Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"—Revelation 11:15

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War of the Worlds

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War of the Worlds *by H.G. Wells is considered a science-fiction classic. It has been read by millions, its 1938 enactment on radio caused a nationwide panic, and it has spawned two popular movies. Is an invasion from outer space a possibility? Did you know that the Bible actually predicts an invasion of this earth from beyond?*

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After the turmoil of today's world, the promised peaceful world of tomorrow is almost beyond belief!

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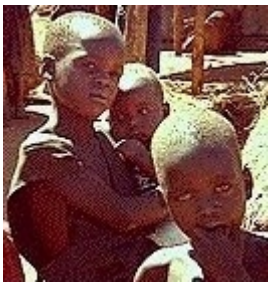

Working with children whose lives have been devastated by war today provides some clues about how we can prepare to help people heal when peace finally does come.

Real Life in the Millennium

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God has given wonderful promises of a world of peace and prosperity. But does the Bible teach that the Millennium will provide a life of ease, a life without challenges? Does Bible prophecy show us that people will be prevented from taking any action that would disturb the harmony of a world under God's government? Since God's purpose requires people to grow in godly character, and since character requires freedom of choice, perhaps the reality of this wonderful world will include a few surprises.

Beyond the Millennium

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The Bible describes the Millennium as a fantastic time of peace and productivity. But beyond that time, an even more amazing period awaits!

Jesus Christ and the Meaning of the Biblical Holy Days

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Jesus Christ celebrated seven festivals every year that most Christians today can't even name, yet He is at the core of all of them. He is the reason for each of these seasons, and they have great meaning for anyone who would like to follow Him better today. What are these festivals, and what do they reveal about our Savior and King?

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War of the Worlds

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War of the Worlds *by H.G. Wells is considered a science-fiction classic. It has been read by millions, its 1938 enactment on radio caused a nationwide panic, and it has spawned two popular movies. Is an invasion from outer space a possibility? Did you know that the Bible actually predicts an invasion of this earth from beyond?*



IT WAS 1937 when the dirigible *Hindenburg* exploded as it docked in Lakehurst, New Jersey, after a transatlantic flight. It was the first time in radio history that millions of people heard a live broadcast of a disaster as it occurred.



At the time, the United States was still in the throes of the Great Depression. People were concerned about the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany. In this period of anxiety, one of the most bizarre incidents in broadcast history caused nationwide panic.

On Oct. 20, 1938, a CBS radio program airing dance music was interrupted with an alarming story of an alien invasion of New Jersey. And these invaders weren't from another country, but were strange creatures from Mars. At regular intervals the music stopped as listeners were told of massive destruction and death being spread around the world by a powerful and unstoppable enemy.



Of course, the truth was that Orson Welles was simply dramatizing H.G. Wells' science-fiction novel *War of the Worlds*. Many misunderstood that the broadcast was a drama, and panic began to spread. Some left their homes and headed for what they thought would be safer places. Telephone lines became jammed. Hundreds of New Jersey National Guardsmen actually tried to report to duty and the governor of Pennsylvania offered to send troops.

The panic eventually faded as people began to understand that the danger was nothing more than imagination run amok.

War of the Worlds was first published in 1898 and has undergone many editions. It was made into a movie in 1953, and again this year. It's a simple story—strange, intelligent and violent alien creatures invade earth and try to erase all humankind. It's a recurring story line in many science-fiction movies, from the Cold War-inspired *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to the 1996 blockbuster *Independence Day*.

An interesting theme of Wells' original *War of the Worlds* is that people turn to God in their time of crisis. Most science fiction takes a more humanistic approach, where human beings learn to work together for the benefit of all. Prejudice, avarice and competition are replaced with a utopian vision such as depicted in John Lennon's famous song "Imagine," where all ideas are equal, everyone is enlightened by human goodness, and people no longer need God.

The Bible predicts a coming invasion



Revelation, the last book of the Bible, an ancient text written by a man far removed from the technological age that created science fiction, contains predictions of a future invasion of earth. John, a disciple of Jesus, describes how nations will unite together to try to repel the attackers, but the armies will descend from the sky to kill many and conquer the earth.

John even tells us the name of the leader of this invading force—The Word of God. Jesus Christ is returning to this earth, not as a baby in the manger, but as the conquering King of Kings.

This isn't bad news—it is the only good news for the future of mankind. Jesus Christ is returning to this earth to save us from ourselves. The irony is that human beings will try and repel their Savior.

Jesus predicted the most terrible time in human history, called the tribulation. He told His disciples, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:29-31).

Like so many science-fiction plots, the Bible predicts that the nations will set aside their differences and band together to combat this perceived threat from outer space. The apostle John describes a gigantic battle between the armies of the earth and Jesus Christ in Revelation 19.

The Kingdom of God

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks."

Jesus is returning to save mankind from self-destruction, but a deluded humanity will believe that He is coming to do them harm. After the Prince of Peace subdues the nations, He will create a new world government and establish one true religion. The economic systems and educational institutions will then teach the foundational, eternal principles of life created by the Lifegiver. The environment will be healed and poverty eradicated.

This period of rule by Jesus Christ is sometimes called the Millennium. One of the most famous millennial prophecies is found in Isaiah chapter 2. You can see these words at the United Nations in New York: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." Sadly, the United Nations has failed to achieve this goal in its checkered 60 years of existence. Jesus Christ, in contrast, will succeed.

Recommended reading

The Bible clearly promises that Jesus Christ will return. But when will He come back? What must happen first? For biblical answers, see our booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

The Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ

By Roger Foster

After the turmoil of today's world, the promised peaceful world of tomorrow is almost beyond belief!



WHEN JESUS CHRIST RETURNS to earth, He will initiate "the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21, New Revised Standard Version). Those prophets consistently assured ancient Israel and Judah that a righteous King would restore God's Kingdom to earth.

The prophets reveal the exact spot to which the Messiah, God's anointed King, will return: "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east" (Zechariah 14:4). Starting with Jerusalem as His capital city, He will expand His reign to the world (verses 9).

Once God's Kingdom is established in Jerusalem among the people of Israel, Christ will ask representatives of all nations to come to Jerusalem to learn about His laws. He will summon them to Jerusalem to attend God's Feast of Tabernacles. "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (verse 16).

Faithful servants of God will serve as the teachers and administrators of that wonderful world to come.

