March-April 2013

The Good News

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



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The Arab Spring That Wasn't

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Bin Laden's Dream Lives On



Osama bin Laden, whose al-Qaeda terror group was behind the devastating Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, has been dead for almost two years. But his dream lives on, and we see this being played out in headlines across the Middle East, Africa and South Asia.

What dream is that? It's the dream of forming an Islamic *caliphate*—a worldwide body of Muslim believers, transcending all national borders, united under Islamic sharia law and the rule of a *caliph*—a successor to the founder of Islam, Muhammad, who died in A.D. 632.

But the caliphate isn't an end in itself. Islam's holy book, the Koran, tells Muslims that Allah sent Muhammad "with guidance and the True Faith [Islam], so that he may exalt it above all religions" (Surah 61:9, Dawood translation). Thus the purpose of the caliphate is to be a stepping-stone to Islamic world domination.

> **"The capital of the caliphate—the capital of the United States of the Arabs—will be Jerusalem, [Allah] willing."**

Bin Laden himself praised the 9/11 attacks, in which almost 3,000 Americans were killed, as "a great step towards the unity of Muslims and establishing the righteous caliphate, Allah willing."

Bin Laden's late deputy and head of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (best known for the videos posted online of him beheading Western prisoners), outlined the group's master plan in seven phases, the last four of which he described as the overthrow of moderate Arab regimes such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the declaration of an Islamic caliphate, the "fight between the believers [Muslims] and non-believers [non-Muslims]," and the final stage of "definitive victory" for Islam.

Although it's seldom reported in Western media, establishing an Islamic caliphate is a powerful motivation among key players behind the so-called "Arab Spring" and much of the current unrest in today's very divided Islamic world.

For example, leaders of some of the rebel groups battling to overthrow Syrian president Bashar al-Assad openly state their desire for a caliphate. The Muslim Brotherhood, which recently gained control of Egypt after the overthrow of former President Hosni Mubarak, was founded in 1928 with an Islamic caliphate as one of its primary goals (the Muslim Brotherhood also spawned the terror groups al-Qaeda and Hamas, which rules Gaza).

In May 2012, Egyptian cleric Safwat Hegazy warmed up thousands at a rally for Mohamad Morsi, later elected as Egypt's president, by saying: "We can see how the dream of the Islamic caliphate is being realized, [Allah] willing, by Dr. Mohamed Mursi . . . The capital of the caliphate—the capital of the United States of the Arabs—will be Jerusalem, [Allah] willing." Taking the stage, Morsi agreed: "Jerusalem is our goal. We shall pray in Jerusalem, or die as martyrs on its threshold."

The dream of an Islamic caliphate means nothing to most of those of us in the West, but it means everything to those raising havoc in an arc of instability stretching 4,500 miles from Morocco on the Atlantic Ocean to Pakistan on the Indian subcontinent.

Islamist gains in elections following the Arab Spring uprisings have actually been referred to by a number of analysts as "electoral Bin Ladenism." Indeed, Osama bin Laden's dream is alive and well, and reshaping the world before our eyes. Read this issue to understand how, and what it may mean from Bible prophecy.

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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WINTER ADVISORY:

The Arab Spring That Wasn't

Despite rosy forecasts of an "Arab Spring," a cold Islamist winter grips the Middle East, as developments in Egypt make clear. What does this mean for the future of this critical region? ***by Tom Robinson***

Sweet springtime! The birds are singing, the trees are budding, all is lovely. And so was it imagined to be by many in the West with the uprisings against dictatorial rule in Middle Eastern states that began at the end of 2010. Young visionaries coordinating through Google and Facebook spawned protests calling for reform throughout the region. Soon despotic rulers were ousted. It was hailed as the Arab Spring. No doubt freedom and democracy were on the way.

As the West, including the U.S. government, encouraged the various uprisings and ousters, some concerned voices warned of the revolts empowering Islamist forces. But this was brushed aside as Islamophobic fearmongering. All was sunshine and rainbows.

So after the February 2011 ouster of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, it came as a shock to many that when millions jammed into Tahrir Square in Cairo, where the protests had taken place, it was not to hear from the young Google executive Wael Ghonim, whom Western media put forward as the progressive, modernist face of the uprisings. He was not even allowed to take the stage.

Rather, the crowds pressed in to cheer on the top jurist of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, regarded by many as the world's most influential Sunni Muslim cleric. Just two years earlier the renowned disabled scholar had told millions on al-Jazeera TV: "The only thing I hope for is that, as my life approaches its end, Allah will give me an opportunity to go to the land of jihad and resistance, even if in a wheelchair. I will shoot Allah's enemies, the Jews, and they will throw a bomb at me, and thus, I will seal my life with martyrdom."

But this, Western commentators assured us, was not widespread sentiment. Except that the Muslim Brotherhood was soon elected into power in Egypt with a stated desire to institute full sharia (Islamic law and jurisprudence) and talk of ending the peace treaty with Israel. And Salafis, perceived by many to follow an even more extreme interpretation of Islam, also got a large percentage of the vote. Similar outcomes were seen in other Muslim states

where the uprisings had occurred.

Egyptian military leaders attempted to marginalize the country's new Muslim Brotherhood president, Mohamed Morsi, but with vast popular and Western support he managed to outmaneuver them, force their resignations and take control of the political process. Opposition figure Mohamed ElBaradei complained that Morsi "usurped all state powers and appointed himself Egypt's new pharaoh."

By the end of 2012 Morsi succeeded in driving through a sharia-based constitution, ultimately by popular referendum. Yet Western talking heads and officials have continued to urge that there's no cause for alarm—maintaining that the elected parties and the majority of the populace in the various nations are really moderates.

Escalating danger as revolutionary fervor spreads

In September 2012, new eruptions of protests and rioting broke out all over the Arab and wider Muslim world—this time against America under the pretense of defending Islam against an obscure, amateurish film portraying Muhammad that was made by an Egyptian living in the United States.

While the movie was certainly used to further inflame passions, it seems that many of the protests had been planned in advance, unrelated to that instigation, to coincide with the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. And besides mere protests, American embassies were attacked, and the U.S. ambassador to Libya and other officials were murdered by terrorists.

Shockingly, it now appears that America has armed such terrorists in Libya, even al-Qaeda. The initial purpose was to depose Muammar Gaddafi, but the revolutionary fighters have used the weapons—augmented by many more formerly under the control of Gaddafi's forces—to spread armed uprising to other countries. Some weapons have been funneled to nearby Mali and Algeria, supplying the recent terror assaults there, while others have ended up smuggled farther away to Hamas in Gaza and, in large amounts, to Islamist forces in Syria.

Speaking of Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has not surrendered to Islamist uprisings, and a civil war has broken out, with more than 60,000 people killed and more than 500,000 refugees having fled to neighboring countries. Syria has become a new rallying spot for Islamist "freedom fighters" from many other nations—including Iraq, where they formerly battled U.S. forces.

While the Assad government represents tyranny, to be sure, an Islamist government would likely be even more totalitarian—controlling the minutiae of personal lives. It would especially be worse for Syrian Christians, as their religious practices were for the most part tolerated and even protected under Assad's government.

Egypt—growing danger for non-Muslim minorities

In Egypt, the situation is dangerously deteriorating for Christians. Dozens of them were killed and hundreds injured when soldiers opened fire on thousands during a protest in October 2011. Just prior to the December 2012 referendum on the new constitution, longtime Muslim Brotherhood figure and popular preacher Safwat Hegazy stood before Muslim throngs warning the nation's Coptic Christians:

"A message to the church of Egypt, from an Egyptian Muslim: I tell the church—by Allah, and again, by Allah—if you conspire and unite with the remnants [opposition] to bring Morsi down, that will be another matter . . . We say and I say to the church: yes, you share this country with us; but there are red lines—and our red line is the legitimacy of Dr. Mohamed Morsi. Whoever splashes water on it, we will splash blood on him."

All the while his enthusiastic Muslim audience repeatedly shouted *"Allahu Akbar!"*—commonly said to mean "Allah is great" but actually meaning "Allah is greater"—that is, greater than all other gods and all forces that would stand against the spread of Islam.

After the new Egyptian constitution was signed into law on Dec. 26, the leader of the nation's Coptic Church stated that "the religious orientation of this constitution prepares the way for an Islamic caliphate"—that is, an empire under Islamic rule bent on world domination.

Other critics of the new constitution noted that it had dropped a ban on slavery—proposed in light of the fact that abduction, enslavement, rape and trafficking of Coptic Christian girls is now at an all-time high, with Islamists allowing such slavery. Salafis involved in drafting the constitution objected to any mention of human trafficking, asserting in spite of the evidence that these problems did not exist in Egypt. In reality, *they're the ones most associated with these problems.*

As to opposition calls to shelve the new constitution, Muslim Brotherhood Secretary General Mahmoud Hussein said, "Such talk is punishable by law because the Constitution has been approved in a fair process."

Ah, springtime! Can you smell the flowers?

The sad reality, as many analysts have recognized since even the outset, is that *there has been no Arab Spring*—that what we are instead seeing is *an Islamist winter* settling over the Middle East. And this development has been abetted by the West. It's important that we understand what's going on in the region—and where it's headed.

The key factor on the ground—Islam

It's clear that the primary beneficiaries of the Arab uprisings are the Islamic supremacists—particularly the Muslim Brotherhood but other groups as well. This is especially true in Egypt, "the mother of the Arab world" and most populous Arab nation, which heavily influences the direction of the rest.

In Egypt's parliamentary elections, the Brotherhood claimed half the vote. Some try to paint this as a slim victory. But the Islamist vote was split with the Salafis, who took another quarter of the vote—meaning that together they received a massive 75 percent. The more recent referendum of December 2012 passed the sharia-based constitution 64 to 36 percent. How could this happen?

Syria has become a new rallying spot for Islamist "freedom fighters" from many other nations—including Iraq, where they formerly battled U.S. forces.

Photo illustration by Shaun Venish/iStockphoto

Author Andrew McCarthy is a former assistant U.S. attorney who led the prosecution of the 1993 World Trade Center bombers and other terrorists. In his new book *Spring Fever: The Illusion of Islamic Democracy* he explains:

"To understand the 'Arab Spring,' it is essential first and foremost to grasp that the key fact on the ground in Arab countries—as well as in Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other neighboring non-Arab territories—is Islam. It is not poverty, illiteracy, or the lack of modern democratic institutions.

"These features, like anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, and an insular propensity to buy into conspiracy theories featuring infidel villains, are . . . *consequences* of Islam's regional dominance and supremacist ambitions. They do not *cause* populations to turn to Islam. One does not need to be led to that which pervades one's existence . . . [And] on its native soil, Islam is most emphatically not 'moderate'" (2013, pp. 4-5, emphasis in original).

"The key fact on the ground in Arab countries . . . is Islam. It is not poverty, illiteracy, or the lack of modern democratic institutions."

This is especially so in Egypt, of which Michael Totten wrote in the journal *World Affairs:* "Almost every woman who goes out in public wears a headscarf. I see more men in just one single day with bruised foreheads—acquired by hitting their heads on the floor during prayer—than I have seen in all other Muslim-majority countries combined in almost a decade.

"The country is, as far as I can tell, the most Islamicized place in the world after Saudi Arabia. It used to be oriented more toward the Mediterranean . . . but that was more than a half century ago" ("Arab Spring or Islamist Winter?" January/February 2012).

Another analyst points out, "Many Egyptians voted as they were told by the leaders of local mosques by selecting pictograms on the ballots (approximately 30 percent of Egyptians are illiterate)" (James Phillips, "The Arab Spring Descends Into Islamist Winter," The Heritage Foundation, Dec. 20, 2012). Of course, even educated people followed the imams.

Islamist groups seize the moment

Suppression of dissent under Arab dictatorship has contributed to the problem. While any kind of secular reformers were squashed, as was free thinking in education, dictators still had to pay lip service to Islam and permit its flourishing. And Islamists were heavily involved in the mosques and various charities—giving them an organizational framework from which to operate.

When the uprisings happened, they seized the moment and hit the ground running. Secularists, on the other hand, were not set up to mobilize public opinion into political action and were quickly shunted aside by the better-organized Islamists.

So why should Islamist victory in democratic elections be any surprise? This is not an environment conducive to freedom-oriented self-governance. McCarthy notes:



"The modern West obsesses over politics and law. We are mesmerized, in particular, by their procedural aspects: popular elections, constitution-writing, and the like" (p. 3).

Yet, he points out, it was a liberty-oriented culture in early America that gave rise to our limited government—not the other way around. We need to look beyond processes—to consider the type of people they will establish in positions of power.

We should especially consider the primary beneficiary of the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood, which many try to portray as moderate. (For some background, be sure to read "A Closer Look at the Muslim Brotherhood" on page 7.)

Not moderate, despite word games

Some try to draw a distinction between the more popular Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis (who won a quarter of the Egyptian election) as a contrast between moderate innovators and strict fundamentalists.



"Hooey," says McCarthy in a *National Review* article. "The Muslim Brothers *are* Salafists . . . The Brotherhood rigorously hews to the Salafist ideology of its founder, Hassan al-Banna . . . that seeks to return to the Islam of Mohammed and the first generations of Muslims—the *Salafiyyah* (a term derived from *al-Salaf al-Salih,* the Righteous Companions: Mohammed and the first 'rightly guided' caliphs).

"This is the Islam the Brotherhood seeks to impose on the world, through implementation of Islam's legal and political system, sharia. The goal of the Salafists is 'shared' with the Brotherhood precisely because the Brotherhood and the Salafists are one, as their just-announced electoral pact

Photos: Wikimedia

A Closer Look at the Muslim Brotherhood

It's important to pay attention to the organization that has made the most significant gains through the Arab uprisings—*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun,* the Muslim Brotherhood, the godfather of all Islamic supremacist groups. With representative political parties and social organizations throughout Muslim nations, and numerous outreach arms in Western countries, it is perceived by many in the West as a moderate, peaceable association.

"However," notes Steven Simpson in the *Canada Free Press,* "if one looks for reality and clarity (unlike the current American administration which foolishly engages the Brotherhood and views it as 'moderate'), it will be seen that the Brotherhood is a violent fascist movement that seeks global Islamic domination. Indeed, it is the phalanx and aegis for all Islamist groups that have emerged throughout the Muslim world. Bluntly put, it is nothing short of an Islamic hydra, and an implacable enemy of the West, Israel, and all non-Muslims" ("Why the Arab Spring Will Descend Into an Islamic Ice Age," April 16, 2012).

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928 by a schoolteacher and imam named Hassan al-Banna, who desired the revival of the Islamic caliphate. The caliphate—the international community of Muslim believers led by a *caliph,* a successor to Muhammad—had fallen with the end of the Ottoman Empire at the conclusion of World War I and the modernizing influence of Kemal Ataturk, who with great difficulty transformed Turkey into a secular state.



Founder Hassan al-Banna and his disciple Sayyid Qutb

Al-Banna was killed in 1949, and the Brotherhood was banned in Egypt just before, but it would continue to operate—soon guided by al-Banna's principal disciple Sayyid Qutb, who had been a bureaucrat in Egypt's education department.

In the words of former U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey: "Qutb caused enough trouble in Egypt to get himself awarded a traveling fellowship in 1948 . . . Regrettably for us, Qutb chose to travel to Greeley, Colorado. And although it would be hard to imagine a more inoffensive place than post–World War II Greeley, Colorado, for a man like Qutb it was Sodom and Gomorrah. He hated everything he saw: American haircuts, enthusiasm for sports, jazz, and what he called the 'animal-like mixing of the sexes,' even in church.

"His conclusion was that Americans were 'numb to faith in art, faith in religion, and faith in spiritual values altogether,' and that Muslims must regard 'the white man, whether European or American . . . [as] our first enemy' . . . [He later] continued to write and agitate for Islam and against Western civilization, particularly against Jews, whom he blamed for atheistic materialism and considered the worst enemies of Muslims" ("Executive Power in Wartime," *Imprimis,* October 2011).

Qutb later became the leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood and was eventually hanged in Egypt in 1966. But his brother Muhammad Qutb fled with other Brotherhood members to Saudi Arabia and eventually taught Sayyid's ideology to then-obscure figures Osama bin Laden and his eventual right-hand man Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda since Bin Laden's death. These al-Qaeda figures and their followers are sometimes referred to as Qutbists.

Another follower of Sayyid Qutb's writings was Omar Abdel-Rahman, often called "the Blind Sheik," spiritual advisor to the 1993 World Trade Center bombers who is currently serving a U.S. sentence of life imprisonment. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri called for his release before the al-Qaeda attack on the U.S.S. *Cole* in Yemen in 2000. And they relied on Abdel-Rahman's fatwa calling for the mass-murder of Americans in perpetrating the horror of 9/11 the next year.

The Blind Sheikh remains a hero among Islamists, so it should perhaps come as no surprise that the major calls for his release of late have come not from al-Qaeda but from the current Muslim Brotherhood leadership of Egypt—the so-called moderates.

suggests" ("An Ill Season," May 14, 2011).

To a degree, this is part of a strategy of proliferating organizations to camouflage unified intentions. It makes it seem like there are many competing groups to choose from when there really aren't, and creates the impression of support for certain issues across a wide and diverse spectrum. The same kind of proliferation of organizations has long been a leftist globalist strategy—groups of many different names, but all working toward the same ends and often cooperating.

Then again, there may actually be some difference between the Salafists in terms of tactics. The Brotherhood has often been more cautious in its statements and actions than some others—working to thoroughly infiltrate society before too quickly resorting to violence, as that could cause a backlash.

Yet we should not imagine that the Brotherhood has renounced violence. After all, the Palestinian branch of the organization is the terrorist group Hamas, which is behind literally thousands of attacks against Israel.

Nor has the Brotherhood moderated its Islamic supremacist aims in recent years. It still unabashedly proclaims its motto that goes back more than 80 years: "Allah is our goal. The Prophet [Muhammad] is our leader. The Koran is our law. Jihad is our way. Death in the way of Allah is our highest hope. *Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!"*

Duplicity in renouncing terrorism

But doesn't the Brotherhood decry terrorism? Yes, but usually in criticizing Israel and the West. We need to understand their use of terms.

McCarthy states in *Spring Fever:* "To an Islamist, 'terrorism' involves the unjustifiable (under sharia) killing of *Muslims.* Killing non-Muslim enemies is never terrorism, it is 'resistance.' To ingratiate themselves with credulous Western leaders, deceptive Islamists will grudgingly . . . condemn terrorist attacks against civilian targets (e.g., the World Trade Center) *in the West.* But this is because they rationalize that such indiscriminate violence can and does kill Muslim civilians, too [and it could cause severe setbacks for spreading Islam] . . .

