

# *The* Good News

November-December 2014

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

# AMERICA'S WAR ON GOD

Silencing God's Children **14** • One Nation Under Allah? **16** • When Was Jesus Born? **24**  
Are You Ready for the Day for the Lord? **28** • After the Chaos: the Times of Refreshing **31**

BEYOND  
TODAY  
UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

Are You Fighting  
Against God? page 20



## Will We Die by National Suicide?



A surprising fact about history, wrote the noted German philosopher Friedrich Hegel, is that mankind learns nothing from history. Sadly, his observation is all too accurate.

In the nearly 20 years that I've been editing this magazine, I've studied a great deal about history. I've walked among the ruins of capitals and palaces of kingdoms and empires long since dead and wondered at what those ancient walls witnessed. As one of the greatest kings of one of those vanished kingdoms observed, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*" The king was Solomon, and his words are preserved for us in the Bible (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25, emphasis added throughout).

Solomon was renowned for his wisdom. To this day the book of Proverbs remains a treasure trove of sound guidance on how both nations and individuals can avoid the many pitfalls of life.

"*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*" This is one of those eternal truths that we've failed to learn. It's written in the decline and fall of many an empire and

***"If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen we must live through all time, or die by suicide."*—Abraham Lincoln**

kingdom. Today the United States and other Western nations are stumbling down the same well-worn path others have trod before.

Where does one even start in the catalog of our massive, seemingly unsolvable national problems? In spite of having the world's most powerful military, America hasn't won a war in decades. Barely a generation ago it was the greatest lending nation in the world; now it's the world's greatest debtor. It can't even control its own borders against an onslaught of illegal immigrants, gang members and drug dealers while some of its citizens are cruelly beheaded by jihadists who vow to bring terror to the nation's shores.

"*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people,*" wrote Solomon in Proverbs 14:34 (New International Version). As explained in this issue, America's moral corruption is a disgrace not just to its people, but to the entire world.

Years ago another man renowned for his wisdom—Abraham Lincoln, later to become the 16th president of the United States—spoke other words that sound eerily prophetic when we consider the sad state of the nation today:

"At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, *it must spring up amongst us . . . If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher.* As a nation of freemen we must live through all time, *or die by suicide.*"

Could a nation really die by suicide? Lincoln certainly thought so—in fact, he *knew* so. Later, in the midst of a civil war that was tearing the nation apart, he wrote: "We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But *we have forgotten God . . . We have become . . . too proud to pray to the God that made us.*"

He told the nation what it *needed* to hear rather than what it *wanted* to hear. He felt a deep responsibility to the country he loved. So do we at *The Good News*. We grieve over the direction of a country that is turning its back on God, and the plagues we are bringing on ourselves as a result. Join us in praying *Your Kingdom come*—turning to God to ask for His forgiveness for our sins and that we not perish by national suicide.

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor

# The Good News

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# Table of Contents



## Cover Feature

### America's War on God

More evident than America's war on terror is a concerted effort to push God and His laws of morality out of the country's civic and personal life. Are you alert to the fight being waged? What side do you come down on? . . . . . **4**

### Government and the Gay Agenda

God's Word condemns all forms of sexual sin. But what is especially shocking in modern society's war against God is how homosexual activity has gone from something practiced behind closed doors to being advocated by government and flaunted in Main Street parades. Does anyone care how God views this? . . . . . **10**

### Silencing God's Children

A major part of the war against God and godly values is the scourge of abortion—the murder of the most helpless. . . . . **14**

### One Nation Under Allah?

Rejecting God and the nation's long history rooted in the Bible, American leaders and government increasingly embrace a religious belief system alien to the country's long-held values. . . **16**

### Are You Fighting Against God?

God says He has friends—and enemies. In what category are you? . . . **20**

### When Was Jesus Born?

Was Jesus born on December 25? Can we know when He was born, and does it even really matter? . . . . **24**

### Is the Rapture Real?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is going to save you from the coming time of global trouble by whisking you away beforehand in what many call the Rapture? What if He doesn't? . . **26**

### Are You Ready for the Day of the Lord?

The Bible speaks of the Day of the Lord as a time of great upheaval and also of hope. It reveals that this "day" actually symbolizes a period of time beginning with great trouble and extending into an eternity of peace. . . . . **28**

### After the Chaos: the Times of Refreshing

In a world of troubles and grief, we are all in deep need of physical and spiritual refreshment. Even tougher times are coming, but they're followed by Jesus Christ's reign and His times of refreshing. . . . . **31**

### "Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled"

When the storms and problems of life seem overwhelming to us, where can we turn to find hope and encouragement? . . . . . **34**

### Why Christ Spoke in Parables

Many people would be surprised to learn that Jesus Christ spoke in parables to hide His message from the masses. Why did He do this? And how can you understand the deepest meaning of the parables of the Kingdom? . . . . . **36**

## Regular Features

**Current Events and Trends** *An overview of conditions around the world* . . . . . **18**

**Beyond Today** *Television log* . . . . . **21**

**Letters From Our Readers** *Readers of The Good News share their thoughts* . . . . . **23**

**Youth Focus From Vertical Thought** *What I Learned From Talking With Teens About Death* . . . . . **38**



# AMERICA'S WAR ON GOD

More evident than America's war on terror is a concerted effort to push God and His laws of morality out of the country's civic and personal life. Are you alert to the fight being waged? What side do you come down on?

*by Tom Robinson*

**T**he culture front has been filled with bad news recently. Recent polls show that some 55 percent of Americans now say they support same-sex marriage, the highest number since Gallup began polling on the issue in 1996, when 68 percent were opposed. America is clearly following the lead of many other Western nations, including Canada and the United Kingdom, where such marriages are already legalized.

In recent months judges have struck down state-approved bans on same-sex marriage in Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Oregon, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin and Virginia. Activists have filed lawsuits in all states with same-sex marriage bans, so this list will grow longer in the coming months, no doubt soon reaching the U.S. Supreme Court.

Earlier this year, “a narrowly divided Supreme Court upheld decidedly Christian

Yet the decline began earlier, often traced to the horrible aftereffects of the world wars of the 20th century—where the many millions slaughtered and attempted genocide led untold numbers of people to view life as cheap and as a godless scramble to do what you want while you can.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of World War I. In the wake of that epic conflict America, Canada and Britain devolved into the “new morality” of the Roaring Twenties. But it wasn’t the war alone that led people to cast off their moorings. Other factors were already taking their toll.

Since the beginning of the 1900s, the United States and other Western nations saw the rise of progressivism, with politicians attempting to lead society gradually into utopian dreams of one-world socialism in which God is ultimately excluded. This was built in large part on the introduction in the 1800s of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and the social implications

this country founded as a shining city on a hill would be projecting such godlessness today?

### **Overturning traditional values**

In a new 2014 book titled *God Less America* (there is a faded B before “Less” on the cover), Fox News radio commentator Todd Starnes has compiled many recent news stories showing the attack on traditional values and the expulsion of God from public life in the nation today. It is an eye-opening and disheartening read.

After mentioning that well-known evangelical pastor Rick Warren told him that he thought religious liberty would become the civil rights issue of our generation, Starnes paints this disturbing panorama:

“Imagine the implications. Imagine what the future might look like for people of faith. Could it be that one day the pastor of the local First Baptist Church will be arrested for preaching hate? Could it be that one day police will turn hoses on little Christian boys and girls as they sing ‘Jesus Loves Me’ at vacation Bible school? Is it possible that Christian business owners could one day be forced to close down for refusing to violate the tenets of their faith?”

“Will evangelical college students be denied entry into science and psychology programs because they believe in creationism? Will chaplains be thrown out of the armed forces if they pray in the name of Jesus? Will evangelical organizations be labeled domestic hate groups for defending the traditional definition of marriage?”

“The perfect storm is brewing. The White House is waging an all-out assault on religious liberty. Public schools are indoctrinating our children with the gospel of secularism. Hollywood is spewing toxins into our homes. The soundtrack of our lives is a pulsating mix of sex and violence and filth. The American family is in ruins. What was once wrong is now right and what was once right is now wrong” (p. 3).

Alarmingly, *some of these things are already happening*. The awful fact is that a war is being waged against the Creator God in the public arena—and ultimately in the spirit realm and the minds of people. We must take warning in what is happening around us—and in our own affected thoughts and beliefs! Moreover, let us be among those “who sigh and cry over all the abominations” in the society around us, looking to God’s deliverance when His judgment comes (compare Ezekiel 9:4-10)—for it *will* come.

## **“Men have been placing themselves in God’s place, divining right from wrong, since the Garden of Eden . . . It always leads to one end—disaster, catastrophe, death, destruction, misery, hopelessness.”**

prayers at the start of local council meeting . . . declaring them in line with long national traditions though the country has grown more religiously diverse” (Associated Press, May 6). This seems like a positive, until it’s realized that the 5-4 decision could easily have gone the other way—and, with the appointment of more liberal justices, still could in the near future.

### **Drastic changes in society**

Things have changed drastically in America since the Supreme Court outlawed prayer and Bible studies in public schools in the early 1960s and declared abortion legal in 1973. (Be sure to read “Silencing God’s Children,” beginning on page 14.)

Over these same decades, morality has plummeted throughout the world and in the United States. Commentator Mychal Massie remarks: “They took away ‘thou shalt not kill’ and ‘honor thy father and mother’ and replaced it with school shootings, abortion and homosexual sensitivity. With God out of schools, school crime has increased 700 percent, but I’m sure that’s just a coincidence” (“God, Not Crime, Barred From Schools,” WND.com, August 4, 2014).



of minimizing or eliminating God’s role as Creator and seeing man as just a more highly evolved animal—a philosophy of meaninglessness enabling liberation from Judeo-Christian morality.

Today the Western world is reaping what has been sown in rampant atheism, communism and immorality—with some trends and practices lowering us to depths not seen even in the debauched pagan societies of ancient times. The nations of the world are thumbing their noses at God—including America. Who would have thought that



## Growing hostility toward Christian faith and morality

According to a 2012 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, religious affiliation in America has dramatically dropped, especially among the young. In 1972, 7 percent of U.S. adults had no religious affiliation. As of 2012, the figure has almost tripled to one-fifth of the adult population—and 32 percent for adults under age 30 (“‘Nones’ on the Rise,” PewForum.org, Oct. 9, 2012).

The Pew survey further showed that 73 percent of these people with no religious affiliation support gay marriage, and 72 percent of them support legalized abortion.

These changes go hand in hand with increased demands for overturning traditional morality. Former Arkansas governor and U.S. presidential candidate Mike Huckabee wrote in the forward of Starnes’ book: “In recent years militant special interest groups have made it their goal to co-opt our religious liberties and *force industry and government to go beyond tolerance of their views and demand full approval of them*. Anyone who believes otherwise is told to shut up. *We’ve become a society that obsesses over tolerance and acceptance of everyone—except God*” (p. xi, emphasis added throughout).

## 600 examples of government hostility to religion

A joint report by two religious freedom groups, the Family Research Council and Liberty Institute, has documented “*more than six hundred* recent examples of religious hostility” (Starnes, p. 208). Some of these and others are noted in an article titled “Persecution of Christians on Rise—In U.S.” on the WND.com (formerly WorldNetDaily) website (Michael Carl, Sept. 17, 2012). Here are several examples, as listed in the article:

“• A federal judge threatened ‘incarceration’ to a high school valedictorian unless she removed references to Jesus from her graduation speech.

“• City officials prohibited senior citizens from praying over their meals, listening to religious messages or singing gospel songs at a senior activities center.

“• A public school official physically lifted an elementary school student from his seat and reprimanded him in front of his classmates for praying over his lunch.

“• Following U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ policies, a federal government official sought to censor a pastor’s prayer,

eliminating references to Jesus, during a Memorial Day ceremony honoring veterans at a national cemetery . . .

“• The U.S. Department of Justice argued before the Supreme Court that the federal government can tell churches and synagogues which pastors and rabbis it can hire and fire . . .

“• Through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, the federal government is forcing religious organizations to provide insurance for birth control and abortion-inducing

can religious values by the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama. In April 2009, he put forward three nominees for U.S. ambassador to the Vatican who were pro-abortion—all of whom were not surprisingly rejected (*The Guardian*, April 14, 2009).

In February 2011, he directed the Department of Justice to stop defending the Defense of Marriage Act (in which same-sex marriage was not recognized by the federal government) against legal challenges. And in July 2011, he allowed homosexuals

**“Militant special interest groups have made it their goal to co-opt our religious liberties and force industry and government to go beyond tolerance of their views and demand full approval of them.”**



drugs in direct violation of their religious beliefs. [This has been halted for now by a recent Supreme Court ruling.]

“• The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs banned the mention of God from veterans’ funerals, overriding the wishes of the deceased’s families.

“• A federal judge held that prayers before a state House of Representatives could be to Allah but not to Jesus.”

In the same article, American Center for Law and Justice senior counsel David French cites a particularly appalling example—“attempt[s] to ban any mention of God from historical markers, monuments or even museum exhibits . . . This represents an effort to whitewash God from American history and change our national identity.”

## Government vs. traditional religious values

A number of observers have cited examples of hostility to traditional Ameri-

to serve openly in the military, ending restrictions that had been in place since the founding of the nation. *Newsweek* magazine showed him on its cover with a rainbow halo over his head and lauded him as “The First Gay President” (May 21, 2012).

Under the Obama administration, a Minnesota widow living in a government-funded apartment complex “was told she could not pray, read her Bible, or have private discussions of a religious nature in the commons area of the complex” (Starnes, p. 10).

In September 2011, the U.S. Army issued new guidelines for Walter Reed Hospital that read, “No religious items (i.e., Bibles, reading materials . . .) are allowed to be given away or used during a visit” (though the policy was rescinded after it was reported to the House of Representatives).

Furthermore, “two Baptist chaplains said they were forced out of a Veterans

# Banning the Mention of God in Public Life

**M**ore and more, God is being shunted aside and banned in the public arena—particularly from schools. In November 2012, a six-year-old girl was told by her North Carolina school that, during a Veteran's Day program, she could not say the word *God* in reading a poem that honored her two grandfathers. "He prayed to God for peace, he prayed to God for strength," the poem stated (Todd Starnes, *God Less America*, 2014, pp. 128-129).

School officials in southern Florida "banned a fifth grader from reading the Bible during 'free reading' time" (Breitbart.com, "FL Teacher Banned Bible From 'Free Reading' Time in Classroom," May 5, 2014).

Meanwhile, officials at other schools are on the alert to make sure that Gideons International does not succeed in—horror of horrors!—passing out free Bibles to students at school.

An e-mail memo from the assistant principal of a New Jersey middle school stated: "It has been brought to the administration's attention that Gideons may be near our campus to distribute literature to our students . . . Please make sure they DO NOT step foot onto our campus at anytime. *There will be added police and security presence at dismissal!*" (quoted by Starnes, p. 116, emphasis added). Apparently some school administrators think distributing Bibles is the big danger in

America's public schools today—to the point that police must be called in to prevent it!

