

# GN

The Good News

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# GN

The Good News

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Jesus Christ of Nazareth told the aged apostle John, then exiled on the island of Patmos in the Mediterranean Sea: "... What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia..." (Rev. 1:11). The entirety of the message as a whole — with all of its fantastic science-fiction-like visions cloaked in symbolism — was originally written for these seven churches in Asia Minor. These were actual, literal, historic congregations; some of which had been the recipients of earlier epistles written by the apostle Paul (see the book of Ephesians and Colossians 4:16).

Each of these seven churches had, to one degree or another, its own unique spiritual problems as well as its good points. In addition to the main prophetic message of the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ was moved to give John a short, separate message for each of these special congregations — perhaps partly because each church would be typical of seven successive church eras existing all the way from the first century to His second coming.

**The Main Message.** The main purpose of this article, however, is not to expound and explain the prophetic possibilities of these passages in the second and third chapters of Revelation. It is to show that each message for each church is also intended for the Church as a whole in all ages, and, as a vital corollary point, to clear up the many misconceptions God's people have had about how we are to view these letters in relationship to the membership of God's Church now!

The salutation to the seven churches begins in verse 4 of the first chapter: "John to the seven churches which are in Asia..."

Notice that all seven churches are initially addressed together as one body of people prior to the specific letters in chapters two and three.

Revelation was written centuries before the invention of printing. Several copies of the whole book were probably copied from John's original and were sent to each congregation rolled up in a separate scroll. Either that or the original itself was carried successively to all seven congregations.

The point is that each of the seven

# What Would You Have Said About God's Church Then?

by Garner Ted Armstrong

**Believe it or not, the whole book of Revelation was originally addressed to seven specific, literal churches in Asia Minor. Contained within its pages are seven separate letters written to each of these seven churches along a Roman mail route. What if you had been living your life in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia or even Laodicea some two thousand years ago? What if you had been an actual member of one of these seven congregations of God's Church back then? Would you have found yourself indulging in attaching labels to the spiritual inferiorities of other congregations in smug self-righteousness — perhaps attacking their spiritual lethargy, lamenting their lukewarmness, decrying their miserable wretchedness? What would you have said about God's Church then?**

churches had the opportunity to read not only Jesus Christ's own direct personal testimony to them personally but also the messages to the other six congregations. Each one was, so to speak, "in on" the sins of the others. But did this give them a carte blanche license to judge each other? I'll cover that question later on in the article.

Further down in the salutation, Jesus Christ is pictured in vision as standing in the midst of the seven churches (verses 13, 20). These congregations are — whether you view them historically as local churches or prophetically as future eras — integral parts of the Church Jesus told the apostle Peter He would build (Matt. 16:18). Not a single one is a church of the devil. None can be conveniently categorized as part of the great false church in all of its splits, sects, divisions and political organizations. Jesus stands in the midst of all seven — firmly establishing that all seven belong to Him — each and every member was purchased by His own blood (see Acts 20:28).

**Ephesus — First Love Lost.** The Church of God at Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7) was one of the leading congregations in all of Asia Minor. Paul had used the city as a base of operations for his evangelistic efforts throughout the entire region.

Jesus Christ of Nazareth — the Builder and living Head of the true Church — begins His letter to the church at Ephesus by reminding them, once again, that He walks in the midst of all seven of these churches (verse 1). He does not disallow or disinherit any one of the seven!

After several points of commendation and approval, He finally says: "Nevertheless, I have some what against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (verse 4). The novelty of being a Christian had worn off. Their adoration of Jesus Christ had begun to wane; it had become "old hat." The flame of initial excitement had flickered and diminished — they were on the downside of their growth pattern.

We grow, even physically, by peaks and valleys. At a certain age, teenagers literally burst with growth and seem to suddenly "sprout up."



Spiritual growth is characterized by the very same phenomenon. To those who are newly baptized, the Bible is a brand-new book. They can't wait to eagerly devour and ingest every scrap and shred of information within its pages. They are filled with a type of euphoric wonderment and enthusiastic excitement.

If we rightly understand the entire history of God's Church to be a series of successive "attitudes" or phases characterized by the seven churches of Revelation, then the

first era of God's Church was initially marked by a flush of "first love" followed by an eventual waning of their zeal.

Of course, Jesus Christ did not intend for the Ephesian church (or era if you will) to remain tired and lethargic — just writing it out! He sternly warned them to "Repent, and do the first works" (verse 5) — to recapture their first love!

Many members of God's own Church have misunderstood the message to the Ephesian church in this sense. The message is not exclu-

sively for either the actual Ephesian church then or what has been labeled as "the Ephesian era." The key is found in the last verse of Christ's message to the Ephesians. Jesus Christ urges them — and us: "He that hath an ear [has spiritual comprehension] let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches [plural, meaning all seven]. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (verse 7).

Jesus Christ's own direct, personal testimony to every one of the seven



churches is for all seven — and the Church as a whole throughout all ages until His second coming. At most every Christian experiences a first flush of energetic zeal and love for His Savior, for the Bible and for the brethren in God's Church. Then, sooner or later, he or she will inevitably have to fight off the tendency to become insipid, lukewarmed and lethargic. It just seems to be part of the cycle.

It would have been very silly for the other churches to judge the Ephesian congregation for losing their first love when there were individual members in every single one of the other six congregations who likewise had lost their first love. But knowing the vagaries of human nature, no doubt they did just that!

If you had been there in the flesh, the chances are you would have done the same thing — especially if you are now judging other members of God's Church for being "Laodicean," which is a modern-day euphemism for a sorry spiritual condition!

**Is It a Sin To Be Martyred?** If the Ephesian church of Revelation 2 is typical of the whole first-century Church, then most of its leaders and many of its members wound up as martyrs. Some of them were, in fact, what some might call "jail birds." We don't think of it that way today, but nobody fits that description better than the apostle Paul. He spent much of his ministry in one type of incarceration or the other.

Yet many in the Church today have vaguely imagined martyrdom to be some kind of spiritual curse and certainly the most obvious proof of spiritual inferiority and lassitude. Some think if the Church is persecuted "something must be terribly wrong" with the Church! Instead of rejoicing in tribulations, they seek the pharisaical solution — the inquisitorial approach — find out who the dirty sinners are, get rid of them, and all will be well again. But is persecution or martyrdom an automatic acknowledgement of terrible "spiritual imperfection"? On the other hand, is physical escape from bodily harm to a "place of safety" a sure badge of great spirituality?

Think about it for a moment! Jesus Christ of Nazareth was martyred!

James, the brother of John, was brutally murdered by one of the Herods (Acts 12:2). Stephen was stoned to death! The Bible and historical tradition tell us that both Peter and Paul were probably the victims of a terrible Roman martyrdom.

Read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and let the inspired words of God sink into your heart. Paul eloquently talks of God's martyrs of long ago — people of greater or lesser ability, people of all stations in life, people who stood next to kings and those who "wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented." (Of whom the world was not worthy)" (Heb. 11:37).

Did each of these, by his untimely death, acknowledge some terrible spiritual inferiority? Were they all in what some might call a "Laodicean attitude"? Was there some great sin in their lives that caused the martyrdom? Nonsense! Any such reasoning is immediately transparent to anybody who really stops to think about it.

But what about future martyrdoms? (The Bible assures us they will happen!) Would they be an automatic admission of spiritual inferiority? I think we know the answer! **Martyrdom and Persecution Promised.** Were members of the "Ephesian era" promised persecution and martyrdom? Of course! Any person in the entirety of the New Testament whose death, for the sake of Jesus Christ, came after the establishment of the Church, must be reckoned a "member of the Ephesian era" if the assumption that God's true Church passed through definite phases, stages or "eras" is true. Therefore every individual who was killed for the sake of Jesus Christ, and whose death is a matter of record in the New Testament, was a person who had his life while being a member of the "Ephesian era" of God's Church.

Jesus said: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a

testimony against them and the Gentiles" (Matt. 10:16-18). He said of His disciples: "... Some of you shall they cause to be put to death" (Luke 21:16).

Jesus warned them that they would be beaten and whipped (and some even murdered); that they would be placed under arrest and forced to testify before various committees, boards, or courts of law, as a result of their preaching of the gospel. Of His disciples He said: "They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service" (John 16:2).

Since He said, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come" (Matt. 10:23), it is obvious He dates this prophecy by showing its total fulfillment will not be culminated until Jesus again stands on this earth.

Did Jesus promise a special place of escape to any of those whom He said would be "delivered up"? After saying brother would deliver up brother to death, the father the child and children, their parents to be killed, He said: "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake; but he that endureth to the end [and that end may obviously be the death of the individual enduring!] shall be saved" (verse 22).

"But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (verse 23). Notice Jesus says persecution is coming! He shows martyrdom is a distinct possibility! And then He tells His true disciples to flee! But flee where? Not away from the "Work," but fleeing from one city, where they are busily preaching the gospel and fulfilling the commission of Jesus Christ, into another city, for the fulfillment of the very same commission!

The entire "tone" of the tenth chapter of Matthew is one of trial, trouble, betrayal and potential death! He urges His disciples to "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul [Greek, *psyche*, of "being"]; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul [*psyche*] and body in hell [*gehenna*]" (verse 28).

He then spoke a great principle which needs to be understood in the light of all else contained in this

article! "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (verse 39).

Now here is the fulfillment of this prophetic command to Jesus' disciples clearer than in the case of the apostle Paul himself, whose life and times comprise a great segment of the "Ephesian era" of God's true Church. He was literally driven from one city to another; once he was stoned, dragged out of a city and left for dead. On another occasion he was let down over a wall in a basket secretly in order to escape from enemies.

On many occasions Paul *did* have to flee from one city to another. On other occasions he was unable to escape, was arrested, and had to suffer the consequences imposed upon him by human governments.

If there was anyone who ever *deserved* to escape martyrdom as a result of the *fruits of his life* — it was the apostle Paul. Jesus' death was not a "martyrdom" in the truest sense of the word, since it was in *God's great purpose* that Jesus die; not only as a "witness" against His tormentors (because He was standing for a great cause or purpose) but because His death was absolutely required for the forgiveness of sins!

But Paul's death would serve no such purpose.

**Are All Martyrdoms in the Public Eye?** Third! No one really knows the *manner*, the exact *time*, or the *place* of Paul's death! Tradition may place it in Rome, but there is no reliable historical record which would absolutely verify it. "Tradition" may imply any number of strange or bizarre methods of execution, but the Bible only alludes to Paul's death in the pastoral epistle to Timothy (I Tim. 4:6).

It is obvious, then, that the holy, inspired Word of God does not include any account of the death of the apostle Paul — does not "set the

scene" in the same manner as it does at the hearing of the apostle Paul before King Agrippa; does not tell us of any shock or shame experienced on the part of any Roman or Jewish leaders; does not even illustrate any shock which is experienced by members within the Church — that the death of the apostle Paul simply cannot be singled out as being *required* of God for some great and lofty purpose for all of mankind!

Rather, the setting seems to be

spare the apostle Paul's life. But at this later date when Paul had grown older, and obviously more and more physically incapable of continuing the grueling pace of preaching the gospel, God was going to allow him to be martyred as a result of the Roman trials. (He had asked for the coats which had been left behind and mentioned the condition of his eyes — which gives us little insights into his poor physical condition.)

Paul's example proves, then, that not every "martyred death" is one which is carefully preserved in the Bible in great detail, as in the case of Stephen!

Martyrdom, then, while a great honor in God's sight — and, if a person truly is "enduring to the end," THE SUREST GUARANTEE of being preserved unto God's Kingdom — does not always necessarily come in such climactic historical fashion that all the events leading up to and, including that martyrdom, are carefully preserved for posterity!

Down through history, there have no doubt been thousands and tens of thousands who have been martyred for the direct cause and purpose of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and His gospel, and whose names are not even known to any of us!

Were they all in some state of spiritual interactivity prior to martyrdom? Nonsense!

**The New Testament Documents.** There is ~~no~~ information available concerning the "Ephesian era" of God's Church than any other. After all, the entire New Testament is "Ephesian era literature."

In order to get an insight into what the Ephesian era was like, you must read not only the statements concerning the church at Ephesus itself in Revelation the second chapter, Paul's epistle to Ephesus, as well as the book of Acts with Paul's meetings with the "Ephesian elders" in chapter 20, but all the rest of

## How do you recognize the true church?



A person undecided about his religious beliefs has over 400 separate churches to sample from. Why are there so many beliefs about God? Write for the free booklet Where is God's True Church? to help you sort through the confusion. See inside front cover for address.

that of a man who truly had "run his course," "fought a good fight," and was now "ready to be offered" (see II Tim. 4:6-8). Remember, the apostle Paul had been inspired to write that he was the one who was "standing in the way" to prevent the "arising in the midst" of a personage who was the very embodiment of evil! Paul had said time and again it was his deepest desire to "depart" and to be with Jesus Christ, awaiting a resurrection.

