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EDITORIAL

Will Christ Return Soon?

On Sunday, August 31, most of us learned the tragic news of the death of Princess Diana. Later that same week, word came of another gruesome terrorist attack in Jerusalem. Six people were reportedly killed and almost 200 were injured. As a result, the Arab-Israeli "peace process" was put on hold yet again. There seems to be no shortage of bad news on a worldwide scale!

And there's more. The September 4 issue of *The San Diego Union-Tribune* reports on a new strain of plague that is resistant to all current antibiotics. And remember that the plague killed 25% of all Europeans in the 1300s!

What does it all mean? Is there some *common denominator* to the barrage of tragic headlines that seems to assault us on a weekly basis? Could it be that prophetic events are *speeding up*? Is the return of the *true* Jesus Christ of the Bible going to occur in *this generation*?

Many religious leaders don't think so. In fact, more and more in the religious community have decided that the countless Bible prophecies predicting Christ's Second Coming are merely "metaphors." That they don't *really* mean what they say. Even many evangelical Protestants have *no idea* of the general time frame of Christ's return. Part of this cynicism is because events have proven that so many of those who taught and preached about prophecy in the past were *wrong*!

Why? One very important reason is found in the Word of God: "A good understanding have all those who *do* His commandments" (Ps. 111:10). So if you obey the Ten Commandments like Jesus told the young man who questioned Him (cf. Matt. 19:17), then you will be given greater understanding of spiritual matters—including *prophecy*! Now, of course, *no* human being at this time knows the full prophetic picture in complete detail. Nevertheless, the seemingly *total ignorance* of basic, foundational principles of prophecy has a reason. It is because most who preach about the meaning of biblical prophecy don't follow the *other* teachings of the Bible—such as the Ten Commandments and the whole *way of life* God revealed to mankind!

The Apostle John adds, "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). Without heartfelt *obedience* to the Ten Commandments as a way of life,

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Roderick C. Meredith
Editor in Chief

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All scriptural references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

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Goodbye England's Rose

by Gary Foster

Goodbye England's rose;
May you ever grow in our hearts.
You were the grace that placed itself
Where lives were torn apart.

And it seems to me you lived your life
Like a candle in the wind:
Never fading with the sunset
When the rain set in.
And your footsteps will always fall here,
Along England's greenest hills;
Your candle's burned out long before
Your legend ever will.

Excerpted from *Candle in the Wind*
performed by Elton John
lyrics by Bernie Taupin

Tragedy struck in the early morning hours of August 31 when the Mercedes carrying Lady Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales, spun out of control on a Paris highway, killing her and two of the other three occupants. As the news spread, it was universally received with disbelief, shock, anguish, pain and a most profound sense of grief. More than just her countrymen, it was the *whole world* that mourned the loss of this “fairy-tale princess.” For “England’s Rose” was far more than that alone. She was one of those genuine and exceedingly rare people who are able to transcend cultural barriers and selflessly give of themselves in such a way that they really make a difference in the lives of others.

Princess Diana was not satisfied with the all-too-common approach of many public figures who often manipulate token acts of charity into mere photo-op sessions. She wanted to truly *impact* those suffering from any number of societal ills—AIDS patients, victims of abandoned land mines, lepers and all who were afflicted by severe illnesses. Diana was no stranger to those who suffered and to those who were dying.

And her work on behalf of these causes and these people seems to have been genuinely altruistic. According to her unofficial biographer, Andrew Morton, in his book *Diana: Her True Story*, she wanted “to gain a closer insight into the daily rhythm of... hospitals, hospices and addiction centres **without the presence of cameras and dignitaries**” (1992, p. 234).

Nor is a commitment to charitable deeds the only character trait of Diana that we should admire. By all accounts, she was a devoted mother to her two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry. And in an unprecedented manner she reached out to her people and to the whole world, putting a warm and personal face on an all-too-often cold and *impersonal* British royalty.

Now of course, Diana had her problems and faults like anyone else. Yet *unlike* most of us, the things that

went wrong in her life were splashed across tabloid headlines of the so-called “yellow press” from one side of the Atlantic to the other. You can imagine the pressure of living in this kind of “fishbowl.” More than just being famous, she was to many the object of *obsession*. It started with her wedding to Prince Charles, which was viewed by three-quarters of a *billion* people (Morton, p. 94). And the intense interest seemingly never died down. In fact, anything and everything about Lady Di was apparently “fair game” for journalists. According to Morton, “*every aspect of her life attracted comment*” (p. 100).

Many believe Diana to have been a true, modern-day heroine. The worldwide grief and mourning for days following her death is a poignant tribute to the esteem in which she was held. But it goes further than that. The princess had been made into a figure *larger than life*. Tens of millions of readers hung on every printed word about Diana, which in turn fueled more and more “news” items to appear in the tabloid press—which in turn sparked *even greater* public obsession. A powerful negative synergism developed—an out-of-control snowball tumbling down a steep hill, growing larger and rolling faster until it finally crashes at the foot of the grade.

And make no mistake, the intense, obsessive interest in all that she said and did had a very *negative* influence on Princess Diana. She is reported to have been the most photographed woman on the face of the earth—which meant that she constantly had to evade the media, including the ever-present and far-too-bold *paparazzi*, to have any

privacy whatsoever. She once confided her feelings of isolation to Princess Grace of Monaco (Morton, p. 87).

And that’s the paradox. One would think that a larger-than-life cultural icon would have no shortage of friends and companionship. But that wasn’t true for Diana. Her worldwide fame was a contributing factor to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Unfortunately, there is an even darker side to such overwhelming fame. There’s no doubt that Princess Diana was a beloved public figure. But it seems to be part of the human condition that some must *tear down* society’s heroes—tarnish that which shines most brightly. And, of course, “the bigger they are, the harder they fall.”

So we ask some hard questions. What went wrong? Who’s to blame?

Left: Princess Diana's funeral procession en route to Westminster Abbey in London on September 6—AFP.
Right: Diana raised a resisting hand toward a camera lens as she exited Brompton Hospital in London. The *paparazzi* followed her everywhere—Archive.

Not just for her senseless death, but also for the continual harassment she suffered in life? The answers may be surprising. But before we explore those answers, let’s take a look at some other public figures who have been turned into something bigger than who and what they really were.

Goodbye Norma Jean

Born Norma Jean Baker in 1926, we know her better as Marilyn

Monroe. This actress was known as much for her shapely figure as for the movies she made. According to the World Wide Web home page of Marilyn Monroe’s estate, she was dazzling, seductive and extraordinary: “Marilyn Monroe was the All-American sex goddess.” Hardly a role model, you might say.

But while there would seem to be little common ground between this film star and Lady Diana Spencer, they did in fact share a common bond. Not in what they did with their lives, but in the pressures that were brought to bear against them. For Marilyn Monroe, too, became an icon—her life magnified out of all reasonable proportions.

Now unlike Princess Di, Marilyn Monroe *sought out* the spotlight. She had always dreamed of being a movie star. And when that dream became a reality, she *enjoyed* the limelight and media attention. But eventually, the kind of artificial existence that “superstardom” really is began to take its toll. Marilyn once said, “Hollywood is a place where they’ll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss and fifty cents for your soul” (Biography, Internet home page). As her fame grew, so did her frustrations. Her biography tells us that, “although always composed and seemingly in control, Marilyn often feared the public.” Why? Because “everybody is always tugging at you. They’d all like a sort of chunk out of you.”

Of course, superstar status was not the only problem in Marilyn’s life. She had several failed marriages and relationships. It is widely known that she had become increasingly dependent on mood-altering prescription medications. But at least part of the reason for this must have been the loss of control of her own life, as her “living-legend” status took on a life of its own.

Lady Diana Spencer and Marilyn Monroe were two women who lived worlds apart. And yet, as Princess Di told some of her friends, “Everyone said that I was the Marilyn Monroe of the 1980s” (Morton, p. 220). Perhaps, then, it’s no coincidence that singer Elton John, close personal friend to Diana, chose as the music he performed at her funeral service a song he had recorded long ago. These new lyrics, written in honor of the princess, were published in many publications, including the September 7 issue of *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. A portion of these lyrics appear at the beginning of this article. But the original version of *Candle in the Wind* described the life of Marilyn Monroe:

*Loneliness was tough,
The toughest role you ever played.
Hollywood created a superstar
And pain was the price you paid.
Even when you died
The press still hounded you...*

And so it was. Princess Diana and Marilyn Monroe. Two very different women, but both hounded relentlessly by the media and scrutinized under a microscope by the public. And they each died very young.

Long Live the King!

Marilyn Monroe’s story is not new. Neither is Princess Diana’s. In fact, there is a long list of prominent people—from sports, entertainment, government, etc.—whose fame has grown so much that they’ve almost been *deified*. To at least some

degree, this has been true of James Dean, John Lennon and, of course, the King—Elvis Presley.

Elvis presented a new style of music to a new generation. As his music grew in popularity, so did the man himself. Too much so, in fact. According to biographer Peter Whitmer, “the kids just went wild at *anything* he did. Elvis could make a funny face and they would scream, go crazy”! (*The Inner Elvis*, 1996, p. 218). Whitmer goes on to describe the *marketing* of Elvis: “Sales of Presley trinkets [allowed] his likeness to be owned by millions. **Promoted on a gargantuan scale... he was everywhere, unavoidable**” (p. 224).

Once again, we see the same forces at work. Someone is thrust into the public eye—the reason is unimportant. He or she is adored by the masses, creating an appetite for information. The media, whose job it is to feed this appetite, provides a seemingly endless supply of “news.” And since there isn’t really that much legitimate news to report, the coverage becomes ludicrous, eventually encompassing almost every aspect of a person’s past and present activities. Of course, the stories are all the more interesting if they can deliver a little “dirt.”

Elvis was no stranger to this darker side of journalism. He thought that the media was “warping the truth” about him. He is reported to have said, “No matter what I do, the press is going to take it and twist it” (Whitmer, p. 218).

Living Legends—Or More?

Earlier in this article, we examined the tragic circumstances of Princess Diana’s death and the sad

reality that she had been denied privacy in virtually every aspect of her life. We asked how this could have happened. We asked who was at fault. Now there’s no doubt that substantial blame rests on the shoulders of those factions of the media that act irresponsibly—willing to ferret out any kind of information (the juicier the better!) in the name of increased readership. But let’s realize that news isn’t published in a vacuum. There would be no irresponsible headlines if there weren’t consumers picking up the tabloids at the grocery check-out line. So *who’s* to blame? We’re *all* to blame—that is, to the extent we purchase these shameful stories.

And for far too many, this isn’t merely some harmless “bad habit.” Obsessive interest in every detail of the life of some celebrity is not only unhealthy—it is, in fact, a sin! In the book of Matthew, Jesus Christ commands, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (22:37). This is a magnification of the first of the Ten Commandments: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:2-3).

This great commandment does not only refer to formal religious worship of primitive pagan gods. It also refers to many activities more familiar to modern-day life. We break God’s first commandment when we place anything—or *anyone*—before God in importance in our lives. If we have an undue focus on money, our jobs or our physical possessions—such that it interferes with the worship and reverence of God—then we have sinned. And some do this very thing with respect to celebrated public figures. (For more information on this and all of God’s commandments, please write for our free booklet, *The Ten Commandments*.)

Now it’s fine, even profitable, to recognize good qualities in others, to use them as role models for yourself or your children, or even to consider them as heroes. But some have clearly stepped over the line. **Instead of holding someone in esteem as a living legend, they have created an idol!**

I can still remember the death of Elvis Presley in 1977. Related stories dominated newscasts for days. One image that has stayed with me through all this time was an interview of a woman who lived in one of the northern states—perhaps Minnesota or Michigan. She was preparing to board a bus for Tennessee so that she could be where Elvis was. The news reporter asked her how she felt. This 50-some-year-old woman answered that **the death of Elvis was the worst thing that had ever happened to her!** Now make no mistake. She wasn’t Elvis Presley’s mother, aunt, wife, nor even his next-

Left: Marilyn Monroe entertaining U.S. troops during the Korean War in February 1954—*Bettman-UPI*. **Right:** Thousands of adoring Elvis fans crowd around an image of the late singer unveiled during his 60th birthday celebration at Graceland in Memphis on January 8—*Reuters*.

door neighbor. In fact, she had never even *met* him—she was simply a fan.

This statement was not *rational*. It was almost as if she were responding on a *religious* level—a worshipful devotee of the “Elvis-god”! And if she were, she was by no means alone. To this day, hundreds of thousands of people flock to Graceland,

Elvis’s former mansion, each year. For many, it’s just another tourist attraction—nothing wrong with that. But for others, it’s nothing less than a *pilgrimage* to the *shrine* of a dead singer and actor whom they had made into an idol. (Of course, many of these same people won’t even acknowledge that he *is* dead!)

In an essay titled “Why Elvis Matters,” Jon Katz tells us of a woman who “*prayed to an Elvis shrine* on her tiny fireplace mantle in Oklahoma City” (World Wide Web, www.wired.com, 1997). We have seen how such behavior violates God’s law. In a misguided attempt to honor a man or woman, one can *dishonor* the Living God.

Marilyn and Elvis sought out fame and publicity. But they got more than they bargained for. Much of the public came to, in a sense, *worship* these cultural icons. And it was too much for them both. It has long been thought that “absolute power corrupts absolutely.” And it seems to be that absolute fame and hero worship corrupts just as surely.

How different things might have been if a simple Bible principle—the Golden Rule—had been followed: “Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). Now it becomes easy. If we wouldn’t want someone taking snapshots of us wherever we go, especially in what should be complete privacy, then we shouldn’t take photos that invade the privacy of others. If we wouldn’t want someone to buy a

newspaper that printed all of *our* secret sins and weaknesses, then we shouldn’t buy one that does this very thing to our fellow human beings.

At the same time that Marilyn and Elvis craved the attention of the spotlight, they came to *fear* the very public that adored them. They found themselves isolated from real

people, surrounded by an elite group of insiders and increasingly seeking the oblivion of drug-induced numbness. To feed the voracious appetite of a hero-worshipping audience, the media propped them up—and eventually knocked them down.

Now the case of Princess Di is different. She did *not* seek the limelight—it sought her. And when it became obvious that she couldn’t escape the media *no matter what*, she used the situation to help others. If the cameras would always follow her, then she would lead them to see what *she* wanted the world to focus on—the plight of the homeless, the suffering of AIDS patients, the menace of land mines and drug addiction. Even if her own life could find little peace, she was determined to do what she could to help others. It is doubly tragic that the ubiquitous *paparazzi*, who caused her so much pain in life by stealing her privacy, should also have been a contributing factor in the collision that took her life.

