

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2006

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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

AIDS

...25 YEARS LATER
Does a Cure Exist?

OUR DWINDLING FOOD SUPPLY

THE REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

VOL. IV | NO. 6 | NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2006

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America's Idols
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the Rich and Famous?
Millions sit hypnotized by the
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PHOTO: MCT

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The preparation and production of this magazine involved the work of editors, proofreaders, graphic artists, illustrators, writers, researchers and those who support the Work of God.

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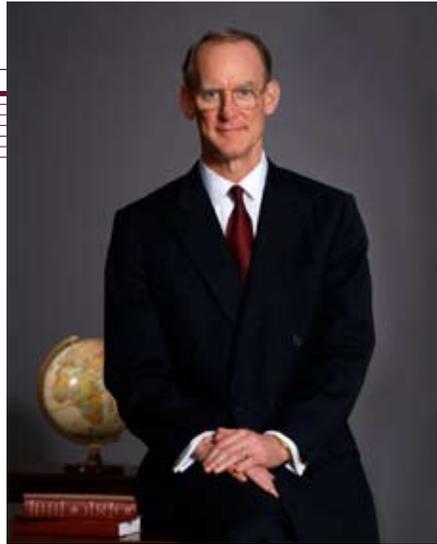
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Are Christmas Traditions *Christian*?

MERCHANTS REGULARLY REPORT that over 60% of their annual retail sales occur during the Christmas shopping season. This represents a tremendous amount of gift buying. Most today believe that gift-giving comes from the Bible example of the “three wise men” (the Bible gives no number) presenting gifts to Christ. Is this true? Where *did* exchanging gifts come from, and what does God’s Word say about it?

The *Bibliotheca Sacra* states, “The interchange of presents between friends is a like characteristic of Christmas and the Saturnalia, and *must have been adopted by Christians from the pagans*, as the admonition of Tertullian plainly shows” (Vol. 12, pp. 153-155).

Like every other aspect of Christmas, the shocking truth is that even this supposed Christian custom does *not* come from the Bible. It is an irony that people love to believe they are following the custom of the wise men giving to Christ, when actually they are giving almost exclusively *to each other!* What hypocrisy! Christ is completely forgotten.

The Bible actually teaches that Christians should not keep birthdays. Numerous scriptures make this principle clear. (Read our reprint article “Are Birthday Celebrations Christian?”) However, what if you went to a birthday party that had been prepared for you and everybody gave gifts to each other and you were left out? The idea is ridiculous! If this happened, you would say that people were being *selfish* and forgetting you. In fact,

most people give to others on Christmas merely because they *expect to receive gifts themselves!*

Let’s briefly return to the “wise men” who gave gifts to Christ. The scripture describing this is Matthew 2:1-11: “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born *King of the Jews*?...And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: *and when they had opened their treasures*, they presented unto Him *gifts*; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

It is commonly supposed that these were birthday presents for “baby Jesus.” But is this what the Bible actually says? Absolutely not! First, it is important to note that they *did* give the gifts to Jesus. They did not stand in His presence and exchange gifts among themselves or give them to others. The gifts were “presented *unto Him*.” Also, they arrived well after His “birthday.” This is another reason these could not have been “birthday presents.”

A long-standing, ancient custom of the East was to present gifts when coming before a king. These men understood they were in the presence of the “King of the Jews.” The Bible carries many examples of people sending gifts to kings or presenting them upon arrival into their presence. This custom is common today when ambassadors or others come into the presence of a world leader.

Finally, notice what the *Adam Clarke Commentary*, volume 5, page 46, states about what really happened on this occasion: “Verse 11. *They presented unto him*

gifts. The people of the east never approach the presence of kings and great personages, without a *present* in their hands. This custom is often noticed in the Old Testament, and still prevails in the east, and in some of the newly discovered South Seas Islands.” Gifts were customarily presented to kings.

What could be more plain?

The Origin of the Christmas Tree

Another tradition people blindly observed centers around the “Christmas tree.” The modern Christmas tree originated in Germany. But the Germans got it from the Romans, who got it from the Babylonians and the Egyptians.

The following demonstrates what the Babylonians believe about the origin of the Christmas tree: “An old Babylonish fable told of *an evergreen tree which sprang out of a dead tree stump*. The old stump symbolized the dead Nimrod, the new evergreen tree symbolized that Nimrod had come to life again in Tammuz! Among the Druids the *oak* was sacred, among the Egyptians it was the palm, and *in Rome it was the fir*, which was decorated with red berries during the Saturnalia!” (Walsh, *Curiosities of Popular Customs*, p. 242).

Frederick J. Haskin’s *Answers to Questions* states, “The Christmas tree is from Egypt, and its origin dates from a period long anterior to the Christmas Era.” Did you know this—that the Christmas tree *long preceded* Christianity?

Most aspects of Christmas are not referred to in the Bible. Of course, the reason is that they are not from God—they are not part of the way He wants people to worship Him. The Christmas tree, however, is directly mentioned in the Bible! Turn to Jeremiah 10:2-5, “Thus says the LORD, *Learn not the way of the heathen*... For the CUSTOMS of the people are VAIN: for one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of

the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.”

This plain description of the modern Christmas tree is clear. God directly refers to it as “the way of the heathen.” Just as directly, He commands His people to “learn not the way of the heathen,” calling these customs “VAIN.” Verse 23 adds a remarkable and powerful statement: “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks *to direct his [own] steps*.” God must teach people how to live. Man simply cannot figure out God’s ways for himself.

There is no room in Jeremiah 10 to believe, as some have tried to suggest, that because these trees are powerless of themselves, it is not really *forbidden* to have a Christmas tree. God condemns the putting up of pagan (Christmas) trees with this plain Bible command!

The Source of Holly Wreaths, Yule Logs and Mistletoe

The *Encyclopedia Americana* states, “The holly, the mistletoe, the Yule log...are relics of pre-Christian time.” In other words, paganism! The Yule log was commonly used in a rite of Teutonic nature worship.

Frederick Haskin further states, “The use of *Christmas wreaths* is believed by authorities to be *traceable to the pagan customs* of decorating buildings and places of worship at the feast which took place at the same time as Christmas.”

The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, under “Celastrales,” exposes the origin of the holly wreath: “European pagans brought holly sprays into their homes, offering them to the fairy people of the forests as refuge from the harsh winter weather.

During the *Saturnalia*, the Roman winter festival, *branches of holly* were exchanged as tokens of friendship. The earliest Roman Christians apparently used holly as a decoration at the Christmas season.”

There are dozens of different types of holly. Virtually all of them come in *male and female varieties*—such as “Blue Prince and Blue Princess” or “Blue Boy and Blue Girl” or “China Boy and China Girl.” Female holly plants cannot have berries unless a nearby male plant pollinates them. It is easy to see why the holly wreath found its way into pagan rituals as a token of friendship and FERTILITY!

Christmas is incomplete to many unless it involves “kissing under the mistletoe.” This pagan custom was natural on a night that involved much revelry done in the spirit of drunken orgies. Just like today, this “kissing” usually occurred at the beginning of any modern Saturnalia/Christmas celebration. I will never forget having to always kiss my friends’ mothers *upon entering each of their houses every Christmas*. It was the first thing that we did. I hated it—but it was something I “had to do”! Mistletoe was considered to have special powers of healing for those who “reveled” under it.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, under “Santalales,” states, “The European mistletoe is thought to have had special ritual significance in Druidical ceremonies and lives in folklore today, its special status as the Christmas mistletoe having come from Anglo-Saxon times.” Mistletoe is a parasite that lives on oak trees. (Recall that the Druids worshipped in oak tree groves.) The ancient Celts (associated with the Druids) used to give mistletoe as an herbal remedy to barren animals to make them *fertile*. It is still referred to as “*all healer*” in Celtic.

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WHAT NEXT FOR POST-WAR ISRAEL?



■ **WAR IN LEBANON:** The 2006 Israel-Hezbollah conflict marked the first time in history that the state of Israel did not achieve a clear and decisive military victory over its enemies.

PHOTOS: MCT/FLASH 90

Israel waged a 34-day war in Lebanon against Iranian- and Syrian-backed Hezbollah. In the aftermath, what lies ahead for the Jewish state?

BY MARK P. DENEE

THE MIDDLE EAST is a region of seemingly endless conflict. In recent times one can bring to mind the First Lebanon War (1982), the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the First Palestinian Intifada (1987-1990), the Gulf War (1990-91), the Second Intifada (2000-present), and the war in Iraq (2003-present).

And then on July 12, 2006, with the incursion into Israel by a Hezbollah unit that captured two Israeli soldiers and killed three, the Second Lebanon War began.

While the Israeli-Hezbollah War was comparatively minor, the potential implications are not. In addition, some believe this conflict to be another part of the greater, intensifying “clash of civilizations” that began on 9/11.

The War and the Aftermath

On the heels of having a soldier captured by Palestinian terrorists in Gaza, five Israeli soldiers were killed on July 12. Attempting to rescue fellow soldiers, another five died. Israel blamed Beirut, citing that the original raid was carried out from Lebanese territory and that the Lebanese cabinet included two Hezbollah ministers.

With Russian-made Katyusha and other rockets raining down on northern Israeli cities that same morning, Israel responded with artillery and air strikes. By the next day, Israel had bombed the Beirut International Airport and the main Beirut-Damascus highway, and imposed an air and sea blockade against Lebanon. On July 23, Israeli land forces crossed into Lebanon, bent on eliminating Hezbollah rocket launch sites.

In addition to firing rockets at

northern Israel, Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shiite militia, was able to destroy several Israeli tanks, disable the INS Hanit, a Sa'ar 5-class missile boat (built by Northrop Grumman), and ultimately kill over 100 Israeli soldiers. Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported that Hezbollah was a trained, skilled, well-organized, highly motivated infantry that was equipped with the cream of the crop of modern weaponry from the arsenals of Syria, Iran, Russia and China.

On August 11, the UN Security Council approved Resolution 1701 in an effort to end the conflict. It demanded the disarming of Hezbollah, the full control of Lebanon by the government of Lebanon, and no paramilitary forces in Lebanon south of the Litani River. Beirut, Hezbollah and the Israeli government agreed to the resolution, and a cease-fire took effect on August 14.

However, the conflict accomplished little, if anything at all, and likely exacerbated an already extremely difficult situation. According to one senior Lebanese cabinet minister, the two Hezbollah cabinet ministers made it clear just prior to the cease-fire that Hezbollah had no intention of

disarming and/or giving up their positions in southern Lebanon. In addition, both the Lebanese government (which deployed its troops to the south) and the UN indicated that it was not their intention to force Hezbollah to disarm.

More recently, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has invited Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to begin peace talks, while at the same time ruling out the possibility of similar talks with Syria. This is the second invitation from Israel. Shortly after the war, Mr. Siniora rejected similar calls by Mr. Olmert, and said that Lebanon would be “the last Arab country that could sign a peace agreement with Israel.”

Immediately after the fighting ended, both sides and their supporters claimed victory, although many ultimately began to question Israel’s difficulty in accomplishing its military and security goals. *The Economist* concluded that Hezbollah had emerged with a military and political victory simply by surviving the conflict. Many editorials in Western papers began to question the supposed invincibility of the Israeli Defense Forces.

On September 22, approximately 800,000 Hezbollah supporters gathered in Beirut for a victory rally.

Meanwhile, the Swiss-based International Relations and Security Network reported that the political shift in Israel appears to be toward the right, and that if an election were held today the Likud party would return to power. (Though led by Benjamin Netanyahu, the leadership of Likud is likely still subject to a primary vote before any national election.)

The Media and International Opinion

When the conflict began, international opinion was largely along typical lines: the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada defended Israel’s right to self-defense. Iran, Syria and Yemen voiced strong support for Hezbollah, while the Arab League issued statements condemning both sides.

Yet world opinion quickly changed, possibly due to international media coverage. Charges of “disproportionate response” and calls for the “immediate cessation of Israeli hostilities” were loud and frequent.

