

The Good News

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A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

THE RUSSIAN BEAR REAWAKENS

Where Does Russia Fit in Prophecy? **13** • A Dangerous Age of Appeasement **18**
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TODAY
UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

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Seventy years ago World War II was entering its last stages. Nazi Germany would be defeated within days, followed by Japan a few months later. That war ended with the United States and Russia dominating the world stage. They would jockey for position and domination over the next few decades.

In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed under its own weight, leaving the United States as the world's only superpower. For a time it appeared that the world would see a new era of global peace and cooperation. But it was not to be.

The horrifying suicide airliner attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, brought the shocking reality that *jihad* had awakened from its long slumber and was on the march again, resuming its mortal battle with the West. America responded with invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq—only to learn, like the British and Russians earlier, why Afghanistan had rightly come to be known as “the graveyard of empires.”

Bruised by two long wars, America began a retreat. The world's policeman, worn and exhausted, hung up its badge and guns and chose to “lead from behind”—a euphemism for relinquishing its world

Bruised by two long wars, America began a retreat. Not surprisingly, others rushed into the vacuum.

leadership role and turning inward. Not surprisingly, others rushed into the vacuum. Now we see chaos almost everywhere we look.

China, recognizing American weakness, is aggressively upgrading its military capabilities and throwing its weight around—pressing territorial claims at the expense of weaker neighbors such as the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea and Japan.

Russia, the primary subject of this issue, is likewise updating its military forces, including testing new nuclear missile systems.

Just over a year ago, in March 2014, Russia wrested control of Crimea from Ukraine and absorbed it into the Russian Federation. Overlapping the Crimean takeover, pro-Russian factions carved out significant portions of eastern and southern Ukraine in what has been described as a “stealth invasion” to reclaim Ukraine as part of the former Soviet Union. Now the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are very nervous about a similar fate overtaking them.

In the Middle East, the so-called “Arab Spring” was hailed as a pro-freedom movement—but turned out to be anything but. Today much of the Middle East is aflame in a way not seen in centuries.

The Islamic State erases national borders in its push to expand its caliphate. Entire nations such as Iraq, Syria and Lebanon no longer exist as we've known them. In Yemen—a chokepoint for control of much of the world's oil supply—the Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam are engaged in a full shooting war. Across North Africa nations descend into chaos and bloodshed.

Jesus Christ foretold that “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matthew 24:7) as part of initial troubles that would grow in frequency and intensity until culminating in an unprecedented period that would lead to human extinction apart from the direct intervention of God sending His Son to establish a worldwide Kingdom and enforce peace (verses 21-22).

This time is swiftly approaching, so we urge you to diligently read every issue of *The Good News*. We want to help you make sense of world news in the light of Bible prophecy. The terrible state of the world is also why you need to join us in continually praying to God, “Your Kingdom come!”

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

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THE RUSSIAN B



EAR REAWAKENS

Russia's recent actions in Ukraine follow a long history of imperialist oppression. Are these events leading the world back to the brink of nuclear extinction? *by Victor Kubik*

In the last U.S. presidential election, many scoffed at candidate Mitt Romney when he named Russia as America's foremost foreign policy threat. Wasn't that ancient history with the ending of the Cold War in the 1990s? But not so many are scoffing at the idea now.

To the shock and concern of many, Russia under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin has taken up its old role of destabilizing provocation, supplying advanced weapons to so-called "separatists" in a war against Ukraine. Apparent subterfuge, deception, shifting of blame, and even open warfare have dramatically increased tensions.

As one with strong ties and current experience in Russia, Ukraine and the

former Soviet Union, I have kept a watchful eye on the storm clouds of war gathering over Eastern Europe and Asia (see also the companion article "Ukraine: A Personal Look at a Country in Crisis" beginning on page 10). Of course this is a situation we should all be watching.

At the moment, tensions dizzyingly rise and fall with frenzied negotiations, blustering and broken promises. What is the outcome in Ukraine to date? Thousands have died, including many civilians, children among them. More than a million people have seen their lives dissolve into anonymous refugee status.

Pro-Russian forces have taken over the Crimea and captured Soviet-era warships. With the bullying, illegal annexation of this Black Sea peninsula in 2014, Mother

Russia regains a warm-water port—free from limiting marine ice—from which to launch its newly commissioned nuclear submarines and battle cruisers.

Peace has all but disappeared in this region—the fervent hopes of continuing independence after the breakup of the Soviet Union almost 24 years ago nearly dashed.

Will this conflict between Russia and Ukraine just blow over? Or will it spread to the Baltic nations and beyond? Where is this leading, and what does it mean for you and me?

Increased tensions toward possible nuclear exchange?

The world is quite different today from the times of the resource-draining Cold War of the 1950s and 60s. Back then the fanciful doctrine of mutually assured destruction appeared to hold nuclear protagonists in place, despite the United States and Soviet Union poking and prodding each other in conflicts all over the earth.

Then 24 years ago a stunned world watched the Soviet flag descend from atop the Kremlin, the Russian tricolor hoisted in its place. The unthinkable had happened. The once-feared and mighty Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had crumbled. The Soviet Union was no more, the Cold War at an end.

Today, though, the renewed winds of a dangerous future now cruelly blow into our faces as a new Cold War ignites. Hostile national sentiments are returning. As Putin advances seemingly unchecked, are we entering into circumstances similar to those preceding World War II? Back then, as Hitler encroached on his neighbors with the German people cheering him on, no one was willing to stop him. We all know the end of that story—a worldwide conflagration with 60 million dead.

So what should we be watching now? The stakes have been raised with a nearly bankrupt Russia refreshing and upgrading its strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. In 2014 Putin authorized the

Will this conflict between Russia and Ukraine blow over? Or will it spread to the Baltic nations and beyond? Where is this leading, and what does it mean for you and me?



A young woman waits outside a building in Kurakhove, Eastern Ukraine, shattered in the conflict between pro- and anti-Russian fighters.



short-range missiles and Tu-22 nuclear-capable bombers in Crimea. Russian nuclear sabers rattle openly with new-generation tactical weapons being positioned near the free borders of Eastern European and Baltic nations.

Might such weapons be used? The last Soviet leader and 1990 Nobel Peace Prize winner Mikhail Gorbachev recently commented on that. In early January 2015, Gorbachev warned in an interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel* that growing tensions between Russia and European powers over the crisis in Ukraine could erupt into major conflict, even an unthinkable nuclear exchange.

We must not forget that the Russian Federation maintains (by treaty) more than 1,600 strategic nuclear warheads deployed on more than 500 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and strategic bombers. In addition, Russia has 2,000 tactical nuclear warheads, some of which have been recently redeployed along European borders. An additional 3,700 nuclear warheads still are to be dismantled.

It was recently estimated that even a “small” regional nuclear exchange—limited to, say, a single exchange between Russia and Ukraine, between Iran and Israel or between India and Pakistan—could potentially render the entire world uninhabitable for human life. Now consider that well over 17,000 known nuclear weapons exist today. The Bible speaks of the time we’re living in, a fact we’ll return to shortly.

While many in the United States remain remarkably unconcerned about rising nuclear tensions, you may have read recently that the infamous Doomsday Clock was moved up to “three minutes to midnight”—midnight here denoting worldwide mass destruction and possibly literal human extinction! The most recent officially announced setting was made on Jan. 22, 2015, due to climate change and the modernization of nuclear weapons in Russia and the United States.

The fall of the Soviet empire

In December 1991 the world watched in amazement as the Soviet Union imploded. Almost overnight, 15 separate countries emerged with almost no bloodshed. The Baltic Republics and Ukraine in particular wasted no time in freeing themselves from the USSR’s yoke.

How could this world superpower that once dominated the space race shatter so

quickly?

I have traveled to the regions of the former Soviet Union many times, starting in 1967 when I visited as a photojournalist and translator covering the 50th anniversary of the October 1917 revolution that established Communism in Russia—the roots of the Soviet Union that soon followed. I have seen firsthand life in almost all the Eastern Bloc countries (the nations under Soviet dominion) before *and* after the collapse of Communism.

Before the fall, there seemed no end in sight to what U.S. President Ronald Reagan called the “evil empire.” But after 70 years, Communist rule collapsed under its

into hibernation in 1991. They have no active memory of what was seared into my mind and the minds of billions of other people who were around back then. And now that the fearsome Russian bear has awakened, many fail to recognize the danger.

Desire to see Russia’s empire restored

In Russia, the sudden loss of the Soviet empire overnight has not been forgotten. To many older Russians—former Soviet citizens—this was a humiliating loss. Today many Russians, including younger people, want their empire back and the legendary greatness of their country restored.



own rottenness of godlessness, corruption, oppression and a failed economic system.

Billions of people then breathed easier. Clear skies ahead, nearly everyone thought. Doomsday averted! Political, economic and military alliances were quickly redeveloped. We basked in our good fortune. In 1991 nobody wanted to think much about the possibility of other global threats down the line. Nuclear extinction was a thing of the past.

But that was then. Almost 2 billion people have been born since the Russian bear went

President Vladimir Putin believes his mission is to steer Russia toward its past glory as a global superpower.

This is a big part of what’s going on in Ukraine. Having this former Soviet country lean towards the West, towards NATO, rekindles old security fears in Russia. My friends in Ukraine recently told me that when Russia grabbed Crimea, one of the propaganda messages was that not surrendering to Russian occupation would result in U.S. missiles in Crimea aimed at Russia!

Russia’s aggressive stance has made

President Putin highly popular in Russia, despite growing economic hardship. People cheer his bravado and bluster. Restoring the former empire is the unspoken thought. At the same time, sentiment toward the United States has soured, giving rise to old fears and resentments.

As you can read or watch for yourself, all of this is being done openly. Set apart from God and His revealed truth, what can the world do? How does the West respond to Putin's encroachments? Are there more Ukraines in our future?

The small nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania own beachfront on the Baltic Sea

Centuries under authoritarian dictatorship

Russia's landlocked position has played a significant role in shaping the Russian national character and the imperialist drive of its leaders (see "Russia's Geographic Outlook" on page 9). And another major factor in the national psyche is centuries of some form of autocratic rule.

From 1240 to about 1480, the Russians were subject to the Mongol rulers from the Far East. This nearly 250 years of foreign rule is still etched into the Russian mind, playing out to some extent in xenophobic reaction to the neighboring nuclear Chinese—who outnumber Russians five to

deal ruthlessly with dissent. Subservience to totalitarian oppression was a Russian hallmark (see "Russian and American dominance predicted by character assessment" on page 17).

Communist Revolution and its aftermath

After the First World War broke out, Russia suffered grievous losses and defeats from incompetent leadership, coupled with millions of casualties. The oppressed people could finally stand no more from the corrupt government, and a grassroots uprising by women in St. Petersburg struck the spark that flamed into a coup. The last czar, Nicholas II, was summoned from the front and dethroned in the February 1917 revolution. He and his family were then executed in July 1918.

The new provisional government was short-lived, overthrown later the same year in the October Revolution by the Bolsheviks, creating the communist state. A protracted civil war between the "Reds" (Bolsheviks) and the "Whites" (anti-socialist factions) ended in Bolshevik victory and the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922. Its first leader, Vladimir Lenin, died shortly after in 1924.

Lenin was succeeded by one of the most brutal human leaders of all time, at least in terms of scale, Josef Stalin. My mother was born in Stalin's Ukraine. Stalin's extremely brutal 29-year absolute rule of the USSR was filled with atrocities, including purges, expulsions, forced displacements, imprisonments in labor camps, manufactured famines, torture and acts of mass murder and massacres. The total number of Stalin's victims is debated but is estimated to be in the tens of millions, besides those killed as a result of World War II.

My Ukrainian mother was eight years old when she survived Stalin's starving of the people of Ukraine in 1933. Six million died that year. As she would later tell me, she remembered bodies of the dead being placed outside homes to be picked up continually in her town.

Not long after I was born, my parents came to the United States in 1949 as refugees. I remember how people who had come over together cheered at the announcement of Stalin's death in 1953. Psychopathic and immoral, this evil dictator had no regard whatever for human life and eliminated anyone thought to be a threat to his power.

Devastation of World War II

World War II, known in the USSR as the

President Vladimir Putin believes his mission is to steer Russia back toward its past glory as a global superpower.



that Russia again covets. In Soviet days the Russians maintained high-security military bases in the Baltic countries, and many areas were totally off-limits to visitors. One such city was Tartu in Estonia, Russia's major Bear Bomber Base in the Baltic. Now visitors can freely travel to Tartu. The United Church of God, publisher of *The Good News*, has held church services and maintains an office there. The bomber base is abandoned.

But what does the future hold? While in Estonia a few years ago, a few of my Russian friends came from St. Petersburg to visit. They were visibly unhappy over a new visa requirement for Russians entering Estonia, an area that a few years back was part of Russia and at that time an easy drive for them. "Let them flap their little wings—for now," they mocked as they expressed their feelings about a free Estonia. That view is shared by many.

one and share a 2,700-mile border where military clashes have occurred on occasion in past decades.

After Mongol rule, the regimes of the czars or tsars (the term a derivative of "Caesar") dominated Russia for nearly four centuries—from 1547 to 1917.

Their despotic control was aided and abetted by the Russian Orthodox Church, the people being oppressed with a singular application of the 13th chapter of Romans, where it reads: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves" (verses 1-2).

As Europe proceeded through the Reformation and the Renaissance and into the Enlightenment, Russia remained stuck in the medieval past, the czars continuing to



Great Patriotic War, was a savage conflict rebuffing Germany's Operation Barbarossa that started in June 1941. Those under Russian rule had suffered from the deaths of millions through World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War and Stalin's purges, and now they experienced another 20 to 40 million in military and civilian losses. These are staggering numbers—unthinkable to us!

When I travelled to the Soviet Union in 1967 translating for a 38-year-old magazine editor and college professor, he noted how he saw a complete void of men his age. He was right. They didn't exist. Of those in the USSR who entered the military at age 19 in World War II, only one in a hundred returned.

While visiting a military cemetery in Kharkov, Ukraine, I saw stone after stone with inscriptions and asked about what they represented. I was told that each stone represented 14,000 dead!

Soviet cemeteries and memorials are huge. I was in Stalingrad (now Volgograd) shortly after the unveiling of the impressive 272-foot high Mamayev Hill Mother Russia statue honoring the millions who died in the battle there. German generals were amazed at Russian military leaders having so little respect for their men as to send vast numbers forward as cannon fodder. The war memorials in Kiev and Moscow are likewise awesome, with great honor and respect being shown the dead. If only such honor had been shown for them while they were alive!

Communism's demise and new hopes now crushed

The history of the Soviet Union is indeed miserable, as is its economy and failed society. The ideology of communism, which the Soviet government worked to instill in the hearts and minds of its population, never really took firm root.

When we traveled through the USSR in 1967 we were surprised at the low outputs of the huge collective state farms. In contrast, the small private plots people were allowed were very productive—a sizeable part of the national produce coming from these small gardens.

There were ideals of equality and justice under communism, but its purveyors greatly misunderstood human nature. People were told they were in a "worker's paradise," but everyone knew they were not. As the national joke went, people *did* become equal—all *equally* poor.

In 1985 Gorbachev came into power after almost seven decades of national tragedy

and economic failure under oppressive socialist dictatorship. The country was suffering severe stagnation and deep economic problems. Gorbachev tried to be revolutionary and introduced a two-pronged approach to reviving the nation. He initiated *glasnost* or "voicing" to the public—that is, publicity or openness in the operations of government, which invited increased freedom of speech. The other prong was *perestroika*, which means rebuilding or restructuring.

As I traveled through the USSR during this time, the word was that it would take five years, maybe 10, maybe a generation before the real changes the people wanted.

However, by allowing freedom of expression, Gorbachev unleashed pent-up passions and political ideas that burst forth in an unexpected rush. Economic reform was slow and ineffective. Results that people hoped for were not materializing. With their new freedom the Soviet people turned on Gorbachev, and it became his undoing.

This directly led to the dissolution of the

and love this part of the world. My ancestral roots are here.

The Russian people can be some of the most generous, hospitable, kind and caring people that you will ever find. The same is true of Ukrainians. I know so many from not only traveling in these countries, but from working with them through humanitarian and church initiatives.

Yet because the Russian people can be so compliant and humble toward authority, they unwittingly give themselves over to opportunistic leaders who cunningly fill voids of power and then turn around and abuse, oppress and destroy them, as evidenced by a string of belligerent leaders of Russia and the USSR. Putin is simply the most recent manifestation of this.

What will Putin bring? He seems unperturbed by what the West does and bent on an agenda to regain what was lost in the breakup of the USSR. He wants the resources and 45 million people of Ukraine. Will he stop there? The West remains

The Bible says a time of restoration—for Russians, for Ukrainians, for all people—is coming, but it's not here yet.

USSR on Dec. 26, 1991—the various countries of the union now becoming independent states. Boris Yeltsin took over then as the first President of the Russian Federation. He was succeeded by Vladimir Putin on Dec. 31, 1999.

Dreams of a better world remain unfulfilled

It initially appeared that we might see a new civilized Russia turned from its traditional past of belligerence and intimidation. Sadly, that was not to be. The same spirit that drove the czars and Soviet bosses is alive and well.

