

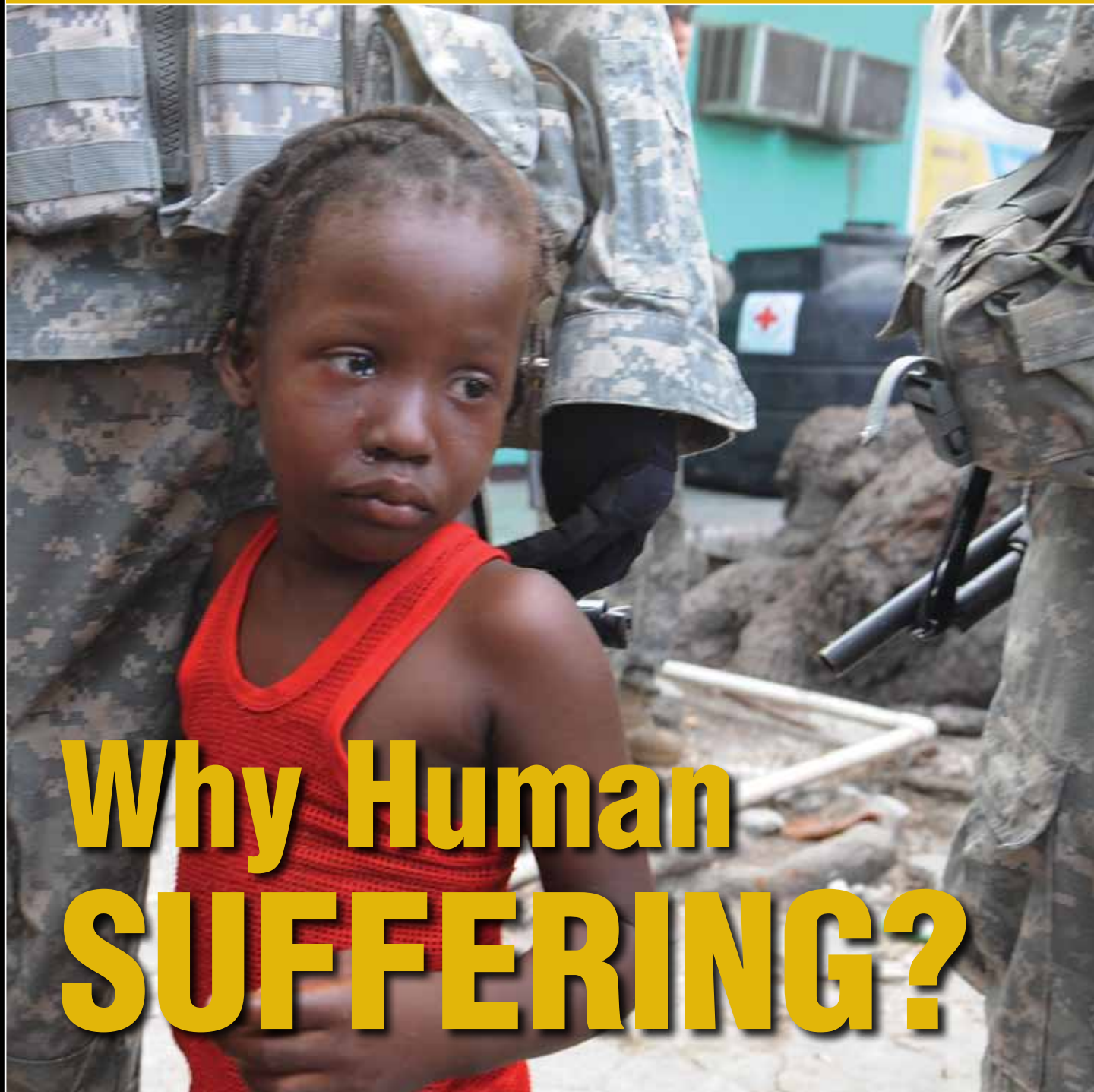
MARCH-APRIL 2010

THE

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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



**Why Human
SUFFERING?**

THE REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

VOL. VIII | NO. 3 | MARCH-APRIL 2010

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PHOTO: PHILIPPE LOPEZ/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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PHOTO: THONY BELZAIRE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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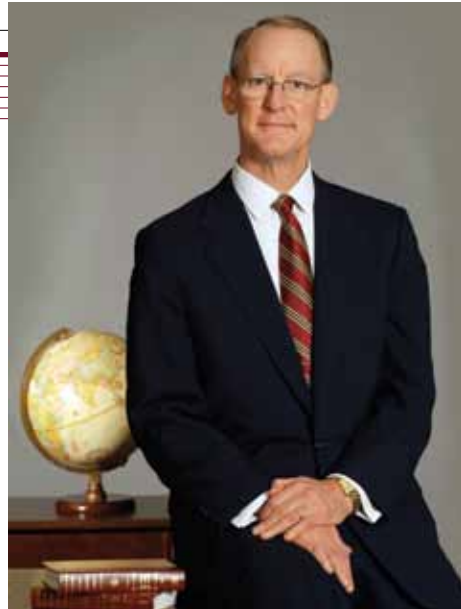
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Why Must There Be Human Suffering?

THE WORLD IS filled with suffering of *every* kind. In fact, countless millions know little else. Yet God allows this. Why has He not stopped the terrible suffering that afflicts so many, and since men have existed? Is there a reason God does not intervene? Does suffering have a great unseen *purpose* that can be understood?

You *can* know the answers to these questions. There *is* a cause for human suffering. The Bible reveals it—and it is so plain a child can understand. After reading this Personal, *you* will understand.

Look at conditions the world over. Vast numbers of human beings are suffering.

Every day, almost 25,000 people starve to death—and only *after* long, horrible agony. This is not limited to physical pain, but includes psychological and mental anguish of parents often having their children die in their arms. Starvation is so awful death can be *longed for*.

We ask: why doesn't God stop this?

Even more people die each day from disease. The very word *disease* means lack of ease. At this moment, untold suffering, trauma and pain, due to crippling conditions, infections and sickness of every sort, is occurring around the world. Just in sub-Saharan Africa, half a million children are orphaned *every year* due to AIDS alone.

Why isn't God intervening?

Consider poverty, which affects a third of all people on Earth. The lack of even the most basic necessities (sufficient water, sanitation, clothing, shelter and food) brings untold suffering to over 2 billion people—day after day after day. And conditions are growing *worse* instead of better.

Why does God allow this to continue?

War ravages much of the world, with some nations experiencing near complete destruction of their economy, property, homes and businesses, including injury or death to large numbers of their civilian populations.

Why doesn't God banish war?

Earthquakes, fires, floods, volcanoes, tornadoes, tsunamis, hurricanes, other violent storms, drought, blights and insect infestations due to weather, also add to the human misery index.

Why doesn't God better control the weather and nature?

Why?

Of course, much could be written about self-inflicted suffering that so many—in fact, in this case all people—periodically endure, from accidents to fall-out from wrong decisions, from financial disasters to all forms of worry, fear and anguish.

Yes, *why* does God allow war, terrorism and violence? Why must men endure disease and famine? Why poverty and misery in the wake of natural disasters?

Just think how often these come. Ask, WHY do these things happen, and almost routinely, on planet Earth?—and why does God not *end* them?

If God is working out an unseen *purpose* through these conditions, what is it? Is there a great—transcendent—REASON for the almost constant state of affliction encompassing, to one degree or another, most of humanity?

The God of the Bible describes His tremendous mercy. He speaks of His kindness to, and compassion for, all mankind. If God is all-powerful, and a God of love, why does He not stop—completely!—the terrible human suffering billions experience?

The ministers and theologians of traditional Christianity cannot explain the purpose of human suffering. Many theorize that Adam and Eve were created perfect and complete, until they “fell” because the devil overthrew God’s Plan by tempting them into sin. This popular idea continues with the explanation that God’s Plan is to *restore* men to their pre-fall condition—but the devil keeps slowing things down and disrupting God’s progress.

Is this true? Is God desperately trying to *repair* damage brought by Satan’s unforeseen attack on a Master Plan that God did not think through carefully enough?

There is no use trying to remove wrong *effects* when the causes are ignored. Grasp this. In all physical and spiritual matters, man only addresses the bad effects engulfing the world today. He does not understand, and cannot explain, the causes—the true meaning and purpose—behind the world’s woes and ills. Our many free magazines, books, booklets, lessons and articles address and explain the true causes of the almost endless bad effects throughout the world. If you have a question on virtually any spiritual matter, you will almost certainly

find that we have addressed it from about every angle and perspective.

God’s Character

The God of the Bible possesses infinite understanding and perfect character. A Christian is to develop that same spotless character, while growing in God’s understanding.

The Holy Spirit, given at conversion to those who *obey* God (Acts 2:38 and 5:32), defines God’s character. Notice: “But the fruit of the [Holy] Spirit is love, joy, peace, *longsuffering*, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Did you see that God describes His Spirit—His *divine nature*—as “longsuffering”? How can God’s character include longsuffering? Most can understand God is love. Most also recognize God experiences unbounded joy! Certainly, none doubt God has absolute faith in His own Plan and purpose—or that He has complete peace and self-control (temperance) in all matters. The same is true of the remainder of this description of God’s nature.

But why does God list suffering (actually suffering *long*) as part of His character?

How does God suffer?

Before He flooded the world in Noah’s time, “it repented the LORD that He had made man on the earth, and it *grieved Him at His heart*” (Gen. 6:6). Does it surprise you that God felt mental pain (grief) at what mankind had chosen—and become? God brought the Flood to put man out of his misery, stating He would never again do this.

The Bible plainly says, “The LORD is *longsuffering*” (Num. 14:18). God wants all to understand that even He suffers. But this verse does not reveal *why* this is necessary.

Let’s grasp what God is saying.

All those with children stop and think! When you see your child hurt or sick, how do you feel? It grieves

you. You suffer your *own* anguish at their pain.