Andrew McCarthy of *National Review* wrote the following, outlining Israel’s “moral” predicament, decision and result:

“Go back just a few months ago to Israel’s predicament. Day-after-day, Hezbollah fired rockets that had

no purpose other than to slaughter Israeli citizens indiscriminately. Yet it was Israel that was cited for purported international law violations by the ineffable Kofi Annan, among other trans-national progressives, who claimed its retaliation was ‘disproportionate’ because of undue collateral damage. (A dubious surmise since Hezbollah terrorists, by dressing like civilians, moving among civilians, and using civilians as shields, make it hard to tell who is truly ‘collateral.’)”

Immediately following the ceasefire, Hezbollah kicked its public-relations campaign into high gear, handing out thousands of dollars in “aid” to the Lebanese, making sure the cameras of the world captured it all. However, Charlie Moore, senior producer at *CNN*, referred to Hezbollah’s post-war presentation to the world media as a “dog-and-pony show,” due to the perception of staging, misrepresentation, and strict control of all interviews.

Between a “Rock and a Hard Place”

With Israel’s military and security objectives regarding Hezbollah unaccomplished, rising public dissatisfaction with the government, and the majority of world opinion edging another notch or two to the anti-Israeli

REGIONAL POWERBROKERS



FOUAD SINIORA
Elected to office in July 2005, Mr. Siniora is the 46th Prime Minister of Lebanon. His ineffectiveness in controlling Hezbollah has led to some saying he is complicit.



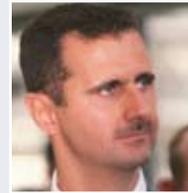
EHUD OLMERT
Officially elected as Israeli Prime Minister on April 14, 2006, Mr. Olmert has been acting in the position since Ariel Sharon’s stroke. Polls show the war hurt his standing.



BENJAMIN NETANYAHU
Former Prime Minister and leader of the conservative Likud party, Mr. Netanyahu is among the most hawkish of the Israeli government.



MAHMOUD ABBAS
The leader of the Fatah party in the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas was elected president in January 2005. He is considered a key negotiator in the region.



BASHAR AL-ASSAD
President of Syria since July 2000, his much talked about Baath party is thought responsible for assisting the insurgency in Iraq and allowing Iranian weapons into Lebanon.



MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD
Outspoken and controversial president of Iran, Mr. Ahmadinejad is thought to influence many of the events in the Middle East.

side, Israel remains caught between the proverbial “rock and a hard place.” In fact, if we consider the bigger picture, the situation is growing ever worse for the Jewish state.

Henry Kissinger—national security adviser for former U.S. President Richard Nixon, and secretary of state for presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford—warned in a *Washington Post* opinion column that Hezbollah was still dangerous after its month-long conflict with Israel. “Hezbollah’s next move is likely to be an attempt to dominate the Beirut government by intimidation and, using the prestige gained in the war, manipulating democratic procedures,” he wrote.

The political normalization of terrorist/fascist/extremist groups, whether in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Iran or China, should raise red flags to most in the world. Recall Hitler’s so-called legitimate National Socialist German Workers’ Party in Germany during the 1930s.

Also consider the ongoing difficulties in Gaza and the West Bank—a people and a government being torn between two political powers— Hamas and Fatah. Violent clashes between the two are not uncommon. The majority of Palestinians support Hamas, but most of the world supports President Mahmoud Abbas, a relative moderate, and his Fatah party.

During a recent tour in the region, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the United States was “very concerned” with the situation, and called on Islamic militants to cooperate with President Abbas. She added that the Hamas government cannot govern in the region.

Mr. Abbas has since threatened to dismiss the Hamas cabinet in an attempt to break the political deadlock and to release the hold on international aid. In a recent visit to the Gaza Strip, he refused to meet with Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, a senior political leader of Hamas, who told a rally that his party would never be pushed out of power, compromise on its principles or recognize Israel.

Political unrest in the Palestinian



■ **LYNCHPIN DEAL:** Hamas political director Khaled Mashaal speaks to supporters in Damascus, Syria, on October 12, 2006. Mr. Mashaal is seen by many as the lynchpin to any deal that could end the political stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock.

PHOTO: MCT

territories will eventually lead to social unrest, which at the very least will bring blame on Israel and likely the resumption of attacks.

Dr. Rice’s visit came on the heels of 135 former world leaders (including former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former British Prime Minister John Major) calling for “fresh thinking and the injection of new political will” to resolve the conflict between Arabs and Israelis. “As long as the conflict lasts, it will generate instability and violence in the region and beyond,” the group said.

In earlier visits to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Dr. Rice received both a polite hearing and a lecture from the United States’ two most powerful friends in the region—that, in effect, the Middle East conflicts are hinged to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel must also contend with increasingly belligerent statements and actions from Iran, with its calls for Israel to be “wiped from the map” and describing the Holocaust as a myth. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke to thousands at an annual pro-Palestinian rally (i.e., Quds or Jerusalem Day, which calls for the handing of the city to Palestinians) and predicted

Israel’s demise. He warned Israeli allies of the “boiling wrath” of the region’s people, describing his warning as an “ultimatum”: “You should not complain that we did not give a warning. We are saying this explicitly now. If a hurricane starts be rest assured that the dimensions of this hurricane will not be limited to the geographic borders of Palestine.”

Finally, Israel must maintain its relationship with its primary ally, the United States, which is experiencing its own struggles in Iraq, as well as with Iran, North Korea, China and Russia. With political change afoot in the U.S., whether in the 2006 mid-term elections or the 2008 Presidential election, Israel should expect more difficult times ahead.

Regardless of how situations with Hezbollah, Hamas or Iran develop—regardless of political change in Israel or the U.S.—more difficult times are now just ahead for the entire world. □

SUGGESTED READING:

The prophet Daniel spoke of “the TIME OF THE END.” The apostle Peter said, “There shall come in the LAST DAYS *scoffers*.” Paul said, “In the LAST DAYS *perilous times* shall come.” Christ’s disciples asked Him about “the END OF THE WORLD.” Has this time come? Can you be sure?





MIDTERM ELECTIONS

What's at Stake for America?

BY CHET R. ECHELBERGER

THE IRAQ WAR—Islamic militancy—economic nationalism—illegal immigration—these and other issues will play a decisive role in determining which party wields power in the 2006 midterm elections.

The thought of international issues playing such a prominent role in a U.S. election is startling. In a world increasingly characterized by

the globalization of business and finance, not to mention terrorism and disease, it could be argued this is long overdue.

In every other instance—through two world wars, a Cold War and the victories, stalemates and defeats America experienced in lesser conflicts—foreign affairs have usually played only a supporting role in the midterm choices voters made.

But that may be about to end. The

combination of unpopular, costly wars raging abroad, a suddenly skeptical economic outlook, a continuing sense of vulnerability to terrorism, plus grassroots movements regarding economic and immigration policy promise to make the 2006 midterm election the most outwardly oriented in U.S. history.

How will the American electorate digest the foreign issues that are now thrust to the forefront of the political stage? Will they seriously consider the implications of their vote?



Americans have a simple mentality when it comes to what they want in politics—the maximum benefits with the lowest cost possible. They want simplicity.

The American public also wants entertainment. People want their politics to fit into a 30-second commercial filled with one- or two-syllable words. They do not want to listen to “long-winded” debates about social reform. Many do not care to be educated on the matters on which they will vote.

Mudslinging attack ads spewing accusations, slander and insults are popular. Elections have become a popularity contest in which one candidate tries to prove his opponent is unqualified. The one who paints his opponent into a “politically incorrect” corner often wins the election, while the candidate who tries to be civil is usually defeated.

Race for Control

Recent public opinion polls have asked, “What is the most important issue facing the United States?” The war in Iraq and terrorism usually finish first, while the economy is close behind. Other issues that could influence a voter’s decision include immigration, health care and gasoline prices.

However, the election results will not have a profound impact on U.S. economic policy. If Republicans hold on to reduced majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, they will continue to have the upper hand on the budget, tax issues and regulatory matters.

If the Democrats manage to recapture even one house of Congress, the dynamics of the legislative process

would change. Yet only a handful of Democratic initiatives would actually become law, since the White House will remain Republican-controlled, and the Bush administration will continue to set priorities that limit congressional action.

Only proposals that attract sizable Republican support in Congress will be able to overcome White House opposition.

Perhaps the thorniest topic in this election season is immigration policy. Congress failed miserably to deal with this emotionally-charged issue earlier this year, despite efforts by the Bush administration to craft a compromise. Opposition to illegal immigrants cuts across both main political parties and regional lines. Dedicated free market advocates (whether Republican or Democrat) prefer highly liberal

approaches that permit large numbers of foreign workers.

Labor unions, normally left of center on most social issues and a pillar of the Democratic Party, are normally opposed to unrestricted immigration. But in ethnic communities where voters give large majorities to Democratic candidates, immigration is a highly personal matter, as it involves reuniting families.

If the Democrats win back the Congress, President Bush may throw the issue back at them, daring them to come up with a compromise solution that can gain strong bipartisan support while meeting the requirements he laid out in his own proposals. It would be a stern test of whether the Democrats can use Congressional power in a constructive way, rather than as mainly a prelude to the 2008 presidential campaign.

What Is Being Done?

However, there is a larger dilemma facing American politics than just the political issues. The very lifeblood of democracy is under threat. Democracy is above all a process of citizen participation—and it is precisely that participation that has been weakened by the private financing of campaigns.

Here are some of the concerns:

- Voter turnout for elections has declined.
- Cynicism about politics and government has steadily grown, especially among young people.
- The cost of running for office continues to escalate. Fewer citizens can afford to run for office.
- The number of uncontested and non-competitive elections has increased.
- The number of young people who want to dedicate their lives to politics or government service has fallen.
- A 2004 Harris poll reported that 80% of Americans think “big companies and political action committees exercise too much power and influence on politicians.”
- Less than 1% of Americans contribute to the vast majority of private money going to fund campaigns.

A pro-democracy movement has emerged, committed to deepening the democratic process in the United States. Fundamental to this movement is the struggle to change the way election campaigns are financed, especially by ensuring public financing for serious candidates.

Private money in elections undermines the democratic political process. Proposals to change the way elections are financed are considered the first and most important step in resolving this situation. If private money continues to dominate American politics, the desires of the affluent will control legislation and the rest of the citizenry will be ignored.

If the campaign finance laws are changed, it is believed this will help create the true democracy that most want—one in which laws and policy reflect the will of the majority of the American people. Democracy Matters, a student activist organization, works under the motto “CHANGE ELECTIONS. CHANGE AMERICA.”

Why Are the Midterms Important?

Control of Congress, the legislative branch of the U.S. Government, is at stake. Republicans have controlled both chambers since 1994, except for a brief time when Democrats held the Senate.

At first glance, the Republicans face a discouraging political landscape: on the defensive over corruption allegations and a former congressman’s sexually explicit emails, with President George W. Bush weaker in opinion polls.

While the general picture may favor the Democrats, much could change before the November elections and the local realities of many races—such as the advantage of incumbents—could give Republicans the upper hand.

In the House, the Republican Party holds 231 seats, while the Democrats hold 201, with one Democrat-leaning independent and two vacancies. In the Senate, Republicans hold 55 seats to the Democrats’ 44, with one Democrat-leaning independent.

Is Democracy Waning?

With a misinformed electorate swayed by biased news coverage and slick campaign ads, can an objective democracy survive?

The majority of the country is polarized into two camps. Elected officials are often voted for on a partisan basis or for their personality rather than how they stand on issues that have direct bearing on the nation’s future. This does not ensure that the best qualified person is put into office. In some cases voters may not even know where their chosen candidate stands on the issues.

What do these present trends in Western democracies bode for the 21st century? Noted political author and U.S. Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork once said, “It is impossible to say what the outcome will be, but for the moment our trajectory continues downward.”

How true!

