

Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

“For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.” But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.”—Matthew 13:15-16

Volume 12 Number 9

October/November 2010

Is Halloween Harmless?

By Jerold Aust

Page 3



Every year at Halloween, well-meaning parents dress their children in grotesque and ghoulish costumes. Is Halloween really harmless? Who and what’s behind this bizarre holiday?

Where Is the Grave?

By Robert Berendt

Page 7



From the beginning of time, man has wondered what will happen once he departs this life. Is a physical body necessary? Where does a person go after death? There is a spiritual dimension most people miss, which is an integral part of God’s Plan for building His Family.

Satan's World Reminds Us How Not to Rule

By Nino Boezio

Page 9



Christians can examine Satan's present rule over this world to discover what his kingdom lacks—and what God's doesn't.

Answered Prayer Through Opportunity

By Dale Schurter

Page 13



Answered Prayer! What a wonderful reality! What a wonderful promise.

Appreciating the Aging Process

By Graemme Marshall

Page 17

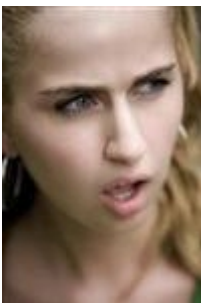


There are challenges for an older person. But getting old isn't the end. It is, in fact, a new venture that only the elderly can appreciate.

Easily Offended? Here's How to Get Over It

By Becky Sweat

Page 21



Unfortunately, people sometimes say and do things that are careless, blunt, insensitive or even mean-spirited. While we can't control the intentions or behavior of others, we can determine how we will act. We can choose to not be offended.

Arabic—the Semitic Language of the Arabs

By Kathleen Hoffart

Page 26

خ	ح
kha	haa
ص	ش
saad	shiin

The cultural, intellectual and social mindset of a people has its roots in language.

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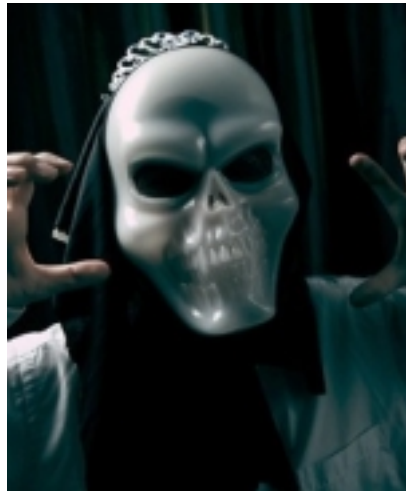
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Is Halloween Harmless?

By Jerold Aust

Every year at Halloween, well-meaning parents dress their children in grotesque and ghoulish costumes. Is Halloween really harmless? Who and what's behind this bizarre holiday?



IT ALL LOOKS LIKE SO MUCH FUN and seems so harmless: jack-o'-lanterns, grotesque grinning masks, long black witch attire with pointed black hats, costumes painted like skeletons, outfits that represent demons and goblins, and children going door to door, soliciting treats from compliant neighbors.

But when Halloween comes around, do you find yourself yearning for the hours to pass until the whole trick-or-treat farce is over? If you don't, you should!

Halloween's not-so-fun side

Since when is it acceptable for little children to threaten to commit vandalism?

What happens if the homeowner doesn't come to the door or doesn't have the treats the kids might expect? Is it permissible for children to then soap his windows, toilet paper his trees, chalk mark his sidewalk or turn over plants as they leave? When is it okay for children to commit vandalism while on another person's property?

Isn't it about time for all well-meaning citizens to just say NO to Halloween?

The clergy, in general, hasn't stood against it. Some churches even have Halloween parties. Some citizens do speak up against it, as the letters to the editor in your newspaper occasionally show.

Is Halloween simply good, clean fun, or is it something else entirely? You need to know!

*Isn't it about time
for all well-
meaning citizens to
just say NO to
Halloween?*

God is giving a wake-up call to professing Christians. As it was with those the prophet Elijah addressed in his day, so it is with us: "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' But the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). What will it take for Christians to accept and stand for God's truth rather than harmful traditions that originated in paganism?

Where did Halloween originate?

Just where did Halloween come from, and why is it so widely celebrated?

The Encyclopedia of Religion explains: "Halloween is the name for the eve of Samhain, a celebration marking the beginning of winter as well as the first day of the New Year within the ancient Celtic culture of the British Isles. The time of Samhain consisted of the eve of the feast and the day itself (31 October and 1 November).

"On this occasion, it was believed that a gathering of supernatural forces occurred as during no other period of the year. The eve and day of Samhain were characterized as a time when the barriers between the human and supernatural worlds were broken. Otherworldly entities, such as the souls of the dead, were able to visit earthly inhabitants, and humans could take the opportunity to penetrate the domains of the gods and supernatural creatures.



“Fiery tributes and sacrifices of animals, crops, and possibly human beings were made to appease supernatural powers who controlled the fertility of the land . . . Samhain acknowledged the entire spectrum of nonhuman forces that roamed the earth during the period” (1987, pp. 176-177, “Halloween”).

On this holiday “huge bonfires were set on hilltops to frighten away evil spirits . . . The souls of the dead were supposed to revisit their homes on this day, and the autumnal festival acquired sinister significance, with ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, black cats, fairies, and demons of all kinds said to be roaming about. It was the time to placate the supernatural powers controlling the processes of nature” (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition, Micropaedia, Vol. 4, p. 862, “Halloween”).

It was, bluntly put, a day devoted to appeasing demonic spirits and the dark side of the spirit world—something no Christian should have any part in (Ephesians 5:11).

So how did this dark celebration continue into modern times? Sadly, Halloween came down to us from the Roman Catholic Church, which assigned a day of each year to each of their saints. When it reached the point that they had more than 365, they then combined them together on Nov. 1 and called it “All Saints Day” or “All Hallows Day”—the night before being “All Hallows Eve” or “Hallow Even” (holy evening), contracted to the name Hallowe’en or Halloween.

Why did they choose this particular day? Again, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* explains: “Samhain remained a popular festival among the Celtic people throughout the Christianization of Great Britain. The British church attempted to divert this interest in pagan customs by adding a Christian celebration to the calendar on the same date as Samhain. The Christian festival, the Feast of All Saints, commemorates the known and unknown saints of the Christian religion just as Samhain had acknowledged and paid tribute to the Celtic deities” (p. 177).

It was, bluntly put, a day devoted to appeasing demonic spirits and the dark side of the spirit world—something no Christian should have any part in.

Thus, a pagan celebration was relabeled as Christian.

The Bible versus Halloween

You cannot find any support for Halloween in your Bible, because God is adamantly opposed to it and the pagan, occult practices it revels in. He warns His people to have nothing to do with these (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:10-12). They blind us from the truth of God.

