had to die—to save *you* from eternal death. In that sense, we are *all* responsible for the death of Christ.

We should also remember that the apostles were adherents of the Jewish faith of their day. And, like Jesus, most of them were Jews by birth. It makes just as much sense to blame the Romans for Christ's death, because the Roman governor had the last say in such matters. As the governor, Pontius Pilate expressed his life-or-death authority to Jesus Christ: "Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and power to release you?" (John 19:10).

The early Church held *just about everyone* responsible for Christ's death. Notice their prayer in Acts 4:27: "For truly against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together."

## Anti-Semitism's ancient roots

But the universal church (in contrast to the true body of Christ), holding sway over the minds of men in the Middle Ages, constantly blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus Christ. This church, which historian Paul Johnson wrote "still spoke for the Empire" (*The Offshore Islanders*, 1972, p. 57), was infected with anti-Semitism from the beginning.

This has been passed down through the centuries. Even as recently as World War II,

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history shows the institutional church did little to help the victims of Nazi persecution, while many supposed Christians participated



**Constantine the Great**, who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, openly expressed his contempt for the Jews and Jewish religious practices.

in the extermination of Jews and others.

Even the universal church's triumph over the minds of men toward the end of the Roman Empire had its origins in hatred of the Jews.

Three decades after the death of Christ, the Jews in Judea revolted against Roman rule. Rome crushed this rebellion, burning the city of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.

At this time, the fledgling Christian Church was considered a Jewish sect. Its members kept the seventh-day Sabbath just as Jesus Christ and the apostles had done (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14; 17:1-2). The early Church began, significantly, on the biblical Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost) as recorded in Acts 2.

The Jewish Revolt and subsequent retribution from Rome's legions led to the Jewish Diaspora, the fleeing of those Jews who remained into all parts of the empire, in an attempt to get away from the persecutions at home. A second Jewish revolt from 132-135 brought further Roman hostility toward anything Jewish and led to the banning of Jews from Jerusalem on pain of death.

### Hatred for Jews shapes the apostate church

Wherever they went, the Jews were hated and often persecuted. Interestingly, the

*Encyclopaedia Britannica's* definition of anti-Semitism says that it is "hostility toward Jews ranging from mild antipathy to a violently expressed hatred; it has existed to some degree wherever Jews have settled in the Diaspora" (15th edition, *Micropaedia*, Vol. 1, "Anti-Semitism," p. 426).

The early Christians, who based their beliefs on the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the sayings of Christ, often suffered along with them. However, with the death of the original apostles through martyrdom, the tendency of many later Christians when faced with persecution was to compromise with Rome to find acceptance.

This totally changed the character of the major, visible church. Barely three centuries after Christ, the Sabbath and the Passover were no longer being observed by most professing Christians, who now worshipped on Sundays like the pagan Romans and kept the Roman holidays under different names—the Saturnalia renamed as Christmas being the most notable example. The new church simply inherited the anti-Jewish prejudice of the Roman imperial system.

The prevailing hostility toward anything considered Jewish was summed up well by the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, who established Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. He directed in a letter written about A.D. 325 that the churches would henceforth celebrate Easter on Sunday instead of the biblical Passover on the 14th of Nisan on the Hebrew calendar.

"When the question arose concerning the most holy day of Easter, it was decreed by common consent to be expedient, that this festival should be celebrated on the same day by all, in every place . . . *It seemed to everyone a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews* in the celebration of this most holy solemnity, *who, polluted wretches! having stained their hands with a nefarious crime, are justly blinded in their minds.* It is fit, therefore, that, *rejecting the practice of this people,* we should perpetuate to all future ages the celebration of this rite in a more legitimate order . . .

*"Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews . . . In pursuing this course with a unanimous consent, let us withdraw ourselves, my much honored brethren, from that most odious fellowship . . . For what can they rightly understand, who, after the tragic death of our Lord, being deluded and darkened in their minds, carried away by an unrestrained impulse wherever their inborn madness may impel them"* (quoted in *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, Isaac Boyle, translator, 1995, p. 52, emphasis added).

### Anti-Semitism remains—and remains wrong

The anti-Semitism that had become ingrained in the universal church continued in its daughter churches after the Protestant Reformation. "There were periodic persecutions, massacres, and expulsions of Jews until the 18th century, when the Enlightenment brought Europe a new religious freedom," states the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on anti-Semitism. Continuing: "When the nationalism of the 19th century swept Europe, however, the basis of anti-Semitism shifted from religion to racial pride and gained a new respectability and much popular support."

This shows how anti-Semitism adapts. Once *religious* prejudices were looked on as superstitious and backward, *racial* prejudices took their place. Now that racism is politically incorrect, anti-Semitism has had to adapt again. Today, it is often disguised behind anti-Israel sentiments—with Israel almost always depicted as the aggressor—and concerns about globalization.

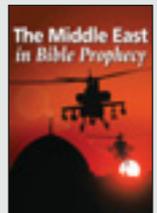
"The insight of Amos Oz, the liberal Israeli writer, is pertinent," concludes Mr. Zuckerman in his *U.S. News and World Report* essay. "He is haunted, he said, by the observation that before the Holocaust, European graffiti read, 'Jews to Palestine,' while today it has changed, to 'Jews out of Palestine.' The message to Jews, Oz says, is simple: 'Don't be here, and don't be there. That is, don't be'" (p. 51).

Jesus was a Jew. The apostles were Jews. The early New Testament Church consisted primarily of Jewish members. It was a Jewish ministry who initially took the Christian faith to other parts of the ancient world.

In reality, hatred of the Jews—or any other nation—shows a rejection of the founder of Christianity, Himself a Jew, and of all that He stood for. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

Where is so much worldwide antagonism toward the nation of Israel heading? Does the Bible give us any indications? To better understand the troubled history of the Middle East—and its tumultuous future—download or request our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.



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# 2004: The World's Superpower Faces Powerful Challenges

As a new year begins, the United States faces a disunited world with dangers both external and internal.

by Gary Petty

The United States finds itself in a unique place in history. As the world's leading superpower, its military can enforce foreign policy virtually anywhere around the globe. The average U.S. citizen enjoys a standard of living most people in developing countries can only imagine. The fingerprints of American culture, from soft drinks to television programs, can be seen in even the most remote regions.

This unprecedented global influence presents some daunting challenges to a nation that is both the world's economic engine and reluctant police force. Many believed that the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War would bring a new era of global peace and prosperity under *Pax Americana*. But even at the dizzying heights of global power, destabilizing trends confront the United States in the coming year.

## Challenges from Europe

Charles Kupchan, a Georgetown University professor and former member of President Clinton's National Security Council, shocked many pundits with his book *The End of the American Era*. Kupchan claims that the greatest threat to future U.S. global influence isn't from Islamic terrorists, but from a united and powerful Europe.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld tried to marginalize France and Germany by labeling them "Old Europe" and playing down the economic and political unity quietly coalescing in central Europe. While member nations of the European Union maintain independent sovereignty, they have created a common parliament, established many shared policies and adopted the euro as the official EU currency.

Europe's old rivalries are being replaced by nations without borders. Professor



The combined population and economic output of the European Union is greater than the United States, and almost 75 percent of European trade is among member states. This means that the EU can sustain a measure of self-sufficiency that has been the sole privilege of the United States.