Not all nations will immediately cooperate. Remember, Satan had organized these same nations to fight Christ at His return. They will not quickly accept Him even after Satan is bound. Therefore Christ will "judge between the nations, and rebuke many people…" (Isaiah 2:4). Early in Christ's reign, strong measures still will be necessary to convince most nations that He intends to enforce the laws of God.

How will He make this clear, especially to nations who obstinately refuse to attend the Feast of Tabernacles? His means of communicating His message to them will be straightforward. He will simply demonstrate His control over the natural forces of earth. "And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain" (Zechariah 14:17).

The nations will quickly learn that their existence depends on God's blessing. Good weather and bountiful crops are blessings from God. From this time forward, only nations that obey God will reap those blessings. All others will not. Such a system will serve as a convincing argument. In time, all nations will respond.

Let's examine some of the specifics of Christ's reign as the King of Kings.

Rewarding the saints

Jesus Christ has promised to reward people who through the ages have faithfully served Him (Revelation 11:18; 22:12). Notice their part in His Kingdom: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

The Spirit of God will enable people to willingly and enthusiastically obey Him from the heart.

From the beginning of Christ's millennial reign, the faithful servants of God—including many who will have suffered severe persecution and martyrdom—will serve as the teachers and administrators of that wonderful world to come. They will assist Christ in teaching the ways of peace and righteousness to the nations. This will fulfill Christ's promise to His Church: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21).

The prophet Daniel foretold the same thing: "Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Daniel 7:27).

Christ does not plan to change the world single-handedly. At His coming His faithful servants will be immediately changed from flesh and blood into immortal spirit beings who can assist Him. Paul explained this.

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

These transformed beings will sit with Christ on His throne. They will serve with Him as teachers and administrators during His millennial reign. (For more details about the incredible future God has in store for mankind, be sure to read the booklets *What Is Your Destiny?What Happens After Death?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*)

Israel will help the nations learn God's ways

Concerning the restored nation of Israel during Christ's millennial reign, God says: "Behold…I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at the first. I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all

their iniquities…Then [Jerusalem] shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it" (Jeremiah 33:6-9).

Nations will see that keeping God's law works. They will come to Jerusalem to learn how they can apply it in their own lands. "Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:2). Eventually "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

The fruit of right knowledge

With Jesus Christ as King, Jerusalem will be the center of learning for the world. God's Word, the Bible, will provide a solid foundation for the development of education and knowledge.



"So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth…It shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (Isaiah 55:11-13).

Prosperity will increase, while crime and corruption will cease. "Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver, instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron. I will also make your officers peace, and your magistrates righteousness. Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders…" (Isaiah 60:17-18).

It takes much more than mere knowledge, however, to produce lasting peace and cooperation. A *spiritual change* is also necessary. It will be that spiritual change in the people of Israel that will inspire other nations to admire their way of life and want to emulate it.

"O house of Israel, …for My holy name's sake…I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:22-27).

The spiritual restoration of humanity is the most important transformation that will occur during this millennial period when the world is transformed. The Spirit of God will enable people to willingly and enthusiastically obey Him from the heart. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10).

Jesus Christ will return to earth to spiritually transform its people and establish utopia, a paradise on earth.

God's Spirit will phenomenally transform people. Obedience will be widespread; people will exhibit honorable leadership and enjoy a stable society. "I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (Isaiah 1:26).

The changes will be permanent, lasting throughout subsequent generations. "Also your people shall all be righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, ...that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time" (Isaiah 60:21-22).

Each new generation will carry on this tradition of righteousness. "All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children" (Isaiah 54:13). People the world over will notice and respect their example. "Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity whom the LORD has blessed" (Isaiah 61:9).

Spirituality spreads

As people from other nations see what happens in Jerusalem and its environs, they, too, will want to serve the living God. "Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant—even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer...For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:6-7).

Finally the barriers between Israel and other nations will fall. This will occur because all will eventually realize "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Physical blessings

As people the world over begin to obey God, first by getting their spiritual priorities straight, they will begin to experience unprecedented physical prosperity.



"'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it...They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them'" (Amos 9:13-14).

Isaiah compares this time to a perpetual feast with the best of everything. "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear" (Isaiah 25:6, NRSV).

Notice this inspiring description of blessings yet to come: "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 like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—and their descendants as well.

"Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox...They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD" (Isaiah 65:21-25, NRSV).

This vision of the millennial reign of Christ is not an illusion, but a promise of reality. Jesus Christ will return to earth to spiritually transform its people and establish utopia, a paradise on earth. The combination of removing Satan's influence, giving humanity God's Spirit and teaching the world the laws and ways of God will produce 1,000 years of peace and a society blessed beyond its wildest dreams.

But, incredible as this sounds, prophecy reveals that an even more amazing period awaits mankind. See the article "Beyond the Millennium."

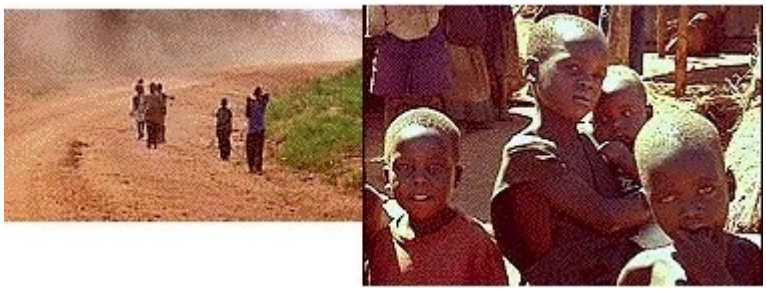
Recommended reading

The Kingdom of God was a major theme of Jesus Christ's teaching, and of the entire Bible. To learn more about the time when Jesus Christ will rule this earth, see our booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

Children of War

By Louise Kleinbergs

Working with children whose lives have been devastated by war today provides some clues about how we can prepare to help people heal when peace finally does come.



"WAR CREATES REFUGEES" was the theme for Refugee Week in the United Kingdom in June 2004. It was a week aimed at celebrating the enormous contribution of refugees to the United Kingdom and promoting understanding for the reasons people seek sanctuary.

The Bible is packed with accounts of wars between nations. In Matthew 24 Christ talks about war being one of the signs of the end of the age. Across the world today there are over 20 wars being fought, yet most of us could only name a few. The consequences of war on the world at large, and individuals in particular, are enormous.

