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Heavenly Signs Are Coming!

Total solar eclipses are rare but they can't compare with the heavenly signs prophesied to come.

By Gregory Dullum

A total solar eclipse will roll across the United States on Aug. 21! Day will turn dark as a moonlit night on a path from the Northwest to the Southeast. Salem, Ore., will experience the total eclipse at 10:18 a.m. Pacific Daylight Time. By 2:47 Eastern Daylight Time, the total eclipse will be over Charleston, S.C.

In Cape Girardeau, Mo., where I live, the moon will start to block the sun's light at 11:52 a.m. The sun will be completely blocked by the moon (called *totality*) at 1:20 p.m. Totality will last about 1 minute and 48 seconds. A partial eclipse will continue until the moon is completely out of the sun's path at 2:49 p.m.

This is the first total eclipse visible in Cape Girardeau since 1869. It has created a lot of excitement! A viewing party is planned at the Cape Girardeau SportsPlex from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Classes on the campus of Southeast Missouri State University will be cancelled during the eclipse and several eclipse-related activities are planned there. Local hotels started booking up in April with advance reservations.

As fascinating and rare as this total eclipse will be, it is a naturally occurring phenomenon. The Bible tells us that as we near the return of Christ, there will be incredible heavenly signs that will be far more spectacular than any eclipse.

When Will Signs Appear?

End-time events can be found in Matthew 24 and Revelation 6.

First are "the beginning of sorrows" in Matthew 24. They match the first four seals of Revelation 6. There will be false ministers, wars, famines and pestilences (Mat. 24:3-8, Rev. 6:1-8).

Then comes a period called "the tribulation" (Mat. 24:9-22; Rev. 6:9-11, 3:10-11, 12:12-17). This is the time of Satan's wrath against God's

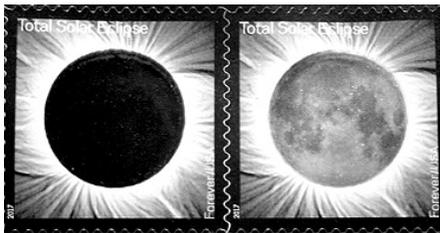


Photo by Gregory Dullum

The U.S. Postal Service issued stamps to commemorate the total solar eclipse. Apply heat to the black circle and the moon's surface appears!

people—his people *spiritually* (the Church) and his people *physically* (the national descendants of Israel (Jacob).

The tribulation is a time "such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Mat. 24:21). During this time, many true Christians will be persecuted and martyred (Mat. 24:9-22, Rev. 6:9-11). Some will be protected in a place of safety (Rev. 3:10, 12:14-17).

The tribulation also is the time of "Jacob's trouble" when the descendants of Israel will go into captivity. This must happen *during the tribulation* because it, too, is described as a time *like no other*: "Alas! For that day is great, so that there is none like it" (Jer. 30:7).

The descendants of Israel will go into captivity because they will refuse to obey God (Lev. 26: 27, 31-35; Deut. 28:36-41, 47-50, 62-64). This captivity will be accompanied by the first of the heavenly signs. God says, "the end has come upon my people Israel" and adds, "'And it shall come to pass in that day,' says the LORD GOD, 'that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight'" (Amos 8:1, 9).

Perhaps this unusual darkness is not caused by miracles in space, but by thick clouds of smoke rising from bursting bombs in baneful battles as the descendants of Israel are taken captive.

The prophet Ezekiel says God will blanket the earth with a dark cloud that heavenly light *CANNOT* penetrate: "'When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of the heaven I will make dark over you, and bring darkness upon your land,' says the LORD GOD" (Ezek. 32:7-8).

Through the prophet Joel, God describes the time *immediately before* the Day of the LORD in similar terms. "Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound the alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Joel 2:1-2). God describes a great army He will use to punish his rebellious people, and adds, "The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. ...

"And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD" (vv. 10, 30-31).

Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, quoted Joel: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD" (Acts 2:20).