The uproar over U.S. steel tariffs in the closing months of 2003 is just the opening salvo in what some European news sources are calling a trade war. The new year promises a further flexing of European economic muscle in direct competition with U.S. interests.

This coming May the European Union plans to expand from its current number of 15 nations to 25. EU members are hammering out a European Constitution in order to transform economic clout into political and even military power. Though talks over it broke down in December, they are to resume sometime next year. If something like the current draft is eventually accepted by the EU member states, it would

## The greatest threat to future U.S. global influence isn't from Islamic terrorists, but from a united and powerful Europe.

Kupchan writes: "The European project has been an unqualified success. Not only has war among Europe's nations become unimaginable, but the borders among them are undefended and already being crossed without passport or customs control . . ."

"Opinion surveys reveal a clear preference among European publics for quickening the speed of integration. Almost half of those polled strongly identified as European, not just as citizens of a national state. And more than 70 percent support a common defense and security policy for the EU" (*The End of the American Era*, 2002, p. 136).

effectively double the size of the European Parliament and give the European Court widespread judicial powers.

The goal is clear. *The Telegraph* (London), in an article titled "Blueprint for Superpower Europe," reports European Commission President Romano Prodi's reaction to the current constitutional draft: "[He] does not like the text but he too agrees it is a 'gigantic step'. He predicts that it will catapult the EU into the global arena as a full superpower by endowing it with 'legal personality', giving Brussels [site of EU headquarters] sole authority to negotiate most treaties."

PhotoSpin



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

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France and Germany have been strengthening their ties to maintain preeminence in the expanding EU. Rifts between these two Central European countries and the United States over the Iraq War, concern over EU member debates regarding the adoption of the European Constitution and the desire for a European defense force separate from NATO, have motivated the French government to an unprecedented relationship with their historical enemy.

One French EU commissioner, Pascal Lamy, is reported in *The Telegraph* as going so far as supporting the unification of the French and German diplomatic corps, formation of a joint parliament and German sharing of France's seat on the United Nations Security Council. Such an unprecedented level of cooperation would put a Franco-German alliance in the driver's seat of all EU operations.

Even with the stalled constitution talks, France, Germany and some other core EU countries now speak of pressing ahead with their own fast track to integration, leaving uncommitted EU nations behind in a looser affiliation. It's only a matter of time until the United States finds itself no longer the world's leading superpower, but competing on the world stage with a European Union no longer in need of NATO protection and an economic giant willing to challenge American global influence.

### Continued unrest in the Middle East

The November bombings in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and Istanbul, Turkey, served as a warning to any Muslim nation cooperating with the West that Islamic extremist groups are alive and well and willing to kill fellow Muslims to attain their goals.

*Time* magazine reported on Nov. 24: "Rather than being defeated by the U.S.-led war on terrorism, Islamic terrorists seem to be methodically widening their holy war against the United States and its allies. Turkey made an obvious target. Even under the current Islamic-party government, democratic Turkey has remained staunchly secular and pro-Western. It was the first Muslim nation to recognize Israel, and cultivates extensive ties with the Jewish state. Long a faithful U.S. ally and member of NATO, Turkey aspires to join the European Union."

Last February a tape from Osama bin Laden fingered Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, Yemen and Pakistan as countries in need of being liberated from what he called American enslavement. Tens of thousands of trainees who graduated from al-Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan are now scattered throughout the Muslim world encouraging

local terrorist groups and forming new ones. The new tactic of Islamic terrorists willing to kill fellow Muslims threatens to destabilize Arab governments and aggravate strife between Muslim sects.

Meanwhile, the United States finds itself in a quandary: Should it commit more troops and resources to stabilize Afghanistan and Iraq, or pull out and doom both countries to bloody civil war and ruin? The price of brokering Middle East peace and rebuilding the two countries is also a huge burden on the U.S. economy, and daily reports of servicemen and women killed by car bombs and ambushes has cut into the resolve of the average citizen in supporting military involvement. The apprehension of Saddam Hussein has, of course, been a great morale booster. But even that may fade if violence persists.

Rebuilding a nation after a military defeat is difficult, to say the least. The difficulty is



## Rebuilding two countries is a huge burden on the U.S. economy, and daily reports of servicemen and women killed by car bombs and ambushes has cut into the resolve of the average citizen in supporting military involvement.

compounded by an all-too-common Muslim worldview that sees the United States in emotionally charged, contradictory terms.

On one hand, many Muslims readily accept American goods and oil money—while at the same time distrusting the United States because it is the prime supporter of Israel. It's common for Islamic clerics to paint the United States as "the Great Satan" and invoke fears of a modern-day American-led Christian crusade.

### Israel under siege

The existence of Israel is at the heart of Arab and Muslim conflict with the United States (though Islamic extremists would oppose America even if Israel didn't exist). Solutions are impossible in a sea of propaganda and rewriting of history by Arab extremists who want to minimize a complicated situation by emphasizing the

Palestinians as victims of Jewish aggression and discounting the legitimacy of the state of Israel. At the 2000 Camp David summit, Yasser Arafat even denied that the Western Wall in Jerusalem was ever part of a Jewish temple complex, and insisted that no such temple ever existed in the city.

Many Arabs, who feel they have been abused by the Western powers for generations, accept the propaganda. Prejudice and paranoia run so deep that many Muslims believe that the destruction of the World Trade Center in the Sept. 11 attacks was the work of a Jewish conspiracy to turn Americans against the Arab world.

In this environment it is unclear whether the current "road map" for peace will bring a new era of U.S.-Arab relations or lead down another dark alley to an even more futile dead end.

At times Israel has had to face legitimate criticism for its treatment of Palestinians, but it is amazing how little global outcry there has been over the three years of the current intifada, as scores of Palestinian terrorist attacks have killed and injured hundreds of Israeli citizens.

The increase in anti-Jewish incidents in Western Europe and areas that were formerly part of the Soviet Bloc doesn't bode well for Israel in 2004. And in the coming year the United States can expect to find itself under increasing criticism for its continued support of Israel. (To learn more

about the disturbing rise of anti-Semitism, be sure to read "The New (Anti-Semitic) World Order," beginning on page 14.)

### Internal culture wars

This last year witnessed a renewed energy in the cultural battle over the gay agenda. A decade ago the gay rights battlegrounds were the military and increased exposure in television and movies; now the battle has expanded to demands that society accept gay marriages as equal with traditional heterosexual marriage and family.

Some political leaders have tried to counter this push with state laws and a possible constitutional amendment that would define marriage as only a union between a man and a woman. But at the same time other lawmakers are lobbying for expansion of gay rights, including the legalization of homosexual marriages. President George W. Bush, react-

ing to a Massachusetts state supreme court ruling in favor of marriages between homosexuals, publicly declared his belief that marriage is between a man and a woman and that homosexual behavior is sinful.

Meanwhile, according to an Aug. 5 Associated Press article, gay-rights activists are demanding that "homosexual rights be included in international human rights treaties" and are asking the United Nations to provide the same benefits to same-sex couples that these treaties provide to married couples. Barney Frank, a homosexual Democrat congressman from Massachusetts, "said that there is strong support for adopting the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people as part of the UN doctrine of human rights, which sets the standards worldwide."

