

THE SABBATH SCOOP

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IS MOTHER'S DAY PAGAN?

The earliest Mother's Day celebrations honored pagan Greek and Roman goddesses.

By Gregory Dullum

The second Sunday in May is Mother's Day in the United States, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Turkey, Australia, and Belgium. Is it an INNOCENT holiday on which we honor our mothers, or does it have pagan origins so we would want to avoid it?

Pagan Celebrations

If you have flipped through this issue of the *Sabbath Scoop*, you may have already read this month's "Fun Fact" on page 5, which reads, "Some of the earliest Mother's Day celebrations on record can be traced back to ancient Greece. The celebrations were held in honor of Rhea, the Mother of the Gods. The Roman equivalent was a religious celebration known as Hilaria which lasted from March 15 to 18."

Encyclopaedia Britannica gives additional information in its article titled "Mother's Day." It says it is "a festival derived from the custom of mother worship in ancient Greece. Formal mother worship, with ceremonies to Cybele, or Rhea, the Great Mother of the Gods, were performed on the Ides of March throughout Asia Minor. With the coming of Christianity this developed into the worship of 'Mother Church,' the celebration occurring on mid-Lent Sunday, when children returned home with gifts for parents, especially the mother" (1959 ed., vol. 15, p. 849).

Paganism Forbidden by God

Does God want us celebrating a day that has origins in paganism? He told the ancient Israelites before they conquered the pagan people in Canaan, "take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not enquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also



Drawing by Greg Dullum

Anna Jarvis urged the observance of Mother's Day to honor our mothers.

will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deut. 12:30-32).

Consider All the Facts

From these three quotes, we might jump to the conclusion that Mother's Day is a pagan holiday which we should NOT keep. But *jumping to a conclusion* is what we would be doing! Let's dig a little deeper and consider ALL THE FACTS.

First, let's examine the quotes describing the pagan celebration of Mother's Day. Notice what they say and don't say.

The Fun Fact does NOT say the Mother's Day we celebrate today CAME from pagan celebrations. It states, "Some of the earliest

Mother's Day celebrations on record can be traced back to ancient Greece." In other words, the pagan Greeks celebrated a type of Mother's Day. Was it *our* Mother's Day? No. It was NOT to honor their mothers. It was to WORSHIP the mother of their false gods. Its purpose was different! Was it on the *same day* as our Mother's Day? No! It was in the middle of March, NOT the second Sunday in May.

Now, let's consider the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* quote. This encyclopedia was written from a *British*—not an American point of view. It does NOT address the *American* custom of Mother's Day at all! It describes a day that has the same name, but is a completely different holiday occurring mid-Lent! Lent is the period between Ash Wednesday (in February) and Easter Sunday (in late March or early April).

These two quotes describe the same pagan celebration! But they are not talking about the American celebration of Mother's Day, which has completely different origins! Let's examine the true origins of the American holiday.

True Origin of Mother's Day

"The first known suggestion for a Mother's Day in the United States was made by Julia Ward Howe, author of 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic,' in 1872. She suggested the observance of a Mother's Day on June 2, as a day dedicated to peace. For several years she held an annual Mother's Day meeting in Boston. Mary Towles Sassey, a Kentucky school teacher, started conducting Mother's Day celebrations in 1887.

In 1904, Frank E. Hering of South Bend, Ind., launched a campaign for Mother's Day at a convention of the Fraternal Order of Eagles in Kansas City, Mo. Three years later, Anna

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Mother's Day

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Jarvis of Philadelphia began a lifetime of effort to establish the nationwide observance of this day. It was she who selected the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day, and who originated the custom of wearing carnations to honor mothers.

"Mother's Day received national recognition on May 8, 1914, through a resolution passed by both houses of Congress.... In the following year, the President was authorized to proclaim Mother's Day as a yearly national observance" ("Mother's Day," *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1956, vol. 11, p. 5275). Note, this is a *national* observance, NOT a *religious* observance!