It was God's purpose, rather, to

Paul's writings, whether concerned with the church in Corinth, Rome, Thessalonica or Colosse.

Remember, the apostle John, writing from the island of Patmos, wrote the book of Revelation, and its message was carried in order to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Again, these were real cities, with real, living congregations having their own special problems depending upon their own spiritual degree of growth, their geographical and political climates. In one essential point, they appear to have had a great common affliction (mentioned again and again in Revelation 2 and 3 as "the synagogue of Satan" and "Satan's seat"), which seemed to involve eating things sacrificed to idols, and illicit sex—even in connection with religious services!

Another common problem was that of "false apostles." Warnings of such are included in the letters to the churches in Asia Minor at that time, as well as continually in the writings of Paul, Peter and Jude.

If you want to find out what kind of a Church, "spiritually," the "Ephesian era" was, then think of what all these writings reveal: some were getting drunk on the Passover, stealing, allowing open incest to exist within a certain congregation while in full knowledge of it, abusing spiritual gifts, lacking in faith, and as "babes" were unable to stand the strong meat of the Word.

On the other end of the spectrum, God's Church at Ephesus was commended by Jesus Christ Himself for their works, patience, labor and hatred of evil (Rev. 2:2-3).

**Some Spiritual Judgments.** God is the judge of all human flesh! (Gen. 18:25, Ps. 75:7, Ps. 96:13.) Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the living Head of the true Church (Eph. 1:20-23, 2:20, 4:15, Col. 1:17-18). He counsels the members of God's Church not to judge according to appearance, but to judge righteous judgment (see John 7:24).

Judging and evaluating the spiritual strengths and weaknesses of the seven churches, whether historically or prophetically, was and is His business! He knows all, sees all, understands all, judges without par-

tiality. Humanly, our judgmental capacities are very limited, especially when we try to stack ourselves up in any comparison with Him.

If you had been a lay member, let us say of the Smyrna church, would you have had the wisdom and spiritual capacity to judge the Ephesian church in "righteous judgment" — to pass judgment on the loss of their first love or their other shortcomings? Or would your limited vision have been slightly out of focus?

Would you have been able to carefully, correctly and cautiously apply Christ's own judgments (Rev. 2:1-7) from your vantage point in Smyrna to the Ephesian congregation about 40 miles down the road on the Roman mail route? Would you have emphasized the good points or only the bad ones? Would you have been able to single out specific members who definitely and without a doubt suffered the loss of their first love?

Would your opinions and judgments have been based mainly on "mail-route" gossip? Of perhaps visitors from the Ephesian congregation? How reliable would your sources have been?

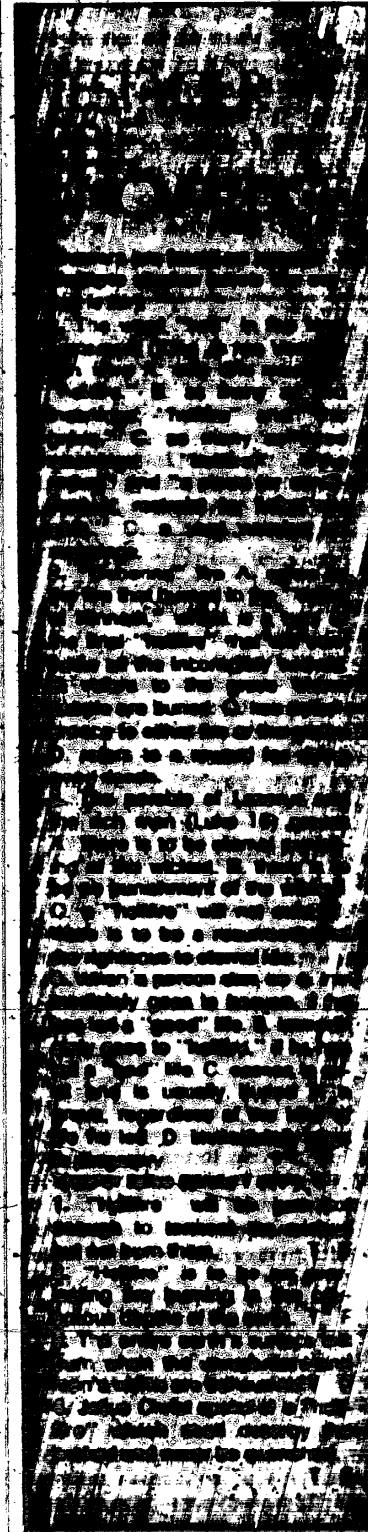
Put yourself in the picture! Get the perspective!

Do you see how silly it is to accuse other brethren of being spiritually inferior? Jesus Christ warns in the Sermon on the Mount (the very pinnacle of His whole message, in many respects): "Judge [Greek, condemn] not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged" (Matt. 7:1-2).

James, the physical brother of Jesus Christ and leading apostle at the Headquarters Church in Jerusalem, wrote: "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law; but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy, who art thou that judgeth another?" (James 4:11-12.)

How would you have judged? What would you have said about God's Church, then? □

(To Be Continued)



**"In the beginning... God said, Let us make man in our image... in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them... heirs together of the grace of life... that as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."**

**G**od never intended there to be any "battle of the sexes" — God always considered men and women equally "in his image." But mankind — male and female — has been responsible for many contradictions of God's intent. That's where our problems have come from.

The ideal circumstances of the Garden of Eden provided equality before God of Adam and Eve, man and woman.

Since mankind's expulsion from the Garden, circumstances have never provided the God-intended equality. A marked deterioration in every facet of life has ensued, varying in degree from generation to generation. The ideal woman, so artfully described in Proverbs 31, has probably never existed in an actual, living, case-history example. There is no counterpart chapter in the Bible to describe the ideal man, and obviously, even if there were, there would be no living example completely fulfilling that ideal, either.

Jesus was a man. He was perfect — that is, no sin was found in Him. Yet, He did not marry, have a family, produce progeny. That was not His purpose. The purpose of His life was to provide the perfect sacrifice for sin required for you and me — male or female.

There are no other examples of perfect men or women in the Bible. Every other man or woman mentioned is flawed with error of one nature or another. Some are basically righteous, some basically evil. Some have names to identify them, others are anonymous. Their examples, in the light of God's perfect law, give us guidelines in two directions: 1) how to act to achieve good, 2) how to act — or not act — to avoid evil.

In striving to achieve the best record in this life and to become qualified to inherit eternal life, applying the principles of these examples is very helpful. Here are some examples: good and bad; of the conduct of women in the Bible. I hope all the men reading this will be able to learn helpful points regarding their own lives; and of course it is the primary intent of this article to aid women in attaining the very most of their human potential.

Powerful examples of women in the Bible are an inspiration to any human being, regardless of sex. Outstanding examples of faith! Admirable stories of intelligence, intrigue and cleverness. Strength of character when all the men had given up, fortitude in the face of

## - IN HIS IMAGE ... HEIRS TOGETHER

by David Jon Hill

adversity, sheer guts in performing action necessary for the freedom of a nation. Passion and compassion. Mercy, love and patience. All examples of spiritual character, which knows no boundary of sex — yet makes for a sparkling jewel in the crown of God.

Yet, just as with the tales of men in the Bible, there are other accounts of jealousy, evil incarnate, depravity — deliberate, ugly sins and sins of omission and ignorance, sometimes with the best of intentions.

Let's look at a few. **Miriam the Prophetess.** We all remember the Song of Moses in Exodus 15 — why don't more recognize that Moses himself also records in the same chapter his sis-

ter Miriam's song? She was a prophetess, leader of all the women of Israel, Moses' older sister who had watched over him as he floated helplessly down the Nile, a baby in his reed basket. Miriam spoke, and Moses recorded, and God inspired and included as a part of His eternal Word the powerful promise: "I am the Lord that healeth thee!" (Ex. 15:26.)

We know that Miriam made a mistake: she accused Moses of a bad marriage with an Ethiopian woman — even God was furious, and punished her severely. So, who said she was perfect? She was just a human being, made in the image of God, who, in her overall life is an outstanding example of leadership and basically righteous conduct. Women are equal with men: both make mistakes! Read the story in Numbers 12 and you'll find Aaron was in on the deal (although he's mentioned second — "Miriam and Aaron"), and it seems to me that if we are going to find fault with people, men and women alike (which is obviously a bad habit to follow since Satan is the accuser!) — it seems to me that I remember a little boo-boo Aaron pulled regarding a golden calf or something like that (Exodus 32). Jesus may have had reference to this kind of thinking when He said, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone" — in the defense of an accused woman!

And speaking of that judgment of Jesus, haven't you ever wondered why, if that woman was "caught in the act," the men who brought her to Jesus in their righteous pomposity — why they didn't also bring the man involved? It wouldn't have made any difference. Jesus' judgment was a matter of principle, not sex!

**Stamp of Approval.** Now let's talk about Rahab, even if she was a harlot. Here was a woman, who by the exercise of *faith* (Heb. 11) not only saved her own life and that of her family, but aided in the fulfillment of God's promise of Israel's occupation of the land. Being in a position to hear all the news of the day, she could perceive that the future was with God's Israel. She determined to become a part of that future — a dangerous and daring as well as



faithful decision. She aided and abetted Israeli spies, outfoxed the secret police of Jericho, and survived the downfall in the only house left when the walls fell flat! If that's not an example of courage you can profit from, no matter what your sex, then maybe you lack guts — or finesse — or faith — or all three!

At any rate, God certainly put His stamp of approval on Rahab: citing her as one of the examples of faith in Hebrews 11, and including her in the genealogy of Jesus Christ — let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

And what about Deborah, prophetess and female Judge in Israel, who, when there seemed to be no men among the boys of Israel, not only withstood the enemy, but devised a plan of attack to conquer? She made no accusations, started no liberation movements just for females, made no attempt to prove she was "equal" — she already knew she was, she dealt from strength, not frustration. She comforted, consoled, encouraged and inspired "Sweet Lightning" (Barak) to do his job with faith. She strengthened and supported — and these are not unequal responsibilities. **AND SHE WON!**

Sometimes in the scope of the story we forget the act of another woman in that day of need: Jael. Not many women, and *no man*, could do what she did that day. She entertained the enemy's commanding general in her tent, and when he was refreshed and sound asleep, she drove a tent nail through one temple and out of the other into the ground! (This act should be judged *in the context* of the book of Judges. It's not recommended for Christian women today!) So ended another occupation of Israel, by the concerted action, indirect and direct, of *two great women!*

**Overcoming Prejudice.** Naomi and Ruth fell on hard times. Living in a foreign country, the death of their husbands proved a catastrophe. But with sterling character, determined action and clever conduct, honest, hard-working and undoubtedly beautiful Ruth, with the help of her mother-in-law won her place in history. Would that all mother-in-law/daughter-in-law teams could get along as well!

Suffering under the stigma of being a woman, Ruth came penniless to the land of her former husband. Overcoming every prejudice with patient calm, she not only restored her family fortunes by marriage to Boaz, but became the grandmother of David and an ancestor of Christ. No male ever achieved a similar record! But the principles she used are applicable to all, and she herself will undoubtedly stand tall in the Kingdom of God! I doubt very much that she ever despaired of being "just a woman."

Take Esther for example. Here was a sweet young thing who proved beyond a shadow of doubt that beauty and intelligence can share billing in one character. Cast into the nexus of international in-

**Are you man enough to take good advice, even if it comes from "just a woman"? Man enough to accept the person, to see beyond prejudice, to recognize truth when you see it?**

trigue, with the extermination of her own Jewish race hanging in the balance, she had to act with uncommon brilliance in an uncommon situation: she proved *equal* to the task!

The winner of a worldwide beauty contest, tender in age and experience, offspring of a despised race, having powerful enemies to boot, she didn't exactly have everything going for her. She was faced with a unique dilemma of history — and, but for her wise and courageous conduct, many of you would not be alive today.

Fasting, praying, seeking counsel from her uncle and trusting God completely, she put her life on the line for her entire nation — **AND WON!** She cleverly maneuvered

Haman into a trap that caused him to be hung on the same gibbet he had built for her uncle Mordecai. She so ingratiated herself in the eyes of her husband, Emperor Ahasuerus, that he managed to change the law of the Medes and the Persians from a death sentence for all Jews to a *carte blanche*. Let's face it, fellows, even though we might be this woman's equal, we never could have done that!

But the principles she employed, we can *all* employ! Faith, patience, intelligence, willingness to listen to counsel, fasting, prayer, determination, guts!

**Snapped Shower Cap.** Abigail has long been a hero (or should I say heroine) of mine. Her example in the face of extremely frustrating life-circumstances gives confidence and helps prevent precipitate action in times of stress. Abigail was married to a no-good, bombastic, self-righteous, demanding, selfish bigot named Nabal (the very meaning of his name in English is "folly"!); David and his guerrilla band were surviving in the hills nearby. They had protected Nabal's flocks from bandits, brigands and marauding animals. They wanted some food in return.