Gay rights activists have scored some impressive victories in recent years, both culturally and politically. The U.S. Supreme Court's striking down of a Texas antisodomy law as unconstitutional, Wal-Mart's public statements about protecting the rights of gay employees and public homosexual parties in Disney World are but a few. Many current or recent TV series include homosexual characters and themes, which are constantly portrayed positively.

These victories have come at a price. A *USA Today*/CNN/Gallup Poll shows some backlash against the gay agenda in the general public. While 48 percent of Americans polled said they supported legalization of same-sex relations between consenting adults, 46 percent said that same-sex unions should be illegal. This is the highest number of people taking an adverse stand against homosexuality since 1996.

The battle over homosexuality is just one front in the internal culture war tearing at the fabric of American society. Other battles in this war are being waged over radical feminism, abortion and the nation's historical Judeo-Christian concepts of morality.

The future of any society depends on the strength of its families. Homosexuality, abortion and radical feminism strike at the very foundation of marriage and family. Astronomical divorce rates, homosexual marriage and the redefining of the traditional family are issues that will intensify in the coming year, threatening the country's foundation of Judeo-Christian culture and morality.

### The AIDS epidemic

When President Bush announced his \$15 billion package to assist in combating the AIDS epidemic in Africa, he acknowledged a catastrophe affecting an entire continent. The latest UN figures on HIV/AIDS show

that in spite of medical and educational efforts, the disease continues to spread.

MSNBC reports that "new global estimates, based on improved data, show about 40 million people worldwide are living with HIV/AIDS, including an estimated 2.5 million children under 15 years old. About five

## HIV/AIDS is sapping both life and the future from countries that are already underdeveloped and poverty stricken. The resulting human suffering and collapse of normal society is a breeding ground for anarchy.

million people were infected in 2003 and more than three million died."

This disease's tentacles reach into every region of the world. An estimated 600 people die every day in South Africa from HIV/AIDS. Forty percent of adults in Botswana and Swaziland are infected. The MSNBC report continues: "... Fueled by intravenous drug use and unsafe sex, [HIV/AIDS] is spreading in densely populated India and China as well as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam and in Eastern Europe where the worst affected areas include the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Estonia and Latvia."

HIV/AIDS is sapping both life and the future from countries that are already underdeveloped and poverty stricken. The resulting human suffering and collapse of normal society is a breeding ground for anarchy. Of course, the spread of HIV/AIDS in the United States is a continuing and costly health catastrophe.

### Is there any good news?

Strange as it may seem, a Jewish teacher who claimed to be the Son of God foretold these overall trends almost 2,000 years ago. Jesus of Nazareth took His disciples to the Mount of Olives just outside of Jerusalem and answered their questions concerning His Second Coming. Matthew 24 records Jesus' prophecy of wars, diseases and natural disasters leading to a time when humanity would be on the brink of self-annihilation.

The bad news is that American ingenuity, military power and economic might can't solve the problems of human nature. The conflicting religious issues between Islam, Judaism and Christianity will continue to spur violent men and women to hatred and brutality. Nations will continue playing a power game to gain economic advantage. Human beings will continue to pursue self-gratification and defend their "right" to lifestyles free of moral restraints.

But the good news is that Jesus is the Christ, and He will fulfill His promise of Matthew 24 to return in power and glory to

save humanity from self-destruction.

So what should obediently faithful Christians do now while waiting for that event? Should we simply accept the evil in the world as inevitable and hide away until Christ's return?

Notice what Jesus told His disciples as

part of this same prophecy: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.

"But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:45-51).

True Christianity is visionary in its firm hope in the return of Jesus Christ to save humanity and establish God's Kingdom on earth. It is also practical in its application to everyday living. True Christians must strive to exhibit the teachings of Jesus in their lives even though they live in a dark and troubled world.

They must take part in God's work of reaching out to Christians, Muslims and Jews with the message of the only solution to the insurmountable problems threatening humanity. That solution is the return of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

Why does the United States face so many challenges, both external and internal? Why is it meeting so much opposition throughout the world? Where are these dangerous trends leading, and what do they mean? To better understand the astounding rise of America's power—and its coming downfall—download or request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.



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## Do Not Despise 'Little Ones'

Jesus Christ tells us to carefully consider our attitudes toward those who aren't as well off. A lot is riding on it—for them as well as for us.

by Rex Sexton

I first met Rick Johnson while attending sixth grade at Franklin Grade School in Danville, Illinois. Franklin was an old red brick school in an old part of town. We all knew that students at Franklin came from homes of modest means, but Rick Johnson's family was poorer than most.

You see, Rick Johnson (not his real name) was an orphan. He lived with his

students bumped into him in the hallway, they would yell, "Oh, I've got Johnson cooties!" and wipe their shirt several times.

Rick was constantly being made fun of and picked on. For him, each day at school was another day of humiliation. He did his best to ignore everyone else, but a few times his anger got the best of him and he screamed through his tears at those mocking

—especially young people—tend to despise "little ones"? Even though generations of people are born and die, human nature remains the same. We deal today with the same challenges that have faced people of all generations. If despising "little ones" was a problem in Jesus' day, it is also a sin we have to be aware of today in our lives.

Jesus Christ also knew that the vast



**True religion doesn't consist of building large church buildings and adding huge numbers of people who attend services. True religion is encouraging and giving validation to "little ones."**

grandparents instead of his parents. Rumor among the other students had it that his parents had been killed in an automobile accident, either both or one of them—no one knew for sure.

Rick's grandparents were poor. When Rick's grandfather came to the school, he always wore the same old worn-out pair of farmer's overalls. In fact, Rick always wore the same black slacks and white shirt. Most of the time the shirt was only partly tucked in. But other students didn't make fun of him much for his clothes; they mostly made fun of his glasses.

Rick wore large black glasses that somehow were always on the end of his nose. Since he was short and not athletic, other students constantly made fun of Rick about lots of things. Rick was the last one chosen for softball or kickball teams. If other

him—saying how awful they were.

Things didn't change much for Rick during the junior high years. Even a new school didn't bring relief from the torture of teasing he endured. He was always by himself because he never had any friends, and most of the students didn't notice him much as we went on through our high school years.

**"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones"**

Jesus Christ warned His followers not to treat people like my classmates treated Rick Johnson. "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven," He said (Matthew 18:10).

What is it about human nature that people

majority of His followers would be the "meek of the earth" or "little ones." He is not now calling the great ones of this world (1 Corinthians 1:26).

How often do we remember these words: "... Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42). So there is a reward for helping the little ones.

I don't know what Rick Johnson did after high school. I remember that he made good grades, so I hope he went to college and has had a successful career.

While I didn't pile on with the other students and make fun of him, I regret not befriending him and helping him. The only times I spoke with Rick were when others were not around. I was afraid that if the other

kids saw me with Rick Johnson, they would make fun of me too.

Years later I began to learn the importance of making an effort to befriend those who appear on the outside to be less fortunate.

### Focusing on the little people

The lessons came by observing a lady who appeared obsessed by the idea—my wife, Patty. No matter what church congregation we attended, what neighbors we knew or what people we worked with, she always made an effort to first become the friend of those who were less outgoing, lower on the economic scale or showed any symptoms of inferiority.

One evening after we had been married almost 10 years I asked her why. I observed how much she had brightened the lives of so many people and how easily she made friends with those who had few friends. So I asked why she naturally focused on the “little people.”

