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verticalthought

a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders



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Resistance Is **Not** Futile!

Watching a movie with friends is a favorite activity for many of us. Whether we go to a theater or watch one on television, it's an easy way to spend time with friends. But behind the scenes, there's an ongoing debate that affects you, me and everyone who listens to or views the various forms of media.

The debate has raged for a long time. On one side, producers of movies, TV shows and music say their products don't cause antisocial behavior such as crime, immorality or disrespect of people and their property. They say their entertainment is harmless, that it just reflects real life.

On the other hand, some media critics argue that the media powerfully affects society—that our minds act like sponges soaking up everything we see and hear with the result that many are led to act out what has come into their minds. Critics also contend that the media doesn't report real life fairly. Moreover, they maintain that media portrayals magnify the level of poor behavior within society and are therefore responsible for encouraging yet more poor behavior.

As a vertical thinker, a person who carefully examines issues in light of God's Word, this debate between media producers and critics isn't a confusing one. Consider the argument that many in the media use in defending sexually immoral scenes and lyrics. They say such things don't influence anyone.

When media producers' worldviews don't include God and His standards of behavior, what kind of influence do you think their movies will have?

Then marketers come along with sexually suggestive ads to sell their products. Advertisers have done their research; they know what kinds of ads cause people to buy and which ones don't. Producers of automobiles, liquor, clothing and gadgets of every type all want us to think that their products are sexy. In the advertising industry, it is a well-known fact that sex sells. And interestingly, it sells movies too! We all know the obvious. What we see and hear *does* influence us!

At the most basic level of this debate, media producers *know* that they have the opportunity to influence people. This is why they often praise one another for making social statements and trying to influence others with their points of view. And when their worldviews don't include God and His standards of behavior, what kind of influence do you think their movies will have? Connect the dots.

God, through the apostle Paul, tells us to bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Controlling each one of our thoughts is a demanding job. As Christians, it is hard to resist pressures to conform to the world—but resist we must. And *resistance is not futile!* Scripture clearly says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

This issue is dedicated to helping you master the wrong influences that come through the medium of movies. It is dedicated to helping you find what is "acceptable" to God and what His "will" is regarding our movie viewing. It explains how to extract values from movies and provides some insight regarding religious movies.

Make yourself some popcorn. Get a refreshing drink. Turn up the light so you can see. Sit back. And read this issue for some vertical thinking about movies.

David Treybig, Managing editor

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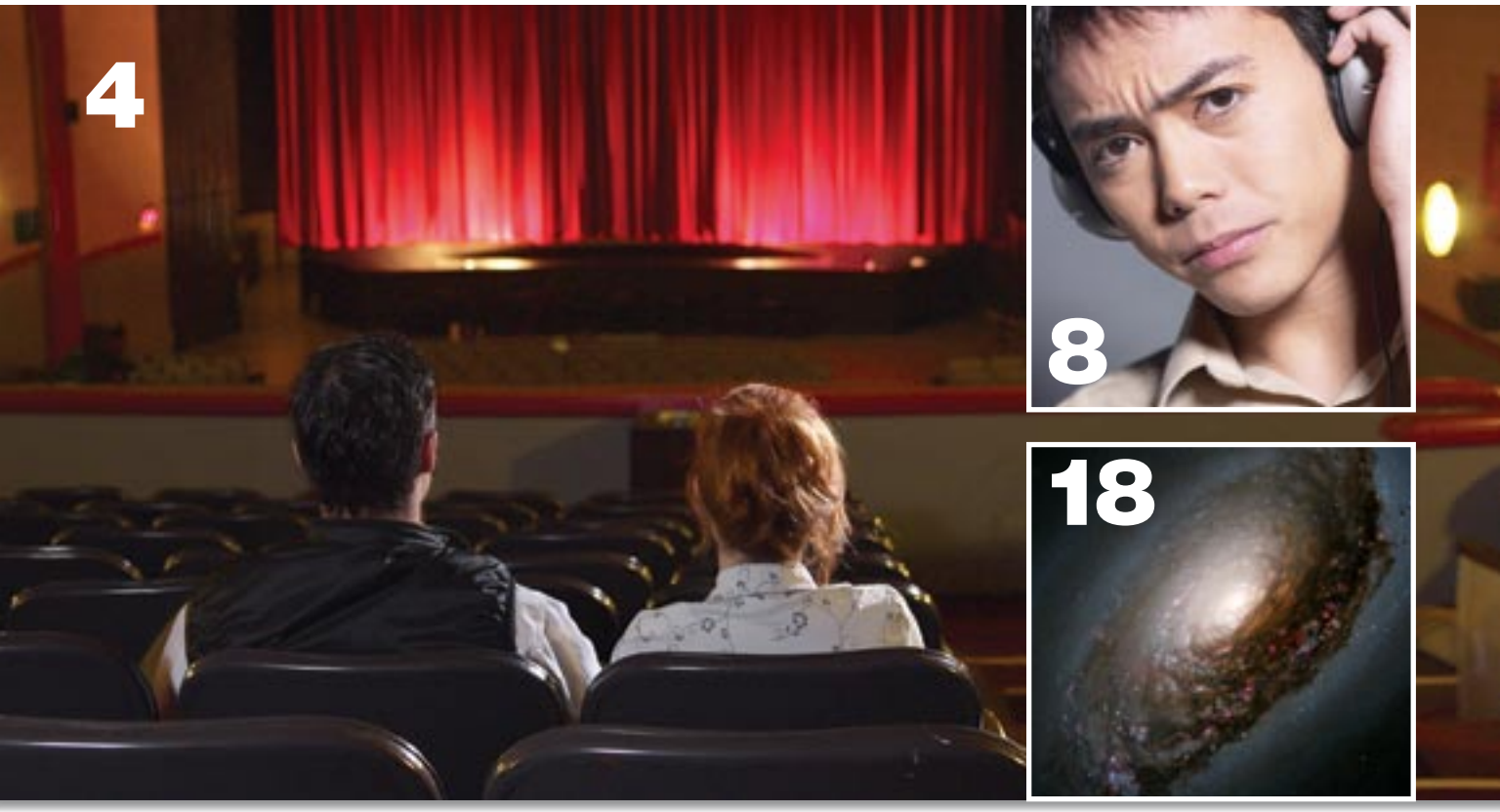

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Photos/illustrations: Getty, Photos.com, NASA Cover: illustration by Dan Dowd/Getty/Digital Vision

How Movies Move Us

Almost everyone enjoys seeing a movie on occasion. But how does it affect you? More importantly, how do you decide which ones to see?

by Gary Petty

The release of *Cinderella Man* in mid-2005 was a box office disappointment despite featuring big-name stars Russell Crowe and Renee Zellweger. The true story about Depression era boxer Jim Braddock's fight to keep his family together through difficult times failed to capture the public's imagination and received mixed reviews.

A few months later, *Brokeback Mountain*, starring Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal as cowboys involved in a homosexual affair, earned three Golden Globe awards, including best drama, and eight Oscar nominations amid much critical acclaim.

The cinematography of *Brokeback Mountain* features beautiful scenes of the American West while *Cinderella Man* captures the mean city streets of the 1930s. Both films deal with deeply felt emotions and the human need for love. Yet comparing the subject matter of these films encapsulates the difficulties Christians face as moviegoers.

Movies can have a positive effect on viewers. Or they can reflect values that are harmful to a person's thoughts and emotions.

An alternative reality

Movies create an alternative reality in the minds of the viewers. Most of us have been emotionally stirred by a movie that made us angry, sad or happy. You can probably name a film hero or heroine that inspires you. Research shows that exposure to cinema's graphic violence and sex can have a profound effect on a person's thoughts, emotions and actions.

What is a movie? It is a collection of images reflecting scripted actors pretending to be someone else. Sigourney Weaver hasn't really killed alien monsters, although she has pretended to do it in several movies. Anakin really didn't become Darth Vader. There really isn't someone named Napoleon Dynamite, and when a person wears a *Vote for Pedro* T-shirt, most of us know that there really isn't a Pedro to get elected.

A film made a number of years ago attempted to show how television affects people's perception of reality. In *Wag the Dog* (1998), filmmakers created a battle scene on a set with actors and released it as news from a third-world country. The story line is that the fake news story affects world politics. Talk about alternative reality. This was a movie with a group of actors pretending to be filmmakers, who were pretending to report news to affect society, who were actually making a movie designed to affect society.

Not all fantasy is bad—human beings are designed to be creative. But we live in a world of alternative reality overload. Movies can warp time and space so that medieval peasants sing rock music as in the 2001 *A Knight's Tale* or so viewers can "visit" the fictional Middle Earth in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003).



Photos: Photos.com

Movies can have a positive effect on moviegoers. Or they can reflect values that are harmful to a person's thoughts and emotions. If this sounds overreactive, just think of a movie scene you found disturbing, frightful or immoral that haunts your memory. Getting those powerful images out of your head is a whole lot harder than the passive watching that puts them there.

