

Forerunner



Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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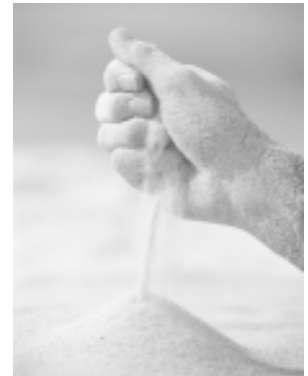
March-April 2004

ISRAEL

as the sand of the seashore

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God promises Abraham in Genesis 22:17, "I will multiply your descendents as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. . . ."

This promise was certainly not fulfilled to any great extent in ancient Israel. So where are the multitudes of Israel today?

Corbis

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The Beast and Babylon

Part One

Matthew 24:32-44 contains a number of important instructions every disciple of Jesus Christ needs to consider deeply because his salvation may be greatly enhanced by doggedly following it. First, His instruction is not given to the general public but directly to His disciples, so He intends it specifically for us. Second, He specifically says we should know from signs He gave that His return is near, thus the responsibility is directly on us. Third, He emphasizes the element of terrifying surprise: The world will be taken completely by surprise, but we should not. Fourth, His overall instruction is that by being alert to the signs and taking advantage of them, we should be ready.

Are we getting anxious about Christ's return? We should not be anxious in terms of being fearful but hopefully and expectantly anticipating it occurring. News reports are getting so alarming that one wonders whether things can get much worse, and the daily pressures of enduring life's sin-sick, wearying culture are mounting. There may also be a measure of

concern because it seems to be taking so long to come to pass. We are certainly in the "time of the end," yet personally, I have been waiting for this to occur since 1959.

Part of our anticipation exists because we have had it drilled into our minds "to watch" for certain events to happen. Sometimes it looks as though prophesied events indeed are being fulfilled. Currently, though, some of the more important events we have been trained to watch for are just not happening. If they are, they are being worked out in a way we are unprepared for and thus do not see. Jesus meant His admonition to "watch" in the sense of a soldier on guard duty being alert to what is occurring around him, and so we watch. But what if our point of view, the perspective from which we watch, is incorrect?

We might be alertly, diligently, and sincerely watching but at best getting only a part of the picture. It is like a soldier on guard duty, alert but looking in the wrong direction, and the enemy sneaks up from a blind spot and surprises him.

Europe Is Not Coming Together

This series will suggest the possibility of a different point of view on Revelation 17 and 18, especially the woman riding the Beast. First, though, what about the Beast itself? Over my entire 44 years in the church, I have been taught repeatedly that we should look for

the Beast to rise in Europe, but where is it? Perhaps most deceiving of all is that Europe is not acting much like the Beast of Revelation 13. Does not verse 4 say, "Who is able to make war with [the Beast]?" This exclamation paints a picture of an awesome, war-making power.

Europe is not coming together in the way we anticipated; it is not becoming the colossus we expected to see arise. In reality, Europe is disunited and at times seems flat on its back politically, economically, and militarily. News articles from recent months clearly and specifically illustrate Europe's present condition, and these will help lay a foundation for understanding what professional journalists observe is happening—or not happening—in Europe.

An article by *Washington Post* columnist Anne Applebaum appeared on February 2, 2003:

If [Defense Secretary] Donald Rumsfeld had been deliberately searching for a way to simultaneously irritate the leadership of Europe's two largest countries, expose their deepest national insecurities *and* undermine the entire European Union political project, which has long revolved around a "Franco-German axis," he couldn't have found a better way to put it [than to call Germany and France "Old Europe"]. He was also, as it happens, correct, possibly more correct than he knows. Although all concerned vociferously deny it, Europe is indeed beginning to divide—slowly, unevenly but perceptibly—into two very distinct camps.

Even though Europe plans to unite well beyond the prophesied ten nations (to twenty-five nations by 2004), the attempt to unify and the laws being enacted to make standards uniform are producing the opposite effect. Europe is in fact declining in many areas important to becoming a superpower, which is what the Bible shows the world-dominating Beast to be.

Here is another series of comments taken from PrudentBear.com. They appeared in an article by Marshall Auerback titled *International Perspective*, on January 28, 2003. Mr. Auerback is British.

Disagreements over farm policy, Zimbabwe and, now Iraq: the aspiration for a common European defense and foreign policy today looks as futile as Don Quixote charging at windmills. Does this

division have implications for a common European economic policy as well, notably in regard to Britain's future membership in Europe's economic and monetary union (EMU)? . . .

Aside from the obvious question of what this growing divide means in regard to future policy in Iraq, this split between the UK on the one hand, and France and Germany on the other, reflect broader political, economic and philosophic divergences between the two blocs—between Anglo-American neo-liberalism and continental Europe's "social market model. . . .

Donald Rumsfeld's comments about Germany and France representing "Old Europe" might have struck a nerve in Berlin and Paris, but his observation that Europe's political (and, indeed,

economic) center of gravity has moved eastward is unassailable. Even France's *Le Monde* conceded as much: "It is perhaps unpleasant to hear it, but for the moment it is unavoidable; the countries of East Europe are massively inclined to follow automatically American leadership in defense and foreign policy." The violent reac-

tion of the French political class in particular might say more about that nation's delicate national psyche than anything else. But whether by accident or design both France and Germany have now been put on notice that their opinions matter less and less in the real world, and that their ability to control the leadership of Europe is also in decline.

Things pertaining to prophecy are happening in Europe, but they are not going in the direction or at anywhere near the speed we expected because of what we were taught. Yet, what if portions of the Beast that will affect its end-time configuration are arising elsewhere? What if nations important to the fulfilling of certain prophecies connected to the Beast have already risen and are exercising their power—and we are not looking in the right direction?

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but for the moment it is unavoidable;
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are massively inclined to follow
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—*Le Monde*

European Weakness

Another article, much longer and far more detailed than the usual newspaper or news magazine column,

deals with areas that any nation deemed to be an influential world power would consider vital. It reveals

major weaknesses in Europe's economic, military, and demographic makeup as compared to the United States, leading the reader to understand that, at this time, Europe is not an entity nations need to fear offending, as they might fear the Beast pictured in Revelation 13.

The following excerpts come from an article, "Old and In the Way," by Karl Zinsmeister, which was published in the December 2002 issue of *The American Enterprise*. The title is interesting because the article was written long before Donald Rumsfeld made his now-famous "Old Europe" statement. Zinsmeister, editor-in-chief of *The American Enterprise*, was asked by the State Department to present an overview of American culture at a conference in Warsaw, Poland, in April 2002. Once there, he found he was the lone American representative.

His report is a summary and a response to the continuous and vile America-bashing that occurred throughout the meeting, which reflected what is going on frequently—and intensifying—among the European public. The word "growing" is important to the thrust of his article, in which he contends that, while the U.S. is still growing in areas important to national greatness, Europe is declining and divided despite what it may look like on a map:

This simple reality needs to be faced squarely by Americans: In a great variety of areas—foreign policy, demography, religion, economics—Americans and Europeans are growing apart. While the September 11 attacks deepened American sobriety, patriotic feeling, and national resolution, in Europe they merely created one more flashpoint for division. European elites, already worried they won't be able to keep up with America over the next generation, are now approaching panic as the U.S. coalesces, during its September 11 recovery, into an even steelier and more determined colossus. . . .

Some Europeans complain that the U.S. is more and more heading off on its own without them. They are right. America's psychic link with Europe, I suggest, is fading extremely rapidly. . . .

Since the end of the Cold War Americans have felt much less intertwined with Europeans, and at least as interested in China, Mexico, India, and the

Middle East as we are in Europe. . . .

If enough of these divergences accumulate, however, America may eventually be forced to conclude that, as economist Irwin Stelzer has put it, many European nations "are ceasing, or may have already ceased, to be our friends."

The U.S. will never be hostile to Europe; there are too many links of kinship and shared purpose for that. But neither do I expect the U.S. will have especially warm relations with the E.U. 15 or 20 years hence. . . .

It isn't just differing policies that are splitting the E.U. from the U.S. It is also sheer competition. The very idea of forming a united states [*sic*] of Europe comes in large measure from a desire to keep up with America. Today, "much of the psychological drive for Euro-nationalism is provided by anti-Americanism," notes John O'Sullivan. . . .

During his term as president of the European Union, the prime minister of Sweden Goran Persson insisted that functioning "as a balance to U.S. domination" was Europe's most important role. The view of many European leaders is that "whatever diminishes the stature of the United States is of benefit to Europe," states Jeffrey

Gedmin. . . . Many of the economic choices, cultural initiative, and foreign policy decisions being [made] in Europe today are animated by simple competitive envy. . . .

"It would be a misreading of Europe's political elites to see anti-American complaints as isolated gripes which can be overcome, one by one, through patient dialogue," warned Michael Gove, a perceptive editorialist for London's *Times*, when I visited his office. "Europe," he said, "is not begging to differ in particulars, but beginning to diverge in fundamentals."