"The Brotherhood has no trouble claiming to be repulsed by 'terrorism.' The problem is that the Brothers don't mean what you think you hear. Again, they don't judge themselves by your standards. They operate in accordance with the Islamic concepts of *taqiyya* (strategic lying to infidels) and *taqiyya*'s close derivative, *tawriya* . . . [or]

'creative lying': a literal truth by which the speaker deceives a listener he knows to be ignorant of basic facts and assumptions" (pp. 57-58, emphasis in original).

It's the same with the naming of the Brotherhood's political parties. In Egypt it's the Freedom and Justice Party, following after the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. While such names play well to Western democracy advocates, they mean something different to Islamists.

To them, "freedom" is found in submission to authoritarian Islam. And "justice" means the whole system of sharia. One of early Brotherhood leader Sayyid Qutb's most successful tracts is *Social Justice in Islam*. Likewise, the Muslim Brotherhood party in Tunisia is named Ennahda or "Renaissance"—referring to society being brought under Islam.

The sentiments of Egypt's new president

Statements and actions by Egypt's new president, Mohamed Morsi, should make it clear that the Muslim Brotherhood's agenda has not been watered down. He vowed what Egypt's new constitution would represent under his guidance: "The sharia, then the sharia, and finally, the sharia." And he came through on his promise.

Besides following through on his commitment to pressuring the U.S. to release the Blind Sheikh (Omar Abdel-Rahman, the spiritual leader behind the 1993 World Trade Center bombers) and other terrorists, Morsi freed hundreds of political prisoners in Egypt—including dozens of terrorist leaders.

Then there's the matter of Israel. Before becoming president, in a Sept. 23, 2010, video interview posted at the Brotherhood's Ikhwan Tube, Morsi called Israeli-Palestinian negotiations a waste of time, claiming: "Either [you accept] the Zionists and everything they want, or else it is war. This is what these occupiers of the land of Palestine know—these blood-suckers, who attack the Palestinians, these warmongers, the descendants of apes and pigs . . . We should employ all forms of resistance against them.

"There should be military resistance within the land of Palestine against those criminal Zionists . . . [And] this should be the practice of the Muslims and the Arabs outside Palestine. They should support the resistance fighters and besiege the Zionists wherever they are . . . We must all realize that resistance is the only way to liberate the land of Palestine" (posted at the Middle East Media Research Institute [MEMRI] website, Jan. 4, 2013).

While he was later running for president, Morsi and other Brotherhood leaders nodded in agreement at a rally as Safwat Hegazy, the same preacher who threatened the Coptic Christians, told thousands: "We can see how the dream of the Islamic caliphate is being realized, [Allah] willing, by Dr. Mohamed Mursi . . . The capital of the caliphate—the capital of the United States of the Arabs—will be Jerusalem, [Allah] willing."

When he came to the stage, Morsi affirmed: "Jerusalem is our goal. We shall pray in Jerusalem, or die as martyrs on its threshold" ("Egypt Islamist Vows Global Caliphate in Jerusalem," *The Jerusalem Post,* May 8, 2012).

"Jerusalem is our goal. We shall pray in Jerusalem, or die as martyrs on its threshold."

—Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, while running for office





Despite all this, some still maintain that Morsi will govern as a moderate. But why should we expect that? Eric Trager writes in *The New Republic:* "Morsi's political biography suggests that he is not a compromiser. Prior to [2011's] uprising and his subsequent emergence as Egypt's first civilian president, Morsi was the Muslim Brotherhood's chief internal enforcer within the Guidance Office, steering the organization in a more hardline direction ideologically while purging the Brotherhood of individuals who disagreed with his approach" ("Why Won't Morsi Back Down? Read His Resume," Nov. 30, 2012).

As the Bible asks rhetorically in Jeremiah 13:23, can a leopard change his spots? We should not expect people to massively change what they're all about—certainly not without some clear conversion.

Grim forecast for the days to come

So where is the warmth of spring in all this? Yes, many millions in the region are certainly thrilled with what's happened—predominantly those who want to see the world engulfed in Islam and made subservient to sharia. As for those who genuinely advocate for real freedom in the region? Not so much.

Again, as should be abundantly clear, there has been no Arab Spring—only a severe winter that's getting colder. Egypt is a bellwether in the Arab world. And overwhelming evidence shows that its direction is now decidedly Islamist. In fact, it and Muslim states throughout the region seem to be on a relentless march toward reviving the Islamic caliphate.

Of course, there is much more to say about these developments. The road Egypt is following has been trod in other countries as well. What does this indicate about Egypt's near future? Is the caliphate truly on the rise? And what does the Bible say will happen? To continue this examination, be sure to read the companion article "Will the World See a New Caliphate?" beginning on page 9. ***GN***

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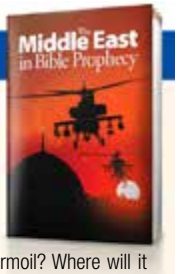

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WILL THE WORLD SEE A NEW Caliphate?

What can we expect will happen as Islamists take charge in the nations of the Arab uprisings? Turkey and other experiments in Muslim democracy give us some precedent. And on the horizon, the Islamist dream looms—a restored empire of Islam. What does this mean for the future of the Middle East and the world? ***by Tom Robinson***

Instead of a freedom-oriented Arab Spring, as cheery enthusiasts have hailed it in the face of toppled dictators, the Middle East is actually beset by a deepening Islamist winter (see "Winter Advisory: The Arab Spring That Wasn't," beginning on page 4— intended as a prelude to this article). Does this relate at all to Bible prophecy, and does Scripture indicate where these trends may be leading?

Of course, Islamist rule has a long history in the Middle East, going all the way back to Muhammad, founder of Islam, in the seventh century. He set the example of spreading his new religion by the sword, taking control of the entire Arabian Peninsula in the space of 10 years (622-632).

After his death, he was followed by other rulers called caliphs, from the Arabic *khalifah,* meaning "successor" (to Muhammad) or "representative" (of Allah to mankind). And the caliph's dominion was known as the caliphate (Arabic *khilafa* and Turkish *Hilafet*). Under the caliph, the dominion was governed by a religious hierarchy following Islamic law and jurisprudence—sharia.

After the first four Rashidun or "rightly-guided" caliphs, the caliphate passed to dynasties of rulers. The Ummayads (7th-8th centuries) and the Abbasids (8th-13th centuries) at their height ruled territory stretching from Spain all the way to India. The rival Shiite Fatimids (10th-12th centuries) took over much of the territory for a time.

Following the Mongol invasions from the east in the 13th century, the caliphate ceased to actually rule. But it was revived under the Turkish Ottomans when they took control of most Arab lands (16th-20th centuries).

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, Kemal Ataturk imposed a secularist state onto Turkey and dragged it into the Western sphere. Various kings and dictators took over the Arab states. These allowed principles of sharia as part of national rule to varying degrees, but not nearly to the satisfaction of most Muslims in the region. And in any case, they failed to all come together into a single *ummah* (supranational community) under a single caliph.

Dreams of a restored caliphate

Since the Ottoman fall, many devoted Islamists have dreamed of reestablishing the caliphate. One such dreamer was the Egyptian Hassan al-Bannah, who in 1928 founded the Muslim Brotherhood, the organization that has benefited most from the Arab Spring uprisings. The caliphate's restoration remains the Brotherhood's goal.

Moreover, the caliphate has been a recurring theme in recent speeches of Islamist leaders. As pointed out in the companion article on the Arab Spring, one celebrated Brotherhood preacher claimed that the election of Mohamed Morsi as president in Egypt was prelude to a coming Islamic caliphate—a United States of the Arabs with Jerusalem as its capital. And

Morsi then acknowledged that Jerusalem's conquest was indeed the goal.

Yet so many in the West can't fathom that such rhetoric is at all serious. They won't even accept that Morsi would rule as an Islamist hardliner despite his ramming through a sharia-based constitution, confident that he will conform to Egyptian politics as usual as the realities of governing set in.

Former U.S. federal prosecutor Andrew McCarthy comments on this notion in his new book *Spring Fever: The Illusion of Islamic Democracy:*

"Then there are the eternal optimists who try to pass themselves off as hard-headed pragmatists. Their theory is that governing will make the ruler accountable to the public; consequently, the practical responsibilities of the offices to which they've been elected will tame Islamist politicians. They will evolve, coming to see that sharia and anti-Semitic, anti-Western animus are just not compatible with running a government in the modern world. Governing will transform them into moderates . . .

"[But] has Iran gotten more moderate over the last thirty years? Has Hamas's election in Gaza . . . helped that terrorist organization evolve? . . . The election of Islamic supremacists in Turkey has moved that country toward extremism, not away from it" (2013, p. 19).

Indeed, Turkey and other recent attempts at democracy in the Muslim world give us indications of developments that will follow elections of Islamists into power in Arab nations. Furthermore, as we will see, Bible prophecy also shows where events are headed. Will they end in a restored caliphate? Or will freedom come to the Middle East at last?

"The Turkish Model"

We should give some consideration to Turkey, as it's looked at by many in the West as a model for the Arab world—"the Yellow Brick Road to the sparkling Oz of 'Islamic Democracy'" (p. 75). U.S. President Barack Obama cherishes his friendship with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan—his go-to counterpart in the Middle East, whom he has looked to for advice on regional issues, including the Arab Spring.

The problem in seeing Turkey as such a model is that its tradition of democracy has nothing to do with Islam. Just the opposite, Kemal Ataturk made Turkey a secular state, although the population remained predominantly Muslim.

Erdogan, on the other hand, is an Islamist—"a Muslim Brother who drank deep the lessons of the master, Hassan al-Banna" (p. 2). Since he became prime minister in 2003, a year after his Islamist "Justice and Development Party" (AKP in Turkish abbreviation) came to power, Erdogan has been leading Turkey *away from* democracy.

For the West and concerned secularists in his own country, Erdogan has sometimes presented himself as upholding secularism while merely allowing Islam free expression in the public sphere. But this is a man who in 1998, four years prior to his party's takeover, said effectively, "Democracy is just the train we board to reach our destination."

And what destination is that? Perhaps his words that followed, adapted from a nationalist poem, provide a clue: "The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets [mosque towers] our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers."

Of course, returning Turkey to the Islamist camp has not been an overnight task—though it has proven far easier than it was for Ataturk to impose secularism. It was a split in Turkey's non-religious parties that allowed the AKP to take over parliament with just a third of the popular vote. Yet in the decade since, Erdogan has managed to play his hand well at several turns, at length overcoming the Kemalist "deep state," the inner sanctum of state officials with military backing that long maintained the secular order against Islamist ingress.

A slow Islamist takeover of Turkey

So where is Turkey today? Erdogan has focused on education promoting Islamic principles, his AKP party moving to establish many new universities with Islamist leaders—part of an effort to reshape the culture.

Furthermore, notes McCarthy: "The prime minister also moved to lower the mandatory retirement age for various categories of government technocrat . . . [which] enabled the Islamists to depose incumbents from thousands of positions—including over 40 percent of the republic's 9000 judgeships.

"In their place, adherents of the AKP's Islamist ideology were installed. Meantime, to degrade further the judiciary's vital role in upholding the secular order, Erdogan refused to enforce judicial rulings and threatened to abolish the Constitutional Court, a key component of the deep state" (p. 80).

Turkey is now ranked as the world's worst jailer of journalists—with scores imprisoned, some sentenced to as many as 166 years. And things have definitely worsened under sharia's repression of women in the country:

"As female employment craters, the rate at which women are murdered has zoomed by *1400 percent*. In 2002, when the AKP was first elected, there were sixty-six reported cases of 'honor killings'—murders of women and girls at the hands of family members who consider themselves shamed when sharia norms were violated. In just the first seven months of 2009, the number was 953" (p. 83, emphasis in original).

On the foreign policy front, Erdogan has cut off longstanding ties with Israel, accusing the Israelis of state terrorism. Meanwhile he has embraced Iran (as has Egypt's President Morsi). And the Turkish leader has even offered himself as a character witness for Sudanese President Omar



Map: Shaun Venish/Wikipedia; photo: Wikimedia

al-Bashir, indicted for international war crimes because of his ethnic cleansing campaign in Darfur—Erdogan stating that "a Muslim can never commit genocide."

He's even had Turkey donate hundreds of millions of dollars to the government of Gaza, ruled by the terror group Hamas. "That is to say, Turkey is now bankrolling Hamas. Erdogan has taken his country from NATO ally to terror sponsor" (p. 116).

Do we imagine better for Egypt and the other Arab Spring countries where Islamists have gained power? If anything, it will be far easier to impose Islamic rule on these countries accustomed to authoritarian rule and sharia principles than it has been for Erdogan to transform Turkey from its decades of secular democracy.



Iraqi and Afghan forays into democracy as preview

Perhaps more closely paralleling the Arab Spring countries are the two countries the United States and other Western nations liberated from dictatorial rule and turned over to new constitutions and democratic processes. How has that worked out?

These are now, as McCarthy puts it, "a pair of sharia states hostile to American interests (Iraq is an Iranian satellite; Afghanistan verges on a Taliban re-conquest), to go along with a regional cavalcade of jihadists and totalitarian Islamists, now swaddled in sovereign legitimacy thanks to the subordination of democratic *culture* to democratic *procedures*—as if electing a class president somehow made the third grade a 'democracy' and the schoolyard bullies a 'political party'" (p. 41, emphasis in original).

U.S.-backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai has even suggested that Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader formerly ousted from power by the U.S. invasion, run for president in the next election!

We should also consider the plight of Christians. In the past few years, thousands of Christians have been murdered in Iraq, and hundreds of thousands more have fled to other countries in fear.

In Afghanistan, the United States twice had to exert great pressure to whisk away individuals who were to be *executed* for converting from Islam to Christianity—one of them released on the pretext that he was "not of sound mind" (for what else would a person who leaves Islam be?). In Egypt, according to a 2011 Pew survey, 84 percent of the people want the death penalty imposed for those abandoning Islam—*84 percent!* The percentage is quite high in other Muslim countries as well.

And how's this for women's rights under sharia in Afghanistan? "At the end of 2011, Karzai's office announced that the president had magnanimously commuted the prison sentence of a nineteen-year-old woman who was serving a twelve-year term imposed by an Afghan court after she was convicted of . . . having sex out of wedlock . . . *with a relative who had raped her.* Karzai's rationale for the pardon? The woman had cured her indiscretion by agreeing to marry the rapist, whose child she had borne during her jail term" (p. 47, emphasis in original).

Such is the outcome of democracy in nations where those desiring the imposition of Islamist rule are in the majority. And appallingly the West, including the United States, has advocated for and continues to support this outrage. (See "Puzzling U.S. Support for Islamists Over Moderates" on page 12.)

What's to follow?

So, what can we expect will now follow? Certainly, the fallout from the Arab uprisings is still ongoing. Expect a tightening of sharia's grip in Egypt and throughout the Arab world and in other Muslim nations—and more misleading assurances from Western leaders and media that there's no cause for concern.

Also look for further conflagration where revolution has not stabilized. With Libya awash with weapons and many flowing to neighboring countries, al-Qaeda in North Africa and other terrorists have been strengthened.

The French intervened in Mali in January 2013 to prevent terrorists from taking complete control there after they had already overrun much of the country. And following the many people killed at the end of the Algerian hostage crisis just after, British Prime Minister David Cameron said that the Islamist threat in this region requires "a response that is about years, even decades, rather than months."

Furthermore, there is the grave danger of chemical weapons being unleashed by Bashar al-Assad in Syria as he struggles to survive. Yet others worry over Assad being toppled by the jihadists allied against him and his chemical weapons and the rest of his vast arsenal falling into terrorist hands.

"Democracy is just the train we board to reach our destination . . . The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers."—Recep Erdogan, before becoming Turkey's prime minister

The spreading Islamist revolution

What about the Arab monarchies, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia? So far they've remained secure against the Arab uprisings. But the Muslim Brotherhood is agitating in these countries to spread the revolution. Numerous analysts believe they will be next to fall.

Lebanese-born author and commentator Brigitte Gabriel said in December that despite claims that U.S. Special Operations troops are stationed in Jordan over concern about what's happening in Syria, "the truth is that our Special Ops [personnel] are positioned in Jordan to protect King Abdullah, because King Abdullah right now has only two-percent approval in his country. The majority of people would vote the Muslim Brotherhood if elections are held in Jordan today" (quoted by Chad Groening, "Prediction: Jordan the Newest 'Arab Spring' Addition," OneNewsNow.com, Dec. 11, 2012).

Elections *were* held in Jordan in January, but the Muslim Brotherhood boycotted them because electoral rules favor the monarchy. Of course, the Brotherhood will continue to press for changes that would allow its candidates to prevail.

Puzzling U.S. Support for Islamists Over Moderates

It should be pointed out that there *are* truly moderate Muslims and non-Muslims scattered throughout the Middle East who desire Western freedoms. They are in the minority, however—just over 20 percent, estimates Andrew McCarthy in his new book *Spring Fever: The Illusion of Islamic Democracy* (2013, p. 55). But they are not the ones receiving Western support—even in places where they have higher numbers.

Consider Tunisia, for example, long regarded as the most Westernized of Arab nations. The Muslim Brotherhood's Ennahda Movement or "Renaissance Party," which Western media wrongly paint as moderate, took over the leadership of the country after the 2011 revolution but captured only 42 percent of the popular vote. Though restrained by having to govern through coalition with non-Islamists, the party still pushes the Islamist agenda, and sharia is gaining ground. Two men have even been sent to prison for posting cartoon images of the prophet Muhammad on Facebook.

In interviewing *actual* moderates who advocate secular government, Michael Totten hears the repeated complaint that they have no support from the United States: *"The Americans are with the Islamists. They support Ennahda in Tunisia and the Wahhabists in Saudi Arabia.* I've heard this complaint from every single secular person I've interviewed in this country without exception, from academics and democratic activists to journalists and teachers.

"They seem to be unanimously shocked and dismayed and appalled. The subject comes up again and again in conversation even when I ask about other things. It's impossible to spend any time here whatsoever without hearing about it" ("US Criticized by Tunisian Secularists for Backing Islamists," *World Affairs,* March 21, 2012, emphasis in original).

This reflects a disturbing realignment in U.S. foreign policy. When Lebanese-born Middle East expert Walid Phares was asked in a recent interview to expand on his statement that "everyone in Washington knows Obama supports the Muslim Brotherhood," he offered this stunning response:

"It is time to understand the policies of the Obama administration, the ones that are public and those that are obvious. If you compare the various Obama administration policies regarding the Middle East uprisings, you'd clearly see that the positioning of Washington regarding these demonstrations and protests is proportional to the outcome of these revolts.

"When the rising masses are targeting Islamist regimes, the Obama position abandons the uprising. When the revolt will end up with an Islamist takeover, the US position swiftly sides with the revolt. These are not theories, these are measurable realities.

