

THE WORLD AHEAD

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EDITORIAL

Total Surrender

Do you believe in the true God—the God of the Bible? If so, it is *vital* that you come to understand the *one basic attitude* that God looks for in people. What is it?

In this world's confused Christianity, many will tell you that God wants us, above all, to "accept Jesus." However, you really need to ask yourself, "Which Jesus?" And what did Jesus Himself say was the most important attitude for a person to have?

Notice this statement by Jesus Christ: "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Even in the Apostle Paul's day there were false ministers who were misrepresenting the genuine teachings of Christ: "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted; you may well put up with it" (2 Cor. 11:4)! So, perhaps, you have heard a lot about "another Jesus" who merely requires lip service, but this is NOT the Jesus Christ of the Bible!

It is vital that we have faith in the true Christ who is revealed to us in the inspired words of the Holy Bible—NOT in the ideas and traditions of men! It is equally crucial that we OBEY Jesus Christ and not just appropriate His name or accept Him with an empty human faith or temporary emotional whim.

The Apostle James, one of Jesus' own physical brothers, was inspired to warn us about empty, vain faith: "You believe that there is one God [the Father and Christ]. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead?**" (James 2:19-20).

Even the DEMONS believe in God and Christ! That is, they know that Jesus Christ was a real person who was crucified and that God raised Him from the dead. They were there. They saw Christ's resurrection. They know! But strange as it may seem to some, just "believing" these things is NOT enough! The demons refuse to surrender their lives and wills to God and to DO what He says!

What about you? Are you content to just "believe" that there is a God out there somewhere, and that His Son, Jesus Christ, died for you? Do you have an empty faith, or a *living* faith which compels you to totally surrender your life to God and give your life to Him through the true Jesus Christ and so be willing to DO WHAT GOD SAYS no matter what? That is the kind of faith that is pleasing to God and which leads to eternal life in His Kingdom!

Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life



Roderick C. Meredith
 Editor in Chief

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How God INTERVENES in Human Affairs

by Roderick C. Meredith

How will God bring about the awesome events prophesied to occur in the years just ahead?

Though many professing Christians don't grasp it, the most awe-inspiring, mind-boggling, spine-tingling events in earth's entire history lie *just ahead of us!*

America, Canada, Britain and the peace-loving democracies of Western Europe will experience awful droughts, famines, disease epidemics, earthquakes, storms and other "natural" disasters unprecedented in our history.

WHY? Because the Creator God is going to *humble* us—to teach us lessons we could not learn any other way. America has been *given* national greatness and power. But America has not honored the God who gave it. And, collectively, we who are Americans seem intent on *dishonoring* Him in the increasing decadence of our national and personal lives.

Recently *The World Ahead* has published several articles that describe what will happen over the next several years. Similar prophetic articles will appear in future issues.



But HOW are these terrifying events going to come about in our modern, highly technological society? Can't we take steps to *stop* these catastrophic events from happening? And aren't modern food production, storage and distribution systems, major flood-control dams, political organizations, medicine, science and industry already sufficiently developed to prevent such things from happening?

The Unseen Chess Master

Be he a modern scientist, businessman or even a theologian who does not take the Bible literally, the biggest stumbling block to understanding God's prophecies is the failure to fully grasp the absolute reality of the true God—the Creator God revealed in the Holy Bible. Just how does God's

power work? How does God rearrange the destinies of nations?

First of all, the God revealed in your Bible has the ability to exercise *total* power and *total* control of nations and individuals. "Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the balance; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing.... It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless" (Is. 40:15, 22-23).

Do you *believe* that? Or is Isaiah making this up or taking literary liberties in this perspective on divine power?

The Prophet Daniel described how Nebuchadnezzar, king of one of the most remarkable empires of antiquity, became insane and was driven out of office "in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men" (Dan. 4:17). God determines who will govern in the various nations, placing in office, sometimes, the basest of men.

Can Americans take comfort in this scripture this election year? Perhaps this year we will get the type of leader we deserve, rather than some decent, wise man whom we desperately need in this country! What about the other nations of the world where crucial elections are taking place this year—especially Russia, Israel, Taiwan, and Spain? What about the leadership in the European Union countries where unemployment is nearing the levels approached in 1933 when Adolf Hitler came to power? During their next elections, who will promise jobs to this massive army of marginalized people? And who is to say what would happen if the current, aging pope should die this year? Who would the cardinals elect to fill the

shoes of this very popular, conservative pope?

The world's present political stability is as solid as a will-o'-the-wisp.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Moses described how God orchestrated and guided the dispersion of nations and peoples in antiquity. "When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut. 32:8). As a chess master, God moves kings, queens, cardinals and pawns at will, according to His purpose. He guides various major nations to the area of the earth where He wants them and blesses or curses them in weather, war and prosperity according to how they yield to *His* will (cf. Lev. 26).

And They Were Scattered!

God does not need to watch the Weather Channel. He decides whether tomorrow will have clear skies or not. Jesus Christ said God "sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). Occasionally God withholds rain, or sends too much, to teach people lessons!

In his epistle, James describes how a man of God "prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit" (5:17-18).

So God has power to water a land or to dry it up. The same applies to the wind, cold, hurricanes and clouds. And He uses this power on occasion to intervene in human affairs: "As when You break the ships of Tarshish with an east wind" (Ps. 48:7).

Several of the major turning points of history for the English-speaking peoples were determined by God's intervention in the weather during battle. These successful interventions made possible the religious freedom, prosperity and power the

Anglo-Saxon-Celtic powers of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom continue to enjoy.

In 1586-87, Catholic domination of the English throne was made impossible by the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. The following year, Spain's King Philip II unleashed his "invincible" 124-ship Armada against England in an effort to reassert Catholic control. Though the English naval forces tenaciously fought, eventually they exhausted their gunpowder! At that critical point, an unprecedented gale-force wind arose and drove many of the heavily armed, lumbering Spanish galleons to their doom. The weather-beaten ships that limped home to Spain were so damaged that many could never again be used.

Queen Elizabeth, commemorating the Spanish defeat, issued a silver medal, bearing the inscription: "God blew and they were scattered." She *knew* who took charge of those winds at that critical hour in the history of her people!

A Miraculous Escape

In 1940, Hitler's forces had swiftly invaded France and the lowlands. They had cut off 330,000 crack British troops, forcing them to retreat with their backs to the English Channel at the port of Dunkirk. If the British lost this army, they could hardly have hoped to beat back the Nazi hordes set on conquering them. Word went out all over Britain: "Winnie (Churchill) needs boats."

Though the English Channel is normally rough and treacherous, hundreds of ships, yachts and small boats—anything that would move while staying afloat—were sent to rescue at least a remnant of the army. But the situation seemed grim.

Then, surprisingly, bad weather on the continent grounded most of the German air force. But, instead of being rough and choppy as usual—

dangerous for small craft—the channel became almost as calm as a bathtub! Men and women who had lived all their lives on its shore had never seen it so tranquil. Winnie’s motley armada of naval flotsam and jetsam rescued nearly one-third of a million British troops—the backbone of their entire army! Hitler was dumbfounded. The Nazi generals bitterly grumbled under their breath for having lost an easy kill. The British were profoundly thankful and called it “the miracle of the calm seas.”

I have spent four years of my adult life in Britain, and talked to several older men who were personally familiar with the Dunkirk rescue operation. They *all* got a certain glint or tear in their eyes when they talked about it. They all remembered the outpouring of gratitude to God by the British people after this event. Sunday, June 9, 1940, was appointed as a Day of National Thanksgiving for God’s deliverance at Dunkirk, and many English vicars will tell you that their churches were packed on that day and have *never* been as full since.

The day before, June 8, London’s *Daily Telegraph* ran an article about what it called “the miraculous deliverance” at Dunkirk. A British officer who had himself been rescued from Dunkirk said, “One thing can be certain about tomorrow’s Thanksgiving in our churches. From none will the thanks ascend with greater sincerity or deeper fervor than from the officers and men who have seen the Hand of God, powerful to save, delivering them from the hands of a mighty foe, who humanly speaking, had them utterly at his mercy.”

Yes, God CONTROLS the destinies of nations—and individuals.

Hitler’s Devil

To enact His will among men, God uses His secret, invisible agents—righteous angels (and at times even fallen angels)—to influ-

ence, to deliver or to destroy.

The Bible reveals a fascinating insight into the working of the spirit world in 1 Kings 22. The inspired writer details an account of a conference in heaven. It seems that God had already decided to take out one of the most wicked kings in the history of Israel, King Ahab. The question was *how* to do it. God settled on the plan to prod Ahab to personally go to an upcoming battle with the Syrians at Ramoth-gilead. But God needed someone to stir Ahab up to go fight. In this case, an evil spirit spoke up and volunteered to do the job: “The LORD said to him [the evil spirit], ‘In what way?’ So he said, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his (Ahab’s) prophets’” (v. 22).

On the day of the battle, God already knew that the Syrian army was stronger and would indeed defeat the Israelites. And Ahab, though he had disguised his rank to avoid being a target, was slain during the course of the battle when a “lucky” arrow pierced the joints of his armor (vv. 34-37). This was because God had determined that this evil king should neither stay behind out of danger, nor escape alive from the battle, but should perish right along with many of his defeated troops.

When Adolph Hitler rose to power, a noted German Lutheran minister, Martin Niemoller, perceptively stated, “Verily a time of sifting has come upon us. God is giving Satan a free hand, so that He may shake us up and so that it may be seen what manner of men we are.”

Evidently, God did specifically allow *demons* to possess or strongly influence the Nazi dictator. British author George Bruce wrote, “Can the mystery of the evil of Nazism be explained? Was there a Satanic nucleus at the heart of it? One interpretation of its nature that should be mentioned is the link between Nazism and the alleged attachment to *black magic* and *occultism* of Hitler and his

inner circle, including Goering, Himmler, Goebbels, Ley and, in the early days, Dietrick Eckart and professor Karl Haushofer.

“Hitler, according to what may seem to many people a far-fetched belief, was the *medium* through whom contact was made with supernatural powers of evil. Hermann Rauschnig, who observed Hitler with a cold and analytical eye, declares that he was a **medium, ‘possessed by forces outside himself—almost demoniacal forces.’** Rudolf Olden, political editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt* [newspaper] in the days of Nazism’s rise to power, remarked how the overwhelming, almost superhuman Niagara of words that poured forth during Hitler’s speeches sometimes reached a climax during which he literally ‘*spoke in tongues*’ and seemed *possessed*. André François-Poncet, French Ambassador to Berlin, also referred to this apparent demoniacal possession” (*The Nazis*, Hamlyn, 1974, p. 154).

After citing a number of other observers who felt Hitler had dark spiritual help, George Bruce speculated, “And does not this theory of Hitler being dominated by evil supernatural forces throw light for the first time on the reason for Auschwitz, Treblinka, the deaths of six million Jews, the plan to murder 33 million of the Slav population of Russia, the readiness to sacrifice three or four million of Germany’s young manhood in war and, finally, the long-term aim, reported by Fabian von Schlabrendorff, for the total and permanent *destruction of Christianity* throughout the world?” (p. 156).

Hitler’s Europe was a mild precursor of what God’s inspired Word prophesies concerning the future revival of a satanically influenced “Babylonian-Roman system”: “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!” (Rev. 18:2).

It is a sobering thought to consider

that some of the most important players on the world scene who are shaping our destinies cannot be seen. We need to be much more aware of the very real *spirit world* around us. And we must make absolutely certain that we are guided by the Spirit of God!

How Does God Know in Advance What Will Happen?

How does God know what will take place in the future? How can He prophesy about some event hundreds or even thousands of years in advance? From the beginning, God has been an acute and perceptive observer of human behavior. He really knows what we’re like. God fully understands how humans tend to degenerate, to compromise and to forsake the right way.

Right after giving ancient Israel the details of His law through Moses, God told Moses, “Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?’” (Deut. 31:16-17).