The philosophical differences between Europe and the U.S. are reflected and magnified in three critical structural breaks: 1) Europe has surrendered much of its economic dynamism. 2) Europe has lost its stomach for military action, substituting an exaggerated confidence in diplomacy. And, 3) Europe is on a path to population collapse.

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—Karl Zinsmeister**

Economic Comparisons

It may help to compare the following from Zinsmeister with Revelation 18.

We have conventionally thought of Europe as having about the same standard of living as Americans. This is less and less true. For the European Union as a whole, GDP per capita is presently less than two-thirds of U.S. levels. America's poorest sub-groups, like African-Americans, now have higher average income levels than the typical European.

What's behind this? For one thing, Americans work harder: 72 percent of the U.S. population is at work, compared to only 58 percent in the E.U. American workers also put in more hours. And U.S. workers are more productive—an E.U. worker currently produces 73 cents' worth of output in the same period of time a U.S. worker creates a dollar's worth.

Strongly reinforcing this is a February 16, 2003, *Atlantic Monthly* article by Ted Halstead. He writes, "American parents have the least amount of free time to spend with their children; indeed, the average American works nine weeks more each year than the average European."

Zinsmeister continues:

The locomotive of Europe is the German economy, which has been in a serious mess for more than a decade. Germany's annual growth rate over the past ten years has been a limp 1.4 percent. Among the major industrial nations, only Japan (a true basket case) has done worse. The German labor market has become one of the most inflexible and uncompetitive in the world, which is why unemployment has been stuck at 9-10 percent [now 11 percent] for years, even amid a global economic boom.

A February 10, 2003, *USA Today* article titled

"German Coziness Puts Nation at Risk" by Steven Komarow confirms those statistics, giving the following figures on 2002 GDP growth for the several countries:

Ireland, +3.9%; Greece, +3.2%; U.S.A., +2.4%; Spain, +1.9%; Sweden, +1.6%; U.K., +1.6%; Austria, +.9%; France, +.9%; Belgium, +.7%; Germany, +.3%; Italy, +.3%; Portugal, +.3%; Netherlands, +.2%; Japan, -.3%;

As bad as one might think it to be in the U.S., the American percentage of increase of GDP in 2002 was *eight times* greater than Germany's and Italy's and almost three times greater than France's.

Resuming from Zinsmeister's article:

**"American parents have the least amount of time to spend with their children; indeed, the average American works nine weeks more each year than the average European."
—Ted Halstead**

Over the long haul, these sorts of disparities add up to crunching economic divergences. Since 1970, America has produced 57 million new jobs. The E.U., with an even bigger population, has produced 5 million (most of them with the government). A startling 40 percent of the

unemployed in Europe have been out of work for more than a year, compared to only 6 percent in the U.S. . . .

If no visible alternative loomed, citizens might not realize that better ways of achieving prosperity exist. But any European with eyes can observe that the United States makes very different economic choices, with very different results. Here is one root of the resentment felt by European elites, who would otherwise have a free hand to mold their societies according to their own visions. "The anti-American alliance," noted Michael Gove in the London *Times* earlier this year, "resents American economic success because it reminds them that their preferred cocktails of protectionism, state regulation, subsidy, and intervention constrict growth. America's practical success is a standing rebuke to their abstract beliefs."

Defense Strategy

A second divergence splitting Europe from America is defense strategy. When it comes to guarding the peace, current European leaders put all their faith

in endless talk, commissioneering, and resolution-writing of collective diplomacy—what they call "multilateralism" (a term nearly as feeble as the

concept). Given Europe's history with the Treaty of Versailles, Neville Chamberlain's Munich Agreement, a biological weapons "ban" secretly violated with impunity by the Soviets and scads of other signatories, plus many more recent failures of "let's pretend" diplomacy in places ranging from Iraq to Rwanda to Bosnia, it's inexplicable that Europeans would bet all future peace on the security of parchment walls. But that's exactly what they are doing.

Charles Krauthammer diagnoses the problem this way: "After half a century under the American umbrella, West Europeans have come to believe that their freedom is self-generated. It is by now, they feel, a simple birthright, as natural as the air they breathe. When they see the U.S. slaying dragons abroad—yesterday Afghanistan, today Iraq, tomorrow who knows who—they see a cowboy whose enthusiasms threaten to disturb the perfect order of things, best symbolized by the hushed paper-shuffling at the International Criminal Court."

At the same time they've bet the farm on swiss-cheese [*sic*] treaties, the Europeans have pared their military spending to the point where the entire

continent now has approximately the same force-projecting power as the Swiss navy. . . .

Without admitting it, the Europeans have essentially decided to rely on the U.S. to keep them safe. . . .

Until Europe demonstrates an equivalent willingness to commit its sons and its treasure to national defense, all talk of building a formidable independent military force in Europe is merely hot air. Wishful thinking will not man and equip a carrier

battle group, build a missile shield, or otherwise instill the necessary awe in the world's tyrants.

Of course, most European elites deny such measures are necessary. To quote my British friend Mr. Gove again: "Europe's leaders seek to manage conflict through the international therapy of peace processes, the buying off of aggression with the danegeld of aid or the erection of a paper palisade of global law, which the unscrupulous always punch through. Europeans may convince themselves that these developments are the innovations of a continent in the van of progress, but they are really the withered autumn fruits of a civilization in decline."

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—Karl Zinsmeister**

Demographic Decline

A final, crushing, structural divergence separating America and Europe is demography. Birth rates in Europe have been catastrophically low for two decades. Europe is thus getting old and starting to shrink. The U.S. remains a youthful and fast-growing nation. Mr. Zinsmeister's assessment of this critical area follows:

It takes 2.1 lifetime births per woman just to keep a population stable over the long run. Today, German women are having less than 1.4 children each—only two thirds the level needed to maintain zero population growth. Italians and Spaniards are at a shockingly low rate of 1.2 lifetime births per woman. The E.U. as a whole is far below the level needed simply to replace its current population.

The social, economic, and geopolitical ramifications are stark. At current fertility rates, Germany's

total population will shrink from 82 million to 67 million over the next 50 years. Italy will tumble from 58 to 39 million people. Over that very same period, the population of the U.S. (where the birth rate is more than half-again as high) will go from 283 million to 410 million.

And it isn't only the raw numbers that will change; the *composition* of the population will also shift dramatically. As birth rates remain below the replacement level year after year, and old people live longer and longer, a geometric spiral forms, and a society becomes elderly. By the end of my expected lifetime in the 2030s, fully *half* of all Germans will be over 50. Italians will be even older—half over 54. (The U.S., by comparison, will have a median age in the upper 30s.) The European

(continued on page 14)

Part Two

What was Jesus thinking about during His last hours as a human? While He was suffering under the pains of torture and cruel death, did He dwell on the horrible sins for which He was dying? It seems highly unlikely that our pure and sinless Savior spent much time thinking about our sins and the sins of every person who has ever lived. In fact, from what we know of Him, He gave them as little heed as He could!

Yet, if Jesus was not thinking about humanity's sins during that last day of human life, of what *was* He thinking? Scripture gives us some clues about His state of mind. The clues derive from what we are told Jesus *knew* during the time from His prayer with the disciples in Gethsemane to His death on the stake late on that Passover day.

For instance, did Jesus know why His Father had to turn away from Him on His last day of human life? Of course He did! Jesus knew better than any other how limitless is the repulsion between God and sin. We might compare this repulsion to that of the like poles of two colossal electromagnets (though this falls far short of describing the antipathy between God and sin).

Try to imagine the mental and emotional torture of our Savior, to whom sin had been a totally unapproachable thing for all eternity, having every sin ever committed forced onto His perfectly pure head! Try to imagine His desolation as His Father, by necessity, had now to turn away and leave His Son to finish the job on His own!

Yet, every detail of it had been planned, agreed to, and prearranged by Them both. Jesus quoted His own words, which He had inspired His servant David to put into writing a thousand years before this day, when He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1). By repeating it as He

hung on the stake, He declared this prophecy to be fulfilled at that very moment; the absolute peak of the agony that He and His Father had planned and foreknew had arrived. Even in His delirium, the utterances of the Logos were solidly based upon His own Word!

In another of his psalms, David had been inspired to prophesy of more details of Jesus' agony at this separation from His Father:

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary with

my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God. (Psalm 69:1-3)

Note the words, "while I wait for my God." Even though their separation was only to last for a little more than three days (the actual period depending on the instant that the Father found it necessary to turn away from His beloved Son), and even though Jesus was only alive and conscious for less than a day of this time, any separation at all was almost unbearable for them both. This was certainly *the* prime case when, with the Lord, one day—His last human day—felt like a thousand years (II Peter 3:8), and to

Jesus' Final Human Thoughts

His Father, the three and a half days of separation felt like three and a half thousand years. It is likely that Jesus' human patience was never tried more than during these hours when He had to wait for His reunification with His Father. How wonderful it would be if we—Jesus' brothers and sisters—would have even a fraction of His desire to be with the Father constantly and to have the Father constantly with us! How profitable it would be if we would cease shutting Him out of most of our thoughts, our words, our deeds . . . our lives!

