

# *Forerunner*

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Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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## *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS*

# Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

January 1997

Volume 6, Number 1

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## About Our Cover:

When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, every one of them was already in existence and had been from the beginning. The Ten Commandments reveal God's character. God lovingly gave them to Adam and Eve, our ancestors, as a way of life that would bring humanity happiness and eventually eternal life. (Corel photo)

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# THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Christians should have a great interest in the subject of idolatry because of its major importance to morality and our relationship with God. We ought to be constantly refining our understanding of it so we can avoid allowing anything to come between us and God. Perhaps for some, if not most of us, idolatry escapes our attention because we look at the subject too broadly. This broad approach keeps us from understanding the sources of idolatry and the extent it can penetrate into our relationship with God.

Though Romans 14:22-23 is usually not applied to idolatry, it has an interesting bearing on this subject:

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

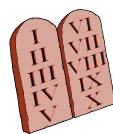
Paul is dealing with a clash of values within an individual. Sometimes we are conscience stricken, feeling very uneasy about what we have permitted ourselves to do. If there were no difference between what one is permitted to do and what one actually does—causing guilt—we would not need to be concerned about self-doubt or self-condemnation.

But these occasions do arise. This leads to a number of overlapping questions that we need to consider:

- What is the source of what you permit yourself to do?
- Where did your values originate?
- Where did you form your values?
- Are you sure you are right even when you are not conscience stricken?

We should ask these questions of ourselves in areas such as business ethics, education, entertainment, athletics, fashions, diet, child training and marital relations, not just in the obvious areas of morality.

## Our Source of Morality



In 1983 I heard Herbert Armstrong give a sermon on the source and origin of law. He said, “That base, or body of beliefs from which you operate, is your system of morality and ethics.” That system of morality is also a body of laws and values. Where did your system come from?

Within the spirit of the word “religion,” any system of morality is an expression of religion because it is a way of life. *Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language* defines *religion* as “a system of beliefs and practices relating to the sacred and uniting its adherents in a community.” It is also “something which has a powerful hold on a person’s way of thinking, interests, etc.” Thus, religion does not need to be related to the divine, for *Webster’s* proceeds to use the example, “Football is that man’s religion.” Devotion to anything creates a way of life.

*Webster’s New World Dictionary* adds, “the state or way of life of a person in a monastery, convent, etc.” Combined, these dictionaries show that “religion,” while most frequently (and rightly) understood in relation to God and church, can also indicate a secular devotion to a body of beliefs, values and laws that effectively motivate one to live his life in a certain way.

When applied to secular life, this has interesting ramifications. Any system of morality is an expression of religion because it concerns itself with values and the way we live. Law, therefore, is enacted, codified morality.

The Bible clearly shows this in relation to God: “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). Romans 4:15 adds, “[T]he law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.” Paul reinforces this in Romans 7:7:

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.”

# Loyalty to any other person or thing at the expense of loyalty to Christ constitutes idolatry.

Law shows us our duties. In reference to God, it awakens us to a consciousness of sin. Through law, we become aware of the contrast between what we ought to do and what we actually do. Our civil legislators enact laws, and thus they tell us what is moral, right and good in a particular, secular area of life.

Instead of calling a transgression of the state's laws "sin," we call it "crime." Many crimes are also sin. The difference between secular law and God's law is that God's law relates directly to the divine. It reveals our duties to Him.

Where do people learn what is moral? When viewed from the biblical perspective, religion, law, state and morality—though specifically different elements—are really part of the same family. In reality, every system of law—or system of morality, since law establishes morality—establishes a religion.

Technically, then, there can be no separation of church (religion) and state. This point escapes most Americans probably because of our democratic political views. It is impossible for politicians to separate their value system (religion) from their public life in politics. When the Beast arises in the near future, this concept will become very apparent as ties between church and states grow closer. This form of idolatry will make all the difference in the world in a person's life.

## "No Other Gods"



The KJV and the NKJV both translate Exodus 20:3 as, "You shall have no other gods before Me." This translation is misleading, though, because it gives us room to think that other gods are permitted as long as the true God is first in importance. God permits no other gods at all!

Other translations more correctly catch the intent. Moffatt says, "You shall have no gods but me." The Knox translation has, "Thou shalt not defy me by making other gods thy own." The Spurrell translation reads, "You shall have no other gods beside Me." Finally, the *New English Bible* renders it, "You shall have no gods to set against me." These make it very clear God will not share His position, glory and praise with any competitors (see Isaiah 42:8). It would not be good for His purpose to allow us to divide our loyalties.

Ezekiel 20:23-26 reveals a critical factor in the idolatry equation that we need to understand:

Also I lifted My hand in an oath to those in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries, because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers'

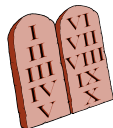
idols. Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live; and I pronounced them unclean because of their ritual gifts, in that they caused all their first-born to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate and that they might know that I am the LORD.

Notice the emphasis on the personal pronoun "My." The source of the law or the values we submit to is the sovereign. This aids us greatly in determining whether idolatry is present and how our conscience will respond.

God forcefully contrasts His laws with pagan commands and practices. He clearly implies that those who submit to pagan commands are guilty of putting another god before the true God. The Israelites—in sincerity and a clear conscience, perhaps even fervently—brutally sacrificed their sweet and innocent firstborn in the fires to Molech, and all the while they were guilty of a horrible, vicious idolatry!

Today, we may not throw babies onto Molech's altar, but we abort 4,200 pregnancies a day, ending the lives of these potential members of God's Family in the name of free choice and self-concern. THE LAW OF THE LAND PERMITS THIS ATROCITY! If that is not idolatry, I do not know what is! What kind of morality, what religion, permits men to enact such heinous laws? People have become blinded by focusing on their own pleasure, failing to see even that murder is involved, let alone the idolatry. God's law nowhere permits such a depraved activity.

## Slaves of Whom We Obey



Romans 6:16, 19 supplies additional knowledge about the critical importance of the source of our values:

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness. . . . I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

We are seen here as the servant of the one we obey; we are under its authority. If man is the source of the morality we submit to, then man is our sovereign. As long as this sovereign agrees with God's standards, then idolatry is no problem. If we broaden this to include the state, whether democratic or socialistic, then the state is the sovereign. But in broadening the scope, the chance that idolatry will

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*Character is determined by the loyalty which rules it. If one's loyalty is to the wrong source, his character will be shaped accordingly. It will not be in the image of Christ and will not be acceptable in the Family of God.*

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enter the equation also increases.

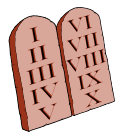
At the beginning of our conversion, usually during counseling for baptism, we are asked to consider Luke 14:26-33 seriously. Verse 26 is particularly important because loyalty to Christ is the issue in this context. Loyalty to any other person or thing at the expense of loyalty to Christ constitutes idolatry. Jesus says, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

This is extremely important because the character of every life is determined by the loyalty which rules it. If one's loyalty is to the wrong source—the wrong government, body of beliefs, laws, people or religion, regardless of whether the person is ignorant of his idolatry, sincere and has a clear conscience—his character will be shaped accordingly. It will not be in the image of Christ and will not be acceptable in the Family of God.

We generally think of Acts 5:29 only in terms of a state of persecution, but its principle applies all the time: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'" Life is a series of compulsions which lead us to choices. These compulsions come in two varieties: 1) forced, as by a gun to our temple which says, "Do this or else," and 2) unforced, just as each dawn comes regardless, gently persuading us to rise and meet our duties. Each pushes us to choose, and the only real difference in them is their strength.

We are surrounded by various elements that, forced or unforced, exert pressure to compel us to submit to them out of loyalty. Both good and evil are compulsions pressuring us to follow them. Our culture urges us to "go along." Family ties influence us to blend in. Our peers, friends in business, school or neighborhood buddies, entice us to conform. These compulsions sweep us along, and all too frequently we go right into idolatry to satisfy our desires to be accepted and feel secure. But Peter and the other apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

## **Idolatry and This World**



Law is inseparable from sovereignty. One can identify the god of any system by locating the source of its laws. When the United States began, the Founding Fathers lifted much of our system of law and morality directly or indirectly from the absolutes of the Bible. After the Civil War, the leadership of the nation gradually altered the basis of our law from those absolutes to human relativism in many areas of our culture. It has since crept into

virtually every area of life. It now dominates our thinking in education, child training, marital relations, economics, education, agriculture, medicine, social programs and even mainstream religion.