In 2012, national Democratic Party leaders removed references to God from their party's platform at their national convention. But this wasn't popular with everyone, and as it was shown on primetime TV nationwide, a move was made to put God back in—at which point many on the convention floor shockingly *booed*. Yes, *booed God*—or at least the prospect of God having anything to do with decisions in governing the nation! How far this country has fallen from the days of the Founding Fathers.

Nationally syndicated radio host Steve Deace comments: "This 'New Left' is not mere liberals. They are flat-out Leftists . . . They are Social Reconstructionists, whose goal is to empower government to replace our Judeo-Christian ideals of liberty and morality with what amounts to Cultural Marxism . . . That's why their ultimate goal is silencing the church . . . For the church says that God alone is God, and government is not.

"Not to mention with God out of the way, so are your God-given rights, which makes you a de facto ward of the state and not a free person. As [noted author G.K.] Chesterton once said [paraphrased], 'Whenever the government removes the god, the government then becomes the god'" ("The Left Officially Declares War on God," Townhall.com, July 13, 2014).

Affairs chaplain training program after they refused orders to stop quoting the Bible and stop praying in the name of Jesus" (Starnes, p. 152). (Read more in "Banning the Mention of God in Public Life" above.)

Yet while government leaders attempt to push God and the Bible out, they welcome and finance alternative religion. The U.S. Air Force Academy in 2011 "dedicated an \$80,000 outdoor worship center—a small Stonehenge-like circle of boulders with propane fire pit—high on a hill for the handful of current or future cadets whose religions fall under the broad category of 'Earth-based.' Those include pagans, Wiccans, druids, witches and followers of Native American faiths" ("Air Force Academy Adapts to Pagans, Druids, Witches and Wiccans," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 26, 2011).

The anti-Christian trend is not just in America. "A dispute over whether government can require Catholic schools to teach

Wiccan and pagan rites as equal to the Ten Commandments and the resurrection of Jesus is heading to Canada's highest court" (Bob Unruh, "Christians Ordered to Teach Wiccan, Pagan Rites," WND, March 11, 2014).

Frighteningly, preferential treatment is now being given to Islam in numerous ways (see "'One Nation Under Allah?'" beginning on page 16).

## Christian values now the lunatic fringe?

It's beyond disturbing how the great numbers of Americans still embracing the nation's traditional Christian values have been not merely marginalized but relegated to a lunatic fringe—by liberal activists, by the mainstream media and now by the U.S. military.

For an instance of the latter, "a group of Army officers was advised to monitor soldiers who belong to what were considered to be anti-gay, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigra-

tion organizations, according to a military e-mail. The e-mail was sent by a lieutenant colonel at Fort Campbell in Kentucky to three dozen subordinates, warning them to be on the lookout for any soldiers who might be members of 'domestic hate groups.'

"Among the groups the Army listed are well-respected organizations such as the Family Research Council, American Family Association, Atlas Shrugs, and the Federation for American Immigration Reform. The Army listed the groups alongside actual extremist and hate groups such as the Neo-Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, and other supremacist groups" (Starnes, pp. 140-141).

In April 2013, Pentagon officials met with Mikey Weinstein, president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, and others of his organization to discuss a policy introduced in 2012 called "Air Force Culture, Air Force Standards," which requires "government neutrality regarding religion." The Family Research Council's president, Tony Perkins, asked the obvious question: "Why would military leadership be meeting with one of the most rabid atheists in America to discuss religious freedom in the military?" (quoted by Starnes, p. 150).

Weinstein said that U.S. troops who proselytize "are guilty of sedition and treason and should be punished . . . 'We would love to see hundreds of prosecutions to stop this outrage of fundamentalist religious persecution.' He compared the act of proselytizing to rape. 'It is a version of being spiritually raped, and you are being spiritually raped by fundamentalist Christian predators,' he told Fox News" (Starnes, pp. 149-150).

Weinstein claims thousands of Protestants among his organization's ranks and says they are only going after fundamentalists—of all faiths—stating: "As soon as we find a fundamentalist Muslim, atheist, Jewish person, or anybody else, we will be happy to fight them . . . but so far they have been few and far between" (pp. 151-152). *Really?!* Does he actually expect us to believe that Protestant Christian churches are chock full of fundamentalists while Muslim fundamentalists are rare? This is clearly dishonest.

Air Force Senior Master Sergeant Phillip Monk was fired when he could not agree that those who object to gay marriage in their thoughts are guilty of discrimination. Monk said that while homosexuals are coming out of the closet, "*Christians have to go into the closet . . . We are being*



robbed of our dignity and respect. We can't be who we are" (quoted by Starnes, p. 157). (Read "Government and the Gay Agenda," beginning on page 10). And this comes on top of many other societal wrongs (see "A Flood of Immorality" at right.)

## Our place in the war

"In a recent foreign-language interview," reported WND chief editor Joseph Farah, "Roman Catholic Cardinal Raymond Burke, the head of the highest court at the Vatican, spoke the truth when he said Obama's policies 'have become progressively more hostile toward Christian civilization'" ("The Answer to Obama's War on Christianity," WND, Mar. 27, 2014).

Farah goes on to comment: "I believe Obama and the agenda he personifies have used abortion and homosexuality as battering rams against the Christian faith. For the proponent of unlimited government, God is truly the enemy because He is the author of liberty. He is the enemy because no one must serve a higher god than government. Men have been placing themselves in God's place, divining right from wrong, since the Garden of Eden. There's nothing new under the sun. It always leads to one end—disaster, catastrophe, death, destruction, misery, hopelessness.

"Obama can scarcely take all the blame for our arrival at this ungodly destination. Believers are more responsible. They let it happen. They continue to allow it to happen. They have the power to direct the nation in a reverse course—just as the children of ancient Israel had the power. It's still there for us today. All that is required is that believers follow the prescription God gave us in 2 Chronicles 7:14."

In this powerful verse, God assures us, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

So the answer is of course national repentance—a drastic change in our thinking and behavior to turn to our Creator and His laws. But that does not begin nationally. Each of us has been enlisted in the war against God individually—and each of us must repent personally.

This is by no means a new war. It goes back to Satan's initial rebellion against God—when he led a third of the angels in revolt. It continued in the Garden of Eden, when Satan as the serpent misled and corrupted the first human beings—taking

# A Flood of Immorality

**W**ith the kind of leadership America has at the top—or perhaps we should say that with Americans having chosen this kind of leadership—it should be no surprise that America (along with the rest of the world) wallows in immoral behavior of every kind.

Sexual immorality is clearly on the rise. As of this writing, same-sex marriage is legal in 17 countries around the world—with others giving recognition to such unions. In America it is legal in 19 states and the District of Columbia—8 by court decision, 8 by state legislatures and 3 by popular vote.

Legalization has the effect of normalizing the practice and making it more and more acceptable—along with homosexuality in general (see "Government and the Gay Agenda," beginning on page 10). Same-sex couples are also increasingly being allowed to adopt children, further corrupting the younger generation by making homosexuality seem normal.

Yet we should not only consider such sensational matters that garner attention in national debates. Rampant adultery and widespread divorce don't receive much notice. Nor does pornography, premarital sex and cohabitation or, as it used to be called, "living in sin." So many movies and TV shows depict unmarried couples sleeping or living together that we rarely give it a second thought. That's just the way it is now, so there is rarely the kind of outrage such behavior should provoke.

The truth is that we have been inundated and overwhelmed—and usually we don't even think about it. The slide in this direction has been happening for a long time, but it has greatly sped up in recent years.

Lying and stealing are often the business of political and government leaders these days—as we hear repeated denial of wrongdoing and see

our hard-earned money taken or diminished in value to increase the wealth of others. Indeed, lying and stealing have become the business of many businesses—and of the average person. It may bother us on discovering that we are the victim, but it's often an expectation now. And worse, so many of us persist in the same behavior.

Violence is on the rise. Many blame the existence of guns. But the problem is not with the weapons—it's with those wielding them. It's with society as a whole, which has lost its moral

## Rampant adultery and widespread divorce don't receive much notice. Nor does pornography, premarital sex and cohabitation. That's just the way it is now.

underpinnings. Priorities are upside down—and almighty government leads the way.

Here's a relevant story: "Among the 36,000 immigrants whom U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE] released from custody last year there were 116 with convictions for homicide, 43 for negligent manslaughter, 14 for voluntary manslaughter and one with a conviction classified by ICE as 'homicide-willful kill-public official-gun' . . .

"This would be considered the worst prison break in American history, *except it was sanctioned by the president and perpetrated by our own immigration officials*," said Rep. Lamar Smith, Texas Republican" (Stephen Dinan, "Feds Release Hundreds of Immigrant Murderers, Drunk Drivers, Sex-Crime Convicts," *The Washington Times*, May 12, 2014, emphasis added).

When we read something like this, it may seem that something is wrong with people's minds—that they are irrational. And indeed they are! In fact, we *all* are to some degree—and it's a problem that ultimately needs to be dealt with on the inside.

captive God's precious creations to make a mockery of God.

Satan has done the same with America—a nation God has often blessed and protected—leading it repeatedly into the depths of depravity as part of his vile assault on God and His ways.

And he still does the same with all humanity. The confusion, the irrationality, the constant conflict, the mire of immorality—it is all under the deception and sway of the ruler of this world, the god of this age, Satan the devil (John 12:31; 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4). All mankind has been in "the snare of the devil, having been taken captive

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In the face of a society in great moral decline, what can you do? What should you do? You need to understand what God wants and expects from you—to seek Him while you can! To grasp the kind of change He wants to see in you, download or request your free copy of *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

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by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26).

So much of the bizarre political rhetoric we hear in the world is not the product of a sound mind, but is the manifestation of spiritual warfare—the screeching of demons fighting both one another and God through their unwitting proxies on the world stage.

And we must understand that we also have not been immune. God's Word says of all of us that "there is none righteous, no, not one . . . They have all turned aside" (Romans 3:10, 12). It further assures us that "the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God's law, for it is unable to do so" (Romans 8:7, Holman Christian Standard Bible).

We need a new mind from God to help us overcome the hostility toward Him that has become ingrained in our thinking—and thankfully God does provide us with the needed spiritual help when we repent!

Yet even with believers, Satan still strives to use us in his war against God. He can't destroy us outright, so he tempts us to corrupt ourselves. And what a shame it is when he succeeds in this, cackling with glee at his ability to capture the height of God's creative work and use it to mock God and His ways!

Let us never be among those of whom it is said: ". . . who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:32).

But if we have so fallen, the answer is still to humble ourselves in repentance—returning to God for His help and forgiveness. He will empower us to extricate ourselves from wrong ways to instead fight on *His* side—to be "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

This is not a physical fight but a spiritual one, battling the evil spiritual forces around us (Ephesians 6:12)—and the wrong thoughts arising from our own carnal or fleshly nature: "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" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

In the war against God, there is no question about who will ultimately win. *Almighty God* will win. The question is, whose side of the war will we be fighting on? And will we endure? **GN**



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# Government and the Gay Agenda

Make no mistake—sin is sin, and God’s Word condemns all forms of sexual sin, including adultery, fornication and pornography. But what is especially shocking in modern society’s war against God is how homosexual activity has gone from something practiced behind closed doors to being advocated by government and flaunted in Main Street parades. Does anyone care how God views this? *by Tom Robinson*

It seemed strange when the gay wedding ceremony of the weather anchor on ABC’s *Good Morning America* and his partner was covered by the news program with smiles and well wishes from the cohosts. A little later, the *Today* show covered the story of one of its weekend anchors having a baby with her lesbian partner—with similar fawning.

Close in time to these events was *Good Morning America*’s George Stephanopoulos sitting down in April 2013 for an interview with the first openly gay athlete in a major U.S. professional team sport, basketball player Jason Collins, and declaring what a privilege it was to interview him.

It’s reached the point that Americans just can’t escape advocacy of homosexuality now—it’s everywhere!

## Tolerance becomes intolerable

Regarding a more recent incident, WND.com (formerly WorldNetDaily) editor in chief Joseph Farah writes: “For a moment, forget ‘same-sex marriage.’ Forget the fact that so many television shows and movies feature sympathetic ‘gay’ characters . . . Forget that ‘homophobic’ is the new ‘racist’ slur. Think about . . . the headlines that a sports figure gets simply by coming out of the ‘gay’ closet.

“Today, when a ‘gay’ NFL [National Football League] draftee kisses his same-sex partner [on TV], *he is congratulated by the president of the United States*. That’s what happened last week [in May] when Michael Sam became the first openly gay player drafted to the NFL . . . When other athletes pointed out the gratuitousness and impropriety of the moment, *they were vilified*—not just by ‘gay’ activists, but by the sports media” (“How Far the ‘Gay’ Revolution Has Come,” May 18, 2014, emphasis added throughout).

Retired player Derrick Ward, who said it was not good because children were watching, *received death threats* against him and his children. And Miami Dolphins player Don Jones, who tweeted “Horrible” after the incident, was banned from team activities and ordered to “undergo ‘training’ related to his comments” (Jesse Lee Peterson, “Michael Sam and the Death of Free Speech,” May 18, 2014). He was further forced to apologize.

“Remember,” Farah asks, “when the rhetoric of the ‘gay rights’ movement was, ‘What I do in the privacy of my own bedroom is nobody else’s business’? Today . . . the ‘gay revolution’ . . . has done a 180 and

Photos: Thinkstock

now believes what people do in the privacy of their own bedroom is *everyone's* business. It must be considered a heroic act when a homosexual tells the world what he or she is. Dissenters are punished. It was always cool to be an athlete. But now it is especially cool to be a 'gay' athlete."

(The player in question, Michael Sam, ultimately wasn't considered good enough to be signed to the active roster of any of the 32 teams in the league. However, after the NFL apparently pressured several teams to give him another chance, one did sign him to its practice squad, allowing him to practice with the team but not play in games.)

In reply to the idea that tolerance should run both ways—that people should tolerate homosexuality but that homosexuals should tolerate the sensitivities of those who disapprove—MSNBC contributor Jonathan Capehart argued that "tolerance, no, is not—it should not be a two-way street. It's a *one*-way street. You cannot say to someone that who you are is wrong, an

abomination, is horrible, get a room, and all of those others things that people said about Michael Sam, and not be forced—not forced, but not be made to understand that what you're saying and what you're doing is wrong" (*Last Word With Lawrence O'Donnell*, May 12, 2014).

What these and many other examples show is that tolerance, as it has long been defined, is now *intolerable*. Those who disagree with the proper politically correct positions must be discredited and marginalized, and their views increasingly criminalized!

We see this more and more with the proliferation of hate speech laws around the world—through which evangelical pastors have been jailed in some countries for merely quoting the Bible in labeling homosexual behavior a sin (see Leviticus 18:22-29; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9). And young people in the country are being further indoctrinated with wrong thinking on this matter (see "The Gay Agenda: Coming

to a School Near You" on page 13).

### Court persecution of those supporting biblical values

Various government agencies and officials are forcing Christian business owners and employees to act against their conscience in providing services in support of homosexuality.

