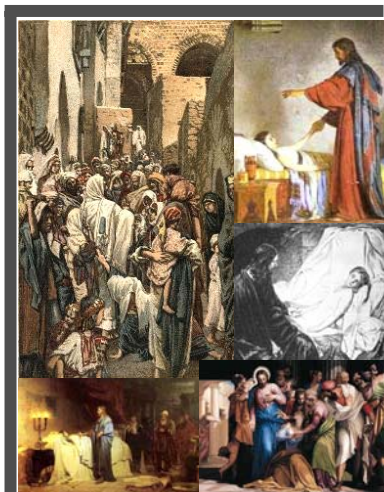


Dear Friends,

The time is short! You recall how when the angels warned Lot of Sodom's impending doom that he tried to rouse his married children to flee but they scoffed, thinking he was joking. But it was no joke. Neither are the admonitions of our Lord concerning these last days before His coming a joking matter. In them are soberness, motivation, conviction, hope, peace and the anticipation of good. Increasingly, it's clear that we live in 'Sodom'. It's not a particular place but a cultural descriptor. Only a radical departure from the unrighteous norms of this world will distinguish the church as the family of Christ. As good as the 'bumper stickers' are, we desperately need now to be a radical, turn-the-world-around-you-right-side-up army of believers focused on effective spiritual warfare. May God help us all in this endeavor. He's at the door, friends. God bless and keep you in His wondrous love! John and Darlene



You're of no earthly value unless you're...

Heavenly Minded

Vol 4 Iss 3



In this issue:
World News
Come!
Heaven 101
Israel's Ace in the Hole

Heavenly Minded is distributed free of charge. To add a name to our distribution list for either the hardcopy or electronic PDF version, simply contact us at jdickey77@yahoo.com. Please share it with your friends and pray for us!!

The goal of HM is to encourage our readers to "Set your minds on things above..." and thereby to be the greater and more effective witness to Christ. Our news items are not meant to scoop anyone or to simply 'tickle the ear' but rather to show potentially meaningful prophetic trends. Articles may be shared freely and reproduced but only in their entirety. Comments and suggestions are always welcome. God bless you!

Come!

Who was in that crowd?
(See Luke 8:40-56.)

Certainly, the disciples were there – at least Peter, James and John. There were probably many curiosity seekers and undoubtedly those who were attracted by the noise and potential entertainment. The seriously religious may have been in the flow or watching from the periphery. And there were the suffering who longed for help as well. Pushing, shoving, shuffling along – an excited throng of people surrounded Jesus.

The same could be said of the contemporary Christian community – that is, the Church in its entirety. The 'crowd' around Christ is a mix isn't it? People gather around Jesus for different reasons.

They were headed far too slowly toward the home of Jairus. At least, that's certainly what he felt for his 12 year old daughter was at death's door. A short while ago, he'd fallen at Jesus' feet and pleaded with Him to come. Now, he probably helped push friends and on-lookers aside to make way for the Lord. Time was of the essence. 'If they didn't get there soon, it would be too late.'

Jairus was an important man and a desperate man. Neither quality lends itself to patience. Thus, when Jesus stopped in his tracks, it surely perplexed the anxious father to say the least.

Jostling one another, the crowd worked to reposition (and to keep their footing!). 'What's going on?! What happened?!' Jairus surely cried within.

"Who touched Me?" Jesus said as He looked around. Possibly, His eyes rested upon the startled, elated and yet somewhat frightened face of a woman. She may have been on her knees, but whether standing or no, she was not hidden amidst the mélange of characters. Around her, everyone hastily denied doing anything of the sort.

'Who touched you??' Peter probably wondered. "Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" he said.

The Greek word used in the text can mean a simple touch, but more literally it means a fastening or attaching to something, and that's really what happened in the spirit.

But Jesus said, "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me."

For twelve years, this dear woman had suffered a deplorable condition – a continual bleeding – which must have at least debilitated her. It was probably something that caused her to be socially ostracized and unmarried as well. Luke made it clear in his gospel that she was also penniless having spent all her savings to enrich the local medical community to no avail.

She may have been somewhat superstitious in seeking to contact Christ for she had touched the hem of His garment. In that day, the blue borders of certain rabbi's cloaks were supposed to be 'special' if you would. Whether that was the case or that it was simply the press of the crowd and her physical weakness which positioned her to grab the bottom of His garment, she 'touched' Jesus. It is the same word

used by Jesus when He said to dear Mary outside the garden tomb after His resurrection, "Don't cling to Me." Spiritually, in humble faith, she clung to Christ and virtue flowed.

It is the only instance recorded in which someone 'came in the back door' so to speak with Jesus. That is probably because Jesus never said, "No" to a sincere person. He even reached into the lives of many who could not ask or didn't know to ask for help. Such is our Lord. This woman had no petition as Jairus had. Neither had she anything to offer Christ.

Just think – a huge crowd all around Jesus and only one person 'touched' Him. Now, many teachings have been made on the mechanics of faith using this passage as a platform. And we know this dear woman had faith for when she *"saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before Him, she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately. And He said to her, 'Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.'"*

Yes, she had wonderful faith. Nevertheless, let's consider another aspect of the story -- the press. Not the press of the crowd but the press in the spirit. On the one hand there was this woman with 12 years of pain and despondency. On the other was Jairus, a man with 12 years of tender parental love and social privilege. Both were in desperate need and the picture in this passage, pregnant with meaning.

Both individuals came to Jesus. Both were at His feet. Both had a 12 year history that led to their desperate need. Both got Christ's attention and help. Yet they stood in stark contrast one to another – Jairus, a leader of the synagogue was at the top of the social ladder while the woman was most definitely at the bottom; we don't even know her name. And they both needed Jesus 'NOW'. There was no where else to turn and time was running out. One broke, one probably rich – both pressed and broken in spirit.

Now, you can't help but notice that the number twelve stands out and that's not by 'coincidence'. For those who put significance upon numbers in the Bible, 12 can point to divine or perfect government. However, I'll suggest that it is perhaps more connected to the concept of heaven for it is mentioned frequently in that context for both the Jewish people and the mostly gentile Church. In Revelation 21, it is written that the heavenly city has twelve foundations bearing the names of the twelve apostles and twelve entry gates displaying the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Twelve angels stand at its gates; within, the Tree of Life bears twelve types of fruit, and the city's dimensions are described in the original language in multiples of twelve.

So what does heaven have to do with this story? Plenty.

Heaven is an actual tangible place – more real than any place you know. But it's far, far more than a place. John tried to describe it in terms we could relate to – brilliant light, translucent gold, diverse

gemstones, and such. Nevertheless, beyond its beauty is its essence or quality. The very atmosphere is filled with intimacy – with He Who is Holy, Holy, Holy and with His family. There is an aroma of love, joy and peaceful security. There is a sense of unparalleled freedom along with exciting purpose. It all speaks of eternal Life. Heaven is truly an essence or quality of Life which is purely the result of God's presence. This story is about coming into His presence – about encountering heaven's maker – He Who makes heaven, heaven.

