

THE WORLD AHEAD®

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EDITORIAL



Roderick C. Meredith
Editor in Chief

Do You Know How to "Watch"?

On the *World Ahead* television program and in the pages of this magazine, we are constantly encouraging you to obey this command of Christ: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). This instruction was given just after Jesus had been detailing point by point the world events that would lead up to His Second Coming.

What *are* the key events you should watch for? And *how* should you watch and pray?

As most of you know, the vast majority of the secular media upholds liberal social and political ideals and rejects the concept of a *real* God—a God with total power who can and *will* intervene in world affairs. Article after article has appeared in different newspapers and magazines over the past few years "making fun" of people's religious concerns about the end of the age. Print and broadcast journalists talk glibly about "millennial fever" and how often people have been misled in the past. About how *all* the dates for Christ's return have thus far been proven **WRONG**.

What most journalists *do not* understand—and, in all fairness, *cannot* understand—is that only those whom God is "calling" will be given true understanding of Bible prophecy. Even among the "elect," those who truly surrender to *obey* God and let Christ *live His life* within them will tend to have far more understanding. As God inspired the psalmist to tell us, "a good understanding have all those who *do His commandments*" (Ps. 111:10).

As many of our longtime followers know, the overall pattern of prophesied world events has been understood by the true Church of God for decades. And world events are *right on God's schedule*—right according to pattern!

What, then, are the key prophetic events to watch for and *how* should you watch? Jumping ahead a little bit, some of the best tools on this earth to help in watching are the prophetic booklets we publish and send out absolutely **FREE** upon request. The booklet titled *God's Intervention in World Affairs* presents the overall pattern of end-time events. *America and Britain in Prophecy* is a wonderful guide to help you fully understand that the American and British-descended peoples are, in fact, descendants of what has come to be known as the "lost Ten Tribes" of Israel. It explains that many awesome prophecies of the end of this age refer specifically to

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Our Unseen ENEMY

In this tumultuous age, we are witnessing ever-increasing acts of violence—from our children killing one another to international terrorists trying to kill hundreds or thousands at a time. Are these just random acts? Or could there be an invisible, malignant force manipulating these trends?

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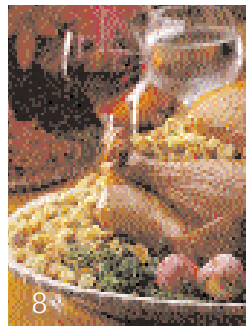
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Our Unseen ENEMY

Mediums, channelers and so-called “spiritualists” are becoming increasingly influential in the United States and other Western nations. For many folks, dialing up the “psychic hotline” is just a bit of harmless fun—so they think. But for others, the occult has become nothing short of a religion! As we will see, both approaches are fraught with danger.

The *San Diego Union-Tribune* recently reported on this phenomenon.

“In the last year, mediums have soared into the media spotlight. At the forefront is the phenomenal success of the book *Talking to Heaven: A Medium’s Message of Life After Death*, by Los Angeles medium, James Van Praagh. It’s been on the *New York Times* nonfiction best-seller list for months.

“Using Van Praagh’s business as an indicator, interest in mediums is intense: During the last year his clientele has grown to a three-year wait for private readings.

“In May, actress Cher revealed she was using Van Praagh to talk to her recently deceased ex-husband, Sonny Bono. Why the fascination? Van Praagh said he thinks it has to do with a failure of mainstream religion” (July 10, 1998).

Mediums and channelers claim to relay messages from beyond the grave to

living friends and relatives. Unfortunately, they often give generalized ideas of hope that serve to confuse grieving people who may be in a most vulnerable state.

When asked what his basic message is for his clients, Van Praagh answered, “That there is no death, there is only life. And that what we create in this life, how we treat one another, is what we’ll take with us when we pass on” (*Union-Tribune*).

Others have chosen a different route to connect with the “great beyond.” In Pentecostal churches throughout the land, worshipers roll around on the floor saying they are “slain in the spirit.” Others talk of being “knocked down by the power of God.” Sixteen-year-old David Heath said, “For me, holy laughter is just rolling around on the floor and having a good time with God” (*Union-Tribune*, Aug. 28, 1998).

Where It All Began

Whether we realize it or not, the origin of many of our ideas and philosophies is not—as we might think—from men themselves. Rather, so much of what we think on a fundamental level comes directly from Satan the Devil! Remember Van Praagh’s statement: “There is NO DEATH, there is only life”? Where did this idea really come from? Whether he realizes it or not, Van Praagh is simply paraphrasing what Satan said to one of our first parents! For in his attempt to deceive Eve

in the Garden of Eden, Satan told her, “You shall *not* surely die.”

In other words, “there is *no death*”!

Now the Bible—the inspired revelation of God to mankind—tells us the exact opposite is true. Notice what *God* said to Adam and Eve concerning the forbidden fruit: “**You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it lest you die**” (Gen. 3:3). Did the Creator KNOW what He was talking about? Or should we rather believe the reasoning and imagination of men repeating the philosophy of Satan the Devil?

The Word of God makes it *very clear* that men can and do DIE. “The soul who sins shall *die*” (Ezek. 18:4). “The wages of sin is *death*” (Rom. 6:23). And “it is appointed for men to *die* once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). So much for Mr. Van Praagh’s idea.

Now what about the notion that Christians should uncontrollably writhe, scream, laugh and be hurled to the ground in so-called religious ecstasy? The truth is that the biblical revelation of how to behave in God’s presence is exactly the *opposite* of this common Pentecostal phenomenon. Rather than seeking wild, uncontrolled frenzy, the Bible says, “God is not the author of *confusion*” (1 Cor. 14:33).

One biblical example of people jumping, yelling or being seemingly “slain in the spirit” is found in 1 Kings 18:17-40. Notice carefully the actions of the prophets of the pagan god Baal: “So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, ‘O Baal, hear us!’ But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they *leaped* about the altar which they had made. And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy,

or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they *cried aloud*, and *cut* themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention” (vv. 26-29).

Then, without any “leaping,” without any “crying aloud”—not even slicing open his skin!—Elijah gave a brief but heartfelt prayer. The result? “Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice” (vv. 36-38).

Now in this case, the Almighty was actually *proving* to wicked King Ahab and the prophets of Baal that He alone is God. He did not permit a response to the frenzied cries directed toward their false god. But that doesn’t mean they never received a response to their pleadings. Just like Pharaoh’s magicians (cf. Ex. 7:11-12), and just like some who delve into the occult today, these prophets *would* sometimes witness supernatural phenomena caused by none other than Satan and his demons!

If we read the Bible carefully and prayerfully, we find that God’s *true* servants through the ages were men and women of *balance, wisdom* and *self-control*. In fact, self-control is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the life of a real Christian (cf. Gal. 5:23). In describing the *right* use of spiritual gifts, the Apostle Paul makes a point of saying, “**the spirits of the prophets are SUBJECT to the prophets**” (1 Cor. 14:32).

But Satan is now causing untold thousands of human beings to seek for God in strange and *unbiblical* ways! And one of the reasons people are so confused is that they are not cognizant of the *reality* and the awesome *power* of

Satan. An insightful comment about this dangerous dilemma was summed up in these profound words, “**The devil’s greatest triumph lies in convincing the world that he doesn’t exist!**”

We all need to be far more *aware* of the existence of a REAL Satan and also become aware of *how the devil works* to deceive sincere men and women everywhere.

How Satan Operates

In His Word, God tells us that Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). In Ephesians 2:2, Paul was inspired to describe Satan as “the *prince* of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” Satan actually exerts his will by “broadcasting” evil thoughts and urges through the *atmosphere*! This is how he *works* in those who disobey God.

The Bible also tells us that the actual “god” most people worship—the real spirit being guiding and influencing this human society—is none other than Satan himself! “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the *god* of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

This malignant being definitely IS broadcasting his attitudes, feelings and lusts through this world’s atmosphere to human societies and religions in order to confuse and *deceive* the “whole world.” He is influencing the creation of vile, perverted films and television shows that undermine righteous standards and decency throughout most of the world. He is causing clever but terribly misguided writers, directors and producers to insert more and more violence, lust and even hopelessness into the programming watched by

by Roderick C. Meredith

hundreds of millions of susceptible young people throughout the Western World. Another tactic particularly aimed at teens and young adults is the rebellious and self-destructive mood projected by so much of today's music.

The Gospel accounts tell of another tactic Satan employs against mankind. We find that he knows the Scriptures—inside out! And he even had the audacity to quote Scripture to the very Author of the Bible, Jesus Christ! “Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: “He shall give His angels charge over you,” and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”’” (Matt. 4:5-6). Satan *accurately* quoted from Psalm 91:11-12. But he *misrepresented* and *twisted* the meaning of these verses. This psalm explains the principle that God keeps us from harm we cannot foresee. But Satan wanted Christ to *pridefully* focus inwardly and EXALT Himself by reason of this scripture. Christ, knowing the *real* meaning, rebuked Satan and refused to improperly “tempt” God (Matt. 4:7).

Next, Satan offered Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me’” (vv. 8-9). Christ acknowledged that the kingdoms of this world *were indeed* under Satan's control. He did not *dispute* Satan's current rule over man's governments!

Rather, Jesus knew the spiritual principles involved and correctly applied the appropriate scripture, saying, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (v. 10). Christ chose to obey His Father and receive His

reward from Him in *God's* time and in *God's* way.

Later, when accused of using Beelzebub—another name for the devil—to cast out demons, Jesus said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” (12:25-26).

The Great Deceiver

Satan *does* have a kingdom! As we have seen, he is the invisible “god” of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). He is the arch deceiver of men and nations. “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, **who deceives the whole world**; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Rev. 12:9).

Satan is the spirit being who will powerfully influence and perhaps finally even possess a soon-to-come, charismatic political dictator. This dictator will seduce a mighty world superpower arising in a revived, militant and united Europe. Amazing, but true. Satan will be the god who animates and empowers the false religious system that will undergird this world-dominating economic and military power! Don't just believe what we write and take our word for it. Look at the Bible for yourself! (cf. 13:1-4).

When Jesus spoke about the various religious leaders of His day, He condemned them for their hypocrisy. These ecclesiastical figures made a pretense of being godly, yet refused to follow the *spiritual intent* of God's law. Jesus attributed to them Satan's own character, using the analogy that since their father was Satan, they would behave just like him. The devil lies. So who should be surprised if his “children”

do the same—preaching a perverted gospel of deception and falsehood.