Nabal refused. David's temper flared. Muttering some nasty invective against Nabal (1 Sam. 25:22), he and hundreds of armed men set out to teach Nabal a lesson he would never be able to remember (since he would die by the lesson!). Anticipating the manly responses of both Nabal and David, Abigail quietly got some food together and met David before he could do bodily harm to Nabal. Using the utmost of tact and diplomacy, she managed to bring David to a screeching halt in an action he would later have regretted. David recognized the wisdom of her advice (even as she was "just a woman") and said: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. . . . Go up in peace to thine house; we, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person!"

Are you man enough to take good advice, even if it comes from "just a woman"? Man enough to accept the person, to see beyond prejudice, to recognize truth when you see it?

Are you woman enough . . . ?

But the story is not finished — it would make a great movie!

When Abigail got back home, Nabal was in a drunken stupor, so she waited until the morning, when he was undoubtedly suffering from one of the greatest hangovers of history, before she told him what she had done — patently, softly, plainly. Nabal snapped his shower cap, went into a blind rage, had an apoplectic fit, suffered a stroke that paralyzed him for ten days, and died! David married Abigail, inherited all of Nabal's earthly goods, and they lived happily ever after.

Now, for all you women who have husbands like Nabal . . . David and Bathsheba. There's good news and bad news in the story of David and Bathsheba. Adultery and murder, shame and disgust, repentance and faith, forgiveness and hope. Most remember David, but what about Bathsheba — on both sides of the coin?

David lusted. But why was Bathsheba bathing where she knew she could be seen? David committed adultery, but it takes two to tango. David arranged for Uriah's untimely death, but did Bathsheba know nothing of the plot?

David repented totally, and wrote perhaps the most beautiful of all his psalms as a result, Psalm 51. But do we think Bathsheba did not also repent? David remained married. So Bathsheba remained married. And together they produced Solomon. Solomon means "peace" with God, with men, with each other. David and Bathsheba.

It was Bathsheba. Involuntarily and costly act of passion, forgiven, who later in her illustrious life together with Nathan, prophet of God, convinced David that he must name Solomon his successor to the throne before his death. Strong and subtle, for "had and good," Bathsheba is quite a woman — period, being.

By the way, Lemuel, as quoted by Solomon, may have written the words that describe the ideal

woman of Proverbs 31, but the Bible says he was taught them by his mother! Some say that "Lemuel" was another name for Solomon. If that is indeed true, then Bathsheba wrote Proverbs 31!

Jezebel was bad, Michal was bad. No need to dwell on that. Manasseh was bad, Pharaoh was bad.

After all, only people are bad. **Unsung Heroine.** Elijah is a luminary of biblical record without peer. His miracles (God's miracles performed at Elijah's request) are stirring, and examples with which most laymen are familiar. But do you remember the woman (unnamed) — as were many famous men in the biblical records) whose pot of oil and barrel of flour stayed full? The widow who sustained Elijah, when all

**God chooses "woman" throughout the entire Bible as the symbol of the Church of God, the Body of Christ. He refers to the entire group of saved human beings as the Bride of Christ.**

others turned him away? The woman whose son Elijah revived from the dead? I think I spot an unsung heroine here. A widow alone against a hostile world, having only her faith and good deeds to keep the wolf from the door. A woman of strong character. A woman with whom God was acquainted. I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee.

Many untold things must have been said regarding their relationship. Undoubtedly all untrue, but hurtful and difficult to live with. His political and religious views were anathema to the community they lived in. Her aiding and abetting him in her home could not have been popular. Unnamed, she yet receives her crown of victory in the

words of Hebrews 11:35 — the faith chapter — "Women [so there must have been others] received their dead raised to life again."

Elijah knew her name, God knows her name, and it won't make any difference that she is unnamed or "just a woman" when she is resurrected to eternal life, a member of the family of God in that better resurrection that same verse mentions. She will be equally one with God along with Elisha, A Spirit Being, All-Powerful, Ever-Living. THAT'S EQUALITY!

**Preferred Company.** God chooses "woman" throughout the entire Bible as the symbol of the Church of God, the Body of Christ. He refers to the entire group of saved human beings as the Bride of Christ. THAT'S EQUALITY!

There are many prejudiced people who have critical and unkind remarks regarding Jesus' open acceptance of women — even more critical and unkind remarks were made in His own day, as the status of women then was worse by far than it now is.

Mary Magdalene, a person of tragic background, with spiritual, mental and physical problems, was one of those closest to Christ, respected, loved, forgiven and encouraged by Him. He pointedly preferred her company to that of the self-important, male, high officials of the religion of His day. He was not afraid of being seen carrying on a conversation with a woman (remember the woman at the well?) contrary to the tradition of His day. There were many women who were His disciples, though most of them remained unnamed in the record, and women furnished an important part in the foundation of the early Church. And don't forget His mother, whom He loved and respected above all, with a woman. Don't disparage manhood in the name of equality.

**Paul a "Woman-Hater"?** Some call Paul a woman hater. He said they ought to keep quiet in the congregation, not gossip, reverence their husbands and obey them, and remember that the man is the head of the woman. But don't forget he also said, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the

church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25).

He sent his epistle to the Romans by the hand of Phebe, of whom he said: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church... receive her... assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also. Greet Priscilla [mentioned first] and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles" (Rom. 16:1-4).

Dorcas was a good woman. Sapphira was a bad woman. Were they equal?

Titus was a good man. Demas was a bad man. Were they equal? In his second letter to Timothy, Paul says: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God... all them that by Paul was telling Timothy he had better not let down "on the outstanding example of his mother and grandmother whom he greatly admired." Paul also reminded Timothy of the scriptural knowledge he had derived from these (1 Tim. 3:15).

And is it not strange that this woman-hater is found preaching his first sermon in Europe at Philipp, where he was sent by a command in a dream, preaching by a river to a group of women whose fashion it was to gather for prayer at that spot? And that his first convert on the new continent was Lydia, a woman.

These and many more examples show Paul rather to be a dedicated servant of just equally respecting men and women alike, acknowledging their deeds regardless of sex, and had no "woman-hater" here.

Equality with God. The Bible does say the man was created first, then woman. But nowhere does it indicate that that creation priority made one superior to the other in body, mind, or spirit.

The Bible does not permit, nor is

there an example of, women preaching. But in the letter to the Philadelphian church in the book of Revelation, God says the overcomers, male and female, who enter His Kingdom will be *worthy of worship*.

Jesus is the member of the God family who has always done the speaking. God the Father has not permitted Himself to address us as yet. Does this mean that the Father is not on an equal plane with the Son? Decidedly not! (Of course, the Father will always be the Head of the God family in terms of authority, see 1 Cor. 15:27-28; John 14:28).

What is eminently dear is that all of us human beings, male and female alike, are offered *equality with God now that's equal!*

As Jesus said in prayer to His Father: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are." Amen.

## Just what do you mean — CONVERSION?

According to the dictionary, religious conversion is the experience of a definite and decisive adoption of religion.

That's fine as far as it goes, but the Bible clearly shows that real Christian conversion is also an ongoing process in the booklet *Just What Do You Mean — Conversion?* Herbert Armstrong gives the reader valuable insights into the subject and points out the danger of "conversion for your own sake."

Get your copy of this helpful instructive booklet by writing to The Good News office nearest you. (See inside front cover for the address.)



## ANSWERS

Multiple choice (This is on page 2)

1-C. The English word, "hell" in the King James Version is translated from three different Greek words: *hades* (meaning a "pit" or "grave"), *gehenna* (a place of punishment), and *tartarus* (referring to a condition or restraint God imposes upon angels. It is used only once in the Bible, in Peter 2:4). When you see the word "hell" in the Bible, you can be sure of the meaning intended by checking an exhaustive concordance for the meaning of the original Greek or Hebrew word.

2-A. The Valley of Hinnom is a place outside Jerusalem where trash was thrown to be burned up. Christ used it as a synonym for the fate of fire into which the unrepentant are to be cast at the end of time. The meaning of the word *gehenna* is explained in much more detail in our free booklet *Is There a Real Hell?*

3-B. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man is explained in part two of the booklet *Is There a Real Hell?*

4-C. See Ecclesiastes 3:18, 20; 9:2-4, 10; Psalm 65, 148:2-6; Job 17:13; Acts 2:28-34; Genesis 37:35.

True or false

1-F. The hellfire the Bible talks about will utterly consume the wicked. Malachi 4:1-3 says it "shall burn them up. They will be ashes." See also Psalm 37:20 and Matthew 13:30.

2-F. *Gehenna* has a "overlapping" in the sense that its results are permanent. It is not a fire that burns forever. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), not eternal consciousness of the torment of an everlasting hell. The Bible says nothing about hell being in ever-curved in the bowels of the earth.

3-Y. See 1 Peter 2:11.

4-T. See Mark 9:43-48. The fire will not be "quenched" — that is, the fire will not be extinguished before it has consumed all combustible material.

# WHAT IS CHRIST'S GOSPEL?

by Brian Knowles

**The world of professing Christianity is full of "gospels" — but what is the true gospel message taught by Jesus Christ and found throughout the whole Bible?**

**T**he apostle Paul twice warned a curse upon any who would preach another gospel: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel — not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preach to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9).

Paul wrote this in the mid-50s A.D., just two decades after the death and resurrection of Christ. In twenty short years the message of the gospel had become perverted by those who would "make merchandise" of the people of God. Christ's message — Christ's own gospel — was being lost in a torrent of word pollution. False apostles and ministers arose everywhere, each trying to capture a following for themselves. Paul warned the Corinthians: "... Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants [ministers, KJV] also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds" (II Cor. 11:14-15).

**The Spirit of Antichrist.** In the twilight years of the first-century

Church — near the end of the century — the aged apostle John also warned of what was taking place: "Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us" (I John 2:18-19).

To be "antichrist" is to be against or opposed to Christ. Those who presumptuously preach a gospel other than that which Christ preached are opposed to Christ. They are in the spirit of antichrist! Those who deny Christ's message deny the Messiah Himself. True Christians must preach the true gospel!

But what is that gospel? What is Christ's message for the world? Of what did Jesus preach in His earthly ministry? Remember, it is "the gospel of Christ" — Christ's own gospel message — that Paul said we must preach.

**What the Gospel Accounts Say.** The best place to begin our search is in the synoptic Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark and Luke). Let's begin with Mark, which is believed by many to be the earliest written account of the life and teachings of Christ. Notice Mark 1:14: "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel" (KJV).

What was the central theme of Christ's gospel? *The Kingdom of God!*

Notice also Matthew's account: "And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23). "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 9:35).

Luke, too, confirms that the Kingdom message is the heart and core of the gospel of Christ: "Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God"

(Luke 8:1). (That's why this magazine is named *The Good News* — it means "The Gospel!")

In the Galilean city of Bethsaida, Jesus "spoke to them of the kingdom of God..." (Luke 9:11).

It should be plain, by now, that the central theme of Jesus' Galilean ministry was the gospel (good news) of the Kingdom of God. But that message was not confined to Galilee. In fact, Jesus explained that the very reason He had been sent from the Father was to preach that message everywhere! Notice Luke 4:43-44: "But he said to them, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.' And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judah."

We have now firmly established the theme of Christ's gospel — the Kingdom of God. But what about that Kingdom? What is the nature of the Kingdom? How did Jesus apprehend and teach the Kingdom? What is the Kingdom? Where is it? How is it to come? Who will head it? Who will be its subjects? Jesus Christ elaborated on all of these points in His gospel.

**The Hope of Israel.** The idea of the establishment of a divine Kingdom — the Kingdom of God — is not unique to the New Testament. It is found in the Old Testament and in the highly popular apocalyptic writings of the pre- and post-New Testament periods. Daniel prophesied of the establishment of a divine, world-ruling Kingdom: "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed... It shall break in pieces all these [worldly] kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

This was the hope of the Jewish community of Jesus' day. Since the time of the House of Judah's captivity to the Neo-Babylonian empire in 587 B.C., Palestine had been a much-occupied territory. First the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks and finally the Romans. No longer was Israel a pure theocracy. The Jewish people had lost much of their sense of community and national religious identity. The Roman occupation was a humiliating bore of contention.



There were those among the Jews who spoke of rebellion. Later, once the Christian Church was well established, major rebellions did take place.

But that's getting ahead of the story. When Jesus began His public ministry in A.D. 27, the occupied people of Judah were yearning for liberation from the Roman heel. While there were elements within the community who were content to submit to the occupying forces, many were not. They looked for a kingdom. They looked for the re-establishment of the glories of the theocracy as it had existed from Moses to Samson. They hearkened back to the golden age of the monarchy under kings David and Solomon. The people of Israel desired emancipation from the indignity of being a subjugated people. They were ready for a powerful Deliverer who would lead them to victory. Some began to sense that Jesus might be that Deliverer.