Pointers for selecting movies

1. Select movies carefully.

It is easy to get movie information and reviews in a newspaper

Editor's note: References to movies in this article are not endorsements by the author or *Vertical Thought.*

or on the Internet. Two good Internet resources are www.movieguide.org and www.pluggedinonline.com, which evaluate movies from a moral perspective. DVD rentals make it easy to turn a movie off if it becomes objectionable.

2. Does the movie reflect biblical values?

Sometimes a movie is a springboard for discussions with friends and family about moral issues. For two generations the good-versus-evil theme in the *Star Wars* movies has launched discussions on morality. It is also important to realize that many of the themes in *Star Wars* reflect the values of the moviemaker, not biblical teachings. The criterion for measuring any value is the Bible.

Does the movie reflect the reality of good and evil? Does evil result in bad consequences? Is evil glorified? A dilemma of the slick, star-studded *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) and *Ocean's Twelve* (2004) movies is that professional thieves are portrayed as the "good guys." These are feel-good buddy movies with cool characters, but you have to ask yourself, should Christians emulate these characters?

Be careful not to get so caught up in the story that biblically

How to Choose a Good Movie

by Amanda Stiver

Have you ever been confused by a large array of movies about which you know nothing? How do you decide?

With 6-inch letters screaming the title and an impressive cast list, the larger-than-life movie poster beckons passersby into the theater at the local mall. One of your



friends turns to you and asks if you've seen the big summer blockbuster.

"No, not yet," you reply. "Well, we've got time to kill," your friend announces to the group. "Let's go see it!"

The decision seems harmless enough. Everyone saunters up to the ticket window, then shuffles into the theater. A hush falls over the crowd as the previews begin. You may not realize it, but what you're about to see may affect you long after you leave the theater.

When we watch a movie, our brains participate in what we are seeing. The movie draws an emotional response from us and prompts both thoughts and feelings. Knowing this, we must heed God's command to guard our minds by making informed choices before we buy a ticket or pick up a DVD. This doesn't mean we are limited to reruns of *The Ten Commandments* for the rest of our lives, but it does mean we need to put some thought and analysis into our decisions.

Read before you watch

If we plan ahead, we can start our analysis before we get to the theater or go to a video/DVD rental store.

- The Internet has a number of sites such as the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) that provide basic plot information about virtually every movie ever made, as well as links to the official Web sites for newer movies. While these sites are made to promote the film, they often contain extra, behind-the-scenes information that gives us more insight into the movie's message.
- Web sites such as PluggedInOnline.com, ScreenIt.com, MovieGuide.org and ChristianityToday.com/movies post reviews that may be helpful. Check the reviewer's values or biases, using the review site or other searches. If their values are similar to God's, then their reviews are likely to be good barometers for good, clean entertainment.
- Finally, check the movie's rating (G, PG, PG-13, etc.). The Classification and Ratings Administration (www.filmratings.com), which was founded in 1968, rates movies for violence, sexual content and profanity. While their standards have slid over the years, their ratings are a good way of determining the film's target audience.

On-the-spot decision making

If you're already at the theater or the video/DVD rental store, you can still do a simple analysis. Take a look at the promotional poster or DVD case and consider a few points:

- Glance at the graphics. If the images depict *gratuitous* violence or *low moral standards,* there's a good chance the film itself will follow suit.
- Who are the actors, directors and producers? If they have been involved with *morally acceptable movies* in the past, they *might* make similar productions again.
- Read the plot synopsis. *Does the story line glorify the breaking of God's laws?*

The final scene

What is the litmus test for a movie? If Jesus were one of your friends in the opening scenario, would He be willing to watch the movie with you? This question may seem trite; however, it's highly relevant. God sees all, and will one day call us to account for everything we do. While He may not be sitting in the theater with us, He's very aware of what's in our hearts and minds. And He does send His holy angels to accompany us.

So plan ahead, choose wisely, watch carefully and make sure the movie you choose is worthy of the time and space in your mind!

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unacceptable actions and lifestyles become permissible in your mind. The blockbuster *Titanic* (1997) was a moving story of doomed people sailing toward a fateful wreck. It is easy to get caught up in the romance and passion of the young lovers. It is also easy to glorify the story's romantic relationship and forget what the Bible teaches about sex before marriage.

Definitely avoid movies about demon possession and satanic influences or any movie that glorifies evil. How many powerful images of evil do you want stored in your memory and manipulating your emotions? Think about it. Since movies are not real, any emotional response we have is manipulated. So why allow your mind to be manipulated by evil? Furthermore God warns us about having *anything* to do with the dark spirit side. Don't dabble in it and don't watch it!

3. What is the storyteller's agenda?

When watching a movie, ask yourself if the storyteller has an agenda. Is this just a good yarn or is there a particular viewpoint or value system the moviemaker is trying to sell you? *Brokeback Mountain* may make viewers feel sympathetic to the emotional trauma of two homosexuals, but in reality homosexuality is a lifestyle God forbids, and the sex scenes would not be ones you want burned into your memory.

Life involves choices, and all choices involve good and bad consequences. Choose your movies carefully.

4. Is the material age appropriate?

Some movies may contain themes or violence that would be disturbing to younger children but might be appropriate for older teens. *Cinderella Man* (*PG-13*) contains some bad language (including the taking of God's name in vain) and graphic boxing scenes that would be too intense for younger children, but the lessons of character, commitment and love could override these scenes for some older teens.

The 1998 war epic *Saving Private Ryan* was rated *R* for graphic scenes of war violence that smaller children should be protected from seeing. On the other hand, some young adults found the horrors of what the older generation faced in World War II to be sobering.

Of course, many movies made today are not appropriate for *any* age!

5. What emotional effects does the film have on the viewers?

A popular genre is the horror film—cheap to make, showing lots of blood and gore and containing no redeeming value to the viewer. In these slasher movies an evil entity runs rampant killing unsuspecting teens. Exposure to these kinds of images creates an adrenaline rush that some young people want to experience over and over in the belief that it is harmless fantasy. But remember, the brain is experiencing an alternative reality. That's why you feel the fear. The images are being processed, felt and stored as memory.

The same is true of sex scenes. Your brain stores those images and recalls them through association. Repeated sexual images create a false sense of what real sex is like. Some people, especially men, can become addicted to sexual images to the point that they are unable to experience a loving sexual relationship with a real person.

Radio (2003), starring Cuba Gooding Jr., is an example of a movie with positive emotional impact. Based on a true story, it follows the relationship between a coach and a mentally handiicapped man who helps unite an entire community. *Seabiscuit* (2003) is another movie that creates positive emotions based on real-life experiences.

6. Expand your movie experiences.

It's hard to beat the special effects of *Spider-Man* (2002) and *Spider-Man 2* (2004), but the character development of older



movies can be worth the concentration. The plot development of *Casablanca* (1942), the 1959 epic *Ben-Hur* (the chariot race in *Ben-Hur* was done with no computerized special effects) or an Alfred Hitchcock mystery can be rewarding. And don't pass up some great animation that may entertain children but contains adult-level humor like *Toy Story* (1995), *Toy Story 2* (1999), *Shrek* (2001) and *Shrek 2* (2004).

Permanent images

It is important to remember that movie images will be stored in your memory for a lifetime. Many movies contain both good themes and unbiblical themes. Many will contain bad language or scenes that you must recognize as wrong. It is important to analyze those scenes even in good films. There are many movies Christians need to avoid because they are spiritually and emotionally damaging.

Movies are one of the most remarkable expressions of creativity. Things have come a long way from the 1933 *King Kong* to the special effects of the newest version. Movies will always be a powerful force in creating mental and emotional responses to well-crafted (and, many times, not so well-crafted) stories recorded in images and mixed with music.

King David wrote, "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes" (Psalm 101:3). Life involves choices, and all choices involve good and bad consequences. Choose your movies carefully.

Gary Petty is an anchor on the *Beyond Today* television and radio programs. He is also a husband, father and pastor of United Church of God congregations in San Antonio, Austin and Waco, Texas.

Photos.com



Q&A

Q ■ Why do some religious groups teach that dancing is not appropriate for unmarried people? What does the Bible say?

A ■ The Bible doesn't forbid dancing when it's done properly. Psalms 149:3 and 150:4 speak of praising God with dance. Ecclesiastes 3:4 says there is a time to dance, and 2 Samuel 6:14 tells us that King David danced when the ark was being brought into the city.

As for why some teach against dancing, one reason is likely because many people don't dance properly. Some dance provocatively with sensual or sexual innuendos or suggestions by their movements. Some hold their partners too closely or touch in inappropriate places when dancing. These types of dancing have given rise to the description of dancing as "hugging set to music."

Since music and dancing are by nature *emotional* expressions, dancing also has the potential to have sexual overtones that go against God's instructions about purity.

While there is no direct prohibition against dancing, we are told to live our lives in purity, moderation and as examples to others (1 Timothy 4:12; Matthew 5:14-16). This means that if we choose to dance, we should conduct ourselves in accordance with these instructions.

Q ■ Why do we say "amen" at the end of a prayer?

A ■ Our word *amen* comes from a Hebrew word that has a similar pronunciation. *Strong's Concordance* defines the word as "verily, truly, amen, or so be it." Saying "amen" at the end of a prayer states our affirmation that what was just said is true and that we are in agreement with the prayer.