It is too early to determine whether the death of Diana will bring about the same cult phenomenon as occurred when Elvis Presley died. I certainly hope not. Let us instead remember her grace, dignity and charity with fondness. Let us look to her example of giving to others in need and try to give of ourselves as well. But let us never *worship* or *deify* this gracious lady. For she was, in the most important sense, just another human being made in God’s image.

Consider what Diana’s brother, Earl Spencer, said at her funeral: “There is a temptation to rush to *canonize* your memory. There is no need to do so. You stand tall enough as a human being of unique qualities not to need to be seen as a saint. Indeed, to sanctify your memory would be to miss out on the very core of your being” (*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 7, 1997).

Goodbye, England’s Rose... 

THE THRONES OF ENGLAND

by Raymond F. McNair

A 4000-YEAR SAGA

With the growing unpopularity of Britain's Royal Family, is the greatest and most enduring dynasty the world has ever seen destined to pass away? To know what lies ahead for the British monarchy, we must take a brief glance at how it came to be in the first place—and why.



The recent shocking death of Princess Diana has focused renewed attention on the Royal Family of Great Britain. Some of the latest discussions in the United Kingdom concern taxpayer money used for the monarchy, the level of public access to royal palaces and communication between the Royal Family and the British people.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, while in favor of making the monarchy pay for itself, doesn't want to go as far with reform as many in his party, who would like to see Great Britain become a republic. But the British *Telegraph* cited another source as saying that "the logic of New Labour—especially the abolition of hereditary peers—could lead even Blair supporters to call for the scrapping of the monarchy" (Sept. 14, 1997).

Just a few years ago, one of the most respected British magazines in the world, *The Economist*, contended that "the monarchy's time has passed... the only powerful argument against abolition is that it is not worth the trouble" (Oct. 22, 1994, p. 15). Yet most in the United Kingdom still want a king or queen. Many reflect with fondness on past glory, such as when Queen

Prince William, Prince Harry and Prince Charles look on as Diana's coffin passes by—*Reuters*.

Victoria reigned over the largest empire in the history of the world, encompassing a quarter of the earth's land and a third of its population.

But with many others calling for its end, is the monarchy in danger of disappearing? Just what *does* the future hold? To discover the answer, we must look to the past. For incredible though it may seem, the future of the British monarchy is recorded in the pages of the Bible.

An Everlasting Dynasty

Our story begins around 1900 B.C. with the biblical patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God promised national greatness for their descendants and also that a line of kings would spring from them, culminating in the Messiah—Jesus Christ—who would bring salvation for the whole world (cf. Gen. 17:6, 16; 22:16-18; 26:3-5; 28:13-14; 35:11).

Jacob, renamed Israel, had twelve sons—each the father of one of the Twelve Tribes. Through his son

Joseph would continue the birthright promise of national greatness (Gen. 48; 49:22-26; 1 Chron. 5:1-2). But the promise of a kingly line leading to the Messiah went to his son Judah, father of the Jews: "Judah is a lion's whelp.... The scepter [ruler's staff] shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [a reference to the Messiah] comes" (Gen. 49:9-10).

Around 1700 B.C., twin sons were born to Judah. This was a strange occurrence, for during the delivery a hand of one of the twins came out first, around which the midwife tied a scarlet thread to identify the firstborn (38:27-28). But this baby then pulled his hand back in and his brother came out first. The midwife exclaimed, "How did you break through? This breach be upon you!" (v. 29). So he was named Perez, meaning "breach." Then the baby with the scarlet thread on his hand was born—and he was named Zerah (v. 30). What an odd event to record in the Bible if it were to have no future significance.

Now Judah's line did not reign over Israel for quite some time. For the Eternal Himself was Israel's first King. And when God eventually gave the nation a human king, Saul, he was of the tribe of *Benjamin*. Sadly, God rejected Saul because of disobedience and then chose another to sit on the "throne of the LORD" (cf. 2 Sam. 3:9-10; 1 Chron. 29:23). Thus, around 1010 B.C., God did at last raise up a man from the tribe of Judah, of the preeminent line of Perez, to be king—David.

God told David, a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22), that he would be the first of a perpetual dynasty, continuing through his son Solomon. **David's house, throne and kingdom would go on forever** (2 Sam. 7:13-16; 23:1, 5; 1 Chron. 28:4-5)—in fact, in "all generations" (Ps. 89:3-4). In other words, David would have a descendant from Solomon's line sitting on a continuing throne in every generation! God swore that this was an unbreakable promise of an unbreakable dynasty—a dynasty preeminent above all others! (vv. 27-37).

But what happened to that dynasty? When the nation split into two kingdoms around 930 B.C., the Southern Kingdom of Judah continued under the throne of David, while the northern Ten Tribes of Israel went through a number of *different* dynasties (cf. 1 Kings

12:16-20). Because of continual idolatry, God finally allowed the Northern Kingdom to be taken into captivity by the Assyrian Empire around 734 to 721 B.C. (2 Kings 15, 17). Subsequently, as the centuries passed, the Ten Tribes seemingly became "lost."

Despite this example, the Jews also disobeyed God (Jer. 3:10-11), so He allowed *their* kingdom to be deported in successive waves (c. 604-586 B.C.)—this time by Babylonian forces under Nebuchadnezzar II. The Davidic line had continued all the way to this point, with Zedekiah then reigning over Judah. But the Babylonian forces took the Jewish king to Nebuchadnezzar, who—after killing Zedekiah's sons in front of him as well as "all the nobles of Judah" to make sure there was no heir to the throne—put out Zedekiah's eyes and threw him in a dungeon in Babylon, where he eventually died (39:1-7; 52:1-11). But what about the promise to David of a *continuing* throne?

Some will point to the fact that there was a former king of the Solomonic line still *alive* in the dungeons of Babylon—Jeconiah (2 Kings 25:27-30). But God had earlier decreed that no descendant of this man would ever sit on the throne of David, ruling over Judah (Jer. 22:24, 30).

Others argue that Jesus Christ took over the throne when He came in the flesh. And indeed He is prophesied to inherit David's throne forever (Luke 1:31-33; Is. 9:6-7). That throne is His by right. For Christ is both "the Root and the Offspring of David" (Rev. 22:16). That is, He was the ancestor of David, being the Eternal God who created Adam—the father of all mankind—as well as David's actual descendant through Mary (Luke 3:30-33). He was even legally adopted by Joseph into Solomon's line (Matt. 1:1-16). Moreover, the preincarnate Jesus was Israel's first King and the throne ultimately remained His to take back. Yet, even if He *had* assumed the Davidic throne at His First Coming, it still doesn't explain why there wasn't a reigning king of David's line for more than 500 years between Zedekiah and Jesus. Wasn't David's throne to be occupied in "all generations"? If it hadn't been occupied for centuries, then Christ would have been taking over a throne that no longer really existed.

The truth of the matter is that Jesus did *not* sit on David's throne when He came in the flesh—*nor has He*

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EDITORIAL

Will Christ Return Soon?

On Sunday, August 31, most of us learned the tragic news of the death of Princess Diana. Later that same week, word came of another gruesome terrorist attack in Jerusalem. Six people were reportedly killed and almost 200 were injured. As a result, the Arab-Israeli "peace process" was put on hold yet again. There seems to be no shortage of bad news on a worldwide scale!

And there's more. The September 4 issue of *The San Diego Union-Tribune* reports on a new strain of plague that is resistant to all current antibiotics. And remember that the plague killed 25% of all Europeans in the 1300s!

What does it all mean? Is there some *common denominator* to the barrage of tragic headlines that seems to assault us on a weekly basis? Could it be that prophetic events are *speeding up*? Is the return of the *true* Jesus Christ of the Bible going to occur in *this generation*?

Many religious leaders don't think so. In fact, more and more in the religious community have decided that the countless Bible prophecies predicting Christ's Second Coming are merely "metaphors." That they don't *really* mean what they say. Even many evangelical Protestants have *no idea* of the general time frame of Christ's return. Part of this cynicism is because events have proven that so many of those who taught and preached about prophecy in the past were *wrong*!

Why? One very important reason is found in the Word of God: "A good understanding have all those who *do* His commandments" (Ps. 111:10). So if you obey the Ten Commandments like Jesus told the young man who questioned Him (cf. Matt. 19:17), then you will be given greater understanding of spiritual matters—including *prophecy*! Now, of course, *no* human being at this time knows the full prophetic picture in complete detail. Nevertheless, the seemingly *total ignorance* of basic, foundational principles of prophecy has a reason. It is because most who preach about the meaning of biblical prophecy don't follow the *other* teachings of the Bible—such as the Ten Commandments and the whole *way of life* God revealed to mankind!

The Apostle John adds, "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). Without heartfelt *obedience* to the Ten Commandments as a way of life,

(continued on page 30)



Roderick C. Meredith
Editor in Chief

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Goodbye England's Rose

by Gary Foster

Goodbye England's rose;
May you ever grow in our hearts.
You were the grace that placed itself
Where lives were torn apart.

And it seems to me you lived your life
Like a candle in the wind:
Never fading with the sunset
When the rain set in.
And your footsteps will always fall here,
Along England's greenest hills;
Your candle's burned out long before
Your legend ever will.

Excerpted from *Candle in the Wind*
performed by Elton John
lyrics by Bernie Taupin

Tagedy struck in the early morning hours of August 31 when the Mercedes carrying Lady Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales, spun out of control on a Paris highway, killing her and two of the other three occupants. As the news spread, it was universally received with disbelief, shock, anguish, pain and a most profound sense of grief. More than just her countrymen, it was the *whole world* that mourned the loss of this “fairy-tale princess.” For “England’s Rose” was far more than that alone. She was one of those genuine and exceedingly rare people who are able to transcend cultural barriers and selflessly give of themselves in such a way that they really make a difference in the lives of others.

Princess Diana was not satisfied with the all-too-common approach of many public figures who often manipulate token acts of charity into mere photo-op sessions. She wanted to truly *impact* those suffering from any number of societal ills—AIDS patients, victims of abandoned land mines, lepers and all who were afflicted by severe illnesses. Diana was no stranger to those who suffered and to those who were dying.

And her work on behalf of these causes and these people seems to have been genuinely altruistic. According to her unofficial biographer, Andrew Morton, in his book *Diana: Her True Story*, she wanted “to gain a closer insight into the daily rhythm of... hospitals, hospices and addiction centres **without the presence of cameras and dignitaries**” (1992, p. 234).

Nor is a commitment to charitable deeds the only character trait of Diana that we should admire. By all accounts, she was a devoted mother to her two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry. And in an unprecedented manner she reached out to her people and to the whole world, putting a warm and personal face on an all-too-often cold and *impersonal* British royalty.

Now of course, Diana had her problems and faults like anyone else. Yet *unlike* most of us, the things that

went wrong in her life were splashed across tabloid headlines of the so-called “yellow press” from one side of the Atlantic to the other. You can imagine the pressure of living in this kind of “fishbowl.” More than just being famous, she was to many the object of *obsession*. It started with her wedding to Prince Charles, which was viewed by three-quarters of a *billion* people (Morton, p. 94). And the intense interest seemingly never died down. In fact, anything and everything about Lady Di was apparently “fair game” for journalists. According to Morton, “*every aspect of her life attracted comment*” (p. 100).

Many believe Diana to have been a true, modern-day heroine. The worldwide grief and mourning for days following her death is a poignant tribute to the esteem in which she was held. But it goes further than that. The princess had been made into a figure *larger than life*. Tens of millions of readers hung on every printed word about Diana, which in turn fueled more and more “news” items to appear in the tabloid press—which in turn sparked *even greater* public obsession. A powerful negative synergism developed—an out-of-control snowball tumbling down a steep hill, growing larger and rolling faster until it finally crashes at the foot of the grade.

And make no mistake, the intense, obsessive interest in all that she said and did had a very *negative* influence on Princess Diana. She is reported to have been the most photographed woman on the face of the earth—which meant that she constantly had to evade the media, including the ever-present and far-too-bold *paparazzi*, to have any

privacy whatsoever. She once confided her feelings of isolation to Princess Grace of Monaco (Morton, p. 87).

And that’s the paradox. One would think that a larger-than-life cultural icon would have no shortage of friends and companionship. But that wasn’t true for Diana. Her worldwide fame was a contributing factor to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Unfortunately, there is an even darker side to such overwhelming fame. There’s no doubt that Princess Diana was a beloved public figure. But it seems to be part of the human condition that some must *tear down* society’s heroes—tarnish that which shines most brightly. And, of course, “the bigger they are, the harder they fall.”

So we ask some hard questions. What went wrong? Who’s to blame?

Left: Princess Diana's funeral procession en route to Westminster Abbey in London on September 6—AFP. **Right:** Diana raised a resisting hand toward a camera lens as she exited Brompton Hospital in London. The *paparazzi* followed her everywhere—Archive.

Not just for her senseless death, but also for the continual harassment she suffered in life? The answers may be surprising. But before we explore those answers, let’s take a look at some other public figures who have been turned into something bigger than who and what they really were.

Goodbye Norma Jean

Born Norma Jean Baker in 1926, we know her better as Marilyn

Monroe. This actress was known as much for her shapely figure as for the movies she made. According to the World Wide Web home page of Marilyn Monroe’s estate, she was dazzling, seductive and extraordinary: “Marilyn Monroe was the All-American sex goddess.” Hardly a role model, you might say.

But while there would seem to be little common ground between this film star and Lady Diana Spencer, they did in fact share a common bond. Not in what they did with their lives, but in the pressures that were brought to bear against them. For Marilyn Monroe, too, became an icon—her life magnified out of all reasonable proportions.

Now unlike Princess Di, Marilyn Monroe *sought out* the spotlight. She had always dreamed of being a movie star. And when that dream became a reality, she *enjoyed* the limelight and media attention. But eventually, the kind of artificial existence that “superstardom” really is began to take its toll. Marilyn once said, “Hollywood is a place where they’ll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss and fifty cents for your soul” (Biography, Internet home page). As her fame grew, so did her frustrations. Her biography tells us that, “although always composed and seemingly in control, Marilyn often feared the public.” Why? Because “everybody is always tugging at you. They’d all like a sort of chunk out of you.”