The vote in Congress was unanimous: "The second Sunday in May is Mother's Day in the United States. It was proposed by Anna Jarvis of Philadelphia in 1907—no one in Congress dared vote against the idea" (*The Illuminated Book of Days* by Kay and Marshall Lee, 1979, p. 56).

Mother's Day in the United States was *never* a day of pagan celebration. While pagan societies may have had their own Mother's Days, the day we celebrate in the United States is a *separate* celebration created to honor our mothers.

New Year's Day, Groundhog's Day, Valentine's Day, Mardi Gras, Lent, Easter, May Day, Halloween and Christmas are all *religious* holidays with customs originating in paganism. For practicing pagans, these were important days of worship. As the Catholic Church spread its brand of Christianity across Europe, it tried unsuccessfully to extirpate the pagan practices. Realizing it could not do so, the church gave "Christian" meaning to the pagan customs. This is exactly what God told the ancient Israelites NOT to do—worship Him using pagan customs.

The American Mother's Day, however, is NOT and never was a *religious* observance; it's NOT a day to worship God or to practice any particular religious ritual. It's a *secular* holiday, established by a secular government to honor our mothers.

Honoring Mothers

Does God want us to honor our mothers?

Absolutely! The fifth commandment states, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12).

Can We Celebrate Other Days?

Is it wrong to observe a holiday that was

NOT established by God? Didn't He say, "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not ADD TO IT nor take away from it"? Does this mean we should NOT observe *any day* except God's holy Sabbath and Feast days (see Leviticus 23)—the days He commands?

If this were true, Christians should not observe any of our national holidays. However, it is NOT true. There are examples in the Bible where God allows his people to observe *national* celebrations.

The Jews, in the time of Esther, created the Feast of Purim (Esther 9:20-22, 26). It was NOT a commanded feast of God, but was a *national* observance.

Later, in the days of the Maccabees, the Jews began to celebrate a festival called Hanukkah, or the Feast of Dedication. Although it falls in December around Christmastime, it is NOT of pagan origin! It is NOT a Jewish version of Christmas. It commemorates the cleansing and rededication of the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus Christ, being a Jew, probably observed this feast (John 10:22).

There are people who claim the national day of Thanksgiving in November should NOT be kept by Christians. They reason that it's not commanded by God, it's similar to pagan harvest festivals, and the cornucopia was used by pagans in the worship of their gods.

However, if we study the origin of the American Thanksgiving Day, we will find, just as in the case of Mother's Day, it's NOT a continuation of any pagan celebration. It was *first* celebrated by the Pilgrims in this country. It was later established by the secular government as a national holiday upon which to give God thanks.

There are other national holidays which have been established by our secular government to honor various people or events, such as Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Martin Luther King Day and Presidents Day. They are not of pagan origin and are okay for Christians to observe!

What God Really Forbids

God did not forbid secular celebrations. What He forbade was:

1) His people observing PAGAN *religious* celebrations *instead* of his feasts ("Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not... take away from it"); and

2) Mixing the pagan customs with true observance—(Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it...). This is called syncretism.

Mixing paganism with Christianity is what most Christian churches do today! They have merged pagan customs with

their Christian beliefs. They celebrate the pagan rebirth of the sun god at the winter solstice (the darkest time of the year), but call it the birthday of the Son of God, (even though Jesus was born in autumn)! They continue the pagan practice of weeping for Tammuz and call it Lent. They continue the pagan practice of sun worship but claim they are honoring the risen Christ at Easter sunrise services.

Mother's Day is NOT *the same* as these other celebrations of warmed-over paganism. No one who observes Mother's Day on the second Sunday in May is honoring some pagan goddess. They are giving honor to their mothers (something commanded by God) on a day set aside as a national holiday by a civil government.

We are to observe the seven annual festivals which God gave us without adding any pagan customs to them. We are to avoid pagan religious festivals altogether. And we are free to observe national holidays that do not originate in pagan observances.

Giving Honor and Thanks

When it comes to Mother's Day and Father's Day, God encourages us to honor our mothers and fathers (Deut. 5:16). On Memorial Day, Independence Day and Veterans Day, it's proper to honor those who fought (and those who died) to give us our freedoms and to keep us free (Rom. 13:7). And it's certainly proper to thank God for his blessings on a national day of Thanksgiving. The Apostle Paul wrote, "in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thes. 5:18).