In my job as an EAL (English as an Additional Language) teacher, I am involved with many students who are refugees. These students have been forced to leave their homes and countries because of circumstances beyond their control. In many cases they became refugees because of war.

Some of the students I teach arrive in the classroom needing more than instruction in English. Some have no concept of the truth and fail to see that lying is a problem. Others know of no other way to solve problems than by fighting, and there are those who will steal whatever they want without a conscience pang.

These children, some as young as 5, know no other life. They do what they can to survive.

There is also, at times, a lack of respect for others, particularly those in authority. This is reflected in their interaction with each other and authority figures. In short, the basic principles of right and wrong need to be taught. But how?

The horrors of war

I spoke with Norman Sheehan, CEO of War Child, a network of independent organizations helping children affected by war by developing programs to reintegrate them into society.

Some of the children they deal with were abducted, drugged and forced to kill in order not to be killed themselves. These children, some as young as 5, know no other life. They do what they can to survive.

A newspaper article by Tim Judah in *The Independent,* dated Oct. 23, 2004, talked of child soldiers, sex slaves and cannibalism in Uganda. Children were forced at gunpoint by the rebels to abduct and murder other children and to drink their blood.

Tim Judah goes on to describe the murder of a 14-year-old girl who had been killed by other child captives. One of the girl captives was asked why she had participated. She responded, "I was frightened, but we were told that if we did not kill, they would kill us. So you had to pretend to be brave."

As part of his job, Norman Sheehan spent a year in Sierra Leone working with children of war. I asked him how these young people could be educated. He gave me four basic principles that prompted me to think about what I do in my role as a teacher today, and what we will all do as teachers in the world to come after Jesus Christ returns to save this world from itself. I like to think of this as the S·T·E·P program.

Safety

After the basic needs of children are met, which are food, clothing and shelter, the most important thing is to make them feel safe. They need to feel they can walk around without fear of being shot, abducted or abused. Without this feeling of safety, fear develops, and then the behavior resulting from fear occurs.

The same article by Tim Judah explained how in Gulu, Kitgum (Uganda), a local hospital gives shelter at night to "some of the 45,000 children who, because of their fear of abduction, stream into Gulu, Kitgum, and other towns every evening to sleep in the safety of the hospitals."

When there is no more war, there will be no more children of war!

In the Kingdom of God we will need to create an environment of safety and reassure people they are safe. Have we considered the trauma that people will have experienced? Those who come up in the second resurrection after the Millennium will also need reassurance. It will be vital that we establish a place of safety for them.

Trust

Secondly, a relationship of trust needs to be established. Norman Sheehan maintains that this is very important if a teacher is to make any progress. Trust is not something that can be bought, and is not something that comes overnight. It is developed by finding opportunities to share your time with the children.

As future teachers, we will need to establish a relationship of trust with the people with whom we will be working. We have had the advantage of learning God's way and practicing it in this life. Before we can teach our future students, we will first have to gain their trust.

Example

Norman Sheehan also mentioned how vital the teacher's example is. The children he worked with did not know the right way to do even basic things such as wash their hands before eating—let

alone how to conduct their lives in an orderly and peaceful way. His example was important for them to learn from.

Our example in the Kingdom of God will be equally significant. We will be a light to the world. Indeed we are told in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

People will be watching us! They will want to know what to do, how to have a happy and peaceful life and how to have a relationship with God and with one another.

Isaiah 30:21 tells us, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left."

How wonderful it will be to be this guide, this light!

Patience

As a teacher, patience is crucial—without it you will fail. The civilized behavior patterns of these children in Sierra Leone have been destroyed. They need to be rebuilt, and it is a very long road to changing their behavior.



I once heard a behavior support teacher say that changing bad behavior is like breaking a bad habit. It takes time and patience for a new pattern of behavior to be learned.

One of the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22 is patience. In our role as teachers in the Kingdom of God, we will certainly need patience. People will not change overnight—or even in a week!

A time to practice

We need to develop the fruit of patience now. These four basic principles of the S·T·E·P program can be developed and practiced today when dealing with people in our workplace and within our families.

We need to practice establishing a feeling of safety and a relationship of trust, as well as setting an example that can be followed. And finally we need to learn to exercise patience on a daily basis.

Our future is pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles, a time of wonderful peace, joy and harmony, when people will learn to live God's way of life—a time when Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit, and shut up so "that he should deceive the nations no more" (Revelation 20:3).

This is a time when God's Spirit will truly be among His people. This time of the Millennium is mentioned in Isaiah 2:4 when they "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; [when] nation shall not lift up sword against nation, [and] neither shall they learn war anymore."

And when there is no more war, there will be no more children of war! May God hasten that day when suffering will cease!

Recommended reading

This world is full of suffering, but thankfully God promises it will all end. Yet why does He allow it now? Our brochure *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* can help answer this challenging question.

Louise Kleinbergs is a teacher at Henry Comptons Boys School in London.

Real Life in the Millennium

By Cecil E. Maranville

God has given wonderful promises of a world of peace and prosperity. But does the Bible teach that the Millennium will provide a life of ease, a life without challenges? Does Bible prophecy show us that people will be prevented from taking any action that would disturb the harmony of a world under God's government? Since God's purpose requires people to grow in godly character, and since character requires freedom of choice, perhaps the reality of this wonderful world will include a few surprises.



THE TREASURED PROPHECY OF ISAIAH 11:6-9 provides us with a welcome vision of the world to come. Illustrated by the symbolism of today's natural enemies in the animal kingdom living together in peace, the millennial mosaic painted by these verses stands in stark contrast to the evil world in which we live.



Countless Christians have been strengthened by these hope-filled words: "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."

What will assure this wonderful peace? Jesus Christ will administer His Father's government, with the help of His saints.

Another major prophecy adds some troubling images, and raises some questions, though. Moving ahead in time to just after the Millennium, we know that there will be a colossal war. Revelation 20:7-9 tells of a rebellion against God's government so large as to defy the imagination. Instigated by the recently released Satan, vast numbers of citizens of God's peaceful Kingdom will draw together with the intent to make war on Jerusalem.

How can such a dichotomy exist? What does it tell us about the world between the time Christ returns and the time of this war? Simply put, establishing a perfect government doesn't translate into a world of obedient citizens.