God is no different. He is a Parent with children. When His children disobey Him, directly hurting themselves in the process, it hurts Him. He feels pain—grief!

Great Unseen Purpose!

Having no idea what God’s purpose is for mankind, most assume life is probably about “getting to heaven,” but have no more idea than this. Actually, salvation has nothing to do with going to heaven.

A book you must read is *The Awesome Potential of Man*. Revealing the *truth* of salvation, it will open your thinking beyond what you have ever dreamed. Not a book of mere helpful hints or tips for life, every chapter is loaded with REAL MEANING you can sink your teeth into—and straight from God’s Word!

To discover God’s purpose, on any matter, you must go to the Source—His Instruction Manual—sent along by the Creator with His creation (man). God’s Word reveals the answers to life’s greatest questions—*all* of them. Surely the reason for human suffering is one of the greatest answers of all.

Mankind’s suffering is no accident. It is actually one of the most marvelous tools within God’s Plan of producing sons who have developed His character within them. The purpose for every human being’s life is to develop the perfect, righteous character of Almighty God. Suffering is tied to character-building. Since God is longsuffering, it is also obvious then, that no person is complete in the development of His nature and character *until* he has learned the value of suffering!

Wise King Solomon recorded one of the Bible’s great truths: “In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the *day of adversity* CONSIDER:

Please see PERSONAL, page 19



Nowhere to Hide?

Terrorism's Universal Threat

Will the fear of random acts of violence always hold us hostage?

BY H. CHRIS LOMAS

AFTER YEARS of cutting corners in his budget, a middle-class European has managed to save enough money for a once-in-a-lifetime vacation. At the airport, he goes through the formalities of checking in and soon finds himself in a seat taxiing down the runway.

In the aircraft, he makes himself comfortable. After an onboard meal, he watches a movie and tries to pass the hours by reading.

A few hours later he dozes off—only to be awakened by what sounds like a loud pop! Amid the commotion,

the words “bomb” and “hijacker” filter through the aisles. Passengers are terrified at the thought of what is happening as a suspect is apprehended and dragged to the front of the plane.

In a moment, an act of terrorism transforms the calm environment of the jumbo jet cabin into an emotionally charged detention facility 37,000 feet above ground.

The attempted Dec. 25, 2009 bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 made it clear that terrorism is a very real threat to the lives of aver-

age people. Such attacks can affect anybody, anywhere in the world and are not restricted to the United States alone. The threat—once mainly aimed against strategic targets—now looms over the entire population of whole nations.

Will the fear of terrorism hold us hostage forever?

The Cost

The attempted bombing over Detroit raised new questions about national security and resulted in enormous

■ **HELD HOSTAGE:** During a drill, a stand-in “terrorist” (right) keeps a “hostage” in the stands of Engenhao Stadium in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Nov. 24, 2009).

PHOTO: ANTONIO SCORZA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

expenses for nations wishing to protect themselves.

Since the attack, full body scanners and more trained security guards have been hired at airports around the world to aid in the search and prevent explosive devices from being smuggled onto planes. In Australia alone, the failed attempt to blow up the Detroit-bound plane resulted in an additional \$173 million spent on internal security.

Seeking added ways to aid in the prevention of terrorism, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security launched a project using truck drivers. The First Observer Trucking Security Program, known as the “Eyes on the Road” program, was established to prevent terrorist damage to critical infrastructure such as bridges, tunnels and roads.

Enemies once kept outside a nation’s borders are now living among the populace. Citizens who sympathize with the cause of extremists can evolve into homegrown terrorists. Often, they train themselves via the Internet, but many sympathizers also train abroad with groups such as the Taliban or al-Qaida. It has become impossible to keep track of these groups as they form independent covert cells both in cities and rural areas.

The *EUobserver* reported that the number of arrests connected to terrorism have doubled in the European Union in 2007. The EU Anti-terrorism

chief, Gilles de Kerchove said, “Al-Qaida is still and will continue to dominate international terrorism for years to come.” The *EUobserver* further stated, “Out of the total 1044 arrested last year, the vast majority was EU citizens suspected of membership in a militant organization. In cases of Islamic extremism, the would-be attackers appear to increasingly have been born in the union’s territory and having EU citizenship.”

The New York Times reported that the CIA warned that an attack will take place on American soil within the next six months. CIA director, Leon E. Panetta, said, “The biggest threat is not so much that we face an attack like 9/11 but it is that Al Qaeda is adapting its methods in ways that oftentimes make it difficult to detect.”

The lengths to which terrorists will go are limitless. British intelligence reports that terrorists have devised explosive breast implants designed to bypass airport scanners.

Speaking about the failed Detroit attack, Andrew Thomas, aviation expert at the University of Akron in Ohio, told *The Christian Science Monitor*, “The terrorists are constantly developing more sophisticated attacks. They are hyper-motivated, they’re not going to stop, and they have a fetish for aviation security.” The paper continued, “Meanwhile, the range of explosive devices that terrorists are developing

is outstripping the ability of screening systems to catch them. Last August, an alleged suicide bomber who had explosives implanted in his body injured Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. Even controversial full body scans don’t pick up such hidden devices.”

Effects on Society

The fear of terrorism affects all sectors of life. This especially applies to those who live in the West. The airline industry spends millions of dollars for extra security checks. Large corporations realize they are main targets of these internal militia groups and spend more money protecting and insuring their investments worldwide. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security projects that in 2010, \$55.1 billion—a 4.9 percent increase over the 2009 fiscal budget—will be required to protect the country. This is almost a six-fold increase over the amount needed in 2000.

By crippling crucial resources, such as oil fields in the Middle East, terrorists attempt to destabilize the economies of Western nations that rely heavily on the constant flow of foreign oil. As a result, the cost to transport oil and protect supply lines is rising. These extra security measures drastically increase operating costs. Unable to absorb these losses, companies must rely on consumers to offset them.

Under Attack

Security agents work around the clock to prevent attacks planned by terrorists. Although they have achieved a certain measure of success in combating these crimes, it is impossible for them to protect everyone at all times.

Small terrorist cells operating across the world make keeping everyone safe nearly impossible—not to mention the fact that would-be-terrorists can purchase most ingredients to manufacture an effective remotely detonated bomb at any local hardware store. Such a homemade explosive, if placed in a populated area, would injure and kill many civilians.

With these terrorist cells randomly spread throughout a country, an attack



can happen at any time. A terrorist that operates independently or is part of a self-proclaimed terrorist cell can easily blend into a crowd.

Promised Safe Haven

As these attacks occur with more frequency, some ask, “Why is this happening to us?”

After governments fail to prevent terror attacks—and seeing little that they can do to protect themselves—some turn to God for answers. They look in their bibles and read, “In righteousness shall you be established: you shall be far from oppression; for you shall not fear” and terror “shall not come near you” (Isa. 54:14).

Upon reading this passage, many become confused about how God is keeping people from terror. They ask, “How can it be that our security is under attack when God says that terror will not come near us?”

While God promises protection, He says that to be protected one must “do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto your enemies, and an adversary unto your adversaries” (Ex. 23:22). The results of obedience to God’s commands are clear. “There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that you shall tread upon, as He has said unto you” (Deut. 11:25).

By carefully reading this, it is clear that terror will not come near us if we obey God. Again, “In *righteousness* shall you be established.”

But what is righteousness? “And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. *And it shall be our righteousness*, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us” (Deut. 6:24-25).

Righteousness is following God’s commands! (See Psalm 119:172.)

Consequences of Disobedience

The results of breaking God’s laws are still playing out today. Note that terror attacks are generally directed



■ **EXPLOSIVE FORCE:** Police walk by car debris after a powerful homemade bomb detonated in front of the Athens Stock Exchange building (Sept. 2, 2009).

PHOTO: LOUISA GOULIAMAKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

against the English-speaking nations of the world—the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and to some degree their allies and former colonies.

Why?

The English-speaking nations are the descendants of Joseph, a son of Jacob (Israel), which received the birthright blessings. Notice I Chronicles 5:2: “For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the *birthright was Joseph’s*.”

When God made the covenant with Abraham, He said, “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant...” (Gen. 17:7). This means forever!

Our nations are in trouble because they have rejected God. “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3).

The seriousness of our transgressions screams at us from the pages of the Bible, but we refuse to hear. As Jesus states in Mark 7:9, “Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition.”

Most who have rejected the truth of Scripture believe that the terror attacks against us are merely a war between freedom-loving nations and rogue states. But what does God reveal about these attacks?

Leviticus 26 clearly explains what blessings God’s people will receive if they obey His laws. In the same chapter, God also defines what curses He will bring upon them for disobedience. “But if you will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments; and if you shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhor My judgments, so that you will not do all My commandments, but that you break My covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you *terror*...” (vs. 14-16).

Will you consider the serious danger you face? There is only one way to find safety and security. Turn to the God who created you—the source of all blessings.

The siege against modern Israel—Britain, America and their sister nations—is due to disobedience. Our people have forgotten where they came from and who allowed them to prosper above all the other nations of Earth.

The terror that is spreading through the Western world is a direct result of disobedience and is prophesied to worsen. But God always warns before punishment comes, leaving no excuse. Those who heed His warning and obey His Law will “be far from oppression,” “shall not fear” and terror “shall not come near.”

What will you do to heed this warning? To learn more, read David C. Pack’s *America and Britain in Prophecy*. □

ISRAEL in the EU

Coming Reality or Impossible Dream?



As the European Union plays a more prominent role in Middle East peace talks, what effect will it have on Israel?

ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER Silvio Berlusconi met with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to tighten Italian-Israeli ties, with Mr. Berlusconi revealing his hope that Israel may someday join the European Union.

During the three-day visit, the two leaders signed nine agreements on issues such as energy, environment, economic cooperation and health. Both sides expressed deep respect and interest in each other's countries and goals.