For twelve years, our dear nameless woman experienced a living hell. Apart from the physical pain and anemia, she was thoroughly shamed. No man would have her as a wife. Imagine someone having a highly contagious flu for twelve years and you can get a sense of how many friends she probably had – zippo, none, nada. No one took her to Jesus like the lame man in Mark chapter two. That's because she was unclean. And without two nickels to rub together, she was bottomed out. Her condition would even prevent her from being a prostitute. It was hell on earth, twelve years of it. Religious people who knew her would not even touch her. Isolated, abandoned, broken both physically and emotionally, she could never come to Christ like others did – so she thought.

So she approached Him from behind.

Her faith was in what He could do – not in Who He is. The previous

twelve years had postured her for desperate faith but as yet she did not understand the heart of God.

'He would never touch me,' she must have presumed. 'A great teacher, a great rabbi – surely he must remain clean.'

How shocked she must have been, not by the healing – oh, that surely elated her – but when Jesus said, "Who touched Me?" He was saying, "Who attached to Me." It was not at all what she had intended. She'd even tried to hide herself.

That's what life in this world has done to some. There are those of us who are so beaten up by this hellish world that we cannot imagine facing God – we're too filthy, too shamed. We believe in His power but cannot approach Him face to face. 'He must think of us as untouchable.' We'll come to Christ for what we believe He will do, for His power to save, but to have an intimate relationship – unimaginable.

But Jesus stopped. He turned and looked. His eyes met hers and that perfect soul gazed into hers with the revelation that she was whole and clean. He stopped everything to let her and everyone else know.

Meanwhile, on the 'other side' of Jesus was Jairus who was a godly man. As a leader of the synagogue, he had to be. His previous twelve years were certainly by comparison, pleasant and perhaps even blissful. Those of you with daughters can understand how sweet their unconditional love is. He was surely quite prominent in the community.

He came to Jesus desperate and in humility, falling at His feet.

But he approached Him head on.

Nothing in his background led him to think he couldn't do so. Some of us approach Jesus with this same confidence.

John wrote, "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." (1 John 3:20-22)

Jairus also approached Jesus for what He could do, but his estimation was far too limited. He esteemed Christ capable of curing his daughter -- but as a giver of life? That was a stretch. Some of us approach our Lord the same way. We are pressed. We come in brokenness and humility, even in desperation. We are confident of approaching Him, but we drastically underestimate Him.

Jairus must have feared, 'Too slow. Too late.' You know the story. "While He was still speaking, someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, 'Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the Teacher.' But when Jesus heard it, He answered him, saying, 'Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well.' When He came into the house, He permitted no one to go in except Peter, James, and John, and the father and mother of the girl. Now all wept and mourned for her; but

He said, 'Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping.' And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead. But He put them all outside, took her by the hand and called, saying, 'Little girl, arise.' Then her spirit returned, and she arose immediately. And He commanded that she be given something to eat. And her parents were astonished, but He charged them to tell no one what had happened." (Luke 8: 49-56)

Jairus had faith but not resurrection faith – the text says, he was astonished. Jesus astonished he and his wife. Dear friend, regardless of your faith, be it great or small, Life, eternal Life, will astonish you as well. Jesus will astonish you with the resurrection or rapture. Heaven will astonish you. Jairus thought Jesus to be a healer but the true healing is in heaven. Jairus met the Power of heaven amidst the grasp of grief.

The power to transform a hellish life of abandonment, misery and destitution with a divine touch and public approval is the Power of heaven. The power to raise the dead to new life is the astonishing Power of heaven. It is the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ.

Whether you must approach from 'behind' or are confident to face Him – you come. Come to the One Who knows you and loves you, to the One Who is far beyond your considerations. Come to Jesus in humility and He will respond. He will amaze you with redemption and astonish you with resurrection or rapture. Meet heaven's King.

Discover Who He is. Forget the crowd. You come.

World News

...with potential for prophetic importance

Middle East

Arabs Proposed EU-Style Union

EU Observer 2/11/04

The European Union is not alone in reforming its institutions. The Arab League is also changing the way its members co-operate and is looking toward the European Union for answers.

Yemen's President, Ali Abd Allah Salih is calling for the Cairo-based body to be replaced with an Arab Union which he says would boost effectiveness on the world stage.

At 22 members and with minimal integration the League has struggled to make its voice heard outside its own region.

According to Al-Jazeera, the President wants EU-inspired reforms in order to 'develop common Arab action with a view to giving international and regional weight to Arab countries'.

Rabbis Declare: Land Is Not Anyone's To Give Away

Arutz Sheva 2/18/04

Over 200 rabbis from all over Israel arrived in the Ramada Renaissance Hotel in Jerusalem yesterday for what was termed an emergency session of the Union of Rabbis in light of the threat to the integrity of the Land of Israel. Speaker after speaker expressed objections on every possible grounds to the Prime Minister's plan to withdraw Israeli control from Gaza and expel close to 8,000 Jews from their homes in the Land of Israel.

Presiding over the conference was Rabbi Avraham Shapira, who served as Israel's Chief Rabbi from 1983-1993, and who heads the Central Universal Yeshiva (Merkaz HaRav) in Jerusalem. "The events have shown all of us that, Heaven forbid, whoever harms the Land

The Bible indicates that the generation which witnesses the rebirth of the nation of Israel will also witness all the events leading up to Christ's 2nd coming. It says that in the last days Jerusalem will be a "cup of trembling" – the focus of attention of the whole world. It predicts a massive war with Russia leading an alliance of nations including Iran, Libya, and many others against Israel. It is thought by many Bible scholars that this war will either immediately precede or be immediately subsequent to the rapture of the Church as mentioned in 1 Cor 15, 1 Thes 5 and several other scriptures. Isaiah 17:1,14 tells us of the coming utter destruction of Damascus.

In addition, there is the prediction of a revival of a major world power arising out of the former Roman Empire (the EU) and exerting a strong influence over Israel and in particular, Jerusalem. (Dan. 2) The leader of this coalition, a charismatic man, will be the ultimate false Messiah and lead the world to oppose Christ's return. He will insist upon a one world religion with ultimately himself as god. Punishment for not following this religion will be, as with Islam, death. And no man will be allowed to buy or sell without his "mark" in his hand or forehead. He will also confirm a significant covenant (i.e. treaty) with many (the UN?).

In addition, Daniel the prophet predicted man's knowledge would dramatically increase in this time.

Without a doubt, we are living in exciting and sobering times.