"In June 2009, when millions of Iranians, mostly young (and female) were demonstrating against the Ayatollahs, President Obama stated the US 'wouldn't meddle.' But when the demonstrations in Egypt exploded, the Obama position evolved in two stages. As long as it was the youth and seculars on the streets, Washington stayed in the middle. But when the Muslim Brotherhood entered Tahrir Square en force, President Obama meddled 'strongly by asking Mubarak to step down.'

"[The] same scenarios occurred in Tunisia and in Libya and seem to be repeating itself in Syria. Observers and commentators in the region, particularly in Egypt, aren't shy about this description. They clearly state and provide evidence for an alignment of the Obama administration with the Muslim Brotherhood. US lawmakers for the past few years have been warning that the administration is favoring the Brotherhood fronts in Washington and seeking their influence in national security and foreign policy.

"Well, since the Arab Spring and particularly this year 2012 in Egypt, this alignment has never been clearer. Ironically, the Obama administration denies siding with the Brotherhood because the American public wouldn't digest such an un-American positioning. It would be the equivalent of an American partnership in the 1930s with the national socialists [German Nazis] or the Italian fascists.

"Today, in the Arab media there are hundreds of articles, statements and panels openly exposing and criticizing the Obama administration support to the Islamists in general and the Brotherhood in particular" (interview with Jennifer Hanin, "How Does Egypt Regain Its Once-Coveted Status? . . . Part I," Breitbart.com, Dec. 17, 2012).

McCarthy likewise mentions "the stinging rebukes of Obama's performance by authentic Egyptian democrats, demoralized over America's infatuation with the Islamists. This, too, mirrored the Islamist ascendancy in Turkey: the more unabashed Erdogan became in promoting sharia and the Brotherhood's jihad against Israel, the closer Washington drew to him" (p. xiv).

To illustrate how bizarre matters have gotten, in June 2012 the U.S. administration hosted a delegation of Egypt's new leaders in Washington that included new parliament member Hani Nour Eldin, a member of the Islamic Group—the terrorist organization headed by the imprisoned Blind Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, spiritual leader behind the first World Trade Center terror attacks in 1993.

Despite the course Egypt is now set on, the U.S. government is continuing to send it, the most powerful Arab nation, billions of dollars in military aid and hardware.

"The White House and State Department stonewalled media inquiries about how a man well known to be a member of a formally designated terrorist organization could conceivably have been issued, first, a visa to enter the United States, and then, an invitation to consult with our government's security and foreign policy officials in Washington" (p. 174). The matter was brushed off as no big deal since Nour was, after all, democratically elected.

Then there are the recent claims of the Egyptian magazine *Rose El-Youssef,* translated into English on the website of the Investigative Project on Terrorism, that six American Muslim leaders working with the Obama administration are Muslim Brotherhood operatives who are helping to shape U.S. policies. Of course, while that may be, there's no proof that anyone needed to steer the administration to where it is today.

Topping all this off is the fact that, despite the course Egypt is now set on, the U.S. government is continuing to send it, the most powerful Arab nation, billions of dollars in military aid and hardware (including 20 advanced F-16 fighter jets and 200 Abrams tanks)—equipment that could end up being used against Israel or even American forces. We need to open our eyes to the future that's being set up today.

Among the Palestinians, it appears a rapprochement is coming between the rival factions of Fatah and Hamas, but rapprochement with the Israeli Jews is out of the question. In line with recent Muslim Brotherhood calls in Egypt, the Palestinian Chief Islamic Judge Tayseer Al-Tamimi said this on Dec. 31, 2012:

"The caliphate will be restored after this tyrannical rule [by Israel] comes to an end. This is already the beginning of the end for the tyrannical rule. The Arab revolutions against injustice, tyranny, and oppression will bring its end, and the caliphate will be restored. What we are seeing in Egypt are birth pangs. The struggle between Islam and others, and all the conspiracies that aim at stopping the train that has already set out to liberate Jerusalem and to restore Islamic rule. Jerusalem will be the capital of the caliphate, Allah willing" (posted at the Middle East Media Research Institute [MEMRI] website, Jan. 7, 2013).



This echoes Erdogan's earlier mention of democracy as the train to reach the Islamist destination. And the ultimate destination is indeed a restored caliphate on its way to taking over the world. With the rate at which things are moving, perhaps the train is not too far from the station.

Clues from Bible prophecy

Bible prophecy does appear to tell us, in Psalm 83, that the world will see a confederation of Middle Eastern peoples intent on wiping out Israel—which will evidently involve the Arabs, the Palestinians, the Turks and others in the region.

Daniel 11 similarly speaks of an end-time "king of the South" who will reignite the age-old struggle against a power to the north—centered in Europe since Roman times—with the land of Israel caught up in between. This will provoke a retaliatory war resulting in the European occupation of many Middle Eastern lands, including Israel. (See "Israel: A Nation in Constant Peril" beginning on page 14 to learn more.)

The confederation and southern power in these prophecies could well be a restored Islamic caliphate, which now seems to be on the rise—although this is not a specific biblical requirement. The Bible mentions only the people and lands involved, not their governance. But given who and where these people are, Islam seems the most likely factor in their cohesion. It is certainly today's most powerful driving force in the region—and has been so for more than 13 centuries.

Some analysts in assessing the near future see the Islamization of the Middle East as almost inevitable. Given the failure of military dictatorships, Islamic rule beckons as a promising ideal for many Muslims. It seems they will have to live under its crushing boot to get it out of their systems, as many in Iran now have (though the Islamists maintain control there). Yet this will not really be enough to free the people, as vast numbers will not recognize their own plight, being enslaved to wrong thinking.

Something monumentally earthshaking must break this evil hold on people's minds to truly set them free. And rest assured, something will.

The long winter will cease

On Palestinian television Dec. 2, 2012, the wife of a Hamas parliament member told an interviewer regarding a woman's role in that culture: "She instills in her children the love of Jihad and martyrdom for the sake of Allah. If every mother were to prevent her son from waging Jihad for the sake of Allah, who would wage Jihad? Who would support Palestine?

"Palestine is dear to us, and its price is paid with our body remains and our life-blood . . . I am constantly praying: 'Allah, make the end of our days be in martyrdom.' I pray for this even for my husband and my children. None of us want to die in our beds. We pray that Allah will grant us Paradise" (posted at MEMRI).

This is dumbfounding and heartbreaking—and devastating to any notions of freedom in the Islamist-dominated Middle East. How does one reason or negotiate with this conviction held by millions of people? It is not rational but is the product of generational programming and outright demonic deception and influence on a colossal scale.

The fact is, something monumentally earthshaking must break this evil hold on people's minds to truly set them free. And rest assured, something will.

As the Bible foretells, unimaginable cataclysm will engulf the world, and people will suffer under tyranny as never before. Then, Isaiah 19:20-21 tells us, the people of Egypt "will cry to the LORD because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them. Then the LORD will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day."

In that day, Egypt will finally be at peace with Israel (verses 24-25). Yes, at long last Jesus Christ will come to save the Egyptians and all humanity—and all will come to know the true God.

The truth is that *all* have been slaves to wrong thinking to varying degrees. In that day, deception will be lifted and ancient hatreds will cease. The devil and his minions will be banished, and peace will reign under the wonderful Kingdom of God. At the end of man's perpetual winter, the springtime of the genuine paradise of God awaits. May it come swiftly! ***GN***

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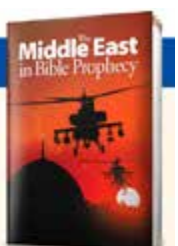

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ISRAEL

A Nation in Constant Peril

Hostility against the Jewish state, encircled by antagonistic countries, threatens to get completely out of control. How will Jerusalem cope with these anti-Semitic outbursts? What does the Bible reveal about this vulnerable nation's destiny? ***by John Ross Schroeder***

Israel, a small democratic nation about the size of New Jersey, is virtually surrounded by 22 Islamic nations, some of which have regularly called for its total demise.

Typical of such statements is the most recent utterance of open hostility from Khaled Meshaal, leader of the terrorist group Hamas: "Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north. There will be no concession on an inch of the land. We will never recognise the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation" (*The Observer,* Dec. 9, 2012).

"From the river to the sea" is typical Islamist shorthand for the territory between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea—meaning the entirety of the land of Israel. No "two-state solution" there!

Even more hostile statements have periodically come from the lips of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, who regularly threatens Israel with annihilation.

Recently installed Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi has also joined in such calls. He presented himself as the arbiter of the cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas-ruled Gaza and in July 2012 called Israeli President Shimon Peres a "great and good friend."

But when interviewed on video in Arabic earlier in 2010 he called Israelis "bloodsuckers" and "descendants of apes and pigs." Morsi also argued for Muslim "military resistance" against Israel and referred to the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as "a waste of time." In addition he firmly declared: *"There is no place for them on the land of Palestine,"* adding that Jews "are hostile by nature—they have been fanning the flames of civil strife wherever they were throughout history. There should also be political resistance and economic resistance through a boycott, as well as supporting the resistance fighters.

"This should be the practice of the Muslims and the Arabs outside Palestine. They must not be given any opportunity, *and must not stand on any Arab or Islamic land. They must be driven out of our countries"* (*The Jewish Chronicle*, Jan. 11, 2013, emphasis added throughout).

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Morsi also stated on video in 2010: "Dear brothers, we must not forget to nurse our children and grandchildren on hatred towards those Zionists and Jews, and all those who support them. They must be nursed on hatred. The hatred must continue" (posted at the Middle East Media Research Institute [MEMRI] website, Jan. 10, 2013).

Has President Morsi softened his approach toward Israel since becoming head of state in Egypt? Time will tell, but his actions to date don't offer a great deal of hope. (For more on him, be sure to read "Winter Advisory: The Arab Spring That Wasn't," beginning on page 4.)

As foretold in the Bible, the Jewish state has been and will increasingly be a focal point of enemy rage and global conflict. What does this mean for Israel, and what lies ahead?

What the Bible reveals

The Bible remains an up-to-date, *now* book, continually commenting on current affairs with astounding accuracy.

You may be surprised to learn that some 3,000 years ago a psalm of "Asaph the seer" (2 Chronicles 29:30) was right on target with these prophetic words about Israel in the end time: "O God . . . Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones.

"They have said, *'Come and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.'* For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You" (Psalm 83:1-5).

While Israel has faced its share of enemies throughout its turbulent history, this vivid description applies even more now. Today the Arab nations are partially divided among themselves, but they generally agree on one point—their fervent desire for Israel's demise. Today the ominous threat level has increased on all of its borders.

Truly Israel today remains a fulfillment of Ezekiel 5:5: "Thus says the LORD God: *'This is Jerusalem: I have set her in the midst of the nations and countries all around her.'"* This passage reflects a lot deeper meaning than its historical context alone would indicate. Throughout Israel's history, God has always understood her fragile position in a hostile world. (For further historical and prophetic insight, see "A Biblical Prophecy of an Arab Confederation.")

A free world unfriendly to Israel

British author Melanie Phillips, also a *Daily Mail* columnist and contributing writer for *The Jewish Chronicle,* concluded a recent Internet piece with this stark statement about current world conditions—especially in the West:

"You are looking at the emergence of a new world order: the eclipse of the west, brought about by the unholy alliance between the Obama administration and death-wish Britain and Europe—and leaving Israel, once the forward salient of the west in the Middle East, emerging instead as the lonely and isolated defender of liberty in the face of a gathering Islamic storm" ("Into the Abyss," Dec. 12, 2012).

Britain and Western Europe have a history of often favoring the Arab countries over Israel. But the United States has long been a loyal supporter and ally of this tiny democratic state. That threatens to change, perhaps more radically than we could ever imagine.

Many observers have pointed out that President Barack Obama's recent choices for two key cabinet posts, State and Defense, do *not* have an encouraging history of support for the state of Israel. As Melanie Phillips, who also appears as a commentator on radio and TV programs in Britain, observed, "John Kerry, tipped to become Secretary of State, is an anti-war activist and left-wing fantasist."

As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Kerry warned against "prejudging" the Muslim Brotherhood as it prepared to take power in Egypt. And he gave assurances that Egypt's President Morsi was committed to freedom and good relations with Israel and the United States—despite much evidence to the contrary ("Exclusive: Muslim Brotherhood Preaching Israel Destruction After Election," IPT [Investigative Project on Terrorism] News, June 27, 2012).

Phillips went on to remark: "The record

A Biblical Prophecy of an Arab Confederation

Psalm 83 contains an intriguing prophecy of many Middle Eastern nations that appears to be as yet unfulfilled and to possibly tie in with end-time events. If so, it foretells a confederation of Arab nations that are determined to eliminate Israel. "They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones.

They have said, 'Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.' For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal, Ammon and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot" (verses 3-8).

These biblical names are significant when we understand the areas and peoples to which this prophecy refers. *Edom* includes the Palestinians and some of the Turks. The *Ishmaelites,* descendants of Ishmael, are many of the Arab peoples throughout the Middle East and North Africa. *Moab* is the area of central Jordan. The *Hagrites* appear to be other descendants of Hagar, mother of Ishmael.

Gebal, meaning "mountain" or "boundary," is commonly equated with the Phoenician city of Byblos, modern Jubayl in Lebanon. *Ammon* refers to northern Jordan around Amman, the capital (which gets its name from Ammon). *Amalek* appears to refer to a branch of Edomite Palestinians. *Philistia* is the area around what is today known as the Gaza Strip. Anciently *Tyre* was a major city-state in southern Lebanon along the Mediterranean coast. Assyria ethnically appears to refer to inhabitants of Central Europe who migrated there many centuries ago, while geographically Assyria is in what is today northern Iraq. *The children of Lot* refers to Moab and Ammon—again, regions of modern-day Jordan.

Arab unity has long been elusive, but slowly a common purpose is bringing the different peoples of the Arab world together. This common purpose is the desire to destroy the nation of Israel and its chief backer, the United States of America, along with the West's liberal culture, long perceived as a threat to the Muslim way of life.

(This is excerpted from our booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy.* We encourage you to download or request your free copy today!)

of Chuck Hagel, is more troubling still . . . He has consistently voted against sanctions on Iran to stop its pursuit of nuclear weapons capability; he voted against naming Iran's Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization; and he refused to sign a letter calling on the European Union similarly to name Hezbollah—which has the blood of countless Americans on its hands—as a terrorist organization. Instead he advocates engaging with Iran."

A *Wall Street Journal* editorial adds that Hagel "has long advocated engagement with Syria's dictator [Bashar al-Assad] and the terror group Hamas" ("A Hagel Education," Jan. 9, 2013).

The Economist quoted Lindsey Graham, Republican U.S. Senator of South Carolina and a member of the Arms Services Committee as stating that Hagel is "well out of the 'mainstream' in his foreign-policy views" and, if confirmed, would be "the most antagonistic Secretary of Defense towards the state of Israel in our nation's history" ("Obama Picks His Soldiers," Jan. 12, 2013).

Texas Republican U.S. Senator Ted Cruz echoes this observation, stating: "His record on Israel strongly suggests that he views Israel not as a friend, but as a nuisance. The U.S.-Israel alliance is critical to our national security, but Hagel has been far too willing to undermine that alliance" ("Why I Expect to Oppose Hagel," *USA Today,* Jan. 9, 2013).

We should also recognize that President Obama's foreign policy has favored Islamists during and following recent uprisings (see "Puzzling U.S. Support for Islamists Over Moderates" on page 12). And Islamists are hostile to the state of Israel.

Israel's long history of encirclement

Douglas Murray stated in his article "Israel Under Siege" in *The Spectator:* "Since 1973 Israel has suffered a status quo of quiet enemies and even quieter friends. Now it is surrounded by disappearing friends and even louder enemies" (Nov. 24, 2012). He spoke of "the overarching movement that has been overlooked for too much of the [20th] century since its birth [in 1948]."

But Israel has faced many enemies since the nation left Egypt some 3,500 years ago. The late British theologian and historian F.F. Bruce tells us, "The departure of the people of Israel from Egypt marks their birth as a nation" (*Israel and the Nations,* 1969, p. 13). He had observed earlier: "Yet Israel's national history was not lived out in isolation from other peoples. The Israelites were surrounded by nations greater and mightier than themselves, who impinged upon the life of Israel, at many points" (p. 11).

During Israel's early days as a nation, "it was not only Canaanite cities in the land that tried to reduce them to serfdom; from time to time they suffered from incursions from beyond Jordan, by their own kinsman of Moab and Ammon [descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot] and Edom [the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau], and more disastrously by the *beduin* [or Bedouin] from remoter parts of Arabia, who mounted on camels, raided their territory year by year at harvest time and destroyed their crops" (pp. 19-20).

Yet ancient Israel also had her share of national heroes and deliverers—Joshua, Gideon, King Hezekiah and King David, the latter conquering the city of Jerusalem and founding it as his nation's capital. In more recent times we think of Israel's modern founder David Ben-Gurion (1948), Moshe Dayan (of the 1967 War) and even of Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu.

Still, throughout too much of Israel's history its peoples have been in either actual or virtual captivity. In the eighth century B.C. the northern 10 tribes of the kingdom of Israel were taken captive into Assyria, followed in the sixth century B.C. by the southern kingdom of Judah being invaded and exiled by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. In the days of Jesus Christ and His apostles and the early Church, the Jews were under the occupation of Rome.

After two failed revolts against Rome's might, the Jewish nation was crushed and its people scattered. Many centuries later the tragic experience of the Holocaust (with 6 million Jews perishing) was followed by the prophesied return of many Jews to their ancient homeland.

These hardy survivors were determined not to become slaves yet again. Thus we see the strong survival mentality of the modern state of Israel, again threatened by a host of enemy countries and now also hindered by waning friendships with key supporter nations.

The late historian Barbara Tuchman wrote in her book *Practicing History:* "With all its problems, Israel has one commanding advantage—a sense of purpose: to survive. It has come back. It has confounded persecution and outlived exile to become the only nation of the world that is governing itself in the same territory, under the same name, and with the same religion and the same language as it did three thousand years ago. *It is conscious of fulfilling destiny. It knows it must not go under now, that it must endure"* ("Israel: Land of Unlimited Impossibilities," 1981, p. 134).

What Bible prophecy clearly reveals

So what does Bible prophecy tell us about what will happen to Israel and Jerusalem in the years ahead? One specific prophetic passage in the Bible becomes supremely important at the time of the end of this age of human misrule, which will be followed by the utopian, millennial reign of Jesus Christ and His saints (Revelation 20:4-6). This key scripture is found in Zechariah 12:2-3, where God says:

Britain and Western Europe have a history of often favoring the Arab countries over Israel. But the United States has long been a loyal supporter and ally of this tiny democratic state. That threatens to change, perhaps more radically than we could ever imagine.

