Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside."—Matthew 13:19

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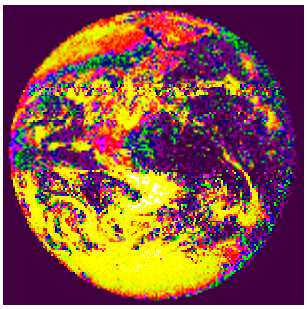

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First the End of an Empire—Now, the End of Britain?

By Melvin Rhodes

Are we witnessing the end of the nation whose people, "relative to their numbers, contributed more to civilization than any other people since the ancient Greeks and Romans"?



I CAN STILL REMEMBER when the news came over the radio. It was a Sunday morning in late January 1965. Sir Winston Churchill had died.

His funeral was the following Saturday. He was only the second commoner in the history of Great Britain to be given a state funeral, normally reserved for royalty. The first had been for the duke of Wellington, the military genius who thwarted Napoleon's plans for world conquest at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, thereby ushering in a century of Pax Britannica. Sir Winston had defeated an even greater evil, Hitler's Third Reich. He didn't do it single-handedly, of course, but without him the outcome could have been entirely different.

I also well remember the silence after the funeral. It was the only time I can remember all the television and radio stations closing down for a period of silence in honor of the great old man to whom Britons owed so much.

People were truly thankful that Winston Churchill had led them to victory in World War II—at a time when everybody else seemed inclined to compromise with Nazi Germany.

Churchill rejected the honor of a dukedom and turned down the opportunity to be buried in Westminster Abbey along with many other famous Britons.

Churchill's funeral was, for Britain, the end of an age.

Ironically, his death came at the end of a 20-year period that had seen the nation reject just about everything he stood for.

Postwar Britain



It had started 20 years earlier, shortly after VE Day. With the European war ended, Churchill called an election. Almost everyone thought his Conservative Party would win. People the world over were shocked when the results came in: The Labour (socialist) Party won by a landslide. Although grateful for Churchill's role as a wartime leader, people had decided they wanted change; they longed for a different world. They didn't want their young men fighting wars in far-off places they had never heard of, nor did they want them coming home to low-paying jobs or unemployment.

After being universally acclaimed as the British lion that roared in defiance of Hitler and the man who had led Great Britain to victory, Churchill appeared to be headed for victory. But, seemingly, it was time for Britain's rapid decline to begin. The prophet Daniel reminds us that it is God who "removes kings and raises up kings" (Daniel 2:21). The same God who had given Britain its victory took away the empire He had given to them, the multitude of nations promised to Joseph's son Ephraim (Genesis 48:19).

People were truly thankful that Winston Churchill had led them to victory in World War II—at a time when everybody else seemed inclined to compromise with Nazi Germany.

The next few years saw massive changes, including the nationalization of key industries (steel, railways, coal mines) and the institution of a government-run medical system. To concentrate on these radical reforms, the country turned its back on an empire that had been built up over the course of 400 years. Britain granted India and Pakistan independence in 1947. By the time of Churchill's death, all the major colonies were gone. Britain had, to quote American statesman Adlai Stevenson, "lost an empire and not yet found a role."

It might have been different if Churchill had won that pivotal election. He was an empire loyalist. His love of history taught him that Britain's security lay with the multitude of nations it had built up gradually since the time of Queen Elizabeth I. Later, after he won the 1951 election as prime minister at the time of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II, he talked of a "new Elizabethan age" that might surpass the first in greatness. But it was not to be.

Britain had embarked on a new course that continues to this day. With the British Empire gone, it was Britain's turn to be dismantled.

The abolition of Britain

A thought-provoking book on this subject by British writer Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain,* contrasts the country at the time of Churchill's funeral with the nation 32 years later at the funeral of Princess Diana. By his own account, it is as if he is looking at two different countries.

Outside the British Isles many people get confused at exactly what constitutes Great Britain and where England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland fit into the equation. At one time all four nations were separate entities. Their eventual union came about over a long period.

England conquered Wales during the time of Edward I in the 13th century. Edward proclaimed his son the prince of Wales, emphasizing that Wales is a separate principality, but was to be administered as a part of England. For 700 years, the heirs to the British throne have been given the title "prince of Wales."

At one time all four nations were separate entities. Their eventual union came about over a long period.

Scotland and England (with Wales) united later. When Elizabeth I died in 1603, she left no heirs. Historically, Scotland had often allied itself with France against England. It was time for the two countries to unite so this would not happen again. Upon her death her cousin's son, James VI of Scotland, became King James I of England. James gave the country its new name, Great Britain (and was instrumental in giving the world the King James Version of the Bible). The new flag was nicknamed the Union Jack after him.

The two kingdoms were still administered separately, but they had the same monarch. A century later (1707) they fully united under one parliament, giving Scots a share in the benefits of the growing empire. Another century later the Irish parliament was abolished, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland formed (1801).

Reversal of direction

The dismantling of the kingdom actually began 80 years ago when most of Ireland was given its independence as the Irish Free State, theoretically still subject to the crown. In 1949 the Free State became the Irish Republic, severing its tie with the United Kingdom.

The six counties of Northern Ireland that have remained within the United Kingdom have been strife-torn for more than three decades. Although in recent years strenuous efforts have been made to negotiate a permanent peace, the problem remains virtually insoluble. At some point it is likely that another "reform" government in London will force a change on the province, as British governments since Churchill's time have eventually given in to terrorists in every disputed territory.



With increasing support for Scottish and Welsh nationalists, the present British government, led by Prime Minister Tony Blair, came to power in 1997 promising "devolution." The two ancient Celtic peoples would acquire their own parliaments and be responsible for their own internal affairs. London would still conduct foreign policy. Both Scotland and Wales now have their own assemblies with increased calls for full independence.

Some of the English, meanwhile, are resentful of the fact that they do not have their own parliament. Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish members still sit in the House of Commons in London and can vote on legislation that affects the English people, while the English people do not have a say in the internal affairs of the Celtic nations around them.

Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) has been fulfilling its dream of an ever-closer union. The Irish Republic has benefited from its membership in the EU, ironically partly subsidized through Brussels by U.K. taxpayers. This has reduced some fears of Irish unity in the North. The South had always been poor, the North far wealthier, so even Catholics had been somewhat apprehensive of unity with the South. Not any more.

Polls show the English to be increasingly weary of the EU.

Polls show the English to be increasingly weary of the EU. Scottish nationalists, however, see the EU as increasing the likelihood of Scottish independence. No longer would the five million people of an independent Scotland be unable to make it economically on their own. Within the EU they would prosper, just like Ireland and other small countries. Similar feelings are evident in Wales.

In coming years the English could find themselves outside of a politically unified EU, with the Scots, Welsh and Irish inside. Queen Elizabeth I's worst nightmare would have come true, four centuries later, of an England surrounded by hostile nations in alliance with the continental powers.

Historians such as Norman Davies think that none of this matters. In his recent book *The Isles* he reminds readers that England at one time was physically a part of the European landmass. At other times it was a part of Europe. It was the westernmost province of the Roman Empire from A.D. 43 to 410, a span of almost four centuries. The English church was a part of the Roman church for almost 1,000 years. The Plantagenets in the Middle Ages ruled England as well as parts of France, spending most of their time in the bigger and warmer part of their territories.

But Paul Johnson, another British historian, sounded a warning in the pivotal year 1972 (between the British Parliament's vote to join Europe and Britain's accession the next January): "Disunity has always proved fatal to the offshore islanders." *(The Offshore Islanders* was the title of his book dealing with Britain's relationship with Europe throughout history.) In other words, the disuniting of the United Kingdom has always proved fatal, enabling hostile powers to invade the country. Why should it be different this time?

Biblical wisdom holds true: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25).

New generation, new outlook

A new generation is in power now.

Mr. Blair, British prime minister, prefers to identify with a new age. He is the first British prime minister who does not remember Winston Churchill. In a speech just before the election that brought him to power, he described himself this way: "I am a modern man. I am a part of the rock and roll generation—the Beatles, colour TV, that's the generation I come from" *(The Abolition of Britain,* paperback edition, p. xix).