Even Jesus' own disciples had no clear picture even after three and one half years of accompanying Christ in His ministry. Perhaps they had lacked the spiritual discernment to really comprehend Jesus' teaching prior to the day of Pentecost. God explained through Paul that "spiritual things are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14-15). As a result, the very men chosen to be apostles of the gospel asked Jesus after His resurrection, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Acts 1:6-7).

The disciples still thought of a revival of the national fortunes of Israel under the rule of the Messiah. Yet the Old Testament prophesies of a world-ruling Kingdom which would encompass all nations and tongues (Dan. 2:44, 7:14). The capital of the entire earth in that day will be Jerusalem, and the law shall go forth from Zion. The prophet Micah explained, "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain [symbol for nation or government] of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills, and peoples shall

flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob: that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:1-3).

The "Lord," of course, is Christ. Jesus was born to preside over a world government emanating from Jerusalem, Palestine. He is destined to sit upon the throne of David from whom He was descended. "He will be great," explained Gabriel, God's messenger, "and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his Kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

**Co-Heirs With Christ.** Jesus was born to be a monarch, a King over Israel and all of the world. But that Kingdom is yet to be established. It is not the Church. The Church is the spiritual body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), which exists for the purpose of carrying out Christ's own work upon this earth. The people of the Church are called "saints" in the Bible. We are the children of God and co-heirs with Christ of the Kingdom.

Paul explained this to the Romans: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirits that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:15-17).

But what will the saints co-inhere with Christ? Jesus, in His gospel, explains: "Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matt. 25:34).

Now is it plain what Jesus meant when He taught "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5)? He meant that literally. All of the kingdoms of this world are destined to become the kingdoms of God and Christ. The saints of God will co-

rule with Jesus-Christ over those kingdoms. There will be one world government originating in Jerusalem. It will not be administered by mortal men (Dan. 2:44, 7:18). It will be governed directly by Christ and the co-heirs of the Kingdom — the saints of God! Zechariah prophesied of that future Kingdom: "And the Lord will become King over all the earth..." (Zech. 14:9). But Jesus will not rule unassisted. His triumphant return will not be a "solo flight". "Then the Lord your God will come, and all the holy ones with Him" (Zech. 14:5).

Daniel spoke of a time when "the saints received the kingdom" (Dan. 7:22). In verse 27 of the same chapter, he made it even clearer: "And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them."

This is the very heart and core of the "gospel of Christ". Jesus' gospel message: His teaching and preaching concerned that Kingdom.

**The Kingdom in Parables.** Jesus imparted knowledge of just how one could qualify to enter the Kingdom of God. His parables had the Kingdom as their central theme.

Often Jesus did not want those who were not then being called to really understand the message concerning the Kingdom. Yet He had to respond to their questions and inquiries. So He spoke in parables which He interpreted privately to His own students (disciples). This is made plain in the case of the well-known parable of the sower: "Then the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' And he answered them, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given'" (Matt. 13:10-11).

(Notice that it is the "Kingdom of heaven" — not the Kingdom on heaven! The English expression "of" denotes ownership — not locality. The Kingdom of heaven will come to this earth as many other scriptures show. Matthew used the more Jewish expression "Kingdom of heaven" for a reason. The literal

Kingdom of God will be a spiritual Kingdom *far transcending* any physical kingdom on earth. Matthew wanted to be sure his Jewish audience understood this difference. Mark, Luke and John all used the term "kingdom of God." But Matthew meant the same thing they did.)

Jesus' parables concerned the Kingdom. In giving the parables, Christ frequently began by saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to..." or "The kingdom of heaven is like..." (Matt. 13:24-31).

The parable of the grain of mustard seed indicated that the Kingdom would begin small (the fledgling beginnings of the early Church) and that it would finally grow to fill the whole earth (Matt. 13:31-32). The same point is illustrated by the one-verse parable of Matthew 13:33. "He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened."

**Just Like Christ!** The Kingdom will eventually fill the entire earth! Once that Kingdom is established, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears let him hear" (Matt. 13:43).

That is the ultimate destiny of the Church of God — to shine like the very sun in the fullness of its strength in the Kingdom of God! As the apostle John explained: "When he appears we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2).

And what is Christ like in His present glorified state? Again John explains: "Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle [belt or sash] round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire." (Rev. 1:12-14) "His face," explained John, "was like the sun shining in full strength" (verse 16).

Those who are privileged to join Christ in the Kingdom will be *just like that!* Incredible? An apocalyptic fantasy? Not at all. What you

have just read is a part of the Word of God. It is a component of the *gospel of Christ!* It is part of His message to this suffering world.

**A New World Coming.** There is hope in the gospel. A better world is coming. A world of justice, peace and mercy for all. Jesus Christ, and the saints with Him, will usher in a millennium of *healing* and universal blessings. The Church will be "a kingdom and priests to our God, and they [we] shall reign on earth" (Rev. 5:10). Those who have died in Christ throughout the centuries, since His ascension to the Father "came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4).

And that rule will be a rule of law and justice. The social injustices and oppressions of this present evil world (see Gal. 1:4) will become a thing of the past. Racial prejudice will be banished. Sickness and disease will be phased out (Isa. 35:5-6). War will give way to farming, and swords (symbolic of all weaponry) will be "beaten into plowshares" (Micah 4:3). Jesus Christ will institute vast ecological reforms and the world will again become an Eden of lush beauty: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon [giant cedars] shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon [among the more beautiful parts of modern Israel]. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God" (Isa. 35:4-2).

Justice will prevail in the courts of the land. There will be no bribery or favoritism. God is not a respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11). He will judge with fairness, mercy and justice in every case. "He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth." Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins" (Isa. 11:3-5).

Isn't that what the world needs? Isn't that **GOOD NEWS!** It is indeed. And it is the very essence of the message of the whole Bible — the **gospel of Christ!** It is a gospel of

salvation (Eph. 1:13) for the whole world. It is a message about the "revelation of all things" (Acts 3:21, KJV). It is the only *true* gospel.

**Kingdom Now Being Prepared.** Jesus is even now preparing positions of rulership in His eternal Kingdom for those who are willing to accept the call (John 14:1-3). Some of these positions have already been spoken for: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me [the twelve apostles] will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel'" (Matt. 19:28).

David will be king over all Israel (Ezek. 37:24) under Christ. Abraham will apparently preside over the entire earth as "second ruler in the kingdom" (see Rom. 4:13).

But there are many other positions available. Crowns of rulership are awaiting those who are faithful to the end. Jesus is merely the "first-born of many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). God has a position waiting for you if you really want it. Are you willing to give up everything and turn your life over to Jesus Christ in order to obtain the "pearl of great price"? (Study the parable in Matthew 13:45!) Will you give your life to God as a "living sacrifice"? (Rom. 12:1.) Or will you forfeit your position in the Kingdom by accepting another gospel — or no gospel at all? Jesus gave a stern warning to the congregation of Christians in the ancient town of Philadelphia: "I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown" (Rev. 3:17).

Will you heed that warning or will you give up your birthright for a bowl of this world's "lentil soup"? Will you truly "repent and believe the gospel" of the Kingdom of God? For that alone is "Christ's gospel!"

#### RECOMMENDED READING

The following booklets are available free of charge upon your request. (See the inside front cover for the address of our office nearest you.)

Just What Do You Mean —

Kingdom of God?

What Is the True Gospel?

What Is the Reward of the Saved?

In times past and present some atheists and agnostics have gone as far as to claim that no real evidence exists outside the New Testament to prove that Jesus of Nazareth actually lived and died, and the New Testament is, of course, dismissed as a pious fraud.

It is true that no record of the crucifixion of Jesus has come down to us from Pilate himself. But other records have been preserved which mention Jesus of Nazareth. These records are non-Christian in origin and, hence, can be regarded as neutral, disinterested, historical evidence of Jesus' life and crucifixion by the Romans.

Writing around the end of the first century A.D., the Roman historian Suetonius tells us that in A.D. 49 the Emperor Claudius banished all Jews from the city of Rome (an incident also mentioned in Acts 18:2): "He expelled the Jews from Rome, on account of the riots in which they were constantly indulging, at the instigation of Chrestus" (Claudius, 25, 4).

"Chrestus" was a common misspelling of the name of Christ. These riots were probably a result of the recent arrival in Rome of Christianity, which would have caused considerable dissension in the Jewish community there, as it did elsewhere (see, for example, Acts 21:31). Writing many years later, Suetonius doubtless misunderstood the police records of the rioting and took the name of "Chrestus" to refer to some individual of that name.

A more detailed account of Christ comes from the Roman historian Tacitus. Writing between A.D. 115 and 117, Tacitus tells us that in A.D. 64 the emperor Nero tried to blame the disastrous fire in Rome on the Christians. Tacitus then goes on to describe these Christians: "They got their name from Christ, who was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. That checked the pernicious superstition for a short time, but it broke out afresh — not only in Judea, where the plague first arose, but in Rome itself, where all the horrible and shameful things in the world collect and find a home" (Annals, XV, 44).

From Tacitus' comments it is

## JESUS OF NAZARETH: FACT OR FICTION? ?

clear he had no sympathy for Christianity. Yet for him there was no question that its founder actually lived and was executed by Pontius Pilate while he was procurator over Judea several decades earlier. Tacitus was an official Roman historian; he had access to official court records, diplomatic correspondence and Roman archives. Aside from his pagan, anti-Christian bias, his account is considered a reliable confirmation of the New Testament story of Christ's death and its aftermath.

Roman historians are not the only ones who tell us of Jesus of Nazareth. Ancient Jewish traditions preserved in the Talmud also apparently mention Him. Jewish scholars agree that traditions of Jesus' death by crucifixion were maintained among the Jews for several centuries after the event and were finally put in written form in the Talmud about A.D. 500. The details in one account of Jesus' death are garbled — the passage comes from a rabbinical debate on criminal procedures (*Sanhedrin* 43A).

Another account of Jesus is found in the writings of the famous Jewish historian Flavius Josephus of the first century A.D. However, historians feel that the passage was later altered by a Christian scribe, to make Josephus say that Jesus was possibly the Messiah — something Josephus, a pious Jew, would never have admitted.

However, one Jewish scholar has reconstructed the passage as follows: "Now, there was about this

time Jesus, a wise man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first ceased not so to do; and the race of Christians, so named from him are not extinct even now" (Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 55-56).

Josephus also mentions Jesus briefly in another passage which scholars feel is quite genuine: "He [Annas] convened a judicial session of the Sanhedrin and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ — James by name — and some others, whom he charged with breaking the law and handed over to be stoned to death" (*Antiquities*, xx, 200).

Many other accounts, mostly fragmentary, have come down to us besides the ones that are quoted here. These documents so corroborate the New Testament record that Professor Klausner stated: "If we possessed them alone, we should know nothing except that in Judaea there had existed a Jew named Jesus who was called the Christ, the 'Anointed'; that he performed miracles and taught the people; that he was killed by Pontius Pilate at the instigation of the Jews; that he had a brother named James, who was put to death by the High Priest Annas, the son of Annas; that owing to Jesus there arose a special sect known as Christians; that a community belonging to this sect existed in Rome fifty years after the birth of Jesus, and that because of this community the Jews were expelled from Rome; and, finally, that from the time of Nero, the sect greatly increased, regarded Jesus as virtually divine, and underwent severe persecution" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 62).

The importance of Jesus Christ's life and death is recorded in the New Testament. Yet for those who do not accept the New Testament as accurate history, other records have been preserved which clearly show that the human life of Jesus Christ was fact — not fiction.

—Scott Rockhold



*Mr. Ted Armstrong recently asked us to prepare a report for the ministry on the objectives and goals of AICF, with special emphasis on its relationship to, and benefits for, the Work and the Church. We were already planning such a statement for the general public media — and so it is appropriate to reproduce it here for our Good News readers. Next month's "Update" will focus on AICF's forthcoming new publication. We would particularly appreciate any comments you have, as we cordially look to you for encouragement and support.*

by Robert L. Kehn and Stanley R. Pader

GOOD NEWS November 1978





**History and Objectives**

The influence of the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation continues to grow through solid, recognized accomplishments in the worlds of culture, international education, sociological and scientific investigation, publishing, human development, humanitarian activities, etc. We would like

to give our readers a concise history of AICF as well as a clear statement of its underlying objectives.

**AICF Basic Philosophy:** The Ambassador International Cultural Foundation is dedicated to serving mankind. Our concern is for people — helping them to realize and fulfill their individual and collective potentials. We work to achieve this

through numerous humanitarian, cultural and educational projects, programs and institutions throughout the world.