"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day [of God's direct intervention] that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it."

Although Jerusalem (often meaning not only the city itself, but the nation of Israel as a whole) has been a source of contention throughout much of its history, this prophetic passage primarily speaks of *the time of Armageddon* (see Revelation 16:14-16). This occurs just prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ. (For a detailed account, request or download our free reprint article, "Armageddon: The End of the World?")

But what decisive geopolitical events lead directly to this most crucial of all

Where Are the "Lost 10 Tribes" Today?

Where did the northern 10 tribes of Israel go after their Assyrian captivity? They became known to historians as the "lost 10 tribes." What happened to them, and how do they fit in with the present peoples of the state of Israel?

We need to realize that Israel *today* includes far more territory than just this tiny modern Middle Eastern nation. Most people associate the name *Israel* with the Jewish state of that name. However, the Jewish people are descendants of primarily *two* of the 12 tribes that made up ancient Israel—Judah and Benjamin, along with a considerable portion of the priestly tribe of Levi.

After the reign of King Solomon, God caused the kingdom of Israel to divide into two separate nations because of Solomon's sins. The northern 10 tribes retained the name of Israel while the southern portion with its two tribes was called the kingdom of Judah. The word *Jew* is merely a shortened form of *Judah.* The first time the word *Jews* appear in the King James Version of the Bible, in 2 Kings 16:5-6, the northern nation of Israel is actually *at war* with the Jews! So clearly they are not one and the same people.

After the time of Solomon, these two nations became two politically distinct geographical entities. The Jews are *part of* the Israelites descended from the patriarch Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. But he had other sons, and the descendants of 10 of them formed the northern nation of Israel, including the descendants of the patriarch Joseph.

Joseph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. In due time their descendants became two great modern nations, one with an empire that stretched around the world. Joseph's descendants became the easiest to identify in contemporary history because the prophetic blessings they were to receive stand out so distinctly (see Genesis 49:22-26; Deuteronomy 33:13-17).

The intriguing story of how the modern descendants of the patriarch Joseph eventually became Great Britain and the United States of America is told in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.* Much of God's prophetic plan cannot really be understood without the national identifications carefully laid out in this publication.

Both Great Britain and the United States played major roles, one following the other, in the restoration (after nearly 2,000 years) of the Jewish people to nationhood in the Middle East in 1948. The Balfour Declaration in Britain (1917) was followed by U.S. President Harry Truman's crucial political backing in the late 40s. The destinies of all three nations—biblically known as Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh—are intertwined and will be a big part of the fulfillment of Bible prophecy at the time of the end, albeit in different ways.

To learn more, download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*

benchmarks in future world history? In brief, a new European-centered superpower will arise and take control of Egypt and the Holy Land. The leader of this power is identified in Bible prophecy as "the king of the North."

Another end-time leader referred to as "the king of the South" (most likely leading an alliance of Islamic Middle Eastern nations, possibly a restored Islamic caliphate) will attack or "push at" the king of the North. This will provoke the North into a blitzkrieg-like invasion of Egypt and neighboring lands, with northern forces also entering the "Glorious Land"—the Holy Land (Daniel 11:40-42).

But then what happens to these conquering enemies? Zechariah 14:3-4 gives us the answer with a basic prophecy about Christ's return to the earth: "Then the LORD will go forth *and fight against those nations* . . . and in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east." These nations will have been gathered together at Armageddon to fight the Messiah, Jesus Christ, at His coming.

Shortly before that time, "half of the city [of Jerusalem] shall go into captivity" (verse 2). So the clear indication is that Israel will once again be occupied by foreign armies, coming under gentile control for 3½ years just before Christ's second coming (Revelation 11:2).

As mentioned at the outset of this article, a number of surrounding nations are already intent on destroying the nation of Israel. Yet in spite of all the troubles they may inflict on Israel, Bible prophecy indicates that these Middle Eastern nations will not be able to eliminate the Jewish state.

Ultimately Israel's captivity and occupation is destined to come from an unexpected source—the aforementioned prophesied European-centered superpower. Then the peoples of Israel will finally learn how dependent they are on God for safety and security (these peoples being more than just the Jews—see "Where Are the 'Lost 10 Tribes' Today?"). Then they will welcome the Anointed One, their-long-sought-for Messiah.

Christ will rescue Israel

An encouraging, yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy of Christ enters this end-time picture: "'Behold, the days are coming' says the LORD, 'that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. *In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely;* now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS'" (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

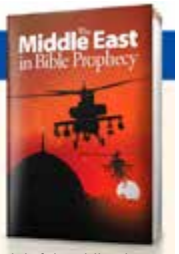
The fulfillment of this prophecy will be so important to Israel's future that it is repeated almost verbatim in Jeremiah 33:15-16.

The context of this particular prophecy makes it even more intriguing. These wonderful, inspiring words are uttered by Jeremiah in the midst of a series of prophecies relaying the terrible news that the nation of Judah was going into Babylonian captivity at that time.

Yes, even in the most discouraging of circumstances, God keeps His plan of ultimate rescue and deliverance fully in mind.

Whatever troubles the peoples of the tiny Middle Eastern nation of Israel may have to endure before that ultimate outcome, we may be absolutely sure that God Himself will come to Israel's rescue through the direct intervention of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Our Creator keeps His eyes on Jerusalem and Israel. And so should we! ***GN***

Learn More



Between a fourth and a third of the Bible is prophecy. Many prophetic passages are directly concerned with the Middle East, so much so that we have published a comprehensive booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy.* This insightful publication goes into much greater detail on the subjects addressed in this article. Download or request your free copy today!

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BEYOND TODAY
UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

The Middle East's Family Feud

The Middle East continues to be a powder keg of violent unrest and political upheaval. What's the root cause of the seemingly never-ending conflict? And what is the solution to the world's oldest family feud?

by **Beyond Today** *host Darris McNeely*

Have you ever watched families fight? It isn't pretty. Accusations fly back and forth. Grievances big and small from years past are often dredged up. Past hurts are not forgotten and live on in the present. This is the fuel of anger, resentment and sometimes hate.

Since 1948 with the birth of the state of Israel, there have been wars, suicide bombings and terrorist attacks.

Why do we see such hatred in the Middle East? The bottom line is that it's all one big family feud.



A family in turmoil

The three main religions of the Middle East—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—all trace their spiritual roots back to the same person, Abraham. The towering historical figures behind these three religions—Moses, Jesus Christ and Muhammad—were all direct descendants of Abraham.

Imagine this scene. Five people, all living in the same home. Abraham and Sarah—husband and wife. Their female servant Hagar and her son Ishmael—who was fathered by Abraham. The fifth person is Isaac, the newborn son of Abraham and Sarah. Isaac is the legitimate son of Abraham and therefore will be heir to all that he owns as well as the promise from God of incredible blessings. It's a perfect recipe for conflict. The seeds of strife are already sown and ready to sprout.

Sarah demands that Hagar and Ishmael leave the home. Abraham objects but has to do it to maintain the peace within the house. Eventually Hagar leaves, but not without a promise of hope for her son.

God gave a message to Hagar, assuring her that her son would have a history and a story. He said to her: "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count . . . You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael [which means 'God hears'] for the LORD has heard of your misery.

"He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers" (Genesis 16:10-12, New International Version).

Ishmael's descendants prophesied to become very great

This description of Hagar's descendants is very significant because many of today's Arabs are descendants of this same Ishmael, whose father was Abraham. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, is said to be a descendant of Ishmael.

When the Bible calls Ishmael and his descendants "a wild donkey of a man," it's really not meant as an insult. The wild donkey in the desert was an aristocrat of the wild beasts of that desert area. The prophecy is a reference to how Ishmael's descendants would emulate the lifestyle of the wild donkey, leading a free and noble existence in those desert lands.

It goes on to say that "his hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him." On one hand, this could refer to Ishmael's descendants striving for independence, resisting foreign domination. But it also must refer to their setting out in conquest and meeting resistance.

The prophecy goes on to say that Ishmael will live in hostility towards all of his brothers. That's a reference to the conflict that's historically existed among the Arabs and between the Arabs and the other sons of Abraham like the Jews.

God said of Ishmael, "He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

The ongoing turmoil in the Middle East is a very real human problem. It's no more difficult to understand than this story of five people we've been tracing. It was a family problem then, and it still is today. Abraham's descendants can't get along today any better than they did thousands of years ago.

So let's review. God promised Abraham a child to carry on the promises and the inheritance. Lacking faith that God would do it, Abraham had a son, Ishmael, by one of his female servants, Hagar. Ishmael, with

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his mother, lived under the same roof as Abraham and Sarah in this story.

But now comes a twist.

Isaac's birth meant hardship for Ishmael

After 14 years as an only child, Ishmael's world is turned upside down when Sarah gives birth! She has a son named Isaac. Now things become really complicated.

Ishmael is a teenager growing toward manhood, and Sarah grows unhappy with him as a rival to Isaac in the household. She wants Ishmael out! She can't stand the sight of him any longer. Abraham is conflicted. He doesn't want to send him away. But God tells him to heed Sarah in this and that Ishmael will become a great people and won't be neglected. God provides for Ishmael—he is not left destitute.

Thus, Isaac's arrival fundamentally changes Ishmael's relationship with his father and his position in the family. Afterward, Ishmael felt envy and rivalry toward his half-brother. These are feelings that tribally survived down through the centuries and affect the politics of the Middle East today.

The feud continues with Esau and Jacob

The family issues only get worse as we read on in the Bible. Isaac, Abraham's son by Sarah, had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Even before these two were born, they struggled within the womb of their mother. God explained that these boys would become two nations, with one being stronger than the other.

Jacob and Esau struggled through deception and envy all of their lives in their own relationship. Because of Jacob's deception and trickery, Esau grew to hate his brother.

Again, the consequences of this are with us to this day. The descendants of Esau intermarried with Ishmael's descendants. Their bitterness and resentment against Jacob's descendants grew through the centuries.

Understand this: Nations are families grown large. They still have the problems that affect family units. When families grow into nations and carry on their problems, it can have global impact.

And so we come to today and the immediate problems in the Middle East.

Different peoples vying for the same land

Today we have Jew and Arab contending over an inheritance, a spot of land that in the end does not belong to either of them. It belongs to *God*. Remember the scriptures from Genesis where God gave the land to Abraham and his descendants. It wasn't Abraham's land. It wasn't his sons' or their descendants. In fact we read in the book of Hebrews that Abraham "dwelt in the land by faith as in a foreign country" and that "he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9-10).

Abraham never really inherited the land he was truly looking for. He considered himself a stranger and a pilgrim while he lived in the land his family was given! God owned the land then, and God owns the land now!

None of this critically important matter is understood and acknowledged in the world of international diplomacy. The present religious and political turmoil in the Middle East is at its heart a family feud between Abraham's descendants. It's a dispute prophesied to erupt into a larger conflict much sooner than we might think.

Because neither side is willing to change their hearts and the way they look at the other, peace treaties have been made and broken through the generations. There's still envy, jealousy and infighting—the kind we see in a family divided.

Jesus Christ will heal the broken family

Will the descendants of these brothers ever be reconciled? Humanly and physically speaking, it's simply not possible. For far too long there has been too much envy, too much hatred, too much bloodshed and too much distrust.

These are ancient wounds that will not be healed by peace treaties. Even in recent history, instead of repairing the breach, leaders of both the Arab and Israeli factions refuse to seriously attempt peace and reconciliation.

There is good news, however. While there is no physical solution, there *is a spiritual solution*. True peace will come when the greatest of Abraham's descendants—Jesus Christ—returns to settle this dispute and all others on earth.

Get to know Jesus Christ—the Prince of Peace—now, and you'll be prepared to work with Him to bring peace to these warring families. Do it today, and you might begin to bring some peace into your own life! ***GN***

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by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

Is World War III becoming more plausible?

Could the unspeakable horror of two world wars that afflicted the first half of the 20th century actually happen again? Will many of the nations that fought in those colossal struggles enter yet another global war? Will war spread around the world or alternatively occur only in key geostrategic locations?

Today well-armed, unstable rogue nations like Iran and North Korea threaten to propel mankind into another global conflagration. Many liberal observers are ignoring the signposts of future war found in resurgence of regressive and exclusivist forces like unbridled nationalism and religious sectarianism.

For those with eyes to see, however, the symptoms and signs are everywhere. We begin with North Korea and progress to other even more dangerous hotspots and potential flashpoints that dot the globe.

North Korea threatens American shores


Kim Jong-un

Consider an amazing headline: "Pyongyang Threatens Rockets and Nuclear Tests to 'Target US'" (*The Times,* Jan. 25, 2013). This rogue country's nuclear tests are part of an ambitious plan—"a new phase of the anti-US struggle," according to an official statement from its National Defence Commission ("North Korea Nuclear Test Threat 'Needlessly Provocative,' Says US," *The Telegraph,* Jan. 24, 2013).

The statement continued: "We do not hide [the fact] that a variety of satellites and long-range rockets which will be launched by the D.P.R.K [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] one after another and a nuclear test of higher level will target against the U.S., the sworn enemy of the Korean people" ("North Korea Issues Blunt New Threat to United States," *The New York Times,* Jan. 24, 2013).

If this notoriously rogue nation did not enjoy tacit Chinese backing, perhaps we wouldn't need to be so concerned. America's official response to this threat from the top U.S. envoy for North Korean diplomacy proved shockingly mild in nature: "*We hope they don't do it. We call on them not to do it"* (quoted in "North Korea Threatens Nuclear Test and Further Rocket Launches," *The Guardian,* Jan. 24, 2013, emphasis added throughout). Can you imagine most past American presidential administrations having envoys issue such statements? Not surprisingly, North Korea went ahead with another nuclear warhead test Feb. 12.

Meanwhile, the United States continues to downsize its awesome military might. While it may decide to withdraw from the world, rogue countries, sensing America's weakness, will not withdraw from increasingly threatening and harassing its national interests. *The Wall Street Journal* predicted that "the nuclear threat to Japan and the U.S. will soon be real" (Dec. 13, 2012). Sources: *The Guardian, The New York Times, The Telegraph, The Times* [London], *The Wall Street Journal.*)

Asian nations fear Chinese military buildup

Japan and other Asian countries are awakening to the Chinese threat. Recently India's outgoing army chief, Gen. V.K. Singh, warned his nation to wake up to China's imperialism and growing army strength. Japan is already flexing its military muscle. Tokyo actively disputes with Beijing over the ownership of tiny Pacific islands, using very tough language from time to time.

Robert Kaplan, chief geopolitical analyst for the global intelligence firm Stratfor, stated in *The Wall Street Journal*: "Asia is in the midst of a feverish arms race, featuring advanced diesel-electric submarines, the latest fighter jets and ballistic missiles. China . . . is projecting air and sea power into what it regards as the blue national soil of the South China and East China seas" ("The Return of Toxic Nationalism," Dec. 23, 2012).

Hostility and hatred is dividing countries, ethnic groups, and ideologies and will culminate in Armageddon and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Kaplan further observed that "the disputes in Asia are not about ideology or any uplifting moral philosophy; *they are about who gets to control space on the map."* Territorial ambitions stubbornly remain a basic cause of conflict between and among nations.

Japan wants closer relations with South Korea and fervently desires a strong and even expanding American military counter-presence in the Pacific. (Sources: Press Trust of India, *The Wall Street Journal.*)


Dmitry Medvedev & Vladimir Putin

Russia's aggressive hostility

"In Russia," says Robert Kaplan in *The Wall Street Journal,* "Vladimir Putin's nationalism is a large factor in his high popularity. President Putin's nationalism is geographical determinism: He wants to recreate buffer states in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, like in the old Soviet Union" (Dec. 23, 2012).

And Moscow continues to project its perceived interests into the Middle East—the most volatile region on this war-weary planet and one that will feature in the fulfillment of end-time biblical prophecy (download or request our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* to learn more).

Already both Russia and China have blocked attempts in the United Nations to bring Syria's Bashar al-Assad to heel. But Putin is not content with just exercising his diplomatic influence.

"Five Russian landing ships carrying hundreds of marines and military vehicles are gathering in the eastern Mediterranean in a show of force" ("Russian Naval Force Gathers off Syria in Warning to West," *The Sunday Times*, Jan. 6, 2013). Presumably, Moscow's main objective is to forestall any Western intervention in Syria. (Sources: *The Sunday Times* [London], *The Wall Street Journal.*)

Iranian threats parallel those of Russia

Even Russia acknowledges that at the end of the day Syria's Assad most probably will not survive all that much longer. But not Iran. According to a London *Sunday Times* piece, "Iran will defend the Syrian government to the end to preserve an 'axis of resistance' to Israel and the West, its ambassador in Damascus has warned. It is already providing military and security advice to Syrian forces caught in an 'impasse' with rebels fighting to oust President Bashar al-Assad, said Mohammad Reza Raouf Sheibani, the ambassador" ("Iran Will Defend Assad to the End," Jan. 27, 2013).


Bashar al-Assad

Especially in its dire circumstances, Syria should not feel free to arm terrorist groups bitterly hostile to the survival of the state and people of Israel. Recently Tel Aviv's warplanes destroyed a convoy of Syrian trucks loaded with advanced, high-tech weapons destined for Hezbollah, a notorious terrorist group.

Israel's encirclement by hostile nations is the subject of an article in this issue of *The Good News* titled "Israel: A Nation in Constant Peril," beginning on page 14. The article also provides a brief outline of where the Middle East is ultimately headed in terms of end-time Bible prophecy. (Source: *The Sunday Times* [London], Jan. 27, 2013.)

Summing up

Many nations of this present evil world are heavily armed with deadly modern weaponry of all kinds. Moreover, hostility, hatred and runaway nationalism and sectarianism dividing countries, ethnic groups, religions, cultures and ideologies will eventually culminate in Armageddon and the second coming of Jesus Christ. The psalmist asked: *"Why do the nations rage* and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed [God the Father and Jesus Christ] . . ." (Psalm 2:2).

Ultimately all of this malice and strife is in defiance of God. Yet only God can put a permanent end to the current madness afflicting mankind. And this God will do!

Photos, from left: KNS/AFP/Getty Images/Newscom, Wikimedia (3), 123RF

Another apocalyptic threat to humankind

As reported in *The Guardian,* "Britain's most senior medical adviser has warned MPs [Members of Parliament] that the rise in drug-resistant diseases could trigger a national emergency comparable to a catastrophic terrorist attack . . . Sally Davies, the chief medical officer, said the threat from infections that are resistant to frontline antibiotics was so serious that the issue should be added to the government's national risk register of civil emergencies" ("Antibiotic-Resistant Diseases Pose 'Apocalyptic' Threat, Top Expert Says," Jan. 23, 2013).



