

# The Good News

January-February 2013

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

## Where Does America Go From Here?

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BEYOND  
TODAY  
UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

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**N**early 2,000 years ago a group of men came to Jesus Christ, intending to put Him on the spot by asking Him for a miraculous sign to prove He was who He said He was. His response, recorded in Matthew 16:2-3, wasn't what they expected.

He told them: "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! *You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times*" (emphasis added).

Jesus had already performed many great miracles, as they no doubt were aware. The evidence was already there, but they refused to accept it. And so Jesus called them what they were—hypocrites and pretenders. He then pointed out to them the result of their lack of belief. Their lack of spiritual understanding, Jesus told them,

## Could disbelief and lack of spiritual understanding leave us blind to dangers that should be obvious?

*made them blind to what should've been obvious.* The signs of the times were there, but they chose to remain oblivious to them.

Do Christ's words mean anything for us today? Could disbelief and lack of spiritual understanding leave individuals—or even an entire nation—blind to dangers that otherwise should be obvious? Are we ignoring warning signs that cry out for our attention?

Consider some indicators of America's national health and stability. The United States currently borrows *40 percent of what it spends*. The 2012 U.S. federal budget was almost \$3.8 trillion, a gargantuan number almost impossible to understand. This breaks down to the federal government spending:

- \$316,333,333,333 (\$316.3 billion) per month.
- \$73,000,000,000 (\$73 billion) per week.
- \$10,400,000,000 (\$10.4 billion) per day.
- \$433,000,000 (\$433 million) per hour.
- \$7,222,222 (\$7.2 million) per minute.
- \$120,370.37 per second.

Since 40 percent of these amounts is borrowed, the United States *borrow and spends \$48,000*—an amount roughly equal to the median U.S. household income—*every second*.

In late 2011 the federal deficit officially overtook the nation's gross domestic product (GDP)—the total value of the nation's goods and services produced in the year. America's per-person share of debt is now higher than that of deeply troubled European nations like Greece that we hear so much about on the news!

America spends more than *\$400 billion annually just to pay interest on its debt*, with about a quarter of that going to China. That interest alone is enough to fund *China's entire military spending*—a military that is aggressively catching up to and challenging U.S. forces in Asia and the Pacific. In effect, through irresponsible government spending, U.S. taxpayers are funding China's military buildup!

In spite of America's power, it's increasingly ineffectual on the world stage. Crowds gather in third-world nations to mock the United States and spit on its flag. In September Libyan terrorists murdered the U.S. ambassador with impunity—the first ambassador killed since 1979.

What's going on? What are these warning signs telling us? It's crucial that you understand the answers revealed in this issue, because they're reshaping not just the nation, but the entire world!

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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### NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

**United States:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027  
 Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)  
**Canada:** United Church of God—Canada, Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada  
 Phone: (905) 614-1234, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (905) 614-1749 Website: [www.ucg.ca](http://www.ucg.ca)  
**Caribbean islands:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027  
 Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)  
**Spanish-speaking areas:** Iglesia de Dios Unida, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.  
 Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: [www.ucg.org/espanol](http://www.ucg.org/espanol) E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)

### EUROPE

**Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg):** P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands  
**British Isles:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England  
 Phone: 020-8386-8467 Fax: 020-8386-1999 Website: [www.goodnews.org.uk](http://www.goodnews.org.uk)  
**Eastern Europe and Baltic states:** Head Sõnumid, Pk. 62, 50002 Tartu Postkontor, Estonia  
**France:** Église de Dieu Unie—France, 127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France  
**Germany:** Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten, Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany  
 Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637  
**Italy:** La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy  
 Phone and Fax: (+39) 035 4523573 Website: [www.labuonanotizia.org](http://www.labuonanotizia.org) E-mail: [info@labuonanotizia.org](mailto:info@labuonanotizia.org)  
**Scandinavia:** Guds Enade Kyrka, P.O. Box 3535, 111 74 Stockholm, Sweden  
 Phone: +44 20 8386-8467 E-mail: [sverige@ucg.org](mailto:sverige@ucg.org)

### AFRICA

**Cameroon:** United Church of God Cameroon, BP 10322 Bessengue, Douala, Cameroon  
**East Africa, Madagascar and Mauritius:** United Church of God—East Africa  
 P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi 00200, Kenya E-mail: [kenya@ucg.org](mailto:kenya@ucg.org) Website: [www.ucgeastafrica.org](http://www.ucgeastafrica.org)  
**Ghana:** P.O. Box AF 75, Adenta, Accra, Ghana E-mail: [ghana@ucg.org](mailto:ghana@ucg.org)  
**Malawi:** P.O. Box 32257, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi Phone: 01 660 851 E-mail: [malawi@ucg.org](mailto:malawi@ucg.org)  
**Nigeria:** United Church of God—Nigeria, P.O. Box 2265 Somolu, Lagos, Nigeria  
 Phone: 8033233193 Website: [www.ucgnigeria.org](http://www.ucgnigeria.org) E-mail: [nigeria@ucg.org](mailto:nigeria@ucg.org)  
**South Africa:** United Church of God—Southern Africa, P.O. Box 36290, Menlo Park, 0102, Pretoria, South Africa. Phone: +27 12 751 4204 Fax: +27 (0)86 572 7437 Website: [www.south-africa.ucg.org](http://www.south-africa.ucg.org)  
 E-mail: [UnitedChurchofGod.SA@gmail.com](mailto:UnitedChurchofGod.SA@gmail.com)  
**Zambia:** P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia Phone: (02) 226076 E-mail: [zambia@ucg.org](mailto:zambia@ucg.org)  
**Zimbabwe:** P.O. Box 928, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe Phone: 0773 240 041 E-mail: [zimbabwe@ucg.org](mailto:zimbabwe@ucg.org)

### PACIFIC REGION

**Australia and all other South Pacific regions not listed:** United Church of God—Australia  
 GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia Phone: 07 55 202 111 Free call: 1800 356 202  
 Fax: 07 55 202 122 Website: [www.ucg.org.au](http://www.ucg.org.au) E-mail: [info@ucg.org.au](mailto:info@ucg.org.au)  
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**Tonga:** United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 518, Nukualofa, Tonga

### ASIA

**All except Philippines and Singapore:** United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A. Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)  
**Philippines:** P.O. Box 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines Phone and fax: +63 82 224-4444  
 Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444 Website: [www.ucg.org.ph](http://www.ucg.org.ph) E-mail: [info@ucg.org.ph](mailto:info@ucg.org.ph)  
**Singapore:** United Church of God, GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia  
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United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.  
 Phone: (513) 576-9796 Fax (513) 576-9795 Website: [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org) E-mail: [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org)  
 Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 40026236.  
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# Where Does America Go From Here?

As the American president takes his oath of office with his hand on the Bible, proclaiming to faithfully fulfill his responsibilities “so help me God,” should we not take into consideration how God views the “state of the union” of the United States? *by Scott Ashley*

**W**arning signs come in many forms. Sometimes it's the piercing shriek of a fire alarm or the Emergency Alert System on the TV or radio. Maybe it's the wail of a loudspeaker indicating an oncoming tornado or hurricane. At times it might be the flashing lights and siren of an ambulance, fire truck or other emergency vehicle.

Regardless of their form, we're usually aware of what warning signs mean. They're intended to alert us to approaching danger, and we know that we must take action if we are to remain safe.

Sometimes the warning signs are not so

obvious. Rather than screaming in our ears or shouting in our faces to get our attention like the examples above, the signs can be much more subtle. And if we're distracted by other things and not paying attention, we can easily miss them.

Could individuals—and sometimes even great nations—remain blind to dangers that otherwise should be obvious? Could Americans be ignoring warning signs that are shouting for our attention?

## **A look at the state of the union**

Early each year the U.S. president gives his annual State of the Union address to

Congress—and, by extension, the nation and world as a whole. It's typically a lofty speech filled with ideals and platitudes expressing the president's agenda.

But despite what it's called, the speech seldom addresses the actual state of the nation. If we were to examine the condition of the United States from the perspective of God's Word, what would we find?

On the rostrum above the head of the president as He gives this speech, seemingly avoided by TV cameras, is the motto “In God We Trust.” The president is himself sworn into office with his hand on a Bible as he pledges to carry out his duties “so help me God.”

So what would God think about the current state of the United States?

## **Growing acceptance of immoral behavior**

The November 2012 U.S. elections were a revealing window into the prevailing





# World News & Prophecy

mindset of voters. For the first time, voters legalized marriage between homosexuals in several states—Maine, Maryland and Washington.

Same-sex marriage had already been approved by state legislatures or courts in six other states, but this was the first time it was approved directly by voters—after it had previously been rejected 32 times in statewide votes dating back to 1998.

Homosexual behavior is repeatedly condemned in Scripture (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10). Yet far from being ashamed of such behavior, many pride themselves on their acceptance of it.

With the country's many "gay pride" marches and parades, could Isaiah 3:9 be a prophecy for America today? "The look on their faces testifies against them; *they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it.* Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves" (New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

Meanwhile, in two states—Colorado and Washington—voters approved possession and recreational use of marijuana, a hallucinogenic drug that remains illegal under federal law. Nineteen other states allow what is called "medicinal" use of the drug, though it's clearly abused by many who want to use it simply to get high.

Although marijuana isn't directly mentioned in Scripture, God's Word clearly

who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! . . .

"Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom will ascend like dust; because they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the anger of the LORD is aroused against His people; He has stretched out His hand against them and stricken them . . ."

## **Broken marriages + broken families = broken society**

As we have often discussed in the pages of *The Good News*, marriage and family are the building blocks of society. When marriages and families break down, so do the bonds holding society together.

So what's the state of marriage and family in America today?

For years about half of all U.S. marriages have ended in divorce. Seeing this sad fact, growing numbers of couples choose to skip marriage altogether.

According to U.S. census figures, between 1960 and 2000 the number of unmarried couples living together *increased tenfold*. It *doubled again* from 2000 to 2010, to 7.5 million couples—though the actual number may be considerably higher since unmarried partners may describe themselves as just friends or roommates.

About 12 percent of U.S. households are now unmarried couples living together. In some cities a third of couples living together are not married to each other. Other recent studies have shown that *almost 60 percent* of women ages 19-44 have chosen to live with a partner of the opposite sex at some point in their lives.

However, rather than a formula for stability, living together before marriage only increases the odds that a couple will break up. About 40 percent of couples who move in together separate before marriage. And, of those who do marry, studies show the divorce rate ranges from *50 to 80 percent higher* than those who chose not to live

together before marriage.

## **The curses of promiscuity, abortion and illegitimacy**

Sexual promiscuity begins early. Studies show that from 40 to 50 percent of U.S. teens are sexually active, with 20 percent having sexual intercourse *by age 15*.

And they are reaping the tragic fruits of breaking God's command against engaging in sex outside of marriage (Exodus 20:14; Ephesians 5:3, 5; Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 21:8). Young people ages 15-24 account for *nearly half* of the nation's 19 million new sexually transmitted infections each year. One in four females ages 15 to 19 is infected with at least one sexually transmitted disease. And each year more than 750,000 15- to 19-year-old females become pregnant, the vast majority unintended.

With so many showing such disregard for God's instruction regarding sex and marriage, it's no surprise that the nation is suffering from twin curses of abortion and illegitimacy. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost one in five pregnancies (18 percent) in America end in the abortion of the unborn baby. The nation's estimated annual death toll from abortion ranges from about 750,000 to over 1 million.

To put this in perspective, Americans were rightfully horrified by the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, in which nearly 3,000 people lost their lives in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in the crash of an airliner in a Pennsylvania field. Yet *almost the same number of innocent unborn children are murdered by abortion in America every single day*. Where is the outrage? What does this tell us about the deplorable moral state of the nation?

Another sad fruit of the nation's promiscuity is that the percentage of births that are illegitimate—children born to unmarried parents—is also dramatically rising.

Of first births to mothers ages 15 to 44 today, *almost half—46 percent*—are illegitimate. For women ages 20-24, well over half—a staggering *61 percent*—are to unmarried mothers.

## **A huge financial toll on society**

As bad as these percentages are, they only hint at the terrible toll this takes on society—and on these children in particular. Numerous studies have shown that

## **Thinking themselves enlightened, people in reality only show how shortsighted and blind they are to the consequences of their choices.**

condemns intoxication in any form—calling those seeking it "drunkards" who will have no place in the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10; Galatians 5:21). The reason so many use marijuana is for the intoxicated state it produces. Otherwise, why do it?

Any nation brings curses on itself when it turns its back on biblical values and accepts sin as normal and commonplace. Thinking themselves enlightened, people in reality only show how shortsighted and blind they are to the consequences of their choices.

They fail to take into account God's view, which He states in Isaiah 5:20-25: "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness;



children born into fatherless homes are far more likely to die in infancy, to be poor, to show aggressive behavior, to abuse drugs, to have behavioral problems in school and to spend time in jail or prison.

Nearly 2 million children are born each year to unmarried parents, often to women with limited education and prospects for improving their lives. What is the cost to taxpayers?

In the 2011 fiscal year, federal and state governments spent a combined *\$450 billion* on assistance to low-income families with children—with about three quarters of this, or some *\$330 billion*, going to single-parent families. This averages out to *about \$30,000 in assistance* to each single-parent household.

But this doesn't mean that this much is actually going to those who need it. Vast amounts go to the government bureaucracies and hundreds of thousands of federal and state employees tasked with overseeing assistance programs. The U.S. government currently operates *more than 80 different means-tested federal programs* that provide social services, medical care, food, housing, cash and other assistance to low-income families and individuals.

## The curse of skyrocketing debt

It should be no surprise that the nation's growing social ills have contributed to an explosion in its financial problems.

Over the last year the debt problems of the European "PIIGS" countries—Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain—have regularly made headlines. Each of the five have enormous debt problems due to their inability to rein in government spending.

However, the per-person share of the government's outstanding debt in the United States is actually higher than in any of these deeply troubled countries!

Each American's share of federal government debt is about *\$45,000*—15 percent higher than the per-capita debt of Greeks at almost *\$39,000*. Even worse, American per-capita debt is expected to grow to *almost \$75,000* by 2020, only seven years away.

Why is government debt exploding? The simple answer is that *the government is borrowing 40 cents of every dollar it spends*.

To put this in perspective, the U.S. government is like a family with a *\$21,700* annual income spending *\$38,200* a year, with *\$16,500* of that put on credit cards—when the family already owes *\$142,710* on those credit cards!

For four consecutive years the federal government has amassed a trillion-dollar

deficit. It took the United States 200 years to accumulate its first trillion dollars in debt. Now it takes about 10 months!

In September 2012 the total deficit passed *\$16 trillion—an amount exceeding the nation's entire GDP!* How vast is that number? A stack of 16 trillion \$1 bills would extend higher than Mt. Everest, past the space station, past the moon 239,000 miles away and back to Earth—*twice*.

Shocking as these figures are, they in fact vastly *underestimate* the scope of the problem. We need to factor in unfunded liabilities—the amount needed to fully fund government promises for Social Security, Medicare, military and government employee pensions and health care. The real debt load then jumps, depending on which set of economic and demographic assumptions one works from, to five to ten times the *\$16 trillion* amount—*far exceeding the*

His instruction: "The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail" (Deuteronomy 28:43-44).

The United States is experiencing a drastic turnaround unparalleled in history. Until about a generation ago, the United States was the world's leading lender nation. But now that has completely reversed, and America is the most indebted nation in world history—with more than half of U.S. debt held by rival nations such as China, Russia, Iran and Venezuela.

## From blessings to curses

The United States is under a curse—as warned of centuries ago in the pages of your Bible. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 record the blessings God promised would



**Americans were rightfully worried about the widespread droughts and massive wildfires that plagued the country in 2012. Lack of rainfall and snowfall has created the worst conditions for the winter wheat crop in almost 30 years.**

*GDP of the entire planet!* And that doesn't even include similar unfunded liabilities for the 50 individual states and hundreds of American towns and cities.

The bottom line? America's cities are broke, its states are broke, and the nation is broke. And we're living in a fool's paradise.

God warned centuries ago that "the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). America currently spends more than *\$400 billion per year just to pay interest on its staggering debt!*

God pronounced curses that would come from a nation disobeying Him and rejecting

come when a nation honored and obeyed Him—and the curses that would come when it dishonors and disobeys Him, such as becoming a debtor nation, as quoted above.

For its first two centuries America enjoyed the abundant blessings foretold (see "The Biblical Identity of America," beginning on page 17).

Yet God had warned: "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you"



(Deuteronomy 28:15).

What curses did He foretell?

“Cursed shall you be in the city,” He began (verse 16). What is the state of America’s cities? Many are impressive on the outside, but they are rotten at the core. Growing numbers are bankrupt. Many are ridden with crime. Poverty, corruption, failing schools and thousands of unassimilated immigrants eat away at their stability. Millions of people flee them—with many millions more wishing they could do the same.

“Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl,” God continues (verse 17). These represent our food sources. Study after study shows that many of our food sources aren’t healthy or good for us. For many, our diet and lifestyle may in fact be dangerous to our health.

“Cursed shall be the fruit of your body” (verse 18). Birthrates are declining. And with the legalization of abortion, we have viewed our own children as curses and slaughtered them by the millions.

For the American children who are born, one in six has some kind of developmental disability according to the CDC—and the number is growing.

Moreover, as noted above, millions of children are born into households where the mother or father or both are ill-equipped to care for them financially, emotionally, mentally or spiritually.

“Cursed shall be . . . the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks” (same verse). Only a few years ago the United States was among the world’s largest exporters of food—primarily wheat, corn and meat. Now that too is reversed, and America actually imports more food than it exports.

“The LORD will make the plague cling to you . . . [He] will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever . . . they shall pursue you until you perish” (verses 21-22). In comparison to much of the world, Americans as a whole enjoy good health and long life. But that comes at an increasingly steep price. From 1980 to today, *health care expenses have exploded more than tenfold*.

Health care costs are currently about \$2.8 trillion, amounting to 18 percent of the nation’s GDP. Yet in spite of such enormous expenditures, Americans’ life expectancy ranks only 42nd in the world, well behind most advanced nations.

### Drought and defeat

“The sky over your head shall be bronze,

and the earth under you iron. The LORD will change the rain of your land into powder, and only dust shall come down upon you from the sky until you are destroyed” (verses 23-24, New Revised Standard Version).

Many Americans were rightfully worried about the widespread droughts and massive wildfires that plagued the country in 2012—as they did in several preceding years. With the nation having moved into winter, the situation remains serious. Lack of rainfall and snowfall has created the worst conditions for the winter wheat crop in almost 30 years.

Drought conditions have caused levels of two of the Great Lakes—Michigan and Huron—to fall to near-record lows, with the other three below historical averages. On the Mississippi River, water levels have dropped 15 to 20 feet below normal in some places, threatening to halt the barge traffic that carries millions of tons of crops and other goods through the American heartland.

“The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth,” God continues (verse 25).

At the end of World War II America emerged as a new world superpower. With the collapse of the Soviet Union several decades later, it stood as the world’s *lone* superpower. Yet in spite of its might, in a struggle lasting eight years and costing more than 4,400 American lives and more than \$1 trillion, the United States withdrew from Iraq, leaving behind a dangerous and unstable nation. A similar pattern was followed in Afghanistan, where U.S. troops are scheduled to be gone by the end of 2014.

Why is it that the most powerful military in the world was essentially fought to a draw by comparatively primitive forces—the enemies having no navy, air force or massive war machinery and fighting from caves and holes in the ground, armed with IEDs and AK-47s?

This makes no sense at all until we consider God’s warning and curse for our sins: “*The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies . . .*”

### Will we heed the warnings?

Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 also list other curses to fall on the nation that defies Him—many truly horrifying to contemplate. We don’t have space to cover them all here, but you can and should read them. This is what lies ahead unless the nation changes its ways!

America likes to be viewed as a religious nation. But for many their religiosity is only skin deep. Most American households have not just one but several Bibles. The problem is that they don’t *read* the Bible, much less *do and live* as it says.

If you don’t believe these warnings from the Bible, consider these other warnings from two of the nation’s greatest presidents:

Thomas Jefferson, to whom many wrongly attribute belief in complete separation of church and state, wrote: “*I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just [and] that his justice cannot sleep for ever . . .*”

Abraham Lincoln, who saw the nation through a horrifying civil war, said: “At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? . . . I answer, if it ever reach us, it *must spring up amongst us*. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, *we must ourselves be its author and finisher.*”

God’s justice is indeed awakening from a long sleep. The warning signs are all around. Our destruction, as Lincoln warned, is coming from ourselves as a once-great nation increasingly rots from the core.

It may be too late to turn the nation around, *but it’s not too late for you*. “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near,” the Bible urges us. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; *let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon*” (Isaiah 55:6-7).

God’s blessing, forgiveness and assurance of peace and safety await those who are willing to repent—who turn to seek Him with all of their heart.

Will you heed your Creator’s plea? **GN**

### Learn More

The United States of America grew from a handful of British colonies huddled along the seacoast to the wealthiest and most powerful nation the world has ever seen. But how? What was the little-understood key behind its remarkable ascent? And now, as it faces challenges that threaten to destroy it, does the Bible give us insight as to what lies ahead? You need read our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to understand the answers!



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# Will America Cease to Lead the World?

From the time of its founding, this unique nation sought to base its future success on the efforts of free individuals, not on class distinctions and hereditary status. America became undisputed world leader because it was set apart not only by the Declaration of Independence, but by its destiny set forth in the Bible. Why, then, is America gradually forfeiting world leadership? *by John Ross Schroeder*

**T**homas Jefferson articulated a vital spiritual principle when he penned America's Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal." This statement not only assumed a Creator God, but it promoted the opportunity of all people to pursue eventual happiness and success free of the restraints of race, class, economic status and ultimately even gender.

Such concepts arose from the Bible. Indeed, America's founding documents (including the U.S. Constitution) were clothed with concepts of liberty, choice, freedom and economic self-reliance—all taught in the Bible in line with the spirit of the Ten Commandments.