Her answer was very simple. “When I was in the hospital, it was the little people who sent me cards and came to see me. I have never forgotten.”

You see, many years earlier, when Patty was 8 years old, she was riding in the back seat of a car that was hit by a train at a crossing. Her mother, grandmother and younger brother were killed, and her younger sister was severely injured. Patty was thrown out of the rear window and suffered many cuts and bruises, but she was able to recover.

While recuperating in the hospital she remembers that the “popular people” gave her no thought, but the ones others made fun of came to see her and brought her cards and flowers. They were her real friends until graduation.

True religion doesn’t consist of building large church buildings and adding huge numbers of people who attend services. True religion is much more than that. It is encouraging and giving validation to “little ones.”

James tells us that “pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

The world you live in is full of orphans, widows and “little people” who will greatly benefit from your friendship and encouragement. **GN**

## Four Horsemen

*Continued from page 7*  
system unlike any previous system, and it will seem to work.

### An unparalleled religious movement

The ride of the first horseman, false religion, will greatly impact the nations in the last days. It will mark the expansion of a religious movement without parallel in history.

Religion continues to be a powerful force among the nations. A great wave of religious change is moving continually throughout the world. Not only are the large world religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, growing and changing, but countless other new faiths are springing up, almost on a daily basis.

Scholars who keep track of the world religious scene identify more than 9,900 distinctive religions. Despite predictions at one time that religion would become extinct, it continues to grow, reinventing itself after the personal interests and whims of people.

False religion marches on at the same time that the world’s citizens are desperately in need of hope and solutions for survival. Their desperation provides fertile ground for religious extremism.

The rise of fundamentalist Islam has precipitated a cultural clash that could lead to dramatic changes in the world geopolitical structure. Terrorism, under the guise of religion, appears ready to drag others, including Christian-professing nations, into a clash of civilizations—one that could possibly trigger the age-ending crisis foretold by Jesus Christ.

Christ spoke of false religion as the precursor to “wars and rumors of wars.” The second seal of Revelation 6 is a rider on a red horse described as taking peace from the earth. Religious strife has often been the cause of war. We will see the connection between the two in the next issue as we look at the ride of this next horseman. **GN**

### Recommended Reading

The Bible has much more to say about the two competing religions that emerged from first-century Christianity. To learn more, request or download our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*. To better understand the prophecies of the book of Revelation, be sure to read *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, also free.



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# Are You Feeling Overwhelmed?

Do too many problems stare you in the face? Do you find yourself with too much to do and not enough time and energy to do it? There are ways out of the dilemma.

by Mark Weaver

**A**s a systems and technology manager of a major company, part of my job is to coach employees. In recent years I have seen an increase of people who feel overwhelmed with their work and home lives.

They feel trapped in three general ways:

- Their problems seem more prolific than they were in times past.
- Their challenges are bigger and tougher than they used to be.
- Life seems much more complex than it used to be.

In general, people are feeling more overwhelmed these days because they sense that the world is tilted out of control. (It was probably never *in* control, but that's another story.)

Both men and women feel overwhelmed with all the tasks staring them in the face. Their work appears too large, too complicated, too insurmountable, too much. My company works on projects that can take years to finish. The scope of some of them intimidates even some of the hardest employees. To them, the task simply seems bigger than *they* are.

Do you ever have feelings like these? If so, read on to find several ideas that can help you learn how to feel less overwhelmed.

## Why do we feel overwhelmed?

I've noticed that the sense of being overwhelmed centers on one or more of the following phenomena:

- A feeling that the magnitude of the task at hand is too big to handle.
- Being put in the position of having to do things you've never done before.
- Being put in or caught up in circumstances where you don't know what to do (a situation especially aggravated when you have had no training to deal with it and there appears to be no plan).
- The fear of failure.

All of these feelings have one thing in common—*fear*.

The core of being overwhelmed is *fear*—being afraid of the unknown and lacking confidence in our abilities to deal with the unexplored and unfamiliar. But we don't need to let fear and anxiety freeze us. There are principles we can apply that will help us



balanced diet. You'll be surprised how much better you can cope with life's challenges.

## Manage the overwhelming

We tend to look at a project as a monolithic unit rather than a batch of small parts. Yet by mentally taking apart the task, we can avoid feeling overwhelmed at its magnitude.

Here is a simple suggestion: Work out a way to break the task down into small, doable parts. Then take it one little piece at a time.

I learned the importance of this approach years ago when I built a home in Wisconsin. Intent on saving money and getting some good exercise at the same time, I determined that my wife and I would do our own landscaping. I arranged to have 12 truckloads of topsoil brought in for our lawn, which we would then spread by hand.

Even after exhaustion and a sick, sinking feeling set in, my manly pride kept me at the task. I found that the only way I could do the job was to break it down into one pile at a time, one wheelbarrow trip at a time,

**Both men and women feel overwhelmed with all the tasks staring them in the face. Their work appears too large, too complicated, too insurmountable. Do you ever have feelings like these? If so, read on to find several ideas that can help you learn how to feel less overwhelmed.**

get a grip on our feelings of anxiety and not let them gain control over us.

## Watch your health

One way to gain the upper hand when you're feeling overwhelmed is to watch your health. Usually that anxious, defeatist sensation comes over us when we are worn out.

We need to know that exhaustion can have a major impact on how we see our tasks at hand. Most of the instances of being overwhelmed that I've seen have come when someone was extremely tired or even exhausted.

Our modern way of living places many demands on our time, and it's easy to neglect our health. Be sure to make time for rest, relaxation, exercise and sleep, and eat a

one shovel swing at a time.

I could handle that. We did well, manually spreading eight of the 12 loads of topsoil.

Around that time an opportunity arose to hire someone to spread the remaining four truckloads with a bulldozer. It cost only \$50 and took a lot of stress off our marriage!

From this I also learned the valuable lesson that, as already noted, it is important to break large jobs down into smaller ones. Rome wasn't built in a day. Neither are other large projects.

When faced with a major task, don't worry or become anxious about it. Realize that it will take time. Lay out the tasks and schedule each day's work. Set smaller goals and actually work toward them. If the job is still too intimidating, break it into even

smaller bits and extend the schedule. This approach makes many jobs much more manageable.

### Look for alternatives

I learned another valuable lesson from seeing the truckloads of dirt in my yard: Sometimes we must seek out alternatives. In my case that turned out to be extra help in the form of a bulldozer.

If you find you have too many responsibilities, remove those that are not as important.

Ask yourself: Do I really need to do this? You may find you are spending considerable time and energy—and too much worry—on things that aren't necessary. Concentrate instead on the essential. Make those things your priority.

You may need more help from family members, coworkers, managers or supervisors. Thoughtfully examine your situation, consider potential solutions and present your case to them.

### Seek God's help

When life seems to overwhelm us, we have God's promises that He will work with

us to see us through (see "Biblical Solutions to Anxiety").

Talk things over with Him in prayer. Such communication with God is helpful in several ways. Prayer helps us focus on what is most important. It enables us to have clearer minds. Prayer resets the mind—lets us mentally start over—and allows us, with God's help, to find alternative ways to deal with our challenges.

Ask God to help you evaluate and properly set your priorities. Sometimes we need to learn a lesson about taking on too much. We should learn that lesson quickly. Otherwise we'll unnecessarily overburden ourselves. Applying some of the advice in this article should make it easier. Remember that fear lies at the root of much of our anxiety, and we shouldn't allow it to immobilize us.