"The rise in drug-resistant diseases could trigger a national emergency comparable to a catastrophic terrorist attack."

According to the same news story, "drug resistance is emerging in diseases across the board. Davies said 80% of [the sexually transmitted disease] gonorrhea was now resistant to the frontline antibiotic tetracycline, and infections were rising in young and middle-aged people. Multi-drug resistant TB [tuberculosis] was also a major threat, she said."

Recall that severe disease epidemics are depicted as the pale horse, the fourth of the biblically prophesied Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Our reprint article series "The Horsemen of Revelation" is available online at www.ucg.org/reprints. (Source: *The Guardian.*)

If U.S. fades economically, will Europe rise?

"Nato chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen has urged EU countries to spend more on defense despite the economic crisis or risk losing US solidarity . . . 'If current defense spending trends were to continue, that would limit the practical ability of Nato's European nations to work together with their North American allies. But it would also risk weakening the political support for our alliance in the United States.'

"He added Nato is still 'the most important military power in the world'" ("Nato Chief: "EU Must Spend More on Military," EUObserver.com, Jan. 31, 2013).

Your Bible says that Europe will rise a final time but its impact will be great. Follow the broken and repaired narrative from the restoration of the ancient Holy Roman Empire in the days of Emperor Justinian in the 6th century until World War II in the 20th and you'll see a number of resurrections of European powers. A careful comparison of the historical setting and prophecies of Daniel 2, 7, 8 and 11 with the historical and prophetic contexts of Revelation 13 , 17 and 18 leads to the conclusion that Europe will rise up one last time as a church-state union with significant power, based on future global economic impact.

After World War II, the United States helped to rebuild Europe, and today America continues to provide support and protection. Could the dissipation of the United States as an unequaled, modern superpower pave the way for the rise of a major new superpower? If so, this would follow the historical pattern by which the rise of new powers fills the vacuum left by the decline of others.

Another dimension to 21st-century warfare

The Middle East, the historic battleground of mankind, appears to be a principal site for cyberwarfare—computer hacking for sabotage or espionage. It can result in considerable damage to human life and complex technological equipment depending on the target—say, perhaps, a nuclear weapons laboratory.

For instance, "an explosion is believed to have damaged Iran's Fordow nuclear facility, which is being used to enrich uranium, Israeli intelligence officials have told *The Times* [of London]. Sources in Tel Aviv said [Jan. 27, 2013] that they thought the explosion happened [the week before]. The Israeli government is investigating reports that it led to extensive structural damage" ("Iranian Uranium-Enriching Facility 'Is Damaged by Explosion,'" *The Times,* Jan. 28).

An editorial in *The Times* defended alleged Israeli cyber strikes: "Iran's nuclear programme is plainly not intended purely to generate electricity. It is a threat to the peace and stability of the Middle East. If not checked, it will spur nuclear proliferation and undermine the credibility of international arms control" ("Beyond Diplomacy: Disrupting Iran's Nuclear Programme by Sanctions and Sabotage Is Wholly Justified" (Jan. 29, 2013). (Source: *The Times.*)

Is it wise for Israel to strike Syria now?

"An Israeli air attack staged in Syria this week may be a sign of things to come. Israeli military officials appear to have concluded that the risks of attacking Syria are worth taking when compared to the dangers of allowing sophisticated weapons to reach Hezbollah guerrillas in neighboring Lebanon.



"With Syrian President Bashar Assad's grip on power weakening, Israeli officials fear he could soon lose control over his substantial arsenal of chemical and advanced weapons, which could slip into the hands of Hezbollah or other hostile groups. These concerns, combined with Hezbollah's own domestic problems, mean further military action could be likely" (Associated Press, Jan. 31, 2013).

Most everyone interested in geopolitics and especially the politics of the Middle East can see the handwriting on the wall. The situation is changing almost daily as extremist groups are taking advantage of social uprisings in countries run by Muslim dictators.

Syrian President Assad probably suffers sleepless nights, for the die has been cast and the precedents are set. Many Muslim Arabs want Islamic rule (see "Will the World See a New Caliphate?" beginning on page 9), and they are willing to die for it. Considering that Israel is surrounded by Muslims and attacked by Islamic extremists, the only choice Israel has is to reduce the chances of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) falling into the hands of extremists.

Your Bible reveals that at the time of the end, there will be much turmoil in the Middle East, including a "king of the South," likely the leader of a Muslim confederation, who will set in motion a great conflagration (Daniel 11:40-45). To learn more, be sure to request or download our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy.*

How can you make sense of the news?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today's dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You're probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. *So are we.* That's one reason we produce the *Beyond Today* daily TV commentaries—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. This eye-opening program offers you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the perspective of God's Word. Visit us at ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!



Hummingbirds: **How Do They Do That?**

"Oh look, there's one!" shouts a small boy. Suddenly a ruby-throated hummingbird darts up to the apple-red nectar feeder on the deck, flits about, and then, hovering in mid-air, inserts his beak and tongue into the opening and extracts the high-energy sugar water needed to fuel its incredible flying acrobatics. A little later another hummingbird, to impress an admiring female, zooms straight up 130 feet and then swoops to the ground, creating a loud shrill burst of noise produced through its tail feathers.

"Wow, how do they do that?!" exclaim those on the deck watching such feats of fancy flight in wonder. Many feel blessed to witness such wonders of nature and give glory to God as Creator and Master Designer. And rightly so.



"Not so fast," counter most educators and naturalists. Even as they gush about the "unique architecture" of hummingbirds, they deny any Master Architect. They claim these living, breathing miniature helicopters somehow evolved over eons of time without the involvement of an Intelligent Designer. Imagine making such a claim about a Black Hawk helicopter with its aeronautical and technological features! Yet when do hummingbirds crash? Or need a pilot?

Now, thanks to high-speed photography, which can be viewed in slow motion, we can see the amazing *specially created* features of this *miracle* bird!

How hummingbirds fly

The incredible aerial feats of hummingbirds are truly a marvel. But that's only the beginning of the story.

Their tiny hearts beat as fast as 1,260 times per minute—*21 beats per second.* A healthy human heart, in comparison, totals only 60 to 80 beats per minute. Imagine doing anything 21 times in a second!

A hummingbird's wings flap *from 40 to 90 times per second.* To appreciate how amazing this is, hold out your arms and try to flap them up and down like wings. Can you manage more than a couple of flaps in a second? You may as well abort takeoff!

The secret of the hummingbirds is that they don't flap their wings up and down. With their flexible shoulders they hover by circling their wings in a figure eight! Treat yourself to a video called "Time Warp: Hummingbird," which you can easily find in an Internet search. The figure-eight motion generates lift from both sides of the wings and enables the hummingbird to be the only bird that can fly in any direction.

Yet, unbelievably, an episode of the PBS program *Nature* ("Hummingbirds: Magic in the Air," 2010) matter-of-factly states that because plants with nectar normally offer nowhere for birds to perch, a hummingbird sometime in the past stared extinction in the face—for itself and for the plant that otherwise wouldn't be pollinated—and taught itself to hover! Evidently it then passed this trick on to its progeny like a magician might teach his protégé how to levitate.

If you are sitting in a chair while reading this, please move away from it so you have nowhere to "perch" and see how long it takes you to evolve how to hover!

How hummingbirds really drink

Though a hummingbird weighs only about a tenth of an ounce, it can consume up to double its body weight each day!

To the human eye, it looks like a hummingbird inserts its beak and tongue into the nectar and then slurps it out like drinking through a straw. For nearly two centuries researchers believed that hummingbird tongues had tube-like channels that sucked out nectar by capillary action (liquid rising up the sides of a tube).

Therefore they expected hummingbirds would prefer nectar with a sugar concentration of about 20 to 40 percent, since higher concentrations would be too thick to rise fast enough. So they were baffled to see hummingbirds routinely choose liquids with double the predicted sugar levels.

New high-speed photography solves the puzzle. It reveals that when the tube-like channels in a hummingbird's tongue hit nectar, they open down their sides, curl around the nectar, and then close back up as the tongue pulls back, carrying nectar back into the beak. (To see this amazing process in action, do an Internet search for "High-speed video shows how hummingbirds really drink" by Dave Mosher.)

Even more amazingly, consider that the hummingbird does all this lightning fast, flicking its tongue in and out of the nectar about 20 times per second! Can you really believe that a tongue opening and closing so smoothly and so quickly could have evolved through blind chance?

The action of the hummingbird's tongue is the limit of scientists' understanding of how it drinks. Ornithologist Alejandro Rico-Guevara of the University of Connecticut, coauthor of a study published May 2, 2011, in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences,* states: "To drink you have to swallow. No one has tried to explain how this works yet [in hummingbirds]. It's considered magic right now."

Rico-Guevara said advanced study is needed to understand how a hummingbird absorbs the energy from the nectar it collects in its tongue.

More than 350 species of hummingbirds are responsible for pollinating some 8,000 species of flowers worldwide. Surprisingly, hummingbirds have no sense of smell—but they are irresistibly drawn to brightly colored flowers or the bright red color of hummingbird feeders offering sugar water.

Locks, keys and hummingbird beaks

The PBS program mentioned earlier admits with admiration that all the various species of hummingbirds are "all designed to fit their favorite blossoms like a key in a lock." *"Designed"* is the key word here—though the program assumes this can happen through mindless evolution. But when you need a key for a lock, would it even cross your mind to wait for one to evolve? Hardly! You know a key and a lock have to be specially designed to fit together.

A case in point is the Datura plant in Ecuador with its trumpet-like blossoms concealing nectar four inches within. The PBS show claims that this unique flower avoided extinction thanks to a hummingbird "going to great lengths in order to feed."

Supposedly this was an evolutionary example of "a plant remaking a bird to do its bidding." In this fantasy of evolutionary thinking, a visionary hummingbird recognized that it, too, would die off if it didn't extend its beak enough to reach the way-down-there nectar. And voila! A swordbill hummingbird with a four-inch beak longer than its body rose to the challenge!

"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" That's the plain assessment of Psalms 14:1 and 53:1 from the hummingbird's Designer and Creator.

God Himself challenged Job face-to-face as to whose wisdom or command was behind the soaring of eagles (Job 39:27-28). The same goes for anybody trying to take credit away from the Creator for how hummingbirds hover and trap nectar.

Now, thanks to high-speed photography, you can see with your own eyes how they do that—and give glory to our great Creator who designed them that way!

—Robert Curry

Who Really Killed Jesus?

Jesus Christ died in fulfillment of the Passover and other Old Testament sacrifices. But who actually bears blame in His being killed?

by Gary Petty

Imagine yourself carried back in time almost 2,000 years. You stand outside Jerusalem, gazing up to where Jesus of Nazareth hangs crucified. He has nails driven through His hands and feet and a crown of thorns jammed down upon His head. Roman soldiers squat in the dust gambling for His clothing. Suddenly, one of the soldiers picks up a spear and thrusts it into Jesus' side. With a gasp His suffering ends. (To understand why this spear thrust is what killed Jesus, see our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story.*)

Earlier that day Jewish leaders accused Jesus of sedition before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Pilate's wife had a troubling dream about the Jewish rabbi and begged her husband to spare Him. The governor did have a way out of condemning Jesus. Roman custom dictated that a Jewish prisoner be released at the Passover season. Pilate offered the crowd the choice of the criminal Barabbas or Jesus. The crowd chose Barabbas.

Reporting what happened next, Matthew 27:22 states: "Pilate said to them, 'What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said to him, 'Let Him be crucified.'" The governor asked the crowd, "What evil has He done?" The crowd "cried out all the more saying, 'Let Him be crucified'" (verse 23).

Matthew then writes: "When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.' And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children'" (verses 24-25). Pilate gave in, and Jesus was led away to be beaten, scourged and crucified.

Who really killed Jesus? Should the Jewish people be held responsible throughout their generations? Does the responsibility rest upon the Roman soldiers who scourged and crucified Him? Should Pilate take the blame?



Photos, from left: Scott Ashley, Lagui/Dreamstime.com

Who really killed Jesus? Does the responsibility rest upon the Roman soldiers who scourged and crucified Him?

The answer can be found in the great meaning behind the sacrifices God required in the Old Testament, commencing with that of a lamb at the biblical observance of Passover.

The Passover—symbolic of Christ's sacrifice

The Passover is traced back to the time of Moses when God led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. Moses told the Egyptian ruler, the pharaoh, that God wanted him to let the Israelites go free. When Pharaoh refused, God brought nine terrible plagues on the people and the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh again refused, God said that He would kill all the firstborn of Egypt.

The Israelites were told to smear the blood of a slain lamb on the doorposts of their houses so that this last plague would pass over them and they would be spared. For generations Israelites have celebrated that night when their ancestors were spared as God passed over their homes and they heard the horrible cries of Egyptians mourning their dead.

At the time of Jesus, nearly 1,500 years after that first Passover, Jewish families selected lambs to be sacrificed as their ancestors had done. On the 14th of the Hebrew month of Nisan they would kill the lamb and eat a special meal of lamb, herbs and unleavened bread to commemorate God's mercy and deliverance shown to their ancestors.

It was on that same day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar that Jesus was crucified. The night before His death, He ate a Passover meal with His closest followers (Matthew 26:17-20). Matthew tells us: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat, this is my body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sin" (verses 26-28).

Sin's deadly result

The suffering and death that mark the human condition is the direct result of sin, which is disobedience to God's ways of life (Genesis 3:17-19). The problem we all have to face is how sinful human beings

can come into the presence of the righteous God. Many people are shocked to find out that God has requirements they must meet to interact with Him.

Throughout the Old Testament period people were required to approach God with an offering of blood. Only certain animals were acceptable to God for these blood sacrifices.

In Leviticus 17:10-11 God explains why a blood sacrifice is required: "And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."

Animal sacrifices may to us today seem strange, even barbaric. But it's important to remember that these sacrifices were commanded by God and communicate something vital. Human beings have sinned, violated God's law, and have brought on themselves the ultimate penalty of sin—death.

The animal sacrifices were a substitute for the blood of the sinner. However, the life of a human being, made in the image of God, is worth more than any number of lambs and bulls. So these substitutes were temporary symbols of a reality that was to be fulfilled in a wondrous way.

The Suffering Servant

What did Jesus mean when He said that His followers must eat bread and drink wine as symbols of His body and blood? How were these symbols involved in the forgiveness of sins? Why did He choose a Passover meal to give them these instructions?

The answers are found in the ancient messages of God's prophets. They told of a coming Messiah, or Christ, who would conquer the nations and establish God's Kingdom on the earth. Other prophecies foretold a great Servant of God who would suffer for the nations.

One prophecy about this "suffering Servant" is found in Isaiah 52-53. In this prophecy, the Servant of God is beaten and "His appearance was marred more than any man" (New American Standard Bible). He is "wounded for our transgressions," "bruised for our iniquities," and is made an "offering for sin." In his death He "bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

Jesus wasn't just a good teacher. Either He is the prophesied Messiah, and the Suffering Servant who came from God's throne to earth as the "Lamb of God" (as proclaimed by John the Baptist in John 1:29, 36), or the entire New Testament is fraudulent, founded on a self-appointed Messiah, and Jesus and His followers were deluded fanatics at best.

Yet there is overwhelming evidence that Jesus *is* who He claimed to be. And as the Lamb of God, His life has more value than all human beings who ever lived or will ever live. The animal sacrifices were mere symbols of the reality of God's plan for salvation—in which Jesus would die for all.

The book of Hebrews tells us: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins . . . we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those

All Bear Responsibility in Jesus' Death

It's important to understand that the blame for Jesus Christ's death did not lie solely with the soldier who thrust the spear into His side. *Many* bore responsibility, *including each of us.* A prayer to God in Acts 4:27 shows a wide range of blame: "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 . . ."

So it wasn't just the rulers, it wasn't just the Jews, it wasn't just the Romans who are implicated in the death of Jesus. They all had a role—*as did we.* Also playing a major part in this was the deceiver and enemy of God, Satan the devil, the ruler of this world (John 14:30). Paul tells us that humanity is in "the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26). So he obviously led the people involved in killing Christ to do so—as He has also led all of us into the way of sin, making Jesus' death for us necessary.

But notice that the prayer cited above from Acts 4 immediately goes on to say to God that the various people were all gathered against Jesus "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28). Clearly, this was God's plan all along. In fact, Isaiah 53:10 says, "Yet, it was the Lord's will to crush him with suffering . . . [making] his life a sacrifice for our wrongdoings" (God's Word Translation). It was God the Father who decreed concerning Jesus, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man who is My Companion,' says the Lord of hosts. 'Strike the Shepherd . . .'" (Zechariah 13:7).

We can further see that it was God's intent through the sacrificial system He gave to ancient Israel. Jesus came in fulfillment of it, His death being obviously predetermined by God.

Moreover, Jesus Himself said: "I lay down My life . . . No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself . . . This command I have received from My Father" (John 10:17-18). That is to say, He would not have died without His and His Father's willingness and orchestration of events for it to occur.

Thus, ultimate responsibility for Jesus' death lies with the Father and Himself. They determined it would happen. In fact, They created man with the possibility of sinning to begin with, and They assumed responsibility for sin through the plan of Jesus' sacrificial death. That's why the apostle Peter, in explaining that we are "redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb" (1 Peter 1:18-19), immediately states that "He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (verse 20). While God gave people free will to choose to sin, which would result in the consequence of death, His plan for them provided a sacrificial offering in their place so they could be forgiven of their sins and reconciled to Him.

None of this, however, excuses human beings for sin. We all bear responsibility in the wrongs we have done. In fact, we must realize that our sins are what necessitated the death of Christ—so that *all of us* share blame for killing Him. Yes, *you, me, everyone.*

—Tom Robinson

who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:4-14).

Jesus as the Passover Lamb

After Jesus was resurrected, His followers continued to observe the Passover, but with new understanding. For Christians, the Passover was no longer just a celebration of how God saved ancient Israel from slavery and how their firstborn were spared.

More than 20 years after Christ's resurrection, the apostle Paul wrote to the church in the Greek city of Corinth, "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). For the earliest Christians, Jesus was celebrated as the perfect Passover Lamb who delivers us from death and slavery to sin.



The importance of Jesus as the Passover lamb is lost in the common message that "Jesus accepts you just as you are." To really understand the need you have for Jesus as your Passover, you must accept that hostility against God's law (Romans 8:7) is at the core of many of your thoughts and actions. God *doesn't* accept you just the way you are. To have a relationship with Him *you must repent, be converted and allow Him to change you.*

At this point you may be thinking, "But I'm basically a good person." Yet "basically good" isn't enough. Unless God supplies a substitute, each one of us faces the death penalty under God's holy law. Only by accepting the shed blood of Jesus, the Son of God who committed no evil, whose life is more valuable than all humanity, can you be passed over and not be subject to ultimate destruction.