Not a "locked-down" environment

The only way for God to make the world free of any hurtful or destructive action would be to exercise complete control, much like the level of control parents of a tiny baby must exercise to ensure its safety and well-being.

The prophecy of Isaiah 30:20-21 has been offered as an indication that there will be a high degree of control. This prophecy has been explained as foretelling the work of spirit teachers, who make their voice and/or presence known at critical times to ensure that the way of God is followed.

Simply put, establishing a perfect government doesn't translate into a world of obedient citizens.

We might imagine something similar to the sudden appearance of a protective father just at the moment an indiscreet young man thinks to touch his daughter in an improper way. The father's authoritative voice instantly gives the young man the restraint that he needs! Perhaps a spirit-born son or daughter of God suddenly appears, just at the moment that a man thinks to rob another—stopping him before the sin is committed.

Does the prophecy of Isaiah 11 mean that there will be no sin in the world to come? Does the prophecy of Isaiah 30 show that all sin will be prevented? The prophecy that we've already seen of a post-millennial war indicates that not all sin will be stopped.

Let's look into this prophecy of spirit teachers, taking care to read it for what it says and not reading anything into it. First, we should be aware of the fact that translators differ on the Hebrew words for "your teachers." Some have, "your Teacher" in both places where the words are used in Isaiah 30:20. Obviously, they interpret this to be a reference to God Himself.

Even if the original intention is to refer to God as the Teacher, we realize that He delegates that responsibility to those who will serve with Christ as kings and priests in the coming Kingdom (Revelation 5:10).

People will welcome their teachers

But is this a prophecy of enforcement? Isaiah 30:20 says: "Yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore."

What does this mean? Commentaries explain that Israel and Judah often persecuted the representatives God sent to them. Time and again, they were forced "into a corner," as it were, by people who were unwilling to hear or respond to what God's servants had to say. Righteous teachers were persecuted. Even God stopped teaching those who closed their ears and hearts to His words.



Considering the entire prophecy of Isaiah 30:20-21, more than a prophecy of "enforcers," this is a prophecy of a change of heart by God's physical nation, coupled with His promise to provide excellent teachers. God will provide teachers who will explain His way of life clearly and understandably, and the citizens will be responsive to those teachers. The citizens won't chase the teachers into hiding—"into a corner"—any more. Of course, we know that many of the teachers will be spirit beings, but that's not the point of this prophecy. It's about a change of heart toward God.

Let's step back a moment and ask what God's purpose will be during the Millennium. Is it only to bring peace to the world? If that were His purpose, then it would be appropriate to have a highly controlled society—one in which there is no allowance for people making wrong choices.

But God's purpose then will be the same as it is today, "bringing many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10). The essence of conversion is a principle that remains constant so long as there are humans: repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of God's Holy Spirit and remaining faithful in the Christian way of life against resistance.

Without Satan (Revelation 20:1-3), what resistance will there be in the world to come? Undoubtedly, his influence will remain for many generations. After it is finally purged, perhaps human nature itself will provide enough resistance for people to develop godly character.

Conversion must be possible

Considering the environment that must exist in order to make conversion possible, the analogy of parents with a small baby isn't workable. That is, it's inappropriate to think in terms of God's government controlling its citizens to the extent that parents would control babies.

A different family analogy might be more illustrative. Parents of preteens and teens control their children's environment, set parameters and communicate expectations of behavior. At the same

time, the children are allowed—even encouraged—to make their own choices. In the process of learning to make right choices, they will make some wrong ones.

If this is an appropriate illustration of the way life will be in the Millennium, it means that people will be allowed to sin.

What would be the difference between then and now? This present evil world optimizes the chances that people will sin. It doesn't allow most people the opportunity to choose the way of salvation. In the world to come, the "playing field will be leveled," allowing people the opportunity to successfully choose and live the way of salvation.

In the world to come, the "playing field will be leveled," allowing people the opportunity to successfully choose and live the way of salvation.

But the Bible doesn't envision a world in which righteousness will be forced upon its citizens, for the end result would not be genuine conversion or salvation. A world that allows true conversion would include the freedom to make wrong decisions, which frankly could include some hurtful and destructive deeds.

Clearly, like a good parent, God will not allow the hurtfulness or destructiveness to be so great as to make salvation impossible. Like a good teacher, He (and His spirit sons and daughters) will be excellent disciplinarians. The objective will be to optimize people choosing and remaining faithful to God's way of life.

But it can't mean that people will be forced against their will to do what they should do.

Christ revealed much about life in the Kingdom

The Kingdom parables give us some insight into how God will manage the Millennium. Look at Matthew 18:21-35, which is a lesson in forgiveness. Here, Christ said, "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like…" Will people treat other people unjustly? Will people need to have patience, tolerance and forgiveness in overlooking the wrongs they suffer from others?

Matthew 20:1-16 is the parable of the workers in the vineyard who dispute with the owner [God] about what they perceive to be His unfair treatment. This is prefaced with, "The kingdom of heaven is like…" Would there be such attitude problems in the Millennium?

Matthew 22:1-14, the parable of the wedding feast, addresses attitude problems too. Christ also prefaced this with "The kingdom of heaven is like…" If indeed these parables indicate life during the Millennium, its citizens will need to be taught what sin is, how to seek repentance, godly skills of getting along with other people and how to love and worship God. These topics are all part of the gospel.

"People problems" during the Kingdom

These references imply that there will be character problems, even *sin,* in the Kingdom. What sin might be allowed? How severe a sin would be tolerated? There are far-reaching repercussions from sin, for it would bring with it varying degrees of pain and problems.

Isaiah 30:20-21 ...is a prophecy of a change of heart by God's physical nation, coupled with His promise to provide excellent teachers.

But doesn't prophecy tell us that the Millennium will be a time of pain-free living worldwide? Revelation 21:1-4 foretells a new heaven and new earth—no pain, death or sorrow. These are treasured promises, which have provided the faithful with comfort for centuries, as we look forward to the life to come. These prophecies, however, describe life *after* the 1,000 years. Why doesn't God simply make that happen now—much less wait until after the 1,000 years? What is He waiting for? What purpose would it serve to have pain, death and sorrow *during* those years?

God's purpose goes far beyond creating a clean and peaceful world. An analogy might help us understand more clearly. "This building is going up too fast!" declared inspectors about a hotel under construction in one American city. Contractors were completing sections of the project so quickly that officials feared *quality* could not be assured. It takes *time* to construct a quality building.