The current generation is a victim of revisionist history. It's a history with an emphasis on multiculturalism, which downplays Britain's role in frequently leading its empire into conflict against despotic European powers that wanted to conquer the world. At the same time, the revised version of history emphasizes the mistakes Britain made, negatively presenting the empire as a shameful era.

Mr. Blair, British prime minister, prefers to identify with a new age. He is the first British prime minister who does not remember Winston Churchill.

It's also a generation that, as in the United States and other Western countries, has grown up with an emphasis on material values, with little concept of morality and often lacking any knowledge of God.

Writing of "the end of Britain" in *Newsweek* magazine (July 10, 2000), columnist George Will reminded readers of the late English writer George Orwell's dismissive comment on English intellectuals: "England is perhaps the only great country whose intellectuals are ashamed of their nationality." (Orwell died in 1950 before this disease spread to the United States.)

Mr. Will added, "Many Europhiles are English intellectuals of the sort George Orwell despised because they despised their nation." It's hard to understand the hatred so many people have for the old values Sir Winston Churchill symbolized. "God, king and country" have no place in the minds of many, including many English intellectuals.

Does this matter to Americans and the rest of the world?

Let George Will have the final say: "What is vanishing, and not slowly, is the nation to which the United States traces much of its political and cultural DNA. Unless this disappearance is resisted, and reversed, soon all that will linger... will be a mocking memory of the nationhood that was the political incarnation of a people who (as has been said), relative to their numbers, contributed more to civilization than any other people since the ancient Greeks and Romans" (ibid.).

Recommended reading

What's behind the remarkably rapid dissolution of the British Empire? How—and why—did the world's greatest empire disappear in only a few short decades? Does Bible prophecy give us any indication?

Strange as it may sound, this remarkable turnaround was written well before it happened—in *the pages of the Bible almost 3,500 years ago*.

The publishers of *Virtual Christian Magazine* have produced an astounding, eye-opening booklet, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. You'll be amazed to learn the truth about where these nations appear in Bible prophecy—and what Scripture says will happen to them in the end time.

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Rejoice in Life!

By Jean Jantzen

Life often seems to be a daily struggle. We forget to delight in daily events that seem insignificant—until we look back upon our life. Rejoice in life for it passes quickly. Rejoice for your future, which includes an incredible inheritance from God in His Kingdom!



UNDOUBTEDLY WE HAVE ALL ATTENDED FUNERALS where everyone, dressed in black, stood around crying copious tears, lamenting the passing of a loved one. Losing a loved one is very difficult, but what if we instead got down on our knees and thanked God for the privilege of knowing the person and for the time we shared? I have always wondered why we look at death as such a melancholy event, a taboo subject. We even avoid talking about it with our children.

I have always wondered why we look at death as such a melancholy event, a taboo subject.

God does not feel this way. He inspired Solomon to state, "The day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). We are told to observe the day of Jesus' death, to remember His sacrifice and life as we get together on Passover. And, even though it is a sobering time, it is also a time for rejoicing: "...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him..." (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

So imagine receiving the letter below:



"To my darling husband and beloved sons and daughters,

"If you are reading this, I have died and my ashes are in the urn next to my brother's and mother's ashes, already hidden on the shelf in the back bedroom. Oh, don't tear up now and ruin the ink on this beautiful paper I purchased especially for this purpose. You'll have to save this and read it whenever you miss me. Of course I want you to miss me, but I want you to rejoice in my life too—remember the good things of our life together. I know there were difficult times too, but they helped us to learn and grow. And why can't we talk of dying? It is part of the journey we are all on. What we all have to remember is that after a while the trip gets long and tiring, tedious even, and it's time to get off and rest awhile.

"I've had much time for reflection the past months as my body slowed down against my will. As you know I've always been an active, busy sort of person, so it has been a little difficult to have Papa wait on me, sit in this rocking chair, something I said I'd never do. But these old bones! I've always wondered why people mourn and grieve at one's passing. Why not rejoice? Celebrate one's life! Rejoice in the time spent together on the journey. Of course, for Papa and me it's been well over a half a century. I thought I'd outlast him, but he's a stubborn old soul, determined to stay on this earth longer than me. (Actually, I think he stuck around to look after me, bless him.)

"What we all have to remember is that after a while the trip gets long and tiring, tedious even, and it's time to get off and rest awhile."

"But we've had many good years together. Remember when we wanted to sell everything and go around the world, but settled for a biking trip to Europe when you all thought we were crazy. What a blast! Oh, we've had our disagreements, as you are all aware, but who hasn't? We made up and carried on together. Isn't that what life is all about... building godly character? I'm sure he's built lots with me too. God has given me my 'three score and ten' and a few more years to boot. I cannot ask for more. Besides, I am just asleep, waiting to hear my name and then I'll see you all again. It's something I look forward to with great anticipation. A new body, a new world!

"It seems just like yesterday when each of you were placed into my arms. Papa and I counted your tiny fingers, and I gloried in your silky newness, your exquisite perfection. And we had done this—created you—with just a little *help from above! We experienced only a few scary moments. One time was when your Papa left the hospital and the nurse came and told me you were in difficulty just hours after your birth. 'How can that be?' You were a big baby, the largest one of all. I remember finding my way to the nursery in a daze and seeing you lying there in an incubator of all places. Your color was not good. They said it was because of your size and coming into the world too quickly to adjust well. I rushed to phone for anointing and prayed you would be all right. God answered my prayer.*

"Then there was the time when Papa and I were having a fine meal in a restaurant when I was three months pregnant. All of a sudden I knew something was wrong. We tried to rush out of the place, but the manager stopped us, demanding payment, even though he could see the blood on my dress and Papa wanting to take me to the emergency room. The doctors held little hope of your surviving in the womb. But you did! We asked for anointing and God saw you were special. I had to take it easy for a couple of months, but when I saw you I knew you were worth every minute.

"I remember times when one of you had croup, or tonsillitis, or one of many childhood diseases. We'd stay up all night, a hot little body resting against my chest, praying over you, putting an anointing cloth on your forehead. Believe it or not those were special times. I felt needed, loved. Papa did too. I guess its one of our many foibles, needing to be needed.

"What more could I ask for... a long, busy and productive life... having the rare privilege of being called by God and given His magnificent truth... the opportunity to be a little light in a dark world."

"I can't help chuckling remembering when God first called our family and we invited a young couple for dinner on only our second Sabbath attending. Papa and I were young in the faith back then, and had so much to learn. You little ones sat like tender plants around the dinner table that evening with beaming faces. God held back my tongue from asking my guests about the pork question (why I had to know right then I don't know—especially when there were little pieces of pork bacon hiding in the cabbage rolls) until after dinner. I can just imagine God having a chuckle too. I laugh now, too, about how I cried on the way home from Church the following Sabbath because Papa had asked over the minister and his wife and four children. I didn't think I was up to the task—a dozen people around the dinner table, how would I manage that?

"We went to every Bible study, talent show, winter campout, sports events, potluck and Spokesman's Club (Papa making us listen to his attempts at public speaking). And year after year we traveled to every Feast, rejoicing before God, some of you tucked into blankets at our feet. And, as our family grew, you trailed in a longer and longer line behind us carrying briefcases, blankets, coloring books and goodies. Wasn't it a blast?

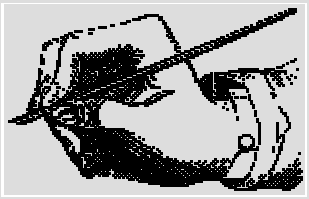
"We waved good-bye as you went off to Y.O.U. summer camp. You were delighted in your grown-up-ness. We wondered if you could manage without us.

"Our family never missed a thing. Don't you remember those camping trips with fondness and delight? The new kids you'd meet in different Church areas. You tried to get the flames going from your pile of sticks, the wee sparks drifting lazily into the night sky. You burned wieners on sticks you'd carved to perfection. You explored the flora and fauna in your bare feet along the ocean shores, bringing us the treasures you found. Even when we had to spend time in the Laundromat drying out sleeping bags because of rain, it was an adventure. Remember the time at the Church campout, when a young lady put her arms around your big brother, thinking he was her fiancé. How she blushed bright pink when she discovered her mistake!