We can confidently continue to celebrate secular holidays that don't originate in paganism and that honor those who deserve our honor and thanks.

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JOHN THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED

John learns about the priorities of this life and what happens after death.

By Gregory Dullum
Part 8

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

Jesus healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath and was criticized by the ruler of the synagogue for doing so. Jesus defended His actions by saying, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" His adversaries were put to shame and the multitudes rejoiced for the glorious things done by Christ (Luke 13:10-17).

Jesus Keeps Hanukkah

In December is the Jewish Feast of Hanukkah, which celebrates the dedication of the temple. It is not one of God's feasts (see Leviticus 23) but is an eight-day festival celebrated by Jews since the time of the Maccabees—the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is mentioned in the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees.

"In 1 Macc. 4:52-59 it is called 'the dedication of the altar,' and by Josephus (*Ant. 12.7.7*) 'the feast of lights.' It was a popular and joyous festival commemorating the purifying of the Temple, the removal of the old, polluted altar, and the restoration of the worship of Jehovah by Judas Maccabeus, 164 B.C." ("Festivals," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* by Merrill F. Unger, 1988, p. 422).

Because Christ was a Jew, He probably kept this Jewish festival. "Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch" (John 10:22-23).

Jews surrounded Christ and demanded that He tell them plainly if He was the Christ. Jesus replied, "I told you, and you do not believe" (vv. 24-25). Jesus said they didn't believe Him because they were NOT of his flock. His flock did two things. They 1) listened to Him and 2) obeyed Him. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (v. 27).

John and the other disciples were the flock of the Good Shepherd at that time. Today, we can be assured we are part of that flock if we listen and obey Him. We

can take comfort that He knows us. Christ is fully aware of all our needs and problems. He is aware of our accomplishments and our shortfalls. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He works with each one of his followers to develop holy, righteous character—the kind needed by a spirit being to use the immense power of God properly. God will not grant eternal life to people who are not ready to handle that responsibility. He wants to give us eternal life (v. 28), so we have a duty to make ourselves ready!

Jesus' words plainly contradict the pagan idea that man already has eternal life but is only temporarily housed in a body of flesh. He told the Jews, "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish" (v. 28). How could Christ give eternal life to his followers if they already had it?

Not only will Christ's followers be granted eternal life, but they will become part of the God family. They will rank above the angels as sons of God! Christ explained this in verses 34-36.

Because Christ called Himself a Son of God, making Himself equal to God (saying, "I and My father are one"—v. 30), the Jews picked up stones to throw at Him (v. 31), and attempted to seize Him but He escaped out of their hand (v. 39).

John and the other disciples are not mentioned in these accounts. It's possible that they were not present—or perhaps they are not mentioned because the focus is on Christ and his words and deeds.

Would the Jews have tried to kill Jesus if He were surrounded by 12 strong men who may have doubled as bodyguards to discourage anyone from physically harming Christ? It's possible the Jews became so angry they didn't pay attention to the 12 disciples surrounding Christ. They wanted to kill Him so bad that they ignored the people around Him.

Did the disciples ever double as bodyguards? The Bible hints that they may have. At least two carried weapons, and they were not afraid to use them to protect Christ's life when it was endangered (Luke 22:36-38, 49-50). Did Christ need bodyguards to keep Him safe? No—angels would protect Him! However, a show of force would discourage bandits along the road or small groups of angry Jews from attacking Christ during his ministry. The disciples may have stood between Christ and the angry Jews at this time, allowing Him to escape (John 10:39).

Jesus Withdraws to Bethany

Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went again to the region across the Jordan River, where John the Baptist had been baptizing. Many of John's disciples came and believed on Christ (John 10:40-42).

Returning toward Jerusalem

During this final 3-1/2 months of Jesus' life, He and his disciples made another trip toward Jerusalem (Luke 13:22).

Someone asked Jesus, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" (v. 23).