In addition, the Bible uses the word *Amen* as one of the names of Jesus Christ. In Revelation 3:14, the message to the church in Laodicea calls Jesus the "Amen." Its use here connects His name with truth and emphasizes that what is said in this message is true.

Jesus gave His disciples a model for prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. In this sample prayer, Jesus set the example of ending it with "amen." Since Christians are instructed to follow the example and steps of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21), we close our prayers with "amen" just as He did.

Q ■ Is it a sin to assist someone who is in severe pain to die?

A ■ The term for assisting someone to die is *euthanasia,* from the Greek for "good death," referring to methods of bringing about painless deaths. Doctors have been in the news for assisting those who are elderly and/or suffering to end their lives. From time to time we hear of lawmakers debating whether to legalize euthanasia. It is already legal in Holland and the U.S. state of Oregon.

The Sixth Commandment plainly states, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Human beings like to play mental games that reason around what God clearly and plainly states (see Proverbs 16:25). God, as the Giver of life, is the only one who can legitimately take it away—or direct someone else to do so. Murder is taking this divine prerogative to oneself—killing without God's permission. That includes the so-called mercy killing of someone who is suffering. Indeed, suicide is wrong for the same reason.

The Bible upholds the sanctity of human life. Life is to be highly respected! Life is precious!

There are many times when God allows a person to suffer before dying. Suffering can teach us many lessons. But there is no scripture that allows us to reason that it might be okay to painlessly take someone's life because he or she is suffering. The same goes for taking our own lives.

For more on what God's law says about murder and to help put present sufferings in perspective, send for or download our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org



Down! Down with the media gods! Down with the purveyors of profit at the expense of the spirit! Down with the entertainers and gamers of destruction. Down with the raucous, mesmerizing music of malevolence and its flashing scenes of immorality! Down with the moguls and idols of mass media and their corrupted ethic of insidious influence on God's children!

Up with the family and with young minds made aware of the mass media's crafty techniques to torque and twist their emotions and the truth! Up with the power of the "off" button on the remote! Up with young adults who have the self-discipline and the divine insight to choose the right kind of entertainment, music and news reporting in the mass media!

Dethroning the Media Gods

Consider how the mass media conditions your mind—and what you can do about it.

by Randy Stiver

Not long ago I found myself as an academically active dad addressing a senate committee on media literacy from the citizen legislature of the U.S. state of Oregon. A consortium of educators and parents sought to have the state board of education launch a program to educate young students about how television, music videos, computer games and movies inordinately influence and condition young minds.

Yes, my friends, it's time to debunk the "media gods" and understand how the mass media condition our minds to accept their wrong worldview and to act on their social and commercial messages. But please understand, not all of mass media is bad—just most of it.



The *mass* of media

That mass media is a massive part of your life in this era of "screenagers" has become all too clear in recent years. Before the average child reaches first grade in America, he or she will have watched more hours of television than a university student sits in class to graduate with a four-year bachelor's degree. Just to graduate from secondary or high school you will spend about 12,000 hours in class, but your unwary classmates will spend *twice* that many hours in the mental embrace of various forms of mass media.

There is also the "mess" of media. The average 18-year-old in the United States has witnessed on television 200,000 acts of violence, with 40,000 of those being murders. Chilling is the stat that in 75 percent of the violent scenes, no immediate punishment is portrayed (National Institute on Media and the Family).

The savvy already know that "because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). And the savvy are right. Study after study has proved that virtual violence (and yes, that definitely includes video game violence, which is not even reflected in the above statistic) triggers aggressive and violent behavior in young people.



Both the American Academy of Pediatrics (aap.org) and the Canadian Pediatric Society (cps.ca) on their Web sites officially cite from their research and other studies grave concerns about the level and intensity of media violence—and sexuality.

Add to the testimony of those auspicious bodies the U.S. research document "Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General" (surgeongeneral.gov/youthviolence), plus numerous university research projects around the world, including the Media Literacy Online Project of the College of Education at the University of Oregon (interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/). Media affects behavior—otherwise why would the networks charge so much for mass media advertising? Think about it.

In the 20 years between 1976 and 1996, during the prime-time family television viewing hour from 8 to 9 p.m. (Eastern Time), the amount of sexual interactions increased a staggering 270 percent. It doesn't take rocket science to realize that the television sex trend has continued to ramp up in the last 10 years.

"Yes," some might say, "but what if it's the healthy sexual parley between a husband and wife?" You're kidding, right? Considering the secular, postmodern worldview of the media movers and shakers of film, television, video gaming and music videos, one of the last things they want to portray is the *right* kind of marital sexual attraction.

Speaking of music videos, everyone knows about the dominating themes of sexual disrespect, abuse and violence toward women and girls that is so graphically depicted in both the lyrics and scenes. Don't think for a minute that it doesn't negatively condition your mind against the marvelous joy God created for marriage alone.

Photos, clockwise from bottom left: iStockphoto: Lisa F. Young, Trent Chambers, Anna Bryukhanova; Photos.com (bottom right and center)

This is your brain

"Our awesomely complex, yet elegantly simple brain is the best organized three pounds of matter in the known universe," declares University of Oregon professor of education Robert Sylwester in his article "The Effects of Electronic Media on a Developing Brain," which is listed on the school's Media Literacy Online Project.

God hardwired our brains with three differently functioning sections commonly known as the forebrain, midbrain and hindbrain (at the back of your head). The forebrain or cortex is where the physical element of analytical thinking, weighing and considering takes place. However, our emotional responses and convictions—accepted or perceived truths—emanate from the midbrain or limbic section of our brains.

We hear, see, touch and otherwise gather information, then think about whether it is true in the cortical forebrain. This section of the brain works more slowly and systematically. When finally we draw a conclusion on a matter, our acceptance of that fact settles into the limbic midbrain, and we believe it at the deep, emotive level. It becomes a "given" when reasoning about a related topic in the future. Thus the midbrain serves as the seat of both emotion and value judgments of what we think is true.



The midbrain section also generates the "fight or flight" survival reactions to danger or fear or the rather explosive emotions of anger, or generally of any intense primal emotions. God made us prepared to get out of the way of something that could hurt us, and to exert great emotional energy to experience and accomplish good things in life. The midbrain fills a very powerful role in molding our thoughts and actions.

This is your brain on mass media

If too much stimulation bombards the logical forebrain, it can in effect overload, and begin to react emotionally with the midbrain. Separate flashing images or pictures accompanied by skull-throbbing bass rhythm and white noise melody can create a sensory overload to the point that the primal emotions activate. Suddenly the heart races and the brain, in lieu of cognitive thinking, begins to accept the message of the music video—violence is good, rebellion is good, disrespect of others is good, sexual immorality is good . . . That's why the heavy beat is mesmerizing.

As Professor Sylwester describes it: "Emotion drives attention, which drives learning, memory, and behavior, so mass media often insert strong primal emotional elements into their programming to increase attention. Since violence and sexuality in media trigger primal emotions, most young people confront thousands of violent acts and heavy doses of sexuality during their childhood media interactions."

Within reason—and with reason—a level of emotional impact in a film or other media is good. When there is too much of it—as in gratuitous, graphic violence or explicit sex scenes—the media experience is manipulating our emotions and minds.



We have two response systems built into our minds. One is a basically slow, analytic, reflective system using the cortical forebrain circuitry, which tends to explore the facts and deliberately respond. The second is a faster, conceptual system that "identifies the fearful and survival elements in a situation and activates automatic response patterns" (ibid.).

The fast system responds to and "focuses on any loud/looming/contrasting/moving/obnoxious/attractive elements that might signal danger, food and/or mates . . . This system thus enhances survival, but its rapid superficial analysis often leads us to respond fearfully, impulsively, and inappropriately to situations that didn't require an immediate response (regrets and apologies usually follow) . . . People often use mass media to exploit this system by stressing elements that trigger irrational fear responses" (ibid.).

How does this mess with your mind? "The fast pacing of TV and video game programming, and their focus on bizarre/violent/sexual elements also trigger this system. If the audience perceives these elements and the resulting visceral responses as the real-world norm, the electronic media must continually escalate the violent/sexual/bizarre behavior to trigger the fast system" (ibid.).

If you make yourself a part of that audience, then your development of rational thought will suffer in your mind, and you will begin to feel at the deep, emotive level that such sinful behavior is not only normal, but acceptable and good.

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

Today's mass media gods mess with our minds if they can, conditioning us to accept their wrong morals and overall skewed worldview. And the true God of the Bible is not pleased.

What can you do?

- Prayerfully commit yourself to God and His Word.
- Analyze the mass media in your life now.
- Reject manipulative, sin-inducing shows, movies, games, music and music videos.
- Seek entertainment that emphasizes honesty, truth, fairness, biblical morality, accurate portrayals and positive hope (Philippians 4:8).



Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Columbus and Cambridge, Ohio.



Are You Dying to Smoke?