In Ephesians 2:19-22, we are provided with the analogy that the Church is the building of God. The entire building will be constructed upon and be consistent with the way the foundation was built. God is building His Church, His spiritual building, on His own schedule, one which will ensure *the quality* He desires.

Symbolism consistent with Old Testament prophecies

Look at two Kingdom parables in Matthew 13:31-33. How long will it take for the mustard plant to grow to maturity? How long will it take for the yeast to cause the whole mixture to rise? Both are symbolic statements of the growth of God's spiritual house, also called His family or His Kingdom.

These symbols repeat the theme used in Daniel 2:34-35 about the stone that is cut out without hands, which strikes the great image on its feet and then *grows* to become a mountain that fills the entire earth. All three symbols could indicate a process of time during which the Kingdom is established over all people.

The training we are now receiving is precisely the training we need to prepare us to teach throughout the coming millennial rule of Christ.

The Kingdom of God is more than just a period when Christ rules on the earth. God's objective, His *will,* is not to force His rule over all people but to have each person come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9) during his or her lifetime. Did you know that a person could be in the Kingdom, but not in the Kingdom, at the same time? Not everyone who *lives* during the millennial reign of Christ will automatically be *spiritually* in the Kingdom of God.

Every individual, whenever he or she lives, *needs to come to conversion* (Mark 10:13-15). It is impossible for "rich men" to enter the Kingdom of God (by relying on their riches); the supernatural calling and power from God is needed (Mark 10:23-27).

Does this imply that the Millennium will be just like this present world? Not at all! The difference between this present world and the Millennium is that conversion will become *possible* for *all*—but not *easy* for any. Salvation is not easy. Repentance is not easy. Seeing and turning from human nature is not easy.

Every person will need to be taught, counseled and encouraged in his own lifetime, including those who live hundreds of years after the second coming of Christ. The gospel is preached first; the calling follows; conversion then ensues.

What follows conversion? Will the people of the Millennium be healthy and wealthy, without a care in the world? To turn the old joke around, we would err if we imagine that everyone will ride in a limousine to school—downhill both ways!

When poor immigrants made their way to the wealth and opportunity of North America in the 1950s, they came with a near universal dream: They did not want their children to struggle in poverty as they had. Typically, they worked extremely hard and many came to enjoy the wealth of which they had dreamed.

True to their hopes, many provided a life of ease for their children. The result was not always good. Not having to work for their wealth, many of their children were unable to really appreciate it. While they did not have to worry about meeting the needs of life, their inner character was soft.

We can be sure that God will not spoil His children, even though He will give them many wonderful blessings through life in His Kingdom.

God's "building codes"



Think again of the building analogy. Special codes need to be followed in order to insure *quality*. Do we imagine that people who are converted during the Millennium will live lives of ease, without challenge, without trial, without struggle? Such people would not be true sons or daughters of God, made in His spiritual image. They would be inferior building material for God's spiritual building.

Conversion cannot be accomplished in a single moment. Time is required for the process to be completed. It is through the passing of time and spiritual teaching coupled with the experience of life, that *faith* is added. Faith is absolutely necessary (Hebrews 11:6). Faith flourishes when people do not know how or when God will help them, according to Hebrews 11:1. Faith flourishes when people *need to endure,* that is, to wait a while for deliverance from their struggles, reveals Hebrews 12:1-2.

People converted during the Millennium will be built on the same foundation as the rest of God's building, with the same spiritual character.

"Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered," we are told in Hebrews 5:8. So also, those who are converted in the Kingdom will need circumstances of life that stir them to seek God's help to *endure*. God's "building codes" include conversion, faith and endurance.

Considering what the Millennium will be like should reinforce in us that the training we are now receiving—*in conversion, in faith and in endurance*—is precisely the training we need to prepare us to teach throughout the coming millennial rule of Christ.

Recommended reading

God's plan involves changing humans—converting them—to become like Jesus Christ. Conversion is necessary now, and will be in the world to come. What does the Bible mean when it talks about repentance and conversion? Our booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* looks at this subject in detail.

Beyond the Millennium

By Roger Foster

The Bible describes the Millennium as a fantastic time of peace and productivity. But beyond that time, an even more amazing period awaits!



OTHER ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE have shown that Jesus Christ, assisted by His faithful servants, will transform the world after His return to earth. But, even after this 1,000-year reign of peace and prosperity, much important work lies ahead.

Jesus spoke of a time when the people of all nations would gather before Him. Why? So He can "separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32).

Notice the nature and result of this separation: "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (verses 33-34). "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels' ...These will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (verses 41, 46).

How will this happen? Who will be involved in this judgment? Notice how Jesus Christ will perform the process of separating the wicked from the righteous. At the beginning of His reign He begins to judge between the nations, teaching them to turn from evil to righteousness (Isaiah 2:4).

Satan released for a short time

Also, as the millennial reign of Christ begins, Scripture tells us that an angel "seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the Devil, or Satan, and chained him up…till the thousand years were ended." However, this is not the end of Satan's role in human affairs, because "after that he must be let loose for a little while" (Revelation 20:2-3, REB).

Notice what happens at the end of the Millennium: "When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be let loose from his prison, and he will come out to seduce the nations in the four quarters of the earth. He will muster them for war, the hosts of Gog and Magog, countless as the sands of the sea. They marched up over the breadth of the land and laid siege to the camp of God's people and the city He loves. But fire came down on them from heaven and consumed them. Their seducer, the Devil, was flung into the lake of fire and sulfur…" (verses 7-10, REB).

The enormity of this event is difficult to convey, and its significance is hard to imagine. What is to happen to all the unsaved billions of people who have ever lived?

Why would God release Satan to again seduce people after the wonderful 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ? Though no specific explanation is given, a logical reason for this turn of events seems evident.

From the beginning, God has always allowed people to choose between good and evil (Deuteronomy 30:19). It would be a mistake to believe that no one born during the Millennium would ever choose the ways of Satan if the opportunity were available.

We can see from the events described in Revelation 20 that God will make that choice available to many people who will live during that 1,000-year era. Some of them will respond to Satan's intrigue and choose his selfish, rebellious ways over the cooperative and loving ways of God.

God has always tested His people to see what is in their hearts (Deuteronomy 8:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; Hebrews 11:17). No doubt all who live during that 1,000 years will have the opportunity to see whether they will be faithful to God and His ways. The only example revealed to us, however, is that God will release Satan for a time.