For instance, a New Jersey shore Christian camp was ruled against for violating discrimination laws when it wouldn't allow a gay civil union ceremony on its property. In neighboring New York a husband and wife were fined \$13,000 for refusing to host a gay wedding on their farm, which they rented out for social events. Rather than face further fines, they chose to no longer host weddings on their property.

"A judge in Colorado said that a baker who refused to make a cake for a same-sex wedding ceremony must serve gay couples despite his religious beliefs, a ruling that a civil rights group hailed as a victory for gay rights" (Todd Starnes, *God Less America*, 2014, p. 66).

Likewise, an Oregon bakery that wouldn't bake a wedding cake for a lesbian couple came under a formal state discrimination examination and was eventually pushed by gay activists to shut down. The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries commissioner said: "*The goal is to rehabilitate*. For those who do violate the law, we want them to learn from the experience and have a good, successful business in Oregon" (p. 69). How benevolent that the state is willing to rehabilitate and reeducate Christian business owners!

Similarly, "a family-owned bakery in Indianapolis was subjected to a city investigation after it declined to make cupcakes for National Coming Out Day" (p. 65).

"The New Mexico Supreme Court ruled that two Christian photographers who declined to photograph a same-sex union violated the state's Human Rights Act . . . Justice Richard Bosson wrote in the court's unanimous decision . . . [that] at its heart, this case teaches that at some point in our lives all of us must compromise, if only a little, to accommodate the contrasting values of others . . . [Despite Constitutional protection of religion] there is a price, one that we all have to pay somewhere in our civic life . . . to leave space for other Americans who believe something different" (p. 70).

Again, this tolerance does not extend to accommodating *Christians'* objections to



## Hope for Sinning Nations and Individuals

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, the apostle Paul asks, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" He then goes on to list several sins—fornication, adultery, stealing, coveting, drunkenness and homosexual activity—that separate people from God and His great purpose for them.

Paul draws no distinction between the sins of fornication and adultery and that of homosexual activity. All are sin, along with stealing, coveting, drunkenness and the others he lists. However, Paul then explains that it is possible, with God's help, to be freed from such sins. "*And such were some*

*of you,*" he writes. "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" (emphasis added).

Through accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins, and being transformed by the power of God's Holy Spirit at work in their lives, those caught up in such sins can receive forgiveness and start a new life. The United Church of God, publisher of *The Good News magazine*, offers help and encouragement to those struggling with problems such as same-sex attraction. To learn more, visit our website at [breakingfree.ucg.org](http://breakingfree.ucg.org).



what they believe to be immoral!

Syndicated columnist Star Parker draws a poignant comparison: “Would anyone question the refusal of a black vendor to sell sheets to the local Ku Klux Klan chapter? Or a Jewish merchant refusing to sell the poster board for a Neo-Nazi rally? Or refusal of a Christian video service to make a pornographic film?”

“So why is it not perfectly clear that the religious freedom of a Christian merchant is violated if that merchant is forced to bake a cake or prepare a flower arrangement for a same-sex marriage, which is not only as personally repugnant to that vendor as any in the cases above, but is also a clear and literal violation of the scripture that defines the faith of these individuals?” (“‘Gay’ Agenda: A Cultural War Against Christians,” WND, Feb. 28, 2014).

### Government enforcing homosexual agenda

The federal government is certainly fast-tracking the homosexual agenda—often in violation of constitutional liberties. Department of Justice (DOJ) employees were sent a brochure directing them to verbally affirm homosexuality. *Not saying anything was not an option*, as the brochure stated that “Silence will be interpreted as disapproval.”

“DOJ Pride” stickers had to be posted in offices to show that this was a “safe place.” Employees were further told to avoid “offensive” phrases such as “gay lifestyle” or “sexual preference.”

“Christians are frightened and terrified of losing their jobs,” said Liberty Counsel founder Mat Staver. “You just can’t keep your head down and do your job. Now you have to become an advocate for the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] agenda—and if you don’t, the DOJ will consider that to be intolerant” (quoted by Starnes, pp. 78-79).

Evangelical pastor Louie Giglio was pressured to back out of delivering the benediction at President Obama’s second inauguration in 2012 when gay rights activists learned of a sermon he gave in the 1990s calling homosexuality a sin and stating that the “only way out of a homosexual lifestyle . . . is through the healing power of Jesus.”

Albert Mohler, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president, said this on his website: “We now see the new Moral McCarthyism in its undisguised and unvarnished reality. If you are a Christian, get ready for the question you will now undoubtedly face: ‘Do you now or have you ever believed that homosexuality is a sin?’

There is nowhere to hide” (Jan. 10, 2013).

He went on to state the disturbing truth: “The Presidential Inaugural Committee and the White House have now declared historic, biblical Christianity to be out of bounds, casting it off the inaugural program as an embarrassment. By its newly articu-

support international homosexual organizations, pressure other nations to change their laws outlawing homosexual activity, and support homosexuals who wish to seek asylum and resettle in the United States.

We see the same in other Western nations too. After Britain’s legalization of gay



## No society that has seen acceptance of homosexual activity has endured for long. It became widely accepted in the Greek and Roman empires and contributed to their moral declines and eventual collapse.

lated standard, *any preacher who holds to the faith of the church for the last 2,000 years is persona non grata.*”

With each passing year the situation worsens. Who would have imagined the U.S. Armed Forces color guard marching alongside rainbow flags in the gay pride parade at the nation’s capital? It was “something never before seen on an American city street”—and yet it happened this year, authorized by the Department of Defense” (Aaron Davis, *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2014).

Every year Tel Aviv, Israel, holds the largest gay parade in the Middle East, but there was something new this year, according to U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro, who wrote on his Facebook page: “For the first time in history, the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv has raised the Pride flag together with our American flag. We are proud to join with the municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo and its residents in celebrating LGBT Pride Week” (June 13, 2014).

Not content with transforming American society alone, the White House has directed the U.S. State Department and other government agencies to use U.S. funds to

marriage last year, British Prime Minister David Cameron called it “a great achievement” and said he wants to “export” how this was done, having the legislative team behind it “take it around the world” (quoted by Christopher Hope, “David Cameron: ‘I Want to Export Gay Marriage Around the World,’” *The Telegraph*, July 24, 2013).

### What happens to nations unashamed of sin

We should consider the attitude of ancient Israel and Judah, which worked to their national destruction—just as it is for America, Britain and the Jewish state today.

The prophet Isaiah wrote: “For Jerusalem stumbled, and Judah is fallen, because their tongue and their doings are *against the LORD* [this being part of the war against God] . . . The look on their countenance witnesses against them, and *they declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves*” (Isaiah 3:8-9). That is, the sufferings in their personal lives as well as the calamitous national judgment God brought and will bring again in the future.

In Jeremiah 6:15 and 8:12 God similarly

# The Gay Agenda: Coming to a School Near You

**F**ox News radio commentator Todd Starnes observes in his new book *God Less America* that those in “the militant gay rights community . . . not only expect you to accept their lifestyle, but they also want you to affirm it. They want your children exposed to it in their public school classrooms. They want private business owners to endorse their court-sanctioned ‘marriages.’ And woe be to any person who dares object” (2014, p. 64).

In 2007 a Massachusetts federal judge ruled that the gay agenda must be taught in public school, “ordering that it is reasonable, indeed there is an obligation, for public schools to teach young children to accept and endorse homosexuality” (Bob Unruh, “Judge Orders ‘Gay’ Agenda Taught to Christian Children,” WND.com, Feb. 24, 2007).

And it’s happening: “An elementary school in Oakland, California, topped off its school year with a ‘Pride Day’ celebrating all types of families, including those in which the parents consider themselves to be lesbian, ‘gay’ bisexual, transgender or queer,” complete with indoctrinating lectures, videos and a sing-along (Leo Hohmann, “5-Year Olds Taught to Celebrate ‘Queer Pride,” WND, June 16, 2014).

Again, it’s not only in America. LifeSiteNews reports on Scotland: “While Scottish government draft guidelines currently allow teachers with moral objections to opt-out of certain aspects of the country’s new sex-ed curriculum [such as teaching about gay marriage], several National Health Service boards have objected to the opt-out clause. They are also objecting to provisions allowing parents to opt their children out of the classes . . .

“Another NHS board *warned against allowing parents too much influence over children, saying that the decision about whether to attend the classes should be left up to the students, even if their parents object*” (Hilary White, “Teachers Cannot Opt Out of Teaching Gay ‘Marriage’ in School

Sex-Ed Classes: Scottish NHS,” May 15, 2014, emphasis added throughout).

It’s truly disturbing to read a recent report from the pro-family organization MassResistance titled “‘GLBT’ Teachers Conference in Boston Reveals Latest Plans to Push Homosexuality Even Further Into Schools. Well Organized, Fueled With Taxpayer Dollars” (May 13, 2014).

The report states: “GLSEN (Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network) is the nation’s largest homosexual and transgender activist organization working inside schools in all 50 states. It has set up ‘gay straight alliance’ student clubs (GSAs) inside thousands of high schools (and even some middle schools) across the country.

“GLSEN *pushes a wide range of psychologically penetrating homosexual and transgender programs and activities into the schools . . . It also directly organizes and trains teachers to integrate their techniques throughout the curriculum . . .*

“In 2000, the Boston-area GLSEN Conference gained national outrage when MassResistance (then known as Parents’ Rights Coalition) exposed the sickening . . . workshop *which involved adults teaching young kids explicit sex acts.*”

In this workshop *students as young as 12 were given graphic instruction in homosexual sex acts by state employees.* The Massachusetts Legislature, along with several U.S. corporations, continues to support the organization.

Some of the 2014 conference workshops for training teachers, administrators and activist students included how to start a “gay-straight alliance” in middle schools (for students aged 10-14!) and “Queering the Classroom” to provide “a safe environment for GLBTQ youth” and “a more comfortable, creative environment for all students.”

For those concerned about their children, it’s highly disturbing to see a picture of a sign behind conference speakers that proudly proclaims,

where their collective choices led them.

Sadly, America, Britain and other modern Israelite nations determined to make the same mistakes and follow the same path to the same fate. Isaiah 3:12, speaking of today’s leaders, says, “O my people, *your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path*” (New International Version).

## Hope through turning to God

Of course, God also says in Jeremiah 18:6-8 that He stands ready to forgive if and when people repent. In 2 Chronicles 7:14

“*GLSEN: Making a Difference in K-12 Schools.*”

No doubt this has had an effect—along with all the other forces pushing young people to accept and embrace homosexuality. “As evidence of a major cultural shift . . . [one family advocate] pointed to a recent poll by the Pew Research Center indicating a full 70 percent of Millennials (born in 1981 or later) support same-sex marriage.

“By contrast, 49 percent of those in Generation X [born between the early 1960s and 1980], 38 percent of Baby Boomers [born between 1946 and the early 1960s] and just 21 percent from the Silent Generation [born between late 1920s and 1945] support homosexual marriage” (Chelsea Schilling, “Claim: Christians Sin By Putting Kids in Public School,” WND, May 17, 2014).

In the Fort Worth, Texas, area, when discussion in a ninth-grade German class shifted to religion and homosexuality, as it often did, 14-year-old Dakota Ary turned to a friend and said “that he was a Christian and that ‘being a homosexual is wrong’ . . . [whereupon] Dakota was sentenced to one day of in-school suspension and two days of full suspension” (Starnes, p. 122).

This was in a classroom where the teacher’s “world wall” had a picture of two men kissing that offended some students. “He told the students this is happening all over the world and you need to accept the fact that homosexuality is just part of our culture now,” said Liberty Counsel attorney Matt Krause (Starnes, p. 123).

The superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools sought to evict a Baptist church renting space in one of their buildings because the congregation opposed homosexuality, stating that renting to those who hold such views “appears to be contrary to school board policy *as well as the basic principles of humanity*” and calling the eviction a “rejection of prejudice and intolerance” (quoted by Starnes, p. 81).

Students across Massachusetts were warned by a Department of Education directive to affirm transgender classmates. “And if little girls took issue with sharing a bathroom with a transgender boy [a boy claiming to be a girl], the state said those little girls could be punished” (p. 119).

declares: “‘Were they ashamed when they had committed abominations? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,’ says the LORD.”

No society that has seen widespread acceptance of homosexual activity has endured for long. It became widely accepted in the Greek and Roman empires and contributed to their moral declines and eventual collapse. Today one can walk among the ruins of those vanished empires and see

He assures us, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” (See also “Hope for Sinning Nations and Individuals” on page 11.)

Make no mistake—this is exactly what the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and other leading Western nations need to do! And individually we need to pray for our leaders and people, that they will turn from rejecting God and humbly seek Him. **GN**



# Silencing God's Children

A major part of the war against God and godly values is the scourge of abortion—the murder of the most helpless.

by Tom Robinson

**T**he ancient prophet Ezekiel thundered these words: “You took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to [false gods] to be devoured . . .

You have slain My children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire” (Ezekiel 16:20-21).

The thought of sacrificing precious infants, burning them on an altar to a pagan god of stone, would strike most people today as abhorrent. But are we not guilty of the same crime when we sacrifice millions of innocent babies to the modern idols of selfishness and convenience?

Since the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision on *Roe v. Wade*, more than 56 million abortions have taken place in America—an unconscionable slaughter of innocents in a professing Christian nation. Yet even this pales beside the ghastly figure of 40 million abortions *every year* worldwide (estimating low)—meaning that at least 1.2 billion children have been aborted since 1980 ([numberofabortions.com](http://numberofabortions.com)).

Sadly, America has become a supporter of the broader killing. In one of his first acts in office, U.S. President Barack Obama “lifted restrictions on U.S. government funding for groups that provide abortion services or counseling abroad” (Reuters, Jan. 23, 2009)—meaning U.S. taxpayers are forced to fund abortions and abortion promotion in other countries.

On Feb. 26, 2014, the president told his pro-abortion political group Organizing for Action that they are doing “God’s work.” On April 26 of the previous year, he spoke at a gala for Planned Parenthood, the nation’s largest abortion provider, concluding with, “*Thank you, Planned Parenthood. God bless you. God bless America*” (emphasis added throughout).

Such words strain our credulity. It borders on blasphemy that anyone, let alone the leader of a nation, would expect God to bless an organization that is in the business of destroying His creation—killing more than 300,000 unborn babies a year, about one every 94 seconds. What God is he referring to? Clearly not the God of the Bible!

As Fox News radio commentator Todd Starnes notes in his new book *God Less America*: “We ask God to bless America, but we silence his children. God bless America? *We should be on our knees asking for His mercy instead*” (2014, p. 210).

## Killing the unborn is big business

But America is far from that. For abortion

providers, the slaughter of the unborn can be a lucrative business. A former abortion provider has explained how she was on her way to becoming a millionaire by selling abortions to teenage girls.

The marketing began in kindergarten and grade school sex education. The goal for fifth and sixth grade students, according to Carol Everett, “was to get them sexually active on a low dose birth control pill that we knew they would get pregnant on . . . That pill did not work, and we could accomplish our goal of 3-5 abortions between the ages of 13 and 18” (quoted by Peter Baklin-ski, LifeSiteNews.com, May 12, 2014).