Since God has such a profound knowledge and insight about us, He can authoritatively predict what the basic conditions of peoples and nations *will be* in the future. Then, by skillfully manipulating the determinants of national power such as the weather, human leadership and other circumstances, God can fulfill *specific* prophecies that are sometimes astonishing in their minute detail.

An example of this divine intervention is the remarkable story of Cyrus the Great, king of the Persian

Empire. Incredibly, God inspired the Prophet Isaiah to describe Cyrus by *name* and by *deed* almost *two centuries before* Cyrus was born!

Around 740-720 B.C., Isaiah wrote under divine inspiration: “Who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, “you shall be built,” and to the temple, “your foundation shall be laid.”’ Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut” (Is. 44:28; 45:1).

Today, many scholars say that these scriptures in the book of Isaiah must have been written contemporaneously with the events they describe. They deny that Isaiah wrote a prophecy 200 years in advance of its fulfillment. On what basis do they deny this? They don’t have facts to prove their point—only a lack of faith that God is the Almighty who truly intervenes in human affairs!

Look at what historians know about the events which took place about 539 B.C. when Cyrus conquered Babylon, an “impregnable” city-fortress renowned throughout the earth for its power. Unable to surmount the massive fortified walls around Babylon, which had repelled so many other invaders, Cyrus’ men diverted the Euphrates River, which normally flowed under the heavy city gates as it passed through the city. By lowering the river level and by having a spy unlock the inner gates along the river, Cyrus’ army invaded the city in a totally unexpected manner and took the Babylonians by complete surprise.

Was God surprised? No. He had described nearly *200 years earlier* how a leader specifically named “Cyrus” would conquer great kings by going through “the two leaved gates”!

Soon after this, Cyrus issued the order to allow the Jews to voluntari-


ly return to their homeland and Jerusalem. And—in another remarkable fulfillment of prophecy—instructed them to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:2-5).


God’s Purpose Stands

God foretells during these “latter days” that man’s “knowledge shall increase” (Dan. 12:4). Perhaps the distinctive hallmark of our time is the explosion of material knowledge. Technological changes are totally overturning what we used to think of as “normal.” In His wisdom, the Creator knew that when our focus would be primarily on materialism, our lives would be entrapped by idolatry and paganism. What we are sowing today, we shall reap tomorrow. The One who *delivered us* again and again from past national threats like conquest by the Spanish Armada and annihilation by the Nazis at Dunkirk, has definitely prophesied that since we have *rejected* Him and His Ways, He will now set His hand—in love—to *punish* us and *humble* us in a coming Great Tribulation!

We could only forestall this by a national change of heart and, individually, by a sincere return to God that demonstrates a willingness to follow His Ways, His righteous laws and His *rule* over our lives. Will we?

If not, the great Creator of heaven and earth will intervene in our leadership and that of other countries. He will *distress us* through weather and other disasters. And He will *allow* perverted demon spirits to strike at and *destroy* the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic nations and their allies through their influence over envious, hateful leaders yet to appear on the world scene!

God is Almighty! He has the power to bring about the inspired prophecies of His Word. God’s will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. 



ARE YOU WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CHRIST?

by Douglas S. Winnail, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Jesus Christ issued an invitation and a challenge to His disciples to “follow in His footsteps.” A major aspect of His message was that “I have come that they may *have life*, and that they may have it *more abundantly*” (John 10:10). Yet for countless millions of people, Christian and non-Christian alike, this physical life is filled with problems and diseases many of which a “Christ-like lifestyle” would *almost totally* prevent!

Down through the centuries theological arguments over the teachings of Jesus have split Christianity into hundreds of sects and denominations. Wars have been fought over the fine points of biblical doctrines. **However, the clear, practical, powerful implications of Jesus’ physical lifestyle are seldom mentioned as being important. While His spiritual teachings are promoted and debated, His physical example is largely ignored.**

How Jesus Lived

Have you ever wondered why Jesus, as the Son of God, came to this earth as a *carpenter*, instead of an exalted, pampered monarch? Or why He did not come as a learned scholar in a famous school in Greece or Rome? Or a cloistered monk in a remote monastery where He could devote his life to quiet study and meditation? Or as an altar boy in a large church in Jerusalem or Rome? Have you ever wondered why Jesus spent His youth in the hill country of Galilee instead of in a synagogue in Jerusalem?

Growing up as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), Jesus spent many hours sawing, smoothing planks or stones, drilling holes and fashioning joints with a hammer and chisel. As a builder “in a land of little wood,” Jesus also worked with stone (*Everyday Life in Bible Times*, 1967, p. 330). This kind of labor in an age without power tools required a considerable expenditure of energy. Jesus was undoubtedly a strong, well-muscled person with a powerful grip. Have

you ever shaken hands with a carpenter or builder?

In order to move about the hill country of Galilee, Jesus had to *walk*. To make the customary three trips to Jerusalem each year to keep the Holy Days (Passover, Pentecost and the fall festivals—Lev. 23; Luke 2:41-42), Jesus would have walked about 150 miles round-trip on each occasion. Just to keep the Holy Days, Jesus would have walked in excess of 450 miles each year. When you consider that He probably walked a mile or more a day during the rest of the year it is not hard to see that Jesus could have easily walked over a 1,000 miles every year!

The Jesus Christ who emerges from the pages of Scripture and who left us an example that we should follow (1 Peter 2:21) was a *physically active* individual. But why would the Savior of mankind choose such an active lifestyle? After all, many down through the ages have felt that a Christ-like life was one of study, prayer, meditation and contemplation. Where was Jesus coming from mentally and spiritually? What principles determined His physical behavior?

Jesus’ Mental Perspective

The principles that formed Christ’s perspective on life are found in the Scriptures. Jesus stated, “I have kept My Father’s commandments” and He taught that we should do the same (John 15:10). He fully understood that the purpose of the commandments was to promote human well-being. After all, Moses had written more than 1,400 years earlier, “You shall keep His statutes and His commandments... *that it may go well with you...* that you may *prolong your days*” (Deut 4:40; cf. 5:29).

The Scriptures say that Jesus never sinned (Heb. 4:15). Sin is defined as the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4 KJV). Jesus knew from the Bible that obedience to the laws of God would produce health, long life and prevent the development of disease (Ex. 15:26; Deut. 28:2-4). As the Son of God with an intimate knowledge of the Creation, Jesus understood that the human body, like the universe, was designed to operate harmoniously by physical laws. Violating these laws would produce physical problems—in the case of the human body—malfunctions, disease and premature death.

Jesus lived a physically active life *as an example* for us to follow. He knew intuitively what modern science has only recently confirmed as the result of thousands of experimental studies—that exercise “may be regarded as a *bodily need*” and that “one should view *non-exercisers* as people who are *transgressing* the laws of nature” (Brockton Enterprise, Dec. 19, 1980—from a study in *Lancet; Nutrition Action*, Nov. 1981, p. 11). The lifestyle *chosen* by the Savior of humanity was not an arbitrary or accidental decision by any means! Why did He live this way?

The Benefits of Activity

Several motives for being physically active are immediately apparent. In order to “practice the obedience He preached,” Jesus had to provide His physical body with the exercise it needed to function in a healthy manner. This enabled Him to be a positive, productive role model for all those with whom He came in contact. He would also have been strong enough and mentally sharp enough to carry out a three-and-one-half-year ministry in the face of persecution and harassment from the religious establishment.

Jesus intended His disciples to be “lights to the world.” But first, they would have to personally experience the results (spiritually and physically) of the way of life He advocated by His example and teachings (Matt. 5:14). He knew that the validity of His teachings would be in the “fruits” or results experienced by those who chose to follow Him. For most people, under normal circumstances, good health and physical fitness can be a by-product of leading the Christian lifestyle.

The benefits of physical activity, as modern research clearly demonstrates, are extremely important to every age group. Physically active *children and adolescents* have increased muscular strength, better coordination, more self-confidence, and better school performance (*Tufts University Diet & Nutrition Newsletter*, Oct. 1991). They are also less likely to be overweight or engage in destructive behaviors like smoking and substance abuse (*J. School Health*, Dec. 1995). Active *adults* have a much lower risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and various types of cancer (*American Health*, Oct. 1993). They have stronger immune systems, fewer colds and sick days, lower blood pressure, a more positive mental outlook and faster healing injuries (*Nutrition Action*, Nov. 1981; *Bicycling*, Nov. 1994).

Senior citizens who begin to exercise or remain physically active reduce their risk for osteoporosis, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer. They experience less depression and have less need for expensive medical care. Their life expectancy increases and their overall quality of life improves (*Geriatrics*, May 1993). Physical activity increases muscular strength and coordination, which enables older individuals to walk faster and climb stairs better. It also reduces the fear of falls and broken bones which enhances a feeling of independence (*Tufts Newsletter*, Sept. 1994). Physical activity appears to slow down the normal aging process. Even *disabled individuals* confined to beds or wheelchairs feel better if they get involved in an exercise program.

One of the most intriguing effects of physical activity is how it effects the brain. People who have a physically active lifestyle are observed to be more mentally stable, handle stress more effectively, exhibit better mental skills

(creativity, memory, math, organization and logical reasoning) and are less prone to depression. This appears to be related to more oxygen getting to the brain as the result of exercise, faster transmission of nerve impulses, and the release of endorphins (mood-elevating, pain-killing chemicals produced naturally in the brain), which cause the brain to relax naturally (*Health*, Mar. 1983; *An Invitation to Health*, 1992, pp. 172-174).

Couch Potatoes Pay The Price

While most of the Christian world has chosen to reject Christ's example of keeping God's Sabbath and the Holy Days (Luke 4:16; John 7:8-10), most people in the Christian industrialized Western nations have also chosen *not to follow* Jesus' physically active lifestyle. Estimates suggest that 80 to 90 percent of people in these countries do not get adequate amounts of physical activity and that 25 percent or more live essentially sedentary lives (*Time*, Oct. 7, 1983).

For many people, an average day consists of riding to work, riding an elevator to an office where they sit at a desk, riding home and watching television for four hours or more. One writer observed, "By substituting automobiles, elevators and televisions for body movement, modern society is engaged in a massive experiment to discover the effects of inactivity" (*Nutrition Action*, Nov. 1981). The price of this sedentary lifestyle is as high as it is inevitable.

In America, unfit employees cost businesses over \$100 billion a year in health costs (*Cardisense*, vol. 1: 1, 1991). Inactive men and women have a death rate from all causes that is four or five times higher than that of their more active counterparts (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, Nov. 3, 1989). Lack of regular exercise is a major reason why cardiovascular diseases and diabetes are leading causes of death in developed countries. Scientifically, when comparing three independent risk factors for developing heart disease—**individuals with a sedentary lifestyle have twice the risk of developing heart disease as people who smoke or have high cholesterol levels** (*Healthy for Life*, 1994, p. 73).

Inactive individuals tend to have higher blood pressure, be more obese and are more prone to diabetes and the effects of osteoporosis. Hip fractures hospitalize more than 200,000 elderly people each year in America resulting in nearly seven billion dollars in health care costs (*Atlanta Journal & Constitution*, Jun. 12, 1990). Elderly people who do not exercise *lose* muscle mass and strength, neuromuscular coordination, mental abilities and a feeling of independence that *could be retained* if they engaged in regular physical activity (*Tufts Newsletter*, Sept. 1994).

Children are, perhaps, the most unfortunate victims of our physically inactive society. Since the 1960s, children have gotten heavier as fitness levels have declined.

Estimates suggest that 20 to 30 percent are overweight, nearly one half do not get enough exercise to develop healthy hearts and lungs, and over 90 percent have at least one major risk factor for heart disease (*An Invitation to Health*, 1992, p. 155). Television viewing, video games and poor parental examples—all of which are linked to inactivity—appear to be primary contributing factors (*New Scientist*, Apr. 23, 1994).

This unfortunate picture is hardly the "abundant life" that Jesus envisioned for humanity. However, it is the "fruit" of failing to "follow in the footsteps" of the Savior of mankind. We are definitely reaping what we are sowing (Gal. 6:7).