God does not take Halloween lightly. As He says, “Learn not the way of the heathen” (Jeremiah 10:2, King James Version). And, “Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise’” (Deuteronomy 12:30).

God will not always remain tirelessly patient with those who insist on celebrating harmful and superstitious customs such as Halloween. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some

understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance . . . What kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God” (2 Peter 3:9-12, New International Version).

The author of Halloween

The author of sin and death, Satan the devil, is also the behind-the-scenes author of pagan customs like Halloween. Jesus said that Satan is a liar and the father of all lies (John 8:44). God is the God of the living, not the dead (Matthew 22:31-32). He is the God of not only true Christians alive today but, because of the certainty of the coming resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15), of those who will yet live when raised from death. So certain is this resurrection that to God it is looked on as an accomplished fact (see Romans 4:17).

It is not a harmless holiday for you or for your children. God warns us to avoid it and to follow His ways, because He hates for us to dabble in the spirit world of Satan and his demons!

Conversely, Satan is the “lord of the dead.” Hebrews 2:14 says of Jesus Christ that, “only by dying could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death” (New Living Translation).

Satan is the lord of the dead in that he leads people by his lies and influence into the way of death and, as the next verse shows, puts them in bondage to the fear of death.

He has foisted Halloween on ignorant people and even well-meaning Christians in a subtle and deceitful way, perpetuating it through the Catholic Church with a “Christian” mask that hides its demonic origins.

Can people make Halloween harmless?

When it comes to Halloween—or any other holiday for that matter—you should ask yourself, “Did God make man in His image, or did God intend man to remake God in man’s image?” Now that’s a sobering thought.



The religious excuse for perpetuating Halloween might be that, as we’ve seen, church leaders long ago called it a “holy evening” for all the Catholic saints who had no day assigned to them. But face it: People who celebrate this evening today couldn’t care less about such religious notions. All they think about is instant gratification, to follow the pack with everyone else and to have some fun.

The Encyclopedia of Religion goes on to say: “Modern Halloween activities have centered on mischief making and masquerading in costumes, often resembling otherworldly characters. Folk customs, now treated as games [such as bobbing for apples], have continued from the various divination practices of the ancient celebrants of this occasion. Supernatural figures [such as the ghost, the witch, the vampire, the devil] play a key role in supplying an aura of the mysterious to the evening, whether or not they originally had an

association with the festival.

“Children are particularly susceptible to the imagery of Halloween, as can be seen in their fascination with the demonic likeness of a carved and illuminated pumpkin, known as the jack-o’-lantern. In recent times, children have taken up the practice of dressing in Halloween costumes and visiting homes in search of edible and monetary treats, lightly threatening to play a trick on the owner if a treat is not produced” (p. 177).

Halloween is one of many human traditions that cloud biblical teachings and keep people in the dark from God’s truth that can set us free (John 8:32). It is not a harmless holiday for you or for your children. God warns us to avoid it and to follow His ways, because He hates for us to dabble in the spirit world of Satan and his demons! Instead, as God tells us in Isaiah 66:2, “On this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

Further reading

For more articles like this, check out the [Good News](#) magazine or request a free subscription.

(This article was originally featured in the September/October 2008 issue of the Good News.)

Where Is the Grave?

By Robert Berendt

From the beginning of time, man has wondered what will happen once he departs this life. Is a physical body necessary? Where does a person go after death? There is a spiritual dimension most people miss, which is an integral part of God’s Plan for building His Family.



FUNERALS, BURIALS AND GRAVE MARKERS have become big business today. In a world becoming more and more crowded with people, the space available for cemeteries is dwindling and more emphasis is being placed on cremation. In some nations, cremation is the only form of body-disposal allowed. In other nations and religions, only the burial of the full body is allowed.

A couple of years ago, eight members of our family went on a trip to Poland to find the graves of our family members who died almost 100 years ago. It may seem strange, but there was something definite that happened within our minds in a spiritual sense when we actually found the headstone of a family member. There is some strange connection to our ancestry. It was disappointing when we were not able to find a well-marked grave. Cemeteries have stories to tell. The death of babies, mother and child on the same day, the dates of birth and death of family members all tell a story. But it is true that in time the memory of a person is forgotten (Ecclesiastes 9:5).



It seems remarkable the graves of the heroes of the Bible are nowhere to be found.

It seems remarkable the graves of the heroes of the Bible are nowhere to be found. There may be a few exceptions, but it seems we cannot find the graves of the judges and kings of Israel, the twelve apostles and other remarkable leaders such as Paul, Timothy, and Barnabas. We know of one case where God Himself took great care to ensure the disappearance of the body of the one who died. Why should this be? Why is there no grave of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:6), Aaron, Abraham, Isaac or Jacob? There may be theories and popularly accepted sites, but no evidence or proof. Is there a reason these bodies have remained hidden? Great people of the past, including Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Nebuchadnezzar, are also among the long list of missing “graves.”

Building blocks of the body of Christ

Since the existence of humans on earth, any number of tragedies have struck that have made burial impossible. There have been thousands of deaths at sea; many have been literally blown apart in the explosions of the World Wars. A number have been eaten by wild animals and no doubt there were other things resulting in the lack of a body to bury in a recorded grave.

Does it really matter? Obviously, in time, any body disintegrates to the point of being unrecognizable. We are made of the earth and will return to the earth at death (Genesis 3:19). However, God can miraculously make exceptions, such as He did after Jesus died. Although Jesus was dead for three days and three nights, no decay had started (Matthew 12:40; Acts 2:27). That was an amazing fulfillment of prophecy (Psalm 16:10). That may be the only exception. Even the body of Lazarus may have started to decay during the four days that he was dead (John 11:17, 39).

The point is this: Bodily disintegration and decay does not hinder God at all when He resurrects someone.

Revelation 20:4-5 explain there is a first resurrection (of Christ’s faithful followers to spiritual bodies), and another, larger one for the “rest of the dead” (to new physical bodies). Over the past 6,000 years of human history, most graves (that is, most bodies) have long since turned to dust and no longer exist. They are disintegrated into so many elements and then, in many cases, scattered all over. Where is the grave? Where is the body? Does God need a body to resurrect a person? No, He does not!

Over the past 6,000 years of human history, most graves (that is, most bodies) have long since turned to dust and no longer exist.

What is most important to know is this: All human beings who have ever lived from the time of Adam and Eve until the second resurrection will live again. Those innocents who have died as babies, or the billions who have died without knowing God or His Lamb will awaken to life, with the opportunity to learn God's truth and qualify for eternal life.

Human life is precious for a number of reasons. Every single individual now living has the potential of becoming a child of God. The Creator has taken careful note of the existence of each person. God takes the responsibility of offering eternal life in just the right time and manner. Even those who die without knowing Him will live again and be given their chance. God is great! He is capable of doing everything He has stated He will do.