With its meteoric rise, the United States has of course had an impact on other nations. Some Americans have seen this as

a bad thing. As the former editor-in-chief of *Commentary* magazine, Norman Podhoretz, reflected: "[America's] liberal community seems to think that the rest of the world would be better off without the United States, or at least with it following the policy of 'leading from behind'" ("Is America Exceptional?" *Imprimis*, October 2012).

However, as Podhoretz also pointed out, "Most conservatives do not believe that a radical diminution of American power and influence would be good for us or the world."

What is happening to America's standing at home and abroad—and what is ultimately behind it?

## An alarming erosion of respect

During the early autumn of 2012 a *Wall Street Journal* article stated: "The Obama Presidency has been an era of slowly build-

ing tension and disorder that seems likely to flare into larger troubles and perhaps even military conflict . . . This is the bigger picture . . ." ("The New World Disorder," Sept. 13, 2012).

This insightful article focused on the increasing helplessness of America to guide and influence global events. It discussed "a pattern of declining respect for U.S. power and influence." For nearly four years the Obama administration has emphasized that the United States should rely more on the United Nations and other countries to deal with world problems. And those other countries have been listening!

The *Journal* article continued: "Across the Arab Spring, the U.S. has done little to shape events and is increasingly irrelevant." As a result of this passive approach to events, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, a decades-long U.S. ally and source of stability in that volatile region, was ousted from power and replaced by leaders picked by the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist movement that's overtly hostile to the United States and Western interests.

Now Islamists have set their sights on other U.S. allies like Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Israel, and there's no way any of this bodes well for America or the West—



especially since much of the lifeblood of the world economy, oil, comes from or passes through this region.

Notice two other notable examples where American passivity has created a power vacuum dangerous to key regions: “The Chinese have brazenly occupied disputed territories in the South China Sea, hinting at war if the U.S. intercedes on behalf of its Asian allies . . . Most of all, Iran continues its march toward a nuclear weapon,” with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declaring that America is “not setting deadlines” for intervention (ibid.).

The erroneous notion that a more deferential United States would gain more global respect looks increasingly hollow. Indeed, as the same article’s drophead points out, “as the U.S. retreats, bad actors begin to fill the vacuum” (ibid.).

**Imagine what would happen if your local police chief and county sheriff announced that they were ceasing patrols, laying off their officers and would no longer respond to emergency calls. That’s essentially the direction the world’s policeman—the United States—is taking.**

*The Good News* has been warning about this troubling trend for a number of years. With American leadership fading, the world is becoming an increasingly dangerous place.

To use an analogy many of us could readily understand, imagine what would happen if your local police chief and county sheriff announced that they were ceasing patrols, laying off their officers and would no longer respond to emergency calls. That’s essentially the direction the world’s policeman—the United States—is taking. And very bad characters, feeling empowered, are emerging from the shadows. The results won’t be pretty.

#### **Lamenting “the decline of a great nation”**

The cover of a recent issue of the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* showed a very sick Uncle Sam on a hospital bed above

the headline “The American Patient—The Decline of a Great Nation” (Nov. 5, 2012). The lengthy feature article inside, written by staff members and translated into English on the magazine’s website, was titled “Divided States of America: Notes on the Decline of a Great Nation.” It began with this general assessment: “*The United States is frittering away its role as a model for the rest of the world.* The political system is plagued by an absurd level of hatred, the economy is stagnating and the infrastructure is falling into a miserable state of disrepair.”

Rather than focus on too much detail, let’s highlight the analysis and a few overall facts. The article continues: “At the beginning of the 21st century, this American dream, which consisted mainly of confidence and optimism envied the world over, is failing.

“It began to fail around the turn of the millennium, with the crash landing of the New Economy, and it imploded altogether in 2008, when Wall Street became the epicentre of a global financial meltdown, and when millions of Americans lost their homes and jobs. *In some polls, almost half of Americans today say that the country’s best days are gone.*”

The authors put matters into perspective by acknowledging the continuing presence of America as a world power: “Nevertheless, ‘decline’ is a big word, especially for a nation that is still the world’s number one economic and military power, and will remain so for the next decade.

“It’s also a country whose innovative energy seems unbroken in many fields, and one that, unlike Europe, has balanced population growth and enormous mineral resources. In fact, when it comes to the demise of former world powers, Europe’s decline is much more evident than that of the United States.”

British author Edward Luce, in his 2012 book *Time to Start Thinking: America in the Age of Descent*, observed that “the greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults” (p. 3).

The nation has faced many crises in the past, yet emerged—sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker. But the sheer number of crises facing the nation, as well as their unprecedented scope, are profound enough to make one wonder whether America now faces insurmountable obstacles—and whether it still has the *will* to survive.

America desperately needs a genuine restoration of basic biblical principles and ideals. No truly patriotic American wants

## **Duality in Bible Prophecy**

**P**rophetic statements sometimes apply to more than one fulfillment, a principle called *duality*. A prime example of duality is Christ’s first coming to atone for our sins and His second coming to rule on earth as King of Kings.

Also, the Bible speaks of someone’s descendants as his “seed.” In some passages the word *seed* implies both an individual (the Messiah) and multiple descendants (*people of Israelite descent, the children of Israel*).

Such dual themes are common in Scripture. The apostle Paul, for example, wrote about “the first man Adam [becoming] a living being” and “the last Adam [becoming] a life-giving Spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Paul noted that physical circumcision was evidence of God’s covenant with Abraham’s offspring, but God defined spiritual circumcision—a converted heart—as the key to a Christian’s relationship with God (Romans 2:27-28). Paul wrote of the spiritually circumcised—the Church, rather than a physical race of people—as being the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

Jesus Christ specifically alluded to the dual application of some prophecies in Matthew 17:11-12). Asked about the prophecy of “Elijah,” who would precede the coming of the Messiah

(Malachi 4:5), Christ responded: “Indeed Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already.” The disciples understood that the prophesied “Elijah” who had come already was John the Baptist (verse 13). But Christ’s clear implication was that another “Elijah” would precede His second coming.

Another prophecy with dual application is Jesus’ Olivet Prophecy (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), so named because He gave it to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem. Many conditions described in this prophecy existed in the days leading up to the Romans’ siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But Christ makes it clear that similar conditions would prevail shortly before His future return to the earth.

In the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus spoke of an “abomination of desolation.” Daniel’s prophecy about this abomination was fulfilled almost 200 years earlier by forces of the Greek Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, but Christ pointed out that this prophecy would have a future fulfillment (Matthew 24:15-16). For a more complete explanation of this and other fundamentals of biblical prophecy, request our free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.



to see this tragic decline continue. Instead they want to see real national renewal. In biblical terms, true Christians plead for a nationwide repentance, a wholesale turn-around of the country's wayward direction.

Some—and hopefully you as a reader of *The Good News*—recognize that America's basic problem is essentially spiritual and moral. These dangerous trends, coupled with great national tragedies, have come upon the country because its people have turned away from God's way of life. Turning their backs on Him, they no longer keep His spiritual law centered on the Ten Commandments.

Does God's Word tell us what the inevitable consequences will be?

## Crucial blessings-and-curses chapters

Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are both part of the Torah or the five books of Moses. They were originally intended for ancient Israel and their descendants—which includes America and the major English-speaking nations (see “Is America Identified in Bible Prophecy?” beginning on page 17, and our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*).

Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 describe God's blessings for obedience and His punishment for disobedience. The theme of both chapters is very simple—fantastic national blessings for obedience to God's laws or multiple curses for casting those laws aside. The blessings included rain in due season, bountiful crops, peace and safety in their homelands, healthy children, an abundance of natural resources and, most important of all, continual contact with the Creator God.

The curses entailed the opposites—chronic ill health, serious and prolonged sicknesses, mental illness, fatal diseases, poor crop yields, drought and eventually starvation and defeat at the hand of enemies—followed by national captivity.

Do these two chapters apply to our modern age? Do they apply in principle to all nations, even in today's world? Often specific prophecies in the Bible are dual. That is, they have more than one fulfillment in history (see “Duality in Bible Prophecy” on page 9).

How has the American nation fared in the past? Clearly the United States has been blessed materially as no other nation ever has, primarily due to the sure prophetic legacy of the patriarch Abraham (again, see “Is America Identified in Bible Prophecy?” beginning on page 17). Although America has never been fully obedient to God, up

until recent decades the country was, for the most part, law-abiding and generally sought to obey and please God. But a significant moral downturn began in the 1960s.

## How's America faring now?

The United States has increasingly been



**“For a country founded by British colonists on British traditions and, for half its history inhabited almost entirely by white Europeans (if you discount the slaves, as the nation's leaders did), [demographic change] signals a seismic cultural transformation for the world's sole superpower.”**

troubled by many and varied kinds of evil, especially since that infamous decade began. Serial killers, once almost unheard of, regularly make the news as they roam the country seeking their next victim. Pornography has vastly increased through the Internet and has gained widespread acceptance. Abortion—the murder of the most helpless of human beings—pollutes the land from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Television programming focuses on themes highlighting raw ambition, financial scandals and illicit sex of all types. Too many Americans worship celebrities and rank materialism, two forms of blatant idolatry. The apostle Paul pointed out that

covetousness *is* idolatry (Colossians 3:5), and James 2:10-11 tells us that he or she who breaks one commandment breaks all 10 in principle.

The curse of the national division we now see across America is caused by *sin*, biblically defined as the transgression of God's spiritual law (1 John 3:4). After King Solomon's reign, God Himself orchestrated ancient Israel's national division because of the sins of Solomon (see 1 Kings 11:30-40).

## Division stalks America

As the results of the Nov. 6, 2012, national election brought out, Americans are a divided people in so many ways. Daniel Henninger, writing in *The Wall Street Journal* two days afterward, stated the obvious—that “the nation is more divided than at any time in 50 years” (“Obama's Divided Nation,” Nov. 8, 2012). He further pointed out that “with every election, the South and Central

States drift further from the coastal sophisticates and the heavy unionized industrial states around the Great Lakes.”

One famous radio commentator even suggested, not entirely in jest, that the nation formally divide in half, with one political party ruling one half and the other party the other half, so each party's adherents could see where their preferred policies eventually lead.

Gerald Seib, Washington bureau chief of *The Wall Street Journal*, wrote in the Nov. 7 issue: “This year's [election] campaign has shown that the two parties are, at this point, deeply divided ideologically, yet nearly evenly balanced in power. That explains why the presidential race has been



so close and, at many points, so harsh.”

Sadly, this national division extends to the sensitive issue of race. As the *Daily Mail*'s Tom Leonard expressed it in an article titled “The Slow Death of White America”: “Mitt Romney won the biggest share of the white vote that any Republican White House contender ever has—and he still lost. In an election battle that was defined as much as anything by race, Mitt Romney won the support of 59 per cent of the whites, but just 27 per cent of Latinos, 26 per cent of Asian Americans and 6 per cent of African-Americans” (Nov. 9, 2012).

Change in the country's demographics is producing a seismic social shift. As Leonard explained: “The evidence of this demographic timebomb, which is likely to alter the face and character of the U.S. far more fundamentally than any number of elections, was made plain in the summer in a new report by the U.S. Census Bureau. It revealed that for the first time in American history, ethnic minorities now account for more than half the babies born in the U.S.

“Of the four million children born in the year to July 2011, 50.4 per cent were ethnic minorities—black, Asian, mixed-race and, above all, Hispanic. It was a long-expected milestone on the road to an America in which, according to experts, within 30 years whites will no longer be the majority.”

One of his conclusions was: “For a country founded by British colonists on British traditions and, for half its history inhabited almost entirely by white Europeans (if you discount the slaves, as the nation's leaders did), it signals a seismic cultural transformation for the world's sole superpower.”

The United States has long been considered a melting pot of races and cultures. While that's never been quite accurate, it is true that immigrants from different parts of the world were able to live and work together to promote a more unified society. But now society is increasingly fragmenting. People of different religions, values, races and cultures are growing steadily apart rather than together.

### The fiscal cliff threatens

Will the nation be able to adapt and retain its greatness—hopefully arresting and reversing national decline?

By now its politicians, if not many of its citizens, are well aware of the enormous and troubling debt problem presently afflicting the United States. Yet another *Wall Street Journal* writer, assisted by other reporters, summarized the seriousness of

the nation's debt crisis:

“The federal debt has grown rapidly in recent years through a combination of economic downturns, tax cuts and spending choices made by lawmakers and presidents from both parties. The U.S. government's deficit has exceeded \$1 trillion for four straight years, and the debt now exceeds \$16.1 trillion. Moody's Investors Service Inc. has threatened to join Standard & Poor's Rating Services and downgrade U.S. debt if the problem isn't tackled” (Damian Palleta, “Tough Calls on Deficit Await the Winner,” Nov. 7, 2012).

As of this writing, the country faces yet another “fiscal cliff” at the onset of the New

## America is seeing the inevitable consequences of disobedience: “Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will rebuke you” (Jeremiah 2:19).

Year. *The Economist* stated, “The election failed to resolve the biggest question hanging over the economy: how to deal with the deficit” (“The Budget Deficit: To the Cliff, and Beyond,” Nov. 10, 2012). Each year the growing crisis causes government to move the cliff. But as *The Economist* pointed out, “moving the cliff leaves the underlying problem intact.”

Gillian Tett, a Washington, D.C.-based writer and correspondent for Britain's *Financial Times*, actually predicted the economic debacle of 2008. Her “Insight” column following the election focused on the fiscal cliff. Her title: “Be Prepared for a Lengthy Era of US Political Cliff-Dancing” (*FT*, Nov. 9, 2012).

Summarizing what she wrote, an era of “Great Moderation” represented by reasonable inflation was followed by an economic crisis called “The Age of Turbulence.” She continued: “But now we have entered a third phase, an area of political brinkmanship. In the aftermath of President Obama's victory on Tuesday [Election Day], there is intense speculation among investors about whether America will fall off a fiscal cliff at the end of the year [2012], as it hits the *trifecta* [triple threat] of a debt ceiling, the expiry of Bush-era tax cuts and pre-planned spending cuts, which could reduce gross domestic product by 4 per cent.”

On a spiritual level at least, Jesus Christ equated debt with sin in what's called the Lord's Prayer: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). The version in Luke is slightly different:

“And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is *indebted to us*” (11:4). Proverbs 22:7 adds: “The borrower is servant to the lender.” Ultimately being deeply in debt compares to a form of slavery.

### The nation desperately needs God

Not only has America lost a lot of respect abroad, but the country also finds itself in deep trouble with God. There is a way out, however, if we would but seek it while there is still time. God, speaking in 2 Chronicles 7:14, stated, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven,

and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” That's an incredible promise direct from God's Word. *But will we do this?*

Late in the history of the kingdom of Judah, our Creator instructed the prophet Jeremiah *not* to pray for the nation's people because their many sins had taken them past the point of no return (Jeremiah 7:16, 11:14). Only a devastating invasion and national captivity would wake them up to see their sins.

We who warn the nation cannot know when time will run out and God actively decides to punish a nation and its people for their sins. As it stands now, America is seeing the inevitable consequences of disobedience: “Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will rebuke you” (Jeremiah 2:19).

May we all pray for a resounding national repentance! **GN**

### Learn More

Empires rise and empires fall. Many of us remember the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some even remember the dismantling of the British Empire after World War II. Are we on the verge of witnessing the fall of the most powerful single nation in world history, the United States? You need to understand what the Bible says! Download or request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!



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# What Could America & Britain Learn From Rome's Fall?

The fall of Rome is one of the most important and world-shaping events in history. But it provides more than an interesting study of the past. It also holds many important lessons for the Western world today. *by Eric Snow*

**E**ven 2,000 years later, the greatness of ancient Rome fires people's imaginations. The Roman Empire's impressive ruins dot the landscape of Europe and the Mediterranean with roads, aqueducts and amphitheaters. By around A.D. 180, the city of Rome likely became the first city of a million people.

Within this City of Seven Hills, the famous Colosseum housed up to 50,000 spectators for sporting events. And possibly a quarter million fans watched chariot races at the nearby Circus Maximus.

In a few centuries this would come to an end. The official date for Rome's fall is A.D. 476, when the Germanic Chief Odo-

acer made himself king after deposing the last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus. For centuries historians have analyzed Rome's past to explain why such an enormous empire of such civilization and wealth collapsed into primitive barbarism.

The story of Rome's fall isn't just a history lesson. It's important for us to understand today. Could the same forces that turned Rome into ruins also take down Britain, which not long ago ruled a fourth of the world? Or what about America, which is still the world's leading military and economic power?

If American and British citizens think they're invincible, they're in as bad a place

as the Romans were when their empire reached its peak. Today, the same forces that helped to destroy Rome are undermining America and Britain. Can they learn from the past so they don't repeat it?

## Creeping government control over citizens' lives

What do America and Britain have in common with ancient Rome? One factor is the way government expands its role to expand its control over the lives of citizens.

During the centuries after the first Roman emperor Augustus (who reigned from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14), the empire became more heavily regulated. Emperor Diocletian (A.D. 284-305) supported using coercion to finance legions, pay the civil bureaucrats and support a large, imposing palace court.

In A.D. 332, Emperor Constantine helped to lay the foundation for medieval serfdom by binding farmers to the soil. Finishing the process that Diocletian began, Constan-



tine ordered the sons of farmers to become farmers, the sons of soldiers to become soldiers, the sons of bakers to become bakers, and so on. The members of town councils couldn't quit their positions. Often they had to make up for shortfalls in the collections of local taxes out of their own pockets. Individuals couldn't change occupations or even leave their place of birth.

Over time, this expansion of government control and regulation turned the empire into a type of prison for tens of millions of its citizens. The already-high taxes roughly doubled in the 50 years after Diocletian.

Of course, lack of freedom in the English-speaking world today isn't that extreme. But many of the trends over the past 100 years or so are ominous.

Consider how government has grown progressively bigger and more powerful. One way to measure this is by looking at government expenditures as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). For the United States, in less than a century this ratio quadrupled from under 9 percent in 1913 to over 40 percent in 2010. Such numbers hold serious implications for the future of Western democracies. Freedom could be damaged by the fact that lawmakers are letting regulatory bodies make law with little or no oversight.

Note an example from 1932. A British Parliamentary committee found that Parliament delegated law-making authority because "many of the laws affect people's lives so closely that elasticity [i.e., arbitrary

documentation, forces American taxpayers and businesses to spend about *7.6 billion hours each year* complying with its filing requirements—the equivalent of *almost 4 million full-time jobs*.

As any American who has traveled through an airport since the 9/11 terror attacks has seen, times of crisis can lead to vast expansion of government control over the lives of citizens.

What if another disastrous national security or economic crisis hits America or Britain? History shows that such crises could be followed by a headlong descent into societal regimentation along the lines of Mussolini's Italy or Hitler's Germany. No one should assume what author Sinclair Lewis gave as the title of his 1935 novel about a fascist



**As the book of Proverbs tells us, “*The borrower is servant to the lender.*” Greece is already learning the hard truth of this text. America and Britain will too, if they don’t quickly change course.**

power] is essential” (quoted by F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 2007, p. 107).

Arbitrary power is essentially unrestricted legislative authority. Think about the long-standing trend of more and more laws that are too complex for most to understand. In America, that can be measured in part by the number of pages of regulations issued in the Federal Register annually and the size of the IRS income tax code.

In recent years the Federal Register—a compilation of federal government regulations—has grown to around 80,000 pages. The IRS tax code includes some 3.4 million words and, according to its own

takeover of America: *It Can't Happen Here*.

#### **Destroying personal wealth by currency inflation**

Inflation occurs when governments dilute the money supply by creating more money, typically to finance more government spending. With more dollars (or pounds, or euros) chasing the same amount of products, prices on those products naturally rise.

Like many modern politicians frustrated by inflation, Diocletian tried to prevent prices from rising. The Law of Maximum Prices (A.D. 310) threatened death penalties against people who charged too much for food.

However, the Roman government's own decisions had been the primary cause of rising prices. The empire systematically devalued silver coinage for decades, since government expenses chronically exceeded government income. From the time of Augustus to Diocletian, the denarius (Roman currency) fell from being 100 percent silver to only 5 percent silver. Emperor Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161-180) alone knocked down its value by 25 percent.

We see that same pattern at work today when governments run huge and inflated budget deficits and “print money” to finance the added debt.

In recent years the Federal Reserve initiated three programs of “quantitative easing” (QE1, QE2 and QE3) designed to stimulate the U.S. economy. As a result, from 2008 to 2012 America's central bank hiked the money supply by 61 percent, and the “monetary base” by more than 200 percent. QE3, announced in September 2012, in effect creates out of thin air *\$40 billion a month* to inject into the U.S. economy. The program is open-ended, meaning it will *continue indefinitely*.

These increases will lead to future inflation, meaning higher prices for everything. America's federal government has run up over \$5 trillion of deficits (about 9 percent of its annual GDP) in its four most recent fiscal years—more than \$4 billion per day. Its total debt passed \$16 trillion in 2012 and now exceeds the nation's total GDP.

Great Britain's deficits are similarly ugly, despite the commitment of its ruling government coalition to austerity. Recently the country's deficit was the third highest in the European Union (at 10.4 percent in 2010), only slightly better than that of shell-shocked Greece. Excluding the bank bailouts (which more than double the final figure), Britain's public sector debt escalated from 37 percent in 2007 to 63 percent of its GDP in 2012.

Any government that recklessly follows such economic principles while unloading its debt on the international bond market should heed Proverbs 22:7: “The borrower is servant to the lender.” Greece is already learning the hard truth of this text. America and Britain will too, if they don't quickly change course.

#### **Growing government by increasing taxation**

Over the centuries, Rome imposed an increasingly heavy tax burden on its citizens. This was to pay for growing cost and



welfare measures, like entertaining the city-based population.