What effect does the use of tobacco in movies have on viewers? The answer is . . .

by Ken Treybig

Does life imitate movies or do movies imitate life? Who cares? What impact could the answer to that question possibly have on you and your life? Actually this question has been the source of much discussion in recent years. You may be surprised to find that you are influenced more than you think.

Behind the smoke screen

More than 40 years ago, on Jan. 11, 1964, the surgeon general of the United States first released a report recognizing that smoking was a cause of cancer and other serious diseases. The report stated that smoking was a health hazard serious enough to warrant efforts to get people to stop.

Some progress was made, but the percentages of people smoking began to rise again in the 1990s, particularly among certain ethnic groups. Lawsuits were brought against the tobacco industry by many state governments who claimed, among other things, that tobacco advertising was often misleading.

In November 1998 the tobacco industry settled the lawsuit. The total payout of the settlement by the tobacco industry is expected to total $246 billion (U.S.) over 25 years—and the states promised to use a significant portion of that money to combat the enormous health problems associated with tobacco use.

What does all this have to do with movies? Recent studies have shown a link between movies depicting smoking as a positive, normal and widespread behavior in society and the number of young people who begin smoking. In the last four or five years researchers at Dartmouth Medical School (Hanover, New Hampshire) have done numerous studies on smoking among American young people and movies. Among other facts, their studies have found:

- Among teens who had never smoked, those whose favorite stars smoked in three or more films were 16 times more likely to express positive opinions about smoking than those who chose nonsmoking characters.
- 31 percent of teens who saw more than 150 occurrences of smoking in movies had tried smoking compared to only 4 percent among teens who had seen less than 50 occurrences.

Scene Smoking

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) offers an hour-long video titled *Scene Smoking: Cigarettes, Cinema and the Myth of Cool* in which professionals from the entertainment and health fields discuss how smoking is depicted on-screen.

One of two people especially noted for their contributions is Jack Klugman, movie and television actor who depicted a medical examiner in the 1976 to 1983 TV drama series *Quincy, M.E.* He now has difficulty speaking because part of

iStockphoto/Oscar Mata

his larynx and one vocal cord has been removed due to throat cancer brought on by years of smoking.

The American Lung Association of Sacramento–Emigrant Trails hosts a Web site (www.scenesmoking.org) that focuses on the impact of smoking in movies and offers reviews of recent movies in light of their treatment of tobacco. In January 2006 they ran an article about a study done at the University of California–San Francisco that found:

- Nearly four out of five recent PG-13 movies show someone—usually a major character—smoking cigarettes or cigars or chewing tobacco.
- Only half as many people in the United States smoke today as did in 1950—but that's not true on the silver screen, as incidents of smoking on-screen rose dramatically in the past decade.

To counteract some of these false messages given in movies, *Scene Smoking* offers the following points:

- In the real world, smokers tend to be poor and less educated. In the movies, the powerful and successful are the ones who smoke the most.
- In the real world, smoking kills smokers. More than 440,000 deaths in the United States each year are attributed to tobacco use.
- In the real world, secondhand smoke kills nonsmokers.
- In the real world, tobacco accounts for more suffering and death than homicide, suicide, illegal drugs and AIDS combined.
- In the real world, every day about 2,050 adolescents will start smoking in the United States—more than half of them because of exposure to smoking in movies.

These facts point out that Hollywood's depiction of smoking is not a factual reflection of true life. In other words, *it's a lie.* Those who smoke on screen are most often depicted as "cool" or heroes, in essence urging the viewer to identify with and want to emulate the smoker. Rarely are any of the negatives and dangers of smoking depicted on-screen. This unbalanced and false representation of smoking has been shown to actually increase the amount of smoking among young people, many of whom later want to stop but are unable to because of addiction to nicotine.

Recent studies have shown a link between movies depicting smoking as a positive, normal and widespread behavior in society and the number of young people who begin smoking.

Tapping the senses and emotions

How can movies have such a powerful effect on human behavior? Part of the reason is that this form of media involves not just one, but two of the senses—sight as well as hearing. In addition, it includes the emotional impact of the background music, which is very carefully selected or created. All these factors help "set the mood" to convey whatever message the writer and director want to portray. Decieving, causing others to believe something to be true when it is actually false, becomes much easier when a form of media can tap into both the senses and emotions.

Some movie directors may argue that they're only using "artistic expression" by using cigarette smoking to depict nervousness, anxiety, celebration, rebellion or some other characteristic, and they say they have a right to free speech. However, the same characteristics can be depicted in other ways, without injecting a subtle lie into the minds of viewers.

Truth and honesty have always been described as important to God. In Isaiah 5:18 God inspired the prophet to describe the nation as dragging a huge wagonload of sin, pulled along by cords of deceit. The picture is that deceit is a great enabler of sin.

Two verses later he says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness." The verse between these two presents people skeptically taunting God to show Himself. It is an easy step from skepticism about God to abandoning values, since God is the source of all true values.

It is also a sad fact that human beings are encouraged to do evil when they feel others are also doing it. In other words, bad habits rub off on us. The apostle Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals'" (Revised Standard Version).

There is some evidence that this was quoted from current Greek literature of the first century, but its roots go back hundreds of years earlier to Proverbs 13:20, which says, "Be with wise men and become wise. Be with evil men and become evil" (Living Bible).

Many have written about Hollywood having an agenda in trying to shape culture. Is it a coincidence that the movie receiving the most nominations for Academy Awards this year is about homosexuality? The Associated Press quoted Heath Ledger, best actor nominee in the gay romance *Brokeback Mountain* as saying, "But if it does alter people's hearts, if perceptions can be altered, that's a good thing."

Not all films try to change your view of reality. But the research by Dartmouth University in the last few years about the false portrayal of smoking in a large number of movies may well be the "smoking gun" evidence that Hollywood often does attempt to change its viewers' ideas and even moral perceptions.

Look through the smokescreen of emotion, glamour and hype to be on guard against any attempts to sway you from your vertical connection to God and right values.

Ken Treybig is the director of United Youth Camp Carter and pastor of United Church of God congregations in East Texas.

A Thousand Words Are Worth a Picture

Religious movies have entertained millions over the years. But in the end, are they of value? Is the Book better than the movie?

by Doug Horchak

Some of you may be saying, *"Hey! You've mixed up the words in the title! It's supposed to be, 'A picture is worth a thousand words.'"* But it's turned around on purpose. I'll explain later.

Millions of kids and adults in the Western world often rely on "pictures" (movies, videos and images) to learn things—and to be entertained in the process! Often this is done through TV or the movies—even biblical or religious movies.

Many of you have heard of and watched the movie *The Ten Commandments.* This 1956 epic film has turned into a classic as far as religious movies go—one that religious and biblical movies have been judged by ever since. I remember seeing the movie for the first time when I was barely 5 years old, and the images of the parting of the Red Sea and God speaking to Moses on Mt. Sinai are still indelibly etched into my mind after all these years!

But at age 5 my interest in biblical scholarship and studying the Word of God was *nonexistent!* The movie was great entertainment, but I really had no idea how accurate it was.

However, since that time I have come to understand that while there were some elements of the Cecil B. DeMille movie that were consistent with the Bible (and some powerful images of the miracles of God in the life of Moses and children of Israel), it was simply not very accurate when compared to "the book"—in this case, the Bible.

In the years that followed, other religious movies have come and gone, including *Ben-Hur* (1959), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) and *The Bible . . . In the Beginning* (1966), to mention just a few.

There have also been controversial biblical movies such as Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2003). These movies attempted to capture the producer's view of the life or death of Jesus—each claiming to depict the possible reality of both Jesus' temptations and His suffering.

In the end, the Scorsese film mixed the author's blasphemous depiction of lustful thoughts of the Messiah with the biblical account of His ministry, while Gibson's used text and images that were in many cases more reflective of Catholic tradition and thought than the actual words of the Gospel accounts about Christ's crucifixion.

What value are religious movies?

But in the end, what value are such movies anyway? While some of them claim to depict the stories of the Bible with presumed accuracy, others have simply used the theme of the Bible and its message to sell or market their own "story." In the moviemaking business, it's all about entertainment, "selling" the product and making money!

In his recent book *The Vanishing Word,* Arthur Hunt shows us that through history, the pagan cultures were the ones that were far less literate and far more dedicated to pictures (or "the image") to depict their gods and spread their influence. Thus, most of the ancient cultures of the Middle East (Egypt being a prime example) focused on the statues, carvings and images of their gods rather than the written word to explain their gods and way of life.

Even the ancient Egyptian system of writing (hieroglyphics) is primarily an expression of pictures and images. It seems the Egyptians would have been great moviegoers, but lousy book readers!

Yet God's people, the nation of Israel, received their education of God through the written word. As Mr. Hunt says: "The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking. Iconography (study of images and statues) thus became blasphemy . . ." So, we see that God wanted His power, majesty and plan to be based on the written word more than the image.

Of course, that is not to say that some of the movies with a biblical theme have no redeeming value. That would simply not be true. Indeed, some movies or pictures that illustrate the reality of life in Bible times can be very helpful—adding to the mental picture of what the words in Scripture convey.