David's prophetic verses picture the human Jesus as losing His footing and sinking in the filthy, putrid mud of the world's sins. We do not like to think of our perfect Lord in this low condition: weary with crying, throat dried out, eyesight failing Him. It must have taken every ounce of Jesus' strength to continue His human sojourn through to the very end. But He bore this agony knowing that He must wait for the final acts of His human saga to play out before He could be reunited with His loving Father.

The Cup

Notice Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane:

He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." . . . He went away a second time and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." . . . So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44)

What was this "cup" that Jesus asked might pass from Him if it were His Father's will? Was He, in a moment of weakness, asking His

Father to prevent Him from going through the coming hours of physical torture? This is doubtful considering that Jesus, with the fullest knowledge and foresight of all the horrible details, had spent His entire human lifetime, and millennia prior to it, in preparation for this day.

A brief word study on these verses may prove helpful here. The word "cup" is translated from the Greek noun *poterion*, which can mean the vessel's liquid contents as well as the vessel itself. It is obvious, of course, that Jesus drank the contents, not the vessel. *Poterion* derives from *pino*, "to drink."

The word "pass" is translated from the Greek verb *parerchomai*, which can refer to the passage of time. From this, we can deduce that Jesus may have been asking His Father to make the time it would take to complete this awful "drink" pass as quickly as possible, but even then, only if it fit in with His Father's perfect will.

Most of us have at some time had to drink some horrible-tasting medicine, and although we knew that it was beneficial for us to drink it, the procedure still seemed to take an eternity! By prior agreement with His Father, Jesus was at this time voluntarily draining an enormous cup of spiritual "drink," which was ultimately a healing medicine for mankind but at the same time was to Him a deadly poison.

This spiritual drink was a mixture of two ingredients that could not have been more repulsive to Them both. The first ingredient was the sin of the whole world. The second was Their separation from each other. Jesus' spiritual poison did not just taste horrible. It racked His body and His mind with stinging agony (I Corinthians 15:56; Luke 22:44). Perhaps, in agreeing to drink of this cup, He even accepted a taste of the fiery fate of those who would never repent, as foretold through the prophet Jeremiah that the poison was like fire that had been injected into His bones (Lamentations 1:13).

Poured Out

Despite His foreknowledge of the effect, Jesus knew that it was necessary for this spiritual poison to enter Him so that it could be poured out along with His lifeblood:

- Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)
- For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Matthew 26:28)
- But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. (John 19:34)

The English word "remission" in Matthew 26:28 indicates that the sins flowed out with Jesus' blood. This word is translated from the Greek word *aphesis*, which can also mean "release" or "liberty," as in the release of blood previously contained by the body's arteries and veins. This word *aphesis* stems from the word *aphiemi*, which means "yield up" or "expire." The word *aphiemi*, in turn, stems from the words *apo* and *hiemi*, which together mean "let go" or "sent forth by separation," as in a violent separation of the blood from the body's pressurized circulatory system (which, in Jesus' case, resulted in His complete separation from His Father in death). When God the Father laid the sins of the world upon the head of His beloved Son, they passed into and contaminated Him. They remained in Him until they were poured out with His shed blood.

So again, it is doubtful that Jesus was having second thoughts about accepting the terrible events of the hours that were ahead. Before His Gethsemane prayer, during, and after it, Jesus knew—He was firmly convinced—that He must imbibe, retain, and endure every drop of the poison that had been prepared for Him by His Father. A week before that Passover night, Jesus said to James and John, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Matthew 20:22). And just minutes after He had concluded His Gethsemane prayer, “Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?’” (John 18:11).

Throughout His great trials, Jesus knew that if the agony would have become too much for Him, He just had to say the word, and He would have been instantly rescued from His enemies. He tells the disciples, “Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53).

Jesus forced this knowledge to the deep recesses of His mind because He knew that, if He chose this alternative of physical deliverance, it would be “game over” for every one of His human brothers and sisters. If He had chosen this option, His Father would have removed our sins from Him—meaning our guilt would remain on our own heads—and our future would be a hopeless one of eternal death. Yet, Jesus knew that He had planned all this with His Father since the world’s foundation, had revealed Their plan to His prophets and disciples, and had come into the world for the very purpose of suffering to pay the death penalty for humanity’s sins. Jesus immediately tells His disciples, “How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus? . . . But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (verses 54, 56).

Quiet Resignation

The gospel accounts indicate that, after His agony at Gethsemane, Jesus seemed more resigned to the barbarous events of His last hours. Referring back to this article’s original question, it is doubtful that He spent much time thinking of individual acts of sin during this time. After all, why should He think about sin numbers 343 and 5,276, but not about numbers 12,345,678 and 876,543? Before coming to earth as a man, had He not been able to actually witness four thousand years of human sin? Had He not the ability to foresee the balance for the remaining three thousand years of man’s time on earth?

Rather than thinking on individual acts of sin in His valuable, final human hours, the Scriptures reveal that, with a level of empathy impossible for any but the Son of God, He suffered the *results* of those seven millennia of sin. He strove to overcome the physical torture and the pain of the spiritual poison which He now carried in Him, with thoughts of His soon-coming reunification with His Father and with the knowledge that, one day, His enemies—hopefully repentant by that time—would see Him seated at the right hand of His Father: “Jesus said, . . . ‘I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’” (Matthew 26:64).

There is no mention of any further complaint from Jesus’ lips—just a quiet resignation throughout the unjust and illegal trials and the inhuman torture and execution.

- He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)
- And while He was being

accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly. (Matthew 27:12-14)

No complaint until, in the very last minutes of His human sojourn, He cried out twice in extreme agony at the pain of separation from His loving Father:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”. . . Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. (Matthew 27:46, 50)

And so the human thoughts of our wonderful Lord came to an end. Although God the Father would suffer from the separation for another seventy-two hours, Jesus’ wait was over. His tortured body and His marvelous mind lay stone dead and inactive for three days and three nights. On the Night to be Much Observed this year, as we rejoice with our physical and spiritual families, we should take a moment to think on the almost unbelievable fact that on this very night in AD 31, our Savior—the very Creator of this universe—was dead!

But Jesus’ and our Father did not leave Him in the grave (Psalms 16:10; Acts 2:27). He raised up His beloved Son and restored to Him the incomparable mind—the vast knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and holy character—that They had shared for eternity before Jesus’ human sojourn. One day very soon, astounding as it may seem, Their thoughts will become our thoughts as They willingly share that same perfect mind with you and me.

—John Plunkett

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

*If anyone hears My voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and dine with him,
and he with Me.”*

Revelation 3:20

Are We Opening the Door?

Most of us have concluded that we are now in the midst of the Laodicean era of God’s church. This requires each of us to be alert, watchful, and on guard against the attitudes that permeate this era. We must protect ourselves from this deadly, Babylonish system and not allow its influences to put us to sleep spiritually.

How can we detect those traces of Laodiceanism that exist in our lives? What can we look for? What are the signposts?

Notice one of the descriptions the Bible gives of a Laodicean: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).

Here, Christ is reporting that—in His own church—some know that He is at the door, but they will not rouse themselves from their spiritual lethargy to open it. By implication, they will not invite Him into their lives. As unbelievable as it sounds, there are those in His church who will keep Him on the outside looking in (see Song of Songs 5:2-3)!

But there is hope. In Revelation 3:20, that word “if” holds out hope—hope that a Laodicean can repent, can change, can *choose* to open the door to Christ rather than ignore Him. Are we opening the door? Are we opening ourselves up to Christ to build the kind of relationship that will lead to eternal life (John 17:3)?

God’s Children

Before answering those questions, we need to be aware of the relationship between God and ourselves. We often talk about God’s purpose and God’s will. Unfortunately, sometimes it is as if we are here, and God’s purpose and will are way over there—somehow separate from us.

The truth is *we* are God’s purpose; *we* are God’s will. Is there any greater purpose that God can be working out than reproducing Himself? Of course, the answer is no! We are going to be His greatest creative achievement.

It is God’s will that each of us be one of His children (John 1:12), however improbable that might sound to the human mind. The depth of His love for us, *His children*, is beyond our comprehension. As Jesus testified in John 17:23, God loves us every bit as much as He loves Jesus Christ—no more, no less.

God has probably spent billions of years planning for us—His children. All that time, He has been waiting for our birth. Even if Christ should not come for another hundred years (and it seems seriously doubtful that it could be that far away!), compared to billions of years, for God, our birth is *now*. The water has broken!

Consider the anticipation that builds when a mother has to wait nine months for a baby to be born. What must the anticipation be for God? He has been waiting *billions* of years for the birth of His children!