Of course, superstar status was not the only problem in Marilyn’s life. She had several failed marriages and relationships. It is widely known that she had become increasingly dependent on mood-altering prescription medications. But at least part of the reason for this must have been the loss of control of her own life, as her “living-legend” status took on a life of its own.

Lady Diana Spencer and Marilyn Monroe were two women who lived worlds apart. And yet, as Princess Di told some of her friends, “Everyone said that I was the Marilyn Monroe of the 1980s” (Morton, p. 220). Perhaps, then, it’s no coincidence that singer Elton John, close personal friend to Diana, chose as the music he performed at her funeral service a song he had recorded long ago. These new lyrics, written in honor of the princess, were published in many publications, including the September 7 issue of *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. A portion of these lyrics appear at the beginning of this article. But the original version of *Candle in the Wind* described the life of Marilyn Monroe:

*Loneliness was tough,
The toughest role you ever played.
Hollywood created a superstar
And pain was the price you paid.
Even when you died
The press still hounded you...*

And so it was. Princess Diana and Marilyn Monroe. Two very different women, but both hounded relentlessly by the media and scrutinized under a microscope by the public. And they each died very young.

Long Live the King!

Marilyn Monroe’s story is not new. Neither is Princess Diana’s. In fact, there is a long list of prominent people—from sports, entertainment, government, etc.—whose fame has grown so much that they’ve almost been *deified*. To at least some

degree, this has been true of James Dean, John Lennon and, of course, the King—Elvis Presley.

Elvis presented a new style of music to a new generation. As his music grew in popularity, so did the man himself. Too much so, in fact. According to biographer Peter Whitmer, “the kids just went wild at *anything* he did. Elvis could make a funny face and they would scream, go crazy”! (*The Inner Elvis*, 1996, p. 218). Whitmer goes on to describe the *marketing* of Elvis: “Sales of Presley trinkets [allowed] his likeness to be owned by millions. **Promoted on a gargantuan scale... he was everywhere, unavoidable**” (p. 224).

Once again, we see the same forces at work. Someone is thrust into the public eye—the reason is unimportant. He or she is adored by the masses, creating an appetite for information. The media, whose job it is to feed this appetite, provides a seemingly endless supply of “news.” And since there isn’t really that much legitimate news to report, the coverage becomes ludicrous, eventually encompassing almost every aspect of a person’s past and present activities. Of course, the stories are all the more interesting if they can deliver a little “dirt.”

Elvis was no stranger to this darker side of journalism. He thought that the media was “warping the truth” about him. He is reported to have said, “No matter what I do, the press is going to take it and twist it” (Whitmer, p. 218).

Living Legends—Or More?

Earlier in this article, we examined the tragic circumstances of Princess Diana’s death and the sad

reality that she had been denied privacy in virtually every aspect of her life. We asked how this could have happened. We asked who was at fault. Now there’s no doubt that substantial blame rests on the shoulders of those factions of the media that act irresponsibly—willing to ferret out any kind of information (the juicier the better!) in the name of increased readership. But let’s realize that news isn’t published in a vacuum. There would be no irresponsible headlines if there weren’t consumers picking up the tabloids at the grocery check-out line. So *who’s* to blame? We’re *all* to blame—that is, to the extent we purchase these shameful stories.

And for far too many, this isn’t merely some harmless “bad habit.” Obsessive interest in every detail of the life of some celebrity is not only unhealthy—it is, in fact, a sin! In the book of Matthew, Jesus Christ commands, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (22:37). This is a magnification of the first of the Ten Commandments: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:2-3).

This great commandment does not only refer to formal religious worship of primitive pagan gods. It also refers to many activities more familiar to modern-day life. We break God’s first commandment when we place anything—or *anyone*—before God in importance in our lives. If we have an undue focus on money, our jobs or our physical possessions—such that it interferes with the worship and reverence of God—then we have sinned. And some do this very thing with respect to celebrated public figures. (For more information on this and all of God’s commandments, please write for our free booklet, *The Ten Commandments*.)

Now it’s fine, even profitable, to recognize good qualities in others, to use them as role models for yourself or your children, or even to consider them as heroes. But some have clearly stepped over the line. **Instead of holding someone in esteem as a living legend, they have created an idol!**

I can still remember the death of Elvis Presley in 1977. Related stories dominated newscasts for days. One image that has stayed with me through all this time was an interview of a woman who lived in one of the northern states—perhaps Minnesota or Michigan. She was preparing to board a bus for Tennessee so that she could be where Elvis was. The news reporter asked her how she felt. This 50-some-year-old woman answered that **the death of Elvis was the worst thing that had ever happened to her!** Now make no mistake. She wasn’t Elvis Presley’s mother, aunt, wife, nor even his next-

Elvis’s former mansion, each year. For many, it’s just another tourist attraction—nothing wrong with that. But for others, it’s nothing less than a *pilgrimage* to the *shrine* of a dead singer and actor whom they had made into an idol. (Of course, many of these same people won’t even acknowledge that he *is* dead!)

In an essay titled “Why Elvis Matters,” Jon Katz tells us of a woman who “*prayed to an Elvis shrine* on her tiny fireplace mantle in Oklahoma City” (World Wide Web, www.wired.com, 1997). We have seen how such behavior violates God’s law. In a misguided attempt to honor a man or woman, one can *dishonor* the Living God.

Marilyn and Elvis sought out fame and publicity. But they got more than they bargained for. Much of the public came to, in a sense, *worship* these cultural icons. And it was too much for them both. It has long been thought that “absolute power corrupts absolutely.” And it seems to be that absolute fame and hero worship corrupts just as surely.

How different things might have been if a simple Bible principle—the Golden Rule—had been followed: “Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). Now it becomes easy. If we wouldn’t want someone taking snapshots of us wherever we go, especially in what should be complete privacy, then we shouldn’t take photos that invade the privacy of others. If we wouldn’t want someone to buy a

newspaper that printed all of *our* secret sins and weaknesses, then we shouldn’t buy one that does this very thing to our fellow human beings.

At the same time that Marilyn and Elvis craved the attention of the spotlight, they came to *fear* the very public that adored them. They found themselves isolated from real

people, surrounded by an elite group of insiders and increasingly seeking the oblivion of drug-induced numbness. To feed the voracious appetite of a hero-worshipping audience, the media propped them up—and eventually knocked them down.

Now the case of Princess Di is different. She did *not* seek the limelight—it sought her. And when it became obvious that she couldn’t escape the media *no matter what*, she used the situation to help others. If the cameras would always follow her, then she would lead them to see what *she* wanted the world to focus on—the plight of the homeless, the suffering of AIDS patients, the menace of land mines and drug addiction. Even if her own life could find little peace, she was determined to do what she could to help others. It is doubly tragic that the ubiquitous *paparazzi*, who caused her so much pain in life by stealing her privacy, should also have been a contributing factor in the collision that took her life.

It is too early to determine whether the death of Diana will bring about the same cult phenomenon as occurred when Elvis Presley died. I certainly hope not. Let us instead remember her grace, dignity and charity with fondness. Let us look to her example of giving to others in need and try to give of ourselves as well. But let us never *worship* or *deify* this gracious lady. For she was, in the most important sense, just another human being made in God’s image.

Consider what Diana’s brother, Earl Spencer, said at her funeral: “There is a temptation to rush to *canonize* your memory. There is no need to do so. You stand tall enough as a human being of unique qualities not to need to be seen as a saint. Indeed, to sanctify your memory would be to miss out on the very core of your being” (*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 7, 1997).

Goodbye, England’s Rose... WA

Left: Marilyn Monroe entertaining U.S. troops during the Korean War in February 1954—*Bettman-UPI*. **Right:** Thousands of adoring Elvis fans crowd around an image of the late singer unveiled during his 60th birthday celebration at Graceland in Memphis on January 8—*Reuters*.

door neighbor. In fact, she had never even *met* him—she was simply a fan.

This statement was not *rational*. It was almost as if she were responding on a *religious* level—a worshipful devotee of the “Elvis-god”! And if she were, she was by no means alone. To this day, hundreds of thousands of people flock to Graceland,

THE THRONES OF ENGLAND

by Raymond F. McNair

A 4000-YEAR SAGA

With the growing unpopularity of Britain's Royal Family, is the greatest and most enduring dynasty the world has ever seen destined to pass away? To know what lies ahead for the British monarchy, we must take a brief glance at how it came to be in the first place—and why.



The recent shocking death of Princess Diana has focused renewed attention on the Royal Family of Great Britain. Some of the latest discussions in the United Kingdom concern taxpayer money used for the monarchy, the level of public access to royal palaces and communication between the Royal Family and the British people.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, while in favor of making the monarchy pay for itself, doesn't want to go as far with reform as many in his party, who would like to see Great Britain become a republic. But the British *Telegraph* cited another source as saying that "the logic of New Labour—especially the abolition of hereditary peers—could lead even Blair supporters to call for the scrapping of the monarchy" (Sept. 14, 1997).

Just a few years ago, one of the most respected British magazines in the world, *The Economist*, contended that "the monarchy's time has passed... the only powerful argument against abolition is that it is not worth the trouble" (Oct. 22, 1994, p. 15). Yet most in the United Kingdom still want a king or queen. Many reflect with fondness on past glory, such as when Queen

Prince William, Prince Harry and Prince Charles look on as Diana's coffin passes by—*Reuters*.

Victoria reigned over the largest empire in the history of the world, encompassing a quarter of the earth's land and a third of its population.

But with many others calling for its end, is the monarchy in danger of disappearing? Just what *does* the future hold? To discover the answer, we must look to the past. For incredible though it may seem, the future of the British monarchy is recorded in the pages of the Bible.

An Everlasting Dynasty

Our story begins around 1900 B.C. with the biblical patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God promised national greatness for their descendants and also that a line of kings would spring from them, culminating in the Messiah—Jesus Christ—who would bring salvation for the whole world (cf. Gen. 17:6, 16; 22:16-18; 26:3-5; 28:13-14; 35:11).

Jacob, renamed Israel, had twelve sons—each the father of one of the Twelve Tribes. Through his son

Joseph would continue the birthright promise of national greatness (Gen. 48; 49:22-26; 1 Chron. 5:1-2). But the promise of a kingly line leading to the Messiah went to his son Judah, father of the Jews: "Judah is a lion's whelp.... The scepter [ruler's staff] shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [a reference to the Messiah] comes" (Gen. 49:9-10).

Around 1700 B.C., twin sons were born to Judah. This was a strange occurrence, for during the delivery a hand of one of the twins came out first, around which the midwife tied a scarlet thread to identify the firstborn (38:27-28). But this baby then pulled his hand back in and his brother came out first. The midwife exclaimed, "How did you break through? This breach be upon you!" (v. 29). So he was named Perez, meaning "breach." Then the baby with the scarlet thread on his hand was born—and he was named Zerah (v. 30). What an odd event to record in the Bible if it were to have no future significance.

Now Judah's line did not reign over Israel for quite some time. For the Eternal Himself was Israel's first King. And when God eventually gave the nation a human king, Saul, he was of the tribe of Benjamin. Sadly, God rejected Saul because of disobedience and then chose another to sit on the "throne of the LORD" (cf. 2 Sam. 3:9-10; 1 Chron. 29:23). Thus, around 1010 B.C., God did at last raise up a man from the tribe of Judah, of the preeminent line of Perez, to be king—David.

God told David, a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22), that he would be the first of a perpetual dynasty, continuing through his son Solomon. **David's house, throne and kingdom would go on forever** (2 Sam. 7:13-16; 23:1, 5; 1 Chron. 28:4-5)—in fact, in "all generations" (Ps. 89:3-4). In other words, David would have a descendant from Solomon's line sitting on a continuing throne in every generation! God swore that this was an unbreakable promise of an unbreakable dynasty—a dynasty preeminent above all others! (vv. 27-37).

But what happened to that dynasty? When the nation split into two kingdoms around 930 B.C., the Southern Kingdom of Judah continued under the throne of David, while the northern Ten Tribes of Israel went through a number of different dynasties (cf. 1 Kings

12:16-20). Because of continual idolatry, God finally allowed the Northern Kingdom to be taken into captivity by the Assyrian Empire around 734 to 721 B.C. (2 Kings 15, 17). Subsequently, as the centuries passed, the Ten Tribes seemingly became "lost."

Despite this example, the Jews also disobeyed God (Jer. 3:10-11), so He allowed *their* kingdom to be deported in successive waves (c. 604-586 B.C.)—this time by Babylonian forces under Nebuchadnezzar II. The Davidic line had continued all the way to this point, with Zedekiah then reigning over Judah. But the Babylonian forces took the Jewish king to Nebuchadnezzar, who—after killing Zedekiah's sons in front of him as well as "all the nobles of Judah" to make sure there was no heir to the throne—put out Zedekiah's eyes and threw him in a dungeon in Babylon, where he eventually died (39:1-7; 52:1-11). But what about the promise to David of a continuing throne?

Some will point to the fact that there was a former king of the Solomonic line still *alive* in the dungeons of Babylon—Jeconiah (2 Kings 25:27-30). But God had earlier decreed that no descendant of this man would ever sit on the throne of David, ruling over Judah (Jer. 22:24, 30).

Others argue that Jesus Christ took over the throne when He came in the flesh. And indeed He is prophesied to inherit David's throne forever (Luke 1:31-33; Is. 9:6-7). That throne is His by right. For Christ is both "the Root and the Offspring of David" (Rev. 22:16). That is, He was the ancestor of David, being the Eternal God who created Adam—the father of all mankind—as well as David's actual descendant through Mary (Luke 3:30-33). He was even legally adopted by Joseph into Solomon's line (Matt. 1:1-16). Moreover, the preincarnate Jesus was Israel's first King and the throne ultimately remained His to take back. Yet, even if He *had* assumed the Davidic throne at His First Coming, it still doesn't explain why there wasn't a reigning king of David's line for more than 500 years between Zedekiah and Jesus. Wasn't David's throne to be occupied in "all generations"? If it hadn't been occupied for centuries, then Christ would have been taking over a throne that no longer really existed.

The truth of the matter is that Jesus did *not* sit on David's throne when He came in the flesh—*nor has He*

at anytime since. Christ portrayed Himself as a nobleman who would go to a “far country”—heaven—to “receive for himself a kingdom” and then return (Luke 19:12). And He hasn’t yet returned to rule this global Kingdom from Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 3:17). He is still in heaven, presently sharing the Father’s throne (Rev. 3:21; Heb. 12:2). So does this mean that more than 2,500 years have gone by without a descendant of David reigning as king? Has God broken His promise after all?