God does not need marked graves or old bodies. Our all-powerful and all-wise God will create new bodies for those He resurrects!

Further reading

For more information about what happens after we die, request our free booklet [*What Happens After Death?*](#)

Satan's World Reminds Us How Not to Rule

By Nino Boezio

Christians can examine Satan's present rule over this world to discover what his kingdom lacks—and what God's doesn't.



HOW DO SATAN'S RULE AND GOD'S KINGDOM COMPARE? Does his evil empire work on a system of cooperation with Satan as the head, just as we will cooperate with God one day to rule?

We are often reminded about the kingdom of God, and how after Christ's return it will fill the entire earth. It will be a kingdom where Jesus Christ rules under God the Father, and the transformed saints will have a positive and unique role in it to work and live eternally.

We also often hear about the devil. We understand that he is an adversary who seeks to incite to sin and cause problems and chaos. He is labelled as the enemy of all Christians, though he is also an enemy of all humanity, whether people realize it or not (Revelation 12:9).

But one thing worth acknowledging is that Satan also has a kingdom. With all kingdoms, there is a certain type of unity (though Satan's is the antithesis of the type of unity that Christians practice for the kingdom of God). After all, demons remain unified in their rebellion, which will all fail when the devil is removed and imprisoned as pictured in the Day of Atonement (Revelation 20:1-3). By understanding the attitudes with which Satan's kingdom operates, we can better understand how far superior God's government and kingdom are.

We understand that he is an adversary who seeks to incite to sin and cause problems and chaos.

A revealing description

In one Scriptural account, Jesus cast out a demon and was then accused of casting it out by using Satan's power:

Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "*This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.*" But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "*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? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house*" (Matthew 12:22-29, emphasis added).

Christ stated here that Satan and his demons have a demonic unity. If Satan were to cast out his own, how could his kingdom stand? So if one *does* cast out demons, it certainly implies that the greater power comes from God, not the demonic realm. This Scriptural passage shows that *God is far more powerful* than Satan and his demonic kingdom.

A world influenced by the devil

We are quite familiar with the various evil dictatorships of our day. These dictatorships have a number of characteristics in common that we should keep in mind:

The leader is very powerful and wields considerable influence. In considering the spiritual realm, we can note that Satan was once one of high position (Ezekiel 28:13-17), and presumably one of the angelic beings wielding some authority over others under God.

The circle of persons around the leader are more than happy to have a dictator as their leader, because they attain advantages that they otherwise would not have. It is why the henchmen that surrounded Hitler and Mussolini were themselves equally corrupt.

The leader is not someone who can be easily overthrown. It is why an inner circle is content to carry out his wishes.

Both the leader and his inner circle benefit from their relationship, more than if they worked apart. Unity, even if it comes about for evil purposes, is still a powerful bond and hard to break. Drug cartels and biker gangs are two examples.

There are a number (usually a very large number) of people in a nation who unfortunately do not benefit, and may often be oppressed for the good of the leader and his inner cadre.

The majority who do not benefit are used as tools and instruments to fulfill the purpose of the leader. They may not even realize that they are simply being used, and so are supportive of his leadership.

The majority of a nation may be fed lies and propaganda in order to keep them in line. The devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). It is quite possible this may have been one of the methods he used to sway one-third of the angels to his cause (Revelation 12:4). We know from history that one way to stop two enemies from fighting each other is to get them both focused on fighting a third.

Ultimately the entire system may self-destruct. Those far below the upper echelons of leadership may suffer tremendously and even revolt in due time—a coup-d'état. Depending on how severe the leader and his inner circle are in the pursuit of their selfish interests, desires and abuse of power, the suffering can reach a proportion that impacts everyone negatively. But history shows that many longed-for human “messiahs” in turn only become the next dictator.



From a Christian standpoint, we should note that humanity is truly a problem for the satanic realm. When God created mankind, humanity was patterned after the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Humanity is intended to one day displace the devil and his demonic realm. Christ also came to disqualify Satan as earth’s ruler (Matthew 4:1-10), to resist him when tempted in the wilderness, and to show that the ruler of this world was judged (John 16:11). Therefore it should be no surprise that humanity, as far as Satan is concerned, serves no long-term useful purpose for him and his demons. Their earthly authority is now in jeopardy and due to be replaced. We see a persistent theme in the Bible where the devil is viewed as being in opposition to humanity and is ultimately seeking to destroy the Church. This is part of the Atonement theme we focus upon annually.

Humanity is intended to one day displace the devil and his demonic realm.

Here are some basic differences between Satan’s realm and the Kingdom of God:

In the realm of the devil, only a select few benefit. Under God's Kingdom, everyone benefits. God's government, based on Godly love, engages and embraces the involvement of everyone for the benefit of everyone. It primarily functions on the servant principle.

Satan's rule works on propaganda and misinformation. God's government operates on truth. At times, religious misinformation and deception can easily masquerade as the truth.

Satan's fruits result in conflict, destruction and oppression. Spirit-led fruits yield resolution, construction and encouragement.

Understanding these differences can be helpful

Although we are glad God doesn't reveal too much to us about the workings of Satan's evil empire, we realize that empire rules the earth today. The important point is that the government of God will benefit all—Satan's government does not.

God's Church strives to follow God's model by encouraging an atmosphere where all can benefit, while at the same time not tolerating sin or improper behavior. We can never claim that the Church or an organization has reached some state of perfection; it is always a work in progress. But we can always endeavour to support and understand the workings of God's Church and its intended support for the building up of the spiritual body (Ephesians 4:12-16).

We can support and understand the workings of God's Church and its intended support for the building up of the spiritual body.

In understanding some aspects of how Satan's evil empire operates, we can gain a greater appreciation for God's Church on earth.

Further reading

Request your free copy of the booklet [*Is There Really a Devil?*](#)

Answered Prayer Through Opportunity

By Dale Schurter

Answered Prayer! What a wonderful reality! What a wonderful promise.



“**W**HEN YOU PRAY, GO INTO YOUR ROOM, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matthew 6:6).

Let’s carefully examine two of the words used in this scripture to describe how our Heavenly Father promises to answer our prayers. These words are *reward* and *openly*. Here are their definitions from the World English Dictionary:

Reward, *n.* A benefit obtained as a result of an action taken or a job done; something positive that follows a desired response and acts to encourage desired behavior.

Openly, *adv.* Willingly, responsively, directly, truthfully, publicly, sympathetically.

As the meanings of these words sink in, we willingly desire to go to our “room” (private place), shut the door and pray to our Father. Our room is not the only place we pray, but also a state of mind; the mental attitude in which we pray. This environment provides a private place for personal fellowship with God our Father—any time, any place.

In contrast, praying hypocritically is examined by Christ: “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward... And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:5, 7-8).