(continued on page 20)

The Forer

Part One: In

The book of Revelation contains many strange and fantastic images that inspire the imagination and motivate Bible students to chase out their veiled meanings. Who has not wondered about the identity of the Beast or considered the implications of Satan the Devil as a dragon? Throughout the book's pages, a parade of scrolls, trumpets, vials, books, stars, swords, creatures, battles, angels and demons, and even fallen women passes by.

Like any good book, Revelation includes good guys and bad guys involved in a titanic conflict to determine the fate of the world. As the book opens, the Hero arrives on the scene, confident that all will turn out well, but the situation seems hopeless—the good guys are weak, disunited, and lethargic, and conflicts and disasters erupt and intensify everywhere. The forces of evil, led by a sinister and powerful ruler, appear invincible and on the brink of victory. Yet the Hero is more than worthy of His task, and undaunted, He leads His army through storm and fire and waste to triumph and immortality. The book ends in paradise, where the victors live happily ever after.

What makes Revelation so intriguing is that it is not a novel but true prophecy guaranteed by the Word of God to be true and soon to come to pass! The book opens with the words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1). In the final chapter, this assurance of authenticity is repeated:

Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." (Revelation 22:6-7)

This is reminiscent of Isaiah 55:11: "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void [margin: *empty, without fruit*], but

it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." When God speaks a prophecy, it will be fulfilled because He will bring it to pass!

This certainty causes curious Christians to try to identify and interpret every symbol in the Apocalypse. Some of them are easily determined because at times the text itself defines them. For instance, Revelation 5:8 defines *incense* as "the prayers of the saints," and Revelation 19:8 identifies *fine linen* as "the righteous acts of the saints" (for more of these, see Revelation 1:20; 5:6; 7:14; 11:4; 12:9; 14:4; 17:15; 19:10; 20:14).

Perhaps the most intriguing image in the New Testament's only book of prophecy is that of the four horsemen—white, red, black, and pale—that exemplify the first four seals of Revelation 6. Fertile minds have used this fantastic imagery in literature and art down through the centuries as harbingers of doom or embodiments of destruction and death. Few things are more frightening than mysterious, dangerous figures riding on strange, thundering warhorses!

And with good reason.

The Seven-Sealed Scroll

The setting for the release of the four horsemen begins in Revelation 4, which describes God's throne room in heaven with all its splendor and attendant beings. As chapter 5 opens, a scroll with writing on both front and back and sealed with seven seals is introduced, shown in the right hand of the Father. This last detail highlights His sovereignty and the divine origin of the scroll. That He holds it in His right hand suggests might or authority (Exodus 15:6; Psalm 20:6; 44:3; 110:1; Lamentations 2:3-4; etc.), and that He is sitting on the throne alludes to coming judgment (see Proverbs 20:8; Matthew 27:19; Acts 25:6).

The scroll itself includes a few peculiar details not found in ordinary scrolls. First, John uses the word *biblion* for it, a diminutive of the normal *biblos*, implying that this particular scroll was not lengthy—a booklet as compared to a book. *Biblion* is often

Horsemen

on the Saddle?

used of letters, contracts, and other documents whose contents would not fill more than one sheet of parchment or vellum.

However, this scroll is “written inside and on the back,” or as it is literally in the Greek, “written within and behind.” The Greeks had a specific term for such a relatively rare document: *opisthografon*, literally “behind writing.” Since writing covered the entire surface, nothing could be added to it. Thus, the image symbolizes a complete and finished work.

Finally, this scroll bears seven seals, a detail that has provoked various interpretations down through the centuries. The best, most logical solution is that the scroll is successively sealed along one edge so that, as a seal is broken, the parchment can be opened only so far as the next seal. Thus, a scroll like this was sealed as it was rolled closed, and the seals must be broken in reverse order. This also means that, as the seals are broken, the previous ones remain open until all seven parts of the document lay revealed.

In the scene in Revelation 5, though, “no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it” (verse 3). The apostle John weeps because no one worthy comes forward. He is soon comforted: “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals” (verse 5).

This figure, called “a Lamb as though it had been slain” (verse 6) is obviously Jesus Christ our Savior (see John 1:29), and He proved worthy by prevailing, *enikeesen*, a word that can also be translated as “overcome,” “triumphed,” or “conquered,” all of which imply victory through conflict or struggle. As Hebrews 2:10 puts it, “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” He proved Himself worthy to be our Redeemer, High Priest, and soon-coming King by living sinlessly against the pulls of human nature and by dying as a perfect sacrifice in our stead (see Revelation 5:9, 12).

In so doing, He also qualified to be Judge of all (John 5:22; II Timothy 4:1, 8; Jude 14-15). Taking on this last role, “He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne” (Revelation 5:7).

Self-Interpreted

A tour through several commentaries on Revelation 6:1-8 reveals widespread agreement on the interpretation of the last three horsemen, but on the first one the interpretations vary. Certainly, none of them agrees entirely with the modern church of God understanding, specifically of the white horse and its rider. Most expositors suppose the first horseman represents Christ Himself conquering the world through the spread of the gospel. In Part Two, we will see in full how this interpretation cannot be correct.

Christians who believe in the divine authorship and authority of the Bible are careful to allow it to interpret its own symbols. Some of the above-mentioned commentaries pay lip service to this foundational principle of Bible study, yet they seem to apply it infrequently, perhaps because they really do not believe the Bible’s sixty-six books are a coherent whole—though written by more than two dozen men over fifteen hundred years—and inspired by One who is profoundly intelligent and organized. For us, who believe the Bible is God’s Word in print and not the product of mere men, there is no need to cull the writings of the ancients for clues to the Bible’s mysteries. All the answers we need can be found within its own pages.

Only a few of the commentaries consulted for this article series even mention Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24 (also Mark 13; Luke 21) as a key to interpreting the Four Horsemen. One of them seems almost surprised that Jesus foretold the exact same series of signs sixty years before to His disciples! Why should they be any different when the same Revelator communicated both prophecies? They are parallel.

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(continued from page 7)

Union will be a very gray place, and within its boundaries every single employed individual will have its own elderly person 65 or older to provide for through the public pension system. This is not a recipe for an energetic society.

Europe's disinterest in childbearing is a crisis of confidence and optimism. It is a spiritual indicator, reflecting millions of individual decisions to pursue self-interest and material well-being instead of participating in the human future. These individual decisions will have profound collective effects. . . .

Among other effects, "a weakened Europe is likely to grow more resentful toward America," warned British journalist Charles Moore in a lecture to the New Atlantic Initiative last year, "rather than blaming themselves."

Though a nasty flame-out is conceivable, I will close with a less alarmist yet blunt prediction about Europe's likely future. Fifty years hence, when my oldest children approach retirement, I expect that today's European dream of achieving economic and military superpower status will be a dim memory, and that some more realistic alternative will have replaced it.

**"A weakened Europe is likely to grow more resentful toward America rather than blaming themselves."
—Charles Moore**

At that point, under current trends, the largest Western European country—Germany—will rank about 23rd on the list of the world's biggest nations. Europe as a whole will contain in the neighborhood of 360 million people and falling. Americans will be at 550 million and rising. The U.S. economy will have grown to more than twice the size of Europe's.

I expect that Americans and Europeans will be reasonably amiable. . . . But it will be China, India, Mexico, Indonesia, Brazil, Vietnam, the Arab world, and Turkey that the U.S. will have to huddle with most earnestly at important international con- claves—not Europe.

That is, frankly, not the circumstance most Americans would prefer. By rights, Europe and America ought to remain close cousins. But Europe's current choices in politics, economics, social and family life, and moral reasoning unmistakably suggest that a less familial relationship is emerging.

It is easy to see that things are not going well in Europe, and they have not been going well for at least the last ten to twelve years. Even though they are gradually uniting, they are in reality declining in power and influence. That is not what the visionaries anticipated for a united Europe.

Beastly Parallels

With that foundation, I want to emphasize that this series of articles should not be considered as church doctrine. I am thinking "out of the box," speculating on what is happening in the world right now. Please feel free to offer your ideas, criticisms, and suggestions.

Events may happen that will change my point of view in the future. At this time, though, it looks as if either 1) a major portion of the Beast may be arising in the nations of Israel led by the United States and United Kingdom, or 2) the woman riding the Beast in Revelation 17 consists of the nations of Israel led by the United States and the United Kingdom. This second possibility is the most likely at this point. However, this is a large subject, and we can only cover a small number of scriptures that pertain to it.

Much will go unanswered in this article. But because of current happenings in the world, if neither of these two possibilities is correct, then we either 1) have a great deal more time before Christ's return for things to form

as we were taught, or 2) dramatic and miraculous events will have to occur both in the U.S. and Europe for the Beast to arise solely in Europe in the near future and to exercise the powers the Bible shows it to have. If those dramatic and miraculous events do not occur soon, and if world events continue at the pace they normally move, we will have a very long time before Christ's return. I—and many of you—will be long dead before that occurs.