Something often overlooked about the scepter prophecy (Gen. 49:10) is that it shows Judah having a king and waiting for the Messiah to take over... “in the last days”! (v. 1). Thus, since Jesus has not yet returned, there must be a descendant of Judah reigning somewhere on earth today. In fact, that monarch must be of the line of David through Solomon, sitting on a throne that has continued through all generations. Otherwise, God’s Word is unreliable.

Royal Succession

Did the Davidic dynasty cease when Zedekiah and his sons were killed—or did it somehow survive? For the answer, we turn to the Prophet Jeremiah, who had been given a mysterious commission by God: “Today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:10 NRSV). Based on Jeremiah’s life after this prophecy was given, it is easy to ascertain what is meant by the *first* part of this commission. God used him to pronounce judgment on the nation of Judah: the people and the kings of David’s line would be overthrown and uprooted. But did *all of them* go to Babylon?

There yet remained the *second* part of the prophet’s commission: “to build and to plant.” What did this entail? Following the captivity, we find a remnant of Jews left in Palestine, including—rather surprisingly—the “king’s daughters” (41:10). But could the royal line continue through one of *them*? Yes—based on Israel’s law of inheritance (Num. 27:1-11). But what happened to the remnant? They fled to Egypt, against God’s orders, taking “men, women, children, the king’s daughters and... Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch”—Jeremiah’s secretary or scribe (Jer. 43:6). The majority of these, God said, would die (42:15-16). But a few would escape and return (44:12-14, 28). Baruch and Jeremiah were clearly among the survivors (cf. 45:2-5). And, as we will see, so was at least *one* of the king’s daughters.

But where did they all go *then*? Jeremiah had earlier prophesied that from then on, David would “never lack a man [a person] to sit on the throne of the house of Israel” (33:17). Notice, it doesn’t say Judah, but rather

the House of *Israel*, which had long before gone into captivity. How then was the throne to transfer to Israel?

Through the Prophet Ezekiel, a Jewish captive in Babylon at the time, God fills in more details. He poses a riddle to the House of Israel (Ezek. 17:2)—again, not Judah—which He also explains. “A great eagle... came to Lebanon and took from the cedar the highest branch” (v. 3). Meaning: “The king of Babylon went to Jerusalem and took its king and princes” (v. 12). Then: “He cropped off the top of his young twigs” (v. 4 KJV). Meaning: “And he took of the king’s offspring” (v. 13).

Having explained these symbols, God gave the following clear parable: “I will take also [“a sprig” NRSV] of the highest branches [Zedekiah and princes] of the high cedar [Judah] and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs [Zedekiah’s children] a tender one [female], and will *plant* it on a high and prominent mountain [a great kingdom]. On the mountain height of **Israel** [not Judah!] I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a *majestic* cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort [all manner of peoples].... And all the trees of the field [nations of the earth] shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree [Judah] and exalted the low tree [Israel]” (vv. 22-24).

Here, then, is what the second part of Jeremiah’s commission was all about. He was responsible for transplanting the throne of David to Israel by taking a daughter of King Zedekiah to the Ten Lost Tribes. But where were the Israelites living at this time?

In our free brochure, *America and Britain in Prophecy*, we explain in-depth how a centuries-long migration was taking the Ten Tribes from the areas of their captivity to Northwest Europe. We also show how mariners from the tribe of Dan—the *Tuatha de Danaan*—had begun to colonize Ireland beginning around the 13th century B.C.

A few hundred years later, around David’s time, an influx of people from Spain “transferred the sceptre [of Ireland] into the hands of that Milesian or Scotie race, which, through so long a series of succeeding ages, supplied Ireland with her kings. This celebrated colony, though coming directly from Spain, was originally, we are told, of Scythic race” (Thomas Moore, *The History of Ireland*, vol. 1, 1837, p. 61). Our brochure proves that the Scythians were, in fact, Israelites. Also of note here is that the Milesians almost certainly came from the city of Miletus in western Asia Minor, right next door to ancient Troy—the famed city of Homer’s classical epic, *The Iliad*. In fact, the Milesians probably *were* Trojans. Quoting a reputedly much older source, a publication from 1897 says that after the Exodus a group of Hebrews, with the blessing of the king of Greece,

“commenced to build the city of Troy” (John MacLaren, *The History of Ancient Caledonia*, p. 4).

But of what *tribe* were these Israelites? We can at least get a clue about the ruling family. The traditional founder of the famed royal house of Troy was Dardanos. That’s why the region around Troy was called Dardania and the nearby strait separating it from Hellas or Greece is now called the Dardanelles. And amazingly, Dardanos can be identified in the Bible. We see in *A Dictionary of the Bible* that Jewish historian Flavius Josephus equates the biblical *Darda* with the Greek *Dardanos* (William Smith, vol. 1, p. 397). *Darda*, or *Dara*, in the Bible is listed as Zerah’s son, and thus Judah’s grandson (1 Chron. 2:6; 1 Kings 4:31). Incredibly, almost every royal family of Europe can be traced back to Dardanos. Thus, the scepter remained with Judah. For from the line of Perez came the royal House of David, while from the Zerah line came the royal House of Troy.

We once again turn our attention to Ireland. Besides the Milesian Trojans bringing the scepter or royal line there, they were also known as the people of the “**Red Hand**.” In fact, the “blood-red right hand of Ulster” appears even today on the official flag of Northern Ireland and the coats of arms of a number of Irish and Scottish clans. According to *The Larne Times*, a Northern Irish newspaper, “one tradition has it... that the Red Hand goes back to biblical time; when the twin sons were being born to Judah” (Dec. 24, 1986). Indeed, the scarlet thread tied around Zerah’s hand may very well be where this emblem originated.

By Divine Right

But what about Jeremiah and his company? How was the line of Perez through David to continue? Let’s read on in the article just quoted: “Many centuries ago three people arrived on the shore at what is today Carrickfergus [Northern Ireland]. It was around 582 B.C. [after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem], and the three were an aged man called Ollam Fodhla (the Lawgiver), his secretary, and a beautiful princess called Tamar.” *Ollam* can be read in Hebrew as one with “hidden knowledge,” while *Fodhla* can be understood in that language as “wonderful” or in Celtic as “revealer”—the two together clearly indicating a Hebrew prophet. His secretary is variously referred to as Simon Breck, Brach or Berach. And Tamar too is a Hebrew name—meaning “palm.” She is also often called in Irish histories *Tea* (Heb. “wanderer”) and *Tephi* (Heb. “beautiful”).

“According to some religious scholars the aged man who landed at Carrick many centuries ago was the Prophet Jeremiah.” No wonder *The History of Ancient*


Caledonia, cited above, repeatedly refers to Ireland as “**Jeremy’s Land**.” That would make Simon Breck Jeremiah’s scribe Baruch. And Tamar or Tea-Tephi would be Zedekiah’s daughter!

But how did the House of David come to rule in Ireland? Going back to the *Larne Times* article, “Princess Tamar married [Herremon] the High King of Ireland and... all the kings of Ireland and Scotland are descended from their royal line.” Thus at last was the breach between the Perez and Zerah lines healed! And from that fateful union sprang a dynasty that continued unbroken through the kings of Ireland, and was later transplanted to Scotland, and later still to England (cf. Ezek. 21:27 KJV).

Now we can understand why the British Royal Family rose to such great prestige and preeminence in the world. By divine right, Queen Elizabeth now sits on the throne of King David—in fact, the very throne of the Eternal! And though she reigns over modern *Israel*, depicted on the Royal Coat of Arms is the lion of *Judah*. Elizabeth, Charles, William, Harry—all of them are descended from Judah! Nor does past intermarrying with other royal families invalidate this claim, for most of *them* have been partly Jewish too! Only Almighty God could have engineered and executed such incredible “family planning.”

Is, then, the British monarchy really in danger of passing away? Consider that David’s dynasty has continued unbroken for 3,000 years—and that it was promised almost 1,000 years before that. God has certainly gone to a lot of trouble to ensure the preservation of this throne. Do you think he’s going to let a few “modernists” with republican ideas prevent Him from fulfilling His Word?

Realize, of course, that there *have* been a few brief interregnums in David’s dynasty, where his descendant was temporarily not reigning. For instance, when Queen Athaliah usurped the throne (2 Chron. 22-23), when Tea-Tephi made her way to Ireland and more recently when Charles I was beheaded and his son remained in France (1649-1660). Such *temporary* gaps still allow for a descendant of David to sit on his throne in “all generations.” As such, they may happen at any time. But rest assured that if the monarchy disappears tomorrow, a generation will not pass before it’s restored!

It seems quite possible that a brief interregnum may yet lie ahead of us. For when Britain goes into national captivity and slavery just as ancient Israel and Judah, the monarchy may be interrupted. But it will by no means cease to exist. For just 3 1/2 years later, the rightful Heir to the throne will stand in Jerusalem. And as Isaiah 9:7 says, “of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever”! 

Family Matters

by Larry R. Salyer

Here in the *World Ahead* offices, *the wheels are always turning*. We're constantly trying to improve our "product." As the director of Editorial Services, I meet regularly with an energetic staff of writers, artists and editors. Not only do they produce the magazine you hold in your hands, but they are creative people who cultivate new editorial ideas. In our ongoing attempt to provide you with useful knowledge for living based on biblical principles, we are launching on this page a new regular feature in the magazine. We call it "Living Christianity."

This section will feature articles on ever-changing topics that affect many of us as we learn to apply principles of Christian living in our everyday lives. In this issue, I will share some thoughts on the importance of the family.

Each of us has some sort of family experience. Perhaps our family is large and interdependent. Or maybe it comprises only a mother and child. Possibly some readers are now left alone with only past memories of time spent with family. So our individual definitions of what a family is may be quite diverse.

As society undergoes constant change in politics, economics, education and standards of morality, so our concept of family is developed by the age and environment in which we live. Today, many consider family to be no more than a vehicle by which the next generation is delivered into the world. It may or may not include marriage and commitment to responsibility. It may or may not include a desire to *spend time* with one's children and raise them to be mature and independent adults. Marriage itself, in fact, is seen by some as an obsolete institution—and family ties and responsibilities as unacceptable limitations on freedom.

But where did marriage and family come from? Are they simply convenient temporary support systems set up by man to further his evolution to some higher form of living? Or maybe just the demands of some archaic religious doctrine imposed on gullible people?

The answer is that they are neither. The real origin and meaning of marriage and family life are found in the pages of your Bible. Marriage, in fact, dates from the Garden of Eden, and was instituted by none other than God Himself. Notice the account in Genesis: "Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (2:22-24).

As the history of mankind unfolds through the Bible narrative, we find many case histories of marriage. An overwhelming majority of these examples reveals unsuccessful unions producing problem children. Even most of those God describes as righteous did not seem to provide a happy home life. Abraham, the father of the faithful and friend of God, erred in

his marriage and fell prey to strife caused by jealousy! David, a man after God's own heart, had several marriages that resulted in emotional distress. And so it goes.

God forgave these great patriarchs their sins and tells us they will be in His Kingdom. Yet he had examples of their problems and weaknesses preserved in His Word so that we would learn lessons (cf. Rom. 15:4).

Even today, most marriage and family problems can be traced to the breaking of God's great spiritual laws—though the victims are mostly unaware of the connection. Two of the Ten Commandments refer directly to marriage and family, while several others include instructions fundamental to expressing love and concern to those closest to us.

Why is God so interested in our human relationships? Could it be that they picture something greater and more permanent? Something beyond this life?

When we study the Scriptures, we see that marriage between a man and a woman is used to typify the relationship between Christ and His Church. Not as an afterthought, but because marriage was created in part to *fulfill* such a purpose.

The Apostle Paul, though apparently not married at the time, was inspired to explain this in the context of marriage instruction to Christians of his day: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:22-24).

This, by the way, does not give the husband any right to be domineering or abusive. For Paul immediately continues, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word [the Word, if obeyed, washes away error], that He might present it to Himself a glorious [glorified] church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

"So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies.... For we are members of *His* body, of *His* flesh and of *His* bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'" (vv. 25-31).

We can easily see the parallel God draws between human marriage and Christ's relationship with the Church. For emphasis, Paul

adds, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (v. 32).

This marriage relationship between Christ and His Church is confirmed by the Apostle John in Revelation. Speaking of the glorious return of Christ to this earth, he writes, "For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready" (19:7).

Not only do we see a great spiritual marriage referred to in God's Word, but we also see that God is bringing children into His own spirit Family. Does that surprise you? Notice the following passages of Scripture:

"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:6-7). "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory" (Heb. 2:10).

These passages reveal that Christians are the begotten children of God today—while still in this physical flesh. But is that the end of the matter? Oh, no! Our destiny is far greater. "Beloved, now are we the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Notice that even though we are *now* the sons of God, we cannot see Him as He is or know what we will be like. That perception is beyond the physical realm. Yet in the future, we will actually be like God—that is, living in the Spirit, born into His very own Family.

Now we can understand why the subjects of marriage and family are so important to God, our Father. We should be able to see that few areas of our life could be as meaningful as building our marriages and nurturing our families. For the very process of doing so teaches us how Jesus Christ, as an affianced Husband, deals with the Church, His future bride. We learn how God Almighty develops us in this life, so that we can someday become His born-again sons and daughters.

Our physical family relationships teach us invaluable *spiritual* lessons. Let us all strengthen and renew our family ties in a way that is pleasing to the Creator God.



A Millennial Paradise on Earth

by Raymond F. McNair



After viewing today's political turmoil and bloodshed in the Mideast, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel asks, "When will it all end?... Will we go on struggling forever? Will the sword forever devour its makers?... Political conflict in the Middle East is not about to disappear under any predictable circumstance—that is, unless one accepts the idea that history will soon come to its end and we shall reach the Millennium" (*A Place Among the Nations*, p. 372).

Is he right? Is continued conflict and bloodshed—in a world that has mastered the technology to erase human life from this planet—the *probable* course of events? Or will the Great God intervene supernaturally and establish this Millennium—a 1,000-year age of peace, justice and prosperity under the rule of Jesus Christ and His resurrected saints?

In past articles of our Middle East series we have traced the ethnic roots of the inhabitants of this region, examined the violence surrounding the birth of the modern State of Israel and considered the horrendous war that will take place at the end of this age. In this final installment of our series, we will look beyond that destruction to the glorious 1,000-year reign of our Savior—the Millennium.