Mankind cannot see where its path leads. The God of the Bible reveals what the 21st century holds for the world. Many Bible prophecies have a dual meaning or fulfillment, and they apply to both the ancient Israelites and their modern descendants, primarily the inhabitants of the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain and New Zealand. God warns a sudden national punishment will befall these nations of the West for their disobedience (Isa. 29:5-6). He will use a foreign power to invade and conquer them (Isa. 10:5-6)—a sobering lesson to the whole world that God *does* intervene in the affairs of men, and that His laws, given for our good, **MUST** be obeyed (Ezek. 5:13-15).

Western democracies, secular educators and politicians have put man, science and human reasoning in place of Almighty God. Misguided scholars and theologians have undermined the authority of the Holy Scriptures. The secular press has saturated society with godless notions of unbridled personal freedom without responsibility—and

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Our Dwindling Food Supply

Disastrous drought in the United States and Australia is sharply reducing global grain stockpiles as the world's population continues to grow. Brace yourself for a steep spike in food prices and even extreme shortages in the near future that will impact millions!

EACH OCTOBER, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issues its "World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimates" report to give an annual snapshot of how the world's burgeoning demand for food compares with global stockpiles of a variety of crops.

In its Oct. 12, 2006 report, the USDA reported that searing, blistering droughts in the United States and Australia—historically, the world's primary bread baskets—have caused a dramatic drop in international grain supplies.

As the world population continues to swell, this ominous downward trend indicates that supplies will tighten, sharply raising the cost of feeding millions of people and straining relations between nations.

The plunge in millions of tons of grain grown throughout the world in recent years is staggering! Yet most people remain oblivious to what this foreshadows and how they will be directly impacted.

Often considered an antiquated, irrelevant book, the Holy Bible shows

that as it becomes increasingly difficult to offset the world's relentlessly growing hunger problem, famine ultimately will stalk countries and become a major gnawing geopolitical issue—even in prosperous Western nations accustomed to abundance and no lack of food. Diminishing stockpiles also will fan the flames of inflation as demand outstrips supply, putting upward pressure on prices. Bible prophecy plainly warns that millions of people will die from starvation as world conditions worsen and approach the most devastating period ever recorded in the past 6,000 years!

The latest USDA report shows that global wheat production for 2006-07 will drop 11 million metric tons to 585 million tons, or 5.4% below the previous year. Carryover stocks from previous harvests, meanwhile, will decline to 119.3 million tons—the lowest stocks in 25 years! If this continues, there will not be enough grain to feed millions of hungry people on all continents.

The level of wheat stockpiles relative to consumption has hit the lowest level on record. Deutsche Bank estimates global corn stockpiles have fallen to their lowest level since 1979. Drought also has cut a swath across

Europe, China, India, Africa and South America.

The USDA lowered the 2006-07 predicted wheat production for Australia, the world's third largest grain exporter, down 55% to just 11 million tons from 24.5 million tons the previous year. Only a month earlier, the USDA estimated it would be 19.5 million tons.

Reducing its estimate for the second time in a month, AWB—Australia's primary wheat exporter—predicted on October 25 the severe drought could reduce the nation's wheat production by 65% to only nine million tons and force the import of feed grains.

The Grains Council of Australia predicts barley production could drop even more steeply—about 75%, from 10 million to 2.5 million tons!

"Persistent drought and September heat, similar to 2002-03 in most of the major growing regions, have sharply reduced prospects for this year's crop," the USDA said of Australia's outlook. "At this level, Australia's production would be only 0.9 million tons higher than in 2002-03 when record drought and heat devastated that crop."

The government of Australia declared on October 23 that half the nation's farm and ranch land was drought-stricken, as the country proceeded deeper into its worst drought on record—following six years of extremely dry conditions

The Australian newspaper reported on October 18 that Australia's severe drought may slice \$3 billion from export earnings. It could cut economic growth by as much as 1% and the Australian farm sector's total output by 40% this year. Australia accounts

for 14% of the wheat traded worldwide. The nation exports about 70% of its wheat. The shrinkage in exports will mainly affect Japan, Indonesia and South Korea, which will need to compete elsewhere for supplies. The USDA cut 2006-07 wheat crop estimates for China, the European Union and Brazil as well.

In the U.S., drought in the Great Plains will reduce wheat production 14% to 49.32 million tons, or 1.812 billion bushels, down from 57.28 million tons harvested a year ago. The USDA also lowered 2006-07 U.S. wheat carryover stocks to 418 million bushels, down 11 million bushels from the agency's September projection, because of increased exports. Those exports are projected at 925 million bushels, which is a 25 million-bushel increase, due to tighter world wheat supplies. Drops in the production of corn, other coarse grains and small grains such as oats and barley also have been recorded.

Drought, Population Growth Pressures

According to the NOAA Satellite and Information Service, "Drought is one of the costliest and most prevalent natural hazards on the North American continent. In recent years within the U.S. alone, drought has resulted in average annual economic losses of \$6-8 billion (US), and the worst droughts of the past 25 years led to losses exceeding \$40B (US)."

Estimated drought losses just in Texas this year were \$4.1 billion for the first seven months of 2006, or nearly *double* the previous biggest loss of \$2.1 billion set in all of 1998. Economists agree this year equates historically to the long dry spell of the 1950s or even Dust Bowl conditions of the 1930s.

Lester R. Brown, president of the World Watch Institute, warns that world grain stocks have fallen precipitously to only 57 days of consumption, far below what's considered safe for food security. In other words, that's the lowest buffer since the 56-day-low in 1972 that triggered a doubling of grain prices.

The proportion of the earth's land surface stricken by serious drought has more than doubled between the 1970s and early 21st century.

"This year's world grain harvest is projected to fall short of consumption by 61 million tons, marking the sixth time in the last seven years that production has failed to satisfy demand," Brown said. "Whenever stocks drop below 60 days of consumption, prices begin to rise. It thus came as no surprise when the U.S. Department of Agriculture projected in its June 9 world crop report that this year's wheat prices will be up by 14% and corn prices up by 22% over last year's."

During the 1990s, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) advocated that world grain stocks should be well above 20-25% of annual grain consumption. By FAO calculations, the world reaches a danger point when grain stocks fall below 17-18% of a year's average consumption. For 2006, stocks of grain are 319 million metric tons, or barely 16% of today's annual use of 2,043 million metric tons.

"World grain consumption has risen in each of the last 45 years except for three—1974, 1988, and 1995—when tight supplies and sharp price hikes lowered consumption. Growth in world grain demand, traditionally driven by population growth and rising incomes, is also now being driven by the fast growing demand for grain-based fuel ethanol for cars. Roughly 60 percent of the world grain harvest is consumed as food, 36 percent as feed, and 3 percent as fuel. While the use of grain for food and feed grows by roughly 1 percent per year, that used for fuel is growing by over 20 percent per year" (Earth Policy Institute).

"The use of grain to produce fuel ethanol, is concentrated in the United States where a projected 55 million tons, or one fifth of the projected 268-million-ton corn harvest for 2006, will be used for this purpose. This year the climbing use of corn to produce automotive fuel will catch up with

the U.S. export of corn, which is also estimated at 55 million tons. For perspective, although 55 million tons is only 16 percent of the U.S. grain harvest, it exceeds the total grain harvest of Canada" (ibid.).

Meanwhile, population growth is expected to increase by 70 million people for each of the next 14 years. So, between 2006 and 2020, the world's farmers will need to grow enough food to feed another 980 million—or nearly one billion—additional people! This is an incredibly daunting task as water supplies diminish and adverse weather conditions make it more difficult to cultivate crops.

It was not until 1830 that the world populace reached one billion. A century later, it stood at two billion. Only 30 years later, it crossed the three billion threshold in 1960. It reached four billion in 1975. Only 11 years later, five billion people inhabited the earth in 1986. By 1999, the six billion mark was achieved. India and China each exceed one billion people, and together amount to *one third* of the entire world.

Meanwhile, the world has lost at least 26 billion tons of topsoil because of rapid population growth, urbanization, marginal farming and desert expansion.

Escalating Food Prices

Wheat prices have soared 55% in the past year in Chicago trading. Shortly before the release of the USDA's October report, wheat futures hit a 10-year high of \$5.51 a bushel, an 18% price rise in less than a week, which translates into higher prices for bread, pasta, cereals and animal feed.

The *Financial Times* reported that the rise in the prices of wheat and other grains has led analysts to caution that the world could face a crisis within the next 12 months if there is another disappointing year of global production.

"We are not near a crisis yet, but if we have another bad year of harvests because of droughts and poor weather then we could be looking at a very serious problem," the newspaper

quoted Abdolreza Abbassian, an FAO commodity analyst.

Gary Sharkey, Head of Wheat Procurement at the National Association of British and Irish Millers, said, “If we have another dry spring or summer in the U.S., then we could be facing all sorts of issues.”

The Financial Times continues: “Food companies, already under pressure from high energy prices...are feeling the impact of higher wheat and grain prices and are passing some of the cost on to customers. Food commodities overall are higher than they were a year ago, with increases in the price of rice, wheat, barley, oats, corn, cocoa and coffee offsetting declines in butter and milk, according to Bernstein Research.”

“Market volatility for wheat futures traditionally peaks in October as information about the spring harvest in the southern hemisphere and the first indications of likely production from hard winter wheat in North America are digested...All of this has led to rising prices. Soft red winter wheat futures on the Chicago Board of Trade have risen more than 19 per cent since the start of the month and 55 per cent this year. The prices of other grains, including corn, have also risen. Deutsche Bank estimates global corn stockpiles have fallen to their lowest level since 1979.”

From Plenty to Scarcity

For decades the amber waves of grain in the United States, Canada and Australia have provided wheat, barley and other crops needed to sustain populations. Massive volumes of grain exports from these countries have kept large portions of the world from succumbing to mass starvation. Bible prophecy shockingly shows that their agricultural production will take a dramatic turn for the worse in the years ahead.

All is not well down on the farm, and the farmer’s plight bodes ill for countries depending upon them for daily sustenance. Dramatic shifts in the balance of international economic power loom. The Bible shows that

prior to the Return of Jesus Christ to establish the kingdom of God here on earth massive food shortages will be rampant throughout the world.

The book of Revelation describes four symbolic horses in its sixth chapter. One of the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” is a rider on a black horse symbolizing global famine. “When He [Jesus Christ] opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, ‘Come and see.’ So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine’” (Rev. 6:5-6 – NKJV throughout).

A denarius was about a day’s wage for a worker in Palestine 2,000 years ago. Carefully measuring and paying that much money for only a small amount of grain shows food in extremely short supply and prices spiraling as a result. Jesus Christ warned that famines would be among the signs of His Second Coming and the end of the age (Matt. 24:3, 7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11).

Famines can be caused by wars or natural disasters, both of which Christ also said would be precursors to His Second Coming.

Food shortages have existed in Africa, Asia and Latin America for decades—but Bible prophecy shows that even the U.S., the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa will experience a major crisis in feeding their own people. This seems unthinkable today, but prophetic trends point in that direction.

A Curse on Our Stockpiles

As world population continues to burgeon and grain supplies shrink globally, the prospect of major grain producers falling dramatically behind in production is a frighteningly grim fact of life.

It is no coincidence that the U.S., Australia and Canada have experienced disastrous setbacks in crop production. There is a cause-and-effect reason for

the downturn in their harvests. As U.S. President Abraham Lincoln stated in 1863, “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven.”

And yet Americans, Canadians, Australians and other Israelite-descended peoples do not acknowledge their blessings originate with Almighty God. As a result of their egregious sin of ingratitude, along with other national sins, those blessings are being stripped away.

The God of the Bible is punishing these nations. As they continue to reject His commandments, they will increasingly suffer the consequences of disobedience (Deut. 8:5-6). When we obey those commandments, we are blessed. When we reject them, we are cursed.

Notice what God says in His inspired Word: “For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; *a land of wheat and barley*, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing...When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you” (vs. 7-10).