Once this test is over, Satan will never again be allowed to deceive anyone.

The general resurrection of the dead

Now the greatest judgment of all must begin. As we read earlier, at the return of Christ only His faithful saints will be resurrected. Prophecy reveals that *"the rest of the dead* did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:5). Another resurrection will take place after the Millennium!

The enormity of this event is difficult to convey, and its significance is hard to imagine. What is to happen to all the unsaved billions of people who have ever lived? What is this time of judgment all about?

Now is the time for all other people—all those who lived from Adam's time up to the generation living into the Millennium at Christ's return—to learn the truth of God and enjoy the same opportunity for salvation given to those who lived during the Millennium. They will all be raised from the dead with a marvelous opportunity to know God *for the first time!*

First, notice the description and setting of this resurrection: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it…" (verse 11).



John, in vision, then witnessed an astounding sight: "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (verse 12).

This is the resurrection of the "rest of the dead" mentioned earlier. In his vision John saw them stand before God's throne.

What does this mean? We must let the Bible explain itself. But first we need to understand the implication of certain critical words and expressions.

The word *judgment* does not have to imply a condemnation to death. It can just as well refer to an acquittal, the determination that a person should not be punished. Judgment is simply a *process* to decide who deserves a punishment or reward and who does not. The judgment described in Revelation 20 is just that: a separation of the wicked and the righteous. Some will be punished, but many more will have their names entered into the Book of Life.

People of all eras and nations are brought back to life to learn God's truth for the first time.

What are the criteria for this judgment? Two factors are involved. These people are judged "by the things which were written in the books" and "according to their works" (verse 12). The Greek word for "books" is *biblion,* meaning the books in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. Those in this resurrection are judged by the biblical criteria for righteousness.

Now, what "works" of theirs must be judged? This is important to understand. The reason these people did not appear in the first resurrection is that they were not among the firstfruits who were first called and then judged to be worthy of eternal life in that earlier resurrection. God did not choose to call them to salvation in the previous age of man, when Peter spoke of conversion in terms of "as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). Contrary to popular belief, today is not the *only* day of salvation: "Now is…*a* day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2, *Young's Literal Translation*).

In many cases these people's past works would count against them. But other passages in the Bible explain that they will not be judged on past performance alone. They will be resurrected and given opportunity and time to repent and demonstrate their willingness to obey God. After all,

most of these billions of resurrected men, women and children will have never known the true God or heard of Jesus Christ and the Bible.

People from all human eras resurrected together



Notice that Jesus says the people of His generation will rise in this resurrection along with people from other ages and other nations. "The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). Jesus stated that "the queen of the South"—better known as the Queen of Sheba, who lived in Solomon's time almost 1,000 years earlier—will be resurrected to life again with those who heard Christ preach in His day!

"And you, Capernaum, …if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day…It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 11:23-24). Here Jesus said that those who had lived in Sodom—who were destroyed for their notorious depravity almost 2,000 years earlier—will be more willing to accept and obey Christ "in the day of judgment" than Jesus' own contemporaries.

This will be a truly remarkable time when people of all eras and nations are brought back to life to learn God's truth for the first time. Contrary to the common religious belief that people who have never heard of Christ go to hell or purgatory at death, the Bible reveals that *all* will have the opportunity to choose whether they will learn God's way, repent and receive God's gift of eternal life.

Details of this great resurrection

What will happen when these people come back to life for this time of judgment? The prophet Ezekiel gives us the answer. In a vision he sees a huge valley full of dried bones, all that remained of many long-dead people (Ezekiel 37:1-2). He is told, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'" (verse 11).

Like most people, they probably believed that when a sinner dies all hope is lost for him. Through Ezekiel's dramatic vision, God corrects that false idea.

The purpose of this resurrection is to make God's Spirit available to these people so they can live, not to condemn or destroy them.

Here is what God reveals concerning this great mass of people who died without repentance. "'Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and…you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it,' says the LORD" (verses 12-14).

The purpose of this resurrection is to make God's Spirit available to these people so they can live, not to condemn or destroy them. Remember that "God our Savior…desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

This resurrection will make God's fervent desire possible. It will open the door so all people who have ever lived can be taught the truth and receive the opportunity to repent so they, too, can be saved.

This means that the judgment of that day will take time, enough time for people to change their lives, sufficient time for them to show clear evidence of repentance and prove themselves faithful to God.

Of course, patience is God's nature. He is also merciful. That is why Peter tells us, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). In His master plan of salvation, God has scheduled a time and opportunity for repentance for everyone.

God's judgment is complete

Any time of judgment involves decisions. At the end of this judgment period God will separate the last of the wicked from the righteous and destroy the wicked forever. "And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:13-15).

Unlike those raised to immortality in the first resurrection (verse 6; 1 Corinthians 15:50-53), the people in this resurrection are composed of physical flesh (Ezekiel 37:4-10). They are mortal, given temporary life with an opportunity to repent and choose God's way of life. They are subject to "the second death," and some will still refuse to repent and submit to God.

Notice who will suffer the second death in the lake of fire. "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).



This second death will be complete destruction from which no resurrection is possible. As Jesus Himself explained, all who do not repent will perish (Luke 13:2-5). The prophet Malachi explained the finality of this destruction: "'For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' says the LORD of hosts, 'that will leave them neither root nor branch'" (Malachi 4:1).

Even in this God is merciful. Rather than allowing some to live on in a life of sin and rebellion that will bring only sorrow and anguish to themselves and those around them, God will simply remove any source of potential suffering. Those who willingly refuse to repent and choose eternal life will be utterly destroyed, reduced to nothing but ashes (verse 3). This is a far more merciful and loving fate than that represented by the common misconception of the unrepentant tortured forever in

an ever-burning hell. (To better understand this biblical truth, be sure to read the free booklet *What Happens After Death?*)

A new heaven and a new earth

But John's vision does not end with the lake of fire. "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Revelation 21:1).

The last two chapters of the book of Revelation present the vision the apostle John received of a marvelous renewal of heaven and earth. The earth itself is described as having "no more sea" (same verse), no longer needing the oceans so necessary for the survival of mortal human beings.

Who will inherit this "new heaven and new earth"? John quotes God giving the answer: "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (verse 7).