However, there is always the danger of being swayed into accepting an actor's portrayal of a biblical character as being truly representative of that person. We must be especially careful that we do not visualize a particular actor in our mind when we meditate on Jesus Christ.

In any event, if you do decide to watch a biblical movie, don't go into it unarmed. Know what the Bible says up front so that you will be able to retain what is useful and discard what is unbiblical.

Have you read the Book?

Indeed, since truth and accuracy are important to you, *know* that God chose to reveal the story of His people and the details of His magnificent plan *in the written Word.*

Therefore, to fully understand the great story of mankind, its Creator tells us to study His Word—to *read the Book!* As Paul told Timothy and us today, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

In writing to his young friend here, Paul was pointing out the great value in *reading* the Bible and *studying* the Scriptures to grasp the greater understanding and meaning of what Paul referred to as "truth." While these early men and women of the Church had no Blockbuster Video store or television to portray God's wonderful works, we can be assured that graphic pictures were indeed painted in their mind's eyes by *reading* the Book!

The Bible is filled with great stories. Any one of them would make a great book or a great movie. And even though "the movie" about all of this is not out yet, the entire *plan of God* (the incredible story of His great purpose for mankind) is laid out for us all to *read* in the pages of the Bible.

The Bible's explanation of what God is doing is an amazing story (see "The Biblical Plan of God"). And it has all the makings for an incredible movie some day—the ultimate action/family/drama/love-story flick! However, we find no such movie at video stores right now.

For now, God has provided the Book (the Bible) and not the movie. In one sense, we're living a very small but vital part of "the movie"—the *live* account of God working out His great purpose on this earth. As such, God encourages us to understand and, through our imagination as guided by His Word, foresee the picture of the great future He has in store for us.

God's great plan is revealed in the Book primarily through His Holy Days. The observance and meaning of these annual Holy Days give His people a regular reminder that this world is not the *real deal!* Instead, we are all being prepared for a future world that will finally realize the perfect form of life, liberty and the pursuit of godly happiness (see our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind).*

The Biblical Plan of God

- In the beginning, God made eternal life available to the first man and woman. However, they refused this incredible opportunity. Ever since, mankind has chosen to go its own way, make its own rules and laws, and to seek its own form of happiness and success. Through approximately 6,000 years of human history, mankind has devised countless religions, hundreds of forms of Christianity and varied theories that attempt to explain the origins of both man and the universe *without* a Creator God. And now, in the 21st century, man is closer to self-destruction than he was at creation. The Bible contains the words that show us something is desperately missing in man's existence.
- Despite man's confusion and destruction, the Bible also reveals that his *ultimate destiny* is incredibly bright! Human beings are destined to have an opportunity to become a part of the very family of God, to be changed from mortal to immortal, to be spirit beings, to travel at the speed of thought, to go where no man has gone before!
- The reality of a different world will begin to happen at the end of this present age, at the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. At that time God will reestablish His literal government on this earth, with Jesus Christ sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem.
- Those who have responded to the opportunity to become converted will have their physical bodies changed into immortal spirit bodies at Christ's return and will assist Him in governing the world (Revelation 5:10).
- Together the divine family will rebuild this world and ultimately the entire universe through education, service and godly leadership (Isaiah 9:7). These events will begin with the 1,000-year (millennial) rule of Jesus Christ, in which all of God's people will serve with Him in establishing God's government on earth to last for all eternity!

The Word over the image

All of God's servants in the past lived and died without seeing any movie. They were thrilled to just *read* the Book. These dedicated servants either read or listened to the words of God telling them the great story of why we exist and where all of this is ultimately headed. Yet, as we see recorded by Paul, they saw a vivid picture of an incredible future—by simply reading the Book.

Hebrews 11:13 says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having *seen* them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

I said at the beginning that I would explain later about the mix-up I made on the famous saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Whether this quote was an old Chinese proverb, the words of Napoléon Bonaparte or from the 20th-century advertiser Fred Barnard is not known (all these are theories of the saying's origins).

However, the principle of this pithy saying *is,* nonetheless, often true. One wonderful picture, composed in a painting or photograph, *can* say so much about the contents of what has been written or said.

But the opposite can also be very true. Many well-stated and crafted words can paint a picture in the mind's eye. A *thousand words can paint a valuable picture*—a very graphic and realistic one. There are many incredible *pictures* awaiting you in the pages of your Bible.

God wants you to engage your brain. He wants you to use your imagination to generate a mental picture of the true history of man, coupled with the reality of our bright future. He isn't offering the movie yet, but He does encourage us to read His Book—*the Bible.*

Doug Horchak, husband, father and director of the Challenger II Canoeing Program on the Buffalo River in northern Arkansas, pastors congregations in Dallas and Sherman, Texas.

Alternative Entertainment 101

So what are you going to do Saturday night? Another DVD? Another movie? Time to think outside the block, buster!

by Mike Bennett

Stuck in an entertainment rut? Maybe all you need is to throw a few alternative ideas around and see what brainstorms result. Here are some suggestions that can add interesting variety to your time with friends.



Unusual activities

These can help break the boredom. Anyone for that classic Chinese game of Mah-Jongg? How about an Italian sing-along followed by hillbilly clogging and Indian curry dishes? Whether you decide to do a fondue party or try a tiddlywinks tournament, be sure to plant your tongue firmly in your cheek and prepare to laugh!

- Build and decorate little pine cars for a derby. (Thanks to the Columbus, Ohio, UCG congregation for this idea.)
- Have a most unusual invention contest—eyeglasses with windshield wipers, cell phones with stun settings (first seen in the cartoon "Crow's Encounters"), etc.
- Create a band with unusual instruments like kazoos, spoons, "kettle" drums, combs, etc.
- Pumped up karaoke: Write a song as a group. Then perform it in various styles—reggae, blues, operatic, etc.
- Coffee house: Write limericks and/or haiku and have a poetry reading accompanied with special coffees Starbucks would drool over.
- Work as a team to write and illustrate a children's book.
- Have a cartoon-drawing contest. If someone laughs, you win!
- Write and create props for a skit for the next variety show.
- Or have a skit showdown.
- Put on your own variety show.
- Fair warning: Create booths that test people's skills at throwing rings around rubber duckies' necks and suchlike things.
- Have a novelty Olympics with crazy races that are fun to do and funny to watch.
- Shakespeare Party: read a scene from one of the Bard's biggest hits, like *Hamlet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Thankfully W.S. can't really roll over in his grave . . .

Nature beckons

Get outside and get your endorphins moving!

- Fly a kite. (But not in several cities in Asia where kite flying is so competitive and dangerous they had to ban it! No need for razor wire or sharp, jagged glass attached to the string!)
- Shoot some hoops (aka basketball) or roll some hoops with a stick like they did in the 1800s.
- Play Frisbee golf, volleyball, softball or tennis.
- Go hiking, running, cycling, swimming, diving, canoeing, kayaking, trampolining, hang gliding and rock climbing. (Not all the same day—it's not the iron man decathlon!)
- Go fishing, bird watching or photographing bits of nature.



Games

- Have everyone bring a favorite board game and write the game names on slips of paper to draw out of a hat. Play the first one you draw.
- Have each person make a new rule about one of the spaces in Monopoly, and see how they alter the game.
- Have a hearts, spoons, crazy eights, poker or cribbage tournament.
- Play Pictionary on a blackboard or large newsprint.
- Have a scavenger hunt.
- How long has it been since you played freeze tag or Red Rover? (Not long enough? Oh, well . . .)

Photos.com



Giving

It's not only more blessed to give than receive (Acts 20:35), it can be more fun!

- Entertain others with a variety show and a bake auction fund-raiser! (Thanks to Ambassador Bible Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, for this terrific idea.)
- Help at a Ronald McDonald House that serves families with a family member in the hospital.
- Visit someone you know in the hospital.
- Visit someone you don't know in a hospital or nursing home (check with the management about who would appreciate visitors).
- Set up a food drive and/or help at a food bank.
- Fast to raise funds for the hungry.
- Kiddie litter: Clean up a children's playground, neighborhood, park or waterway.
- Paint a widow's house (if it needs it and she doesn't mind!).
- Build a house! (Help with Habitat for Humanity or a similar group.)



Friends, family, food, fiesta

These all can lead to fun!

- Have an ice cream social. Maybe make your own ice cream, come up with some interesting toppings and make up names for your final concoctions. I know you can do better than these: A flying bananarama, the final chocolatier or berry interesting.
- Try a progressive dinner. That's where you have appetizers at one place, move to another for a first course of soup or salad, move on for the main dish and finish at yet another place with dessert. (Don't forget to help clean up or you may not be invited back.)
- Put on a medieval feast, complete with costumes, lords, ladies, jesters and food you can eat with your hands. (Thanks to the young people in the United Church of God in Tacoma and Seattle, Washington, for this idea.)
- Fix foods that start with *F.*
- Have a "you can even eat the dishes" evening (everything from tacos to ice cream cones).
- Create a challenge cook off ("bet you can't make . . .").
- Organize an "eat with chopsticks or go hungry" meal.
- Do a dessert contest.
- Have a chili cook off.
- Have a wiener roast and sit around the campfire sharing stories and jokes and what you like best about each other . . .