As we consider these things in light of God's eternal Word, we can take heart that all is moving toward His conclusion. Just a few scriptures to review:

Middle East -- Zech 12:2,3, Ez 37

Knowledge growth – Dan 12:4

Russia – Ez 38, 39

Church – 2Tim3:1-5, 1Tim4:1,2

Final Generation – Mk 13:28-30

One World Religion -- Revelation 13

of Israel, whoever thinks thoughts in this direction, loses his seat and his regime," Rabbi Shapira said. "We are expressing not a political opinion, but the opinion of Torah; whoever wants to hear it, will hear it. The Torah says that the entire land is ours and we must not give it away, and especially when it is liable to lead to loss of life."

"We come in the name of the Torah to strengthen and be strengthened," Rabbi Shapira continued. "The entire public, our rabbis and their students, will cry out and will act, even if we have to instruct the public to gather in Gaza, in Gush



US Soldiers on guard at site of rocket attack in Baghdad preceding the signing of Iraq's interim constitution.

Katif, we will do that, with G-d's help, with might and valor and greatness, to double and triple the number of Jews there, and not allow the evacuation and uprooting of a Jewish town. It is against Torah law and simple morality, and the government must not even discuss it!"

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, who served as Rishon LeTzion (Chief Sephardic Rabbi) alongside Rabbi Shapira, said that no one has the right to give away parts of the Land of Israel. "Let no one think that just because he was elected, this means that the Land of Israel is his." He said that Israel's economic and religious situation is bound up with the strength of our connection with the Land.

Rabbi Elyakim Levanon of Elon Moreh

said, "If the Prime Minister goes to the U.S., President Bush should know that Sharon is presenting a check with no backing."

Rabbi David Chai HaCohen of Bat Yam: "The dismantling of communities is a crime against the Jewish nation throughout the generations, one that cannot be forgiven. An agreement in this spirit is akin to the Munich agreement made with the Nazis."

A position paper distributed at the conference read as follows:

"The right and obligation of the Nation of Israel towards the Land of Israel is an eternal right to the entire land and throughout all the generations. The plan to uproot flourishing communities from their land is in total opposition to the Torah of Israel. It is forbidden to be a partner to such a plan in any manner. According to Halakhah [Jewish Law], no one - including government ministers and the Prime Minister - has the right to promote this ruinous program. We call upon all the political parties, ministers and Knesset Members who are loyal to the G-d of Israel and His land to act to thwart this program in

the Cabinet. If the Cabinet accepts this terrible program, Heaven forbid, and all the more so if the Prime Minister travels to present the program without a Cabinet decision, they must quit the government immediately."

Preparing For The Big Quake

Arutz Sheva 2/18/04

The Knesset's Environment Committee discussed Israel's earthquake preparedness yesterday, with representatives of all the relevant government ministries invited to speak. The dry numbers tell of 1.17 million buildings in Israel, of which some 700,000 are residential. More than half of the latter are in danger of being

damaged, or worse, in the event of a major earthquake.

The basic picture painted during the committee session was not a bright one, as the experts discussed lack of coordination between authorities, lack of funding, an uneducated public and other problems. However, some measures are being taken, including the buttressing in the coming months of some 100 installations whose collapse would cause a dangerous chain reaction, as well as educational actions.

PA leader: Israel has no right to exist

Jewish state 'Satan's offspring' which can't be 'among human beings'
WND 2/18/04

Although Yasser Arafat has acceded in peace talks to Israel's right to exist, Palestinian officials indicate otherwise.

In an interview broadcast on Palestinian Authority television, Ahmad Nasser, secretary of the Palestinian Legislative Council, said the Jewish state has no right to exist because it is "Satan's offspring."

Nasser asserted Israel cannot exist "among human beings" because it was "founded on the basis of robbery, terror, killing, torture, assassination, death, stealing land and killing people," reported Palestinian Media Watch.

President George W. Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon have agreed to the concept of "two states living side by side."

But Nasser's comments "reflect the PA's continuing campaign to challenge and deny Israel's right to exist," says PMW director Itamar Marcus.

Marcus notes Nasser, in his interview, even criticized Israel for its willingness to release 400 Arab terrorists and prisoners, arguing it was its way of putting a value on Palestinians.

"We see that Israel is trying to delude the world and delude the Arabs and the Palestinians psychologically [by showing] that one Israeli will be exchanged for a thousand Palestinians,"

he told PA TV.

Sharon: Bush's road map is the only acceptable option

Jerusalem Post 2/19/04

The US-backed 'road map' is the only diplomatic initiative Israel will be following, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said after his meeting with three top American envoys Thursday in Jerusalem.

"The road map is the only plan acceptable to Israel, and we are committed to President Bush's vision to a solution of the problems in the area," the prime minister said.

Sharon's statement came after a meeting with a three-man US delegation that was in the capital to discuss Sharon's plans to unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip - a move not included in the road map plan, which calls for reciprocity.

The Prime Minister's office issued a press statement after the three-hour meeting which said that ideas were exchanged regarding Sharon's unilateral disengagement plans in an atmosphere described as "congenial".

Before the meeting, US Ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer said that Israel feels there is no partner to negotiations, and is waiting for a new Palestinian leadership to emerge.

In related news, UN special envoy to the Middle East, Terje Larsen commended Sharon's daring and vision, calling his plan to withdraw from Gaza unprecedented in Israeli history.

US Calls on Syria to Shed WMD

MENL 2/23/04

WASHINGTON -- The United States has urged Damascus to follow Libya and dismantle Syria's weapons of mass destruction programs.

In the most direct appeal, the Bush administration called specifically on Syria to allow international inspections of suspected WMD facilities as well as dismantle weaponry. The administration said Syria's WMD program has become

a major obstacle toward better relations with the United States.

"We hope other governments, too, like Syria, will realize that chemical weapons and other WMD programs won't make their countries safer," Secretary of State Colin Powell told an audience at Princeton University on Friday, "their people more prosperous, or their own hold on power more secure. To the contrary. It goes in the other direction."

Officials said Powell's warning was part of the administration's effort to revise Syria's policy before President George Bush reports to Congress on compliance by Damascus to the Syria Accountability Act. The bill, signed into law in December 2003, warns of a virtual U.S. trade embargo on Syria unless it withdraws troops from Lebanon, ends support for groups termed terrorist and dismantles its WMD.