As hopeful as we once were about a change in the nature of nations and people, the words of the prophet Isaiah ring out: "The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways" (Isaiah 59:8).

Once on a Russian trip I had a lengthy talk with a female conductor on a train. She asked, "Why do you want war when we want peace?" I was astonished that she would think this! What had she been taught? How had her mind been so manipulated?

Our human experience is one warring tragedy after another. And what's now on the horizon in this region will predictably lead to more misery through oppressive government, war and death. This impacts me deeply, as I have extensively worked in

accommodating in talking with Russia in spite of Soviet-style big lies and denials about its actions. But with power and lack of resistance you can do what you want.

(One aspect of this to consider is that Bible prophecy foretells the rise of a revived European-centered Roman Empire in the last days. And Russia's recent actions have provoked serious discussion among European nations about turning from dependence on the United States for their safety and taking security matters into their own hands, establishing a European military force for instance.)

Awaiting the sure solution

Those of us with strong ties to the people in these areas also have strong feelings and desires for them to enjoy peace and a normal life. And even apart from such ties, everyone should feel compassion for those suffering under such plights. Yet humanly we feel helpless about what we can do. So what's the answer?

In a lengthy prophetic outline of end-time events, Jesus Christ stated that in the last days before His return "there will be great distress [called in other translations "great tribulation"], unequalled from the beginning of the world until now" (Matthew 24:22, New International Version). So bad will it

Russia's Geographic Outlook

Russia often doesn't make sense to the West. In 1939 England's wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously said, "Russia is a riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma." But considering the power in the hands of this nation, we should seek some understanding of what Russians call the *Rodina* or Motherland.

Russia is huge, spanning 11 time zones and thus stretching halfway around the world. It's a rich land not only agriculturally, but in minerals, with enormous oil and gas reserves in Siberia. The discovery of Siberian oil fueled the Russian economy, but with the recent collapse of the price of oil, the Russian currency, the ruble, has turned to rubble.

In spite of its massive size, Russia has very poor access to the open seas and natural pathways to the rest of the world. This has played a critical role in the shaping of the Russian mind-set. In his book *Peter the Great: His Life and World*, author Robert Massie described 17th-century Russia this way: "Like a giant closed up in a cave with only a pinhole for light and air, the great land mass of the Muscovite empire possessed but a single seaport: Archangel, on the White Sea. This unique harbor, remote from the Russian heartland, is only 130 miles south of the Arctic Circle. Six months of the year, it is frozen in ice."

Peter the Great fought a war against the Swedes to gain

another outlet to the world—seizing from them swampy land with access to the Baltic Sea and founding there St. Petersburg in 1703. However, even today ships from St. Petersburg must sail past Finland, Estonia and Poland, under a bridge connecting Denmark with Sweden, then past Norway and the United Kingdom to reach the Atlantic Ocean.

In the south, the Ottoman Turks long controlled the Black Sea. And when the Russians finally gained access to it, their ships still had to pass through the narrow Bosphorus Straits, sailing under two Turkish bridges, then through the Dardanelles and the length of the Mediterranean Sea before passing through the Strait of Gibraltar to reach open seas.

Some of Russia's greatest rivers flow nowhere. The Volga empties into the landlocked Caspian Sea. Great Siberian rivers flow north into the frozen Arctic. It's a very awkward geography that has contributed to the frustration and aggressiveness of Russian rulers with ambitions of greatness on the world stage. (The geography of the United States and Britain, in contrast, is very different, with plentiful rivers and warm-water ports and harbors with full control of key naval gateways.)

These geographic shortcomings helped mold the Russian national psyche, fostering a xenophobic viewpoint—an intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries.



lenging times lie ahead, but God gives those of us who will follow Him now the power and direction to survive and be victorious! He commands us to change the way we think, to accept and embrace the new heart that He wants to give us today.

As Jesus Himself tells us: "The time has come . . . The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15, NIV). The word translated "repent" here means to change one's mind or purpose—to turn from our own ways to seek God and His ways.

What is God's direction for us today? "Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40).

We do not need to feel helpless and hopeless with the increasing darkness that is coming over this world. While the world will be rocked by terrible devastation, apparently including nuclear war, this will not be the end of the human race—or of God's plan for man-

be that He goes on to say that if those days are not "cut short, *no one would survive*" (verse 22, NIV, emphasis added throughout). Ominously, human extinction through mass destruction is now possible.

But here's the good news for a world facing the specter of nuclear war and catastrophic devastation. Jesus then stated, "But for the sake of the elect [the people of God] those days *will be shortened*" (NIV). Humanity *will survive!*

This period of great end-time calamity is foretold in many different Bible prophecies. The outcome, however, is always intervention and salvation. That is where we secure our confidence and hope. We don't need to live in fear or bury our heads in the sand. Our faith needs to be in the comforting and authoritative words of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

A time of restoration—for Russians, for

Ukrainians, for all people—*is coming*, but it's not yet here. We live in the critical time just before that. We desire it greatly, but we must wait a little while longer.

At the same time that we approach these terrible days of survival, the world has almost universally sunk to the basest levels of behavior. Even so, the Bible clearly instructs us to embrace hope and the ways of God, holding fast as we near the end of this age.

The promises of the age to come are worth waiting for. For those of that time, God says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" (Ezekiel 36:26). Indeed, God says, "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28)—on all peoples, the Russians and Ukrainians and everyone else. God will change our very nature to His own loving nature!

Yet what about now? Difficult and chal-

kind. It's darkest before the dawn, and a new, glorious dawn is coming—maybe not as far off as we might think. Then there will at last be world peace. May it come swiftly! **GN**

Learn More

Why are we seeing so many dramatic changes on the geopolitical scene? Why so much turmoil across the globe? What does it all mean, and does the Bible provide any clues? You need to know! Download or request our free study aid *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*



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Author Victor Kubik stands with his aunt Vera Kubik at the site where his father once lived in his home village of Uhorsk in western Ukraine.

Ukraine

A Personal Look at a Country in Crisis

We should give attention to the ongoing crisis in Ukraine—what's behind it, where it may lead and the terrible human toll being paid. Here is some needed perspective from one with personal ties to the region. *by Victor Kubik*

Over the past year or so, world news has been regularly filled with reports of difficulties, open warfare and even atrocities in Ukraine. Russia under President Vladimir Putin is redrawing the borders of Europe by force, the lines etched in blood.

Having personal connections to both Ukraine and Russia, I am deeply saddened at what is going on. Of course, all of us should be appalled at such developments and mourn for those directly affected. Yet it's often hard for people to wrap their minds around such things.

In the 1920s Soviet leader Josef Stalin, one of the most cunning and evil men to ever walk the earth, made this repulsive statement during a devastating famine in the Ukraine: "If only one man dies of hunger, that is a tragedy. If millions die, that's only statistics."

While Stalin's mind was twisted beyond measure, he cruelly understood the inability of the human mind to comprehend wholesale murder and disaster. It's all too easy to set these grievous monstrosities apart from our day-to-day lives.

For me in this case, it is not so. While I am a naturalized lifelong citizen of the

United States, my father was Ukrainian and my mother was of Russian descent. Most Americans today would probably have difficulty comprehending what they endured some 75 years ago—relevant today, as it increasingly parallels current events.

As one with deep personal ties to Ukraine and Russia, allow me to offer some perspective about what is happening there, looking back on a difficult past and focusing ahead on a remarkable future. (Be sure to also read the companion article "The Russian Bear Reawakens!" beginning on page 4.)

A harrowing family history

I'll start with some of what my parents went through. As teenagers, they experienced the Nazi German invasion of Ukraine. My mother was terrorized by a German bombing raid of her hometown that left 700 people dead. A year later they were forcibly taken from their homes by the Nazis and then made to work as slave laborers in German factories for the rest of World War II.

After the war they ended up in a United Nations refugee camp in occupied Germany's British Zone. There they married.

I was born in the camp, and then in 1949, when I was almost two years old, our family of three crossed the Atlantic to the United States. Over time we all became U.S. citizens.

My parents had survived terrible horrors, including personal abuse and witnessing the deaths of so many of their friends and coworkers. Many of these died in the last desperate months of the war from the relentless bombing of German towns by British and American planes, ending up as "collateral damage." By the grace of God, my parents made it through.

While they felt enormous gratitude for having survived, it was still difficult for them. For the first four years of living in the United States my parents had no contact with their relatives in Ukraine. But after Stalin died in 1953 there was a slight easing of relations between the USSR and America, and my parents received their first letters from their respective homes.

How well I remember that day! My mother trembled and cried after the postman delivered a registered letter from Ukraine and she heard from her family for the first time in nearly 10 years. In one day my father received word of the deaths of his mother and brothers in the war. It was stressful at our home as my parents tried to shield us children from their personal trauma and grief over their families whom we as children never knew.

My parents longed for their homeland. They felt estranged and separated, but going



The author visits an abandoned school in the town of Pripyat, about one mile from the doomed Chernobyl nuclear reactor.



At the entombed Chernobyl nuclear reactor with Dr. Vasil Pasichnik, pediatrician who treated the first child victims of the nuclear accident.



Delivering pediatric wheelchairs to the "Revival" Center 30 miles east of Chernobyl on a humanitarian mission.



Church services in western Ukraine with music provided by a mandolin and accordion ensemble.

back would be a one-way trip and would probably result in severe punishment, even death, for being supposed “collaborators” with the Germans—even though it was forced labor.

So they couldn’t go back. But they didn’t forget where they came from. And they made certain that I and my siblings didn’t either. Thus I am deeply invested in Ukrainian culture and ethnicity. I didn’t learn to speak English until kindergarten age. I was taught Ukrainian grammar, writing and history.

Ongoing personal involvement in the region

In my professional life I have worked extensively in Ukraine, Russia, Estonia and other former Soviet republics. In the past 40 years, in addition to serving as a pastor and administrator, I’ve worked there as a translator, journalist, guide, and manager of non-profit projects in conjunction with Russian broadcasting, supporting orphanages and education and exchange programs.

For the past 20 years I’ve been deeply involved with a center for rehabilitating children in Chernihev, about 30 miles east of the infamous Chernobyl reactor, along with members of the Ukrainian parliament in Kiev and Ukrainian members of Rotary International.

So when I hear the news or am contacted directly by friends in Eastern Europe and Ukraine (nearly daily by Skype or e-mail), I am very deeply affected by the current devastating conflict that has already taken thousands of lives.

Today there is terrible war and much suffering among the military and civilian populace alike, with destruction of city after city, resulting in more than a million refugees.

I earlier witnessed and lived through the amazing transition from the seemingly immovable Iron Curtain days to the dismantling of an atheistic Communist monolith with its heavy-handed control of its subjects. But the hopes of that time have been replaced by misery.

Today there is terrible war and much suffering among the military and civilian populace alike, with destruction of city after city. More than a million refugees are being resettled all through Ukraine.

Through an international non-political charity that I helped found and organize (LifeNets), we are helping children to evacuate from the war zone as well as

helping elderly and displaced people in the Donetsk region and elsewhere. The rehabilitation center we have worked with in Chernihev is taking in dozens of children from this region who survived the shelling by invaders.

Short-lived independence?

To understand where we are today, let’s consider a short history. Breaking free of Soviet domination, Ukraine became a sovereign independent nation on Aug. 24, 1991.

Freedom and democracy came rather suddenly and unexpectedly. Regrettably, the nation did not fare particularly well under this new system, being understandably unprepared for free governance. To some, democracy meant “Now I can do whatever I want.”

There was also a sense of whiplash as the country overnight leapt from a one-party system to multiple parties of various interests and agendas trying to govern. Corruption set in immediately, as the Mafia there quickly filled power voids and established control.

After independence the economy didn’t get better. It got worse. Ukraine became very poor. When visiting my relatives in western Ukraine in 1996, I was shocked to hear them pining away for the better days of greater plenty under Soviet rule. Capitalism and democracy were not working for them. Under the one-party system, there had been security and control.

Of course, under communism the economy had been quite limited and hopelessly

inefficient—and no one was free to leave. Now the people had the freedom to buy anything and go wherever they wanted, but there was no money and often no work.

Both the Russians and Ukrainians, finding it difficult to manage moderate governments, have found themselves back under intimidating dictatorships, as is their historic norm.

My friends in Chernihev wrote to me last July 4 with congratulations to America for 238 years of independence. In the same message they lamented about what might be the fate of their freedom after only 23 short years.

I am told by many of my Ukrainian



friends and contacts that they do not know how the crisis of Russia's invasion will end. No one sees the bottom. Will more of Ukraine be taken? Will all of it—piece by piece?

Why does Russia want control of Ukraine?

Ukraine is a compact country of 45 million people living in a territory slightly larger than that of France. It's a beautiful country rich in natural resources for both farming and mining. At one time the country was known as the breadbasket of Europe. Its amazingly fertile land called "black earth" requires little or no fertilizer. It has beautiful navigable rivers, including the Dnieper, Dniester, Desna, Pripyat and Danube, that flow into the Black Sea and give passage to, ultimately, the Atlantic Ocean.

Besides its position on the Black Sea shores, there are other factors that heighten Ukraine's strategic importance. Ukraine is at the crossroads of East and West, having long been an intersection of nations, including Mongols, Turks, Poles and Russians, who have in times past helped themselves to this land and people. Today Russian oil flows through Ukraine to the West.

And now Ukraine has, since gaining its freedom, been trying to shift its allegiances and economic ties to Western Europe. That raises fear and paranoia among Russians, who continue to mistrust Europe and America and especially dislike the notion of being kept in check by them.

This is compounded by the fear of Ukraine being accepted into the American-led NATO alliance. If Ukraine were a member of NATO, it would be protected by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that an attack on any NATO nation *is considered an attack on all*, requiring all NATO nations to respond with force. From a Russian point of view, the idea of Ukraine nestled inside the NATO alliance is intolerable. So the Russians act now.

Today's crisis in Ukraine is one to watch carefully, as it is one of a number of serious flashpoints in the world. Any one of these could cascade and ignite a sequence of events quickly leading to regional then world war.

And we may yet see more of these flashpoints on Russia's borders, as it seeks to recapture the empire it has lost. Make no mistake: This Russian belligerence holds ominous implications that go far beyond the aggression in Ukraine. Are the Baltic nations next? And then what?

A brighter tomorrow—and the mission at hand

Ukraine has had a traumatic history hard to imagine. The country was a primary target of Stalin's purges and resettlement or outright genocide by Stalin. My mother lived through the 1933 artificial famine in which more than 6 million starved to death. Then the costly Second World War ruined the nation. Much later in 1986 the country suffered the devastating Chernobyl nuclear



The author at the Kubik family cemetery where his father came from in Uhorsk, Ukraine.

From the pages of the Bible, I confidently know that even as this world "groans and labors with birth pangs," it does so as a precursor to the return of Jesus Christ.

disaster. When will the suffering end?

While I hold my Ukrainian ancestry to be precious and remain profoundly grateful for the freedoms offered to me as a naturalized citizen of the United States, I know where my ultimate citizenship lies. As the apostle Paul, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5), wrote to a gentile congregation in Greece nearly 2,000 years ago, "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 20, English Standard Version).

From the pages of the Bible, I confidently know that even as this world "groans and labors with birth pangs" (Romans 8:22), it does so as a precursor to the return of Jesus Christ. The time is ripening for that wonderful day when He will at last come again, this time as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16). Many biblical passages proclaim that when Jesus returns, He will then rule the nations—even with a "rod of iron" (verse 15) for those who would seek to viciously oppress other peoples, be they Ukrainians or anyone. That day is coming, and it is certain!

God has given His people the responsibil-

ity to proclaim this good news or gospel to the whole world—and the mission of this magazine centers on that task.

Moreover, we must all strive to follow this biblical command: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act" (Proverbs 3:27, New International Version). According to God's will, if we can help then we must—not for the praise of men but because it is the right thing to do. We must also humbly

labor in prayer and action for the very core of our hope through Jesus Christ, crying out to God, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10).

Until it comes, let's remember that the world around us is not yet subjected to God's rule. Rather, "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19, NIV)—the ultimate liar and destroyer, Satan the devil. His diabolical handiwork is evident in the horrible deaths of mil-

lions in Ukraine as well as all the atrocities of human history.

But let us also remember that when Jesus returns, such satanic evil will *end!* This gives me the greatest joy when I am profoundly saddened by the tidings from Ukraine.

Through God's grace mankind will survive, and peace will come. Join with us to help bring this vital, uplifting message of good news to the world! **GN**

Learn More

We live in a dangerous world in which the patterns of history of oppression, enslavement, famine, intimidation, warfare and suffering repeat with gruesome regularity. But it will not always be this way! To learn about how God will put an end to human suffering, download or request our free study aid *The Gospel of the Kingdom* today!



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Where Does **Russia** Fit in End-Time Bible Prophecy?

More than two decades after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia is very much back in the news—and not in a good way. Recent aggressive moves are raising fears of a renewed Russian expansionism. How might this play out in Bible prophecy? *by Mario Seiglie*

Russia has been in the news a lot lately—mostly for negative reasons. Ukraine, once a part of the Soviet Union, has been rocked by turmoil from Russian-backed factions. In 2014 the Crimean peninsula, also part of Ukraine, was taken over and annexed by Russia, violating a 1994 treaty in which Russia had committed to respecting Ukraine's existing borders.