It is important to grasp the fact that Satan is the very *father* of lies. He continually and cleverly deceives mankind—as do his servants. In fact, lying is so common that some people find it easier to deceive than to tell the truth—exactly according to Satan's plan!

As part of his organized conspiracy to thwart God and overthrow His great purpose for mankind, Satan has his own ministers! Paul warned the Christians of his day about a coming great deception. That warning is even more applicable to our time now: “For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted; you may well put up with it!” (2 Cor. 11:4).

Paul continues his warning, “For such are *false* apostles, *deceitful* workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! **For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light**. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”! (vv. 13-15).

Deceived worshipers *think* that Satan's ministers are preaching the true Gospel. But they actually preach “another Jesus” and have a “different gospel.” It's up to each one of us to genuinely *study* the Bible and *prove* what Jesus and the early apostles taught and practiced. To help you do so, please write for our free booklet, *Christianity's Greatest Deception*.

An Unseen Battle Rages On

Satan has a great deal more to do with world affairs than most people realize. As the end of this age

approaches, he will intervene all the more as he sees his time running out.

We find that God sent an angel to encourage the Prophet Daniel after he had been fasting to seek greater understanding (Dan. 10:10-12). The angel gave Daniel some remarkable information about why it took so long for his prayers to be answered. “But the prince of the kingdom of Persia [an evil spirit] withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes [a righteous angel], came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia” (v. 13).

Later, this same angel recounted more details of the unseen spiritual world. “Then he said, ‘Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece [another evil spirit] will come. But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince’” (vv. 20-21).

Clearly, this passage is speaking of SPIRIT WARS! It is describing the *battles* that go on behind the affairs of men in the unseen *spirit* world. The angel speaking to Daniel was describing this *battle among spirits* wherein even the great archangel Michael (cf. Dan. 12:1) had to be called in for assistance!

Just before the Great Tribulation begins, Satan will make one last-gasp direct assault upon God Himself! We read of this awesome war of spirits in Revelation 12. First, John describes ancient Israel bringing forth the Christ child (vv. 1-4) and His subsequent resurrection and ascension to heaven (v. 5). John next describes how the *true* Church of God—the “little flock” (cf. Luke 12:32)—had to *flee* to the wilderness during the Dark Ages to escape persecution. Then—for the

entire rest of the chapter—God reveals to us a coming spirit battle wherein Satan, because he knows that he has only a “short time” left, hurls himself and his demon armies against God and His angels. After Satan is defeated and cast back down to this earth, he grievously PERSECUTES the “woman”—now meaning *spiritual* Israel. The spiritual Israelites are they “**who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ**” (Rev. 12:17). At this time, Satan will be filled with *great wrath* against God's faithful Church. It will be a time of human warfare and spiritual persecution *unparalleled* in human history! During this coming holocaust, only those who *live by* the true Christian faith will remain steadfast. “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (14:12).

Overcoming the Enemy

God is now calling selected individuals, His “elect,” to *replace* Satan and his demons. Why? To eventually *rule* this earth under Jesus Christ! Those who make it will have an opportunity—as part of the Kingdom or Government of God—to bring genuine *peace* and *joy* to this earth at last. But only the “overcomers” will be accounted worthy. “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations; ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels’; as I also have received from My Father” (2:26-27).

True Christians must overcome their own selfish nature, the pulls of this present evil world and the influence of Satan. *How* can we do this?

First, we must come to understand that both God and Satan are REAL. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). We will never overcome if we do not seek God with all our hearts. Knowing also that Satan is real, we must obey God and follow His instructions in how to resist this evil spirit. “Therefore submit to God. **Resist the devil and he will flee from you!**” (James 4:7).

Moreover, we must be constantly aware that there is a genuine spirit BATTLE going on for control of our minds and control of our lives! So we must be *alert*. We must be *strong*. We must be *on our knees continually* in fervent prayer to God for true understanding—and for the spiritual strength, faith and LOVE to serve the Almighty and to resist Satan. For true spiritual understanding and knowledge, we must really *study* God's inspired Word—the Holy Bible (2 Tim. 2:15 KJV). We must also meditate

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Thanksgiving...

Have We Forgotten Whom to Thank?

On the fourth Thursday in November, Americans across the country will enjoy more than 45 million turkeys, 55 million pumpkin pies and 80 million pounds of cranberries! More than 80 million viewers will turn on their television sets and watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, live from New York City. And the National Football League will dominate the rest of this day's television scheduling, as we watch the Detroit Lions and the Dallas Cowboys battling their opponents in what we hope will be games that bear on the various playoff races. All the while, Americans can sit back and stretch to relieve the discomfort caused by one-too-many mouthfuls of turkey and Mom's "special dressing."

But that's not how Thanksgiving Day began.

In September 1620, Christopher Jones piloted a small ship beyond the shores of England. In July, its 102 passengers had come from Holland, where they had spent the previous 12 years fleeing English religious persecution. On board the *Mayflower*, they hoped for a new beginning—in a new land.

Instead, the first winter in Plymouth colony brought death to fully half the colonists. But the summer of 1621 brought renewed hope. With an ever-present faith in God's protection and blessing, the colonists reaped a bountiful summer harvest. Governor William Bradford, who coined the term "pilgrims" for the newcomers in his *History*, issued a decree proclaiming a

three-day feast to thank God in celebration and prayer for His protection and blessing that year.

But even this isn't the *first* instance of celebrating thanks to God in our history. The tradition of giving thanks to the Almighty for protection and blessing goes back deep into our national heritage. If you are a regular reader of *The World Ahead*, you're familiar with the modern-day identity of Israel. You're aware that modern Anglo-Saxon countries (i.e. the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada) carry the ancient birthright blessings of Joseph, one of the sons of Jacob. For more information on this topic, please call or write for our free brochure, *America and Britain in Prophecy*.

The ancient Israelites—our ancestors—carried out similar traditions, minus the turkey and football! Let's take a look at an ancient heritage of thanksgiving.

Israel Gives Thanks

The nation of Israel had just been freed from cruel slavery in Egypt that had lasted for generations. God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt with a series of miracles that humbled the Egyptians, even as the

Israelites had been humbled in their slavery (Ex. 7–11). Perhaps it wasn't until they had been saved from the wrath of Pharaoh and his army—through the miracle of the Red Sea parting—that the full impact of what happened really began to sink in. "But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their



left. So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses" (14:29-31).

What follows in the next chapter is the Song of Moses—a song of praise and thanksgiving to God. The Israelites desperately needed God's help to save them from being driven back to Egypt in chains, and He *had* protected them. "Moses and the

children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: 'I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously!... He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him'" (vv. 1-2).

Later, after lapsing into the idolatrous worship they had learned in Egypt—complete with a golden calf—the Israelites were humbled by God's anger at their sin. When Moses

announced the construction of a tabernacle for worshiping the true God, they showed their gratitude for God's forgiveness with an overwhelming response. "Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, and they spoke to Moses, saying, 'The people bring much more

than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do'" (36:4-5).

Forty years after leaving Egypt, the Israelites entered the land of Canaan. Unfortunately, they quickly fell into a pattern of religious and political confusion that lasted for more than 200 years. Even under the rule of Saul, their first human king, instability still reigned. Because of his character problems, the land continued to suffer. Finally, under the leadership of David, peace came to the people of Israel. The ark—the

by Jonathan W. McNair

centerpiece of the tabernacle in the wilderness that provoked such an outpouring of generosity during the days of Moses—was placed in the new tabernacle that David built. The Israelites were filled with gratitude for God's blessing—the newfound peace and protection in the land. "Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn, with trumpets and with cymbals, making music with stringed instruments and harps.... Then they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God" (1 Chron. 15:28–16:1).

Then, in true Thanksgiving form, the people ate. David "distributed to everyone of Israel, both man and woman, to everyone a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a cake of raisins" (16:3). "And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel" (v. 4).

At this time, David presented a new psalm to the Levite musicians. "Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples!... Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.... And all the people said, 'Amen!' and praised the LORD" (vv. 8, 34–36).

Thanksgiving to God is a theme that runs deep through the history of our people. And it certainly has been part of our more recent heritage as a nation.

Thanksgiving in America

Fifty-five years after the first recorded Thanksgiving celebration, members of the governing council of Charlestown, Massachusetts, held a meeting to decide the best way to give thanks to God for the secure establishment of their community. On June 20, 1676, they unanimously

voted to instruct Edward Rawson, the clerk, to proclaim June 29 as a day of thanksgiving. We can still read the words of that First Thanksgiving Proclamation:

"The Holy God having by a long and Continual Series of his Afflictive dispensations... brought to pass bitter things against his own Covenant people in this wilderness, yet so that we evidently discern that in the midst of his judgements he hath remembered mercy.... It certainly bespeaks our positive Thankfulness, when our Enemies are in any measure disappointed or destroyed; and fearing the Lord should take notice under so many Intimations of his returning mercy, we should be found an Insensible people, as not standing before Him with Thanksgiving, as well as lading him with our Complaints in the time of pressing Afflictions:

"The Council has thought meet to appoint and set apart the 29th day of this instant June, as a day of Solemn Thanksgiving and praise to God for such his Goodness and Favour, many Particulars of which mercy might be Instanced... that the Lord may behold us as a People offering Praise and thereby glorifying Him."

George Washington penned a similar Thanksgiving Proclamation on October 3, 1789. After the birth of a new nation, and a desperate struggle to survive, the delegates of the new congress urged President Washington to issue a proclamation assigning Thursday, November 26, "to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation."

The tradition of Thanksgiving continued in many areas, but did not receive national recognition again until almost 80 years later. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the first presidential proclamation setting aside a national day of Thanksgiving on the last Thursday in November. He began his proclamation by reminding Americans that "the year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and



healthful skies." It was an encouraging note, considering that the Civil War was in its third terrible year. Before the war was over, half a million Americans would die. But it was a time to look to God for blessings, and to ask for His protection.

Once again, this tradition of giving thanks to God as a nation is a part of our heritage. There is a dark side to this tradition, however.

A Darker Side

If we go back to the story of ancient Israel, we learn that their attitude of thankfulness to God never lasted very long.

The people were extremely grateful to the Almighty after He'd saved them from the wrath of Pharaoh. Yet within a matter of days, they were willing to sacrifice burnt offerings to an image of an animal, a golden calf (Ex. 32). This, after God had specifically told them not to make any images for worship (cf. 20:4–6).

This same pattern emerges during and after King David's reign. The Israelites wholeheartedly joined David in giving thanks to God. They had good reason to, since peace and prosperity had finally been realized after generations of confusion and foreign domination. And under the reign of King Solomon, David's son, the land of Israel prospered to an even greater extent.

"Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing.... And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon" (1 Kings 4:20–25).

By the time of Solomon's death, however, thankfulness to God for the overwhelming prosperity of the land was already being forgotten. Within a few short years, the kingdom had been torn in two. The northern tribes soon slipped back into pagan idolatry—showing their "thankfulness" to golden calves set up in Bethel and Dan! (12:29).

When America Gave Thanks

If we take a closer look at Thanksgiving in American history, we find a similar pattern. As we've seen, the Plymouth Colony's Thanksgiving celebration of 1621 followed a grisly winter—as fully half of the Pilgrims in the group had perished. Like men lost at sea, they were desperate for God's intervention on their behalf, and they appreciated the protection He granted.

The first Thanksgiving proclamation, issued in Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1676, came during a time of struggle. Hunger and disease were the colonists' ever-present companions. There was constant fear of attack from Indians. Despite their adversities, though, these colonists recognized that they owed thanks to God.

They knew that their brothers back in England had suffered terribly during the previous decade. The first disaster struck in 1664 as the Great Plague—the last, and worst, outbreak of bubonic plague. More than 75,000 people died in London alone. The second disaster began on September 2, 1666, with a fire in a bakery near London Bridge. By the time the fire had been extinguished seven days later, most of the city, including 13,000 houses and 84 churches, had been destroyed. So despite their own hardships, the Massachusetts colonists were thankful for God having spared them from these catastrophes.

George Washington's Thanksgiving proclamation came after another period of economic and political difficulties. The Revolutionary War had brought hardship throughout the colonies, with men lost, property destroyed and families torn apart.

Perhaps Abraham Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation most clearly reflects the desperate straits Americans would "wait for" before honoring the Lord their God. For by the time the Civil War was over, one out of every 20 males over the age of 14 had been struck down in battle, or from the diseases that accompanied that war. In 1860, the top 5% of the population owned half the nation's wealth, while the bottom half owned but 1% of it. More than 80% of the population lived in rural areas—the majority of them working as field hands, day laborers, haulers, lifters or slaves. Many were in debt and in poor health. During the month that President Lincoln issued his Thanksgiving Proclamation, the bakers of San Francisco went on strike. As a job benefit, they demanded a 12-hour workday with Sundays off! They weren't successful, so back to work they went—15-hour days, seven days a week.

It was a harsh time, yet they

hoped for prosperity, and thanked God for the meager blessings they enjoyed. The most earnest Thanksgiving celebrations followed tough times. Perhaps this is somewhat natural. But how much better might things have been if our ancestors had kept God's blessings and protection in mind at all times? It seems that when we're too prosperous, we forget to be thankful to God!

Modern Material Thanksgiving

In 1920, Gimbels Department store in Philadelphia organized the first Thanksgiving Day parade. Santa Claus was featured as the main attraction! In 1924, both Hudson's in Detroit, and Macy's in New York City did the same. In the Macy's parade, the first balloons were used, featuring a dragon, an elephant, a toy soldier and Felix the Cat. Many stores began to use Thanksgiving as an official springboard for Christmas sales. In fact, in 1939 commercial interests, led by the head of Ohio's Federated Department store, managed to persuade President Franklin Roosevelt to move Thanksgiving from November 30 to November 23 in order to add six additional shopping days before Christmas. In 1941, Thanksgiving was permanently set as the fourth Thursday in November, to ensure four full weeks of Christmas shopping. It was no wonder, then, that some began to call the day "Franksgiving." Today, with the day after Thanksgiving being the biggest shopping day of the year, it appears that prosperity has changed our priority from giving thanks to God to shopping till we drop!

Maybe this change in the whole focus toward Thanksgiving marked the beginning of a change in our attitude toward God. Perhaps it's not too late to refocus.

(continued on page 29)

The Marriage Covenant

Only one couple in human history had the chance for a perfect marriage. Indeed, God Himself made every physical preparation for their happiness. He personally instructed them in the basics of married life and envisioned an ongoing, mentoring relationship between Himself and the couple. But Adam and Eve abruptly and tragically *forfeited* their opportunity by disobeying their Creator! They ate from the one tree He had forbidden them access to—setting in motion conditions that have plagued mankind ever since: enmity, pain, sorrow, curses, toil.

Four thousand years after He expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, God again walked the earth with mankind. Mark 10 records the Creator, now in the Person of Jesus Christ, discussing with the Pharisees the subjects of marriage and divorce. At that time the Jews generally accepted divorce. Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that the Pharisees debated endlessly about what constituted proper grounds for divorce. The Pharisees hoped to trap Jesus into stating something unscriptural. We find this account in Mark 10.

One such encounter pitted some of their leading religious authorities against our Savior, Jesus Christ.

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" the Pharisees asked.

"What did Moses command you?" Christ replied.

"Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away," they said.

Christ pointed out that although God had allowed Moses to provide for divorce, it was because of their sinful, hard-hearted nature. In point of fact, however, the Almighty never *intended* for husbands and wives to divorce, nor does He approve of it. Jesus reminded them that God had created man and woman and designed marriage for a specific purpose: "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (vv. 2-9).

Puzzled by His words, the disciples questioned Christ, saying, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry" (Matt. 19:10). In fact, Christ agreed that *some* should not marry. But those who do should accept God's intent for marriage and live by it.

From the beginning, God intended for marriage to be a *covenant relationship*. In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Prophet Malachi rebuked Jewish men for divorcing their wives. The Lord "no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.... He is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant" (Mal. 2:14). In Proverbs 2:17 Solomon describes the strange, licentious woman as one who "left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God." Commentators state that this covenant is a marriage vow, and the adulterous woman violated "her pledge of fidelity" (*Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 914). Jeremiah and Ezekiel both refer to God establishing a marriage covenant with Israel. "I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you... and you became Mine" (Ezek. 16:8; cf. Jer. 31:32).

In today's age of deception, perjury, falsification, cover-up and contracts with unreadable "fine print," we don't grasp the *solemnity* of making a covenant with Almighty God. A covenant is a formal promise between God and the involved parties to "enter into a special kind of relationship" (*Oxford Dictionary of Jewish Religion*, p. 178), created for the benefit of all parties. When God

makes a covenant with man He invests His permanence, His faithfulness and His power in the agreement. When the covenant is ratified, God commits Himself to act in the best interests of all (Rom. 8:28).

When a minister of God presides at the wedding of a true Christian couple, he oversees the establishment of a formal, binding covenant between God and the man and woman. The husband and wife are asked to promise some specific things to God and each other:

"Do you (husband) faithfully promise and covenant with God in the presence of these witnesses to take (name of fiancée) to be your lawful wedded wife for as long as you both shall live, to love her, cherish her, honor her, and provide for her?"

"Do you (wife) faithfully promise and covenant with God in the presence of these witnesses, to take (name of fiancé) to be your lawful wedded husband for as long as you both shall live, to love him, cherish him, honor him, and as God has ordained to be subject unto him?"

God, knowing perfectly what the husband and wife bring to their union, invests Himself in fulfilling the purpose for marriage: creating a one-flesh entity that reflects the love Christ and the Father have for one another. When husbands live by their covenant promise and make sure their wives feel loved, cherished, honored and cared for, and when wives live by their covenant promise and make their husbands feel loved, cherished, honored and respected, then God does His transforming work of making the two into one.

In this sense, marriage is like conversion—a process. From two separate, self-interested individuals, God fashions one entity. Just as individual Christians become more like Christ through conversion and demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit, a marriage "on track" to becoming one flesh will be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and order (cf. Gal. 5:22-23).

Marriages can become sidetracked—sometimes

severely—as in the example of the Pharisees, who had no vision of the potential for marriage and gave themselves over to quibbling about divorce. Christians today may find themselves starting down the wrong track—pointing the accusing fingers of Scripture at their mates (cf. Eph. 5; 1 Peter 3), complaining to one another about their spouse's failure to comply with scriptural obligations. Some may seek to put "ministerial pressure" on a mate by asking for sermons on "submission" or "the duties of a husband/wife." Other wrong approaches include *ignoring* the symptoms of a stressed marriage or heaping blame upon oneself.

All of these courses of action herald a breakdown between two of the three covenanting parties—the husband and wife. God, however, never breaks down. An experienced Christian friend, minister or counselor can sometimes help a stressed couple begin to communicate respectfully and honestly with one another and move back toward honoring their covenant. But no outside party can "solve" the problem of a troubled marriage, since the covenant was not made with the outsider. God wants each

marriage to work in tandem with the conversion of each mate. Christ reminded His disciples that it was not necessary to marry, but those who elected to take on the joys and rewards of having a spouse needed to do so with full understanding of God's intent (Matt. 19:11-12).

Many years ago Mr. Herbert Armstrong, our predecessor in this Work of God, observed that "**marriage is a God-plane relationship.**" He understood that the Creator covenants with Christians to transform their human unions into something truly significant, distinct from every other marriage, just as Christians themselves are distinct from one another. God would make them "one flesh," an entity to reflect, for a brief moment in time, a hint of His incredible love!

"From the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

—Mark 10:6-9

The Sermon on the Mount— Part 2

by John H. Ogwyn

Did Jesus Christ teach that obedience to God's law is necessary for salvation? Most professing Christians would emphatically answer "NO"! But are they right? What did Jesus Himself say? Do the commandments of the *Old Testament* remain valid for *New Testament* Christians?

The New Testament application of God's Law and the true Christian's response to it will be in the spotlight in this the second installment of our three-part series on the Sermon on the Mount. In our last issue, we discussed the beatitudes—statements by Christ revealing the way to true happiness and lasting fulfillment. We now continue our examination of this Sermon—found in Matthew 5–7—which is undoubtedly the most important section of the entire Bible!

The Hebrew Scriptures, commonly called the Old Testament, point beyond themselves to a further and fuller revelation from Almighty God. Moses, the author of the first five books of the Bible—called the Torah—testified in Deuteronomy 18:15 that the Eternal God would, at some future time, raise up in Israel "a prophet like unto me." In the closing words of this book, appended to the account of Moses' death and burial in chapter 34, is the statement, "And there arose *not* a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses" (v. 10 KJV). This statement is traditionally understood to have been added by Ezra the Priest, who put the canon of the Old Testament into its final form. Clearly, there *was* to arise a prophet comparable to Moses, but, at the close of the Old Testament period, that prophet had not yet come.