Government has now mandated abortion

agent went so far as to tell a pro-life group it had to remain neutral on the issue of abortion and lectured the group’s president about forcing its religious beliefs on others.

“You have to know your boundaries,” IRS agent Sherry Wan can be heard saying in a recording. ‘You have to know your limits. You have to respect other people’s beliefs’” (p. 8). Remember that this refers to beliefs about what is in fact murdering unborn children!

Thankfully, the Supreme Court ruled on June 30—in the case brought by the arts and crafts retailer Hobby Lobby—against government attempts to impose employer-provided coverage for abortion-inducing

alive during an abortion procedure. Haven’t heard about these sickening accusations? It’s not your fault . . . There has been precious little coverage of the case that should be on every news show and front page . . .

“None of the news shows on the three major national television networks has mentioned the Gosnell trial in the last three months [as of the time Powers wrote this] . . . The deafening silence of too much of the media, once a force for justice in America, is a disgrace” (“Philadelphia Abortion Clinic Horror,” April 11, 2013).

Meanwhile, the indoctrination of the younger generation continues. Officials at a high school in Tacoma, Washington, decided “to allow posters and events for a ‘gay’-straight alliance while refusing to allow similar posters and events related to the local Students for Life . . .

“[The pro-life] group wanted to put up two posters. The first reads ‘Since Roe v. Wade 1/3 of our generation has been aborted’ . . . The second poster quotes President Ronald Reagan: ‘I’ve noticed that everyone who is for abortion is already born.’ But school officials said the posters might ‘offend’” (“School: ‘Gay’ Is OK, But Pro-Lifers Must Go,” WND.com, Feb. 19, 2014). Yet of course they allowed the pro-gay messages.

Where is the outrage over the ongoing mass murder of helpless babies? In the approximately five minutes it’s taken you to read this short article, about 375 abortions have been performed around the world (see the counters at [numberofabortions.com](http://numberofabortions.com)).

God warns in Numbers 35:33 that “blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.” That includes all who bear responsibility. Clearly the whole world is facing judgment over this global atrocity! **GN**



## The thought of sacrificing infants to a pagan god would strike most people today as abhorrent. But are we not guilty of the same crime when we sacrifice millions of innocent babies?

insurance coverage for the whole country through President Obama’s health care legislation, the Affordable Care Act, commonly called Obamacare. Starnes points out: “The Obama administration is trying to force religious organizations to provide insurance for birth control and abortion-inducing drugs in direct violation of their religious beliefs . . .

“The Internal Revenue Service launched investigations into pro-life organizations, demanding to know the contents of their prayers. They ordered a Wyoming church to turn over its membership rolls. This is happening right here, right now, in the United States of America. We are under attack from within” (p. 209).

Another pro-life group was told by the IRS that “they could not picket or protest abortion clinics. An attorney representing the pro-life groups called the IRS actions ‘intimidating’ and ‘heavy-handed.’ One IRS

drugs when it’s against the employer’s religious beliefs. But this was by a narrow margin of 5-4, and time may see it overturned. In fact, Senate Democrats have already attempted to circumvent it. In any case it remains disturbing how rabidly the government has pursued the pro-abortion agenda and persecuted those who stand for life!

### Overlooking infanticide

The media has been complicit in this, as it has in most aspects of the liberal-progressive agenda. Commenting on the failure of the news media to report last year on the trial of Pennsylvania abortion doctor Kermit Gosnell over late-term abortions and infanticide—ostensibly because it would draw negative attention to abortion—liberal political analyst Kirsten Powers wrote in *USA Today*:

“Infant beheadings. Severed baby feet in jars. A child screaming after it was delivered

### Learn More

What happens when a nation turns its back on God’s commandments? Sadly, the thinking of its people becomes corrupted to the point where sin and death become commonplace—as with the plague of abortion. On the other hand, what is the thinking behind God’s commands as given in his Word, the Bible? Download or request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments* today!



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# One Nation Under Allah?



Rejecting God and the nation’s long history rooted in the Bible, American leaders and government increasingly embrace a religious belief system alien to the country’s long-held values.

*by Tom Robinson*

**A**ctor and commentator Chuck Norris presented a stark contrast in a column a few years back. He wrote: “Speaking for most Founding Fathers in his day, John Jay, the first chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, appointed by George Washington himself, said, ‘Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of a Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.’”

“Two hundred years later, President Barack Obama has denied America’s rich Judeo-Christian heritage before the eyes and ears of other countries, as he publicly declared in Turkey on April 6, 2009, ‘We do not consider ourselves a Christian nation’” (“President Obama: Muslim Missionary?” Townhall.com, Aug. 17, 2010, emphasis added throughout). How times have changed!

In May 2009, President Obama “cancelled the traditional White House event honoring the National Day of Prayer, saying that he would pray only in private” (Phyllis Schlafly, “One Nation Under Government—Not Under God,” July 11, 2012). Yet he has repeatedly hosted Muslim iftar dinners at the White House during Ramadan.

The Obama administration has sought to strike terminology deemed offensive to Muslims from government speeches and documents—like Islamic extremism, Islamic radicalism, jihadists, terrorists and the like. The president even stated in Cairo in June 2009, “I consider it part of my responsibility as president of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam whenever they appear” (quoted by Norris).

Christians do not receive the same sensitivity. Obama had earlier demeaned many among them as those who “cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren’t like them” (quoted in *Christianity Today*, April 13, 2008).

While often avoiding official mentions or acknowledgements of traditional Christian observances, the president “has released statements in honor of Ramadan, Eid-ul-Fitr, Hajj and Eid-ul-Adha, holidays which most Americans cannot pronounce and certainly do not celebrate” (“President Obama Ignores Most Holy Christian Holiday; AFA Calls Act Intentional,” American Family Association, 2011).

## Promoting Islam, marginalizing Christianity

The efforts of the president and others

Photos, from left: Thinkstock (2), Wikimedia, Thinkstock



who are marginalizing Christianity while effectively promoting Islam are having an effect. In his 2014 book *God Less America*, Fox news radio commentator Todd Starnes points out that “while the government cracks down on public expressions of the Christian faith, they are embracing public expressions of the Islamic faith—many times at taxpayer expense. [For instance] universities across the nation are spending thousands of dollars to install foot baths so Muslim students can wash their feet before their five-times-a-day prayers” (2014, p. 26).

Starnes further points out how the rise of Islam in America has been “described as a bloodless revolution, a stealth jihad that is being waged in the nation’s public school

“Representative André Carson, a congressman from Indiana, advocated for modeling the nation’s public school system after Islamic schools . . . [stating] ‘America will never tap into educational innovation and ingenuity without looking at the model that we have in our madrassas—in our [Islamic] schools—where innovation is encouraged—where the foundation is the Quran.’ The mainstream media ignored the congressman’s declaration . . .

“William Saxton, chairman of Citizens for National Security, has studied the promotion of Islam in public school textbooks. Saxton’s all-volunteer organization launched a nationwide study in 2009 to root out what they believed to be Islamic bias in American school textbooks. He said

moting that might be to encourage interfaith marriages” (BBC video, July 8, 2014). His remarks elicited chuckles, not scorn over advocating a further step toward national suicide.

### Funding a war on Christianity

Sadly, the United States and other Western nations are helping to fund the war on Christianity by Muslims abroad through foreign aid to governments that persecute non-Muslims.

U.S. Senator Rand Paul remarked in 2013: “It angers me to see my tax dollars supporting regimes that put Christians to death for blasphemy against Islam, countries that put to death Muslims who convert to Christianity, and countries who imprison anyone who marries outside their religion.

“There is a war on Christianity, not just from liberal elites here at home, but worldwide. And your government, or more correctly, you, the taxpayer, are funding it. You are being taxed to send money to countries that are not only intolerant of Christians but openly hostile. Christians are imprisoned and threatened with death for their beliefs” (“Rand Paul’s Message to Evangelicals: ‘There Is a War on Christianity,’” CBN News Blogs, June 13, 2013).

One sad irony in all this is that the liberal elitists who accuse Christians of intolerance and champion the rise of Islam as a counterweight would in the end discover the Islamists to be far more intolerant of them, putting them to death unless they swear devotion to Islam—as is happening right now in Iraq and Syria.

Sadly, this is but one example of how Western nations, in their rejection of God and His values and laws as revealed in the Bible, are supporting forces that will ultimately contribute to their downfall! **GN**



## Western nations, in their rejection of God and His values and laws as revealed in the Bible, are supporting forces that will ultimately contribute to their downfall.

classrooms” (p. 161). How?

“A Colorado high school, for example, came under scrutiny after students were led in an Arabic translation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Instead of one nation under God, students pledged their allegiance to *one nation under Allah*.

“An advanced placement world geography teacher at a Texas high school who encouraged students to dress in Islamic clothing also instructed them to refer to the 9/11 hijackers not as terrorists but as ‘freedom fighters,’ according to students who were in the class.

“And schoolchildren in Indiana were required to sing a song declaring ‘Allah is God’ during what was supposed to be an inclusive holiday concert . . .

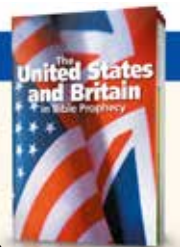
they found as many as eighty textbooks that overly promoted Islam” (pp. 164-166).

Of course, this is a serious concern throughout the world. “The *Daily Mail* reported that research indicates that Britain may no longer be a Christian country in just twenty years. If trends continue, the number of nonbelievers is set to overtake the number of Christians by 2030. And guess what religion is rapidly gaining ground? Muslims. The *Daily Mail* reports the number of Muslims has surged by 37 percent” (p. 165).

A British peer named Baron Scott of Foscote, who has two adult children who’ve converted to Islam, stood up in the House of Lords and jovially suggested that “if an improvement is needed in relationships between the faith groups, one way of pro-

### Learn More

What happens when a nation turns its back on God? We’re beginning to see it firsthand, as America and other English-speaking nations pursue paths and policies that threaten their very existence! You need to learn the sobering story of why they are on such a dangerous path and where it will ultimately lead. Download or request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* today!



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# Current Events & Trends

by Milan Bizic, Peter Eddington, Darris McNeely and Rudy Rangel

## Islamic State leaders seek to spread terror to the West

While the world collectively gasps at the horrific violence employed by the recently declared Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East, including beheadings of captured Westerners, to date there hasn't been much tangible fear throughout Western nations. The Islamic State's control over large parts of Iraq and Syria seems in the West to be still far away—especially with the West now conducting attacks against IS positions.

This may be changing, however, after police in the Australian states of Queensland and New South Wales foiled a terror attack in which Islamists had planned to “carry out public beheadings in Australia” (Michael Sin and David Stringer, “Beheading Plot Thwarted in Australia Terrorism Raids,” Bloomberg News, Sept. 18, 2014). Thankfully averted in time, a successful beheading by Islamic terrorists in a prominent Western nation like Australia would spread terror throughout the Western world.

According to a report in *The Australian*, the threat isn't past either: “The Islamic State has called for terrorist attacks in Australia and elsewhere” (Mark Schliebs, “Islamic State Leader Calls for Attacks on Australia in New Audio Message,” Sept. 22, 2014).

In London, an 82-year-old woman was beheaded Sept. 4 by a Muslim convert (“Woman Beheaded ‘With Machete’ in North London Garden,” *The Telegraph*, Sept. 4, 2014) and in Moore, Oklahoma, a recently fired Muslim convert beheaded a 54-year-old

female coworker Sept. 25 (“Police: Woman Beheaded at Oklahoma Workplace,” Associated Press, Sept. 26, 2014). Such individual acts are being called for by jihadist leaders in addition to concerted plots.

The report in *The Australian* quotes IS leader Sheik Abu Mohammed al-Adnani as announcing the call-to-arms by saying, “If you can kill a disbelieving American or European—especially the spiteful and filthy French—or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war . . . then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be.”

Throughout this issue we've shown the moral degradation of Western society as demonstrated by the sins of abortion, sexual immorality and the rejection of God and His influence in daily life. In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 God presented the people of Israel with the choice between obedience with blessings and disobedience with curses.

He told them that if they chose to disobey Him and live sinfully they would live in fear: “I will even appoint terror over you” (Leviticus 26:16). The blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience also apply to nations like the United States and Australia, where people have knowledge of God and should know better than to live sinfully.

God wishes for His people to turn away from these destructive lifestyles and come to have a relationship with Him based on respect and love. Until the nations

reject these sins and humble themselves to repent and turn to God, they will live in terror of unknown enemies and an uncertain future. You can do your part in overcoming this fear and uncertainty in your own life by turning to God and rejecting sin today. (Sources: Bloomberg News, *The Australian*, Associated Press, *The Telegraph* [London].)

## Islamist attacks Australian police after fatwa

On Sept. 24, 2014, only days after thwarted terror attacks in Australia (see “Islamic State Leaders Seek to Spread Terror to the West” above), a young Islamist militant attacked two police officers in the Australian state of Victoria. The officers were wounded and are recovering in hospital care, while the attacker was shot dead.

*The Daily Telegraph* in Australia reports that the attacker was a known threat and “a person of interest in a counterterrorism operation aimed at detaining and questioning—and had been under surveillance in relation to threats” (Simon Benson, “Islamic Extremist Shot Dead, Two Police Officers Stabbed Outside Endeavour Hills Police Station in Victoria,” Sept. 24, 2014).

The attack came after Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami of the Islamic State terrorist organization proclaimed a fatwa ordering adherents in the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe to kill non-Muslims.

Government officials in Australia say the threat is real. Australian Attorney-General George Brandis was quoted as saying, “We have to take the threat of ISIL [Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant] very seriously because, as the Prime Minister has been saying all along, these people have set their face against the West in the most belligerent imaginable way” (“‘We Must Take ISIL Threat Seriously,’ Says Attorney-General,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sept. 23, 2014).

Please read “One Nation Under Allah?” beginning on page 16 of this issue to learn more about the threat radical Islam poses to the West. (Sources: *The Daily Telegraph* [Australia], Australian Broadcasting Corporation.)

## Islamic State exploiting power vacuum

For 13 years now al-Qaeda has been the face of terror and Islamic extremism, both feared and hated in the West. But now their hold on the Middle East and the loyalty of Islamic militants may be slipping.



Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

Despite the insistence of senior al-Qaeda leaders that there is nothing wrong in the organization, Reuters reports that “counter-terrorism experts say al-Qaeda's aging leadership is struggling to compete for recruits with Islamic State” (Noah

many regions across the Middle East and North Africa, the cumulative effect on the group has been undeniably debilitating.

Just a few months ago reports of the weakening of al-Qaeda would have been welcomed as good news. But the power vacuum being left by al-Qaeda and its affiliates has been quickly filled by the Islamic State or IS, a group making headlines through its declaration of a caliphate, extreme brutality and speedy expansion.