Change Direction

In a major effort to curb this epidemic of inactivity, the American government plans to produce warning labels similar to those found on alcohol and tobacco products. The proposed wording states, "The Surgeon General has determined that lack of physical activity is detrimental to your health" (*USA Today*, Feb. 5, 1996). The goal of this nationwide program is to bring about a change in established attitudes, habits and behaviors.

In biblical terms, this change of direction is called *repentance*. This was, and is, a major aspect of Christ's message (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 13:1-5). Peter urged a crowd of some 3,000 to "repent" and "be saved from this perverse [turning away from the evidence of what is good] generation" (Acts 2:38, 40). Although Peter was speaking in spiritual terms—of spiritual repentance—the physical ramifications of His challenge, as we have seen in this article, could also apply.

Real repentance involves much more than just a momentary twinge of conscience, repeating a short prayer, and "giving your heart to the Lord." The word "repent" actually means: turning with sorrow from a past course of action that was sinful and detrimental, and thoroughly amending one's life (see any dictionary). It involves not only changing your mind, but also developing *new* attitudes, habits and behaviors (cf. Rom. 6:4-6). If we seriously desire to walk in *all* the footsteps of Christ and to experience the abundant life that He spoke about, most of us will have to change how we think, what we believe and how we live our daily lives—even our physical lifestyle!

The Path to Follow

Changing attitudes and habits is not an easy task. Established behaviors resist being altered. However, change is easier when we: 1) see clearly in a personal

(continued on page 29)

This spring, most of Christendom will observe the ancient rite of Easter, saying that it commemorates Christ's resurrection. Many who do so acknowledge that

the name, Easter, and its seasonal observance long predate Christianity—in paganism! However, they reason that since it is now a widely accepted, traditional Christian practice, Christ appreciates it.

But other people look in the Bible and come to a different conclusion. These Christians will observe the Christian Passover as Jesus originally ordained it and as the early Church originally observed it.

How did the Easter celebration come into Christianity? Do the Scriptures give us guidance about selecting religious traditions and practices for observance? To which did Christ say we should keep a memorial—His sacrifice or His resurrection?

"Christianizing" the Festivals of Ancient Sex Goddesses?

The origins of pre-Christian Easter festivals in pagan cultures are well-known in history. In the ancient world, some of the greatest female deities were the various incarnations of the great fertility goddesses known as Ishtar (Babylonian), Astarte (Phoenician), Atargatis (Philistine), Ashtoreth (Hebrew), Eastre (Anglo-Saxon), Ostara

(German) and Aphrodite (Greek).

These goddesses are regarded as essentially the same deity due to the similarities of their names, mythologies, worship and festivals. These factors are what define a deity

SHOULD YOU OBSERVE EASTER OR THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER?



by Dexter Wakefield

as its worship moves between cultures. The primary fertility festivals for these deities—and their associated male gods—were in the spring, a time of renewal and birth.

In *The Myth of the Goddess*, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford write, "Now we read everywhere of goddesses and gods who take their being from one Primordial Goddess who is the origin of all things.... She is single yet she marries; she is a virgin and mother; and sometimes her son becomes her consort. As before, she gives life and takes it away. The goddess has many names and many different tales are told about her, but one

story is unvarying throughout the Near East. The goddess becomes separated from the one she loves, who dies or seems to die, and falls into a darkness called 'the Underworld.' This separation is reflected in nature as a loss of light and fertility. The goddess descends to overcome the darkness so that her loved one may return to the light, and life may continue.

"Aphrodite is primarily a descendant of the Mesopotamian Goddess Inanna-Ishtar, who became Astarte in Phoenicia and was called Atargatis by the Philistines, and Ashtoreth by the Hebrews. Inanna's consort, Dumuzi, and Ishtar's Tammuz became, in the Greek tradition, Aphrodite's Adonis, the dying and resurrected son-lover of the goddess in a new form.

"The Greek goddess Aphrodite loses her lover, the beautiful Adonis.... Now the goddess no longer rescues him herself, but has to ask the god Zeus to allow him to return to life from spring to autumn, the fertile season of the earth. Finally, Jesus, son of the Virgin Mother, Mary, dies.... Christ is 'rescued' by his Father in Heaven, but, like the others, his return coincides with the date of the earth's regeneration. Easter is celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox, so that Christ's resurrection, like those before him, also reflects the turning of winter into spring" (pp. 145-147, 359).

Another author, Joseph

Campbell, drew the conclusion that the Christian practice of Easter “occurs on the date of the annual resurrection of Adonis, which **in the Christian cult became Easter**. In both the pagan cult and the Christian, the resurrection is of a god” (*Occidental Mythology*, p. 138).

These authors are expressing a view commonly held among modern, secular historians that there was a significant continuity in “Christianized” Gentile cultures with their pagan past. They had a tendency, over time, to superimpose Christian themes as a veneer over their existing pagan practices, which were already deeply ingrained in their societies and psyches. They are saying that in history, the Christian version of Easter as a memorial to Christ’s resurrection is essentially a modification of an earlier pagan resurrection festival. **The practice did not originate in Christianity.**

Unfortunately, when the Gentile churches reverted to the cultural rites that they were more comfortable with, they abandoned essential instructions from Christ and the apostles. While it is true that most of Christendom observes Easter saying that it commemorates Christ’s resurrection, **the observance that the Bible actually ordains for Christ is not a memorial specifically to His resurrection but, quite the opposite, a memorial to His sacrificial death.**

It is important to remember that, as the above quotes show, by the time of Christ and the early Christian Church, the Gentile cultures of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean already had ancient cultural roots involving spring festivals associated with fertility, rebirth and resurrection. These fertility festivals occurred around the time of the Passover when the paschal lamb was sacrificed by Jews as a memorial of the Exodus. But when Christ instructed His followers

to keep the Passover with a new, Christian meaning, it became a memorial to *His sacrifice* as the Lamb of God—not a memorial to His resurrection. Christ avoided confusing the meaning of His memorial with the well-known pagan customs of His time and antiquity.

Ancient statuette dated in the early dynastic period (2645-2460 BC) found in the Temple of Ishtar at Mari, Syria. —Erick Lessing/Art Resource

Actually, the time of the saints’ resurrection from the dead at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:12-20, 50-52) is pictured by the Feast of Trumpets, which takes place during the fall Holy Days (Lev. 23:24), not during the spring. As we shall see shortly, the practice and the meaning of the Christian Passover are explicitly taught in the Bible and were taught by the first century, apostolic Church.

Yet, as Christianity spread into Gentile areas, with passing generations, some churches tended to grav-

itate back toward prior pagan cultural practices of their own societies and away from religious practices for which some in their societies held negative associations with Judaism.

As a result, the proper observance of Pasch, or Passover, was changed both in its time and meaning. Historians in orthodox Christianity acknowledge the transformation. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* explains, “Not only was the significance of the Jewish feast changed by the Christians, but also the date. The Jewish method of fixing the date, the 14th of Nisan, did not confine it to any one [Roman calendar] day; at a very early time [Roman] Christians assigned their Pasch to the Sunday following the Jewish feast” (1967, vol. 5, p. 7). Pasch is Latin for Passover. But upon the change of date and meaning, this celebration is more appropriately identified by the English word ‘Easter.’

“The Asiatic practice in the 2d century of observing Easter [Pasch] on the day of the Jewish Passover conflicted with the *Roman* custom of celebrating Easter on Sunday, the day of the Resurrection.... Originally both observances were allowed, but gradually it was felt incongruous that Christians should celebrate Easter on a Jewish feast, and unity in celebrating the principal Christian feast was called for” (p. 8).

“Quartodecimanism [the practice of observing Pasch or Passover on Nisan 14 of the Hebrew calendar], prevalent in Asia Minor and Syria in the 2d century, emphasized *the death of Christ*, the true Paschal victim (John 18:28; 19:42), while *Roman practice* emphasized the observance of Sunday as the day of the *Resurrection*.... As Christianity separated from Judaism, **Gentile Christians objected to observing the principal Christian feast on the same day as the Jewish Passover**” (vol. 12, p. 13).

Christianized Veneer or Solid Scriptural Practice?

It is clear that Easter is a Christianized pagan festival! While many who celebrate Easter acknowledge this, they argue that doing it in honor of Christ makes it okay. But in His Word, God strongly condemns this kind of reasoning and practice. Notice how He instructed Israel:

“When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; **you shall not add to it nor take away from it**” (Deut. 12:29-32).

God clearly tells us to avoid recycling pagan religious customs for His worship. We are to worship God as *He* instructs, not as we might reason on our own. Keeping Easter certainly *adds* to what God instructed, and as we shall see, rejecting the Christian Passover certainly *takes away* from what we are told to do as Christians.

Christ said, “‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And *in vain* they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men” (Mark 7:6-8). And Paul cautioned the Romans, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16).

The Gospels’ Witness About What to Do

Some people may be surprised to learn that the New Testament gospels have a lot to say about the actual practice that Jesus and His disciples followed the night before Jesus’ death: “And He sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the *Passover* for us, that we may eat’... So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the *Passover*... When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this *Passover* with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’

“Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; **do this in remembrance of Me.**’ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you’” (Luke 22:8, 13-20). Earlier, He had washed the disciples’ feet and instructed them to do the same for each other (John 13:1-15).

Christ said that they were eating the Passover and that they should “do this in remembrance of Me.” He commanded them to keep that night **as a memorial to Him**, and He showed them the manner in which to keep it, using unleavened bread as a symbol of His body and wine as a symbol of His blood.

When Should This Paschal Worship Take Place?

Now notice on what day of the Hebrew calendar these events took place. It is important to note that by

Israelite reckoning, a day begins at sunset and ends with sunset the next day.

The Jewish Passover, which is a high day and a Sabbath, falls on Nisan 15 of the Hebrew calendar and begins at the evening ending Nisan 14 (Lev. 23:5-6). In the time of Christ, the Jews killed the Passover lamb the afternoon of Nisan 14 at about the hour Christ, the Lamb of God, died at the hands of the Romans. Christ’s last supper took place at the *beginning* of Nisan 14, on the evening *before* the crucifixion. That night He was betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter and beaten before the high priest (Matt. 26:30-75; John 18:1-27).

The following morning—still Nisan 14—He was tried by Pilate, condemned, scourged and crucified (Matt. 27; John 18:28-40). Notice in John 19:31 that Christ had to be buried before evening “because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day).” These scriptures show conclusively that the Passover memorial that Christ ordained was on the evening that *began* Nisan 14. This was the evening before the Jewish Passover celebration, which was held in the evening beginning Nisan 15.

The Meaning Behind the Symbols

We now have seen *what* Christ instructed His followers to observe as a memorial to Him, and *when* they were to keep it. But *why* did He say to do this? The Apostle John preserved Jesus’ explanation of the *why* of the Passover bread and wine in his gospel: “‘I am the bread of life.... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh,

(continued on page 20)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Singles Speak Out

I wanted to commend you for all your great articles. I especially wanted to thank you for the article "Single and Alone..." in the January 1996 issue. When you are alone and there is really no one to listen, you begin to think that no one understands or cares—not even God. And yet, I know that He does.

I have read articles in other publications that focused on young singles who had never before married, and people who had become single because their mate had died. But I never read an article that also talked about those who are single because of divorce. Thanks for including us!

J. C.
Arma, Kansas

I've been receiving the *World Ahead* magazine for months, now. I deeply appreciate your articles—they are a big help to me. "Single and Alone..." was very enlightening. There was a lot of insight on the subject. As a single man, I'm hoping God will provide me with a Christian woman to be my wife.

Sherril Hart
Bonita Springs, Florida

On the Airwaves

I am 33 years old, but consider myself a very young Christian. I'm married, with three little girls. We attend church... here in Cleveland, Tennessee, [but] because of snow and road conditions, we didn't go to church the past two Sundays. So, for the first time, I watched your show both weeks.... I enjoyed it so much and unlike other shows, I was able to understand everything that was being said.