"All these memories have made it all worthwhile. Your first steps, your first day of school and suddenly graduation, leaving home, getting your first jobs, meeting the one of your dreams, weddings, cakes, flowers, photos, babies, our grandchildren. Exciting, thrilling—then Papa and I alone! Where has the time gone? But we were always busy and our life was filled with such busy and beautiful memories.

"And what of me as a woman, a child of God? Has God been pleased with me? I can only hope that He has. A woman friend of mine wrote me the following letter many years ago now and the words, although faded, have encouraged me as I walk this path. Not many people come out and tell you you're an all right person, so I kept her letter and in times of discouragement I have read her kind words:

"And what of me as a woman, a child of God? Has God been pleased with me?"



" 'I can remember as yesterday sitting at Mom's bedside as her scribe and responding to your letters of comfort. You were one of two pen pals who were constant in caring for her in her time of need. It was this love you had for my mother in her distress and the wisdom you spoke through the written word that initially drew me to you as a woman of valor. You were the "woman who stretched her hand to the needy... and in her tongue was the law of kindness." After mom's death, you were the only woman who was there for me, listening and supporting me. I still remember our long bike ride together and your comforting presence. You were so unlike the others who callously told me to "stop crying" or who met my grief with flat platitudes. You seemed to really care and empathize with my pain. You were a woman who had the courage to develop your talents and grow in knowledge and still maintain a balanced scriptural approach to life based in a love of God's Word. I looked up to you as a role model. Your example inspired me to think that I, too, could survive in the academic world and meet the intellectual challenges of struggling to be a little light in a dark world. I rejoiced to have a friend whose vision of godly womanhood was positive and expansive, not rigid and demeaning.' "

"Sitting here in my rocking chair the light from the sun warming me, what more could I ask for... a long, busy and productive life... having the rare privilege of being called by God and given His magnificent truth... the opportunity to be a little light in a dark world. I am eternally grateful for all He has given to me and to each of you and for being a part of something that is bigger than we are... and for brethren whom we have loved and who have loved us.

"We've had a lot of time to commune together—God and I—and we have come to an understanding. I have been comforted by His words in the 23rd Psalm. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.'

"And, besides, this dying is a momentous event that is way up there with getting married, graduating, giving birth and being baptized. I want you to know I have looked on dying just as I did on living—giving it my all—with as much courage and dignity and energy as I could muster. I admit God put me to the test, but never gave me more than I could handle. I could feel His presence more and more as the time drew near, and His hand was always in mine. I look forward to it with joy, this short sleep, this time of rest. I've earned it. I have fought the good fight and a crown of glory waits for me. I am waiting to hear His words: 'This is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased.'

"With all of my love—see you all very soon."

How Did Life Begin?

By Doug Horchak

Science has long sought answers to several important questions: What is life? Where did it come from? How did it begin? But you won't find the answers while peering into a microscope, telescope or test tube.

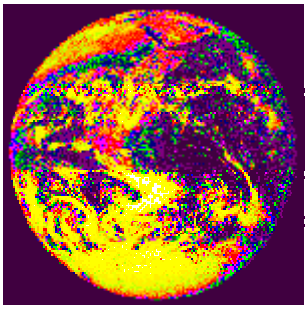


MILLIONS OF SPECIES share this planet. But only man has tried to understand the world and universe around him. Only man continues to search for the origin and meaning of life. Clearly what sets us apart from all other living creatures on earth are the abilities and power of the human mind. It drives us to want to understand.

Some people's desire to understand life through religion is made evident by cathedrals, temples and churches. Others look to science in their search for meaning and gaze through microscopes, build particle accelerators and send space probes to neighboring planets in search of life and its origins.

When all is said and done, history has shown that, whether in religion or science, man's foundational curiosity has to do with the basics of life. What is life? How did life begin? How did it get here? What is the meaning of life?

Science and creation



When we consider the quest for the understanding of the universe and life within it, one of the great minds of the 20th century, Albert Einstein, comes to the fore. Although he studied physics rather than biology, Einstein was intrigued by the question of human origins and the existence of the universe. He recognized the evidence for an intelligence behind the functioning of the cosmos and the existence of life.

After years of study into the structure and origin of the universe, he acknowledged that "the harmony of natural law" he saw in the laws of physics "reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of

human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection" *(The Quotable Einstein,* Alice Calaprice, editor, 1996, p. 151).

Einstein acknowledged that "...all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection."

Some would say Albert Einstein, in spite of such a profound admission, was not thinking of a biblical or personal God when he spoke of this superior intelligence. However, Einstein also never had the opportunity to consider many of the aspects of the growing body of evidence for cosmic fine-tuning and design that cosmologists have discovered in recent decades. Discoveries about the beginnings of the universe point to a beginning, a "first cause," that many cosmologists claim is the most likely explanation for the origin of all things.

The "intelligent design" movement

According to the Darwinist model of evolution, undirected natural causes are responsible for the origin and development of life. Because Darwinist evolution is based solely on random genetic mutation, it precludes the possibility of a supernatural Creator, or any guiding intelligence, playing a role in life's development.

In spite of the incredible level of acceptance of Darwinism and evolution over the decades, however, there have always been some dissenters who rejected Charles Darwin's claim that undirected natural causes could not only produce life but be responsible for the countless species and forms of life we see today.

Until the mid-1980s, these other voices were largely isolated and sporadic. More recently these growing voices—categorized as the "intelligent design" movement—have become more focused in their pointed criticisms of Darwinist evolution. Many attempt to overturn the cultural dominance of Darwinism in both social and academic circles. Without employing the Bible as a scientific text, many intelligent-design scientists and scholars, including authors such as Phillip Johnson, Michael Behe, Charles Thaxton, Michael Denton and Stephen Meyer, have critiqued Darwinism on scientific and philosophical grounds.

What, then, is intelligent design?

It is a theory of our origins that begins with the observation that intelligent causes can accomplish things that undirected natural causes simply cannot. This is true of the design or development of both inanimate and living things.

Consider the word game of Scrabble as an example. Let's grant that the board and letter pieces exist. Try tossing them into the air and see how they land. You certainly wouldn't expect all the letters to land in place on the board, arranged in correctly spelled words. Yet that, in essence, is what evolutionary theory asks us to believe. To achieve an arrangement of a multiplicity of meaningful words requires the assumption of an intelligent cause--in this example the players of the game. An outside cause must sort and place the pieces in a meaningful order.

Try tossing the game of Scrabble into the air. You certainly wouldn't expect all the letters to land in place on the board, arranged in correctly spelled words.

This concept—that a fundamental distinction exists between undirected natural causes on the one hand and directed or intelligent causes on the other—has served as the premise of proponents of the design concept over the centuries. This fundamental concept has been the basic thesis of the more-recent intelligent-design movement that is being accepted by a small but growing number of scientists, astronomers and cosmologists.

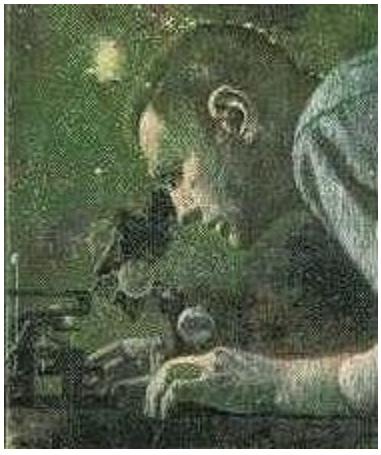
The quest to understand life's origins

Man has long recognized the significant difference between living and nonliving matter. Since the early days of man's realization of the rarity of life, there has never been a shortage of theories to explain the presence of life on earth. Yet, in spite of centuries of research and hundreds of theories, the origin of life remains one of the greatest challenges to science. As Nobel laureate Max Delbruck put it: "...There has been an immense conceptual gap between all present-day life and no life." The mechanics of the transition from no life to life is "perhaps the fundamental question of biology" *(Mind from Matter?,* 1986, p. 31).