Psalms 10:4 explains why this happens: "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of His thoughts." This is of major concern because the first commandment is the most important. A proper understanding of—and thus obedience to—the other nine depends largely on this one.

This does not mean "the wicked" never thinks of God. He may even "belong" to a church and attend fairly regularly. He is not an atheist, but he does not fear God. He has no regard for Him and may in fact purposefully avoid Him. This person has conveniently chosen to live without God except to meet society's conventions. He is effectively worshipping himself.

This nation has more and more frequently been led by men and women answering to this description. They have been largely responsible for impressing their concepts upon society, which has been swept along in absorbing their ideas. People may still frequently talk about God, but He is not feared and obeyed. Idolatry is doing its damage, and reaping of the whirlwind is not far off.

None of us has escaped defilement from this world. We were born into it. Since we were virtually defenseless against it, we have grown up absorbing this world's values and system of morality. Most of us were absolutely unaware that this was happening.

John writes of this system:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" *is not of the Father* but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (I John 2:15-17)

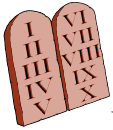
II Corinthians 4:3-4 identifies its source:

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.

The Bible uses "world" (*cosmos*) as man's system—of government, economics, religion, education, culture, etc.—established apart from the Creator God. This sys-

tem is the source of much of what we believe and, along with its author, Satan, has been our god, though we did not realize it. Because Satan has been clever enough to include some of the true God's system, beliefs, stories and practices within his, the Devil's system has an air of righteous authority. We can feel good, even joyous and inspired, while doing evil—like committing idolatry—in submitting ourselves as servants to his way.

## Ignorance Is No Defense



We might think to plead “innocent by reason of ignorance,” but God's Word nails all of us to the wall in Romans 1:18-20:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Our knowledge of God is certainly partial at best, but



we cannot plead complete ignorance. Paul says His creation reveals enough of Him to make a major difference in our lives. Failure to keep the first commandment is the major reason why this world is in its current condition. Had mankind kept it, the natural, spiritual progression would have led him to keep the rest because he would then, at the very least, have had the correct Source of law and morality. Without keeping this commandment, the best that man can do in establishing standards is by his own experience, and that leads him directly to Satan!

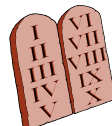
We are not alone in our helplessness, for all the great ones of past and present stand equal to us before God. In Acts 26, Paul tells King Agrippa the story of his calling on the Damascus road. Verse 14 contains an apropos comment:

And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

Christ seems to be saying, “Saul, why are you beating your head against the wall?” Paul was zealously persecuting God's church, all the while thinking he was part of the true religion, but at that point, he did not even know the true God! God called him dramatically to change the source of his belief system so that he could guide the Gentiles in changing theirs from Satan to God.

Paul, quoting David, writes, “There is none who seeks after God” (Romans 3:11). Man is so deceived and imbued with his own system that no one knows what to look for! The Devil has so deceived the world (Revelation 12:9) that the true God is hidden. Satan is the god of this world because he is the source of its ways of life. All mankind worships and responds to him except for that small, elect group to whom God has revealed Himself.

## True Worship

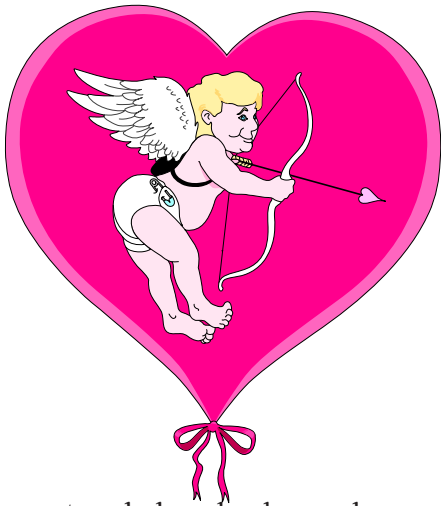


Notice the discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:19-24:

The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Jesus said, “You worship what you do not know.” Since the Samaritans used the Pentateuch, they had a measure of truth. They had the basis of the best system of morality ever devised! But even though one may discover

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“Cupid, draw back your bow  
And let your arrow go  
Straight to my lover’s heart  
For me. . . .”

Sam Cooke sang those words back in 1961, and “oldies” radio stations still play the song on occasion. Oddly enough, Sam Cooke was killed at the relatively young age of 29, gunned down by a jealous girlfriend at a Hollywood motel. Evidently, Cupid’s arrow spawned only a fatal attraction.

This song was from a more innocent time, and before conversion, many of us probably sang along, totally ignorant of its deeper, pagan meaning. Now people sing of graphic sexual acts with no subtlety or imagery involved. Advertisers and merchandisers discovered early on that sex sells.

Satan, sexless and childless, with no hope of becoming part of a family, has seen to it from the beginning that man has misused sex. The term “sex” here not only means the sex act itself but related areas such as pornography, sex shops, prostitution, perversions, etc. Satan has always found willing victims among mankind because we always want the easy way. Is it any wonder that prostitution is known as “the world’s oldest profession”?

Rather than working on a relationship, growing and overcoming with one’s wife or husband, humans have always sought immediate pleasure for themselves with no thought of others. David saw Bathsheba, as she possi-

# Be My Valentine?

bly had planned, and he wanted her (II Samuel 11:1-4). With no thought of the pain it would cause, they both sought their own pleasure. Satan has succeeded in seducing not only individuals like David and Bathsheba, but cities (Sodom and Gomorrah; see Genesis 19) and nations (Israel; see Numbers 25; I Kings 14:24, II Kings 23:7).

Christ is returning to marry His church, a chaste virgin, dressed in white, without spot or blemish (Ephesians 5:27; Revelation 19:7-8). On the other hand, Satan is behind Babylon, symbolized as the whore and mother of harlots (Revelation 17:1-6). Quite a contrast.

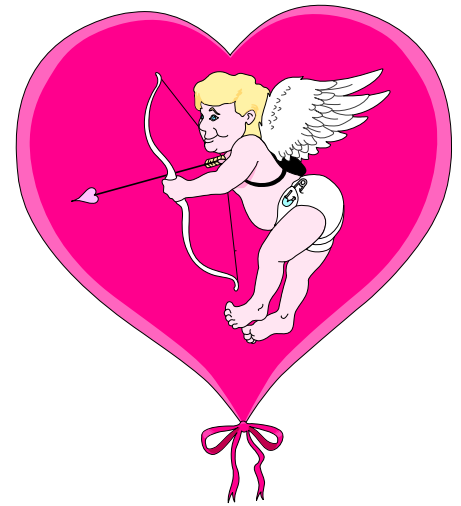
## Valentine’s Day



What does all this have to do with Sam Cooke and Cupid? Well, nothing with Mr. Cooke directly, but plenty with Cupid!

February 14 is Valentine’s Day, a day when Cupid supposedly does his thing. It is sometimes lost in the afterglow of Christmas’ glitter and the awakening of Easter’s false hope. Yet it is a day emblematic of the devil’s whole approach. It is a holiday worth knowing more about so that we can be more fully armed and better able to withstand Satan and his wiles (Ephesians 6:11).

To most people, Valentine’s Day would seem to be nothing more than kids exchanging Valentine cards and adults giving chocolates or flowers. But it is harmless only in the eyes of those who do not know any better. As with most worldly festivals with religious



overtones, its origins go back long before Christ. And, as we have come to recognize, the Roman Catholic Church “Christianized” it, assimilating pagan beliefs into its own.

Any good encyclopedia or reference material will state where Valentine’s Day originated. *The American Book of Days* by Jan M. Hatch (3rd edition), reads, “. . . association [of Valentine’s Day] with lovers is a survival, in Christianized form, of a practice that occurred on February 14, the day before the ancient Roman feast of the Lupercalia. . . .” (p. 178).

*Holidays and Anniversaries of the World* by Laurence Vrdang and Christie N. Donohue, in the article “Valentine’s Day,” says, “[Valentine’s Day is] also believed to be a continuation of the Roman festival of Lupercalia.”