Headed by self-declared caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Islamic State's influence is being felt strongly as far west as Turkey, where officials have closed the border with Syria in response to an influx of Syrian and Kurdish refugees fleeing IS encroachment (“Turkey Clamps Down on Syria Border After Kurdish Unrest,” BBC News, Sept. 22, 2014).

Why is it important to keep a close eye on the activities of the militant, extremist Islamic State? Besides the obvious reasons of staying informed about the world and potential impacts upon your personal life, the Bible gives us a lens through which we can understand the real storylines behind the world's events.

Daniel 11 describes historic wars between two geopolitical powers called the king of the North, located north of Jerusalem, and the king of the South, located to the south of Jerusalem. In verse 40 the perspective switches to a prophetic view of future events: “At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack

him [the king of the North]; 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” (Daniel 11:40). (To learn more, see our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and “Islamic Caliphate Declared: What Does It Mean?” in the Sept.-Oct. 2014 issue of *The Good News*.)

With the Islamic State's aggressive stance and strategic pushes toward the West, this situation is one that biblically minded individuals will want to keep a close eye on. (Sources: Reuters, BBC.)

Browning, “Al-Qaeda Denies Decline, Acknowledges ‘Mistakes’ by Its Branches,” Sept. 14, 2014).

Browning's report quotes the U.S. State Department in saying that al-Qaeda's “ability to conduct attacks and direct its followers” has been limited (ibid.). The terrorist group has been dealt several severe blows over the last three years, beginning with the assassination of its figurehead and leader Osama bin Laden in 2011. Bin Laden was seen as al-Qaeda's spiritual leader as well as its geopolitical and organizational chief.

Several more key attacks and assassinations have repeatedly weakened al-Qaeda by eliminating high-ranking personnel. While al-Qaeda remains active in

## Richard Dawkins: It's immoral not to abort Down syndrome baby

**A**“Abort it and try again. It would be immoral to bring it into the world if you have the choice,” were the words of noted evolutionist and atheist Richard Dawkins on Aug. 20, 2014, in response to a woman carrying a baby suspected to have Down syndrome (Twitter feed posted at *The Independent*, Sept. 26, 2014).

Dawkins used the social media outlet Twitter to share his opinion. The tweet caused a “feeding frenzy” of angry backlash, for which he apologized. It’s interesting that he apologized for the backlash but not for the comment itself. He obviously believes that that value of the life the woman was carrying is little enough that it ought to be killed. In his own words, he believes that proper morality is defined as ending that innocent life.

This is not surprising coming from an avowed atheist who makes a point of ridiculing the idea of God’s existence. Dawkins’ view is symptomatic of the Darwinian belief that we are all here merely because the strongest have survived and the weak are left behind. From that viewpoint, someone with Down syndrome is merely a genetic aberration.

And modern technological advancements have given us the opportunity to determine if a baby in the womb has potential abnormalities.

To someone who does not believe that life comes from God, it seems logical to terminate a pregnancy in which there are abnormalities. If that judgment feels off to you, it should. It’s inhumane—even animalistic—to think this way. Yet while we note the Holocaust and other mass murders, we willfully ignore the genocide taking place right under our nose—abortion.



God said to the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

God is the Giver of life. One day Mr. Dawkins’ eyes will be opened to the compassionless, error-filled viewpoint he has adopted and promoted. (Source: *The Independent*.)

## Scottish vote highlights UK divisions

**O**n Sept. 18, 2014, Scotland’s voters decided to remain a part of the United Kingdom—at least for now. It was a long and emotional campaign. Deep divisions between Scotland and England were exposed. The union remains, but it has taken a beating.

Westminster made major concessions to persuade voters. Delivering on those promises will further alter the relationship between the two countries. “There will always be an England,” the old saying goes, but its standing in the world continues to decline. The debate surrounding this vote is a symptom of the

## Deep divisions between Scotland and England were exposed. The union remains, but it has taken a beating.

decline of the English-speaking nations—the most successful confederation of peoples in the history of mankind.

In the end the likely deciding issue was economics. Too much money already flows north to subsidize education, research and industry. Scotland’s economic future was more important in this case than history, tradition and culture.

The lesson for England? Break down the elitism that forms barriers with others. Treat those with common ancestry and language as equals. There is nothing to lose by taking this kind of approach.

Writing in *The American Interest* on Sept. 12, Walter Russell Mead said: “The British political establishment has been tried and found wanting in this referendum; unfortunately it is not alone. The leaders of the European Union have conspicuously and repeatedly failed to master the vital and urgent issues that confront them.

“The euro has ruined and embittered a third of the European Union; populist movements of protest and resistance are bringing fascism back from the grave in more than one country. Outside, the enemies of every European ideal are gathering strength; inside, voters across Europe increasingly find the post-War social-democratic order bland, remote, and overbearing” (“A Royal Mess”).

Europe and America continue to grapple with a destabilizing mixture of events. As the current leadership of America and the United Kingdom struggles to effectively defend and explain their importance to the modern world, Bible prophecy reveals that another power will arise on the world scene to ensure order—at what will ultimately prove to be a devastating cost. (Source: *The American Interest*.)

## Continued Vatican revelations discredit Christian faith

**T**he continued investigations into sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests are back in the news cycle with the house arrest and impending trial of Josef Wesolowski, former Vatican ambassador to the Dominican Republic. The Associated Press reported that “the Vatican put its former ambassador to the Dominican Republic under house arrest Tuesday [Sept. 23] after opening a criminal trial against him, the first time a high-ranking Vatican official has ever faced criminal charges for sexually abusing youngsters” (“Vatican Puts Ex-Dominican Envoy Under House Arrest,” Sept. 23, 2014).

### Jesus derided those who claim to serve Him but act in ways that are contrary to His commands.

While there have been many investigations into sexual abuse cases involving Catholic priests, this is the first time a Vatican official of a high rank has been brought to trial for the crime. The impact on the lives of children who have been hurt by such terrible acts is enough for us to stop and take note of these cases. We should pray for the well-being and healing of those damaged by all cases of sexual abuse.

At an even deeper level we should take note of how sexual abuse charges against those professing to follow and serve God and Jesus Christ damages the reputation and message of the Bible and the Christian faith.

Jesus Christ Himself derided those who claim to follow and serve Him but act in ways that are completely foreign to what He commands them to do: “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. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Christians should live in such a way that they honor Christ and promote Christianity as a positive force in the world. (Source: Associated Press.)

## How can you make sense of the news?

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





# Are You Fighting Against God?

God says He has friends—and enemies. In what category are you?

by Beyond Today host Darris McNeely

One of the scariest statements in the Bible comes near the close of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount:

"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. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23, emphasis added throughout).

"I never knew you!" I don't know about you, but when I see this statement I find it quite sobering. It makes me look deep inside and ask whether Jesus might say that to me. I follow Christ and call myself a Christian, and I sure don't want Him to look me in the eyes and say those words.

Those are words someone might say to an enemy. Is it possible that you or I could be enemies of God Himself?

## Enemies of God

Let's look at a dramatic example.

The book of Revelation shows us a prophetic image of armies gathering to fight Jesus Christ at His second coming:

"Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon [Satan], out of the mouth of the beast [an end-time political leader], and out of the mouth of the false prophet [an end-time religious leader]. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . And they gathered them together to

the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (Revelation 16:12-16).

Now in chapter 19 of Revelation we see more details. It reads this way:



mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.' And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army" (verses 17-19).

What does this mean? How could men gather to fight God? It's one of the most

puzzling scenes in the Bible. Yet there it is!

Here's the tough question we need to ask ourselves: Will you or I be in this army? Could we find ourselves fighting against Jesus at His second coming? The only way that we can avoid being in this army is *by not fighting against God in our lives beforehand*. So we need to be submitting to God in our lives right now.

## Resisting God

Christ's own words compel every one of us to look deeper into what He's really saying to us.

In the New Testament is the story of a man who thought he was the friend of God but one day discovered he wasn't. This man was fervently religious. He

**Paul was challenged by God because *he was fighting God*. The encounter deeply impacted the rest of his life.**

"Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of

went to worship services every week. He knew the Bible thoroughly. He could quote it verbatim. But one day he was confronted by God with the hard reality that he was actually an *enemy* of God.

This man was Saul of Tarsus, later known



as the apostle Paul. He dedicated his life to fighting against what he considered to be false teaching. But in reality he was fighting against His Creator, Jesus Christ.

Could you or I be in the same position—thinking we’re doing the right thing but in reality fighting against God? We need to open our hearts and minds and perhaps be able to see ourselves in the story of Paul.

Even Christians can find themselves in a position where they become enemies of God by fighting against His purpose in their lives. The story of Paul is very sobering. He was a devout man, and by his own description he was “without blame” in observing his religious faith. If such a man could be wrong in how he worshipped God, then how important is it that you and I examine our religion? Are you a friend of God or an enemy?

### Practicing lawlessness

Consider the army foretold in Revelation

that will gather together “to make war” against Jesus Christ at His return. Who makes up this army? Who is this who fights Jesus Christ? This army is made up of people to whom Jesus will say, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:23).

Now ask yourself: Am I practicing lawlessness?

Paul was challenged by God because he was *fighting* God. The encounter deeply impacted the rest of his life. From this event he learned that mankind has a fundamental problem. It’s a problem he wrote about in a letter to the Christians at Rome. Look at what he said:

“And even as they [those of the pagan world] did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting” (Romans 1:28-31). This is a powerful statement that should make each of us stop and think!

Paul then includes a list of behaviors. He mentions sexual immorality, wickedness and murder—all what we might be tempted to call “big ticket sins”—sins you would expect to be included on a “top 10” list of sins. Sins that you say aren’t a part of your life.

But wait!

He also mentions deceit, evil-mindedness and backbiting. He says pride is a problem, too. He talks about boasting and being disobedient to parents. He warns against not being able to forgive or to show mercy.

Paul is unsparing in this list. He compiles human mistakes that reflect to one degree or the other the human problem of not retaining God in our hearts and minds on a daily basis. Such behaviors wear down a relationship with God. These are the types of behaviors that make us enemies of God. Sin is sin, and it takes an enormous toll!

What Paul writes here in Romans tells us the reason there is an end-time army that gathers to fight Christ at His coming.

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#### Colorado

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#### Ohio

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#### Oklahoma

Tulsa ch. 44, 28, Sun 8 a.m.

#### Oregon

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Medford ch. 15, 95, Sun 5 p.m.

Milwaukie ch. 19, Tue 5:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m.

Oregon City ch. 23, Fri 7:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m.

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Because people do “not like to retain God in their knowledge,” there develops an animosity to God that distorts His true image. Mankind cannot recognize God because of sin.

Lawless transgression of God’s revealed way of life is what keeps the world in darkness today and will cause nations to rise in defiance when Christ appears in glory. Again, we have to ask, will you or I be found in this end-time army?

### Who is a friend of God?

If God has enemies, which we see that He does, does He also have friends?

We have an example in the Bible of a man God considered a friend: “And the

know or to want to know. Abraham began to believe and do things to follow and obey God that others did not. He started to get to know God by living the right way of life—*God’s way*.

It’s by living God’s way that we get to know Him better and more intimately. When we live God’s way, we become His friend and not His enemy. And we experience life as God lives and intends for us to live.

I ask again: Are you a friend of God or an enemy of God?

### You can become God’s friend now

The apostle Paul spent much of his life unknowingly as God’s enemy. Through an intense wake-up call he stopped fighting

His friend, but this requires that you stop fighting against Him.

What are you waiting for?

Just like He did with Paul, God can turn your life around and make you into one of His disciples. The choice is yours. Will you consider that you don’t know—fully know—and understand God as a Father, and the “only true God and Jesus Christ whom [He has] sent” (John 17:3)?

Are you fighting against God? Don’t assume you’re not! It takes more than belief to be a friend of God. It takes faith *with action*.

The end-time army that fights against God will be made up of people who fail in asking themselves these hard questions. They will not be characterized by looking deep into themselves and comparing their life choices with God’s Word. They will go with the flow of society and end up on the wrong side of that battle.

When Jesus returns and that army rises up to fight Him, what will the soldiers essentially look like?

They’ll look like you and me. If we don’t consider where we stand with God and strive in obeying Him as His friends, we could be found to be fighting against God.

Are you a friend of God or an enemy of God? Everyone is one or the other. Which will you be? **GN**

## As He did with Paul, God can turn your life around and make you into one of His disciples. *The choice is yours.*

Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God” (James 2:23).

Wouldn’t you want to be called a “friend of God”? I would! What does it take to be a friend of God?

Abraham was a man told by God to start a journey to a new land. He was called to leave his past behind in search of a new life. God said, “Get out of your country from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.” The Bible tells us, “Abram [as he was then called] departed” (Genesis 12:1-4). Put yourself in his shoes. What would you have done?

Abraham listened to God. By leaving his home to go to the land God promised, he began to demonstrate faith—the active, living faith that it takes to become a friend of God. He went out into an unknown world purely on faith in God’s Word and command in his life.

He pulled away from the familiar religious teachings of his time. Abraham obeyed a God no one else seemed either to

against God and became His friend through obedience.

Abraham was a man who became God’s friend by listening to God and doing what He said to do. We can follow his example by developing a firm intent to know the true God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Understanding and obeying the Ten Commandments of God is an important starting place for coming to know God and becoming His friend. But it takes even more than that. It takes a *deep-seated, heartfelt desire to know God and to know Jesus Christ*. A desire to know God and to obey Him is the starting point for the kind of faith held by Abraham, God’s friend.

Think again about the army that will fight against Christ at His return. Where will you be when that takes place? Will you be in that army, standing against your Savior? If we don’t keep God at the center of our lives right now, we could find ourselves as His enemy.

But the good news is that *we can know God*, and we can become a friend of God just like Abraham. God wants to make you

### Learn More

As noted in this article, understanding and obeying God’s Ten Commandments is vital to coming to know Him and to becoming His friend. After all, these are a reflection of His character and His thinking. Obeying the commandments helps us understand and become more like Him! Download or request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments* today!

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The United Church of God, in accordance with responsible financial stewardship, is audited annually by an independent accounting firm.





# Letters From Our Readers

## Dates of the biblical Holy Days?

I read the information on the biblical Holy Days in the Sept.-Oct. issue. What are the actual months and dates of the seven holy days you discussed in the articles?

*Internet reader*

*Thank you for your message. Feel free to access our online Holy Day calendar, which lists the dates for all of the upcoming Holy Days from 2014-2019. You can find it online at [ucg.org/holy-day-calendar](http://ucg.org/holy-day-calendar).*

## Comments on articles about World War I

Of all the *Good News* issues I've read, your July-August 2014 issue taught me the most. The history of World War I clearly explains the problems of the world today. Your excellent articles opened my eyes to the underlying conflicts of today. I applaud such concise and appealing writers. Over the years of receiving *The Good News*, I've established a line of readers behind me who greatly enjoy your modern approach to life. Being a reformed Jew, I truly enjoy your responsible and reasonable outlook.