Nevertheless, the immense conceptual gap between life and nonlife is seldom recognized and rarely admitted to by many evolutionary theorists. Even Darwin sidestepped the issue, adopting the attitude that "it is mere rubbish thinking at present of the origin of life; one might as well think of the origin of matter" *(Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 15th edition, Macropaedia Vol. 10, p. 900, "Life").

Regardless of evolutionists' enthusiasm for their theory, they must propose a credible explanation for the spontaneous generation of life from nonliving matter. After all, for the proposed process of evolution to begin, some starting material is necessary—some substance that the random processes of evolution could use to bring about life.

Scientists' attempt to explain life



This need led to the concept of "chemical evolution" for the scientific explanation of the origin of life. When the present-day theories of chemical evolution (the natural processes on a prebiotic earth that supposedly gave rise to the first living matter) were formulated by Alexander Oparin and J.B.S. Haldane in the 1920s, little was known about the biochemical details and workings of living matter. Thus early theorists took great latitude to propose mechanistic processes by which organisms could come into existence.

Modern theories of chemical evolution in textbooks suggest that our planet was covered with a warm, slightly alkaline ocean. The theories claim that ultraviolet light from the sun, geothermal energy from volcanoes, shock waves from thunder and cosmic radiation acted on gases of the primitive atmosphere to cause the formation of amino acids, sugars, proteins, nucleic acids and cell membranes. In time, these compounds somehow came together into the first protocell, and then became more complex until the first true living cell came into existence.

In spite of centuries of research and hundreds of theories, the origin of life remains one of the greatest challenges to science.

In 1953 the work of Stanley Miller and Nobel prize-winner Harold Urey was hailed as providing the missing link in understanding how the chemical origin of life could have happened. They synthesized amino acids and proteins in what they claimed to be a simulated primitive-earth environment. Miller's work served as the sole pillar on which today's chemical evolutionists build their theories. Today, however, many scientists have concluded that the early atmosphere was vastly different from that of Miller's experiments and that he was operating under fundamentally wrong assumptions.

Further, over the past 45 years little progress has been made to indicate that such simulated primordial oceans or organic-soup experiments yield anything more than a few inanimate proteins or amino acids without any other characteristics of life. Among other things they are missing are the all-important informational macromolecules that exist in all forms of life, the molecules that carry the vital information that defines life, its very nature and its functions.

Some evolutionists have recognized the difficulties of explaining the spontaneous beginning of all of the necessary chemical components to life. They observe the high degree of complexity of present life-forms and admit the seemingly impossible task of offering a plausible explanation. However, since life is present on Earth, and science demands some sort of mechanistic explanation for its existence, they continue to search for theories that will satisfy the scientific method.

The fifth miracle

In 1999 theoretical physicist Paul Davies, of Australia's University of Adelaide, wrote *The Fifth Miracle* to address the definition and origins of life. In his book Professor Davies cited new research that he claimed hints that the beginnings of life may have lain deep within the earth's hot crust rather than the "warm pond" suggested by Darwin.

The "fifth miracle" of Davies' title refers to Genesis 1:11: "Let the land produce vegetation" (New International Version), implying the first four biblical miracles are the creation of the universe, light, the firmament and dry land. Even though Davies disavows the notion that life is the result of a miracle from a Creator God, he admits that the actual beginning of life is the most unsolvable mystery of science.

Professor Davies recounts how the work of Louis Pasteur in the 1860s led to the scientific realization that only living organisms could beget other living organisms. Pasteur's research and findings essentially debunked the concept of spontaneous generation, that life could arise spontaneously from nonliving matter.

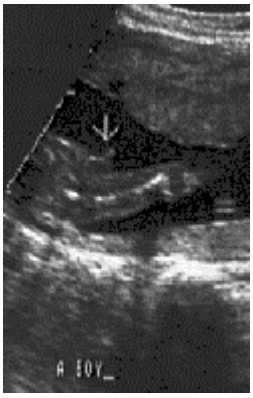
Davies states: "Important though this demonstration was, Pasteur's conclusion came into direct conflict with Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin's celebrated tome *On the Origin of Species,* which had been published just three years before Pasteur's experiments, sought to discredit the need for God to create the species by showing how one species can transmute into another. But Darwin's account left open the problem of how the *first* living thing came to exist" (1999, p. 83, emphasis in original).

The work of Louis Pasteur in the 1860s led to the scientific realization that only living organisms could beget other living organisms.

So we are left with the fact that, unless life had always existed, at least one species—the first—could not have come into existence by transmutation from another species, but only by spontaneous generation from nonliving matter, a concept that Pasteur's work disproved.

Darwin himself wrote a few years later: "I have met with no evidence that seems in the least trustworthy, in favour of so-called Spontaneous Generation" (ibid.). Yet, as Davies continues: "...In the absence of a miracle, life could have originated *only* by some sort of spontaneous generation. Darwin's theory of evolution and Pasteur's theory that only life begets life cannot both have been completely right" (ibid.).

Man cannot explain it



Davies' book, although citing much of the current research in early-life origins (microbes around volcanic vents in the ocean's floor) and striving to offer explanations of how life came to be, is actually a work filled with admissions that science simply does not have the answer as to *how* life began. "Science rejects true miracles," he writes. "Although biogenesis strikes many as virtually miraculous, the starting point of any scientific investigation must be the assumption that life emerged naturally, via a sequence of normal physical processes. It is very unlikely that we will ever find out exactly what happened..." (pp. 81-82).

One of the greatest challenges to scientists, and the focus of much of modern research into life's origins, is the key issue of *information.* For life to exist, information—software, as it were—must have existed in those initial proteins and amino acids.

That is what scientists simply cannot explain and what random selection cannot reproduce. Professor Davies admits: "In a living organism we see the power of software, or information processing, refined to an incredible degree... The problem of the origin of life reduces to one of understanding how encoded software emerged spontaneously from hardware. How did it happen? How did nature 'go digital'? ...It is like trying to explain how a kite can evolve into a radio-controlled aircraft. Can the laws of nature as we presently comprehend them account for such a transition? I do not believe they can" (p. 115).

Clearly, the argument that Davies and other representative viewers of modern science seem to be making is that we need to discover and understand some fundamentally new variable that is beyond both chance and law.

In spite of the lack of answers for the origin of life that are forthcoming from the known laws of physics, mathematics and biochemistry, humanity seems bent on considering *only* answers from modern science—answers that do not allow for a Creator. The concept of an intelligent force operating in the history of life is seen by scientific materialists as some sort of magic on a cosmic scale.

The impact of modern science

Modern science, with all its achievements, continues to evolve its very research methods and definitions. A problem is that "science" has two distinct definitions in our culture.

On the one hand, science refers to a method of investigation involving exacting measurements, repeatable experiments and an open-minded attitude that insists that all claims be carefully tested. But science has also become identified with a philosophy known as materialism or scientific naturalism.

Humanity seems bent on considering only answers from modern science—answers that do not allow for a Creator.

This definition of science insists that nature (the natural, physical cosmos) is all there is, or at least the only thing about which we can have any knowledge. The conclusion follows that nature had to do its own creating, that the means of creation must not have included any role for a Creator. Students are not supposed to approach this philosophy with open-minded skepticism--as they are told to do in any other scientific endeavor—but, ironically enough, to take it on faith (although they would never use that religious-sounding term).

The reason that neo-Darwinism and natural selection in evolution are so blindly accepted in the academic world is that they are the main scientific props for scientific naturalism. Students first learn that evolution is fact; they then gradually learn more about what that fact means.

The same principle is true in the search for the origin of life. When one assumes that all living things are the product of mindless material forces such as chemical laws, natural selection and random variation, God is excluded from the picture. Humans (along with all life) thus are the accidental product of a purposeless universe.

The only alternative

Many people claim to see a huge difference between the revelations of the Bible and the factual findings of science. That view has caused many simply to disregard the Bible when they consider the quest to understand the origins of life and its meaning.

Some 2,000 years ago the apostle Paul addressed the world's alleged wisdom and knowledge about such fundamental questions. He stated the obvious: that God has shown proof of Himself to man: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" (Romans 1:19, New Revised Standard Version).