There are two fundamental concepts underlying all goals and activities of the Foundation:

1) That man is a unique being, possessing vast mental, moral and spiritual potentials, — the devel-

opment of which should be aided and encouraged.

2) That it is the responsibility of all men to attend to, and care for, the needs of their fellowmen.

In keeping with these concepts, AICF supports activities ranging from benefits for handicapped children to major cultural events; from agricultural research to hospitals; from archaeological excavations to parks for children.

The scope of the Foundation is very broad, and the possibilities are all but limitless. AICF looks to the future with great anticipation as more and more people demonstrate their concern by joining hands with us in the service of mankind.

How did it all begin? There is only one place to start — with Founder Herbert W. Armstrong's visionary understanding of the majestic capacity of the human mind and the transcendent purpose of human life.

Basing his conception of man entirely on the Bible, Mr. Armstrong has long taught that culture in general, and the performing and literary arts in specific, are among the highest forms of human expression and represent the finest achievements of the human mind which in turn glorifies the God who created it. Mr. Armstrong has emphasized, again fully basing his view on biblical understanding, that there is a "spirit in man" which the Creator designed to transform the purely physical human brain into the magnificent, incomprehensible human mind. While rejecting the traditional theological doctrines of the immortality of the soul, Mr. Armstrong focuses upon this *spirit in man* as the real key to understanding man and his purpose. As a result, it is indeed the spirit-in-man concept which forms the philosophical basis for all of the diverse activities of the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation.

**Help People Help Themselves.** Some ten years ago, Mr. Armstrong began to meet with heads of state, government, educational and business

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**Our concern is for people — helping them to realize and fulfill their individual and collective potentials.**

leaders in many countries around the world to bring his unique message about man and his potential and to discuss the problems confronting mankind everywhere. These activities have mushroomed and today Mr. Armstrong is well known in some of the highest circles throughout Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and increasingly so in Europe, Central and South America.

As he visited with these world leaders, Mr. Armstrong desired to help in ways relevant to both his host country and Mr. Armstrong's own overall understanding of man — projects which would help people to help themselves. Consequently, joint endeavors were undertaken. Among the first were the archaeological excavations at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in cooperation with Hebrew University and the Israel Exploration Society. (Our institutions have jointly sponsored this most significant investigation since its inception in 1968.)

We are involved in archaeological excavations in Babylon in cooperation with UCLA, the University of Turin and the government of Iraq, and a joint Japanese-Israeli archaeological project under the auspices of Prince Mikasa (fostering international cooperation between the two countries). Other projects we are participating in include anthropological expeditions conducted by the King Leopold III Foundation; mobile schools to educate the mountain people in Thailand and Nepal in cooperation with the kings

of both countries; a technical school in Kenya at the request of Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta; cultural-educational projects with the Shah of Iran; a cross-cultural educational effort for young people in Jerusalem (the International Cultural Center for Youth); worldwide fund raising for handicapped children (in London, Monte Carlo, etc.); the World Wildlife Association and many more similar activities.

Herbert Armstrong has received many awards for these efforts, including the Medal of Jerusalem and decorations from Emperor Hirohito of Japan and King Hussein of Jordan. All of these projects and activities, though diverse in scope, focus on the same point — discovering, realizing and improving man's potential.

**Ambassador Auditorium.** At the same time, at the headquarters of the Worldwide Church of God and its liberal arts college, Ambassador College, Mr. Armstrong was completing his twenty-year dream of building what is acclaimed to be one of the finest auditoriums of its kind in the world. Serving multiple functions, the Auditorium is primarily utilized by the College for forums, assemblies and classes. Next, it is used every Sabbath for services of the headquarters congregation of the Worldwide Church of God. Finally, it is a magnificent concert hall, the increasingly renowned center for the performing arts presented by AICF. Again, the focus is sharp: to celebrate the pinnacle of man's achievements educationally, spiritually, artistically — College, Church, Foundation — directly reflecting Mr. Armstrong's biblical understanding of the spirit in man and human potential.

In March of 1975 the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation was founded to direct and conduct all of the cultural, humanitarian, charitable and educational activities heretofore initiated by Mr. Armstrong through the Worldwide Church of God and Ambassador College. The Foundation is legally

independent of both the Church and the College and is totally non-sectarian in nature. It is firmly and fully committed to emphasizing all activities which properly represent, demonstrate and enhance humanity's spiritual potential in all forms of human activity.

**Doing Good Works.** Garner Ted Armstrong has long emphasized that the Bible instructs us to take care of those less fortunate than ourselves. The Foundation enables the Church to do its "good works" effectively and efficiently — in a completely nonsectarian, secular sense — thereby causing its light to shine before all men everywhere. By seeing the Church's "good works" through the Foundation, all may recognize the Creator God behind it all.

Through its Extension Center, the Foundation further extends its capacity to help people. With "human development" as its keynote, a coordinated program of seminars, cassette courses and a "Successful Living" newsletter is enabling individuals to help themselves in all aspects of their lives. Pilot chapters of the AICF in Milwaukee, Seattle and Washington, D.C. are engaged in local activities aiding the blind, crippled children, the elderly, etc.

**Wide Recognition.** In the short period of time the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation has existed, its worldwide impact has been gratifying. Its inaugural concert season in Pasadena featured a number of distinguished performers. As a result of the concerts, the Auditorium and College have achieved international recognition and attention.

Each artist, as well as each member of the audience, has become a beacon in their own right, telling others far and wide about Ambassador Auditorium, AICF and the Ambassador College campus. The public awareness of all our institutions — Church and College as well as Foundation — has skyrocketed in the past 18 months, locally, nationally and internationally. The Passovs, for ex-

**The Foundation is firmly and fully committed to emphasizing all activities which properly represent, demonstrate and enhance humanity's spiritual potential in all forms of human activity.**

ample, perhaps the world's most traveled and celebrated dancers, told Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem that Ambassador is the finest place — with the finest people — they have ever seen. And so the Foundation's reputation grows — with the upcoming second season to highlight Mstislav Rostropovitch, Beverly Sills, Lazar Benman, the Rome Piccolo Opera, and the Philadelphia, Tokyo, Polish National, and Utah Symphony Orchestras. Future plans include special cultural/educational concerts to be telecast (probably in 1978) nationwide from Ambassador Auditorium — underwritten in full by a major American corporation.

It has been our continuing desire to conduct all the activities of the Foundation without publicly promoting the Church. The AICF seeks to attain its objectives by: 1) indirectly demonstrating or reflecting the transcendent spiritual nature of man, and 2) fulfilling the biblical injunction to do good works, and help others. (All this with a total commitment of barely three percent of the Church's budget.)

However, the media, more attracted by the Foundation's programs and projects in the last year than it ever has been by the Church's more traditional religious activities, has generated significant public exposure — and thereby impact — for the Church and for the Armstrongs. Many articles have appeared in leading publications around the world about the entirety of our institutions, Church and Col-

lege as well as Foundation. In most cases, the articles were either directly triggered by the Foundation or indirectly mentioned in scope and tone based upon the obviously successful program of good works — cultural, humanitarian, charitable, educational — conducted by the Foundation for the Church and College.

In addition to all of this, our most significant project is about to be launched: an exciting new publication, *Quest 77*, designed to make a fundamental statement about human potential, reflect the highest quality of our institutions and the publicity and commercially successful.

Many of the media reports have been laudatory, some controversial, and a few derogatory. But all have been fascinating, which adds up to powerful public awareness and impact as never before. The public profiles of both Herbert Armstrong and Garner Ted Armstrong continue to be substantially elevated. It was *not* our objective, it is *not* our objective; but it is a fact, it has happened — and we now accept it.

**Being a Light.** In Matthew 5:14-16, Christ said: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Being a "light to the world," as Mr. Armstrong has taught, does *not* refer to proselyting-type activity or in any way even promulgating church doctrine to those who do not voluntarily request it. Rather, "good works" refer to all those secular actions, activities and conduct that all men — even the nonreligious and irreligious — must appreciate and respect. If then, to apply the analogy today, the "light" is the collective "good works" of the Church, the Foundation is one of the "candlesticks."

# THE GOSPEL- PREACHED IN EGYPT

*The gospel of salvation is not overly complex. It is so simple, in fact, that any rational mind can understand its essential principles. But sometimes the Bible is deeper than it appears at first glance: much clear, significant meaning, incidentally and additionally proving the existence and authorship of God, lies hidden from many.*

by Lawson C. Briggs

**T**hirty-five centuries ago in Pharaoh's Egypt, God injected into human culture the message of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. Fifteen centuries before Christ! But the truth about salvation and grace, revealed in the types and events of that first Passover, was not fully comprehended for the full span of those fifteen centuries — and has been almost universally forgotten, it would seem, the last twenty.

Instructing the ancient Israelites about the Passover, Exodus 12:11 records these words of God: "In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's passover. For I will pass through

This verse has been a problem to many. Many have assumed it to mean that the Israelites were to be ready to desert their homes, at any instant, even while they ate. But not so. For God had already said that He would pass through "about midnight" (Ex. 11:4), and He continued to instruct: "none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning" (Ex. 12:22).

Make no mistake, the instruction was to be observed literally, but its

meaning was symbolic, not literal. This is shown by the fact that Israel was to eat while holding at the same time "your staff in your hand." If the purpose had been to literally speed their exit, it would have been quite sufficient to have had the staff leaning in easy reach of the door, conveniently ready to grab as the owner dashed through, — and their eating would certainly have been more than a little easier with a free extra hand!

But what did the instruction symbolize? Biblical scholar T. H. Gaster believed that eating "in haste" was a symbol of purity, no fermentation having entered into lamb or bread (*Festivals of the Jewish Year*, p. 33). But this really doesn't answer the question, especially concerning the staves, the sandals, the clothing. **Meaning of Symbols.** What we must realize is that the whole ritual was designed in the beginning by God, to picture the atoning sacrifice of His Son. When we rightly apply the symbols, their true meaning should appear.

At the midnight approach of the mob which came to take Him to His trial and crucifixion, Jesus immediately said: "But all this has taken place, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matt. 26:56). What prophets? Moses, who wrote the book of Exodus, was a prophet, though more than a prophet (see Deut. 18:18). What prophecy was being fulfilled as Jesus spoke? The verses immediately preceding explain: "While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs [KJV: staves]. . . . But how then [else] should the scripture be fulfilled, that it must be so? At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?'"

In all the Bible there is no prophecy that the Messiah or Savior was to be taken by a mob with staves, in haste, prepared with "loins girded" and shoes on their feet to chase Him should He flee. None, that is, except the Passover instructions in Exodus 12.

Shortly before, Jesus had demonstrated His concern to properly fulfill prophecy: "And he said to them, 'When I send you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' They said, 'Nothing.' He said to them, 'But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. For I tell you that this scripture [Isa. 53:12] must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfillment.' And they said, 'Look, Lord, here are two swords.' And he said to them, 'It is enough'" (Luke 22:35-38).

**Why Swords?** Was there really a need, prophetically, for swords? How could two be enough? And was Christ actually "reckoned with the transgressors"? Verses 47 and on give the answer: "There came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?' And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, 'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?' And one of them [Peter — see John 18:10-11] struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' [this much was sufficient for that prophecy's sake] . . . and healed him" (see also Mark 14:43-48).

"Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, 'Have you come out as



against a robber, with swords and clubs." Here was the mob with the staves. (A staff, in essence, is a stick of wood. It may be a walking stick. It may be a weapon of offense or defense. Hence John 18:3 speaks of the mob having lanterns, torches and weapons.)

"When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." What was that hour? "About midnight" — the hour of the death angel, that power of darkness himself, who caused the death of all the firstborn in Egypt except those where the Eternal also was, protecting those who had the sign of the blood.

This was the hour and the situation pictured at Passover even today by the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim. They kill their Passover lamb at the *precise instant* of sunset, but do not actually eat till *after midnight* and in *great haste* (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, pp. 665, 666).

There in the garden of Gethsemane was the mob in great "haste" — a haste to get rid of the unwelcome prophet Jesus before the people who heard Him gladly should know what was happening (Mark 12:37; 14:2). Their haste continued until they had condemned Him to death and coerced Pontius Pilate into seconding the sentence and carrying out the execution.

Who Killed Christ? But why should the Israelites, who were being given God's protection from death, symbolize the mob who were putting Christ to death? The answer to this is the answer to the question, "Who really killed Jesus Christ?" We — sinful human beings — all of us — we killed Jesus Christ. Our sins forced Him to suffer and die, to make it possible for us to enter into eternal life. The mob was stubborn,

sinful Israel in ancient Egypt. They killed Jesus Christ — just as they killed the Passover lamb whose blood they put on the doorposts to symbolize the blood of Christ. The mob was the Gentiles, who have never kept the Passover, and those who have never yet heard the name of Jesus. They killed Christ. The mob was us, all of mankind!