These "children of God, …heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17), will become like Jesus Christ is today (1 John 3:1-2) as co-owners of the wonderfully renewed heaven and earth.

As the apostle Paul explained, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18) when we "inherit all things."

This promised inheritance is made possible through Jesus Christ, "for whom are all things and by whom are all things," who plays a central role "in bringing many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10).

Paul comments on the nature of the glory we are destined to inherit: "The sun has a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour, and the stars yet another; and one star differs from another in brightness. So it is with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown as a perishable thing is raised imperishable. Sown in humiliation, it is raised in glory; sown in weakness, it is raised in power; sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:41-44, REB).

The new heaven and new earth will be populated with the children of God who are miraculously changed into immortal spirit beings (verse 51-54).

The eternal family of God

The next thing John sees in his vision is a city, New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven as a gift from God. The city is described as "a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2), a description that emphasizes the relationship of its inhabitants. It represents the eternal household or community of the children of God. The husband, or bridegroom, is Christ (Matthew 25:1), who is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

God Himself dwells among them. "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (Revelation 21:3). This community is God's family.

Residents of this city are the true "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). "Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel" (Revelation 21:12).

In other words, they are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, "the father of all those who believe" (Romans 4:11; compare Galatians 3:29). For "by faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance…He dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:8-10).

This promised inheritance is made possible through Jesus Christ, …who plays a central role "in bringing many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10).

The huge dimensions of city indicate the awesome success Jesus Christ will have in bringing the overwhelming majority of people who have ever lived to repentance and salvation. "The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs [1,500 miles, or 2,500 kilometers]. Its length, breadth, and height are equal" (Revelation 21:16).

God reveals here that the number of people who will come to repentance and receive eternal life will be like the sand on the seashore and the stars in the heavens: beyond the natural ability of any human being to count them. This is the blessing God promised to Abraham (Genesis 22:17).

The vision the apostle John received of this magnificent city provides us with a graphic picture—a visual illustration—of the family God is creating. God dwells in the midst of this city of His immortal, spirit children.

Another garden of paradise

The biblical account of man begins in the Garden of Eden at the confluence of four rivers. In the midst of that garden God placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:8-15). Satan, the great deceiver, first persuaded Eve to sin, then Adam joined her. As a result of their rebellion against God's instruction, Adam and Eve chose to partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—a deadly mixture that has brought suffering and anguish to mankind ever since (Genesis 3:1-6).

The final chapter in the account of human destiny closes with a description of another garden. It surrounds the throne of God from which a river flows with the "water of life."

"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life…" (Revelation 22:1-2).

The fruit in this paradise is good. "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him" (verse 3).

You can know the future

God provides us a clear picture of our destiny. But the decision is ours. We must choose whether we will turn from the ways of Satan and this present evil world (represented in the Garden of Eden by the tree of knowledge of good and evil) to the righteous ways of God (pictured by the tree of life).

Notice Jesus' words in Revelation 22:6-7 as He closes the vision of the new heaven and the new earth: "These words are faithful and true...Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Recommended reading

This article is from the concluding chapter of *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. For the full story, read this enlightening free brochure.

Jesus Christ and the Meaning of the Biblical Holy Days

By Vince Szymkowiak

Jesus Christ celebrated seven festivals every year that most Christians today can't even name, yet He is at the core of all of them. He is the reason for each of these seasons, and they have great meaning for anyone who would like to follow Him better today. What are these festivals, and what do they reveal about our Savior and King?



THIS OCTOBER, A NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS will be celebrating four of the Holy Days that Christ and the early New Testament Church observed. They will be reminded of Jesus Christ's central role in the meaning of these festivals that most Christians today know little about.

What are all of the biblical festivals, and what role does Jesus Christ play in each of them? For Christians today, it is crucial that we see the biblical Holy Days in the proper perspective. That perspective points to Jesus Christ. Jesus, who sits at the right hand of the Father, is central to God's plan of salvation for humanity.

We all know that when Jesus came to the earth, He came to die for our sins and to pave the way to eternal salvation. He taught His followers true Christianity, both by His words and by His example.

One example that we see recorded in Scripture is Him observing the Holy Days of God. For example, He kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16), the Passover (Matthew 26:17) and the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2, 10).

Passages in the New Testament indicate that Jesus' followers also observed these same Holy Days. They saw these days as being magnified by a New Covenant setting. Paul admonished the gentile Corinthians to observe the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Christ our Passover sacrifice for sins

Passover is commanded by God (Leviticus 23:4-5). It is mentioned no less than 28 times in the New Testament, with the majority of occurrences found in the Gospels. But what is the New Testament Passover all about? It is about the One who is so profound, so holy, so important, that without Him, there is no New Testament Passover: Jesus Christ.

What are all of the biblical festivals, and what role does Jesus Christ play in each of them?

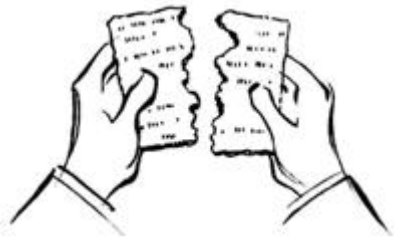
Paul explained it clearly in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8: "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For *indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (emphasis added throughout).

Just before Jesus' last Passover, the Jewish high priest Caiaphas predicted that Jesus would "die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish" (John 11:50). John continues with this comment: "Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, *and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad*. Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death" (John 11:51-53).

These scriptures reveal that Jesus is our true Passover lamb. As we observe the New Testament Passover in the spring (in the northern hemisphere), we understand the central role Jesus has in the removal of our sins. "And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5).

Unleavened Bread: Christ in us

The Days of Unleavened Bread comprise the second festival, right after Passover (Leviticus 23:6-8). In observing these days, Christians know that it is a time to focus on putting sin out of their lives. Leaven, for the purpose of the spring festival season, represents sin. Paul refers to it as "the leaven of malice and wickedness" (1 Corinthians 5:8). Other scriptures refer to leaven as hypocrisy (Luke 12:1) and false doctrine (Matthew 16:12).



During the festival, leavening is portrayed as a type of wickedness that Christians strive to overcome. But there is an even deeper meaning to the Days of Unleavened Bread. These days picture the promise of the risen Christ. Jesus promised that He and the Father would make Their home in our hearts (John 14:23). In fact, it is Christ in us who is the hope of our glory (Colossians 1:27).