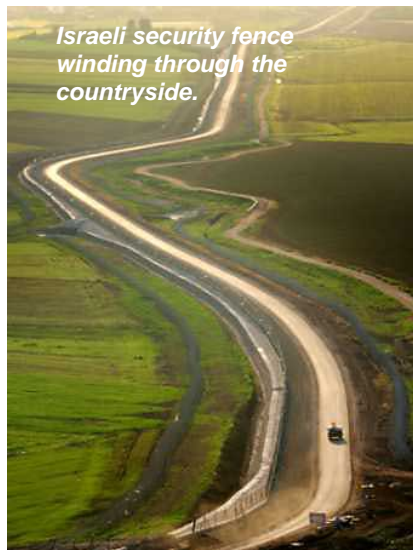
Syria and Iran Cement Military Ties Debkafile 3/1/04

The visit Iranian defense minister, Admiral Ali Shamkhani, paid to Damascus Saturday, February 28, distanced the Assad regime further than ever from Washington and Europe. He and Syrian defense minister General Mustafa Tlas affixed their signatures to a new military pact. DEBKAFfile's military and intelligence sources reveal its key clause as being an Iranian pledge to invest in additional long-range Scud C missile production lines at Syria's underground missile facility in Hamah. Tehran will also transfer technology for the manufacture in Syria of advanced Iranian Shihab-3 missiles as well as financing expanded production of long-range artillery and ammunition.

The pact marks Syrian president Bashar Assad's decision to turn away from efforts to start a dialogue with the Americans and Europeans. He is not willing to pay the price they demand of scrapping his long-range missile programs and weapons of mass

destruction or ending his sponsorship of terrorists. On all three issues, he and Iran's hardline rulers are of one mind.

Recently the Syrian ruler sent a note to President George W. Bush offering to lay the Golan issue aside in initial stages of peace talks with Israel. He also proposed channeling US-Syrian exchanges through the CIA-Syrian military intelligence track.



Israeli security fence winding through the countryside.

His note went unanswered.

Assad is reported by our sources to have remarked to a recent Western visitor to Damascus that Syria is a state not a welfare organization and anything demanded of it has a price. He asked what Washington had on offer.

Left without military back-up by the fall of the Saddam regime almost a year ago, Damascus has therefore opted to shore up and expand its existing ties with Tehran.

European Union

EU's big three search for elusive chemistry

The Guardian 2/18/04

Tony Blair and President Jacques Chirac of France fly to Berlin today for a

trilateral summit of the European Union's "big three" in advance of the EU's enlargement on May 1 from an unwieldy 15 members to a daunting 25.

Some hope - and others fear - that the meeting symbolises the way the EU will be governed. Some French officials have described it as "a triangle of infinitely variable geometry". More prosaically Jack Straw, the foreign secretary, has said: "If the three of us agree, Europe is likely to be more united."

Yesterday, one senior French diplomat said: "It's clear that a France-Germany-Britain triumvirate is very powerful and can achieve a great deal. It could perhaps even make Washington think twice, which is a very attractive idea for all three leaders."

But the same official emphasised the strength of the Franco-German alliance: "While we've had a lot of very encouraging support from Britain over the budgetary stability pact, the constitutional convention and enlargement, it's also clear that our alliance with Germany is the basis for everything, the bedrock."

Germany joins Anglo-French defence plan

EU Observer 2/11/04

Germany will take part in Franco-UK plans to create rapid deployment troops it emerged yesterday (10 February).

According to German media reports, Berlin is also ready to participate in forming units of 1,500 troops that could be deployed within 15 days.

Berlin diplomats indicated that the three countries have been in intensive negotiations leading up to yesterday's presentation of detailed plans surrounding the idea to the EU's political and security ambassadors.

News of the initiative comes just ahead of a meeting between the leaders of France, Germany and the UK in Berlin next week.

The idea to create such rapid-deployment troops stems from an

Anglo-French Summit last November and was based on the experience of the EU's first military mission outside Europe, in the Democratic Republic of Congo last summer.

The UK and France want the plan accepted by all member states by June 30 and for troops to be available by 2007.

Blair denies big three want to run Europe

EU Observer 2/13/04

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair has denied that the three biggest countries in the EU are trying to dominate the running of the Union.

Speaking yesterday (12 February) after a meeting with his German counterpart Gerhard Schröder, Mr Blair said "I think it is important to realise this is not about trying to create some *directoire* in Europe at all".

"I think it is important we try to work at these things together, and that is not in any sense at all to exclude other countries", he said.

"In a Europe of 25, I think there will inevitably be attempts to make sure that we can resolve issues and resolve them not simply always operating at 25 but also trying to work at these issues amongst ourselves", he continued.

His words come just ahead of a meeting between France, Germany and the UK next week (18 February) which has been causing concern in some of Europe's capitals.

All three leaders will gather in Berlin, with an array of ministers, to discuss competitiveness in the EU, but also other more sensitive topics such as the European Constitution and enlargement.

Italy has been one of the most outspoken about the meeting. Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said recently "even if we had been invited we would have said no because we cannot accept initiatives which put members in a position of being dictated to".

Big three want to reshuffle Commission

EU Observer 2/17/04

France, Germany and the UK want to see the European Commission revamped so that it is better able to pursue industry policy.

British prime minister Tony Blair, German chancellor Gerhard Schröder and French president Jacques Chirac will use their summit in Berlin tomorrow (18 February) to call for a "rebundling" of portfolios to give priority to industry and innovation policy, report German and UK media.

According to the Süddeutsche Zeitung, Berlin wants to see a "super-commissioner" created who would oversee the work of existing internal market, environment, trade and industry commissioners.

The proposed "restructuring" would create a hierarchy of commissioners, with prominence given to portfolios tasked with boosting the EU's competitiveness, reports the FT.

Berlusconi: Big three meeting is a 'big mess'

EU Observer 2/18/04

Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi has slammed the meeting of France, Germany and the UK, which begins today in Berlin, describing it as a 'mess'.

Speaking in Rome yesterday (17 February), Mr Berlusconi said, "Europe doesn't need any directorate; it's just a big mess".

"This is my opinion and it is shared by all the other European countries, with the exception of the three countries in question", he added, according to the FT.

Rocco Buttiglione, Italy's Europe Minister echoed his leader's views, saying, "Europe is not made up of three countries. It is made up of 25 and those other countries are not going to accept to be led by three countries".

Not for the first time, Italy's scepticism of the 'big three' meeting was shared by Spain, whose foreign minister Ana de

Palacio yesterday said, "Nobody should be allowed to kidnap the general interest of Europe".

The sharp criticisms coming from Madrid and Rome echo a wider concern that the Franco-German-UK axis may be the beginning of a directorate from which other countries will be denied access.

Berlin, London and Paris furiously deny this.

Berlusconi of Brussels?

Meanwhile, Mr Berlusconi yesterday announced his intention to run in the European elections, which in Italy will be held on 12-13 June, coinciding with the administrative elections.

The parties in Mr Berlusconi's governing coalition will not run under a common list - unlike the opposition centre-left parties - but under a common slogan of "united and free".

Silvio Berlusconi said he intends to lead the government even if the coalition does badly in the European Parliament elections.

Vast majority of Israelis want to join 'antisemitic' EU

EU Observer 3/10/04

BRUSSELS - A new European Commission poll in Israel has shown that 85 percent of Israelis want to join the EU but that the majority believe the union to be anti-semitic.