The blood of Jesus, our Passover Lamb, the very life of the man who was also God, the man who was perfect, the man who never sinned, was sufficient for all times, to re-

**The blood of Jesus, our Passover Lamb, the very life of the man who was also God, the man who was perfect, the man who never sinned, was sufficient for all times, to redeem all generations.**

deem all generations. It is more than sufficient, with plenty left over. The same is true of His body. Notice further some vital facts of the gospel of Christ which were pictured by the body of the Passover lamb and shown in the rules for the Passover.

**Body of the Lamb.** First of all, of course, the body of a lamb to represent Christ had to be perfect, without blemish (Ex. 12:5). Then Israel was told (verse 9): "Do not eat any of it raw or boiled with water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts." The body of the lamb picturing Jesus was not to be dismembered as would occur in boiling it. In fact, not a bone — in lamb or Christ — was to be broken (verse 46;

Num. 9:12; Ps. 34:20). This is why Christ had to die from a spear wound rather than having His legs broken like the thieves which were crucified with Him (John 19:31-37). (For further information on this point, write for our free article "Did Christ Die of a Broken Heart?")

The spear could slash open his flesh, on the analogy of what would occur if the Passover animal's entrails were removed, but neither Christ nor lamb were allowed to be cut apart. Then what was done with any amount of the Passover sacrifice which might be left over? The blood, of course, was poured out right at first. It was not eaten. It represented payment for sin. The body of the lamb, however, was consumed, representing an intake of Jesus Christ Himself into the Christian, resulting in a becoming character-wise like Him. But a deadline was set on this physical intake, illustrating the spiritual fact that there is coming a time when this opportunity of taking in Christ's nature will no longer be available to mankind. It will end with the lake of fire. Now read Exodus 12:10: "And you shall let none of it remain until the morning, anything that remains until the morning you shall burn."

With the fulfillment of the meaning of that, the plan of God for the salvation, sanctification and identification of mankind with God will be complete. □

#### RECOMMENDED READING

For more information on the Passover and an exposition of God's master plan of salvation for mankind as pictured in God's annual holy days, be sure to request two free booklets published by the Worldwide Church of God. The titles are: *How Often Should We Keep the Lord's Supper?* and *Pagan Holidays — or God's Holy Days — Which?* Addresses are on the inside front cover.

**Q**UESTION: "If you forgive someone for something awful, how do you forget it? Or are forgiving and forgetting the same thing?"

Mr. and Mrs. Floyd H.,  
Delworth, Minnesota

**A**NSWER: "Forgive and forget" is an old saying we have all heard, but it is not found in the Bible. While Christ taught that if our brother wrongs us and repents, we are to forgive him (even if this happens seventy times seven times! — Matthew 18:21-22). He did not require that we forget. In many cases, forgetting what our neighbor has done to us would be humanly impossible, although ideally that is what we should strive to do. (But if we can't completely forget, the very least we can do is to *never mention* the offense again or hold it against the person in any way.)

God, in contrast, has the power to perfectly forget our sins once we have repented (Isa. 43:25). But even though God forgave the prophets and patriarchs of old, he still allowed their sins to be recorded and remembered in the Bible, as an example to others (1 Cor. 10:11).

**Q:** "In the article on human potential, it states: 'The physical body decays but the spirit that was in the body preserves the form, the shape, the memory and the character.' Does this mean that in the resurrection our dear ones will remember the terrible pain and suffering they endured just before death and during their lifetimes? I am anxious to have this explained."

Anonymous,

Waukegan, Wisconsin

**A:** Those who are resurrected as immortal spirit beings will, like God, have perfect memories. But the memory of our past life will not be painful. Jesus Himself "learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). Christ is not now suffering at the right hand of the Father. David wrote: "... At thy right hand

there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11, KJV). If we were to *totally* forget what we had suffered, there would be no point in going through such trials in the first place. But God promises that in His Kingdom He will "wipe away every tear... and death shall be no more... for the former things [shall] have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

**Q:** "Why would Christ admonish the faithful to pray, 'lead us not into temptation'?" (Matt. 6:13.) It would seem that God would never deliberately lead a person away from good. Since God is always righteous and perfect and knows us well, would this scripture mean that God is always testing us?"

M.E.,

El Paso, Texas

**A:** God has set up this world and its temptations as a training ground for the life to come. The trials we are faced with give us an opportunity to exercise our free moral agency and develop the type of godly character that we will need as members of God's Kingdom. James 1:13-15 reads, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death." In light of this scripture, we can conclude that Matthew 6:13 means that we are to ask God to keep us from situations where we will be tried severely. God, however, promises that we will never be tested beyond our strength (1 Cor. 10:13).

**Q:** "If a person were baptized without first repenting, would he or she ever be forgiven by God?"

Betty B.,

Uniontown, Pennsylvania

**A:** Repentance is the key to forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38; 3:19). If a person is baptized without first repenting, then his or her sins are not forgiven. But whether or not these sins are ever forgiven depends on

whether or not that person repents in the future. They may again be baptized as a symbol of the death of their old self and resurrection to new life in Christ with His Holy Spirit. But God is very merciful — He is glad to forgive us *whenever* we repent (Ps. 86:5). For more on this subject, request the free booklets *What Is a Real Christian?*, *All About Water Baptism* and *Just What Do You Mean — "The Unpardonable Sin"?*

**Q:** "For many years I have known that we should not eat blood, but in the July GN a O&A spoke of fat and blood. In Leviticus 7:23 the children of Israel were told to eat no marrow of fat. In practically all cuts of meats today some fat is mingled with the lean. This is especially true in marbled steaks and ground beef. How do we avoid the eating of some fats in our meats?"

Keith P.,

Watertown, Wisconsin

**A:** The Bible clearly shows us that it is not wrong to eat meat that is tender and well-marbled. In Christ's parable of the prodigal son, the father killed a "fatted calf" to celebrate his son's return (Luke 15:23). The kind of fat which is to be avoided is the type that can be easily cut off before or after cooking. Most doctors today recognize that this form of saturated fat probably contributes to circulatory diseases and other health problems. The better grades of ground beef in particular do not contain a significant amount of fat if cooked and drained — only as much as one would get from eating a well-marbled cut of meat.

**Q:** "A man was talking to me about reincarnation and based most of his evidence on the Bible, John 9:2 specifically. I've been trying to figure out just what that verse does mean. How could the man sin before his birth, unless he had lived before? Please explain."

Elmer B.,

Waterhouse, California

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**A:** John 9:1-2 reads: "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Your friend apparently infers from this scripture that people can sin before they are born, reasoning that the blind man would have had to have sinned before he was born in order to be penalized at birth.

This kind of reasoning goes totally against the thrust of the rest of the Bible. The plan of God, as outlined in the Scriptures, makes no allowance for men to pass through a series of lives before being admitted into some sort of Nirvana of paradise. The Bible shows that people have no consciousness before their present life, and none after death until they are resurrected and given either eternal life or death. (For more on this subject, request our free booklet *Do You Have an Immortal Soul?* and the reprint article "If You Die, Will You Live Again?")

Notice also that Christ answered His disciples in the negative: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). In other words, this was a situation planned or allowed to occur by God in order to make known to the world that Jesus Christ was His Son.

**Q:** "What does Peter mean when he states that the gospel was preached to 'dead men' (Greek), that they 'might be judged... in the flesh, but live... in the spirit'?"

**Nicholas M.,  
Mt. Zion, West Virginia**

**A:** I Peter 4:5-6 reads: "But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God." This scripture is referring to people who are now dead, but had the gospel preached to them while they were alive. The context (verse 5),

which refers to God judging "the living and the dead," refers to the time of the resurrection when those who are now dead will be made alive once again. This is the only logical explanation in light of the other clear Bible passages on this subject. Other scriptures show that God is "not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him" (Luke 20:38, KJV). For a more thorough explanation of life after death, write for our free booklets entitled *After Death - Then What? Do You Have an Immortal Soul?* and the free reprint "What Will You Be Like in the Resurrection?"

**Q:** "About your article on birth control, God never says to worry about material things (education, population, food supplies). Why are you worried about them? If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, all would be taken care of. What is impossible with men to solve is possible with God."

**Walter M.,  
Fairbanks, Alaska**

**A:** God does require that Christians exercise faith. He also does not want us to take any "anxious thought" about material things (Matt. 6:25-34). (See several modern translations of verse 25. It is not properly translated in the King James Version.) But God also expects us to be responsible stewards of whatever He gives us (Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27) - including the ability to procreate, or not procreate if the situation warrants it. The apostle Paul recognized that there could be unusual times when it would even be unwise to marry (see I Cor. 7:26).

To quote another statement from the Bible: "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26, KJV). We are not to tempt God (Matt. 4:6-7) by placing ourselves in jeopardy if it is in our power to control certain areas of our lives. In the same way, God will not bless and protect us if we flagrantly violate principles of wisdom and common sense. God does not expect us to have more children than we can reasonably expect to support and nurture properly. The means are available by which we

can limit our families, and if we do not avail ourselves of them, we cannot expect God to unconditionally bail us out of our self-inflicted predicament.

**Q:** "In David Jon Hill's article, 'What the World Needs Is Hope,' it was stated that God plans to expand His family for eternity by adding sons and daughters. Will God do this by spiritual creation as He created the angels, or is this given for us to know (I Cor. 2:9)?"

**Billy W.,  
Burns, Oregon**

**A:** The concept that God will continue to expand His family for eternity is a very logical inference drawn from Isaiah 9:7, a prophecy of Christ which states: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end..."

Some have speculated that when each of us are immortal spirit beings, sons of God in His family, we will have a part in extending God's Kingdom throughout the universe. Perhaps God will create other human beings on other planets in the universe who will then be afforded an opportunity to become members of God's family as we were. Detailed specifics about the next life are few and far between in the Bible, but we are promised:

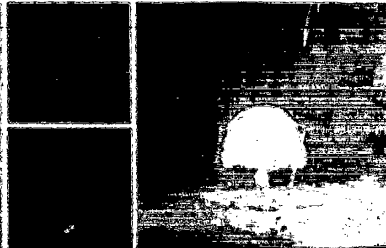
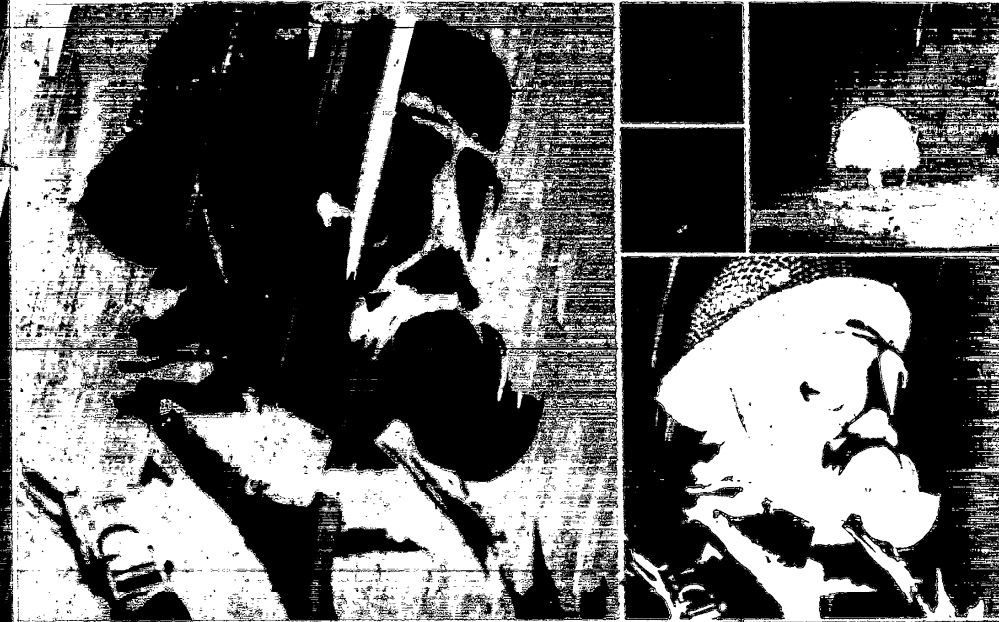
"... I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

**Q:** "Should a Christian drink coffee or tea?"

**Rory D.,  
Fetton, Georgia**

**A:** Coffee is a mild stimulant which is usually not harmful if used moderately. Most people can tolerate and enjoy it with no harmful effects. However, some people find that even a small amount causes nervousness, and they would probably be better off not to drink it at all. The same principle applies to tea.

For more on the subject of psychoactive substances like coffee, tea, chocolate, wine, whiskey, and so forth, request our new booklet *The Dilemma of Drugs*.



## ARE WE LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS? PART FOUR

# A Time of Unprecedented Peril

by George Ritter

**N**obody likes bad news. By nature most of us tend to be optimistic. After all, we've got good reasons to be. We've heard the wolf, wolf, and the sky-is-falling refrains too many times in the past.