As we eat unleavened bread during this festival, we are reminded that Christ is the ultimate example of sincerity and truth. We desire with all of our being to have that Holy One living in us. Observing the Days of Unleavened Bread reminds us that it is not *our* righteousness that causes us to overcome sins. Rather, it is the righteousness that comes as a result of Jesus living His righteous life in the hearts of His people, empowering us to conquer sin. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, *but Christ lives in me;* and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Thus the Days of Unleavened Bread are a celebration of the resurrected Christ who saves us from our sins.

Pentecost: Christ empowers His Church

The third of God's Holy Days is Pentecost. It was celebrated with much excitement in Israel because it signified the completion of the early firstfruit harvest from the fields. Israelites could be assured of food for their families when God's blessing was on them.

In the New Testament, we see a deeper and more profound parallel to this. When Jesus was about to ascend to heaven following His resurrection, the apostles were perplexed because their risen Lord was being taken from them. But Jesus had already promised them that He would not leave them as orphans (John 14:18). He promised that both He and the Father would come to the disciples by and through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-23).

Jesus repeated this promise in Luke 24:49: "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." That power is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), and suddenly the disciples became the Church of God.

No longer were they a dazed and bewildered group of men and women—they were now the firstfruits of the people of God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they would now be able to truly overcome sin. And through that same power, God's Church would take the gospel to the entire world. This all became possible because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He fulfilled His promise by empowering the Church with the Holy Spirit. As Christians celebrate Pentecost to this day, we are reminded that Jesus enables His Church to do His will and to preach the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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We will now briefly cover each of the next four Holy Days, which come in the fall of the year. As we examine them, we will again notice the pivotal role Jesus Christ has in fulfilling each of these days.

Trumpets: announcing Christ's return

The Feast of Trumpets is observed in the early fall, September or October on the Western calendar and the first day of the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar (Leviticus 23:24-25).

Trumpets are used in the Bible for several purposes. They were used to call the people of God to assembly (Numbers 10:1-10). They were used to announce the beginning of this first fall Holy Day (Leviticus 23:24). Trumpets were also used to announce the coronation of a king (1 Kings 1:39-40). All of these purposes find their ultimate fulfillment in the New Testament teaching that Jesus Christ will return to the earth as King and assemble His people together at the sound of the seventh trumpet.



Furthermore, the New Testament makes it clear that the first resurrection will occur at the blowing of the seventh trumpet: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). And in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 we read: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

A key scripture is Revelation 11:15: "Then the seventh angel sounded [his trumpet]: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'"

Atonement: Christ sends Satan away

The Day of Atonement is the most unusual of the Holy Days. It is a day on which God's people fast (Leviticus 23:26-32; Acts 27:9). Atonement is also the day on which the Israelites sacrificed one goat as a sin offering (Leviticus16:9) and released a second goat, the scapegoat (Hebrew, *Azazel*), into the uninhabited wilderness (Leviticus 16:10). The scapegoat is representative of Satan, the one who departed from God and who is responsible for the temptations of humanity. Satan is the one Jesus called a "liar" and a "murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

After Christ returns to the earth, He will commission an angel to banish Satan into the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1-3). Satan will not be allowed to deceive the nations for a thousand years. This world will not know true peace until Satan, the ultimate deceiver, is put away. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the One who has crushed the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15, New International Version) is central to the ultimate fulfillment of this day.

Tabernacles: Christ's millennial rule

Jesus is also central to the understanding of the Feast of Tabernacles. He observed the Feast while He was on the earth, and told His disciples to observe the Feast as well (John 7:2-14). In Old Testament times, the Israelites would gather in Jerusalem and dwell in small huts or booths made from the leafy branches of trees, and rejoice in the worship of the Lord (Leviticus 23:40). The Old

Testament links the reign of Jesus Christ on the earth with the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16-21).

After Jesus returns, there will be a 1,000-year period of peace and prosperity (Revelation 20:1-6). The earth will be changed, not through the achievement of mankind, but through the power of God.

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In Isaiah 35:4-7 we read: "Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water."

These scriptures will be literally fulfilled when the One who sits at the right hand of the Father, Jesus Christ, returns to the earth.

Last Great Day: Jesus offers salvation to all

Following the Feast of Tabernacles is a final feast day (Leviticus 23:36). This festival has an ultimate and profound meaning in the plan of God. Many today worry about loved ones who died without receiving salvation through Jesus Christ. They worry about loved ones who died before they repented and were baptized in faith. Their concern is that their loved ones are lost, doomed forever in an ever-burning hell fire.

But God is a God of love. He will never allow any human being to be lost without first being given a fair opportunity to hear the gospel. He will save even those who have gone to their graves without the knowledge of God.

The Holy Days of God give us an overview of God's great plan of salvation.

In Ezekiel 37:10-14, we read of a great resurrection of Israelites, people who died without really having understood God's great plan: "So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army." God's words to them are: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it."

Ezekiel 37 tells us that there is a time coming when those who died without the full knowledge of God will be given an opportunity for salvation. They will finally recognize Christ for who He really is, our Lord and our Savior. Non-Christians who lived their entire lives without ever hearing His name will be given the opportunity to both accept His sacrifice as payment for their sins and to receive the Spirit.

This wonderful truth is the point of Jesus' sermon recorded in John 7:37-38: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

The meaning of this Last Great Day is that there is a time yet coming in God's timetable in which those who never had the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will be raised from their graves and given an opportunity to hear the truth.

The Last Great Day is not for those who presently are called and who know the Lord's will. We know that our time of judgment is right now, and that we must be busy serving God today. But those who have never known the truth will someday come to know God and understand His great plan. The meaning of the Last Great Day is that it will not ultimately be only the few who will be given an opportunity for salvation, but the many. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

The Holy Days of God give us an overview of God's great plan of salvation. The fulfillment of these days is dependent upon the One who became a man, who died for our sins and who now sits at the right hand of the Father. His name is Jesus Christ.

Recommended reading

To find out more about the importance of these days, please see our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. This comprehensive booklet goes into greater depth about the fundamental significance of each of God's Holy Days and how they relate to His plan of salvation for all mankind.

Many people profess to be Christians and yet know little about how Jesus Christ truly lived. For more information about His fascinating life, death and resurrection, please see *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. In this booklet, you'll find out how He lived, what He taught, what Holy Days He observed and what significance all of this has for your life today.