What was unique about Moses? For one thing, God dealt with Moses "face to face" (v. 10). Moreover, Moses was the *mediator* of the covenant between God and Israel (Ex. 19–20). We also must consider that Moses had the rank of *lawgiver* (John 7:19). While subsequent prophets might have expounded upon the law that God had given through Moses, none pretended to speak with the same authority or to give *additional* law. After the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, in the time of

King Artaxerxes, the Jews recognized that the canon of Hebrew Scripture was closed. The first-century Jewish priest and historian, Flavius Josephus, bears witness to this in his book *Against Apion* (chap. I, sec. 8).

Just as the last statements of the Torah bear witness to a special prophet yet to come, so also does the prophetic book of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament. It speaks of a preliminary messenger preparing the way before the "messenger of the covenant." This Messenger of the Covenant was to suddenly come to His temple and was prophesied to *cleanse* and to *purge* (v. 3).

Role of Jesus Christ

When Christ came, just over four centuries after the days of Malachi, He was not simply another teacher of the law. Rather, He came as the *Mediator* of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6). He was, moreover, the Messenger of the Covenant prophesied by Malachi. And Christ tells us that He alone had directly seen the Father (John 6:46) and had been sent by Him with a message. "I have come in My Father's name," Jesus declared (5:43). He went on to tell His listeners, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me" (v. 46).

Additionally, Jesus Christ came as a Lawgiver. He made clear in the Sermon on the Mount that His words superseded anything His listeners had ever heard before. But did Jesus, as Lawgiver, somehow "do away" with the law that had been given through Moses many centuries earlier? This is a crucial question that has been greatly misunderstood by most professing Christians.

As we have already noted, Jesus Christ brought a message from the Father (Acts 10:36). That message is described as the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). It contained the announcement of the New Covenant, which had been directly prophesied by

Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31). And **the very essence of the New Covenant is that God will write His laws into the hearts and minds of those who will ultimately inherit His Kingdom!** (v. 35; cf. Heb. 8:10).

In Exodus 21–23, Moses gave statutes and judgments that *applied the principles* of the Ten Commandments to the civil government of the nation of Israel. It was a nation that didn't really have a heart to obey (Deut. 5:29). In the judgments rendered in Exodus 21 and 22, the key word is "if." "IF someone does this, then here is what you do," Moses told them. Nevertheless, the basis of God's covenant with Israel was His great spiritual law, summed up in the Ten Commandments (Deut. 4:13).

Just as Moses gave statutes and judgments at the inception of the Old Covenant, so also did Jesus Christ when He began announcing the New Covenant. The Sermon on the Mount is Christ's summary of what is involved for those who would participate in this New Covenant and eventually inherit the Kingdom of God.

Fulfilling the Law

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. **I did not come to destroy but to fulfill,**" Jesus told His disciples (Matt 5:17). Of course, most professing Christians—theologians included—*do* think that Christ came to in some way weaken or countermand the obligations of the law.

The Greek term translated "destroy" is *kataluo*, which means to loosen, disintegrate or demolish (*The New Englishman's Greek Concordance and Lexicon*, 1982, p. 474). In Matthew 24:2, this word is translated "thrown down," when Jesus spoke to His disciples of the utter destruction that would occur to the temple. Clearly, then,

The Spirit of the Law

according to Matthew 5:17 above, **Christ did not come to throw down the law.**

He went on to say that He was coming to “fulfill.” Now what did He mean by that statement? The Greek word used is *pleroo*, which literally means “to fill up.” It is used in Matthew 13:48 to describe a net filled with fish. So once again, when Christ referred to fulfilling the law, He certainly didn’t mean He was “throwing it away”! Rather, He indicated that He would fill it up to the very brim! He would reveal its full meaning and intent. And that’s exactly what He proceeded to do for those who heard Him.

In Matthew 5:20, Christ told His listeners, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness *exceeds* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” The Pharisees prided themselves on their scrupulous and meticulous observance of the law. The scribes wrote out copies of the law and taught it to others. Yet, according to Christ, we must go far beyond them in obedience or we won’t even *be* in the Kingdom of God. How is that possible?

For all the attention paid to the law by the Pharisees, **they missed the whole point of what God was after.** They added many of their own “dos and don’ts” to God’s commands, but often failed to perceive His intent. In fact, they missed it by a country mile! Much of the time they sought loopholes to avoid fulfilling even as much of the spirit and intent of the law as they did understand. This is made evident in Christ’s scathing indictment of these religious leaders in Matthew 23. He told them, “**For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.** These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone”! (v. 23). He went on to tell them that they strained at gnats while swallowing camels (v. 24). Truly, they couldn’t see the spiritual forest for the physical trees!

Under the New Covenant, God’s law, which reflects His very nature, is to be written in our hearts and minds by His Spirit. God’s grace makes it possible for our sins to be wiped out through the shed blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Based upon faith, repentance and baptism, God then imparts His Spirit to the new believer (Acts 2:38). He or she is now begotten as His child. In other words, conversion means that those who would be the heirs of the Kingdom must undergo a change of their innermost nature! As Peter wrote many years later, we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Christ did not spend His time reciting an endless litany of new rules for His followers. Rather, He magnified the “old rules”—showing what it was that God

had really been after all along. The question for Christ’s disciples to ask is this: What would God be most pleased with? In order to illustrate what kind of righteousness He desired, Jesus went on to specify six statements from the law. He expressed what they understood, then proceeded with the words “but I say unto you” to lay out His authoritative interpretation of the *intent* of the law (see box on next page). Christ gave *spiritual principles* and *illustrated* them to explain what the law REALLY meant. This is what the spirit of the law is all about.

It may help to think of it this way. The *spirit* of something is the enlivening or energizing principle. The spirit of the law is the principle that gives the particular doctrine (or law) its real *purpose* and *vitality*. Christ wanted His followers to be motivated by a new way of looking at life and dealing with others. **They were to be developing the very mind of God!** In other words, Christ insists that if we are to inherit the Kingdom, we must become just like our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:48).

Amplifying the Commandments

To give a practical illustration of the principles He was teaching, Christ chose the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13), and showed how much more it meant than what they then understood. Jesus explained that it was not just the physical act of murder that would result in God’s judgment, but unjustified anger as well (Matt. 5:22). Expressions of contempt are the outgrowth of feelings of anger and hostility. They reflect the *spirit* of murder. It’s not enough simply to refrain from intentionally killing someone. Christ told His disciples to get rid of the very *attitudes* that could motivate such an act.

He went on to emphasize that reconciliation with fellow human beings goes hand in hand with reconciliation with God. We must have a willingness to make amends and a desire to heal damaged relationships if we expect to be received by our Creator. Reluctance to do so indicates that the spirit of murder is being harbored somewhere within us—somewhere below the surface. And what’s inside is critical. For God does not approve of a false front. He wants our relationships with others and with Him to be pure—motivated by real, godly love.

After discussing the spirit of murder, Christ proceeded to discuss another of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not commit adultery” (v. 27). He emphasized again that avoidance of the physical act wasn’t sufficient. God desires much more of those who would inherit His Kingdom. As Christ went on to explain, lustful thoughts violate the spirit of the seventh commandment, even if

there are no physical acts accompanying them.

This surely must seem strange to many in modern Western society where the appeal to lust permeates not only television, movies and music, but even advertisements for everyday consumer goods that don’t really have anything to do with sexual passion! Our culture is so pervaded by that which is lustful and sexually provocative that these attitudes have come to seem normal to us. So much so that the very idea of avoiding all sexual activity outside of marriage is viewed by many as quite unrealistic. This just shows how *skewed* our modern society’s concept of reality really is. For if the reality of God, His Kingdom and His coming judgment were truly grasped, then we would be willing to go to any lengths to avoid sin! (v. 30).

Examples from the Statutes

After quoting two of the commandments and showing the real intent that underlay them, Jesus went on to quote two of the statutes Moses had given Israel. Again He proceeded to explain God’s real intent to his listeners—which was radically different from the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees.

First, Christ quoted from Deuteronomy 24:1, a statute dealing with divorce. The emphasis put on this statute by the Pharisees centered around the technicalities of what constituted a valid divorce certificate. The exact details became a controversial subject of the day.

Once again, the Pharisees had clearly missed the whole point. For God *hates* divorce! (Mal. 2:16).

Later in His ministry, when the Pharisees sought to draw Him into one of their interminable arguments about the exact meaning of this statute, Christ responded with an answer that focused their attention on the *spirit* of the law (Matt. 19:1-9). Rather than arguing with them, Jesus told them to reflect upon God’s original *intent*. He reminded them that in the beginning God had created one man and one woman. This was a clear indication of the Almighty’s design for the family. “What God has joined together, let not man separate,” Jesus commanded (v. 6). It’s true that God had *allowed* this practice because of the hardness of their hearts (v. 8), but from the beginning it was never meant to be. Now, Jesus was setting the record straight!

In Matthew 5:32, Jesus made it plain that one of the only acceptable reasons for someone to take the initiative in divorcing a mate was because of serious and persistent acts of immorality. The Greek word *porneia*, translated “fornication” in the *King James Version*, was used in the Greek language to not only indicate sexual activity prior to marriage, but also a whole range of seriously immoral acts including homosexual relations. The spirit and intent of God’s law takes a very high view of the sanctity of marriage. The Creator is not impressed

(continued on page 28)

Christ Reveals a Greater Meaning

“**You have heard** that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ **But I say to you** that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment....

“**You have heard** that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ **But I say to you** that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart....

“**It has been said,** ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ **But I say to you** that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery....

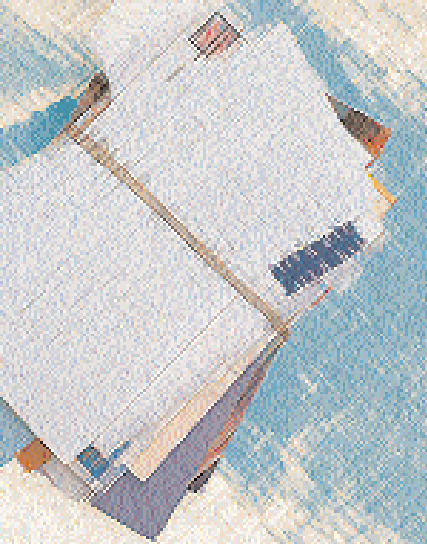
“**You have heard** that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ **But I say to you,** do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King....

“**You have heard** that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ **But I tell you** not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also....

“**You have heard** that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **But I say to you,** love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

—Matthew 5:21-44

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



THE YEAR 2000

I am a new subscriber to the *World Ahead* magazine and have enjoyed every article in every issue I've read! I especially appreciated "Facing the Year 2000" by Roderick Meredith in the July–August issue. Your message has reminded me and my family to *prepare*, while raising more questions concerning Christ's return.