The biggest governmental expense by far was paying for the army, which doubled in size from A.D. 96 to 180. Even long before in the closing years of the Republic, Julius Caesar found that 320,000 people were on the list to receive free grain every month. Augustus was able to get the number down to 200,000 during his rule. Yet this was still a huge drain on Rome for decades afterward.

It also wasn't cheap to supply games for the Roman mob. Just imagine the scale of the type of entertainment provided for citizens. For example, when Emperor Trajan in A.D. 107 celebrated conquering Dacia (mainly Romania today), 10,000 gladiators fought. About 11,000 animals died in the gory spectacle. When Marcus Aurelius ruled, enormous amounts of money were spent for both free games and for the daily allowance of pork, oil and bread given to the capital city's poor residents. His gifts would equal more than \$1,000 per person today. He provided free spectacles 135 days a year.

But all this liberal giving had its downside. In A.D. 167, he sold his palace's furniture to help pay for wars against the barbarians and Persians. It was a lot like the tax revolt that King Solomon's son Rehoboam experienced in the Bible, which cost him most of his kingdom (1 Kings 12:3-19).

Popular support for Rome fell as taxes rose. Between the third and fifth centuries peasants fought back against tax collectors and judges in areas that are now France and Spain. Some of them even found that being ruled by barbarians or leaving the empire was better than living with Rome's harsh tax collectors.

The biggest material reason that Rome fell was that its economy was too weak. It was a low-income agricultural economy, and it couldn't support the armies needed to keep out the barbarians.

Compare Rome's disastrous economic experience with America's federal government spending. The Pentagon's budget more than doubled in only 10 years. It went from under \$305 billion in 2001 to over \$693 billion in 2010 while the nation fought two major wars against Islamic extremists in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, the cost of Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other income support programs almost doubled from \$1.07 trillion to \$2.11 trillion.

As America's population gets older and the Baby Boom generation retires, these big expenses will only grow larger. The federal government's unfunded liabilities

(unpaid promises of future benefits) were estimated at \$61.6 trillion in 2011, which is about four times the annual GDP. That's \$528,000 per household! And some figure the liabilities to be much higher. Think about what this means for *your* future. Can you really expect to receive everything you were promised?

## Low birthrates lead to collapse, not prosperity

Let's look at another way that the United States and Britain are like ancient Rome. From the mid-200s A.D. onward, Rome's population began to drop. Disease, barbar-

328). Unlike their Germanic neighbors outside the empire, the Romans limited family size (resulting in the practice of infanticide). Instead they invested more in educating and raising their surviving children. The illiterate Germans chose to have many children. Even in rich families, though, they treated them with benign neglect. This difference helped the Germanic peoples to overwhelm Rome by sheer numbers.

Europe, and the United States to a lesser extent, is facing a similar problem today. High birthrates and less desire to assimilate into European cultures by immigrants signal an ominous trend. Secular people,



**Compare Rome's disastrous economic experience with America's federal government spending. The Pentagon's budget more than doubled in only 10 years—from under \$305 billion in 2001 to over \$693 billion in 2010.**

ian invasions, wars and economic decline in the second, third and later centuries all contributed to the fall of the empire. Even worse, the fact that slavery was institutionalized meant that the slaves didn't want to have children. After all, why bring children into a world where they'll know only harsh slavery? As Roman laws and taxes turned many free people into bitter, apathetic slaves to their state, the birthrate among the common people went down as well. As Rome's educated upper class stopped having many children, the empire's high culture decayed.

Historian W.H. McNeil, in *The Rise of the West*, explained that "the biological suicide of the Roman upper classes" weakened "the traditions of classical civilization" (1991, p.

no matter what background, have fewer children than religious people. So if the trend continues, the future belongs to the staunchly religious.

## Fracturing families through divorce

One cause of the low birthrate for Rome's elite, which worried the first emperor Augustus, was their high divorce rate. All a husband needed to do to legally divorce his wife was to say three times, "Go home." By 55 B.C., a Roman wife could divorce her husband almost as easily.

In the first century, the philosopher and playwright Seneca described how Roman upper-class women regarded their marriages: "They divorce in order to re-marry. They marry in order to divorce." The sati-



rist Martial fired one of his pointed short poems at a woman who married for the 10th time. He accurately labeled it legalized adultery.

Homosexual behavior was so widespread that many Roman writers, like “the arbiter of elegance” Petronius, the gossipy historian Suetonius, and Martial, assumed all Roman men were bisexual. The fact that they often engaged in such behavior reduced the birthrate even more. It’s obvious that high divorce rates, lower birth rates and gay subcultures aren’t new social innovations. It’s



just picking up where pagan Rome left off.

America’s no-fault divorce laws, a product of the 1960s’ “Sexual Revolution,” caused the nation’s divorce rate to explode. It became one of the worst for any major country (3.2 per 1,000 in population per year). Britain’s rate isn’t far behind (2.9 per 1,000). What socially liberal people regard as “forward-looking social legislation” often just resembles a failed ancient pre-Christian past.

### Immigration changes society

What happened when Rome’s population declined? In North Africa, one estimate found that a third of the land was no longer cultivated. As farmland was abandoned, tax receipts fell. To recruit enough soldiers for its armies and to till its empty fields, the imperial government resorted to immigration.

That’s the same solution Europe has resorted to in more recent decades. Barbarian allies of Rome along the empire’s northern frontier and elsewhere were enticed into military service through land grants

and offers of citizenship. Even by A.D. 180, according to historian W.G. Hardy, a major part of the Roman army was made up of foreigners and semi-civilized tribesmen.

The legions were increasingly filled with non-Romans. As a result, when the barbarian Vandals invaded North Africa, the Roman governor protected the city of Hippo there with Gothic mercenaries. The local Roman population provided little help. Since many thought the barbarians were better or no worse than the Roman tax collectors and officials, in a lot of cases they didn’t even want to preserve the empire.

## Following in Rome’s footsteps, America’s no-fault divorce laws, a product of the 1960s’ “Sexual Revolution,” caused the nation’s divorce rate to explode and families to fracture.



### A growing culture of corruption

Let’s consider deeper spiritual, religious and philosophical reasons for Rome’s decline and then ask ourselves if America and Britain are experiencing the same things today.

The satirist Juvenal famously painted the average Roman as only caring about bread and circuses (i.e., athletic contests). Today, how many Americans, Britons, Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders are just as content to sit and be entertained, heedless of the world’s gathering storm so long as they have their chips, beer and TV? Empty desire for material things dulls our spiritual senses. Petronius mocked the rich people of ancient Rome for obsessing over luxuries and wealth.

Especially throughout the empire’s first two centuries, the worship of material things and overemphasis on enjoying luxuries characterized the lifestyle of the rich. During huge, extended banquets, the rich Romans would vomit so they could keep gorging themselves. Seneca described them by saying, “They vomit so that they may

eat, and eat so that they may vomit.”

It’s not that different in the United States and Britain today. Millions give themselves up to sexually lawless and materialistic lives. They don’t care about God’s law and spiritual principles. The apostle Paul condemned materialism and sexual sins in 1 Corinthians 6:13: “Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”

Each person’s religious and philosophical worldviews have a major impact on how

they deal with the pressures of life. Pessimism, materialism and hedonism start with anti-religious skepticism. Like so many of today’s intellectuals, ancient pagan Rome’s scholars had no infinite God or way to relate their lives to having true meaning or an ultimate purpose.

By contrast, the Bible’s revelation gives people an integrated view of life. Faith and reason, purpose and pleasure, the infinite and the finite, general universal values and particular human lives are all reconciled. The Bible’s total-life knowledge and values bring meaning to individual lives.

The most important things can only come to humanity by divine revelation. The Bible’s worldview brings meaning and purpose to human life that simply can’t be known by human reason or emotions alone. But as this general heritage of the Protestant Reformation has been assaulted for over two centuries, a growing crisis of civilization is brewing.

This has ominous implications for the survival of Western culture. It goes even deeper than its economic, social and demographic problems. According to famed sociologist Daniel Bell of Harvard University, “The lack of a rooted moral belief system is the cultural contradiction of [a post-industrial] society, the deepest challenge to its survival” (quoted by Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* 2005, p. 225).

### Abandoning long-held beliefs

America and Britain share in a culture based mostly on ancient Greco-Roman culture and the Judeo-Christian religion. But



like falling Rome's scholars didn't believe in their gods anymore, many of today's highly educated people have lost faith in their traditional faiths of Judaism and Christianity.

Few academics believe in the true God or take the Bible seriously anymore. Many are secular humanists who think man is the measure of all things. But significant numbers have also grown more apathetic, skeptical, uncertain and pessimistic. They doubt that human reason can provide an integrated unified worldview of existence or can offer any real meaning to life.

Over the past two and a half centuries since the rough mid-point of the Enlightenment (ca. 1745), their faith in human reason's effectiveness declined nearly as quickly as their faith in God's existence. It's no coincidence that they have rejected both reason and faith in God. Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) reconciled the two so the West could have both in the High Middle Ages. As Emile Cammaerts summarized the thinking of English author G.K. Chesterton, "The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything."

The apostle Paul once explained the consequences of false religion in terms that apply to us in the modern world. First, people have "without excuse" rejected the proof of God evidenced in nature's design and perfection. As a result, "although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:20).

As so many Western intellectuals and others, who "professing to be wise became fools" (verse 22), their anti-Christian worldview unleashed damaging sins, including the homosexual lifestyle. It's as the noted American scholar Richard Weaver noted in the title of his 1948 book: *Ideas Have Consequences*.

## Rejecting truth while embracing error

The huge upswing in the West's interest in eastern religions, the occult, reincarnation and "New Age" ideas is proof that empty, atheistic modern thought just doesn't meet most people's needs. The ideology of multiculturalism, which ultimately stands for no values other than accepting all ideas as equally valid, reflects Western intellectuals' philosophical bankruptcy. Such self-contradictory clichés as "All is relative" and "There are no absolutes" ultimately prove to be empty and meaningless.

By contrast, many of the Muslim immi-

grants who are flooding Europe uphold a dogmatic certainty about their faith. They see no need to apologize for their imperialist, jihadist past. Like their medieval ancestors, many of today's Islamists believe they are obligated to force their beliefs and values on others.

There's a serious ideological battle between skeptical, uncertain secularists and devout, dogmatic Islamists. History inevitably favors the latter over the former. When people lose



## How many are content to sit and be entertained, heedless of the world's gathering storm so long as they have their chips, beer and TV?

confidence in their own civilization's values and virtues, it's been seen that they won't fight strongly to prevent their own collapse. It happened with Rome, and it's happening today to the West, and to the United States and Britain in particular.

The 18th-century English historian Edward Gibbon, in his classic work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, famously blamed traditional Christianity for undermining the empire's ability to survive. But even if his interpretation is blindly accepted, it's important to realize that patterns of history don't always repeat themselves exactly.

Unlike ancient Rome, modern America's and Britain's lack of faith and commitment to living as truly Christian nations will be the biggest cause of their downfall. In fact, a lot of their economic and demographic problems are directly related to their lack of regard for God's law and His wisdom.

As these nations turn their backs on God, He will turn His back on them. God is increasingly withdrawing His blessings and protections from them. His words are

recorded in Hosea 4:6: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

Many will be surprised to learn that the Bible and other historical evidence reveal that America and Britain are the main recipients of the great birthright blessings promised in Genesis to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. (See "Is America Identified in Bible Prophecy?" beginning on page 17, and request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Because these nations have been so blessed by God, they are much more responsible to God for what they do. They became great not because of their own goodness, but because Abraham obeyed God, who was faithful in His promises to this great biblical patriarch (Genesis 27:4-5).

But now these nations' disobedience to God's law will cause them to lose their high status. Only heartfelt repentance, coupled with a commitment to obey God's law and to have faith in Jesus Christ, will save them from the coming national calamity referred to in the Bible as the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21).

No matter what others choose to do in

whatever nation we live in, we're *all* individually responsible to God. We all need to come to know and have faith in Jesus of Nazareth, repent, and obey God's law. This is what brings true meaning and real purpose to our lives. Whether nationally or individually, let's trust in God's love when He promises in Jeremiah 29:13, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." GN

## Learn More

Few people are aware of the amazing biblical origins of the major English-speaking peoples of the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. You need to learn the amazing story of how the Bible prophesied their incredible rise to greatness—and what the future holds! Be sure to download or request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!

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# Is America Identified in Bible Prophecy?

The Bible identifies a number of nations that are relatively minor players on the world scene. Does it make sense that the most powerful nation in the world would go unnoticed and unmentioned in Bible prophecy? Can we know America's identity in Bible prophecy?

by Noel Hornor

**T**he United States is the greatest single nation that has ever existed in the history of the world.

But this certainly wasn't always the case. Eighty-five years after its 1776 founding, the fledgling American power suffered a bitter, divisive civil war that could have destroyed it—a war that resulted in the death of nearly 2 percent of the nation's population.

A remarkable leader arose at that time—Abraham Lincoln, whom many historians consider to be the nation's greatest president ever. By his tenacity and courage, he led the nation with great conviction, preserving the Union so that it could fulfill its divinely appointed destiny. Still, today it's vital that we recognize that America has a prophetic role in the world that was foretold

thousands of years ago in the Bible.

## **Lincoln's recognition of the Source of national blessings**

Three months after the bitter and brutal three-day battle at Gettysburg, Penn., in July 1863, President Lincoln issued the first-ever proclamation for an American national Thanksgiving Day. In it, he spoke of the national blessings the nation continued to receive even during the time of the most catastrophic war in its history, stating:

"The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that

they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God . . .

"Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle, or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore . . .

"No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy."

Lincoln had believed for many years that America's blessings were from God. In a Jan. 27, 1838, speech in Springfield, Ill., he stated: "In the great journal of things happening under the sun, we, the American People, find our account running, under date of the nineteenth century of the Christian era. We find ourselves in the peaceful possession of the fairest portion of the earth, as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil,



and salubrity [healthfulness] of climate.”

## America replaces Britain in global ascendancy

In the first half of the 20th century, the British Empire was the world’s preeminent power. Its navy ruled the seas. The empire’s vast territories—such as Canada, South Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Australia and New Zealand—spanned the globe such that it was famously said that “the sun never sets on the British Empire.”

Few realized how quickly that would change and a new superpower arise. Allied with America, the British Empire fought and won the Second World War. Yet after the war, Britain was deeply in debt and no longer able to sustain its empire.

America began to flex its muscles globally. President Dwight Eisenhower pressured Britain to surrender the Suez Canal back to Egypt as enticement to keep Egypt from straying into the Soviet camp. Piece by piece, Britain’s empire began to disintegrate as nation after nation sought and gained independence. Within a few short years that great empire was a shadow of its former self.

In its place a new power arose. America became the dominant financial power in the world, with the dollar replacing the British pound as the international reserve currency. Blessed with a temperate climate, vast and fertile lands for agriculture, abundant mineral resources, many navigable rivers flowing with fresh waters, peaceful neighbors to the north and south, and oceans providing a barrier to invasion from east and west, the nation quickly grew to enjoy global supremacy.

The amazing truth, however, is that America’s ascendancy to greatness was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy!

## Promises of national greatness

So where is America mentioned in the Bible?

Much of biblical prophecy deals with nations and events at the end of the age—the time in which we now live. Would it make sense for God to exclude the greatest nation in the world from His prophecies of great nations of this time?

One of the most prominent individuals in biblical history is Abraham, to whom God promised great blessings—blessings he would not see during his physical life, but which would be fulfilled in his descendants (Genesis 17:1-8; 22:17-18). Later God repeated those promises to Abraham’s son Isaac, telling him those promises would be

fulfilled through his descendants (Genesis 26:2-5).

To Isaac was born a son named Jacob, whom God renamed as Israel (Genesis 32:28); he would go on to have 12 sons from whom would spring the 12 tribes of Israel. The great blessings God had promised to his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham would be passed on through his descendants (Genesis 48:3-4; compare Genesis 27:27-29; 28:1-4).

Joseph, one of Jacob’s 12 sons, was sold

the firstborn by his wife Rachel (Genesis 48:8-22; 1 Chronicles 5:1). Thus Joseph’s sons would become the primary heirs of the promises originally given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And what did those promises entail? Notice what God had told Abraham: “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and *you shall be a father of many nations . . . I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.*”



For many years the United States has been the bread basket of the world, with millions of tons of grain and agricultural produce exported to other nations around the world every year.

**“No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God . . .” —Abraham Lincoln**

by his jealous brothers to a caravan of traders (Genesis 37:25-38), who took him to Egypt and sold him as a slave to Potiphar, an officer in the Egyptian pharaoh’s court (Genesis 37:36).

Later, through a chain of God-directed events, Joseph became second-in-command over all Egypt when he was 30 (Genesis 41:37-46). Shortly thereafter Joseph married, and his wife gave birth to his firstborn son, whom he named Manasseh, and then another son, Ephraim (verses 50-52).

When Jacob, the grandfather of Manasseh and Ephraim, neared the end of his life, Joseph brought these sons to him to have them blessed. It was customary in those days that the firstborn should receive the greater share of material blessings. Reuben was Jacob’s eldest son by his wife Leah, but Jacob bypassed him because of wrong he had done and instead bestowed the firstborn blessing on the two sons of Joseph,

“And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:4-8, emphasis added throughout).

## God expands His promises of greatness

God later expanded those promises, telling Abraham: “. . . *I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice*” (Genesis 22:17-18).

But Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not see those promises fulfilled in their



lifetimes. That would come much later, primarily through the descendants of Joseph.

A number of generations later, shortly before his death, God's great servant Moses foretold what would happen to the descendants of Joseph: "And of Joseph he said: *'Blessed of the LORD is his [Joseph's] land, with the precious things of heaven, with the dew, and 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*

national greatness would be realized among his descendants through "a nation and a company of nations" (Genesis 35:11). And in Jacob's blessings on Joseph's sons, it was further clarified that Joseph's son Ephraim would become the company or "multitude of nations" (Genesis 48:19), while Joseph's son Manasseh would become the great single nation (same verse).

But again, these awesome promises were not fulfilled in ancient times. They were not fulfilled in the lifetimes of Abraham, Isaac,

became the nations of the British Empire and Commonwealth, while Manasseh became the great single nation of common heritage with Britain, the United States of America.

Indeed, we can see confirmation of the promised blessings as applied to the great single nation of Manasseh in an assessment of the rich agricultural lands of the Mississippi Valley, the vast wheat and grain fields of the American Midwest, the fruit lands of the Pacific Coast and Florida, the fertile soil of California's Sacramento/San Joaquin Valley, the great forest lands of the East and the Pacific Northwest, the rich gold and silver fields Americans once mined, the vast treasures of coal, the iron ore deposits of the Lake Superior region, plentiful pasture lands and the most abundant supply of fresh water of any nation in the world!

In addition to all this, the United States in the mid-20th century produced more than half of the world's petroleum!

These and other national riches enabled America to attain the highest standard of living in the world. The ultimate bestowal of this great blessing was not fulfilled in totality until the latter centuries of our current age. America reached the apex of her blessings in the 20th century.

America, as President Lincoln noted, was given "the fairest portion of the earth." Lincoln was affirming, perhaps unknowingly, the promise that God had inspired Jacob to speak and that Moses repeated several millennia previously. Indeed, in all the history of man, no nation has been blessed nor prospered as abundantly as has the United States of America!

### **A covenant people and the Promised Land**

As noted above, Israel had 12 sons. But his two grandsons—Ephraim and Manasseh—would particularly bear his name. In pronouncing the blessing, Israel stated, "Let my name be named upon them" (Genesis 48:16). Though all of the sons of Israel were his descendants, very often when the name "Israel" is used in scriptural passages that followed this special pronouncement, it is Joseph's two sons who are given honorable mention.

As God's chosen people, He made a covenant with the Israelites. It was initiated at Mount Sinai where the Lord gave through Moses what was essentially a national contract, which was based on the Ten Commandments, written by God with His finger on tablets of stone. They were now the covenant people.

## **The amazing truth is that America's ascendance to greatness was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy!**

*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 [the burning bush, i.e., God]"* (Deuteronomy 33:13-16).

Moses was affirming what Jacob had said earlier of Joseph, that "in the last days" God would "bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb," blessings that would extend to "the utmost bound of the everlasting hills" (Genesis 49:1, 25-26). The firstborn blessings promised to Joseph were incredible!

Furthermore, Jacob had been told that

Jacob, Joseph or Ephraim and Manasseh. Nor were they fulfilled in their descendants in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in ancient times. Those kingdoms never came close to the levels of greatness and power foretold by God. So if God is faithful to what he has promised, *we must look elsewhere in time—"in the last days,"* as Jacob had said in Genesis 49:1.

### **"The fairest portion of the earth"**

What nations best fit these biblical descriptions? Careful consideration of history and geography reveals that Ephraim, prophesied to be a company of nations,

## **The Colonial View of America as a New Israel**

**D**id any of America's early settlers consider themselves to be God's covenant people? One of the first settlements in what would become the United States was by the Puritans in New England. "Independently, many Puritans took up and applied the older idea that England enjoyed a covenant with God—a 'covenant of grace,' they called it—even if they hesitated at first about whether the Promised Land was to be found in the new England or the old" (Todd Gittlin and Leil Leibovitz, *The Chosen People*, 2010, p. 65).

Puritan minister John Cotton "preached the 'land of promise' to . . . Puritan voyagers aboard the *Arbella* as they were about to set sail from Southampton in 1630, drawing his text from II Samuel 7:10: 'Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more'" (pp. 65-66).

As time went on, some of the Founding Fathers of America used biblical metaphors and word pictures to describe the new land. On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress instructed Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams to design a seal for the United States. What did they propose?

"A few weeks later, Franklin proposed this image (in his own words): 'Moses standing on the Shore, and extending his Hand over the Sea, thereby causing the same to overwhelm Pharaoh who is sitting in an open Chariot, a Crown on his Head and a Sword in his Hand. Rays from a Pillar of Fire in the Clouds reaching to Moses, to express that he acts by Command of the Deity. Motto, Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.'