One of the most popular, long-time religious beliefs is that those who have led a "good life" go to heaven when they die. It follows, then, that heaven would be where

Christ establishes His Kingdom. But are these assumptions really what the Bible teaches?

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit *the earth*" (Matt. 5:5). What a strange thing to say if people go to heaven when they die. And most assuredly, the meek have not inherited *today's* world, where so often "might makes right"!

Perhaps the most definitive proof of all is found in Revelation 5. Speaking of the resurrected saints, we learn that they will be "kings and priests to our God; **and... shall reign on the earth**" (v. 10).

He Will Rule All Nations

What will happen in this Kingdom? Jesus taught that after He returns to earth, He will take the reigns of government. "When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His

glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him" (Matt. 25:31-32).

It is the Father who will give Christ the authority to rule these nations at His Second Coming. The book of Revelation tells us of that time: "Then the seventh angel sound-

ed: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever'" (11:15). But first, as our last installment in this series showed, Jesus will have to destroy the armies gathered at Jerusalem who oppose His rule (cf. 19:15).

Under Christ, a resurrected King David will rule the descendants of the Twelve Tribes of Israel



living at that time (Ezek. 37:24-28; Jer. 30:9). Under David, the twelve apostles will "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). As we saw earlier, other immortal saints will rule as "kings and priests" over all nations under Christ (Rev. 5:10).

The very seat of Christ's Government will be in the Middle East. "At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it" (Jer. 3:17 NRSV).

In chapters 43 and 44 of Ezekiel, we are told of a glorious millennial temple that will be located in Jerusalem. "And He said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever'" (43:7).

The book of Daniel also tells of this time: "Then the... greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (7:27).

And Isaiah foretells the Messiah's rule over nations as well: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder.... **Of the**

increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom... forever" (Is. 9:6-7).

A Time to Learn

What a wonderful concept Isaiah speaks of—global peace! But peace can never come to a world held in the grip of ignorance, poverty and lawlessness. Today's world rejects God's laws and has turned to "man's way"—the path that produces *ignorance* and *suffering* (Rom. 3:10-18). But the time is soon coming when this earth will be refreshed by first learning, then following, God's ways of peace and happiness (cf. Is. 48:17-18). These "times of refreshing" will come to this earth after Christ's return (Acts 3:19).

The Father "will send Jesus Christ whom heaven must receive until the time of *restoration of all things*" (v. 21). What will the Father *restore*? God's way, His law and His government over all the earth!

But to restore these things, the entire human race must be *reeducated*. Men and women will need to acquire true wisdom, knowledge and understanding. "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house

shall be established on the top of the mountains.... And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; **He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.**' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Is. 2:2-3).

Mankind will then come to love the law of God, and will learn how to apply it in everyday life (cf. Ps. 119:97-104). During that utopian age, man will no longer doubt the existence of his Creator. The foolishness of atheism (Ps. 14:1) will be replaced by the full realization by everyone that our universe did not come into being through blind, random forces.

In the wonderful World Ahead, all nations will come to see that the fear of or deep reverence for the Lord "is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). Part of fearing God is learning to *obey* Him. "A good understanding have all those who do His commandments" (Ps. 111:10).

But more than just learning His

laws, people will come to really know God Himself, the Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth. No person or nation can be truly wise and understanding without genuinely comprehending that an all-wise Creator made the entire universe and rules it by His great power, through His invisible laws! (cf. Deut. 4:6-7).

During this present age, all mankind has been misled by Satan, the great deceiver (Rev. 12:9). And surely the greatest of his deceptions have been in the realm of religion. Of the six billion human beings alive today, only one-third even *professes* to believe in Jesus Christ. But, sadly, even most of them do not really understand the awesome plan of God and the real meaning of His true Gospel. Rather, many have accepted a *counterfeit* gospel (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Cor. 11:3-4).

Today, countless millions look to Mecca, Rome or other holy cities for religious guidance and direction. Millions make pilgrimages to those places. But during the Millennium, far greater numbers will flock to Jerusalem, and will then look to it as God's Holy City: "And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me" in Jerusalem (Is. 66:23). Furthermore, "it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up [to that city] from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zech. 14:16). Thus, God's Sabbaths and Festivals (cf. Lev. 23) will be kept by all of humanity!

When the Messiah comes to establish His Kingdom on earth, He will begin the colossal task of reeducating the entire world. It will take much time and effort to convince all nations that they have been deceived by following false ideologies in all

major areas of belief and activity—religion, morality, education, government, commerce, etc.

But God will bind Satan and remove the evil influence he has had over all mankind from the time of Adam and Eve (Rev. 20:1-3; Eph. 2:1-3). Then, with the resurrected saints helping Christ to teach mankind a better way of life, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Is. 11:9).

There is so much instability in today's world—in its religions, government, education and family structure. But, that will not be so in the World Ahead: "The LORD is exalted.... He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of your salvation" (33:5-6).

After the Almighty removes Satan's influence from this earth, He will then graciously pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28-29). God will give humanity "a new heart and... a new spirit" (Ezek. 36:26-27). Further, the Great God says that He will put His laws "in their mind and write them on their hearts" (Heb. 8:10).

Peace and Prosperity

The nations will then learn that living by God's law of love—summarized by the Ten Commandments (1 John 5:3)—is the only way to peace, happiness and everything good. Only then will they begin to experience true peace with security. The power of divine love will then replace the destructive influence of bitter hatred and strife that is so prevalent in our world today.

What will be the result of the influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of *billions*? Today's worldwide ethnic hostilities will vanish as God's Spirit softens the hearts of all men. The book of Isaiah tells us that

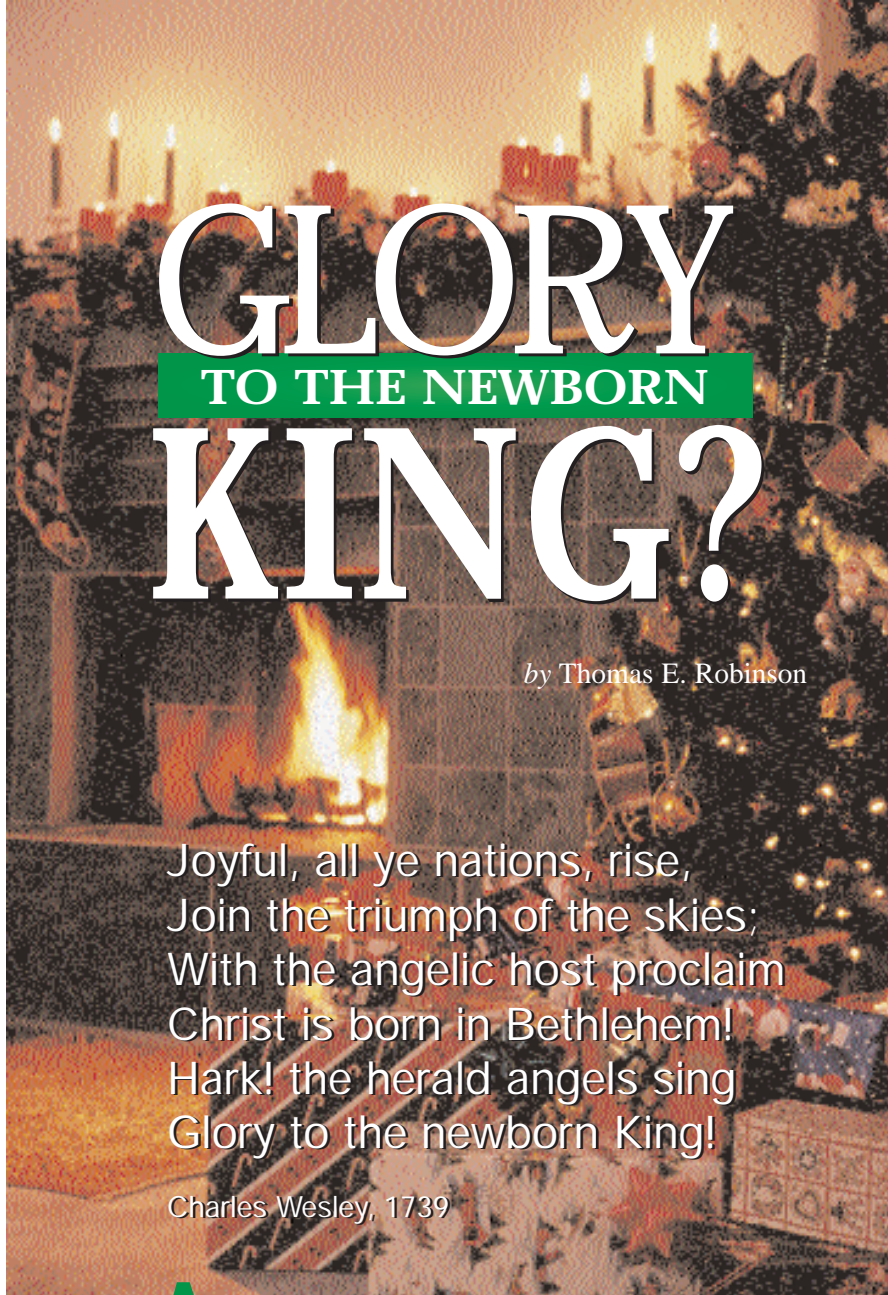
men will "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore"! (2:4).

Do you fully realize the importance of this prophecy? Men will convert their weapons of war and destruction into implements of production! No more heavy taxes to pay for arms that serve only to maim and kill fellow human beings.

The peace, prosperity and abundant living of the coming Millennium is perhaps best summed up by the Prophet Micah: "Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree and no one shall make them afraid" (4:4). What a contrast to our present societies plagued by violence, poverty and ignorance. May God hasten Christ's return and the establishment of that marvelous paradise on earth!

The city of Jerusalem today is a hotbed of ethnic strife, unrest and violence. But in the Millennium, this same city will be the focal point from which will flow the knowledge of God's way of life to every other nation and people on the face of the earth. God tells us of that time in the book of Zechariah: "I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.... Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing"! (8:3-5).

At this time of year, many are beginning to recite the words of the heavenly host on the day of Christ's birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!" (Luke 2:14). Yet how sad it is that most who read these words do not understand what the angels were really talking about—that Jesus Christ was born as the King of a genuine World Government that will one day bring world peace, harmony and love. WA



GLORY TO THE NEWBORN KING?

by Thomas E. Robinson

Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim
Christ is born in Bethlehem!
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!

Charles Wesley, 1739

As the year comes to an end and seasonal decorations appear on front lawns and in store windows, many choirs are already warming up to sing Christmas carols. And while shopping malls are filled to capacity, from many a pulpit will come the cry to "put Christ back into Christmas," as in earlier days. Yet, strangely enough, according to *U.S. News & World Report*, "the earliest Christians simply weren't interested in celebrating the Nativity.... They 'viewed birthday celebrations as heathen.' The third-century [Catholic] church father Origen had declared it a sin to even think of keeping Christ's birthday 'as though he were a king pharaoh'" (Dec. 23, 1996, p. 58).

Furthermore, Jesus Christ was born *nowhere near* December 25 (see "Questions & Answers," p. 26). The *U.S. News* article continues, "How the church [later] arrived at December 25... is a matter of conjecture.

Most widely held is the view that the holiday was an intentional 'Christianization' of Saturnalia and other pagan festivals.... in the third and fourth centuries.... marking the winter solstice, when days began to lengthen.... December 25—the solstice on the Julian calendar—[was the] *natalis solis invicti* ('birth of the invincible sun'), a festival honoring the sun god Mithras" (p. 59).

The pagan origin of Christmas and its customs is attested to in source after reputable source. For instance, "The Christmas tree is believed to have its origin in the ceremonial use of the palm tree in the worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis.... at the winter solstice.... In northern climates... the celebration of December 25 was modified by the substitution of a fir tree" (Clyde W. Parke, *The Lincoln Library of Essential Information*, 1959, p. 2,070).

Most people aren't too bothered by all this. But in light of the facts, we should at least ask, "How does Christmas bring *glory to the newborn King*?"

"Christmas" in Ancient Israel

Let's first look closer at the Roman Saturnalia from which Christmas is in large part derived. A hedonistic harvest festival dedicated to the god Saturn, it was a "time of merrymaking and exchange of gifts" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 3, 1991, p. 283). Renowned historian Will Durant says

it was very similar to a more modern Central African festival in which "full sexual license" is enjoined: "Prostitution is freely indulged in, and adultery is not viewed with any sense of heinousness.... No man attending the festival is allowed to have intercourse with his wife" (*Story of Civilization*, vol. 1, p. 66).

Saturn was worshiped similarly all around the Mediterranean, and often with worse atrocities: "The Phoenicians every year sacrificed their beloved and only-begotten children to Kronos or Saturn" (Eusebius, *In Praise of Constantine*, chap. 13, p. 267). Durant writes of this ghastly affair as well: "Everyone knows of the Moloch to whom the Phoenicians... offered human victims.... Probably it was bound up with cannibalism" (p. 66). **This is the same Moloch mentioned in the Bible—"probably to be equated with... the Roman god Saturn or Mithra"** (Jan Knappert, *Encyclopaedia of Middle Eastern Mythology and Religion*, 1993,

p. 206). And as the *Mythology of All Religions* states, “the Phoenicians offered the first born in the fire which celebrated *Sol Invictus*”—whose birthday was December 25 (vol. 5, p. 52).

Tragically, even the ancient Israelites were swayed to adopt these heinous practices. God lamented, “They have forsaken Me, and worshiped Ashtoreth [or Isis] Chemosh... and Milcom” (1 Kings 11:33). According to *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, Chemosh and Milcom are both names for Molech (Moloch), who is once more identified with Saturn and with Baal, the sun god (1986, pp. 70, 113, 405, 413).

Certainly all the solstice rites attached to these gods were practiced by the Israelites—including decorating trees. And this despite God’s warning to His people: “Learn not the way of the heathen.... For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not” (Jer. 10:2-4 KJV). Those who argue that this was simply talking about wooden idols should realize that decorated trees were *themselves* idols. And sadly, God’s people *did* fall into idolatry, going so far as to worship the false sun god from the very temple of the living Eternal God! (Ezek. 8:15-18).

And it only got worse. *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* points out that the Israelites’ worship of Baal and Ashtoreth involved the most impure sexually licentious rites imaginable (pp. 60, 70). Moreover, God says that “they built the high places of Baal... to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination” (Jer. 32:35). So here was “Christmas” in ancient Israel—joyful singing, decorated trees, exchanging gifts in honor of the “Savior’s” birth... and a drunken orgy combined with the gruesome sacrifice of innocent children! More incredible still, God’s wording here makes it appear that they were doing this horrible thing *in His honor*—as if He’d commanded them to.