Timothy Nelson
Luganville, Sanma, Vanuatu

I was deeply and spiritually touched by the article titled "Facing the Year 2000" in the July–August issue of your magazine. Information on the "Y2K" computer problem and the effects of launching the euro next year are very helpful. My faith is strengthened as I see prophecy being fulfilled.

John Sedrick
Menjama, Papua New Guinea

ARTICLES IMPACT READERS

I read with great interest the article titled "Develop a Good Attitude" by Jonathan McNair in your July–August issue of *The World Ahead*. Sadly, society seems to be interested only in self-love, power, materialism and hedonism. Everywhere there is disrespect and thoughtlessness toward others. This environment tends to make a "good attitude" difficult to maintain.

Since reading the above-mentioned article, I realized that the area I live in is *also* naturally beautiful. And all of my basic needs are easily attainable. Your

magazine—this article specifically—has helped me strive to *develop* and *keep* a good attitude. And realizing that *my* attitude can affect those I come in contact with gives me more motivation to try harder. After all, people will tend to return to you what you give to them!

Peter John Stubbs
Dorset, England

Thank you for my new subscription to *The World Ahead*. The May–June articles "Revival in Our Time" by Roderick Meredith, "Prove Me with Prophecy" by Rex Sexton and "Why America Is the Only Superpower" by Raymond McNair have awakened my faith and spirit to focus on the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your magazine is a joy to read because the articles contain necessary spiritual information relevant to our present time. May God's inspiration and blessings continue to be upon *The World Ahead* and your ministries.

Ambrose Mewea
Temotu, Solomon Islands

I recently read your July–August issue of *The World Ahead* and want to comment on the article titled "Teen Violence" by Raymond McNair. The information detailed in this well-written piece is an eye-opener for adults who should always be on the lookout for the development of young people, not only in schools, but also within our communities. It's shocking that a child as young as age 11 can commit such godless acts toward parents, teachers or fellow students. I agree that television, movies, video-games and brutality in sports contribute to this inhuman behavior. Self-discipline and self-control must be practiced by

every individual, young or old. Moreover, parents play an integral part in children's growth, helping them develop a good and pleasing attitude toward themselves, their families and the world. Thank you once again and keep on publishing God's powerful Word!

Marie Grace Rosario
Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines

The article titled "Some Advice from Dad" by John Ogwyn in *The World Ahead* (March–April 1998) inspired me to write this note of appreciation for your magazine. Thank you for promoting the concept that "a loving and happy marriage is one of the greatest blessings that... God has ordained for His sons and daughters."

Gina T-Ramo
Pagadian City, Philippines

BOOKLET COMMENTS

Wow! I have been studying the booklet titled *Your Ultimate Destiny*. Thank you for such an inspiring source of spiritual information. Never before have I read anything that has so clearly articulated what our divine purpose truly is.

My life has been full of difficult situations and I have looked in many directions for solutions. I have been in and out of correctional facilities most of my adult life, dealt with loneliness, drug and alcohol dependency, depression and, as a result, contemplated suicide numerous times in my 27 years on this earth. I have recently been studying my Bible daily and in my search for spiritual answers, this booklet provided more information than any other source I have previously found. I believe that finding the proper "teaching" is crucial to maintaining an honorable relationship with God.

J. H.
Susanville, California

Thank you so much for the free booklets. I am finding that I understand things I was not clear on before. There is renewed hope in knowing that those who are called can know that the Lord has things we are to do that will glorify Him, regardless of how big a mess we've made up to this time.

Nedro Parket
Iowa Park, Texas

THANKS FOR MAGAZINE

Thank you for your magazine. The articles have become more meaningful in my life with each issue I receive. I have just completed the May–June issue and encourage you to continue including future articles about prophecy, because we are really running out of time. I pray that in providing shelter for His people, God will also guide and defend your ministry through the harder times to come.

Jerry B. Marie
Papua New Guinea

I recently had the pleasure of reading my first *World Ahead* magazine and would like to get a free subscription for future issues. I strongly believe that God has sent His message to me through this magazine. I hope and pray that the Lord will continue to bless your ministry abundantly and look forward to receiving the next publication.

Darnell Frier
Malone, New York

I have truly enjoyed the literature I recently had the pleasure of reading. The booklets and magazines have been of great help in my Bible studies. I have grown in wisdom and knowledge from them and I thank God for all of you every day. May God bless and keep you in His heart.

James McDanio
Rosharon, Texas

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for your ministry through the *World Ahead* magazine. The articles are especially informative in regard to what is really happening in the world as biblical prophecy is fulfilled. I am challenged to be more watchful, obedient and prayerful and thank God for His divine guidance in making your ministry effective and meaningful in my life.

Rey P. Bernal
Cavir, 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.

UNSEEN ENEMY (continued from page 7)

on what we have studied, fasting from time to time to get even closer to our God.

When Jesus knew that he was about to be tempted by Satan, he "fasted forty days and forty nights" (Matt. 4:2). Obviously, Christ was given supernatural help to fast this long. Without such help, the human body could not survive this long without food and water. At times, we too can and must fast for a day or longer to draw closer to God. Of course, if you have any health problems or concerns, consult a physician before fasting. But to abstain from both food and water (Deut. 9:9, 18) as Moses and Jesus Christ did is a powerful spiritual tool if used properly. During a fast, our time should be devoted to fervently using other spiritual tools—*study*, *meditation* and heartfelt *prayer* to the Creator.

When His disciples could not cast out a particularly stubborn demon, Jesus told them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). You see, in this *real* spirit war, we need to use all the resources we have to win. We need to go "all out"!

Paul describes this warfare and the spiritual "armor" we need to fend off the enemy: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. **Put on the whole armor of God**, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:10-17).

As this age draws to a close and evil spirits try to influence us more than ever, *we must be ready!* We must understand the enemy and resist him with every fiber of our being. For it is only the overcomers who will inherit the soon-coming absolutely glorious Kingdom of God!

As Women Journey Through Life

New Hope for the Older You!

by Judy Swanson



Are you approaching the age of 50—and perhaps dreading it? Or do you wish you could go back to that age? Do you feel like a park statue? You know, the kind that's turned green, weather-streaked and crumbly? The kind that no one, even when standing right in front of it, notices anymore? The aging process surely makes some women feel this way. And the ways that other people see us—or stop seeing us—are often the first clues we have that we are growing older.

“Hutton was pushing 45 when the photographer Steven Meisel thought of featuring her in a now-famous Barneys New York ad. She rejected the job again and again. ‘I hadn’t looked at a fashion magazine for five years because it was too painful,’ she says. ‘Everybody in them was twenty-five years younger. There was no one from my generation. I kept feeling further and further away from beauty. Old. Worn-out. Faded’” (Gail

Sheehy, *New Passages*, p. 182).

Hutton’s viewpoint is the same as so many women of her generation. They feel that only the young are beautiful! Western culture has promoted that lie, harming many women through the last 30 to 40 years! It is especially hard on those accustomed to being appreciated for their looks and compensated for being pretty—such as models, actresses, dancers, etc. But it doesn’t stop there. For many other jobs are also biased toward hiring young and pretty girls.

Many of the *fiftysomething* set, or those approaching it, don’t even have the natural attributes of a famous model such as Lauren Hutton. Far too many of these women suffer from internalized images of themselves being shapeless, tired, sexless—even useless!

Magnifying the problem is the fact that Western women today are living longer than at any time in the last 1,000 years! Not only are we living long enough to enjoy our

grandchildren, but many of us are even able to watch our *great-grandchildren* grow up. There has been a revolution in the life cycle (Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*, 1992).

We thought *our* parents were old when they turned 50. But today, many women are seeking new careers in our 60s! A prediction from demographers is that a girl born today has a one in three chance of living to age 100! (Mann, *Life Expectancy*).

Anthropologists tell us that from antiquity to present day, life has been divided into ages or stages. Poets, scientists and philosophers from Homer and Virgil to Shakespeare and Freud have sought to fill the need to find order, and stability or predictability in the cycle of life. For the first seven decades of this century, life was fairly predictable with certain events taking place pretty well “on schedule.” Most people did not

deviate from birth, graduation, marriage, children, retirement, widowhood (or widowerhood) and death. Chronological age pretty well set the social prescription of the standard for normalizing certain roles, responsibilities and events in one’s life. The boundaries of productive adult life were usually considered to be ages 21 to 65. But since the mid 70s, these norms are no longer true. The stages of adulthood have shifted forward by up to ten years. Although children leave their childhood sooner, they take much longer to grow up—and longer still to grow old. True adulthood may now not begin until age 30!

In its turn, middle age has been pushed far into the 50s—when it is acknowledged at all. Age 50 is now what age 40 used to be, 60 is what 50 used to be, and so on.

Since the life cycle is ever changing—with people growing older more slowly and living longer—many women are putting off marriage and children until they have

become well established in their careers. The tragic consequence for some is that their biological clocks have run out of time. After desperately trying to have a baby in their 40s, some discover that they simply can’t get pregnant, which can be shocking since many women this age still feel vibrant and young.

Women turning up at infertility centers in Southern California, given this area’s obsession with nutrition, fitness and youthful appearance, look like virtual “Wonder Women”—the most enviable specimens of their age group. “Forty percent of the patients who come to Dr. Richard Marrs, one of the most respected fertility specialists on the West Coast, are women from 40 up to age 50. They are typically high achievers who chose to delay pregnancy for career reasons. They can pay the fees for fancy health clubs or PTs (Personal Trainers) and go to spas and stay in great shape. They’ve ‘made a million,’ but they *don’t have a child*. And they’re

desperate” (Sheehy). They wanted the “good life” before they settled down to the traditional role of motherhood. But they waited too long. Thus, many women are driven to seeking medical miracles to help them produce a baby.

According to some doctors, this is not uncommon. It seems that more and more “boomer” women over 40 are drawn to having a baby as a way to *delay the aging process*. Such a woman may believe that an infant is an outward sign to everyone around her that she is younger than her birth certificate says she is. But what does this do to the children? By the time a child is 16, if the parents were older at the time of birth, it can make it difficult for them to identify with him or her. At a time when the parents should be enjoying their retirement, they may find themselves exasperated as they try to guide an adolescent through the awkward teen years.

Popular characters of fiction such as Murphy Brown of American

television fame serve to promote the myth of flawless and ageless femininity—that is, that a woman of any age should be able to produce a perfect baby.