*The New Standard Encyclopedia*, under the article “Valentine,” states:

Saint Valentine was an obscure, possibly legendary, martyr who by tradition was put to death by the Romans on February 14, about [AD] 269. This day was made a feast day by the Roman Catholic Church. The date of his death almost coincided with that of the Roman feast of the Lupercalia. . . .The celebration of the two occasions merged.

So Valentine’s Day is nothing more than a continuation of Lupercalia.

Luper-who?

There is nothing mysterious or secret about this pagan observance,



## Nimrod—Again

Who was Lupercus anyway? Lupercus was a hunter of wolves (Latin *lupus* is “wolf”), associated with the Roman god Faunus, god of agriculture and fertility. Since Rome took its gods from those

it conquered, we can trace Faunus to its Greek equivalent, Pan, god of woods, fields and flocks. The ancients pictured both of these mythological beings as having a human torso, but legs, horns and ears of goats. This fits nicely with the fact that they sacrificed goats and used thongs from their skin to whip women during this “feast.” The Bible often compares God’s people to sheep while frequently linking Satan with goats.

Pan can be traced to the Phoenician sun god Baal (also a god of fertility and nature). We can make a strong case that Baal is none other than Nimrod. In Genesis 10:9, Moses describes Nimrod as a “mighty hunter.” In the days after the Flood, animals multiplied rapidly and caused fear among the people. Nimrod grew powerful because of his ability to fight the wild animals. Tradition says that he roamed as far as Italy to hunt wolves.

*Valentine* comes into play

here. The word derives from the Latin *valens*, meaning “strong, powerful, mighty.” Our word *valiant*, “courageous, heroic,” also comes from this root.

These are apt descriptions of Nimrod. In a sense, he was the peoples’ valentine!

as most of these reference works also have information about Lupercalia. *The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1996, from the article “Lupercalia,” says:

... an ancient Roman rite held each February 15 for the fertility god Lupercus. Goats and a dog were sacrificed, and goats’ blood was smeared on the foreheads of two young men and wiped off with wool dipped in milk. Young men, wearing only goatskin about their loins, ran around the base of the Palatine hill, striking with goatskin strips any women they met. This was to ease labor for pregnant women and to make the others fertile.

Well, how thoughtful!

*The American Heritage Dictionary*, under “Lupercalia,” reads, “a fertility festival in ancient Rome, celebrated February 15 in honor of the pastoral god Lupercus.” Even the month of February gets its name from this pagan ceremony. The Latin *februae* means “to purify” after this so-called “Feast of Purification.” Some sources say that the thongs from the skins of sacrificed animals—which the priests used on the evening of February 14 to whip women—were called *februa*.

Even the heart, ubiquitous symbol of this day, is actually a symbol for Nimrod. The Romans acquired the heart symbol from the Babylonians, who spoke the Chaldean tongue. In this language, the word for “heart” was *bal* or *bel*. Due to its similarity in sound to “Baal,” it became an emblem for Nimrod.

There is even a link with Cupid. What equipment does Cupid always carry? He is always pictured with a bow and arrows, such as a hunter would have! In mythology, Cupid, also known as Nin or Ninus, “the Son,” was the son of Venus. Ninus was Nimrod.

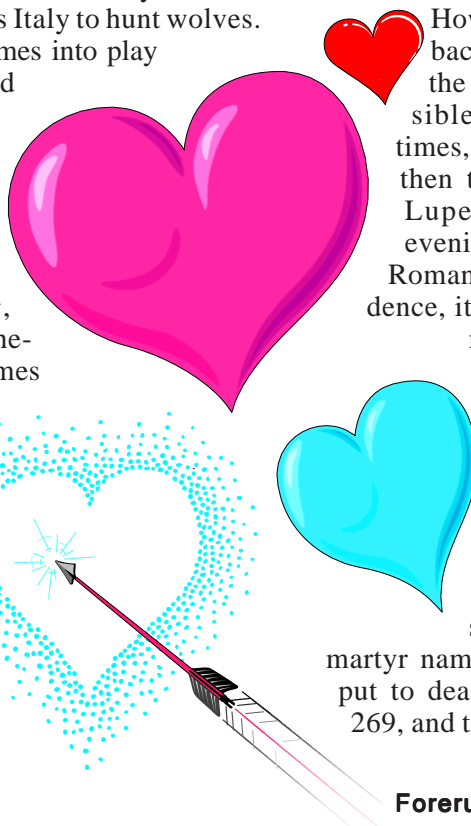
Venus is the Roman equivalent of the Greek goddess Aphrodite (Ceres) and the “mother goddess,” Semiramis (the biblical Ashtoreth). These pagan goddesses, usually depicted with multiple breasts or breasts extremely out of proportion to their body, symbolized fertility. The thread between Lupercus–Faunus–Pan–Baal–Nimrod–Cupid and Venus–Aphrodite–Ceres–Semiramis–Ashtoreth is fertility, or in today’s vernacular just plain SEX. The celebration of the Lupercalia was just an excuse to lower the morals and inhibitions of people, under the guise of religion. A “church-sponsored” orgy, if you will!

## Why February 14?

How did the date get moved back from February 15 to the 14<sup>th</sup>? There are two possible reasons. In ancient times, days began at sunset, so then the “festivities” of the Lupercalia began on the evening of the 14th. As the Roman calendar took precedence, it was no great matter to move the holiday up a few hours.

The other reason for the change to the 14th is that Pope Gelasius simply ordered it changed in AD 496. As mentioned earlier, Catholic legend speaks of an obscure martyr named Valentine who was put to death on February 14, AD 269, and the Roman church made

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## “AND NOT A DROP TO DRINK”

Speaking of Judah in the end time, the Eternal prophesies through Ezekiel:

They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread, that they may lack bread and water, and be dismayed with one another, and waste away because of their iniquity. (Ezekiel 4:16-17)

Jesus specifically names famine as one of the signs of the end (Matthew 24:7). Scripture shows that Israel and the rest of the world will suffer famine due to sin (Ezekiel 5:7, 16-17).

Obviously, a key element of famine is water scarcity. Not until recently have spiraling human demands for water begun to outgrow the capacity of the earth's natural systems. The demands of our generation worldwide now exceed the sustainable yield of the earth's aquifers. At current levels of consumption, underground water tables are now falling in the U.S. Southwest and Great Plains, in several states in India, in much of northern China, across north Africa, in southern Europe and throughout the Middle East.

The impact of water scarcity worldwide is immeasurable! It threatens food production, environmental balance and social and political stability. Water promises to be a fulcrum on which the world's fate hangs.

### Food Production

Water has always been a crucial requirement of life. Having no substitutes, it is indispensable to food



production. Worldwide, agriculture uses about 65 percent of all the water removed from rivers, lakes, and aquifers, compared with 25 percent for industries and 10 percent for households and municipalities. Depending on its severity, the lack of water will begin to slow or halt food production in short order.

When droughts strike, governments typically favor urban residents over farms when rationing scarce supplies. This tactic ultimately backfires when farmers must cut food production or their crops fail as a result of insufficient irrigation. In addition, by heavily subsidizing water prices, governments give out the false message to consumers that it is abundant and we can afford to waste it.

An equally serious menace to life is water that has been polluted or rendered undrinkable. Though opin-

ions differ on the acceptable level of quality, nevertheless, most experts believe that the present quality of our drinking water is unfit for human consumption. Researchers have found serious bacterial contaminants such as *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia* in 40 percent of the treated drinking water in the United States.

As water tables drop, the resource becomes too costly to continue pumping, too salty to irrigate crops as it is pulled from greater depths, or it simply runs out altogether. In Israel, decades of over-pumping have caused seawater to invade the nation's coastal aquifer, a key freshwater source. Israel's water officials predict that they may need to close 20 percent of coastal wells within a few years. More than 10 percent

of the irrigated area of the world appears to suffer from salt buildup serious enough to lower crop yields.

Man toils to grow food with irrigation, but God blesses obedience with rainfall (Deuteronomy 11:10-11), giving rain in due season. To compensate for the lack of God's blessing of rainfall due to sin, man has reasoned that increased irrigation will solve all his agricultural problems. As a result, he has seriously harmed his environment and with it his ability to grow food.

### Environmental Balance

According to the World Resources Database in Washington, D.C., global water use has more than tripled since 1950. Around the world, there are roughly 38,000 dams (higher than 15 meters), more than 85 percent of which were built during the last 35 years. The effect on

upstream areas has been devastating. These areas suffer from such impacts as flooding, permanent relocation of people, animals and birds, and destructive increased water flow velocity. Conversely, the dramatic decrease in water has put farmers and fisherman downstream out of business, and whole towns have dried up.

