



IS THE WORLD GETTING BETTER? (Part Two)

I am sure **all** of us could make a list of things that are *not* right—*bad* and *evil* things that go on in this world. But for *this* message, our focus will be on things that are of “good report” (Phil. 4:8). This is *Part Two* of an article I wrote a year ago with the same title (printed copies will be sent free upon request).

About 20 years ago, I checked out the video “Horatio’s Drive” from our library. It tells the adventurous story of Horatio Jackson, the *first*—along with Sewall Crocker (a backup driver and mechanic)—to drive an automobile clear across America (San Francisco to New York). That was back in 1903. By this time, trains were crossing the country, but there were few roads and bridges for cars, especially in vast portions of the West.



Toward the first part of the trip, they picked up a dog named “Bud” who apparently enjoyed riding in the car. But having neither roof nor windshield, because of dust and sand, Bud was fitted with a pair of goggles.

People in some towns who learned (by telegraph) they were coming, lined the street, cheering them on as they passed through. They had become “celebrities”—all three of them! Loaded with difficulties and with the odds against them, the trip was finally completed in just over 63 days.

How different—and better—driving is today with our vast network of Interstate Freeways! Cars are better, safer, faster, and more comfortable.

Of course these are secular advances, raising the question: “What about *spiritual* things?” That is a valid question. But if we think it through, millions of people who attend church services get there in cars, as do the preachers!

Today, “travel” is an *upbeat* word, commonly used of trips taken for fun and pleasure. But the word “travel”—based on the word “travail” (meaning torment, labor, struggle)—seems to reflect the extreme difficulty of travel in centuries past.

Traveling from Babylon to Jerusalem, a large group of men, women, and children did so by walking, though some may have

ridden on animals, which were also used to carry supplies. It took *four months* for them to make the 900-mile journey (Ezra 7:7-9). Today, driving time in a car for that distance could be as little as *15 hours!*

When travel was on foot, by donkey or some other animal, wild animals like *lions* (often mentioned in Scripture) were a serious threat (1 Kings 13:24; Jer. 5:6). Today, wild animals pose no threat to car travel.

Going clear back to the book of Genesis, the use of camels, horses, donkeys, and mules for transportation is mentioned (Gen. 12:16; 47:17; 36:24). A **mule**—distinguished from the other animals in Scripture—is the offspring of a male donkey (a jack) and a female horse (a mare). Mules can be either male or female, but cannot reproduce.

Coming on down to more recent times, walking along a tow path, **mules** were used to pull barges along the Erie Canal. On land, a mule could carry about 250 pounds, but could pull a barge on water weighing as much as 60,000 pounds! This significantly lowered the cost of transporting freight.



Opened for travel in 1825, the 363-mile Erie Canal was an engineering marvel for that time, connecting Albany with Buffalo (New York State). By stagecoach, this trip took two *weeks*. By the canal it took five *days*. Today, Amtrak makes the trip in five *hours!* And by air, the time is *one hour!*

Canal transportation had a serious drawback. In winter, when the water froze, travel became impossible. Trains provided better transportation and eventually made the canal system obsolete.

The Bible shows that travel was greatly affected by weather and seasons, especially *winter* (Mark 13:18; 2 Tim. 4:21). That time of year was “dangerous” for travel by ship, as when Paul was taken as a prisoner to Rome (Acts 27:9-15). Caught in a horrible storm, for many days they had not seen the sun nor *stars* (which mariners depended on for guidance.) In the black of night, fears that they were about to shipwreck on a rocky landmass were confirmed. “They dropped a weighted line and found that the water was 120 feet deep...a little later they measured again and found it was only 90 feet deep” (Acts 27:27,28 NLT).

Think how different all of this would have been if they had a Global Positioning System (GPS)!

At the time of Jesus, people living in Israel made predictions about the weather. A red sky in the evening indicated fair weather was ahead. A cloud rising out of the west meant a rain shower

was coming, while a south wind meant hot weather was on its way (Matt. 16:2; Luke 12:54, 55).

Today, because of information provided by satellite imagery and radar (wind speeds, the direction of storms, precipitation, etc.), weather forecasting has become very reliable. Being aware of an approaching hurricane can save the lives of many.

The Bible often mentions travel by ships and boats. These were propelled by the use of oars (Jonah 1:13; John 6:19). “Row, row, row your boat!” Others harnessed the wind with sails (Acts 27:7, 15). Some ships were highly decorated (Ezek. 27:5-9).