Before we close, it will be helpful to see the prophetic parallels between Daniel 2 and 7 and Revelation 13 and 17. These parallels indicate Europe will be a major player in the Beast unless our current interpretations are incorrect. If they are wrong, then the possibility arises that the Beast need not be confined to Europe.

Jesus says in Luke 12:49, 56, "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! . . . Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?"

“Fire” indicates judgment, and Jesus clearly wanted to get on with seeing His work concluded. However, as He shows, things have to be done in their proper order. In this case, He is referring to His death.

Clearly, in calling these carnal people “hypocrites,” He expected them to understand who He was and what His mission was. If He expected them to grasp what was going on during His day, how much more does He expect of us? Greater depth and clarity and therefore understanding are always to be found because God is faithful to reveal more as we grow and come closer to its fulfillment. Yet, it is evident from the church’s history that we do not always hit the correct understanding of prophecy right off.

Ezekiel 6:14 adds to this fact that most prophecy is misunderstood: “So I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land desolate, yes, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblah, in all their habitations. *Then they shall know that I am the LORD.*” This final sentence occurs frequently in Ezekiel. In each case, it means that people will not understand the fullness of something until either it is actually being fulfilled or it is completely over. This means, as matters progress, we have to do some updating—including some speculating—from time to time to adjust our understanding to fit reality.

Daniel 2:32-35 describes the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and the prophet interprets it in verses 38-40, 44:

... and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron. . . . And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

Verse 38 shows us that in this imagery the king represents the entirety of the kingdom’s existence as a world-ruling empire. The term “after you,” in verse 39 introduces three separate, successive kingdoms following Nebuchadnezzar’s Chaldean Empire. Then verse 44 shows that the image’s timeline exists until our day and the return of Jesus Christ for the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

This prophecy, then, brings us right into our present time. We can look for the last empire, represented by the feet and toes, to exist today. History has shown those four empires to be the Chaldean, Medo-Persian, Greco-

Macedonian, and Roman empires. The last existed from 31 BC to AD 476, when secular history shows that the Vandals defeated Rome. However, Emperor Justinian revived and reestablished Rome as the “Holy Roman Empire” in AD 554.

All of Daniel 7 is helpful at this point. The important element to note is that this illustration from Daniel’s dream parallels Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2, but it uses different imagery. This confirms that the legs of iron in Daniel 2 and the fourth beast in Daniel 7, which are parallel images, exist at Christ’s return, fight against Him, and suffer defeat, and then the saints receive the Kingdom.

Revelation 12:3-4, 9 records:

And another sign appeared in heaven; behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. . . . So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

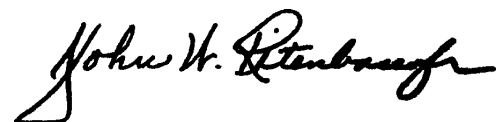
The Dragon is identified as Satan (verse 9), providing the lead-in to the introduction of the Beast in Revelation 13:1-8. The similarities between this and Revelation 12:3, 9 show a direct relationship between the Dragon viewed in heaven and the Beast rising on earth.

This relationship is further confirmed in Revelation 13:4, which shows the Beast on earth receiving its power from the Dragon. Another commonality is that both the Dragon seen in heaven and the Beast on earth have seven heads and ten horns, yet there are two differences: The first is in the number of crowns (seven on the Dragon, ten on the Beast), and a second is in the location of the crowns (the Dragon’s are on the heads, while the Beast’s are on the horns. At this point, what that difference means is unknown.

The Beast in Revelation 13 is a further illustration of the fourth beast of Daniel 7 with its ten horns. The ten horns represent ten kings who will be part of the Beast and present at Christ’s return. There is no doubt that the legs of iron of Daniel 2, the fourth beast of Daniel 7, and the Beast of Revelation 13 and 17 all reveal the Roman Empire, its revivals, and some of its end-time configuration.

This awesome combination of powers is forming for that great day of Christ’s return.

In Christian love,



SEARCHING

Part One: The Prom

Nowadays, everyone from grammar school pupils to graduate students use “search criteria” to locate information quickly on the Internet. Search criteria are those “signposts” a search engine uses to locate websites. For example, if I wanted a good recipe for my favorite pie, my “search criteria” would be the words *recipe*, *rhubarb*; and *pie*. I input those words, and Google responded with 22,200 sites—and more recipes than a thousand pastry chefs could easily whip up (as well as a whole lot of other stuff I could not or would not eat!). Unless one is well-experienced in the use of search criteria, his “net” can garner far more fish than he can fry.

That is not at all how it is with the “search criteria” God provides students of His Word seeking to learn the identity of modern-day Israel. For those “who have eyes to see,” the search criteria He provides will not yield junk results. Rather, they will pinpoint only one group of people—the *real* people of Israel.

Here are the search criteria. Modern-day Israelites will be

1. *Multitudes of peoples*, living in
2. *a nation and a company of nations—multitudes of nations*, whose
3. *geographic focus* lies to the north and west of Jerusalem, but whose
4. *lands spread* to all compass points. Israel’s people own
5. *possessions* over rivers, across seas, in the islands and coastlands. At least some tribes of Israel will enjoy wide-spread
6. *wealth and prosperity* and will possess

7. *gates*, that is, strategic commercial and military positions, in the midst of their enemies. They are a people who have been
8. *ruled* without interruption by a monarchy whose roots lie in the tribe of Judah. That monarchy will be
9. *currently centered in Britain*. Finally, they are a people whose
10. *dominance*, politically, militarily, and economically, did not begin until about AD 1802.

Ten in all. Ten specific, easy-to-grasp identifiers—or markers, if you will—of the whereabouts of modern-day Israel. True, we are dealing with over three thousand years from the time of Abraham until today. So, it makes sense that not every criterion will be applicable to every period of history. Some criteria will have more application to Israel of yesterday; some will relate to Israel of today; some to Israel in the Millennium or beyond. Many will have application to more than one period. Nevertheless, all will point straight to Israel!

In this series of twelve articles, we search God’s Word and His history for the whereabouts of Israel today. We begin by locating these ten identifiers in God’s Word, showing how each one points to Israel. Putting them together, we encounter overwhelming evidence of the whereabouts of God’s people Israel—and of God’s forethought, care, and purpose for those peoples.

We will find more than that. We will find that God’s plan, His purpose, is so tightly linked with Israel, so much part-and-parcel with Israel’s history, that when we find Israel, we will also find God. In essence, to search for Israel is to search for God; to find Israel in history is to find God there too.

F O R I S R A E L

ises to the Faithful

The Call of Abraham

Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him. (Isaiah 51:1-2)

The book of Genesis records a number of promises God made to the patriarch Abraham. These promises point directly to modern-day Israel. They become, therefore, “search criteria” which will help us identify Israel today. Here are the principal promises God issued to Abraham:

Genesis 12:1-3: God appears to Abraham while he is in Haran, calling him to Canaan:

Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Abram, as his name was at that time, was 75, and he “departed as the LORD had spoken to him” (verse 4), not knowing to what land he was going. The promise at his calling is very general. God particularizes it in a number of iterations. In these further rehearsals, God embellishes this first promise.

Genesis 12:7 records the first of these embellishments: “To your descendants I will give this land.” Abraham is in Shechem at this time. The *land* is the focus of this and other restatements of the promise. Because God promises to give it to Abraham *and* his descendants, the land becomes an *inheritance*. In

Romans 4:13, the apostle Paul interprets the giving of land to be a reference to the *entire world*. Prophetically, Israel’s domain is the whole world.

Genesis 13:14-15 contains another important embellishment: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.” God commits Himself to giving Abraham this land *forever*. The concept of eternity enters the picture early in God’s relationship with Abraham.

Genesis 13:16 emphasizes the concept of fecundity. “I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered.” God promises to multiply Abraham greatly.

Genesis 15:18-21 provides a detailed delineation of the land God gave to Abraham. The territory extends from the Nile River in Egypt to the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia.

Genesis 17:6: God here repeats His promise of fruitfulness: “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.” Note the plural forms of the words *nation* and *king*.

Genesis 17:7 is an important iteration of God’s promise in Genesis 12:2-3 that Abraham “shall be a blessing”: “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.”

God promises to establish an eternal *covenant* not only with Abraham but also with his descendants. Those descendants are going to be very precious to God. In fact, so close to God are those descendants that the prophet Zechariah refers to them as the apple of God’s eye (Zechariah 2:8). Historically, God and Israel are never very far apart.

In **Genesis 17:8**, God reiterates His promise to give land to Abraham's descendants as an *everlasting* possession: "I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

There is an important addition here. The possession of the land is connected with the covenant mentioned in verse 7, where God promises to be the God of Abraham's descendants. Ultimately, those descendants will possess the land as a people worshipping the true God.