So now, I would like to receive your literature.... Thank you very much for your show. I hope it will continue as I will be able to tape it.

Sabrina Phillips
Cleveland, Tennessee

I have enjoyed watching your TV program on one of the cable networks. I find your show to be enlightening and instructive and would like to receive your free booklet, *What is a True Christian?* And a subscription to *The World Ahead*.

I hope you keep up the good work of proclaiming God's Kingdom as I look forward to receiving the good news.

Rudy Weeks
Trinidad and Tobago

We are gratified at the confident, dynamic and comfortable TV presence you have developed. In the parlance of the 78 and 45 rpm generation, "you are in the groove!"

David James

I have been watching your TV program here in New Jersey. I find it very informative and have been quite blessed by it. As the days grow darker, men like you are harder to come by. It's a blessing and quite refreshing to hear the wonderful, pure Word of God as it ought to be taught!

Ed Griffith
Trenton, New Jersey

It was with great pleasure that I discovered your morning program on Radio Luxembourg. I first started listening on December 25 of last year. I'd like to ask for a transcript of the radio program. May God bless you and be with you always!

Antoine Dousrin
Rantin, France

We Stand Corrected

I would like to thank the Global Church of God for providing the *World Ahead* magazine free of charge. I find it very helpful and edifying.

The purpose of this letter is to point out what seems to me an unfortunate factual error in the December 1995 issue. In the article "What Do You Mean—Born Again?" there is an accom-

panying box entitled "Greek Expressions Referring to a New Birth" (p. 10). It is implied that the Greek word *gennao* is used in Luke 2:11.

I don't know Greek, but in checking a *koine* Greek New Testament, I failed to find anything in Luke 2:11 that appeared to be a declension of *gennao*. Instead, Luke seems to have used the word *etekhte* in this verse.

I hasten to add that I found the article in question to be very beneficial, and have no serious doubts about the correctness of its conclusions.

Ragnar Schroder
Stavanger, Norway

Thank you for your diligence to "prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21 KJV). We certainly want to inform our readers when we are in error. Luke 2:11 was mistakenly cited in this example. Our point would have been made with a verse like Matthew 2:1, which says that "Jesus was born [gennethentos] in Bethlehem."

We must also make another correction to the same box article. We stated that the very first occurrence of *gennao* in the Bible is in Matthew 1:20. Actually, we should have said that it is one of the very first occurrences. There are other forms of this word in Matthew 1 before verse 20, which are rendered "begot" and "born." We appreciate your bringing this matter to our attention—ed.

Free Literature

Please receive a warm-hearted greeting, especially to Roderick Meredith and Mario Hernandez, who we remember from his work in Colombia. Congratulations for your excellent magazine. I think this Work you are doing is what God wants.

Could you please send me, in addition to your magazine, any materials you have available in Spanish?

Huber Jurado
Santale de Bogota, Colombia

In addition to the *World Ahead* magazine and other literature published in English, we also offer a number of book-

lets for our French- and Spanish-speaking readers in their native languages. As with all of our literature, they are offered free of charge as a public service—ed.

Your magazines and booklets are quite inspiring. I really feel motivated to continue studying the Word of God and apply the teaching in my life.

L. Ram
Cayenne, Guyana

A & B in Prophecy

I am in prison and I receive your magazine *The World Ahead*. I appreciate all the information you have. I'd also like you to send me your brochure *America and Britain in Prophecy*. I can see by reading the Truth that what's in the Bible is being fulfilled more and more every day.

D. L.
Rosharon, Texas

What does the future hold? Where will it all lead? Staggering crises face a bewildered humanity over the next decade or two. You need to know what's going to happen and why. Write for your free copy of *God's Intervention in World Affairs*.

We welcome your comments, criticism or questions. Please mail letters for this section to "Letters to the Editor" at our U.S. address. Be sure to include your name, address and daytime phone number. We reserve the right to edit your comments for clarity, propriety or space.

EDITORIAL (continued from page 3)

will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24-25).

When a young man asked Jesus the way to eternal life, what did He reply? "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. **But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments**" (Matt. 19:17). Jesus was the "Light" God sent into the world to show us how to live. He was our example. Yet, carnal men have come up with dozens of excuses as to how or why the Ten Commandments were somehow done away with.

We have had many articles in *The World Ahead* giving PROOF that true Christianity involves obeying the Ten Commandments! So you must decide whether you will obey the God of the Bible or the religions of this world. It is just that simple.

Simple? It should be simple, but the human mind plays devilish tricks on us. For we do not want to be looked down on or ostracized by our fellow men, our family, our lodge or our club.

Many of us are like the Jews of Jesus' day: "Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42-43). If you find something in God's teachings that may cause you to lose favor with others, will you pull back, disregard it and, consequently, disobey? Perhaps you say, "It doesn't make any difference."

Think about this: "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Is. 66:2).

A genuine Christian must remember that he is NOT his own. He is bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ! So it naturally follows that he will strive to fully *obey* God. A true Christian knows that Christ really is his "Lord," his actual "boss"! This is the attitude of TOTAL SURRENDER to God. This is the attitude that will show God that—unlike unfaithful Satan and his disobedient demons—you and I will always be LOYAL, having active faith to *do* what God says.

Ask God for the attitude of total surrender to Him. Take time to learn His ways by studying the Bible. Remember to *do* what the Good Book says. Read carefully our booklets and the articles in *The World Ahead*. Compare what we teach thoughtfully with your Bible. Don't worry about "what other people think." Learn to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21 KJV).

Then, with God's guidance through His Spirit, you will allow Him to build within you the one basic attitude that, if continued, will ensure your place in the everlasting Kingdom of God.



WHAT WAS NAILED TO THE CROSS?

by Jeffrey H. Patton

Many people today think it doesn't matter what days they keep to worship God, if they bother to worship at all. Most people who think of themselves as Christians also assume that the Apostle Paul propagated a "theological divorce" between Old Testament and New Testament practices involving the keeping of the law, the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days.

What is the Truth? Was the law nailed to the cross at Christ's crucifixion?

To investigate this controversial subject, Jeff Patton, managing editor of *The World Ahead*, interviewed Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, professor of Church History and Theology at

first non-Catholic graduate student. He earned his doctorate *summa cum laude*, personally receiving a gold medal from Pope Paul VI in recognition of his achievement.

Dr. Bacchiocchi has recently written a new book, *God's Festivals in Scripture and in History*, which examines the question of the validity for Christians of the festivals taught by the Hebrew Scriptures. This month's issue presents the second half of Dr. Bacchiocchi's interview.

WA: Many people maintain that the Apostle Paul—despite some limited acceptance of the law's general, ethical utility—was very specifically "anti-Holy Day." To back up this position they cite Colossians 2:14-17:

"Erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it. Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is

to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (NRSV). Does Paul condemn the observance of the weekly Sabbath and the Holy Days in this scripture?

Dr. B: I can assure you that this has been one of the fundamental texts of

the New Testament that I have examined at great length. In my doctoral dissertation, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, I have an appendix of 30 pages on this verse. To give an exhaustive answer would take us some time. So I'm only going to mention a few basic points.

First, we need to define what was nailed on the cross. The prevailing perception among many Christians, including commentaries, is that when Christ was nailed on the cross, usually they say it [represented] the law—whether it is moral or ceremonial—that was [symbolically] nailed on the cross.

The Greek term used to describe what was nailed to the cross is *cheirographon*. It means "something that is handwritten"; a handwritten document that is nailed on the cross. That term occurs only once in the New Testament. When you only have one usage of a term you cannot make a comparative analysis of the meaning of it. But fortunately, recent research has examined the usage of that term in the extra-biblical literature [of the same time period].

WA: Such as?

Dr. B: *Apocalypse of Isaiah* and a number of other works. It's interesting to notice that the term is used in extra-biblical literature to refer to the "record book of sin." This meaning fits beautifully with the context, because if you read... beginning from verse 12, it [Colossians 2] speaks about being

buried with Him in baptism and being raised in Him through faith in the working of God. Then verse 13 shows you were "dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made you alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses."

So, you notice Paul refers to circumcision and to baptism in showing

how this represents the cleansing, the forgiveness of our sin. And then having discussed this forgiveness, in verse 14, he goes a step further, showing the completeness of God's forgiveness by nailing to the cross, erasing, canceling even the record of our sin [better than hitting the delete button on a computer].

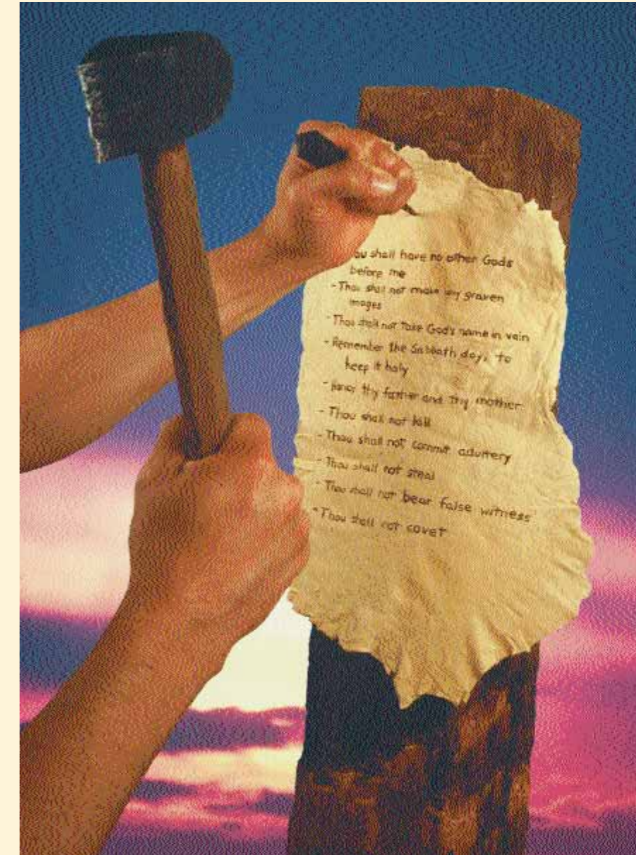
In other words, this image of the *cheirographon*—the handwritten document—has to be seen in the context. And the context is a whole theological discussion of Paul when he tries to help the Colossians that were misled by heretics.... [These false teachers] taught them that... they had to call for the help of principalities, of powers, of the angels of this *stoicheion kosmos*, [translated: "the elements of the world" or "elemental spirits of the universe" v. 20]. And Paul [in effect] says, "Why do you feel so insecure? Why are you trying to seek salvation by submitting yourself to all of these rules and regulations? Don't you realize that God and Christ have forgiven you (v. 13), and yes, more than that, He has even canceled, erased, nailed to the cross the record of your sin, so you don't have anything to worry about."

Having developed this theological argument, from verses 12-15 Paul proceeds to discuss the implication: "Therefore, since you are completely forgiven, since you are completely at peace with Jesus Christ, 'let no one judge you.'" Careful now! This is the

text that has been used historically as the death nail of the Sabbath and the Holy Days through Christian history.

WA: So, who's judging?

Dr. B: Now we're coming to the real question. The mistaken, prevailing, historical misunderstanding of this



agree with me 100 percent. They say that the "anyone" doing the judging is not Paul, but false teachers! Colossian heretics! They were doing the judging. In one sense, they were telling the Colossian believers how to eat, how to drink, and how to observe the annual, monthly and weekly days. They were telling the believers that if you really

want to be saved, if you want to reach perfection, you have to eat in a certain way, drink in a certain way and observe the annual, monthly and weekly days in a certain way. They were laying down the *dogma*—that is the Greek term used—the rules and regulations [or "ordinances"].