Jesus replied that only a few would be saved at this time. Many would seek to be saved but salvation was not available to them. They will strive to be good Christians and will claim, "We ate and drank in your presence, and You taught in our streets." But Christ will say to them, "I do not know you.... Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity" (vv. 24-27).

If we want to be among the few who are saved at this time, we must repent of our sins (iniquity) and change our lifestyles so that we HEAR the Good Shepherd's words and OBEY THEM! We can't rely on thinking we're "good people" or "good enough," or that our membership in a church will save us. Christ says No! We ALL have an individual responsibility to STUDY the instructions given in the Bible and to PUT THEM INTO PRACTICE in our lives!

For those who think they are good enough to receive eternal life but have not stopped breaking God's laws, Christ gives this warning: "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out" (v. 28).

Pharisees arrived and warned Jesus to flee, for King Herod had plans to kill Him. Jesus told them to tell Herod that He had his own plans to do miracles, and that Herod could not stop Him if he tried (vv. 31-33).

Back Beyond the Jordan

After three days, Christ and his disciples returned to Perea, beyond the Jordan, out of Herod's reach.

There, Christ again healed on the Sab-

John

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bath while eating in the home of one of the Pharisee rulers.

He told a parable to those who were invited, instructing them to be humble, saying, “For whomsoever exalts himself shall be abased, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:1-11). He told the host that one should NOT give just to get something in return. We will be *blessed by God* if we give to those who are *unable* to repay us (vv.12-14).

Christ then told the parable of the great supper. In this parable, many were invited to eat at a great supper, but they had excuses not to come. So the master of the house then invited the poor, blind, maimed, and anyone else passing by to come eat with him. Those who were invited, but found *excuses* not to come, were NOT allowed to eat (vv. 15-24).

We have been invited each Sabbath and holy day to partake of a spiritual feast with God. Do we make excuses NOT to attend? “I’m too tired.” “It’s too far to travel.” “I must stay home because family is visiting.” “I have to work.”

What are our priorities in this life? Are our top priorities 1) taking care of our possessions (v. 18); 2) doing our job (v. 19); or 3) being with family (v. 20)? These things are *not wrong in themselves!* But they should NOT be our TOP priorities. If they are, we risk making our Master angry with us! This parable tells us that our TOP priority should be *to serve God*, and all that it entails, including attending church services, where we are spiritually fed by God!

True disciples of Christ must even put their *closest* family members SECOND to God (v. 26). This is part of counting the cost—something each disciple should have done before baptism and committing their lives to Christ (vv. 27-33).

If disciples of Christ go back on their commitment, they become like salt that has lost its flavor and will be cast away as useless (vv. 34-35). This instruction was meant for John and the other disciples in that day—and for us and all the disciples who hear and follow Christ’s words since then! Christ said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (v. 35).

Accused of Eating With Sinners

Tax collectors and sinners drew near to Christ to hear Him. The Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1-2). Christ defended his actions with three parables: that of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost (prodigal) son (vv. 3-32).

Instructions About Money

Christ then turned specifically to his disciples and told them the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-8). Following that parable, Christ gave John and the other disciples specific instructions:

1. Use the money you have to make friends, so when you need friends, you will have them (v. 9).
2. Be faithful in small things, such as the use of money, if you want to be given greater responsibility in the kingdom of God (vv. 10-12).
3. Do not love money more than God. Put money in its proper place and put God first in your lives (v. 13).

The Pharisees, who loved money, scoffed at Jesus’ words to his disciples (v. 14).

Christ responded with the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Some use this as proof that when people die, their souls leave their bodies and go to heaven (if they were good) or to an eternal, fire-burning hell (if they were bad). However, this is NOT a real event. It’s *a parable—a fictional story* Christ tells to make a point.

The Bible tells us plainly that souls DIE—they don’t live without the body (Ezek. 18:4, 20). People lose all consciousness at death (Eccles. 9:5-6, 10). The inanimate human spirit that records our thoughts, memories, character and personality, leaves the body at death and goes to heaven where it is stored until the time of resurrection, when it will be placed into a new body (Eccles. 12:7, 1 Cor. 15:35-44). Our human bodies decay and return to dust (Gen. 2:7, 3:19; Eccles. 12:7).