The poll, conducted by the Dahaf Institute for the Commission's representation in Tel Aviv, reveals that 60 percent support the idea that Israel should apply for membership of the EU and 25 percent "tend to support" this idea.

And an overwhelming majority (90 percent) think that the EU is a "positive development for the world".

But, for Brussels, the good news ends there because 74 percent of Israelis said that the EU's attitude to Israel was "unfair" and that the EU sides with Palestine in the Middle East conflict.

Moreover almost two out of three agreed with the proposition that the EU's

attitudes towards Israel was "anti-Semitic disguised as moral principles".

Russia

Putin aide: Russia losing war on terror

UPI 2/18/04

WASHINGTON -- Russia is losing its war against economic crime and terrorism, a top aide to President Vladimir Putin has said.

"Peace is not yet with us. Terrorist activity is taking on the character of open defiance of the state and society," Viktor Ivanov, deputy chief of Putin's presidential staff in the Kremlin, told a conference at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Moscow last Thursday, according to a report in the Rossiyskaya Gazeta newspaper monitored by the BBC.

"Counterterrorism activity is not yet achieving its main purpose," Ivanov said. "We are still not succeeding in preventing terrorist attacks which have increased by 50 percent in the past year."

Russia's police are also losing their war against dirty money, Ivanov said. Around \$11 billion is being illicitly converted into cash in Russia every year, he said.

"Analysis of the situation suggests that a significant proportion of this money consists of the proceeds of organized crime from the narcotics trade and illegal immigration and is very possibly financing terrorist activity," he said.

Russia may be offered bigger say in European security

EU Observer 2/26/04

BRUSSELS - Russia could have more of a say in the EU's security and defence policy if progress is made in resolving disputes on the Soviet Union's old borders, the EUobserver has learned.

The EU is ready to offer Moscow the carrot of deeper security ties, in return for progress in thawing the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia,

diplomatic sources have told this news-site.

The move could see Russia play a co-decision making role in EU crisis management operations, a significant step up in co-operation and one which Moscow has repeatedly called for.

Although Russia has provided troops for previous EU missions, most notably in the Balkans, it has so far been given a minimal say in how such operations have been run.

Breakthrough?

Since the inception of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) Moscow has pressed for greater involvement, viewing EU military development as a means of diluting NATO's primacy in Europe.

With EU-US rows over European defence abating and the threat of regional instability moving up the agenda, the EU now looks ready to grant Moscow its wish, in return for more flexibility.

United Nations

EI Baradei: World may be headed for nuclear destruction

Reuters 2/12/04

VIENNA - The head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog said Thursday the world could be headed for destruction if it does not stop the spread of atomic weapons technology, which has become widely accessible.

In an opinion piece in the New York Times, Mohamed ElBaradei wrote that nuclear technology, once virtually unobtainable, is now obtainable through "a sophisticated worldwide network able to deliver systems for producing material usable in weapons."

Above all ElBaradei echoed U.S. President George W. Bush's call in a speech on Wednesday for states to tighten up the control of their companies' nuclear exports to proliferators.

ElBaradei, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director-general, said the world must act quickly because

inaction would create a proliferation disaster.

"The supply network will grow, making it easier to acquire nuclear weapon expertise and materials. Eventually, inevitably, terrorists will gain access to such materials and technology, if not actual weapons," he wrote.

"If the world does not change course, we risk self-destruction," ElBaradei said.

The father of Pakistan's atom bomb, Abdul Qadeer Khan, admitted last week that he and scientists from his Khan Research Laboratory in Pakistan leaked nuclear secrets.

They are believed to have been part of a global nuclear black market organized to help countries under embargo such as Iran, North Korea and Libya skirt international sanctions and obtain nuclear technology that could be used to make weapons.

The massive illicit network has touched on at least 15 countries around the world.

In a clear jab at the United States, which plans to forge ahead with research into the so-called mini nukes, ElBaradei said the world must drop the idea that nuclear weapons are fine in the hands of some countries and bad in the hands of others.

"We must abandon the unworkable notion that it is morally reprehensible for some countries to pursue weapons of mass destruction yet morally acceptable for others to rely on them for security - and indeed to continue to refine their capacities and postulate plans for their use," he said.

United States

San Francisco officials marry same-sex couple

Mayor's unprecedented move defies state law, will issue license to all who apply

WND 2/12/04

With the prodding of Mayor Gavin Newsom, San Francisco officials defied

state law today by officiating at the marriage of two lesbians and vowing to issue a license to any homosexual couple that applies.

The unprecedented move apparently was intended to upstage a pro-family lobby group's attempt to thwart Newsom's plans.

San Francisco's move likely will set off legal challenges forcing state courts to determine whether barring same-sex couples from marrying is discriminatory and unconstitutional.

Last Wednesday, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court said in an advisory opinion same-sex couples are entitled to marriage and not an alternative, such as Vermont-style civil unions. The high court decided Nov. 18 homosexual couples are legally entitled to wed under the state constitution. However, the 4-3 November ruling stopped short of declaring homosexual couples should be granted the license, ordering the state legislature to come up with a solution by mid-May.

The court ruling in Massachusetts and elsewhere has prompted Congress to propose a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

Last year, California passed a domestic partner law giving same-sex couples virtually all the rights of marriage without using the term. But state Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, plans to introduce a bill this week to legalize same-sex marriage in the state. It would allow same-sex couples to travel across state lines without jeopardizing their marriage rights.

Science/Technology

Researchers Make Cloning Breakthrough

AP 2/12/04

WASHINGTON - Researchers in South Korea have become the first to successfully clone a human embryo, and then cull from it master stem cells that many doctors consider key to one

day creating customized cures for diabetes, Parkinson's and other diseases.

This is not cloning to make babies, but to create medicine.

But it immediately revived controversy over whether to ban all human cloning, as the Bush administration wants, or to allow this "therapeutic cloning" that might eventually let patients grow their own replacement tissue.

"We have to do this research because of its promise for treating disease," said Dr. Moon Shin-yong of Seoul National University, who co-led the new research.

Without cloning, stem cells won't be genetically identical to the patient who needs them, causing "a rejection problem, and we would like to overcome it," Moon told The Associated Press. "This kind of science should be conducted in South Korea and in the United States. It is very important to medicine."

Embryonic stem cells are the body's building blocks, cells from which all other tissue types spring. They're present in an embryo only days after conception and are ethically sensitive because culling stem cells destroys the embryo.

Scientists have used therapeutic cloning to partially cure laboratory mice with an immune system disease. And they can cull stem cells from human embryos left over in fertility clinics.

But attempts to clone human embryos, to supply stem cells, have failed until now.

The Seoul scientists say they succeeded largely because of using extremely fresh eggs donated by South Korean volunteers and gentler handling of the genetic material inside them.

Moon and colleague Woo Suk Hwang are discussing the research Thursday at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Details will be published in the journal *Science*.