When David fled from Jerusalem, he crossed the Jordan River in a **ferryboat** (2 Sam. 19:18). Many years later, this may have been the location on the Jordan River where John baptized Jesus, *Bethabara* meaning “ferry-house” (John 1:28-29).

Solomon had ships that traveled to exotic lands, bringing back gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks (2 Chron. 9:21). These ships, coming “once every three years,” seems to imply a very distant destination and how *slow* ship travel was at that time.

A later king, Jehoshaphat, “made merchant ships to go to Ophir for gold; but they never sailed, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion Geber” (1 Kings 22:48). Being made of wood (compared with steel today), ships were vulnerable.

*O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties, above the fruited plain!
AMERICA! AMERICA! God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea!*



When singing about **America**, very few would think of **Amerigo** Vespucci (1454–1512). Yet it is from his name that our country is called America. He was a European explorer who sailed across the Atlantic and along the coast of what was (later) named South America. Unlike Columbus—who sailed a few years before—Amerigo believed he had discovered a separate continent and called it *Mundus Novus* (the New World).

Considering the primitive ships back then, what would Amerigo think about our great ships today?! The seldom-used ?! symbol, called an interrobang, fits here very well!

The *Icon of the Seas*, the world’s largest cruise ship (almost four city blocks in length), can accommodate 7,600 passengers, has 20 decks, numerous restaurants, 7 swimming pools, and even an ice-skating rink!



Years ago, an elderly man told me about the *first* time he saw an **airplane**. As a boy, out in the yard of the little farm where he lived, he heard a noise. Then, passing overhead, was an airplane! The thought that someone could actually *fly* was overwhelming. He was excited!

Today, in the United States, **2.56 million** passengers (on average) fly each day! There are **87,000** commercial airline flights per day (on average), a *staggering* number. When there is a plane crash, it (understandably) receives a lot of press coverage. But considering the many flights each day and the vast distances covered, air travel is probably the safest means of travel *ever*.

Because of airplane flights, the United States Post Office can offer **overnight** delivery anywhere in the country—something undreamed of years ago. In 1860, when the Pony Express was established—though quite limited in locations where it went—it was the fastest postal service yet: **ten days** to carry a letter from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California.

Today, we tend to take the United States postal system for granted. But it actually ties the country together. Over these many years, our ministry has possibly sent out a million books and articles. Without our postal system, this would not have happened.

In the Old Testament we read about a primitive form of postal service. Notice the word “**posts**” in the following verses from the *King James Version*:

- “**Posts** went with letters...throughout all Israel” (2 Chron. 30:6).
- “Letters were sent by **posts** into all the king’s provinces” (Esth. 3:13).
- “The **posts** that rode upon mules and camels went out” (Esth. 8:14).
- “Letters were sent by **posts** on horseback” (Esth. 8:10).
- “One **post** shall run to meet another” (Jer. 51:31).

Instead of “posts,” most newer translations use words like *runners* or *couriers*. But the word “post” is not totally obsolete, even today. We still use words like *postage*, *postal*, *post office*, and *postman*!

Because “postman” has been so commonly used, I once asked a *woman* who was delivering mail the correct title for *her*. She said: “Letter Carrier.”

Historically, letter carriers were usually men. But we do know of a *woman* (mentioned in the Bible) who carried a very special letter all the way from Corinth to Rome. That letter, written by Paul, is what we today call the book of *Romans*. That woman’s name was Phoebe, a minister of the church at Cenchrea, located about six miles east of Corinth (Rom. 16:1). An explanatory note at the end of *Romans* (included in some editions of the Bible) says: “*Written to the Romans from Corinth, and sent by Phoebe.*”

Some years ago, I visited the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento. A mail postal car from the *Empire Builder*—a famous train that went from Chicago to Seattle—is on display. Back when most mail was carried by train, letters were sorted en-route by being placed in various cubbyholes. A museum docent explained that each of these was labeled for a **city or town** along the way. There was *one* exception: mail to The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It had its



own cubbyhole—an indication of the large volume of mail that was received by the Billy Graham ministry!

Back in the first century, John the apostle spoke of writing a letter using “*paper* and *ink*” (2 John 1:12). “*Ink*” at that time was made of soot and water, with a species of gum to give it durability. The writing instrument, called a “*pen*,” was made from a *reed*. The word translated “*pen*” is the same Greek word translated “*reed*” (3 John 1:13; Matt. 11:7).