"Jefferson . . . [suggested] 'a representation of the children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night'" (pp. 67-68).





Forty years after the covenant was initially made at Sinai, Moses reminded the Israelites of their agreement with God (Deuteronomy 29:1). He delivered an exhortation to his successor Joshua, telling him he must lead the Israelites into the land God had promised to give them (Deuteronomy 31:7, 23). This is commonly referred to as the “Promised Land” or the “land of promise.”

God had earlier promised Abraham that He would give this land to his descendants (Genesis 12:7). He later affirmed the promise to Isaac (Genesis 26:3), and yet again, He repeated the promise to Jacob.

As restated to Jacob, the blessing would include “the fatness of the earth” (Genesis 27:28). This statement goes beyond the land of Canaan, which Israel received shortly after coming out of Egypt. The “fatness of the earth” foreshadowed the bestowal of the choicest real estate portions of the globe, not just of the Middle East.

Ancient Israel did inherit, as a result of God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the land of promise—formerly called Canaan—which was a fertile and productive land for that part of the world. However, it was only a foretaste of the far greater national riches their descendants would receive “in the last days.”

## The Source of modern Israel's wealth

Before ancient Israel entered the Promised Land, God told them, “You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 8:18). That all wealth ultimately comes from God is an eternal, immutable principle. “The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts” (1 Samuel 2:7, New Revised Standard Version).

U.S. Founders Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson proposed that a new seal represent America as Israel (see “The Colonial View of America as a New Israel” on page 19). Though their recommendations were not adopted by the Congress, they were quite appropriate given the way that God blessed the American people with the riches of a continent that dwarfed the riches given to ancient Israel.

King David of Israel, exalted and wealthy, knew that his and his nation’s blessings were from God: “Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all” (1 Chronicles 29:12,



## God blessed Americans with the riches of a continent that dwarfed the riches given to ancient Israel.

NRSV). God gave riches and honor to David because he yielded to God, sought His will and put his trust in God over the course of his life. He was a man “after [God’s] own heart” (Acts 13:22).

### Departure from God a self-imposed destruction

Early in the existence of the United States, a major part of the leadership and citizenry sought God’s will as best they understood it. Christianity and the Bible played a major part in the early years of the American nation.

Abraham Lincoln, perhaps America’s most biblically literate president, read the Bible from his youth and throughout his life. In his second inaugural address, he made 14 references to God, several biblical allusions, and direct quotations from the Psalms and Matthew. He called the Bible “the best gift God has given to man.”

America today, having lost its way by drifting away from its biblical foundation, sorely needs to return to the Bible. The nation is rapidly declining and will eventually fall unless it repents. This collapse is in the process of being triggered internally.

Lincoln foresaw that this would be the case: “At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us in a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined . . . could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

“At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever

reach us, *it must spring up amongst us*. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, *we must ourselves be its author and finisher*. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or *die by suicide*.”

Could a nation die by suicide? It’s sobering and frightening to contemplate. Yes, America does exist by God’s divine grace. But the nation is testing God in its growing national sins. It stands in danger of pushing at God to the point that He removes the blessings He bestowed on the nation as promised.

Bible prophecy contains dire warnings for America at the end of this age. Part of the purpose of these prophecies is to shake people to *wake up and repent*—turn from their own selfish and arrogant ways and humbly turn to God. And although a nation hell-bent on doing things its own way apart from God is unlikely to change course, *you* as an individual can certainly change if you yield to Him. We pray you will have the wisdom to do so! **GN**

## Learn More

This article only scratches the surface of the amazing story of God’s great promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and their amazing fulfillment. There’s far more to the story—more that you need to know to understand where the United States is heading and why! Download or request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!

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# Hurricane Sandy, the Bible and You

Hurricane Katrina was the most costly natural disaster the United States had ever experienced. Yet in some respects Hurricane Sandy had an even greater impact. Why is America experiencing major national catastrophes, whether from nature or inflicted by enemies, such as the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001? Does the Bible provide answers?

by John Ross Schroeder, Scott Ashley and Bill Bradford

**T**he end of October 2012 saw a storm unlike any other. A warm hurricane from the Caribbean crept northward to plow into a cold jet stream stretching as far south as Florida, and then collided with a powerful “nor’easter,” all converging at the most heavily populated area of the northeastern United States—New Jersey and New York. The largest Atlantic storm ever recorded, Hurricane Sandy took the lives of almost 200 people in seven countries and affected 24 U.S. states from Florida to Maine, as far inland as Wisconsin. Particularly hard-hit was New York City, where 32-foot waves from New York Harbor flooded tunnels, streets and subways and cut power to millions of people.

Damage was so severe and widespread that it will be difficult to calculate a final

tally, but current cost estimates run as high as \$50 billion for property damage, lost business and extra expenses for the millions of people affected by the storm. Insurance companies expect to pay out between \$10 to \$20 billion.

It wasn’t that long ago that the world witnessed Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in 2005, resulting in the loss of more than 1,000 lives and over \$100 billion in damages. Hurricanes are often enormously destructive. New Orleans remains a very important American city, but the greater New York megalopolis remains the economic and financial heart of the nation. Having mostly recovered from the effects of 9/11, New York City and its environs have suffered yet another major catastrophe.

*Bloomberg Businessweek* reported these

statistics in mid-November: “At least 40 U.S. deaths. Economic losses expected to climb as high as \$50 billion. Eight million homes without power. Hundreds of thousands of people evacuated. More than 15,000 flights grounded. Factories, stores and hospitals shut. Lower Manhattan dark, silent and underwater” (Paul Barrett, Nov. 11, 2012). Of course, recovery is far along, and thankfully the death toll and economic damage figures, bad as they are, will not come close to Katrina’s.

But what about the next one—or the next? What is happening with the weather? As we will consider, the Creator God has told us in His Word, the Bible, that we would see a rise in such events with the approach of the end of this age.

## Are natural disasters intensifying in power?

What are the effects of natural disasters? The Sept. 16, 2005, issue of *Science* magazine reported on research by scientists at the Georgia Institute of Technology and the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado. At that time the researchers concluded that while the number of hurricanes and cyclones had not increased, they “did find a sharp increase



during the past 35 years in the number of category 4 and 5 tropical cyclones, the most intense storms that cause most of the damage on landfall” (Richard Kerr, “Is Katrina a Harbinger of Still More Powerful Hurricanes?” p. 1,807).

More specifically, these scientists found that the frequency of the most dangerous and damaging storms—those rated category 4 and 5—increased by 80 percent from the 1970s to the last decade.

Destructive storms are not the only kinds of natural disasters that seem to be on the rise. For instance, the December 2004 earthquake off Indonesia was the most powerful in decades, unleashing a massive tsunami that took some 300,000 lives—the greatest number of casualties from an earthquake in more than 500 years.

But as the *Bloomberg Businessweek* article above noted, an inordinate number of weather-related disasters are striking

leading up to His return. “And there will be famines, pestilences [disease epidemics] and earthquakes in various places” (Matthew 24:7).

The Greek term translated *earthquakes* deserves a much closer look. The word here

24, Mark 13 and Luke 21) remains one of the most important prophetic discourses in the Bible. The chain of events it describes culminates in Christ’s second coming. Jesus spoke of highly disturbing world conditions that would precede and accompany His



## Scientists have found that the frequency of the most dangerous and damaging storms—those rated category 4 and 5—increased by 80 percent from the 1970s to the last decade.

the United States. The article reports: “On Oct. 17 [2012] the giant German reinsurance company Munich Re issued a prescient report titled *Severe Weather in North America*. Globally, the rate of extreme weather events is rising, and ‘nowhere in the world is the rising number of natural catastrophes more evident than in North America.’”

It further explains: “From 1980 through 2011, weather disasters caused losses totaling \$1.06 trillion. Munich Re found ‘a nearly quintupled number of weather-related loss events in North America for the past three decades.’ By contrast, there was ‘an increase factor of 4 in Asia, 2.5 in Africa, 2 in Europe, and 1.5 in South America’” (emphasis added throughout).

### An important prophecy of Jesus Christ

What light does Bible prophecy shed on this and other disasters? Consider Jesus Christ’s Olivet Prophecy delivered to His disciples nearly 2,000 years ago (called so because He was speaking to them on the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem). “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,” He told them, describing global trends in the time

is *seismos*, from which we derive such English terms as “seismic” and “seismology”—referring to earthquake activity and the study of earthquakes. *Strong’s Lexicon* defines it as “a commotion, i.e. (of the air) a gale, (of the ground) an earthquake—earthquake, tempest” (Strong’s no. 4578).

So *seismos* encompasses a broader meaning than just the earth shaking. For instance, Matthew 8:23-27 records how a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee overtook Jesus’ disciples in a boat while He slept aboard. He awoke and “rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.” The word used in verse 24 for this sudden, powerful storm is *seismos*, here translated “great tempest.” The parallel gospel account in Mark 4:37 calls it a “great windstorm.”

Clearly *seismos* can also refer to violent storms involving both wind and water. This term cannot be limited to just earthquakes, as we might assume. It can apply to hurricanes, typhoons and tornadoes as well as earthquakes.

### Nature out of control

The Olivet Prophecy (found in Matthew



return to the earth: “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring” (Luke 21:25).

Indeed conditions will become so threatening that if Christ does not return to the earth and halt mankind’s self-destructive ways, human life won’t survive: “For then there will be great tribulation, such has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, *no flesh would be saved*; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:21-22).

But why will nature itself become more and more out of control? The answer may be surprising to those not familiar with the Bible. These disasters will increase because people’s sins are worsening and becoming even more widespread. So much so that our Savior stated, “*And because lawlessness will abound*, the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12)



The prophet Isaiah stated: “Look! The LORD is coming from heaven to *punish the people of the earth for their sins*” (Isaiah 26:21, New Living Translation). The “LORD” here is Jesus Christ, who along with God the Father is also God (see John 1:1-3, 14; Hebrews 1:1-3, 8). A major aspect of His return and the events surrounding it is judgment on rebellious humanity.

Yet during this time of national and international chaos, those who humbly repent of their sins and become converted will be protected: “Come My people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; *hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past*” (Isaiah 26:20).

God makes a distinction between those who obey Him and those who do not. He always has! However, a word of qualifica-

tion: It is certainly true that some Christians will be marked out for martyrdom—assuring their glorious future in the Kingdom of God. Christ told us not to fear those who kill the body and that’s all they can do (Matthew 10:28).

### Now what will you do?

Many Americans took notice of the sufferings of Hurricane Sandy. There was an outpouring of sympathy, and people from around the country tried to help out or donated money. Focused on the calamity, some people probably ceased from their typical trivial concerns and even wrongdoing for a while, as often happens with major disasters. Yet one of the Hebrew prophets tells us that faithfulness would be like the dew on the grass (Hosea 6:4). It would soon dissipate.

With Hurricane Sandy now out of the headlines, it’s out of sight, out of mind. Football, basketball and hockey games will continue, with fans supporting their favorite teams. New movies will continue to hit theaters, and people will enjoy their usual diet of entertainment and escapism. For most around the world, life will continue without missing a beat.

But make no mistake: Our preoccupation with materialism is far off the mark of the biblical standards God requires. Shortly before Noah’s Flood drowned the world and fire from the sky devoured the city of Sodom, people were going about their daily

lives as if nothing bad was ever going to happen (Luke 17:26-30). How true that is today too!

Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), but the world of his day didn’t believe him. And although Lot apparently sighed and cried over the sins of Sodom, no one there asked him for help in overcoming the inevitable effects of the sick lifestyles that prevailed in that doomed city (verses 7-8). Not even 10 righteous people could be found in it.

We at *The Good News* ask all of our readers to not just *study* the Bible but, more importantly, *act* on its truths. Our *Beyond Today* TV program, our many free booklets, our free *Bible Study Course*, our websites and our offices around the world are all available to help our readers to come to understand God’s truth as revealed in His Word.

How would we like you to respond to the gospel of the Kingdom of God? We sincerely hope that you as a *Good News* reader will imitate the Bereans of Paul’s day: “They received the word with all readiness, and *searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:11). And then act accordingly—*live by* what the Bible teaches.

No matter what the nation does, you personally can swim upstream and, with God’s help, change your own lifestyle to one devoted to His righteousness (Psalm 119:172). That is our fervent hope! **GN**



## When Will America Run Out of Resources?

**E**ven before Hurricane Sandy the United States was already suffering from an enormous national debt crises, measured in the trillions of dollars. Sandy adds another \$50 billion to the frightening total.

Shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, America moved quickly into a full-scale, very expensive war on terror. Even after the initial military campaign in Iraq concluded, Washington found itself funding a costly nation-building project intended to produce a peaceful democratic state, a mission whose ultimate outcome continues to be far from certain. Afghanistan is following a similar pattern.

Washington poured millions into the nations devastated by the Indian Ocean tsunami several years ago. Americans have a long history of generosity when other nations are afflicted by major natural disasters. Yet there may come a time when the nation’s own resources are drained to the point where it cannot be of much more help. What about the prospect of yet another mega-disaster down the line? Will America even have the resources to rescue, rebuild and sustain its own national infrastructures?

At some point in the future, Americans’ wayward lifestyles will start to count very heavily against them. These national problems are cumulative. Clearly Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 (the blessings-and-curses chapters of the Bible) apply to the plight of America today. Obedience to God brings abundant blessings

and natural resources: “Blessed shall be the fruit of your body [healthy children], the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks . . . The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand” (Deuteronomy 28:4, 8).

Since its inception the United States of America has been blessed by God even beyond the pioneer generation’s wildest dreams. Even today new methods of extracting oil and gas (particularly in North Dakota and South Texas) are helping to alleviate the nation’s energy problems.

Yet in the long run persistent disobedience to God will bring down a nation. “Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks . . . Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The LORD will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me” (Deuteronomy 28:17-18).

May we have the wisdom to see where our actions are leading us and the courage to change course before it’s too late!

—John Ross Schroeder



# Current Events & Trends

by John Ross Schroeder

## Outlook for the year ahead

**W**hat will the year 2013 bring mankind? Present trends indicate that we may be locked into a period of prolonged uncertainty, along with increasing social unrest and intensified conflicts.

In *The World in 2013*, published by the British magazine *The Economist*, editor Daniel Franklin writes in his editorial: "From a showdown with Iran over its nuclear plans to a catastrophic break-up of the euro zone, it is not hard to think of disasters that could strike the world in 2013" (Nov. 21, 2012).

A *Financial Times* article at the beginning of 2012 carried the drophead "Peaceful acceptance of deep differentials is coming to an end" (Moisés Naím, "Economic Inequality," Jan. 2, 2012). The author predicted, "In 2012 peaceful co-existence with inequality will end and demands and promises to fight it will become fiercer and more widespread than they have since the end of

the Cold War." This secular prophecy may well apply much more to 2013 and beyond than to last year.

Still, in 2012 European protestors took to the streets in various locations to voice their grievances. The following were some of the newspaper headlines in October and November: "Leftists March in Paris Against Austerity Plans"; "Dealers [in stock exchanges] Run for Cover in the Face of Europe's Angry Marching Millions"; "Europe's Day of Anarchy"; "Violence That Proves Euro Shouldn't Survive."

The last article, from the *Daily Mail*, began with: "Rubber bullets fired in Madrid . . . violent protests in Milan . . . armoured police cars guarding the Athens parliament . . ." (Nov. 14, 2012).

Besides economic distress, we'll turn attention in our overview to a number of leadership, geopolitical and even religious issues confronting our global life today.

## Political disappointment and division

**W**hat's wrong with our leadership? Is increasing political divide leading to national fragmentation and possible breakup?

Gideon Rachman, writing for *The World in 2013*, predicts: "Politicians will disappoint the voters—again. *The world's leading democracies*



*are experiencing a crisis of confidence.* In 2013 that crisis will intensify in America, the European Union, Japan and India. *All grapple with profound problems of governance*" ("Democracy's Woes," emphasis added throughout).

Rachman's report continues: "American politics will remain gridlocked . . . In 2013 America will find it more difficult than ever to fashion coherent policies to revive growth and to tackle the soaring national debt." He also states that "public faith in politicians could hit new lows in 2013."

One of the major accomplishments of American president Abraham Lincoln was to keep the Union together through the terrible ordeal of the Civil War. It appears that at no time since then has America been as divided as it is today. Major issues divide Americans, with no prospects for unity in sight.

America isn't alone in this regard. Apart from the current intentions of Catalonia in seeking separation from Spain, the most immediate threat to the unity and territorial integrity of a major nation will occur in 2014 in Great Britain. Scotland will then decide whether to remain a part of the United Kingdom or become independent. If it opts to go it alone, the Union of 1713 between England and Scotland will cease—with far-reaching negative political and

economic consequences for both countries. Will the present UK leadership be up to the task of persuading the Scots to remain in the United Kingdom?

Part of the biblically foretold decline of the end-time descendants of the patriarch Jacob may involve divisive fragmentation of territory. If you don't yet understand the true biblical identities of these peoples, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

## Severe economic uncertainty and anxiety

**I**n another *Financial Times* article a year ago, Gideon Rachman predicted: "Efforts to rescue the world economy in 2012 will be afflicted by a perilous political paradox. The more that international co-operation is needed, the harder it will be to achieve" ("The Big Questions for 2012," Jan. 2, 2012). Again, this prophecy could easily extend into 2013 and well beyond.

Other concerned voices described the widespread fiscal uncertainty. An Oct. 14 headline in *The Observer* read, "Economists in Dismal Failure to Get to Grips With a World Changed by Meltdown." Michael Medved lamented "The Cracking of America's Optimism," with many citizens trapped and stalled by desperate debt and job dilemmas (*USA Today*, Oct. 29, 2012). "Hopes Turn to Fear and Uncertainty," stated the *Financial Times* in a major, multipage separate section (Oct. 11, 2012).

How long can America continue to break basic fiscal laws without risking devastating economic consequences? Fundamental financial principles such as "The borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs

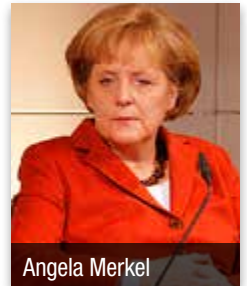
22:7) remain true and in effect.

The catastrophic impact of broken economic laws will not be staved off forever. After all, the Republic of China still holds 3 trillion U.S. dollars in its treasury. The drophead of a *Wall Street Journal* article asked, "How long can the laws of fiscal—and political—gravity be suspended?" (Bret Stephens, "Liberal Exceptionalism," Nov. 5, 2012).

## Germany pushes on while France threatens the euro

**C**hancellor Angela Merkel of Germany continues to be the West's most successful political leader. John Peet, *The Economist's* European editor, reported that "in Europe it will be Germany that calls the tune" ("Wait for Angela," *The World in 2013*).

Some are referring to Merkel as the "Iron Chancellor"—recalling the architect of Germany's unification and imperial rise in the late 1800s. The designation is also meant to draw comparison with Britain's former prime minister Margaret Thatcher, the "Iron Lady." She famously said of herself, "The lady's not for turning"—and this expression is now likewise applied to Merkel. Several prominent journalists depict Merkel as the only leader who can save the euro and ultimately the European Union.



Jeremy Warner, who journeyed to Berlin for *The Sunday Telegraph*, had this to say: "Anyone who thinks Berlin is itself about to buckle under the pressure and bring monetary union to a rapid conclusion is sadly misinformed. The euro is Germany's currency now, but in the possessive rather than the collective sense. *To all intents and purposes, the single currency has become Germany's new Deutschemark*, and despite some concessions to fellow members, Berlin its undisputed capital. Nothing, least of all British obstructionism, will be allowed to stand in the way of saving the euro."

"But this is about more than simply defending the national currency. *For many in Germany's political class, the [currency] crisis is the mechanism that allows the euro finally to fulfill its destiny as a dynamo of European reform and integration*" ("The Euro Has Become Germany's New Deutschemark," Nov. 17, 2012).

Will the German chancellor become a key factor in paving the way for a European federal union, a United States of Europe? The Bible foretells a future union of 10 political entities centered in Central Europe that will ultimately be led by a charismatic dictator—a power that will dominate the world for a relatively short time (Revelation 13:3-9). This will happen not long before the second coming of Jesus Christ. (To learn more, see our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*)



France's President François Hollande occupies the opposite end of the leadership spectrum from Mrs. Merkel. *The Economist* now considers France to be "The Time Bomb at the Heart of Europe"—as stated on the cover of its Nov. 17-23, 2012, edition. Some observers even suspect that bailouts are on the horizon for Paris and that France could be more of a threat to the euro than Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal countries combined. Bearing the cover title, the magazine issue's lead editorial presented, as stated in the drophead, "why France could become the biggest danger to Europe's single currency."

The Paris bureau chief of *The Economist*, Sophie Peddor, writes in *The World in 2013*: "It will be a rude return to earth for France's President François Hollande in 2013. He was elected to 're-enthrone the French dream.' He will now have to manage an economic nightmare—feeble growth, over 3m[jillion] unemployed, factory closures, declining competitiveness and strained public finances."

### Israel's encirclement crisis continues

End-time prophecy focuses primarily on two regions of the globe—Europe and the Middle East. European leaders are certainly dogged by many knotty difficulties at present, but the Middle East has been beset by one major crisis after another recently—some occurring simultaneously.

Recall that it is to Jerusalem that Jesus Christ will return as ultimate world ruler, setting up His global capital in this ancient city. Ancient Israel's King David urged his contemporaries and later generations to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6). In due time that prayer will be wonderfully answered through the reign of Christ Himself—which will bring universal peace and prosperity among the nations. But until then the Middle East will remain a cauldron of unrest and upheaval.

The most prominent regional leader continues to be Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. Although some in the media picture him as a warmonger, he seeks *survival* for his country. Surrounded on three sides by hostile countries, he sits in the proverbial hot seat, striving to steer the state of Israel through yet another national crisis.