It's elegant work that provides long-anticipated proof that human therapeutic

cloning is possible, said stem-cell researcher Dr. Rudolf Jaenisch of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research in Cambridge, Mass.

Critics immediately urged Congress to ban all forms of human cloning. The House last year voted to do that, but the Senate stalled over whether there should be an exception for some research.

"The instrumentalization of human life for the benefit of others demeans the value of all human life," said Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., who has sponsored legislation for a complete ban.

The White House referred reporters to President Bush's comments to an anti-abortion march in Washington last month.

"We'll also work with Congress to pass without delay a comprehensive and effective ban on human cloning," Bush said at the time. "We can push the limits on medical science while maintaining the highest of ethical standards. Human life is a creation, not a commodity and should not be used as research material for reckless experiments."

Internationally, the United Nations recently postponed a decision on what kinds of human cloning to ban. The United States is pushing for a total ban; Britain is leading the call for cloning for medical experiments to be left unhindered.

Earth was minutes from asteroid alert

Scientists reveal they nearly warned Bush of potential devastation
WND 2/25/04

Astronomers were within minutes of alerting President Bush to a potentially devastating asteroid they believed had a 25 percent chance of hitting Earth.

The asteroid turned out to be even bigger than expected, about 1,600 feet wide, but it eventually passed the planet at a distance of about 7.5 million miles, about 32 times the distance from the Earth to the Moon, BBC News reported.

But the fact that "2004 AS1," as it was designated, nearly caused scientists to pick up the phone and alert the president has prompted a review of procedures for raising the alarm.

On Jan. 13, some astronomers thought the object, at that time believed to be about 100 feet wide, had a one-in-four chance of hitting the planet within 36 hours.

The potential for local devastation prompted them to consider a call to President Bush before new data finally showed there was no danger, the BBC said.

An asteroid just 100 feet wide has the ability to cause loss of life worse than the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The scene was recounted in a paper presented at the Planetary Protection conference in California, in which veteran asteroid researcher Clark Chapman called it a "nine-hour crisis," the BBC said.

Religion

Sinking Sand -- Ruin Looms for a Church that Forsakes God's Word

AgapePress 2/11/04

Feature by Ed Vitagliano

The Scriptures have always suffered the attacks of the kingdom of darkness, even as far back as the garden of Eden, when the serpent slyly asked the woman, "Indeed, has God said ...?"

The Evil One knows that if he can undermine the Bible, he can undermine the Christian. For Jesus said His words are like a rock upon which a house is built (Matthew 7:24), serving as a firm foundation for His followers.

Of course, Christ's words are a rock when they are obeyed. If they are discarded, it is as if a man has built his house on shifting sand. When the inevitable storm of wind, rain and flood hammer it, the house will fall, and Jesus said its ruin would be great.

Christians are witnessing a real-life demonstration of Christ's warning in the actions of the 2.4-million-member

Episcopal Church, which is the American branch of the worldwide Anglican Communion. When a majority of Episcopal leaders at their General Convention in August elected openly homosexual Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire, they tossed aside the clear teachings of Scripture.

Conservatives saw the decision as an act of ultimate betrayal. As Suzanne Gill, spokeswoman for the Episcopal diocese in Fort Worth, told *The Dallas Morning News*, "From our point of view, this is a departure from the teaching of Holy Scripture for the past 2,000 years." *A Truth 'Still Unfolding'?*

Liberal Episcopalians seem to have understood that the Bible stands firmly in the path of the church's normalization of homosexuality. As a result, some merely argued last year that the traditional church views on homosexuality are not, in fact, what the Scriptures actually teach. By twisting Biblical passages in an attempt to legitimize sodomy, they have asserted that the Word of God has nothing to say about loving, committed same-sex relationships.

Perhaps more disturbing, however, was a different strain of argument that arose during the Robinson dispute, which claimed that, while the old view of homosexuality as a sin may have had its roots in the Bible, that is not what God is saying today.

In fact, at the height of the Episcopal controversy this summer, Rev. Frank Griswold, the denomination's presiding bishop, insisted that, on the issue of homosexuality, God's truth is "still unfolding."

Liberals seem enamored with this idea of a never-ending search for God's truth, a Hegelian process which turns its back on the past and is always looking forward to that fresh synthesis of old and new.

Diana Butler Bass, author of *Strength for the Journey: A Pilgrimage of Faith in Community*, said members of the more liberal mainline Protestant churches "are

open to the newness and unexpectedness of how God works. God can open doors and lead us to new understanding."

Robinson, in fact, declared after his election, "I feel like God is doing a new thing in the world. I believe something is happening in the church" regarding the acceptance of homosexuality.

This "newness" is applauded as something the Holy Spirit is doing among Christians today. "This [vote to confirm Gene Robinson] is a prophetic step forward," gushed Rev. Susan Russell, executive director of Claiming the Blessing, which has been urging the Episcopal Church to officially legitimize same-sex unions. "The General Convention has now said amen to what the Holy Spirit said to the people of New Hampshire" when they originally selected Robinson.

Most conservatives would find it an odd thing to claim that the Holy Spirit is saying something that contradicts the Bible, but liberals often seem intent on treating the Bible as nothing more than a bit of quaint advice.

For example, Dan Webster, director of communications for the Episcopal Diocese of Utah, said, "One of the things that I was always taught is that we love the Bible so much that we never take it literally."

This is a far cry from what Jesus said in John 14:23: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word." It appears that the Lord meant literally, regardless of what Webster thinks.

This is why, for some conservatives, homosexuality was not really the point of contention over Robinson. "The gay issue is not the real issue," said Rev. Steven R. Randall, who resigned his Episcopal pastorate at St. Timothy's Church in Catonsville, Maryland, in protest of the Robinson vote. "The real issue is: Does the Bible mean what it says, or can you make it mean whatever you want?"

Edith M. Humphrey, associate professor of New Testament at

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and a five-year member of the [Episcopal] Primate's Theological Commission, said in an article for *Christianity Today*: "Modern spirituality begins and ends with the self; Christian spirituality, with the Alpha and Omega."

This "truncated spirituality," she said, is "intent mainly upon finding an inner connection," and winds up being "an amorphous concept." It can be whatever the person wants it to be.

Humphrey told *AFA Journal* that Christians must oppose the liberal assertion that, simply because they claim "the 'Spirit' is all about leading us into 'new things,'" that "contemporary (and individual) experience can 'trump' the wisdom of the apostles (as found in the Scriptures) or the ongoing witness of the historic Church."

That's not to say that experience is unimportant for Christians, but, she insisted, a proper understanding of experience reveals that it is not simply some internal feeling of bliss or connectedness to something greater. Instead, Humphrey said Christians should pray that they might "experience" God's truth, love, and presence" in their lives.