Christians are to celebrate the Passover by partaking of the symbols of Christ's body and blood as the true Passover Lamb. Like the ancient Israelites, you have no way to save yourself from the slavery of sin or eternal death except through the blood of the Lamb of God. We simply cannot resurrect ourselves.

We return to 1 Corinthians where Paul wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Once a year, on the anniversary of the Passover Jesus kept with His disciples, Christians should gather to proclaim the Lord's death.

Which brings us back to our original question: Who really killed Jesus?

Accepting responsibility

Let's transport ourselves back to the scene at the feet of where Jesus has been crucified. The Roman soldier who had just thrust his spear into the side of Jesus slowly turns towards you. You have an opportunity to look into the face of the killer of the Son of God. He turns, takes off his helmet, and you find yourself *staring into your own reflection.*

For the earliest Christians, Jesus was celebrated as the perfect Passover Lamb who delivers us from death and slavery to sin.

Of course, the face would be that of others as well. But, personally speaking, you must recognize and acknowledge your own part in Jesus' death. This isn't a cheap attempt to try and make you feel guilty. Christianity is a worthless religion unless Jesus, the Son of God, indeed came from heaven to live as a man, to die for our sins and to be resurrected three days and three nights later. To become a Christian, you must accept that His death was a substitute for what *you* deserve. This is a foundational truth of what it is to be a Christian. "He died to sin once for all" (Romans 6:10) that you may live.

Less than two months after Jesus was crucified and resurrected, the apostle Peter was speaking to a large crowd in Jerusalem. The people were shocked when he revealed their personal blame in the death of Jesus—"Whom *you* delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate." He further told them, *"You denied the Holy One . . . and killed the Prince of life"* (Acts 3:13-15, emphasis added).

The responsibility for the death of Jesus Christ isn't just a matter of accusing the Jews who betrayed Him, nor the Roman soldiers who crucified Him, nor Pilate who condemned Him, nor the devil who led them, nor God whose plan it was all along (see "All Bear Responsibility in Jesus' Death" on page 24).

The fact of the matter is, you must accept that Jesus' death was a substitute for what *you* deserve. As Paul tells us, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23). That includes you and me. Jesus died for us so that you can have access to God our Father and be freed from sin and death. If you were the only person on earth, the Lamb of God would have been sacrificed as *your* substitute.

Our responsibility now is to obey and accept those same words from Peter—to turn from our sins in repentance and gratefully accept Jesus' sacrifice. When we do that, God forgives us and gives us His Spirit to help us obey Him (Acts 2:38). How wonderful is God's mercy!

For Christians today, the Passover remains a time to reflect on the awesome sacrifice of Jesus Christ—when He laid down His life for all of us. It isn't just a Jewish celebration. There can be no greater recognition of Jesus as our Redeemer than for Christians to gather on the night that He did with His disciples and partake of the symbols of unleavened bread and wine as an annual memorial of His body and blood given in sacrifice for all of us! ***GN***

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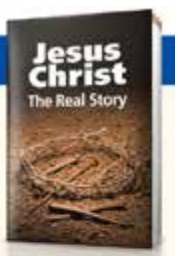

You need to understand the truth about Jesus Christ—who He was, why He came to earth, what His sacrifice means and why He is coming back again. Be sure to read our eye-opening booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story.* And for more on the Passover and God's other festivals, found in the Bible, read our booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.* Download or request your free copy of each today!

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Did Jesus Fulfill His Prophecy of How Long He Would Be Entombed?

Jesus Christ plainly said He would be entombed for three days and three nights. Can this be reconciled with a "Good Friday" crucifixion and burial and an "Easter Sunday" resurrection, which allows for barely a day and a half in the tomb? Or do the Gospels spell out a solution that fits perfectly with what Jesus foretold? ***by Scott Ashley***

In Matthew 12:38, some of the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign to prove He was the Messiah. "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you," they told Him (New International Version).

Jesus responded that the only sign He would give was that of the prophet Jonah: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (verse 40, NIV).

But how can we fit "three days and three nights" between a Friday afternoon crucifixion and entombment just before sundown and a Sunday morning resurrection at sunrise? This traditional view allows for Jesus to have been in the tomb for only a day and a half—or half the time Jesus foretold!

Traditional view doesn't fit

Some believe that Christ's statement that He would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" does not require a literal span of 72 hours. They reason that any part of a day can be reckoned as a whole day.

Thus, since Jesus died in the afternoon and was entombed just before sunset, they think the closing few minutes of that Friday constituted the first day, Friday night was the first night, Saturday was the second day, Saturday night was the second night, and a few minutes at dawn on Sunday morning made up the third day.

But where, then, is the third night? Even if a few minutes of daylight late on Friday and another few on Sunday morning constitute "days," this interpretation fails to explain how only *two* nights—Friday night and Saturday night—can somehow be the *three* nights of which Jesus spoke.

In fact, Scripture is plain that Jesus *had already risen* before Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early Sunday morning, arriving "while it was still dark" (John 20:1-2). So in reality, *no* parts of Sunday could be counted as a day, as Jesus was *already resurrected* well before the break of dawn.

Jonah 1:17, to which Jesus referred, states specifically that "Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." We have no biblical basis for thinking that Jesus meant only two nights and one day, plus part of another day.

If Jesus were in the tomb only from late Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning, then the sign He gave that He was the prophesied Messiah *was not fulfilled.*

So which is it? Is something wrong with Christ's words, or is something wrong with the traditional view of when and how long He was in the tomb?

Let's carefully examine the details from the Gospels. When we do, we uncover the real story of how Jesus' words were fulfilled precisely.

Two Sabbaths mentioned

Notice the sequence of events outlined in Luke 23. Jesus' moment of death, as well as His hasty burial because of the oncoming Sabbath that began at sundown, is narrated in verses 46-53. Verse 54 then states, "That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near."

In Jewish society of that time, heavy cooking and housecleaning were done on the day before a Sabbath in preparation for it. Thus the day before the Sabbath came to be called "the preparation day" or simply "the preparation." The biblical Sabbath falls on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. According to Bible reckoning, days begin at sunset (Leviticus 23:32; compare Genesis 1:5, 8, 13), so all weekly Sabbaths start Friday evening at sundown.

Based on these facts, many people have assumed that it is the weekly Sabbath mentioned here, and that Jesus was therefore crucified on a Friday. But two types of "Sabbaths" are mentioned in the Scriptures—the regular weekly Sabbath day, which fell on the seventh day of the week, and seven annual Holy Days (listed in Leviticus 23), Sabbaths that could—and usually did—fall on days of the week other than the regular weekly Sabbath day.

Was the day after Jesus was crucified a weekly Sabbath, or one of these annual Holy Days?

John 19:31 clearly states that this approaching Sabbath "was a high day." This term does not refer to the weekly Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset), but in this context to the first day of Unleavened Bread, one of God's annual Holy Days (Exodus 12:16-17; Leviticus 23:6-7). A number of Bible commentaries, encyclopedias and dictionaries will confirm that John is not referring to the weekly Sabbath here, but rather to one of the annual Sabbaths.

According to the biblical evidence, in that year this high-day Sabbath fell on a Thursday (meaning it began on Wednesday night at sunset). This becomes especially clear from details in the Gospel accounts showing us that *two* separate Sabbath days are mentioned.

Luke 23:55-56 tells us that the women, after seeing Christ's body being laid in the tomb just before sundown, "returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils" for the final preparation of the body.

They would not have done such work on a Sabbath day, weekly or annual, since it would have been considered a Sabbath violation. This is verified by Mark's account, which states, "Now *when the Sabbath was past,* Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices [which they could not have purchased on a Sabbath day], that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 16:1).

The women had to wait *until this Sabbath*

was over before they could buy and prepare the spices to be used for anointing Jesus' body. Then, Luke 23:56 tells us that, after purchasing and preparing the spices and oils on Friday, "they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment"—which means they had to have acquired the spices *before* that Sabbath on which they rested. This *second* Sabbath mentioned in the Gospel accounts is the regular weekly Sabbath, observed from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

By comparing details in both Gospels—where Mark tells us the women bought spices *after* the Sabbath and Luke relates that they prepared the spices *before* resting on the Sabbath—we can clearly see that *two different Sabbaths* are being discussed here.

The original Greek of Matthew 28:1 even tells us the women went to the tomb "after the Sabbaths" (plural), as some Bible translations show.

The first, as John 19:31 tells us, was a "high day"—the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—which in this year fell on a Thursday. The second was the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. (To see these events spelled out day by day, see the chart below.)

Sign of the Messiah

After the women rested on the regular weekly Sabbath, they went to Jesus' tomb early on the first day of the week (Sunday), "while it was still dark" (John 20:1), and found that He had *already* been resurrected (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:1-3). Jesus was not resurrected at sunrise on Sunday morning. When Mary Magdalene arrived "while it was still dark," she found the stone rolled away and the tomb already empty!

When we consider the details in all four Gospel accounts, the picture is clear. Jesus was crucified and entombed late on Wednesday afternoon, just before a Sabbath began at sunset. However, that was a high-day Sabbath, lasting from Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset that week, rather than the regular weekly Sabbath that lasted from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

Since Jesus was entombed in the late afternoon just before sundown, according to His own words He would have been resurrected at around the same time three days and nights later. He remained in the tomb from Wednesday at sunset until Saturday at sunset, when He rose from the dead. While no one witnessed His resurrection (which took place inside a sealed tomb), to fit His words and the biblical evidence it had to have happened three days and three nights later, near sunset on Saturday.

This time line perfectly accommodates three full nights (Wednesday night, Thursday night and Friday night) and three full daylight periods (Thursday, Friday and Saturday). This is the *only* time that fits Jesus' own prophecy of how long He would be in the tomb. And, as we have seen, it fits perfectly with all the details recorded in the Gospels.



This rolling-stone tomb in Galilee is typical of such tombs from the first century. Jesus Christ's body was likely placed in a tomb similar to this one.

We can be assured that the entombment period Jesus gave as proof He was the Messiah was exactly the duration He foretold. Because most people do not understand the biblical Holy Days Jesus Christ and His followers kept, they fail to understand the chronological details so accurately preserved for us in the Gospels. ***GN***

THE CHRONOLOGY OF CHRIST'S Crucifixion and Resurrection

Tuesday:	Wednesday:	Thursday:	Friday:	Saturday:	Sunday:
Jesus Christ ate an evening Passover meal with His disciples (at the beginning of Nisan 14, Jewish reckoning) and instituted the New Covenant symbols (Matthew 26:26-28). Jesus was then betrayed by Judas, arrested and during the night brought before the high priest.	Jesus was crucified and died around 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50). This was the preparation day for the *annual*—not weekly—Sabbath, which began at sunset (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). Jesus' body was placed in the tomb just before sunset (Matthew 27:57-60).	This was the high-day Sabbath, the first day of the biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:4-7). It is described as the day after the "Day of Preparation" (Matthew 27:62). Wednesday night and the daylight portion of Thursday were the first of three days and nights Jesus' body was in the tomb.	The high-day annual Sabbath now past, the women bought and prepared spices for anointing Jesus' body before resting on the weekly Sabbath day, which began at Friday sunset (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56). Thursday night and the daylight portion of Friday marked the second of three days and nights Jesus' body was entombed.	The women rested on the weekly Sabbath day, according to the Fourth Commandment (Luke 23:56; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus rose near sunset, exactly three days and three nights after His body was placed in the tomb, fulfilling the sign of Jonah and authenticating the sign He gave of His messiahship.	The women brought the prepared spices early in the morning *while it was still dark* (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Jesus had *already* risen (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:2-3; John 20:1). He did not rise on Sunday morning, but near sunset the day before—three days and three nights after being put in the tomb, just as He foretold.

Photos, from top: Scott Ashley, Photodisc

How Much Do You Know About the Biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread?

Millions of people celebrate Easter in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus never observed Easter, but He did celebrate the biblical Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. What relevance do these days have for Christians today? ***by Gary Petty***

For most of us bread is an unheralded side dish in our everyday diet. In much of the Western world meals are centered around meat, pasta or casseroles, and unless we're eating a sandwich, bread is an afterthought. That wasn't true of the Middle Eastern cultures of biblical times.

In ancient Israel eating meals was a communal affair. Family and friends gathered to eat a meal while reclining on a floor mat. Each person would tear a piece of bread from a small loaf or thin round chunk and use it as a sort of spoon to scoop food from the various dishes offered at mealtime. This is why the Bible speaks of people eating a meal as "breaking bread."

During Roman times couches and a low table replaced the mats, but the meal was eaten in basically the same manner.

Bread was made from different grains including wheat, barley, millet or even beans and lentils. Loaves were prepared by mixing flour with water and kneading it in troughs or bowls. Depending on where families lived or how wealthy they were, bread was baked on hot sand or flat stones over a fire, on a griddle or in an oven made of bronze, iron or, more commonly, clay.

The leavening process—the process for making bread dough to rise—is fascinating. A leavening agent, which causes tiny gas bubbles to form, is introduced into a batch of dough to cause it to expand. This leavening agent permeates every part of the dough until the entire batch is leavened. A small amount of leavening can leaven a large amount of dough.

We commonly use purchased baking soda or yeast today, but that wasn't the case then. Since bread was made daily, the easiest way to leaven it was to save a lump of leavened dough from the previous day. This lump would be added to the dough and left to stand until the leavening process had permeated the entire batch.

Every spring ancient Israel observed the biblical festival of Passover and another over the following seven days called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Just before the Israelites were delivered from their slavery in Egypt by great miracles, they were commanded by God not to eat leavened bread during this week-long period (Exodus 13:3-10).

Do these ancient observances have any meaning for Christians today?



Does the ancient festival called **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** have any meaning for Christians today?

"Let us keep the feast"

Many say that Christians are to live by the teachings of the New Testament and pay little attention to the Hebrew Scriptures.

They forget that the only Scriptures available to the apostles and Church of the first century were what we call the Old Testament. As the apostle Paul told Timothy of these books: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Paul was reminding Timothy to remember what he had been taught as a child from the Old Testament. In this context it's not difficult to understand why the early New Testament Church observed the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. God's inspired Word told them to!

Notice what Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians, a predominately non-Jewish congregation: "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

In the context of what he wrote, Paul uses leavening as a symbol of human pride and vanity. He understood the leavening process and applied it to the human condition. In verse 2 he told the Corinthians that they were "puffed up." Remember, leavening fills dough with air bubbles to make it "puffed up." Even today, we refer to someone preoccupied with self-importance as being "full of hot air."

Now notice verse 8: "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." What feast is Paul speaking of? Obviously he's talking about the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which these gentile Christians were observing (verses 7-8).

Jesus' references concerning bread

Jesus Christ used leavening as a symbol of false teachings. Notice what He said to His disciples: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees . . . How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:6, 11). Then they realized He meant the teachings of these groups (verse 12).

We see from the words of Paul and Jesus that leavening can serve as a symbol of human pride and of false religious teachings and sins that *result from* human pride.

On another occasion a group of Jewish

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religious leaders approached Jesus and asked Him to perform a sign to prove that He was sent from God. They referred to the time God provided ancient Israel with food called manna, which God had referred to as "bread from heaven" (Exodus 16:4).

Jesus explained the spiritual reality the manna foreshadowed: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.' And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst'" (John 6:32-35).

Jesus made the remarkable statement that *He* is the "bread of life." He said that if you eat of this bread you will live forever (verses 50-51, 58). As we saw above, the apostle Paul also linked the Passover observance with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus Christ was offered as the New Testament Passover sacrifice, and He called Himself the bread of life.

Feeding on Christ's flesh and blood?

Jesus then made the following perplexing statement: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:53-56).

What did Jesus mean by these statements? Did He really intend that a person eat His body and drink His blood to receive eternal life? This statement offended many people, yet Jesus didn't attempt to explain Himself then except to say that His words were spirit and life (verse 63). But He would reveal more the night before His death.

Jesus then assembled with the 12 disciples to observe the Passover meal, commonly referred to as the Last Supper. During this meal He explained more of what He meant concerning His earlier statements about eating His body and drinking His blood:

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matthew 26:26-28).

Thus we must receive Jesus' sacrifice—His suffering and death in our place. We must internalize this along with Jesus' teachings and way of life as expressed through the whole of Scripture.

Which religious days should we observe?

As we have seen, the New Testament reveals that Jesus is the true Passover Lamb of God (1 Corinthians 5:7). So why do so few Christians actually observe the Passover and the accompanying Feast of Unleavened Bread?

Just where did the Western world get its present religious calendar? The New Testament Church didn't observe Easter. Even the *name* Easter comes from an ancient pagan goddess, as almost any good encyclopedia will show. The Easter bunny and colored eggs have origins in fertility rites of antiquity and have nothing to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus the Son of God.

Why is it that so many in the Christian community ignore, or have no knowledge of, the Holy Days described in the Bible, the same Holy Days observed by Jesus and the apostles and kept by the early Church?

Why have so many ignored or abandoned these scriptural festivals and replaced them with holidays whose origins lie in dark, non-biblical antiquity? Let us keep the feasts God has given us in His Word! ***GN***

Learn More



Many people are surprised to discover that the real origins of popular holidays like Easter and Christmas aren't found in the Bible but date to centuries earlier. And perhaps even more surprising is the fact that the Bible reveals a series of observances that tell us a great deal about Jesus Christ's role in God's plan for salvation—beginning with His sacrificial death on our behalf as symbolized by the Passover. You need to learn what the Bible really says! Download or request your free copies of the booklets *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* And *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*

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The Parable of the Workers: A Fair Wage From a Fair Employer

One of Christ's parables might strike some of us as unfair, but it holds valuable lessons about God's generosity and our need to stick to the course to the end. ***by Darris McNeely***

When I was 18 years old my father sold the family business and went to work for a construction company. I lost my job and needed another to make money for college. I tried getting on with my dad's new employer as a day laborer. That didn't work out too well.

Every morning men would gather in a large room at the company headquarters. Workers were always needed to carry material and do a lot of the grunt work on building sites. The pay was minimum wage, and the hours were long.

On two consecutive mornings I showed up eager to work and stood around with grown men twice my age and experience. Both times I was turned down for work. I watched as the boss handed out jobs to the others. It was disappointing and a bit humiliating for me. I was not used to being passed over.

After the second morning of no work I got the message. I was not going to be selected for any work that day or *any* day. I could not rely on my father's name or reputation, at least not with this company. I had to make my own way.

I went out and found work on my own. In fact I found two jobs and went on to make enough money to get a start on college that fall.

This experience taught me valuable lessons. I learned resourcefulness, to endure and to continue searching to find work. I learned that an owner can hire who he wants, when he wants, and pay the worker what he says is fair.