Now a part of Eastern Ukraine is in armed conflict, and Ukrainian troops are fighting pro-Russian forces aided and armed by Russia. Europeans and other neighbors are quite alarmed by this aggression, and they fear it can spill over to other European territories neighboring Russia, such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Fearing more Russian aggression, the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, recently called for the formation of a united European army, since “a common army among the Europeans would convey to Russia that we are serious about defending the values of the European Union” (Andrew Sparrow, “Jean-Claude Juncker Calls for EU Army,” *The Guardian*, March 8, 2015).

God's “time machine”

Naturally, many readers will want to know what the Bible has to say about Russia. It is one of the great world powers, with one of the world's most formidable, modern and well-equipped militaries.

It also has by far the largest territory of any nation on earth—with almost twice

the land mass of the world's second-biggest country, Canada.

We don't have a crystal ball, but we do have something far better—God's Word. As God said in Isaiah 46:9-10, “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.’” Only He knows for sure what the future holds!

The apostle Peter wrote of “the prophetic word . . . which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no

Bible prophecy gives strong indication that Russia will play a significant role in end-time events.

prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation [or origin], for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-20).

So the Bible can be viewed as a sort of time machine in a sense, faithfully describing from God's point of view events in the past, present and future. Although prophecy had much to say about events that followed in ancient times, there is one period still ahead that it refers to more than any other. That time is referred to in Scripture by several terms, such as “the end time,” “the time of the end,” “the latter

days” and “the last days.”

God reveals what will happen during this period immediately before the second coming of Christ. Of course, He is able to know what will happen far in the future and knows what nations will be involved during this crucial time. And one of them, from the historical and geographical description given in the Bible, appears to be Russia.

In this regard, it's important to note that when prophecies are mentioned in the Scriptures, they are usually given from the reference point of Israel and its capital, Jerusalem. God describes this as the place to which Jesus Christ will one day return to rule all the earth.

The prophet Zechariah even mentions where Christ will place His feet when He descends to this planet: “Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east . . . And the LORD shall be King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:3-4, 9).

So where does Russia fit in? From the geographical description given in a biblical prophecy, there is strong indication that Russia will play a significant role in end-time events.

Armies arrayed for battle

Let's see a description of the end time in the book of Daniel, which refers to a number of the nations involved.

Notice what it says in Daniel 11:40-12:3: “At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and



with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon.

“He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels. But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him.

“At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

It’s important to include these last few verses in the context because some Bible interpreters believe this section is actually talking about a time in the past. But as you can clearly read, these events are referring to the last days, from right before Jesus Christ returns to the resurrection of the dead at His coming (compare 1 Corinthians 15:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16), something that has not happened yet.

So we have in this section a glimpse of end-time conflict between several alliances of nations, one led by a ruler called “the king of the South,” another known as “the king of the North,” and then forces to “the east and the north” (or possibly “northeast,” for which there is no equivalent Hebrew term) of the Holy Land that will eventually enter the fray.

The kings of the North and the South

During the time in which Daniel wrote this prophecy, the region of the king of the North was governed by the Persian Empire. Then it was conquered by the Greek Empire, which was subsequently absorbed by the Roman Empire. Although the original Roman Empire collapsed in 476 A.D., there have been periodic revivals all the way up to the 20th century (normally called “the Holy

Roman Empire” or an equivalent term).

For instance, the alliance of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini (who proclaimed in Italy that he was restoring a version of the ancient Roman Empire) eventually led to the worldwide bloodbath that was World War II.

So this “king of the North” is destined to arise, as we understand it, one last time—at the time of the end. After being provoked, his forces will sweep down and occupy the lands of a final king of the South.

We can see from Daniel 11 that the end-time king of the South will be a leader commanding a confederation of nations

for centuries parts or all of Spain, Portugal, France, Eastern Europe, Sicily and Italy.

Over recent years several Muslim leaders and religious figures have boasted of their desire to capture Rome, which they see as the seat of Europe and Christianity—the taking of which in their minds would prove the superiority of Islam over Christianity.

Other non-Arab countries like Pakistan, possessing dozens of nuclear warheads, and Iran, widely assumed to be pursuing nuclear weapons, are also almost entirely Islamic. Moreover, several militant strains of the Islamic religion are presently disrupting a

large swath of the world stretching from the Atlantic coast of North Africa all the way to Afghanistan and India.

“News from the east and north”

Where Russia seems to come into the picture in Daniel’s prophecy is the indication that after the king of the North invades the Holy Land, “news from the east and the north shall trouble



Any European-led invasion of the Holy Land, as foretold in this prophecy, would be viewed by Muslims in these regions as another “Crusade” against Islam.

predominately to the south of Israel, but also stretching to the east and west since the Scriptures name several of them—Edom, Moab, Ammon (their ancient territory now making up a large part of modern Jordan), Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia.

Note that Scripture says of this region that “many countries will be overthrown” (including Israel), implying it can encompass other nations in the general vicinity east, south and west of Israel that are not mentioned by name. The two common factors in these countries, excepting Israel, are that they are mostly of Arab descent and their religion is Islam.

It appears that this confederation of the South is made up mainly of Arab nations with Islam as their religion—perhaps a reborn Islamic caliphate, long the dream of millions of Muslims. It is also the dream of many Muslims to conquer Europe—reliving the glory days of earlier Islamic empires that invaded and in some cases held

him” (Daniel 11:44). Since several nations in this region are going to be invaded and conquered by the king of the North, there is naturally going to be a reaction from major powers to the north and to the east (or, again, possibly northeast) of that region.

To the east of the Holy Land lies a large swath of Muslim nations that would be incensed at a takeover of Islam’s third-holiest city, Jerusalem. Among them are Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and several predominately Muslim nations from the former Soviet Union, plus India with its 200 million Muslims. To the north of the Holy Land are yet more Muslim nations—Lebanon, Syria and Turkey, plus areas of Russia with large Muslim populations.

Any European-led invasion of the Holy Land, as foretold in this prophecy, would be viewed by Muslims in these regions as another “Crusade” against Islam. Although

that sounds odd to Western ears, this is exactly what many Muslims termed the U.S.-led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. In the minds of millions of Muslims, the Crusades never ended, and Islam remains at war against Christianity in a battle for supremacy—as we see reflected in the words and actions of many jihadists today.

No doubt a Western takeover of Jerusalem and the Holy Land would rally many Muslims to fight and throw out the “Crusaders”—exactly as happened in Iraq and Afghanistan, leading to humiliating Western withdrawals and resulting chaos as militant Islamic groups swept into the void.

A look at a map shows that beyond these Muslim nations and above the Middle East (and east of the area of the king of the North) there is only one major power, and that is Russia. Moscow is almost due north of Israel. And if the correct translation of the verse in question is the “northeast,” there is still only one powerful nation northeast of the Holy Land, and that is Russia, its territory stretching farther to the east than any other Asian power.

Russia has an intense interest in the Middle East for political, economic, military and religious reasons. In the last 200 years, a historical pattern has emerged when European powers have sought to conquer the Middle East—sooner or later, Russia will usually get involved, since this region significantly affects its national interests.

“Kings from the east”

Daniel 11:44 tells us that “news from the east” (if that is a single direction), will greatly trouble the king of the North. What might this be referring to?

The book of Revelation, expanding on aspects of Daniel’s prophecy, describes two major troop advances involving the Euphrates River, the ancient boundary between the Roman Empire and adversaries to the east. No doubt these movements from the east will be in response to the takeover of the Holy Land by the king of the North.

The eastern powers will field a massive 200-million-man army and will launch an apparent counterattack called the second woe, when a third of mankind will be killed—evidently through the unleashing of weapons of mass destruction (Revelation 9:13-18). Then later, as the time comes for Jesus Christ’s return, a force led by “the kings [rulers] from the east” will cross the Euphrates, then dried up, in the sixth of the seven last plagues, these collectively referred to as the third woe (Revelation 16:12).

As noted above, to the east of the Holy Land are a large number of Muslim nations. Even further east are the major powers of India, China and Japan, plus other Islamic nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia. Some of these nations could likely form an alliance since the Middle East also concerns their national interests. Middle Eastern oil is very important to some of them, and those of the Islamic faith in Asia look to Jerusalem and Mecca and Medina, in Saudi Arabia, as their holy cities.

Clearly it would be unacceptable to them to see their holy cities threatened with takeover by a European power. Also with a European force ruling at least a part of the Middle East, the balance of power and wealth would now be shifted and tilted against these powers.

Another possibility for the identity of these eastern forces could be China and its Asiatic allies, including Russia, that often share common economic, political and economic interests.

As a recent article from *The Economist* magazine highlighted, “Relations with China, Russia’s biggest neighbor and Asia’s greatest power, are thriving, buoyed by a 30-year deal agreed last May [2014] to supply Siberian gas to China by pipeline . . . China has a huge demand for Russian energy; and as another permanent member of the UN Security Council, it is an important diplomatic shield” (“Banyan: Bear With Us,” Feb. 21, 2015, p. 41).

So a threat to the Middle Eastern oil supplies and its vital sea lanes could provoke a reaction by any of these nations. China, with its population of more than 1.3 billion, could certainly field a huge military force, and Russia’s military power and technology are still first-rate.

Regarding the king of the North, the Bible says he will contend with those who eventually form an alliance against him and will “go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many” (Daniel 11:44).

So we see two major movements of geopolitical forces to the east and north of the Holy Land, beyond the Euphrates River, and several leading candidates to form these forces. These will likely include the vast number of Muslims across southern Asia as well as the people of Russia, China, India and Japan.

The final march to vie with European forces in the Holy Land will lead them to Armageddon and the great battle at Christ’s return—in which both the European and eastern forces will be destroyed. (To learn

more, download or request our free study aid *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.)

Therefore, it appears that the rise of Russian power seems destined to have a major impact on these end-time events leading to Christ’s return, so it behooves us to be alert by watching world news, especially dealing with these leading nations.

Good news in the end for Russia and the rest of the world

Yet there is good news in the end for Russia—and the rest of the world. Jesus Christ is returning to put an end to human politics, greed and war.

One of the most encouraging scriptures in this regard is found in Isaiah 2:2-4, which describes what will happen after this time of global turmoil ends and Christ comes to rule the nations.

It is our hope and ultimate goal to be part of His coming Kingdom—for then there will finally be peace and harmony on the earth. Would you like to be part of that Kingdom as well? That is what this magazine is ultimately about.

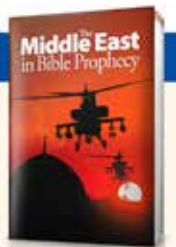
We will leave you with these verses from Isaiah 2:2-4 to meditate on, since they describe that wonderful coming solution to war: “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

“Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

“He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” GN

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What great geopolitical movements will shake the world in the time of the end before Christ’s return? How will they affect you and your loved ones? You need to read our study aid *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. A free copy is waiting for you!



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Current Events & Trends

by Milan Bizic, Rudy Rangel and Tom Robinson

Religious freedom law decried

The state of Indiana recently passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) to ensure that people operating businesses are not compelled to act against their religious convictions. This liberty is supposed to be protected under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but activist judges have reinterpreted the Constitution to suit their own values with the approval of a broad sector of society. Those adhering to traditional Christian morality are labeled as practicing “hate” and are increasingly persecuted through legal action. Thus the new law.

In fact, RFRA is a federal law passed by Congress in 1993 and signed by President Bill Clinton that was intended to cover federal, state and local government. However, the Supreme Court ruled in 1997 that the law only applied at the federal level. This led individual states over the years since to pass their own RFRA. Indiana is just the latest of 21 states that have done so (and 11 other states have similar provisions through state court decisions rather than legislation).

Indiana’s bill more directly came about after the nationally debated Hobby Lobby case in which the company sought to be exempt from having to provide employees with insurance coverage for abortion-inducing drugs under President Barack Obama’s health-care law. (Thankfully the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Hobby Lobby in that case.)

Furthermore, the Indiana legislation came on the heels of various courts forcing businesses to cater to gay weddings and the like—and the law was seen by some as a way to guard against that.

Not surprisingly, Indiana’s RFRA was swiftly denounced by liberal politicians and interest groups, particularly gay rights activists, as a “license to discriminate.” Various others then began to pile on against the law to escape the stigma of appearing to favor discrimination—and Indiana officials went into damage control.

In an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal*, Indiana’s Republican Governor Mike Pence said: “I abhor discrimination. I believe in the Golden Rule that you should ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’ If I saw a restaurant owner refuse to serve a gay couple, I wouldn’t eat there anymore. As governor of Indiana, if I were presented a bill that legalized discrimination against any person or group, I would veto it. Indiana’s new law contains no reference to sexual orientation. It simply mirrors federal law that President Bill Clinton signed in 1993” (“Ensuring Religious Freedom in Indiana,” March 31, 2015).

Many conservatives were disappointed that Governor Pence ended up signing a “clarification bill,” approving changes to the law “amid fears that it would allow discrimination against lesbians and gays” (Associated Press, April 2).

Speaking on CBS News’ program *Face the Nation*, former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum issued this answer to those on the left who say religious freedom laws just let businesses discriminate against homosexuals: “Tolerance is a two-way street. If you’re a print shop and you are a gay man, should you be forced to print ‘God Hates . . . [a derogatory term for gays]’ for the Westboro Baptist Church because they hold those signs up? . . . Should the government—and this is really the case here—should the government force you to do that?” (April 5, 2015). Obviously not. Likewise the government should not be able to compel Christian business owners to support what they consider immoral.

As society drifts farther from God, we can expect the persecution of those advocating biblical morality to increase. (Sources: Associated Press, CBS News, *The Wall Street Journal*.)

Atlanta educators guilty of cheating

In early April 2015 a group of educators in Atlanta, Georgia, were found guilty in one of the largest cheating scandals in U.S. history.

“On their eighth day of deliberations, the jurors convicted 11 of the 12 defendants of racketeering, a felony that carries up to 20 years in prison. Many of the defendants—a mixture of Atlanta public school teachers, testing coordinators and administrators—were also convicted of other charges, such as making false statements, that could add years to their sentences” (Alan Blinder, “Atlanta Educators Convicted in School Cheating Scandal,” *The New York Times*, April 1, 2015).

Education is a topic that tends to be political in nature. Is standardized testing a good measure of the quality of education? Is gym class necessary? Is art class worth the expenditure? Schooling in its various forms significantly affects the future of a nation. Generally, better education leads to a better society.

Of course, education is more than numbers and letters. Teachers and school administrators provide moral guidance whether or not they are trying to, as youth see the example they set and learn from it for good or ill. The example of cheating to get ahead is a terrible one. Hard work and perseverance with a good attitude are what the younger generation should see as an example for successful living.

On the flip side we can see that biblical principles are again validated—and parents should point out this valuable lesson to their children. Proverbs 10:9 states, “Honest people can always feel secure, but lying cheaters will be caught” (Easy-to-Read Version).

It’s very sad to see people educating the future generation fall to such lows for personal gain. (Source: *The New York Times*.)

California drought conditions becoming critical

There’s been much news in the last few months about the drought in California. This American state has a population of nearly 39 million, and the people are facing a crisis.

Water scarcity is a serious matter. A recent National Public Radio (NPR) article said: “The water outlook in drought-racked California just got a lot worse: Snowpack levels across the entire Sierra Nevada [mountain range] are now the lowest in recorded history—just 6 percent of the long-term average. That shatters the previous low record on this date of 25 percent, set in 1977 and again last year” (Nathan Rott, “Scary Times for California Farmers as Snowpack Hits Record Lows,” April 1, 2015). As a result, California is imposing its first-ever mandatory water restrictions.

Farmers are really struggling. When there’s no rain or snowmelt, the only water available for drinking is from wells. Yet water below ground is diminishing every day. Farmers typically would rely on government water and use groundwater to supplement their needs. But last year there was no government water, and it looks like this year will be the same situation.

While droughts can be common natural occurrences, they might indicate something else. We should consider that God warned ancient Israel that He would send droughts as a national judgment and a warning of further judgment to come if the people refused to repent: “The skies above will be as unyield-

ing as bronze, and the earth will be as hard as iron. The LORD will change the rain that falls on your land into powder, and dust will pour down from the sky until you are destroyed” (Deuteronomy 28:23-24, New Living Translation; compare Jeremiah 12:4; 14:1-10). One severe drought is not necessarily such a judg-



Extreme drought—a sign of worse things to come?

ment. But devastating patterns of drought should be considered in this light—especially with the rampant immorality and rejection of God we see today.

Even if particular droughts are not directly from God, people still need His help and blessing in the midst of them and all troubles. And for that we should be seeking Him in faith and living according to His will (see Matthew 7:7-11; Hebrews 11:6; 1 John 3:22). (Sources: National Public Radio, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.)

Iraq pushes back against ISIS, regains some ground

Recently the Iraqi army recaptured the town of Tikrit, which had been controlled by the Islamic State (IS or ISIS) since last year. The pushing back and forth between extremists and opposing forces in the Middle East is ongoing.