Why did Christ tell a parable where two dead people are alive; one in heaven and the other in hell, if it’s not true? Because the Jews believed in heaven and hell; Christ used a fable they understood.

And what was his point? They should have recognized themselves as “the rich man” and Christ’s followers as the poor beggar Lazarus. They, like the rich man in the parable, loved money and didn’t use their riches to become better people—they ignored instructions from Moses and the prophets, perhaps believing that their riches would save them. The rich man discovered too late that his lifestyle was wrong. He wanted Lazarus to warn his family, but Christ concluded the parable by saying, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

It’s ironic that Christ gave this parable shortly before He raised his friend, LAZARUS, from the dead—causing some to believe on Him, and others to *want to kill* Him, proving his point!

Instructions to Disciples

Christ then turned his attention from the Pharisees and spoke directly to John and the other disciples.

“It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!... Take heed to yourselves, if your brother sins against you, rebuke him (let him know); and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him” (Luke 17:1, 3-4).

We who follow Christ must be willing to forgive our brothers when they offend us. And we should take care not to do or say things that would offend others. If we slip up, we should apologize and ask for forgiveness. Too many in the church have been offended by the words or actions of others and have allowed their hurt feelings to turn into a root of bitterness that have led them out of the church.

John and the other apostles knew that they needed more faith to make this possible. So they asked Christ to increase their faith (v. 5) Christ didn’t just say, “Poof! You have more faith.” He told them a parable with a poignant point: “So likewise you, when you have done all the things which you are commanded, say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.” In other words, if they wanted more faith, they needed to go BEYOND *obedience* to all the *commandments*. They were to go beyond their *duty* and give *MORE of themselves*.

Raising Lazarus from the Dead

While He was preaching in Perea beyond the Jordan, word came from Mary and Martha in Bethany, a town near Jerusalem, that their brother, Lazarus was sick.

Jesus didn’t rush off to heal Lazarus while he was still alive. He had a better idea. He chose to allow Lazarus to die so he could raise him from the dead!

“So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again’ ” (John 11:6-7).

John and the other disciples remembered that the Jews in that area had sought to kill Jesus and they were not anxious to go back. “The disciples said to Him, ‘Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?’ ” (vv. 8).

Jesus compared death to sleep when He told his disciples, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up” (v. 11). The disciples didn’t get it (v. 13). They said to Him, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well” (v. 13). Then Jesus told

them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there [to heal him while he was alive] that you may believe [when you see Me raise him from the dead]. Nevertheless, let us go to him" (vv. 14-15).

Thomas said to John and the other disciples, perhaps with a tone of sarcasm, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (v. 16). If they indeed served as Christ's bodyguards, it would have been their duty to protect his life with theirs.

When Martha heard Jesus was coming, she met Him outside of Bethany and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you."

Jesus told Martha, "Your brother will live again."

She knew Lazarus was not alive in heaven. He was dead and buried, but would be resurrected back to life at a future time. She said to Jesus, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus told her that God had given Him the power to raise people from the dead. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives [eternally] and believes in Me shall never die [again]. Do you believe this?"

She replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is come into the world" (vv. 20-27).

Meanwhile, Mary was mourning in the house with friends and relatives. Martha went and told her, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." She arose quickly and went to Jesus. The other mourners followed (vv. 28-31).

Mary fell at Jesus' feet and repeated the words He had heard from Martha, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." The other mourners held a similar sentiment. Some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" (vv. 32, 37).

Jesus wept (v. 35). Why? He had NO REASON to weep for the loss of Lazarus, for He had come to raise him from the dead!

Crying can be contagious. Christ may have seen their tears and felt sympathy. Yet, Christ realized there was no need for this grief and feeling of loss; if they had truly believed that He was the resurrection and the life, they would not have been so sad. Perhaps Christ wept when He saw those around Him unnecessarily suffering, because they lacked faith in Him. It was their lack of faith that may have brought tears to his eyes.