Those two days that I stood in the workroom of the construction company and looked for work taught me a life lesson. They taught me that the boss can do what he wishes with the resources of his company. If he is a good and gracious employer the company will prosper. It was not my place to argue with him. It was my responsibility to learn from the experience and get on with my life.

I've often thought about this experience when I read one of the parables Jesus Christ used to teach us about the work He calls us to for the Kingdom of God. In Matthew 20 Christ spoke a parable of workers toiling away in a vineyard. We are "hired" to work for God, and when we grasp this truth it gives our lives, and even the work we do in our lives, purpose and meaning. If we can grasp this key it ignites life with passion, energy and devotion.

Let's look at this parable for what we can learn about the work God is doing.

Workers brought on at different times

Jesus stated: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent then into his vineyard" (verses 1-2).

The workday would begin early, perhaps at sunrise, and those wanting to work gathered in one spot to wait for the landowner to come and offer work. You can still see scenes like this throughout the world. Work is what defines a person. It's more than a means to pay the monthly expense. Work gives dignity and meaning to life. When people cannot find work for long periods

We must be willing to enter the vineyard and work. We have to want to work. And we have to endure to the end of the workday, however long that might be.

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of time their sense of identity and self-worth is eroded.

Christ is describing the work of a wealthy man of means who employs people at fair wages. A set wage (one denarius, a day's pay) is agreed. The workers enter the vineyard.

In Christ's parable, at "about the third hour," or 9:00 a.m., the landowner sees others standing idle in the marketplace and offers them work. They too enter the vineyard and begin to work. There is plenty of work to go around. This continues through the day. At three-hour intervals he returns to the town square and hires additional workers.

By mid-afternoon, 3:00 p.m., we have a scene that must look something like this: Many workers are engaged in the work needed to plant, maintain, prune and harvest the produce of a large vineyard. The need for more workers through the day could be due to a couple of factors.

One, perhaps the work needing to be done constantly grows. More crops are planted. Existing growth must be maintained. All of this takes human effort to get it done. New hires are the way to keep up with the work.

A second possibility is worker attrition. Maybe some hired early grow tired and leave the vineyard. Perhaps they decide the effort is too much, or they're not cut out for it. They have to be replaced because the work doesn't end—planting, maintaining and harvesting are ongoing in a vineyard. If some can't keep up and drop off, others must be found to replace them.

The parable continues. The work goes on and at 5:00 p.m., the eleventh hour, the need for workers is still there, so the owner goes out and finds people without work, without purpose because no one had hired them, and he gives them a job too. "You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive" (verse 7).

All paid the same

With the day at an end the owner sends his steward out to pay the laborers. Those hired at the end of the day are paid first. Those who were hired at the start of the day were last in line. Every laborer, no matter how long they worked, received the same amount—one day's wage, a denarius.

This example defies modern labor practices. But remember it is a parable, told to teach a specific lesson. God's ways and thoughts are not ours. We may think it unjust that one who works only a short time is paid the same as the one who works all



Some workers were upset that the vineyard owner was generous to those who worked less.

day. But God doesn't. So let's listen to the point He makes.

After hearing the complaints—"these last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day" (verse 12)—the landowner replied, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did not you agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good? So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen" (verses 13-16).

Each worker had agreed to working for what the vineyard owner would pay. Those at the beginning of the day had accepted the offer of a denarius as fair and appropriate. No one had any room to complain about what they were given. What he would give to others was outside their agreement.

God holds all wealth, and He is generous and gracious to all. That is an obvious message through this parable. Those called and chosen at the "last" have access to God's Kingdom just as those called and chosen at the start of the day. God's grace to those who are faithful is a key lesson here. But there is more.

Endure to the end

Notice that all who were paid a wage received the wage at the end of the day. In other words, they had to endure to the end, remaining on the job until the day was done. The work of planting, growing and harvesting is continual until the job is complete. Only then, in the vineyard of the Lord, is the wage paid.

Do you love to work? I hope so because, as this parable shows, the Kingdom of God is like a vineyard full of workers, each hired by the owner to work in a specific role at a specific time. We have to love work enough to seek it and stay with it. We have to love the work of preparing for the Kingdom of God.

God will finish His work on Earth in this age. It is all being done in a set manner according to a great plan. Jesus Christ set His parables within everyday activities that form the basis of life. Through them we learn many things, including what the Kingdom is and how we may enter it.

What we see from this parable is that we must be willing to enter the vineyard and work. We must make ourselves available for God (the landowner) to find us. We have to want to work. And we have to endure to the end of the workday, however long that might be for each of us.

The calling to God's Kingdom is the highest and noblest in life. If we do not quit or lose heart we will receive the promised reward, God's gift of a crown of righteousness.

Years ago I learned a valuable lesson about work and staying with something. It would have been easy to get discouraged and think I could not find any work at all. I could have become bitter toward the owner who would not hire me, even for a day. It took perseverance to find the right job, to stick with it and to do it right.

All these lessons have been applied to the greater calling of the Kingdom of God. For me that has been a lifelong work of great meaning and purpose. May it be so for all of us! ***GN***

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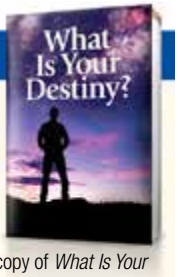

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Bearing Our Cross Like Christ

Jesus tells us that to follow Him, we must take up our cross and walk in His steps. But what does that mean? ***by Robin Webber***

In Luke 14:25-33 we discover a great deal about what Jesus Christ's invitation of "Follow Me" really means. The account begins by describing how "great multitudes went with Him." And why not? Here was a teacher with incredible insights, a humanitarian providing food for the masses, and one performing miraculous healings. Indeed, Jesus must have been an incredible human magnet drawing gigantic crowds. What was there not to like? But now, He knew the time had come to tell His audience what the rest of their journey entailed.

He proclaimed: "If you want to be my follower you must love me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And you cannot be my disciple if you do not carry your own cross and follow me" (New Living Translation).

How do we do that?

Emulating the cross-bearing life

Jesus' statement isn't a casual invitation, but a *demanding expectation* that requires surrendering every fiber of one's being. Bearing a cross wasn't lost on the audience of that day. Many had seen condemned individuals carry the beam on which they would die to the spot of their execution. Such a vivid description surely grabbed their attention!

Christ's invitation to "come after Me" remains for all to ponder throughout the ages. Before going any further, notice what Jesus specifically states regarding His expectations.

Those who accept His invitation, He said, would have to bear their *own* cross—not to be confused with the redemptive sacrifice borne by Christ alone. Thus, we don't "piggy back" on His cross, but learn from Him how to bear our personal challenges as we follow in His steps.

Here the One who so often spoke of life was seemingly embracing suffering and even death as a gateway to fuller understanding. Is it any wonder He challenges His followers to "count the cost" to see whether they have the commitment to finish the course? (verse 28-33).

How, then, do we respond to this invitation as we face our many challenges in the arena of life? Let's prepare the pathway of our personal journey by appreciating that emulating a "cross-bearing" life was foundational to the teaching and expectation of Jesus and the early Church.

The apostle Paul summarized it in this way: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20, King James Version). Paul expounds and expands the spiritual equation that the crucified existence is not something limited to Golgotha alone, but is to be firmly staked in our hearts, representing the seat of our motivation.

Jesus' statement isn't a casual invitation, but a demanding expectation that requires surrendering every fiber of one's being.

While the Bible would not have us elevate the symbol of a cross to the level of adoration, our daily worship of God is molded by this powerful biblical metaphor of bearing a cross. Embracing and internalizing its significance, as Christ intended and the apostle Paul expressed, is a guiding principle of not being conformed to this world, actively renewing our minds, and being transformed into Christ's image. How then do we bear a cross, *our* cross, like Jesus?

Always keep our purpose in mind

The first aspect to emulate is that Christ's purpose was always before Him. Jesus didn't simply wind up on a cross as some kind of "accidental savior." At the beginning of His ministry He clearly stated, "The Son of Man must be lifted up" (John 3:14), alluding to His coming crucifixion.

He referred to Moses raising the emblem of the serpent in the wilderness to stop death in its tracks as a type of what His role would be to halt sin's death grip. Jesus clearly began each day with this end in mind. He understood that He was set apart for a special purpose—to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The crucified life in Christ is something no naturally minded person would ever choose. But Jesus made something very plain in John 15:16, stating, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you." Likewise, our purpose of honoring such a calling and serving others must always be set before us, lest we succumb to being "accidental Christians."

Jesus Himself said, "I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30). He knew that He had to die that we might live. And likewise we must die to our own agenda that Christ might live in us. As long as you cling to a personal agenda, the will of God will be thwarted in you.

Paul expressed the full significance of the crucified existence when he wrote, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

In following Christ, Paul was putting to death any desire he might have had to follow the allure of this world or to establish an agenda apart from God's will. When God's purpose is foremost in your life, you won't live accidentally (despite stumbling at times). Your established focus of a cross-bearing life will serve as the ultimate "spiritual GPS" directing your steps.

Carrying our load with humility

The second aspect of Christ's life to con-



Those who heard Christ speak of bearing a cross understood His challenge. Many had seen condemned prisoners carry the instrument of their execution.

sider is not only His bearing of a cross but *how* He carried it. It is the essence of the crucified existence. It's not simply recognizing a cross in our life or even being willing to bear its weight, but *how* we carry it that creates the meaningful outcome of glorifying God. Bearing our cross like Christ means we must walk in humility behind His example.

Allow me to be blunt: Religious folks aren't always the humblest people. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) or the reaction of the scribes and Pharisees to all those "sinners" gathered around Jesus (Luke 15:1-2) displays a pride-filled walk diametrically opposite to that of Christ. Their vaunted estimation of themselves before God was blurred by who they thought they were and what they knew rather than what their hearts revealed about their inner motivations.

Their hearts, while sincere, were contrary to the words of Paul in Philippians 2:5: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (English Standard Version).

Jesus stepped down from the realm of eternity into time and space and died for us so we might live forever! He did it without fanfare or complaining about the mission set before Him. He never lifted Himself up beyond what was proper and allowed His Heavenly Father alone to "highly [exalt] Him and [give] Him the name which is above every name" (verse 9).

Embracing spiritual reality

What does such humility entail for followers of Jesus Christ? Humility is a proper estimation of ourselves apart from God and who He is. It is a proper recognition that we deserve nothing but death but have been rescued, reconciled and restored—the reality being that, but for the grace of God, we would still be drowning in self.

Thus, we view and respect others as God has treated us—graciously—and recognize that God has not completed His work in them or in us. We realize full well that we were "dead men walking" and never forget it.

Paul outlined this trait of humility again and again in his letters. He often prioritized humility as a premier trait of God's Spirit. This was in stark contrast to the worldview of the day that disdained the thought that humility could be a virtue. Paul repeatedly emphasized this vital step in bearing our cross like Christ in stating, "Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness" (Ephesians 4:1-2).

Even as we bear our personal cross with footsteps of vision and humility, allow me to be frank: The crucified life within you can be humanly lonely. Scripture reminds us of challenges Jesus faced—that early on the disciples didn't grasp His discussion about crucifixion, that He prayed alone while others slept, that His associates fled at Gethsemane when humanly needed most, and that one of His closest associates repeatedly denied knowing Him.

Helping bear the load

Need I say any more about the lonely walk of bearing a cross? Yes! God will bring people into our lives to help us carry our cross. Scripture gives a clear example in Mark 15:21 that when Jesus could humanly go no further, one named Simon of Cyrene was used to help God's Son go the distance.

When God does bring such people into our lives, we need to let them help carry the load. Appreciate them! More than that, be prepared to step up and bear the spiritual and emotional cross of others.

Again, we are reminded in that chronicle of Christ's humility in Philippians 2 of our duty in this regard: "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others" (verse 4).

Paul further broadens this concept in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4: "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."

Simply put: Pass it on! Being a modern-day Simon of Cyrene is never planned, never easy, sometimes unpopular—except with God. It's being open, available and willing to experience what God has in store.

As we accept the challenge of bearing our cross like Christ, whatever it might be, understand that it's not simply going to disappear because of imitating His approach and attitude. We may still have to endure great hardship. But it will have purpose-filled meaning. The unique calling that God has granted us and fellow believers is not designed to bring instant gratification, but rather to conquer the flesh and place it in context with God's eternal perfection being molded in our inner man now.

When we embrace this reality, we will accept that pain is inevitable and it's only misery that's optional. Christ bore His cross and was hung on the cross, remaining there until He died. He did not come down from that which He bore in our place. Neither can we abandon that which we have been honored to carry for God's purposes to be revealed.

Before we bear a crown (2 Timothy 4:8), we must bear a cross. It may be on us now or perhaps it awaits us—along with God's promises concerning His care. He will never lead us where His Spirit cannot care for us. Always recognizing that the greater the need, the greater the grace, step by step we take up the privileged invitation of carrying a cross like Christ. ***GN***

Learn More



What does it mean to have faith? And what *is* faith, really? The Bible tells us that we are to *live* by faith, but what does that mean? How did the many figures of the Bible live by faith? Discover the answers in our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith.* Request or download your free copy today!

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets

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Mini-Study

Real Utopia Is Coming to Earth!

Humanity is bringing our planet to the point of destruction, but the Bible shows that Jesus Christ will intervene. How will His government, laws and citizens change the world? What will the wonderful benefits of the Kingdom of God be?

For the present time, man gropes to solve seemingly insurmountable problems of his own making. Consider one terrible instance:

"At 1:24 a.m. on Friday, April 26 [1986], unit 4 of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded. There were two enormous explosions within three seconds of each other and they blew the roof off the building. Radioactive gases, debris and materials from inside the reactor building were thrown two-thirds of a mile into the air. Pieces of the reactor's superhot fuel rods flew through the air and landed almost a mile away, setting radioactive fires that added to the exposure in the area.

"Two workers were instantly killed, and twenty-nine were bathed in so much radiation that they were essentially dead from that moment on, even though most of them lingered on for a couple of weeks in the hospital, suffering through the final stages of extreme radiation poisoning" (Stephen Spignesi, *The 100 Greatest Disasters of All Time,* 2002, pp. 112-113).

Some estimates said that 400 times more fallout was released in this nuclear accident than had been released by the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in World War II.

A 2002 United Nations report titled *The Human Consequences of the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident* concluded that about 2,000 cases of thyroid cancer had so far been diagnosed among young people exposed to radioactive iodine. It further noted that, "according to conservative estimates, this figure is likely to rise to 8-10,000 over the coming years."

Even the efforts to enclose the radioactive ground zero provoke new worries for the future. "The cement enclosure was poorly built . . . and it began to leak radiation a few years after construction was completed. More work was done to ensure its integrity but there are still doubts as to its safety" (Spignesi, p. 113).

As terrible as this accident was, it is only one of many human-caused catastrophes that—through carelessness, mismanagement, greed and violence—are harming our planet. How will this be turned around?

In the last three studies we've looked at the real hope of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ will return soon to bring practical solutions to our problems of inept and corrupt governments, of bad and unjustly enforced laws, and of violent and selfish human relationships.

Now let's look at a fourth wonderful benefit of the Kingdom of God—how it will transform Earth into a planet-wide Garden of Eden! And always remember: This awesome hope for the future has real, practical benefits for making your life now more meaningful and fulfilling!



From the brink of destruction

▶ What does God say He will do to those who spoil and destroy the planet?

"The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should *destroy those who destroy the earth"* (Revelation 11:18, emphasis added throughout).

Human beings have been selfishly abusing the water, soil, plants, animals and air around them since the beginning. But as our technological prowess has increased, so has our destructiveness. War, deforestation, industrial pollution, wastefulness, greed and shortsightedness are pushing our planet toward the edge, and God is not happy with humanity for mismanaging the planet He has entrusted to us.

▶ How does God personify the emotions of His creation?

". . . The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:21-22).

This world was put under man's control (Genesis 1:26), and when humanity chose the way of selfish greed—of sin—the earth also felt the destructive effects.

▶ What has God promised throughout the Bible to stop this cycle of abuse and destruction?

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, *so that times of refreshing may come* from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive *until the times of restoration of all things,* which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).

Conversion of people is a necessary step in freeing our planet from the bondage of humanity's destructive choices. Jesus Christ's return will bring a refreshing change, restoring the beauty and

harmony of God's creation. By choosing to change (repent and be converted), we can begin that process of restoration in our own lives now!

What will the world be like under the Kingdom of God?

▶ How does the Bible describe the world under the benevolent rule of the Kingdom of God?

"For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; *He will make her wilderness like Eden,* and *her desert like the garden of the LORD;* joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody" (Isaiah 51:3).



Instead of expanding deserts, the world will become like the idyllic Garden of Eden God first gave to man.

▶ What will the cities and farms of that future world be like?

"'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them,' says the LORD your God" (Amos 9:13-15).

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets'" (Zechariah 8:4-5).

No longer will war, captivity or disaster cause people to lose the fruits of their efforts. People will work and enjoy the benefits of their labor in a world of perpetual abundance. And cities will be safe for young and old alike.

▶ How does the Bible describe the health of the people during the Kingdom age?

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert" (Isaiah 35:5-6).

The persistent human tragedies that have afflicted all generations will finally be removed! Health and vitality will replace the pain and disabilities that afflict so many throughout their lives and all of us as we age. The quality of life will reach heights not experienced since the Garden of Eden.

▶ Will this utopian condition extend even to the wild animals?

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:6-9).

People will feel safe everywhere, as there will no longer be dangerous jungles or concrete jungles. All of these wonderful conditions are based on the spread of the knowledge of God's way around the world. Acting on this knowledge will be the cause of peace and prosperity then, and it can bring great benefits to our lives now (see 1 Timothy 4:8).

Conversion of people is a necessary step in freeing the earth from the bondage of humanity's destructive choices. Jesus Christ's return will bring a refreshing change, restoring the beauty and harmony of God's creation.

Apply what you've learned now

Jesus Christ's return and the Kingdom of God are the only real hope for the future. But these wonderful promises from God are not just about the future. They should transform our lives now. Matthew 6:33 is a pivotal scripture many Christians have committed to memory. Read and deeply consider this verse and the priorities and direction it gives to your life today.

For example, how does it affect what you pray most about? (See Matthew 6:10.) How does it affect your entertainment, spending and giving choices? (See Matthew 6:19-24.) How can this approach decrease your worry? (See Matthew 6:25-34.)

Write down two things you will do starting today to put higher priority on preparing for the Kingdom of God and living by the laws of that Kingdom (His righteousness, defined by His commandments—Psalm 119:172; Exodus 20:1-17).