I wonder what John would have thought about a ball-point pen or, better yet, a computer with a laser printer!



The “*paper*” on which he wrote, being made from the Egyptian papyrus plant, was much inferior to what we call paper today. Consider how different our lives would be without paper (as we know it)—printing (like *this* article), pages of the Bible, newspapers, magazines, books, paper plates, paper towels, and, yes, even toilet paper!

The modern bathroom is in stark contrast to the days of the outhouse and, prior to that, when conditions were even more primitive (Deut. 23:12-13).

It has been estimated that the average American, in taking a shower, uses 17.2 gallons of water.

I have thought sometimes about the woman at Jacob’s Well (John 4:5-42). Because the well was “*deep*”—by some estimates 120 feet deep—it was an effort to draw water. The biblical text implies it was some distance from the well to where she lived.

Think how many trips she would have needed to make to obtain water for a shower, had such even been available!

At the time of Moses’ birth, we read that Pharaoh’s daughter *bathed* in the Nile River (Exod. 2:5). Considering that the Nile had huge crocodiles (ranging from 12 to 16 feet in length), this would not be the most desirable place to take a bath!

How much better is a safe bathtub or shower with hot and cold running water!

I thought about Nile crocodiles in 1983. I was with a group of pastors (including long-time friends of mine: Fred Horner and Doug Young), when we spent three days going down the Nile from Aswan to Cairo, Egypt. Stops were made at various places to visit the historic ruins of ancient temples and cities.

It came as a surprise when we met up with (former) President Jimmy Carter at one of those stops. I took this photo just after the cruise ship he was on arrived (Carter in center).



When he was told a group of pastors would like to meet him, he and Rosalynn came right over, shook hands with each of us, and visited a few minutes. The photo below (taken a short time later) shows Carter, a couple Secret Service bodyguards, and a few of us in the ruins of an ancient Egyptian temple. That is me on the left wearing a dark green jacket.



When reading that a woman named **Jael** “*opened a bottle of milk*” (Judges 4:19 KJV), we might think of what we call “*bottles*” (made of glass or plastic). But “*bottles*” in Scripture (for milk, water, or wine) were usually made from the skins of goats or sheep. The practice was common enough that Jesus used it to make a point: “*Men do not put new wine into old wineskins.*” The expansion produced by fermentation would cause them to break (Matt. 9:17).

How different a milk display would look in a grocery store today if containers were animal skins! Would anyone want to go back to “*bottles*” made of goatskins?

But getting back to Jael serving *milk*, we read that Sisera, the Commander of the Canaanite army, facing defeat, “*alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot.*” As he passed the tent of Jael, she invited him in, offered to hide him, and covered him with a blanket. Being exhausted, he asked her for water. She gave him milk to drink and he fell asleep. What followed is gruesome:

“*Then Jael...took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died*” (Judges 4:21).



A couple things tend to go unnoticed in this account.

(1) We read that “*Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite*” (Judges 4:17). *Her tent* was a separate tent from “*his tent*” (verse 11). This could imply that Heber—like some others mentioned in Judges—had more than one wife (cf. Judges 8:30).

(2) In times of war, a soldier on the winning side, upon seeing “*among the captives a beautiful woman,*” would take her for a wife (Deut. 21:10-14). When Sisera—having been killed by Jael—did not return home from the battle, his *mother* was deeply troubled. She hoped the delay was simply due to dividing the spoil and giving to each soldier “*a girl or two*” (Judges 5:28-30 NKJV).

The *King James Version* says “*a damsel* or two.” The Hebrew word here translated *damsel*, has been translated “*womb*” four

other places. *The English Standard Version* says “a *womb* or two for every man.” *The New American Standard*: “two concubines for every warrior.” *The NET Bible* says “a girl or two for each man to *rape!*”

Sisera, being exhausted, asked Jael for water, but she gave him milk. Milk and water have been in use a long time, both being mentioned in the book of Genesis (18:8; 21:14). Alcoholic drinks also go back to ancient times. In Genesis we read that Noah “planted a vineyard, and he drank of the wine, and was drunk” (Gen. 9:20, 21).