There can be no denying that the modern nations descended from ancient Israel have inherited the world’s prime agricultural land. But after decades of taking it for granted, they have credited themselves with their prosperity and wealth, not the God in heaven who has given it to them. The underlying strength of a nation’s economy is primarily in its farm production.

“Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full...then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth...Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and

DROUGHT IN SOUTHEASTERN AUSTRALIA

This image shows the stress on vegetation—predominantly in croplands—in southeastern Australia. Places where the greenness was unusually low are colored brown; places where vegetation was near average are yellow, and the few places where vegetation greenness was higher than average are green. Places where vegetation greenness couldn't be measured, perhaps due to clouds, are colored gray.

IMAGE: NASA/ Jesse Allen, Earth Observatory



follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish” (vs. 11-12, 17-19).

The U.S. and other nations have been reeling from a relentless barrage of national setbacks hammering their economic, military and political power, shattering their prestige in the eyes of other nations. Conditions are going to become much worse unless they repent of breaking God’s Ten Commandments and wholeheartedly return to the One who gives them the power to obtain wealth. Severe agricultural problems will be at the forefront.

As we approach the end of this age, God will more directly chastise unrepentant peoples and nations. God warns, “And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit” (Lev. 26:18-20).

Nothing will destroy a nation or empire more effectively than disastrous crop failures, which will force people to spend more of their income to feed themselves at escalating costs. In Deuteronomy 28, God shows that if we do not obey His voice and carefully observe His commandments and statutes, then curses will overtake our lands, not the least of which are agricultural catastrophes. “Cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be...the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks,” God again warns (Deut. 28:16-18).

“And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed” (vs. 23-24).

“Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your donkey shall be violently taken away from before you, and shall not be restored to you; your sheep shall be

given to your enemies, and you shall have no one to rescue them” (vs. 31).

Ezekiel’s Warning

The Bible and history show that the nations of the U.S. and British Commonwealth are modern-day descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh—two of the 12 tribes of ancient Israel. (For more on this key to Bible prophecy, read our book *AMERICA AND BRITAIN IN BIBLE PROPHECY*.) Just as God has heaped tremendous abundance on those nations in the past two centuries, He is removing those same blessings with alarming speed as national sins mount to heaven.

The prophet Ezekiel’s message to these modern nations of Israel is sobering and frightening unless our people change course. As a symbolic sign of divine punishment on the house of Israel, God told Ezekiel to shave his head and beard, and weigh and divide his hair (Ezek. 5:1). “You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third

and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after them” (vs. 2).

As God punishes these nations, arrogant disregard for His laws will bring terrible woes. The birthright peoples will experience tragic consequences as they begin to reap what they have sown. The descendant nations of Israel lead the world in creating a culture that glorifies violence, illicit sex and sick humor in entertainment, murders innocent unborn babies by the millions, and mocks traditional Judeo-Christian values. Other countries will be astounded at how rapidly the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa are brought down.

“Therefore thus says the LORD God: ‘Because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you and have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments, nor even done according to the judgments of the nations that are all around you,’ therefore thus says the LORD God: ‘Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations’” (vs. 7-9).

God warns, “One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third



■ **DEC. 12, 2003:** The Great Salt Lake, outside Salt Lake City, Utah, has disappeared along the first mile of the causeway leading from the mainland to Antelope Island, due to droughts over the past five years.

PHOTO: MCT

to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them. Thus shall My anger be spent, and I will cause My fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged; and they shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it in My zeal, when I have spent My fury upon them” (vs. 12-13).

“When I send against them the terrible arrows of famine which shall be for destruction, and which I will send to destroy you, I will increase the famine upon you and cut off your supply of bread” (vs.16).

For a third of a nation’s population to be wiped out by famine and pestilence—which ride side by side as two of the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”—there must be massive crop failures brought about by natural disasters such as drought and flooding. Keep watching for continued dramatic declines in farm production.

Not Too Late to Repent

Americans, Britons, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans can avert widespread national

disasters by returning to their God in heartfelt repentance and changing their ways. If they refuse, calamities will intensify and ultimately lead to national captivity and slavery.

Notice what King Solomon implored: “When heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name and turn from their sin because You afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your

servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance. When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers... whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows his own burden and his own grief, and spreads out his hands to this temple: then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know” (II Chron. 6:26-30).

God promises, “When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (II Chron. 7:13-14).

The choice is ours! □

ELECTIONS

Continued from page 8

all are suffering the consequences. But as God foretold long ago, “My people love to have it so” (Jer. 5:31).

Just as God punished ancient Israel, He will punish its modern descendants—unless they change how they live! That same God stands ready to relent His course of punishment on

the Bible-promoting, yet not always Bible-believing, peoples of the West—if they repent of their disobedience to Him and turn to obey to Him (Jer. 18:7-8).

Politicians might paint visions of glowing sunrises, but Bible prophecy and astute observers suggest that, barring heartfelt national repentance, the sun is setting on liberty-loving (but no longer God-fearing) democracies.

But despite the specter of even

darker days ahead, a new day will come—indeed, a new age! In this new world, the kingdom of God will be established on the earth. It will displace all the governments of men. Jesus Christ will rule all nations with justice, equity and lasting peace. Factions, political parties and bureaucratic gridlock will no longer exist. Under Christ’s lead will be leaders of proven character—tried, tested and true. May that day come soon! □



THE AIDS PANDEMIC ...25 YEARS LATER DOES A CURE EXIST?

For 25 years, governments, scientists and medical experts have desperately sought a cure for AIDS, yet none has been discovered. Why?

BY ROBERT R. FARRELL

IN 1981, researchers diagnosed a mysterious virus that was killing homosexual men in the Western United States. They named it “Gay Related Immune Deficiency” (GRID). Due to extensive lobbying efforts by homosexual and other liberal special-interest groups, the name was later changed to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—AIDS.

AIDS was initially thought of as a homosexual disease. This perception has changed, as the virus has killed millions of heterosexual men and women, with millions more presently living with it. For example, over 17 million women are currently living with the infection.

More than a generation has passed since the AIDS virus was first diagnosed. In that time millions of lives have been ruined, numerous communities destroyed and whole nations shattered. Billions of dollars have been spent to find a cure, but none has been forthcoming. To this day, there is no vaccine or cure for AIDS. Why?

Never before has there been a disease like this. Consider its scope: Since its discovery, AIDS has infected more than 65 million people worldwide. Of those infected, it has killed 25 million.

A Worldwide Pandemic

The sheer scope of the disease is mind-boggling. Presently, 40 million people worldwide are living with it—larger

than the population of Canada. About 4 million were infected in 2005 alone. Sadly, many of those infected are unaware of their status.

Indeed, the impact of AIDS is so great that the United Nations considers it to be one of the greatest development and security issues facing the world today. In 2005, 3 million people died (averaging 8,500 per day), and within the next two years a staggering 6 million more are expected to succumb to the disease. No part of the globe has been spared its wrath, not even traditional, socially conservative societies.

Here is a snapshot of the worldwide impact of AIDS:

■ **North America:** Over 1 million people in the United States are living with HIV (Human immunodeficiency virus, a retrovirus that causes AIDS), with 40,000 new infections occurring every year, many of them in adults under the age of 25. The primary sources of new infections are homosexual and heterosexual sex, and needle sharing by drug abusers. Recently, a new wave of infection has been attributed to the use of methamphetamine, also known as “crystal meth.”

Of particular concern to authorities is an increase in unprotected sex and “risky behavior” among young people who have grown tired of the “safe sex” message.

It is estimated that about one-fourth of those with HIV have not been diagnosed and are unaware of their infection.

■ **Western Europe:** In this region, 570,000 to 890,000 adults currently live with HIV. AIDS-related deaths

have been relatively low since the 1990s due to the availability of anti-retroviral therapy. However, in some countries it is estimated that a large proportion of HIV infections remain undiagnosed, and there is worrying evidence of antiretroviral drug resistance among some newly infected individuals in this region.

■ **Eastern Europe and Central Asia:** Evidence indicates a rapidly growing epidemic in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. An estimated 1.5 million lived with HIV in 2005. The increasing rate of infections (from the mid-1990s onward) has been due to social and economic collapse, along with increased levels of intravenous drug use.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), by 2005 the number of reported cases in Russia was 257,000—up from 15,000 in 1995, with predictions that the infection rate will continue to rise quickly. Transmission of HIV is increasing through sexual contact and drug abuse among young adults. More than 80% of current infections in this region occur in people under the age of 30.

■ **Middle East and North Africa:** The number of cases in these regions is relatively low, with approximately 440,000 people infected. Methods of infection are diverse, including sex between men, prostitution and intravenous drug use.

■ **East Asia:** Though the prevalence rate is low, many are living with HIV, due to large populations in the region. The picture here is dominated by China, estimated to have up to 1.5 million cases, with some estimates even higher.

In rural areas, the number of those infected is in the tens of thousands, primarily due to large numbers of farmers participating in unclean blood transfusions.

■ **Latin America:** HIV-infected men in Latin America outnumber HIV-infected women by roughly 3 to 1. Lower prevalence in some countries disguises serious localized epidemics.

In Mexico, Brazil, Columbia and Argentina, homosexual activity and

■ **GLOBAL IMPACT:** Orphans and vulnerable children attend the feeding program at KENWA's (Kenya Network of Women with AIDS) drop-in center in Kiambiu, a slum area in Nairobi (top of previous page). An HIV-positive woman visits the Moscow office of “Return to Life,” a non-profit group that helps drug addicts and victims of HIV (bottom left). An AIDS-infected addict gets help injecting heroin in Ruili, China, a border town that has seen an increase in the illegal drug and sex trade.

PHOTOS: MCT

drug use are the primary means of transmission. Brazil accounts for more than a third of all HIV infections in Latin America.

■ **Oceania:** There are approximately 78,000 adults living with AIDS in Australia, New Zealand and other countries and territories. The number of AIDS-related deaths has been relatively low, as treatment has been widespread in this region.

■ **South and South-East Asia:** This region has the second highest number of people with HIV infections, 7.4 million (representing 15% of all cases). Over two-thirds of AIDS infections in this

region occur in India, which has now overtaken South Africa as the country with the highest number of infections in the world (5.7 million).

■ **Caribbean:** The Caribbean has the second highest infection rate in the world. Among young adults, AIDS is the leading cause of death. The adult prevalence rate is approximately 1.6%. HIV transmission occurs mainly through promiscuous heterosexual sex, with two-thirds of AIDS cases attributed to this.

■ **Africa:** Sub-Saharan Africa is by far the most affected region on earth. Though home to only 10% of the

world's population, more than 64% of all HIV-positive people live there. This amounts to a staggering 24.5 million (3 million of whom are children under age 15).

In 2005, there were 12 million AIDS orphans living in sub-Saharan Africa. In the 35 African nations with the highest prevalence, the average life expectancy from birth is 48 years—7 years less than it would be without the disease.

Southern Africa is the hardest hit area, with prevalence rates exceeding 20% in most countries in the region, and even 30% in Swaziland and Botswana. South Africa has the highest number of infections in Africa—5.5 million, representing 12% of the population.

AIDS has cut off economic growth in many nations, particularly in the Third World, by destroying large numbers of human lives. For example, the UN has estimated there could be as many as 90 million cases of infection in sub-Saharan Africa by 2025.

Mass infections mean that not only are many people unable to work and contribute to their economies, but also a significant financial outlay is required for medical care.