In his welcoming comments, Mr. Netanyahu said, "I can think of few peoples who have contributed more to Western civilization than our two peoples. In both Rome and in Jerusalem,

the foundations of Western culture were laid. That is why it is vital that Italy and Israel stand side by side, proud of our heritage, committed to our values, and determined to defend our future and our culture."

Prime Minister Berlusconi said that due to Italy's close relationship with Israel, he considers Israel "one of the European countries."

He affirmed his commitment to the country by stating that "as long as I am one of the shapers of politics, my greatest dream is to include Israel among the European Union countries."

While visiting sites in Israel, Mr. Berlusconi said that his government would not ignore threats against the Middle Eastern nation. "We will not close our eyes before a state that wishes to destroy a country that is our

friend," he said in an apparent reference to Iran.

Mr. Berlusconi also met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. In Bethlehem, he addressed the suffering of the Palestinian people, saying, "...just as it's right to cry for the victims of the Shoah [the Hebrew term for the Holocaust], it's right to show pain for what happened in Gaza."

During Mr. Berlusconi's Israeli tour, German Chancellor Angela Merkel met with Israeli President Shimon Peres in Berlin, demonstrating the EU's increased interest in the Middle East peace process.

At a January 2010 United Nations Security Council forum, an EU official statement advocated a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.

"If there is to be a genuine peace, a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. The EU calls for the reopening of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem in accordance with the Roadmap [to peace]." It maintained that "the EU stands ready to contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements, aimed at ensuring the sustainability of peace agreements."

Commentator Ghassan Michel Rubeiz, writing for *Common Ground News Service*, a non-profit initiative for a peaceful resolution to the Middle East conflict, proposed a future role for EU security forces in the region: "Over the years, Europe's role as a mediator receded, giving way to an expanding US role in the region. But in more recent decades, European states have achieved excellence in policing peace in many places: in the Middle East, the Balkans, West Africa and elsewhere. Given the opportunity, Europe could provide the Israelis and Palestinians with the necessary international security that is crucial for enforcing a two-state solution."

While the futures of Europe and Israel are intertwined, they will follow very different paths. To learn more, read "Out of the Ashes – The Rise of Europe." □

■ **STRENGTHENING TIES:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (right) shakes hands with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (left) during a press conference at Mr. Netanyahu's office in Jerusalem (Feb. 2, 2010).

PHOTO: DAVID FURST/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Society's relations have become strained. Respect for others is fading. It does *not* have to be this way!

BY JEFFREY D. DAVIS

“YOU LIE!” shouts a congressman, interrupting the president during a speech. While the representative later apologizes for the incident, the media lambastes his behavior, which overshadows the president's message.

Something is not right.

Outraged at Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, a man attacks the premier, knocking out his two front teeth, breaking his nose and lacerating his lip. Italy's interior minister later reveals that the attacker planned the assault for some time before carrying it out.

Something is wrong.

In Baghdad, Iraq, a television correspondent, upset by a visit from then-president George W. Bush, throws his shoes at him and yells, “This is a farewell kiss, you dog!” The president ducks to avoid being struck as the shoes fly over his head. In the Middle East, footwear is considered ritually unclean and even merely displaying the sole of one's shoe is a severe insult.

Nine months later, after being released from prison, the offender tells the news media that he spent his time in prison being tortured. He alleges that the Iraqi prime minister lied that he was being well cared for in prison. The man refuses to apologize for throwing shoes at President Bush, instead insisting that the Iraqi prime minister should apologize to him.

A young country singer accepts the MTV Video Music Award trophy for best female pop video. In the middle of her acceptance speech, a hip-hop artist bursts onto the stage, steals the microphone, and rudely proclaims that

★ The ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ DEATH of CIVILITY

“It could be said that dealing with rude behavior is one of the greatest reasons people today are always busy, but never get anything done!”

Old Way

There was a time, not long ago, when these things were virtually unheard of. Instead of attacking those they disagreed with, the public generally showed respect and even outright concern for one another.

Society valued standards, morals, etiquette and politeness. Certain rules existed for speaking, which ensured no one was confused or unnecessarily offended. There were also many rules for behavior, which made sure everyone's needs were cared for and no one was accidentally injured, insulted or excluded.

Consider this “rule of civility” from a list of 110 maxims copied down by George Washington, with spelling and grammar updated in today's language: “Run not in the streets, nor go too slowly, nor with the mouth open. Go not shaking your arms, kick not the earth with your feet, nor walk upon the toes, nor go in a dancing fashion.” How many accidents, annoyances and offenses would be avoided if people, especially in large cities, followed rules such as this?

President Washington was able to quash a potential rebellion of officers seeking pay after the American Revolutionary War simply by tactfully deferring their attention from themselves. These disgruntled men were calling the new Congress “tyranny” and were ready to take action, saying it was time for “swords and not words.”

Rather than lashing back and insulting the men, Washington entered a meeting of dissenters and asked to speak to them. He then pulled out a letter outlining the position of Congress. Before reading, he took out a pair of glasses that he had recently acquired. He explained to the audience: “Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country.”

Since those he spoke to were also men who suffered in service of their country, this reminder struck home. Many listening were in tears as he

a different musician “had one of the best videos of all time.”

The young lady accepting the award is too shocked to finish her speech. Later, many fans call for the hip-hop artist to apologize. On his

blog, he attempts to justify his comments: “I'm sorry to my fans if I let you guys down!!!! I'm sorry to my friends at MTV...Welcome to the real world!!!!”

Something is *missing*.

read the letter. Men made statements saying they regretted their previous positions and that Congress now had their complete loyalty.

With tact and civility, Washington defused an uprising that could have split the fledgling nation.

Another example of the old way is hospitality. It was once considered an honor and a privilege to host guests. Many went out of their way to ensure their home was always ready to offer refuge to weary travelers, house visiting relatives, and weather surprise visits from friends.

When you could always count on friends and family to be hospitable, it was easier to form strong friendships, which, in turn, built a stronger society based upon mutual concern.

New Way

While the loss of politeness in modern society is lamentable, the reality is that modern man has “progressed” far beyond simply lacking politeness.

One who is uneducated in the finer nuances of etiquette or is simply under pressure may sometimes be impolite. Under such circumstances, however, it is never appropriate to be outright rude. There is an in-between area where a man or a woman still shows respect for his or her fellow human beings. This basic level of good behavior is referred to as being “civil.”

But sadly, civility is dying. In many cases, especially with younger generations, it is already dead. People around the world have forgotten how to show *any* kind of respect to others—instead, they look out for themselves only.

A woman who received an incorrect food item at McDonalds, grew agitated, demanded her money back, and after the employees refused, she threw a fit. First, she grabbed the water dispenser and poured it on the counter, then she knocked over the cookies, followed by throwing signs and knocking over cash registers. In the end, she caused \$1,700 in damages—all because of an incorrect order.

When people care only about themselves all while expecting the worst from others—there is no end of

arguing, fighting, squabbling, accusing, distrust and outright rudeness beyond anything people would have once ever thought.

When he was asked to move his car, a man in Pittsburgh punched the person who asked him and pulled out a gun. When police arrived, he shot at them. The man was arrested. How much easier would it have been to simply *discuss* the issue?

Consider your own life. How often do you encounter rude clerks, customer service representatives who do not care, salesmen who lie, and corporations who mislead their customers in order to squeeze more money from them? Again, how often does this behavior lead to arguments, confusion, misunderstandings, stress, anger and resentment?

Further, consider how much time it takes to resolve these problems. In some cases, it can take numerous phone calls, meetings, letters, lawyers and years to resolve even the most basic issues. It could be said that dealing with rude behavior is one of the greatest reasons people today are always busy, but never get anything done!

All this because society no longer cares to be civil.

Best Way

No discussion about behavior would be complete without considering the single greatest guide ever written about human behavior—the Bible. While it covers many subjects, a huge portion of this Instruction Book for mankind is devoted to explaining right conduct.

Notice: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). Also: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3).

While the wording of the King James might sound awkward, this is instruction to show respect to fellow human beings. In fact, it says we

should respect them more than ourselves! Does that sound strange?

For those who think it does not make sense to be kind to others, God offers additional explanation. “The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself” (Ecc. 10:12), and, “A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

These last two verses speak directly to the subject of knowing the right things to say. They explain that politeness begets politeness. If you employ gracious speech, you will help build an environment of peace. Your correct or incorrect use of words can either save you from great difficulty, or cause you no end of troubles.

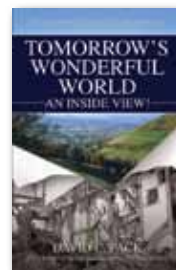
Do these principles of conduct seem outdated or even a little naïve? If you followed them, would it really make a difference in society?

Imagine if all parents taught their children to peacefully play with others and respect their elders instead of allowing them to mindlessly sit for hours in front of the television, if neighbors helped one another without receiving anything but a kind “thank you” in return, if students paid attention to teachers’ authority, if employees always strove to work hard to please their bosses and benefit their company.

What would it take to make this a reality on all levels of society?

Such a change would have to start with leaders of government, who would teach by exhibiting the example of right conduct and character defined by obedience to God’s laws. In short, a top-to-bottom transformation of all man’s systems of government, religion and education, which would result in everyone acting with *true* civility.

For a broader picture of what such a society would look like, and how today’s never-ending cycle of rudeness and disrespect will soon be erased, read David C. Pack’s book *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* □





Chilean Earthquake Claims Over 800 Lives

■ **MASSIVE DEVASTATION:** A car remains submerged after a destructive tsunami struck the coastal town of Dichato, Chile (March 1, 2010).
PHOTO: CLAUDIO SANTANA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ONE OF THE strongest earthquakes ever recorded struck Chile during the early hours of February 27, registering magnitude 8.8—64 times stronger than the recent Haiti quake. More than 800 are reported dead, with at least 1.5 million homes damaged.