Genesis 22:16-18 records God's embellishment of the promise on the occasion of Abraham's "sacrifice" of his son Isaac:

By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.

God promises to multiply Abraham and to give him control of strategic military and commercial positions, "gates," in his enemies' territories. As we will see, this promise speaks of the geopolitical advantage God later gave Abraham's descendants. God bases this promise on Abraham's obedience of the command to sacrifice his son, Isaac, a sacrifice God of course stopped just before the knife fell. Note, too, that this promise has the effect of an oath, in that God swears by Himself.

Since this is the last recorded promise to Abraham, it is fitting that God should refer to His first promise, recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. God reminds Abraham of His promise that his seed would be a blessing to all nations. In Galatians 3:16, Paul makes it plain that this "Seed" is Christ. Christ, who is in the lineage of Abraham, blazed a trail by which all peoples could ultimately develop a relationship with the Father. Christ's work makes it possible for God to be our God, according to the promise of Genesis 17:7-8. Christ is indeed a blessing to all nations.

The Other Patriarchs

God restates a number of these promises to Abraham's son, Isaac, as well as to his grandson, Jacob. For example, in Genesis 26:3-5, God harkens back to Abraham when He tells Isaac:

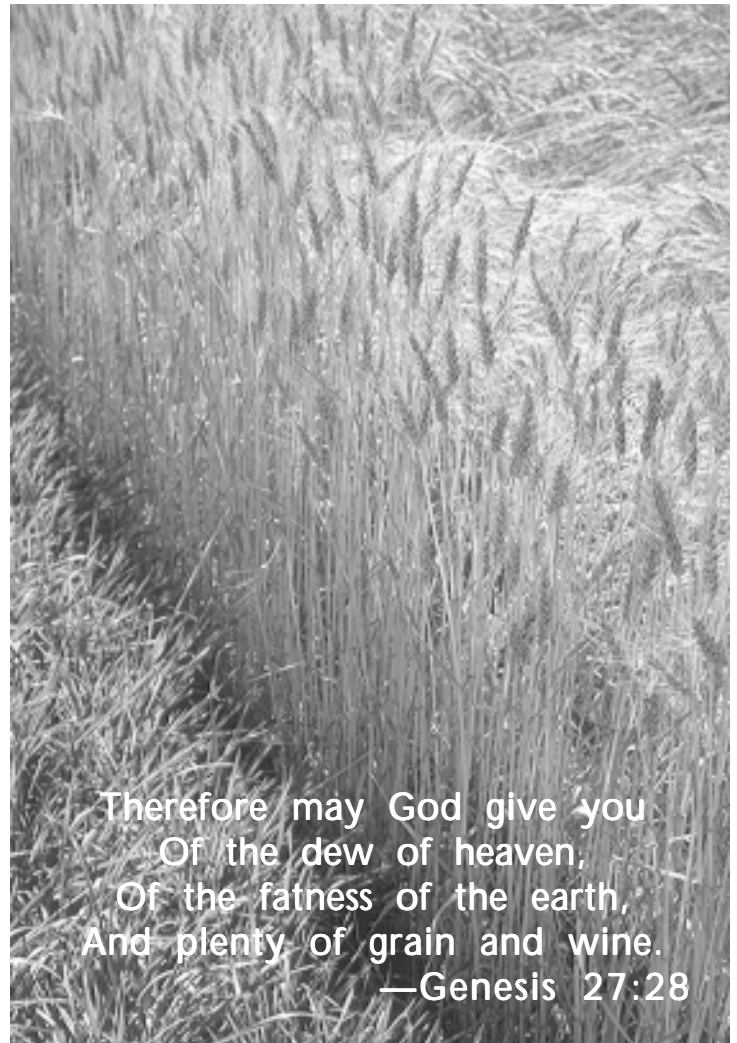
Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all

these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.

Notice that God refers to "the oath" (see Genesis 22:16-18) He swore to Isaac's father.

Genesis 28:13-14 records yet another restatement of the promises. These are part of God's comments to Jacob at the occasion of his dream of a ladder reaching to heaven. Jacob is in Bethel at this time.

I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.



Therefore may God give you
Of the dew of heaven,
Of the fatness of the earth,
And plenty of grain and wine.
—Genesis 27:28

**"I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you."
—Genesis 17:6**



Notice that these promises are the same ones God earlier made to Abraham: land; a multitude of descendants spreading east, west, north, and south; and the "Seed," Jesus Christ, who would bless all nations. It is also extremely important to note that all the earth's families would be blessed "in you *and* in your seed" (emphasis added). Those blessings were to come not only as a result of Jacob's posterity, or even as a result of Christ's work, but of something Jacob *himself* was to do.

Finally, Genesis 35:11-12 restates certain promises God had earlier made to Abraham:

I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.

God here reiterates His promise to Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 17:5-6, that he would be a father of kings. God also tells Jacob that from him would

descend not only a nation, but also a whole *company* of nations.

Hebrews 11:9 reports that it was "by faith [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." These patriarchs of the future people of Israel received the same promises from God and lived in the same faith. Of them, and others after them as well, Hebrews 11:39 speaks eloquently: "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise."

In God's promises to the patriarchs are a number of "search criteria" describing Israel. Israelites will be eventually organized in one great

- *nation* as well as in a
- *multitude* of other nations. The vast
- *masses* of Israelites in these nations will enjoy plenty of
- *land* and
- *prosperity*. They will also come to occupy the
- *gates* of their enemies.
- *Kings* will descend from the patriarchs. These peoples will become a
- *blessing* to all the nations of the planet.

Helpful as these search criteria are, questions still remain:

- Do these factors describe Israel past, present, or future?
- Has God already fulfilled His promises in the context of ancient Israel?
- Is He fulfilling them today?
- Is their fulfillment yet future?

As the comedian said, "Timing is everything!" To locate Israel today, we need more detailed search criteria, criteria that have a time-element. As we will see, God has provided time-specific search criteria.

Next month, we continue our quest for search criteria pinpointing the whereabouts of modern-day Israel. We will look at the blessings the patriarchs conferred on their progeny. These blessings, bestowed in faith, have the force of prophecy, and therefore become identifiers of Israel.

—Charles Whitaker

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me."

(continued from page 11)

There is nothing He is more intensely focused on than us—His children. In fact, His focus is so intense that Jesus says that God even knows the number of hairs on our heads (Luke 12:7)! That is minute and detailed focus and attention.

When it comes to His children—you and me—absolutely NOTHING escapes His attention. To see the truth of this, notice Job 7:17-18: "What is man, that You should magnify him, that You should set Your heart on him, that You should visit him every morning, and test him every moment?"

God tests us *every* moment—not some moments, not most moments, but EVERY moment. *Test* can mean "examine." God is scrutinizing every moment of our lives because He is our Father and takes His responsibility to love and care for us very seriously.

Therefore, with that intensity of focus, love, and care, it should come as no surprise that God has promised to supply *all* our needs (Philippians 4:19). That includes *everything* we will need to make it into His Kingdom—to be His children. He has supplied us with the tools we need to open the door to build a relationship with Himself and Christ that will lead to sonship and eternal life.

Relationship-Building Tools

The first set of relationship-building tools He has supplied is prayer, study, meditation, and fasting. However, none of these will do us any good until we make the right kind of effort in those areas. These tools are there, just lying at our doorstep, but we are required to make the effort, to open the door up to these activities.

When we open our Bibles and study, we are opening the door to the Word of God—we are opening the door to Jesus Christ Himself. By the right amount and kind of prayer, meditation, and fasting, we are opening the door to knowing the True God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Another tool God provides is the weekly Sabbath service. However, if we do not open the doors of our minds and hearts as we attend them, we have closed the door to God's inspiration and communication with us.

Before the scattering of the church, consider how many tens of thousands of people sat in Sabbath services for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, and more years. How many of these Sabbath-keepers are still around? The tools can be there, right at our doorstep, yet we still have to open the door.

Luke 10:16 shows that one way to slam the door shut on Christ is to look at the men giving the messages rather than the God who is behind them: "My followers, whoever listens to you is listening to me. Anyone who says 'No' to you is saying 'No' to me. And anyone who says 'No' to me is really saying 'No' to the one who sent me" [Contemporary English Version (CEV)].

If we believe in how minutely God is involved in our lives, then it follows that what is preached in Sabbath services has a purpose and is allowed by the Sovereign God. Therefore, a complaint that we have about a speaker or the message is a complaint against God. Despising the spiritual food God has prepared is dangerous ground to tread.

This does not mean the speaker is infallible, by any means, but the wrong attitude effectively diminishes what we can glean from his message. A safer approach would be to offer a prayer for help to understand and see how the food is for our good (Psalm 84:11) rather than to slam the door on the message or the messenger. Either we trust and have faith in God's sovereignty and His love for us, or we do not. There is no safe middle ground (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Another tool God gives us is *Forerunner*. It shows up on our doorstep, so to speak. If we believe how minutely God is involved in our lives, then again it follows that the information in this magazine is

not accidental.