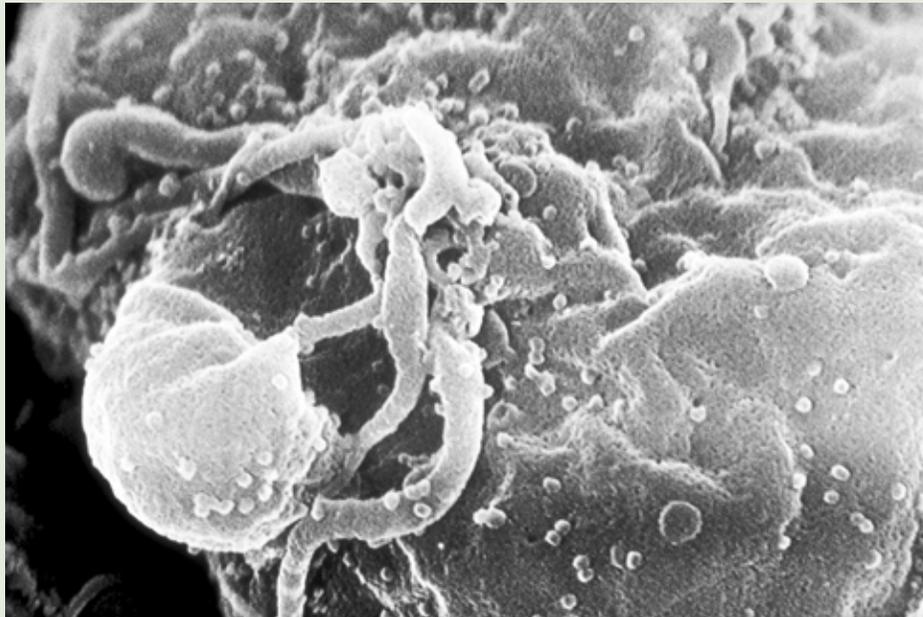
By killing off the young population, AIDS can seriously weaken the taxable population of a community. This has particularly been the case in some African countries. The UN has documented a correlation between decreasing life expectancies and the lowering of gross national product in many African countries with prevalence rates of 10% or more.

As the spread of the disease accelerates around the world, it is expected that other countries will replicate Africa's sad experience.

The Search for a Cure

In the first decade of the epidemic, various forms of alterna-

WORLDWIDE IMPACT OF HIV/AIDS (2005)

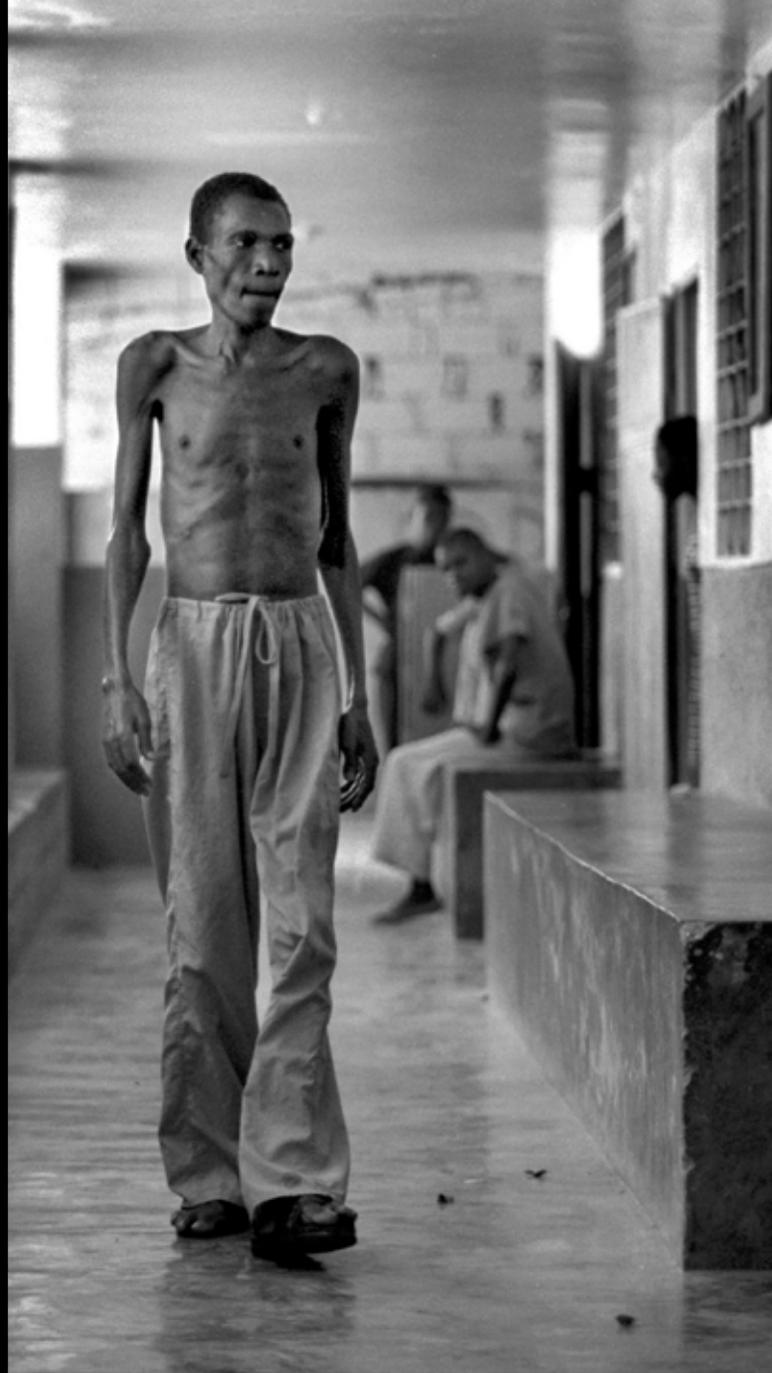


■ **THE HIV VIRUS:** Scanning electron micrograph of HIV-1 budding from cultured lymphocyte. Multiple round bumps on cell surface represent sites of assembly and budding of virions.

PHOTO: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION/C. GOLDSMITH

	People living with HIV	New infections	AIDS deaths	Adult prevalence
Sub-Saharan Africa	24.5 million	2.7 million	2 million	6.1%
Asia	8.3 million	930,000	600,000	0.4%
Latin America	1.6 million	140,000	59,000	0.5%
North America, Western and Central Europe	2 million	65,000	30,000	0.5%
Eastern Europe, Central Asia	1.5 million	220,000	53,000	0.8%
Middle East, North Africa	440,000	64,000	37,000	0.2%
Caribbean	330,000	37,000	37,000	1.6%
Oceania	78,000	7,200	3,400	0.3%
TOTAL	38.7 million	4.1 million	2.8 million	1%

Source: UNAIDS



■ **A DAILY STRUGGLE:** A patient holds some of his 34 prescribed drugs he takes each day to battle the AIDS virus (top left). A drug addict loosens the belt around his arm as he injects a syringe filled with heroin and cocaine at a health clinic in Vancouver, B.C., in Canada. Police do not make drug arrests at the site, located in a neighborhood with an open-air drug market, because such clinics are believed to stop the spread of AIDS (bottom). An AIDS patient walks back to his bed after washing up in the sink at a clinic on the outskirts of Cite Soleil, a densely populated slum in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He later died from the complications of the disease, leaving behind a wife and five children (right).

PHOTOS: MCT

tive medicine were used to try to treat symptoms or to alter the course of the disease itself. Treatments included massage, herbal and flower remedies, and acupuncture. None of them were found to be effective.

In recent years, a series of drugs have been developed that can prolong the lives of those who are HIV positive. These antiretroviral drugs block the virus's ability to replicate. They can delay the onset of AIDS by slow-

ing the loss of the patients' CD+ cells. However, they do not cure the disease, nor do they alleviate the symptoms. For many, these drugs have achieved less than optimal results. This is primarily due to non-adherence and non-persistence with antiretroviral therapy because of the complexity of the treatment programs, including the number of pills, dosing frequency and meal restrictions.

Also to be noted is that a wide

variety of unpleasant side effects are associated with antiretroviral therapy: diarrhea, nausea, fatigue, vomiting, rashes, insomnia, stomach pain, headaches, etc. Damage to the liver and nerves, changes in body shape, inflammation of the pancreas, anemia and muscle pain can also result from some of the drugs. And sadly some people are becoming infected with strains of the virus that are resistant to these drugs.

Research to develop better treatments include decreasing side effects of current drugs, further simplifying drug regimens to improve adherence and determining the best sequence of regimens to manage drug resistance.

While antiretroviral drugs have proved useful in prolonging lives, it is postulated that only a vaccine would be able to cure the epidemic. However, after over 20 years of research, no effective vaccine is on the horizon.

Global Response

The past few years have brought greater international attention to AIDS. This has led to several initiatives, including The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS and Declaration of Commitment; The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; The World Health Organization's "3 by 5 Initiative"; and the U.S. "President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief."

Despite all the impressive sounding initiatives, governments and organizations around the world have struggled to cope with the AIDS pandemic. Large sums of money have been thrown at the problem, with little to show for it. UNAIDS estimates that HIV/AIDS spending rose from \$300 million in 1996 to \$8.3 billion in 2005. However, with more money to go around, disagreements are emerging as to how it should be spent. The Bush administration has committed an impressive \$15 billion to fight AIDS, but the White House has come under criticism by some for giving priority to projects that promote sexual abstinence over condom use.

In addition to trying to find a cure, another approach that has been promoted is "prevention," i.e. reducing the number of people who actually contract the virus. One method of prevention is the "CNN Approach," which promotes *condom* use for those who engage in risky sexual behavior; using clean *needles*; *negotiating* safer sex with a partner; and encouraging women to make wise choices. This has been the most popular approach worldwide.

On the other hand, the United States endorses the "ABC Approach." This involves *abstinence* or delay of sexual activity, especially for youths; *being faithful* to one's sexual partner; and *condom* use for those engaging in risky sexual behavior. This approach has been effective in Uganda, where HIV prevalence has decreased from 15% to 5%.

Challenges Ahead

The main challenge in combating AIDS is in providing patients with access to treatment. According to the UNAIDS/WHO "3 by 5" progress report, only 20% of those in need of treatment are now receiving it. Indeed, only one in eight people who want to be tested are currently able to do so. It should be noted that while the cost of a year's antiretroviral treatment has fallen sharply, over 80% of the people who most need these medicines still do not have access to them. It will be difficult to address this situation, as there will need to be investment to build hospitals and train staff.

Finding a safe, effective vaccine is proving to be difficult, and it is unlikely there will be any effective immunizations before the end of the decade. There are around 30 different AIDS vaccines currently undergoing trials.

And then there are the financial challenges. The \$8.9 billion available for AIDS funding in 2006 is far short of the \$14.9 billion the UN estimates is needed to effectively counteract the spread of the disease. A similar shortfall in funding is expected in 2007. In addition, the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative points out that only 1% of global research and development is being channeled into finding an AIDS vaccine.

The Cause and the Cure

To understand how to cure AIDS, one must first understand what is *causing* it. Simply put, for every cause there is an *effect*. Numerous research studies have concluded that AIDS is spread primarily in two ways—sexual contact and intravenous drug use. On the sexual front, it has mainly spread by

what has been termed "risky behavior," including homosexual sex, sexual intercourse with more than one partner and paid sex. Therefore, AIDS is different than most diseases; it is spread through certain types of behavior. It is a "lifestyle disease."

Nations have been unable to solve the AIDS pandemic because they have tried to eradicate the disease without first addressing the *CAUSE*. AIDS has accelerated as the world plummets to greater depths of immorality. Sexual behaviors once considered "unacceptable," "horrible," "shameful" and "unspeakable" just two or three generations ago are now accepted as "alternative lifestyles" and as "lifestyle choices." What was once considered to be evil is now acceptable (Isa. 5:20). As a result, the world is reaping a grim penalty in deadly, incurable diseases (Rom. 1:26-28).

Yet AIDS is a preventable disease—IF people did not participate in illicit drug use and promiscuous sexual relations outside of marriage, conduct God never intended for mankind. Yet the overwhelming majority will not accept this—and will become indignant at even the suggestion of changing one's lifestyle! Most would rather treat the *effect* and not deal with the true *cause*.

Yet there are innocent victims who have not engaged in the wild lifestyle and have still contracted the disease through the actions of others, causing them to needlessly suffer. For example, some contract HIV or AIDS through blood transfusions, adulterous spouses, infected parents and superstitious practices.