*Reader in Illinois*

I am writing to tell you how much *The Good News* magazine is a blessing to me. I have just finished reading "100 Years After World War I: What Have We Learned?" It is excellent. Though I don't always agree with you, your magazines are good. Keep it up.

*Reader in Nairobi, Kenya*

## Comments regarding *Beyond Today TV* program

Thank you for your *Beyond Today TV* program. This was my first time catching it and I will definitely stay tuned now. I have been praying for more understanding on this issue of what happens when believers die, and I believe God may have answered my prayer when I stumbled across your show this morning. Thank you very much and God bless.

*Viewer in Ohio*

I was watching *Beyond Today TV* and I found it very interesting. You have a free giveaway *Bible Study Course*. I am interested in it if you could please send it to me. Thank you very much for your efforts. It's really changing my life. God bless you.

*Viewer in Queensland, Australia*

I've been enjoying your *Beyond Today TV* program and literature I have received from you. Most of the mainstream churches have got it wrong. Where is your church in Brisbane?

*Viewer in Queensland, Australia*

I was very interested in everything I heard in your *Beyond Today TV* program titled "Are You Fighting Against God?" I was wondering if you have any meetings of the United Church of God in Western Australia because we are looking for somewhere to fellowship. I really liked what I heard today, I agree with absolutely everything that the gentleman said and I thought I should contact you and find if there is a group over here that I could attend. I would like to hear back. Thank you very much indeed.

*Viewer in Western Australia*

*We do have groups that meet in Perth and Bunbury. You'll find contact information for our Australian office on page 2 of this issue.*

## Who are you?

I receive *The Good News* magazine and enjoy reading it. I'm still confused as to whether you are Seventh-day Adventist or what? What do you all call yourselves? Do you worship on Saturday?

*Internet reader*

*Thank you for your interest. The Good News is published by the United Church of God and is not affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventists. We have some doctrines that are similar to the Seventh-day Adventists, the chief one being our observance of the seventh-day Sabbath according to the Ten Commandments. However, there are also a number of major differences between them and us.*

*Rather than attempt to comment on their doctrines, we prefer to inform you about our own. We'll leave others to speak for their own organizations, and you can draw your own comparisons.*

*We invite you to learn more about the United Church of God by reading our booklets This Is the United Church of God and Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God. You can read or download these online or request free printed copies at [ucg.org/booklets](http://ucg.org/booklets). At this same location you can find booklets covering virtually all of our beliefs in great detail.*

## Heartfelt thanks for *The Good News* and booklets

Thank you very much for the valuable magazine and booklets that you have sent me. You cannot imagine how happy I am to receive your magazine for about 10 years free of charge. I can't find enough paper, ink, or even words to express my feelings on to you. What I am able to say to you is this: God bless you in your ministry. Your writers are really fantastic, and they are leading me into deep meditation. All the booklets I have received are really a blessing to me, and I am greatly enriched spiritually. I keep them carefully because they are a great source of information and inspiration to me.

I would like to apologize that I have not enclosed a contribution or donation towards your expenses. I live in Eritrea (in the Horn of Africa) and am still in national service, but hopefully I will do something soon. Thank you so much for supporting me in my spiritual growth. May God bless you and your ministry.

*Reader in Asmara, Eritrea*

My heartfelt thanks and gratitude goes out to all of you for sending me a free subscription to *The Good News* magazine. I've learned many things about the world we're living in. It's really very informative reading material! To help me really understand the words of God, please send me the booklets *How to Understand the Bible* and *Jesus Christ the Real Story*. Thank you very much and may God continue to bless and guide you all in spreading the gospel!

*Reader in Camarines Sur, Philippines*

*The Good News* magazine is a fixture in my home. I've been receiving issues since 2001 when I was running from doctor to doctor with my younger son who had been injured on the job, and again the same year my older son was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in 2002. It was a very sad year, but I derived comfort from your magazine and have read it faithfully ever since. Please keep up the good work! It is very much appreciated.

*Reader in Colorado*

Thank you for sending me the first three lessons of your *Bible Study Course*. They have helped me immensely. I'm hoping to get my husband to do them. We both are thankful for the work you do in sending out the booklets and magazine. We thirst for knowledge—true biblical knowledge.

*Reader in Western Australia*

I just received the booklets I requested. Thanks so much. It is really a big help to us who have many questions in following Jesus. In reading the materials, our faith was restored, our long-time questions were answered and more knowledge was poured upon us, especially through the *Bible Study Course*. In our town, I am the only subscriber and am sharing *The Good News* to those who need it. I do not have enough words to explain how thankful we are.

*Reader in Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines*

I received the booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest* as I requested. What I found out in reading this booklet really shocked me. Thank you and God bless *The Good News* worldwide.

*Reader in Masinloc, Philippines*

Please accept this donation to help get *The Good News* out to everyone. I love it! It has helped me a lot, and I believe like you do. Keep up the good work.

*Reader in Oklahoma*

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# When Was Jesus Born?

Was Jesus born on December 25? Can we even know when He was born? And most importantly, does it even really matter when Jesus was born? *by Darris McNeely*

**W**hen was Jesus Christ of Nazareth born? We hear Christmas carols about the baby Jesus in the manger and the winter wonderland associated with His birth. If we look at our calendars, chances are they label Dec. 25 “Christmas Day.” The birth of Jesus Christ is said to be the reason behind the season. But was He actually born on that day? It’s not as clear and simple as our calendars would suggest.

Dec. 25 wasn’t always considered Jesus’ birth date. In a *U.S. News and World Report* article titled “In Search of Christmas,” Joseph Sheler wrote: “Lacking any scriptural pointers to Jesus’ birthday, early Christian teachers suggested dates all over the calendar. Clement . . . picked November 18. Hippolytus . . . figured Christ must have been born on a Wednesday . . . An anonymous document believed to have been written in North Africa around A.D. 243, placed Jesus’ birth on March 28” (Dec. 23, 1996, p. 58).

Although it’s difficult to determine the first time anyone celebrated Dec. 25 as Christmas Day, historians are in general agreement that it was sometime during the fourth century. This is an amazingly late date! Think about it—this means that Christmas, which most consider Jesus’ birthday, wasn’t observed by the Roman church until about 300 years after Christ’s lifetime on earth!

Christmas can’t be traced back to either the teachings or the practices of the earliest Christians. That sounds almost impossible, doesn’t it? But it’s true.

So why did the Roman church adopt Dec. 25 as the time to celebrate Jesus’ birth? The reason His birthday is celebrated at that time of year is that religious leaders in that era wanted to give a pagan festival held on Dec. 25 a name change to make it easier for pagans to convert to Christianity!

The *Encyclopedia Americana* makes

this clear: “In the fifth century, the Western Church ordered it [Christ’s birth] to be observed forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol [the sun god], as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ’s birth existed” (1944 edition, “Christmas”).

The reason for this confusion is not surprising. The Bible doesn’t actually spell out the exact date of Jesus’ birth. What’s more, we find zero mentions of any celebrations being held honoring Christ’s birthday by the early Church.

## Jesus wasn’t born in December

So what about Dec. 25? A careful Bible study shows that the middle of winter was clearly *not* the time Jesus was born. There are two big reasons why this can’t be the time of Christ’s birth.

First, we know that shepherds were in the fields watching their flocks at the time of Jesus’ birth: “And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger . . . Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:7-8).

Shepherds would not have been “living out in the fields” during December, the weather being cold and miserable. According to *Celebrations: The Complete Book of American Holidays*, Luke’s account “suggests that Jesus may have been born in summer or early fall. Since December is cold and rainy in Judea, it is likely the shepherds would have sought shelter for their flocks at night” (p. 309).

Similarly, *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary* says this passage argues “against the birth [of Christ] occurring on Dec. 25 since the weather would not have permitted” shepherds watching over their flocks in the fields at night. Though some dispute this, other reputable sources, such as *The Companion Bible* and *Clarke’s*

*Commentary*, make the same points about the shepherds not being outside in the open at night in late December.

So the first reason we know He wasn’t born in December was that there were shepherds in the fields tending their flocks, something that wouldn’t have been happening in the cold Judean winter.

Another reason we can conclude that Jesus wasn’t born in December is that His parents traveled to Bethlehem to register in a Roman census (Luke 2:1-4). No Roman ruler would’ve had a census taken in winter when temperatures often dropped below freezing and roads were in poor condition.

Taking a census under such conditions would have been self-defeating, since it would have been too difficult for Judean residents to travel to be counted. Travel back then wasn’t as easy as it is today. We live in an age of heated vehicles and snowplowed roads, but back then the vast majority of people walked wherever they needed to go.

Based on these two facts alone we see that it’s highly unlikely that the biblical account of Jesus’ birth happened in the winter, let alone on the specific date of Dec. 25. More than being a simple incorrect guess, the Dec. 25 date was an attempt to synthesize pagan practices into Christian worship.

## Jesus was born in the autumn of the year

This all begs the question: Just when *was* Jesus born?

We find important clues about the real time of His birth in what the Bible tells us about His cousin, John the Baptist.

Maybe you’ve read the Gospel of Luke and thought it was strange that the book begins not with the story of the conception of Jesus, but with the story of the conception of John the Baptist. There’s a very good reason Luke was sure to tell us in very specific detail when John was conceived and born.

Luke tells us that John’s mother Elizabeth was six months pregnant when Jesus was conceived: “In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to . . . a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant



of David. The virgin's name was Mary . . ." (Luke 1:24-36).

Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were cousins. From this passage we know that John was six months older than Jesus. So we can discover the approximate time of year Jesus was born if we know when John was born.

Let's look at what the Bible says about the time of John's birth.

John's father Zacharias was a priest serving in the temple at Jerusalem in "the division of Abijah" (Luke 1:5). At this time, the temple priests in Jerusalem were divided into different "divisions" or "courses"—groups of priests that would take turns performing temple service during the year. This formed a yearly schedule for those serving at the temple.

Historians calculate that the course of

ence in ages between John and Jesus (Luke 1:35-36)—brings us to about *late September* as the likely time of Jesus' birth.

### Does Christmas really honor Christ?

So if it can be shown from the Bible and some historical research that Jesus was born in the autumn of the year instead of December, does that mean we should keep Christmas in September instead of December?

*No, it doesn't!* Nowhere in the Bible do we find any instruction or command to celebrate Christ's birth. The fact that so many specific dates are given in the Bible about other important and less important events, while this exact date remains vague, is significant!

*God didn't call for an annual celebration of Jesus' birth.* God *does* give us other specific days to observe that honor Jesus

Christ and the Father. For those who love God and His Son it's only natural to desire to worship Them. But it's far better to do this on the days and times *God has set* rather than to invent our own days and times!

As for the celebration of Christmas in December, remember what we read earlier about the Roman church adopting pagan practices into the Christian faith to create Christmas.

Jesus wouldn't want us to celebrate pagan days to honor His birth.

How do we know what Jesus would or would not want us to do in this regard? God makes it very clear that He doesn't like pagan worship practices being used to honor Him. He told the ancient Israelites:

"When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' *You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way . . .* Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; *you shall not add to it nor take away from it*" (Deuteronomy 12:29-32, emphasis added).

### Jesus' coming brought us many things

We should of course be grateful that Jesus Christ was born—it's a joyous event that brought us many things.

He showed us how to have a relationship with God the Father. We see His example of a perfect life, perfect sacrifice, and His resurrection back to spirit life. He showed us the way for man to have the opportunity to share His glory and live forever in the family of God. He came to form a new relationship with man that, through His blood, extends to all nations. He came to become our High Priest and intercede before God's throne for us.

Through Him we can have an authentic and fulfilling relationship with God based on truth and love. And if we truly love Him, we will show Him love the way He wants to be loved. To love God we should do what He asks: "But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:5; compare John 14:15, 21; 15:10).

By not obeying God we are missing out on a closer relationship with Him. Christmas traditions, nearly all of which can be traced back to pre-Christian false religions (as nearly any good encyclopedia or a quick Internet search will verify) obscure these wonderful truths and keep us from a stronger relationship with God.

Christ was not born on Dec. 25, in the dead of winter. Celebrating this date as His birthday doesn't change the fact. And God never gave us instruction to observe Christ's birth annually in any fashion.

Instead of holding to a wrong day and a wrong idea, isn't it time you focus on *why* He was born? And shouldn't you be observing and discovering the meaning of the days He Himself instituted and observed? Build a better relationship with God starting today! **GN**



## God makes it very clear that He doesn't like pagan worship practices being used to honor Him.

Abijah, during which Zacharias served, was on duty around early to mid-June (see *The Companion Bible*, 1974, Appendix 179, p. 200).

During Zechariah's temple service, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and announced that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a child (Luke 1:8-13). After he completed his service and traveled home, Elizabeth conceived the cousin of Jesus—the child who would later become known as John the Baptist (Luke 1:23-24).

Considering that John's conception likely took place later in June, when Zechariah returned home after completing his service in the division of Abijah, adding nine months brings us to around late March as the most likely time for John's birth.

Adding another six months—the differ-

### Learn More

Many people worship Jesus Christ on Dec. 25, assuming that to be the date of His birth. Yet the Bible itself shows it clearly wasn't! If people are mistaken about the time of His birth, what else could they be mistaken about? Perhaps a great deal! Download or request your free copy of *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* today to see what the Bible really says! And also request the free study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*



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# Is the Rapture Real?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is going to save you from the coming time of horrendous global trouble by whisking you away into heaven beforehand in what many call the Rapture? What will you do if He doesn't? *by Gary Petty*

Imagine pilotless airplanes plummeting to earth, empty cars crashing, and those “left behind” anxiously searching for their loved ones who disappeared, as depicted in a recent major movie. Many proclaim that this will happen—but is this idea of “the Rapture” biblical?

Many Bible believers realize that we are fast approaching a time of massive war, disease epidemics and natural calamities. This will lead into what Bible prophecy refers to as the Great Tribulation, followed by the terrible calamities of the Day of the Lord. The book of Revelation tells of this latter time when seven angels will successively blow seven trumpets, each one heralding great events during the time leading to the return of Jesus Christ as the King of Kings (Revelation 8-9; 11:15).

Some believe they will be spared from these worldwide calamities by the Rapture—taking place, depending on who you ask, 7 years, 3½ years, or a few months before Christ's return. As commonly conceived, the doctrine of the Rapture—or, more technically, the pretribulation rapture—is the teaching that Christ comes to take Christians away into the safety of heaven before the years of Tribulation start.

What about you? Do you expect to hear the blast of a trumpet and immediately rise to meet Jesus in the clouds—before the great calamities of the end time?

On the other hand, how devastated would you be if these things begin to happen and you and others are *not* raptured? That could undermine your entire faith and belief in God!

So we must ask: What does the Bible actually teach about the Rapture? Let's explore four biblical passages to see if the Bible can answer the question, Is the Rapture real?

The pretribulation rapture story is compelling, and it is easy to see why people want to believe it. Nevertheless, if we search the Scriptures repeatedly, and grasp the proper overview of the seven trumpets,

we will see that the common Rapture teaching does not fit with what God tells us in the Bible.