Our room is not the only place we pray, but also a state of mind; the mental attitude in which we pray.

I'm reminded of an example of "vain repetition" I saw some years ago when on assignment in Saudi Arabia. The king's brother, Prince Mamdouh Al-Saoud, invited us to a meeting and banquet in the desert near the Red Sea, some 70 miles southwest of Jeddah.

We took off across the desert sands, "cruising" between 60-75 miles per hour, and it quickly became evident this was more of a race to see which vehicle could "nudge" closest in line behind the limo of the Prince.



A professor from the University and I were the only ones in our vehicle with Richard, our driver. We raced along in the dust, literally leaving the ground when encountering sand mounds. Richard was determined to move forward from our present ninth position. As the lead car turned a partial corner, we cut out of line and headed "cross-country," aiming at fourth position. I turned to check on the professor, but did not immediately see him. Looking over the back of the seat, I saw him on the floorboard praying, repeating the same

words over and over, looking down, then looking up with fear filled eyes.

As we approached the line of vehicles, it seemed certain we would crash into one of them. Then, like magic, a space opened behind car four and we found ourselves fifth in line. The professor slowly returned to his seat. Repetitious babbling was what he had been taught to do by his mentor. This is quite different from the instructions of our Teacher.

How does our Heavenly Father answer prayer?

Does God always answer our prayer in the manner we desire at the time of our request? Are we sure our notion of answered prayer is always the correct one? And if an answer is provided differently than we expect, are we discouraged or disappointed?

Sometimes we receive an immediate answer to our petitions. I well remember one of these immediate answers early in my ministry. After giving the sermon, one Sabbath in Shreveport, LA, a brother in his mid-eighties requested prayer and anointing for his wife, also in her mid-eighties. She was at home in bed with severe back pain. My wife and I, and several brethren, accompanied him to their home.

We knelt at her bedside before our Creator. When I removed my hands following the anointing and prayer, she did not move or make a sound. Had she passed out? I quickly asked, "Are you okay?" She opened her eyes and said, "I don't have any pain at all, and I'm afraid to move." She slowly began to move to the edge of the bed, sat up, stood up, bent over, nearly touching the floor with her hands, then straightened up and repeated the exercise—both crying and laughing at the same time. We joined her with joy and sincere gratitude toward our Father, the Almighty Healer and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Does God always answer our prayer in the manner we desire at the time of our request?

Although this prayer was answered immediately, more often we receive answers that come over time. As we watch and pray, we hope we are developing good fruit in our life, praying to always know and do His will.

One of the ways God answers prayer in a way that has multiple benefits. I call it *opportunity-answered prayer*, or *answered prayer through opportunity*.

The key word is *opportunity*—opportunity to grow in grace and knowledge while we are receiving answers to our requests. This method of answering prayer includes one's personal involvement and participation.

How many of us have prayed for courage? When watching and reflecting on my own experience, the answer to praying for courage often came by way of an opportunity to be courageous. Opportunity was provided, but I had to choose, in faith, to accept the opportunity or reject it. In reality, the choice was mine to accept or reject my Father's answer.

Through this process of answered prayer, we receive and retain the courage to meet the challenge again and with expanded courage to meet even greater challenges. We develop not only more courage, but also more confidence, experience more peace of mind and less fear, and have strengthened faith. We grow in Godly character, truly encouraged.

We pray for faith—we are given opportunity to be faithful

We pray for strength; our Maker may provide opportunities to be strong, to stand strong, to make a difference. And as we meet the opportunity with faith and more courage, we become stronger, more resolute and steadfast in righteousness. This can challenge be an answered prayer.

We pray for knowledge—He provides opportunity to learn

Psalm 111:10 says, "A good understanding have all those who do His commandments." We pray for understanding; He sometimes provides opportunity to receive understanding. We step out in faith and act on an opportunity. We make a decision to accept God's word, and as we do, we begin to receive understanding of why: its purpose, its value and benefits. Again, answered prayer.

David ran into action to keep and guard the commandments of his God, the Almighty, and became a man after His heart. As we do the same, we continue to grow in grace, in knowledge, in understanding, and in Godly character.

We too become a person after the hearts of our Father and Savior. And as we continue to observe these laws of freedom as a way of life, we continue to

grow in Godly character, purging (and replacing) the ways of the god of this world with the way of the Kingdom of Heaven (Hebrews 9:13-14, New International Version).

*Seeking, knocking
and asking include
personal action and
personal
involvement.*

Is not the ultimate purpose of answered prayer a purifying of conscience and heart resulting in a mature Godly character, a continuing walk in physical and spiritual healing and maturing in righteousness for the rest of our natural life and beyond? Absolutely.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

Seeking, knocking and asking include personal action and personal involvement. When we pray, we need to be alert and watching for opportunity to participate in receiving our request. In the middle of a raging flood, mentally or physically, we pray for rescue. But when a boat or airlift opportunity arrives, we must take action to get on board to be saved.

We praise God in prayer, with thanksgiving, and within the loving guidelines of His laws. In this environment, we can be confident we are making our praises, petitions, and requests according to His will. And as we do, we know we will receive that for which we ask, either directly or through opportunity—every time!

Included in this, we must fully accept *His* timing, even when we offer up urgent requests. Our faith and trust is that He always has our best interest at heart. Truly, this is the way to peace—peace of mind and inner tranquility! Let’s review how opportunity-answered prayer relates to the fruits of the spirit. If we pray for...

Love, God gives us an opportunity to express and demonstrate love to Him and to others. And, as we do, additional character is developed in us and we become more loving.

Joy, we pray for joy and are often given opportunity to provide a joyful environment for others. And when we do, we receive and share in the joy.

Peace, we are given opportunity to be a peacemaker.

Longsuffering (patience), we are given opportunity to exercise patience.

Kindness, we are given opportunity to be kind, to offer and demonstrate kindness and we become a kinder person.

Goodness, we are given opportunity to do good, thus strengthening good character.

Faithfulness, we are given opportunity to be faithful and our faith increases.

Gentleness (meekness), we are given opportunity to be gentle, to be meek, and we become more gentle. (Proverbs 15:1)

Self-control, we are given opportunity to exercise control over our personal behavior.

The fruit of the Spirit is the fruit our Father and Savior in us produces. It is up to us to harvest the fruit, lest it decay on the vine, fall to the ground and return to the dust from which it came. God gives us the chance to harvest these fruits through opportunity-answered prayer. What a joy! What a privilege! What an opportunity!

Further reading

Be sure to request your free copy of [You Can Have Living Faith](#).

Appreciating the Aging Process

By Graemme Marshall

There are challenges for an older person. But getting old isn't the end. It is, in fact, a new venture that only the elderly can appreciate.