Every generation has its prophets of doom, its own local doomybrooks, and from time to time a catastrophe or two. Famine, war, pestilential plagues and environmental destruction have always dogged the heels of humanity. Empires come and go, nations rise and fall, and somehow through it all the human race has usually managed to land on its feet.

So who is to say this generation is any different? The British people have maintained for decades "there will always be an England," and so far they have been right. Do we have any reason not to be just as optimistic about the particular age of history in which we are living?

**Can All Things Center?** While this attitude is sometimes not without its merits, in today's world it leaves something to be desired. For instance, take the perennial problem of war. In the past nations fought wars that were limited in both scope and intensity. This ensured that the survivors could live again to fight another day.

But beginning with the twentieth century, the concept of total global warfare—involving entire civilian populations and fought simultaneously on several different continents—became a reality. Add to this the nightmare of nuclear destruc-

tion, ballistic missiles that can traverse continents in seconds, instant communications with virtually any point on the globe and you have all the ingredients necessary for the ultimate doomsday holocaust—never before present in human history.

The same is true when it comes to famine and overpopulation. Traditionally, food shortages were caused by cyclical fluctuations in weather patterns or prolonged bouts of warfare. But because of an unprecedented population explosion in the last few decades, the potential for famine is now built into the structure of world society. Cyclical variations only serve to aggravate a steadily growing problem.

The potential for worldwide energy and resource shortages is also something new to this age. In the past, civilizations could always utilize a new frontier over the horizon waiting for exploitation. Now most of the new virgin lands and easy sources of energy and minerals are rapidly being exhausted.

In addition, the traditional military and political alliances that have been responsible for some semblance of order in the world are now in a state of disarray. Poorer developing nations that for centuries lived under the umbrella of Western colonial powers are now beginning

to flex their newly found political and economic muscles. Heedless dictators and power-hungry potentates are now making outrageous claims concerning their "fair share" of the world's wealth which they feel has been unjustly denied them for too long. Existing political and religious institutions created to solve many of these problems either lied themselves essentially impotent or, in some cases (such as the United Nations) only serve to aggravate the situation.

**Looking Forward in Time.** With this in mind, it becomes easier to appreciate the relative significance of a few of the biblical prophecies that deal with the period commonly called "the time of the end." The famous Olivet discourse is a good case in point. Here Christ not only foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, but the spoke of a series of global calamities that would herald a pivotal turning point in human history.

In verses 5 through 10 of Matthew 24, He outlined the usual scenario of wars, famines and persecutions that seem to accompany the disintegration of civilizations. These events could be applied to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but in verse 21 Christ went on to expand the scope of His prophecy: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be."

As had as the Jerusalem and



view of Jerusalem was in the first century. It can't compare with some of the modern-day mass persecutions that have been perpetrated under the names of Nazism, Communism, and Fascism. Nor have the nations of the world experienced the visible return of Jesus Christ "with power and great glory" (verse 30). So Christ was obviously speaking of a tumultuous time yet in the future that would culminate in His return to establish the Kingdom of God on this earth.

The prophet Daniel called this period "a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time" (Dan. 12:1). Isaiah stated that "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established... and all the nations shall flow to it" (Isa. 2:2).

Some twenty years after the fall of Jerusalem, the apostle John's apocalyptic vision in the book of Revelation also painted a rather grisly scenario of future global events. Many of John's statements concerning the four horsemen (again the old formula of war, famine, pestilence) and subsequent plagues tend to corroborate the troubles Christ described in the Olivet prophecy. (For more information on the book of Revelation, write for our series of booklets on the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: *The Red Horse War; The White Horse False Religion; The Pale Horse Disease-Epidemics; The Black Horse Famine.*)

**Cause for Every Effect.** In principle these prophecies are describing the end result of a cause-and-effect relationship that has been at work for most of man's known history, and, as such, serve as a futuristic outline of what will happen to humanity if it continues to follow a certain course of action. The blessings and curses listed in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 are an example. Obedience to God's way of life brings blessings. Disobedience brings disaster.

And you don't have to have a crystal ball to extrapolate future trends of population growth, nuclear proliferation, environmental pollution, economic growth, greed, political gerrymanderings, and the like to see that the course the

human race is on at the present time has a future course written all over it. Nor should we make the mistake of ascribing these future penalties to some form of direct divine judgment. It's what we are doing to ourselves that really hurts.

But there is one key catalyst in this equation for future disaster that often gets overlooked — none other than Satan the devil. In Revelation 12:7-12, the apostle John spoke of a time in the future when this great, but perverted, angelic being would focus all his diabolical attention on the destruction of the human race.

Just as an iron-fisted dictator who feels his seat of power threatened, Satan will wreak all-out havoc trying to defend his claim of world dominion (see Matt. 4:9). During this period, conditions will become so intolerable that Christ Himself stated that if the times were not cut short by His active intervention in world affairs all humanity would ultimately perish (see Matt. 24:22).

**Way of Collective Escape.** And yet if men and nations were willing to turn from the self-destructive activities that have led them down the primrose path toward war, overpopulation, political upheaval and resource depletion, much of this future agony could be avoided. That is the central theme behind the message of the good news of the Kingdom of God.

That was Christ's hope for His fellow countrymen when He tirelessly went from city to city in first-century Palestine. His attitude was expressed in Matthew 23:37-38, when He lamented over the unrepentant state of Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. Had that nation collectively repented they could have avoided the disaster which occurred in A.D. 70.

This kind of revolutionary about-face is neither outside the realm of possibility nor without historical precedent. The ancient city of Sodom could have escaped an untimely end had there been as few

as ten righteous men within its gates (Gen. 18:32-33). Not even radically altered its ways after the prophet Jonah brought a message concerning its imminent overthrow. In this case the head of the government issued a proclamation declaring: "... Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands" (Jonah 3:8).

Today the same basic set of options confronts the human race. Either we collectively change our ways or prepare ourselves for a rather grim scenario. For the Western world it would mean an unprecedented abandonment of our headlong pursuit of superaffluence. It would entail our lending a helping hand to our less fortunate neighbors whether they live in city slums or the sub-Sahara. It means dropping the barriers of racial and sexual prejudice that still permeate much of our society.

Big business would have to abandon its idolization of ever-growing profits. Labor unions would need to start thinking more in terms of providing a service rather than continually increasing fringe benefits. Governmental officials and legislators would require radical reversal of their shop-aorn philosophies.

But most of all it would take the acknowledgement of men, nations, and their leaders that their only hope of salvation lies not in governmental institutions, economic systems, or stockpiles of weaponry, but in the Creator God of the universe and His Son Jesus Christ. It would take the same degree of responsiveness the men of Judea demonstrated when the apostle Peter preached to them on the day of Pentecost. As the book of Acts records it, "When they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.'" (Acts 2:37-38, 40). That is the only viable solution for the troubled times in which we live.

# JOB AND YOU

## PART 2

### WHY DO MEN SUFFER ?

by D. Paul Graenke

*Review: Satan accused Job of obeying God because it paid him to do so. Remove the profit motive, Satan argued, and Job's piety would turn to blasphemy. God allowed Satan to test his theory and Job by taking away his wealth, family and health — everything but his life.*

*Along came Job's three friends to console him. But their consolation soon turned into condemnation as they tried to get Job to confess what surely had to be heinous sins to warrant such severe suffering.*

*Job's friends erred because they didn't have all the facts, and what facts they did have were grossly misinterpreted because of mistaken theological ideas about God and suffering. Consequently, God rebuked them for misrepresenting Him, not to mention unjustly maligning Job.*

**J**ob's three friends were not the only ones whose theology was contradicted by calamitous events. Job himself was having a severe trial of his faith in and beliefs about God.

Before disaster struck, Job was probably confident that righteousness — at least his righteousness — had its own reward from God in this lifetime. But now his theological system of temporal rewards and punishments, at least, was severely challenged. Job didn't have God all figured out after all.

In the dialogues between Job and his friends, we read of an afflicted man simultaneously fighting a desperate battle on two fronts. On the personal front, Job was defending

his character and reputation against the insinuations and accusations of his "friends." On the theological front, Job questioned God Himself for visiting disaster upon him for no apparent reason. In his speeches, Job alternated between these two fronts, now addressing rebuttals to his friends, now addressing complaints to God.

**Pleads Innocent.** On the personal front, Job defended his integrity in two ways. First, he refuted his friends' theological arguments by asserting that, contrary to their neat theological formulas, some wicked people "spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol" (21:13).

Second, Job steadfastly maintained his innocence. Job didn't say he had never sinned. He wasn't *that* self-righteous! But he insisted that he had done nothing to warrant such devastation and suffering.

The climax of Job's defense of his integrity occurs in chapters 29-31. After reminiscing about the "good ol' days," and complaining about his present suffering and humiliation, Job launched into a remarkable description of how scrupulously he had lived his adult life. In summary, Job said: "Look at me then. Look at me now. But you're still looking at an innocent man!"

Some have wondered if Job was boasting or perhaps exaggerating. But remember, God had highly praised Job's righteousness to Satan ("Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?") and Satan could not gainsay God's words!

Be sure to read chapter 31. It has been said that "if we want a summary of moral duties from the Old Testament, it might be better found in Job's soliloquy... than in the Ten-Commandments."

**Outrage and Despair.** So much for Job's defense of his integrity. Meanwhile, back on the theological front, things weren't going at all well. Why, why, why was he subjected to such suffering? Job could think of no cause or provocation. He had no explanation that gave meaning or purpose to his suffering.

If he had been privy to the bargain struck between God and Satan in heaven, he might have steeled himself to pass the test with flying colors and fewer complaints. But Job was completely unaware of any purpose behind his affliction that should inspire him to rise to the oc-

passion. So instead of maintaining a stiff upper lip, Job let loose with a torrent of woe and lament.

In chapter 6, for example, Job wished he were dead rather than suffer such pain and alienation from God and friends. In chapters 9 and 10 Job expressed his feeling of helplessness at being a victim of divine injustice. "If I lift myself up, thou dost hunt me like a lion," he said of God. "Why didst thou bring me forth from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me" (10:16, 18). Later on Job yearned for a face-to-face confrontation with God so he could plead his case before the Supreme Judge of the Universe (chapter 23).

These "woe-is-me" words of Job amount to more than just a sob story. Threaded through them is a debate with his friends and a complaint against God about how mere men can be just before God (9:2; 25:4). He wonders if God has forgotten how human He has created humans. He complains that God has overreacted to his few-and-far-between foibles.

"Must you be so harsh with frail men, and demand an accounting from them? How can you demand purity in one born impure? You have set mankind so brief a span of life. . . . So give him a little rest, won't you? Turn away your angry gaze and let him have a few moments of relief before he dies" (14:3-6, *The Living Bible*).

And so forth. It is important to emphasize that although Job questioned God Himself almost to the point of accusation, he still believed in God! His emotions and outlook swung wildly between despair and hope, between bitterness and trust.

**Troubled But Tenacious.** For instance, in chapter 12 Job, out of the depths of alienation and vexation, pleads: "Pay me, pity me, you that are my friends; for the hand of God has touched me. Why do you pursue me as God pursues me? Have you not had your teeth in me long enough?" (Verses 21-22, *The New English Bible*.)

Then, two verses later, comes a fleeting moment of confidence and hope: "But in my heart I know that my vindicator lives and that he will rise last to speak in court" (verse 25).

This begins the famous section immortalized in Handel's oratorio *The Messiah* that some believe refers to the resurrection. Unfortunately, the Hebrew is obscure here and the correct translation is difficult to arrive at. But despite this problem, Job's confidence and belief in God comes through loud and clear.

This endurance, this determination, this steadfastness of Job is an attribute the apostle James later held up for all Christians to emulate. (See James 5:7-11. The translation "patience" of Job in the King James Version may convey a wrong connotation. A general survey of the book of Job shows that he may not always have been "patient." But he was tenacious. He held fast to his belief in God in spite of all circumstances.)

Job's tenacity also extended to his belief in his integrity. Unable to penetrate his defenses and unaware of the true purpose of Job's suffering, his three friends finally gave up trying to wring a confession out of him. "So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes" (32:1).

Now youth had its say. A fourth companion, Elihu, heretofore not mentioned, had remained silent in deference to his elders (32:4). "And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he became angry" (verse 5) and jumped into the fray.

Elihu rehearsed some of the same arguments and insinuations of the other men. But he seems to have avoided the pitfall of thinking he had God all figured out. He made an allowance for a margin of mystery in the way God works.

**At Last - God Speaks.** Up until now, God was a distant deity, a being defined and explained by theological dogma, speculation and argument. Now God personally intervened in the debate. And not in a still small voice either, but a voice of power and authority arising from a whirlwind or tempest (38:1).