Consider Paul's words in Romans 8:31: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" And Jesus reminds us that "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

With God's help, we should be able to cast aside fear and anxiety. We should be able to focus on what is appropriate and possible—and then do it. **GN**

## Biblical Solutions to Anxiety

Several scriptures give us good advice on dealing with fear and anxiety. Proverbs 12:25 is one: "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad." This verse acknowledges something that is common knowledge but that all of us could do better at putting into practice.

We need encouragement, particularly when facing a daunting project or new responsibility involving unfamiliar skills and challenges. Make it a part of your job to give encouragement and foster a feeling of confidence among your coworkers. Take the same approach within your family, spreading the kind of "good word" about which Solomon wrote in Proverbs 12.

Jesus Christ pointed out that, in the end, worry and anxiety accomplish little.

"Therefore I say to you," He counsels us, "do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

"Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:25-34).

Christ does not advocate irresponsibility in caring for ourselves and our families. He does point out, however, that if we do as we should and strive to please God, we can have faith that He will take care of us and see us through life's struggles. Because of our confidence in God, we need not become overburdened with worry and anxiety.

The Scriptures assure us that God will never allow more burdens to come upon us than we can endure. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it" (New Revised Standard Version). This promise, of course, is given to us only if we do our part and draw near to God.

When feeling overwhelmed, why not review these and other encouraging scriptures to be reminded of God's promises and love for us?

## Who's Behind The Good News?



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

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

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

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

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



For additional information, visit our Web site:

[www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org)

## 'Many False Prophets Will Arise and Deceive Many'

When Jesus Christ foretold the major trends that would precede His return to earth, the first sign He mentioned was religious imposters who would come in His name. Do you take that warning seriously?

by Tom Robinson

**W**hen Jesus Christ's disciples asked Him what would herald His coming to rule all nations, He answered by first relaying a series of developments that would lead up to the grand climax of the present age: religious deception, wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes (Matthew 24:3-8; Mark 13:3-8; Luke 21:7-11).

Jesus said that these were just the "beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8, emphasis added throughout)—or, as the New International Version better renders this, the "beginning of birth pains." As birth pangs—or labor contractions—get stronger and closer together as delivery approaches, so these trends would appear with increasing intensity and frequency as the end of the age approached.

Let's take a closer look at the first of these trends—religious deception.

### "Many shall come in my name . . ."

Just what is the nature of this deception? Notice Jesus' specific warning: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (verses 4-5, King James Version).

Modern Bible versions often place quotation marks around "I am Christ," the translators assuming that Jesus was talking about people who would claim to actually be the Christ or Messiah themselves. There *have* been such people, and Jesus warned later in the same discourse of "false christs" at the end of the age (verse 24).

Yet there clearly have *not* been, as verse 5 requires, "many" such individuals who have been taken seriously—much less deceived the "many"—in the two millennia since Jesus said this. And there certainly has not been a great increase in such individuals in recent centuries—while there *has* been a marked increase in the other prophesied signs.

Some have proposed that Jesus was referring to false "savior" figures like the Roman emperors of New Testament times

or Napoleon, Hitler, Mao and Saddam Hussein in the modern era. But this is stretching the concept of "the Christ" or "the Messiah" far beyond what Jesus' disciples would have understood it to mean—the prophesied anointed king of the line of David.

Indeed, notice again that Jesus said, "Many shall come *in my name*"—His name being *Jesus*. Furthermore, they would come *in* His name, not *with* His name or *bearing* His name. In other words, they would presume to *represent* Him—not assume His identity.

So a clearer rendering of what Jesus meant in verses 4-5 would be: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many shall come claiming to represent Me, saying *that I [Jesus] am the Christ*, yet shall deceive many." That is, they would proclaim Jesus as the biblical Messiah and would claim to be His representatives—but they actually would be part of a massive religious deception.

It is *these* people—false preachers and teachers claiming to be Christian—who would proliferate and deceive ever more people as the end of the age neared.

The apostle Paul later affirmed, in a Christian context, that "evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). So not only do they deceive others. *These false teachers themselves* are deceived.

### Lawless fruits

In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus issued the following warning regarding false prophets or preachers: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Jesus being the great Shepherd, His followers are portrayed as sheep. Yet these false prophets only *appear* to be Jesus' followers. Their true nature is one of devouring the lives of the unsuspecting—as a wolf among the flock.

Paul would later warn of this as well. He told the leaders of the church 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).

Yet such imposters would be identifiable. Jesus explained: "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit" (Matthew 7:16-17). By "fruits," Jesus is referring metaphorically to visible results or outcomes.

He then gives us an example of something to look for in our evaluation: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' [merely acknowledging Him as Lord], shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does the will of My Father in heaven*" (verse 21). Then notice: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied [preached or taught] in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'" (verse 22).

Again, as in Matthew 24, we see such preachers coming *in Jesus' name*—having done various *works* in His name. But their lives are not lives conformed to the will of God. Jesus concludes, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:23).

Practicing lawlessness means living as if God's law is done away or of no consequence. Notice that these individuals are deceived about their own spiritual state. They think they have a special relationship with Jesus—but He ends up telling them they are gravely mistaken. In reality, He doesn't know them at all.

Why? *Because they don't honor God by obeying His law.* As the apostle John would later explain: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4).

Jesus is telling these false prophets that

He doesn't know *them* and *they* don't know *Him*. For if they knew Him, they would understand what He required—obedience to God's law. As Jesus stated in Matthew 19:17, "If you want to enter into [eternal] life, *keep the commandments.*"

Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "Whoever . . . breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called the least [by those] in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19).

Notice that Jesus speaks here of those who would disobey God *and* those who would *teach others* to disobey Him. So it's not only a matter of *practicing* lawlessness—but also of *teaching* it, whether through word or example.

### Exalting traditions over God's law

Jesus applied these principles to the religious leaders of His own day. For instance, Jesus chided the scribes and Pharisees for establishing many legalistic traditions that sidelined God's actual commandments. He said: "Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'" (Matthew 15:6-9).

Thus it is actually possible to worship God *in vain*—uselessly—in this case by putting the traditions of men ahead of the commandments of God.

Moreover, the scribes and Pharisees went beyond mere false teaching. As Jesus explained, "All their works they do to be seen by men" (Matthew 23:5). He castigated them, "Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (verse 28).

Yet it should be made clear that it's not necessary to be a hypocrite to be a false preacher. A man preaching that God's law is done away may be completely sincere in his belief—yet he is nevertheless a false teacher and certainly not a true representative of Jesus Christ.

### Counterfeit Christianity

Jesus' prophecy of false teachers coming in His name began to be fulfilled even during the era of the apostles. Paul mentioned a number of false teachers. He said a "different gospel" was already being preached (Galatians 1:6).

Paul even identified a heretical system he referred to as "the mystery of lawlessness," which during his ministry was "already at work" (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

This system, he showed, would persist until the end of the age: "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, *because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved*" (verses 8-10).

The book of Revelation refers to this lawless mystery religion as "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT" (17:5) and shows it appearing with "two horns like a lamb" (presenting itself as Christ-like) but speaking "like a dragon" (13:11). The "dragon" in Revelation is Satan the devil, who deceives the whole world (12:9). So what we're seeing here is an extremely powerful "wolf in sheep's clothing."