Man has long endeavored to control water. Hezekiah “made a pool and a tunnel and brought water into the city” (II Kings 20:20). Many rivers now resemble elaborate plumbing works, with the timing and amount of flow completely controlled, like water from a faucet, to maximize the rivers’ benefits for humans. Regarding the vanity of such great accomplishments, Solomon explains:

I made myself waterpools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. . . . Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:6, 11)

Solomon must have learned his lesson, for he says in Proverbs 21:1, “. . . like the rivers of water; [God] turns it wherever He wishes.” Only God truly controls the rivers.

When human beings take things into their own hands they become vain and presumptuous. But while modern engineering has been remarkably successful in getting water to people and farms when and where they need it, it has failed to protect the basic ecological functions of rivers and aquatic systems. On the Arabian peninsula, to give one example, 75 percent of groundwater used on crops is not just overdrafted, it is non-renewable. Trapped underground thousands of years ago, this water is not replenished by rainfall.

The consequences of this failure are just beginning to become clear—from degraded river deltas and species on the brink of extinction to shrinking inland lakes and disappearing wetlands. For instance, ac-

ording to the book *State of the World 1996*, “[California] has lost 95 percent of its wetlands, and populations of migratory birds and waterfowl, which depend on such areas for food and habitat, have dropped from 60 million around 1950 to just 3 million today.” The Wildlife Society in Washington, D.C., reports, “The amount of wetlands lost between the 1780s and the 1980s globally averaged more than 60 acres an hour for every hour of those 200 years.” This comprises an area of 105,120,000 acres or 164,250 square miles, a region slightly larger than California!

The Psalmist writes:

He sends the springs into the valleys, which flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their habitation; they sing among the branches. He waters the hills from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works.” (Psalm 104:10-13)

It is the Creator who blesses the earth with water according to our obedience. All the ways of humanity are contrary to God’s way, and we see man’s way in the abuse and destruction of the earth resulting from misuse of the earth’s resources. God says in Revelation that He will “destroy those who destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:18).

## Social and Political Stability

There is an emerging trend regarding water scarcity that is likely to shape world affairs in the near future. While water tables are falling and rivers are drying up, competition for dwindling supplies is increasing. Isaiah records the Eternal’s words regarding His control of the earth’s water resources, “Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink because there is no water, and die of thirst” (Isaiah 50:2).

Claims on rivers by some countries are also becoming excessive, draining some rivers dry before they

reach the sea. Three hundred Chinese cities are now short of water. China’s Yellow River often runs dry before it gets to the Yellow Sea. Similarly, the Colorado River rarely makes it to the Gulf of California.

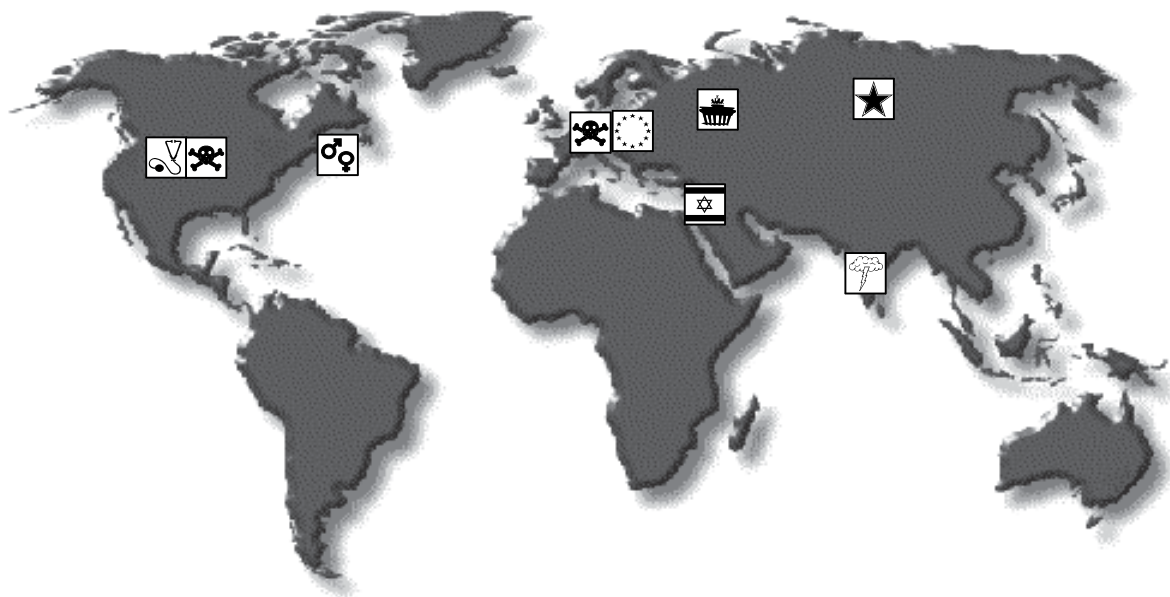
Conflicts over shared river systems are intensifying. Bangladesh is protesting India’s excessive use of the Ganges, which leaves all too little for Bangladesh to irrigate its cropland. Israel and Palestine are spending endless weeks negotiating over the allocation of shared water resources. Conflicts among central Asian countries over the waters of the Amu Dar’ya and Syr Dar’ya are intensifying as population pressures build to the point where demand exceeds the sustainable yield of the rivers. The United States and Mexico compete for the waters of the Rio Grande.

Water has always been scarce in the Middle East. With regard to physical survival, nothing is more serious than the absence of water (I Kings 17:1; Jeremiah 14:3; Joel 1:20; Haggai 1:11). Before 1967, modern Israel, though relatively more powerful than its immediate neighbors, was in an awkward and futile position regarding water and felt its interests were at risk. Syrian attempts to divert the Baniyas, one of three sources of the upper Jordan River, contributed to rising tensions and a series of armed confrontations with Israel immediately preceding the Six Day War in 1967. Israel’s victory in that conflict included gaining control over two areas of strategic water importance—the West Bank aquifer and the Golan Heights, which feeds the Baniyas into the Jordan and provides access to the site of an intended Jordanian dam on the Yarmouk River.

Regarding future water resource planning, Klaus Lampe, general director of the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, warns: “Thoughtlessness and ignorance regarding tomorrow’s food supply are among the most dangerous of the many factors influencing our political, economic and environmental systems.” As a result of water shortages, we will see a dramatic increase in wars over the more than 3,000 ma-

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# World Watch



## Israel



Israel is concerned that Egypt is making plans for war against her. Egypt recently signed a contract with a San Diego firm to construct a Military Training Center that will enable their armed forces to simulate battles and pinpoint enemy soldiers, tanks and other vehicles.

## Pestilence



U.S. and European public health officials have agreed to establish a global early warning network to alert doctors and governments about budding epidemics. Up to now, small outbreaks of disease are treated locally, but these can quickly grow into worldwide epidemics if transported by jetliner.

## Science



The Visible Human Project is an attempt to record the human anatomy digitally. Scientists first scanned the donated cadavers of a man and a woman using computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans. Then they embedded the bodies in gel and froze them to  $-70^{\circ}\text{C}$ , after which a milling machine ground away a millimeter of their surface at a time. Each time, the exposed surface was photographed digitally and conventionally. In this way, scientists hope to compare the images with diseased tissue in living patients.

## Weather



On November 8, a cyclone left more than 1,000 Indians dead and hundreds of thousands homeless. Crops and livestock in one of India's most fertile regions were destroyed. Losses are estimated at a staggering \$555 million in a nation where the annual per capita income is less than \$500.

## Russia



Russia and China expect to sign an agreement cutting troop levels along their 2,500-mile border when their foreign ministers meet next spring. Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov said, "The development of Russia-China relations will help build stability in the post-Cold War world and is not aimed at creating a bloc to counter other countries."

## Sexual Perversion



Twenty-seven Episcopal Church bishops are demanding an investigation into a report that a "cadre of gay and bisexual, cross-dressing Episcopal priests" conducted bizarre sexual rituals at the altars in darkened churches on Long Island, New York. The bishop of the diocese denied personal involvement and said, "If they were consenting adults, my position is that they were certainly free to take that action."