If captivity happens at the very END of the tribulation, and just before the Day of the LORD, these heavenly signs could be the same signs that Christ foretold.

Jesus: Darkness; Falling Stars

Jesus tells us that miraculous heavenly

HEAVENLY SIGNS

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Heavenly Signs

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signs will appear IMMEDIATELY AFTER the tribulation: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Mat. 24:29).

These heavenly signs are also described in the sixth seal of Revelation 6: “I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up” (vv. 12-14).

Isaiah: A Time of God’s Wrath

The prophet Isaiah gives a very similar description of the heavenly signs: “All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; all their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree” (Isa. 34:4).

Isaiah also tells us that these signs will be used by God to signal the beginning of “the Day of the LORD” when God will punish the earth’s population for its sins (v. 8).

This time is described more fully in chapter 13: “Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, every man’s heart will melt, and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames. Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. . . .

“Therefore I will shake the heavens and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger” (Isa. 13:6-10, 13).

Heavenly Signs As Armies Gather

Just before Christ returns, armies will prepare to battle each other for world domination in a valley outside of Jerusalem. God says heavenly signs will occur as these armies gather: “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon

will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness” (Joel 3:14-15).

1/3 Darkened Again

These heavenly signs are NOT PERMANENT. The sun, moon and stars won’t *remain* dark *until Christ returns*. In Revelation, they occur as part of the sixth seal. When the seventh seal is broken, seven angels blow trumpets. When the fourth trumpet is blown, there is a partial darkening of heavenly lights, so they *must have been restored to full brightness* in order to be DARKENED AGAIN. “Then the fourth angel sounded: and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened: and a third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night” (Rev. 8:12).

Sun Becomes Hotter

After the sixth trumpet is blown in Revelation, John saw seven angels bringing bowls containing seven last plagues to complete God’s wrath. The fourth bowl is poured out on the sun: “Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the God who has power over these plagues, and did not repent and give Him glory” (Rev. 16:8-9).

At this time, the sun’s power is INTENSIFIED instead of *diminished*. What could cause this? Perhaps the planet will be shaken *out of its normal orbit* and moved *closer to the sun*. Or, perhaps God will cause the *sun to burn brighter*, or *change our atmosphere* to allow in more heat from the sun.

Limited Darkness

The final heavenly sign to occur before Christ comes back is that of a *limited area* of DARKNESS.

After the fourth bowl was poured out on the sun, making it hotter, the fifth bowl is poured out, taking away light, but ONLY in *one kingdom*: “Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain” (v. 10).

This is reminiscent of the plague of darkness that God brought on the Egyptians, while the Israelites in Egypt had light in their habitations (Ex. 10:21-23).

Not Your Normal Eclipse

These heavenly signs described in the Bible are NOT your *normal eclipse!* They are NOT caused by the *moon blocking the sun* (solar eclipse) or the *Earth blocking the sun’s rays* from illuminating the moon

(lunar eclipse). During THESE heavenly signs that we have just read about, the SUN, MOON and STARS will ALL be affected *at the same time*. And some stars will appear to be falling like figs from a tree.

Some of this darkness will be caused by thick clouds, and in some cases these will be clouds of war. But all this darkness we have read about is not caused by NORMAL cloud cover. (When it’s cloudy, we can usually still tell day from night, no matter how thick the clouds are.) And in the case of the fifth bowl poured on the kingdom of the beast, the darkness appears to miraculously cover ONLY one *specific* kingdom.

In many cases, these heavenly signs cause pain and suffering (as God tries to get people to repent). Normal eclipses are not painful (unless we look at a solar eclipse without protective eyewear!)

Signaling Christ’s Return

There is one “heavenly sign” that will surely cause true Christians to REJOICE (even though worldly people will mourn!)

Christ tells us that following the heavenly signs we have just discussed, “Then the SIGN of the Son of Man will appear *in heaven*, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a mighty sound of a trumpet [the seventh trumpet], and they will gather together the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mat. 24:30-31, emphasis added).