“The liberation of Tikrit was carried out by the efforts of the Iraqi army and police, public mobilization units, tribal forces and the people of Tikrit city,” Mr. Abadi [i.e., Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi] said on state television. “It was carried out under air cover and concentrated bombardment by the Iraqi air force, army air force and the international coalition against the terrorists of ISIS” (Matt Bradley and Julian Barnes, “Iraq Recaptures Tikrit From Islamic State,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 31, 2015).

At the point where the Iraqi army started to stall, the United States began air strikes to aid in the operation. The Americans want the Iraqis to continue to partner with them instead of Iran and the Shiite militias it's backing, as the latter could well lead to Iraq eventually coming under Iranian dominion.

As for the Islamic State, Tikrit was a major loss, but ISIS is able to regroup in various areas—and more terrorists in other places continue to declare loyalty to what they see as the restored Islamic caliphate.

Of course, the Middle East will continue to be a hotbed of military and religious strife. And the ongoing struggle will, despite breaks in hostility at times, lead in the end to the return of Jesus Christ. Finally, an ultimately just and wise Ruler will bring peace to the most contentious area of the world. (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)

Russian and American dominance predicted by character assessment

For half a century after World War II the world was divided in two in terms of international power—split between the American-led free world and the Russian-led Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. Remarkably this bipolar world had been predicted almost prophetically more than a century earlier by the French political historian Alexis de Tocqueville in his 1835 book *Democracy in America* on the basis of national character and condition. In the same book he recognized that America's strength came from the righteousness proclaimed from its pulpits.

Consider that when the following was written the British Empire was the dominant power on earth. Russia, while a great power, was by no means yet a global superpower, this being nearly a century before the Soviet Union, and neither was the newly formed United States, which was still in its pre-Civil War days. The character De Tocqueville described back in 1835 remains deeply ingrained:

“There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which started from different points, but seem to tend towards the same end. I allude to the Russians and the Americans . . . All other nations seem to have nearly reached their natural limits, and they have only to maintain their power; but these are still in the act of growth . . . These alone are proceeding with ease and celerity [swiftness] along a path to which no limit can be perceived.

“The American struggles against the obstacles that nature opposes to him; the adversaries of the Russian are men. The former combats the wilderness and savage life; the latter, civilization with all its arms. The conquests of the American are therefore gained by the plowshare; those of the Russian by the sword.

“The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of the people;

“The conquests of the American are therefore gained by the plowshare; those of the Russian by the sword.”

the Russian centers all the authority of society in a single arm. The principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter, servitude. Their starting-point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.”

This is utterly stunning. Clearly there is such a thing as national character—and it certainly matters.

Nuclear Iran could lead to nuclear Saudi Arabia

Israel, Europe and the United States are not the only world powers with an intense interest in the outcomes of the international talks over Iran's nuclear future. Sunni-led Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, are anxiously waiting to see whether Shiite Iran will have the potential to develop nuclear weapons. Such an eventuality would introduce major security risks for Saudi Arabia, which doesn't want to see Iran's influence expand in the region.

Saudi Arabia has taken strong action in both Iraq and Yemen in recent days, fighting ISIS forces in the former and Houthi rebel forces in the latter. *The Jerusalem Post's* Ariel Ben Solomon points out that it “may not have been a coincidence that the Sunni regional powers' united military action to counter the Iranian-backed Houthi rebel forces in Yemen occurred as the Iranian nuclear talks reach zero hour” (“Saudis Would Develop Own Nuclear Program in Reaction to Nuclear Iran,” April 2, 2015). Saudi Arabia thus ironically joins Israel among the strongest voices against Iran possibly becoming a nuclear power.

A major consequence of allowing a nuclear Iran would be the potential for a nuclear Saudi Arabia. Ben Solomon's article continues: “From the point of view of Gulf states, ‘a nuclear agreement means that

the Sunni Arab states will take security measures into their own hands’ . . . Saudi Defense Minister Prince Muhammad bin Salman told a visiting congressman this week [at the beginning of April] that the Saudis need more weapons in order to deal with Iran.”

The Middle East has long been a powder keg of conflict, violence and unrest. Adding multiple nuclear-armed states to this volatile mix could have catastrophic consequences.

As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned in his speech before the U.S. Congress in early March, a bad deal allowing Iran to develop nukes would “spark a nuclear arms race in the most dangerous part of the planet . . . A region where small skirmishes can trigger big wars would turn into a nuclear tinderbox” (“The Complete Transcript of Netanyahu's Address to Congress,” *The Washington Post*, March 3).

And that could lead to the dire conditions mentioned in Matthew 24: “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. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened” (verses 21-22).

Be alert to what is happening in the world around you and to your own spiritual condition before God as the times become increasingly perilous. (Sources: *The Jerusalem Post*, *The Washington Post*.)



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Are We in a Dangerous Age of Appeasement?

Two significant powers, Russia and Iran, are throwing their weight around and taking over nearby territory. But rather than stand up to them, Western powers—especially the United States—meekly acquiesce. The parallels with the pre-World War II appeasement of Adolf Hitler are striking. *by Mike Kelley*

Citizens of Vienna, Austria, could tell something major had happened when they awoke on the morning of March 12, 1938. A strange new sound—the pounding of thousands of hobnailed boots marching on cobblestone pavement—announced the arrival of German army troops. On major public buildings, dozens of Nazi standards had been unfurled, their black swastikas stark against the white circles and red backgrounds.

Three days later, Adolf Hitler made his triumphant entry into the city. Cruising

slowly toward Vienna’s huge public square, the Nazi dictator never broke a smile as he raised his hand in the Nazi salute.

Behind the stern face, however, Hitler had every reason to be satisfied. Austria had just become a part of the German Third Reich, and it had happened without a shot being fired.

In one of history’s greatest acts of international bullying, Hitler had threatened the leadership of the smaller nation of Austria with military intervention if it didn’t take steps that soon allowed the Nazis to assume control of Austria and merge it with Germany.

Return to appeasement?

Are we seeing today a return to a dangerous policy of appeasement? The West’s reaction to the current Russian incursions into Ukraine bear striking resemblance to 1938, when refusal to stand up to Hitler led to a devastating world war. Russia’s president Vladimir Putin boldly and ruthlessly annexed Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula and, seeing little meaningful resistance, gave support to pro-Russian insurgents in Ukraine’s eastern provinces, which he seeks to “liberate” from an increasingly Western-leaning Ukraine.

But there’s more to it than that. Once a KGB officer in Russia’s Communist era, Putin longs for what he sees as the glory days of the old Soviet Union. He and millions of Russians felt the sting of the loss of Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania in the breakup of the Soviet Union. Now the virtual dictator of Russia, Putin wants to bring these areas

back into the Russian sphere.

As an old Cold War veteran, Putin is also distrustful of what he sees as increasing NATO encroachment on Russia's western borders.

The similarities to the years leading up to World War II are unmistakable. Just as Adolf Hitler sought to annex German-speaking areas of Europe, such as Austria and the Sudetenland provinces of Czechoslovakia, into his greater German Reich, Putin is more than willing to help "liberate" Russian-speaking Ukrainian separatists in the eastern provinces as they seek to unite with Russia.

Eager to prevent another European war after World War I, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's September 1938 meeting with Hitler produced the infamous "Munich Pact," in which Britain accepted Hitler's annexation of the Sudeten areas of Czechoslovakia. Proclaiming "peace in our

relations may be hurting Russia even more than originally intended, says Anders Aslund, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and former economic adviser to the Russian and Ukrainian governments in the 1990s:

"We can see that no money has been going into Russia after July [2014]. No financial institutions dared to provide Russia with any financing more than a month after that. And that we know from talking to banks. The point is that the [July] financial sanctions have worked out as far more severe in their effect than anyone seems to have believed" (*PBS Frontline*, Jan. 13, 2015).

Putin's escapades in Ukraine, and implied threats to the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, have led to a dramatic increase in hardening European attitudes toward Putin and Russia.

As expected, Ukraine itself has seen

economy to support the effort.

Will Iran get nukes?

For more than a quarter century the leaders of Iran have pursued with single-minded determination their goal to acquire nuclear weapons. In spite of repeated assurances that a nuclear capability would be used only for peaceful purposes, current and past Iranian leaders have made no effort to hide their contempt for the tiny state of Israel and their determination to ultimately wipe it from the face of the earth.

Iran now has the means to deliver on its threats. Its arsenal of Shahab 3 missiles can deliver warheads up to 1,500 pounds to targets 1,200 miles away—putting Israel (and many U.S. military bases in the region) easily within range. The prospect of those missiles carrying nuclear warheads is chilling to Israel, which knows that one medium-sized nuclear weapon detonated over Tel Aviv could effectively annihilate the small Jewish state.

In the face of this danger, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been trying for years to warn the United States, Europe, and the world of the need to stop Iran's nuclear efforts. Just as with Russia, harsh U.S. and European economic sanctions have crippled the Iranian economy but have failed to deter Iran's nuclear ambitions. Like Russia, Iran has weighed the price and determined that the gain outweighs the pain.

March 2015 saw yet another Western extension in negotiations with Iran over a new agreement that would reduce economic sanctions in return for supposed iron-clad measures that would effectively delay Iran's nuclear program for at least 10 years. U.S. President Barack Obama, eager to create a positive legacy for his final years in office, seems to want to go down in history as a peacemaker.

Many observers note that if he continues on the path of bowing to Iranian demands, he could go down in history as a latter-day Neville Chamberlain.

A growing chorus of pundits and others see the broad outlines of the agreement being negotiated with Iran as flawed, with sanctions being lifted in the face of few real guarantees that Iran would cease its nuclear program. As England did in 1938, would America give up critical security guarantees while hardly slowing Iran's nuclear efforts? Would the current administration carry the appeasement stigma?

On March 18 Israelis went to the polls

The West's reaction to the current Russian incursions into Ukraine bear striking resemblance to 1938, when refusal to stand up to Adolf Hitler led to a devastating world war.

time," Chamberlain came back to England with a worthless scrap of paper. Less than a year later, Hitler invaded Poland, and World War II had started. Before it ended, some 60 million people would die.

Neville Chamberlain earned the dubious distinction as perhaps history's greatest appeaser. History has a way of repeating itself. Are we now seeing a replay of those tragic 20th-century events?

Polarization on Putin policies

Increasingly stringent economic sanctions imposed by both Europe and the United States have failed to change Putin's aggressive behavior. As a result, the European Union in late January decided to extend the measures, which include travel restrictions, a freeze on Russian assets, and restrictions to European capital markets.

Russian reaction has been swift. Andrey Kostin, chief executive of Russia's VTB Bank, labeled these measures "economic war" and said that while they hurt the Russian economy, they will also affect European security. In conjunction with the falling price of oil, the main Russian export, the sanctions have put Russia into a severe recession, compounded by an inflation rate exceeding 11 percent.

Now in place more than a year, the sanc-

tioned the greatest shift in attitudes. Though the Ukrainians gained independence from Russia in the early 1990s, Russia has continued as Ukraine's largest trading partner, and 80 percent of Ukrainians viewed Russia favorably as recently as 2013. That figure has dropped to 35 percent since Russia took over Crimea last year, with the majority of that coming from the largely Russian-speaking eastern provinces.

One wonders if Putin learned some propaganda lessons from Hitler's experience. As Hitler preyed on German humiliation following World War I, Putin has played on the emotions of Russians stung by the loss of empire from 1989 to 1992, leading a clear majority of Russians—83 percent—to favor his actions.

Most Russians seem willing to ignore increasing economic hardship as the price to be paid for a return to Russian glory (Pew Global Attitude survey, as reported in *The New York Times*, July 9, 2014).

And just as the other European powers stood by in the late 1930s as Hitler gobbled up one European state after another, today France, Germany, Italy, Poland and other European nations stand by as Putin continues his aggression. Ukraine fights on alone with an army a fraction the size of the Russian forces and an increasingly crippled



and reelected Netanyahu to a fourth term as prime minister of Israel. Less than two weeks before the election, he addressed the United States Congress, making an impassioned appeal for greater strength and resolve in the U.S.-Iranian nuclear negotiations.

“America’s founding document promises life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” Netanyahu told the U.S. Congress, “but Iran’s founding document pledges death, tyranny and the pursuit of Jihad.”

He went on to remind the lawmakers of the recent Iranian record towards America: “Iran took dozens of Americans hostage in Tehran, murdered hundreds of American soldiers, Marines, in Beirut, and was responsible for killing and maiming thousands of American servicemen and women in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Negotiations with deadly implications

Iran, Netanyahu said, has been on the march in the Middle East, gobbling up territory and using its influence to gain power. It now effectively controls four Arab capitals: Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus and Sena’a, the capital of Yemen. “At a time when many hope Iran will join the community of nations, Iran has been gobbling up nations,” he said.

In short, says Netanyahu, Iran wants to pursue its stated goal of the destruction, first of Israel, then of the United States. To Iran’s radical leaders, Israel is the “little Satan” and America is the “great Satan.” Iran’s goal in the current negotiations is to give up as little as possible in its quest for nuclear weapons while ending the onerous sanctions.

Some of the partners in the nuclear talks with Iran want to see a halt to Iran’s nuclear development progress, which would mean the dismantling of its estimated 19,000 gas centrifuges needed to enrich uranium, as well as the destruction of its existing stocks of uranium. Vigorous, unrestricted inspections by the International Atomic Energy

Agency would also be part of the deal.

Although details of the negotiations are murky and at times contradictory, *The New York Times* in a March 18 story said the U.S. has proposed limiting Iran to 6,000 centrifuges and merely requiring reductions in its uranium stockpile. If Iran broke the treaty by denying inspections, they would then need at least a year to develop a nuclear weapon versus the few months that experts believe they now need.

However, the initial deal would not require the destruction of any of Iran’s nuclear facilities, while leaving most of its uranium-processing centrifuges intact. If it decided to duck inspections, it could have a nuclear

“I will break the pride of your power,” God thundered at our ancestors more than 3,000 years ago, “And your strength shall be spent in vain.”

weapon with a few months. Also, as currently negotiated, any restrictions on Iran’s nuclear development would expire in 10 years.

“Now, 10 years may seem like a long time in political circles, but it’s just a blink of an eye in the life of a nation,” Netanyahu said.

As the broad outlines of the deal emerged, skepticism grew. Netanyahu stated it unequivocally: “That deal will not prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons. It will all but guarantee that Iran gets those weapons—lots of them.”

Observers from around the world are already comparing Barack Obama to Neville Chamberlain for his willingness to agree to such a one-sided deal.

As Richard Rogovin of the Columbus, Ohio, *Dispatch* stated it: “Today we have a Neville Chamberlain in the White House . . . and a leadership in Iran that bears a striking resemblance to the Nazi regime in every way . . .

“Like many British in 1938, some Americans are tired of war and would rather appease our enemies than offend them.

History is repeating itself before our eyes, but some of us are incapable of seeing this” (“Obama Pulled a Neville Chamberlain,” March 18, 2015).

Speaking to the Israeli newspaper *Israel Hayom*, prominent Harvard legal expert Alan Dershowitz, not one known for conservative views, drew similar comparisons, saying that Barack Obama might go down as another Neville Chamberlain if Iran gets hold of a nuclear weapon. “It would be better to have no deal at all than a bad deal,” he said (Feb. 18, 2015).

Netanyahu’s speech galvanized Congressional opposition to what many Congressional conservatives see as a bad deal for

Israel, the United States and the world. Less than a week after his speech, 47 U.S. senators signed a letter to Iran’s leaders, putting them on notice that any deal with Iran would need the approval of Congress before it could take effect.

Western weakness foretold

Our 21st century sees Russia and Iran bullying Ukraine and Israel. Wouldn’t it be nice if these problems would simply go away? But they won’t just go away. America and Europe have the power to deal with them, but can’t seem to act. Why have we lost the national and international will to do so?

“I will break the pride of your power,” God thundered to our ancestors more than 3,000 years ago (Leviticus 26:19). “And your strength shall be spent in vain” (verse 20).

Almost daily we hear of new attacks by radical Islamists. Whether beheading Coptic Christians on a Libyan beach, shooting dozens of foreign tourists in a Tunisian museum, or simultaneous suicide bombers killing more than 130 in Yemen, the level

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of barbarism seems to know no bounds. What is the meaning of it all? And more importantly, when will it all end?

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The good news is that after a time of growing world turmoil and trouble, a time of peace is coming to the entire world. Peace will come to the Middle East, and to Europe, in a way that the governments of this world know nothing about. Jerusalem, a city fought over for thousands of years yet holy to three religions, will be the capital of a peaceful kingdom that will encompass the entire earth.

“Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain [symbolic of a kingdom in Bible prophecy] of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills [or smaller nations]; and all the nations will stream to it . . . The law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2-3, New American Standard Bible)

A peaceful new world order is coming. But in the meantime, Jesus Christ has given us our marching orders: “Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house . . . Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:33-37).