The toll of AIDS continues to mount. As long as every man does "what is right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25), even greater suffering and death is yet to come. □



SUGGESTED READING:

To find out more about the coming impact of disease epidemics on this world, read our brochure *And there shall be PESTILENCES*.



NORTH KOREA JOINS “NUCLEAR CLUB”

BY GABRIEL N. LISCHAK

GLOBAL TENSIONS increased dramatically when North Korea announced on October 9 it had successfully conducted an underground nuclear test. Immediately the rogue nation received international condemnation, with the United States, Britain, Japan and even China leading the way in a united voice of criticism.

U.S. President George W. Bush stated that the test poses a threat to global peace and security, and “deserves an immediate response” by the United Nations Security Council.

The council had warned Pyongyang not to follow through with the test only two days earlier.

All 15 members of the Security Council denounced the test. “No one defended it, no one even came close to defending it,” U.S. Ambassador John Bolton said.

“I was very impressed by the unanimity of the council...on the need for a strong and swift answer to what everyone agreed amounted to a threat

to international peace and security” (AP).

On October 14, the council unanimously agreed on a resolution that would bar the sale or transfer of missiles, warships, tanks, attack helicopters and combat aircraft, as well as missile- and nuclear-related items to the North Korean government. Further, the resolution demands that no future tests be carried out, and calls for UN member nations to inspect cargo going to or from the country.

In response, huge rallies were held by the communist regime, proclaiming that the sanctions are nothing less than a declaration of war. Pyongyang’s government-controlled news bureau, *Korean Central News Agency* (KCNA), released a statement that “the resolution cannot be construed otherwise than a declaration of a war,” adding that it would deal “merciless blows” against any country that dares to violate its sovereignty.

North Korea’s UN ambassador said the Security Council should be congratulating his country instead of passing “useless” resolutions or statements. Meanwhile, Iranian state radio blamed the nuclear test on the U.S., proclaiming that the test was “a reaction to

America’s threats and humiliation.”

KCNA said the test was a complete success, with no leak of radiation. North Korean scientists “successfully conducted an underground nuclear test under secure conditions,” the agency said, adding that this was “a stirring time when all the people of the country are making a great leap forward in the building of a great prosperous powerful socialist nation.”

Further, KCNA stated, “It marks a historic event as it greatly encouraged and pleased the...people that have wished to have powerful self-reliant defense capability. It will contribute to defending the peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in the area around it” (ibid).

Many are concerned that North Korea may attempt to launch a second nuclear test. Satellite images taken days after the first blast indicated such a possibility, with activity observed around at least two other sites.

However, one U.S. defense intelligence official cautioned, “This activity could represent prep for a second test, but it doesn’t necessarily mean definitively that it is,” (*Express*).

Speaking to a Chinese envoy, Kim Jong-il said North Korea would not conduct an additional test—that is, unless the United States “harassed” his country. He added that his country is prepared to return to negotiations over its nuclear program, but only if Washington is willing to lift sanctions.

More than one week after the incident, the U.S. confirmed that a nuclear explosion did occur. This officially makes North Korea the eighth country to join the “nuclear club,” which consists of the United States, Russia, Britain, France, India, Pakistan and China. (Many believe Israel possesses nuclear capability as well, though the nation has never publicly made such a claim.)

With this addition to the “club,” some questions naturally come to mind: Will North Korea “play by the rules”? Will it use its newfound power as a means of geopolitical influence? Can the world live peacefully with a nuclear North Korea? □



AMERICA'S IDOLS

WHY THE OBSESSION WITH THE RICH AND FAMOUS?

Millions sit hypnotized by the celebrity life. Why are the lives of the rich and famous so fascinating?

BY JUSTIN T. PALM

THEY ACT. They sing. They dance. They give award-winning performances in dramas and comedies. Magazines glamorize them. The public envies them. Off screen, they marry, have children and get divorced. Some get arrested, “find religion” or take on a political voice. They adopt, fight poverty or combat the spread of AIDS.

Actors become directors. Musicians become actors. Singers become authors. Sports superstars

sign movie contracts. There are seemingly no limits or bounds to what celebrities can do.

The media hype surrounding these “beautiful people” is like nothing else. Magazines report the latest celebrity news, and the Internet is swarming with it. Celebrity faces are splashed across advertisements and billboards for all to see. Their lives are on constant display.

People are entranced by celebrity news—why?

Media Frenzy

The advent of the Internet has changed entertainment news. Websites report the latest on who divorced whom; who gained weight; who was seen where; who is pregnant. People’s craving for intimacy with the famous can even be satisfied by cellphone news alerts. The most searched Internet phrases are almost always celebrity names.

Fascination with celebrities is nothing new; it has only grown more pervasive. The public cannot seem to get enough of every intricate detail of their lives—and from an endless array of sources. Many cannot go a day without reading the latest juicy morsel of celebrity gossip. Drawn like a magnet to trivial facts about other people’s lives, many turn straight to the *Life* or *People* section of their newspaper.

Incidents in a celebrity’s life often make international news. When a highly popular actor is arrested for driving under the influence and lets loose a drunken tirade, the reports can dwarf news coverage of vastly more important world events. Other celebrities are interviewed about their opinions of the actor in question. Even politicians are queried for their opinion. Media pundits ask, “Is his career over? Will he be able to bounce back?”

■ **THE CHASE FOR FAME:** Contestants on the television show *American Idol* perform during pre-race ceremonies prior to the Coca Cola 600 at Lowe’s Motor Speedway (previous page). Below, high school students watch friend Kelly Clarkson win the first “American Idol: The Search for a Superstar” competition.

PHOTOS: MCT



We *hear* about celebrities, *read* about celebrities and *watch* celebrities in virtually every medium. Why do so many millions care?

The Paparazzi

Fueling people's interest are the infamous photographers behind the photographs. Similar to private investigators, paparazzi work off of tips to track down and photograph famous people doing mundane, day-to-day activities. These photographs can sell for thousands of dollars. Although some are among the highest paid in the photog-

raphy industry, paparazzi are generally looked down upon for the intrusive methods they use.

Accidents sometimes result from the famous trying to avoid paparazzi, as was the case with Princess Diana in 1997. Her tragic death was due in part to being chased by the paparazzi.

Further, the line between celebrity reporting and paparazzi is being blurred. A *People* magazine reporter was recently arrested for trespassing on celebrity property. Searching for the latest exclusive photo, *reporters* are now stalking celebrities.

The Celebrity Couple

Nothing creates more media frenzy than the celebrity couple. Millions are enthralled by which popular actor is dating which famous singer, or which movie star was seen with which sports star. Ridiculous nicknames are coined, combining their first names to create hybrids.

Not content with just the couple, their babies are brought into the public eye. According to *CNN*, "Few recent celebrity subjects have produced as much table-thumping tabloid copy

FAN'S OBSESSION LEADS TO TRAGEDY

In the late 1980s, a young actress named Rebecca Schaeffer was quickly becoming a household name. Starring on the popular sitcom *My Sister Sam* and scheduled to audition for *The Godfather III*, she made the cover of *Seventeen* magazine. She seemed destined for success—until an obsessed fan brought her life to a tragic end.

Robert John Bardo was a fast-food worker obsessed with child actresses. He idolized Schaeffer, and even erected a shrine to her in his bedroom. Its walls were filled with publicity shots of her.

Bardo stalked Rebecca Schaeffer for three years through letters, and eventually tried to enter the studio where *My Sister Sam* was being produced. When he was denied, Bardo became even more determined to get to her. A journal entry from his diary described how he felt: "She came into my life in the right moment. She was

brilliant, pretty, outrageous, her innocence impressed me. She turned into a goddess for me, an idol. Since then, I turned an atheist, I only adored her."

When he saw a film in which Schaeffer had an onscreen sexual relationship with another actor, Bardo became even more obsessed. He took a bus to Hollywood to track her down. He phoned the office of Rebecca Schaeffer's agent to find out where she lived, but was refused the information. Bardo wandered the streets with her photograph, asking people if they knew where she lived. He even hired a private detective agency, which obtained her home address from California's Department of Motor Vehicles.

Armed with this information, he went to Schaeffer's home and rang the doorbell. When Schaeffer came to the door she saw him and ignored him. After an hour of waiting at the door Bardo again rang the bell. Schaeffer

came back to the front door, opened it and saw it was him again. Schaeffer told him to leave her alone and that he was wasting her time. So Bardo grabbed the door, pulled a gun from his bag and shot her twice. Schaeffer died 30 minutes later at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

Although Bardo confessed to the murder, his defense attorneys pleaded that he had an unstable mental condition due to childhood abuse. Bardo was convicted of murder and sentenced to life without parole. The killer said in an interview one year later, "I was a fan of hers and I may have carried it too far."

Partly as a result of this case, the Governor of California signed a law that prevented the DMV from releasing personal information. The law passed in 1990, and was the first of its kind. It later helped convict a stalker who attempted to carry out threats against filmmaker Steven Spielberg. □

LIVING UNDER A MICROSCOPE

When asked in a *Rolling Stone* interview about his breakup with actress Jennifer Lopez, actor Ben Affleck said, "It's tough to live your life under a...microscope, and now turn that microscope into a high-powered, shooting-into-space telescope that's constantly focused on you like a laser."

Seeing that the female interviewer was skeptical of his answer, Mr. Affleck was determined to prove his point. He grabbed his keys and

said, "Let's go get something to eat. I will show you what happens."

He drove her to a Mexican restaurant in Los Angeles, and within minutes of sitting down a photographer appeared.

Mr. Affleck said to his interviewer, "See the guy in the pink shirt? That took three seconds. That's good stuff. You'll be the 'unnamed female.'"

More paparazzi came on the scene and snapped away, capturing the event with their cameras. Mr.

Affleck told the interviewer to hide her tape recorder. He then put his arm around her, laughing and whispering in her ear. When the woman shrank away from the cameras, the paparazzi got closer. Ben Affleck held her hand as they walked out of the restaurant.

The next day there was a bidding war between tabloid magazines for the photographs. The "winner" purchased them for \$11,000. The interviewer admitted that the actor had made his point. □

as questions about the existence and well-being of [celebrity baby].” The report continued, “But after the baby was born...[celebrity couple]...disappeared from public view, leading to a tabloid outcry as to why the child was not being seen.”

Magazines will pay millions for photograph rights. For instance, *Variety* magazine reported that one well-known couple sold photograph rights of their newborn to a magazine for \$4.1 MILLION.

Believe it or not, these pictures are actually worth the cost to the magazine due to public demand. For example, one website hosting such photos broke a single-day traffic record, attracting 26.5 million page views!

Revered as Gods

In a *National Public Radio* interview, one journalist said, “With celebrity journalism...we really are one giant high school and they’re the cool kids, and everyone on the Internet can comment on them, can envy them, despise them, emulate them. So I understand why you [the public] feel a familiarity with them.”

Millions tune in to *American Idol* to watch the newest “average Joe” be transformed into a pop star. Nielsen Media Awards reports that “*American Idol*...averaged 28 million viewers, compared to 15 million for the Grammys. The fact that more viewers were caught up in the Hollywood auditions of amateur singers than in the glitz and glamour of the world’s hottest-selling recording stars was further testament to the popularity of *Idol*, the most watched show on television” (*Reuters*).

These celebrity icons are admired and worshiped by millions due to their fame, power, wealth, status and achievements. America bows to these prominent figures. They are truly—and without shame—made into idols and revered as gods.

A Measure of Success

Shallow minds often focus on people. It is this interest that fuels the ever-increasing wealth of celebrity news



■ **CATCHING A GLIMPSE OF THE FAMOUS:** Fans watch as celebrities arrive at the 78th Annual Academy Awards at the Kodak Theater in Hollywood, California, Sunday, March 5, 2006.

PHOTO: MCT

and gossip, most prevalent in Western media.