## Caught up into the air after a trumpet blast

Of course if you believe in the Rapture, you may be saying at this point: “This publication is wrong. The Rapture is mentioned in the Bible by the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians.”

Let's consider that passage. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 Paul writes to the first-century church in Thessalonica:

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen

caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

This is the predominant passage used to support the typical Rapture teaching—as the word translated “caught up” in verse 17 could be translated “raptured” in English, since “raptured” simply means “suddenly caught up.” But the context in the pretribulation rapture teaching is all wrong. Notice the mention of the *trumpet* here. To really understand this passage we must compare it with three other New Testament passages that describe the same events.

## Christians gathered at Christ's return with a trumpet after the Tribulation

Let's now look at what Jesus taught about His second coming and the gathering of the saints in what is known as the Olivet Prophecy, as it was spoken on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem (Matthew 24-25;



## Do you expect to hear the blast of a trumpet and immediately rise to meet Jesus in the clouds in the Rapture?

asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be

Mark 13; Luke 21). Many people will tell you that the Rapture and Christ's second coming are two separate events with years in between. However, the Bible reveals the error in this teaching. Christ's followers *will* be saved, but *not* in the way the common teaching of the Rapture depicts.

Here's what Jesus said, as recorded in Matthew 24:29-31: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect [or chosen people, true Christians] from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Some would claim that this applies only to those converted during the Tribulation period—not to believers supposedly raptured before the Tribulation. Yet we elsewhere see, and we’ll look more closely at this shortly, that all believers who’ve died and those alive at Christ’s return will rise in the resurrection to eternal life together, with merely a moment separating these two groups. There is no scriptural identification of another group rising to immortality a while before this.

There are remarkable similarities between what Jesus taught in the Olivet Prophecy and what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians. Recall that in 1 Thessalonians Paul wrote that those who are alive up to the time of Christ’s second coming will not rise before those who have died in the faith, because the dead in Christ will rise first.

We also saw that Jesus in the Olivet Prophecy talked about gathering His followers from the “four winds,” or from all areas of the globe, *after* the Tribulation.

Do the passages in 1 Thessalonians and the Olivet prophecy describe the same or different events? The matter should be clearer now—but let’s consider two more passages to help us put together the pieces of this puzzle.

### Resurrection and change at the last trumpet

The third passage we’ll look at is also written by the apostle Paul—1 Corinthians 15:50-53: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

Notice that this occurs at the *last* trumpet. The pieces of the puzzle are beginning to fit together. The three passages of Scripture we’ve read (in 1 Thessalonians, Matthew and 1 Corinthians) are all describing

the same event—what happens at the last trumpet! We have one more passage to add to the picture.

### The resurrection follows the seven trumpets of Revelation

Just as Matthew 24 showed that ominous heavenly signs would follow the Tribulation, so does the book of Revelation (compare Revelation 6:9-14). And Revelation further shows that this introduces the great day of God’s wrath (verse 17), elsewhere referred to as the Day of the Lord, which will add another year to the preceding calamity (see Isaiah 34:8).

Revelation 8 and 9 then describe six major events that will happen during the Day of the Lord—followed by a seventh in Revelation 11:15. As mentioned earlier, these events are heralded by the blowing of seven trumpets. At the last, or seventh trumpet, Christ is proclaimed the world’s new ruler and returns to resurrect and meet His followers.

Here is what the apostle John was inspired to write in Revelation 20:4-6 about those raised at the time of Christ’s return:

“I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.

“They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years” (New International Version).

Note that the first resurrection, which is only one resurrection, includes all of Christ’s followers from the past as well as those who are martyred at the time of the Great Tribulation. The end-time rising of believers does not occur at both ends of the final Tribulation and Day of the Lord period—it occurs only afterward.

All of the passages we’ve examined are describing the same events. Those who are caught up to meet Christ in the air in 1 Thessalonians 4 cannot precede those who are dead, because the dead rise first. The dead are raised at the sound of the seventh trumpet when Christ returns after

the Tribulation period—and those alive in Christ are changed in the next moment to be part of the same resurrection.

### The biblical conclusion

When we look at these scriptures, it is plain that there is no real biblical support for the pretribulation Rapture. The followers of Jesus Christ will be caught up to meet Him, but this will be *after* the Tribulation and the trumpets of the Day of the Lord, at the sound of the last, or seventh, trumpet, when all true Christians who’ve died or are still alive are changed *together*.

The supernatural trumpet supplies a key to understanding the events leading to Christ’s return to establish God’s Kingdom on the earth.

The dead in Christ will be resurrected, and His followers who are alive will be changed and “caught up together in the clouds.” However, they will not stay in the clouds—or return permanently to heaven to dwell, as some imagine. Jesus Christ is coming to earth to save humanity and establish God’s Kingdom over all nations. This is the hope for all those who anticipate His return!

If you are waiting for the return of Jesus Christ, it’s important that you understand the great steps in God’s plan of salvation, including the resurrection of believers at Christ’s second coming. Then you will not be devastated when you and others are not raptured. Don’t let an unbiblical teaching undermine your entire faith and belief in God!

Thankfully there are many scriptures that, on careful study, show that God *does* provide protection for His people and will do so in the calamitous last days (Matthew 24:13; Luke 21:36; Revelation 12:14)—but that protection will be here on the earth, as we await the joyful rising to meet our Savior that will come at the end of that terrible time! **GN**

### Learn More

Many people are confused about exactly what will happen in the time leading up to Jesus Christ’s return. But you don’t need to be! Download or request your free copy of *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* today to understand what the Bible reveals!



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# Are You Ready for the Day of the Lord?

The Bible speaks of the Day of the Lord as a time of great upheaval, cataclysm and also of hope. The Bible reveals that this “day” actually symbolizes a period of time beginning with great trouble for mankind and extending into an eternity of peace. *by Rex Sexton*

“Get ready for the Day of the Lord!” cries the fiery preacher. Those in the audience listen almost in terror as the pulpit-pounder describes horrifying phenomena that he says will soon engulf the entire earth.

In graphic detail they hear that the sun and moon will cease to give light, that heavenly bodies will collide with the earth, and that plagues will stalk the land—disease, starvation and war! Great earthquakes will topple whole cities as fierce and relentless storms punish men, women and children. Thus will Almighty God lash out in anger and exact a cruel revenge on a sinful mankind!

“The time of judgment is at hand, and you had better be ready!” the voice thunders through the loudspeakers.

But, we might ask, is this picture of the Day of the Lord accurate? Does the Bible teach that “gloom and doom” is all there is to this period of time? Is Jesus Christ going to return to the earth merely to destroy it? Just what is the Day of the Lord anyhow?

The Bible refers to this same time in a variety of ways. The expression “Day of the Lord” is synonymous with the “day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12), the “day of the Lord Jesus” (2 Corinthians 1:14), the “day of judgment” (1 John 4:17), the “great and awesome day” (Joel 2:31), the “day of vengeance of our God” (Isaiah 61:2) and “the great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14). Other passages simply refer to this time as “the day,” “that day,” or “the day of God.”

Regardless of how it is referred to, it is going to be the most awesome time in all of human history! And it’s imperative that you

understand what will happen during this period and the incredible changes it heralds for our world.

## So what is the Day of the Lord?

In its broadest sense, the Day of the Lord simply refers to the era wherein God will take control of the earth. Right now we are living in the “day of man,” since God presently allows wayward mankind to rule over this planet apart from Him.

The Bible also indicates that we could refer to this time as the “day of Satan,” since Satan is now the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4) and “deceives the entire world” into following his social and religious systems (Revelation 12:9). But his influence on the earth is only temporary according to God’s purpose.

The Bible reveals that Jesus Christ will remain in heaven “until the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21). Thus, something that used to be here is going to be restored—put back in place. But what was removed that needs to be restored?

The answer is simple—*God’s direct rule over the entire earth!* It will be restored during the Day of the Lord.

## One day!

More than 2,500 years ago, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a disturbing dream. In it, he saw a vision of a huge statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay (Daniel 2:31-33).

As he was admiring the statue, a supernatural stone came out of the sky and

smashed the statue’s feet and toes! The entire statue then collapsed into dust and was blown away by the wind, with no trace left behind. Then the stone quickly grew into a great mountain that filled the entire earth! (verses 34-36).

The only one able to explain the vision was the prophet Daniel, who at that time was a captive serving in Nebuchadnezzar’s court. Daniel explained to the king that the statue represented a succession of empires that would dominate the known world from that time forward.

The final stage of these governments—represented by the feet and toes of mixed iron and clay—would be an alliance of 10 distinctly governed nations or regions. During the time of their unified kingdom, the God of heaven will come to the earth to destroy every vestige of these national powers. He will then establish His own Kingdom that will last forever (verses 41-45).

The Day of the Lord is referred to in some scriptures as the day of the final battle—when Jesus Christ and His army of angels and resurrected saints defeat the army of the final human empire. Not surprisingly, this final empire is referred to as mighty “Babylon,” now falling for the second time (Revelation 18:2).

Jesus foretold that on this day He will be visible in the sky like lightning: “For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day” (Luke 17:24).

The final cataclysmic battle takes place at Jerusalem. The prophet Joel gives some vivid details of the devastation that will take place, beginning with an alarm of war being sounded: “Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand” (Joel 2:1).

He then goes on to describe an immense

army coming down to Jerusalem—an army including soldiers from virtually every nation on earth!

These armies will be gathered by Satan and his demons in one last, desperate attempt to prevent the Kingdom of God from being established on the earth. “For they are the spirits of devils, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14).

But their efforts will be for nothing as

These momentous events, it should be noted, take place after the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15; 16:17). However, a number of scriptures also include events that *precede* this trumpet as part of the Day of the Lord. So it is also correct to see this “day” as a lengthier time period.

### **The year of trumpets and plagues**

The apostle John opens the book of Revelation by telling his reader that he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10—not Sunday, as many assume, but he was hav-

occurred shortly after Christ’s *first* coming. They are represented by the opening of “seals” in Revelation 6.

The visions of the first four seals are known as the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” They represent false Christianity, war, famine and disease epidemics. The same global problems were also foretold by Jesus Christ directly (Matthew 24:1-12).

When the fifth seal is opened, Satan initiates a great persecution of true Christians (Revelation 6:9; 12:12-17). This will also be the time of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7)—when the devil is allowed to vent his wrath on the nations that have been enjoying the blessings of Abraham. (For more understanding on this critical topic, request our free study aid *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

The “Beast”—the European-centered world government foretold in Revelation 13—will have risen to power at this time. As this union of civil and religious rule enforces its “mark” on all mankind, true followers of Jesus Christ who refuse to receive this mark will be afflicted, hated in all nations, betrayed and in some cases even martyred for their refusal to disobey God (Revelation 13:15-16; Matthew 24:9-10).

This time, referred to by Jesus as the Great Tribulation (verse 21), will be Satan’s last attempt to harm the people of God!

These events signal the beginning of the 3½-year countdown to the final battle! According to Revelation 13:5, the Beast will rule the earth for 42 months (3½ years). This same period of time was revealed to the prophet Daniel as the time when this powerful church-state union would come like a whirlwind into the “Glorious Land”—that is, the Holy Land (Daniel 11:40-41)—and would shatter the power of the “holy people” for “a time, times, and half a time” (Daniel 12:7). This also refers to the 3½ years—each “time” evidently representing one year in prophecy.

It is during the 3½-year period, “immediately after the tribulation,” that terrifying heavenly signs will be seen (Matthew 24:29). These heavenly signs—visible phenomena in the sky—constitute the *sixth seal* of Revelation in Revelation 6:2. They occur between the persecution of God’s people and beginning of His wrath upon the earth.

The prophet Joel tells us that the heavenly signs will occur *before* the Day of the Lord: “And I will show wonders in heavens and in the earth . . . The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and



## **Does the Bible teach that “gloom and doom” is all there is to this period of time? Is Jesus Christ going to return to the earth merely to destroy it?**

they are defeated by the returning Christ. Indeed, His weapons will be earthquakes, a hail of fiery stones from heaven, and a “plague” that virtually melts soldiers away while they are still standing (Revelation 16:18, 21; Zechariah 14:12-13). Modern weapons, destructive as they have become, will be no match for the infinite power of Jesus Christ!

Then, after the battle is over, Christ will ascend the throne of rulership over the entire earth and at last establish His Kingdom: “And the LORD shall be King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9).

So the Day of the Lord can be correctly understood as the day of the final battle at Jerusalem—the day when all the combined armies of the world are defeated and the Son of God establishes His rule over the earth.

ing a vision of the Day of the Lord). According to *Vine’s Dictionary of the New Testament*, the Greek word *herera*, translated here as “day,” can mean a “period of undefined length marked by certain circumstances . . . The Day of the Lord is the Day of His manifest judgment on the world” (pp. 270-271).

This understanding is borne out by the message of the book—the visions John saw and recorded for us concerning this awesome march of events that culminates in Jesus Christ’s Kingdom being established here on earth! Christ also included what will happen just prior to His return as part of “the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (see Luke 17:28-30).

Leading up to these events is a series of ever more frequent and intensifying calamities, the first manifestations of which



awesome day of the LORD” (Joel 2:30-31).

The tumultuous and chaotic events Joel writes about earlier in the same chapter occur after the heavenly signs and during a period leading up to the great Day of Battle. Over the course of this period the “seven trumpets” of the “seventh seal” are sounded (Revelation 8-9). Each trumpet brings a new plague upon the earth as God, in His great mercy, begins the process of leading deceived and defiant human beings to repentance so that Jesus Christ can rule them.

This time is heralded as the “great day of His wrath” (Revelation 6:17)—a “day” that, following the prophetic “day for a year” principle (see Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34), is referred to in Isaiah 34:8 as one *year*: “the *day* of the LORD’s vengeance, the *year* of recompense for the cause of Zion.” That year—the last year of the 3½-year period—will include the most intense part of God’s wrath upon sinful mankind.

On the heels of these tremendous events and their culmination in the immense battle at Jerusalem, a new era in history begins! And the Scriptures reveal that the Day of the Lord will then continue throughout the 1,000 years that follow.

## The Millennium

The wonderful truth that Jesus Christ is going to establish His throne—*His Kingdom*—upon the earth and rule with His saints for 1,000 years (a millennium) is well documented in Scripture (Revelation 11:15; 20:4). When Jesus returns as King of Kings, He will land exactly where He left from—the Mount of Olives, just east of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (see Acts 1:9-12; Zechariah 14:4).

From that time forward, He will begin the healing process for the nations and teach people to obey God’s laws—so much so that the knowledge of the true God will cover the earth as water now covers the seabeds! This wonderful time of peace and rebuilding is pictured for us in the book of Isaiah: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

From the earliest days of Christianity, some Bible scholars have traditionally believed that God has allotted a time period of 7,000 years to deal with mankind. In this “7,000-year plan,” each day of the week is understood to represent 1,000 years, with the “seventh-day Sabbath” as the final millennium—the time when Jesus Christ will rule the earth and give it rest from the influence of Satan the devil.