Today we see history repeating itself. More than ever before, you need to be grounded in what is really important. Learn what God’s prophecies teach about our time, and be forewarned! **GN**

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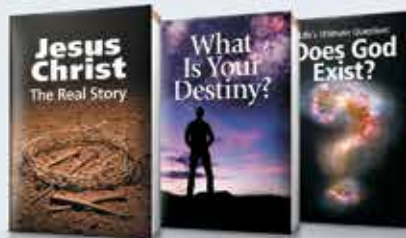
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The Power of the Holy Spirit

Is your life ruled by fear and uncertainty? Do you feel disconnected from God and unsure of how to improve your life? Learn how God's Spirit can powerfully transform your life. *by Beyond Today host Darris McNeely*

U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt said in his first inaugural address, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." He spoke to a generation of people who genuinely feared for their immediate future. They feared they would lose their property, jobs and the ability to actually feed their families. My parents were part of the audience to which Roosevelt spoke.

Things haven't changed much. We find ourselves still fearing loss of jobs, loss of home and difficulties feeding our families. What are your fears?

God wants to help you live a productive life—free from crippling fear. If fear is a daily part of your life, the truth about God's Holy Spirit is exactly what you need to hear.

God's Holy Spirit now available

Fearful, uncertain, doubtful—words that describe Jesus' disciples following His crucifixion. Their Master and Teacher was murdered in brutal and bewildering fashion. Their mission was seemingly at an end.

But these negative emotions were mingled with a new excitement. Jesus, whom they saw crucified, appeared to them and delivered new instructions: "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

A short time later they assembled for the Feast of Pentecost. As they remembered Jesus' words, the anticipation must have been palpable. Then, as they were gathered there in Jerusalem: "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak



God's Spirit is a very potent power, much like fire. It has to be nurtured and "stirred up" to be an effective tool that God uses to impart qualities we need for a successful life.

with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:2-4).

The wait was over. Jesus' promise was now being fulfilled. They had indeed been given great power from God. His Holy Spirit began to change their lives in incredible and tangible ways. This same power is available *today* for those God is calling to obey Him—it's available *to you right now*.

A Spirit of change

God's Spirit is a spirit of change—of conversion. It's what enables Christians to begin to develop the character of Jesus Christ in their own lives. We should choose to develop the spiritual side of life—the character side—first. Then, with sound character, we

can handle the physical things of life that sometimes challenge us.

What is the Holy Spirit? It's not a third person in a trinity, as many believe about God (see our free study aid *Is God a Trinity?*). Instead, the Holy Spirit is the *essence of God*. It's the essence that both God the Father and Jesus Christ share though They are distinct beings. You see, God *is* Spirit (John 4:24)—two Beings consisting of Spirit.

The Bible shows us that the Holy Spirit is also the *power* of God that can be projected outwardly from Them. It's what They use to create. This Spirit was the method of creation: "The earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2).

Here we see that the Holy Spirit of God is described as something far more than what you've perhaps been led to understand. It's the power with which God through Christ works His will, not only on the topography of our planet, but in the lives of those who put their faith in Him

and ask for His help each day.

The Holy Spirit of God is the missing dimension in human lives that will transform people beyond anything you can imagine!

Kindling the Holy Spirit

Do you need help to overcome sin? Do you need faith to conquer fear and to be courageous in life's trials? The honest answer is *yes*—we *all* do. Overcoming sin in particular is something we are incapable of doing of our own will and effort. What we need is the power of God's Spirit in our lives.

Have you ever sat by a fire and watched it die down to glowing embers? In time those embers will fade. To rekindle the fire,



you have to stir up the coals so oxygen can breathe life back into the fire. Then you can add more wood and watch the fire grow into a nice warm blaze again.

The power of the Holy Spirit works in much the same way. God's Spirit is a very potent power, much like fire. It has to be nurtured and "stirred up" to be an effective tool that God uses to impart qualities we need for a successful life.

The apostle Paul mentored a young minister named Timothy in how to nurture the gift of the Holy Spirit: "I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands [a reference to the way the Holy Spirit is bestowed—see Acts 8:17-19]. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

Notice these elements of the Holy Spirit—*power, love, a sound mind*. They are the opposite of fear.

Fear is what President Roosevelt was trying to combat when he encouraged the nation that there was nothing to fear but fear itself. Yet all these years later the same fears remain for many of us.

But God doesn't want us to live this way. He offers a better way of life. We need to align ourselves with our Creator and His way of life for the real solution to the problem.

A Spirit of power

Think about what God offers. First, He offers power. To understand, we have to understand power differently than what people might think. This power that Paul speaks of in the Bible gives a person confidence about life. And when you begin to understand that your life has purpose, it brings a contentment that is a very real power.

Knowing why you were born is really the starting point for power and mastery over yourself. We then need inner strength to

maintain focus and act accordingly. This is the power that Paul is talking about in this verse—power over *yourself* and over your thoughts and actions.

Changing your life in this sort of profound way is challenging to say the least. It would probably be more accurate to say it's impossible to do it alone! When God tells us we can have a Spirit of power, this is what He means—power to actually *change our lives*. God will help us experience this powerful change, but we must take a step in His direction.

A Spirit of love

The apostle Paul next describes the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of love. Love is a concept much misunderstood today. Love is too often understood only in a romantic context. While that can be part of the meaning, it doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of what love is all about. To understand love

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we must look to how God defines it.

On one occasion, the Pharisees gathered around Jesus. One of them, a lawyer, tested Him with a question, saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:36).

Christ’s reply went to the heart of what God requires. He said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (verses 37-40).

Yet to love God and others to this depth, remaining obedient to God’s commandments (1 John 5:3), requires something we don’t naturally have. Rather, God’s love is “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5, New Revised Standard Version). We need the power from the Holy Spirit to transform us into people capable of a deep, godly love.

A Spirit of soundness of mind

Lastly, Paul writes that God’s Spirit enables us to have a sound mind. When we have a sound mind through the Spirit, we’re able to bring our thoughts under control and become subject to the life-giving direction of Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote of this in another letter: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Do you have “arguments” against God? Maybe you think God isn’t fair, or that He doesn’t hear you when you call out to Him. Maybe you’re disappointed He hasn’t answered your heartfelt prayers.

Living according to God’s Spirit means jettisoning our own personal concepts of God. It means viewing Him as He really is and ourselves as we really are. Paul challenged Christians of his time to tear down any contrary thought about God and His sovereignty over all life and bring every thought into captivity to Christ. This requires a self-disciplined mind molded by the Holy Spirit.

Transformed by the Spirit

After Paul’s miraculous encounter on the road to Damascus, he went through a very

important process. Paul was *baptized*, and he received the gift of the Holy Spirit. From that moment forward, his life had a true, godly focus. He later wrote about the process of transformation he had gone through himself. He wrote it so that we could understand the power that’s available to us.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

Before Paul was baptized and received the Holy Spirit, he struggled with his own inherited view of God. When he began to walk by the Spirit, he experienced a completely new approach to life.

Paul’s experience can be summed up by paraphrasing what he wrote in Romans 8:5-8: *I thought I was a good person, pleasing God. Then I realized I was just another man like everyone else, struggling with life by my own works. But my mind was not completely right with God. Something was lacking, and until I took the necessary step toward God, life was futile. As long as I was trying to do it all alone I could not please God.*

Are you at this point? Do you feel something is missing? Perhaps you feel the failure of not being able to overcome your own personal shortcomings. The good news is that we can make the choice to resist sin, and with God’s divine help through the Holy Spirit we can actually *overcome* sin. The difference between the old Paul and the new Paul was the Spirit of God.

Notice how he explains it: “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9, New International Version, 1984).

Live a changed life through the Holy Spirit

To be a Christian, we must have more than a profession of belief or faith. We must *have the Holy Spirit*. There is no shortcut to true Christianity. And to receive this gift, we must *repent*. This means turning from sinful actions to obeying God and His Word. The life of a committed Christian requires that we go above and beyond the exact literal wording of God’s law and strive to follow its underlying intent.

Christ said that lusting after someone is the same as adultery. Even more, hating someone is equivalent to murder (Matthew 5:21, 28). He described the deeper, spiritual dimension of the law.

Paul understood, through his own life, how to rise above himself and his past and how to change and grow into a different person. Is this what you want for your life?

Paul writes: “Therefore . . . we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship” (Romans 8:12-16, NIV, 1984).

The Holy Spirit frees us from fear and enables a transforming relationship with God. When we are led by that Spirit we can experience a settled, confident, joyful and successful life. We have the love and power of God leading us. We have a life framed by sound character that leads us to make wise choices with all the details of our life.

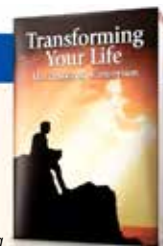
Have you repented of your sins? Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior? Have you followed His example in being baptized? Have you had hands laid on you by one of His ministers with prayer that the Holy Spirit be bestowed on you?

Unless you have followed the biblical steps of repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands, you may not have God’s Spirit. It doesn’t mean you’re not sincere. But God is clear that He expect us to carefully follow the example of Jesus and His apostles.

The fears that gripped society during Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency still echo in our modern world. The fact is, times of trial and difficulty have been and always will come up. We can’t escape all of life’s negative circumstances. What we can escape is the fear that comes from not having a sound confidence and love from our Creator that helps us truly live a transformed life of power, love and a sound mind! **GN**

Learn More

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God's Spirit and Our Destiny

Many people, believing that God is a Trinity, are confused about what the Holy Spirit really is and the future God intends for us as part of His family. What does the Bible really say? Astonishingly, the Holy Spirit is key to understanding God's future for you!

by Peter Eddington and Tom Robinson

A basic litmus test in mainstream Christianity today is that a person believe in the doctrine of the Trinity to be accepted into almost every Christian denomination.

A question on the website of Evangelical commentator John MacArthur's ministry Grace to You asks, "Can you become a Christian if you deny the Trinity?" The response: "I would answer, 'No.' If you don't believe in the Trinity, then you don't understand who God is . . ."

The Trinity doctrine argues that the Holy Spirit is a third divine person along with the Father and the Son. But a closer look at the Bible reveals many problems with this view. It is *simply not biblical*, and it does not express either the true nature of God or the

God's divine essence and *power*.

The prophet Micah explains that "truly I am *full of power by the Spirit of the LORD*" (Micah 3:8). In the New Testament, Paul referred to it as the spirit of *power*, love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Informing Mary that Jesus would be supernaturally conceived in her womb, an angel told her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you," and the divine messenger described this Spirit to her as "*the power of the Highest* [which] will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35). And, in a noteworthy Pentecost-related statement, Jesus told His followers, "You shall receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8).

Confronted with such scriptures, even the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* admits:

"The OT [Old Testament] *clearly does not envisage God's spirit as a person . . . God's spirit is simply God's power*" (1965, Vol. 13, "Spirit of God," p. 574).

The reference work *A Catholic Dictionary* similarly acknowledges, "On the whole the New Testament, like the Old, *speaks of the spirit as a divine energy or power*" (William Addis and Thomas Arnold, 2004, "Trinity, Holy," p. 827).

God's Word shows that the Holy Spirit is the very nature, presence and expression of *God's power* actively working in His servants. Indeed, it is through His Spirit that God is *present everywhere at once*, or omnipresent, throughout the universe and affects it at will.

Unlike God the Father and Jesus Christ, who are consistently compared to human beings in form and shape, the Holy Spirit is represented in a completely different manner.

glorious future He has planned for us!

How, then, does the Bible define the Holy Spirit if it is not a person?

The power of the Highest

The word "spirit" is translated from the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma*. Both words denote breath or wind, an invisible *force*. Scripture plainly says that "*God is Spirit*" (John 4:24, emphasis added throughout).

So, just what is the Holy Spirit? One of the simplest biblical descriptions is this: *It is the "power of the Highest"* (Luke 1:35). Rather than describing the Holy Spirit as a distinct person or entity, the Bible most often refers to it as and connects it with

The impersonal Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is spoken of in so many ways that demonstrate that it is not a divine person. For example, it is referred to as a *gift* (Acts 10:45). We are told that the Holy Spirit can be *quenched* (1 Thessalonians 5:19), that it can be *poured out* on people (Acts 2:17, 33), and that we are *baptized* with it (Matthew 3:11).

People can *drink* of it (John 7:37-39), *partake* of it (Hebrews 6:4) and be *filled* with it (Acts 2:4; Ephesians 5:18). The Holy Spirit also *renews* us (Titus 3:5) and must be *stirred up* within us (2 Timothy 1:6). These impersonal characteristics are certainly *not* attributes of a person or personal being!

The Spirit is also described by other designations—"the Holy Spirit of *promise*," "the *guarantee* of our inheritance" and "the spirit of *wisdom* and *revelation*" (Ephesians 1:13-14, 17)—that show it is not a person.

In contrast to God the Father and Jesus Christ, who are consistently compared to human beings in their form and shape, the Holy Spirit is consistently represented by various symbols and manifestations in a completely different manner—such as *breath* (John 20:22), *wind* (Acts 2:2), *fire* (verse 3), *water* (John 4:14; 7:37-39), *oil* (Psalm 45:7) and a *dove* (Matthew 3:16).

These depictions are difficult to understand if the Holy Spirit is a person! Notice Matthew 1:20: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her *is of the Holy Spirit*." Here we read that Jesus was *conceived* by the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus continually prayed to and addressed God the Father as His Father and *not the Holy Spirit* as His Father. He *never* represented the Holy Spirit as His Father!

Clearly, the Holy Spirit was the *agency or power* through which the Father begot Jesus as His Son—not a separate person or being altogether. It's the divine power through which God acts.

We must allow His Spirit to become the guiding force in our lives to produce the qualities of true Christianity. For it is through God's Spirit that we become like Him as His children. But what does that really mean?



You are gods?

Let's get to the heart of this matter. The Jews of Jesus' day accused Him of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God: "The Jews answered Him, saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.' Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, 'You are gods'"? If He called them gods . . . [why] do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"?"' (John 10:33-36).

In other words, said Christ, "If Scripture outright called human beings *gods*, why are you upset when I merely state that I am God's *Son*?"

Yet are human beings actually gods? What did He mean? Look at Psalm 82:6, which Jesus was actually quoting to the Jews: "I said, 'You *are* gods, and all of you *are children of the Most High*.'"

The key here is the word *children*, just as we read in other verses about our relationship with God. We must understand that God is *a family—a divine family of more than one person*. There is *one* God (the God *family*) comprising *more* than one God *Being*.

The God family from the beginning comprised two divine Beings—God and the Word. The Word became flesh 2,000 years ago as the Son of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3). After Jesus' human life and death, He was resurrected to divine spirit existence as the "*firstborn* from the dead" (Colossians 1:18) and "*firstborn among many brethren*" (Romans 8:29).

Who are the "many brethren"? They are God's saints—His sanctified or set-apart people. These are Christ's brothers and sisters—all the members of His Church.

Jesus was spiritually born in the resurrection as the *first* of many *brethren* or *fellow children of God* to follow later. As pointed out in Acts 17:28-29, we are God's offspring: "'For *we are also His offspring*.' Therefore, *since we are the offspring of God*, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising."

The Greek word for offspring used here, *genos*, means "kindred," "race," "kind," "stock" or "family." We are thus of *God's kind or family type*.

Psalm 82 is much easier to understand in this light. In verse 6 the word *gods* is equated with "*children of the Most High*." That makes perfect sense. When any entity bears offspring, its offspring are *the same*

kind of entity. The offspring of human beings are human beings. The offspring of God are, in Christ's own words, "gods."

But we must be careful here. Human beings are not *literally* gods—not yet, at any rate. Indeed, people initially are not literally even God's children, except in the sense that He created humanity and did so in His image and likeness.

We must understand that God is a family—a divine family of more than one person. There is one God (the God family) comprising more than one God Being.

In Psalm 82, when human beings are referred to as *gods*—they are still declared imperfect and subject to corruption and death. So they are of the divine family in only a restricted sense.

One aspect of this is that man has been created in God's image and likeness on a physical, mortal level with limited dominion, resembling God but *without His divine character and glory*. But another aspect of this is that *man has the ultimate potential of becoming the same kind of beings the Father and Christ now are*.

Amazingly, God's purpose is to *exalt human beings* from this fleshly existence to the same level of *divine spirit existence* that He has!

The ultimate outcome—divine glory

God speaks of us as His children (Romans 8:16-17; Philippians 2:15; 1 John 3:2). The spiritual reproductive process starts with God's Spirit joining with our human spirit: "The Spirit [itself] bears witness with our spirit that *we are children of God*, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and *joint heirs with Christ*, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be *glorified together*" (Romans 8:16-17).

Through this miraculous union, we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). The Spirit-begotten Christian is a child of God, an actual member of the God family—but not yet in an ultimate sense. As children, we must still go through a *development process* in this life—a period of building *godly character*, becoming more and more like God in the way we think and live.

But at the end of this life, in the resurrection at Christ's return, we will be changed into *divine spirit beings like the Father and Christ*. Look at this amazing truth recorded by the apostle John: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that

we should be called *children of God!* . . . Beloved, *now we are children of God*; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-2).

In fact, to expand on this, we are told in many passages of Scripture that we will receive the *divine glory* of the Father and

Christ. Let's note just one of them: "Walk worthy of God who calls you *into His own kingdom and glory*" (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

As coinheritors with Christ, we will receive dominion over all things, including the entire vast universe just as Christ has (Romans 8:17).

Nothing less than divinity

To truly exercise dominion over all things—including the raging thermonuclear furnaces of 50 billion trillion suns and every subatomic particle of every atom of every molecule in the cosmic expanse—*requires the omnipotent power of God*. We will need the power of God within us to sustain our inheritance.