Indeed, Israelite idolatry was *syncretistic* rather than purely pagan. In other words, they continued to worship the Eternal but blended pagan practices with that worship. Yet, as we’ve already seen, *any element* of pagan worship is forbidden by God (cf. Deut. 12:28-32).

If You Can’t Beat ‘Em...

So what was the rationale for attaching Christ’s name to Molech’s birthday and continuing in the same pagan customs as before? A Reader’s Digest

Association publication tells us, “The early missionaries faced an uphill task. The pagans were reluctant to give up their false gods and ancient practices. So the missionaries, unable to convert them easily to an entirely new code of worship, did the next best thing. **They took the pagan festivals as they were and gradually grafted the observances of the new faith onto these festivals and the rites and customs surrounding them**” (*Strange Stories, Amazing Facts*, 1976, p. 283).

Many today assume this was perfectly acceptable to God. In February of this year, a nationwide Evangelical Christian radio program featured a doctrinal discussion covering this very subject. A guest minister said that Christian holidays based on originally pagan practices “are not an objectionable thing as long as Christ is the



centerpiece.” He argued that since God can convert a pagan *person* to Christianity, He can transform pagan *holidays* into Christian Holy Days.

However, not everyone agrees with this proposition. The early New Testament Church, remember, did not keep Christmas. Instead, **“the first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals [i.e. God’s Festivals],** though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed” (*Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 8, p. 828). Indeed, the enduring Festivals of God, listed in Leviticus 23, picture God’s entire plan of salvation for mankind from Christ’s death for our sins to His role as coming King and Savior of all mankind—and the glorious future beyond. Christmas *obscures* this vision by constantly painting Jesus as a powerless little infant “away in a manger,” rather than the Living GOD that He now is—blazing in infinite majesty at the right hand of the Father!

Can you imagine the early apostles attaching pagan religious customs to the worship they had learned from Jesus Christ Himself? Especially in light of what Paul told the Gentile converts of Galatia who were returning to observances of pagan holidays: “But now after you

have known God, how is it that you turn again to the *weak and beggarly elements*, to which you desire again to be in bondage? **You observe days and months and seasons and years.** I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain” (Gal. 4:9-11). Some today argue that this was referring to *Jewish* holidays. But would Paul call *God’s* Holy Days—which the Jews did observe—“weak and beggarly”? Moreover, a recent Cambridge University publication attests that from the immediate context of Galatians 4:10, it “must be understood as a *pagan* temporal scheme” (*New Testament Studies, an International Journal*, Jan. 1996, p. 113). Not only that, but the recipients of Paul’s letter, as we’ve already stated, were primarily *Gentile converts*. They had *never been* Jews! They, therefore, would *never* have observed God’s Holy Days *at all*—that is, *until they had converted to Christianity*. In this context, then, Paul’s statement makes no sense if he had been referring to God’s Holy Days. The answer is clear—*he wasn’t!*

Do you remember that Origen, the early Catholic church father, declared it a sin to celebrate Christ’s birthday? We find similar pronouncements from other Catholic church fathers. Tertullian, writing around A.D. 230, told Catholics, “If thou hast renounced temples, make not a temple of thy own house-door”—that is, with midwinter evergreen decorations and accompanying lights (Clement A. Miles, *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition, Christian and Pagan*, 1968, pp. 267-271).

Even after December 25 was declared Christ’s birthday, “the use of evergreens was so closely associated with the garlands of pagan days that in many of the early [Catholic] church celebrations they were forbidden.... It was therefore not until the *sixteenth century* that Christian houses were commonly decorated” (Alfred Carl Hottes, *1001 Christmas Facts and Fancies*, 1944).

Later still, “England’s Puritans inveighed against keeping the holiday *at all* and succeeded for a while in having it banned. The Puritans... ‘were correct when they pointed out—and they pointed it out often—that **Christmas was nothing but a pagan festival covered with a Christian veneer.**’ When Christmas landed on American shores, it fared little better” (*U.S. News & World Report*, p. 60).

Honoring God Today?

Of course, many will state at this point, “Okay, Christmas comes from paganism. So what? *I’m* not honoring some pagan god by celebrating it. *I’m* honoring Jesus Christ.” Let’s analyze this attitude in light of some plain biblical statements and simple common sense.

Jesus Christ—the God of the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 32:4; 1 Cor. 10:4)—was actually *married* to ancient Israel (Jer. 3:14; 31:32). As we’ve seen, however, Israel was unfaithful to her Husband and “played the harlot” (cf. Ezek. 23; 16) by having countless “affairs” with other gods like Molech or Saturn—all in the name of the Eternal God! And remember, the wayward Israelites actually celebrated the winter solstice as the *birthday of the unconquered sun*—from which Christmas has arisen—supposedly to honor the preincarnate Jesus Christ.

Now some will claim that God’s command for His people to not worship Him with pagan customs in Deuteronomy 12:28-32 was talking only about horrible practices like child sacrifice and not milder traditions such as carols and decorations. But that’s just not true. For instance, not only did God tell His people not to raise up decorated trees, but He had earlier told them to get rid of *all* pagan worship sites, altars, sacred pillars, images, etc. (vv. 2-3). **“You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things”** (v. 4). Why didn’t God want to be worshiped in this way? Consider that He can *remember* the hideous things that were done by His children at such places and with such implements. He *knows* what all the customs represent. He saw it *first-hand!* And He hates to be *reminded* of it, much less *associated* with it.

But let’s look at this another way. Consider once again the Old Covenant marriage between Christ and Israel. He “put her away” or divorced her, and later died at His crucifixion. Now resurrected, Jesus is in the process of making a *New Covenant* with Israel (Jer. 31:31), of which the New Testament Church, the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), is the forerunner. This *spiritual* Israel is being cleansed of false religion and sin to once more marry Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 5:22-32; Rev. 19:6-9). Only this time, she will never again turn aside from her Husband.

With all this in mind, think what it would be like for God if His true Church were to celebrate Christmas. Imagine that you are a kind, giving man married to a woman who’s been having an on-again, off-again affair with some evil guy named Nick. She has engaged in all kinds of perverted sexual experimentation with him and has even let him kill your children in celebration of his birthday. After many failed attempts to change her conduct, you finally divorce her.

Years later, the wounds have begun to heal. Your wife returns and seems to be truly repentant. She begs your forgiveness and asks if the two of you can start all over. Your heart melts and you take her back. Yet no sooner have you done so than your wife says, “Honey, I

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



INTERESTING ARTICLES

I am very much interested in your articles, especially the one titled "The Truth About Antichrist" in the July–August issue.

I also enjoyed reading the article on suicide titled "By their Own Hand..." particularly under the subhead on page 14 "Teens Are Different." It gave a concise explanation of suicide among young people.

May God bless you and help you to continue in His Work.

Augustine Fonootu Tuita
Solomon Islands

In response to the July–August issue of the *World Ahead* magazine, I hereby send congratulations for the precise work printed therein—especially the article titled "The Truth About Antichrist" by Mr. Meredith. It is only through inspiration that someone can write this way—with a lot of confidence and without fear. Keep up the spirit to stand for the Truth. Thank you, for I now understand what is meant by the phrase "Jesus has come in the flesh."

Grace Kingod
Sultan Hamud, Kenya

My wife and I wish to express our sincere thanks to Dr. Meredith for writing the article, "The Truth About Antichrist." It was the best I have ever read on this subject. The truth could not be expressed more clearly. We hope that many will read and really study this article, for it contains so much "meat."

Jan and Ann Berg
Guelph, Ontario, Canada

ANGLO ANGLE

Thank you for your magazine, *The World Ahead*. It has opened my eyes to many things. I pray that it will help others too.

Mrs. E. Swain
Merseyside, United Kingdom

Thank you for the booklets received over the past few weeks. I found each one very interesting and have been impressed with the clarity of explanation in the various biblical articles.

Michael S. Gardham
Derby, England

I really enjoy reading *The World Ahead* because the articles are up to date and full of God's teachings. They are also powerful and hard-hitting. Keep up the good work.

C. Sadler
Cottingham, England

COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

Thank you for responding to my request for information about your Church. I received my first issue of *The World Ahead* and read Mr. Meredith's editorial titled "Which Jesus Christ?" It reminded me of a discussion I recently had with a co-worker concerning laws and justice in the United States. He felt that laws needed to be changed since the system was too easy on criminals. I suggested restoring the Ten Commandments as the basis for our law, which he thought was not the answer. I then

asked him to think how life might be if just one commandment were kept by everyone—you shall not steal. He thought a bit and said that not only would theft disappear, but other crimes would diminish as well. He said he now realized that the Ten Commandments would be the best basis for American law if we really want to reduce crime and improve society.

Charles V. Metzger Sr.
Howell, New Jersey

Thanks so much for the *Ten Commandments* booklet—it's great! Dr. Roderick C. Meredith and Tom Robinson did a superb job, getting right to the heart of each commandment. Thank you both for your diligent work.

Mr. and Mrs. Don Levoir
Coon Rapids, Minnesota

ABP

I'd like to commend you on your publication *America and Britain in Prophecy*. I've read many other books pertaining to the lost tribes of Israel, but your publication offered a lot of information that I had never encountered before. This added knowledge convinces me more than ever that Israel has at last been found!

Charles S. Wentzell
Cuero, Texas

FROM SOUTH AFRICA

I hear your program on Christiana Radio Station on Sunday afternoons. I always enjoy listening to this spiritual program because I am a child of God. Please send me a free transcript of the program and accompanying literature about the times in which we live and the future. I visit Israel regularly and am very interested in all the prophecies being fulfilled in the latter days. I would like to know more since the clock is now ticking rapidly toward the end. I look forward to hearing from you.

A. Van Jaarsveld
South Africa

Our regional offices send out transcripts upon request of *World Ahead* radio programs in French and Afrikaans because there is not a full complement

of support literature. Unfortunately, transcripts are not available for English-language radio and television broadcasts—ed.

Please send me your booklet, *The Beast of Revelation*, and all available literature in Afrikaans or English. Thank you for the May–June issue of *The World Ahead*. I read it in one sitting—just couldn't put it down! Thank you very much.

Fielies Coetzee
South Africa

NEW SUBSCRIBERS

I am 17 years old and recently started subscribing to the *World Ahead* magazine. I have received about seven issues so far.

By reading through these magazines I am coming to know more about the true Gospel of God. I've found all of them interesting, with the most wonderful thing of all being God's Truth.

I would like to thank those who have paid my subscription fee by donations—may God bless them richly.

G. Obo
Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

I am a new subscriber to your magazine, *The World Ahead*, which I find to be very interesting. The fact that you not only tackle tough issues, but also refer us to what the Bible says about them, is very refreshing. This has set it apart from any other magazines I usually read at school. It helps me better understand world events, especially political issues. (I am graduating as a political science student and contemplating entering religious life.)

Now I am looking forward to receiving every issue. Thank you for making it available for free. Also please send me a copy of *America and Britain in Prophecy* and *The Beast of Revelation*.

God bless you all.

Romina Enopia
Zamboango City, Philippines

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.

know you haven't asked me to celebrate your birthday, but I'd really like to. And since I don't know when it is, I'll just pick the day myself. Ah, I know—I'll keep it on *Nick's* birthday! I'll go find all the decorations I used to put up for him when we killed the kids. Oh, it'll be great. It'll be wonderful. Just you wait and see."

Yes, it sounds ludicrous—it's supposed to. Yet isn't this almost how it is? Of course, the woman *here* knew what the decorations and the birthdate represented in the past—just as did those religious leaders who "intentionally Christianized" the Saturnalia. But today, many professing Christians *don't* know about the true origin of Christmas—at least its more heinous aspects. This, however, cannot be used to support Christmas celebrations. For, as mentioned earlier, God *does* know. He remembers it all.

To continue the above analogy, let's say that, years later, celebrating your birthday when Nick was supposedly born has become a tradition among your extended family. So basically, you are *never* allowed to forget what happened. *They* may not understand how it came to be, but *you* have to relive it in your mind year by year! You wish they would stop. And even though you've explained it to some of your family, most of them have turned a deaf ear. They've *enjoyed* using this day to honor you—and they're going to keep right on doing so. In their mind, you *must* give your approval—you've got no choice. You see, it's not about how *you* feel—it never was. It's about what *they* want. And what they want is their time-honored *tradition*.

Jesus similarly described the religious leaders of His day: "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 7:7-8). Most people today reject God's commanded Festivals while persisting in the continuation of pagan traditions. If you've been a part of this, it's not too late to change!

Now God *will* honor a humble and worshipful attitude—but it must be accompanied by a willingness to look into His Word and obey it (Is. 66:2). You may not have understood *before* where Christmas came from and what God thinks about it. But *now* you have been given the truth! And to whom much is given, much is also required (Luke 12:47-48).

Don't be deceived. Christ can't be "put back" into Christmas—for **He was never there to begin with!** This Satan-inspired holiday does NOT bring glory to Jesus Christ. In fact, He abhors it. Will you be one who scorns what you've just read—intent on celebrating December 25 as always? Are you determined to shove Christmas in God's face this year once again, telling Him He needs to get over His "hangups" about it? Or will you humble yourself before your Creator and truly honor His wishes, cleansing yourself and your entire household of this pagan festival once and for all? He is waiting to see what you'll do. God help you to follow His clear instructions on how to *truly* give glory to the King of kings! wa



by Roderick C. Meredith

Keeping Love Alive

Why is it such a struggle for so many couples to even stay married—much less remain happy? Here are some important keys that can help your marriage be happier, healthier and more able to weather the storms of life.

With tears welling up in her eyes, the woman in front of me started to shake and sob. Burying her face in her hands, she softly moaned as she wept. When at last she recovered—sitting up and wiping her eyes—she blurted out, “I’ve always realized how empty my marriage was. But hearing you describe in your talk today about what marriage ought to be makes me realize I’ve just got to do better in my own!”

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

There were, of course, many things wrong. The root problem, however, didn’t involve sexual difficulties, financial woes or other

typical sources of marital discord.

“My husband just won’t talk to me,” this woman said repeatedly. “I’m lonely and frustrated. I don’t even really know the man I married. I feel like I’m living with a stranger.”