“BUT THE GODLY WILL FLOURISH like palm trees... Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green” (Psalm 92:12, 14, New Living Translation).

The opportunity for older people is a new level of learning

Psalm 92 is positively encouraging: Part of the blessing of being among the godly is that older people are able to find a new goal for this critical stage of life, becoming productive and fruitful. Instead of focusing on time running out, it is more positive to make the most of each day. There are different priorities when time is shorter. The story of the aggressive young salesman trying to sell an insurance policy to a ninety-five-year-old man illustrates this—despite polite refusal from the elderly gentleman, the young man still persisted. Finally the old man said, “Look, young fellow, you don’t seem to understand. At my age, I don’t even buy green bananas.” If every day is welcomed with a joy for God’s Truth, you’ll never feel too old. You will just keep on growing.

Contrasting the last days of David and his friend Barzillai

After David fled Jerusalem from a coup by his son Absalom, the rebels were miraculously defeated and David once again began a return to the city. A good friend, Barzillai, had provided for him and his entourage. As they began the some 50-kilometer return, David asked his good friend to go with him and be a court confidant. Barzillai’s response illustrates old age and its limitations. Scripture says he was “very old” at 80 years (2 Samuel 19:31-37, NLT). He knew he lived day-by-day and may have doubted whether he would even survive the journey. His physical state included impaired hearing and faulty taste buds. He realized he was quite unable to serve in a court environment. His focus was now on remaining close to his hometown, where his ancestors were buried. With no refrigeration in those days, men and women were buried (except for the

It is important to keep a positive, humorous outlook on aging because God designed the process. It's not the act of a vengeful God, but a loving one.

embalmed) close to they died. He wanted to put his affairs in order and remain in familiar surroundings while awaiting his death.

By contrast, David had no peaceful end. At 70, he was surrounded by palace succession intrigues, plagued by body circulation problems and had a stranger tending him rather than his wife (1 Kings 1:1-2). He records in a Psalm how he endured insincere flattery, disease problems and disloyal former friends (Psalm 41:5-9). Some of us will face our last days somewhere between the experiences of Barzillai and David.

What does God intend for us to learn from the aging process?

We try to counter aging's effects with light-hearted banter. Popular seniors' anecdotes illustrate this: "When I bend down to tie up my shoes, I look around to see what else can be done while I'm down there," "These days, my back goes out more than I do," or, "When I go downstairs to get something, I often wonder whether I'm coming or going." It is important to keep a positive, humorous outlook on aging because God designed the process. It's not the act of a vengeful God, but a loving one.

Positives to appreciate

Aging brings maturity and mellowing, born from experience. There is a digestion of life and an assimilation of loss and grief. There is the realization of Job, who said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Paul explained, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7).

The aged have absorbed the blows and wounds of life. Some heal, some scar. The mature no longer feel they must protect some unnecessarily inflexible position. Maturity means composure, with less exuberance or depression. The mature years bring a greater sense of being in control of life. There may be a desire to *feel* young, but not to *be* young again. They have too much self-control, ease of interpersonal relations and self-confidence to trade for a youthful mindset again.

Men in maturity



Older men become much more comfortable with themselves and their mates. Aging causes many men to accept their present place on the career ladder; where they are becomes "far enough." Mature men show more affection to their mates and value the part their wives have played in the family. Romantic love can blossom even more. This is the beauty of committed love with lifelong devotion. A lengthy partnership of love in facing good and bad times means a husband and wife are real friends. Committed love over long years yields the highest return on this faithful investment. Looking back on child rearing, men attribute much of the teaching and nurturing to their wives, indicating they themselves were too busy making a living. With fewer financial obligations, they desire more companionship from their marriage relationships.

Women in maturity

While younger women are often vulnerable and dependent on their husbands, mature women are no longer preoccupied by the responsibilities of family life. When children are grown up and leave home, older women have renewed energy to reassess and modify their life. Many women look anew at the positives of their husbands and at their own personal appearance. They are more settled in what they like and dislike. They no longer feel the need to fit in with every fashion, knowing now what best suits them personally. Many develop careers for the first time, or pick up from where they left off when parenthood began. Grand parenting experiences bring pleasure without parental strains.

Giving up driving

For many, driving equals independence. The ability to shop, go to church or visit family and friends as you please is prized. The decision to hand over the car keys for good can be very difficult. Most people change their behavior as they get older—they drive less, and then only to familiar locations, and less at night. Aging brings physical and mental changes that can compromise driving ability, including changes in vision, and motor function. Aging eyes can take longer to adjust to changes in levels of light and dark, making glare and night driving more difficult. Cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration can impact visual perception. Arthritis of the neck or hands can make it more difficult to turn the head, switch the foot from the accelerator to the brake and operate other controls. To improve safety, some install wider rearview mirrors. Being prepared to use alternatives, such as taxis, mass transit, senior-center shuttles or other community transportation for seniors can help ease the loss. That said, age alone is not the key measure of whether someone is safe to drive—many 90-year-old seniors remain good, safe motorists.

Mature men show more affection to their mates and value the part their wives have played in the family. Romantic love can blossom even more.

The dangers of falls

In 2005, traumatic brain injuries resulting from falls caused nearly 8,000 deaths and 56,000 hospital visits among Americans 65 and older. Statistics show most older adults do not exercise regularly, and 35% over 65 do not participate in any physical leisure activity. “If a person lives in a very cluttered home with telephone cords across the room, loose rugs, etc.,” says the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence, “these things are hazards.” Falling isn’t an inevitable part of the aging process, and there are ways to avoid succumbing to a nasty, or expensive, spill. If you break a hip and end up in a nursing home, very frequently the fracture suffered will keep you in bed. In very bad cases, some never get up again.

Aged concerns at home



Hearing loss can affect watching television, talking on the phone or general conversation. This is where a hearing aid helps. Eyesight problems contribute to misdials on the telephone or failing to see obstructions like mats and carpets. Big-button phones and large-print Bibles help. Arthritis affects the joints, which can make computer use, writing or taking notes at Church or turning the pages of your Bible difficult. Church members who are unaware of arthritic hands can give a strong handshake that pains the hand!

Insecurity over future health costs

Because of age, health insurance restrictions come into force while age-related health conditions continue. The best options for dental, eye, ear and other health needs may now become out of reach financially. Mobility problems and perhaps wheelchairs or walking canes enter your life. And what about winter and walking on ice? Getting in and out of a vehicle also becomes more of a chore.