And what about our minds? As human beings, we couldn't count all the individual stars of the universe, at one per second, in a trillion lifetimes. But God, in a passing remark, says He knows all the stars by name (Psalm 147:4).

Consider this: Converted human beings are to one day possess *divine* nature, divine glory and total power over the creation, sharing God's infinite knowledge. *All of this requires nothing less than divinity!*

This biblical truth, hidden by the common doctrine of the Trinity, comes as quite a shock to those who have heard only the traditional view of mainstream Christianity regarding the ultimate reward of the righteous. Yet those who might be quick to denounce this teaching will perhaps be even more surprised to learn that many early "church fathers" of mainstream tradition *did understand* this incredible truth, at least in part.

Paragraphs 398 and 460 of the current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995) state: "Created in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully 'divinized' by God in glory [but sinned] . . . The Word became flesh to make us 'partakers of the *divine*

nature” (pp. 112, 128-129). The latter paragraph quotes from earlier theologians:

From Irenaeus (2nd century): “For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God” (*Against Heresies*, Book 3, chap. 19, sec. 1).

From Athanasius (4th century): “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God” (*On the Incarnation of the Word*, chap. 54, sec. 3).

And from Thomas Aquinas (13th century): “The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us share in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods” (*Opusculum 57*, lectures 1-4).

This teaching is even more prevalent in Eastern Orthodox tradition, where it is known by the Greek term *theosis*, meaning “divinization” or “deification.” Notice the remarkable explanation of the early theologian Tertullian, writing around A.D. 200:

“For we will be even gods, if we deserve to be among those of whom He declared, ‘I have said, “You are gods,”’ and ‘God stands in the congregation of the gods.’ But this comes of His own grace, not from any

the Father, the Son and ultimately *us*, the multitude of other sons brought to glory (transformed believers).

There is indeed only one God, but that God is a family—with others to be added to that family. There are at present two fully divine members of the God family—two distinct Beings—God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). And, as incredible as it sounds, there will be *more to come*.

The Father and Jesus Christ will remain at the top of the family forever, reigning supreme even with the addition of billions of divine children. Unlike us, the Father and Son are uncreated, living eternally throughout time, without beginning. And there is only one Savior in whose name we can receive God’s gift of eternal life (Acts 4:12), setting Him above us forever. Nevertheless, Their plan is that we share divine existence with Them as Their family, reigning with Them over all creation.

Why are you here?

This, then, is *why we are here!* It is the ultimate potential destiny of all mankind. It is the awe-inspiring purpose for which we were created. As Jesus quoted, seeing our future, He said, “*You are gods.*” Our future can’t get any higher or better than that!

The offspring of human beings are human beings. The offspring of God are, in Christ’s own words, “gods.”

property in us. For it is He alone who *can make gods*” (*Against Hermogenes*, chap. 5, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 480, quoted in “Deification of Man,” David Bercot, editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 1998, p. 200).

You see, this was the commonly accepted view during the early Christian centuries before the Trinity doctrine took hold. Some of the later theologians of this early period were, despite this understanding, veering into developing Trinitarianism. But earlier theologians, closer to the original apostolic source, show no hint of Trinitarian ideas.

Consider this remarkable statement from the second-century bishop Irenaeus, who was taught when young by a disciple of the apostle John: “There is *none other called God* by the Scriptures except the *Father* of all, and the *Son*, and *those* who possess the adoption [i.e., sonship as God’s children]” (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, preface).

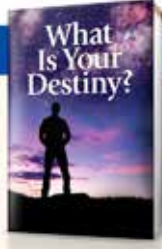
So rather than the Trinitarian one God in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Irenaeus proclaimed one God that includes

The Trinity doctrine doesn’t allow for God’s family to expand like this. Indeed, the Trinity denies the greatest truth we can know—that God is a *growing family of which we can become part*. The truth astounds the mind in the immensity and grandeur of its scope.

May you hold fast to the stunning and glorious destiny God has promised in His Word, and be filled with the power of His Holy Spirit! **GN**

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How can you apply the power of God’s Spirit in your life? And what is the ultimate purpose of life and why you are here? You need to read our enlightening study aids *What Is Your Destiny?* and *Is God a Trinity?* Request your free copies today!



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Who’s Behind The Good News?



Who’s behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by *people*—people from all walks of life, from all over the world, as enabled by God.

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*, dozens of helpful study guides (also free) and our *Beyond Today* TV program, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution



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Is Belief All That's Required for God's Gift of Salvation?

Eternal life is God's gift, not something any of us deserve or can in any way earn. But does God set conditions for us to receive this gift? It's vitally important to your relationship with God and to your future that you understand! *by Scott Ashley*

a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation *to all who obey Him*" (emphasis added throughout).

Can gifts have conditions?

Since salvation is God's gift, what does this passage mean when it speaks of "eternal salvation to all who *obey Him*"? If

we must *do something* to receive God's gift of salvation, how can it be a gift?

To use an analogy, if someone offered to send you a \$100 bill if you would send him a self-addressed stamped envelope, he would be offering you a gift. Simply believing that he would send you the money would not actually get you the money. And if you failed to send the envelope, you likewise would not receive the money. You might complain, but you still would not receive the gift because

part. No one will ever be able to boast that he or she has earned or deserves the gift of eternal life.



We must look at a number of verses scattered throughout the Bible to get the whole picture and look at all the Bible says on the subject to come to a proper understanding.

But it doesn't stop at simple belief and grace. Can we do things—or *not* do things—that disqualify us from receiving that wonderful gift from God? The answer is crucial to your relationship with God and to your future!

The fact is, the Bible shows that God sets certain conditions for receiving salvation. Meeting these conditions will *enable us* to receive that gift, while disregarding and failing to meet them will *disqualify us* from receiving it. What are these conditions?

If there is an authority on receiving eternal life, it has to be Jesus Christ. After all, He is the One through whom we receive it!

In Hebrews 5:8-9, Jesus is called the author of our salvation: "Though He was

you had not met the conditions.

On the other hand, if you sent the required envelope and received the \$100 bill, this does not mean you *earned* the gift. *You simply met the necessary conditions.* Without the offer of the undeserved gift, you could've sent hundreds of envelopes and received nothing, as you would have been entitled to nothing. The fact that conditions are attached to receiving a gift makes it no less a gift. Millions of people fail to understand this simple fact, and as a result don't realize that they risk missing out on God's priceless gift of salvation!

What must we do?

Since Jesus is the author of our salvation,

You've probably seen the religious tracts quoting Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Or maybe they quoted Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

Do this, the tracts assure us, and we have the promise of eternal life. But is this all there is to it? Is belief all that God requires of us for salvation? Some assume these two passages are the final word on the subject. But is that true?

If you've studied your Bible much at all, you probably realize that we must look at a number of verses scattered throughout the Bible to get the whole picture. We must look at *all* the Bible says on the subject to come to a proper understanding. And few things could be more important than understanding what we must do—or *not* do—if we are to receive God's gift of eternal life.

Belief is a clear requirement—but is there more?

Certainly belief in God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son, as They are described in Scripture, is crucial. As Hebrews 11:6 tells us, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." So belief in God and having living faith in Him is vital to pleasing God and receiving His gift of salvation.

And salvation, eternal life, is God's gift by grace—His loving disposition of favor and acceptance toward us—as Ephesians 2:8-9 explains: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Salvation is God's gift, unearned and undeserved on our

let's examine a few of His statements that tell us what we must do to receive that gift of salvation—eternal life with Him.

In Matthew 7:21 Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but *he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*" Jesus made it clear that merely acknowledging Him as Lord and Master—saying "Lord, Lord"—is not sufficient. To inherit the Kingdom of God, we must *do something*. We must *do the will of the Father*, as He clearly stated.

Jesus wants us to understand that there is more to receiving eternal life than just belief or mental acceptance. Our conviction that He is our Savior must be more than just a warm, comforting thought or intellectual concept. Jesus warns that simply calling on His name or recognizing Him as "Lord" is not enough.

At one point a wealthy young man asked Jesus how he could receive eternal life. "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16). Christ's reply, in verse 17, might shock some who think obedience to God's law is unnecessary—that He has done that for us so we don't have to do anything. Jesus responded, "If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments.*"

Jesus didn't answer that nothing is required other than believing in God or in Him. He told the young man he must *obey the commandments of God* to receive the gift of eternal life. How plain!

As the apostle James points out, belief is pointless unless it is backed up by action and obedience: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. *Even the demons believe—and tremble*" (James 2:19). If we think that belief is all we need for salvation, *we are sorely mistaken*. As James tells us, the demonic spirits fully believe in the existence of the one true God. They further know that Jesus is the Son of God raised from the dead. But the demons' belief in this regard doesn't mean they are saved!

James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, goes on to explain that faith—belief and trust in God—and obedience go hand in hand: "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that *faith without works is dead?* Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" (verses 20-22).

James thus explained that works of obedience as a result of our faith maintain our relationship with God and lead to *greater*

faith and obedience, as God requires. Without works as evidence of our faith, that faith is dead—worthless and useless.

Baptism and laying on of hands

Jesus gave another condition for God's gift of eternal life in Mark 16:16: "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*" Water baptism—by full immersion—is a symbolic act representing the death and washing away of our old sinful self and the beginning of a new life of serving God and striving to avoid sin (Romans 6:1-23). Through this act we symbolically put to death and bury the old person with his or her sins and rise from that watery grave to a new life as a new person.

Baptism is to be followed by the laying on of hands by a true minister of Jesus Christ, which allows us to receive God's Holy Spirit and truly belong to Him (Acts 8:17; Romans 8:9). Unless we surrender our lives to God through baptism and the laying on of hands to receive His Spirit as instructed, we fail to meet—whether knowingly or unknowingly—His prerequisites for receiving His gift of salvation.

The apostle Peter also affirmed these conditions for receiving God's Spirit, declaring, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Repentance means to turn from disobedience to God to obeying Him. So again, committed obedience and baptism are shown as requirements in the salvation process.

To those who would brush aside these and other plain biblical instructions Jesus replies, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and *do not do the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46).

In Matthew 10:22 and 24:13 Jesus gave another condition we must meet to receive God's gift of salvation: "*He who endures to the end will be saved.*" Some believe in the unbiblical teaching of "eternal security" or "once saved, always saved." But as Jesus plainly and directly implied here, *we can lose out on salvation if we fail to endure to the end* (See the "Question and Answer" on page 37.)

Once we have committed ourselves to obeying God and surrendering ourselves to Him, *we must stay the course to the end* and not look back (Luke 9:62). Even the apostle Paul realized that he needed to discipline himself to be in total subjection to God—"lest, when I have preached to

others," he wrote, "I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27). He clearly understood that through neglect he could lose out on God's gift of salvation! (compare Hebrews 2:1-3).

Salvation is free, but not cheap

You may have heard the expression, "Salvation is free, but not cheap." God's gift of life to us cost Jesus Christ *His life*. He, the very Son of God, willingly surrendered *His* life so that *we* might receive God's wonderful gift of eternal life. And it cost the Father, who "gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

But God expects us to surrender our lives in return, as Jesus states in Luke 14:26-27: "If you want to be my follower you must love me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And you cannot be my disciple if you do not carry your own cross and follow me" (New Living Translation, 1996).

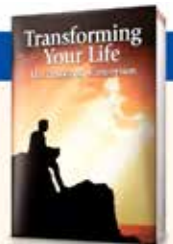
Our love for and commitment to Jesus Christ and God the Father must be more important to us than any other relationship. Each of us must be willing to bear his "cross," to faithfully follow Jesus even through life's most difficult challenges.

Verses 28-33 carry on that thought, warning us to consider carefully that accepting the gift of eternal life comes at the highest cost we can imagine. "So no one can become my disciple *without giving up everything for me*" (verse 33, NLT, 1996). As Jesus Christ gave His life for us, we must be willing to give our lives to follow Him!

So returning to the title of this article, is belief all that's required for God's gift of salvation? Clearly the answer is *no*. His Word spells out certain conditions for us. Let us be sure, as Hebrews 2:3 exhorts us, that we not "neglect so great a salvation"! **GN**

Learn More

We hope you now better realize some of what your Creator expects of you to receive His gift of salvation. To better understand this commitment, and the wonderful rewards it brings, be sure to download or request our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.



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Choose the Best Answer

Much of traditional Christianity believes that the law of God no longer applies to Christians. There are several different arguments against keeping the commandments, but are these biblical? Which approach gives the best answer from the Bible? *by Josh Harms*

When I was in college I used to take multiple choice tests on Scantrons—you know, those tests where you needed a No. 2 pencil to fill in the little bubbles that corresponded to the correct answer. I was great at those tests, *except* for the ones that said, “Choose the best answer.”

Of course, once you saw that statement, you knew there was more than one answer that could be right, but you had to choose the one that *best fulfilled* the question. It wasn't always easy. Sweat beaded on the brow, and anxious breathing followed. Let the process of elimination begin.

Not long ago I posted on Facebook a simple three-minute video that explains how Sunday came to be the “preferred” worship day of the week for mainstream Christianity—and why it should not be. I simply commented, “Not bad for 3 minutes.” Little did I know that this simple posting would start a heated argument regarding the validity of the commandments of God. In trying to debate this issue, numerous excuses were thrown out on why the commandments were no longer valid, and I countered them the best that I could. One answer seemed to work the best.

My question I pose to you is this: What answer supports the validity of keeping the commandments of God, and the reason you should keep them? (*Choose the best answer.*)

Answer A: I don't have to.

Mainstream Christianity will often say that the commandments of God were nailed to the cross, that Jesus fulfilled the law, and that we are therefore no longer required to obey the laws of the Old Covenant. Others will quote Colossians 2:16 which states, “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day” (New International Version).

First, what was actually physically nailed to the cross? Jesus Himself, of course, and

the sign placed above His head that stated, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” What was *spiritually* nailed to the cross? In Colossians 2:14, we see that the “hand-writing of requirements that was against us”—“the charge of our legal indebtedness” (NIV)—was nailed to the cross. Is that referring to the laws of God? No. The laws aren't against us, but *our sins are*—sins that required the payment of a penalty.

Not only were our sins nailed to the cross, but also the penalty for our sins. Jesus was the perfect and ultimate sacrifice to cover all of humanity's sins. No longer would animal sacrifices be needed. Rather, Jesus' blood would cover all sins for all time. This doesn't mean that sin no longer exists. It just means we are no longer under the death penalty for our sins if we've repented and accept His sacrifice.

God's law still defines what sin is. If the law was no longer valid, the entire New Covenant would never mention sin, for there wouldn't be any sin to discuss. Obviously, the law still exists.

Jesus Himself stated: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least [by those] in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great [by those] in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

Jesus' own words warn about teaching that the commandments are done away. Instead He tells us to *do* them and *teach* them. Furthermore, the word “fulfill” means “fill up” or, in context, “give full meaning to.” Jesus would fulfill the law by teaching its full spiritual intent and living by it as a perfect example. In no way does “fulfill” here mean that the law is done away!

Regarding Colossians 2:16, it's no sur-

prise that this scripture is so often taken out of context. The chapter is referring to heretical teachings with gnostic influences, not the doctrines of the New Testament church congregation in Colosse.

A close reading shows that the heretics being discussed believed that one should practice asceticism, worshipping a hierarchy of spirits and refraining from feasting on such occasions as God's Sabbaths and Holy Days. In fact, Paul in Colossians 2:16 is saying not to worry about these heretics judging the way the church members were celebrating the Sabbath and Holy Days.

This scripture that is so often used to say you don't have to keep God's laws is actually teaching just the opposite! (To learn more, download or request our free study aid *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest.*)

Answer B: Jesus was without sin—He gave us the perfect example

Was Jesus the perfect Jew? Or was Jesus the perfect Christian? If He was *both*, what does that mean regarding the law and its application for us as Christians?

The majority of mainstream Christianity believes that Jesus was sinless and the perfect example of what it is to be Christian. However, where Christians tend to divide is in deciding what application the law has for them. Some believe the law is only for the Jews and that Christians only need to follow the example of Christian living that Jesus gave us.

In Galatians 3:28, we see that “there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (New Living Translation). Plainly, Jesus was the perfect example for *all of mankind*. Not only are we to lead a Christian life, but we are also to obey God's commandments as He did.

The book of Galatians is where mainstream Christianity will often base its overall argument that Paul is saying Christians no longer have to obey the law of God. Certainly, the study of Galatians is much more expansive than what can be covered here. However, in light of the rest of Paul's epistles and the entirety of the New Testament, there is no possible way to legitimately conclude that Paul's epistle to the Galatians is ultimately saying that one is no longer



It wasn't always easy to choose the best answer. Sweat beaded on the brow, and anxious breathing followed. Let the process of elimination begin.

under obligation to obey God's law. (To better understand Galatians, download or request our free book *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God's Law?*)

While many argue that the commandments were just for the Jews while we need only to live a Christian life, they fail to see that not only did Jesus keep the commandments of God, but so did His apostles (see 1 Corinthians 7:19; 1 John 5:3) and so would the Christians of the end time (Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 20:4). His true followers are defined as those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.