During the following days, several tsunamis and at least 100 strong aftershocks, one measuring magnitude 7.5, hit the region.

Many thousands of homes were leveled, leaving great numbers without basic necessities such as food, water and fuel. Roads were destroyed, bridges collapsed, power lines were disrupted and resulting tsunamis swept away entire coastal villages.

The government immediately enacted emergency measures including curfews and the deployment of some 10,000 troops to prevent looting of supermarkets and maintain order.

The Associated Press reported that during the three-minute temblor, “Chileans near the epicenter were

tossed about by the magnitude-8.8 quake as if shaken by a giant.”

Concepcion, a city of nearly 700,000 residents that is situated about 300 miles south of Santiago, Chile’s capital, was hardest hit. The quake toppled a 15-story office building, and led to widespread looting of pharmacies, grocery stores and a collapsed grain silo.

In Talca, 65 miles from the epicenter, the earth shook for over a minute, toppling furniture in homes and destroying the city’s historic town center, built largely of adobe clay.



■ **SURVEYING THE DAMAGE:** Top right, survivors in the village of Talcahuano walk pass a boat thrown into the middle of a street by a tsunami triggered after the 8.8-magnitude earthquake (March 1, 2010). Bottom right, people salvage what they can from a home that was damaged during the massive earthquake and ensuing tsunami in the coastal city of Constitución (March 6, 2010).

PHOTO: (TOP) MARTIN BERNETTI/AFP (BOTTOM) JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

Authorities immediately began rescue efforts to distribute food and restore vital electrical and communication systems. Efforts to rescue victims trapped in collapsed buildings continued slowly due to recurring aftershocks. Fearful families abandoned their homes, choosing instead to camp outside.

“After huddling in a crisis meeting with her cabinet, President Michelle Bachelet called the damage caused by Saturday’s magnitude-8.8 quake ‘an emergency unparalleled in the history of Chile’” (*The New York Times*).

The president has frequently visited hard-hit areas to oversee relief efforts.

Many neighboring countries quickly offered assistance, including Argentina, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico. United States President Barack Obama also offered America’s support.

“The United States stands ready to assist in the rescue and recovery efforts, and we have resources that are positioned to deploy should the Chilean government ask for our help,” he told reporters at the White House.

One U.S. risk assessor, Egecat, put the cost of the damage between \$15 billion and \$30 billion (*BBC News*).

The long-term economic effects this natural disaster will have on the nation are yet unknown. Agriculture and copper mining were halted in certain places due to power outages.

The earthquake was the strongest to hit Chile since a magnitude 9.5 earthquake struck the nation in 1960, taking the lives of approximately 1,655 people and causing \$550 million worth of damage in southern Chile. □



China

A Sleeping Giant Awakens

As China comes into its own—with its ties to the United States and Europe loosening—what does history reveal about this rising Asian dragon?

BY WILLIAM H. BEHRER

THROUGH MILLENNIA of recorded history, the people of China have enjoyed a civilization rich in tradition, culture and art. Today, one in five people on Earth lives in China.

The nation remained a mystery to most Westerners up to the latter half of the 20th century. United States President Richard Nixon's trip there in 1972 ended 25

years of isolation between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China, resulting in the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1979.

It was not until 1994, when the official control of money exchange was abolished, that China began to vigorously develop, becoming part of the global economy.

But it was the 2008 Summer Olympic Games that introduced modern China to the world. Through the Internet

and worldwide television coverage of the spectacular opening and closing ceremonies, the people and nation of China boldly demonstrated they had entered the 21st century.

At the same time, the publicity surrounding the games shed light on China's limits and challenges.

Most recent governments in China have been working with the United States and the European Union in the areas of economic development, climate concerns and terrorism as a cooperating partner. China is a full member of the United Nations Security Council and joins with the West in striving to achieve world peace. However, age-long feelings of superiority run deep in the minds of Chinese leaders whose predecessors once enjoyed independent prominence and view reliance on the West as a temporary necessity.

As it hints at breaking free from foreign ties, China is poised to once again stand on its own as a world power.

Historic Disdain

In a 2008 essay published in *Foreign Affairs*, Kishore Mahbubani writes, "The United States is currently the only country with the capacity and the ambition to exercise global primacy and it will remain so for a long time to come. This means that the United States is the country that can exert the greatest strategic pressure on China. Although in recent years Beijing has refrained from identifying Washington as an adversary or criticizing its 'hegemonism'—a pejorative Chinese code word for U.S. dominance—many Chinese still view the United States as a major threat to their nation's security and domestic stability."

In reality, the emotion runs more deeply. Many Chinese hold a condescending view of Americans and Europeans. They do not believe that long-term strength is built through the rule of the people, but rather are con-

vinced that it is just a matter of time before the democracies of the U.S. and Western Europe fall. This evaluation of the West is not a new feeling in China, but is deeply felt, and was manifested in the way the Chinese treated arriving merchants from the West.

The first to land in China were the Portuguese, establishing a foothold at Macau, from which they monopolized foreign trade at the Chinese port of Guangzhou (Canton). Soon the Spanish arrived, followed by the British and the French.

Trade between China and the West was carried on under the guise of tribute: foreigners were obliged to follow elaborate, centuries-old rituals imposed on envoys from China's tributary states. The imperial court did not entertain the possibility that the Europeans would expect or deserve to be treated as cultural or political equals. The sole exception was Russia, China's most powerful inland neighbor (with whom China still enjoys close ties today).

In an article, "China's Growing Sea Trade with Europe 1517-1800," essayist James Graham states, "The Europeans constantly faced different rules and higher costs in their trade with China than did China's traditional tributary states. Excluding precious metals there was little desire in China for anything the Europeans had to trade. This position of relative strength allowed China to draw the Europeans into its world order largely on Chinese terms...China relied on its tribute system to subordinate non-Chinese to the Emperor and thus maintain its perception of a world dominated by Chinese civilization."

Strained Ties

For the time being, because the United States is a global leader in economics, education, culture, technology and science, China must subdue its view of the West and maintain a close relationship with both the Americans and the

European Union if its modernization efforts are to succeed.

China depends on the U.S. to export its goods, while the U.S. relies on China to buy up its rapidly ballooning debt. China holds more than \$801 billion in U.S. Treasury debt, the largest foreign holding of any country. In addition, the amount of trade between the two nations soared from \$5 billion in 1980 to \$387 billion in 2007.

"Shortly after [President George W. Bush] was sworn in, China and the United States confronted each other over one of the severest challenges posed by the collision of a Chinese jet plane with an intruding US spy aircraft over the South China Sea in April 2001. With cool-headedness and reason, the two countries managed to keep the event's impact on bilateral ties to a minimum" (*China Daily*).

But recent events have strained their relationship, as reported by *The Associated Press*.

"Beijing was incensed by Washington's January announcement of a \$6.4 billion weapons package for Taiwan, the self-governing island it considers Chinese territory. Beijing suspended military exchanges and has threatened to retaliate against U.S. aerospace firms involved in the deal."

The Chinese government has also voiced disagreement regarding Washington's position on the Iranian nuclear program.

"China may want to avoid any damage to its burgeoning economic relationship with Iran, an important source of energy for the booming Chinese economy. Beijing shares relatively few of Washington's concerns in the Middle East beyond energy security, and the recent bilateral tensions may have made the leadership even less inclined to cooperate with the U.S. push for sanctions.

"The new tensions join recurring friction over human rights and commerce, with U.S. critics accusing China of deliberately undervaluing its currency to boost its massive trade surplus. Meanwhile, Beijing last month charged Washington with abus-

■ **EAST MEETS WEST:** Opposite page, German Chancellor Angela Merkel shakes hands with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao following a press conference in Berlin (Jan. 29, 2009).

PHOTO: JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ing trade relief measures after U.S. regulators increased import duties on Chinese-made steel pipes” (ibid.).

The February meeting between the Dalai Lama and U.S. President Barack Obama also fueled friction.

“China accuses the Dalai Lama of heading separatist forces—he says he seeks only meaningful autonomy—and has taken a tough line on his meetings with heads of state, particularly since his high-profile 2007 visit to the US. In 2008 [China] cancelled an EU summit after learning that French president Nicolas Sarkozy was to meet him” (*The Guardian*).

And given that the U.S. imports more than China exports, there is now a \$250 billion trade deficit, which has put the U.S. in a compromised financial position.

Separate Track

A *Washington Post* article titled, “China’s strident tone raises concerns among Western governments, analysts,” detailed China’s rising sense of itself.

“From the Copenhagen climate change conference to Internet free-

dom to China’s border with India, China observers have noticed a tough tone emanating from its government, its representatives and influential analysts from its state-funded think tanks.”

“‘There has been a change in China’s attitude,’ said Kenneth G. Lieberthal, a former senior National Security Council official who is currently at the Brookings Institution. ‘The Chinese find with startling speed that people have come to view them as a major global player. And that has fed a sense of confidence.’”

China has been gaining influence not only on the world scene, but also among Asian countries, as it has been viewed as helping to bring unity to the area.

“A free-trade agreement between China and Southeast Asia came into force [in January 2010], consolidating a sixfold surge in economic activity over the past decade between countries representing a quarter of the world’s population.

“The agreement expands a limited 2005 trade area between China and the 10-member Association of Southeast

Asian Nations, scrapping tariffs on about 90 percent of goods” (*Jakarta Globe*).

While the U.S. and Europe attempt to avoid increased tensions with Asian nuclear powers, particularly Iran, China watches these nations with other motives.

As the West calls for stiffer sanctions on the Iranian Republic, Beijing has repeatedly acted alone, opposing most any action against the nuclear ambitions of the nation, which supplies more than 15 percent of China’s oil.