In times past, in certain privileged communities, like Manhattan's Upper East Side, well-married

to perpetuate that ideal. How selfish!

What was it like for women 100 years ago? Or 200 years ago? Or even 1,000? Were they as obsessed with their image as so many women seem to be today? It's hardly likely. For one thing, they didn't have as many mirrors in their homes or any-

now!" (Sheehy, p. 205).

Although experts can explain the physical world around us, none of us, it seems, understands what's really going on in our lives. We live in a society where anything is possible, but almost nothing is certain. Many have shunted the awareness of

her uniqueness, her knowledge and her experiences.

Even the Holy Scriptures teach us the value of the older woman. She should be able to teach younger women how to love and respect their husbands and their leadership. She can share with them the lessons

for the woman to be a man's "gofer." He intended, rather, that husband and wife be partners in life—and for life. The husband might generally focus on long-term goals. The wife can help him by removing and managing the short-term obstacles. In this way, the family unit gets to

by the promise and blessing of God, who used her in a mighty way. She was the mother of the faithful, and we are considered her daughters if we do well! (1 Peter 3:6).

In the same book, Peter tells us that our beauty should not just consist of our appearance, clothing, makeup

Once we gracefully accept our maturity... we can grow and build on what makes the new "older woman" so valuable.

women competed for who could remain the thinnest. Has this "pastime" been traded in for who can have the youngest child? One obstetrician was quoted as saying, "It's women trying to show up other women, like having a larger diamond ring. This [advanced reproductive] technology which is supposed to be doing things for women may actually be working against them. **The message it sends is a very chauvinistic one: the only thing valuable a woman can do is have babies.** So prolong the magic at any price. Show your powers. It's very unhealthy" (Sheehy, p. 112).

The average child 100 years ago was one of five and a half children in a family. Today the average child has but one sibling. With fewer children, parents have more money to spend on themselves and their desires. Unfortunately, it seems they also have a lot more inclination to divorce. The want-it-all selfish attitudes of many of the baby boomers has in fact become a long-term, fundamental driving force in American culture and that of other Western nations. The obsession with *self* has permeated the whole nation and our society fairly reeks with it! We not only want to stay young and thin, but we want to use *innocent human life*

where else for that matter. And in general, they had a lot more physical labor. Our grandmothers and great-grandmothers were so busy nurturing and caring for their families, many of them literally settling this nation as pioneers, that they never even dreamed about having the opportunities that we women of the 20th century enjoy. We can build a career or pursue interests that women of the past never had the opportunity to do. And by the very fact of increased longevity, people today are going through more stages of life than ever before. Perhaps this is one reason why mental disorders, psychoses and crises of identity are seemingly at unprecedented levels.

When you think about it, the "change of life" or menopause is the *death* of our youth. Now no one likes to think about death. But it is just as much the *birth* of a new, fully mature being. In this light, **"women who take the time to evaluate where they are, physically, psychologically, spiritually, are the ones who will move ahead;** they'll be more balanced and productive in their 50s and 60s. Think of it this way, you're going to live another 30 or 40 years inside this house called your body. Don't let it fall into ruin. Start renovating it

a higher Power or Authority into the realm of magic and mysticism. The concept of a Creator, it seems, represents an affront to modern science and technology. How sad and how dangerous to leave God out of the picture. Instead of *dismissing* Him, we should be striving to order our lives according to His will.

For example, knowing that our own life cycle is changing and actually extending should encourage us as women to take a personal inventory of our lives, strengths and skills, and see where we might be able to use them for the betterment of the lives of those around us—our loved ones and our neighbors. With one foot planted in the 20th century and one free to plant it wherever we want to in the *next* century, we have so much that we can dream about doing. And with the help of God, we *can* accomplish much. We don't have to worry about the stigma of growing old and wrinkled. Instead, we can rejoice in the precious wisdom God has given us.

And we can become grounded and content once we gracefully accept our maturity—complete with wrinkles, sags, "roundness" and normal weight gain that comes with it. Once grounded, we can grow and build on what makes the new "older woman" so valuable—

she's already learned in loving and caring for her children, being a good homemaker, and being discreet and modest (Titus 2:3-5). This can be the *prime time* of our lives for those of us with an empty nest. Just think of what we can do for others. Our warmth, curiosity and ease in relating to people, and how we exude the fruit of God's Spirit—the fruit of love, joy and peace—become more important than physical appearance. These attributes, along with godly wisdom, compassion and a good sense of humor, make up the heart and soul of our humanity—the essence of our real value to the community.

When God created mankind, He created woman to be a helper to the man. We can see by human experiences over the thousands of years since Creation that women have indeed carried most of the burden of caring for others. Yet many women, and certainly many of the baby boomers, have *resisted* this traditional role. Worse yet, some have misled others by saying this traditional role relegated the woman to nothing more than her husband's "property." Surely this contributed to the Feminist Movement.

What they didn't realize all along was that God never intended


where it wants to go! Yet sadly, most boomer women today only think of themselves, what *they* can accomplish and how they can be fulfilled—rather than dedicating themselves to *helping* their husbands and *serving* others with whatever skills and capacities God has blessed them.

Many women forget that there is a book that can be read to help us go through our life cycles. We can gain strength from studying the examples of others who have lived before us. The holy women of old are models of courage and strength. Their experiences were written in the Bible so that we could learn from them. If we can apply the lessons from their lives to ours today, just think what we can accomplish! In the book of Judges, Deborah was not only a prophetess, but also a judge of the children of Israel. And because of her courage, strength and faith in God, Israel was delivered in time of war and defeated the Canaanites! (Judges 4).

Hebrews 11 mentions Sarah as a woman of outstanding faith. Although she was past the age of childbearing (having already gone through menopause), she was blessed by God in bearing Abraham a son. She didn't have to go through difficult and expensive medical procedures to become pregnant! It was

or jewelry. Rather, our real beauty lies in our gentle and quiet spirits. This should be what we are known by, as it is so very precious to God!

Mary, the mother of Christ, had the most awesome blessing of all women—that of giving birth to our Savior, the Creator of the entire universe. Now wouldn't you have loved to have that opportunity?

The good news is that you *can* have ample opportunities to serve God and your fellow man. The *new* "older you" can *also* be counted among the faithful. With more time to grow, learn and be productive, we can be among those whom God considers *virtuous* and *precious* in His sight. Proverbs 31:10-31 is the most perfect picture of the ideal godly woman. She had motivation and zeal to help better her own circumstances as well as those of her community and, in turn, those of the nation. **This is the mirror in which all women should examine themselves.** It doesn't matter to God that we grow old, and become wrinkled and gray. After all, He made our bodies to function as they do. Rather, what God seeks is that we love, respect and obey Him, and love our neighbors as ourselves. And if we do, He will bless us and we will be praised by Him forever! 

The New World Order...

A world at peace... or a world in pieces?

by Douglas S. Winnail

As we approach the year 2,000—the end of a decade, a century and a millennium—questions about the future are on the minds of many. Are we heading, as some suggest, for one world government that will bring peace under the auspices of the United Nations or the World Trade Organization? Will we see the emergence of one world religion that will unite all faiths and put an end to bloody and violent religious conflict? Or are we on the threshold of a time of unparalleled turmoil on a global scale that will split our modern world asunder along political, cultural and religious lines?

The world's political map has certainly changed dramatically in the last several decades. The globe-girdling British Empire shrank and then evaporated. Colonial empires of European nations were liquidated. The Soviet Union crumbled and broke into pieces. East and West Germany reunited, forming a relatively strong and stable country, while other Eastern European nations are in a state of flux. Old hatreds have reignited in the Balkans.

Outside of Europe, the Muslim world has assumed a more threatening posture. The young tigers of Southeast Asia have lost their economic claws and are mired in depression. The Chinese dragon has awakened from its long slumber and is casting about with hungry eyes. Are these merely random events unfolding on the world scene, or is there much greater *significance* to these developments? Are we approaching a critical turning point in human history?

While foreign policy experts predict, political pundits pontificate and talk-radio hosts stir everyone up, what often goes unnoticed today is that world events are beginning to *closely resemble* the very situation that Christ said would mark the end of this age and His return to the earth. Astonishing as it may seem, many of the events making news today and even the forecasts of knowledgeable observers are *falling into line* with long-pondered Bible prophecies. The emerging parallels are sobering indeed!

Nation Against Nation

Nearly two thousand years ago, the disciples asked Jesus, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). He responded with a series of *detailed prophetic statements*. Jesus’ words are recorded in the Gospels—Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21—where He repeatedly urges His disciples to *remain alert and be watchful*. Vital details are also found in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

One of the initial signs Jesus mentioned was that “you will hear of wars and rumors of wars.... For *nation will rise against nation*, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matt. 24:6-7). While we have always had wars to contend with, there has generally been hope that peace would prevail. This was the rationale behind founding the League of Nations and the United Nations. Two world wars were fought in this century in hope of ending *all war*! However, not only have human efforts failed to secure lasting peace, prominent forecasters are offering somber warnings about the future that *echo* Jesus’ statements.

Professor Samuel Huntington of Harvard University—a specialist in strategic studies—sees the world of the 21st century *breaking apart* along the fault lines of religion and culture. In his provocative book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order 1996*, Dr. Huntington writes, “In the emerging world, the relations between states and groups from different civilizations will not be close and will often be antagonistic.... The *most violent fault lines* are between Islam and its Orthodox, Hindu, African and Western Christian neighbors... with the *most intense conflicts* occurring between Muslim and Asian societies on one hand, and the West on the other. The dangerous clashes of the future are likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic assertiveness” (p. 183). Huntington is predicting increasingly antagonistic and violent episodes involving the most populous nations on earth in the years just ahead. Is it merely coincidence that Jesus Christ said the same thing?

While many have criticized Dr. Huntington’s ideas, events in the news today *confirm* statements he has been making for the last five years. The global political stage *is* being reconfigured along the lines of religion and culture, and the “hot spots in world politics *are* on the ‘fault lines’ between civilizations”—Bosnia, Chechnya, Central Asia, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Sudan, the Middle East, etc. (*jacket*). Yahya Sadowski, a professor of International Studies, observes that “**ethnic conflict seems to have supplanted nuclear war as the most pressing issue on the minds of policy makers**” (*Foreign Policy*, Summer 1998, p. 12). He also states that “the number of ethnic

conflicts has *continued to grow* since the Cold War ended”—at a slow and steady rate (p. 12). These conflicts, according to Sadowski, “are expressions of ‘modern hate’ and largely the products of the twentieth century” that will be *extremely difficult to resolve* (pp. 12, 22).