Also, to better understand this coming Kingdom, be sure to read our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom.* You can download or request your free copy today! ***GN***

Photos, from left: Wikimedia, Digital Stock

Letters From Our Readers

"Where Does America Go From Here?"

Thank you for the article "Where Does America Go From Here?" As a nation we shrink from facing the symptoms of our national decline and instead trust in secular pragmatism, rather than turning to God.

We exalt immoral behavior, failing to see the inevitable consequences of breaking laws and traditions that our pioneering forebears once honored. Today our country doesn't even adhere to the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, much less the Bible. As a true patriot and a former student of a state university, I deplore what's happening to America.

S.J., Austin, Texas

"What's Behind the Gay Agenda?"

I don't claim to fully understand the "gay agenda," but there certainly does seem to be an agenda to debase the value of the family. Not only is the divine institution of marriage as defined in Genesis 2:23-24 being increasingly attacked and undermined, but so too is the very concept of family.

Family is what God is all about, and to dig away at this most basic building block of society is camouflaging the true gospel, hiding the true destiny of mankind [to be part of the family of God] from our eyes. Surely the one most delighted with recent attempts to redefine marriage, especially in Britain and America, is Satan the devil.

B.F., Cheshire, England

I feel deep anguish whenever I reflect on the attack on marriage, the first institution God Himself established. Your magazine is a big consolation. Unfortunately this trend cannot be reversed until Christ's return. And many will have suffered irreparably. How I wish Christians would pray for the rescue of some, so that they would change from the aberrant path they're treading. God bless you all at *The Good News* magazine.

I.B.O., Nigeria

"The Human Side of Homosexuality" and "No Room in the Inn"

I just finished the November-December issue of *The Good News*, with its terrific and enlightening articles. It's really easy to judge the gay population adversely. Thanks for "The Human Side of Homosexuality: From One Who Has Struggled" for those folks who really care about God and want to please Him. The article "Was There Really 'No Room in the Inn'?" was really interesting and brand-new information to me. For future reference, I did a lot of underlining on that one. Please accept the enclosed donation.

S.H., Prescott, Arizona

Beyond Today TV program

Thank you so much for your TV program *Beyond Today*. I have been watching it for only a short while, but I got quite a shock when I heard you were talking about the seventh-day Sabbath. I did not know of any church that kept it. You see, I have been a Sabbath-keeper for a long time and most churches worship on Sunday. My friends and I have been studying with another group and do not feel they are teaching the whole truth. You can understand why I was so happy to hear you teaching about the Sabbath and the commandments.

Reader from Queensland, Australia

Our readers may wish to request the free booklets Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest *and* The Church Jesus Built.

The Good News magazine

Thank you for the interest that your Church has shown by reminding me not once but twice to renew my subscription to *The Good News* magazine. I want to say thank you and may God continue to bless your organization, Church and staff for making this magazine available, especially for me without any charge. Your teachings have given me so much knowledge about Christian living, particularly when compared to what we hear from other organizations. I would like to receive your 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*.

B.R., Trinidad & Tobago

The free Bible Study Course *and all of our other publications are generously underwritten by the members of the United Church of God and our coworkers and donors. We are very grateful for their tithes and voluntary offerings. We have enrolled you in the Bible course.*

I have no idea who submitted my name for a subscription to your *Good News* magazine, but they have indeed done me one of the largest favors of my life. Your magazine has been a wonderful influence and has taught me so many wonders about biblical prophecies that I did not know. I was brought up in a Christian family, but never studied the Bible as it should be studied. Your magazine is indeed a God-given gift to the whole world.

D.R., San Antonio, Texas

I am 48 years of age and had no religion and no denomination. I do not know how I started receiving your *Good News* magazine, but it has been the best thing that has come into my life. In 1999 divorce ended my 16-year marriage. I am still single, but since receiving your magazine I am no longer alone. I have placed God my Creator more into my life. It takes me an entire month to read through your magazine, front to back. But a new one does arrive. God has become much more real.

T.D.C., Hardin, Illinois

I am writing to convey my heartfelt gratefulness for reading the current happenings that are shaping our world in this end time. Many thanks to *The Good News* magazine writers and editors for a wonderful job in reporting and enlightening us about the events that are happening and unfolding that fulfill Bible prophecy.

A.K., Papua, New Guinea

I am at this moment an inmate of Her Majesty's prison. The purpose of my letter is that I would very much like to receive a subscription to *The Good News*. I have been reading it every time I can borrow one from another inmate and have found the topics very interesting, especially the prophetic areas. I am beginning to realize how serious the times we are living in are becoming.

A.H., Barbados, West Indies

I am writing to tell you how much I appreciate *The Good News* that you send to me. I treasure it so much that I go back to old editions and read them all over again. They all bring me understanding and happiness. God bless your organization.

Reader from New South Wales, Australia

Thank you for sending me the booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Thank you also for including *The Good News* magazine, which may help me find answers to my questions about the Holy Bible and the real meaning of the Scriptures. I have started to read it, and as I go along, I find it more interesting and educational. If it is not too much to ask, please send me a free copy of *What Happens After Death?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

F.M., Ontario, Canada

It's not too much to ask. Our office in Toronto was very happy to mail these two and other free booklets to you.

Visit *The Good News* on Facebook

Are you on Facebook? If so, visit our *Good News* magazine page. See what other readers are saying. Find links to interesting articles and Web commentaries. Become a *Good News* magazine Facebook fan!

I really enjoy *The Good News* magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

- K.T., Good News *magazine Facebook fan*



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Questions & Answers

Q: Some suggest that the apostle Paul claimed that the weekly Sabbath and biblical Holy Days had been abolished. However, if Christmas and Easter weren't introduced until several centuries after his death, what Holy Days did Paul observe?

S.H., Cheshire

A: Before his conversion, Paul had been a strict adherent of the Jewish sect of the Pharisees (Acts 22:3). Following the dramatic events on the road to Damascus, Paul became a true Christian. Contrary to what many have believed, he continued to observe the biblical festival days the Jewish people observed.

Some of Paul's contemporaries accused him of teaching fellow Jews to "forsake Moses" (Acts 21:20-21). Paul repeatedly refuted this contention (Acts 24:14; 28:17). Perhaps his commitment toward the biblical festivals could best be summed up by Acts 18:21: *"I must by all means keep this coming feast* in Jerusalem" (emphasis added throughout).

In addition, Acts 20:16 mentions Paul's determination to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost. He had intended to be there for the biblical Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, but circumstances required him to observe them en route in the Greek city of Philippi (verses 1-6)—leaving him even more determined to be in Jerusalem for the next festival.

Paul wrote his epistle 1 Corinthians to the predominately gentile church congregation in the Greek city of Corinth during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Many scholars acknowledge this timing based on the letter's internal evidence, especially chapter 5, where Paul uses the analogy of leaven to make important spiritual points about sin.

Analogies and metaphors are effective only if the audience is familiar with the illustration. Paul's mention of leaven without explanation clearly implies the congregation understood the process of putting out leavening during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, an annual biblical festival.

In their classic work *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul,* W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson conclude: "There seems no difficulty in supposing that the Gentile Christians joined with the Jewish Christians in celebrating the Paschal [Passover] feast after the Jewish manner, at least to the extent of abstaining from leaven at the love feasts. And *we see that Paul still observed the 'days of unleavened bread' at this period of his life"* (1974, p. 390).

Paul also gives a command regarding the mindset we should have in observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread: "Let us 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). The construction of the Greek verb translated "let us keep the feast" is used "to urge someone to unite with the speaker in a course of action upon which he has already decided" (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics,* 1997, p. 464).

What about the other festivals listed in Leviticus 23? Did Paul observe only those mentioned in the New Testament? A similar line of reasoning asserts that only those Old Testament commandments repeated in the New Testament are still valid. This careless assumption is based on an argument from silence. Do widely known and practiced truths need to be repeated?

The Hebrew scholar David Stern asserts that in most cases "the New Testament does not repeat truths already evident from the Tanakh [Old Testament]; it assumes them. Sha'ul [Paul] assumed them, too" (*Jewish New Testament Commentary,* 1992, p. 303). In Colossians 2:16-17 Paul upholds the biblical festivals as "a shadow of things to come." In Galatians 4:10 he condemns pagan, astrological superstitions, which are also condemned in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 18:10-14).

The evidence of the scriptural record leaves two basic questions for those who consider the Bible's Holy Days obsolete: 1) Why would Paul teach against observing the festivals God gave in the Old Testament when he himself devotedly kept them? 2) Where does the Bible tell us to discard them?

Today people seldom question how biblical injunctions have been replaced with customs from other religions. Long ago, God inspired Moses to command the nation of Israel not to adopt the religious customs of other nations in their worship of God (Deuteronomy 12:29-32). Jesus similarly warned that it's possible to worship God in vain by following humanly devised traditions (Matthew 15:9). The clear record of Scripture is that Paul and the apostolic Church continued to observe the festivals of the Bible.

For more information, please download or request our free booklets *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* and *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

We realize that payment is unnecessary for receipt of your magazine. Nevertheless, we feel that it wouldn't hurt to contribute something for the cost of postage. We have enclosed our check in gratitude.

R.B., Camas, Washington

Discarding pagan holidays and embracing God's Holy Days

After studying and praying about Christmas and Easter for the past two years, I have come to the conclusion that I have been participating in a non-biblical tradition. I no longer will participate, and I mailed a letter to each of my family members, including a copy of the article at www.ucg.org "The Top 10 Reasons Why I Don't Celebrate Christmas." I feel this article explains my decision perfectly. As expected, most of them don't agree with me, but they will honor my beliefs.

T.D., Cincinnati, Ohio

I am trying to honor the Bible's seven annual festivals, but I have met with resistance. There are no gatherings here to honor these days, and when I try to explain about Christmas and the other so-called holidays, people shy away from me. I really feel like a pilgrim and a stranger. What can I do and where can I go? I'm not discouraged because I know what I am doing is right.

R.L., Internet

It's not surprising that others resist your efforts to honor the seven annual festivals of God. The apostle Peter wrote about the sufferings of Christ and the fact that Christians share in His sufferings by enduring persecutions (1 Peter 4:4). He went on to reassure Christians that things will work out for our good as God's Holy Spirit leads in our lives (verses 12-14; compare Romans 8:28).

Thankfully, there are gatherings of Christians who do observe God's annual Holy Days and festivals in many locations around the world. Through the United Church of God website www.ucg.org/churches, you can find the contact information for the congregation nearest you.

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to *The Good News,* P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or e-mail **gninfo@ucg.org** (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).

Take Care of Yourself Emotionally

People concerned about their health start exercise programs. But they should also think about improving their emotional health.

by Scott Hoefker

Emotionally healthy people are in control of their emotions and their behavior. They're able to more readily handle the challenges of life. They tend to build stronger relationships and more easily recover from setbacks.

Over the years many young adults have conveyed to me that beauty and health are important—but that they wish to be emotionally stable and happy *even more* than being physically fit.

We know the effort required to build and maintain physical health. Mental and emotional health requires the same or more. Improving your emotional health is rewarding, benefits all aspects of your life, boosts your mood, builds resilience and improves your enjoyment of the life God has given you.

What is mental or emotional health?

Mental or emotional health refers to one's overall psychological well-being. It includes the way you feel about yourself, quality of your relationships, and your ability to manage your feelings and deal with difficulties that arise.

Good emotional health isn't just the *absence* of mental health problems. It's much more than being free of depression, anxiety or other psychological issues.

Mental and emotional health refers to *the presence of positive characteristics.*

Here's how God describes it: *"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones"* (Proverbs 17:22, English Standard Version, emphasis added throughout).

The Bible also emphasizes the need for positive focus: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—*think about such things"* (Philippians 4:8, New International Version).

Similarly, merely not "feeling bad" is *not the same* as feeling good. While some people may not suffer from negative feelings, they still need to do things that make them feel positive to achieve emotional health.

The teenage and young adult years progressing through puberty while dealing with social and peer pressures tend to affect

Emotional-Physical Health Connection

Taking care of your body is an important step towards mental and emotional health. God created links between the human body and mind.

When your physical health improves, you'll experience greater mental and emotional well-being. Research has proven that exercise not only strengthens our heart and lungs, but also releases endorphins, powerful chemicals that energize us and affect our emotional and mental health in good ways.

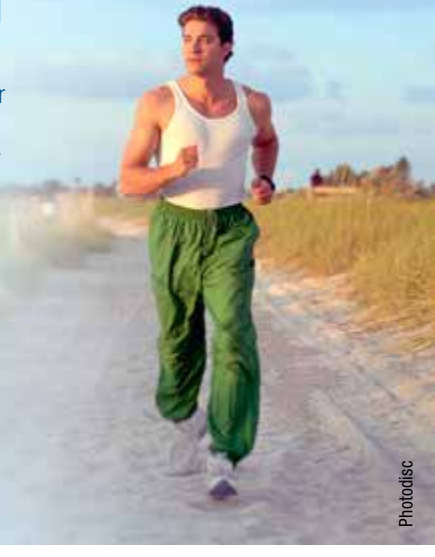
Get enough rest. Most people need seven to eight hours of sleep each night to function optimally.

Exercise to relieve stress and lift your mood. Exercise is a powerful antidote to stress, anxiety and depression. Taking the stairs instead of the elevator or going on a short walk daily can help. Try for 30 minutes or more of exercise per day. The results will be noticeable!

Learn about good nutrition and practice it. The more you learn about what you eat and how it affects your energy and mood, the better you'll feel.

Get a dose of sunlight every day. God created sunlight in part to lift our mood. Try to get at least 10 minutes of sunshine per day. This can be done while exercising, gardening or in a social setting.

Avoid cigarettes and other drugs. These stimulants unnaturally make you feel good in the short term but have long-term negative consequences for mood and emotional health. Consider what God's Word makes clear: "Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, New Living Translation).



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emotional health. The results are sometimes devastating, and a few seem to never recover, carrying emotional scars with them for the remainder of their lives.

God never intended us to stay emotionally ill, or to suffer continuously. In fact, one of Christ's apostles put it this way: "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 1:2, New International Version). Let's look at how we can take care of ourselves emotionally and mentally.

Positive characteristics

Mentally and emotionally healthy people develop *positive* characteristics:

- A sense of contentment.
- A balance between work and play, rest and activity.
- An ability to deal well with stress and bounce back from adversity.
- A zest for life—laughing often and having fun.
- Flexibility to learn new things and adapt quickly to change.
- A sense of meaning and purpose in activities and relationships.
- An ability to build and maintain fulfilling relationships with others.

These factors allow you to fully participate in life through productive, meaningful activities and solid relationships. They also help you cope when faced with life's challenges and stresses.

Being emotionally and mentally healthy doesn't mean you never go through difficult times or experience emotional challenges. We all have disappointments, loss and change. While these are normal parts of life, they can still cause sadness, anxiety and stress.

Many men and women in the Bible faced mental and emotional challenges (we aren't the only ones!), and we can draw strength from their examples.

Resilience

Emotionally healthy people bounce back from adversity and stress—that's called *resilience*. Such people cope with difficult situations and maintain a positive outlook. They remain focused, flexible and creative during good times and difficult times.

Throughout His ministry Jesus Christ dealt with many kinds of adversity and stress, yet He was able to maintain a positive outlook. That's the ideal mindset, so "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). This will give us resilience.

One of the key resilience factors is effectively balancing stress and emotions. The capacity to recognize your emotions and express them appropriately helps you avoid getting stuck in anxiety, depression or other negative moods.

Boost your resilience by turning for encouragement and support in tough times to a strong network of trusted people—family and church members, friends, and your pastor.

How do you feel?

Strengthening your mental and emotional health also requires paying attention to your own needs and feelings. *Don't let stress and negative emotions build up.* Try to maintain a balance between daily responsibilities and the things you enjoy.

Pursue activities that naturally release endorphins and contribute to feeling good. Endorphins are released with physical exercise *and* when we do things that positively impact others. Serving others and focusing on helping others will help us too.

Take an education class, visit a museum, learn a new language, or simply travel somewhere new. Learn and discover new things. Think of it as an "intellectual treat."

At my home here in North Carolina I enjoy the beauty of nature. I've found that simply walking through my forest garden has lowered my blood pressure and helped reduce stress. The same goes for taking a walk through a park or art gallery, hiking, just sitting on a bench or relaxing at the beach.

Know yourself

Because we're all different, not everything will be equally beneficial to all people. Some feel better relaxing and slowing down, while others need more activity, excitement and mental stimulation to feel better. Find activities that you enjoy and that give you a boost.

Whatever internal or external factors have shaped your mental and emotional health, it's never too late to make changes that will improve your psychological well-being. Counter your risk factors with protective factors like strong relationships with God and your family and friends, a healthy lifestyle, and coping strategies for managing stress and negative emotions.

The "wonderful Counselor" Jesus Christ wants you to take care of yourself emotionally and mentally (see Isaiah 9:6-7). The effort will bring you rich rewards! ***GN***



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How Much Do You Know About *the Real Easter Story?*

How much do you know about the origin of Easter and its popular customs? Take the following short quiz to assess your knowledge!

1 ☐ **TRUE** ☐ **FALSE** Easter didn't originate with Jesus Christ's resurrection, but had been celebrated for many centuries prior.

2 ☐ **TRUE** ☐ **FALSE** Rabbits and eggs have nothing to do with Christ's resurrection, but are holdovers from ancient spring fertility celebrations.

3 ☐ **TRUE** ☐ **FALSE** Easter gets its name from an ancient fertility goddess.

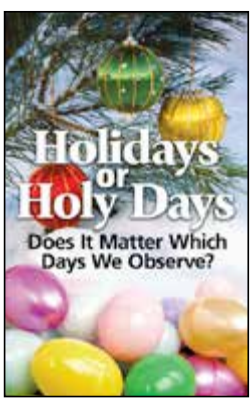
4 ☐ **TRUE** ☐ **FALSE** Pagans celebrated the supposed resurrection of their false gods in the springtime many centuries before Jesus Christ.

5 ☐ **TRUE** ☐ **FALSE** The word *Easter* appears only once in the Bible—and that one time is a mistranslation of the Greek word for *Passover.*

6 ☐ **TRUE** ☐ **FALSE** Neither the apostles nor other members of the early Church celebrated Easter.

7 ☐ **TRUE** ☐ **FALSE** Celebrations such as Easter are condemned in the Bible.





The correct answer to all of the above questions is *true*—and you can verify most of these answers with a quick look through several good encyclopedias. Or, for an in-depth look at the real Easter story as revealed by history and the Bible, request your free copy of our booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

Too many people go through life thinking they are honoring Jesus Christ through popular celebrations such as Easter. But before you celebrate Easter again, why not consider what Jesus Himself thinks about this holiday? As a serious Christian, don't you think it's time you considered His point of view?

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