Also, China has eclipsed global export leaders. Last year, the nation edged ahead of Germany as the world’s largest exporter. “Total 2009 exports were more than \$1.2 trillion...ahead of the 816 billion euros (\$1.17 trillion) forecast for Germany...” (*AP*). Low-cost manufacturing, a huge labor force and purchasing power has helped catapult China into rapid economic growth. Chinese auto sales surpassed United States’ totals in 2009.

While China’s motives may seem unclear to the West, history reveals the answer. In the past, China called the shots for its international dealings and desires to do so again.

Just as history demonstrates China’s unending quest for power, Bible prophecy—more simply, *history written in advance*—shows the *future* of this rising powerhouse, which will one day rival a soon-to-come European superpower. Prophecy indicates that China, along with longtime ally Russia and other nations, will help organize an army that will march into the final culmination of a Middle East crisis (Rev. 9:16).

As it shoots to prominence on the world stage, China seems capable of charting its own course—regardless of popular opinion. Similar to the past, China appears to be awakening to the reality that it can once again operate freely, under its own terms.

To understand China’s role in future conflicts, read David C. Pack’s booklet *The Mid-East in Bible Prophecy* and our article “What Is Armageddon?” □



■ **CHEAP LABOR:** Chinese employees work in the Nile Textile Group factory in Port Said, 137 miles northeast of Cairo, Egypt (Nov. 8, 2009). The Chinese textile group has moved operations to Egypt to more cheaply produce ready-made garments.

PHOTO: KHALED DESOUKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

THE TRUE MEANING OF LENT



What is Lent and why is it so widely observed today? Did Christ or any of His apostles keep it? Most important, what does the Bible say about this worldwide practice?

THE SMELL OF baked haddock wafts through a parish as local families attend a church-sponsored Friday night dinner together. Heaps of coleslaw, macaroni salad and mashed potatoes fill diners' plates, yet no trace of meat products such as beef are to be found.

The Lenten season has begun.

Unlike New Year's, Christmas, Halloween, St. Valentine's Day and other pagan holidays that are celebrated by the secular, non-religious world, Lent is observed by dedicated religious believers.

For more than 1 billion Catholics and many Protestants across the world, the start of Lent signals the beginning of 40 days of prayer, self-denial and confession that culminates on Easter.

During the Lenten period, lasting from Ash Wednesday to Easter, observers abstain from certain foods or physical pleasures. Some vow to give up bad habits such as smoking or nail biting while others abstain from chocolate or a certain kind of ice cream. Others promise to help "heal the environment" by walking to work for 40 days instead of driving or use Lent as a time to give to others without being recognized for their good works.

Abstaining from physical pleasures or modern conveniences supposedly imitates Jesus Christ's 40-day fast in

the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-2), helps the believer understand the suffering of Christ, and better prepares him or her for Easter.

Given that this practice appears well-intentioned and those who practice it seem sincere, Lent must be a practice that God approves.

Or does He?

Examining Lent's Purpose

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "the real aim of Lent is, above all else, to prepare men for the celebration of the death and Resurrection of Christ...the better the preparation the more effective the celebration will be. One can effectively relive the mystery only with purified mind and heart. The purpose of Lent is to provide that purification by weaning men from sin and selfishness through self-denial and prayer, by creating in them the desire to do God's will and to make His kingdom come by making it come first of all in their hearts."

On the surface, this belief sounds sincere, yet it does not agree with the Bible, God's Word, the only source of true spiritual knowledge and understanding (John 17:17).

God, through the apostle Paul, commands Christians to "continue you in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them; and that from a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise

unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:14-17).

Understand that the "celebration of the death and Resurrection of Christ," referred to earlier, has in mind so-called Good Friday, but also Easter Sunday—a holiday deeply rooted in ancient paganism. They were instituted by mainstream Christianity to counterfeit and replace the Passover season. Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread were observed by Christ, the original apostles and the New Testament Church—including Gentiles. God commands His people to observe them today (I Cor. 5:7-8).

So where did Lent originate? How did it come to be so widely observed by mainstream Christianity?

Approved by Official State Religion

As surprising as it may seem, Lent was never observed by Christ or His apostles. He commanded His disciples to "Go you therefore, and teach all nations...to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus never commanded them to observe Lent or Easter. He did, however, command the keeping of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. In fact, during His last Passover

on Earth, Christ gave detailed instructions on how to observe the Passover service. He also instituted new Passover symbols (John 13:1-17; Luke 22:19-20).

Notice what Alexander Hislop wrote in his book *The Two Babylons*: “The festival, of which we read in Church history, under the name of Easter, in the third or fourth centuries, was quite a different festival from that now observed in the Romish Church, and at that time was not known by any such name as Easter...That festival [Passover] was not idolatrous, and it was preceded by no Lent. ‘It ought to be known,’ said Cassianus, the monk of Marseilles, writing in the fifth century, and contrasting the primitive [New Testament] Church with the Church in his day, ‘that the observance

of the forty days had no existence, so long as the perfection of that primitive Church remained inviolate.’”

Lent was not observed by the first century Church! It was first addressed by the church at Rome during the Council of Nicea in AD 325, when Emperor Constantine officially recognized that church as the Roman Empire’s state religion. Any other form of Christianity that held to doctrines contrary to the Roman church was considered an enemy of the state. (To learn more about the history of the true Church, read our book *Where Is the True Church? – and Its Incredible History!*) In AD 360, the Council of Laodicea officially commanded Lent to be observed.

It became a 40-day period of fasting or abstaining from certain foods. “The emphasis was not so much on the

fasting as on the spiritual renewal that the preparation for Easter demanded. It was simply a period marked by fasting, but not necessarily one in which the faithful fasted every day. However, as time went on, more and more emphasis was laid upon fasting...During the early centuries (from the fifth century on especially) the observance of the fast was very strict. Only one meal a day, toward evening, was allowed” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

From the ninth century onward, Lent’s strict rules were relaxed. Greater emphasis was given to performing “penitential works” than to fasting and abstinence. According to the apostolic constitution *Poenitemini* of Pope Paul IV (Feb. 17, 1666), “abstinence is to be observed on Ash Wednesday and on all Fridays of the year that do not fall

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE THIEF ON THE CROSS?

SOME CITE the account found in Luke 23:39-43 as validation for the doctrines of “deathbed repentance” and “the saved go to heaven.” But what does the Bible really say?

Luke 23:42-43 states, “And he [a thief crucified next to Christ] said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto you, Today shall you be with Me in paradise.”

Along with the principle of “deathbed repentance,” supposedly represented by the thief, this account is often cited as proof that “the saved go to heaven.” It proves neither—and there are a number of points to examine.

Consider: King David was “a man after [God’s] own heart” (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). Abraham was God’s friend (II Chron. 20:7) and the “father of the faithful” (Gal. 3:7-9).

Moses was the meekest man who ever lived (Num. 12:3) and spoke with God personally (Ex. 33:11). Yet Jesus—who cannot lie (Titus 1:2)—said that “NO MAN has ascended to heaven...” (John 3:13).

In light of just these few verses, how is it possible that a *thief*, although repentant at the end of his life, could have a guaranteed, immediate reward in heaven? But there is more.

Now notice John 20:17. Christ told Mary Magdalene, four days *after* Luke 23:43 occurred, that He had still not been to heaven! Could He have so quickly forgotten what He told the thief?

Reread Luke 23:43, but this time read it with the comma *after* the word “today,” not before. Then realize that “shall you” is more commonly said as “you shall.” Therefore, the Greek is best understood as “Verily I say unto you today, you shall be with Me in paradise.” In verse 42, the thief said, “remember me when You come into

Your kingdom.” He would not say “remember me,” unless he understood that much time would pass before Christ could fulfill this promise. Christ used the word “today” as if to say, “Right now, *even while we are dying on a stake*, I can tell you with certainty that you shall be with Me in paradise.”

The meaning of the Luke 23 account is distorted because of a simple error in grammar. The comma that follows Christ’s lead-in statement, “Verily, I say unto you...” was incorrectly inserted. It changes His entire meaning. The original Greek, the language of the New Testament, did not use certain punctuation, such as commas and quotation marks. Translators using their own discretion added them later. The correct rendering is, “Verily, I say unto you today [in other words, “I tell you right now”], shall you be with Me in paradise.”

To learn more, read David C. Pack’s booklet *Do the Saved Go to Heaven?* □

on holy days of obligation, and fasting as well as abstinence is to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

Today, Lent is used for “fasting from sin and from vice...forsaking sin and sinful ways.” It is a season “for penance, which means sorrow for sin and conversion to God.” This tradition teaches that fasting and employing self-discipline during Lent will give a worshipper the “control over himself that he needs to purify his heart and renew his life” (*ibid.*).

However, the Bible clearly shows that self-control—temperance—comes from having God’s Holy Spirit working in the life of a converted mind (Gal. 5:16-17, 22). Fasting—of and by itself—cannot produce godly self-control.

Paul warned against using self-denial as a tool to rely on your own will. He called it “will worship.” “Wherefore if you be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col. 2:20-23).

God did not design fasting as a tool for penance, “beating yourself up” or developing will power: “Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?” (Isa. 58:5-7).

God’s people humble themselves through fasting in order *to draw closer*

to Him—so that they can learn to think and act like Him—so that they can live His way of life in all things (Jer. 9:23-24). Fasting (and prayer) helps Christians draw closer to God.

Lent’s Ancient Roots

Coming from the Anglo-Saxon *Lencten*, meaning “spring,” Lent originated in the ancient Babylonian mystery religion. “The forty days abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshippers of the Babylonian goddess...Among the Pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz...” (*The Two Babylons*).

Tammuz was the false Messiah of the Babylonians—a satanic counterfeit of Jesus Christ!

The Feast of Tammuz was usually celebrated in June (also called the “month of the festival of Tammuz”). Lent was held 40 days before the feast, “celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing” (*ibid.*). This is why Lent means “spring”; it took place from spring to early summer.

The Bible records ancient Judah worshipping this false Messiah: “Then He brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD’S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz” (Ezek. 8:14). This was a great abomination in God’s eyes!