God’s faithful followers will be changed to spirit beings and will rise to meet Christ in the air as He returns (1 Cor. 15:52, 1 Thes. 4:15-17).

The SIGN of Christ appearing in heaven is one “heavenly sign” that all true Christians will be GLAD to see!

The SABBATH SCOOP

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DEACONS: HELPERS IN THE CHURCH

Polycarp mentions qualities of deacons; Sanctus was tortured and miraculously healed; materialism sets in.

By Gregory Dullum
Part 4

Last month we saw that Ignatius, who had been a pupil of the apostle John, was arrested and taken to Rome to be martyred about A.D. 110. On his way to Rome, he wrote seven letters. Many mentioned how he had been visited by nearby elders and deacons. The deacons had offered him comfort and assistance.

Polycarp Mentions Deacons

A contemporary of Ignatius was Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who also had been a pupil of John. Shortly after the death of Ignatius, Polycarp wrote to the Church of God at Philippi (*New Testament History* by F. F. Bruce, 1972, p. 419).

We have a translation of this epistle made by Archbishop Wake. While there is controversy over the genuineness of this epistle, Wake implicitly believed it to be the original. There also is a translation available by Dr. Cave, attached to his life of Polycarp (*The Lost Books of the Bible*, 1979, p. 192).

In his letter, Polycarp described the qualities of deacons in much the same way Paul did in 1 Tim. 3:8-10. Polycarp wrote: "Also the deacons must be blameless before him, as the ministers of God in Christ, and not of men. Not false accusers; not double tongued; not lovers of money; but moderate in all things; compassionate, careful; walking according to the truth of the Lord, who was the servant of all" (Philippians 2:10).

Polycarp then turned his attention to "younger men" and encouraged them to "be unblameable in all things; above all, taking care of their purity, and to restrain themselves from all evil" (v. 12). In verse 13, he tells the younger men to avoid the lusts of the world and to submit to the au-

thority of the priests and deacons: "Wherefore ye must needs abstain from all these things, being subject to the priests and deacons, as unto God and Christ" (*The Lost Books of the Bible*, 1979, p. 194).

Sanctus Tortured (Twice)

In the year 177, Christians faced martyrdom in southern France (then called Gaul): "Under Marcus Aurelius (161-180), there fell that bloody persecution in Southern Gaul which claimed countless victims from the Christian Church at Lyons (177)" (*Outlines of Church History* by Rudolf Sohm, 1895, p. 12).

Christians were arrested in Lyons and Vienne, a town 20 miles down the Rhone River, in June 177. They were brutally tortured as they waited in prison for the day of mass execution, set for Aug. 1 of that year (*The Gnostic Gospels* by Elaine Pagels, 1981, pp. 101, 102, 119).

"This [Aug. 1] was a holiday to celebrate the greatness of Rome and the emperor. Such occasions required the governor to display his patriotism by sponsoring lavish public entertainment for the whole population of the city. These obligations burdened the provincial officials with enormous expenses for hiring professional gladiators, boxers, wrestling teams, and swordsmen.

"But the year before, the emperor and the Senate had passed a new law to offset the cost of the gladiatorial shows. Now the governor could legally substitute condemned criminals who were non-citizens, offering the spectacle of their torture and execution instead of athletic competitions—at the cost of six aurei per head, one-tenth the cost of hiring a fifth-class gladiator, with proportionate savings for the higher grades. This consideration no doubt added incentive to the official zeal against Christians, who could provide, as they did in Lyons, the least expensive holiday entertainment" (Pagels, pp. 102-103).

"During this period the terrors of persecution raged in France, particularly at Lyons, where the torture to which many Christians were put almost exceeds description. Even the servants and slaves of opulent Christians were racked and tortured, to make them accuse their masters and employers.

"At Lyons, some of the martyrs were sewn up in nets, and thrown on the horns of wild bulls. Indeed, so far did the malice of the pagans proceed, that they set guards over the bodies, lest the friends of

the deceased should get them by stealth" (*Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Marie Gentert King, ed., 1978, pp. 18-19).