Many people envy the “perfect” lives of celebrities—their posh, multi-million-dollar mansions—expensive cars—monstrous bank accounts—and

the freedom that comes with wealth and fame. They seem happy, successful and invincible at times. Celebrity personalities are routinely given special privileges, and often are allowed to live above the law (when com-



■ **REACTING TO INSTANT FAME:** Burlleson High School students react as former student Kelly Clarkson wins the *American Idol* contest.
PHOTO: MCT

pared to the average person) due to their high-profile status. Consider the popular singer who was reportedly able to bypass the normal legal restrictions surrounding adoption and received permission to adopt a child from Africa.

Such privileges explain part of the reason the public so desires fame, and the riches and power that come with it. Many are willing to do almost anything to get into the media's spotlight. For example, a night club recently hosted a *Girls Gone Wild* event (an entertainment company famous for filming young women exposing themselves to camera crews). One 17-year-old girl, eager for a chance at stardom, became intoxicated and began to strip for the camera crew. Tragically, she was allegedly raped by a *Girls Gone Wild*

cameraman later that night. "[A] bright but flawed local girl...bought into what turned out to be a dangerous illusion in a society that has become so obsessed with fame...everyone seems to be angling to become the next Paris Hilton" (*Akron Beacon Journal*).

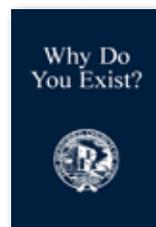
People envy the celebrity lifestyle, but then moments later take joy when a megastar comes crashing down. An actor or singer is arrested, checks into rehab or goes through a messy divorce, and people take pleasure in reading about it. It is a love/hate relationship many fans have with the celebrities they idolize. This feeling of happiness at a celebrity's downfall comes from envy or jealousy. Yet the public followers find themselves suddenly rooting for the

famous individual to make a career comeback.

Following the celebrity's life also serves to divert attention away from their own. When focusing on someone else's problems, thoughts of one's financial difficulties go away and marriage problems are forgotten (at least temporarily). It is much easier to escape to someone else's life.

In an article by *AFP*, a man was quoted as saying, "...celebrity in many ways is defined by how much exposure you get." The fame celebrities achieve most often has nothing to do with their accomplishments, talents or successes.

Few understand that fame and wealth are not all there is in measuring *true* success. To learn more, read our booklets *The Laws to SUCCESS* and *Why Do You Exist?* □



PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

Like mistletoe, holly berries were also thought to be sacred to the sun god. The original “sun log” came to be called the yule log. “Yule” simply means “wheel,” which has long been a pagan representation of the sun. No wonder people today commonly speak of the “sacred yule-tide season.”

Worship of the True God Mixed with False Practices

The modern term for merging false pagan customs with the worship of the true God is called *syncretism*. Anyone who did this in ancient Israel was put to death (Lev. 18:21, 29)! It was that serious!

A fascinating look into how Israel thought and believed, in their own minds, that they were worshipping God as an entire nation, comes from II Kings 17:33: “They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from there.”

Did you grasp this? Yes, they feared the true God while serving other gods. No wonder the very next verse (34) states that they really “fear NOT the LORD” according to the way God commanded. This is how God views what people are doing today—no matter what these people copying ancient pagan practices might think of their own actions!

Verse 30 says that all this had been learned from contact with “the men of Babylon” (among others), whose chief god, we will recall, was Nimrod (Baal or Molech)—who we now know were one and the same.

Notice how specific was God’s warning to Israel in Deuteronomy 12:29-31, and *why* He warned them! “When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations from before you...and you succeed them, and dwell in their land; Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you; and that you *enquire not after their gods*, saying, *How did these nations serve*

their gods? Even so will I do likewise. You shall not do so unto the LORD your God: for EVERY ABOMINATION to the LORD, which HE HATES, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters have they burnt in the fire to their gods.”

Many verses, similar to Deuteronomy 12, should be carefully studied. (See Exodus 34:10-17; 23:28-33; Leviticus 20:22-26; Deuteronomy 20:13-18, etc.) The true God knew that serving *other gods* always led to sacrificing children to them!

Deuteronomy 12:32 made clear that God does not want us to mix His ways with any false ways: “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not *add* thereto, nor *diminish* from it.”

These are God’s PLAIN WORDS to all who say that they can mix the horrible customs of outright paganism with a supposed “focus on Christ.”

Ancient Israel’s Pagan Practices in Modern Customs

Deuteronomy 12:2-4 establishes an important context. God plainly says, “You shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which you shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And you shall overthrow their altars...and burn their groves with fire...you shall not do so unto the LORD your God.”

Notice God’s references to “every green tree” and “their groves.” There are at least ten similar verses throughout the Old Testament referring to “green trees” and their association with idolatry. Historians hold that the reference to the term “green” refers to green year-round—*evergreen* trees!

Once again, let’s more closely examine the actual history and origins of some of the Saturnalia customs still practiced today. Notice the following chilling quote from the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, “Oscilla” 3rd edition, volume II: “...all ranks devoted themselves to feasting and mirth, presents were exchanged among friends, and crowds thronged the streets, shouting ‘Lo Saturnalia.’

An offering was made beneath a decorated evergreen tree, according to the pagan poet, Virgil. *Figurines* and masks—called ‘*oscilla*’—were hung on the tree, as are Christmas decorations today. History admits...there can be no doubt that we have in these ‘*oscilla*’ a relic of *human sacrifice*...”

Doesn’t all of this sound familiar? Presents, singing in the streets, evergreen trees, decorations, offerings under the tree, merrymaking, feasting? They may *sound* wonderful, but they represent things that are truly abominable.

Modern *oscilla* look like chubby little “angels” when hanging on a tree. I placed these little “angel babies” on our tree, myself, as a small child. At least I *thought* they were angel babies. How wrong I was! Do you think any of your friends realize what they really represent? Of course not—but that does not make it any less serious or less wrong in God’s eyes!

Outright Paganism Blended into the Church

One additional source demonstrates how this all came to be a heritage practiced so “innocently” by millions—yet far from innocent in God’s sight. Now read the following quote from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition, volume 10, pages 1062-3: “Christianity...by a complex and gradual process...became the official religion of the [Roman] empire.

“For a time, coins and other monuments continued to link Christian doctrines with worship of the sun, to which Constantine had been addicted previously. But even when this phase came to an end, Roman paganism continued to exert other, permanent influences, great and small...The ecclesiastical calendar retains numerous remnants of pre-Christian festivals, notably Christmas, which blends elements including both the feast of the *Saturnalia* and the birthday of Mithra. But, most of all, the mainstream of *Western Christianity owed ancient Rome the firm discipline that gave it stability and shape.*”

An authority as reputable as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* actually

acknowledges, for any willing to see, that the Saturnalia and ancient Rome are what defined the “discipline...stability and shape” of Western Christianity!

This is a truly stunning admission!

The next powerful quote reveals how this idolatrous, pagan festival slipped into the “Christian” world. It is from the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, under “Christmas”:

“How much the date of the festival depended upon the pagan Brumalia (December 25) following the Saturnalia (Dec. 17-24), and celebrating the shortest day of the year and the ‘new sun’...cannot be accurately determined. The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence...The pagan festival with its riot and merry-making was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and in manner. Christian preachers of the West and the Near East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ’s birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia accused their Western brethren of *idolatry and sun worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival.*”

One additional source reveals how the Roman church absorbed Christmas into an official celebration. The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1946 edition, states, “Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church... Certain Latins, as early as 354, may have transferred the birthday from January 6th to *December 25*, which was then a *Mithraic feast...or birthday of the unconquered SUN*...The Syrians and Armenians, who clung to January 6th, accused the Romans of sun worship and idolatry, contending...that the feast of December 25th, had been invented by disciples of Cerinthus...”

Thus, a pagan festival, celebrated long before Christ’s birth, found its way into recognized Christianity.

Did you know that even the seventeenth century Puritans of New England understood how wrong Christmas was? They actually banned its obser-

vance by law, in 1659, throughout the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Fines and imprisonment could result from being found keeping it. It was almost 200 years (1856) before people stopped working on Christmas in Boston. The Puritans knew its roots and labeled it “heathen, papist idolatry.”

Those Who “Change Times and Laws”

The prophet Daniel (7:8) speaks of a “little horn,” which (7:25) “shall speak great words against the Most High... and think to change times and laws.” This little horn is a great religious authority that attempts to superimpose its *own* view of dates and celebrations, on an unsuspecting world, in place of God’s plain instruction.

The Hebrew word translated “change” means to “transform, alter or set.” The word translated “times” means “appointed occasions, seasons or times.” The Hebrew word translated “laws” means “decrees or laws of God.” When put together, this phrase refers to an authority that attempts to “transform appointed occasions and seasons within the Law of God.” Certainly, Christmas is a great example of how this has been done. God’s instructions have been replaced with religious traditions of men.

The following quote reveals how this has happened. It also comes from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, under “Christianity”: “Thus, the Easter liturgy has been developed more highly in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Christmas liturgy more highly in the Roman Catholic Church...The Christian calendar is the most widely disseminated Christian institution. The seven-day week and the rhythm of the Christian festivals have been accepted even by most of the non-Christian countries. Despite energetic attempts at the introduction of a sliding work week, the seven-day week with work-free Sunday could not be eliminated even in Communist states with an Atheist world view. Even in Atheistic circles and organizations throughout the world, Christian holidays enjoy an undisputed popularity as work-free days...*especially Christmas.*”

Truly, it has been the “ecclesiastical politicians,” referred to earlier, who have sought to impose the modern “Christian” calendar on an unknowing world. It is these leaders who *have* “thought to change times and laws.”

The Dangerous Power of Lies

One of Satan’s names is *Destroyer* (Rev. 9:11). Nimrod/Saturn/Molech/Baal, like Satan, is the fire god who destroys and devours little children.

The real Jesus Christ was *never* in and *never will be* in Christmas! He cannot be put back into where He has never been. But the “god of this world,” Satan (II Cor. 4:4), has *always* been in Christmas. He is its author!

The true God commands that we must “worship Him in spirit and in *truth*” (John 4:23-24). This does not mesh with the great Christmas and Santa Claus *lies* that all children so willingly believe.

I Timothy 4:2 warns of those “speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.” Parents can “burn” their own children, to the point of searing them, with the Christmas deception and lie!

There is no “safety in numbers” in this world for those who keep Christmas, because Satan, who is called “the father of lies” and “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44), has “deceived the *whole* world” (Rev.12:9)! Turn to this verse and read it. Then recognize that Christmas is certainly a testimony to that great deception.

But Christ refers to His Church as a “little flock” (Luke 12:32). Many other verses show this. This Church does not have the large numbers of the respected, established brands of the Christianity of this world.

“Another Jesus”

There is another problem with the idea of “putting Christ back in Christmas”—and it is big! The “Jesus” that is the focus of this season is NOT the *true* Jesus Christ of the Bible!

Most have been taught that there is only one Jesus Christ. But God’s Word speaks of a counterfeit, and this sub-

stitute Christ is identifiable in history. The proof? The apostle Paul warned of “another Jesus.”

Grasp what is at stake here!

First, consider Paul’s entire introduction as he sets the stage for the warning that follows: “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent [Satan] *beguiled* Eve through his *subtilty*, so your minds should be *corrupted* from the *simplicity that is in Christ*” (II Cor. 11:3).

Now for the actual warning in the next verse: “For if he that comes preaches *ANOTHER JESUS*, whom we have not preached, or if you receive *another spirit*, which you have not received, or *another gospel*, which you have not accepted, you might well bear with him” (II Cor. 11:4). The Corinthians seemed to “bear with this” without much resistance.

Paul, under inspiration of the *true* Jesus Christ of the Bible, was moved to record the peril of unwittingly following “another Jesus.” Consider. Most have probably never remotely considered the idea of a false Jesus for even a moment—that there *is* such a thing as a wrong, different and “false Christ” (Matt. 24:23-24)—called “another Jesus.” In the past, this “Jesus” has even corrupted the thinking of true Christians. This much is plain. But the “subtilty” of *how* this can happen, and *how* it has occurred in history, is so deceptive—so seductive—that even true Christians can unknowingly slip into worshipping this so-called Jesus. This is what was happening to the Corinthians.