But why did the church at Rome institute such a pagan holiday?

“To conciliate the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated, and, by a complicated but skillful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter, in general, to get Paganism and Christianity—now far sunk in idolatry—in this as in so many other things, to shake hands” (*The Two Babylons*).

The Roman church replaced Passover with Easter, moving the pagan Feast of Tammuz to early spring, “Christianizing” it. Lent moved with it.

“This change of the calendar in regard to Easter was attended with

momentous consequences. It brought into the Church the grossest corruption and the rankest superstition in connection with the abstinence of Lent” (*ibid.*).

Before giving up personal sins and vices during Lent, the pagans held a wild, “anything goes” celebration to make sure that they got in their share of debaucheries and perversities—what the world celebrates as Mardi Gras today.

Abomination Masked as Christianity

God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). He never instituted Lent, a pagan observance connecting debauchery to the supposed resurrection of a false Messiah.

God commands His people to follow Him—not the traditions of men. God’s ways are higher—better than man’s (Isa. 55:8-9). Men cannot determine for themselves right from wrong or how to properly worship God. Why? Because “The heart [mind] is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9), and “the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps” (10:23). God designed us and gave us life. He teaches how we are supposed to worship Him.

To be a Christian and properly serve God, you must live “by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4), recognizing that His Holy Scriptures “cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

God commands Christians to flee from the pagan traditions and customs of this world (Rev. 18:2-4), currently led and deceived by Satan the devil (II Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9).

Lent may *seem* like a sincere, heartfelt religious observance. But it is deeply rooted in pagan ideas that counterfeit God’s Plan. God hates *all* pagan observances (Jer. 10:2-5; Lev. 18:3, 30; Deut. 7:1-5, 16). They cannot be “Christianized” or made clean by men. This includes Lent.

For more information about so-called Christianized practices, read *The True Origin of Easter and Christ’s Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*. □



Drowning in Debt

Cause Behind the Credit Crisis

With so many struggling to stay afloat in the global financial meltdown, you can break free from debt and avoid being just another statistic.

The following is an adapted excerpt from *The World to Come* broadcast “World Economic Collapse! – And You!” presented by David C. Pack.

SINCE 2007, the economic crisis has erased a staggering \$50 trillion dollars in wealth around the world. To complicate this economic meltdown, personal and commercial debt continue to spiral out of control.

What is the answer?

The world’s largest economy, the United States, is now more than \$12 trillion in debt—and this debt is growing by over \$4 billion daily. Most Western nations are being crushed by financial obligations. Catastrophe now looms.

Consider this example. The U.S. expects to receive an estimated \$2.19 trillion in tax revenue in 2010. Projected spending is at \$3.94 trillion.

Now suppose these estimates represented the spending of an American family of median income. Such a family would take in \$50,303 (2008 estimate), but be planning to spend \$90,042—while already being more than \$275,632 in debt. Such deficit spending is unsustainable.

Using credit to purchase luxury items and a near-universal obsession to obtain material goods fuel the mounting crisis. The present generation is very different from those of the past. Many, in fact most, now live solely for pleasure, comfort, gain and entertainment. Personal responsibility and character-building have almost disappeared.

Most people live their entire existence completely unaware of why

things either “go right” or “go wrong.” They seem unable to grasp that what they do, or do not do, has a direct effect on their lives. Most do not recognize that for every cause there is an effect—or, conversely, for every effect there is a cause. Nor do they know that this is a law. Scientists recognize this in physics, but society is unaware that the same is true in life—that the law of cause and effect is no less immutable than any law of science.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Bible also teaches this principle. “As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the *curse causeless shall not come*” (Prov. 26:2).

But what does this have to do with the debt problem? Where can people find solutions to end all their financial worries, along with answers to *all* of life’s problems?

The Bible, God’s Instruction Manual for mankind, contains many practical, helpful points about finances. God created laws to govern *every* aspect of His Creation, but most do not understand that these laws therefore govern *every* action in life. The law of CAUSE and EFFECT—where actions always bring reactions—applies to finances. There is a way—a direct path—to financial freedom.

Jesus explained in John 10:10, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

But how can you receive this abundant life? It requires a decision.

God laid out this same decision to ancient Israel: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore *choose* life, that both you and your seed may live” (Deut. 30:19).

Realize that God will not force anyone to follow His ways. Yet obeying Him leads to blessings and happiness—disobedience leads to misery and unhappiness.

Like the Israelites, many dismiss God’s warnings. They ignore the fact that by not following His commandments—including His financial laws—bad effects will come. Impulsive spending is the byproduct of a generation lacking in strength and character and is the CAUSE behind why so many are now buried under a mountain of debt.

You do not have to become another statistic in the global financial meltdown. Choose to follow God’s fiscal laws and take the first steps to living an abundant, debt-free life!

Read the booklets *Taking Charge of Your Finances* and *End All Your Financial Worries*. They offer instruction from God’s Word, as well as practical, common-sense advice you can use. Also, watch *The World to Come* broadcast “World Economic Collapse! – And You!” □



PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

[Now notice] GOD also has set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him” (Ecc. 7:14).

Did you know of this verse? God did this! God designed life so we would face “adversity,” and be forced to “consider” our circumstances. Certainly adversity is no fun. It is sometimes very difficult, hard, painful, even traumatic, to endure. Yet, God said He engineered human existence to include adversity! This seems strange to the human mind that wants a free pass to sail through life, experiencing only the *good* life—*good* times!

Solomon revealed more of God’s purpose for suffering: “It is better to go to the house of *mourning*, than... the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay [this] to his heart. *Sorrow is better than laughter*: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better” (Ecc. 7:2-3).

Does this passage surprise you? Does it make sense that “sorrow is better than laughter” or mourning is better than feasting? Yet these statements are God’s *plain words* about how He views suffering—and that He actually designed this physical life to require it.

Understand. If one is mourning, it is usually because something *terrible* has happened—serious illness, painful divorce, death of a child or loved one, loss of property through a disaster or bankruptcy, or similar things. Therefore, this passage seems absolutely backward to the human mind. This is why Solomon says, “FEASTING...is the end [goal] of all men” (Ecc. 7:2). The goal of the average person is to make life one long, never-ending *party*—or “feast.”

Why Christ Suffered

The world gives much attention to the suffering of Jesus. But how many know what the Bible says about why He suffered? Here is God’s answer—and it has a direct bearing on you: “Though He [Christ] were a Son, yet

learned He obedience by the things which He *suffered*” (Heb. 5:8).

Christ was sinless—without fault, blameless. If He were otherwise, we would have no Savior. Yet this passage reveals that even Christ *learned* from the suffering He endured. This is what God says.

Suffering completed Christ’s learning process. Yes, even Jesus (as God incarnate) could learn as a result of being made of flesh. This allowed Him to learn lessons He would otherwise not have known. The *reason* Christ learned from suffering is—grasp this!—pain kicks the mental learning mechanism into gear! *This* is why Solomon said “consider” when facing or undergoing adversity.

For instance, serious physical pain stops people in their tracks. They begin searching for the cause of the pain. Whether the discomfort of an oncoming heart attack, an acute headache or the inflammation of arthritis, people want to know why they hurt.

The apostle Paul begins connecting suffering to the process of God’s purpose in making sons who reflect



Why God Allows Human Suffering

Broadcast now available on
The World to Come at www.realtruth.org.

His character. Notice: “For it became Him [Christ]...in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation *perfect through sufferings*” (Heb. 2:10).

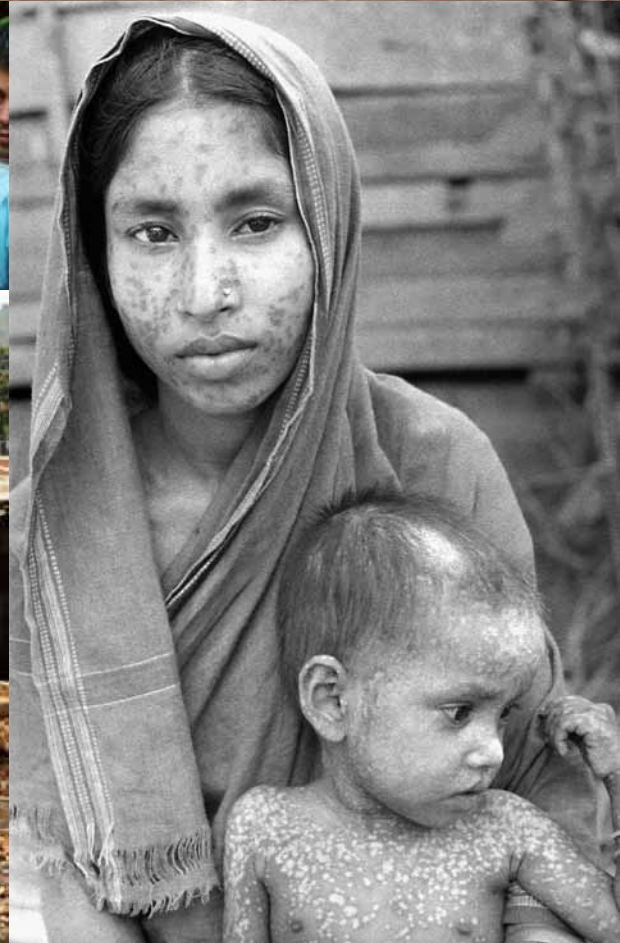
Jesus’ suffering actually perfected Him—made Him full, mature, com-

plete, as a begotten Son. This is what it says. Notice more: “And being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that OBEY Him” (Heb. 5:9). Christ qualified to “author eternal salvation” because He was willing to endure and learn from

God’s prescribed suffering process for all who are His sons—those who obey Him.