The traditional Christian argument against the law maintains that, in the time between Jesus' death and His second coming, the adherence to the commandments is unnecessary. Many state this in spite of the fact that the Bible shows that time period being book-ended by Jesus and His early disciples keeping them and the end-time Church keeping them. The argument is simply illogical.

□ Answer C: As the name implies, they are commandments, not just suggestions

No one debates what the word "commandments" means. However, there were two arguments made against the commandments.

The first of the arguments made was to

debate *whose* commandments we are to keep. To many, there is a difference between God's commandments (considered "nailed to the cross") and Jesus' new commandment stated in John 13:34: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (NIV).

Did Jesus' new commandment replace God's commandments? As we've seen, Jesus did not come to destroy God's law or replace it. What He did come to do was to "fulfill" the law, or give it full spiritual meaning. Jesus emphasized how love and the law *work together*. They are not exclusive of each other. Rather love equates to fulfilling God's law (Romans 13:10).

When Jesus was asked which commandment is greatest, He responded: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40, NIV).

The requirements of the whole Bible and all the commandments of God are ultimately summed up as *love*. If you are loving God and your neighbor, you will be upholding the law and fulfilling it. Furthermore, "loving your neighbor" is not *only* a New Testament concept. Jesus was directly quoting Leviticus 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

The second argument often made is that you can't earn salvation by keeping the commandments. Salvation is a gift. Since you can't earn salvation by keeping the commandments, you don't need to keep them.

This argument is a half-truth. It is true in that salvation is a gift that can't be earned. However the conclusion is faulty. While you can't *earn* salvation by doing anything, that doesn't mean that God doesn't expect us to

follow His way of life or meet conditions He sets (see "Is Belief All That's Required for God's Gift of Salvation?" beginning on page 28). Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:19 that "keeping the commandments of God is what matters." It's very difficult to argue around what this verse is saying.

□ Answer D: You keep God's commandments because you love God

Even in the Old Covenant, God understood the problem in the covenant agreement with His people ancient Israel. The problem was never with the *law*, but with the hearts of the *people*. God stated this clearly: "Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!" (Deuteronomy 5:29, NIV).

The combination of "love," "hearts" and "commandments" are used so many times together in the Old Testament that we can't possibly cross reference them all here. God understood that His people in the Old Covenant didn't have the heart to follow Him, a problem common to all mankind (Romans 8:7), but He promised to change that in the New Covenant.

He stated through His prophet Jeremiah: "'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (Jeremiah 31:33, NIV). In the Old Covenant, the law was written on stone. In the New Covenant, it is to be written on our hearts. God wants our motivation of obedience to be that of love, not just because it is commanded.

In the New Testament, we see this stated again and again. The apostle John wrote: "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him" (1 John 2:3-5, NIV).

He continues: "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2-3, NIV).

We can summarize all this simply with: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. We so love God that we keep His commands."



Follow Me

Christianity 101: Forgiven & Forgiving

God offers us the priceless gift of forgiveness—but requires us to forgive others in return. What does this mean, and how can we put it into practice? *by Robin Webber*

Two brothers went to their rabbi to settle a long-standing feud. The rabbi got the two to reconcile their differences and shake hands. As they were about to leave, he asked each one to make a wish for the other in honor of the Jewish New Year (a time of new beginnings). The first brother turned to the other and said, “I wish you what you wish me.” At that, the other brother threw up his hands and said, “See, Rabbi, he’s starting up again!”

This story challenges us to ask: Why is it so easy to detect an unforgiving spirit in others but not in ourselves? Which leads to another important question: What kind of forgiveness do you offer, if you offer any at all?

Let’s realize that every day we live with the results of our decisions to forgive or not forgive. Our desire (or lack thereof) to the challenge of forgiving either grants us a new lease on life or perpetuates emotional and spiritual paralysis. And God doesn’t want that for us. It’s not a part of Jesus’ calling to “*Follow Me*.”

Christ made plain the course we are to follow in what is commonly called “the Lord’s Prayer” when He said, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12)—the debts here referring to unpaid penalties for wrongdoing. He further amplified this in following verses: “For if you forgive men their trespasses [the wrongs they have committed against you], your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (verses 14-15).

This stunning statement brings us to a frank spiritual reality: Once we are made aware of God’s desire and willingness to forgive us of our wrongdoing, that forgiveness is conditional and proportional to our willingness and desire to forgive others.

At this juncture you might be protesting,

“But—but—but—!” Okay, I get it. I’m human too, but our Heavenly Father has given us a calling to be like His Son Jesus Christ, and not to continue as we’ve been. How then do we respond to Christ’s call of “Follow Me” in forgiving others? As we explore the matter, let’s remember: Jesus never said following Him would be easy, but He did say it would be worth it.

“So ready to forgive”

Let’s begin by understanding what

On the headstone is the one-word message “Forgiven.” What an incredible testimony of one’s temporal existence before one’s Maker—the great forgiver.

separates God from man and what truly makes Him One we should adore and emulate. Psalm 86:5 portrays God’s incredible attributes in declaring, “O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help” (New Living Translation, 2007).

God is *ready* to forgive. This most challenging attribute of true love permeates His existence. God is actually leaning forward in anticipated readiness to forgive.

There’s no greater example of this readiness than the recorded utterance of a dying man nailed to a beam of wood. It’s here on Golgotha that Jesus with one of His last breaths says to those within earshot, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

It’s here that we not only sense the immediacy of a spirit ready to forgive, but the intimacy between what Jesus preached (Matthew 6) and now practiced under the most trying of circumstances.

Christianity 101, simply put, entails fully grasping that God doesn’t ask us to do what He hasn’t done. We need to remember

what’s been done for us because of what we were before God’s saving grace forgave us.

Sometimes we forget where Christ picked us up along the road and said to us, “Follow Me.” God’s merciful forgiveness isn’t our personal property, but is to be shared with others. What we say and do defines this understanding.

Long ago someone embraced this understanding. In a cemetery not far from New York City is a headstone engraved with a one-word message—“*Forgiven*.” The message is simple and unembellished. There’s no date of birth or further epitaph. There’s only a name with the word. What an incredible testimony of one’s temporal existence before one’s Maker—the great forgiver.

But that’s only half of the equation. Truly

accepting God’s forgiveness means we too must in turn be ready to forgive. To simply accept divine forgiveness and not be prepared to forgive others is being only half a Christian. That’s like being half pregnant! You can’t be that. You either are—or you’re not.

This is a challenge for all who seek to follow Christ. When the 18th-century British evangelist John Wesley talked one day with the founding father of the American colony of Georgia, General James Oglethorpe, about a corrupt individual, Oglethorpe said, “I never forgive.” Whereupon Wesley said, “Then I hope, sir, you never sin!”

Moving beyond our hurts and pains

How do we move beyond Oglethorpe’s and our mutual far-too-often spiritual shortsightedness and expand the gravestone’s words to “*forgiven and forgiving*”? A Christian must realize and embrace three great truths:

1. *We have been forgiven and now experience God’s continuing grace.* Psalm 103 tells us to look up and praise our personal

Redeemer: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities” (verses 2-3), “who redeems your life from destruction” (verse 4), who “has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities” (verse 10), and who has removed our transgressions “as far as the east is from the west” (verse 12). Sounds like He’s leaning forward, doesn’t it?

2. *Although forgiven, we will remain imperfect even as we strive to emulate a perfect God.* The apostle Paul had something to say about this in Romans 7:18-19: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is

is very costly. It costs you, not the person being forgiven. Forgiveness means that justice will not always be fulfilled. Forgiveness does not rebuild the house that has been burned down by someone carelessly playing with matches. Forgiveness does not always put a broken marriage back together. Forgiveness does not restore virginity to the rape victim. Forgiveness is letting go. It’s the relaxation of your death grip on the pain you feel” (p. 88).

Yes, it’s cutting off the price tag of what it costs you. No, it’s not easy to forgive, but consider the alternatives: 1) being a slave to past injustices, 2) allowing present emotions to daily take you hostage, 3) thereby

robbing you and loved ones of a positive future.

Let me share a story regarding the hard work and ultimate benefit that the process of forgiveness brings. During World War II many Dutch families hid Jews from the horror of the Nazi regime. Some paid with their lives while

others were incarcerated. Corrie ten Boom, later to become a renowned author and lecturer, was such a one. She shared her forgiveness journey in a 1972 *Guideposts* article titled “I’m Still Learning to Forgive.”

Years after her concentration camp experience in Nazi Germany, she was giving talks on forgiveness and met face to face one of the cruel German camp guards whom she and her sister had to degradingly walk naked before. Her sister had died in that awful place. Now this man said he’d become a Christian and stretched out his hand to her, asking, “Will you forgive me?”

She writes: “I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But . . . the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. ‘. . . Help!’ I prayed silently . . . And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place.

“The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. ‘I forgive you, brother!’

I cried. ‘With all my heart!’ For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.”

In this example we see a profound truth: To forgive is to set a prisoner free—and discover that the prisoner was *you*.

Several years ago my wife and I were at a funeral service in a cemetery. As we wandered on the gentle grass through rows of markers, we came upon one reminiscent of the previously mentioned “forgiven” tombstone. On this one was simply a name, date of birth, a dash, a date of death and a short phrase.

So often, it’s in the silence of the dash in which God does His loudest work in us if we so allow. The dash here was amplified by three engraved words that demonstrably said it all—*Jesus is Victor*.

What kind of person will you be?

Now please read carefully. Does this mean we are to continually allow ourselves to be subjected to harmful behavior such as verbal, emotional, physical or sexual abuse and just keep on taking it? Is that what’s required in being forgiving? Absolutely not! Sometimes we run out of cheeks in “turning the other cheek.”

True love, wisdom and patience tell us some matters and some people need to be dealt with from afar, over a period of time, and with meaningful spiritual preparation on our part in light of Christ’s example. Galatians 6:1-2 makes this readily plain: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

With some people we must be forgiving without necessarily being reconciled to them at this time. Forgiveness means we do not hold a grudge. We desire that offenders repent rather than seeking vengeance.

Some matters and people will simply need to be committed to God’s providential safekeeping to be reconciled to Him and restored to us in His perfect timing alone. But until then, we are to lean forward with hearts desirous to forgive even as we have been forgiven.

Will you be forgiving too? Follow the example of Jesus Christ. He will be there with you all along the way as you practice Christianity 101—in which you have no time, no space, no person to waste! **GN**



present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” The apostle here is reminding us that we all have some serious spiritual personal homework yet to deal with.

3. *Because we have been forgiven, we must ourselves be forgiving.* What we have received we must in turn share as God’s human instruments. Acts 20:35 reminds us of the full equation of being Christian: “And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Yes, accepting and expressing God’s sovereignty in our lives isn’t merely receiving forgiveness, but passing it on to others.

Cutting off the price tag

In reading this you know it’s important, and you appreciate God’s example, and you understand the spiritual hazard of not forgiving. But why is forgiveness *so difficult*?

Allow me to quote from Tim LaHaye’s 2010 book *Anger Is a Choice*: “Forgiveness

Lessons From the Parables

The Parable of the Tares: God's Field

I've written about the gardens I used to plant and what I've learned through the many seasons and plantings. Let's consider that God, too, has a garden, a spiritual field—and what our part is in that.

by **Darris McNeely**

To the church congregation at Corinth the apostle Paul wrote, "You are God's field, you are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). Throughout this passage Paul makes it very clear that though he or another minister may have sown seed or tended and watered, it was God who gave the increase. God controls His field and what it produces for harvest (verses 5-9).

This is both comforting and encouraging. Let me tell you why.

I've been a minister of the gospel for more than 40 years. I've pastored the people of God and taught them about the Kingdom. I've given thousands of sermons, driven countless thousands of miles to minister. I've baptized repentant believers into the Body of Christ, blessed countless children, anointed the sick and buried the faithful. Today I serve a wider audience through a ministry rooted in several forms of media, including this printed page.

This calling has brought me into contact with all kinds of people and personalities. Though they have had many backgrounds and motives and problems in life, one thing brought us together. Our paths crossed on the field called the Church of God. It was in this venue that we talked, walked and experienced the grace of God's guiding hand.

In 42 years I still believe and teach what I did from the first day in this field, though refined considerably as I've learned and come to understand more. Sadly, some of those I've known no longer hold to the faith.

As we saw in the parable of the sower and the seed, some allow the seed of the gospel to be choked out by the cares of life and the persecution of the world. Some with whom I once worked fall into this category. With most, I never foresaw that they would fall by the wayside, nor did they. We appeared the same to each other. We

professed the same goals and beliefs.

My work in Christ's ministry has taught me another lesson. It is that even though we are in the fellowship of the same church, it may be for different reasons. The parable of the wheat and the tares adds another dimension to our understanding of seed sown in a field.

Tares among the wheat

Christ gave this parable immediately following the parable of the sower. Notice what He said:

"Another parable He put forth to them,

While growing next to wheat, tares cannot be distinguished from the real wheat. It is not until near the time of harvest that you can discern which of the two is the real item.

saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.

"So the servants of the owner came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?" He said to them, "An enemy has done this." The servants said to him, "Do you want us then to go and gather them up?"

"But he said, "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Matthew 13:24-30).

This parable is similar to the previous one only in that we have the sowing of seed. But that is where the similarity ends. Every

other element holds a different meaning and takes us to a sobering conclusion about God's field and those who are in it.

A tare is a plant that commonly grows in fields of grain. And although it looks similar to an edible grain, it isn't suitable for food. In fact, many feel the specific tare, or weed, referred to in this parable is the darnel, a poisonous weed that is very similar in appearance to wheat.

While growing next to the stalk of wheat, darnel cannot be distinguished from the real wheat. It is not until near the time of harvest, when the wheat comes into ear or sprouts its fruit, that you can discern which of the two is the real item.

The parable explained

Notice how Jesus explained this parable: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds

are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.

"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (verses 37-43).

God has a field, defined here as the entire world. There is a divine meaning and purpose being worked out here. God is guiding history and mankind to an end that will fulfill His purpose.

This parable is showing two different works being done in the world. And it pro-

vides understanding as to why there is evil. God plants good seed that becomes His children of the Kingdom. Satan, the wicked one, plants those who are his offspring.

Because the tares and wheat look alike, it's virtually impossible to determine by sight which is which. That is why God tells His servants to let them both grow to harvest when the difference will become apparent. Of course, “The Lord knows who are His” (2 Timothy 2:19).



Only near the time for harvest can the fruiting head of dandelion, left, be easily distinguished from the fruiting head of wheat, right. Before this stage the plants look almost identical.

Are the “sons of the wicked one” among them truly evil people? No. The parable tells us they look and act similar to “the sons of the kingdom”—you cannot tell them apart. Until we repent and turn to God, we are all walking “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). Satan influences by mood and attitude, and until we understand this and actively resist his evil spirit at work, we can unwittingly be his agents.

Satan is the god of this age and keeps everyone deceived (2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9). And he can infiltrate the closest quarters of God's people. Jesus' words to this effect should serve as a warning.

Let God sort His field

Here is a lesson I've learned as a pastor. Be patient with those you work with. Treat people with kindness, fairness and gentleness. God, who knows the heart—something I could not always discern—expects us to do this. One of the key thoughts in this parable is the owner telling his servants to not go through the field cutting out those they thought were tares. That is a pretty dangerous action.

I worked with many people who expressed interest in God and a desire to live righteously. You learn to give them the benefit of the doubt. When they sin, it provides the opportunity to help them get back on their feet spiritually. People may at times *act* like a tare but be a son of the Kingdom. And people may act like a son of the Kingdom but be a tare. I couldn't always tell.

One of the lessons I took from this parable is to let God do the work of discerning

who are His and who are not. Not only was it not my role, but I didn't have all the tools for the job. A worker in God's field has to adopt a position of vigilant toleration that watches like a shepherd over God's people and teaches sound doctrine from the Bible along with gentle oversight.

Treating people fairly and kindly always had good results. I might have let some problems go longer than I should have. But I thought it best to maintain a vigilant position, taking action when it was clear that some people had wrong motives and needed to be separated from the other members.

The apostle Paul advised us to be patient. If the servants of the field owner had rambaged through the fields tearing up the good wheat along with the tares, what kind of mess would have been created? Good crops would have been prevented from coming to maturity and bearing fruit. So it is with working in God's spiritual field and tending His Church. It is possible to harm, even destroy, the good in any effort to weed out the tares.

God's timing

God says to let them grow together until the harvest, the end of the age and the coming of Jesus Christ. Then He will make a

distinction as only He can.

Christ says that any who offend and practice lawlessness will be gathered and cast into the furnace of fire. Judgment is a difficult and hard time. But that is one of the lessons here. There is a time of judgment determined on the world. Those who are agents of Satan, engaging in deliberate acts of evil, will face judgment.

The modern world doesn't like to hear a word like judgment. Judgment implies that there are standards, laws and absolutes—both morally and ethically. But God says there is a coming time of judgment that will deal with lawlessness and unrighteousness. The key is that it is *God's* judgment, not man's. That is a wonderful and comforting truth, because God judges in perfect righteousness and in His time.

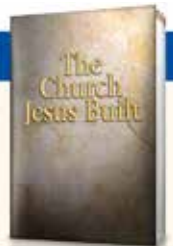
We need to take God and His working very seriously. I don't want to be a tare, someone who impersonates the real thing. How about you? The world is full of good intentions but short of those who carry through to show themselves the real thing. In this case the real thing is a genuine Christian planted by God in His field.