Inspirational

Sometimes you need ideas for fun but inspiring things to do after church.

- Bible charades may be tried and true, but some skits are so funny you'll laugh till you're blue.
- Bible baseball tests our knowledge of biblical facts. Maybe write some new questions to ask the other team after snacks.
- Have a hymn fest sing-along.
- Have a "topics" session where you take turns answering interesting questions about living the Christian life.
- Be crafty: Help the children at church have fun doing a craft for their mothers or fathers.
- Face the music: Put together a choral group to perform at church.

Jump Start Your Job Search

Need a job? What steps can you take to get one?

By Valerie Waddle

Whether you're looking for a part-time summer job to earn a little spending money or starting your career, some basic principles and tips can help you land the job you really want.

1 The first step to getting a good job is to *pray.* Prayer is a key ingredient to success in any endeavor. Pray about each step in finding a position. God's involvement in your life will make the difference in finding true success. You can ask for guidance and insight into where to direct your work life and ask for help in opening doors to a fulfilling career.

2 After asking for God's help, do your homework. What jobs are available? Are you looking for something that will give you some information about a future career, or just something with good hours, location or pay? If you have the opportunity, work toward your career goals rather than taking any job available.

For example, if you think you may want to be a veterinarian, try the local vets' offices or the Humane Society or working on a local farm caring for livestock. You'll learn something about your career field and understand more about your own interests.

For example, I worked as an intern in a certified public accountant's office during college, didn't like it at all, and realized I didn't want to make that my career. First jobs are all about learning what you enjoy and what you don't.

Once you've selected some positions to apply for, the real challenge begins. First impressions happen only once, and you must be ready. I've known people who went into a workplace just to pick up an application but who were then introduced to the hiring manager, interviewed and hired (or not) before they had time to fill out the application!

3 Be prepared ahead of time and you won't be put on the spot. Research the company and practice common interview questions. Plan some questions to ask your potential employer. Definitely look at the company Web site (if they have one) and see what they emphasize. Employers will be impressed if you've taken time to learn about them.

4 Fill out the application neatly, have your résumé, references, prior work information and a pen with you. When you go to the interview, *be on time!* In fact, 10 minutes early is about perfect.

5 Look the part. Consider the type of position you are applying for before you dress. I've known managers who would never consider hiring someone who came to interview in a suit because they felt the applicant wouldn't fit in the casual work environment. Dress in accordance with the company's dress code.

What do the clothes say about you that the employer is interested in hearing? Modest, attractive, professional type clothes (and hairstyles) say you are ready for work. Dress the same way to get an application as you would for an interview.

6 Show proper confidence. If you don't believe you can do the job, they won't either! Most interviews start with the introductions and handshakes. Practice on some friends who will tell you if your handshake is too firm or too weak. Focus on making natural eye contact. It's not a stare-down contest, but don't be afraid to look up either.

And *smile!* You are bound to be nervous, but focus on communicating and getting to know the company. After all, an interview goes both ways. You have to decide if you want to work for them too.

7 Be your professional self. It's fine to show your personality in your responses, but this is not the time to tell your best jokes or unload your entire family history. Keep your comments pertinent and don't share overly personal information. Be honest, yet tactful, and avoid casual slang terms. Practicing answers to common interview questions ahead of time will help a great deal. The employer wants to get to know you, so don't try to act like someone else. Just act like the professional you.

8 At the close of the interview, request a business card so you can later make a follow-up call and send a thank-you card. End the interview with a smile, a handshake, and ask to be chosen for the position if it's a job you'd like to have.

Additional considerations

The money question. How much will this position pay? It's better not to ask about the pay in a first interview. However, there are times to ask, especially if you get the sense during the interview that the position might pay less than you require. As a potential employee, it is better to wait until you know they really want you before the subject comes up. But if it hasn't been discussed and they offer you the job, don't be afraid to ask. You want to know all of the terms before you accept a position.

The Sabbath question. How and when should you explain that you don't work on the Sabbath? First of all, ask what the work schedule is. If the schedule doesn't conflict with the Sabbath, there is no need to discuss your religious beliefs during the interview. If the schedule might conflict, you need to let the interviewer know that you would not be able to work during the conflicting times and why. Most employers in the United States are sensitive to religious beliefs and will adjust a schedule for a potential employee if the job allows. If they will not work with you, *why* would you want to work for them?

Work will fill more hours of your waking life than most of the rest of your activities combined, so make your job a learning experience you enjoy!

Valerie Waddle formerly worked as a human resources manager for College Pharmacy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Today she lives in Ellenboro, West Virginia, with her husband, United Church of God pastor Tim Waddle, and their two children.

Photos:, from left: Photos.com, iStockphoto/Sharon Dominick

Career Tips

Knowing that many of our readers are trying to decide what careers to embark upon, *Vertical Thought* asked for suggestions from those who have recently found jobs about how they decided on a career or got the job. Here is some information that can be of help when you make these important decisions.



Jennifer Messerly, 25, After-School Program coordinator, Garrett County Health Department, Oakland, Maryland

How summer camp helped me get a job

I have always loved going to summer camp. I began going to church summer camps when I was 6 and rarely missed a summer after that. As soon as I was old enough to begin serving at camp, I jumped at the chance, and I have served at several summer camps over the past 10 years. Little did I know how beneficial this experience would be for me.

Two years ago I interviewed for a job as the coordinator of a middle school after-school program. During the interview I was asked to give an overview of my experience working with youth. I mentioned a few things I had done in the past, but the majority of my experience came from working at United Youth Camps.

I went into detail about the camp program and the service I had done for it. When I was finished answering the questions, I was told that was just the type of experience they were looking for. I have been at the job for the past two years and get to work with youth year-round. I never expected serving at summer camp would lead me to my dream job.



Tony Antonacci, 34, EDS network security engineer

Not working on the Sabbath

In my career I have had to deal with getting off for the Sabbath a lot during the last several years. In addition to bringing this concern to God and asking for His guidance and help, here is another approach that helped me a lot: creating a win-win situation for me and my employer. Creating a win-win situation means finding a solution where your employer benefits in exchange for giving you the Sabbath off.

When I got the job I now have at EDS, I almost was not hired after telling them about the Sabbath. The job I was applying for, a network security/firewall administrator position, occasionally requires employees to work on Saturdays if an emergency pops up. When a company's network is compromised, the company just doesn't want to wait until the Sabbath is over to stop a security breach or an attack on its network.

To convince EDS to hire me, I told them that I would be willing to work on Sundays and that I'd be willing to work on the days that almost everyone else wants off (Christmas, Christmas Eve, Easter, Thanksgiving, etc.), and that I would work as a fill-in or longer hours for people who are on vacation.

By showing a willingness to make sacrifices to make up for getting the Sabbath off, they decided to hire me. I told them that I really wanted the job and that I thought we could come up with a win-win situation if they were willing to work with me. They were so impressed with my persistence and willingness to work at other times that they hired me. Now my not working on the Sabbath is not an irritation because everyone knows that I will work at other times when they don't want to.



Popular Interview Questions to Practice:

Tell me about yourself.

Why should we hire you?

What are your strengths/weaknesses?

Tell me about a problem situation and how you resolved it.

What is your greatest accomplishment?

Why do you want to work for us?

Do you have any questions for us?

Why did you leave your last job?

What are your salary expectations?

How does your experience relate to our position?

Online Help

Great site with quizzes:

• www.quintcareers.com/intvres.html

For the entry-level younger job seeker:

• www.collegegrad.com/intv/
• www.bls.gov/oco/oco20045.htm
• http://about.com/careers/

Use the internal search function for any specific information.

• www.careerjournal.com/jobhunting/interviewing/
• http://interview.monster.com/

Good basic tips:

• www.e-resume.net/resume/tips.html

Sample résumés for students:

• http://jobsearch.about.com/od/teenstudentgrad/a/studentresume.htm



A Long Time From Now In A Galaxy Far, Far Away...

Science fiction movies portray intelligent life already living on other planets and in other galaxies. Could it be true? If not, then why did God create such a vast universe?

by Paul Luecke

Do you recognize the title above? If you've seen any of the *Star Wars* episodes there are scrolling words at the beginning of the movie. But they aren't the same as the words above! The movie's introduction *actually* says, "A long time *ago*, in a galaxy far, far away . . ."

But think about those words for a minute. Have you ever wondered if something *is* going on in some distant galaxy? Could there really be people (or aliens) living out there, as suggested by science fiction? If so, did they already have advanced civilizations a long time ago, before we human beings on earth did?

Exploring the unknown

There is something in us that makes us wonder what might be on other worlds far from our earthly home. People *want* to explore things that are unknown, distant and mysterious. Did you know that the *desire* to search out the unknown and to live into the future is something God actually put into the hearts of human beings?

"Also He has put *eternity* in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that *God* does from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). God's creation is so immense and awesome, and man *wants* to learn its deepest secrets, but he cannot. Even what he does know through modern technology is still miniscule compared to what is unknown.