That type of experience is anchored in the Word. Humphrey said Christians should remember "that God's will is heard through Scriptures, as understood in the Church as a whole (tradition). The Holy Spirit will continue to direct God's living Church -- but not over against what she has learned before."

As Episcopalian Russell R. Reno, associate professor of theology at Creighton University and author of the book, *In the Ruins of the Church: Sustaining Faith in an Age of Diminished Christianity*, said, Bible-believing Episcopalians should do their best "to remind [liberals] that the Holy Spirit leads us into the depths of Scripture, not beyond it."

Israel's Ace in the Hole

Oil in the Holy Land

By Hal Lindsey

Most of the industrial world is now against Israel because of their need for Muslim controlled oil. Major Western nations like France and Germany have made secret oil deals with Muslim nations. Their oil deals with Iraq not only threatened the security of Israel, but also the U.S.

And now even U.S. support for Israel is on the decline, largely driven by the need for Muslim oil.

As I look at Bible prophecy, I know certain things. First, Israel will survive as a nation. Second, in the tribulation period that immediately precedes the Second Coming of Jesus, they will have enormous wealth. According to prophet Ezekiel, this wealth will be so great that it attracts a desperate attack by Russia and the Muslim Confederacy. This attack will actually be the first battle of the war of Armageddon.

So what wealth is Ezekiel talking about? Israel has achieved an agricultural miracle in the land, as predicted. She also has developed a world class high-tech industry. But none of these have brought the kind of wealth that is forecasted by the Bible.

The one source of this kind of wealth that would achieve the conditions of the prophecies is OIL. A major oil discovery would not only deliver Israel from the tyranny of the Muslim oil weapon, but also provide the great wealth that is demanded by the prophecy of Ezekiel. If Israel had a major oil discovery, it would change

the entire balance of power in the Middle East and the world.

I believe that just such a discovery is possible. Last year I reported on an exciting new oil exploration in Israel by Zion Oil & Gas, Inc.

(www.zionoil.com). It is the result of the persistence of a dedicated Christian named John Brown. He has been driven by a vision God gave him over twenty years ago. One miracle after another has enabled him to pull together a company of professionals that truly believe they are at the right place, at the right time to find a major oil reserve.

They are not operating on a 'pipe dream'. The Jerusalem Post reported, "The oil potential of Israel was evaluated twice at the request of the Israeli government. In 1962, the former chief geologist at EXXON determined that 'the potential ultimate oil resources of Israel should be of the order of 500 to 2,000 million barrels from primary recovery ... In 1979, James Wilson, former chief geologist of SHELL (US) determined that on-shore Israel has a potential of 330 to 2,000 million barrels of recoverable oil. Both of these experts have been president of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists."

Zion Oil has leased and is about to drill in what appears to be a recommended area for discovering oil. Geological records that now go back for decades have been carefully studied and plotted to verify this. But there is one geological source Zion Oil is using that I believe is the most important of all. It is the Bible itself. It so happens that the secular geological records coincide precisely with the area projected by the Bible.

In the early 1980s, John Brown was inspired by a series of messages given by a noted Bible teacher named James Spillman called, "The

Treasures of the Deep." He believes that God spoke to him and revealed that this was to be his mission in life.

He began to intensely study the Scriptures that predict certain riches would come to the descendants of two of Jacob's sons in the "last days". The first prophecy is made by the Patriarch, Jacob.

The time to which these prophecies apply is given, "And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in THE LAST DAYS ..." (Genesis 49:1 NKJ)

Here are some important excerpts from the prophecy concerning Joseph's sons, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a well ... By the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above [and the] BLESSINGS OF THE DEEP THAT LIES BENEATH ..." (Genesis 4:22, 25 NKJ)

The place where these blessings will be bestowed is also specified, "The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and ON THE CROWN OF THE HEAD of him who was separate from his brothers." (Genesis 49:26)

Remember this.

The second prophecy concerning Joseph is made by Moses, "And of Joseph he said: 'Blessed of the Lord is HIS LAND, with the precious things of heaven, with the dew, AND FROM THE DEEP LYING BENEATH, with the precious fruits of the sun, with the precious produce of the months, with the best things of the ancient mountains, with the precious things of the everlasting hills, with the precious things of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt in the

bush. Let the blessing come 'on the head of Joseph, and ON THE CROWN OF THE HEAD of him who was separate from his brothers.'" (Deuteronomy 33:13-16 NKJ)

The third relevant prophecy is also made by Moses. This one concerns Jacob's son Asher, whose allotted tribal land adjoins Joseph's sons' land, "And of Asher he said: 'Asher is most blessed of sons; Let him be favored by his brothers, and LET HIM DIP HIS FOOT IN OIL.'" (Deuteronomy 33:24 NKJ)

As you look at the map of Israel's tribal lands, note that 'the toe of Asher's land' juts out into the ocean at the foot of Mount Carmel. From ancient times it has been called 'the foot of Asher.'

But what has been overlooked is the shape of lands of Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Follow the outline and it looks like a man's head with a crown on top. The 'crown' is up against the 'foot' shape of Asher's land. I believe with John Brown and James Spillman that this is the key to the prophecies about blessing Joseph and Asher with riches in the last days with the treasures of the deep. And Asher is to dip his foot in the oil of that area.

Geological studies of Israel's oil potential show an underground oil bearing formation that is in this area. It is in the very heart of this region that Zion Oil is being led to drill an abandoned well to a deeper depth.

The well is called Ma'anit No. 1. Interestingly, it is located near the ruins of the ancient city of Megiddo, from which the apocalyptic name 'Armageddon' comes.

I believe that very exciting things are about to take place in Israel. If we are in the prophetic times that I believe we are in, it is truly time for things like this to take place.



*O Love divine, what has thou done!
The immortal God hath died for me!
The Father's coeternal Son
bore all my sins upon the tree.
Th' immortal God for me hath died:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!*

*Is crucified for me and you,
to bring us rebels back to God.
Believe, believe the record true,
ye all are bought with Jesus' blood.
Pardon for all flows from his side:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!*

*Behold him, all ye that pass by,
the bleeding Prince of life and peace!
Come, sinners, see your Savior die,
and say, "Was ever grief like his?"
Come, feel with me his blood applied:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!*

Charles Wesley

HEAVEN 101

*Excerpts from "The Truth About Heaven" by Rick Rood
What Will Life in Heaven Be Like?
Spiritual Changes!*

First, we know that our transition to heaven will result in a change in our spiritual nature. Paul spoke of "the hope of righteousness" for which we wait (Gal. 5:5); the expectation of being made wholly righteous. In Romans chapter 7 he spoke of being released from the internal struggle against indwelling sin, through being set free from our mortal body (Rom. 7:23-24). John said that when Jesus appears, "we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). Even now, we are told that as we behold "the glory of the Lord" we are gradually transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). One day we will see Him "just as He is." And when we do, there will be something about our vision of Him that will purify our hearts from all sin and bond us eternally to Him! One result of this transformation will be the perfecting of our relationships with one another. On earth, even among the most mature of us, our relationships are hindered by barriers created by fear, pride, jealousy, and shame. But the Bible says that "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). When we fully apprehend the perfect love which God has for us, and are cleansed from the sin that presently indwells us, our relationships with one another will finally be what God intended them to be.