During this persecution, a deacon from Vienne named Sanctus was tortured.

"Sanctus was another who with magnificent, superhuman courage nobly withstood the entire range of human cruelty. Wicked people hoped that the persistence and severity of his tortures would force him to utter something improper, but with such determination did he stand up to their onslaughts that he would not tell them his own name, race, and birthplace, or whether he was slave or free; to every question he replied in Latin: 'I am a Christian.' This he proclaimed over and over again, instead of name, birthplace, nationality, and everything else, and not another word did the heathen hear from him.

"Consequently, the governor and his torturers strained every nerve against him, so that when they could think of nothing else to do to him they ended by pressing red-hot copper plates against the most sensitive parts of his body. These were burning, but Sanctus remained unbending and unyielding, firm in his confession of faith, bedewed and fortified by the heavenly fountain of the water of life that flows from the depths of Christ's being. But his poor body was a witness to what he had suffered—it was all one wound and bruise, bent up and robbed of outward human shape, but, suffering in that body, Christ accomplished most glorious things, utterly defeating the adversary and proving as an example to the rest that where Christ's glory is nothing can hurt us.

"A few days later wicked people again put the martyr on the rack, thinking that now that his whole body was swollen and inflamed a further application of the same instruments would defeat him, unable as he was to bear even the touch of a hand; or that by dying under torture he would put fear into the rest.

"However, nothing of the sort happened: to their amazement his body became erect and straight as a result of these new torments, and recovered its former appearance and the use of the limbs: thus through the grace of Christ his second spell on the rack proved to be not punishment but cure" (*The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* by Eusebius, translated by G.A. Williamson,

Know Your Bible

By Charles Nenninger

Complete these phrases regarding the armor of God:

1. Shield of ...
2. Breastplate of ...
3. Sword of ...
4. Helmet of ...
5. Feet shod with ...
6. Loins girded with ...

(Answers on page 5)

DEACONS

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Family Love Can Be Challenging

Problems arise if love is not equally shared among family members.

By Gregory Dullum
Part 8

Let's look at one more use of the word "love" (*ahab*) in the Old Testament, and then draw this study to a close.

Family Love

Ahab can be used for the love that is expressed among family members. Family relationships are complicated. We are bound together by blood (hence the old saying, "blood is thicker than water"). However, each family member is an individual and makes personal choices that may or may not be shared by others.

Some of these choices can cause friction in our relationships. If we dislike the choices a family member makes, we may find it hard to *phileo* that person. *Phileo*, remember, is to cherish someone based upon the intrinsic qualities of that person. It is difficult to love a family member whose lifestyle runs in a direction different from our own; the less we have in common, the less there is to build a relationship based upon *phileo*.

However, because we are family, we are to love each other with an *agape* style of love—a commitment to the well-being of each other. Thus, parents still love their children even if they don't love what they do—or vice versa—children can still love their parents even if they don't agree with their parents.

We should be strongly committed to the well-being of other family members. However, our commitment to our heavenly Father should be even STRONGER! Our loving commitment to God should trump the feelings and commitments we have toward our physical family members. Abraham set us an example.

Abraham and Isaac

Abraham waited 100 years to have Isaac. There was a real bond of affection between Abraham and his son. And yet, in what has been considered as one of the greatest acts of faith, Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice his son. "And He [God] said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you'" (Gen. 22:2).

Although he loved his son, Abraham was willing to do what God said. *He*



NAPS photo

Love is not limited; it grows as family members increase.

loved God more than his son, setting a high standard for others to follow. (Once God saw Abraham's commitment to Him, He didn't require the sacrifice.)

Jesus said *this kind of love and obedience* is REQUIRED of his followers: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. ... So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:30, 33). Jesus did not mean we should actually *hate* our family members, but we should *love them less than God*. God should come FIRST in our lives.