There is an old saying, "Truth is stranger than fiction." And the truth about the purpose for this vast universe—as well as what really *will* happen far in the future—is more fantastic than any science fiction plot! Can you imagine a long, long time from now—let's say a billion years—in a galaxy far, far away . . . and *you* being there? You should! Because you *could* be there at that time! Let's look at some facts that the very Creator of all these galaxies has revealed to us earthlings.

According to plan

God created the whole universe—every galaxy, star, planet, moon and atom. And He created it all with a fantastic *plan* in mind. It did not evolve of its own accord, and neither did the life-forms within it (see Revelation 4:11; Isaiah 40:26; 42:5; Genesis 1).

This planet—this earth—is where God roughly 6,000 years ago created very special life-forms now called human beings. And of all the creatures God made, He fashioned them in His *own* form and image (Genesis 1:26-27). God made human beings with the ability to have children, who would naturally be born in the same form and image as their parents.

So why did God create people in His own image? He did so because He planned for them to one day become members of His own divine God family!

About 2,000 years ago the Creator Himself came down to the earth to live as a man. He did so in order to be killed, to pay for human sins, to make it possible for people to become *immortal* and live *with* God as a member of His family *forever.* But did this same great sacrifice happen again, somewhere else? Or did it happen only *once*, and for *all?* Read Hebrews 9:11-12, 1 Peter 3:18, and Romans 6:9-10 for the answer. Didn't it therefore happen *only* on *this* unique planet?

Of all the countless billions of planets God has made, to which of them is the Creator *returning* to set up His Kingdom, and to live upon and reign forever? Read Matthew 24:30 and Revelation 1:5-8. Can *you* reign on the earth too, *with* Christ our Creator? See Revelation 5:9-10, Daniel 2:44 and 7:14, 18, 22, 27.

But what about God the Father? Will He remain up in heaven forever? What does 1 Corinthians 15:23-24 say? Doesn't even the Father Himself come down to live on *this* planet, where Christ has set up His Kingdom?

Revelation 21–22 shows that God will one day make the earth a "new earth" and then an enormous new city will descend upon it. And what is the name of the city? It is a *capital* city. Originally a capital in ancient history, it still is today—and it will be the world capital during the Millennium, the 1,000-year reign of Christ. But notice what is described in these chapters about the incredible size of this city *after* the Millennium, when its new form is set upon the new earth.

Think bigger

So the earth will become and remain the *capital* or headquarters of God's Kingdom. But does all life then remain *only* on the earth for all eternity? Speaking of this Kingdom, Isaiah 9:7 says, "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end." This passage allows for the expansion of God's Kingdom to other planets, star systems and galaxies!

Could it be that God intends to *plant* life out there beyond the earth, like planting seeds in a vast garden? (See Isaiah 45:18; 51:16.) Is such an expansion of His Kingdom part of what God wants to place under our care? (Note Hebrews 2:5-8 and Romans 8:18-22.)

If so, there is certainly plenty of room to grow. Astronomers estimate that there are more *galaxies* than the number of people who have ever lived and died through all human history! That would mean—in terms of numbers—perhaps a galaxy per person!

As spirit beings capable of instantaneous travel from any point to another, it would not be difficult for us to oversee other galaxies where God's Kingdom could be planted—even though our *home base* will always be this earth. By then you and I will be spirit beings in the family of God and will shine as brightly as the sun (Matthew 13:43).

Although we don't know the exact details of how God's Kingdom will continue to expand, we do know that His Kingdom is sure to come. It *will* happen!

In the meantime, what can you do besides dream? If you have grown up in the truth of God or are now beginning to understand the scriptural teachings presented in *Vertical Thought,* it is likely that you are one of the few people in this world being *called* by God at this time to prepare for the return of Christ and the beginning of His Kingdom. And God's directive in this case is that you "make your own calling and election *sure"* (2 Peter 1:10-11). God will give those of us who respond to Him now the opportunity to teach and serve others in the future. Imagine teaching your classmates, cousins or even ancestors God's truth!

What else can you do? You should start *thinking bigger!* Being *different* from your peers now is *nothing* compared to what your future holds! (Romans 8:18). Do *everything* now with pleasing God in mind. He is the One whose plans include you—and perhaps *seeing* you one day actually *going* to that galaxy far, far away . . .

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Photos: Corbis (insets), NASA, ESA, S. Beckwith (STScI), and The Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA)

mysterious festival days

Psst. Let me tell you a secret. Millions of professing Christians don't even know these days exist. Yet these festivals explain how and when God will have a personal relationship with every human being, including you and me. Here's the inside story. It's my story, and I hope it is or will be yours.

by David Treybig

When I was a young child, my parents kept all the traditional Christian holidays including Christmas and Easter. We went to church on Sunday and lived like most other people who were part of mainstream Christianity. I suspect we had our denominational biases like almost everyone else, but in general our religious life was set.

Then a strange thing happened. Mom and Dad traded in Christmas and Easter for a different set of observances—feast days or festivals. It was a confusing time for me.

Although I was too young to understand why they were making the change, I did perceive that we were different from our neighbors, and this seemed a bit mysterious to me. In fact, I made a point of *emphatically* explaining to them that I wanted to continue celebrating the traditional holidays—something my parents and I laughed about later. At this tender age, little did I know that I was experiencing firsthand, on my own level of understanding, that God's way of life *is* a mystery.

As I matured I learned that most of the people claiming to be Christian don't believe that the gospel—the good news—of Jesus Christ is a mystery at all. Most think that Jesus spoke in parables (stories containing moral lessons) so everyone would comprehend what He was saying. Most think His message is so simple and so easy to understand that all they have to do is pass it on and everyone will get it. Ah. That's what makes it a mystery!

Mystery book

Now let's get something straight. I'm not making this mystery business up. The Bible, the book that reveals God's instructions for us human beings, describes it that way.

In fact, Christ Himself—the One from whom Christianity gets its name—said the Kingdom of God is a mystery.

Notice the context in which Jesus made this statement: "But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, 'To you it has been given to know the *mystery of the kingdom of God*; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that "seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them"'" (Mark 4:10-12, emphasis added).

In contrast to what most people think, Christ said He spoke in parables so everyone *wouldn't* understand. Only the few got it.

If you look up the word *mystery* in a Bible concordance (a book that identifies every passage using a particular word) you'll find that the word is used 22 times in the New Testament. In summary, it is used by Mark, Paul and John to describe God's way of life.

Occasionally, this word is used to describe "the mystery of iniquity [disobedience]" (2 Thessalonians 2:7), but most often it is used in connection with "the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16). For an interesting study, find a concordance and look up these passages in your own Bible.

Mysterious celebrations

Among the many mysterious aspects of God's way of life are His annual festivals. The importance of and value in observing these days are hidden from most people. Today it's common for people to dismiss the biblical festival days as celebrations that were just for ancient Israel. They assume that these days have no relevance for New Testament Christians. The mystery truly is a mystery.

The reality is that these festivals are *God's* festivals; they aren't *just* Jewish celebrations (Leviticus 23:1-2). They're for everyone, eventually. These feast days have deep Christian meaning. They are reminders of things that we must do now to have a relationship with God, and shadows showing the shape of things that are going to happen in the future (Colossians 2:17). And they were kept by Jesus, the apostles and the New Testament Church—people whom we should be imitating (1 John 2:6;

1 Corinthians 11:1). So when are these festivals of God?

Unknown to most, the seven biblical celebrations of Christ occur in groupings in the northern hemisphere seasons of early spring, late spring and autumn. The first three festivals occur this year between April and June—the months covered by this issue of *Vertical Thought.* What do they mean? Here's a brief overview of these first three celebrations:

- ***Passover*** is the annual observance of Christ's death during which baptized members of the Church partake of bread and wine symbolizing Christ's broken body and His shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Part of the mystery is that it is supposed to be observed only once a year on the night Jesus was betrayed (1 Corinthians 11:23).

The service also involves washing another person's feet as a sign of humble willingness to serve one another. Christ told Peter that unless he participated in this part of the service, he would have no part with Him (John 13:8).

Observing Passover is an annual reminder that we belong to God. It reminds us of the baptismal covenant we make with Him and represents the path every person who comes to God must take.

- ***The Days of Unleavened Bread*** are marked by putting leavened products (items like bread and cake that have leavening agents such as yeast, baking soda and baking powder that cause dough to rise) out of our homes (Exodus 12:15; 1 Corinthians 5:8). Leaven represents sin (our disobedience to God's instructions), and this annual observance reminds us that we must continually seek God's help to identify and put sin out of our lives.

- ***Pentecost*** is the day the New Testament Church began. On this Holy Day thousands of people, including Christ's disciples, gathered in Jerusalem to observe this important festival. While God can grant His Spirit to whomever He will, at this beginning of the New Testament Church, only those who were observing Pentecost received the initial invitations to become part of His Church.

The order of these festivals teaches us an important lesson in the way God works with people. In order to receive God's Holy Spirit, pictured by Pentecost, we must first accept Jesus Christ and His shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins and then strive to live in accordance with God's instructions.