## Germany



Germany and France are preparing a joint peace-keeping force for Bosnia under an expected UN mandate once the mandate for the NATO-led force expires. This 5,000-strong Franco-German brigade forms the nucleus of a European corps that includes Belgium, Spain and Luxembourg.

## European Union (EU)



The EU's heads of state pledged to change the EU treaty in June to accommodate a dozen new countries, most of them Eastern European. The new treaty will give the EU powers now held by national governments. Helmut Kohl said, "Without any preconditions, we all agreed that the treaty should be finalized."

— Andy Benedetto

# TIME AND LIFE

Since creation, time has always fascinated mankind. Shortly after creation, men had devised time-keeping devices and calendars based on the orbits of the earth and moon. They could easily predict the cycles of the moon and the changing of the seasons. As men's scientific and mathematical understanding increased, so did his ability to understand and calculate time.

In our modern age, the same is true yet to an even greater extent. Beginning with H.G. Wells book, *The Time Machine*, the science of time has led visionaries, writers and scientists to develop theories about time. Physicists like Stephen Hawking, author of *A Brief History of Time* and other books on time and origins, spend their entire lives trying to devise workable temporal theories.

Even our popular culture is obsessed with time. Each of the four *Star Trek* series have had several episodes each season that deal with what they call "anomalies in the space-time continuum." Someone falls into or comes out of a space-time rift from the past or the future, and the intrepid crew of the *Enterprise*, *Voyager* or *Deep Space Nine* must deal with all the ramifications that interfering with time brings. Other movies and shows—*Sliders*, *Back to the Future*, *Quantum Leap*, *Time Bandits* and *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* to name a few—also

appeal to our curiosity about time travel.

Of course, in our day-to-day lives, we look at time in a completely different way. We look at it very simply: past, present, future—and never the three shall meet. We often try to

***"So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."***

"save time" or "make time" or "waste time," but in reality, it goes on at its steady, relentless pace.

We may wish we could go back in time and change events, but we know we cannot manipulate time. In practical terms, time is linear. What has been done cannot be undone. We must make the best of the present, facing the future determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

## God and Time

How does God look at time? How does He view the passage of minutes, hours, days, months, years, centuries, millennia? Is God concerned about time? Does He control it?

The human mind cannot conceive of a time without time. For all intents and purposes, time has always been. Man cannot explain the origin of time,

just as he cannot explain the origin of space, energy or matter. These are all explained by the power of Almighty God, but humans cannot conceive what it was like before then.

Isaiah writes that God "inhabits eternity" (Isaiah 57:15), that is, He dwells in perpetuity or lives eternally, continually. Moses puts it a different way in Psalm 90:2, "Even from everlasting to everlasting [or *age to age*], You are God." However, the way Isaiah constructed the phrase, "inhabits eternity" can mean that God moves freely in time; any period of time is accessible to Him. He made it

and has power over it. Whether this was Isaiah's actual intent is unknown.

Understanding this is made more difficult because Hebrew has no general word for "time." *Ad*, the word used in Isaiah 57:15, simply means "duration, perpetual, continuity." This is similar to the idea behind the name *Yahweh*, translated "LORD," which means "He who is." This corresponds to "'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Revelation 1:8). God is, has always been and always will be, no matter how men perceive time.

Another of God's names, "I AM" (Exodus 3:14) also implies that men cannot truly understand His relationship to time. Robert Young, author of *Young's Analytical Concordance*,

## A Ready Answer

"Be Ready Always To Give An Answer" – I Peter 3:15 (KJV)

writes of this word, *hayah*, “A name indicating rather the *unsearchableness* of God than his mere *existence*, as commonly supposed” (p. 506, his emphasis). As Paul points out in Romans 11:33, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”

God’s eternity allows Him to work out His plan over the whole expanse of time. From the most remote past, He has planned, created and fulfilled each step of His purpose to bring about His ultimate goal, the birth of sons and daughters into His Family (II Corinthians 6:18). God Himself explains how this works:

Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.” . . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it. (Isaiah 46:9-11)

Because of God’s endless life and His power over events and lives of men, He can prophesy a thing to occur in ancient times and bring it to pass today. Only a Being unconstrained by time could carry out such a long-term feat.

### Nothing Is Impossible

This gives greater meaning to Jesus’ statement in Mark 10:27: “But looking at them, Jesus said, ‘With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.’” A God who has no restraint upon His life or power can do awesome things!

Psalm 90 gives us probably the best biblical perspective of time. This Psalm, the only one attributed to Moses, compares how man and God view time and life. His conclusion, of course, is that man and God look at time from entirely different perspectives.

It is this difference in point of view that makes a huge difference in how we conduct our lives.

Moses begins by asserting that God is everlasting and almighty (verses 1-2). He can destroy men’s lives, and a thousand years later, He resurrects them to life with a word (verses 3-4)! Thousands of years can pass, and God can still bring people back from the dead! Man has no power over death, but God can, has and will overcome time and death by the power of the



resurrection. To God, these thousands of years pass swiftly “like yesterday . . . like a watch in the night.”

This is far different from man’s point of view. “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (verse 10). Ethan, the Psalmist of Psalm 89:47-48, echoes this in his plea to God:

Remember how short my time is; for what futility have You created all the children of men? What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? Selah.

God is eternal and all-powerful; man is temporary and weak. God sees time passing quickly, yet with a grand purpose. Man, on the other hand, seeing the same swift passage

of years, groans in frustration, “Life is futile!” Man sees his death quickly approaching, and he considers himself powerless to stop it (Ecclesiastes 9:11-12).

However, men have a desire to live forever. Solomon writes, “[God] has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Thus, the swift passage of time is a bitter enemy, and death is the end. They have no real hope beyond it. Even though they profess a belief in life after death, they still fear the grave. Why?

Psalm 78:22 provides the answer: “Because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation.” Men fear death because they do not believe that God can save them! They cannot boldly accept death because they are uncertain about the afterlife. They are hopeless and terrified.

Conversely, if we believe that God is our Savior and that eternal life is assured as long as we continue in His ways, death should be a beginning, not an end! God looks positively upon the death of His children: “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15). He is happy that His children have succeeded in their quest for His Kingdom, and now all their trials and pains will be but a memory.

Time and death are no barrier to God! Solomon says comfortingly, “[When a person dies,] the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7; see 3:21; Job 32:8). He keeps that spirit intact and ready to clothe it with a body at the resurrection of the dead (I Corinthians 15:35-49). Nothing is impossible to God!

### The Faithful Dead

The Bible gives us several examples of how righteous men of God regard death. Job did not fear death; in fact, he felt death would be a relief from the struggles, infirmities and trials of

physical life.

Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands. (Job 14:13-15)

He KNEW that God would raise him at the appointed time, the first resurrection. He was sure in his redemption; he trusted God to forgive, save and resurrect him. Further, he understood that his life in the Kingdom would be so much superior to his physical life:

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in [from, without, see the Amplified Bible] my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27)

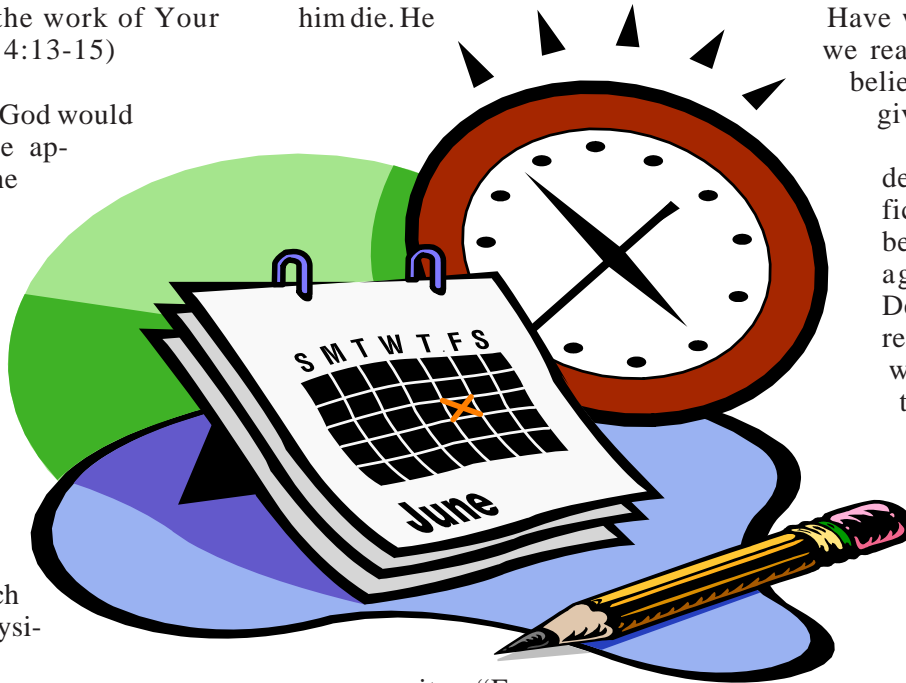
David is another Old Testament example of a righteous man who longed for life beyond the grave:

I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your

presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:8-11)

He makes a similar statement in Psalm 17:15: "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness."