Even Jerusalem's treaty with Egypt has been drawn into question by the recent rocket war with

Gaza. Although Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi successfully cast himself in the role of mediator in the conflict, which ended in a cease-fire, he "said he would not leave Gaza on its own and *condemned Israel's 'blatant aggression against humanity'*" ("We'll Back the Gaza Militants, Says Egypt," *Daily Mail*, Nov. 16, 2012).

The drophead of an article by Anshel Pfeffer in *The Tablet*, written before the cease-fire, stated: "The election in Cairo of the Muslim Brotherhood, with its links to Hamas, altered the balance of power in the region and left Israel fearful that its peace accords with the Egyptians would crumble. But as a journalist reports from Jerusalem, Egypt seems determined to broker a ceasefire" (Nov. 24, 2012).

The title of another article by Pfeffer in *The Jewish Chronicle* called it "Gaza: The War That Worked" (Nov. 22). Hamas even claimed victory. *The Tablet* article's title accurately describes the continuing atmosphere of crisis: "Peace Hanging by a Thread."

The Nov. 29 UN vote to grant the PLO observer status in that body throws yet another destabilizing factor into the volatile Middle East mix, and can only inspire greater intransigence toward Israel.

Above all others, the threat of Iran's nuclear ambitions still hangs over Israel's head. That continuing danger is summed up by Ronen Barany, the maker of a short video imagining an Iranian nuclear attack on Israel: "We had one Holocaust. We don't want another one" (quoted by Nick Meo, "Holocaust Fears Haunt Israelis as They Prepare for Possible War With Iran," *The Sunday Telegraph*, Oct. 14, 2012).

Another report indicated that "Iran is ready to sharply expand significantly its uranium enrichment at an underground site after installing almost all the centrifuges the site was built for, a UN nuclear report showed on Friday [Nov. 16]. The development is likely to fuel western alarm over Tehran's nuclear aims as it suggests that Iran would be in a position to ramp up production of additional highly enriched uranium at a moment's notice" (James Blitz and agencies, "Iran Ready to Boost Uranium Enrichment," *Financial Times*, Nov. 16, 2012).

Only God knows how events will play out in the Middle East in 2013 and beyond, but He has given us clear prophetic guidelines and told us through Jesus Christ that the principal geopolitical, end-time events will climax at Armageddon (Megiddo in northern Israel). Armies will gather there before heading to Jerusalem to fight the returning Christ.



Mohammed Morsi

To understand much more, request or download our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

### Christendom losing ground

After Christ returns, people everywhere will learn and follow true religion—leading at last to world peace. But today religion seriously divides the planet. And whatever goes by the name of Christianity continues to be relentlessly persecuted in many parts of the world—especially in some Middle Eastern countries and particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Writing in *The World in 2013*, *The Economist's* international editor Edward Lucas predicts: "The greatest trouble for Christians is in the places that feature in the Bible: 2013 will be one of the worst years ever for Christians in the Middle East. The exodus of Christians from Palestine and Iraq will slow—but only because so many have already left. Instead, Christians will be fleeing Syria and Egypt. Do not expect the Muslim Brotherhood rulers of Egypt to mourn their going. For an Islamist party, there are few votes in religious tolerance" ("Christianity at Bay").

The Anglican Church in Britain remains deeply divided over issues such as women bishops and same-sex marriage. Lucas further stated: "There will be more splintering in 2013. Anglicans in Africa will go their own way, in partnership with like-minded conservatives from America. They are appalled by the theological liberalism of the [Archbishop] Williams era, especially on issues of sexual morality. So too are the parishes in Britain that hew to Bible-centred Christianity, rather than the diluted and trendy version beloved by the church leadership."

It appears that even in America secularism will remain on the rise in 2013, and atheists will emerge from the closet in greater numbers than before. Americans with no religious identity have already risen to nearly 20 percent of adults ("Meet the 'Nones': An Emerging Force" and "Protestants Lose Majority Status in U.S."—both by Cathy Grossman, *USA Today*, Oct. 9, 2012).

If you would like to know more about the genuine Christianity of Christ, ask for or download our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*. (Sources: *Daily Mail*, *The Economist*, *Financial Times*, *The Jewish Chronicle*, *The New York Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Tablet*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The World in 2013*.)



Benjamin Netanyahu

### How can you make sense of the news?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today's dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You're probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. So are we. That's one reason we produce the *Beyond Today* daily TV commentaries—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. This eye-opening program offers you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the perspective of God's Word. Visit us at [ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!](http://ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!)



# GOD, Science & the Bible

## Does Life Exist Somewhere Out There?

For years people have wondered: Are we alone in the universe? Do other life forms exist out there? Will we ever find them?

Astronomy began to develop as a science in the 15th century, sparked by the discoveries of Galileo and Copernicus that the Earth is not the center of the universe. Based on information gathered by their primitive telescopes, they discovered that Earth revolves around the Sun—not the other way around, as had been supposed for centuries. Far more advanced telescopes of the 20th century revealed billions of specks of light that turned out to be galaxies millions of light years away.

As we learned more about our own solar system, astronomers began to focus attention on Mars, one of the two planets closest to us and the one thought most likely to harbor life. More than 40 years ago America's National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) launched a probe toward Mars, the 1965 *Martiner IV*, that sent back faint radio signals showing the planet to be a lonely, pock-marked wasteland, a dead world with seemingly no way to support life.

Eternally curious, scientists wanted to know more. Last August, the attention of millions was riveted on the approach of a spacecraft to the surface of Mars. Its payload was the most advanced robotic rover ever designed to explore the surface of another planet. Through maneuvers of amazing complexity, that rover, dubbed *Curiosity*, landed successfully on the Martian surface on August 5.

About the size of a tiny car, *Curiosity* was designed for one singular purpose—to look for signs of life on the Red Planet. A roving laboratory, *Curiosity* will spend at least two years trying to unlock the scientific history of Mars. Equipped with an array of scientific sensors and other instruments, the explorer will scoop soil and rock samples for analysis to determine if life exists, or ever existed, on Mars. For example, the rover can analyze soil to determine if the soil ever offered the environmental conditions to support microbial life.

Scientists are looking for “biomarkers”—evidence, however faint, that life may have at one time existed on Mars. One of those biomarkers, perhaps the most important one, is the existence of water, a key ingredient needed to support even microbial life.

Even before *Curiosity*, astronomers noted the similarity between Mars and Earth. Both have an atmosphere, although Mars' is much less dense than Earth's and chemically much different. Both have a surface covered with soil. *Curiosity* has analyzed soil samples that show Martian soil to be a volcanic type, somewhat similar to volcanic soils here on Earth. Scientists have long puzzled over the presence of Mars' huge polar ice caps, similar in appearance to those on Earth.

*Curiosity* has lived up to its name. In the three



Self-portrait of NASA's *Curiosity* rover at Gale Crater, Mars.

months since it touched down, it has sent back thousands of pictures and hundreds of hours of communications. The scientific world thrilled to the late September discovery of evidence that a stream of water once ran across the area of Mars where the rover is exploring. In early October, a hammer-like device on *Curiosity* gathered powder samples of a Martian rock that was found to be similar in mineral composition to common rocks here on earth.

In late October and early November, *Curiosity* experienced dust storms similar to those on Earth. As on Earth, the atmosphere provides some shielding from outside radiation and helps to regulate temperatures. However, because the atmosphere is thinner, the rover detected, as expected, evidence of large amounts of radiation present. And the Martian atmosphere was found to keep surface temperatures within a range of -130° F to about 5°, a difficult abode for even microbial life.

### Uniqueness of planet Earth

So one might well ask: Do the various similarities point to the possibility of life on Mars?

Beyond the similarities are huge differences that make the probabilities of life as we know it being found on Mars or any other planet in our solar system quite miniscule.

At more than twice the Earth's distance from the Sun, surface temperatures on Mars seldom rise above 0° Fahrenheit. Life as we know it would not be able to survive in the thin Martian atmosphere (only 1 percent that of Earth), composed predominantly of carbon dioxide with much smaller amounts of nitrogen and argon. The *Curiosity* scientific team had hoped to find methane, which might be an indicator of life, but none has been detected.

It was reported Dec. 3 that in soil sample analysis *Curiosity* had detected “water and sulfur and chlorine-containing substances,” as well as “one-carbon organics”—which are needed for life—though “it is possible the carbon may be of Earth origin, carried by *Curiosity* and detected by [its lab's] high sensitivity design” (“NASA Mars Rover Fully Analyzes First Soil Samples,” NASA.gov). In any case, in its several months on Mars, *Curiosity* has not discovered any clear evidence of life.

However, even if no life is found that's not to say that life doesn't exist outside our planet. It *does*—it's just *not life as we know it*.

### Extraterrestrial life of a different kind

God Almighty, Maker of the universe, dwells in the spiritual abode of heaven. And sometime in the ancient past, God created spirit beings to help Him rule and administer the vast universe. We call these spirit beings *angels*. In your Bible, Psalm 148:1-5 shows that they, and the physical universe, were created at God's command! There are millions of them (Daniel 7:9-10), and God created them with some of the same supernatural powers He Himself possesses.

God refers to these angels in several ways. Job 38:7 calls them “morning stars” and says they sang and shouted for joy when God created the earth. So the angels have been around for eons.

Over the past 35 years, millions have flocked to the *Star Wars* movie series. They've thrilled to the adventures of Jedi warriors Luke Skywalker and Yoda in their struggles against Darth Vader and the evil Sith. It's the classic struggle between the forces of good and evil.

You may be surprised to learn that a true cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil did take place in the universe! This cataclysmic event occurred before human beings existed. The pock-marked surface of the moon and other scarred planets, moons and asteroids of our solar system may be evidence of that battle. But what led up to it?

One of the archangels God created, referred to as Lucifer in translations of Isaiah 14:12, was, as Ezekiel 28:17 shows, a being of immense beauty and perfection—and entrusted by God with vast responsibilities. But Lucifer became dissatisfied and led a rebellion of one third of the angels against God (Revelation 12:3-4).

Does this sound like fantasy? Isaiah 14:13-15 reveals that Lucifer planned to “exalt [his] throne above the stars of God” and “be like the Most High.” In other words, this being led an angelic rebellion to overthrow God!

So there was what we might call an original “star wars,” a literal war in heaven among supernatural beings. “And war broke out in heaven. Michael





## God in His Word reveals that He is not finished with the universe He's created.

[another archangel] and his angels fought with the dragon [Lucifer now having become Satan, meaning "Adversary"]; and the dragon and his angels fought" (Revelation 12:7).

Verse 9 shows that Satan and his angels, since their rebellion referred to as demons, were defeated and hurled from heaven back to the earth (see verse 4). Jesus Christ said of that time, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Again, that great cosmic catastrophe may be why we see such scattered debris—in the form of comets, asteroids and other such wreckage—in outer space.

That may well be when Mars was likewise left a wasteland. Was Mars created a barren wasteland, or did it become that way? We don't know. But nothing *Curiosity* has discovered on Mars has changed the reality of its desolate condition.

### God will expand life throughout the universe

So what do we know at present? We are certainly familiar with life on Earth, including the seven billion human beings who call this planet home. Your Bible says God created angels to be His servants. Despite the fact that a third of them rebelled, we know that two thirds still serve God as His messengers and servants.

And here is the exciting good news: God is not finished with the universe He's created! He reveals there will be more life throughout the universe. And what many may find astounding is that human beings are part of that plan!

It will come as a surprise to many religious people to learn that the reward of God's followers is not just to float off at death to live in the spiritual heaven of His throne. Notice what God says in Matthew 5:5: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Those words are Christ's own, from the Sermon on the Mount. John 3:13 further tells us, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven."

But if going to heaven at death is not the reward

of the saved, then what is? Let's pose this question: Does it make sense that a God who endowed human beings with the desire to know more about the universe, and the ability to explore it, would not have a higher purpose for mankind than to merely live a brief physical life and then die?

While science strives to find out if life exists on planets other than Earth, God's Word reveals—if one is willing to look—the incredible potential of human life. In the book of Hebrews we read this: "What is man, that you are mindful of him . . . you made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, and put everything in subjection under his feet" (Hebrews 2:6-8, NIV).

Did you catch that? Man's current status is "a little lower than the angels"—or "for a little while lower," as some versions translate this—but God reveals that in time everything will be put in subjection under man!

We begin to get a clue about our future and our place in the universe in recognizing that the "all things" God has promised us in various verses includes everything—the earth, heaven, the entire physical universe! God says that, for those willing to believe what He says, the vast universe, with all its billions of galaxies, its innumerable stars and planets, will be put under our dominion.

Romans 8:22 is quite revealing: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (NIV). All of our exploration has revealed this to be true—that the planets we have been able to observe other than our own are lifeless, dead places with conditions hostile to life. But notice verse 21 of the same chapter: "The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (NIV).

No evidence has yet been found for life on other planets. But even if some form of physical life—bacteria or something more complex—were to be found elsewhere, that would only mean that God created it too—not that it somehow evolved there on its own. However, other than the wishful thinking of some, we have no reason to think there is any physical life at all beyond the earth.

In any case, there is indeed certain "life out there" already—and there will yet be more in the wonderful future God has in store for us!

—Mike Kelley

### Learn More

Why were we placed here on Earth? What is the ultimate purpose and future of mankind? People have pondered these questions for millennia without finding the answers. But you can find them in the pages of your Bible! Download or request your free copy of *What Is Your Destiny?* today!

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And those people have a common goal: **to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News*, various booklets (also free) and our *Beyond Today* TV program, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and



threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of

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# A Crucial Biblical Question for the President (and You)

Given the opportunity, what would you ask your country's leader as he starts a new term in office? How would his answer stack up against the Bible, and does it matter? *by Beyond Today host Darris McNeely*

In the days of ancient Israel, kings had various counselors in their court to advise them on how to run the nation—based on the Word of God. Samuel guided Saul. Nathan counseled David. The prophet Isaiah revealed God's will to Hezekiah. These men of God were independent voices representing God to the king.

The president of the United States begins a new term of office on Jan. 20, 2013. What might he hear if a true servant of God—a Samuel, Nathan or Isaiah—entered the Oval Office? What kind of biblical questions might he put to the president of the United States? What questions should I ask if I were sent to the Oval Office? What would you ask?

Consider this. The United States and other major nations are facing serious problems. The days of reckoning began right after the November election. Runaway deficits, exploding entitlement programs and a moral slide into the abyss are carrying America to a day of judgment.

In the United States, bright prospects of hope and change have dimmed. What the president promised has not been delivered. Fear is a very real part of the American scene right now.

The rest of the world is intently interested in the decisions made by America's leaders. Despite a considerable level of anti-American resentment, most people know that what is decided in Washington impacts the world.

Which is why the president of the United States, and the rest of the world's prime ministers and leaders, could benefit from a biblical perspective when it comes to governing.

## America's greatest threat

Let's start by examining a big question put to the two major presidential candidates during the last election campaign. Both men

and Syria are in turmoil, and this threatens the stability of other states in the region.

Iran's drive for nuclear weapons was next on the list. No serious leader feels a nuclear-capable Iran is good for the stability of the region or the world. Israel, which Iranian leaders have threatened with extermination, certainly doesn't.

The rise of China as an economic and military power is high on any list of threats.



The framers of the U.S. Constitution were men who read the Bible and knew what type of moral character was needed for the nation to prosper. The character of the people had to be in line with the spiritual law of God.

were asked, "What is the greatest threat to America's national security?" The answers given were what we would expect.

Let's look at what they identified.

Both men mentioned the Middle East tension since the eruptions of the so-called "Arab Spring" in 2011. Egypt is going through major changes as Islamic fundamentalists push to assert Islamic law. Libya

China holds in its hands billions of dollars in America's debt and is challenging long-standing American supremacy in Asia.

Finally, the candidates mentioned America's \$16 trillion debt as a threat to national security. And it surely is. Even the world's most powerful nation can spend itself into bankruptcy.

Serious as these threats are, none is *the*





most serious threat to national security. In fact, the threat posed by these are actually symptoms of a deeper threat that no one in government leadership has identified.

The most serious threat to America's security, and it applies to every other nation

compact among the nations comes close to the simplicity and beauty and justice embodied in this charter. The Israelites vowed to obey and worship God, and He in turn promised to bless and protect them as His chosen people. "All the words which

## What is the greatest threat to America's national security? We can learn what it is from a source found very close to every president of the United States.

as well, is something you won't read about in any news source.

What is that threat? We can learn what it is from a source found very close to every president of the United States—God's Word, the Holy Bible.

You might laugh this off, dismissing the Bible as irrelevant to national security concerns. And you might think it has nothing to offer in terms of leading us out of the mess we're in. Really, though? Can you show me what *is* providing the help and direction we need? Why not turn to the Bible and ask the president—and every other world leader, for that matter—some straight questions? Both you and they might be shocked, but this approach would be the start down a path that *would lead to some solutions*.

Every U.S. president is sworn into office with his hand on a Bible. The custom began with George Washington and continues today. So why not open up this great book and read it? In its pages lies the answer to the question of the greatest threat to national security, not just for the United States but for *any* other modern nation.

### The moral state of the union

The greatest threat to national security is easily identified in the Bible. It's *your* sins, *my* sins, and *the sins of our nation*. The greatest threat is *the moral state of the union*.

Let's look at Deuteronomy 28. In this chapter one of the great national leaders of the past, Moses, rehearsed the most important covenant or agreement ever made by a sovereign people.

Forty years earlier this generation's parents stood at Mount Sinai and made an agreement with God to live by His laws, the Ten Commandments, as a basis for their civil and religious government. No other

the LORD has said we will do," they promised (Exodus 24:3).

Now, in Deuteronomy 28, Moses repeats the terms of the agreement. Let's look at some of what he said and draw some questions that are vital to today's world.

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth" (verse 1).

Here is the promise of national security—not just for Israel, but for any nation that obeys and worships the God of Abraham. God intended Israel to be the single nation on earth to which all others could look as a godly example to follow.

No other nation would be governed by His laws. As the Israelites prospered because of God's blessings, they would attract the attention of others who would want to emulate them and be blessed as they were (Deuteronomy 4:5-9). These others would come to Israel to learn their "secret." They would learn to do what Israel did.

Continuing in Deuteronomy 28, verse 2 says, "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God."

What kind of blessings would come from obeying God? The list follows on in Deuteronomy. But note *why* and *how* the blessings come—from *obedience to the voice of God, to His commandments and teachings*.

Today, the idea of obedience to God as part of a nation's character seems so archaic and out of date. Yet America was founded on clear biblical principles. As John Adams, second president of the United States, said: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

The nation's Founding Fathers under-

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stood that adherence to the Ten Commandments was a way to make the U.S. Constitution work within society. True, the commandments were not written into that document, but there is no doubt that its framers, men who read the Bible, knew what type of moral character was needed for the nation to prosper. The character of the people had to be in line with the spiritual law of God.

### The great law of God

Let's pause for a moment and think about the Ten Commandments. It's been rightly noted that these are the "Ten *Commandments*" and not the "ten suggestions." No greater law has ever been given by which men can be governed both collectively and personally. Taken as a whole, they are a moral compass for us—the basis for a way of life that can create a just and moral world. If each one of us committed to live by these laws and sought God's help to do so, the world would be powerfully transformed.

You need to look into what these laws mean and make them a positive and productive part of your life. Obedience to these laws is at the heart of a nation's security. And in Deuteronomy we are told about the promised blessings for obeying the commandments. Look at how they match up to some of the critical issues facing the nation today:

*"Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body [that is, children], the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out"* (verse 3-6).

This section outlines both general and specific results of a social structure rooted in God's spiritual law. Verse 3 is talking about a good and ordered life for everyone. It describes a peaceful and tranquil setting

where people can pursue life, liberty and happiness. Think about this.

In America's Declaration of Independence it is written: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

That is exactly what God promised here in the Bible. He shows the way to a happy life where people can work and provide a good living for their family.

It begins with a solid moral foundation based on God's spiritual law. Ask yourself what it is that you want in life. If you're like most, you want good health and a happy life—a life at peace, secure from fear of any kind. You want to live free from fear and guilt—free from all the personal and private insecurities that come with this human experience. You want to be happy!

I learned this once in a counseling session with a person who was fighting the demons of a genuinely unhappy lifetime. "All I want out of this life is to be happy," this person screamed into my face. "I just want God, or someone, to lift this gloom and make me happy!"

What I learned then was that neither I nor anyone can make a person happy without that person first walking with God according to the agreement here in Deuteronomy —"because you obey the voice of the LORD your God."

### Moral character impacts national security

Verse 7 goes on to state that one of the blessings of obeying God will be that "the LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways."

The promise directly addresses a nation's security from its enemies. In the violent and troubled world of the past century, the United States has been a defender and guarantor of freedom for many nations. Twice

in the 20th century American troops went to Europe to help liberate the Continent. During the Cold War the American military halted the further spread of Soviet totalitarianism. Today the U.S. Navy guards the seas and allows global commerce to thrive.

However, terrorism continues to eat away at world security. Threats of a nuclear-armed Middle East cast a shadow of fear on the world.

What is behind the world's continual strife and evil leading to war and suffering? Is there a deeper cause to these problems than we are willing to admit?

If a nation obeys the law of God, He foretells that their enemies will flee before them seven ways. Does this happen today when we see terrorists attack American diplomats in Libya with impunity? Obviously not.

What God is telling us here is that *the moral character of a people is tied directly to its national security*. He is saying that you and I have something to do with the security of our nation. That's right—*your* character, your neighbor's character and that of everyone where you live *impacts the peace and safety of the country*. It's time for some direct talk about this, and time we all face the individual responsibility we bear before our Creator.

### Character counts

A story from the seventh chapter of the biblical book of Judges illustrates the personal responsibility each of us bears. You're probably familiar with the story of Jericho, perhaps remembering the popular song about the Israelite leader Joshua and the famous battle that ended in victory for God's people Israel—when "the walls came tumblin' down." But what most don't know is the next scene in the story.