Abraham did not hate Isaac. He loved him. But he was willing to sacrifice him in order to obey God. Abraham's willingness to believe and obey God led him to be called father of the faithful (Heb. 11:8-9, 17-19, Rom. 4:9, 11).

Love for family members is good! It is a STRONG LOVE that drives us to DO GREAT THINGS and to SACRIFICE for each other. It must not, however, take the place of our love for God.

Naomi and Ruth

We see this lesson also taught in the example of Ruth. She left her Moabite family behind because she loved her mother-in-law, Naomi, and Naomi's God (Ruth 4:15).

This Moabite woman gave up her homeland and the ways of her people to be with Naomi. She told her, "For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will

be buried" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Isaac & Esau; Rebekah & Jacob

Isaac grew up and married Rebekah and they had two sons, Esau and Jacob.

The two boys were very different. Esau grew up to be a "man's man," a hairy hunk of a man who loved the outdoors. He was a skillful hunter who could be relied upon to bring home fresh meat for dinner (Gen. 25:20, 24-25, 27). Isaac appreciated the manliness of his firstborn son and Esau became his favorite.

Jacob was not as big and hairy as his older brother. Instead of hunting in the woods, he preferred to stay home and do chores around the house. By helping his mother, he became her favorite (vv. 27-28).

Isaac and Rebekah loved both of their sons, but their parental love was not shared equally. Sometimes parents can have a favorite child. *This causes problems!*

The RESULT of showing favoritism was a *division* within the family. Jacob (with his mother's help) stole Esau's birthright and had to flee from the family, *living in exile* for more than 20 years. He *lived in fear* that Esau would kill him for what he did.

They say time heals all wounds. Eventually, Jacob returned, and he and his brother were reconciled (Gen. 33:4).

Jacob loved Joseph

Jacob did not learn from his own life how showing favoritism causes *hurt feelings* and division in the family. He showed favoritism among his wives, as we saw last month; and he also showed favoritism among their offspring. He loved Joseph, Rachel's son, more than the sons of his other three wives. And this caused real problems in the family!

"Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him" (Gen. 37:4).

David and Absalom

Family relationships can be quite complicated. Last month we discussed how David's son, Amnon, "loved" his half-sister, Tamar, and had incestuous sex

with her. She was the sister of Absalom (2 Sam. 13:1-15).

Absalom hated his half-brother for what he had done (v. 22), so he had his servants murder Amnon (v. 28). Absalom then fled (v. 34).

How did David react when he learned of Amnon's murder, caused by his brother? "And David mourned for his son every day" (v. 37). Eventually, he was comforted (v. 39).

How did David feel toward his other son, Absalom? He didn't hate Absalom! Instead, he longed to go see him (v. 39). It was improper for him to do so, so he didn't. When he allowed Absalom to return to the kingdom, he still refused to see him (2 Sam. 14:24).

Later, Absalom led a treasonous rebellion against his father (2 Sam. 15:1-6, 12-13). David had to flee Jerusalem (v. 14). In spite of all this, when news of Absalom's death came to David, how did he react?

"Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: 'O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!'" (2 Sam. 18:33).

Parents continue to love their children, even when they DO WRONG!

As we look at these examples of family love, we may think that love is limited. If parents show favoritism, that seems to indicate they love one child over another. The comedian Tommy Smothers struck a common chord when he told his brother, Dick, "Mom always liked you best." Many of us may have felt this way growing up.

As we grow older, get married, have children and grandchildren, we realize that love does not have limits. It grows. We don't love our mate less because a child is added to the family. We don't love our firstborn less if we have a second child. We don't love our children less in order to love our grandchildren. Instead, our love grows and expands to include each addition to the family.

All Love Is Outgoing Concern

Throughout this study, we have learned many things about love. It is a word that in English, has 22 definitions, so it's no wonder that people become confused by the topic.