Here Paul acknowledges a truth that mankind has taken thousands of years to discover in secular, scientific research--that realities about God and His part in the creation of life and the universe should be and are indeed evident to those willing to see.

He tells us that, for all of man's efforts to understand how life could have originated, proof of a Creator (an intelligent designer, as many scientists are discovering) has been in front of us all along: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (verse 20).

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen..." (Romans 1:20).

Yet, as was true in first-century Rome, so it is true today: Mankind simply refuses to acknowledge the need for the Creator. Of the educated elite of his time Paul noted that, "even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind..." (verse 28).

Later Paul prophesied that modern man would depart from acknowledging and accepting the role of he Creator God: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, ...having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1, 5).

While the most fundamental questions of science—what is life, and where did it come from—continue to perplex the best minds of secular science, God reveals that He not only has the answers to the initial question of life's origin but the solution to the profound question of life's purpose.

Whether we understand the purpose for human life or not, the Bible promises that "the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 40:5, NIV). In due time this will come to pass. *VCM* is committed to sharing the revealed understanding to be found within the Bible.

The Bible is silent on the scientific, chemical and biological origins of life. Why? Because it reveals that *all life was created by God*. This answer to the ultimate question of modern science is rejected by most, but the time will come when all will understand!

Recommended reading

How did the universe come about? Where and how did life begin? Are we, as the theory of evolution proposes, merely the result of a series of lucky accidents in a world with no purpose or meaning? Are we nothing more than animals, drawing breath for a short while with no future or ultimate hope? These are crucial questions indeed, and you need to know the answers!

Discover the exciting truth in these two booklets, *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* Both examine many scientific facts and discoveries that point to one inescapable conclusion: The Creator God, who has a great purpose for you, exists!

Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles

By Jerold Aust

How much do you really know about the apostle Paul? Why did God choose Paul and who was he? Many factors in his background—his family, intelligence, hometown, Roman citizenship, education and zeal—appear to have marked him for God's use.



THE ROMAN SOLDIERS brusquely prepared Paul for scourging. This vicious lashing was a fast and effective way to get to the truth of the dispute between the apostle and some Jews in Jerusalem.

As the Roman soldiers yanked the clothes from his back, Paul asked the centurion overseeing the punishment, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" (Acts 22:25, New International Version).

Paul's question about the rights of a Roman citizen immediately thwarted the soldiers' intentions. The rights of a Roman citizen could open doors throughout the empire and automatically nullify this kind of abuse of position by petty officials.

The centurion scurried to his commander to warn him of the possibility of illegally mistreating a Roman citizen, a serious offense anywhere in the empire.

Could this man really be a Roman citizen?

The garrison commander approached Paul cautiously. Could this man, who had somehow so provoked the local Jewish leadership, really be a Roman citizen? The officer knew he had better tread carefully.

He asked Paul, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" (verse 27). Paul responded that indeed he was.

The officer had to accept Paul's answer at face value for several reasons. First, he had already made the mistake of not conducting an inquiry of his prisoner beforehand. Second, if his prisoner were a Roman citizen, he ran the risk of losing his position and—in a worst-case scenario—his life.

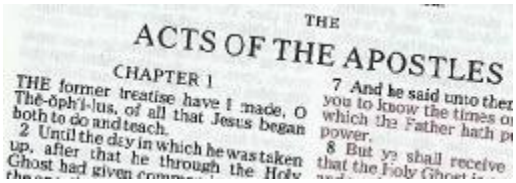
But then he made an erroneous assumption. Seeing that Paul was a Jew, he assumed Paul was in no better position than he when it came to Roman citizenship. Looking at the manacled prisoner, he said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship."

Paul responded, "But I was born a citizen" (verse 28, NIV).

At the time, Roman citizenship was a valuable privilege conferred on those of high standing, those who had performed exceptional service for the empire or those who had paid for citizenship through what amounted to a bribe. The officer had bought his citizenship at great cost. Paul had been born a citizen, probably because an ancestor had been honored with Roman citizenship for service to an administrator or military commander.

Hearing Paul's response, his questioners withdrew. They were in enough hot water for their abuse of Paul's rights as a Roman. The commander realized his dilemma. But what he didn't know was the entire scenario lay in the hands of God and that Christ's apostle, Paul, would serve as a witness for Him not only to the highest levels of government in Rome but to us 2,000 years later.

Profiling Paul


THE
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
CHAPTER 1
THE former treatise have I made, O Thĕ-ŏph'i-lus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,
2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given
7 And he said unto them you to know the times o which the Father hath p power.
8 But ye shall receive that the Holy Ghost

We have many ways of approaching a profile of the apostle, and it is difficult to squeeze into one article even the highlights of a tumultuous life that fills most of the book of Acts and much of the rest of the New Testament.

In this article we concentrate on understanding why and how Paul conducted himself within the diverse cultures of the Roman Empire. We'll gain an overview of the many cultural, educational and religious factors that shaped a powerful servant of God.

When you read the book of Acts and Paul's letters, this perspective can serve as a backdrop and perhaps help you better understand why Paul was "all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Paul's formative years

In the New Testament, more of Paul's writings were preserved than those of any other writer. But who was he? Where did he come from? What was his family background, his education? What did he look like?

Reading a little of the context pertinent to these questions can help us understand God's work with His disciples in general, and Paul in particular.

Paul had been a Pharisee, a member of one of the strictest Jewish sects. He considered himself the most zealous, rigorous and careful of all Pharisees.

His given name was Saul, the same as Israel's first king more than 1,000 years earlier. Like that Saul, the apostle was from the Israelite tribe of Benjamin. He later became better known by his other name, Paul. Many factors in his background—his family, intelligence, hometown, Roman citizenship, education and zeal—appear to have marked him for God's use.



The city of Tarsus, where Paul was brought up, was the capital of Cilicia, then a part of the province of Syria. It was a metropolis of its time and in many senses a free city of the Roman Empire. It was situated on both sides of the River Cydnus, built on a spacious plain bounded by rolling hills. Beyond the hills rose the majestic snow-covered Taurus Mountains.

Tarsus was one of the great cities of the empire. The Greek geographer Strabo said that, when it came to philosophy and general education, Tarsus was more illustrious than either Athens or Alexandria. At the crossroads where East meets West, Tarsus was home of major gentile communities as well as a considerable Jewish colony.

Family and education

Paul was not merely a resident of the distinguished city of Tarsus, he was a Roman citizen. "To the Roman his citizenship was his passport in distant lands, his talisman in seasons of difficulties and danger. It shielded him alike from the caprice of municipal law and the injustice of local magistrates" *(The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* 1986, Vol. 3, "Paul, the Apostle," p. 2273).

Paul's family apparently had lived in Tarsus for generations because his ancestors "had been planted in Tarsus as part of a colony with full municipal rights" (ibid.). The Jews' dispersion and subsequent migrations dated back some 500 years, through the successive empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and finally Rome.

His cultural environment outside the Jewish colony in Tarsus was awash in Greek thought and education and ruled by the Romans, who themselves incorporated much Greek culture into their own.

Paul was educated. His schooling probably began in a room attached to a synagogue and culminated in Jerusalem, where he sat at the feet of the renowned Jewish teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

The learned Rabban (an eminent title) Gamaliel was Paul's tutor in the law. Gamaliel had a great reputation among all the people of Jerusalem. He showed the capacity to rise above the bigotry of the Pharisees (Acts 5:34-39). Paul's training in Jerusalem under Gamaliel helped equip Paul to serve God.

Paul spoke Aramaic, Hebrew and likely Greek and possibly Latin. "The city [Tarsus] gave him a schooling in his social, political, intellectual, moral, and religious life, but in varying degrees. It

was because Tarsus was a cosmopolitan city with 'an amalgamated society' that it possessed the peculiar suitability to educate and mold [Paul's] mind" (ibid.).

Paul was, in effect, a citizen of the world, equipped to mix with Jew or gentile.