What Paul and this section of Revelation are describing is a great *counterfeit* of the true religion—a world-dominating *false Christianity* led by Satan and his ministers, who appear as ministers of righteousness (see 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

As shocking as it may sound, the world religion that now lays claim to the name of Christianity, having nearly 2 billion adherents, *is* that very lawless mystery system! This is not to question the sincerity of its many followers. Most are motivated by a sincere desire to please God. But *sincerity* is not the measure of right and wrong. *God defines what is right* by His laws and commandments, and Christianity in general has rejected many of God's clear instructions.

Early on, this religion shed many important biblical doctrines and commandments in favor of popular pagan concepts and traditions. Christmas and Easter, for instance (the name "Easter" even deriving from the pagan goddess *Ishtar*), are merely pagan holidays covered over with a Christian veneer—despite the Bible's explicit command that we not worship the true God with pagan customs (see Deuteronomy 12:29-32).

It is just as Jesus said of the Pharisees: "In vain they worship Me, *teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*"

The *true* Christian Church, holding fast to God's commandments throughout history, has remained, in the words of Jesus,

a "little flock" (Luke 12:32). In contrast, the popular substitute for Christianity has grown enormous and powerful—just as Jesus foretold in Matthew 24.

### The worst yet to come

Recall Christ's warning that false teachers would be on the rise through history, culminating in the vast and powerful deception of the last days. Of the time just before His return Jesus said, "False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24).

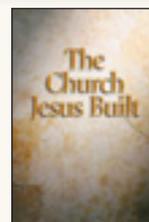
These signs and wonders are the same ones Paul mentioned. They have happened at times throughout history—yet will grow in magnitude at the end of the age, reaching their height with the coming of the great false prophet, who also appears to be representing Christ but in reality is the Antichrist.

All of us need to be wary and watchful. We must examine the fruits of all those who claim to represent Jesus Christ—in the way they live and the doctrines they teach. Do they insist that we are required to obey God's commandments? Or do they preach a message of cheap grace—that we can come to God just as we are without making any fundamental changes in our behavior? Remember, most of those who claim to represent Jesus *actually don't*. Moreover, as time goes on, ever more pretenders will arise, however sincere they may be. And finally, bear in mind that the greatest period of deception ever is just ahead of us. "See," Jesus said, "I have told you beforehand" (verse 25).

He was warning us to be prepared. Are you? **GN**

## Recommended Reading

Time and again Jesus Christ and His apostles warned of a religious system that would arise and claim to represent Him. We see an outline of this system emerging in the writings of the apostles. But how many take those warnings to heart? Do you? You need to read the incredible story of a pseudo-Christianity that has soared to great prominence and power—and discover where it is leading. Download or request the free booklets *The Church Jesus Built* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. You need this crucial information!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org)



# Letters From Our Readers

## “4,000 Years of Christmas?”

I wanted to thank you for your recent article on the Christmas holiday. I read about the true origin of Christmas for the first time in your magazine last year. I never knew before that our Christmas traditions were rooted in pagan customs. I was so surprised that I had to research it for myself. But I found everything you had printed to be true. I no longer celebrate Christmas. I do not want to participate in anything that is associated with, adopted from, or rooted in pagan customs or idolatry. The Bible explicitly forbids such relationships.

But what has surprised me more is the number of Christians who do know this and it doesn't bother them in the least! I have actually had fellow Christians tell me that it is not considered lying to teach your children about Santa Claus. I just wish the rest of the world would open their eyes and see Christmas for what it really is and stop trying to justify it.

*M.M., Chester, Georgia*

As a Southern Baptist and born-again Christian, I have enjoyed your magazine. But one thing I see disturbs me. Too many of your articles are approached purely from the intellectual side. Your article on Christmas was like this. Maybe Christmas and Easter came from pagan rituals, but isn't it wonderful that God has through Christians defeated Satan and turned them into Christian holidays? Many, many things we do are spiritual and make no sense to the secular person. We must let God lead even when it doesn't make sense to us, and if we do, we'll be triumphant. It does not matter in the least that December 25 was not the true birthday of Christ.

*S.E., Bowdon, Georgia*

*The problem with such arguments is that truth does matter! Our Creator made human beings in His image (Genesis 1:26-27), conferring on us the precious privilege of rational choice—an attribute of God Himself. He wants us to make decisions based on the plain instructions in His Word, the Holy Bible, not on misguided emotions and feelings emanating from manmade religious fables and traditions contrary to Scripture.*

*Jesus Christ tells us we must worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Truth is based on historical fact. Deuteronomy 12:30-32 plainly tells us not to add or adapt*

*pagan practices to our worship of the true God. The New Testament indicates that pagan customs are equated with demon worship (1 Corinthians 10:20-21). Our free booklet Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep? explains these biblical principles in much greater detail.*

## Reporting news and world events

I want to thank you for the very helpful and clear way that your organization reports on world events and news in your various publications. I often find your reporting to be much more honest and frank than the news channels, newspapers and magazines.

*L.E., Internet*

## The Christian Sabbath

I've been keeping holy the Sabbath (Saturday) for some time now, only because of my reading the Bible. I thought that I was the only Christian in the world that was doing this. I've struggled with it for years because all those around me are Sunday worshippers. They think I'm nuts, but they don't dare say it.

*D.T.D., Sr., Sutersville, Pennsylvania*

## Thoughts on water baptism

I found a very intriguing article on your Web site. You said something in the article that caught my attention. Many Christians believe that baptism is not an important part of being saved—that it is more of a gesture to show the world your commitment to God. From your comment it looks like you believe that baptism is essential. I am extremely interested in hearing what you believe the Scriptures instruct on how to be saved.

*M.F., Internet*

*Many New Testament passages affirm the central importance of water baptism. Some of the more prominent are Mark 16:16, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved,” and Acts 2:38, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized . . .” For a much fuller exposition, please request our free booklets The Road to Eternal Life and Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion, both of which have major sections on baptism.*

I am 15 and I know that at this age I am considered young. I do still have a lot to learn from life. But from all the literature I've read off your Web site, I believe I might qualify for water baptism. I cannot find anything about

when you are ready to be baptized. I wonder if you can help me with this issue.

*Reader on Internet*

*Yours is a question that many young people have. It has been addressed in an article in Youth United (now called Vertical Thought magazine). You can access the article, “When Should You Be Baptized?” on the Web at <http://youthmagazine.org/yu/article.asp?volume=3&issue=2&article=baptized>.*

I am a new *Good News* reader. I have been interested in becoming baptized for three months now with a very strong desire. I would like you to arrange a private appointment.

*B.M., London*

*We are very glad to arrange a meeting for you with one of our ordained ministers.*

## Should readers cancel when they disagree?

I got the November-December issue of your magazine a few days ago. I don't know who you are, but I do know you are Anti-christ. In my mind you are surely some of the children of Satan. I will keep this issue to show people how the Antichrists are working in our country today. A number of other stories in your magazine that I have seen, I know to be false. Do not send any more.