In the New Testament, Paul was ready anytime God chose to let him die. He



writes, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. . . . [T]o depart and be with Christ . . . is far better" (Philippians 1:21, 23). In comparison to the sufferings and persecutions of his physical life, he actually desired the better life that death would eventually bring.

In II Timothy 4:6-8, Paul shows his faith in God's ability and promise to save him, to redeem him from the flesh:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

He KNEW that his next conscious moment after death—"on that Day"—he would be part of the resurrection to immortality! Each of these men, as well as many other saints in times past, had the "full assurance of faith" and "[held] fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:22-23).

### "A Heart of Wisdom"

Have we reached this point? Are we ready to die in faith? Do we believe that God will save us and give us eternal life?

It is certainly natural to fear death, but through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we have been released from this bondage (Hebrews 2:14-15). Death—hopeless and final—really has no claim on us! We will still die physically, but the grave will not be able to hold us once God commands us to rise to immortality (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Some may have wondered how the saints in ages past could have died so peacefully in martyrdom—in sometimes very painful and gruesome ways. Here is the answer! They trusted God! They had accepted and believed God's view of death and time, and relied upon His power to bring their resurrection to pass!

In this light, it is interesting to notice how Moses concludes his comparison of God's and man's views of time in Psalm 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." We can take this in at least two ways.

1. We most commonly think of this in relation to Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:16 to "[redeem] the time, because the days are evil." We say this means "use your time wisely because you only have so much of it." This is not wrong.

2. The second way grows out of the clause "that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Wisdom is the right, proper, godly application of knowledge and understanding. It is how we live with or apply what God

has revealed to us. Thus, if we properly “number our days,” we will live wisely.

To understand this second meaning, we can paraphrase the verse like this: “Help us to understand time and life as you do, so that we can live wisely.” If we look at our lives, at our sojourn in the flesh, at our day of salvation, from the same perspective that God does, *we will make the right decisions.*

Paul explains in I Corinthians 2:6-16 that “we have the mind of Christ” because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Now notice what Jesus’ godly mind accomplished, acting in faith and hope and love:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. . . . [He] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name . . . to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5, 7-9, 11)

The mind of Christ allowed Him 1) to become a man and take on all the weaknesses and temptations of humanity, and 2) to submit to a torture and death as no man has ever experienced. Why? To give glory to God the Father! For this He is exalted above all others.

It is this same mind, this same trust in the Father, that Christ’s disciples must have. If we believe that Christ’s return is imminent, we must also believe that some will suffer cruelly, even to the point of martyrdom. If we have the mind of Christ, which was willing to obey God to the point of death, death’s sting will be “swallowed up in victory” (I Corinthians 15:54-58).

Whether or not we suffer persecution or martyrdom, it is a great consolation to know and believe and trust in God’s perspective of time and life.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## AND NOT A DROP TO DRINK”

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gor rivers that mark or cross international borders. The day will come, according to Ezekiel, when all the rivers of Israel will become the plunder of the surrounding nations (Ezekiel 36:4).

### “Water of Affliction”

The sins of humanity have brought upon this world a plethora of problems that are unsolvable by man’s methods. These problems have become overwhelming and will soon contribute to the decimation of man on earth. God warns Israel in Leviticus 18:26, 28, “You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments . . . lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it.” This principle certainly holds true for the entire world.

In Deuteronomy 28 God promises to curse Israel for disobedience to His commandments. He will withhold rain, causing drought and famine (verses 23-24). God says lack of water is a result of sin:

Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you

turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD’s anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you. (Deuteronomy 11:16-17)

In ancient Israel the phrase “water of affliction” (I Kings 22:27; Isaiah 30:20) could fittingly be used under conditions when water had to be rationed (Lamentations 5:4; Ezekiel 4:11, 16). The context, however, usually suggests punishment for sin (see Lamentations 5:16; Ezekiel 4:17).

Obedience to God is the only way to ensure that we live in a world where rain falls as needed for the health of agriculture, the environment and people. To the obedient, God promises, “I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing” (Ezekiel 34:26). God promises through Isaiah:

The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. (Isaiah 58:11)

—Martin G. Collins



# UNTANGLING THE RACE ISSUE

## Part One

**W**hy raise the race issue? Why all the cry about hue? Why not let a sleeping dog lie? Very simply: The racial dog *is not sleeping!* This very day, blood is spilling from the severed arteries of a six-year-old girl in Bosnia, a bright-eyed baby boy in Pakistan, a wizened grandmother in Zaire, a bomb victim in Dublin or Jerusalem, an angry young man in Chicago's ghetto. . . . As the world turns and burns through one day, every day, thousands of people are left lifeless on the ground. For them it is over, because someone hated their skin, their nose, their accent. Their families weep, wail and agonize. Some vow vengeance, ensuring that the cycle of bloodshed will continue.

For the thousands in the world each day who writhe in pain to drop into dark nothingness, millions more suffer through favoritism, deprivation, discrimination, jokes, slights, slurs, innuendo and cursing. Does a day ever pass in these United (?) States of America when there is not a major newspaper headline signaling what may have been a racially charged event? Civil rights laws abound. "Political correctness" tells us everyone is equal, yet racial tensions appear to be worsening in society, rather than diminishing.

More people have been killed over race and religion—usually a composite of the two—than any other excuse. What is the problem and how will it be solved? Is it totally hopeless, or can man learn to live peacefully with ethnic and racial differences?

## The Races Created

Was the Creator of the universe so

lacking in foresight, He could not foresee the emotional tangle that would arise from making people of various colors? Many cry, "Why have you made us thus? And what are you going to do about it?"

If we believe in an Almighty, All-wise Creator God rather than evolution, we must also believe God Himself created the races. With painstaking care, He personally designed and planted in Eve the seeds of the various races. Otherwise, one race was created and the others were "mutants"—genetic accidents! In other words, the sovereign **GOD INTENDED**



**FOR THERE TO BE A VARIETY OF RACES!**

As He finished the creation, God pronounced His efforts "very good" (Genesis 1:31), not "generally okay" in spite of a few alleged mistakes such as fangs on snakes, thorns on roses and colors on man." He was pleased with what He had accomplished!

This article will study the history of race in the Bible to determine what God intended from the beginning. We will survey what occurred in the Old Testament and the New, and take a peek at the future. By considering the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27)—the One who created the races—perhaps we can see why the worldwide

problems with ethnicity exist and what the solutions are.

## Less Than Ideal

The Old Testament is an intriguing study in race, divorce and remarriage, multiple wives, slavery and other areas where God seemed to tolerate less-than-ideal situations. In a way that puzzles us today, He not only tolerated but in some cases regulated these situations by scriptural statute and ordinance. Obviously, from creation God intended the ideal to be one man and one woman in marriage for life without divorce or polygamy. God also did not intend slavery to be an ideal. Yet, in both the Old and New Testaments, He permitted and regulated both divorce and slavery.

With these examples as a background, we can only deduce that He must have intended the races or He would not have created them in the first place. What happened to man that made God's tolerance necessary, and what ramifications did that have on race?

**Man sinned in Eden.** That was far short of the ideal. **Man did not repent.** That was also far short of the ideal. When man pivoted away from God, God withdrew from man, pronouncing a death sentence for sin. At that point, God already had a plan of redemption in mind (Revelation 13:8), whereby the ideals of creation could be restored. To work that plan out, He had to allow man to explore the depths of depravity (Ezekiel 20:25; Romans 1:24, 26, 28; Ephesians 4:18). Man had to painfully discern that "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 16:25).