Unimpressive in appearance



Indications are that Paul was not a man of impressive size. His Roman name, Paul, means "little." A secular and unflattering tradition has it that he was baldheaded, bowlegged and short but strongly built, with eyebrows that met over a large nose.

The Bible, however, isn't clear about Paul's physical appearance since God focused more on His servants' spiritual condition, teaching and service. Paul was a giant in those areas.

At Lystra, after Paul's participation in a miraculous healing, the natives took Barnabas for Zeus and Paul for Hermes because Paul "was the chief speaker" (Acts 14:12). Apparently Barnabas had the more impressive appearance. In Malta, the natives first thought Paul was a murderer, then changed their minds, thinking he was a god since he didn't die after a serpent bit him (Acts 28:4-6).

Enemies at Corinth sneered at Paul's bodily presence, which apparently was in contrast to his powerfully written letters (2 Corinthians 10:10). Their reaction to Paul indicates his looks were anything but impressive. Besides his natural appearance, he probably had suffered scars and other disfigurements from his many beatings (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

A thorn in the flesh

In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul mentions his "thorn in the flesh," referring to an infirmity, mental or physical, that causes a person trouble. Although Paul doesn't explain what this was, it might have been poor eyesight.

Paul apparently refers to a vision problem in his letter to the Galatians. "For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me" (Galatians 4:15).

In the same epistle he writes, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!" (Galatians 6:11).

Although some argue that "large letters" refers to a long epistle, the original Greek wording denotes sprawling, untidy letters, written by someone who was not a scribe by trade. Also, the letter to the Galatians is not long.

If poor or deteriorating eyesight was the problem Paul alluded to, such a condition must have frustrated him, given his zeal for God and his drive to spread the gospel of Christ.

But Paul, with his faith in God and Christ, bore up under his infirmities: "From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17).

From a spiritual standpoint, God was pleased with the way Paul appeared, for God looks on the heart, not the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7). Based on the record we have of Paul's life, we can safely say his outward scars showed monumental inward faith in God.

Paul's natural abilities

Paul was known for his zeal. As a young man he was a formidable foe of the early Church. The hard-hitting Pharisee traveled far and wide to bring Christians to Jerusalem for imprisonment, interrogation and even death (Acts 26:10-11).

God, however, had other plans. He channeled Paul's zeal to His service. In God's service Paul served as scholar, sage, statesman, seer and saint. He had heart, imagination, sensitivity and a strong will. He was courageous, sincere, subtle, humorous and tactful. He had vast leadership abilities and a gift of expression.

Paul was also a gifted thinker. He examined ideas and opinions logically, often with questions and answers, to determine their validity. He was keenly analytical and an expert expositor of the Scriptures.

His sharp mind caught the attention of many, including rulers and other government officials. Nowhere is this more evident than when he was accused of the Jews while a prisoner in Caesarea (Acts 25-26). During that time he was restrained in bonds, the Jews hoping to have him delivered to their judgment in Jerusalem. Instead, God allowed him a day in court with Felix, the governor—and later with his successor, Festus, as well as King Agrippa and Queen Bernice.

Paul examined ideas and opinions logically, often with questions and answers, to determine their validity.

All of these rulers, and especially the latter, were at least partially persuaded to consider the truth of God's Word through Paul's inspired explanations of the Scriptures. King Agrippa replied to Paul's incisive exposition, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28).

Paul's gifts from God

Paul had his share of spiritual gifts. He understood prophecy and could explain it well. God granted him visions and other revelations, including a vision of "the third heaven," to God's throne in "Paradise" (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

God worked miracles by the hands of Paul (Acts 14:8-10; 16:18; 19:11-12; 28:8-9). He even raised a young man to life after he had died in a fall (Acts 20:9-12).

Among Paul's spiritual gifts, few were as dear to him as his calling (Acts 9:15). Paul reported he had seen the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:8).

Paul was also a gifted teacher. He wrote at least 13 epistles preserved in the New Testament. His insights give us broad understanding of the rest of the Scriptures and reveal deep spiritual principles.

When studying Paul's writings we should consider them in the context of the entire Bible. After all, as Jesus said, we are to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4). Many well-meaning Bible students have difficulty understanding Paul's writings. The apostle Peter called his writings complex and easy to "twist," and some people had come to erroneous and dangerous conclusions because they were unskilled in the truth (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Apostle to the gentiles

A major part of Paul's service to God included his calling as an apostle to the gentiles (Romans 11:13; Ephesians 3:8). Although the other apostles carried the gospel primarily to the descendants of the tribes of Israel, Paul was chosen for the huge responsibility of taking God's truth to gentiles.

God didn't send just anyone to the rest of the world, beyond the scattered nation of Israel. He sent a converted Israelite who had grown up in the understanding of the gentiles' culture as well.

Most Bible students know that God's truth and the gospel first went to the "Jew"—or, more broadly, to the Israelite—and then to the gentile (Romans 1:16). With Paul, God began to carry out His original intention for peoples to know Him, His truth and His laws and ultimately to experience God's peace and prosperity. Although relatively few are called and understand His truth now, God's original intent will not come about until Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom of God on earth—when peace will begin to pervade the world (Isaiah 2:2-4; Hebrews 8:10-12; Zechariah 14:8-9, 11).

God specifically chose Paul to begin the work of making all people into spiritual Israelites (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:15-16). God drafted His great plan before He began the age of man on earth (2 Timothy 1:9). God didn't send just anyone to the rest of the world, beyond the scattered nation of Israel. He sent a converted Israelite, skilled in the ways of God, who had grown up in the understanding of the gentiles' culture as well. God used Paul as an instrument to open doors to gentiles in a much broader way. As a result, all peoples have the opportunity and privilege to become spiritual Israelites. God used Paul, although Paul acknowledged the credit goes to God.

A faithful servant awaits his crown

The disputes that brought Paul into conflict with Jewish religious and Roman civil authorities eventually brought Paul to Rome, the heart of the mighty empire. He wrote several of his epistles while a prisoner there. He was first held under house arrest but was free to receive visitors (Acts 28:16-31). Even under those circumstances he could exercise considerable influence, to the point that some in the emperor's household were converted to Christianity through his teaching (Philippians 4:22).

His captors eventually released him, but he was imprisoned again. His situation grew increasingly grim as Christians began to experience persecution throughout the empire. This time he was held in prison and sentenced to death.

At one point Paul thought Jesus would return in his lifetime (1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17). Later he realized Christ would not return in his day. Yet he was confident that a crown of life was reserved for him, to be given him at his resurrection to eternal life.

Paul's words to Timothy remain a great source of encouragement for Christians of all ages: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8, NIV).

When you read Paul's letters in the Bible and the account of his ministry in Acts, remember this thumbnail sketch of Paul to better understand why he could be all things to all men.

Keep in mind why God chose and used Paul. It was because He knew Paul was capable of remaining a faithful servant to the end: "...He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

Coming: An End to Suffering

By Larry Walker

Why is the world awash in suffering? How did the world come to be in such sad shape? Most important, what will bring about the end of pain?



AN EERIE SILENCE hangs over the room. Chairs separated by curtains line the walls. Every seat is occupied. Men and women, old and middle-aged, sit quietly. Each patient is connected to a plastic tube that drips powerful chemicals into veins in his arm. Most of the people are bald. One has had a leg amputated just below the knee. An elderly man struggles to his feet, his spindly legs trembling. Another quickly takes his place.

The process is called chemotherapy. It is multiple biochemical drug therapy that doctors routinely prescribe to destroy tumor cells after cancer surgery.

Chemotherapy destroys fast-growing cells throughout the body, including cancer cells, which keep reappearing as the disease spreads. Doctors monitor each patient's response and the growth of cancer cells to determine the details of appropriate treatment. Chemo, as it is called, is a fact of life for many cancer patients battling the disease.

Carol lives in a small town in Oregon. Her daughter drives her 150 miles for weekly treatments. The trip takes four hours one way. From 9 in the morning until 1 in the afternoon, Carol is hooked up to a device that trickles the chemicals into her system to fight her pancreatic cancer. Carol's treatment cycle calls for two weeks of treatment, then a three-week reprieve.