*B.M., Frankford, Missouri*

*We have removed your name from our mailing list. And yes, some of the articles that appear in The Good News are shocking. We encourage our readers not to simply accept what we say but to follow the example of the Bereans, whom the apostle Paul commended because they “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Those who want a better understanding of the Antichrist should be sure to read the lead article in this issue.*

I want to thank you for sending me *The Good News*. The most I have ever learned from any religion was from this magazine and the Church of God. Every story is backed up with passages from the Bible for those who are in doubt. *The Good News* lets me make my own decision whether to believe it or not. I want to close by saying to all those who ask to be removed from your mailing list: Why not take some time to do some comparing before you make that decision?

*A.C., Dallas, Texas*

## Spreading the true gospel to others

Thank you so much for your truly enlightening magazines and the many informative booklets you have sent me. Your *Bible Study Course* is also very thorough and educational. Even though you

graciously never ask for contributions, I wish to submit this check in appreciation so you may continue to spread the truth about many beliefs that are not the true hallmarks of Christianity.

L.P., Seattle, Washington

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



# Questions & Answers

**Q: I am having a difficult time in my life. I have lost my faith in God. Can you tell me why I should believe in God when nothing in my life has gone the way I have wanted it to? What can I do to get my faith in God back? Any advice would be great.**

*Reader on Internet*

A: You are certainly not alone. We all go through times of difficulties, discouragements and regrets about life. Yet God's Word provides many encouraging solutions to our human dilemmas. Jesus Christ said: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). The apostle John wrote: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 2).

While God wants us to experience a positive and encouraging Christian life in the here and now, He is even more concerned with our awesome potential of enjoying everlasting life with Him in His Kingdom. But getting there isn't an easy journey, since society is mostly focused on the here and now. Jesus Christ tells us that "narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:14).

As Paul and Barnabas reminded members of the early Church, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). At times God even uses our discouraging "down" times to help bring us to our senses and cause us to rely more on Him, increasing our faith.

It is often helpful to consider the source of our discouragements and trials in life. We may even suffer for doing godly things. The apostle Peter tells us: "For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:17). Also: "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter" (1 Peter 4:16).

Moses actually chose the consequences of this godly type of suffering over the comforts of a sinful life apart from God (Hebrews

11:25). The majestic salvation our Creator is planning for the rest of eternity will pale into insignificance the sufferings we experience today. Consider the comparison the apostle Paul makes: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Jesus Christ tells us that we "always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Yet we are human and sometimes fall short of that ideal, inevitably losing faith and becoming discouraged on occasion. But Paul has the antidote. He wrote to the brethren at Corinth: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation*, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, emphasis added).

Ask God to encourage you and restore your faith in Him! His ears are open to our cry (Psalm 34:15).

At the same time, you should do what you can to rebuild and restore that faith. *The Good News* has run many articles profiling the lives of biblical personalities and the trials they went through, as well as many other pieces proving the trustworthiness of the Bible as God's Word. You can search for such articles at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).

We also offer a wealth of information in our literature library ([www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets)) that addresses these human dilemmas and questions. For instance, we offer free booklets with the following titles: *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*, *Who Is God?*, *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*, *You Can Have Living Faith* and *Making Life Work*. You can read, request or download these booklets online or we can mail them to you free of charge.

**Q: I have a little problem with social anxiety at the United Church of God**

**congregation I attend. Every time any of the youth talk to me I just freak out. I don't know what to do. I get really nervous and want to run away crying. I want to enjoy local youth events like the barn dance, but I am just too afraid. I was wondering if I could ask some help or advice.**

*A young reader*

A: Sometimes meeting and getting to know other young people can be very challenging. Shyness is somewhat normal for some people, especially in their teenage years. Yet it is something one can work on and change over time. We have to be very patient with ourselves in dealing with who we are and how we relate to other people.

Consider the encouraging words of Jesus Christ: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). The apostle Peter wrote about "casting all your care upon Him [God], for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Go to God the Father in prayer and ask Him for His peace of mind. Ask that Christ would help you to work through this problem. He is our High Priest and is there for you!

You should also consider talking with your local pastor. He can suggest ideas based on the principles of the Bible and His experience in helping young people. Perhaps he can help you figure out how to break the ice one person at a time. He may even be able to set up occasions and opportunities that will make it easier for you to get to know others and for them to get to know you. Sometimes cultivating just one good friend can make a big difference. Then that friend can help you get acquainted with others and form new friendships.

You may be aware that the United Church of God has been producing a *Youth United* magazine on the Web for several years. It now publishes a printed version entitled *Vertical Thought*. In the Web version, the July-September 2003 edition focused on friendships. You can find a list of other back issues and articles on the Web (at <http://youthmagazine.org/you/archive.asp>).

# The Dating Debate

With all the bad results, should a Christian give up on dating altogether? Or is there a better way?

by Ken Treybig

**D**ating in the United States and most other developed countries is in serious trouble.

Don't misunderstand—the practice of dating is very much alive. The problem is what has happened as a result of current normal dating practices. Teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, emotional scars and a host

of other problems often result from modern dating habits.

From *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* to *I Gave Dating a Chance*, the books about dating in the Christian realm run the gamut, with all of them saying they have biblical backing for their approach. Which is truly right in God's eyes? If you are eligible for marriage, how can you know what you should do—give dating a chance or kiss it goodbye?

## Big change in dating practices

Beth Bailey's book, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, chronicles the dramatic changes that took place in the world of dating and courtship during the 20th century.

As the title indicates, the automobile has played a big part in those changes.

By giving young

command about keeping sexual activity within the bounds of marriage (Exodus 20:14; 1 Corinthians 6:18).

God has consistently told His people to be different from the people around them—from His commands to ancient Israel to statements like the one in 2 Corinthians 6:17. Christ said those who follow Him are to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14). He inspired Paul to refer to faithful Christians as lights that shine brightly in a crooked and perverse world (Philippians 2:15).

As dating practices from the 1960s on became more focused on physical intimacy before marriage, authors familiar with Scripture began to draw attention to the fact that modern dating practices were going against God's Word.

## Dating with a biblically based focus

Joshua Harris grabbed a lot of attention with his best-selling book about kissing dating good-bye, which was published in 1997. In 2000 he wrote a sequel book after his courtship and marriage, titled *Boy Meets Girl*. As the back cover of the book says: "*Boy Meets Girl* is an honest, romantic, and refreshingly biblical look at relationships. It's about dating with a purpose."

So despite what might appear to be a prejudice against any kind of dating by the first book's title, the book is really about avoiding the *wrong kind* of dating.

So if his first book is not really against all dating, what's the point? Was it just a catchy title for marketing purposes? Perhaps a quick review of the book will help.

The first chapter deals with the importance of doing what *is* good, not just doing what-



**The dating debate is not really about giving up on dating completely. It's about giving up going out exclusively with one person until you are ready to marry.**

people more mobility, one-on-one boy-girl contact has gone from a public, almost family setting in the parents' home to a private and intimate setting. This often leads to sex before marriage in defiance of God's

ever *feels* good. Having a series of short-term relationships that include physical intimacy not only means you give away part of your heart to many partners before marriage, it also sets up a person to view marriage as a



potential short-term relationship instead of the lifelong commitment God intended (Matthew 19:6).

Chapter 2 gets to the heart of what's wrong with the typical dating scene by focusing on the negative tendencies of defective dating—that is, dating the way most people have done it for decades. He points out that the wrong kind of dating can have the following negative effects:

- It leads to intimacy but not necessarily to commitment. When couples eventually break up, they simply move on to another similar relationship.