Second, in Heaven our comprehension of the nature of God will be greatly expanded. The apostle Paul says that "though now we see through a glass darkly," then we shall "see face to face" and "shall know fully, as we are known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

It is this knowledge I am convinced that will move us to spontaneously join the heavenly chorus in singing hymns of praise to Almighty God. From the few glimpses of heavenly worship we are granted in Scripture, we learn that our praise of God will focus both on who He is--the eternal, holy, almighty God (cf. Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8)--and on what He has done (Rev. 4:11; 5:9-14). If our worship of God is muted now, it is at least partially because we do not yet fully comprehend the greatness of His glory and the awesomeness of His creative and redemptive work. But in Heaven we will gain much clearer insight into the wisdom of God displayed in the intricacies of His creation, and of His marvelous purposes manifest in His redeeming work. Some have wondered how we could be happy in heaven knowing that some of God's creatures are enduring His eternal judgment. It seems apparent, however, that in Heaven we will gain a much clearer perspective on the justice of God (cf. Rev. 18:20; 19:1-4). Perhaps the most perfect happiness of Heaven is impossible apart from some element of sorrow over the eternal loss of those who have rejected God's grace. No doubt, however, many of the mysteries of life and of God's ways in our individual lives will be more clearly understood, prompting us to join in His praise.

Finally, there is every reason to believe that there will be opportunity for growth in Heaven . . . not growth toward perfection, but growth in perfection. As a man, Jesus was indeed perfect. Yet Scripture tells us that He "grew in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man." Scripture also tells us that one of the three virtues that will abide forever is hope (1 Cor. 13:13). And what is hope

but the expectation of better and better things yet to come . . . the prospect of all for whom Heaven is our eternal home!

What Will Life in Heaven Be Like? Physical Changes!

... the Bible informs us that the life that awaits us is not only "better" than anything we could ever dream of here, or even "much better," but according to the apostle Paul, "very much better" (Phil. 1:23)! Now we want to continue our consideration of some of these "very much better" things that await us in Heaven.

First, once God's purposes for life on earth are through, our physical bodies will be resurrected to a new order of life. Philippians 3:20 tells us that the Lord Jesus himself will "transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (Phil. 3:21). In 1 Corinthians 15, the relationship between our present mortal body and our future resurrection body is likened to that between a seed and the plant that comes to be when it is sown in the ground and "dies" (1 Cor. 15:35-38). When a plant rises from the soil, it brings into actuality all the potential that was packed in the seed from which it grew. When our bodies are transformed, they will possess in actuality all that we can now only dream of being capable of. Not only will our bodies be freed from illness and aging, but our capacities will be immensely expanded and transformed! Paul describes it as a body that is "spiritual, honorable, imperishable, and powerful!"

The second "very much better" thing that will await us is the creation of a new heaven and earth in which we shall live with Christ forever. Jesus referred to this transformation of the creation as "the regeneration" (Matt. 19:28) the same term used to

describe the new birth of a believer. Paul described it as the time when it will be "set free from its slavery to corruption" (Rom. 8:21). In the Revelation we are told that in the new creation there will be "no more sorrow, pain or death" (Rev. 21:4). And in Isaiah's prophecy we read that the glories of the new creation will be so marvelous that "the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind" (Isa. 65:17)! Not only will the sufferings of this present life fade in comparison to the glory of this new world order (Rom. 8:18), but even the most wonderful of life's experiences will be so overshadowed by our new life that they will barely survive in our memory! When the apostle John was given a vision of life in the new creation, he was so overwhelmed that he had to be reminded to record what he was witnessing (Rev. 21:5), and to be assured twice that what he was beholding would really come to pass (Rev. 21:5; 22:6)!

And how will we occupy our time in this new order of life? The Scriptures tell us that in addition to engaging in united worship of God, we will serve (Rev. 22:3) and reign with Christ (Rev. 20:6; 22:5). The domain over which we will reign will no doubt encompass all of creation, for we're told that for Christ "all things have been created" (Col. 1:16), and that with Him we will inherit "all these things" (Rev. 21:7)! Though in many respects there will be a certain continuity between our present and future life, many tasks and occupations of the present order will no longer be needed. The enterprises in which we will engage will be totally creative and productive far more fulfilling and exciting than anything we know on earth today!

What Difference Does Heaven Make?

First, the hope of Heaven transforms our perspective on the

disappointments and sufferings of this life. D. A. Carson was right when he wrote: "There is nothing in Scripture to encourage us to think we should always be free from the vicissitudes that plague a dying world". But one thing the hope of Heaven can do is help us to put the "dark side" of life in perspective. Paul wrote: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). The glory to come will be immeasurably greater than the depth of any sorrow we may know today!

But Scripture also tells us that our present sufferings actually play a role in preparing us for that glory to come! As the apostle put it: "For momentary, light affliction is producing in us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). The very qualities and virtues that will fit us for Heaven are today being woven into our soul through the many afflictions of our present life . . . freeing us from the bonds of self-indulgence, creating in us a heart of compassion for others, and prodding us to draw ever closer to the One whose presence we shall enjoy for eternity to come.

Second, the hope of Heaven transforms our perspective on the true nature of success. On every side we hear the message that the "good life" consists in the accumulation of material possessions, the acquisition of power, or the enjoyment of sensual pleasure. Scripture does encourage us to enjoy the many good things of life with which we may be blessed (1 Tim. 6:17); but the hope of Heaven should remind us that this world and all that is in it is passing away, that its glory is for only a season (1 John 2:15-17), that we truly are "strangers and aliens" in this world (1 Pet. 2:11).

That's why it exhorts us to set our minds and hearts on Heaven and to seek the things that are above (Col. 3:1-3). God is urging us to turn aside from what in His eyes are "trivial pursuits" that end only in emptiness, and to devote ourselves to those ambitions that will yield fruit that will accompany us into the next world. When Jesus said to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness," He was encouraging us to make these things our highest priority in life.

Finally, the hope of Heaven transforms our perspective on death. The Scriptures nowhere teach that as believers we are immune from or should deny the reality of the sorrow that death can bring. But in Christ, we share in His victory over death! We grieve, but we grieve not as those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13), rather as those who are certain of our reunion with loved ones who have gone before, of receiving a glorious body that will never weaken or decay, of entering a wonderful new life beyond our fondest dreams, and of forever being with the Lord!

At the end of his beloved "Narnia Tales" C. S. Lewis describes the events that transpire as the characters in his story enter Heaven: "(T)he things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."