Jesus said that wars and rumors of wars—perhaps ethnic conflict on a global scale—would be “the *beginning* of sorrows” (Matt. 24:8). It would herald the fast-approaching end of the age. But as bad as ethnic violence is, it will only be a *prelude* to even more devastating events (vv. 6-7). The Prophet Isaiah, writing in the 7th century B.C., also addresses this crisis that will occur at the end of the age, saying, “The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly”—seeing their efforts fail on a global scale as quarreling nations pursue their own selfish interests (Is. 33:7-9). These sobering events appear to be *a lot closer* than most people would like to think!

Times of the Gentiles

Jesus refers to the period just before His Second Coming as the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). It is to be characterized by vengeance, great distress, tumult and war (cf. Ezek. 30:1-2; Joel 2). In the book of Daniel, the four great Gentile empires prophesied to wield power over the Mediterranean world, including the one just prior to Christ’s return, are described as *rapacious, devouring beasts* (chap. 7).

In striking contrast, the world has been strongly influenced for the last several centuries by the religion and culture of the Christian West. In spite of its shortcomings, this influence has improved the lives of almost everyone it touched—through education, sanitation, infrastructure development and an emphasis on basic human rights. The 20th century has been called the American Century. As Robert Kegan notes in a recent article titled “The Benevolent Empire,” most clear-eyed international observers realize that “in truth, the benevolent hegemony exercised by the United States is good for a vast portion of the world’s population” (*Foreign Policy*, p. 26). The world has come to depend on the United States being “the sole remaining superpower [and] guarantor of stability and prosperity” (p. 4). To understand more about the unique role that certain Western nations have played in world history, please request our free brochure *America and Britain in Prophecy*.

However, with the waning influence of the United States in the world and the rise of Islamic, Asian and central European seats of power, the relative stability of the last 50 years is poised to change. Regarding the current world situation, one Asian critic of the West comments “For the first time since the Universal Declaration

[of Human Rights] was adopted in 1948 [by the UN], **countries not steeped in the Judeo-Christian and natural law traditions are in the first rank.** That unprecedented situation will define the *new* international policies of human rights. It will also *multiply the occasions for conflict*" (Huntington, pp. 196-197). Dr. Huntington has also observed that "a world without U.S. primacy will be a world of *more violence and disorder and less democracy and economic growth*" (*Foreign Policy*, p. 26). Perhaps unknowingly, these students of international relations are describing the events that will precede Christ's return—a time dominated by Gentile powers.

Adding another detail to this prophesied end-time scenario, Jesus stated that during the times of the Gentiles, Jerusalem would be *surrounded by armies* and its inhabitants killed or carried into captivity (Luke 21:20-24). The modern nation of Israel, ever since its inception in 1948, has been surrounded by hostile Arab neighbors

rounding nations (vv. 41-42), eventually moving his headquarters to that area (v. 45). Reasons for the military activities of this northern power could include securing a source of oil to run its economy, attempting to ensure open access of all faiths to Jerusalem or perhaps quelling terrorism sponsored by the king of the South.

The identities of these two kings or powers have long puzzled students of the Bible. The king of the South is clearly identified in these verses as an alliance of Middle Eastern nations (Egypt, Libya, etc.), which today clearly fall in the Muslim bloc and would undoubtedly be part of the Arab League. The king of the North, as previously noted, will emerge from the **revived Roman Empire**—something many feel to be the ultimate destiny of the developing European Union. Again, we must ask if it is merely coincidence that one of the most critical flashpoints on earth today (according to Huntington and others) involves the growing

next decade or two, China will become the second-most-powerful military power on earth, with economic power to match. Most unsettling of all, perhaps, [is that] **China has given numerous signals that it views the West as its spiritual and practical adversary**" (*The Coming Conflict with China*, 1997, p. 21).

This adversarial stance that China is assuming toward the West could have a ripple effect in the Middle East that would also tie into Bible prophecy. As Huntington comments, "China's conflicts with the West... mean that it will value partnerships with other *anti-Western* states.... China's increasing needs for oil are likely to *impel* it to expand its relations with Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia" (p. 240). To purchase oil, China sells arms to Middle Eastern countries. This arms-for-oil axis has already created a bond between these cultures. If a united European power were to move into the Middle East, many observers suggest that Russia and Japan

could be a counterattack by forces opposing the European Beast power. If Russia, China and other Asian nations are allied together against a European empire, both struggling for world domination, their combined forces could reach staggering numbers. A recent source estimates that China alone has "a huge pool of 200 million surplus laborers" and growing urban unrest (*Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1998, p. 138).

In Revelation 16:12, we are told that the **waters of the Euphrates river will be dried up** "so that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared" as armies begin to gather at Armageddon. This wide, fertile plain some 60 miles north of Jerusalem has been the site of many important battles in the history of the Middle East. Will a European Beast power shut off the water supply to Islamic countries in the Middle East for political reasons? Could

Within the next decade or two, China will become the second-most-powerful military power on earth, with economic power to match.

that have resented its very existence and have sworn to eventually push it into the Mediterranean Sea! In recent decades we have witnessed a succession of hostilities between Arabs and Palestinians on the one hand and Israelis on the other. The "Muslim-Jewish" Middle East is a powder keg waiting to explode!

While some have suggested (based on interpretations of Ezekiel 38-39) that Russia or a Russian-Arab confederation will invade and occupy the Holy Land prior to Christ's return, those prophecies are actually for a *later* time. When correctly understood, the Bible reveals that a *different* Gentile power will invade and occupy Jerusalem and various nations of the Middle East just prior to Christ's Second Coming. This power will actually emanate from the revived roots of the Roman Empire in central Europe that the Bible refers to as the "Beast" (Dan. 7:7, 23; Rev. 13:1-6). Its reappearance on the global political scene will *astound* the world (v. 3). It will last for three and one half years (the times of the Gentiles) just before the return of Jesus Christ to this earth.

North vs. South

One of the most detailed passages in Scripture regarding the end of the age is found in Daniel 11. Here we read that "at the time of the end the *king of the South* shall attack [the king of the North]; and the *king of the North* shall come against him like a whirlwind" in a massive and devastating counterattack (v. 40). This king of the North will occupy the Holy Land and various sur-

assertiveness of Muslim nations in the Middle East toward their Western Christian (and Jewish) neighbors. More than one observer has suggested that what is developing in the Middle East could devolve into a modern "replay" of the Crusades of the Middle Ages! Are we destined to witness another epic confrontation between Christian Europe of the *North* and the Muslim nations of the *South*? The developing picture fits the end-time prophetic scenario outlined in the Bible like a glove!

Kings of the East

Daniel's prophecies also reveal that after this European Beast power (the king of the North) invades and occupies much of the Middle East, "news from the *east* and *north* shall trouble him" (11:44). To the *north* and *east* of Jerusalem lie two other would-be world powers—*Russia* and *China*. It has only been in the last decade that China has begun to reemerge as a potential world power. With its huge population (1.2 billion) and its developing economy, China is now "the biggest player in the history of man" (Huntington, p. 231).

Numerous observers suggest that with the reawakening of this slumbering giant—with its designs of becoming the dominant power in East Asia and controlling the sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific oceans (i.e. Japan's oil supply)—China has been placed on a *direct collision course* with the Western World. Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro, former Southeast Asia bureau chiefs for *Time* magazine, assert that "within the

may take new sides. Huntington, who describes both Russia and Japan as "swing" civilizations, says that "a Russian-Chinese connection, like the Confucianism-Islamic connection, [would be] a means of countering Western power and universalism" (p. 243). Japan has historically tended to align itself with the most relevant dominant power. Her *cultural* ties, however, are much closer to China than to the United States and the West. Other Asian nations could also climb aboard China's bandwagon.

Again, is it mere coincidence that we see a situation developing in the world today that could push major nations to the *north* and *east* of Jerusalem into the same camp—as allies? Might this result in a struggle against a revived Roman Empire in the form of a European Beast power that the Bible refers to as the king of the North? Are biblical prophecies about the end of the age actually beginning to coincide with current developments on the global stage?

A River Runs Dry

In Daniel 11:44, we learn that in response to disturbing news from the north and east, this king of the North "shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate." This military operation of the Beast power may be what's described in Revelation 9, which uses the imagery of an army of locusts (vv. 1-12). The last half of this chapter describes the devastating activities of a 200 million-man army that lies beyond the Euphrates. This

this spark retaliation by Muslim allies to the north and east? Turkey has built a series of huge dams across the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. They are capable of cutting off the flow of water to several key Islamic nations. A number of modern observers have postulated this very scenario. Once again, current events appear to be merging with Bible prophecies.

Trouble Ahead

When we survey the world scene of spreading ethnic conflict, the decline of stabilizing American influence and the rise of Gentile powers in central Europe, the Middle East and Asia, the future looks sobering. Remember Christ's prophecies—nations rising against nations, and a tumultuous struggle for world domination by Gentile powers in the north, south and east that culminates around Jerusalem just before His Second Coming. These prophecies written so long ago appear increasingly relevant to our present era!


While elite groups in the West envision a world government built around the United Nations or some other international organization, the emerging situation is actually quite different. The UN is an organization in *disarray*, in need of reform, that could "bicker itself into oblivion" (*The Economist*, August 8, 1998, p. 22). The International Monetary Fund, an organization designed to foster economic development around the world, and which has been increasingly used by nations in economic turmoil as a bank of last resort to stave off default on foreign debt, is

itself fraught with problems and short on funds (*Foreign Policy*, Summer 1998, p. 114). "Economic inequality is on the rise around the world" (p. 76).

On the religious front, Christians in the West anticipate a revival as the new millennium dawns, and prophecy buffs predict the emergence of one world religion as all nations are enthralled by the miracles of a coming Antichrist. These ideas, too, may not square with reality. These are essentially *Western* concepts about the future that do not take into consideration the more than 1 billion Chinese who tend to view the West and its religious and cultural ideas with distrust and even disdain. For 800 million Muslims, America is "the great Satan," and Christians are regarded as infidels and appropriate targets for holy wars.

Numerous commentaries suggest that when the Scriptures refer to the whole world following the Beast and Antichrist, the reference may actually be to the Roman or Christian world, not to all the inhabitants of the earth (cf. Dan. 7:23 in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1985, p. 93; Rev. 13:3, 7 in *Clarke's Commentary*). Instead of one world religion, the future will probably see **religion pitted against religion** around the world.