Sadly, this situation is typical of millions of marriages. Though they start out with courtship, romance and endless hours of talking, the honeymoon ends all too quickly. Quite often, at least one spouse *thinks* there’s still two-way communication going on. But the other feels frustrated and alone. In reality, the two spouses are merely coexisting under the same roof. They may not harm one another physically or verbally—but the openness, warmth

and *total sharing* of two lives that should be there simply isn’t!

One authority on the subject quoted a woman discussing her marriage of ten years as saying, “It’s heartbreaking. Before I was married, I used to go out to restaurants and just by looking around the room I could tell who was married and who wasn’t. Either the married couples were eating in dead silence, or the woman was gabbing away while the man ate and pretended she wasn’t there. I swore that this would never happen to me—but it has.”

Now *why* did it happen? Why do husbands and wives, of all people, fail to communicate more fully with each other? What can be done about it?

Stumbling Blocks to Sharing

Normally, newlyweds work hard at learning and adjusting to each other’s attitudes and preferences. Exchanging opinions on all aspects of life is a real pleasure. But after a few months, the opinions are all exchanged and the attitudes apparently understood. The excitement of getting to know one another is no longer there. Rather than bothering to discuss topics of mutual interest, both spouses often take for granted what the other thinks.

As life continues and children come into the picture, the wife may stay home during the day to raise them while the husband is away earning a living. In this scenario, the wife’s focus and conversation may turn increasingly toward the children and various domestic details that the husband is not really interested in. Unfortunately, many fathers care to hear only good news concerning their children—and get irritated or bored when their wives let them in on the day-to-day problems of child rearing.

When their children are very young, many mothers have no one to really talk to during the day—creating a dire *need* to communicate with their husbands in the evening. Yet many husbands, partly because they wish to avoid what they perceive to be a boring rehash of household frustrations, drop lifelessly onto the couch with the TV remote control or the evening newspaper.

Marriage in which both partners work outside the home may have even more difficulties in this regard. After a tiring day at work, the husband and wife return home to face *all* the household chores. Not only is there physical fatigue to contend with, but a fuller schedule of domestic work for both spouses. The all-too-frequent result is again

a sad lack of loving and bonding communication.

Sadly, this may all sound normal and even natural to some. Far too many see no problem with it whatsoever. Why? Because our society has utterly failed in teaching people the true *purpose* and *meaning* of marriage.

What Marriage Should Be

Most of us know the expression, “No man is an island.” Now many *do* go through life without ever marrying. But in so doing, they miss out on some of the richest blessings God has given to mankind. Near the beginning of the Bible, God says, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Gen. 2:18).

In general, human beings need a partner of the opposite sex with whom to share their triumphs and sorrows, their laughter and tears, and their appreciation for life’s special joys—a beautiful sunset, a moving ballad, the toothless smile of a newborn child. They need a life mate with whom to experience the passion of making love within marriage. They need someone with whom to share their plans, hopes and dreams.

In marriage, two people must go beyond themselves to create a synergism—wherein the combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual efforts. This will greatly enhance their development, helping each to become a more mature and understanding human being. When a marital relationship is reduced to two people merely coexisting in the same house while remaining *separated* in their feelings and aspirations, then that marriage is missing the mark—failing to achieve its awesome potential.

Also important in marriage is the element of children. God made

husband and wife to become one. “And why one? He seeks godly offspring” (Mal. 2:15). The family is the building block of decent society. And the strongest link in the family unit is quite often its smallest member.

An old saying contends that “a man’s home is his castle.” Indeed, this analogy should be broadened to encompass his entire family—where he is the benevolent king, his wife the beloved queen and his children royal princes and princesses who need training for the important roles they must assume in years to come. The parents enthusiastically work together to provide nurturing, guidance, discipline and instruction for these future leaders. This is the way God’s own Family Kingdom is structured!

(To learn more about how marriage and family in the human realm typify God-plane relationships, please see the chapters on the fifth and seventh commandments in our booklet, *The Ten Commandments*. It is free upon request.)

Sensibly and cheerfully blending the concept of a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual union with that of a “family kingdom” should produce an atmosphere wherein men and women can find complete fulfillment in the here and now. This fulfillment is pictured in the book of Psalms: “Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways.... Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table” (128:1-3).

Build on This Foundation

Think deeply about these concepts relating to the meaning and purpose of marriage. And once you really grasp them, why not start building *your* marriage and home

life using them as a foundation?

Rather than husband and wife being bored with each other's thoughts, both should be enthralled with the miniature family kingdom they are energetically building as a team. If they have children, there should be a deep common interest in properly rearing them, in improving their living conditions and in planning for the future—their future! For in a truly happy marriage, it isn't *my* house, *my* car or *my* paycheck. Instead, whether in actual words or simply in obvious attitude, it must be *our* house, *our* car, *our* income, *our* future.

Thus, the mutual attitude should be one of constantly looking forward and planning for improvements to your "castle." The wife's wishes, as well as expertise she often has in home decorating, cooking and housekeeping, should always be one of the foremost factors involved. Though ultimately the husband's decision, every major purchase—be it a home, car, computer, etc.—should be a *family project* to be shared between him and his wife.



Nothing to talk about? Not so! There's *everything* to talk about—and share. That's the right answer. Husbands and wives should see themselves as *partners* in a great adventure, building a career, a business, a life—together. With both entering wholly into the discussion,

they should plan their mutual strategy and talk over in detail what each can contribute to bring their goals in life closer to reality.

And then there are the children. A tremendous blessing from God, a child provides a world of opportunity for communication between spouses. There is so much to discuss in this arena—from the simple joys of watching him or her grow to mutual problem solving and planning for the future. And since each child is unique, the next one to come along does not mean it's going to be "been there, done that." Rather, more children means there's more to talk about! Parents should take time to discuss the strengths and shortcomings of each of their children and how to guide them, nurture them and help prepare them for full and successful lives.

Whatever you do, *find* things to discuss! For a marriage without deep and heartfelt communication is really no marriage at all. Sadly, though, many thoughtless and selfish people pursue and find just the opposite—excessive duties, endless distractions or spending far too much time with their friends to help them *avoid* heart-to-heart discussion with their mates. Someone with this attitude is always "too busy," never finding the time to truly delve into the heart and mind, the hopes and dreams of the very one to whom he or she is

united in covenant for life. Worse yet, the neglected spouse may be *aching with desire* to be included in the "busy" person's life and thoughts.

It may be that only a tragedy is enough to shock the insensitive partner into an awareness of his or her

responsibilities. The husband may lose his job. One of the children may suffer a serious injury. Indeed, in the course of a normal life, tragedy seems to find us one way or another. But God often uses misfortune to teach us spiritual lessons—in this case to strengthen a marriage. If met by both partners together, tragedy can actually draw them closer to one another. In fact, a trial can spark communication and a sense of sharing that may have all but disappeared. And at such a time, a husband and wife may discover that what they've really needed all along is each other.

What is paramount is that each partner be willing to sympathize with and truly understand his or her mate. So anything that breaks down the barriers of pride, selfishness, insensitivity and coldness is a move in the right direction. Ironically though, it all too often takes some major setback to bring this message home.

Overcoming Barriers

Why is there such a lack of completely candid, heart-to-heart talks between spouses? Almost all people to some degree *fear* exposing their inner selves and opening up to other human beings. Many are afraid to let even their mates in on their doubts and fears as well as their hopes and dreams. Underlying this is a deep-seated phobia of being misunderstood, ridiculed, criticized or censured.

Before a solid relationship has been slowly and painstakingly built over the course of months or years, even marital partners often avoid sharing their innermost thoughts. Yet, until this failure to openly communicate is rectified, they can never truly be "one"—and a basic human need is left unfulfilled.

Often men are more proud than women in this area. It can be harder

for them to admit that they're afraid, for example. So when a husband becomes uncomfortable with a conversation because pursuing it might reveal part of his true (and secret!) nature, he might just cut his wife short with a harsh word—ending the discussion.

Another example of counterproductive communication would be answering a matter before you've heard all the facts (cf. Prov. 18:13). Consider a man who is distressed about a very complicated problem on the job that has gone on for quite some time. With some hesitation, he finally starts to share this anxiety with his wife. And regarding this matter that he has mulled over and analyzed for *months*, she instantly concludes, "You should stand up for yourself like a man..." and proceeds to instruct him on what actions he needs to take.

With a sick feeling, the husband lowers his eyes, thinking, "She didn't even wait to hear the whole problem!" With an off-the-cuff remark concerning something just learned and not properly thought out, his spouse has made him feel ignorant and unmanly. This husband had been seeking mature help and understanding in what may have been one of the biggest problems facing him. But hurt by the ill-conceived and hasty advice, he is forced to withdraw, change the subject or leave the room. His wife actually *meant* well—but she just didn't know how to *listen*.

Deeply understanding another human being requires that we learn to *listen carefully*. We must be attuned not only to the words that are said, but also to the feelings with which they are spoken. We must provide however much time it takes for

our spouses to unburden their hearts to us—as often as they need to. And during this learning process, we must not hasten to offer criticism or judgment. Rather, we must diligently seek to *understand* those we love.

And, of course, the example given is merely to illustrate this widespread *human* problem. Wives are not more likely to "listen poorly" than husbands—nor are husbands more likely than wives. The point is that we *all* need to listen more carefully and intelligently to better offer helpful and wise coun-



sel. In this way, both husbands and wives can be better communicators and thereby help build stronger, lasting marriages!

You see, there's a very close link between love and understanding. For the very definition of true love is outgoing concern. Therefore, those who truly love each other will seek to understand, to encourage and to share the depths of their beings with one another.

But perhaps you're wondering where to begin. If you would like to practice the arts of total communication, of understanding and of love in your own marriage, here are a few suggestions to follow.


For one, build a deep interest in the growth and fulfillment of your spouse as a person. Jesus Christ said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

There is no greater opportunity available to us on this earth for giving, sharing and inspiring joy and fulfillment in another person than that of marriage. If each partner thinks, "How much can I give toward the joy and fulfillment of my mate?" and wholeheartedly works toward that end, you've got a recipe for marital bliss!

Also, learn to share and communicate on the deepest level. Make time for long talks together—perhaps including walking, hiking or cycling through the countryside if possible. Spend holidays and vacation trips together. Even overnight or business trips—leaving small children with those you trust—can become "second honeymoons" that put *zest* into your marriage. And when at home, develop mutual interests and hobbies.

It doesn't matter so much *what* you do, so long as you both do it *together*—that it's something you can truly *share* by the hour with one another, and that it serves as a vehicle to stimulate a deeper *closeness* and *understanding* between you both.

Finally, learn to respond to one another—openly and lovingly. Have no secrets. Bear no grudges. This is your only life, your only mate, your only love. Learn to think and feel in unison—solving all your problems *as a team*. The mutual encouragement and stimulus you'll feel—along with the added warmth and love you'll experience—will add an extra dimension of understanding, purpose and joy to your life that cannot be gained in any other way. And the honeymoon will *never* be over!

To find out more about building a strong marital relationship, please write or call for our free booklet, *How to Have a Joyous Marriage*. 

Does the Bible indicate that Christ was born on December 25?

One key to the accurate dating of the birth of Jesus Christ is contained in an obscure statement recorded in Luke about Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. Here we are told that John's father was "of the course of Abijah" (1:5 ASV). This brief mention has great significance.

We learn from Luke that Mary, the mother of Jesus, went to visit her cousin Elizabeth right after the conception of Jesus. Elizabeth was six months pregnant at the time (vv. 36-41). Thus, John the Baptist was about six months older than Jesus. So if we can ascertain when John was born, figuring out the approximate time of Christ's birth is a simple matter. And that's where the "course of Abijah" enters in.

About 1,000 years earlier, in the days of King David, the number of priests in Israel had grown considerably. David, therefore, divided them into 24 "courses" or divisions so as to rotate their service in the temple (1 Chron. 24; cf. 23:6; 28:13 KJV). The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote in the first century that the aforementioned "partition has remained to this day" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, bk. 7, chap. 14, sec. 7).

According to the *Talmud*, all of the priests served in Jerusalem during the three annual Festival seasons—Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (cf. Lev. 23; Deut. 16). Throughout the rest of the year, however, they took turns, with each course serving one week in rotating order. The rotation began on the first Sabbath of Nisan (or Abib)—the first month on the Hebrew calendar—with each course serving from Sabbath to Sabbath.

Now, because *all* of the courses served during the week of Passover, that meant the course of Abijah—eighth in rotation (cf. 1 Chron. 24:10)—would have come on duty at the beginning of the *ninth* week. And when this rotation was over, the week of Pentecost had begun—so the course of Abijah would have remained for the tenth week as

well. Luke 1 informs us that John was conceived right after his father returned home from serving at the temple (vv. 23-24). This was during the last half of Sivan, the third month of the Jewish calendar. Thus, his birth nine months or so later would have been in the spring of the next year. And since Jesus was born six months or so after John, *He* would have been born during the following autumn.

Such a conclusion is corroborated by two other details Luke gives us about the events surrounding Christ's birth. One is that the shepherds were *in the field*, keeping watch over their flocks by night (2:8). Shortly after the fall harvest and the Feast of Tabernacles, in October, Judea's rainy season would have begun. And by November—as the weather began to turn colder—the flocks would have been brought in for the winter. Therefore, by December they would no longer have been in the fields at night with shepherds watching over them.

The second detail Luke provides is that Joseph and Mary had gone to Bethlehem at the time of a census enrollment for taxation (2:1-4). Normally such enrollments were set for right after harvest—which, again, would coincide with a fall date.

Clearly, then, Jesus was not born on December 25. To learn where this tradition originated, please read "Glory to the Newborn King?" beginning on page 17.

How does God view national holidays like the American celebration of Thanksgiving?

Traditionally celebrated as a family feast, Thanksgiving Day in the United States is a holiday with the purpose of thanking God for all His blessings. It began with Pilgrim settlers in 1621 showing gratitude to the Almighty for health and harvest. Later, presidential and congressional proclamations were issued for days of thanksgiving as well as days of fasting and prayer. This finally developed into a particular day—the fourth Thursday of November—being instituted as Thanksgiving.

Some few think that because God

told His people not to "add" to the laws of worship He gave in the Bible (Deut. 12:32), therefore we must not celebrate *any* days besides those specifically commanded therein. Yet the context of God's directive clearly shows it to be a prohibition against adopting *pagan* worship practices to honor Him, such as holidays like Christmas and Easter (vv. 29-32).