Concerns at church

Speakers and song leaders have numerous things on their mind and are often unable to adjust to the needs of the whole congregation. The aged and hard of hearing may miss hymn page numbers and so resort to asking someone for help. Speakers may give a verse too quickly for you to recognize or turn to. It might become difficult to stand up for hymns, or to remain seated all through a service. You might need to walk around a little at the rear. You may no longer be able to take notes; it might be enough to just listen. There may be times of bad weather or ill health when you must decide whether to attempt going to services at all. Attending one of God's festivals like the Feast of Tabernacles poses an eight-day long activity that now may cause you to consider whether you can make it. Then there are stairways and entrances. While most of the congregation might have little difficulty, stairs and difficult entrances may pose a barrier for you. With modern electronics, there are cables on the floor which can cause you to trip. And though once upon a time as a young parent you could easily tolerate young children's distractions at services, you might now find this an annoying distraction.



Concerns for prayer and study

With arthritic knees or knee replacements, getting down on your knees or raising your arms to God might now be a major task. You now discover that you must pray in as good a position as you can. You might now find meditation and reflection more effective than the eyestrain of reading.

An aged opportunity

*There may be times
of bad weather or
ill health when you
must decide
whether to attempt
going to services at
all.*

Reconciliation opportunities always exist, but we often procrastinate and let them slip by. It is of little help to others to wish you'd have said something to make up for a past mistake. Have you heard people say after the death of a loved one, "I wish I'd said such and such to them before they went"? Each day is a window of opportunity to help correct any past mistakes. The mellowing of age equips you to forgo pride in favor of doing the right thing. The aged have a realization of how temporally close they might be to the Kingdom of God. They stand on the brink of eternity. They have a sense of daily urgency to be closer to God; to be concerned how their Christian works might be viewed and judged. The final heartbeat is not an end—but a grand beginning.

Further reading

For other interesting reading like this, request your free subscription to the [Good News Magazine](#).

Easily Offended? Here's How to Get Over It

By Becky Sweat

Unfortunately, people sometimes say and do things that are careless, blunt, insensitive or even mean-spirited. While we can't control the intentions or behavior of others, we can determine how we will act. We can choose to not be offended.



“I CAN'T BELIEVE you let your kids eat toaster pastries! They're all sugar and trans fats!” a friend told me recently. She was over for coffee and couldn't help peering into my open pantry and seeing the box of toaster pastries.

I could feel my hackles starting to rise. What would motivate someone to make a remark like that?! It would never occur to me to critique what other people have in their kitchen cupboards. Still, I told myself my friend probably meant well. After all, she studied nutrition in college and that was “her thing.” In her own way, she was probably trying to show concern. So I simply smiled, shrugged and replied, “You’re right. They’re not exactly nutritious. But once in a while I buy them for a special treat.”

The fact of the matter is offenses are going to come our way. When they do, it's okay to admit that it hurts.

This response is what I call the “Value-the-Other-Person’s-Perspective” approach. You let the other person know you can see some truth to what she just said. Sure, it would have been easy to take offense at my friend’s words, but why? In the broad scheme of things, does it really matter that my friend doesn’t agree with all of my grocery purchases? Obviously, it doesn’t. If I would have challenged her on what she said, that may have led to an argument. Instead, after my response, my friend smiled back. Then we began to talk about something totally different, and had a pleasant conversation.

I wish I could say I *always* respond to offensive remarks in this way, but I don’t. Sometimes I let other people’s careless, blunt or insensitive words rub me the wrong way. I feel hurt, upset, insulted, snubbed, slighted or wronged. I’m not able to let the comments just slide.

Chances are, you can relate. From time to time, probably most of us find ourselves offended by something someone said, or perhaps did. You don’t get invited to a party that everyone else you know is going to. Your boss commends your coworker in the company meeting, but doesn’t acknowledge any of your efforts. You don’t receive a thank you card for the birthday gift you gave someone. Your son sits out on the bench the entire baseball game, while the coach’s son and his circle of friends play the whole time. It can be so difficult to overlook these kinds of annoyances.



Yet, we must. The Bible admonishes us to not be oversensitive: “Do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others” (Ecclesiastes 7:21-22).

We know that part of the fruit of God’s Spirit is love. In 1 Corinthians 13:5, we’re told that a vital aspect of love is to not be easily provoked or stirred to anger.

Those who really love God’s law and understand His Word will not allow small irritants and annoyances to drive a wedge between others and themselves. They know how easy it is to cause others offense. Proverbs 11:12 says, “He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his peace.”



Certainly, these verses are not telling us we should never confront another person about a serious problem. There are times when we do need to go to our brother, as commanded in Matthew 18:15-17. However, confronting others should not be something we are doing on a regular basis. You don't want to be the proverbial "contentious woman" (or man) who is just itching to be offended, all-too-ready to tell others off and put them in their place. No one wants to spend time around someone like that.

Of course, some people aren't "confrontational," but may get just as offended. Rather than pick a fight with the offender, they stew about what the person said or did, harboring all kinds of negative emotions. That's not good, either. These kinds of feelings can grow and fester, and turn someone into an angry, bitter, miserable person. It can also lead to grudges. I know people who have spent years estranged from once good friends over relatively small offenses.

The fact of the matter is offenses are going to come our way. When they do, it's okay to admit that it hurts. However, we don't have to get upset about it. We can choose to not be offended. It says in Colossians 3:13 that we should be "bearing with one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." Here are some suggestions for how to do just that:

Get your focus off "self"

Having hurt feelings and being easily offended is almost always a result of being too preoccupied with "self": "No one liked *my* ideas." "She was curt with *me*." "They hardly talked to *me*." "He didn't even thank *me*." "No one ever asked for *my* opinion." "Why wasn't *I* considered for the position?" "Nobody paid any attention to *me*."

I can see it in some of my own interactions. Once my husband and I hosted a dinner party and one of our guests spent much of the evening going on and on about what an elegant hostess one of her friends was: "Oh, you should see the tables Joelle sets!" "Joelle doesn't serve everyday food like most of us do when we have dinner parties; she serves six-course gourmet meals." "I always feel like I'm at a five-star restaurant when I go to Joelle's house for dinner." "Joelle makes the best desserts I've ever tasted!" This guest didn't make any positive comments that evening about the meal I prepared. I was feeling slighted, because I thought I had served a nice meal on a beautifully set table too.

If you find yourself easily upset with others, examine yourself to see if something is going on in your life to make you more irritable.

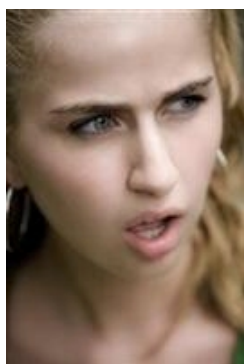
It wasn't until after the guests left that evening that I really thought things through. The reason I felt offended was because someone else was getting recognition, not me. That's not to say it was wrong to hope for a compliment that evening. Everyone likes that kind of positive feedback. But I did need to get my mind off "self concerns."

If you find yourself getting irritated because someone else is in the limelight, think about that person's good qualities. Try to see why he or she is being praised. Ask God to help you be happy for others when they are successful.