Paul says, let not anyone judge you, that is, dictate to you, how to eat, how to drink and how to observe the annual, monthly and weekly days. But, Paul is not doing the judging. The ones who are doing the judging are these false teachers. And Paul tells these false teachers to mind their own business. Let them not trouble you, because apparently what the Colossian Christians were doing was correct. **When you condemn a perversion, that**

doesn't mean that you are condemning the principle. Professor Lincoln, in this book I was referring to a moment ago, comes out with a statement that in this passage, Paul speaks approvingly of the five major practices: eating, drinking, observing festivals, new moons and Sabbaths.

What a turnaround! That is a 180-degree turnaround! In the past, the passage was always understood as a Pauline condemnation of those five practices. Today, scholars come out [saying], "No, no, no. It's *not* a Pauline condemnation; it's a Pauline approbation [approval]!"

WA: Just the opposite of what was formerly taught?



Dr. Samuel Bacchiocchi, Professor of Church History and Theology at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Periodically, *The World Ahead* interviews interesting personalities with expertise in areas of controversy and debate that are of general interest to our readers. An interviewee's comments are his own and do not necessarily represent the view of the magazine staff.

Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

In the wake of the Catholic Church's Vatican II reforms in the 1960s, Samuele Bacchiocchi was admitted to the prestigious Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome as its

text is that Paul is doing the judging... in the sense that he's telling the Colossians: "Don't worry anymore about observing the annual, monthly or weekly Holy Days." However, recent doctoral dissertation research [has been completed by] seven scholars who worked together in England at Cambridge University... dealing with this Sabbath/Sunday question [Donald A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day, A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, Zondervan, 1982].

There's a whole chapter dealing with Paul, the Sabbath and the law and a whole section on Paul's preaching in Colossians 2:14-16. Amazingly, the authors who dealt with this passage

Dr. B: Just the opposite! Which merely goes to show how sometimes even sincere people, even sincere scholars, have been misled, jumped to conclusions that were totally unwarranted. Today, there is a whole new realization that Paul was far more supportive of the observance of the biblical calendar than we have ever imagined. What Paul is condemning is mainly the perversion of the Colossians, Galatians, Romans... who were attracted by these Greek philosophical practices: gnosticism, asceticism, Docetism.

Some of these heretical movements believed that in order to please God they had to submit themselves to regulations by not touching, by fasting, by abstaining from certain foods—like in Romans 14 where Paul speaks about being a strict vegetarian. So the idea was that these practices would predispose you better to divine revelation and would enable you to please the “elements of the world”—these old mediators. The idea was that there was a mediator between you and God. You could not reach God directly. You had to go through this *stoicheion kosmos*. There are a lot of key words used by Paul which are reflective of this gnostic, heretical system.

Paul says, “Listen, that doesn’t make sense. Christ is the Head. We can have direct access to Jesus Christ. We do not need to call for help from anybody [*stoicheion kosmos*] by submitting ourselves to all of this regulation.” So, basically, we need to understand the context. Many times, people will take a Bible text, “something nailed to the cross,” and jump to the conclusion that it is the law. Paul did not even use the word “law.” The Greek word “law”—*nomos*—doesn’t occur a single time, **not a single time in the whole epistle to the Colossians!**

Usually law and grace are the axis of Pauline theology, but [they are] never discussed in the whole epistle. Paul is not talking about the law. Paul is talking about forgiveness. God has

completely forgiven us by nailing to the cross the record of our sin [*cheirographon*]. Because we are fully accepted in Jesus Christ, we don’t need to follow heretics who say, “You’re not accepted; you have to call for help [from some *stoicheion kosmos*, an elemental spirit] by eating, drinking and observing days in a certain way.” **What Paul is condemning is the perversion, not the principle of the Scriptures.**

WA: Dr. Bacchiocchi, many people feel that the weekly Sabbath and the annual Sabbaths stand or fall together. Many have felt that Jesus, when He called Himself the Lord of the Sabbath, was doing so in a way that would take off from our shoulders some sort of burden, a legalistic duty, to observe some point of time. How do you understand this? Did He come to do away with the Sabbath?

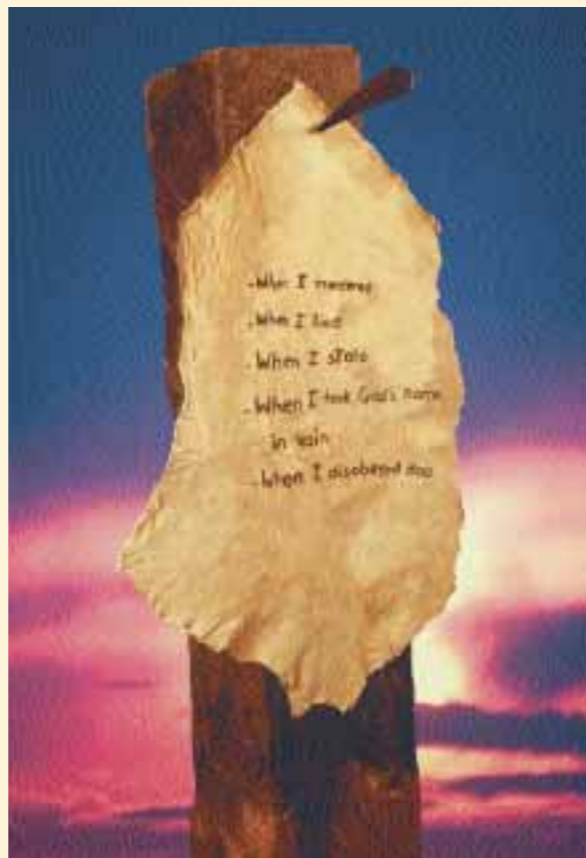
Dr. B: Jeff, I have addressed this question in the fifth chapter of my book, *A Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*. The whole chapter is entitled “The Sabbath Good News of Redemption”.... How do we define the attitude of Jesus toward the Sabbath? We must recognize that Jesus observed the Sabbath in a very provocative way.

WA: What do you mean by that?

Dr. B: Jesus did on the Sabbath that which was not acceptable by prevailing, rabbinical tradition. In rabbinical tradition, if a person was at the point of death, he could be helped on the Sabbath. But, if a person was a chronically sick person, he could wait for an extra day to be helped after the Sabbath.

Amazingly, all the saving, healing episodes reported in the gospels, every one them—without exception—have to do with chronically sick people: a paralytic for 38 years, a man blind

from birth, a woman bent low for 18 years, a withered hand. All of these healing, Sabbath episodes have to do with people who were chronically sick—who could have waited an extra day. This really shows that Jesus acted



World Ahead Image

INTENTIONALLY to reveal the meaning and the spirit of the Sabbath, which is the day when God shows to us not only His creative love, but also His redemptive deliverance.

Now, the question is this: Did Jesus break the Sabbath? Did the way in which Jesus observed the Sabbath, by acting against prevailing tradition, is that to be understood as Christ’s intent to do away with the Sabbath? That is a prevailing perception. I could show you a doctoral dissertation written by scholars who argue that the provocative method of Sabbath-keeping by Jesus was designed to pave the way for the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday, which was supposedly implemented later by the disciples.

My response to this reasoning is: That doesn’t make any sense! Every

time Jesus was accused of Sabbath-breaking, He responded by challenging that accusation: “Haven’t you read about David when he was hungry he went to the temple?... Haven’t you read that the priests work on the Sabbath?...” And they work on the Sabbath even more intensely, and “they are guiltless” (cf. Matt. 12:3-5). WHY? Because their work is redemptive.

All the sacrifices were doubled on the Sabbath. They were working more.... Not to make extra money, but because the Sabbath was the day to extend redemption. He says, I am greater than the Temple; so why are you mad with me? I am here providing, realistically, the redemption that was offered to you typologically through the Sabbath. Why are you mad with me?

In John 5, remember when they got mad because Jesus told the paralytic to take up his pallet and go. Don’t you, on the Sabbath, circumcise a boy if the eighth day falls on the Sabbath? Why? Because circumcision was a redemptive act. Why are you mad with me, then? I made the man whole. Well, do you see that counter-argument? Circumcision was seen, according to rabbinical counting, as one of 248 parts of the human body. In other words, if you can take care of, on the Sabbath, one out of 248 because that is a redemptive act; what about me? I [took care of] not only one out of 248; I restored the whole man!

You see, Jesus made the Sabbath the day of liberation—the day of *physical* and *spiritual* redemption. Remember that crippled woman, who for 18 years was bent low and couldn’t stand straight? Jesus said to her, “Woman, you are *loosed* from your infirmity” (Luke 13:12). And the ruler of the synagogue got mad, because for him the Sabbath was rules to obey, not people to love. Jesus took him to task. “The Lord then answered him and said,

‘Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath *loose* his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it?’” (v. 15). When you call somebody a hypocrite, you are not paying him a compliment!

That is the second usage of the same verb “loose” [in this gospel account]. In Greek, it’s *luo*. Why would they water their animals on the Sabbath? Because if the animals didn’t drink they would lose weight, and if they lost weight they lost market value. So, Jesus said, you are concerned about financial loss on the Sabbath if you don’t water your animals. “So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be *loosed* from this bond on the Sabbath?” (v. 16). That is the third usage of the same verb, *luo*. In seven verses, the same verb is used three times, which tells me it is an intentional usage.

Jesus makes the Sabbath a day of *loosing*—the day of liberation. Not only from the physical [burdens], but she was [also] *loosed* from the bondage of Satan. So, you know there is a spiritual dimension.

May I ask you: How did that woman come to view the Sabbath? When the next Sabbath came around she was not bent low looking up to the preacher with a twisted neck. She was standing straight, singing the psalms of David. Don’t you think that she came to view the Sabbath as the day of complete, total liberation of redemption? Don’t you think she came to view the Sabbath as the day to celebrate not only God’s creative, but God’s redemptive love?

WA: Dr. Bacchiocchi, I want to thank you very much for this. I have just one more question for you. If a person keeps the Sabbath and the Holy Days, it’s going to make that person different. As you were growing up, you, too, had to be different. Where did you find the courage to be different?

Dr. B: When I understood that to show my love for God I needed to take time out for Him, I found that observing the Sabbath served to give a concrete expression of my love, of my commitment to my Lord.

There are many today that say they love the Lord, but they don’t want to show it in a concrete, tangible way. It’s a kind of cheap grace. It’s a kind of lip type of service to God—God, I love you, but let me do what I like. Don’t ask for my time, don’t ask for my money... let me do what I like. But, you see, I really feel that this is where the Sabbath comes in. Today we live in a self-centered society. **People want to please themselves, rather than please God. The Sabbath and the Holy Days challenge us to be God-centered, not self-centered.**

On the Sabbath and on these annual feasts, we take time out to celebrate what God has done, what God is doing and what God will do for us. We are showing in a concrete and tangible way that God really counts in our life. Remember this, time is the essence of our life. The way we use our time is indicative of our priorities.

If we don’t like somebody, we can’t find time for them. Most of us use that excuse all the time. [I’ll let you go. I’ve got to run now!] What we really are saying is, “I’m sorry, but I’m not interested.” But, if we like somebody, even if we are plenty busy, we take time, we make time for that person. That’s why the Sabbath and the Holy Days are so important. Because, as we take time out on the weekly Sabbath and annual Holy Days to show our love to God, it really shows that we are committed to God not only on this special occasion but every day of our lives.

WA: Thank you very much, Dr. Bacchiocchi, for your time in coming to visit us at *The World Ahead*.

Dr. B: Thank you for inviting me. WA

EASTER OR PASSOVER? (continued from page 13)

which I shall give for the life of the world.' The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, 'How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?' Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day'" (John 6:48, 51-54).

Christ is Our Passover

The events described in the book of Exodus prefigured the death and purpose of the true Passover Lamb. The Israelites were instructed to take a lamb to be slain. "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year.... Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day... the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night.... For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn.... Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, **I will pass over you**" (12:5-8, 12-13).

The events of the Exodus pictured what would be fulfilled later in Jesus Christ. **Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is our Passover sacrifice.** As the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians, "For indeed Christ, our *Passover*, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Christ's sacrifice is absolutely essential for our salvation, because without it our sins cannot be forgiven. The Bible teaches that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of

God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Through the blood of the Lamb of God (John 1:29), our sins are forgiven—*passed over*—and we are reconciled with the Father.