The salvation process involves *obeying* Christ. Let’s see more plainly something else obedience includes. The apostle Peter explains, “For even

“...suffering
builds
character—
it
strengthens
the person
who is
enduring it.”



hereunto were you [Christians] called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an *example*, that you should *follow His steps*" (I Pet. 2:21).

Let Peter's words speak to *you*. Christians do not just believe in Christ, they *copy* Him—they pattern their lives after His life! This was the whole purpose of His "example." This verse also shows that copying Christ means being willing to suffer as He did! We have seen that it is this very suffering that causes one to learn and to become perfect. Peter explains that God's servants are actually called to an entire life that involves periodic suffering.

He also explains that people sometimes have to "endure grief, suffering wrongfully"—that they must "take it patiently" because "this is acceptable with God" (I Pet. 2:19-20). (Also see Ecclesiastes 8:14.) It is acceptable with God because He knows suffering builds character—it strengthens the person who is enduring it.

I do not enjoy pain—of any kind. Neither do you. But, for those God is calling, it is *only* through suffering that we can learn what He intends in order to achieve salvation. Paul also wrote, "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also *live* with Him: *if we suffer*, we shall also REIGN with Him..." (II Tim. 2:11-12).

I repeat, suffering is absolutely essential to the character-building process. Therefore, because it is a process, *time* and *experience* are involved.

Paul recognized that suffering was tied to the resurrection of the dead, and actually looked forward to suffering, seeing it as a way of drawing closer to what Christ endured—as literally fellowshiping with Christ. Here is how God inspired him to record this connection: "That I may know Him [Christ], and the power of His resurrection, and the *fellowship of His sufferings*, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11).

Paul certainly did not seek out suffering, as do those who participate in fanatical crucifixion rituals each

spring. This is terribly wrong, and not what the verse intends.

A Lesson from Psalms

The author of Psalm 119, possibly King David, learned crucial lessons during his life, some involving great pain. Adversity and suffering was a pattern to the writer. He grasped the purpose of what he had to endure: "Before I was afflicted [suffered] I went astray: but now have I kept Your word" (Psa. 119:67).

The writer knew exactly what suffering was intended to produce. It brought him back into line with God's Word—and purpose in his life. And further: "It is good for me that I have been *afflicted*; that I might *learn* Your statutes" (Psa. 119:71). Suffering teaches us to obey God's laws.

Suffering certainly did not *feel* good to the writer, but he knew it *was* good! Mankind is now suffering terribly, but, in the end, it will be to its good. Six thousand years of suffering will eventually teach *all* humanity the central lesson that it cannot ignore God and still be happy. Many other vital lessons are byproducts of painful trials and tests.

The psalmist grasped the great truth that those who obey God—who practice righteousness—often suffer affliction. Many know of this next verse, recorded by David, but how many truly believe it, or the promise that accompanies it?—"Many are the *afflictions* of the righteous: but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones: not one of them is broken" (Psa. 34:19-20).

Job Proves the Point!

Most know of the patriarch Job, but little of the crucial lessons his life holds about how God works with His servants—even His greatest ones. Though Job lived thousands of years ago, his experience bears directly on us today.

The book of Job is fascinating, and contains an almost endless number of principles and lessons—in all 42 chapters. Our focus is merely on the first two. In Chapter 1, Satan appeared before God. God asked Satan, "Have

you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews [or shuns] evil?" (Job 1:8). This establishes Job's extraordinary character. While Solomon was the wisest man ever, Job was certainly the most righteous—and we will see most patient.

Also, what follows could not be considered *punishment* for evil-doing because God described Job as "perfect."

The account continues with Satan boasting he could turn Job from God, *if* he were permitted to bring terrible suffering upon him. Because Job was one of the richest men in the world, Satan argued that he merely obeyed God because it was in his best interest. In effect, God was *paying* him to be righteous!

Next, Satan caused tremendous destruction in Job's life, killing all of his 10 children and causing the death of all his servants and animals through four separate disasters. The devil wiped out the most precious things—people and possessions—in Job's life.

Yet Job's reaction to this devastating turn of events was not to attack or blame God. He acknowledged that all his blessings had *come* from God. In no way did he show a wrong attitude.

Satan's Second Attempt

Chapter 2 records that Satan again came before God: "One day the angels again came to present themselves before the Eternal, and among them the Adversary. 'Where have you been?' said the Eternal to the Adversary; and the Adversary answered, 'Roaming here and there, roving about the earth.'

"Then the Eternal said to the Adversary, 'Have you noticed that there is no one like My servant [Job] on earth, a blameless and an upright man, who reverences God and shuns evil? He still holds to his loyalty: it was idle of you to entice Me to undo him.' But the Adversary answered, 'He has saved his own skin! A man will let all he has go, to preserve his life. Only put out Your hand, touch his flesh and

bones, and see if he will not curse You to Your face!’ So the Eternal said to the Adversary, ‘There! He is in your power; only, spare his life!’” (Job 2:1-6; Moffatt translation).

While this passage concludes with God giving Satan authority to strike Job’s health, God retained final control over his life, with Satan unable to go one inch beyond what God expressly permitted. Studying the account shows specific limits to what Satan could do. Men’s ideas about the devil’s ability to disrupt God’s Plan for mankind collapse like the very *fall of man* theory that theologians invented.

The account continues with Satan smiting Job with horrible boils over his entire body. As a result, his wife tried to convince him to curse God. His response: “You speak as one of the foolish women...What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips” (Job 2:10).

This is a remarkable passage. It reveals Job’s understanding that human beings must sometimes “receive evil” from God. Notice God does not correct Job for misstating the facts! Rather, the passage *validates* Job, stating, “in all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

Grasp what you have read in this abbreviated description. God permitted catastrophic suffering in Job’s life—terrible physical and emotional pain beyond imagination! Yes, *God* directly allowed and endorsed this nightmarish suffering—but it was for an awesome purpose in Job’s life within God’s Master Plan.

The next 34 chapters primarily describe Job’s three friends blaming him for what had befallen him. Throughout, Job refused to accept blame, while continuing to identify God as the source of what had occurred. He knew God was working out an incredible purpose, both in his life—and with all mankind. He had complete faith in God’s overall control of events.

This account is recorded for us to understand! True Christians have faith in God’s decisions about what they must endure. While God could stop Christians from suffering, He does not

choose to, because it would thwart His purpose.

The last five chapters show how God eventually brought home certain lessons to Job about God’s greatness and Job’s insignificance in God’s sight.

Study this remarkable book for its application to *your* life!

Later, Job acknowledged, “No purpose of Yours can be restrained” (Job 42:2; ASV translation). He had previously said, “If a man die, shall he live again?...You will have a desire to the work of Your hands” (Job 14:14-15). Job knew God was working directly in his life, and that nothing could impede or restrain that purpose.

The same is true of you! Christians are purposed by God to develop His character. After a lifetime of overcoming, character development and spiritual growth, they are to be *born* as sons of God. This process involves suffering and affliction, sometimes both, and sometimes seemingly without end. But this is God’s purpose and no one can defeat it. God knows that life’s all-important learning process is inseparable from suffering.

Is God a Source of Evil?

While most wonder why God does not stop suffering, there is a related question some ask: “Can evil come directly *from God*?” God answers: “I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, *and create evil*: I the LORD do all these things” (Isa. 45:6-7).

Obviously, Isaiah agrees with Job. Evil can come from God, and, though always within God’s overall control and purpose, Satan is often the vehicle that brings it. I cannot stress enough how all true servants of God recognize the central role of suffering within the learning and character-building process, crucial to all whom God calls to His truth!

The apostle Paul *lived* what he taught! Take time to study what Paul’s ministry required him to endure. An astonishing passage—II Cor. 11:24-30—reveals that people can—with God’s help—handle far more discomfort, pain and suffering than they think—if they see its purpose.

Yet, in the grand scheme of things—when compared to the reward that God has in store for all His begotten sons and daughters—how really difficult was the suffering? Paul answers, “For I reckon that the *sufferings* of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us [at the Resurrection]” (Rom. 8:18).

Nothing we endure in this life even remotely compares to the eternal life of supreme happiness in God’s kingdom awaiting those who serve Him. Nevertheless, suffering can be very difficult for the moment—for “this present time.” God understands this, as the One who designed the process, and knows exactly when to let up—when the intended lessons have been learned! God has promised to never allow you to be tried beyond what you can endure. Read I Corinthians 10:13.

Job knew God’s supreme *wisdom* was at work in all that happened to him—everything. After acknowledging God’s sovereign power over his life, he was blessed far beyond what he had before his long trial. Faith in God paid off in the end.

Remember, God alternates “days of prosperity” with “days of adversity” throughout life. Consider that this means either one will always be followed by the other. If you are enjoying good times, difficult ones are coming. If you are experiencing difficult times, good ones will follow. David knew this, stating, “weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning [or soon]” (Psa. 30:5).

This is God’s promise. If you submit to Him—if you obey Him in all points—this principle will be fulfilled in *your* life—both now and eternally! Those in the only Church that Jesus Christ built deeply understand this.

A booklet you need to read is *Why Man Cannot Solve His Problems*. You will learn knowledge that is so important, but known by so few. Another vital book *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* reveals how the abundant life will come to all people and nations tomorrow, but can be experienced by you *today*. □

MIDDLE EAST

Iran Declares Itself a Nuclear State



■ **NUCLEAR PROCLAMATION:** Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad addresses thousands of people at Azadi (Freedom) Square in the capital city, Tehran, during the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. While speaking, the president declared Iran a “nuclear state” (Feb. 11, 2010).

PHOTO ATTA KENARE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Weeks of Internet chatter, calls for stricter sanctions on Iran, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declaring that something was going to happen on February 11 led to one pronouncement on the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Republic: Iran was now a “nuclear state.”

“I want to announce with a loud voice here that the first consignment of 20 percent enriched uranium was produced and was put at the disposal of the scientists,” he said to a gathering of thousands waving flags and banners to demonstrate their support.