Cancer is a leading cause of death in Western nations. In the United States nearly half a million people die of cancer every year.

As with many forms of medical treatment, side effects are a problem. They include weakness, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, pain along the vein of infusion, anorexia, diarrhea, constipation, flu-like symptoms, fever, headache, inflammation of the mouth's mucous tissue and multiple lacerations and fissures in the mouth. Anemia and dermatitis are common delayed reactions.

Chemotherapy lowers the white-cell count and calcium levels and the platelets in the blood that normally enable clotting. Other side effects are destruction of functional liver tissue and bone-marrow suppression as well as harmful pulmonary, renal and central nervous system effects.

Loss of hair is another heartbreaker. Carol's long blond tresses are gone, replaced by short gray hair that has no chance to lengthen between chemotherapy sessions. She has good days when she feels well enough to spend time doing light work in her yard. Other times are more difficult and painful for her. The cancer, the chemotherapy and the other medications all cause discomfort and pain.

Diseases of the West

Cancer is a leading cause of death in Western nations. In the United States nearly half a million people die of cancer every year. Yet it is not the No. 1 cause of death.

Heart disease is the biggest killer, claiming 700,000 lives annually.

Worldwide, an estimated 400 million people suffer from mental or neurological disorders or from other problems such as alcohol and drug abuse. Many suffer in silence and alone. Besides physical symptoms, the emotions of fear, guilt and shame accompany these problems.

According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD), almost 13.8 million Americans over the age of 17 have problems with drinking. Alcohol is said to contribute to 100,000 deaths annually. The NCADD estimates that 43 percent of U.S. adults (76 million people) have been exposed to alcoholism by growing up with or being married to a problem drinker or alcoholic.

Epidemics in poor nations

Other diseases affect large segments of the population in poor countries.



AIDS continues to exact a staggering toll. Since AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) was identified 20 years ago, nearly 58 million people have been infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), also called the AIDS virus. Of those, almost 22 million have died and more than 36 million are still alive, according to December 2000 figures released by the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

The report reveals that AIDS deaths reached a record 3 million in 2000 and that new HIV infections continued mostly unchecked, with an estimated 5.3 million adults and children becoming infected last year. UNAIDS estimates that 34.7 million adults and 1.4 million children under the age of 15 live with the AIDS virus.

The report reveals that the steepest increase in AIDS in 2000 was recorded in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, where the number of new HIV infections, 50,000, surpassed all previous years' HIV infections combined. In all of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the number of the HIV-infected rose by almost two thirds from 1999 to 2000, from 420,000 to an estimated 700,000. In India estimates place HIV infections in the country at around 4 million.

Other diseases take their toll

Up to a third of the world's population is infected by soilborne diseases caused by worms and parasites, with 300 million experiencing severe adverse effects. Such maladies are invariably more prevalent in the poorest sections of the poorest countries.

At the beginning of the 21st century, epidemics ranging from cholera and meningitis to Ebola and Lassa fever continue to pose serious worldwide risks to health. In the last four years the World Health Organization (WHO) claims to have verified more than 800 internationally significant outbreaks.



Preventable problems such as respiratory disease, diarrhea, malaria, measles and malnutrition account for more than 70 percent of child mortality in Africa. Medical researchers estimate that 1.5 million of the 75 million children under age 5 in Africa die each year from pneumonia. The WHO estimates that each child in the region has five attacks of diarrhea per year and that 800,000 die annually from diarrhea and dehydration. Malnutrition and measles are often associated with these deaths.

In 1993 malaria affected some 90 countries or territories, almost half of them in Africa south of the Sahara. The world faces an estimated 300 to 500 million clinical cases annually, with tropical Africa accounting for more than 90 percent of that total. The vast majority of malarial deaths occur among young children in Africa, especially in remote rural areas with poor access to health services. About one million deaths among children under 5 years of age can be attributed to malaria alone or in combination with other diseases.

In Africa south of the Sahara, 70 to 90 percent of the population shows evidence of prior hepatitis-B infection. Hepatitis B is a major factor in liver cancer, which ranks either first or second among cancer deaths in males in many sub-Saharan African countries. Primary cancer of the liver is always fatal. The average age of death is 35 to 45 years, killing parents and wage earners at the most productive time of their lives.

Will medical science eliminate disease?

Medical researchers estimate that 1.5 million of the 75 million children under age 5 in Africa die each year from pneumonia.

The world is racked with suffering. People's pain and suffering is documented daily on TV news and the front page of your newspaper. Crime, domestic violence, wars and terrorism inflict pain and death on millions of victims. Agonizing, crippling injuries and accidental fatalities on the job, in the home and on the highways add to the toll. Famine and hunger result in widespread agony, especially in poverty-stricken countries.

We're all too familiar with suffering, from minor ailments to chronic, life-threatening conditions. Why is life fraught with pain? Will we ever see an end to suffering?

In recent years researchers have made much progress in pain relief. But such respites are not available to everyone, especially in poor nations. Even those who can afford pain medications experience only temporary, limited relief. Living with pain remains a daily burden for millions.

Recent medical breakthroughs offer some hope for victory over debilitating diseases. The highly touted Genome Project (see "The Human Genome Project: Decoding the Mystery of Man," *The Good News,* July-August 2000, http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn29) offers fundamental information through genetic "mapping" that may lead to more effective treatment and even prevention of disease.

However, this prospect presumes that learning how diseases form on the genetic level of victims will lead to methods of prevention. At best this will take time. Even the most optimistic proponents admit that it will take years before any such results will be forthcoming. For the foreseeable future, the costs of such high-tech treatments will limit the benefits to a small number of patients.

Man cannot end suffering

Many residents of big cities live in fear of violent crimes—murder, rape, robbery and assault. Though crime rates fluctuate widely, neither technology nor educational programs has eliminated its scourge. The same can be said for war. In spite of the proliferation of treaties and peace talks, wars continue, and terrorism remains a constant threat.

Some 2,700 years ago the prophet Isaiah predicted a time of peace when peoples "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; [and] nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

In 1961 the United States and the Soviet Union announced a plan to achieve that goal. The Soviets introduced the idea at the United Nations General Assembly in 1959. On Sept. 20, 1961, John McCloy of the United States and Valerian Zorin representing the Soviet Union signed the Joint

Statement of Agreed Principles for Disarmament Negotiations, which stated that "disarmament is general and complete and war is no longer an instrument for settling international problems."

The sculpture that symbolizes man's desire to put an end to war and convert the means of destruction into creative tools for the benefit of all mankind.

The United Nations headquarters in New York City displays a sculpture called "Let Us Beat Swords Into Plowshares," donated by the Soviet Union in 1959. Made by Evgeniy Vuchetich, the bronze statue represents the figure of a man holding a hammer in one hand and, in the other, a sword that he is beating into a plowshare. The statue symbolizes man's desire to put an end to war and convert the means of destruction into creative tools for the benefit of all mankind. Yet it stands as a mute testimony to man's inability to accomplish these lofty goals.

Neither science nor education, nor any human agency, can end suffering. The best man can offer is limited, temporary relief. The causes of pain are too widespread and deeply rooted to yield to the efforts of human endeavor. A world free from anguish would seem to be an impossible dream.

Good news from the Bible

The bad news for the world today is but a prelude to the good news of the world tomorrow, when that impossible dream will become reality.

In a lengthy prophecy recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, Jesus Christ warned that suffering and death from wars, famines, disease epidemics and natural disasters will continue to plague mankind and reach a crescendo at "the end of the age." The book of Revelation gives vivid, detailed descriptions of unimaginable misery and death. But beyond this time of unprecedented suffering, the Bible prophesies a utopian world.

The scenario portrayed by the UN statue depicts only one part of the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 2. This chapter reveals that universal disarmament and peace will not come through human-initiated efforts, agreements and treaties, but as a result of learning and living by the laws of God (Isaiah 2:2-5). The prophet Micah echoes this prophecy and adds that "everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4).

God also inspired Isaiah to write, "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 11:9). God's people will dwell safely with no need for protection (Jeremiah 23:6; 3:16, 31:8-14; Ezekiel 34:25-28).