Joshua sent a reduced force of men against another smaller town called Ai. But instead of an easy victory, this strike force was ambushed, 36 were killed, and they all ran from the field in fear, their hearts melting like water. What was expected to be an easy

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victory turned into a humiliating disaster.

Joshua and his aides were dismayed and fearful. “How could this happen?” they wondered. “We’re bigger and stronger. How could we be defeated?” They rightly wondered how to deal with this major threat to their security.

that’s almost right—many people do steal something, even if it’s something small. And *that’s why this story is in the Bible*. There’s a crucial lesson for us to learn in it about our own conduct.

Sin—the violation of God’s spiritual law, the Ten Commandments—is woven

and the world’s national security? It is *the moral character of the people*. It’s the type of people we will choose to be before the Creator and Judge of the world.

Our national character, the moral fiber of the people, is crucial to God’s blessing and protection. America has the potential to be a great and good people, but it needs a careful examination in light of the law of God. Is America really a nation under God? Is Great Britain? Is Canada? Australia? The state of Israel or any other nation on earth? These are the biblical questions for the president, the prime ministers and you.

If a nation puts on its currency the statement “In God We Trust” but refuses to obey or trust God, then how can it expect Him to offer His gracious blessing and protection? It’s another biblical question for the president and for you.

The problems listed by our nation’s leaders as threats to national security are only symptoms of a greater problem. The nation’s moral character has been crippled because it has not followed the basis of the agreement with God as outlined in Deuteronomy. God’s promise to give national security if we follow Him is the basis for the only valid relationship between God and any nation at any time in history. Break its terms and there are consequences. No wonder we see so many threats to national and personal security!

Again, the greatest threat to America’s national security is its moral and spiritual condition before God. When we violate His commandments and the terms of this agreement, we reap consequences.

We are rapidly approaching a time when every nation will have to face this issue. But you and I don’t have to continue down this dangerous path the world is taking. We *can* turn it around in our lives today, seek and obey God, and enjoy the great blessings He promises! **GN**



## The Ten Commandments are a moral compass for us—the basis for a way of life that can create a just and moral world.

The answer was not in their physical strength. The problem was in the *moral character* of the people. God allowed this defeat to expose a sin that, if hidden and unrevealed, would infect the entire nation for generations. God had to expose it then and there, and in this story we find a sobering lesson for us today. Your country’s national security is at stake if this lesson is not impressed on us and taken to heart.

But what is it? What was the sin that threatened Israel?

It was the sin of stealing—the breaking of the Seventh Commandment, “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15). A man named Achan had violated God’s rules of war and stolen gold and other loot from the ruins of Jericho against the express command of God to burn and destroy the city and everything in it.

Achan had stumbled upon a treasure, and while no one was looking he took it for himself and hid it within his quarters. No one knew he had the valuables. But God did. And God was not going to let the sin of greed and stealing take root at this time among the people.

Not fair, you say? Why, everybody steals something, and no one is perfect. Well,

into the fabric of every nation in the world. Because of this, we see a world in conflict and suffering the consequences of broken law. God holds a nation claiming to honor and represent Him to a standard based on this law.

Achan’s story of hidden sin and God withholding His blessing on the people teaches us exactly what we read in Deuteronomy: Honor and obey Him, and one’s enemies will flee seven ways. Disobey, dishonor, walk all over His law and pretend to be something you aren’t, and the result is confusion, suffering and threat. You and I *do* have a part to play in the national security of our country.

### What does it all mean for you?

God has a question for you. Will you stop sinning? Will you begin to obey the Ten Commandments and all His ways today?

These questions strike at the heart of every one of the prophets of the Bible, beginning with the prophet Moses here in Deuteronomy. Every one of us has a responsibility before God to live by His laws. They are at the heart of every good thing we would want in life and for our nation.

What’s the greatest threat to America

### Learn More

Why is the United States facing so many serious threats—some external, but many from within? What is the origin of the nation’s longtime relationship with God? You’ll be surprised to learn the real answers! Download or request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!



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# Are You Pressing the Spiritual Snooze Button?

What does your to-do list look like? Is it full of tasks, chores and other physical worries? Where does your spiritual life fit in? Stop hitting the snooze button for your spiritual growth! **by John LaBissoniere**

A number of years ago I had trouble waking up each morning. The alarm clock would buzz and I'd press the snooze button, which stopped and reset the clock to go off again 10 minutes later. But pushing the button once wasn't enough for me. I'd often press it two, three or even four times. Thankfully those days of continually pushing the snooze button are long gone. I wasn't alone in my problem though. A lot of other people seem to struggle with it too.

Our lives are so often filled to the brim with tasks and duties. At the end of the day our minds are racing as we think about everything we did and what we still need to do. We can't seem to get to bed on time, which in turn makes it hard to get up in the morning. When we finally do arise we're exhausted. We need coffee or energy drinks to get us going. We repeat this process nearly every morning. And each time we press the snooze button one more time before we finally drag ourselves out of bed.

That's what was happening to me, but there was even more to my story. While I was accomplishing a lot physically, I wasn't doing much spiritually. Although I would physically wake up every morning, I was still, in effect, *spiritually* asleep.

How about you? Are you neglecting your spiritual life, even though you might be getting a lot done physically? Is your life so jam-packed with day-to-day concerns that little or no time is left for the most important parts of life? Are you figuratively pressing the *spiritual* snooze button over and over again?

We know that physical sleep is essential to function effectively. But did you know the Bible tells us that spiritual sleep can be

seriously dangerous (Matthew 25:5-13)? The apostle Paul wrote: "You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore *let us not sleep*, as others do, but let us watch and be sober (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6, emphasis added throughout).

Yes, spiritually speaking, we all need to stop hitting the snooze button, wake up and get going.

## You are a spiritual watchman

In several places the Bible uses the example of a watchman in ancient times. Watchmen guarded the agricultural fields from animals or thieves who could damage or steal the community's food supplies.

A watchman was also posted on the top of the walls surrounding a town or city to monitor any potential threat. If danger arose, he would promptly sound a warning trumpet. The town's gates would then be closed and the residents would prepare to defend themselves (Ezekiel 33:3-6).

It was critical that the watchman didn't fall asleep on the job. He had to stay awake and alert at all times. Dozing off even for a few moments could allow an enemy to take advantage of the situation, with devastating results.

We can think of ourselves as watchmen in spiritual terms. Not only should we vigilantly guard our own spiritual condition, but we have the commission to spread the gospel and warn others to wake up from their spiritual slumber as danger approaches (Mark 16:15, Matthew 25:1-5).

## Redeeming the time

Writing to the Christians in the city of Ephesus, Paul admonished them to wash

the spiritual sleep from their eyes: "*Awake, you who sleep*, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:14-16).

Likewise, the apostle Peter zealously urged worshippers to "be on your guard and *stay awake*. Your enemy, the devil, is like a roaring lion, sneaking around to find someone to attack" (1 Peter 5:8, Contemporary English Version).

The message from both apostles was that spiritual sleep can be dangerous and we must avoid it at all cost. Could you be spiritually dozing by placing other goals and interests ahead of your holy calling? (See Matthew 6:33; 1 Peter 2:21.) Let's consider for a moment the enormous importance of this great calling from our Creator.

## Fulfilling our marvelous calling

God the Father invites us to participate in the most important work in all of human history (Matthew 22:4; John 6:44). Besides having been called to proclaim His greatness, we are to participate in teaching others about the coming Kingdom of God (1 Peter 2:9; Romans 10:15). Moreover, we have the astounding personal opportunity to inherit eternal life and to serve as kings and priests with Jesus Christ for 1,000 years and beyond (1 Timothy 6:12; Revelation 20:6).

For those God has called now, this is our unique moment! This is our special time! What are we *doing* about it?

The illustrious Winston Churchill, Britain's prime minister during the Second World War, wrote: "To each there comes in their lifetime a special moment when they are figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing, unique to them and fitted to their talents. What a tragedy if that moment finds them unprepared or unqualified for that which could have been their finest hour."

Is this your finest hour? Are you com-



pletely awake to your marvelous divine vocation? Are you prepared to accomplish your mission, or unprepared? (See Matthew 25:1-10.)

To be equipped and ready, you have to fully follow Jesus Christ's example of loyal service to our Heavenly Father. We should live energetic lives of faithfulness, obedience, patience, sacrifice and endurance just as Jesus did (Matthew 7:21; Luke 22:42; 1 Peter 2:21).

Having been given this extraordinary responsibility, we have no time to take a

Of course there was nothing wrong with those things in and of themselves. But it was not supposed to be their *primary* objective. Forsaking their most important goal, the people nearly forgot why they returned to Jerusalem in the first place. But God didn't forget! And He wasn't going to let His work languish and fail.

He assigned the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the responsibility of reawakening the people to their mission (Ezra 5:1). Haggai rebuked the former captives over how they abandoned their God-given responsi-

encouraged the Church in New Testament times. The apostle Paul pressed the brethren in Rome to wake up from their listless spiritual condition. He said, "It is high time to *awake out of sleep*; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11). Paul also reproved some brethren in Corinth who became spiritually sluggish by entreating them, "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin" (1 Corinthians 15:34).

Are you awake, alert and watchful? Are you attentive and listening receptively to God's Word? Are you striving with God's help to overcome sin? In chapters 2 and 3 of the prophetic book Revelation, Jesus Christ issued a spirited wake-up call to those grown sleepy and apathetic. Notice this paraphrase of His words:

*"Up on your feet! Take a deep breath! Maybe there's life in you yet. But I wouldn't know it by looking at your busywork; nothing of God's work has been completed. Your condition is desperate. Think of the gift you once had in your hands, the message you heard with your ears—grasp it again and turn back to God. If you pull the covers back over your head and sleep on, oblivious to God, I'll return when you least expect it, [and] break into your life like a thief in the night"* (Revelation 3:2-3, The Message).



spiritual siesta. We have to stay spiritually bright-eyed, attentive and alert. As the apostle James wrote, we need to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

### **The work that needed to be done**

We can't be like some people of ancient times who walked away from God's calling when His work needed to be done. An important illustration is found in the book of Ezra.

Several decades after the nation of Judah went into captivity, God rescued a remnant of Jews and brought them back to their native land. He wanted them to have a part in the most important work of rebuilding the center of worship—the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-2). The effort began well with the renovation of the temple's foundation, but it wasn't long before persecution from outsiders began (Ezra 4:1-5, 23).

What was the result? Instead of courageously standing firm against their enemies, the people laid down their tools. They stopped doing God's work and quickly turned their attention to their own interests. They built houses, started businesses and got married.

bilities. "Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?' Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Consider your ways!'" (Haggai 1:3-5).

### **Awake, alert and watchful**

Thankfully, the people repented, and God cleared the way for them to finish the work (Ezra 6:1-14). But the question still stands for you and me: Could we be guilty of a fault like that of the people in Haggai's day? Are we *really* awake to our divine calling, or are you and I so caught up in our day-to-day tasks that we are essentially saying, as the people said then in Haggai 1:2, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built"?

Make sure you're not pressing the spiritual snooze button. Make sure you're not just telling yourself that you'll get busy doing God's work tomorrow, the next day or the day after. If we're self-absorbed and too busy with physical concerns, that day will never come.

Just as God urged the people in Haggai's age to faithfully carry out His work, He

### **The alarm clock is ringing**

Does Christ's rebuke apply to you and me? Are we spiritually asleep? Are we continually pressing the spiritual snooze button? If so, what does He want us to do to shake off the cobwebs in our minds and wash the sleep from our eyes?

"Here's what I want you to do: buy your gold from me, gold that's been through the refiner's fire. Then you'll be rich. Buy your clothes from me, clothes designed in Heaven. You've gone around half-naked long enough. And buy medicine for your eyes from me so you can see, really see" (Revelation 3:18, The Message).

The passage continues: "The people I love, I call to account—prod and correct and guide so that they'll live at their best. *Up on your feet, then!* About face! Run after God! Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you" (verses 19-20, The Message).

The alarm clock is ringing. Do you hear the sound? Don't press the spiritual snooze button. Wake up! Make this your finest hour as you carry out the work God has called you to complete! **GN**



# Lincoln's Qualities of Leadership

A major new movie examines the life and accomplishments of President Abraham Lincoln. What was it that made him an effective and inspirational leader? *by Noel Hornor*

**W**hen we look at the world scene today it's natural to wonder where the great leaders have gone.

Many presidents and other national leaders let the power of their office go to their heads—due perhaps in large part to the almost godlike way many of their supporters see them. As a result, they lose something critically important to success.

As Marvin Olasky recently observed in *World magazine*: “A half century ago America's leaders typically attended church regularly and had a better sense of what was unseemly, but that sense became unsustainable as mainline Protestantism turned into a hollow, doughnut faith. When people make lifestyle decisions without the sense of humility and modesty engendered by belief in an almighty God, unseemliness is the result” (“Not Classy,” Nov. 3, 2012).

It's one thing to profess faith in the Almighty, but another to truly humble yourself in your daily life, putting the national good ahead of desire for personal exaltation. This is a hallmark of great leadership.

One of America's greatest presidents was Abraham Lincoln. What made him an effective and successful leader?

## Humble beginnings forge a leader

Lincoln was born on Feb. 12, 1809, in a small log cabin at a place called Sinking Spring Farm in rural Kentucky. His parents, Thomas and Nancy Lincoln, named him after his paternal grandfather. This humble start in life would also mark the first time that a future president would be born outside the original 13 colonies.

“Thomas raised his son to be a farmer and even hired him out to other homesteaders from time to time. But Abraham disliked farm work, prompting some to remark that he was ‘lazy, awful lazy.’ But others recalled that he toiled ‘hard and faithful’ and was ‘mighty conscientious’ about getting a full day for twenty-five cents—which he gave his father who legally commanded

his wages until he came of age.

“Between his eleventh and fifteenth years he went to school irregularly, attending brief sessions between winter harvest and spring plowing. All told, he accumulated about a year of formal education . . . Lincoln came to school with an old arithmetic [book] under one arm, dressed in a raccoon cap and buckskin clothes, his pants so short they exposed six inches of his calves” (Stephen Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, 1977, pp. 10-11).

When Lincoln was 20 he became interested in law. At 21 he moved from Indiana to West Salem, Illinois. While living there, he decided he wanted to study law and become a lawyer. He had ambition in spite of his humble background.

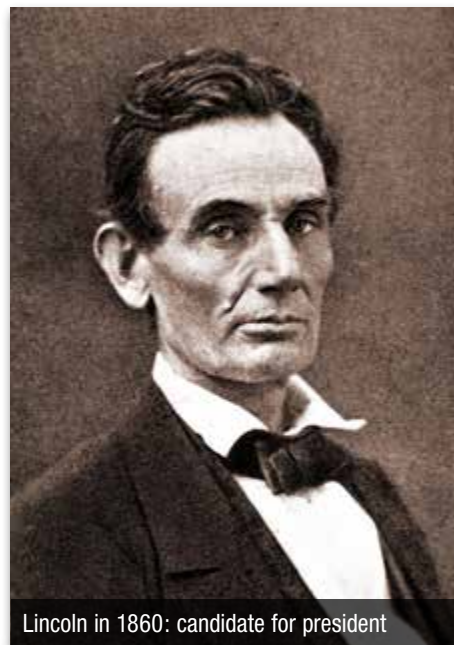
He also became interested in politics. “In fact, he decided to run for political office that very year of 1832 . . . At the age of twenty-three, he announced himself a candidate for nothing less than the state legislature. With painstaking care, he wrote out, revised, and polished his first political platform and carried it down to Springfield.

“If elected, the candidate would give his undivided support to internal improvements. While railroad construction was a grand idea, an imaginative idea, he thought it would cost too much” (p. 23). Lincoln wanted to be elected so that he could improve and utilize the resources of the real estate that Thomas Jefferson had acquired for the country.

He would have to overcome adversity, but adversity can mature and season a person. “By late July Lincoln was back in Sangamon County and campaigning hard for the legislature. He spun yarns in country stores, pitched horseshoes with voters, and declaimed his sentiments from boxes and tree stumps. Never had he been so exhilarated, so sure of himself. Yet he lost the election, running eighth in a field of thirteen candidates” (p. 25).

“Still, all was not bleak despair in these years. In 1834 he ran for the legislature

again, which cheered him considerably . . . Lincoln's soft-sell campaign paid off. On election day, August 4, he placed second out of thirteen candidates and was one of the four men elected to the Illinois house of representatives . . . He was only twenty-five years old” (pp. 27-28).



Lincoln in 1860: candidate for president

He would eventually serve four terms in the Illinois state legislature. He still wanted to be a lawyer and determined to become one despite the fact that he had no formal legal education.

“In March, 1836, he took his first step toward becoming a lawyer when the Sangamon County Court registered him as a man of good moral character. Afterward, between speeches on the political stump, he crammed hard for his bar exams, an oral grilling in which practicing attorneys would interrogate him on technical points of the law and legal history.

“At last he got up his courage and took the exams, sailed through without mishap, then treated his examiners to dinner, according to the custom of the day. On September 9, 1836, he received his law license and went right to work on his first case, a complicated action involving three related suits over disputed oxen and farmland” (p. 34).

## Efforts to abolish slavery

Lincoln became president of the United



States decades later in 1861. And on Jan. 1, 1863, he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring “that all persons held as slaves” within the territory of the secessionist Confederate states “are, and henceforward shall be free.”

The Proclamation announced the acceptance of black men into the Union army and navy, enabling the liberated to become



Lincoln at Antietam, Maryland, in 1862

added to the Republican Party platform for the upcoming presidential elections. He used all of his political skill and influence to convince additional Democrats to support the amendment’s passage.

His efforts finally met with success when the House passed the bill in January 1865 with a vote of 119-56. Finally, Lincoln supported those congressmen who insisted southern state legislatures must adopt the Thirteenth Amendment before their states would be allowed to return



Lincoln in 1865 just before his assassination

**“The ability to see the world clearly, and to draw the right conclusions from what is seen, is the foremost lesson which great men and women of state have to teach us . . .”**

liberators. By the end of the war, almost 200,000 black soldiers and sailors had fought for the Union and the abolition of slavery.

The Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery, was passed during the Civil War years when southern congressional representatives were not present for debate.

The amendment was passed in April 1864 by the Senate, with a vote of 38 to 6. The required two-thirds majority was defeated in the House of Representatives by a vote of 93 to 65. Abolishing slavery was almost exclusively a Republican Party effort—only four Democrats voted for it.

Lincoln then took an active role in pushing it through Congress. He insisted that the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment be

with full rights in Congress.

### Standing by convictions

“Lincoln had to face the voters [in 1864], and he feared he would lose reelection. Exhausted after three and a half years of civil war, many Northerners were turning to the Democratic aspirant, General George McClellan, who was pledging a quick peace with the Rebels. Lincoln’s political advisers told him that his Emancipation Proclamation was dragging him down: millions of northerners were willing to shed blood to restore the American Union, but not to abolish slavery.

“Some told Lincoln that if he continued to make abolition a condition for peace with the South, he would be drubbed even in his home state of Illinois. Why not pull out of

the race in favor someone who could win?

“But Lincoln refused to withdraw or back down, and he knew the consequences. He told one visitor, ‘You think I don’t know I am going to be beaten, but I do—unless some great change takes place, badly beaten’” (Michael Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 2007, p. 96).

Lincoln had courage to stand up for what he believed to be righteous principles. He wanted to finish the work of freeing the slaves and preserving the nation that would be one nation free under God. He was willing to risk his political life instead of backing down from this fight he bravely stood up to champion.

The noted historian Paul Johnson, in identifying what he believes are vital characteristics of true leadership, mentioned Lincoln among others, stating: “The ability to see the world clearly, and to draw the right conclusions from what is seen, is the foremost lesson which great men and women of state have to teach us . . .

“Abraham Lincoln felt all else had to be sacrificed to the overwhelming necessity of holding the Union together, behind the principles of 1776 . . . Such concentration of effort is itself a product of clarity of vision which includes a strong sense of proportion” (quoted by William Bennett, *The Book of Man*, 2011, p. 321).

### It’s what’s inside that counts

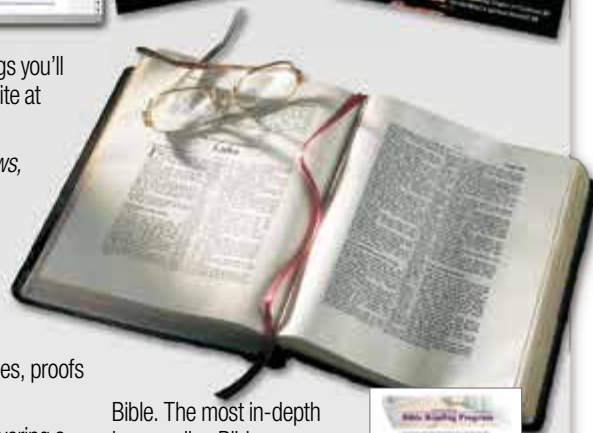
Lincoln was a homely man in appearance, far from photogenic. If he were alive today, it’s difficult to see him being elected president.

Because of his looks, he was advised to grow a beard while running for president by an 11-year-old girl, Grace Bedell, to improve his appearance. She wrote him in part:

“Have you any little girls about as large as I am if so give them my love and tell her to write to me if you cannot answer this letter. I have got 4 brothers and part of them will vote for you any way and if you let your whiskers grow I will try and get the rest of them to vote for you you would look a great deal better for your face is so thin” (Oct. 15, 1860).

Lincoln wrote her back: “My dear little Miss. Your very agreeable letter of the 15th is received—I regret the necessity of saying I have no daughters—I have three sons—one seventeen, one nine, and one seven years of age. They, with their mother, constitute my whole family. As to the whiskers, having never worn any, do you not

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think people would call it a piece of silly affection if I were to begin it now? Your very sincere well wisher A. Lincoln" (Oct. 19, 1860).

But he went ahead and took young Grace's advice. And during his inaugural train trip to the White House, he stopped in Westfield, New York, to give little Grace a kiss and thank her for her advice. This illustrated humility and grace.