For the first sixteen hundred years or so of man's existence, God basically kept hands off. He does not give

us many specifics of what occurred from Adam's sin until the Noachian Flood, but man had become so sinful by Noah's time, God contemplated chucking the whole deal (Genesis 6:7).

However, He showed some favor to Noah, who was a righteous man—in contrast to the rest of the men who were out of favor. God says, "But on this one will I look [have favor, regard]; on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). God does not favor beauty, intelligence, height, wealth or any other physical asset (James 2:1-9). He *does* favor righteousness over unrighteousness and righteous people over unrighteous people. The righteous will inherit the earth (Revelation 5:10), and the unrighteous will burn in fire (Revelation 20:14-15).

The Flood, as the second pivot in man's relationship to God, has a great deal to do with ensuing events in man's story.

### God Divided the World!

Had an opportunistic God seen His "mistake" and not intended ethnicity to continue, the Flood would have been a prime time to cancel a few races. Instead, He carefully maintained them through only eight people. This knowledge alone should make those of all races feel wanted, included and special to God.

The Bible indicates that God may have divided the earth into continents in the days of "Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided" (Genesis 10:25). This Hebrew word for "divided" (*palag*) is used only three other times in the Old Testament:

1. I Chronicles 1:19, 25, where it repeats Genesis 10:25.
2. Psalm 55:9, where it refers to dividing languages.
3. Job 38:25, where the context is

of dividing the seas and other major happenings that Job was obviously too puny to comprehend or affect.

Some commentators feel Genesis 10:25 refers only to God confusing the tongues at Babel, but the implications of the word in Job 38:25 may be to an even greater division.

Genesis 10:32 describes a separation of nations: "These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood." The point is, God *at least*

divided the languages and the nations in the days of Peleg, and perhaps He made an even greater separation, that of the continents.

Genesis 11 relates the story. When man ventured outside God's purpose for man, He used an interesting method to stop man's project. At that time, all men spoke the same lan-



guage (verse 1), and the races worked together on their Tower of Babel project (verses 2-6). God confused their languages, giving various families or nations their own tongues (verse 7).

This created a natural separation according to language. It caused them to move to areas of the earth God had reserved for them. This is very clearly shown in Scripture:

When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, *He set the boundaries of the peoples* according to the number of the children of Israel. (Deuteronomy 32:8)

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and *has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitations.* (Acts 17:26)

Notice that God exercised His sovereignty and separated from one blood (the sons of Adam) EVERY NATION ON THE ENTIRE EARTH and appointed both when they would migrate there and what their boundaries would be! Nations did not wander about and wind up where they did by accident! By changing language, geographical location, and possibly by even dividing the land itself to form the continents, God ensured the separation of the races for a long time.

### Races for God's Purpose

Again, this seems to show God took great pains to maintain the uniqueness and division of each race **for His purposes**. In Revelation 4:11, the twenty-four elders say, "For You created all things, and by Your will [*for thy pleasure, KJV*] they exist and were created."

God created the races. He was pleased with the arrangement. Are we? Do we question His wisdom?

In American culture, some people are pleased with their ethnic background. Others seem to fight it, perhaps subconsciously. Many attempt to blur the distinctions between the races by coloring the skin, changing the hair or undergoing cosmetic surgery. At the extreme end, we are all aware of the measures Michael Jackson has taken to hide his racial characteristics.

Are we missing something?

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Darryl Henson

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# THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

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bits and pieces of truth, he will still end up worshipping Satan. Unless God calls him, he approaches God with too many preconceived ideas absorbed from the world's system. This is why God demands repentance.

In Matthew 22:37, Jesus expands the first commandment in what is called the great commandment of the law: "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" Among all the things in our lives that we are to devote to God, this leaves very little out! It impacts on every facet of our lives. What can we do that does not involve our very life, emotions and intellect?

This commandment, therefore, involves the fear, service, obedience and worship of the great God who is the Creator. The dictionary definition of *worship* says it involves intense admiration, adoration, honor and devotion to someone or something. Practically, worship is our response to our god.

If we respect someone greatly, does not our respect cause us to behave differently because of him? If we know he will be in our area, do we not try to spend some time with him or at least see him? Maybe we plan to give him a gift. If we know his habits, do we not try to emulate him, such as copying his manner of dress or his speech? When we are in his company and he suggests we do something, are we not moved to comply?

In Western civilization, people and institutions reach heights of admiration that drive some to do all sorts of unusual things. Teens, mothers and even grandmothers will swoon over a crooning singer. Fans will practically tear the clothing from a rock star. Boys and men idolize athletic heroes. At political conventions, grown adults will act like mindless fools in behalf of their candidate.

It is this principle that is involved in keeping the first commandment. The respect and response we give to men, things or the self should be given to God. Do we devote as much time, concern or effort in admiring God's great abilities as Creator as we do some human performer? God *created* the potential for the abilities and beauty we may admire in humans. His abilities are far greater!

## Needed: Sweeping Changes



The result of idolatry in our culture has been immorality on a scale unparalleled in the history of the United States. This will never change until the values, the system of morality that

people use to determine right from wrong, change. This change will not occur until a governmental change of such magnitude sweeps aside all existing institutions and standards. We have seen in our lifetimes that the mere replacing of political affiliation, names and faces of those in positions of leadership really changes nothing. It may temporarily moderate immorality, but it does not change the fundamental reasons for it.

Worldly religion has conditioned us to think of worship as something that we do briefly once a week, and then we are free to do what pleases us. This is woefully inadequate for fulfilling God's purpose of creating us in His image. His purpose involves putting His mind in us that we may imitate Him in every area of life.

In this the first commandment has very practical ramifications. If another crowds God out of first place in our thinking, affections and conduct so that we admire, submit to and imitate him, we will be in another's image, not God's. If we are not in God's image, will He allow us into His Kingdom?

It is good to remember Isaiah 57:15 frequently:

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

We must always remember that we can have no other god but Him because He is our Model as well as supreme Creator, Ruler, Lifegiver, Lawgiver, Liberator, Healer, Redeemer, Righteous Judge, Advocate and much more. The Bible shows Him acting on behalf of His people and His name. It shows Him faithfully fulfilling His promises and carrying out His purpose.

No man can serve two masters. We must worship Yahweh only. To worship one God is to have one supreme loyalty in our lives that all of our instincts, passions and impulses obey.

Far too often, a person's conception of God is very inadequate:

- Without realizing it, some worship their own conscience, an inner voice that makes God a sort of resident policeman.
- Others worship a god who is nothing more than the superimposition of their own father. Humanly, our fathers may have been good men, but compared to God, all fathers are very inadequate.
- Many think of God as nothing more than a grand old man. They consider Him a nice guy but old fashioned, comfortable in His easy chair, forgetful, a soft touch who is essentially out of it. He is certainly not a vital, dynamic presence who is vigorously com-

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*To worship one God is to have one supreme loyalty in our lives that all of our instincts, passions and impulses obey.*

pleting His purpose!

- How about “gentle Jesus meek and mild”? Jesus fearlessly challenged the hypocrites of His day and courageously went to an undeserved martyr’s death in our behalf. The Bible calls Him the Lord of armies!
- Finally, some think of Him as the Managing Director of the Universe. This idea has possibilities, but it implies that He is aloof and detached, too busy to be aware of “little old me.”

Any human idea of God will be insufficient. Isaiah writes, “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?” (Isaiah 40:18). Only what God reveals of Himself in the Bible is truly adequate. What the Bible reveals of God is His effort and gift to convey to His children a correct impression (image) of Him. Even so, at times He makes statements so grand that our finite minds cannot comprehend them:

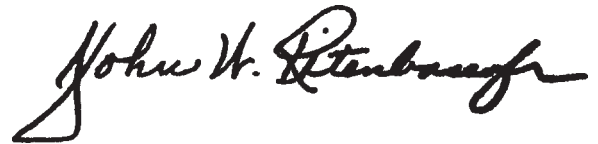
Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing. (verse 26)

This is the One upon whom we must fix our eyes, ears

and heart. He is worthy of our loyal emulation. He is the Author of a body of laws from which arises the only perfect system of morality. Having other gods besides Him has produced this evil world. It—with all its violence, confusion, anxiety and despair—is passing away. When the God of all power—the One we are to worship in keeping the first commandment—says, “Enough!” and arises to establish His rule, this world will perish.