Iran, the world’s fifth largest oil exporter, has consistently claimed it is committed to the peaceful use of nuclear technology while denying enriching uranium for weapons. It maintains its nuclear work is for generating electricity and producing radioactive isotopes to be used for radiation therapy in hospitals.

But world powers, particularly Israel and the United States, are not convinced of the peaceful nature of its work.

Weeks earlier, in his first State of the Union address, U.S. President Barack Obama promised Iran would pay a price if it does not abandon its

nuclear program, stating “...as Iran’s leaders continue to ignore their obligations, there should be no doubt: they, too, will face growing consequences.”

Tension over Iran’s nuclear ambition rose with the announcement by Mr. Ahmadinejad that he would step up uranium enrichment. Iran is reportedly prepared to increase uranium enrichment if the United States attempts to halt its nuclear program.

German newspaper *Der Spiegel* claimed to have access to an intelligence dossier showing the existence of a secret military branch of Iran’s nuclear research program, whose aim of producing a bomb has reached an advanced stage. According to the paper, “Experts believe that Iran’s scientists could produce a primitive, truck-sized version of the bomb this year, but that it would have to be compressed to a size that would fit into a nuclear warhead to yield the strategic threat potential that has Israel and the West so alarmed—and that they could reach that stage by sometime between 2012 and 2014.”

In response to Iran’s refusal to discontinue its uranium development, the United Nations, along with other Western nations, have repeatedly threatened sanctions against the

nation, including a fuel embargo, which would likely cause Iranian gasoline prices to soar as Iran has no refineries and imports almost half of its total oil for gasoline consumption, and travel restrictions for senior members of the Revolutionary Guard and nuclear scientists.

According to *The Associated Press*, the last round of sanctions, enacted in March 2008, “authorized inspection of cargo shipments by two Iranian companies that are suspected of containing banned items. It also introduced financial monitoring of two banks with suspected links to proliferation activities and called on all countries ‘to exercise vigilance’ in entering into new trade commitments with Iran, including granting export credits, guarantees or insurance.”

Russia, the UN member with the strongest ties to Tehran, has wavered on the idea of further sanctions and does not support a nuclear strike on one of its largest trading partners.

According to non-profit organization *Réalité*, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reassured Russian leadership in September of last year that unilateral pre-emptive strikes against Iranian nuclear installations would not be launched by Israel as long as Moscow did not supply Iran with an S-300 missile system, which would allow Iran to launch nuclear warheads.

A month later, Mr. Netanyahu sent evidence to Moscow that Russian scientists had been assisting Iran in building a nuclear bomb. According to Mr. Netanyahu, Russian companies have also supplied material to help produce ballistic missiles.

Russia and Iran heavily rely upon one another. According to one commentator, “For Russia, Iran is a regional power and an important trade partner. Russia needs Iran for arms sales, as well as for maintaining the security of Russia’s southern borders; Iran needs Russia for military equipment, energy security and political protection at the U.N. and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)” (ibid.). □

EUROPE IN CRISIS

Greek Deficit Threatens EU Currency



■ **ON STRIKE:** Police push demonstrators protesting against austerity measures that the Greek government is considering to combat the nation's public debt crisis (Feb. 24, 2010).

PHOTO: LOUISA GOULIAMAKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Following the Greek government's admission of financial instability, public outrage resulted in repeated strikes in Athens and Thessaloniki.

More than 20,000 demonstrators walked off their jobs for a one-day general strike in protest of a possible plan to save some \$6.7 billion through wage freezes or cuts for government workers, increased taxes, raising the retirement age from 61 to 63 by 2015, and higher gasoline prices.

The New York Times reported that the "government is under intense pressure to plug a budget deficit estimated at 12.7 percent of gross domestic product and to avert the first national default among the 16 countries that use the euro."

The latest European Union member to announce a major financial crisis, Greece reportedly needs about \$73 billion to combat its bloated budget deficit and has asked for financial assistance from other countries.

The news lowered the value of the euro and brought into question the

sustainability of a united European currency.

"Most euro zone countries oppose going to the International Monetary Fund for reasons of political prestige and to avoid any admission that EU budget discipline rules have failed," *Reuters* reported. The EU prohibits countries such as Germany and France from putting together a strictly financial bailout package.

According to *BBC News*, while visiting French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou "pledged to 'take any necessary measures' to reduce Greece's deficit."

"The uncertainty has recently buffeted the euro and the problems have extended to Spain and Portugal, which are also struggling with their deficits. The possibility of Greece or one of the other stricken countries being unable to pay its debts—and either needing an EU bailout or having to abandon the euro—has been called the biggest threat yet to the single currency" (*ibid.*). □

EU's Economic Troubles Spark Need for "Major Reform"

Economic contractions, massive deficits, sluggish growth and looming bankruptcy among European Union member-states are contributing to the Continent's instability.

"The eurozone faces the danger of a 'doubledip' recession after Germany's economy retreated into stagnation...Germany was the biggest drag, recording zero growth in the final three months of 2009 after emerging from recession earlier in the year" (*Daily Mail*). A severe European winter worsened the economic downturn.

In response, EU President Herman Van Rompuy recently called for a new, stronger EU economic regime empowered to legislate, supervise and impose budgets. "The crisis has a potential negative impact on longer-term growth prospects," Mr. Van Rompuy told a Christian Social Union party conference in Wildbad Kreuth, Germany (*The Financial Times*).

In response, plans for major reform are taking shape—reforms that could significantly redefine Europe.

Mr. Van Rompuy "suggested ominously that a window for 'major reform' has been opened by the Greek debt crisis, which has undermined the euro and has shown up the limits of EU power to co-ordinate government spending among the 16 countries sharing the same currency" (*Morning Star*).

Sarah Gaskell of Open Europe, an independent EU think tank, told *The Associated Press* that she views recent actions of Mr. Van Rompuy as a "power grab" and that he is pushing "forward economic integration in a way that's not necessarily transparent." □

Drug-related Rape Cases Rising



■ **DANGEROUS CONCOCTION:** Police display drugs confiscated from men accused of using a cocktail of illegal substances to commit drug-induced sexual assaults.

PHOTO: KAREL ZWANEVELD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The use of drugs to commit sexual crimes is increasing, according to a report by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), a United Nations subsidiary that monitors illegal drug use worldwide. “Date-rape drugs” as they are termed, include Rohypnol, Ketamine (gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid or GHB), gamma-Butyrolactone (GBL, a type of solvent), morphine, codeine and methadone.

The report said that while stricter measures and awareness campaigns have aided in reducing the misuse of the drug Rohypnol to commit sexual assaults, criminals have now found other substances to use in place of it, which has led to the increase. These include “gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid (GHB), a psychotropic substance that was not under international control until recently, as well as substances that remain outside drug conventions such as ketamine and gamma-Butyrolactone (GBL),” which can be easily procured from online pharmacies or from unlicensed chemical factories.

“What is alarming is the unscrupulous way in which those drugs are used upon unwitting victims—the drugs, which are usually disguised in food or drinks, are introduced in dosages that are significantly higher than the dosages used for therapeutic purposes—a practice which entails serious health risks for the victims,” the INCB statement revealed.

Hamid Ghodse, president of INCB, told *BBC News* that predators employ these drugs to lower victims’ inhibitions and in some cases, cause them to forget the incident ever occurred.

“These drugs are used so as to tremendously reduce people’s resistance to unwanted sexual activity and then subsequently they might not even remember what happened,” he said.

In its report, the INCB urged governments to work closely with pharmaceutical companies and the police to halt the illegal use of these substances, which are still legal in certain countries. The United Kingdom government classifies GHB and GBL as Class C drugs—meaning that possession can only result in two years imprisonment and paying a fine—but in Argentina, punishment for the possession of cannabis is not constitutional. On the other hand, in Mexico, the possession of five grams of cannabis, 500 milligrams of heroin and two grams of opium are absolved from criminal prosecution and drug use in Brazil is not even punishable by law.

The INCB report also highlighted the issue of prescription medication abuse, especially in the U.S.

“In the United States, the abuse of prescription drugs is now the second most important drug abuse issue after cannabis, with 6.2 million people abusing prescription drugs in 2008, more than the total number of people who abused cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, MDMA (‘ecstasy’) and inhalants.” □

AMERICAS

New Americas Group to Exclude United States

Latin American and Caribbean leaders, including CARICOM, a conglomerate of 15 Caribbean nations, announced at the end of their latest Rio Group meeting that they will form a new regional association under the provisional name of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) that will exclude the United States and Canada.

According to Mexican President Felipe Calderón, the aim of this group is to foster integration, promote commerce and to more effectively address the issues of countries in the region.

Many Latin American leaders have felt discontented by the current Organization of American States (OAS), which is comprised of 35 member-states from the Western Hemisphere. They maintain that it is not adequately addressing the specific needs of their countries, which is why a separate organization is required.

As leaders made the announcement at the end of the summit, however, there was uncertainty among participants regarding the future role of the group. Chilean President-elect Sebastián Piñera cautioned members to retain the importance of the OAS, calling it “a permanent organisation that has its own functions” (*BBC News*).

According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, “Regional support for the US has steadily declined over the past decade as the war on terror has turned US attention away from its neighbors to the south. Most analysts see this move as part of a gradual shift away from the US and toward growing global trade partners such as China and India.” □

THE WORLD TO COME

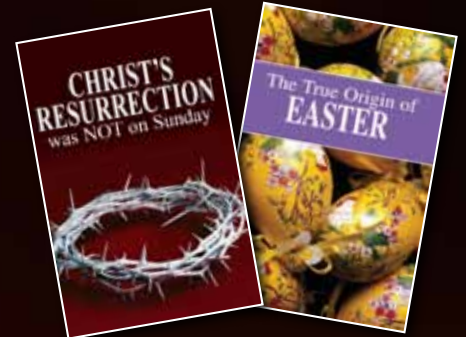
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