Notice *Forerunner's* subtitle, *Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God*. Are those just some words on a page, or do they mean something? If we believe that God is thoroughly involved in the lives of His children and providing for them, then they mean exactly what they say.

Matthew 25 begins with the parable of the Ten Virgins. Five were wise, and five were foolish. What separated the wise from the foolish? Was it not preparation and readiness? The wise were ready and the foolish were not. The wise were Christians who used the tools available to prepare themselves for the Kingdom of God.

How do we treat *Forerunner*? Do we take lightly what this magazine is all about? When *Forerunner* comes in the mail, have we finished the last one? Or worse, have we not yet even started the last one?

What would be the most common excuse for this failure? *I have not had the time!* Not having the time to seek first the Kingdom of God? What is wrong with that picture?

I have found myself uttering that excuse about time. Please realize that, when I have used that excuse, it was not because I was so busy praying, studying, fasting, and meditating that I just could not squeeze in anything else! No, the reason I do not have time is that I am too busy with *my* priorities and *my* pursuits rather than God's. That is a deadly and stupid attitude—it is Laodiceanism.

If I believe I am in desperate need, I will do everything I can to seek first the Kingdom of God—I will make the time, no matter what. But if I believe I have need of nothing (Revelation 3:17), then I will be lackadaisical about my relationship-building responsibilities with Christ. I will be a foolish virgin that is careless about fulfilling the responsibilities required to prepare for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44). One has to work hard to find a hidden treasure, and in the same way, we have to work hard to find and understand God’s truths. God wants to know whether we really hunger and thirst for Him. Will we work at it as if our lives depended upon it? In reality, it does!

When it comes to *Forerunner*, I do not know which month will contain the nugget of truth that will make a difference in my life. I do not know which article will contain that nugget. I do not know which paragraph—perhaps even which word!—will make a difference.

Gambling With Eternal Life

This means I have to read every word of it, every month, to be sure I do not miss any nugget God has hidden for me to search out and find. If I am not diligent, I am playing Russian roulette with my eternal life. Russian roulette is the game where a player loads a bullet into an empty revolver, spins the cylinder, puts the gun to his head, and pulls the trigger. The first man to blow his brains out loses.

Does a game get any more stupid

than leaving one’s life to chance? Yet, those who play Russian roulette lose only their physical lives. How much more incredibly stupid is it to risk one’s spiritual—eternal—life?

Proverbs 30:2 gives a perspective that applies here: “I am far too stupid to be considered human” (CEV). A saying from half a century ago mirrors this verse: “He does not have the brains God gave little green apples.” “He is dumber than dirt” is similar.

To play Russian roulette with eternal life is “dumber than dirt.” It just does not get any lower and more idiotic than that. How mentally fogged up and sleepy would a person have to be to take that kind of risk?

Our calling is irrevocable (Romans 11:29), and it is God’s will that we succeed (John 6:39-40). And when a thing is God’s will, Isaiah 14:24 says, “Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand.” God has given us everything we need to succeed; we just have to open the door.

Are we opening the door? There are some easy tests:

- Are we diligently praying, studying, meditating, fasting, and not allowing our deceitful and sleepy natures to ac-

cept excuses for failure?

- Are we opening our minds and hearts during services by being alert and eager?
- When *Forerunner* comes in the mail, have we completely read the last one?
- Are we wise or foolish virgins? Have we been lulled to sleep and see no need for urgency (II Peter 3:4)?

God knows the true answers to each one of these questions. Do we?

These relationship-building tools are our Christian responsibilities. They are the daily, little things given to us that, in a large measure, tell God the real intentions of our hearts. Failure to handle these “trifles” proves us as unfaithful servants (Luke 16:10-13).

One who gives careless attention to his responsibilities is a Laodicean. We need to open our doors to Christ as never before because, as Romans 13:11 says, “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.”

—Pat Higgins

(continued from page 13)

Notice the questions Jesus’ disciples ask to solicit from Him what has come to be known as the Olivet Prophecy: “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). In Jesus’ response, He concentrates almost entirely on the second question—the signs of His coming and of the end—and the question of when is answered mostly in their aggregate. The closest He comes to answering when appears in verse 14: The end will come when the gospel has been preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations. Only He knows when this goal will be reached.

Nevertheless, the Olivet Prophecy consists of a series of signs of the end. As we read earlier, the

book of Revelation identifies itself as a disclosure from Jesus Christ of “things which must shortly take place.” It is plain that Revelation is a book concerned with the events of the end time that crescendo at Christ’s return and culminate in the new heavens and new earth, and Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24 covers the same ground, concluding with the second coming. We would be derelict not to compare the two.

Before leaving Matthew 24 for the time being, we should note verse 8 as vital to understanding the timing and duration of the Four Horsemen: “All these are the beginning of sorrows.” This short sentence separates Jesus’ commentary on the Four Horsemen, which are the first four seals of Revela-

tion 6, and His comments on the fifth seal, the tribulation and martyrdom of the saints (Matthew 24:9-10). The implication is that the Four Horsemen will ride roughshod on the earth to commence the time of “sorrows,” and it may also indicate a length of time between the fulfillment of the fourth seal and the opening of the fifth. The first four seals, then, might be broken in quick succession and allowed to inflict mayhem for a long period before the fifth seal is opened.

And Jesus’ choice of words in verses 4-7 suggests that the Horsemen were let loose long ago!

Horses in Scripture

The Four Horsemen possess one obvious common factor: Each one rides a horse. Horses appear frequently in Scripture, more than 150 times across both Testaments. Most often, they appear in the context of battle, although a small number of passages emphasize their aggressiveness (Jeremiah 5:8; 8:6; Ezekiel 23:20) or stubbornness (see Psalm 32:9; Proverbs 26:3). However, the imagery of horses is overwhelmingly inclined to represent martial strength (Deuteronomy 17:16; II Chronicles 9:25; Psalm 20:7; Proverbs 21:31; Isaiah 30:16).

Probably the most complete biblical exposition on horses appears in Job 39:19-25. God says to Job:

Have you given the horse strength? Have you clothed his neck with thunder [or, *a mane*]? Can you frighten him [or, *make him spring*] like a locust? His majestic snorting strikes terror. He paws in the valley, and rejoices in his strength; he gallops into the clash of arms. He mocks at fear, and is not frightened; nor does he turn back from the sword. The quiver rattles against him, the glittering spear and javelin. He devours the distance with fierceness and rage; nor does he stand firm because the trumpet has sounded. At the blast of the trumpet he says, “Aha!” He smells the battle from afar, the thunder of captains and shouting.

The picture is of an animal eager and well-suited for war and carnage. Elsewhere, the Bible shows horses to be speedy (Jeremiah 12:5; Joel 2:4) and fierce when they charge in battle (Habakkuk 1:8), causing panic and fright (Jeremiah 8:16). They are also strong (Psalm 147:10), many times the strength of a man, and formidable, especially in the gear of war.

This is the exact impression the image of the Four Horsemen is designed to elicit. They represent an oncoming, relentless, unstoppable, and terrifying enemy bent on destruction and death. They are embodiments of some of humanity’s greatest fears.

And, as Jesus says, they are just the beginning of woeful onslaught mankind must endure before the end of the age!

Symbols of Judgment

Taken as a whole, the Four Horsemen are dreadful judgments upon mankind for sin. As we will see, they descend upon humanity at the direct command of Christ the Judge, and He gives them free rein to do their worst upon the earth’s inhabitants—to kill up to a quarter of the planet’s population (Revelation 6:8). In today’s terms, that comes to about a billion-and-a-half people!

Since Romans 6:23 clearly declares that “the wages of sin is death,” the incessant commission of sins upon the earth makes its inhabitants ripe for judgment (for more examples of this metaphor, see Jeremiah 6:9; Amos 8:1-3; Joel 3:12-13; Revelation 14:17-20). Because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23), God is certainly justified in sending His judgments at anytime, against anyone, and to any degree of severity. Paul writes in the previous chapter:

But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who “will render to each one according to his deeds”; . . . to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil. . . . (Romans 2:5-6, 8-9)

The apostle asks, “Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? . . . Their condemnation is just” (Romans 3:5-6, 8). As Psalm 96:13 prophesies, “For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth” (see Psalm 9:8; 98:9; Acts 17:31). Though the Four Horsemen cause terrible devastation and loss of life, their deeds are, in effect, humanity’s just desserts (Revelation 16:5-7). Had men not cut themselves off from God through sin, these measures would not have been necessary.