The issue covered by the first commandment is loyalty—loyalty to the great Creator whose creative acts did not end with the physical creation. When His children keep this commandment, a process works to complete their creation in His image. This is why we have free moral agency—to participate in forming holy, righteous character like our Savior and God has. If we do not keep this commandment, the purpose of God in us crumbles because regardless of who we are, we will take on the image of who or what we believe and obey. We can be certain God will be doing His part to encourage us to keep it. Let’s do our part by making every effort to submit joyfully to One so worthy of all loyalty.

In Christian love,



## Be My Valentine?

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this day a feast day. There is nothing “festive” about a martyr’s death. More than likely, the Catholic Church was doing what we call “spin control,” trying to put a better face on a licentious occasion.

Why did the Romans observe the Lupercalia on the 15<sup>th</sup> in the first place? Nimrod was supposedly born at the winter solstice. In the 21st century BC, the solstice occurred on January 6. As time progressed, however, this date moved earlier every four hundred years or so. In Roman times, Julius Caesar ordered it fixed on December 25. (Today, it falls on December 21.)

In antiquity, the mother of a male child customarily presented herself before her god for purification on the 40th day after giving birth. Remember, the Lupercalia was a “Feast of Purification.” Forty days from January 6 is February 15!

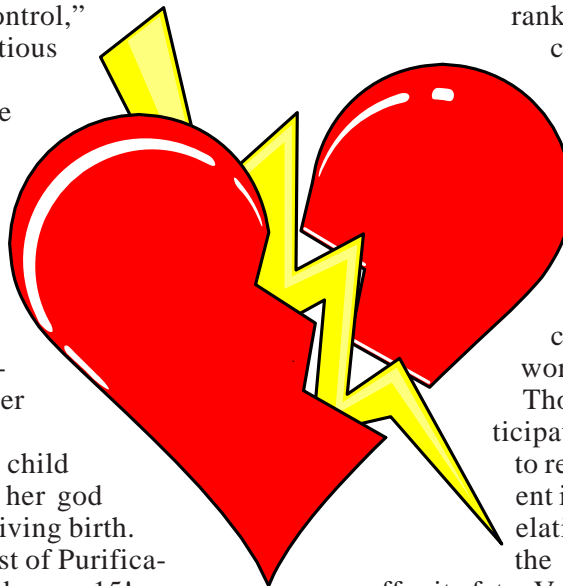
Two other Valentine’s Day traditions may be of interest. During Lupercalia, the names of young women were put into a box and drawn out by men as chance directed. Exchanging Valentines grew out of this name drawing.

Why is the color red associated with Valentine’s Day? Isaiah writes that “sins are like scarlet, . . . red like crimson” (Isaiah 1:18). Adultery is known as the “scarlet sin” (recall the classic book by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*). Prostitution is practiced in the “red-light district.” The Bible describes certain princes of Babylon dressed in vermilion (Ezekiel 23:14-15). Babylon herself is a harlot dressed in scarlet (Revelation 17:4). The highest ranking priests of the Catholic church, cardinals, wear red.

When we tally our list on the merits of Valentine’s Day, this pagan holiday shows not one redeeming value! Valentine’s Day is as worldly as they come. It is indeed a product of Babylon, and the love of God does not rest on those who become enmeshed by the ways of this world (I John 2:15).

Those who continue to insist that participation in it is harmless have refused to recognize the rank paganism inherent in this holiday. God warns in Revelation 18:4 that if we remain within the gates of Babylon, then we will suffer its fate. Valentine’s Day is just another reason why God says to us, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”

—Michael R. Ford



# BIBLE STUDY:

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The spiritual law of God works much like the physical laws of the universe. Like the invisible law of gravity, the law of God is always in effect, working at all times. When we keep it, God blesses us. If we do not, we bring its penalty upon us. To think that God has abolished His inexorable spiritual law is like telling people the law of gravity has been done away, so they may freely jump off tall buildings with no ill-effects!

This study will show that the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5) are not laws devised by Moses and given only to Israel. They were binding before Moses' time, as well as during and after Jesus Christ's life. In fact, the Ten Commandments have been in full force and effect since creation. They are still binding on us today! We will see also that they are not just "church rituals" or "good suggestions," but the very code of conduct of our God!



1. What is the difference between commandments, statutes, and judgments? Psalm 19:7-9.

**COMMENT:** A *commandment* is a specific instruction or law from God that we are to obey forever. Commandments have no precedents because they establish original, divine law.

A *statute* designates a law that one engraves, meaning a lawgiver establishes it unchangeably unless he alone changes it. A religious statute sets rules for worship. Secular statutes have the force of a royal decree. A statute is formulated like a law: "You shall (not) do so-and-so" (Exodus 22:18-23:33). A synonym for statute is "oracle."

A *judgment* is a decision based on another established law. A judge takes associated factors into account to decide appropriately for the specific situation. It takes the form of a case-law: "If you do so-and-so, you will pay so much" (Exodus 21:1-22:15). A synonym for judgment is "precedent."

2. What is sin? I John 3:4. What is the effect of sin? Romans 6:23. For how long has sin been a factor in human existence? Romans 5:12-14.

**COMMENT:** Because His law was in effect, God has ascribed sin to man from the beginning. Without law, there is no sin.

3. To whom did God first make known His law? Genesis 2:15-17. Were others guilty of sin before the time of Moses? Genesis 3:1-11; Genesis 4:6-12. Did people commit the sin of idolatry before Abraham? Joshua 24:2. Do other examples show that breaking the commandments was sin before the time of Moses? Leviticus 18:3, 21, 27; Exodus 16:4-5, 22-30; Genesis 9:21-26; 39:7-9; 30:33; 20:1-9; 6:1-6.

**COMMENT:** Law defines sin, so for sin to exist there must be law. Since Adam sinned, God must have given him His law, which certainly included the Ten Commandments, the basic law of God's Kingdom. Thus, it was sin to break any of them before the time of Moses.

4. Did Abraham, the father of the faithful, keep the commandments? Genesis 26:5. Was David, a man after God's own heart, concerned about keeping God's commandments? Psalm 119:97-100, 105.

**COMMENT:** By faith Abraham and David obeyed God (Hebrews 11:8, 32-33).

5. Did Jesus Christ keep the Ten Commandments? Luke

4:8; John 15:10. Did He teach others to do likewise? Matthew 19:17-19. How did He elaborate on keeping them? Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28.

**COMMENT:** Jesus emphatically says, "If you want to enter into [eternal] life, keep the commandments." Could anything be clearer? John writes, "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I John 2:4). Paul instructs Timothy, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ [calls himself a Christian] depart from iniquity" (II Timothy 2:19).

6. Are the commandments found in the words of the apostles? Romans 1:18-25; 13:9; I Corinthians 10:7; Ephesians 6:1-2; Colossians 3:8; Hebrews 4:9.

**COMMENT:** Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, mentions the commandments frequently in his writings. He summarizes the keeping of the last six as how to love our neighbor (Romans 13:10). If it is sin to break any of the last six that show love toward fellow man, most certainly it is sin to violate any of the first four that show love toward God.

7. Would the church that Christ built teach obedience to the Ten Commandments? Revelation 12:17; 14:12.

**COMMENT:** A sign of God's church, symbolized as a woman, is the keeping of the Ten Commandments. A church that does not teach and keep them is a church of the world.

8. Does having love nullify God's law? John 14:15; 15:9-14; I John 5:2-3; II John 5-6.

**COMMENT:** John, an apostle and close friend of Jesus Christ, emphasized love. However, not once did he say that love nullifies or supersedes the Ten Commandments. Indeed, by keeping the commandments, the love of God is perfected in us (I John 2:5). The Ten Commandments constitute a spiritual law that is inexorable and eternal, producing faith and happiness and righteous character that pleases God.

9. Will God's law still be kept once His Kingdom is established? Revelation 21:8; 22:14-15.

**COMMENT:** Even after the Millennium, when New Jerusalem comes down, no lawbreaker will be allowed in the city. In Revelation 22, the last chapter of the Bible, obedience to God's law is the central issue. This is very clear proof that the law of God, which reflects the holy conduct of the Almighty, will be the standard for all eternity!