- It tends to skip the friendship stage of a relationship. Friendship can be described as two people walking side by side toward a

## Being fun on a date doesn't necessarily say a lot about how a person will be as a husband or wife. Real-life settings around family and other friends show much more of what a person is really like.

common goal or interest. Typically dating tends to focus on being a couple with the goal of intimacy.

- It often mistakes a physical relationship for love. A later chapter talks about looking up "love" in God's dictionary to see what it should entail. Sex does not equal love, yet it is often mistaken for love. Though the excitement of the physical relationship is intoxicating, real love extends far beyond sex.

- Sex before marriage often isolates a couple from other vital relationships. Many authors have noted the importance of making a lot of friends of both sexes while young so you have a good idea of what others are like. Often in isolated relationships when a breakup comes, other friends have been or will be alienated, leaving the former partners even more isolated and lonely at a time when they both really need friends.

- In many cases it also distracts young adults from their primary responsibility of preparing for the future. The most obvious thought might be of higher education, but even developing skills and talents can be stunted when one's attention is focused on steady, intimate dating.

- An undesirable consequence is discontentment with God's gift of youthful single-ness. Some might disagree with the choice of phrasing, but the focus is that being unattached while young means you have opportunities for growth, learning and service that

will be more difficult if not impossible when married. The author urges people to take full advantage of their single years. The teen and early adult years especially should be a time for refining many areas and facets of personal development.

- Defective dating creates an artificial environment for evaluating another person's character. Being fun on a date doesn't necessarily say a lot about how a person will be as a husband or wife. Real-life settings around family and other friends show much more of what a person is really like.

### Avoid the negative, focus on the positive

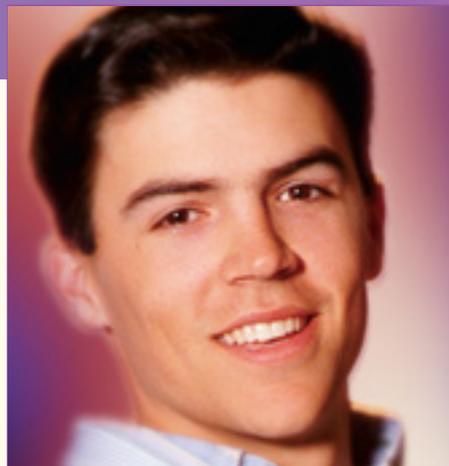
The rest of the book focuses on how to avoid such negative effects and, beginning

with chapter 4, it focuses on godly love. Harris accurately points out that Christ said if we love Him, we will obey Him. So true love always expresses itself as obedience to Christ and service to others.

In contrast to that, the focus of defective dating is usually gratifying self and going against God's commands concerning righteousness and purity in our lives. There is a chapter on putting past mistakes behind and realizing that even if you have made mistakes, you can live a pure life from now on.

There are also suggestions on how to keep your focus on being singles and truly friends in a "couples" and "just do it" world. The final section includes some thoughts on what really matters in a life partner—the character and attitude issues that will be a blessing to one's spouse. The book ends with a chapter encouraging readers to be sure their stories of how they came to marriage are ones they will be proud to tell.

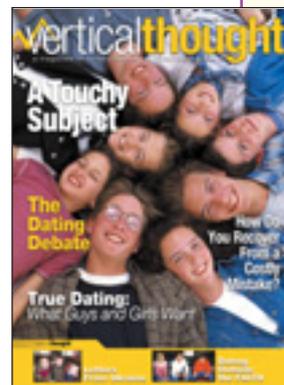
So the dating debate is not really about giving up on dating completely. It's about giving up going out exclusively with one person until you are ready to marry. It's about being sure that your dating practices are godly and done at the right time and in the right manner. It's about rejecting the kind of dating that is so common in today's society and making sure that you follow God's instruction about purity and holiness in everything you do. **GN**



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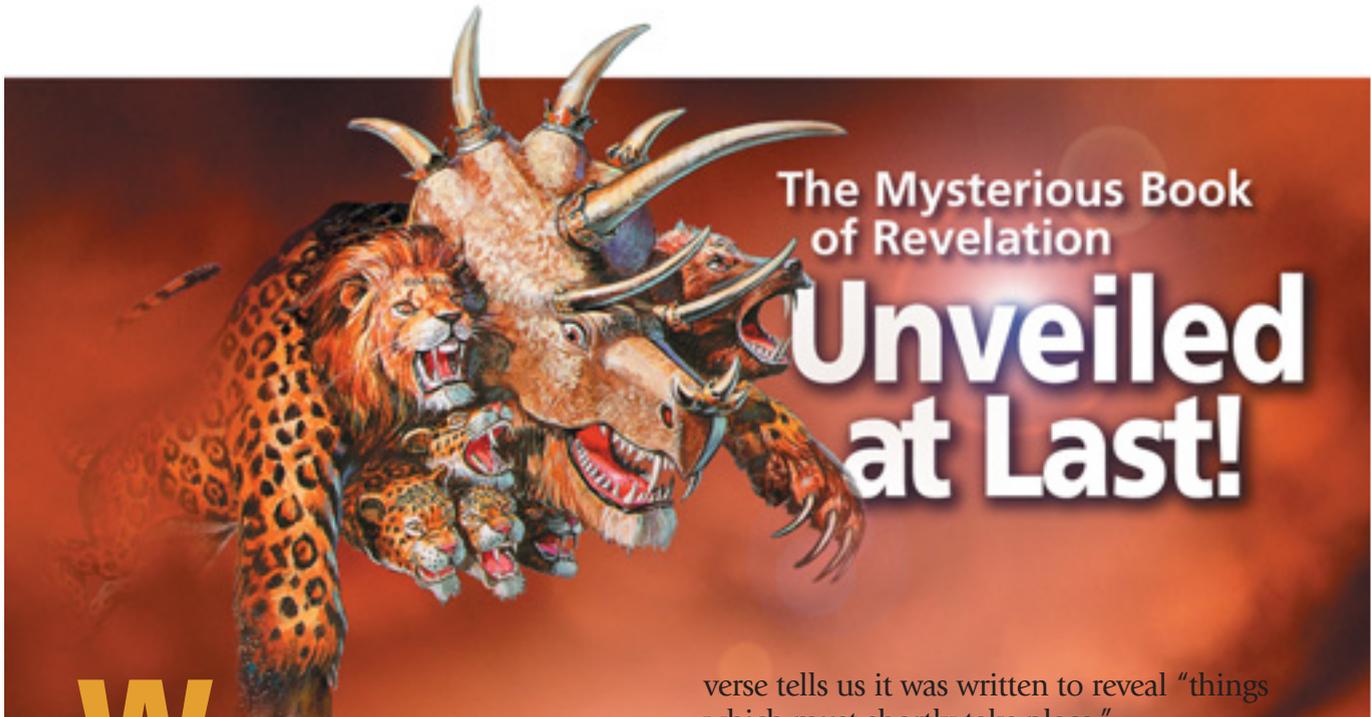
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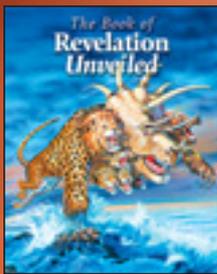


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