Yet, underlying God’s severe and just punishments are His goodness and mercy. Those hewn down by the Four Horsemen will have an opportunity for salvation in the resurrection from the dead (Revelation 20:12-13; see Isaiah 65:20-25), a time far more congenial to accepting and embracing God’s way of life than is available in this world. Perhaps the lessons learned in this life of sorrows will prove beneficial to them in the world to come.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Vatican's Islam Dilemma

The Catholic Church can no longer ignore the growing influence and cultural disturbance of Islam, the fastest growing religion in the world, particularly in areas where Catholicism has traditionally been the dominant religious factor—such as Europe and the United States. In Britain, for example, 930,000 Muslims attend a place of worship at least weekly. While this does not yet compare with the 1.5 million Catholic churchgoers, it has already outstripped Anglican attendance of 916,000. In traditionally Catholic France, current birthrates indicate that in 25 years France may have a Muslim majority. Even now, many demographers estimate that as much as 20-30% of the population under 25 is Muslim. As Muslim culture begins to push more forcefully into many historically Catholic cultures, the Vatican feels constrained to respond.

The Vatican is not in a position to take this entity head-on, nor does it seem likely to try. Rather, the Roman Catholic Church has historically utilized syncretistic assimilation of potential threats instead of blatant annihilation. Though Islam and Roman Catholicism are not going to meld into one religion anytime soon, quite a few highly visible overtures by the Catholic Church indicate an increasingly aggressive “ecumenism”:

- In late December 2003, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, the recently retired Vatican foreign minister, criticized Muslim countries for treating Christians as “second-class citizens.” He told the French Catholic daily *La Croix* that Christianity and Islam faced “an enormous task” of learning to live together in mutual tolerance.
- According to the ZENIT News Agency, the rector of the shrine of Fatima in Portugal, Monsignor Luciano Gomes Paulo Guerra, contends that the Fatima apparitions were exhortations to ecumenical dialogue. He claims that the apparition of Mary knew that her choice of the site in Portugal would one day be understood as a deliberate association with the daughter of the Islamic prophet Mohammed—whose name was *Fatima*.
- John J. Schmitt, associate professor of theology at Marquette University, writes in the *National Catholic Reporter* that reconciliation between the Catholic Church and Jews began with the Second Vatican Council, but up to this point, “there is no major text that asserts the essential ties among Judaism, Christianity and Islam.” He highlights the fact that even the current Catechism of the Catholic Church seems to rank Islam

lower than Judaism as an “Abrahamic faith.” Currently, Catholic-Jewish relations are handled by the Council for Promoting Christian Unity, while Catholic-Muslim relations are dealt with through the Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

- In mid-January, the Vatican hosted an interfaith “Concert of Reconciliation” to “promote the commitment for a peaceful coexistence among all the children of Abraham.” The presentation was centered on composer John Harbison’s choral *Abraham*, and was attended by about 7,000 people, including Israel’s two chief rabbis, Rome’s Imam, and the secretary general of the World Islamic Call Society.
- John Paul II has been the first Pope to visit a synagogue and to step into a mosque. He is a staunch defender of the notion that the three “Abrahamic faiths” worship the same God, albeit through different “revelations.”

These recent events highlight the curious dance in which Islam and Catholicism are involved. It is too soon to tell where this will end, but it is noteworthy that the Roman Catholic Church has survived for nearly two millennia by changing its shape while still holding to the creed of being the *universal* church.

EUROPEAN RELIGIOUS REVIVAL?

Uwe Siemon-Netto, religious editor for United Press International, believes that “the Old World may be slowly shifting away from its doctrinaire secularism.” Writing in *The National Interest*, Siemon-Netto sees a number of “signs—faint and uncertain though they may now be—of a revival” of Christianity in Europe, most of which has long been thought of as “the great plain of irreligion.” He points to the “astonishingly lively debate” over the issue of including the words “God” and “Christianity” in the European Union’s constitution—a debate which ultimately failed to achieve its goal, but

which nevertheless demonstrated that there is yet a religious zeal. On November 13, 2003, an “impressive group of 22 European leaders,” past and present, criticized the “narrowly ‘secularist’ vision of European societies” as “a danger both for the country’s democratic life and cohesion, and for the full development of the European project.”

However, this frontal—and, it turned out, potent—assault on French and German secularism is not the only evidence of revivalism. Siemon-Netto also cites the “huge interest in new Bible translations”; the popularity of “adult catechism

classes in France”; the growth of evangelicalism in France, where “every ninth day a new evangelical congregation is born”; the “massive” number of lay people taking courses in the prestigious *Institut Catholique* seminary in Paris; the shift of many Protestant seminararians from “political causes back to orthodox theology”; and the increasing large number of lay people “taking over pastoral functions in the absence of a sufficient number of priests.” Very slowly, an environment conducive to the appearance of the False Prophet may be forming in Europe.

NEWS AND TRENDS Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man is coming. (Matthew 25:13)

BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLES OF LUKE 15 (PART ONE)

Jesus' discourse in Luke 15 breaks down into three distinct illustrations: The Lost Sheep (verses 4-7), The Lost Coin (verses 8-10), and The Lost Son (verses 11-32). The whole chapter is essentially one distinct parable with three illustrations. One illustration flows without interruption into the next; one thought transitions into another to make one parable. We know this because Luke uses the singular "this parable" when he introduces the three illustrations in verse 3.

Jesus' intention is to reveal that, as the Son of Man, He

came into the world to seek and save the lost. The three illustrations, when combined, present us with a far more complete picture of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ than would only one. Concern over a thing lost and the joy at recovering it is the fundamental issue of each illustration. The sheep, the money, and the son—all lost—were all worth saving. It was a serious matter to lose a sheep, worse to lose money, and worst of all to lose a son. Part One of this three-part study will analyze what is commonly known as the Parable of the Lost Sheep.



1. What is the reason Jesus spoke this parable of the lost possessions? Psalm 119:176; Ezekiel 34:11, 16.

COMMENT: This parable results from a statement made by the scribes and Pharisees, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). As the end of Jesus' public ministry neared, the downtrodden, the despised, the lowly, and the sinful were drawn to Him. They were sincere in their desire to be raised out of their poor condition and genuine in their desire to follow Him, and He publicly identified Himself with them. Unlike the Pharisees, these sinners knew they were sinners and needed to be saved.

By this parable, the Pharisees stood condemned, and so they found fault with the godly work Jesus Christ was doing. Their criticism implied that Christ allowed these sinners in His presence because He was like them in character. They never understood that He allowed them in His presence to save them from their sins, as Ezekiel had prophesied.

2. How does the illustration of the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7 differ from a similar one in Matthew 18:12-14?

COMMENT: In Matthew, Jesus describes God's care over the least and little ones. In Luke, He magnifies divine grace to the lost, showing that God desires their recovery and salvation. The Bible contains many prophetic references to the One who would be the Ideal Shepherd (Psalm 23:1), the Perfect Shepherd (Ezekiel 34:11-16), and a Savior who would see the multitudes as sheep having no shepherd or, even worse, a worthless shepherd (Zechariah 11:16-17). Christ claims for Himself the title of the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). In Luke's illustration, Jesus seeks the lost sheep, sinners who desire to change because the Good Shepherd gives His life for those who repent. He desires to save them, give them His Holy Spirit, and help them through a life of overcoming that ends in eternal life.

3. Who does the one lost sheep represent? Luke 15:1, 4; Ezekiel 14:11.

COMMENT: The lost sheep knew that, without the instruction and the care of the shepherd, it was lost. Neverthe-

less, because of curiosity, it strayed, wandering away from the shepherd (James 1:14). The lost sheep represents the foolish and thoughtless wanderer from God to whom He says, "Do not listen to anything that will lead you away from Me and My truth." The caution in Proverbs 19:27—"Cease listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge"—is not just for children but for the well-educated adult who instead listens to the ungodly teachings of those who feign knowledge (II Timothy 4:3-4). How often have Christians allowed themselves to be enticed away by their own intellectual vanity? God corrects this type of person's straying by allowing the curse of his sins to fall upon him.

4. Why is there more joy over the repenting sinner than the loyal and faithful righteous? Luke 15:5-7.

COMMENT: Just people need no repentance because they need no change of mind and purpose. Some people were reared in a godly and righteous family environment. Their parents obeyed and worshipped according to God's laws, statutes, and ordinances, and taught their children to do likewise. The Gentile Cornelius was one such man (Acts 10:1-2). Of course, no human being is completely just (Ecclesiastes 7:20), but he may be righteous in comparison to those who flagrantly sin, such as those succinctly described in Luke 15:1. A just person cannot repent of the idolatries of a pagan, which he has not practiced, nor of the larcenies of a tax collector, of which he has never been guilty. When comparing just people to flagrant sinners, we immediately see what Jesus means: These needed no repentance in comparison to the others, not being guilty of such gross sins.

There is more immediate joy over a sinner who repents and follows Christ than over those who are already repentant and safely within God's flock. The latter already have greater and more intimate happiness—eternal joy!—within the Family of God. Faithful members should be elated by the fact that their Shepherd loves and cares for them so intimately. And for the one who strayed, upon genuine repentance, there is hope of salvation.