We cannot give ourselves eternal

The ancient fertility goddess (dating back to the early second millennium BC), holding a vase. It is now in the National Museum in Damascus, Syria.
—Erick Lessing/Art Resource

life. Good works and repentance from sin are the results of our living faith, but all the good works in the world cannot save us, because our works do not justify our past sins. Only the blood of Jesus Christ does that, and only God has eternal life to give. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the *gift* of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Notice how Paul explained it in Romans 5:8-9: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for

us. Much more than, *having now been justified* by His blood..." Paul reveals that by Christ's sacrifice we are now cleansed from our past sins. Continuing, he said, "*We shall* be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, *having been reconciled*, we shall be saved by His life" (vv. 9-10).

We have a living, resurrected Savior, and our hope for eternal life is by resurrection through Him. Jesus Christ's resurrection is of great importance to Christians, but we were not given a spring festival to commemorate it.

The Apostle Paul's Teaching

What did the Apostolic Church teach and practice? When instructing the Church at Corinth, Paul wrote, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus **on the same night in which He was betrayed** [the evening of the beginning of Nisan 14] took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; **do this in remembrance of Me.**' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, **in remembrance of Me.**' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes**" (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

This is an explicit instruction from Paul for the Church to keep the Passover as a memorial—at the very same time, in the same manner and with the same meaning that Christ instructed His disciples.

Whereas the Christian Passover pictures the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the Days of Unleavened

(continued on page 30)

QUESTIONS & SHORT ANSWERS

Q.

Does Romans 14:5-6 teach us that it's no longer necessary to observe the Sabbath or God's annual Holy Days?

A.

The verses you ask about have been wrongly used by many to indicate that Sabbath and Holy Day observance is no longer required in New Testament times. Let's examine these verses: "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it."

It's clear Paul *is* explaining that some "days" may be observed or not, according to someone's preference. But is he talking about the weekly and annual Sabbaths? An examination of the context in which these verses are placed will show us that Paul meant something very different.

We must consider to whom Paul was addressing the letter. The Church of God at Rome did not primarily comprise converted Jews, but rather Gentiles whom God had called to His Truth (Rom. 11:13). Paul, therefore, would not have told them to stop observing the very days God had commanded—Sabbath observance—if, in fact, these customs had *already been* abolished. There would have been no reason to, since these *former pagans* had NEVER observed the Sabbath. So what is being referred to here?

The subject throughout Romans 14 is a matter of eating meat, or abstaining from it. If we continue in verse 6, we read, "He who eats [meat], eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat [a vegetarian], to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks." There was a wariness about eating meat among many of the Roman brethren, since most of the meat available at the market had been previously offered to idols in

pagan religious services.

Some of these formerly Gentile Roman Christians still clung to the superstitious belief that the idols of their past pagan worship could somehow hold power or influence over their lives. For this reason—to assure they would not eat anything involved in pagan rituals—they had become vegetarians. For similar reasons, others would feast on certain days and fast on others.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary links the question of eating or abstaining from meat with that of observing or not observing certain days: "The close contextual association with eating suggests that Paul has in mind a special day set apart for observance as a time for feasting or as a time for fasting" (vol. 10, p. 146).

These practices were probably most prevalent among recent converts. It is clear that "religious vegetarianism" and superstitious feasting and fasting are not mature Christian practices (1 Cor. 8:4-8). Nevertheless, Paul wanted the Church at Rome to accept those "weak in faith" and not judge them or become a stumbling block to them (Rom. 14:1, 13). That is why Paul says, "If your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died" (v. 15).

To observe a day, then, or to not observe a day refers here to feasting or fasting on particular days for matters of conscience. The message Paul is conveying is that it makes no difference when we fast, provided we do it with a right heart and a proper respect and reverence for God. Likewise, we are not to sit in judgment of others with respect to their personal decisions in this matter.

It is clear, however, that Paul is by no means teaching Christians that observance of God's Sabbaths have become unnecessary or obsolete. The Sabbath and Holy Days are not even referred to in this entire passage of Scripture.

Q.

The Bible says that Elijah was taken to heaven. Isn't this proof that the righteous saints go to heaven when they die?

A.

You are referring to the account in 2 Kings, which reads, "Then it happened, as they [Elijah and Elisha] continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire

appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into *heaven*" (2:11). Certainly, God *did* take Elijah into heaven. But just what does that mean?

The popular interpretation of this verse is that Elijah was taken to God's throne in heaven, where the Father and Christ now dwell. But the word "heaven" has three different meanings in the Bible: 1) the atmosphere, or sky; 2) the stellar universe, or outer space; and, 3) the place where God's throne is. Elijah *did* ascend into heaven—but which heaven was it?

It is interesting to note that several years after Elijah's ascension to heaven, *he was still on earth!* "And a letter came to him [Jehoram, King of Judah] from Elijah" (2 Chron. 21:12). A careful study of the chronology of these events shows that Elijah was still on earth when he wrote that letter—several years *after* he "went up... into heaven."

"Though it is clear he [Elijah] is taken from the earthly scene in a chariot of fire that rises to heaven like a whirlwind, the author might well have had in mind his removal or 'retirement' to some remote area. If so, 'heaven' in this text is equivalent to 'sky,' and the author does not intend to imply that Elijah joined *Yahweh* as an immortal in the heavenly court. This appears to be the understanding of the Chronicler, who reports that much later, Jehoram, king of Judah, receives a letter written by Elijah (2 Chron. 21:12-15)" (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, pp. 91-92).

Clearly, Elijah did *not* go to the heaven of God's throne (John 3:13), but was taken up into the atmosphere.

Honor

to Whom Honor Is Due



Is Respect for Parents Out of Date in the 90s?

by Roderick C. Meredith

What kind of parents do you have? Are they genuinely loving and nurturing? If you are a parent, are you committed to your children? Or do you see them as a drag on your resources and time—little burdens that tie you down?

In spite of the fact that all of us have human failings, the vast majority of people sincerely want to be good and decent parents. They *care*. Most work hard to provide. And, although imperfect, they basically want to provide a nurturing atmosphere at home—or at least they used to.

My father was “all” man. Though a little on the quiet side, he always encouraged me to do my best and he always taught me to do what was right.

We had a cabin down on the Elk River in southwestern Missouri where we would often go when I was a small boy—especially in summer. After a weekend of hiking, fishing and swimming, I would usually fall asleep in the car on the long drive home. Even now, I can

remember feeling myself being gently lifted out of the car when we got home. I would sometimes wake up—dazed and whimpering. My father’s voice would lovingly reassure me, “It’s okay. It’s daddy. We’re home now.” Then he would carry me into the house and tuck me into bed.

Once in bed, I quickly fell back to sleep in peace. Because I knew it *was* “okay.” For my dad and mother had safely brought me and my sisters home. And my daddy’s powerful arms had gently lifted me from the car and put me to bed. I felt secure because I *was* secure in a home with parents who really loved me.

I *never* heard my parents utter the word “divorce” in connection with their marriage, because they were committed to each other and to us. They *never* beat us or threatened to kick us out of the home. Oh, yes, they had occasional disagreements and “hearty discussions” about how to pay the bills or other matters. But I never had reason to doubt their underlying loyalty to each other, or to our family. And both of them tried to help and encourage

me and my sisters as long as they lived.

So, perhaps, it has been easier for me than for many others today to *honor* my father and mother. **Yet the attitude of honoring one’s parents is vital to the preservation of a decent society—and to your own personal happiness!** However, the neglect of God’s fifth commandment “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long” (Ex. 20:12), breeds a society full of the attitudes of cynicism, sarcasm and outright contempt. Aren’t television programs like *Beavis and Butthead* and *The Simpsons* appropriate symbols for our time?

In the March 1996 issue of *Sassy*, an American magazine for teenage girls, one article teases prospective readers with the following: “Do you *really* hate your parents? Like who doesn’t? How to deal with your set of detestables” (p. 4). “Detestables”? What a disgrace respect for parents among young people is so low that this teen magazine’s editors feel it a fair, representative sentiment among adolescent girls to refer to mothers and fathers in such terms!

But disrespect for parents is not limited to youth. There are far too many cases of physical abuse of elders by adult children. Often elder abuse takes on the form of financial exploitation of aging parents by their grown children. How shameful!

The Bible warns us “that in the last days perilous times shall come.... For men shall be... disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection...” and the list goes on (2 Tim. 3:1-3 KJV). Those days are definitely here!

Why Such Contempt for Authority?

But what is the origin of such contempt for parents? Dr. James Dobson, a child psychologist, states, “It is imperative that a child learns to respect his parents—not to satisfy their egos, but because **his relationship with them provides the basis for his later attitude toward all other people**. His early view of parental authority becomes the cornerstone of his future outlook on school authority, law enforcement officers, employers and others with whom he will eventually live and work” (*Focus on the Family*, “The Five Keys to Family Harmony,” Mar. 1994, p. 11).

How true! Yet parenting, along with the family in general, is under constant assault from the corrupt spirit of this age. Families are the most basic unit of societal organization. They not only provide humanity with its most effective means of sustaining and nurturing society’s most dependent members, but they also prepare our minds for a spirit-plane relationship with the Creator God—our Heavenly Father—who wants to embrace us, lifting us up in His strong arms, just as my physical father took care of me!

It is for this reason that God placed the fifth com-

mandment where He did among the Ten Commandments. The first four (covered in the May through September 1995 issues of *The World Ahead*) define our relationship with the Father and our Older Brother, Jesus Christ. The last six govern our relationships with our parents, our spouses and all the other children of God.

The fifth commandment stands as a sort of “bridge” between these two sections of God’s Ten “Words” on the subject of relationships—because God is our parent even more so than our *physical* parents! Yes, truly obeying the fifth commandment is directly tied to obeying and honoring God Himself.

Under the Sinai Covenant, a flagrant violation of the fifth commandment was a capital offense! Notice: “And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.... And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death” (Ex. 21:15, 17). That’s how seriously God views this command!

Why was such a severe penalty demanded in God’s physical nation? As already mentioned, disdain for parents leads to disdain for ALL authority—including God. To a small child, a parent—as provider, protector, teacher and lawgiver—stands in the place of God Himself. Dr. Dobson reflected, “I was shocked to see this close identification between God and me in the mind of our son when he was two years old. Ryan had watched his mother and me pray before we ate each meal, but he had never been asked to say grace. One day when I was out of town on a business trip, Shirley spontaneously turned to the toddler and asked if he would like to pray before they ate. The invitation startled him, but he folded his little hands, bowed his head, and said, ‘I love you, Daddy. Amen.’

“When I returned home and Shirley told me what had happened, the story unsettled me. I hadn’t realized the degree to which Ryan linked me with his ‘Heavenly Father.’ I wasn’t even sure I wanted to stand in those shoes. It was too big a job, and I didn’t want the responsibility. But I had no choice, nor do you. God has given us the assignment of representing Him during the formative years of parenting” (p. 11).

How a child relates to his parents will, in large measure, affect how he relates to God. This should really motivate parents to set the right example for their children and to bring them up in a loving and nurturing environment. It should also help children to understand the seriousness of properly responding to their parents.

A Divine Promise

The command to honor parents carries a special promise to those who listen and act on it. The Apostle Paul focused on this special blessing in the New Testament: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’” (Eph. 6:1-3).

What does it mean to “honor” our parents? For children, who have not yet reached adulthood and become financially independent, that means “obey” as the Apostle Paul expressed it in the above verse.

When small, a child has limited experience and judgment. Such a child **MUST** be taught to obey his parents immediately, without question, for his own safety. If your young child laughingly runs out into a busy street, it may then be *too late* for any detailed explanations. As the child grows, explanations and reasons **MUST** be given so he or she can begin learning how to make sound, appropriate decisions. **The habit of obedience should be taught** since any successful human organization requires structure and order!