Although the immediate future appears to be violent and dangerous, there *is* good news ahead. Our modern world may fragment along the lines of religion and culture but the world will not end. The Gospel that our Savior proclaimed and inspired in the Scriptures is about a coming Kingdom of God. The Living Jesus Christ is going to return to this earth as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16). He is going to return with great power to set up a world-ruling Government of God that will reign on this earth for 1,000 years (11:15-18; 20:4-6). In fact, the Scriptures reveal that if God did not intervene and cut short the mounting violence and physical carnage (exceeding anything the world has ever yet experienced), mankind would face total annihilation (cf. Matt. 24:21-22).

The Bible, however, emphatically states that Jesus Christ IS going to return to establish real peace on this earth (Is. 9:6-7). Even more exciting is that *you* can have a part in this incredible transformation. The saints, those who are willing to come out of this world now and learn to live by the laws of God and follow the instructions of Jesus Christ, will be given the opportunity to reign with Him in this world-ruling Government (cf. Dan. 7:27; Rev. 5:10; 20:4-6). They will assist Jesus Christ in teaching all mankind the way to real and lasting peace (Is. 2:2-4; 30:20-21). For more information on this vital topic, please request our free booklet, *Your Ultimate Destiny*. 

SPIRIT OF THE LAW (continued from page 17)

by people looking for loopholes and technicalities in an attempt to thwart His very purpose for mankind. (For more information on the incredible future God has in store for His children, please call or write for our free booklet, *Your Ultimate Destiny*.) Their failure to follow the spirit of the law in this area led Christ to refer to the religious leaders of His day as an "evil and adulterous generation" (12:39).

Another major area in which the Pharisees totally missed the point of what God was really after concerns oaths. In Matthew 23:16-22, it's made clear that they spent a lot of time debating which oaths were more valid than others. Christ showed them just how futile this was by emphasizing that God's real desire and intent was for people to simply tell the truth on all occasions. The idea that truth was obligatory under *certain* conditions and not under others is alien to the very character and nature of our God.

Scripture is always true (cf. John 17:17). God can absolutely be counted on to fulfill His promises. Those who would be part of the Kingdom that God is going to establish must themselves be men and women of truth. Christ emphasized to His followers that rather than take any oaths whatsoever, they should simply let their yes be yes and their no be no (Matt. 5:37).

How to Treat Others

There is something greater and nearer to the heart of God than justice. That something is *mercy!* Christ went on to explain that principle. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is quoted from Exodus 21:24 and subsequent places in the civil code that God gave to ancient Israel. It wasn't talking about personal retaliation, but rather about the way in which justice was to be administered by the civil courts. It simply meant that the punishment should fit the crime. And the punishment dealt with *value*. The transgressor was to pay the value of what it would cost the victim to lose a tooth, for example.

In Christ's day, however, many had come to view "getting even" as their God-given right. They used this statement in the law as a basis to justify their quickness to defend themselves against any perceived injustices. Christ explained what God is looking for in our handling of life's difficulties. In the first century it wasn't uncommon for the Roman government to be abusive to residents of occupied Palestine. Roman soldiers would sometimes force a man into service and


require him to carry the mail for a mile. Consequently, resentment seethed beneath the surface of Judean society. The Zealots, who promoted armed rebellion, had much sympathy from the people. But Christ explained that those who would enter His Kingdom weren't going to be "demanding their rights," but rather would show an example of giving and serving.

Christ emphasized the way of give in Matthew 5:41-42. Of course, as other verses show (cf. Acts 3:1-6), what we actually give may not always be what is requested. Nevertheless, an emphasis on "me, my and mine" is contrary to what God seeks to develop in His children.

The other statement from the law that Christ selected for comment was taken from Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor." Many of the Jews of that time interpreted this scripture to mean that it was good to show kindness to those who were your friends, but you were certainly free to retaliate against those who weren't. As with the other examples we've seen, those who took this approach totally misunderstood the spirit of the law. Christ enjoined His followers to have the very attitude of God Himself.

Helping those who help you is something that makes sense even to those who make no pretense of religion. Once when Christ discussed the importance of loving our neighbor with a religious scholar, he sought to justify himself for his lack of loving concern for his fellow humans. He asked Christ this question: "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus responded by telling the story of a man who was beaten, robbed and left for dead by the side of the road. A priest and a Levite both passed by the scene and continued on their way. Finally a Samaritan came along and stopped to render aid. After concluding the story, Christ asked the question, "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" (v. 36). Clearly, the one who stopped and helped. The meaning is clear. We must be a neighbor to *anyone* with whom we come into contact.

Christ's whole emphasis in expounding the spirit of the law was to show that **God wants us to become just like Him!** The spirit of the law is an expression of God's intent and purpose for each one of us. Do Christians have to keep the commandments? Absolutely! But not merely in the letter—rather in their full spirit and intent.

Watch for the final installment of our series on the Sermon on the Mount in our next issue. We will be examining Christ's authoritative teachings concerning relationships with both God and our fellow man. 

THANKSGIVING (continued from page 11)

God appreciates our thanks. In fact, in Psalm 50:14 He commands us: "Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High."

A national day of thanksgiving to God for all His blessings must be pleasing to Him. But does our Thanksgiving Day really reflect an attitude of thankfulness? The lesson of the ancient Israelites showed us that as they began to prosper, they quickly *forgot* God, and their thankfulness toward Him vanished. And as they forgot God, they *replaced* Him with other, false gods.

Have we begun to worship false gods in our nation? Do we even *know* the true God—the Creator—the One to whom we should give thanks?

The latest edition of the *Encyclopedia of American Religions* lists more than 2,100 religious groups, a figure that has nearly doubled in the last 20 years. This number includes 3.5 million Muslims, 750,000 Buddhists and every fringe group from White Supremacists for Jesus to fanatic stargazers waiting to hitch a ride from passing space aliens! Though nine out of ten believe that God exists, there is a chasm of disagreement about just what He is. Eight out of ten American adults consider themselves to be Christians, but most are hazy at best about the basic tenets of their faith. George Barna, in *The Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators*, concludes that "America is transitioning from a Christian nation to a syncretistic, spiritually diverse society." We have difficulty being thankful toward God today. It's not because we watch football on Thanksgiving Day. And it's not because we enjoy a turkey dinner with our family. But perhaps the physical blessings that Thanksgiving is meant to recognize have seduced us into forgetting just Whom we should thank.

In Deuteronomy 8, we find all the blessings God said He would bring to Israel. But we also find a warning. "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them... then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth'.... As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish"! (vv. 10-20).

Let us never forget Whom to thank! 

(continued from page 3)

these nations. The booklet titled *Fourteen Signs Announcing Christ's Return* tells you a number of specific events that herald the Second Coming of our Savior. And our booklet, *The Beast of Revelation*, is a powerful, thoroughly documented work describing the coming Beast power in Europe.

If you will call or write for and actually STUDY each of these booklets—comparing them carefully with the prophetic statements in your Bible—you will indeed build a strong foundation for your understanding of biblical prophecy.

Here, then, are some of the *main prophetic events* you should watch for as you read a good daily newspaper (*the best source!*) or weekly news magazine, tune into television news or listen to radio news broadcasts: Jesus' Olivet prophecy in Matthew 24, what John saw in Revelation 6, and parallel prophecies for both ancient and modern Israel—including the United States, Canada and Great Britain—as given in Leviticus 26:14-35 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

First, primarily following the pattern in Matthew 24, notice that Jesus speaks of false ministers—those who come *in His name* but who preach a different message than what He taught. He says these men will deceive MANY! Next, we find wars and rumors of wars coming upon the earth leading to the time of the end. And with modern radio and television, it's actually much easier to document the seemingly endless parade of one armed conflict after another. Next—affecting even the United States and the British-descended peoples—are famine and disease epidemics. New killer pathogens like the Ebola virus will appear—spawning diseases that medical science simply will not be able to control.

Earthquakes are another plague prophesied in the end times. They will increase both in frequency and destructiveness.

God also indicates that He will have to break the “pride of power” of modern America, Britain and Canada (Lev. 26:19). We still have a great deal of power. But we're increasingly afraid to use it—don't seem to know *how* to use it—and have lost our sense of national purpose. This “malaise” will only worsen with time.

Even as disasters strike the nations of modern Israel, there will also be *increasing persecution* of the true Church of God. Matthew 24:9 describes the time when God's true servants will be “hated by ALL nations” for Christ's sake. *Think about it.* They can't be hated by *all* nations unless they become reasonably prominent. And they won't be reasonably prominent, no doubt, until a powerful “witness” is given by the true Church as Jesus predicted (v. 14). So, somewhere on this earth, God *will* be doing a great Work of warning and witnessing.

During this time frame, watch for the “Beast” of Revelation to arise and a False Prophet to appear in Europe. Soon, strange and unusual miracles will be done by this great false religious leader (Rev. 13:11-14; 2 Thess. 2:7-10). This will be accompanied by continued deterioration of the moral fabric of the American and British-descended peoples—illicit sex of all types, increasing substance abuse, crime, youth violence and absolute hedonism (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-6).

Toward the end, there will be real *starvation* that accompanies the horrifying disease epidemics. *Then*, the “abomination of desolation” will occur (Matt. 24:15). It will be a powerful warning for God's true people to prepare to flee. The book of Daniel indicates that a strong military alliance and leader referred to as the “king of the south” will provoke the European Beast power, who will then *counterattack* and take over the nation of Israel and much of the Middle East (11:40-45). So we need to watch the Middle Eastern nations for the rise of a coming “mahdi”—perhaps a politico-religious leader who will sweep the Arab world and stir it up against the West.

When God's faithful and zealous people are finally taken to safety (Rev. 3:10; 12:14-17), the Great Tribulation will begin (Matt. 24:21-22; Dan. 12:1). This time of horrifying persecution and violence directed primarily against the true Church and the “house of Israel” will shake the entire Western World and have its effects, in fact, *all over the earth* leading finally to the “day of the Lord”—the time of God's *direct* intervention and supernatural punishment of *all* nations. During this time, most of God's *faithful* and *obedient* people (Rev. 14:12) will be in a place of safety.

All of us should zealously watch these world events as they unfold according to *God's* pattern. And, as Jesus said, we should be PRAYING that we would be accounted worthy to escape the coming horrors and persecution. As we pray, we should ask God to *cleanse* us and *purge* us—to make us fit to be in His Kingdom. We should consciously *yield ourselves* as instruments in His hands—asking fervently for Jesus Christ to *live His life within us* (cf. Gal. 2:20 KJV). I hope and pray that *all* of our readers will heed the warning in God's end-time message.