At last Job had gotten the confrontation he so earnestly wanted. But instead of putting God on the witness stand, Job found himself being grilled with a series of about 40 questions extending through the next four chapters.

Even more amazing, God's interrogation *completely ignored* Job's suffering. He didn't mention the conversation with Satan. He didn't bring up any of Job's complaints or questions. Instead, God gave Job a nature lecture. He quizzed him on the wonders and mysteries of His creation.

Halfway through, God let Job get a word in edgewise. You might expect Job to complain about this line of questioning. You might expect him to reply, "What has meteorology and biology got to do with my problems?" Or "That's fine. Now about my questions . . ."

But, no. Job merely said: "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further" (40:4-5).

What happened? Why the about-face in thinking and attitude? Theologians, philosophers, and even psychologists have speculated on Job's frame of mind for millennia.

What happened was that God was no more just an argument or a belief, but an awesome reality! Speculation and dogma had been replaced by the real Being! Job was face to face with God as He is, not as Job believed or imagined Him to be. It was a mind-expanding, attitude-altering experience. Job was undergoing a conversion in outlook and belief.

God worked this conversion by cutting Job down to size. His ego was deflated. For all his works of righteousness, Job was made to realize more profoundly that he was not equal in any way to God. He realized that neither man nor man's standards, no matter how perfect and right they may seem, can be used to measure God or His works. Man is very, very small and insignificant in the larger scheme of things.

Job also came to realize how little he knew about God's physical creation. "Do you know . . ." God asked Job over and over. And each time, the answer was "No" (as it is today in spite of the quantum leaps in our knowledge). God drove home the point again and again that Job was pretty dumb about the physical world around him. And if Job knew

so little about the physical realm, how much less did he know about the spiritual realm?

God's interrogation diverted Job's attention from his problems. Instead of giving Job His sympathy vote so he could further wallow in self-pity, God focused Job's attention on God's greatness, His mighty works. His infinitely deep and broad knowledge. His immeasurable power. The net effect was that Job began to see God as he had never seen Him before. "... I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. . . . I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:3-6).

There were many things about God that he had never seen before, that he had been unable to grasp through theological debate and dogma. As Roger Bacon wrote: "There are two modes of knowing, through argument and experience." Job was knowing, experiencing God apart from abstract arguments. And further, Job was seeing God separate from his own needs and his own deeds. That made all the difference.

Job, like many religious people today, like you and me, had often related to God in terms of his daily needs and blessings. God was defined and thought of as the One from whom all necessities, fringe benefits and bonuses flowed. They had flowed to him with great abundance. That was great, so God was great.

But then they stopped flowing. That wasn't so great and now God wasn't so great. Perhaps, as Satan had charged, Job's piety was partially based on his great material prosperity. In any event, Job now saw God apart from His blessings, apart from his own physical needs.

**God Separate From Deeds.** Job also came to see God apart from his righteous deeds. Job, like many religious people, like you and me, had related to God too much in terms of temporal rewards for obedience and punishments for sin. Of course, God wants us to act and think righteously! But too often people turn righteousness into a racket. They seek to impress God, others and themselves with their good works.

Or, they operate under a tacit stipulation that their obedience to God will be commensurate with His good favor. According to the measure God blesses them, they will hew to the strait and narrow. But if God doesn't deliver the goods, then He becomes unfair, inconsiderate, unsympathetic. And just for that, people will wander from the strait and narrow until the temporal profit incentive is restored. Or they may dispense with God altogether as they see that it is possible to prosper without God in this life. And the punishment of the wicked that God is certain to mete out? Well, that's too distant, too removed from this life to take into consideration until one is old or on his deathbed.

When the blessings stopped, Job questioned God's goodness and concern. He wondered what value there was in obeying God if the righteous suffered while the wicked prospered. But he clung to his sense of morality, and did not forsake the righteous life. Unfortunately, a lot of other people who were once "religious" can't say the same. Can you? Is there a profit incentive in your religious life?

**What Will God Deliver?** After Job came to see God and the universe a little more from his Creator's point of view, and a little less from his own, God restored his fortune. He blessed him with ten more children, and gave him twice as much wealth as he had before.

Does this mean, then, that the lesson of Job is: If you hang in there long enough, God will eventually bless you physically?

No way! The covenant — the covenant — Christians make with God is not predicated on prosperity clauses, or guarantees of physical prosperity and good health in this lifetime. Such blessings are optional clauses added or deleted at God's discretion without prior consultation. As it turns out, God is more often than not very generous with physical blessings for His begotten children.

But that is not the important thing to God. What counts with Him are factors important to the next life — love, mercy, obedience, etc. These essential spiritual traits are produced and matured in the

trials, adversities, challenges and sufferings of life. "We rejoice in our sufferings," wrote Paul, "knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom. 5:3-5).

And James exhorted Christians to "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).

The principal guarantee we have with God is that those who will fulfill their part of the contract in this life will receive the gift of eternal life in the next. It's a deferred payment plan, if you will.

Yes, Job was blessed with twice as much as he had had before. But many other godly people in biblical times did without the amenities or even necessities of life. As the apostle Paul recounted in Hebrews 11:35-38, they endured deprivation, pain, torture and death. "And all these," Paul concludes, "though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised" (verse 39).

The real goods — predicated upon the promised resurrection which is our great hope — have yet to be delivered to Job or anyone else, except Christ.

**Warning — God at Work.** The book of Job is not for casual readers. It doesn't have easy answers, or tidy solutions. In fact, Job never got a direct answer from God at their showdown as to why suffering, vicissitudes and injustices are endemic to physical life. Consequently, many readers of the book have come away crying "foul!" After 37 chapters of buildup, they think they have been left hanging with no resolution to the problems and questions raised.

But Job was satisfied. He didn't get the answers to his questions, but He was visited by the One who has the answers. And for him that was enough. Through his personal confrontation with God, Job knew that God had not abandoned or betrayed him.

And he came to realize that as an animal can't comprehend what a human does — so great is the gap in their intelligence levels — so man can't understand the divine, for God's level of thinking and existing is far above our ability to grasp. Therefore be wary of criticizing the way God works.

"Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles?' ... Thus says the Lord ... 'Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands?'" (Isa. 45:9-11.)

Today we are the beneficiaries of more revelation about God's will and ways than was available to Job. We know more about the great overall purpose God is working in our lives — to make us His sons in His Kingdom. (Man's transcendent destiny is explained in our booklet *Why Were You Born?* Be sure to write for your free copy if you have not already done so.)

But even with this additional knowledge of God's long-term plan, we can't always know what His short-term goals are. We can't always understand how and why God does what He does, or why He allows circumstances to happen to us individually.

Why are some unemployed? Why are some children born with congenital deformities or mentally retarded? Why have some lost mates in middle age or children in their youth? Why are some dying prematurely with cancer or other incurable diseases? Why are some deaf, blind, crippled?

Why fatal car accidents? Why miscarriages? Why disease? Why oppression? Why drug addiction? Why hunger and poverty?

**Strength From Weakness.** Why you? Why your loved ones? Why anyone?

God only knows! And right now, He is giving us the same silent treatment He gave Job. But He has given enough revelation for us to take the unknown, the unexplained in stride and in faith. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we

may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood," wrote the apostle Paul (I Cor. 13:12), another individual who had more than his share of suffering.

At one point in his life, a "thorn in the flesh" became so unbearable that three times he pleaded for God to provide surcease. "But he said to me," the apostle wrote, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore Paul proclaimed: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor. 12:9-10).

**God Works for Good.** Paul drew upon Christ's strength and also kept in mind the overall long-term goal — the resurrection to the Kingdom of God. That goal gave meaning and purpose to his whole life, enabling him to face with courage and confidence any adversity — even death itself!

It enabled him to write elsewhere: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us ... for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:18-20, 21).

When we know from the book of Job and the rest of the Bible "the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11), we can take the unknown in faith and hope. We can rise to the challenge God places before us, making the best of an imperfect existence, winning "strength out of weakness" (Heb. 11:34).

We can say with Paul that "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). □

## IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW MORE

Many hundreds have written asking if we have representatives in their areas to counsel with them personally and to answer their questions.

The answer is yes, we do.

The Worldwide Church of God stations personal representatives (most are ordained ministers) in the United States and British Commonwealth and many other areas of the world. These men will visit you, if invited, directly in your own home.

So if you have spiritual matters to discuss or questions to ask about biblical topics such as repentance, baptism, etc., please feel free to write us and request a private appointment. Worldwide mailing addresses are as follows:

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# LETTERS

## African Campaign

After reading Mr. Redman Armstrong's African campaign results in the "Personal Letters" section, I was certainly gratifying to hear these top people in that area had their minds opened to receive the message of the coming Kingdom. This is truly God's work.

Frank M. Dixon, California

## Death Penalty

You say that the ancient Jews advocated the death penalty. Jesus Christ was put to death under Roman law. Try reading John 18:28-32. You will find that the Jews, during the time of Christ, did not have the death penalty.

Clifford M. Kremming, Colorado

The article did not imply that the Jews during the time of Christ advocated the death penalty. We stated that the "theocracy of ancient Israel" (as recorded in the Old Testament) had a system of capital punishment. This was before their captivity, before the intertestamental period, and long before the days of Christ. The apostle Paul's reference to capital punishment (mentioned in the article) had to do with the Roman system, not the government of the Jews.

## Proverbs 31

My husband and I were so dumbfounded and upset by your article in the August GN ("The Proverbs 31 Superwoman - Ideal of Impossibility?") that I felt compelled to write. Any woman that must find employment outside the home simply because she feels she isn't worth anything is not diving into the complex facets of her role as wife and mother. Why do a husband and wife have to have two separate lives to achieve their potential? The many roles a woman must undertake in the home are just too numerous to mention. I have a college degree and have never felt the need to go out and work to be fulfilled. So many marriages today

are on shaky ground simply because the husband and wife are following separate lives and pursuing different goals. There is absolutely no reason why you cannot apply Proverbs 31 today, the same as any scripture in God's Word. Please present both sides of the story before women lose sight of their magnificent God-given role of "managers at home."

Nancy F. Browns Mills, New Jersey

Thank you for giving the women in God's Church some concrete answers. Thank you for helping us to realize that we do have other options opened to us besides being "kept at home." I hope and pray that men can read your article with an open mind. You have given women answers that no man ever could, simply because they are men and could never fully understand the problems Christian women have. Your short article made more sense and opened more doors for women than any other article, book, sermon, or talk I have ever read or heard.

Thank you for being a heavy burden of questions gone and answered. Thank you for putting the perspective the women of the Bible have to husbands, fathers and sons; that their concerns are of no chance to them; but that there is all the opportunity and wisdom we have to ourselves. In truth, the God who chooses us to be wives, mothers and daughters is also the God who chooses us to be "superwomen." Thank you for being a heavy burden of questions gone and answered. Thank you for putting the perspective the women of the Bible have to husbands, fathers and sons; that their concerns are of no chance to them; but that there is all the opportunity and wisdom we have to ourselves.

Donna M. [unclear]

As Executive Director of the New Hampshire State Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, I wish to compliment you on your presentation "The Opening of Drugs" by Dr. Paul Graubner. It is one of the best publications of its type I have seen to

date. Is it possible to get these booklets in mass quantities? If so, we would be interested in receiving several hundred copies for distribution here in New Hampshire.

Jesse T. Concord, New Hampshire

## Questions Answered Personally

I want to thank you for having your minister visit my home and answer my questions personally. I was very much impressed with the forthright and candid manner of his response to my many questions.

R.E. Delta, Ohio

If you too would like to have a minister of the Worldwide Church of God call on you in your home, see the box on page 26 for telephone numbers and addresses.

## Changed by Broadcast

I have come a long way since I began listening to your broadcasts about a year ago. You are a most remarkable man and I have learned so much. I feel I am on the road to becoming a Christian, although I still have a long way to go. One question is I would like to know how to whom should I make my regular payments?

John W. [unclear] Florida

We appreciate your questions and will answer them as soon as we can. Thank you for your interest.

## Gifts and Requests

I was greatly impressed with the bookkeeping in the July 1974 issue of "The Open Bible." As a former proprietor of a printing plant and with shops of many years' standing, I was just what you are of bookkeeping. The book is a most interesting and helpful book. I would like to know if you have any more copies of this book available for purchase. I would like to purchase a copy for my library.

Joseph M. Bridgeport, Connecticut

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prophecy: where many modern nations are mentioned, and what major events are prophesied for the next few years. You'll discover the God-inspired way to genuine happiness, achievement and true awareness. And you will discover the real meaning of human life — an ultimate purpose and destiny far greater than anything you've imagined!  All this and much more is laid out in step-by-step detail. There is no tuition fee or cost whatever. (The course is also available in French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian and Afrikaans.) To enroll and begin receiving your monthly lessons, write to us.

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