A true leader needs godly characteristics more than anything. He should adhere to biblical commands. Abraham Lincoln was not officially a member of any church, but he endeavored to live by the Bible.

As historian Michael Beschloss noted: "Marching into the chasm of the Civil War, Lincoln immersed himself in the Bible, which he called 'the best gift God has given to man.'"

"During the summer of 1864, Lincoln's old Springfield roommate Joshua Speed stayed overnight at the Soldiers' Home . . . Recalling Lincoln's old complaints about religion, Speed was now startled to find the President in his bedroom, absorbed in his Bible. He told Lincoln, 'If you have recovered from your skepticism, I am sorry to say that I have not.'"

"'You are wrong, Speed,' replied Lincoln. 'Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a happier and better man'" (pp. 121-122).

What's the best brief summation of how a Christian should live? We find a good answer when Lincoln answered a congressman from Connecticut as to why he did not join a church.

Lincoln responded: "When any church will inscribe over its altars, as its sole qualification for membership, the Savior's condensed statement of the substance of both the law and the Gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,'—that church will I join with all my heart and soul" (quoted by David Gelernter, *Americanism: The Fourth Great Western Religion*, 2007, p. 33).

This is what Jesus Christ told a man who asked Him which was the greatest commandment in the law (Matthew 22:36-40). Abraham Lincoln no doubt knew and understood this. How blessed would any nation be to have a leader who truly believed and lived these words with all his heart and soul! **GN**

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# The Art of Appreciation: The Bucket Fillers

Each of us has a figurative “bucket” waiting to be filled. How can you fill your own and others’? *by Janet Treadway*



**S**everal years ago I was feeling a bit down while working at my job at the United Church of God home office and asked God privately to encourage me. Wow, did He answer that prayer quickly!

Later that very day, some wives of men on the Church’s Council of Elders walked in and handed me and other ladies working in the office beautiful gift bags with several nice gifts in them. Each had a couple of little tea bags, some cookies, a little planner and a handmade bookmark and card.

On the front of this pretty gift bag was the scripture 1 Corinthians 15:58, which says it all when it comes to how God feels about us. Not only were my spirits lifted, but so were those of all the ladies in the office.

Everyone wants and needs to be appreciated, no matter where we work or what we

**Every drop in our “emotional bucket” makes us stronger and more optimistic. But an empty bucket poisons our outlook, saps our energy and undermines our will.**

do in life. Aside from the paycheck that most of us receive, we all need to know that our contribution in life is appreciated. Our “buckets” need to be filled emotionally.

Not long before, I had read the book *How Full Is Your Bucket?* by Tom Rath and Don Clifford (2004). Its premise is that emotionally we all metaphorically have buckets that need to be filled. These buckets are constantly being either emptied or filled, depending on what others say or do to us. When our buckets are full, we feel great. When they’re empty, we feel awful.

Each of us is also figuratively equipped

with a “dipper” in our relations with others. When we use the dipper to fill other people’s buckets—by saying or doing things to increase their positive emotions—we also fill our own bucket. But when we use the dipper to dip from others’ buckets—by saying or doing things that decrease their positive emotions—we diminish ourselves.

Like the “cup that runneth over,” a full bucket gives us a positive outlook and renewed energy. Every drop in that bucket makes us stronger and more optimistic. But an empty bucket poisons our outlook, saps our energy and undermines our will. That’s why every time someone dips from our bucket, it hurts us.

The book also talks about why people leave their jobs. The number one reason is that they don’t feel appreciated. About 65 percent of Americans receive no recognition at all on their jobs. That is astounding and sad!

So we face a choice every moment of every day: We can fill one another’s buckets or we can dip from them. It’s an important choice—one that profoundly influences our relationships, productivity, health and happiness.

I thought of this book when the elders’ wives went around to the ladies in the office

and filled our buckets with appreciation. The scripture they placed on the bag also reminded me of how much God is a bucket-filler too! It reads: “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58, New International Version).

We all need to practice filling one another’s buckets with appreciation and kindness, no matter where we work, what we do, or whom we come in contact with. It makes a huge difference for others as well as for us! **GN**



# Two Questions for a Disciple

Jesus of Nazareth asked two key questions of His disciple Peter—questions that each of us also must ultimately answer. *by Robin Webber*

**J**esus Christ poses two great questions to every believer. They are yours alone to answer. These two questions are not designed to stump us, but to promote growth in Christ's calling to "Follow Me."

Both inquiries were initially asked by Christ and answered by His disciple Peter. One answer would open a door to blessed opportunity, and the other would provide a window to view responsibility. Let's put these two questions side by side to prepare you for giving your own answers.

## "Who do you say that I am?"

We find the first question in Matthew 16:13-17. Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" The disciples blurted out a list of names

pletely surrendered your life into His hands.

Let me be plain: There is a world of difference between *knowing who Jesus is* and *allowing Him to direct your steps*. Class was momentarily over for Peter, but there would be another day, another session and another question.

## "Do you love Me more than these?"

The second question was asked at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry in John 21. We here find Jesus and Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. A lot has occurred since they first met—years of travel together, miracles, visions of the Master's transfiguration, and Jesus' arrest, death and resurrection.

Now Christ comes to Peter with unfinished business. He asks the second and greater question: "Simon, son of Jonah, do

It's only after the third denial that the eyes of Peter and Jesus met (verse 61), and he knew that Christ knew he had denied Him three times just as Jesus had foretold. Understood in this light, Jesus' words would be crafted so as not to leave Peter frozen in time dangling as a coward—but rather giving him opportunity to be fully restored as a true follower.

## The questioning intensifies

Peter, perhaps taken by surprise by Christ's question, responds with, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." However, in this response Peter did not use the word for love that Jesus did. Instead the word here is *phileo*, meaning "brotherly affection." Peter was stressing that his was not just a general godly love for Christ as we are to have for all people. Rather, his love for Christ was personal and brotherly. Yet note that he did not exalt himself above the others in his response.

Jesus then tells Peter to channel his stated devotion into serving Him: "Feed My lambs"—His followers (John 21:15). In effect, Peter would demonstrate his stated devotion through His obedience to Christ and love for others.

Yet Jesus goes on to intensify the questioning by asking again, "*Do you love Me?*" (again the more general term *agapao* is used). We can imagine a bewildered Peter emotionally retorting, "C'mon, You know that I love you even as a brother" (once again the word *phileo* is used here instead of *agapao*).

But Christ has every right to question Peter's motives. After all, his life up to his recent denial justified such concerns!

Peter's religion, like that of so many, has been one of emotion and motion, not surrender and conviction. This kind appears dynamic and can make others appear lacking. But the flame that burns the hottest burns out faster, and Christ was guiding Peter to a spiritual depth and conviction that would have to endure beyond emotion alone. So He had to "turn up the heat" to mold Peter to clearly see himself.

He now tells Peter to shepherd His

## Christ was guiding Peter to a spiritual depth and conviction that would have to endure beyond emotion alone.

including John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah and other prophets—i.e., men like them!

But then Jesus narrowed the focus with no allowable wiggle room: "But who do *you* say that I am?"

Peter, so often quick on the draw, proclaimed, "You are the Christ [i.e., the Messiah—the promised King of the line of David], the Son of the living God." Jesus answered, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

Peter hit the proverbial nail right on the head, and was blessed.

But this was only the start of his spiritual education. The Jesus he saw was the Lord of the Bible, the personification of prophecy, but not yet fully understood or embraced as the complete Lord of his life. Perhaps that's where you might be right now. You're stuck and you don't know it. You know who Jesus is but haven't com-

you love Me more than these?" (verse 15).

Here the Greek word translated "love" is *agapao*, meaning a selfless, outgoing love. It seems likely that by "these," Jesus was referring to the other disciples. Thus: "Do you love me more than these others do?" (Good News Translation). This would have reminded Peter of his own words and actions found in Matthew 26:33: "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." In his characteristic bravado, Peter had said he would always be there and love Christ when others would not!

And yet, on the evening of Jesus' betrayal, when needed most, Peter denied Him three times. First Peter denied ever personally knowing Jesus (Luke 22:57). Then he not only denied Christ, but all his companions (verse 58). And finally and ultimately, he denied his entire experience with Christ, including his Galilee background (verses 59-60).





Peter went from denying Christ to becoming a pillar and powerful leader in the early Church.

sheep—to properly care for and lead them—a tremendous responsibility. Was he really up to it?

Then the third probing question (verse 17) is perhaps the deepest incision and yet the most meaningful, because now Peter is led to the full gravity of Jesus' inquiry. Jesus asks *three probing questions* for Peter's *three previous denials*.

Again Christ doesn't settle for superficial answers. He now uses the same term Peter had been using (*phileo*) in these verses. Essentially He asks Peter, "Are you truly personally devoted to Me as you say?"

### Restored to keep following

Peter then appeals to Jesus' judgment, stating: "Lord, You know all things." Peter well understood that his former boasting had been in vain. But now, with his heart opened to Christ's examination, Peter recognizes that he is being given the opportunity to turn things around—to remain faithful.

He then attests again that He does indeed love Christ with brotherly devotion. In contrast to his threefold denial of his relationship with Christ, Jesus has led him to a threefold *affirmation* of his relationship—one Peter will now be able to show in his service to Christ and Christ's other followers.

Jesus is hereby fulfilling His prophetic promise of restoration given to Peter on the night of His betrayal. He had directly told Peter then: "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have

returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31-32).

And now Peter *has* returned to Christ with a threefold affirmation of devotion. And Jesus encouragingly tells him, "Feed My sheep"—committing to him both a position of trust and the opportunity to prove himself in it. Thus, in His wisdom Christ has completely removed the cloud of Peter's denial and guilt—as if the scene in the courtyard of Jerusalem had never occurred.

Moreover, Jesus then declares confidence in Peter's faithfulness even to the end of his life, offering a startling and sobering picture of how he would eventually face death: "When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish"—an allusion to Peter's own crucifixion (John 21:18).

The day would come when Peter could not take matters into his own hands as he had long been used to doing. He would be given the honor of dying as his Master.

Then Jesus gave Peter another command: "*Follow Me*" (verse 19). In other words, "No matter what, you stay true to the course right behind Me."

Peter was willing, but sobered, and asked in verse 21, "But Lord, what about this man?"—referring to the disciple John. Jesus replied, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? *You follow Me.*" Jesus put it clearly and bluntly: "Keep your eyes *on Me* and not others."

### What does loving God bring?

As we leave the shores of the Sea of Galilee and face our own lives, let's ask a basic question: What does loving God bring? After all, that is His desire to all whom He bids to "Follow Me," and the response comes solely from each of us.

First, let's appreciate that when we commit our love to God, He will give us an assignment just as He did Peter. He essentially told Peter, "If you love Me, then you will show that love by loving those I will bring into your life."

Jesus earlier declared, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Talk is cheap. You may have told God you know and love Him, but how are you working on the assignment end of the relationship?

The spiritual GPS to get from point A to point B in Christianity has one set of guiding principles: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:12-15).

Expressing love to God the Father and Jesus Christ is an incredible one-on-one privilege, but it bears with it the responsibility to care for others.

Second, it brings forth sacrifice—*ours!* Love will always demand responsibility followed by sacrifice. The path of Christianity will always have a cross set before us—perhaps not quite like the martyrdom that awaited Peter, but laying down our lives nonetheless. Before we bear a crown from above, we must bear a cross here below. It will not be a cross of our choosing or timing, but, like the apostle Paul stated, we must be willing to "die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31).

Third, truly loving God brings acceptance and incredible peace of mind that frees us from worry and envy. Remember Peter's question of "What about John?" Christ basically answered: "Never mind the task I have given another. *You* stay focused on your personal journey with *Me.*"

When all was said and done, Peter would never be a lofty thinker like John or a cosmopolitan adventurer for the gospel like the apostle Paul, but he would preach what he knew to keep others from falling as he had fallen. He would speak to people as one who had made huge mistakes, one who had even denied his Savior, but one who could be fully restored and put into action on Christ's behalf.

And now as we put this article down and go on with the remainder of our lives, two questions yet face us:

*"Who do you say that I am?"*

*"Do you love Me?"*

Don't be surprised when Christ issues to you the same penetrating challenge He gave Peter. Your thoughts, words and deeds will reveal your answers as to whether you remain steadfast in His priceless invitation of "*Follow Me.*" **GN**

### Learn More

What does it mean to have faith? And what *is* faith, really? The Bible tells us that we are to *live* by faith, but what does that mean? How did the many figures of the Bible live by faith? Discover the answers in our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*. Request or download your free copy today!



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

[www.GNmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.GNmagazine.org/booklets)

# Train Now to Help Jesus Christ Rule

**J**esus Christ is coming back to earth as King of the Kingdom of God to save the human race from destroying itself. How will the rebellious and traumatized citizens of this world become the peaceful subjects of God's Kingdom? Who will help serve and teach the people? What does the Bible say about the citizens of the Kingdom of God?

In the past two mini-studies we looked at the return of Jesus Christ as King to save this world from itself and at the constitution of the Kingdom of God—God's laws. The King and the laws of the Kingdom are two of the four parts necessary for a kingdom. Today let's look at the third necessary component of the Kingdom—the citizens.

## A story of transformation

Consider the story of one of the Bible's most intriguing figures. Simon Bar-Jonah was a rough fisherman—brave, audacious and zealous. His life goals surely didn't include becoming a fancy preacher or a high-and-mighty king. But when he heard Jesus' message, he was convinced that this was the real thing. This was a true and powerful message from God.

So when Jesus asked him to leave his fishing nets behind and become one of His "fishers of men," Simon could not refuse.

What followed was a remarkable time of training and transformation. Day after day he walked the dusty roads with Jesus, hearing His parables and teachings. He watched Jesus' service to others and was sent out to practice serving others too.

He felt the joy of Jesus' praise and the sting of His corrections. All these things were helping shape and mold the clay that would become the powerful apostle Peter. And those same experiences were training him for the job Jesus promised him in the Kingdom of God—to be king of one of the tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29-30)!

Jesus gave two final commands to Peter: "Feed My sheep" and "Follow Me" (John 21:17, 19). The biblical record is of a man who did both of those things throughout the rest of his life.

The incredible thing is, the training program God used for Peter is also available to us through the Bible and living the Christian life today. Peter's last recorded words to Christ's sheep were the encouragement for us to also follow the same training program: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).

## Christ's loyal subjects

In 6,000 years of recorded history, there have been few times of real justice, happiness and peace between people. And there have been even fewer times when people truly obeyed their Creator God. Living the way of "get" described in the last mini-study has led humanity along a downward spiral, threatening our very existence.

As we have seen in the last two studies, things will change! Jesus Christ will take over as King. His laws will become the constitution of the coming Kingdom of God. But these two elements are not enough. The *citizens themselves* must change. The transformation of rebellious humanity into the peaceful subjects of the

Kingdom of God is a fascinating story. It's a story that can begin today—with you!

## ► What will people's predominant attitudes and actions be in the last days before Jesus Christ's second coming?

"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.' 'Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit'; 'the poison of asps is under their lips'; 'whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes'" (Romans 3:10-18).

Because the selfish way of "get" so thoroughly fills the world, people do not even realize that thinking and doing what "seems right" to them is actually producing the world's problems. They want peace but live in ways that make peace impossible. And matters will only worsen as the end draws nearer.

## ► What will be the state of humanity when Christ returns?

"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).

"But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts" (Revelation 9:20-21).

Human rebellion will bring the worst time of trouble the world has ever seen. It will be worse than the Inquisition, the pogroms, the genocides or the Holocaust. Yet even through the plagues and troubles, people will refuse to repent, and nations will even try to fight Christ at His return! But at the end of it all, the remnant of humanity still alive will be ready to surrender, and they will be in great need of healing in body, mind and spirit.

## ► Whom will Jesus Christ rule, and what will they come to see?

"Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:14).



“O LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say, ‘Surely our fathers have inherited lies, worthlessness and unprofitable things’” (Jeremiah 16:19).

“No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For



## When Jesus asked Simon to leave his fishing nets behind and become one of His “fishers of men,” he entered a remarkable time of training and transformation.

I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).

All people will finally come to know that all human ways and traditions are worthless. Eventually each person will be able to learn God’s way and have a personal relationship with God.

### ► Who will help Jesus Christ teach and rule the people?

“But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” (Daniel 7:18; see also Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21).

Jesus Christ will have His transformed followers *assist Him* in teaching and caring for all people. All those set apart in this age by the gift of God’s Spirit are known as saints (Romans 1:7; 5:5).

### ► What specific jobs in the Kingdom of God are mentioned in the Bible?

“David My servant shall be king over them [the Israelites], and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever” (Ezekiel 37:24-25 ; see also Jeremiah 30:9).

“So Jesus said to them [His 12 apostles], ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’” (Matthew 19:28).

Notice that in the Kingdom of God, King David will reign over all Israel and each of the 12 apostles will rule over individual tribes of Israel—so there will be a tiered structure of governance.

### ► What other jobs should we be preparing to help with in the Kingdom of God?

“... Your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:20-21).

“And so it was that when he [a nobleman representing Jesus in a parable] returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned ten minas.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned five minas.’ Likewise he said to him, ‘You also be over five cities’” (Luke 19:15-19).

The Bible lists future responsibilities such as teaching people God’s ways and serving them as rulers over cities. God’s people have the challenge to train now for those future responsibilities!

### ► How do we prepare to serve in God’s Kingdom?

“... But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ...” (2 Peter 3:18).

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).

“But Jesus called them [His disciples] to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’” (Mark 10:42-45).

To be able to teach and help others to live God’s way in the future, we must learn and practice His ways now. To help others overcome sin and transform their lives, we must overcome sin and transform our lives. To serve Jesus and others effectively in the future, we must learn to serve them now. Jesus Christ will bring a way of peace and real joy that will spread to all people around the world. He wants us to now be training to help Him in that most wonderful work. Now is the time for you to accept that challenge!

### Apply what you’ve learned now

In the last mini-study we looked at God’s command for Israelite kings to write out a copy of God’s laws and to read them regularly (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Writing down scriptures can help emphasize what we are studying, and thinking deeply about God’s words can help us keep the right perspective.

Last time we asked you to write out the first four commandments. Today, take the time to write down the last six of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20:12-17. These six commandments deal with our relationships with other people and help explain how to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

After writing down these six commandments, take time to reread them and to think about how to apply them every day. You will find a chapter about each of these commandments in our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*, which you’ll find very helpful in your further study of this subject. Download or request your free copy today! **GN**





# Lessons From the Parables

## Hope and Restoration— the Story of the Prodigal Son

What can we learn from Jesus Christ's parable of the prodigal son? In a world of broken relationships, it teaches us a lesson of deep love and hope. *by Darris McNeely*

**A**s he did every day, the father walked from his home to the small hill where he could look down the road and see for several miles. He always thought, and hoped, that he would see a familiar figure heading his way.

His thoughts were always the same—a mixture of longing, of hope and of regret. When he failed to see what he'd hoped, he would turn and go about the business of the day. There was always work to be done. But there was also the empty place created by the one who a long while back had chosen to leave and go far away from his home.

The father remembered the day his son left the family. The young man wanted his portion of inheritance to go out on his own and make an independent life. It would create a hardship to divide off his portion earlier than planned. But the father did it, with regret, but knowing it was the only thing that could be done. His son would learn life's hardest lesson no other way.

Watching him go was the most difficult moment of the father's life, knowing that his son wasn't prepared for life and that he wouldn't listen to him for instruction or wisdom. When would he return? And when he did, could the family environment be the same?

This is the story Jesus Christ told in Luke 15, commonly known as the parable of the prodigal son. It recounts a son's departure from his father's home, the lessons he learns, and his return, wiser for the experience. It is also the story of a family's journey to reconciliation.

Families are the foundation of life. The biblical family is the model on which God is building a spiritual family of glorified sons and daughters. This parable tells of a

son who was lost and then found. While it shows many details about a family, in the end one truth stands out—a father's patient endurance for the son he loves.

### The story in brief

Let's review the account. A man had two sons. One day the younger came to him with a demand: He wanted an early disbursement of his inheritance. Despite the likely hardship that would come in taking this money from the estate, the father gave the son his portion. So off the young man went, into another life.

He traveled, it says, to a far country.

**God the Father stands waiting for the time when each of His children will at last realize the need for a lasting and satisfying relationship with Him.**

Distance in a relationship is not always measured in miles. It would seem the distance in this relationship had grown to become quite vast long before he left the family home. The son no longer wanted to live under his father's roof.

Did he no longer respect his father? Had some longstanding unresolved tension between the two led to a severing of relations to where they could no longer "walk together" (Amos 3:3)?

The story allows almost anything to be read into it to provide an explanation. Father-son relations are beautiful to behold but also at times complex. Could it be that the son had emotionally left the home long before he physically walked out the door?

In time the son burned through his money and found himself penniless. High

living beyond his means reduced him to doing manual labor for a daily wage. Using all the material enticements available to us today, it's easy to imagine how his money could've easily disappeared. A new car or expensive motorcycle. Costly meals. Entertaining and spending money on people whose friendship was dependent on his ample bank account—their friendship lasting only as long as he had money.

After working at a job that paid little and gave no satisfaction, he began to evaluate his situation. He was barely making enough money to buy food. It seems the animals that he fed ate better than he. No money. No friends. No good prospects.

### A breakdown of relationships

What would you do in such a situation? Would pride prevent you from returning home or restoring a relationship? Would

stubbornness push you toward self-destructive behavior such as addiction to drugs or alcohol? Or perhaps you might feel your parent no longer loved you and would not want you back.

Perhaps you actually find yourself at present in a position similar to that of the son in the parable. You have been estranged from a parent or friend and feel you cannot return to him or her. You can't bring yourself to pick up the phone or reach out and begin to mend a broken relationship.