If you are upset because you didn't get your way or someone pointed out some of your shortcomings, ask God to help you cultivate more of a humble mindset. You may not want to hear it, but there may very well be others who have more expertise in a particular area than you do. It's hard to become offended if you are esteeming others better than yourself, and valuing what they have to offer. Truly, one of the best ways to keep from becoming offended is to get your focus off yourself...and onto others.

Examine your own feelings

Typically, people who are easily offended are over-sensitive about too many things. They seem to have a chip on their shoulders, and are very quick to interpret even the most innocent comments as an offense. They become offended, not so much because of what was said or done to them, but because of inner, personal struggles.



A friend told me how she felt insulted while on a tour overseas. Another woman on the tour came up to her, introduced herself, and then looked her squarely in the eyes and asked, "How old are you?!" My friend, incredulous that someone she just met would be so forward, stuttered, "Umm, uh, uh..." Then, before she could come up with an appropriate answer, the woman demanded, "Are you 52? You look like you're in your 50s." My friend, who was 42, could hardly believe someone could be so brusque. She replied, "Do I really look *that* old?" to which the woman answered back with another question, "Well, are you 48?" My friend never answered, but admits to feeling "really irritated" with this

person.

Unquestionably, going up to someone you just met and boldly asking her age is not exhibiting a lot of tact. However, after my friend started thinking about what happened, she realized the real problem wasn't so much the perceived offense, as much as she was having a difficult time coming to terms with getting older. She knew she was aging and didn't like what she saw in the mirror. That was the real reason she was upset.

If you find yourself easily upset with others, examine yourself to see if something is going on in your life to make you more irritable. Are you blaming others for offending you, when in reality you wouldn't be upset if you had already dealt with certain hot-button issues in your life? Ask God to help you get over these wounds, emotional scars and insecurities, so they're no longer driving a wedge between yourself and others.

Look at the other person's background

Always take other people's backgrounds into account. We all have different reasons for doing the things we do. Sometimes what seems to be a major offense is simply a reflection of a different personality, upbringing, cultural background or lifestyle.

I once knew someone who had moved to the United States from another part of the world, who was often offending others. His new friends in the U.S. thought he was too blunt and forward. It wasn't until this man's family came to visit the U.S. that his American friends really understood why he talked the way he did. They observed their friend and his family interacting with each other in a very direct, "in your face" manner. Yet, they could see that this man and his family had

a deep love and respect for each other. From that time forward, their friend's blunt manner (by American standards anyway!) was no longer taken as an affront, but rather a cultural difference.

Next time you find yourself taking offense to something, try to imagine yourself in the other person's situation. Remind yourself that he or she may not be coming from the same perspective as you. What once seemed like a huge offense may no longer be one.

Shed unfair expectations of others

Often when we take offense, it's a matter of being disappointed in other people when we see their faults. You see the same clique always together at church, never trying to get to know anyone else. Your child's teacher has a week's worth of homework to grade and isn't very friendly when you drop by her office to talk with her. The office kiss-up name-drops so that you know "how tight" he is with the boss. Unfortunately, these kinds of things happen. Don't let yourself be taken aback when they do.

Often when we take offense, it's a matter of being disappointed in other people when we see their faults.

True, if the person who has offended you has accepted the Christian calling, you should see some Godly fruits in him. Hopefully you will be able to keep some of these good qualities in mind. But you should also remind yourself that the person is still human and far from perfect. He or she is going to make mistakes, just as you will.

The Apostle Paul summed up the human condition this way: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find" (Romans 7:18). If you remember this, you will be much more tolerant of others, and less likely to take offense when people say and do things they shouldn't.

Assume good motives

Finally, it's important to assume that the person who offended you has your best interest at heart, or at least didn't mean to hurt you. One friend, a copywriter with an advertising agency, told me how she made some French pastries and brought them into work one day. Her boss, the agency's creative director, took one bite of the pastry and raved, "You're in the wrong field! You should be working in a bakery! This is the best dessert I have ever tasted in my life!"

My friend thanked him for the compliment, but was furious inside. She fumed to herself, "I spent six years in college and have a Master's degree in Advertising. I've gotten several awards for my copywriting. But my boss tells me I should be baking for a living!"

She didn't stay upset, though. "Just the previous week my boss told me I did an exemplary job on a direct mail piece I'd recently completed," she related. "I had to remind myself of that, rather than dwell on what he said when he was completely enthralled with the pastry he was devouring." In the end, my friend knew that what her boss said the moment he was eating the dessert was not an accurate assessment of what he thought about her professional work. It's helpful to remember that what someone says is not always what he or she meant.

I'll admit to being the queen of sticking-your-foot-in-your-mouth. I've always been a fast talker, and don't always give myself time to think things through before I speak. Not surprisingly, some

of the things I blurt out don't always come out that well. I am grateful my friends give me the benefit of the doubt. I don't have to worry that they are going to assume the worst in interpreting my words and actions. I know that if I do say something tactless or inappropriate, they will see it for what it is and not make more of it than necessary. This is the same kind of understanding I need to extend to others.

If others offend you, consider that they probably didn't intend to. Chances are they were preoccupied with something else, weren't feeling well, or didn't think how their actions may have come across.

Next time you find yourself getting offended, take a few moments to think things through. Once you do, you may realize it's not something to get upset about. Remember, we all have unique personalities. Allow for those differences, ignore the unpleasant mistakes, and learn to enjoy other people—even when they don't always say or do things that endear you to them.

Further reading

For more Christian Living material, request our free booklet [You Can Have Living Faith](#).

Arabic—the Semitic Language of the Arabs

By Kathleen Hoffart

The cultural, intellectual and social mindset of a people has its roots in language.

خ	ح	ج	ث	ت	ب	ا
kha	haa	jiim	thaa	taa	baa	alif
ص	ش	س	ز	ر	ذ	د
saad	shiin	siin	zaay	raa	thaal	daal
ق	ف	غ	ع	ظ	ط	ض
qaaf	faa	ghayn	ayn	thaa	taa	daad
ي	و	ه	ن	م	ل	ك
yaa	waaw	ha	nuun	miim	laam	kaaf

AT ONE TIME, EVERYONE ON EARTH spoke the same language. Genesis 11:1-9 details the event that led God to confound the communication channels between peoples. Thwarted from building their city, groups of people speaking the same language dispersed throughout the land.

The origins of Arabic

Arabic belongs to the Semitic language group, as does Hebrew. Linguists dispute where the Semitic languages originated, but do know the languages flourished in the coastal areas of the Levant and in the Tigris-Euphrates River basin.

Both the north and south Arabian language groups developed their own alphabet and script. The earliest form of North Arabian (Proto-Arabic) texts, dating back to the eighth century B.C., were found in eastern Saudi Arabia. Most of these texts were written in variants of Musnad, an ancient Yemani alphabet.