Tears of sadness were about to be

turned into tears of joy. Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus, which was a cave with a stone over the mouth. Jesus commanded, "Take away the stone."

Martha objected. "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

The stone was rolled away and Jesus prayed to his Father loud enough for the bystanders to hear. Then He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

Lazarus, who had been dead, waddled out of his tomb, for he was bound hand and foot with graveclothes and had a cloth wrapped around his face. "Loose him and let him go," Christ ordered.

Many of the Jews who had been at the funeral and had mourned with Mary, believed on Christ. But some did not. They went to the Pharisees and told them what Christ had done.

The Pharisees feared a loss of their POWER. They worried that ALL would follow Jesus instead. And they thought the Romans might "take away both our place and our nation." From that day on, they plotted to put Christ to death (vv. 38-53).

"Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with his disciples" (v. 54).

Heading to Jerusalem

"As Ephraim was pretty certainly in the northern part of Judea, it has been reasonably supposed... that, when the Passover was approaching, Jesus went from that region northward through Samaria into the southeastern part of Galilee, so as to fall in with the pilgrims going from Galilee through Perea to Jerusalem" (*A Harmony of the Gospels* by A. T. Robertson, 1950, p. 139).

This circuitous route explains why Luke says they traveled north from Samaria to Galilee while on their way to Jerusalem, which was south (Luke 17:11). In a village in either Samaria or Galilee, they encountered 10 lepers who begged to be healed. Christ told them to go and show themselves to the priests and they would be cleansed. Only one of the lepers—a Samaritan—bothered to return to Christ and thank Him (vv. 12-19).

Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus told these unbelievers, "The kingdom of God is within you." Some have taken this reply to mean that the kingdom of God is established

JOHN

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Fun Fact



Drawing and Fun Fact are courtesy of NAPS

Some of the earliest Mother's Day celebrations on record can be traced back to ancient Greece. The celebrations were held in honor of Rhea, the Mother of the Gods. The Roman equivalent was a religious celebration known as Hilaria which lasted from March 15 to 18.

Witerature

Wit and wisdom to complement the truths of the Holy Bible can be found in secular writings.

Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand, Signet, 1996, p. 924.

Why Our World Is Evil

"‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ said a voice that came from the radio receiver—a man’s clear, calm, implacable voice, the kind of voice that had not been heard on the airwaves for years—‘Mr. Thompson will not speak to you tonight. His time is up. I have taken it over. You were to hear a report on the world crisis. That is what you are going to hear...

“‘You have destroyed all that which you held to be evil and achieved all that which you held to be good. Why, then, do you shrink from the world around you? That world is not the product of your sins, it is the product and image of your virtues. It is your moral ideal brought into reality in its full and final perfection. You have fought for it, you have dreamed of it, you have wished it....’”

Jer. 17:9, Isa. 5:20, Prov. 14:12

Quotable Quote

"All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her."

—George Washington

Memory Scripture

"...[T]he scripture cannot be broken."
—John 10:35

John

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mysteriously within the hearts of his followers. But these Pharisees were NOT *followers!* A correct understanding of this verse is, “The kingdom of God is in your midst.” Jesus Christ was KING of that kingdom! He represented that kingdom while He was on the earth, and He was standing in their midst. He then explained that He would establish the kingdom on earth when He returned (vv. 23-24). He noted that He must die before he could come back as a spirit being to rule (v. 25). The day of his return will be unexpected. People will be caught unaware, as were the people in Noah’s day who perished in the flood, or in Lot’s day, who died in the fire and brimstone that rained from heaven (vv. 26-37).

Christ then warned that two people would be together, either in bed, or working together, and one would be taken and the other left behind (vv. 34-36). Some have used this scripture to believe in a secret rapture, that true believers will be taken to heaven. Christ didn’t say they were raptured to heaven. He was asked by the disciples where they will be taken. His reply was, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (v. 37). There are no bodies in heaven.

Christ was speaking about a place on earth—a place of safety—to which the body of his church would flee on the wings of an eagle (Rev. 12:14). But notice! Not everyone who thinks they are in the church will be protected! Some will go to a place of safety and some will not—they will go through the great tribulation (Rev. 12:17).