No longer needing to fear terrorist attacks, "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).

During Christ's millennial rule on this earth the surviving descendants of ancient Israel will enjoy a relationship with God that will inspire people of all nations (Ezekiel 36:33-36; 37:28), who will send representatives to Jerusalem to learn more about the laws of God that lead to such wonderful results (Isaiah 2:1-3). Then and only then will mankind "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks," and "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

Universal healing and health

The many healings Jesus performed during His earthly ministry were only a forerunner of a great time of healing and health foretold in Isaiah 61. When Jesus quoted this prophecy as applying to His ministry, He stopped short of quoting the entire prophecy (Luke 4:18). The other encouraging events detailed in the prophecy are yet to take place.

After Jesus returns to earth, He will fulfill the remainder of Isaiah's prophecy. Cities will be rebuilt (Isaiah 61:4). Mourning will give way to joy (verse 3). Nations will rejoice in response to God's abundant blessings (verses 7-11). God reveals that a time of peace, prosperity and happiness for His people is coming when He will "turn their mourning into joy" (Jeremiah 31:13).

The many healings Jesus performed during His earthly ministry were only a forerunner of a great time of healing and health.

This wonderful world will not simply appear instantaneously. People will have to learn the way of peace. They will come to realize that mankind's woes from the beginning of time are the result of ignorance of, and disobedience to, the laws of God.

From the time that Adam and Eve chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, man has followed a path that has led to suffering and death (Romans 5:12). Most of the problems that afflict the world are the result of sin. (To better understand this crucial truth, be sure to request our free booklet *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*)

The gospel and the plan of God

God has a plan that will ultimately eliminate sin, suffering and death (Daniel 9:24; 1 Corinthians 15:25-26). That plan is an integral part of the message of good news—the gospel—that Jesus brought and taught.

Sin has long played a central role in humanity's suffering and death. We can understand how sin will be defeated and eradicated when we properly understand Christ's ministry and mission. He died for the sins of mankind to make possible forgiveness of sin and access to God and His promises (John 3:16; Romans 5:1-2). But the message of the gospel goes beyond the death of Jesus Christ and our relationship with God in this life. As Paul said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

The scope of the gospel reaches out to encompass the good news of future events in the plan of God that Jesus will accomplish. "...Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28).

After describing the horrendous plagues destined to strike the earth at the time of the end, the book of Revelation states that Jesus will return to earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16). Prophecies in Daniel 2 and 7 speak of the kingdoms and governments of man being replaced and superseded by the Kingdom of God. Under the loving rulership of Christ, the suffering of mankind will be greatly diminished as men, women and children everywhere learn to live a way of life that leads to the wonderfully hopeful and positive results described in so many biblical prophecies.

The gospel Jesus preached focused on the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:1, 14-15; Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Luke 4:43; 8:1; Acts 1:3). This focus has been obscured over the centuries since the early Catholic theologian Augustine (A.D. 354-430) determined that "the millennial kingdom had commenced with the appearing of Christ and was therefore an accomplished fact" *(The Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 11th edition, Vol. 18, "Millennium").

The resurrection and the end of suffering

This Kingdom of God will rule our physical world in the future (Daniel 2:44; 7:13-14). But in reality it is an eternal spirit kingdom. Paul says plainly that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50). God is spirit (John 4:24), and He must change us from physical flesh and blood to immortal spirit that we may "inherit" that kingdom.

The entire 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians explains that He will change us from corruptible flesh to incorruptible spirit by means of a resurrection from the dead. Paul describes the final victory over pain and death in verse 54: "So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

In Philippians 3:21 Paul writes that God "will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body..." For those who become God's people in the present age, this momentous transformation will take place at the time of the sounding of the final "trumpet" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). John refers to this event as "the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:6).

Jesus said that ultimately all mankind will live again—most in the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29, Young's Literal Translation). This will be the time when their future for all eternity will be decided. Those who repent will enter into God's Kingdom. Those who hold fast to an obstinate heart will perish.

Ezekiel 37 graphically describes the resurrection to physical life of the house of Israel during that time. Jesus later explained that people of all ethnic origins will rise from their graves in the same resurrection (Matthew 12:41-42). God, in His mercy (Matthew 11:22-24), has built into His plan an opportunity for everyone to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

God's feast days outline His plan

The exciting story of God's plan to end pain and death is outlined in seven annual festivals that He first revealed to ancient Israel (Leviticus 23). Jesus and the apostles observed these days, as did the early New Testament Church (Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 2:41-42; John 2:23; 7:2, 8-10; Acts 18:21; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8). These days offer "a shadow of things to come" in the plan of God (Colossians 2:16-17).

The months corresponding roughly to September and October feature four of these seven annual feasts. The Feast of Trumpets anticipates the return of Christ at the last trumpet. The Day of Atonement pictures the putting away of Satan shortly after Christ's return so the world, which is

deceived by the devil, can understand the plan of God and be reconciled to Him (Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

The seven-day Feast of Tabernacles pictures "the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:5), when peace and prosperity, health and happiness will prevail throughout the world. The Last Great Day, immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles, looks forward to the time when all who have lived and died will live again and be given the opportunity to become vessels of the "living water" of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39).

Members of the United Church of God, publisher of *Virtual Christian Magazine,* observe these days, including the Feast of Tabernacles, in many locations around the world. We invite you to enjoy with us this coming foretaste of the world God is planning and preparing for us.

Of the future world God tells us: "I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying…

"They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them" (Isaiah 65:17-23).

The end of suffering

Carol, the cancer patient we met earlier, lives one day at a time in eager anticipation of this exciting future. She describes her disease as "a temporary thing, like this is a temporary world."

"God has a plan," she says, "and whatever it is I wouldn't want to be in any other situation."

Paul compares the suffering of this world to the pain of childbirth (Romans 8:22-23), and even God's people must endure some suffering (2 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Peter 4:19). This servant of God who experienced so much abuse and pain in his life (2 Corinthians 11:23-28) concludes, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Just as the joy of childbirth follows the pain of delivery, "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" (verses 21-22).

Our temporary physical existence is but a shadow of the real life to come, like "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14) and grass that withers or a flower that flourishes for a while then fades (Isaiah 40:6-8; 1 Peter 1:24).

Revelation 21-22 describes a transformed world in which every trace of sin and suffering, disability and death will be gone forever. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

May God speed that day!

Letters to the Editor

Who calls one to conversion?



I was wondering if United has changed it views on only God the Father converting people.

I quote from the article ["Held Together by a Spiritual Thread" in the February 2004 issue]: "They are to be loved and accepted, too, for who knows if they may not be converted by our example." Can't they only be converted if God is calling them?

Thank you for your question regarding conversion.

The United Church of God has not changed its understanding of John 6:44. We firmly believe that no man can come to Christ "unless the Father who sent Me [Jesus Christ] draws him."

With that in mind, how can it be said, "They are to be loved and accepted, too, for who knows if they may not be converted by our example"? Perhaps the wording would have been more clear and accurate if "by our example" had been "through our example." God can use our example in calling others.

In 1 Peter 3:1-2 it gives us some insight, "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear." These verses are speaking of a married woman whose mate is not a part of the Church. They tell us that a wife can have a most positive impact upon a husband. Her conduct may win him over to the point where he is not hostile to her involvement in the Church. It may also be that her conduct may influence her husband to the point where he is open to God's calling. The wife does not call. God calls, but a wife or husband can impact his or her mate in a way that makes it easy for the mate to respond to God's calling.

Notice also 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. In these passages Paul says in verse 19, "that I might win the more," and in verse 22, "that I might by all means save some." Is Paul saying that it is he, not God, who "wins" and "saves"? Or is he saying that he seeks to preach the gospel to the Jews, to those under the law, to those without the law, and to those who are weak from their particular vantage point in order that the Word of God might have its greatest impact? However, no matter how well Paul presented the gospel, it would be up to God to call.

As Christians, we are to be lights shining in the world in order that people can observe our practicing God's way and come to glorify our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:15-16). Our example only serves to help a person whom God may call.

I hope the explanation above serves to clarify the subject of God's central role in the conversion process.

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