Depending on translation, the word “wine” appears over 200 times in the Bible. But, strangely, the word “beer” (in the *King James Version*), based on a Hebrew word, means a *well*. This, in turn, provided the name of a town. During the Exodus, the Israelites “went to **Beer**, which is the *well* where the LORD said to Moses, ‘Gather the people together, and I will give them water’” (Num. 21:16). Later, we read that “Jotham...went to **Beer** and dwelt there” (Judges 9:21). “Beer” provided the names for *wells* such as Beer Lahai Roi, Beersheba, etc. (Gen. 16:14; 21:30,31).

Numerous Bible verses speak of “washing clothes” (Exod. 19:10; Lev. 11:40). Newer translations call one who did this a “laundrer,” whereas the *King James Version*, in older English, uses the term “**fuller**.”

On one occasion, Jesus’ garments became “shining, exceedingly *white* as snow,” whiter than “any **fuller** on earth can white them” (Mark 9:3 KJV). Years ago, I heard a preacher say: “Jesus’ garments became so white, no fuller could make them *that white—not even Charles Fuller!*” An older generation may remember the well-known preacher Charles Fuller (1887-1968).

We also read about the “*fuller’s field*” (Isa. 7:3), a place where clothes were washed, a laundry. Using “*fuller’s soap*” (Mal. 3:2) clothes were washed with water, beaten over rocks, and scrubbed with abrasive sand or stone.

How different—and better—things would have been with a modern washing machine and dryer!

It is estimated that about 97% of American homes have at least one **television set**.

By the time of Abraham Lincoln, the *camera* had been invented, making it possible to take *still* photographs. This would lead to *motion* pictures. Television would come along later—*much later!* Considering this long interval of time, it hardly seems possible that someone who witnessed Lincoln’s assassination would still be living and talk about it on a television program. But it’s true!

When he was just five years old, Samuel J. Seymour, attended a play at Ford’s Theater on the fateful evening of April 14, 1865. He was seated in the balcony directly across from the President and says he heard the shot, saw Lincoln slump over, and watched John Wilkes Booth jump onto the stage before fleeing. On February 9, 1956, two



months before his death, Seymour recounted the story on the television show *I’ve Got a Secret*.

That program can still be viewed on YouTube. As the panel asked questions in an attempt to unravel the “secret,” it was Jayne Meadows who asked if it involved Abraham Lincoln. She was the wife of Steve Allen, the original host of the long-running television program “The Tonight Show.”

Television sets and *many* other products are made from **plastic**: radios, phones, clocks and computers. In our cars, plastic is used for steering wheels, dashboards, and door panels. It is used extensively in trains, planes, ships, satellites, and even the International Space Station, travelling at about **17,500** miles per hour, and orbiting the Earth every 90 minutes!

But **plastic** (as we know it) was *non-existent* until **1907**. This was when Leo Baekeland invented it and coined the term *plastics*.

We use plastic pens, combs, toothbrushes, tape, buckets, water pipes, mugs, trash bags, flooring, curtains, shopping carts and soda pop bottles. Model trains, planes, and numerous toys are made from plastic.

To put it mildly, our lives would be very different today if we did not have plastic!

Ancient **sundials**, as the one belonging to King Ahaz (Isa. 38:8), were unreliable and could only function on days when the sun was shining. Today, a common wristwatch (even a very inexpensive one) can provide *accurate* time—day or night! Is there any question which is *better*?

As we now come to the end of this article, MANY examples about things that are “better” remain unmentioned. Perhaps a “Part 3” will follow, “the Lord willing” (James 4:15).

It has not been our purpose to deny that bad and evil things go on in this world. There is crime, chaos, conflict, and confusion. This is obvious. But those who believe the world can only get *worse and worse*, have little incentive to solve problems or try to make things better. To them, everything is going down the drain.

People of faith, on the other hand, should be upbeat, optimistic, thankful for our many **blessings**. Where problems exist, we should do what we can to help solve those problems and make things better, keeping in mind “The Prayer of Serenity”:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Despite problems in the world, we (as people of faith) are **blessed** in so many ways. Where sin abounds, *grace will much more abound* (Rom. 5:20). *Greater* is He who is in you, than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). In all these things we are *more than conquerors* through Him who loves us (Rom. 8:37). There is *victory* in Jesus! (1 Cor. 15:57). Though (at times) it does not *seem* like it, *we are* on the *winning* team! GOD is still on the Throne!



RALPH WOODROW
PO BOX 21
PALM SPRINGS, CA 92263
E-mail: ralphwoodrow@earthlink.net
Phone: (760) 327-6049
Website: ralphwoodrow.org