It's a sad feature of life today. We're connected by so much social media yet can't always connect at the deepest level of love and meaning. You can have hundreds, even thousands, of "friends" on Facebook but be all alone in your life at the most critical moments. It's vital to have friends and those





A key lesson of the parable of the prodigal son is that there is always hope for reconciliation.

on the phone and said, "This is Donna, your daughter." The man discovered he had a family he knew nothing about. He quickly agreed to meet and began making up for lost time, knowing time could not be regained but determined not to allow any more to be lost.

That is how it will be one day for those who wait. That is what this parable is talking about. The prodigals will return. They will come to a moment of clarity and say: "I want a relationship once again with those who love me and pray for me. I need to go home!"

### **A message about deep love**

Jesus Christ gave this parable to encourage families. God's great plan of salvation is based on the family structure of a father and mother and children born within the love of a relationship based on His laws governing the family. And the basis of that law is love—the love of a parent for a child.

This parable shows the deep love of a father for his lost son. I can imagine him praying each day for his son's return, requesting God to guard him from harm, asking God to help the son even when the son's behavior didn't honor God. During these prayers the understanding that God wouldn't suspend the law of consequences didn't keep him from asking for God's mercy and goodness on the lad.

This parable is also about each of us. God the Father stands waiting for the time when each of His children will at last realize the need for a lasting and satisfying relationship with Him.

The image of family reconciliation and turning of hearts is quoted in one of the great prophetic messages of the Old Testament (Malachi 4:6). This parable of the lost son combined with this prophecy helps us to understand God's deep desire to bring reconciliation within His creation. Together these form a promise that you can take to His throne of grace and claim in full faith. When hearts turn to God, they will also return to those human relationships that have been broken through the years. You can count on it.

### **Holding out hope**

The parable of the lost son is a parable for today. It offers hope for all who long for reconciliation. Whether it be with a child, a parent or a friend from the past, this story points to hope. It teaches that even when hope is deferred and the heart is sick, there is the promise that hope will blossom into a tree of life (Proverbs 13:12).

Imagine for a moment the day the father goes out to the hill and at last sees his son coming up the road. What joy and elation he feels! His heart immediately reaches out to his returning son, his feet quickly propelling him forward to the exuberant embrace. Both father and son are together again, the distance bridged and the time apart forgotten.

His years of hope and longing are summed in the declaration, "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:24).

You may think this is a good place to end. But the story goes on. There is the reaction of the older son. Remember him—the one who stayed and honored his father and worked to build the family business? At first he wasn't that happy over the return of his brother. When he came home that day and heard the noise from the celebration, he wondered what it was all about. When he heard his brother had returned home and a banquet was being held in his honor, it was more than he could handle.

He refused to join in the celebration. On hearing of his son's anger, the father pleaded with him to join in welcoming home his brother. But he couldn't because, as he put it: "These many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him" (verses 29-30).

Once again the father showed his wisdom: "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found" (verse 31-32).

The bond forged between the father and the older son could never be broken. The loyalty and dependability of the son here had been proven beyond doubt. Such relationships need no party or grand demonstration of fact. Trust was simply there.

I like to imagine the two brothers reconciling and their healed relationship becoming stronger and enduring through the years. The father lives on to see grandchildren run through his home with shouts of joy and fun. In his later years he thanks God for all of his family, and in time he dies, full of years and giving thanks to God with his last breath for His goodness and grace.

There is always hope for reconciliation. Pray for it and expect it. Never ever give up on God! **GN**

we can talk with to receive counsel, encouragement and support. It also takes effort to keep the lines of communication open.

Returning to Christ's story, it now reaches the most critical point. The young man comes to himself when he realizes the servants in his father's home have plenty of food and don't go hungry. He says, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:18).

Imagine the moment of humility. He's at the end of his rope. All his natural confidence is gone. He realizes he can't go forward on his own. He knows that he must return home. The journey is now at its most crucial moment.

### **It's never too late**

How many of you are waiting for a child to return to you and your home—back to a relationship that may have been severed long ago? You think back over the long months and years—lost time that cannot be regained. Yet you haven't lost hope. You wait for a letter, an e-mail, a call or to hear footsteps on the path to your house. You know that someday it will happen, you just don't know when. A day doesn't go by that you don't think about your child.

The news recently carried a story about an 87-year-old man who was reunited with his daughter after 40 years. He had divorced her mother when the daughter was four, and he last saw her when she was 12. For more than 40 years he didn't see his child.

She grew up, married, had children and grandchildren. One day she called him

# Letters From Our Readers

## **"Waiting for Marriage: What Do I Do Now?"**

I really enjoyed the articles in the November-December issue. Especially appreciated was Amanda Stiver's article on being single. At age 68, collecting social security, still single and with no prospects in sight, I'm not worrying about "singleness." But if someone had sat me down about age 18 and gone through what was in Amanda's article, possibly I'd be married now.

When I worked in a nursing home, I found that well over half of the residents had never been married, and it might well have been more. Keep in mind that there are millions of single people who don't have the social skills to attract anyone and I'm one of them. If you're wondering, nobody has ever introduced me to a lady, invited me to a party or any other social event.

*Reader from South Dakota*

*Thank you for your courageous and frank letter, which helps present a more complete picture of what it's like for some to be single. As you state, developing social skills is essential. Our free booklet Making Life Work may help you and other readers (see [www.ucg.org/booklets](http://www.ucg.org/booklets)). For our younger readers ages 12-22, we also suggest a free subscription to Vertical Thought, our youth magazine. It's also available for everyone to download or read online at [www.VerticalThought.org](http://www.VerticalThought.org).*

## **Kingdom of God articles**

I am absolutely delighted about *The Good News* magazine that you kindly send me. After receiving it today, I have already embarked on the avid reading of the first 20 pages. And I can say that the articles helped me clarify and understand much of the message in the Bible about the Kingdom of God. I will visit your website for sending a donation.

*S.S., Norwich, England*

The articles about the Kingdom of God have been expository and revealing. Thank you for this blessing.

*O.A., County Cork, Ireland*

I've been reading your magazine for many years. I've always loved reading all your articles. I read them to my husband. We read "What Is the Kingdom of God?" [pages 4 to 7]. Then when we came to page 16 of "Your Down Payment on Divinity" by Jerold Aust, I was shocked by what I read. When he talked about the Holy Spirit in John 16:5-7, he put "it" in the place of "Him" which is in the Bible, King James Version and New Living Translation. Why did he alter this? Thank you so much for your reply to help me understand. I'd like to keep reading and trusting in your magazine.

*S.S., Colfax, Louisiana*

*Thank you for your commendable attitude and your honest question. You can find a detailed explanation in our free booklet Is God a Trinity?—which we have already mailed to you. The answer is on pages 58 and 59 in the section titled "Why the Holy Spirit Is Sometimes Incorrectly Referred to as 'He' and 'Him.'"*

*Briefly, unlike English, the Greek language in which the New Testament was written assigns a specific gender for every noun. Every object, animate or inanimate, is designated as either masculine, feminine or neuter, and corresponding pronouns such as "he," "she" or "it" would be used. Often the gender*

*is unrelated to whether the item is indeed masculine or feminine.*

*To use some modern examples, the French word for "book" is livre. It is of the masculine gender and is referred to by a pronoun equivalent to the English "he" or "him." Similarly, the Spanish word for "table," la mesa, has been assigned the feminine gender. Of course, neither a book nor a table has any real gender. You'll find a much more complete explanation in the Trinity booklet mentioned above.*

## **Kingdom of God Seminar**

I attended a Kingdom of God Seminar in London this afternoon and found it very informative. Unfortunately, I had to leave early to catch a coach home, just as the question time was starting. I have found all your information trustworthy and biblical.

*A.E., Canterbury, England*

*Thank you for your kind comments. We will gladly inform you in advance of the time and venue of the next seminar in London. In the meantime, you may wish to request our free booklets The Gospel of the Kingdom and What Is Your Destiny?*

## **The Good News**

I sit waiting my turn when visiting my eye doctor. So I reach for something to read. Some years back, I came across *The Good News* magazine and have been reading it ever since. *The Good News* has changed my life completely. In your last issue you mentioned the seventh-day Sabbath. I am sending you some money. I hope it helps.

*V.R., Plainview, Texas*

*The gentleman from Texas may already have our free booklet Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest. Any of our readers may also download it or request a printed copy. Contributions do help a great deal in sharing the message of the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20). We sincerely appreciate them.*

I just wanted to let you know that I think *The Good News* is the best magazine anywhere in the world today. And it just keeps getting better and better. I have read all but five issues of what you have online, including those older issues from earlier years.

*B.J.L., Internet*

Thank you for the subscription. I have enjoyed *The Good News* through the years. It has educated me about the truth of what God expects of us. I saw my first issue at a friend's house. From there I grew to be sound in God's Word. Please forgive me for not really complimenting you for such a great job done and a good ministry.

*B.M., Commonwealth of Dominica*

Your May-June issue touched my heart so much. I was reading it to my husband and just started crying. It was so moving and educational for us during this journey and time in our lives. It ministered directly to our situation. I am so thankful for *The Good News*.

*S. S., Internet*

*The Good News* is not just a magazine to me. The documentation in each issue is such worthwhile information that it brings transformation to serious people. Thank you so much for your efforts.

*V.V., India*

## **The Ten Commandments**

Thank you for your timely booklet *The Ten Commandments*. I can now say that I understand better the purpose and intent of God behind the Bible. I have finally come to the light. I have studied the Word of God over the past six to seven years through Bible school and on my own. Your literature has made it all clear. Enclosed you will find my personal check as a contribution toward your future efforts.

*C.A.S., Phoenix, Arizona*

## **You Can Understand Bible Prophecy**

I have read your booklet about Bible prophecy, and I must say that it changed the way I visualized the end time. I like the fact that it is backed up by words from

## **Visit *The Good News* on Facebook**

Are you on Facebook? If so, visit our *Good News* magazine page. See what other readers are saying. Find links to interesting articles and Web commentaries. Become a *Good News* magazine Facebook fan!

I really enjoy *The Good News* magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

*- K.T., Good News magazine Facebook fan*



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# Questions & Answers

**Q: "I read your article "Whom Would Jesus Christ Choose to Be a World Leader?" It is stated that sometimes God places leaders in office. When one reads Colossians 1:15-16, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-14 and Daniel 2:21; 4:17, I have to conclude that God sets up all world rulers. How do you square that circle?"**

**L.C., Internet**

A: While these scriptural passages do show that God has the capacity, authority and the power to both set up rulers and remove them, they do not actually say that He *always exercises this power*. Ultimately all things are under our Creator's overall sovereignty and He reserves the right to use it as necessary to fulfill His purpose on earth.

A case in point is when God specifically intervened and raised up Cyrus to be king over Persia to further the working out of His plan for the exiles from the nation of Judah to return from Babylonia and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (Isaiah 44:28).

Although God the Father is "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matthew 11:25; Acts 17:24), He has allowed Satan to remain on earth as "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4) until Jesus Christ returns and orders him removed from all authority and power (Revelation 20:1-3). Clearly the devil is the on-site, behind-the-scenes ruler of this present world or age.

The apostle Paul referred to Satan as the "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). Jesus called this evil being "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The devil even offered Jesus all the world's kingdoms if He would only fall down and worship him (Matthew 4:9). Jesus totally rejected Satan's offer (verse 10), but He did not dispute the implication that the devil had these kingdoms to give.

God does not tempt or influence anyone to sin (James 1:13). But the devil has shown himself to be a master at tempting people, beginning with Eve in the Garden of Eden. Dictators and even democratic leaders are certainly no exceptions. The evidence of the devil's work is everywhere on this planet, and not least among rulers. Just read your daily newspaper or watch the news on television.

Of course, the Bible does teach us to respect and pray for our rulers, no matter what their lifestyles happen to be (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3;

1 Peter 2:13-14). Apparently the corrupt tyrant Nero was Roman emperor when Paul gave this instruction to the Christians in Rome.

One of the spinoffs of sin is confusion, and God is certainly not the author of confusion, wanting mankind—especially Christians—to do everything in proper order (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). It is Satan who is the author of the chaos and confusion we see in our world and its governments! (To learn more, download or request our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?*)

Another basic principle we should all understand is that God has granted human beings the power of choice—the capacity to exercise free will. Our Creator always wants us to choose the right way (Deuteronomy 30:19), but just as He allowed Adam and Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit, so He also has allowed their descendants to choose the wrong way and then suffer the inevitable consequences. As was pointed out in the article, God allowed the Israelites to have a human king when they sinfully demanded it (1 Samuel 8).

It is true, as the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar came to admit, "that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men" (Daniel 4:17), but we should understand this in the sense that God exercises overall direction to ensure that His great purposes are worked out on earth, including the fulfillment of promises and prophecies He has given.

Although God has made a number of major exceptions during this present age of man, He has largely adopted a "hands-off" policy so that humanity in general will eventually learn through hard experience that we desperately need Jesus Christ to come and directly reign over us. Christ is the King and Ruler in the life of true Christians now, but after He returns He will establish the Kingdom of God over all nations in the direct sense of a ruling world government.

In the meantime, God Almighty has and exercises the power to move the pieces on the chessboards of history and prophecy so that the overall human experience fulfills His plan and purpose for mankind. Our free booklets *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* and *What Is Your Destiny?* outline the whole plan of God, adding many details. You can download or request both from our website at [www.GNmagazine.org](http://www.GNmagazine.org)/booklets.

the Bible itself, and I now see My Redeemer differently than before. Thank you for giving me the knowledge in this booklet. I would like to read more of your literature, and I would like another copy of this booklet to give to friends.

**P.C., Internet**

## Reader comments from Canada

I am writing to thank you for all the help and information that you send me, and would like to receive more of your booklets. Some of the people for which I request your booklets do not have a home or address of their own. Yet they want more information, as they live in a shelter day by day, receiving some food from food banks or wherever. I am trying to help these people as much as I can.

**Reader from Ontario**

I got my latest issue of *The Good News* and was expecting to find my letter in the *Letters From Our Readers* feature. I thought it was a good letter in that it was about "Sex and the Young Christian." I sent my letter to Cincinnati, Ohio, as directed in the magazine.

**Reader from Ontario**

*Thanks for sending us your comments—and for writing again. Please*

*understand, though, that we receive many letters and have room for only a small selection. But feel free to write us again. Readers can also send comments on Good News articles to our office nearest them (in your case in Canada). See addresses on page 2.*

## Comment from the Maldives

I would like to cancel my *Good News* subscription and any other publications as I live in a majority Muslim country. I will continue to view your publication online. Thank you for your support and hard work in sending the magazine for all those long years.

**Reader from Maldives**

*Thank you for your kind comments. We understand your circumstances and have removed your name from our active subscription list.*

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to *The Good News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or e-mail [gninfo@ucg.org](mailto:gninfo@ucg.org) (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).

# Men and Women of Steel and Velvet

When should we show tenderness and bigheartedness—the “velvet” qualities? And when should we be like steel—firm and resolute?

by Mario Seiglie

**A**s author Aubrey Andelin noted in his book *Man of Steel and Velvet*, only one human being ever fully modeled the best aspects of firm determination and gentle caring, though a few others have set admirable examples: “Christ stands alone. None can be compared to Him. However, in a modest way other great men have left a mark that will not be forgotten. Such is Abraham Lincoln, who was described by [his biographer] Carl Sandburg as possessing qualities of steel and velvet [see quote at the top of the next page] . . .

“Lincoln demonstrated then and now how a person can possess both a will of iron and a heart of tenderness. Nothing deterred the president during the American Civil War from his ‘noble’ cause, and few persons have ever endured more criticism and detractors than Lincoln. Yet he was no more a man of steel than one of velvet” (1972, p. 15).

How can we tell when it’s the right time to be tender (apply the velvet qualities) versus firm (the steely characteristics)? After all, if the velvet approach is used when the steel would be better, we could end up with a colossal failure on our hands. And we shouldn’t confuse an iron will with hard-headed stubbornness.

Part of what made Abraham Lincoln great

was his discernment of when to apply steel and when to use velvet. Likewise, true godly character can be defined as doing the right thing at the right time and for the right reason.

Motivational author Steve Groodier wrote: “Another courageous American, Martin Luther King, Jr. some hundred years later [after Lincoln’s death], encouraged us to exhibit tough minds and soft hearts . . . not the other way around. Be mentally tough; your resolve and determination will

**There are dozens of men and women of steel and velvet in the Bible—their examples make a good study for young men and women who want to develop these qualities.**

overcome great obstacles along life’s path. But let your heart be soft; your compassion and love will make the journey worth it” (“Men of Steel and Velvet,” *Life Support Systems Newsletter*, Dec. 1, 2009, p. 1).

In the Bible God developed men and women of steel and velvet through the tests and trials He let them face. Let’s note a few examples.

## **Abraham—a man of steel and velvet**

Throughout his life, the biblical patriarch Abraham showed both steel and velvet in his character.

Consider first his “velvet” side. Abraham and his nephew Lot had difficulties with their livestock grazing together. Since Abraham was the head of the clan, he had the first choice of picking the best land to graze. But Abraham graciously allowed Lot to have first pick of where to live, being happy to settle for second. Lot chose the verdant, well-watered Jordan plain, while Abraham was left with the more arid, mountainous terrain. It was quite a sacrifice for Abraham, but he showed his “velvet” side (see Genesis 13:7-12).

On the other hand, when the occasion arose, Abraham applied his “steely” side. After hearing that a coalition of kings defeated the kings from where Lot settled

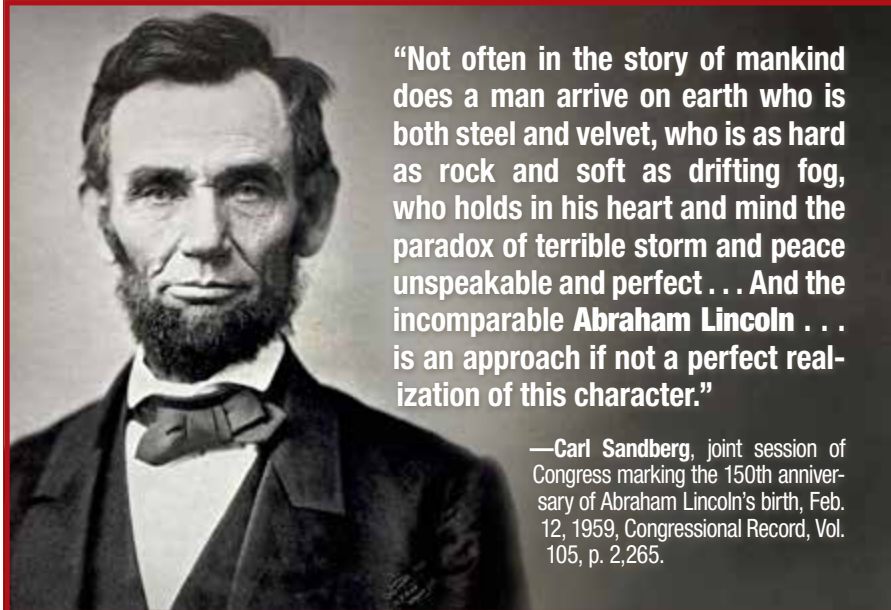
and had kidnapped him, Abraham took a few hundred of his servants and ambushed the victorious rulers in a daring night raid. Abraham defeated them, rescued Lot and returned the plunder to the king of Sodom (see Genesis 14:14-15). That took enormous strength of will and courage!

## **Esther—a woman of steel and velvet**

This young lady showed her steel and velvet qualities while facing the greatest test of her life—which included the possible extermination of all her people, the Jews.

The Persian king had removed his for-





**“Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as rock and soft as drifting fog, who holds in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and peace unspeakable and perfect . . . And the incomparable Abraham Lincoln . . . is an approach if not a perfect realization of this character.”**

—Carl Sandberg, joint session of Congress marking the 150th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth, Feb. 12, 1959, Congressional Record, Vol. 105, p. 2,265.

mer queen and used a “beauty contest” to replace her. Esther showed her velvet attributes by humbly accepting advice from the palace eunuch. She displayed grace and a modest beauty that won the king’s heart (Esther 2:15-17). She was then crowned as the new queen of the great Persian Empire.

But Esther’s inner steel came to play when the king’s right-hand man persuaded him to issue a death sentence against all the Jews in the kingdom (neither knowing that Esther was a Jew).

Persian law held that even the queen couldn’t talk with the king unless she was invited. If she presented herself uninvited before the king, she would be immediately executed—unless the king intervened (which seemed unlikely!).

After fasting for three days, Esther courageously went before the king. He did intervene, sparing her life, and asked her what she desired. Esther showed her velvet side again by not revealing her dire situation until it was the right moment.

She invited the king and Haman, the king’s chief counselor who was behind the Jewish death sentence, to a private dinner. She built suspense that intrigued and delighted the king. Then she coyly invited them to a second private banquet.

By this time, the king was beside himself to please her, and it was only then that she revealed that she, being a Jew, was going to die because of Haman’s plot against her people. The king was filled with rage. Instead of Esther and her people perishing, it was actually Haman and all the enemies of the Jews who were killed (Esther 9:5).

If you want to see a great summary of a woman’s steel and velvet qualities—of strength, gentleness, firmness and compassion—read Proverbs 31:10-31.

### Ultimate steel and velvet

The perfect example of the man of steel and velvet is Jesus Christ. Notice His velvet qualities: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Jesus displayed His steely side when dealing with the greedy money changers at the temple: “Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer;” but you have made it a den of thieves’” (Matthew 21:12-13).

There are dozens of men and women of steel and velvet in the Bible—like Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Ruth, David, the prophets, and many men and women of the New Testament. Their examples would make a very good Bible study for young men and women who want to develop these qualities of steel and velvet.

God wants you to, but do you personally want to become a man or women of steel and velvet? I can guarantee that if you choose to pursue this aim, it will be one of the best decisions you’ll ever make! **GN**



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communities. They're a guide to transform the way we think, what we do and how we live.



We've prepared a free, eye-opening booklet that we'd love to share with you. Just contact us at our office in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

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