Parents have the responsibility—it is even a duty—to teach their children the Word of God. They cannot pass the buck to any other person or institution. God says to parents, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them dili-

gently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:6-7).

Godly authority in the

family should be exercised and followed “in the Lord.” As a child grows and comes to increasingly understand God’s mind as revealed by the Bible, he should begin exercising more self-discipline and need less external discipline from the parents. Parents need to remember that God establishes and upholds parental authority only so long as it is “in the Lord”—according to His loving will. Parents who exercise their authority contrary to God’s Word undermine their own authority. As the Apostle Peter said, “We [who are believers] ought to obey God rather than men [who do not follow God’s commandments]” (Acts 5:29).

Be Worthy of Honor

Implicit in this fifth commandment is that parents have a responsibility to be honorable. For to be honored, the Word of God requires that one be honorable. Parents should live lives worthy of respect—walking in God’s love, which means a parent keeps God’s commandments just as Jesus Christ kept His Father’s commandments (John 15:10).

According to Dr. Dobson, “If you want your child to accept your values when he reaches his teen years, then you must be worthy of his respect during his younger days. When a child can successfully defy his parents during his first 15 years, laughing in their faces and stubbornly flaunting their authority, he develops a natural contempt for them.... Viewing his parents as being unworthy of his respect, he may very well reject every vestige of their philosophy and faith” (p. 11).

On the other hand, if parents do their job properly, their children will develop the priceless habit of obedience and will learn deep respect for all law and constituted authority. The Apostle Paul expounded the divine principle about respecting proper authority, which is inherent in the fifth commandment: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

“Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.

“For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor” (Rom. 13:1-7).

A Christian should obey constituted authority not only because of fear of punishment, but also because he knows that appropriate social authority is ultimately from God. Coming to understand this begins with submission to parents during childhood.

Too many children today obey their parents only when coerced, begged or bribed! Parents need to teach by word and deed the benefits of serving and cooperating with others. By showing love and respect to their children, parents can more easily communicate an understanding of the authority principle. They make it easier to be obeyed. But if parents act like uncaring, harsh dictators, then the children may indeed obey as long as they must, but the time may come when they

feel strong enough or desperate enough to rebel.

A godly parent-child relationship must flow from both directions; although it is the parent who is in the leadership position. A parent must be willing to take the initiative in leading, teaching and loving—and the child must be willing to respond and follow. This reciprocity in parent-child relationships is something that God is specifically concerned about in today’s dangerous endtime: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. **And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.** Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5-6).

All this should help explain why obeying the fifth commandment enables us to “live long on the earth.” Children who obey their parents develop the habits and character traits that tend toward long life. By listening to their parent’s counsel, children can avoid the numerous and extremely dangerous ambushes that often lead to early death. Having learned a proper respect for duly constituted authority, adolescents and young adults will desire to avoid breaking civil and criminal laws, which will keep them safe and out of prison. Young people who have learned to respectfully listen to their parents will also be receptive to listening to their heavenly Father: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24; cf. Matt. 5:5)!

Adults Should Still Honor Their Parents

In our modern society as opposed to biblical society, adult children don’t usually think they are bound to obey their parents. Nevertheless, God still requires that adult children honor their parents. “Honor” means to show a great deal of respect for someone—to treat a person in a way which lets him know he is highly esteemed by you. If a parent has been abusive in the relationship with the child, the “honoring” may have to be at an appropriate distance until a reconciliation can be effected. By exercising wisdom, all adult children can treat their parents with appropriate courtesy and thoughtfulness.

With maturity comes a greater realization of all our parents did for us growing up and the tremendous love they showered on us. We should delight in a continual returning of that love. Don’t forget to remember them on special occasions like anniversaries or Mother’s Day—but, of course, that is not nearly enough. Write them, phone them and take time to visit them.

Author Susan Yate admonishes us to “care for parents when they are old and ill.... Assess the situation. What are their needs? What extended family support is available? What resources such as financial, health, car, housing are

available?... Be willing to make personal sacrifices. We must be willing to sacrifice time, space in our own home, and financial resources to care for our parents. It won’t be easy. But then again, we weren’t easy to care for as their babies. Now it is our turn to honor them and care for them” (*Focus on the Family*, “When In-Laws Are in Town,” Apr. 1995, p. 7).

In Jesus Christ’s day, some religious leaders were teaching that a man could reject the responsibility to care for his aged parents! They claimed that funds which might have been so employed could be dedicated instead to a religious service that would somehow induce God’s favor. Christ condemned those leaders and their ungodly practice (Mark 7:9-10).

Notice how these hypocrites tried to get around God’s fifth commandment: “But you say it is perfectly all right for a man to disregard his needy parents, telling them, ‘Sorry, I can’t help you! For I have given to God what I could have given to you.’ And so you break the law of God in order to protect your man-made tradition” (vv. 11-13 Living Bible). Jesus Christ plainly taught that if our parents are in need and we are able to help them—materially, financially or otherwise—we are required to do so by the fifth commandment.

Christ provided a shining example of obedience to this commandment even in His dying moments on the stake. As He hung there, suffering one of the most excruciating deaths ever devised, Jesus looked down and saw His mother, Mary, and His closest disciple, John, standing together. “When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home” (John 19:26-27).

Jesus honored and loved His mother to the end—even making final provision for her to be taken care of while He was dying. Other men would have been focused on *self*, but not Jesus. He looked upon the woman who bore Him, who fed Him and clothed Him in childhood, who taught Him from the Scriptures, and who now unashamedly stood in this horrible place, weeping at His death—and He remembered His Father’s fifth commandment.

Always remember this perfect example of Jesus Christ! And always remember to “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long...” (Deut. 5:16).



Heaven— or Paradise on Earth?

Has God ever promised His people they will inherit heaven? Or does He say the righteous will inherit a “Paradise”—right here on earth?

by Raymond F. McNair

There is a popular concept of saints wafting off to heaven when they die—to forever look upon God’s face, while playing on a celestial harp. But is this really taught in the Bible? If not, then where did this commonly held belief come from?

Notice this frank admission: “The popular conception of heaven revolves around clouds, harps, and angels, with humanity marching through the Pearly Gates to live a life of bliss. This conception is far removed from the biblical witness” (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, “Heaven”).

Could it be one of the many fables which a very clever Devil—“the god of this age”—has foisted upon a deceived world (2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9)?

Does “Kingdom of Heaven” Mean a Kingdom in Heaven?

What did Jesus Christ mean when He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3)? Did He mean that the poor in spirit would inherit the Kingdom of God in heaven?

Part of the answer to this ques-

tion is found in Christ’s own words: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (v. 5). Jesus undoubtedly alluded to Psalm 37, which repeatedly mentions that the meek shall inherit the earth and dwell therein forever.

Think, for a moment! Did Jesus really mean to imply that, as their reward, the poor in spirit will go to heaven, while the meek will inherit the earth? Is it plausible to think Christ was promising His disciples a choice of two destinations—heaven or earth?

Of the four New Testament gospels, Matthew’s is the only one which uses the expression “kingdom of heaven.” In fact, he uses “kingdom of heaven” 32 times, and “kingdom of God” just five times (6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43)! However, a careful study of those five verses reveals that Kingdom of heaven and Kingdom of God are used synonymously. The indicated meaning is that the Kingdom of God is possessed in heaven—held in trust until such a time as it will be established on this earth. In the gospels according to Mark, Luke and John, on the other hand, there is only the expression “kingdom of God.” “Kingdom of heaven” is never once used!

No One Ascended to Heaven?

Has any human, other than Christ, ever gone to heaven—that is, to God’s throne?

God’s Word says, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man” (John 3:13).

Can we believe God? Some of the Jews of Christ’s day correctly understood that the prophets had not gone to heaven. “Then the Jews said to Him [Jesus]... ‘Abraham is dead, and the prophets’” (John 8:52). Jesus did not in any way say or imply that those Jews erred in their statement. Yet, Christ frequently corrected the Jews when they spoke in error (cf. Mark 12:18-27).

Speaking of King David, Peter said, “the patriarch David... is [right now] both dead and buried... For David did not ascend into the heavens” (Acts 2:29, 34)!

The Bible is clear in revealing that, of all flesh and blood humans, only Jesus has ascended to the heaven of God’s abode. He is now “seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1; cf. Eph. 4:8-10).

Much People in Heaven?

Let us now examine certain Scriptures which some mistakenly believe indicate that saints go to heaven when they die:

1) “And no man [Gk. *oudeis*, “none, nobody”] in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book” (Rev. 5:3 KJV). Nearly all modern translations render this verse correctly as follows: “And no one [meaning angels, cherubim or seraphim] in heaven...” (RSV, NIV, Moffatt, NRSV). The usual Greek word for man (*anthropos*) is not used in this verse!

2) “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people [Gk. *ochlos*, “crowd”] in heaven, saying, Alleluia” (Rev. 19:1 KJV). *The New Twentieth Century Bible* has “a great many people in heaven.”

Surely, this verse proves that people are in heaven, doesn’t it? Absolutely not! The NKJV, RSV, NIV, ASV and nearly all modern versions of the Bible correctly render *ochlos* by such English words as “crowd,” “throng” and “multitude.”

The Greek word “*ochlos* [simply means] a crowd, throng” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, p. 172). To use Revelation 19:1 as proof that “people” are in heaven is clearly a misinterpretation of God’s Word!

3) Another misunderstood text: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who... has begotten us again to a living hope... to an inheritance incorruptible... reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4). But notice that Peter did not say that after people die, they go to heaven to receive that which is now “reserved” for them. He only indicates that the reward is reserved there now—held in trust, as it were.

And Jesus told a rich young ruler, “Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Matt. 19:21). Further, He urged His disciples to “rejoice



because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20; cf. Heb. 12:23).

But, nowhere in all the Bible does God promise that His people will receive their inheritance at, or go to, God’s throne in heaven! He does, however, reveal that when we repent of our sins, accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and receive His Holy Spirit—then our names are written in heaven. When Jesus Christ returns to this earth at His Second Coming, He will bring the reward of the saints with Him (Rev. 22:12; Is. 40:10).

Where Did This Idea Come From?

If the Bible reveals that—except

for Jesus—no man has ever gone to heaven, and if there is no promise that the righteous will ever go to heaven—then where did this idea come from?

The real author of this belief is none other than Satan the Devil (Rev. 12:9)!

Long before God Almighty put mankind here, He first placed many of His angels on this earth—undoubtedly to “dress and keep it.” Jude says some of those angels later committed insurrection. “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain [“their first estate” KJV]... He has reserved in everlasting chains... [awaiting] the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).

The Apostle John wrote, “Behold, a great, fiery red dragon [appeared]... His tail drew a third of

Meaning of the “Three Heavens”?

It will come as a surprise to many to be told that the Bible actually speaks of *three* heavens. The Apostle Paul said, “I know a man in Christ who... was caught up to the *third heaven*” (2 Cor. 12:2).

What are these three heavens? According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Heaven” denotes: [1] the sky; [2] outer space; [3] the abode of God, angels, and other spiritual creatures” (vol. 2).

1) A *primary* meaning of “heaven,” as mentioned in the Bible, is the earth’s *gaseous atmosphere*—its *sky* or *firmament*. “Then God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters’” (Gen. 1:6). “And God called the firmament *Heaven*” (v. 8).

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens’” (v. 20). In the Bible, *heaven* is often spoken of as a place where birds fly (Gen. 7:23).

This heaven is also a place from which the dew falls (Gen. 27:28). Rainbows and clouds are located in that heaven (Gen. 9:13-14). And from that heaven comes rain (Gen. 8:2), as well as winds (Dan. 8:8).

2) A secondary meaning of “heaven” is *outer space*, the *starry expanse*—the entire *physical universe*, excluding the earth. We read about the “stars of heaven” (Gen. 22:17; Matt. 24:29).