It is not my role, nor is it yours, to figure out who are tares and who are wheat. Let God do that. Perhaps the main reason this parable is here is to sound a warning to all of us who profess Christianity to examine ourselves to make sure we are in the true faith, following the teaching of Christ and building on a right foundation.

Jesus likened those who heard His teachings and actually did them to one who built his house on a rock—to thereby withstand the winds and gales of life that seek to destroy and shipwreck faith (Matthew 7:24-27). In this parable Christ concludes by saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” It's wise to hear the teaching and let it move us in godly fear to habits and a life that are sound and faithful. **GN**

Learn More

As this article shows, not everyone who claims to be a Christian actually is a true follower of Jesus Christ. How does the Bible define one who is or isn't? You may be surprised! You need to read our free study aid *The Church Jesus Built*. Download or request 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

Letters From Our Readers

“How Christian Is Easter?”

For years I have known these facts and resisted change for the sake of the children in the family who would be highly disappointed not to receive an Easter basket loaded with goodies. But out of concern for their long-term spiritual state, I raised the question to them this year. While explaining to the granddaughters that it was not pleasing to God that we have Easter baskets, they totally agreed! Much to my surprise and relief there will be no baskets this year!

From the Internet

Praise the Lord for His Word and understanding. I have been questioning Sunday services and Christian holidays most of my life. Thank God you confirmed what I knew in my spirit but couldn't put words to. Bless you and amen!

From the Internet

“Good Friday—Easter Sunday: It Doesn't Fit With the Bible!”

I have known the truth about three days and three nights for years now, but most people have been raised in one denomination or another and have been taught myths about many things biblical or spiritual. It is somewhat difficult to convince them of the truth about things they think they have known or have been practicing all their lives. Some even know the truth, but because their parents and family believe and practice otherwise they just go along with the myths, which is not what God would have them do.

From the Internet

Thanks from around the world

Thank you very much for sending *The Good News* magazine. This is a great information resource for me to know my Bible and world events. May God bless you and your ministry for all the things you are doing for Him!

Reader in Myanmar

I am truly thankful for everything I have been receiving from you. You have been incredibly helpful and indeed sweetly enlightening in my life—you must know that.

Reader from Mexico

Thank you for your continuous gift of *The Good News*. I am a Muslim, but many of your articles are very informative. I read some of your articles on life after death. The scientific point of view was not touched upon in your articles. In a country where scientific knowledge is growing day by day, your articles will be more impressive if written in a style rich in arguments from the current scientific discoveries. However your efforts of spreading spiritual knowledge are appreciated.

Reader from Pakistan

Thank you, and we're glad you find The Good News helpful in your studies. Science can't prove what happens after we die, so we must rely on the revealed Word of God for guidance on that subject. However, one thing many people point to when discussing what happens after death are near-death experiences, where a person claims to see visions of heaven or hell or has a conversation with a dead loved one. We discussed some of the scientific research that's been done on near-death experiences in an episode of Beyond Today called "Near-Death Experiences and the Bible," which you can watch free online by searching for "near-death experiences" at beyondtoday.tv.

Cancel my subscription

Although you are kind enough to send me a free subscription to *The Good News*, I have decided to decline your offer. Quoting rightwing columnists does much for me to answer your credibility. And this has nothing to do with biblical prophecy. You fail to mention that President Obama is getting out of unnecessary wars that we so recklessly fell into because of the Bush administration.

I am convinced that the world thinks less of our country because we cause so much destruction in these wars. I know you believe this is a Christian nation. It is a nation primarily of Christians but remember: One of the reasons our great country was founded was because of freedom to believe whatever we want. So, to make a long story even longer, please remove my name from your mailing list. P.S. Please give me a citation in the Bible that condemns homosexuality.

Reader from Seattle, Washington

We're sorry to hear you no longer wish to receive our magazine. Our purpose

is not to offer a perspective that is either right-wing or left-wing, but to view news and trends from a biblical perspective based on the Word of God. As for your comment about us believing America to be a Christian nation, that is not accurate. While the country was founded in part on biblical principles, it never embraced true Christianity—and has since widely turned its back on God despite professing Christianity.

To answer your request for a biblical reference showing homosexuality to be wrong, read Genesis 19:1-25; Jude 7; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 and Romans 1:20-28. On the hotly debated topic of gay marriage, consider Jesus Christ's own statement about marriage: "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" (Matthew 19:4-5).

Later the apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). "Homosexuals" here refers to practicing homosexuals—not converted Christians with same-sex attraction who are struggling to remain pure in their thoughts and actions, whom we are to treat with compassion. It is those who won't repent of sin of whatever type who are condemned. Yet Paul offers hope to the repentant, stating: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (verse 11).

Learning about the Sabbath

Through the literature and information you have provided for me through the years, I have been convinced and in some way thrilled to know that now I am observing the true day that the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel had sanctified. I have been praying to God to give me a job so I can work Monday to Friday so the Sabbath could be free for me to attend the gathering to worship the Lord. I have now been offered a job working Monday to Friday with a lot of spare time in between as well. I was brought up in a God-fearing Christian family, but I have now realized that we were in a denomination that was worshipping on the wrong day. I feel so blessed thanks to your wonderful messages and literature. Keep up the wonderful work. Thank you so much and be blessed.

Reader from Sydney, Australia

I finished reading your Sabbath booklet. I have just started this new path in my life to follow God and His Word. I have been reading the Bible, going to church on Sunday and even got baptized. Now I am reading that the Sabbath is not on Sunday! So by this I am not keeping a commandment? My church I just started going to only has Sunday services. After reading this booklet, now I feel like it is wrong to go there on Sunday as it's not the Sabbath. Any help with this matter? I read that we must not break one commandment or it's the same as breaking them all. Please, any help you can give on this I would really appreciate. I'm trying to be the best Christian I can, and I just started on this path. I am 38 years old and just found the Word of God. I do not want to be the seed that fell on the rocky ground. I want to walk in God's true word and way.

From the Internet

As you saw from the booklet Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest, the Bible is quite clear that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, not Sunday, the first day of the week. As you saw from the quotes in the booklet, most major denominations even admit this. You can find a complete list of our Sabbath-keeping congregations online at www.ucg.org/churches, as well as contact information for faithful ministers who can help with your questions. We hope to see you on a Sabbath soon at the congregation nearest you!

Wanting to make a donation

We would like to make a donation as we enjoy the magazine and other publications you print and distribute at no charge. What address should we use for this purpose? Thank you and may God continue to bless your good works.

Reader from Indiana

Readers can find a list of addresses of our offices around the world on page



Questions & Answers

Q: Once I am saved, am I automatically saved forever?

—*Internet reader*

A: Some people believe that when a person commits his or her life to Jesus Christ, accepting Him as personal Savior, then eternal salvation is totally assured from that moment on, with absolutely no possibility of ever losing it. This is often referred to as “eternal security” or “once saved, always saved.” But does the Bible really teach this? Let’s examine the Scriptures to understand the truth.

Those who teach or hold to this belief use several scriptures to try to prove it. Let’s look at one passage that is often misunderstood this way, and then see many verses that show this to be an erroneous conclusion.

John 10:27-29 are pivotal verses used for this teaching: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.”

Jesus made this statement in response to some who had questioned Him as to whether He was the promised Messiah (John 10:23-24). The focus here was not “eternal security” but the recognition of His messianic identity.

He declared that His true followers, drawn to Him by the Father, followed Him as the One through whom they would receive eternal life. They thus recognized Him as the Messiah, and no one could shake them from their God-given conviction. His answer, then, was effectively that people couldn’t properly understand His identity and follow Him without the Father leading them to Him (compare John 6:44).

The verbs “hear” and “follow” are in the present tense in the Greek, so Jesus was speaking of the present and not specifically about the future. In stating that “no one is able to snatch them [the sheep] out of My Father’s hand,” He meant that no external power—be it Satan, false religious leaders or anyone else—could take them away. Jesus definitely did not say that His followers couldn’t ultimately fail due to fault of their own. Other verses clearly show it is possible to be once enlightened and then fail to continue in the path of righteousness.

Other scriptures used to establish the “once saved, always saved” doctrine follow the same pattern of being misinterpreted and misapplied. Just one clear scripture that contradicts this teaching is enough to show that the teaching is not biblical. Yet in fact, we can find *many* passages that teach just the opposite of this doctrine, showing that one must meet—and *continue* to meet—certain conditions to receiving God’s gift of salvation.

We are assured that God will never leave us or forsake us as Christians (Hebrews 13:5). But the Bible never says it is impossible for us to leave or forsake God and lose out on His gift of salvation!

Let’s notice a few of the many scriptures proving this is possible:

- “But he who *endures to the end* shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13, emphasis added throughout).
- “By which also you are saved, *if you hold fast* that word which I preached to you; unless you believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:2).
- “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we

have heard, *lest we drift away*. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, *how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation . . . ?*” (Hebrews 2:1-3).

- “But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are *if we hold fast* the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:6).

- “For we have become partakers of Christ *if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end*” (Hebrews 3:14).

- “For you have need of endurance, *so that after you have done the will of God*, you may receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36).

- “Look to yourselves, *that we do not lose those things we worked for*, but that we may receive a full reward” (2 John 1:8).

- “And *he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end*, to him I will give power over the nations” (Revelation 2:26).

- “Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, *that no one may take your crown*” (Revelation 3:11).

- “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, *if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance*, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4-6).

- “For *if we sin willfully* after we have received the knowledge of the truth, *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26-27).

These are just a few examples of verses that say we must continue in the faith to the very end to be saved. Notice that some verses say, “*if we hold fast . . .*” Salvation is conditional on our continuing to the end. Even such a figure as the apostle Paul did not say he was assured of salvation. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:27, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, *I myself should become disqualified.*”

The doctrine of “eternal security” is not found in the pages of the Bible. We must all endure to the end to be saved.

On the other hand, there are many verses that show that as long as we do not through continued neglect or bitterness come to ultimately reject God, we are indeed assured of salvation. We do not need to live in worry, but can be confident in God to see us through. That is what Paul meant in Philippians 1:6: “. . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” We just need to stay in the process with God—to keep repenting, growing and overcoming with His help.

To learn more, be sure to read “Is Belief All That’s Required for God’s Gift of Salvation?” beginning on page 28. Interested readers can also search our website on the topic of salvation for more in-depth information. Take particular note of a section of our free study aid *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God’s Law?* titled “Salvation Accomplished in Stages” (within the sidebar “How Does Justification Relate to Salvation?” at www.ucg.org/booklets/nc).

2 of this issue. Those who wish to become coworkers in this worldwide work can send donations to the office in their country of the country nearest them. We deeply appreciate the support of those who help us in this work of sharing the gospel with people in all nations.

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 (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).



Tattoos have become very popular among teens and young adults. But are they a good idea? Here are some questions to make you think before you ink! *by Janet Treadway*

Recently I watched a news clip about Dr. Jon Mendelsohn at Advanced Cosmetic Surgery and Laser Center. He was using his skills as a plastic surgeon to remove unwanted tattoos from convicted criminals who had just been released from prison. It's a mission he hopes will help these men live better lives.

Two of his clients, Michael and Leroy, have served time behind bars. Michael was sentenced on drug charges. Leroy's criminal record began when he was 12. Now 31, he's been locked up for more years than he's been free. Leroy realized that the tattoos made it harder for him to get a job.

Both former convicts are now fathers, and they realized that to get a job they had to remove the tattoos. They also wanted to be a better example to their children, so now they are having them removed.

We often make our decisions on the spur

of the moment, based on our emotions at the time or peer pressure, instead of considering how this will affect us down the road or how it will look on our changing bodies. Will this person whose name I want to tattoo on me be in my life 20 years from now?

In making a decision, consider how you will feel about it years later. Here are three factors to think about in considering a decision, particularly when it comes to tattoos.

Will you regret the decision later?

The number of people who regret getting tattoos while a teen or a young adult is on the rise, according to a survey reported in London's *Daily Mail* (Naomi Greenaway, "Do You Regret Your Tattoo? One in Six People Hate Theirs and 50% Regret Getting Inked Because It Makes Them Look Common," April 1, 2014).

The article noted that "one in six hate

their tattoos so much they want them surgically removed" and that "the most prevalent reason for the change of heart is fear of the so-called 'tramp stamps,' as fifty per cent worry they will be considered 'common [and] uncultured.'"

What seemed so cool years ago is not so cool for them now. Even several well-known celebrities claim they now regret their tattoos. More than a third of those surveyed "express regret for fear of how they'll look as they get older (and saggier), and half of those surveyed admitted that a person with prominent tattoos was less likely to succeed in business."

The article also noted the following: "Perceived promiscuity is also a worry for the tattooed masses. One in six of those surveyed said people with tattoos are seen as more likely to have one-night stands."

Three celebrity music artists who are judges on the weekly television singing-competition show *The Voice* have regrets of being inked. In 2012 Pharrell Williams told *Complex* magazine that he was "young and dumb" when got his tattoos and is currently going through the painful process

of having them removed.

Adam Levine can't stand the tattoo on his right shoulder that was supposed to be a cool Russian heritage symbol. Instead he now thinks it looks more like a "cauliflower with a sun in the middle of it."

Blake Shelton, another judge on *The Voice*, considers his tattoo of deer tracks—which he got to represent his love of hunting—ugly and stupid, mostly because the tracks are "constantly mistaken for lady bugs." All three now have regrets.

So ask yourself, will I regret it later? Will it be worth the cost and pain to remove it?

How will it affect the image you want to present?

What image do markings on your body reflect to others? How might it affect your job and career? According to an article titled "How Tattoos Affect Your Career" at Salary.com, a survey of 2,700 people found that 76 percent felt that tattoos and piercings hurt an applicant's chances of being hired for a job.

Dr. Andrew Timming of St. Andrews

Israel, "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:28).

The apostle Paul reminds us that our body is meant to be the temple of God's Spirit and that it does not belong to us but was bought at the price of Jesus's blood when He died for us, so we are to glorify God in our body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Whatever we do should reflect and glorify Him.

Is your body consistent with the importance you attach to your life as God's creation and the intended dwelling place of His Spirit? We are to represent God (Matthew 5:14; 1 Peter 2:9, 12). Our worship of and service to Him are far more important than anything else we do. Do we give others that distinct impression by our appearance, or do we send a very different message?

While we strive with God's help to be clean and pure on the inside, this should affect how we present ourselves on the outside. Will you be a good representative for God's way of life starting with your appearance? Or when people see you

coming, will they be turned off?

Think before you decide to tattoo your body. A vital key to making wise decisions is to consider *consequences!* Every single decision you have ever made or will ever make has consequences, whether good or bad. Don't follow the crowd! Have courage to be your own person and be proud of it! You can do that without having to tattoo your body.

Ask yourself these three crucial questions: Will you regret the decision later? How will it affect the image you want to present? Does it glorify God?

If you already got one or more tattoos before now, you shouldn't feel like you have to have them removed to have a deep relationship with God (although they should be covered or removed if they promote something offensive, vulgar or demonic). You are very special to God! And the person you are on the inside is what most concerns Him.

This article is aimed at those who might be thinking about getting tattoos and isn't meant to condemn those who already have them. More broadly it's aimed at all young people who read this in hope that they will think before they ink! **GN**

Don't follow the crowd! Have courage to be your own person and be proud of it! You can do that without having to tattoo your body.

University School of Management interviewed recruiters in 14 organizations, including a hotel, bank, city council, prison, university and bookseller, to get a broad view of their opinions on tattoos. He found that most respondents agreed that visible tattoos are a stigma.

And think about this: While you might think it's cool to have a tattoo, the most surprising finding of the survey reported in the *Daily Mail* earlier is that when it comes to romance, a tattoo can be a turnoff—even to people who have them! A third of those surveyed said they would be less likely to date someone with prominent tattoos.

So ask yourself: What kind of image do I want to project? Will this affect me in job hunting or my plans for my future career? And will my tattoos be a turnoff in regards to dating and future relationships?

Does it glorify God?

Above all, will your decision whether to sport a tattoo reflect God and His values and character? We need to remember that He is holy and pure and wants us to be also. God commanded those of His nation of

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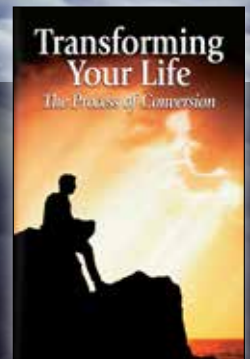
**We were created
incomplete. What
are we missing?**

How often do you find yourself struggling with a problem that you just can't seem to shake? How often do you realize you can and should do better, but you still fall short?

Few realize it, but *we were created incomplete*. We lack a vital *missing ingredient*.

This is a major theme of the Bible from beginning to end. Without this missing ingredient, we remain mired in problems and weaknesses that drag us down and hold us back. With it, however, we can grow and develop spiritually to reach the awesome future God has planned for us!

What is this missing ingredient, and how can you find it? We've put together an eye-opening study aid, *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, in which you can discover God's great purpose for you and the biblical foundations for a productive, successful life of growth and positive change.



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