But these alphabets and scripts were eventually replaced by the Nabataean version of the Aramaic script. Used by Arab tribes affiliated with Rome and Persia, this script gradually evolved into what would be recognized as Arabic script in the sixth century A.D. The Arabic language, as spoken by nomadic tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, also continued to evolve.

Luke, in the book of Acts, wrote that Arabians were among those who heard words spoken in their own language on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5-11).



MS 1982. Dead Sea scrolls. Hebrew book script. Foliation of 1982.

In A.D. 613, Muhammad began to preach publicly in Mecca. His language? Arabic. With the rise of Islam, Arabic gradually became the language of Islamic politics and culture.

One cannot separate the Arabic language from the Muslim faith. The sixth-century A.D. Meccan dialect of Arabic became the standard language of Islam and the Qur'an. The Qur'an became the holy book of the Muslims, and Arabic became the holy language of all Muslims.

One cannot separate the Arabic language from the Muslim faith.

Ataturk, founder of modern day Turkey, recognized the symbiotic relationship between Islam and the Arabic language. He banned the speaking and writing of Arabic within the country.

In the Arab world, when the question "Who is an Arab?" is asked, the answer among Arabs is, "One whose mother tongue is Arabic." Language, not ethnic background, usually becomes the determining factor of who is an Arab. There are approximately 280 million people whose first language is Arabic.

Arabs place a high value on their language

Raphael Patai, who spoke several languages, including Arabic, wrote, "The best Arab minds considered the Arabic language the greatest treasure possessed by the Arabs and devoted enormous ingenuity to the fullest possible utilization of its potential. In this they were greatly helped by the rich vocabulary of Arabic, the great variability of Arabic verb structures, the ease

with which the language lent itself to rhythmic cadences and its exceptional suitability to rhetoric and hyperbole” (*The Arab Mind*, 50).

Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic.

“Arabs are secure in the knowledge that their language is superior to all others... Most important, when the Qur’an was revealed directly from God, Arabic was the medium chosen for His message; its use was not an accident, Arabic is also extremely difficult to master, and it is complex grammatically; this is viewed as another sign of superiority. Because its structure lends itself to rhythm and rhyme, Arabic is pleasing to listen to when recited aloud. Finally, it has an unusually large vocabulary and its grammar allows for the easy coining of new words, so that borrowing from other languages is less common in Arabic than in many other languages...” (Margaret K. Nydell, *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Westerners*, 117).

Arab historian Philip K. Hitti wrote, “No people in the world has such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and is so moved by the word, spoken or written, as the Arabs. Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic. Modern audiences in Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo can be stirred to the highest degree by the recital of poems only vaguely comprehended, and by the delivery of orations in the classical tongue, though only partially understood” (*The Arabs: A Short History*, 21).

Arab language deconstructed

There are three forms of Arabic:

Classical. Used from pre-Islamic times in Arabia, this is the Arabic students learn as they memorize the Qur’an. Many of the words are now obsolete. It is not used in conversation nor is it used in non-religious writings.

Modern Standard (MS). Continuing to evolve, this is the written Arabic of books (other than the Qur’an) and newspapers. It is also the Arabic of news broadcasts and formal occasions, but not ordinary conversation. It may be used in conversations between Arabic speakers of different dialects. Most educated Arabs living anywhere Arabic is spoken can read MS.

Colloquial (spoken). This term covers the many dialects of Arabic that can vary from region to region within a country. The *lingua franca* is Egyptian Arabic—radically different, but popular because of the movies and television programs produced in Cairo.

The *Eastern Arabic-English/English-Eastern Arabic* book by Rank A. Rice and Majed F. Sa’id is the dictionary and phrasebook for the Arab dialect spoken in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine/Israel and Syria. Public, professional and official documents are rarely written in Arabic dialect.

An interesting footnote in history

Sa'adya, an Egyptian Jew who lived in Baghdad and died in A.D. 942, wrote an Arabic commentary on the Bible. But his commentary "soon became largely unintelligible to the majority of the Arabic-speaking Jews, because of the discrepancy between literary and spoken Arabic, which has been in existence for many centuries. Therefore it became necessary to translate the Bible anew, and this time into the various local dialects" (SD Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: A Concise History of Their Social and Cultural Relations*, 135).

The Arabic script was not finalized until the mid-eighth century A.D. Arabic calligraphy became, and is considered, a major art form in the Islamic world.

The Arabic script was not finalized until the mid-eighth century A.D. Arabic calligraphy became, and is considered, a major art form in the Islamic world.

This chart shows how Arabic letters are written. All letters are written in cursive script from right to left. Numbers are written from left to right. Most letters have four forms, depending on where the letter is written within the word.

The difficulty in the transliteration of Arabic

To quote Lonely Planet's guide *Syria & Lebanon*, "The presence of sounds unknown in European languages and the fact that the script is 'incomplete' (most vowels are not written) combine to make it nearly impossible to settle on one universally accepted method of transliteration. A wide variety of spellings are therefore possible for words when they appear in Latin script—and that goes for places and people's names as well.

"The whole thing is further complicated by the wide variety of dialects and the imaginative ideas Arabs themselves often have on appropriate spelling, in, say, English (words spelt one way in Jordan may look very different again in Lebanon and Syria, with strong French influences); not even the most venerable of western Arabists have been able to come up with a satisfactory solution" (405).

There are times when, reading Middle Eastern English-language newspapers online, I have to double-check to make sure different articles are talking about the same place or person.

The writer has these "encouraging" words on page 360 of my copy of *Jordan: The Rough Guide*: "Arabic is phenomenally hard for an English speaker to learn. There are virtually no familiar points of contact between the two languages. The script, written in cursive from right to left is unrelated; there's a host of often guttural sounds which don't appear in English and which take much vocal contortion to master; and the grammar, founded on utterly different principles from English, is proclaimed as one of the most pedantic in the world. It's said that, starting from scratch, Arabic can take seven times as long to master as French."

In Arabic, each and every letter is pronounced and Arabic words can become tongue twisters within themselves.

Learning a new language is valuable

On a personal note, as I was moving forward to step over the high doorsill to exit a small museum in Umm Qais, Jordan, I noticed a small man standing beside the door, holding it open. I glanced at his face and said شكراً (shukran). There was a few seconds silence and as I stepped over the sill, I heard a softly spoken عفواً (afwan).

That simple exchange was well worth the time I took to learn the simple, yet so important, “thank you” in Arabic.

The future of language

God confounded the original language spoken by humankind. But that isn't the end of the story. His prophet Zephaniah wrote, “For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD” (Zephaniah 3:9).

God speed that day.

Further reading

To learn more about the prophecies related to the Arab peoples, please request our free booklet [*The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*](#).