What are the dates for these observances? What are the other festivals? I won't tell you the *entire* mystery in this one article. But you can find out if you want to. Just read our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. It's a great mystery well worth your time to discover. The Bible says that eventually God's festival days will cease being mysteries because everyone will know about them. I love understanding and living "the mystery of godliness" now. I think you will too.

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IN THE NEWS

Compiled by Amanda Stiver

Your Ears WIll Thank You!

Today's iPods are the neotechnological version of the now ancient Sony Walkman. Both are compact, both provide personal listening experience, but there they differ. The iPod product by Apple uses digital technology to create a nearly flawless sound, undistorted at any decibel level. It also employs earbuds—essentially an in-ear version of the older headphones. This, however, has experts worried.



An article by Joel Selvin explains that the dangers of too much music at too loud a decibel level have become a concern as the quality in personal listening devices have advanced (*San Francisco Chronicle*, "Play It Loud, and You May Pay for It," Sept. 22, 2005).

The problem is in the way the sound is introduced to the eardrum. With earbud type devices that focus all sound directly into the ear canal and at the eardrum, the hearing damage is much greater. The high quality sound can also make it difficult for listeners to realize just how loud the music is.

Research suggests that taking a break five minutes out of every hour allows for the ear to rest and repair. Also, "if you can hear headphones two or three feet away, it's probably too loud," says audiologist Douglas Beck.

Like anything else, personal responsibility is essential. The technology is incredible, but the human beings using it are subject to error from time to time, so it is important to remember that our bodies are the temple of God and need to be treated with respect and appreciation. So use iPod-like devices responsibly, and from time to time cherish the sounds of silence.

Feminine Dress: Tight Enough and Loose Enough . . .

Ever heard of Audrey Hepburn? Grace Kelly? Not so long ago they were the epitome of modest femininity. Is there an equivalent today? Britney Spears? Well, no, she doesn't exactly exemplify modesty, and neither do Madonna or Lindsay Lohan for that matter. So where are the examples and icons of modesty and loveliness in dress for young women and girls to follow today? The sad truth is that there aren't very many.

In her article, "Too Young to Be Sexy," Patricia Dalton explains that the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s gave a false feeling of sexual freedom to the young people of that era.

Unfortunately things haven't gotten better. The sexualized lifestyle has become pop culture and it now affects children, particularly young girls in their dress and conduct. When young women wear immodest, revealing clothing, their younger sisters follow suit. And many parents today aren't insisting that their children wear modest clothing.

What can young women do about this? First, by knowing that they set an example for younger ones, they can be careful in their choice of dress. Clothes carry a very clear message. Clothing that is low-cut, extra tight, low riding, super short and see-through sends a specific message—lack of sexual restraint.

Look at the clothes in stores. If the above adjectives describe them perfectly, then one should probably look for a more modest alternative. Modest doesn't mean dumpy; it means classy and chic!

To paraphrase 1940s era Hollywood costume designer Edith Head, "Your clothes should be tight enough to show you're a woman and loose enough to show you're a lady" (*The Washington Post*, Dec. 16, 2006). A young lady of God should dress as if she were in God's presence (because she is) and not according to the dictates of this world's fashion.

Darwin and Nazism

What does the average high school biology class have in common with Hitler's genocidal Nazi movement? According to a recent book by Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany*, they share the same foundational evolutionary concepts.

Although that is fairly common knowledge, Mr. Weikart explains that Darwinian biologists, before the rise of Nazi Germany, championed the overturning of Christian ethics, especially that of the sacredness of human life–the very ideological concepts that led to the horrors Hitler and the Nazi's inflicted upon Europe (book review, *Conservative Book Club*).



Hitler's war machine and genocidal policies weren't an aberration from evolutionary biology, but were cutting-edge and logical conclusions of Darwinism. The problem is that the seemingly innocent evolution being taught in the classroom leads to the same conclusions today as it did in Hitler's Nazi Germany. God's intent for His creation has nothing to do with the depraved end results of a worldview based on godless survival of the fittest.

Intelligent Design vs. Evolution, Next Round!

The battle for the acknowledgement of truth is being fought in the courts of the United States. Evolution and intelligent design (the scientific study that supports the existence of a Being who created the universe) are the combatants in a battle for the hearts and minds of the American people, through the education of their children.

A recent ruling by a court on intelligent design occurred in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The Dover Area School District ran a six-week trial allowing a one-minute explanation of the concept of intelligent design to precede a unit covering evolution.

Photos: Shaun Venish, Corbis, Photos.com

The U.S. Middle District Judge John Jones presided over the trial and determined that it was too religious and thus cancelled it. The major criticism was that such short explanations are overtly Christian and therefore unscientific (Bill Sulon and Adelle M. Banks, "Intelligent Design Is Too Religious for Schools, Judge Rules," *Religion News Service*, Dec. 21, 2005).

In Atlanta, Georgia, a sticker placed in biology textbooks reminds students that the theory of evolution is indeed a theory, not a fact as is being alleged in the courts. In a positive development for free thinking, Kansas state education officials have allowed the teaching of intelligent design in classrooms (Doug Gross, "Federal Judge Consider Evolution Stickers," *Associated Press*, Dec. 15, 2005).

The mere acknowledgement of intelligent design upsets many evolutionists, and they are fighting intelligent design not necessarily in the science laboratory or through scientific proof, but in the court systems where law-like educational regulations are determined by individual judges. For more information on this subject, request or download our free booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* (www.ucg.org/booklets).



Watch What You Say!

Remember the old adage, "Do you need your mouth washed out with soap?" Well, in Hartford, Connecticut, police officers are trying the next best thing—decreasing the cursing and swearing in high schools by fining students $103 for each infraction.

According to police officer Roger Pearl, it is working and students are keeping their language in check. "Before, the kids were swearing all the time. It went from many incidents to almost nothing. It's quiet in the halls," said Mr. Pearl (www.janetrosier.com, Nov. 30, 2005).

Though it seems drastic to fine students or their parents for a student's foul language, it illustrates an important point in today's society—lack of respect. Cursing and taking God's name in vain are obvious sins according to the Ten Commandments. Even mild versions of euphemisms are not right, as they will become a habit, but most importantly, they show lack of respect for God.

Foul language, likewise, shows lack of respect for people around us. Words carry meaning and attitude with them and foul or coarse language carries with it degrading, angry attitudes. Colossians 3:8 says, "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth."

Each language of the world contains thousands of uplifting words; you can show respect to others each day by using more of them! For more information on God's laws, request or download *The Ten Commandments* (www.ucg.org/booklets).

Endangered Bananas!

Will you miss the banana on your morning cereal? Will the banana split be the same without the main ingredient? These may become important questions if Tropical Panama Disease Race 4 reaches the shores of Central America and affects the Cavendish banana.

The Cavendish is the most popular commercial banana variety, according to an article by Mark Roth of the Pittsburgh Post Gazette ("Disease Threatens Appealing Banana: Killer Fungus Preys on U.S.'s Favorite Tropical Fruit," Dec. 16, 2005).

If it becomes infected by the Tropical Race 4, an entirely new variety of banana would need to be developed for the market, which would take considerable time to plant and introduce, resulting in a potential banana drought!

This circumstance occurred previously to the Gros Michel, which was the most commercially viable banana during the early 20th century. When it was struck by disease, an overhaul of production had to take place in the 1960s. The Cavendish saved production, but increased costs because its more delicate constitution required expensive shipping practices.

What can be learned from these foreboding banana prognostications? God created plant life with incredible built-in genetic variety allowing new types to be developed. However, the more mankind relies on monoculture (the mass growing of single varieties for international markets) the tougher it becomes to avoid disasters like the Irish Potato Blight and the Big Banana Blot!

Is there a time when mankind will develop a more sustainable, family-oriented type of agriculture—benefiting the farmer and keeping people close to the land? For more information, learn about the coming Kingdom of God in your Bible and by requesting our free booklet on The Gospel of the Kingdom (www.ucg.org/booklets).

Archaeology Finds "Goliath"

Archaeological evidence of past cultures is an important component in the process of proving what really happened in history. Many purported scholars have doubted that the stories of the Bible actually took place, but one of a number of recent finds thwarts that supposition and adds to the pile of proof that the Bible is true and that biblical characters actually lived and breathed just as we do today.

At an archaeological excavation in Tel es-Safi in southern Israel, the location of the ancient Philistine city of Gath, evidence of the use of the name Goliath has been found. A piece of pottery bearing a name that transliterates into Hebrew as Goliath was dated to soon after the period in which the story of David and Goliath, as related in the Bible, took place (*Associated Press, Earthlink News*, "Finding Said to Boost Proof of Goliath," Nov. 11, 2005).

This kind of evidence isn't like finding a letter from Goliath, but it, along with many other finds, helps establish that the Bible accurately presents the period of history it claims to.

This adds to the weight of evidence that the Bible is truthful, just as God says it is, and that the miraculous events of the biblical record, instead of being figments of the imagination of Israelite scribes, are in fact true instances of God's powerful intervention in the history of man.

For more information on proofs of the Bible, request or download *Is the Bible True?* (www.ucg.org/booklets).

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Didn't He ever give His people a long holiday weekend?

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