3) A third meaning of “heaven,” as mentioned throughout God’s Word, is a place called “the LORD’s throne”—the “heaven of heavens” (1 Kings 8:27). Apparently, that particular *heaven* is located somewhere *beyond* man’s known universe. “The LORD’s throne is in heaven” (Ps. 11:4). That *heaven*—which Paul called “the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2)—is often contrasted with the earth. For example, Christ said, “Do not swear at all: neither by *heaven*, for it is God’s throne; nor by the *earth*, for it is His footstool” (Matt. 5:34-35).

the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth” (Rev. 12:3-4). “A third of the stars” (meaning angels, Rev. 1:20) were deceived into following the great dragon, Satan the Devil.

Luke says Jesus Himself had intimate knowledge of that ancient rebellion of the Devil and his angels, for Christ had seen “Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18)! When was Satan thrust out of heaven, and flung back to this earth?

Ezekiel tells us about a glorious anointed cherub who was once “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the Garden of God” (Ezek. 28:12-13). In the distant past, his office or function was to serve “on God’s holy mountain”—in heaven itself! “You were the anointed cherub who covers” (v. 14). God continues, “You were *perfect* in your ways from the day you were created, till *iniquity* was found in you” (v. 15).

What had perverted the mind of that powerful anointed cherub? “Your heart was lifted up because of your *beauty*” (v. 17). Being one of the two privileged cherubs whose outstretched wings covered the mercy seat of God in heaven—as represented by the golden cherubim of Exodus 25:20—that great angelic being became puffed up with self-importance and pride. He sinned against the Great God by leading one third of the angelic hosts in rebellion against their Creator.

“I Will Ascend into Heaven!”

The Prophet Isaiah gives us additional details concerning Satan’s ancient rebellion—the first insurrection against God ever to occur in the universe. God says, “How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer” (Is. 14:12)! Some time after Lucifer and one third of God’s angels had been placed on this beautiful earth, they began to plot against their own Creator.

“For you [Lucifer] have said in your heart: **‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne** [on which God had placed him] above the stars [angels] of God... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High” (vv. 13-14).

When the mighty archangel Lucifer and his angelic followers ascended “above the clouds” and zoomed up toward God’s throne in heaven, they were turned back by a mighty force of loyal angels who intercepted them, and hurled them right back to their God-assigned

abode on this earth (Jude 6).

“Then the seventy [disciples] returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’ And He said to them, **‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven....** Nevertheless... rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:17-18, 20)! The very first being who, *uninvited*, tried to “go to heaven”—was none other than the former Lucifer—Satan the Devil, the Adversary of God and man!

Clearly, nowhere in all the Bible does God ever promise that the righteous will go to heaven when they die! Rather, as we saw, Christ said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the EARTH”—not HEAVEN (Matt. 5:5)! Further, we read, “The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’s; but the earth He has given to the children of men” (Ps. 115:16).

Will Heaven Someday Come to This Earth?

God does not promise that the saved will go to His throne in heaven. Nonetheless, He *does* promise that both the Father and Son, and their heavenly court, will someday leave heaven, in order to establish their universe-ruling throne—their headquarters, their new “heaven”—right here on this renewed earth!

The Apostle John wrote, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.... Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, *coming down* [to the earth] *out of heaven* from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:1-2).

John then heard a voice saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and **God Himself will be with them** and be their God” (v. 3).

Will that beautiful city be situated

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FOOTSTEPS OF CHRIST

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way the *dangers* of continuing old habits; 2) realize plainly the benefits that can be achieved by adopting new behaviors; 3) and when we learn and *apply* the actions needed to replace our old behaviors (*Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, May-June 1993). This provides us with reasons for change and a path to follow.

Basic motivations are also important if lasting change is going to occur. While many people exercise to improve their health, appearance and skills, these are purely physical reasons. In fact, *many more* people know they *should* get more physical activity but *don’t!* However, when *religious* reasons are coupled with physical reasons, real change is more likely to occur, because this involves a person’s core belief systems—his fundamental values of good and evil, his sense of what is right and wrong.

Jesus knew this. He understood how the human mind works. It is no accident that He instructed His disciples to “follow in His footsteps” and to “walk as He walked.” Jesus knew the positive results that they would experience if they followed His physical example. The Apostle Paul mentions in his letter to the Corinthians that “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit... therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). It is a Christian’s responsibility to take care of the body he has been given by God.

In a letter to Timothy Paul further states that, while spiritual growth is most important, “bodily exercise profits [for] a little” (profits for a little time, is of some service—see various translations of 1 Timothy 4:8). This is exactly what modern science understands about the benefits of exercise—they do not last too long! To be optimal, beneficial physical activity must occur on a *regular* basis—once a month or once a year doesn’t work. This requires *discipline*.

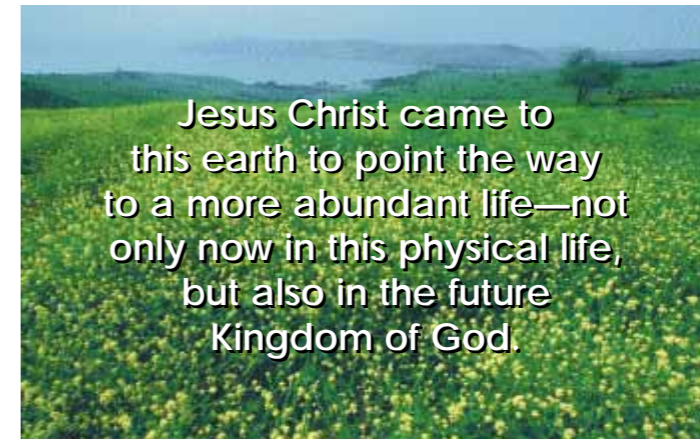
Again, Paul comments that anyone who desires to walk in the footsteps of Christ must discipline his mind and body if he wants to achieve the rewards He promised (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Heb. 12:11). Christianity is not a spectator sport! It is an active and challenging way of life that involves growing and changing, overcoming old attitudes and habits, and replacing them with new ones (Rev. 2:26; 3:12).

The *exciting news* about developing a more physically active lifestyle is that almost any amount of activity is better than none! If you cannot afford to start with 30 minutes

a day, then try *ten minutes three times a day*. Instead of a coffee break, take a walk—out the door, down the hall, down the stairs, outside and around the building, back up the stairs, and back into your office. You will feel refreshed, you will burn off calories and strengthen your heart, lungs, muscles and bones. Try this after lunch and especially after dinner. Do this with a friend, or your pet, or make it a family affair—a time to relax and talk over the day together. Let your children and grandchildren see and share your example. It will change your life—how you feel and how you

look! It will show your children the path to follow.

Jesus Christ came to this earth to *point the way* to a more abundant life—not only now in this physical life, but also in the future Kingdom of God (cf. John 10:10). While it may be surprising to many, Jesus knew that most people would be blind to the real spiritual content of His



message (Matt. 13:10-17) and would be confused and deceived by the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:3-4). However, this blindness and confusion need not apply to the practical power of His physical example. Modern science has clearly demonstrated—apart from Scripture—that regular exercise pays real dividends!

Jesus’ mission at His First Coming was to call and train a small core of disciples (John 17:6-19). By following His teachings and walking in His footsteps, they would more deeply develop an understanding of the practical applications of the fundamental principles He espoused. Eventually they would come to the point where they “trembled at God’s Word” (cf. Is. 66:2)—where they deeply understood the value and applications of the Scriptures. As they learned to live this new way of life, they would grow toward the perfection (spiritual maturity) that God desires eventually for all humankind (Gen. 17:1; Matt. 5:48).

The individuals who grow to understand the value of living God’s way of life will have the opportunity to share this life-saving knowledge with all humanity in the future. As teachers in the coming Kingdom of God, their approach will be to outline and explain the path to follow—“This is the way, *walk* in it” (Is. 30:20-21). They will actually show millions of human beings, who have been confused and deceived, how to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and how to have a more abundant life. Such individuals will be effective teachers because they will have learned to live that way themselves.

Are you preparing for that incredible opportunity? Are YOU walking in Christ’s footsteps?

EASTER OR PASSOVER?

(continued from page 20)

Bread—the week following the Passover—also have great meaning for Christians. During the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Israelites were to have put all leavening out of their homes (Deut. 16:3-4). Leavening is a biblical symbol for sin, and the removal of leavening foreshadowed the cleansing of Christians—spiritual Israel—from sin and also prefigured the ongoing repentance from the sin that takes place after an individual accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The Apostle Paul commanded the Corinthians, “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, **since you truly are unleavened**. For indeed Christ, *our Passover*, was sacrificed for us. **Therefore let us keep the feast**, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7-8).

In the Bible, we have clear instructions from the Apostle Paul and Jesus Christ concerning the *time, manner* and *meaning* of the observance of the Christian Passover. While it is clear that this was the teaching and practice of Paul and the Corinthian Church, it is also interesting to note that this doctrine continued into the second, third and fourth centuries A.D. in the churches in Asia Minor, which were raised up by Paul and frequented by the Apostle John in his old age.

The Roman church, which advocated the observance of Easter, labeled those who continued the practice of observing a Christian Passover on Nisan 14 as “Quartodecimans”—from the Latin for “four and ten.” The eastern or Asiatic churches, however, insisted on continuing in the faith delivered to them by the apostles.


Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John and Bishop of Smyrna, debated the issue with Pope Anicetus

(c. 155 A.D.) and asserted that he had been personally taught the proper observance by the Apostle John.

Later, “an attempt by Pope Victor I (189-198 A.D.) to impose Roman usage [Easter] proved unsuccessful in the face of a determined opposition led by Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus [a church founded by the Apostle Paul].... All accepted the Roman practice except the Asiatic bishops. When Victor attempted coercion by excommunication, St. Irenaeus of Lyons intervened to restore peace (Eusebius, *History Ecclesiastical*, 5. 23-25). During the 3rd century Quartodecimanism waned; it persisted in some Asiatic communities down to the 5th century” (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, vol. 5, p. 8; vol. 12, p. 13).

The fact that this practice dropped out of sight is not surprising. The Christians who continued Quartodecimanism were excommunicated and made anathema by the Roman church in the fourth century, and many suffered terrible persecution. It is clear that the Asiatic churches considered the keeping of the Passover on Nisan 14 to be an extremely important doctrine!

Actually, the practice of observing the Christian Passover did not die out, but continues today as a faithful observance by the Global Church of God and other churches every spring on the evening beginning Nisan 14.

The Bible teaches that it is important for us to worship God as He commands—and to commemorate Christ as He taught. We should not borrow religious practices from pagan cultures! This spring, most of Christendom will keep Easter, but some Christians, who faithfully follow Jesus’ instructions and the examples of the Apostles Paul and John, will joyfully continue the observance of the Christian Passover. What about you? 

PARADISE?

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on earth, or in heaven?

The new Jerusalem is the “city” which Abraham looked forward to inhabiting (Heb. 11:16). John described that universe-ruling city as a “great city, the holy Jerusalem, *descending* out of heaven from God [to this earth!]” (Rev. 21:10).

But before that great city is established on earth, God will first purify the present heavens and the earth. He will burn up everything that defiles, degrades or harms!

Peter says God will prepare this earth to receive the new Jerusalem—*before* it descends from heaven. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which *the heavens will pass away* with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

At that time, “the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat” (v. 12). Peter continues, “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for *new heavens* and a *new earth* in which righteousness dwells” (v. 13)!

Clearly, God’s immutable Word promises, “The meek... shall inherit the [new] earth” (Matt. 5:5), but God will first cleanse this old sin-stained earth, purifying it by an all-consuming fire. It is that new earth that God promises as the everlasting inheritance of His people.

At that time, only those who have yielded to God—having overcome Satan, his evil world and their own weak, sinful human nature—will have been given God’s free gift of immortality (Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:53-54)! As His very own “sons and daughters” (2 Cor. 6:18), they shall live joyfully, during the endless eons, serving their Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, throughout all eternity (Rev. 21:7)!

Someday heaven will be on this earth! 