We learned that in Greek there are three words for love. The Greek word *eros* refers to romantic, sexual love, but this word is not used in the New Testament. The Greek word *phileo* means to have tender affection for someone or something based upon the intrinsic value of that person or thing. The Greek word *agape* is setting the mind or will to desire the best for another person or object no matter what. *Agape* doesn't re-

quire love in return.

We have learned that there are many different words in Hebrew that are translated "love" in the Old Testament, but the most common is *ahab*. It has many different meanings as does the English word "love" and those meanings must be determined by the context in which the word is used.

Love Is Unselfish

If we had to summarize all the various uses of the word "love" in the Bible, we would find this commonality: LOVE IS UNSELFISH.

"As all sin roots itself in selfishness, so all virtue springs out of love" ("Love," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* by Merrill F. Unger, 1988, p. 786).

All SIN is a form of SELFISHNESS. Therefore, SIN is the *opposite* of LOVE. All love, as described by the eighth dictionary definition we quoted (see June issue of the *Sabbath Scoop*), is the "affectionate concern for the well-being of others." No matter which English word we use, this is part of it. No matter which Greek word we use, this is part of it. No matter which Hebrew word we use, this is the umbrella under which every definition of love may be found: the "affectionate concern for the well-being of others."

The 20th-century apostle, Herbert W. Armstrong, defined love as "outgoing concern" for other people. "If I had to define love in four words, I would say, 'Love is an unselfish outgoing concern; for the good and welfare of the one loved. Love is primarily on the giving, serving, sharing side of the fence—not on the getting, taking, factional, striving side. It is not selfish'" (*The Missing Dimension in Sex* by Herbert W. Armstrong, 1981, p. 82).

"Love" need not be some mysterious emotion that we can't understand. It is a very real part of our character that we must develop if we wish to be in God's kingdom. It should drive out thoughts and our actions toward our fellow human beings and toward God.

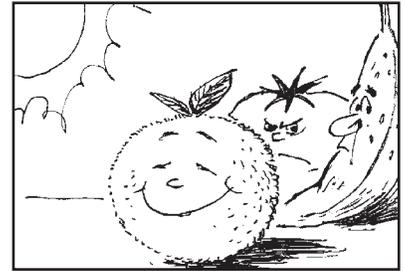
Let us grow in love as we strive to obey the two greatest commandments: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 13:30-31). If we do these, we will have eternal life waiting for us (Luke 10:25-28)!

Know Your Bible Answers

1) Faith. 2) Righteousness. 3) The Spirit or Word of God. 4) Salvation. 5) Gospel of Peace. 6) Truth.

Fun Fact

of creation, history, holidays & the Bible



Drawing and Fun Fact are courtesy of NAPS
The fuzz on peaches protects them from sunburn.

Witerature

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

Trashing the Planet by Dixy Lee Ray, HarperPerennial, 1992, p. 171.

People Are Not Animals

"Third, keep a sense of perspective. This old earth has been through a lot, including drastic climate changes, without any help from humans. It will continue to change. The earth has never been stable or remained the same for long.

"Finally, humans cannot live on earth without using natural resources. Our responsibility is to be good stewards of the environment and to remember that a well-tended garden is better than a neglected woodlot. It is demeaning beyond belief to consider mankind simply another species of animal, no better and no worse than wild beasts."

Gen. 1:26-28, 2:15; Ps. 8:3-8

Quotable Quotes

"As a general thing, people marry most happily with their own kind. The trouble lies in the fact that people usually marry at an age when they do not really know what their own kind is." —**Robertson Davies**

Memory Scripture

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."
—**2 Peter 3:9**

Deacons

Continued from Page 3

1965, pp. 196-197).

When it was all over, almost 50 Christians had lost their lives in the two-month ordeal (Pagels, p. 104). What resulted from this trial on the Church of God? Was the church stamped out? Of course not! Martyrdom actually caused growth in the church. Spectators were so moved by the conviction of the martyrs that many were converted (Pagels, p. 121).