Furthermore, there are some very positive Scriptural examples of national leaders setting aside days for national worship, celebration and feasting before God. Solomon did so following the dedication of God's newly built Temple (1 Kings 8:62-66). And under King Hezekiah's leadership one year, the people kept the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread for an *extra* seven days (2 Chron. 30:21-27). God had not commanded this—but was pleased.

Centuries later, the Jews instituted Hanukkah (the Feast of Lights or Dedication). This eight-day winter festival still celebrated by them today did not originate in pagan religion. Rather, it commemorates the anniversary of the purification of the second Temple (165 B.C.), following its defilement by Syrian invader Antiochus Epiphanes. Tradition holds that though there was oil enough to light the Temple Menorah for only *one* day, it miraculously lasted for *eight* days! Thus the eight-day festival.

Even Jesus Christ Himself attended this Feast of Dedication (John 10:22). There was certainly nothing wrong with the Jewish people celebrating the Temple's dedication—and nothing wrong with giving God thanks on that particular anniversary. Indeed, Christ's perfect example here showed that it is right and well to participate in a national religious observance or holiday instituted for an honorable purpose—as long as it is free of pagan religious customs and false religious ideas.

Of course, it *should* be noted that the national holidays celebrated by the Jews—like Hanukkah and Purim—may have very little significance for *non-Jews*. Therefore non-Jews would certainly not be expected to participate in them. Likewise the *American* national holiday Thanksgiving may have very little significance for *non-Americans*.

They Will Live Again

by Gerald Weston



In the last several seconds, somewhere on this earth, somebody's baby just died. It's a cruel and bitter fact. But for some of you reading this article, you know what this means on a personal level. You have experienced the loss of a child—there's nothing "factual" or "academic" about it. You went through the planning, the preparation and the dreaming. You studied the list of names, felt movement in the womb and knew the joy of a new life made in your image.

But you also understand all too well the *emptiness* of a beginning that ended far too soon. Perhaps it was due to some congenital deformity, sudden infant death syndrome or an accident. No matter, for the result and feelings are all the same—confusion, emptiness, anger and depression. Then there are the questions. Why? How could it have happened? Is this all there is to show for our labors? There are also the more religious questions. Is there a God? Is there life after death? If so, where is my baby now?

Why is it that when tragedy strikes no one seems to have the same answers to these questions? In fact, a lot of people don't have any answers at all! But is that because there *are* none? Hardly. The fact is that God has *revealed* the answers in the pages of your Bible. And it's the most comforting "good news" there could ever be!

God's Fairness

Some 35 years ago I was shocked to learn that the Bible does not say a lot of the things that people claim it does. For example, burning bodies that are never consumed, condemned to hellfire, are nowhere to be found in

Scripture. Neither could I find the concept of going to heaven and strumming on harps while sitting on clouds. In fact, the very idea of an immortal soul with a conscious existence after death was the *exact opposite* of what I read when I opened the Word of God for myself! The dead are *unconscious*—as if asleep—waiting to be resurrected (cf. Ezek. 18:4; Eccl. 9:10; 1 Thess. 4:14).

The immortal soul concept has given rise to one of the greatest deceptions ever told, which has caused unneeded fear and suffering for *billions* of professing Christians. This lie holds that God is trying to save every human being *right now*. But think about that for a moment. If God is trying to save everyone *now*, isn't He rather unsuccessful? By most anyone's reckoning, God is *losing the battle*—and losing badly. For those who claim to be Christian don't even constitute 50% of the world's population—nor have they ever!

Think also what this means about God's *fairness*. Recently I saw an interview with a famous religious leader in which he was questioned along this line: "Do you really believe that everyone who does not accept Christ is condemned to hell forever?" Not surprisingly, he dismissed the question. "I can't answer that. Only God can judge." He artfully sidestepped the issue. Why? Because if he answered it according to popular understanding, he would have been trapped!

He knew that no thinking person could truly believe that *everyone who has ever lived* has had an opportunity to accept Christ as Savior. What about inhabitants of remote areas of the world who lived and died without ever having heard the only name by which salvation comes (Acts 4:12). What

about small children growing up in an atheist home?

The dilemma is clear to see. If a minister *were* to answer that an unbaptized infant, for example, is condemned for eternity because he never accepted Christ, it begs an obvious question: “How can a fair God condemn someone who has never even had a chance?”

The truth is that God wants to save all who have ever lived. Moreover, He has a plan to carry out that very purpose. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:3-4).

The Plan of God

But how do we reconcile these ideas? How can it be that *only* through the name of Jesus Christ is there salvation, while so many have lived and died in ignorance of their Savior? The answer is really quite simple. It’s that Almighty God has a different timetable from what most men have ever imagined.

Man has been allowed to make choices for himself from the very beginning. Most are familiar with the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We know that they were presented with two trees—the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. When they chose to eat the fruit of this latter tree, they sinned, disobeying God’s direct instructions. And we are reaping the consequences to this very day!

After they had sinned, God drove them out of the Garden of Eden, away from the “Tree of Life” (Gen. 3:22-24). He cut off their access to this tree—which would have opened the path to eternal life. And for nearly 6,000 years now, man has been learning the lesson—written in blood, sweat and tears—that he is incapable of achieving his highest potential apart from God’s involvement in his life. Thankfully, the Almighty has dealt mercifully with mankind. Through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, the path has once more been opened to the Tree of Life.

Most people today, however, are not yet on that path. Jesus made it clear that not everyone is being called in this age. He said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). Think about it. This clearly implies that while some *are* being drawn today, *others aren’t*.

Jesus’ disciples once asked why He spoke to the people in parables (Matt. 13:10). His reply might surprise you: “It has been given to *you* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to *them* it has NOT been given!” (v. 11). That’s right. Those not called in this age could not yet *understand* the spiritual principles Christ taught.

Jesus tells us that “many are called, but few are chosen” (22:14). “Many,” of course, does not mean “all.” In this case, many does not even mean *most*—as an honest look around the world will surely tell us. Consider the *billions* of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. The vast majority of them have not been touched in any meaningful way by the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. And even most professing Christians haven’t really understood God’s plan of salvation. But someday they will!

The Bible speaks of *more than one* day of salvation. In fact, it gives us the time order of God’s great plan. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Cor. 15:22-23). But, what about those who are not Christ’s? When will they be resurrected?

More Than One Resurrection

In Revelation 20, we find the answer. Following Christ’s return to this earth, He will establish a 1,000-year Kingdom to rule all of mankind (v. 4; cf. Is. 2:2-4). Governing with Christ will be the resurrected saints—those who *were* called during this present age, who surrendered their lives to Him and endured to the end. The saints will be in the “*first* resurrection” (Rev. 20:4-5 NRSV). Now there couldn’t be a *first* resurrection unless there were also a second, right?

And we see it here. The second resurrection is for the *rest* of mankind—those who never had a real chance to walk on the path that leads to eternal life. This will include *billions* who have lived and died and never heard the name of Christ, or who, if they had heard of Him, never understood what His First Coming was all about! It will include all the infants and children who have died throughout history. Their resurrection will come at the end of 1,000 years of Christ’s rule! Set in parentheses in verse 5 is the following statement: “But the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended” (NRSV).

We read of this resurrection beginning in verse 11: “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it... And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” But what books?

Remember what Jesus said about speaking in parables. He used them to *hide the meaning* from those to whom He was not granting spiritual understanding. Let’s look at Mark’s parallel account of the passage we earlier examined in Matthew 13. “To those who are outside,

all things come in parables, so that ‘**Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand**; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them’” (Mark 4:11-12).

How many times have you heard someone say that he just can’t understand the Bible? The truth is that many don’t even try very hard. But even those who do often find it to be very confusing. Consider all the different denominations professing Christianity. They all claim to teach the Bible, yet so many hold vastly different doctrines. The fact is that even among those who have come in contact with the Bible, it is a closed book—unless, of course, Jesus Christ opens their minds to it!

It should be easy to see, then, that Revelation 20 refers to the books of the Bible, which will finally be opened so that *all* human beings can understand them. They will need to, for they will then be judged by what is written in these books. “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (James 2:12).

A Future Judgment

There is another book spoken of in the same passage of Revelation. It is the Book of Life—apparently the record God keeps of those whom will be given *eternal* life. Note that it is open, not closed. In other words, those who are resurrected at that time will be judged then—not now! They will *then* have the opportunity for their names to be written in this Book of Life. *Judging* is not the same as *sentencing*. Those who have been called and chosen today are being judged *now* (1 Peter 4:17)—throughout each person’s present lifetime. But those who will be in the second resurrection will be judged *then*—throughout the course of a *new* lifetime!

Ezekiel 37 refers to this time of judgment to come. In vision, the Prophet Ezekiel is taken to a valley filled with bones. These bones are very dry, indicating that life had left them a long time ago. There is an old song about the bones of Ezekiel 37. Sadly, few have ever understood the wonderful meaning of the section of Scripture it is based on.

After bringing the bones together, covering them with muscle and skin, and breathing physical life into them once again, God reveals to whom these bones belong: “Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the *whole house of Israel*’” (v. 11). Note that this is a resurrection to *physical* life. The *first* resurrection of the saved was to eternal, spirit life (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-50).

But those in the second resurrection are not already saved. This is clearly indicated in the verses that follow: “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you


into the land of Israel.... I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live” (Ezek. 37:12-14). They did *not* have God’s Spirit before, meaning they had never been converted in their previous life (cf. Rom. 8:9). Yet here they are, being given God’s Spirit following a resurrection!

At this time, there will be a heartfelt repentance on the part of those who have never really known God’s Truth. Yet it will be harder for some than for others to face up to the past and turn their lives around. Jesus Himself said so.

Notice what He told the people of various cities He visited that wouldn’t accept His message and repent: “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in [the pagan Phoenician cities of] Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum... if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matt. 11:21-24).

If ancient pagans *would* have repented, then wouldn’t God—who shows no partiality (Rom. 2:11)—give them a chance to do just that? Of course! And He *will*—in the Great White Throne Judgment. Christ further told the Jews of His day, “The men of Nineveh [pagan capital of Assyria] will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it [i.e. its sins], because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here” (Matt. 12:41). The Ninevites did heed God at that particular time—but they were never spiritually converted. Yet salvation will be made available to them during the judgment period to come.

Today, then, is not the *only* day of salvation. Now Isaiah 49:8 and 2 Corinthians 6:2 have been used by many to say it *is*—yet both verses may actually be translated “A day of salvation” (NRSV). For *everyone who has ever lived* will be given a real opportunity to join the Family of God for eternity. If, during this new life, those who have been resurrected choose God’s way and accept the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, they will have their names written in His Book of Life. Those few who choose the way of sin, rejecting God’s mercy, will be destroyed in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15). But *no one* will be able to claim that God has been unjust and that they did not have every opportunity to attain eternal life.

A *new life* awaits those who have lived and died apart from the Truth of God. What a wonderful plan God has for *all* mankind! 

(continued from page 3)

God's Word tells us that we are not really acquainted with our Creator! We may know *about* Him. But to really *know* Him, one must "walk with God" and experience the life and character of the Almighty by keeping His spiritual law—the Ten Commandments. Such a person must have Christ actually LIVING the same obedient life within him or her that He lived in the flesh nearly 2,000 years ago (cf. Gal. 2:20 KJV; Heb. 13:8).

God inspired Peter to tell us that "scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3-4). Peter then goes on to write, "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (v. 8).

God gave mankind a seven-day week. If, in this context, a prophetic day equals 1,000 years, as indicated here and elsewhere, then it may well be that God is working out His Plan for mankind in 7,000 years—seven prophetic "days" in one prophetic "week." And by most reckoning, we are nearing the end of 6,000 years of recorded human history. Will the *next* millennium belong to Jesus Christ as King of kings?

As a servant of God, I must tell you that I feel prophetic events are now starting to speed up! Many of you may have seen the shocking article in the August 25, 1997, edition of *Newsweek* magazine titled, "HAIL MARY." It describes how more than four million signatures have been sent to Pope John Paul II asking him "to exercise the power of papal infallibility to proclaim a new dogma of Roman Catholic faith: that the Virgin Mary is 'Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix of All Graces and Advocate for the People of God.' Such a move would elevate Mary's status dramatically beyond what most Christians profess." Though the present pope says he does not agree with this, he "has received 4,340,429 signatures from 157 countries—an average of [nearly] 100,000 a month—supporting the proposed dogma."

On the political front, Arab leaders continue to proclaim their definite intention to DESTROY the state of Israel! Time and again, we read of various Arab leaders talking to their *own people* (not the Western media!) and telling them that the Israelis must be *wiped off the face of the earth!*

Meanwhile, the extreme religious right wing in Israel is now fascinated with a "red heifer" that they claim was prophesied and, to them, indicates that it's time to resume sacrifices on the Temple Mount. But, of course, Arab leaders are warning of violence and a probable *jihad* if such an event takes place. This could sweep the entire Middle East into a maelstrom of all-out WAR—dragging in the United States and perhaps other Western nations, and causing a tremendous oil shortage that would crimp industrial production and set most of the Western World aflame.

As at the end of the 1980s, when the formerly Communist nations of Eastern Europe *suddenly* began to break loose, events could once again snowball out of control. Remember that time? Seemingly overnight, East Germany became free and the Berlin Wall quickly came down. One event impacted another, creating a domino effect. *And it could happen again!* Events that God prophesied thousands of years ago would *suddenly* take place. A type of synergism would be created—sweeping all obstacles aside in its path.

Are we at such a time in human history? As a minister of Jesus Christ, I must tell you that I definitely feel we are. For the first time ever, mankind has, in this generation, the means at his disposal to *erase human life from the face of this planet!* We read increasingly about the ominous potential of chemical and biological weapons of war. These "weapons from hell," as they are sometimes called, are extremely hard to defend against and have the capacity to destroy MILLIONS of human lives almost overnight. Biological warfare involves the use of microorganisms or toxins to spread death and disease. Combined with the coming "plagues" that man is *already* bringing on himself from the misuse of pesticides, food additives, and polluted air and water, these biological weapons will have an ENORMOUS impact on the population of this earth (cf. Rev. 6:8).

Events will move swiftly! We may not have as much time left as we've thought. So I urge *all* of our readers to genuinely *study your Bibles* and "get involved" with and follow God's Truth. Get involved as well with the Work of the Living God—helping others to understand. For the evidence indicates that Christ WILL come *within this generation!* May God help you to understand. If you would like personal counsel, or if you would like to meet with others who believe the Truth, then call or write to us at our address nearest you. It is listed on page three of this magazine.