People can worship in ways that represent things that are far different than what they sincerely believe or intend. Bible “believers” today can *think* that they are worshipping the true Savior when they are really worshipping a *false savior*—ANOTHER JESUS! The entirety of traditional Christianity is actually worshipping Nimrod/Saturn/Molech/Baal. The modern mother/child “Mary/Jesus” emphasis, including the worshipful adoration of Mary by millions, is a parallel with Nimrod and his mother, Semiramis, that cannot be missed.

Here is the point of what is being explained. Many speak of “putting Christ back into Christmas.” This is heard every year from thousands of pulpits and elsewhere. But the true Christ was never there! Just as a person cannot go back into a room that he had never entered, Jesus Christ cannot be “put back” into an event that He has never been in, and that He in fact hates! (See Mark 7:7.) The Jesus that these preachers and religionists have in mind is another Christ, one with another gospel, another spirit—the Christmas spirit!—bringing totally different doctrines and teachings.

Can you see the connection?

What Should You Do?

Finally, let’s examine what God told His people they should do and the way they ought to teach their children.

In Jeremiah 7:31 God condemned Israel for burning their children in the Valley of Tophet. Eight verses earlier (vs. 23-24), God had made plain what He requires: “But this thing *commanded* I them, saying, *Obey My voice*, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people: and walk you in all the ways that I have commanded you, *that it may be well unto you*. But they hearkened not...but walked...in the imagination of their evil heart...”

Human beings do not want to obey God (Rom. 8:7). They would rather follow their own “imagination.” They do not understand that God wants their lives to go “well.” He wants happiness, joy and blessings to flow into people’s lives. All these are the results of obeying Him.

God inspired Moses to warn parents of the grave responsibility that they have in what and how they teach their children. Notice His instruction in Deuteronomy 6:1, 6-7, 20-21, 25: “Now these are the *commandments*... which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you go to possess it...And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart: And you shall *teach them diligently unto your children*, and

shall *talk of them* when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up...*And when your son asks you* in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God has commanded you? Then you shall say unto your son, We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand...And it shall be our righteousness, *if we observe to do all these commandments* before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.”

God took Israel out of Egypt—from slavery—out of the customs of the world around them and revealed His Law to them. He does not want His people going back to the traditions, customs and ways from which He has called them.

When all of the interconnected traditions, filled with the symbolism of worshipping an ancient pagan, humanly devised god, are taught, this is not worshipping the true Creator.

We Have not Known that Christmas is of Babylon

Jesus said twice, in Matthew 7:16 and 20, that “you shall know them by their fruits.” Everything that people say or do, good or bad, has fruits. The *fruits* of Christmas are terrible. This season leads the entire year in adultery, loneliness, jealousy, drunkenness and drunk driving, family arguments (and worse), and accumulation of debt that often lasts until March. This problem is so significant that almost all churches typically report that their incomes—how ironic—*drop* during this period as people “recover” from all their spending!

The Real “Christmas Spirit”

The prophet Isaiah was inspired to write, “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression” (58:1). I have done this. Now that you have read the PLAIN TRUTH about the true origin of Christmas, what will you do? □



WORLD NEWS DESK

AN EDITORIAL ANALYSIS OF WORLD NEWS, TRENDS AND CONDITIONS



SOCIETY & LIFESTYLES

INTERNET CHILD ABUSE IMAGES INCREASING

The Internet is being flooded with websites hosting images of child abuse. The UK's Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) marked its 10th anniversary by releasing statistics for the last decade, reporting that more than 30,000 websites containing illegal child abuse content were removed from the Internet in that time.

The IWF has received an average of 1,000 reports per year of illegal web content since it was set up in 1996. The group received nearly 30,000 reports in 2006 to date, compared to 615 reports in 1996.

The organization revealed that 79% of the "child victims featured in the images were female." They also reported that the "severity of the images over the last 12 months had significantly increased."

Over the past 10 years, 51% of the content was believed to have originated from the U.S., with 20% of it coming from Russia.

Source: *DailyMail*

POLE-DANCING KIT MARKETED TO CHILDREN

Tesco, Britain's number one retail chain, was forced to remove a pole-dancing kit from the toys and games section of its website after it was accused by a family campaigning group of "destroying children's innocence."

The game's description reads, "Unleash the sex kitten inside...simply extend the Peekaboo pole...slip on the sexy tunes and away you go...soon you'll be flaunting it to the world."

The kit includes a chrome pole that extends to 8.5 feet, an instructional DVD showing suggestive dance moves and a "sexy garter."

A spokesman for the company stated, "Pole dancing is an increasing exercise craze. This item is for people who want to improve their fitness and have fun at the same time." The item has since been moved to the "Fitness Accessories" section of Tesco's website.

Source: *DailyMail*

WEATHER

RECORD SNOWFALL IN NEW YORK STATE

Buffalo, New York, was hit with almost two feet of heavy snow—the most recorded in a two-day period in October. The storm killed six people and left around 380,000 without power.

One resident said, "Our street looked like it was hit by a hurricane. It looks like the apocalypse. It's unreal. One-hundred-year-old trees are down."

A spokesman for National Grid said, "This is certainly a storm and restoration effort that ranks among the most significant we've ever had."

Source: *AP*

DEADLY WILDFIRE SCORCHES CALIFORNIA

Awildfire almost three times the size of Manhattan burned more than 40,200 acres near Palm Springs, California, and killed five firefighters, injuring 13. The deadly fire destroyed 39 houses, 20 buildings and cost roughly \$9.9 million.

Officials suspect arson was involved and have placed a \$500,000 reward for information leading to an arrest.

Source: *Reuters*

HEALTH, SCIENCE & SOCIETY

WORLD MORE OBESE THAN STARVING

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “for every four adults in the world who are malnourished five more are overweight, 30% of them clinically obese.”

WHO said that the world’s obesity problem constitutes a global epidemic. One out of six people (or one billion) in the world is overweight. In comparison, 800 million people do not have enough to eat.

Obesity plagues some countries more than others. The number of obese makes up around 5% of the population in China, Japan and some African nations. By contrast, in parts of Samoa, 75% are considered obese.

Thirty percent of U.S. adults are categorized as clinically obese—roughly 60 million people. Among certain demographic groups, particularly African Americans, the percentage rises to 45%.

In the European Union, 45% of the population (or 200 million adults) is overweight.

Researchers say the cause of this rise in obesity is due to people’s inactive lifestyles and diets rich in sugar, fats and salt.

Meanwhile, a recent UN “food insecurity” report stated that world leaders are coming up short of their goal to cut in half the number of undernourished people in the world. The Millennium Development Goal was set in 1996 at the World Food Summit.

“Ten years later, we are confronted with the sad reality that virtually no progress has been made towards that objective,” Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Director-General Jacques Diouf said in the report.

Although there has been no reduction in the total number of hungry people—854 million people worldwide—the FAO report stated that a declining proportion of the population is underfed.

Leaders remain hopeful that the goal could still be reached by the 2015 deadline.

Source: *AFP, Reuters*

AIDS SPREADS THROUGH CHINA

AIDS in China is spreading outside of high-risk groups such as prostitutes, drug users and homosexuals. According to a senior health official, the disease is being transmitted in China in similar ways as it is spread in Africa, which has the highest number of HIV-infected in the world.

Hao Yang, the deputy director general of the bureau of diseases prevention and control at China’s Ministry of Health, said, “We’re now like Africa.”

Last year, we found that 48 percent of those who were newly infected contracted the disease from sex, so it’s not a disease that afflicts only high-risk groups.” Mr. Yang continued, “There are 190 new infections every day,” and in some high-prevalence areas “nearly one percent of pregnant women are infected.”

Many in China living with the virus

are taking drugs to prolong life. Yet the treatment is proving ineffective due to people’s ignorance of the strict regimen. One AIDS activist said, “So many patients are just taking the drugs haphazardly.” When treatment is not done correctly the virus can mutate and develop a resistance to the drugs.

China is acting fast to curb the spread of the virus and has already spent \$20 million on treatment methods. The country now requires all entertainment spots to make condoms available, has increased the number of methadone clinics to help drug addicts beat the habit, and just opened the first ever homosexual health clinic. The nation is currently negotiating prices with two leading drug companies, Abbott and Gilead Sciences Inc. to provide

drug treatment for its citizens.

UNAIDS has cautioned that if more is not done to prevent the spread of the disease, roughly 10 million people in China could become affected by AIDS in less than 5 years.

Source: *Reuters; MedIndia.com*



RELIGION

MORE U.S. HISPANICS TURNING TO ISLAM

An increasing number of Hispanics are being drawn to Islam.

Since 1999, the U.S. Hispanic Muslim population has increased by 30% to an estimated 200,000, according to the national director of the American Muslim Council in Chicago.

Many of the new converts, often second- and third-generation Hispanic Americans, are attracted to Islam due to curiosity, marriage and a common interest such as immigration.

The boom is especially significant in New York, Florida, California and Texas, where Hispanic communities are the largest.

Source: *Christian Science Monitor*

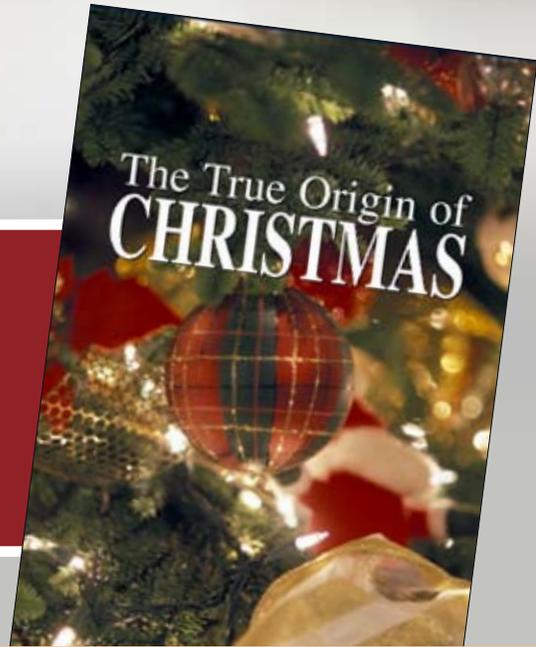


PHOTO: MCT

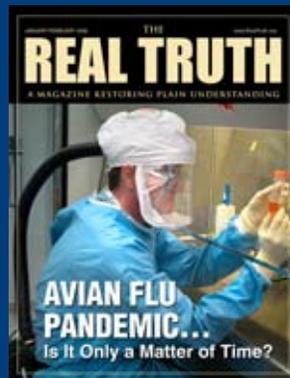
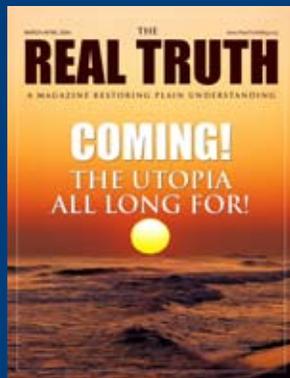
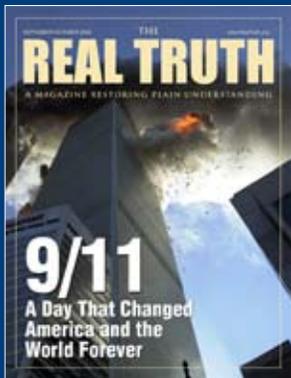


“Tis the Season”?

Where did Christmas originate? From the Bible or paganism? What is the real origin of Santa Claus—mistletoe—Christmas trees—holly wreaths—and the custom of exchanging gifts? Many are concerned about putting “Christ back into Christmas.” Was He ever there? Here are the stunning answers!



Have you missed out on previous issues?



Read them online at your convenience!