Church Becomes Materialistic

In the middle of the third century, the truth of God became watered down as the Church of God became materialistic. "Many errors had about this time crept into the Church: the Christians were at variance with each other, and a variety of contentions ensued among them" (King, p. 21).

The Roman Emperor Decius began a persecution against Christians in the year 249. Perhaps this was God's way of waking up his church!

In the description that follows, note that during this time, deacons forgot their role as helpers:

"At the beginning of the persecution, under Decius, about 248... 'Each was bent on improving his patrimony: forgetting what believers had done under the apostles, and what they ought always to do, they brooded over the arts of amassing wealth. The pastors and DEACONS equally forgot their duty, works of mercy were neglected, and discipline was at the lowest ebb. Luxury and effeminacy prevailed. Metricious arts in dress were cultivated. Fraud and deceit were practiced among brethren. Christians could unite themselves in matrimony with unbelievers, could swear, not only without reverence, but without veracity [truth]; with haughty asperity they despised their ecclesiastical superiors; could rail one against another with outrageous acrimony, and conduct quarrels with settled malice; even many bishops, who ought to be guides and patterns to the rest, neglecting the peculiar duties of their stations, gave themselves to secular pursuits; deserting their places of residence and their flocks, they traveled through distant provinces in quest of gain, gave no assistance to the needy brethren, were insatiable in their thirst of money, possessed estates by fraud, and multiplied usury' —Townsend's Abridgment, p. 110, Ed. 1816" (*A History of the True Religion* by A. N. Dugger and C. O. Dodd, 1972, pp. 70-71, emphasis added).

(To be continued!)



North Korea Fires Intercontinental Missile

"The Trump administration on Tuesday [July 4] confirmed North Korea's claim that it had launched an intercontinental ballistic missile, and told Pyongyang that the United States would use 'the full range of capabilities at our disposal against the growing threat.'

"The administration followed up that warning on Wednesday morning with a joint military exercise in which United States and South Korean forces fired ballistic missiles in the waters along the Korean Peninsula's east coast.

"But North Korea reaffirmed Wednesday that it would never deviate from its determination to bolster its nuclear missile abilities as long as the United States' 'hostile policy' and 'nuclear threat' persisted.

"The North's state-run Korean Central News Agency said its new intercontinental ballistic missile, the Hwasong-14, was capable of hitting the 'heart of the United States' with 'large heavy nuclear warheads' " ("U.S. Confirms North Korea Fired Intercontinental Ballistic Missile" by Choe Sang-Hun, *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com, July 4, 2017, p. 1).

These military threats being hurled across the Pacific remind us that we are in the "beginning of sorrows" leading up to Christ's return. "And you will hear of wars AND RUMORS OF WARS. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. ... All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Mat. 24:3, 6-8, emphasis added).

At the time of the end, the king of the North, a European union (north of Jerusalem), will be attacked by the king of the South (most likely a Muslim union of nations south of Jerusalem), and will respond militarily by occupying the Holy Land (Dan. 11:40-43). "But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many" (v. 44).

This "news from the east" seems to be a great army under a third union of Asiatic

nations called "kings from the east":

"Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. ... And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (Rev. 16:12-14, 16).

This army from the east will number 200 million (Rev. 9:14-16). An army that large will probably come from China, along with other Asian countries such as Russia and North Korea.

When the army from the east clashes with the army of the king of the North in a valley outside of Jerusalem, it will be time for Christ to return (Joel 3:9-14). The armies will stop battling each other and will fight Christ (Rev. 17:14, 19:11, 15-21).

Does West Have Will to Survive?—Trump Asks

"President Trump said on Thursday [July 6] that Western civilization was at risk of decline. ...

" 'The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive,' he said. 'Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would destroy it?' " ("Trump, in Poland, Asks if West Has the 'Will to Survive' " by Glenn Thrust and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com, July 6, 2017, pp. 1-2).

God warns the Western nations descended from Israel that if we turn our backs on Him, we will be cursed until we exist no more (see Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28). The question is, do we have the will to repent of our national sins and return to God?