Christ’s instruction in Luke 17 indicates that perhaps only half of those who think they are in the church will be taken to a place of safety. Although they share a bed or do a work together, only half will be taken to a place of safety!

Those last days before Christ returns will be very difficult. It will take strong faith to persevere to the end. Christ told his disciples the parable of the persistent widow and concluded with this question: “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:1-8).

In addition to having faith, the followers of Christ must be humble and teachable to be among those who are spared from the great tribulation—and to ultimately be exalted to the position of son of God. Christ next told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, concluding with these words, “for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (vv. 9-14).

(To be continued!)

END-TIME EVENTS

RECENT WORLD EVENTS & THEIR PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

Japan Builds Up Military; Shifts From Pacifism

“With small but significant steps, Japan has been moving for several years toward refashioning itself and its 240,000-strong Self-Defense Forces into something closer to a true partner of the United States military.

“In recent years, the two countries have jointly developed a ship-borne missile system capable of shooting down ballistic missiles. Mr. [Shinzo] Abe [Japan’s new prime minister] is calling for a broader interpretation of the post-war Constitution, which restricts Japan to acting only in ‘self-defense,’ to include acting in defense of allies.

“The new assertiveness has been particularly apparent under the new prime minister, Shinzo Abe, a conservative who has increased military spending for the first time in 11 years.... Mr. Abe’s calls for a bolder, stronger military are getting a warmer welcome in Japan than similar efforts in the past” (“Japan Shifts From Pacifism as Anxiety in Region Rises” by Martin Fackler, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, April 1, 2013, pp. 1-2).

Although currently enemies, Japan could join China and North Korea to become part of an Oriental confederation called “kings from the east” mentioned in end time prophecy. The kings from the east will wield a vast army of 200 million that will attack the “king of the North” (Europe) outside of Jerusalem at the time of Christ’s return (Dan. 11:40-41, 44; Rev. 9:13-18, 16:12-16).

North Korea to Restart Old Nuclear Reactor

“North Korea will restart its shuttered Yongbyon nuclear reactor, its official KCNA news service said on Tuesday [April 2], a move that could enable it to extract more plutonium to bolster its atomic stockpile for use in nuclear weapons...

“Pyongyang is estimated to have enough fissile material to build up to eight nuclear bombs, although estimates vary.

“According to estimates from the In-

stitute for Science and International Security from late 2012, North [Korea] could have enough weapons grade uranium for 21-32 nuclear weapons by 2016 if it used one centrifuge at its Yongbyon nuclear plant to enrich uranium to weapons-grade” (“North Korea to restart Yongbyon Nuclear Reactor” by Reuters, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, April 2, 2013, p. 1).

North Korea may be one of the “kings from the east” mentioned in end-time prophecy (Rev. 16:12-16).

U.S. Speeds Missile Defense to Guam

“The United States announced Wednesday [April 3] that it was speeding the development of an advanced missile defense system to Guam in the next few weeks, two years ahead of schedule in what the Pentagon said was a ‘precautionary move’ to protect American naval and air forces from the threat of North Korean missile attack” (“U.S. Speeds Missile Defense to Guam After North Korea Bars South’s Workers,” by Choe Sang-Hun and David E. Sanger, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, April 3, 2013, p. 1).

One of the signs that we are approaching the end time and Christ’s return is, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars” (Mat. 24:3, 6).

Bird Flu Mutates

“In a worrisome sign, a bird flu in China appears to have mutated so that it can spread to other animals, raising the potential for a bigger threat to people, scientists said on Wednesday [April 3].

“So far, the flu has sickened nine people in China and killed three. It’s not clear how they became infected, but there’s no evidence the virus is spreading among people” (“Bird flu in China mutates, might be able to infect mammals” by Gillian Wong and Malcolm Ritter, Associated Press, *The Southeast Missourian*, April 4, 2013, p. 11A).

One sign that we are approaching the end time is that of “pestilences” or diseases (Mat. 24:3, 7, Ezek. 7:1-3, 15).