The Day of the Lord sometimes refers to this 1,000-year period, as it is the “day” when the Lord will rule the earth. The apostle Peter seems to have been referring to this particular understanding in 2 Peter 3: “But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise . . . But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” (verses 8-10; see also Psalm 90:4).

The Bible also confirms the identification of the Millennium as a 1,000-year-long Sabbath day in the book of Hebrews. The author uses the keeping of the Sabbath as an illustration of the “rest” or reward that Christians are striving to enter.

“For there is a place where it is said,

## Each trumpet brings a new plague as God begins the process of leading deceived and defiant human beings to repentance so that Jesus Christ can rule them.

concerning the seventh day, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works’ . . . for if Y’hoshua [Joshua] had given them rest, God would not have spoken later of another ‘day.’ So there remains a *Shabbat*-keeping [Sabbath-keeping] for God’s people. For the one who has entered God’s rest has also rested from his own works, as God did from his. Therefore, let us do our best to enter that rest” (Hebrews 4:4, 8-11, Complete Jewish Bible).

So the Millennium itself, in some cases, is represented as a “day”—indeed, the Day of the Lord. Isaiah 19 and numerous other references in the prophetic books of the Bible describe the time when Jesus Christ will be ruling over the nations and teaching them His ways. The phrase “in that day” often occurs in these passages and should in this context be understood as meaning the Millennium—the day when the Lord rules the earth and all its nations!

But the Kingdom of God will not end after the 1,000 years are finished. In fact, God’s Kingdom will have no end (Isaiah 9:7). Finally, then, the Day of the Lord, meaning the time when the Lord will rule, can also be applied to what comes *after* the Millennium.

## Eternity beyond

In the broadest sense, the Day of the Lord begins shortly before the Millennium starts and continues through the endless eons of time afterward—for all eternity. Daniel was told in no uncertain terms just what would

happen: “But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” (Daniel 7:18).

Adding a dual meaning to a passage we examined earlier in 2 Peter, the apostle seems to also include events *beyond* the Millennium—when the earth’s surface and atmosphere are burned away—as part of the Day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10).

Revelation 21 gives us a glimpse of the new heaven and earth that will replace what we know today: “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride

adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God’” (verses 1-3).

So God the Father and Jesus Christ will dwell for all eternity with those who have been born into Their family! God proclaims, “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son” (Revelation 21:7).

So, incredible as it may sound, each one of us has an awesome invitation from Almighty God, the great Creator of the universe, to spend His Day—*all eternity*—ruling with Him over the vast universe. What a day that will be!

Are you ready for the Day of the Lord? **GN**

## Learn More

Many people are puzzled by the prophecies of the Bible. Yet they were recorded to reveal to us the things that would happen in the future. We’re here to help! To more fully understand the Day of the Lord and how it fits in the overall picture of Bible prophecy, download or request your free copy of our study guide *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.



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# After the Chaos: the Times of Refreshing

In a world of troubles and grief, we are all in deep need of physical and spiritual refreshment. Even tougher times are coming, but they're followed by Jesus Christ's reign and His times of refreshing. *by Gary Petty*



know you could use some spiritual refreshing. We all live in an emotionally, physically and spiritually parched and exhausting world.

But don't despair! God has a plan for quenching your spiritual thirst. The apostle Peter summed up God's plan this way: "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come . . . that He may send Jesus Christ . . . whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things . . ." (Acts 3:19-21).

Peter said that these "times of refreshing" and "times of restoration" are descriptions of when God sends Jesus Christ back to the earth. Most Christians anticipate the time when Christ returns, but have you ever wondered what it will be like after He actually stands on the Mount of Olives and takes charge of human affairs? What kind of world will He create?

It will help our understanding if we visualize what it will be like when He returns. You've probably read or heard descriptions of prophecies in the book of Revelation concerning massive destruction caused by war, diseases and natural disasters that precede

Christ's return. Let's bring these descriptions down to a personal level by taking an imaginary trip through time with a family that experiences what various Bible prophecies indicate lies ahead—transitioning from the great suffering at the end of this age to the peaceful times of refreshing to follow.

## The darkness before the dawn

Visualize a family of four—father, mother and two daughters. They live in an affluent nation—perhaps on a farm in the American Midwest, along the coast of Australia, or in a small town on the Canadian plains. It could be your family. We'll call the parents Tom and Judy. They own a nice home and work hard. Life is hectic, but it's the price you pay for success, right?

They weren't prepared for when times got difficult. They began to notice the price of meat, bread and vegetables going up, but they still could afford their smartphones and car payments. When Tom lost his job it felt like he'd lost his legs. He started to slip into depression. Judy had to pull double shifts to keep up. In spite of the difficulties, their children still made it to soccer practice, and Tom and Judy still hoped the

government would find ways to stop the economic slide.

They ignored the decaying morals of the society around them and the distant conflicts that were now unraveling the rest of the world. As long as they had heat and air conditioning, a supermarket filled with food and could watch the latest reality shows, things weren't really that bad.

And then it started. The nation was strained to the breaking point and fears mounted in the face of increasing natural disasters and growing domestic and international instability. Diseases long thought conquered reemerged, and an epidemic caused by a viral mutation took their first child. They saw their home value and their retirement wiped out when the economy collapsed, and food riots broke out.

A new attempt at a world government seemed to stem the tide for a while, but it failed. Nations revolted, and a new world war brought with it nuclear destruction on major cities and a breakdown of society in outlying areas. There was no basic medical care, no electricity, and even drinkable water was hard to come by. Tom was killed by thugs who stole their last can of gasoline.

In the next stage of the nightmare foreign troops appeared. Moving from town to town, they rounded people up to take them to "safe" areas. Judy held on to her remaining little girl as she and others were transported to holding facilities—actually concentration and slave labor camps.

But the nightmare wasn't over. Terrifying blasts and cataclysmic events literally shook the earth as large meteors struck the planet. Order disintegrated as all who were able to scatter into the countryside, taking shelter in ruins. In the chaos Judy's daughter died of malnutrition and dehydration when the sun's heat became so intense that it scorched the vegetation. Judy looked out from her shelter, waiting for death and wondering, "Is there a God?"

Then soon after the greatest blaring yet heard, Judy saw it—a great light, brighter than the sun, moving across the face of the sky and descending to the earth far over the horizon. Shortly afterward the ground



beneath her was rocked as never before—this earthquake being bigger than any of those accompanying previous calamities. Had another meteor struck the planet? Or could this be what some in the camps had said was coming—the return of Jesus Christ to the earth?

Several days later Judy heard about amazing events happening in Jerusalem. Just when it seemed that humanity was going to destroy itself, a Being shining like the sun, accompanied by a vast force that was also blazing brilliantly, touched down on the Mount of Olives, which split in two. That is when the earthquake had happened.

Some people thought the planet was being invaded by aliens from outer space. Others said it was the Antichrist. Converging military forces marched on Jerusalem to battle Him, but they were utterly vanquished. Yet this woman remembered that Jesus Christ had promised to return—and she realized that the day had now come!

This is the world Jesus will come back to save and refresh.

### Restoration and peace under Christ's reign

What a momentous challenge Jesus will face—an environment that will no longer support life and people who are numbed or driven mad by the horrific and terrifying events of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord. Our fictional Judy represents just one of untold millions of violated, starving people still living without hope.

Amid this burned-out environment, and mass of hopeless people, Jesus Christ will start bringing great change to the world with the help of His saints—His followers from this age resurrected at His return to assist in His reign over the nations. How will Jesus and the saints begin to create the “times of refreshing”?

The prophet Isaiah wrote one of the most enduring descriptions of Christ's reign on earth in Isaiah 2: “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 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.’ . . .

“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” (verses 2-4).

One of the first things Christ must do is heal the environment that has been ruined by natural disasters, nuclear war and meteor impacts. And of course He must begin leading people into the way of peace.

World peace will not come instantly, but it will come. Even the nature of animals will be transformed as an aspect of the world becoming a secure and peaceful realm. Isaiah 11 is one of the great prophecies about the “times of refreshing”:

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young

The peace and joy of Christ's reign can be your future. It can also be part of your present daily life. To realize this future time of restoration, you will have to take action *now*. You must discard the worn-out, empty platitudes that pass for religion and *become a true disciple of Jesus Christ*.

### Future news and the Feast of Tabernacles

Can you imagine turning on your computer and reading headlines like these?

- “New Government Program: All Military Armored Vehicles to Be Turned Into



## What a momentous challenge Jesus will face—a world destroyed and people driven mad by the horrific and terrifying events of the Great Tribulation.

goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them . . . The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (verses 6-9).

These prophecies give us a wonderful glimpse into what the “times of refreshing” will be like.

But what of people like Judy who will have already lost loved ones before Christ's return. How will they regain hope? They will learn the wonderful truth that their loved ones will live again—that they can be reunited with them still. In the meantime, Christ and His saints will give them comfort, teach them God's plan and purpose, help them in the right way to live and bless them with joyful lives.

Farm Machinery and Road Graders”

- “God Heals the Earth: Food Shortages Disappear on All Continents as Crop Growth Outstrips Ability to Harvest”
- “Peace Talks Between Israelis and Arabs Reach Final Peaceful Solutions Under the Direction of Jesus the King”

These made-up headlines actually portray events foretold in biblical prophecies about the times of refreshing.

Zechariah 14 is another of the great prophecies of Christ's return. The prophet describes how after Jesus touches down on the Mount of Olives and a great earthquake occurs, a river of living water will flow from Jerusalem to begin healing the earth.

Then Zechariah adds this curious statement: “And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of



Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16).

You might be surprised, but one of the first religious requirements Jesus establishes for all humanity under His reign is the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. This might be something completely new to you. The biblical Feast of Tabernacles is centered on the late summer and autumn harvest season in the Middle East. Also known as the Feast of Ingathering, it is a celebration of the abundant blessings of God.

Zechariah continues: “And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:17-19).

Do you grasp what this prophecy actually foretells?

Not just Israel and the Jews, but *all nations*, even the Egyptians, will be required to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This isn’t a historical account. This has never happened. This is a prophesied future event concerning the establishment of the Kingdom of God over all nations!

Christ will not only require the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles, but He will punish people who refuse to obey for their own good. One aspect of Christ’s spiritual refreshing of humanity will be the universal celebration of all the annual biblical festivals of God, which reveal God’s plan of salvation for all mankind. As usual, some people will stubbornly resist the goodness of God.

Observing the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering is one of the keys to understanding the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. For

Christians who anticipate Christ’s return, it’s a celebration of the coming spiritual harvest when Jesus Christ gathers all people to Himself and to His Father.

### Living the future today

Let’s look at another of Isaiah’s prophecies about the messianic Kingdom: “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles [that is, to all the nations] . . . He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands [the far reaches of the world] shall wait for His law” (Isaiah 42:1-4).

As with other passages we’ve seen, this looks forward to Christ’s coming reign. Yet to take part in it then, we must submit to His reign in our lives today.

Do you desire to make a positive impact on the world? Do you want to change things and help people have better lives?

That is exactly what Jesus Christ is doing now and is going to do when He returns. He will restore the wastelands. He will have the power to stop war and violence. He will establish one true religion centered on the worship of the one true God. He will set up a new government based on laws of fairness and justice. He will develop an economic system that eradicates poverty. He will produce educational programs and promote and enable well-being for everyone.

This isn’t a fairy tale. This is what will happen in the future times of refreshing that are coming to your life!

I know that in the face of today’s problems, this wonderful future can seem far away. How can you begin to experience these times of refreshing right now? God wants to bring spiritual refreshing to your life, but it’s going to take some action on your part.

Let’s go back to what Peter said: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come . . . and that He may send Jesus Christ . . . whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things” (Acts 3:19-21).

You must take the action of crying out to God to convict you of your need for this refreshing. All too many people are unaware of their own spiritual thirst.

Jesus Christ reigning on earth is the future. Do you want to be part of His future? If your answer is “Yes,” then Jesus Christ must reign in your life today! **GN**

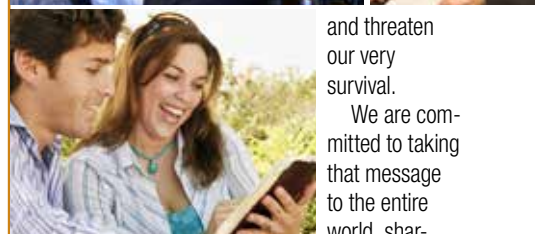
# Who’s Behind The Good News?



**W**ho’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



and threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, shar-

ing the truth of God’s purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

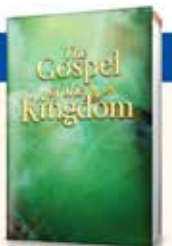
The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address on page 2. Visitors are always welcome.

**For additional information, visit our website:**

**[www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org)**

## Learn More

This article touches on a number of prophecies of events to happen in the time leading up to Jesus Christ’s return. To learn more, request our study guides *The Gospel of the Kingdom, Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Free copies are waiting for you!



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# Follow Me

## “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled”

When the storms and problems of life seem overwhelming, where can we turn for hope and encouragement? *by Robin Webber*

**H**ave you heard any good news recently? You’re probably getting the same daily dose of human nature on steroids with the steady traffic of troublesome headlines concerning the horrific slaughter of people in the Middle East at the hands of religious fanatics, the conflict in Ukraine between Slavic neighbors, crime waves suffocating our urban centers, friction in race relations in America, and the anguish of a stalled economy.

The list is even longer, but the human psyche can only handle so much—so I’ll stop here.

Then throw into the mix our personal and family challenges and the combination can paralyze even the faithful. Sometimes we may beat ourselves up, feeling less than Christian, if we’re troubled about what’s going on around us or by what’s gnawing at our hearts.

Rest assured, though, that Jesus Christ understands the human plight of His followers. He is fully aware that fear, anxiety and even hopeless anger are synonymous with the human condition. So we shouldn’t become distraught. But we can’t ignore the problem either. It’s not spiritually responsible to let fear stew and simmer without addressing it.

Allow me to be clear: It’s a choice—*your* choice and mine! It’s a matter of where to keep our focus. We can remain paralyzed in despair, or we can choose to heed the ongoing invitation of Jesus of “Follow Me” and His calming assurance, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1).

### Peace I leave with you

About 2,000 years ago, the Teacher from Galilee gave us a framework to guide us through our troubled world. It wasn’t meant to be trite philosophy or prose, but a personal anchor to securely moor us in

times of great insecurity.

The very night He spoke it, multiple prophecies were coming to a collective bursting point. His world and that of His followers was about to be turned upside down. In less than a day He would be dead—crucified!

Nonetheless, He squarely laid out a blueprint of hope for us to build on in John 14:27-28: “*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You*

### The peace of which Jesus spoke is a direct gift from God to those who focus on and truly believe in His promises and reach for them even in their very real moments of despair.

have heard Me say to you, I am going away and coming back to you” (emphasis added throughout).

Embedded within Christ’s statement is a progression of three specific steps to bear in mind and an incredible responsibility to uphold for Him. Let’s work our way through these together. Jesus said:

- 1) He was going to be taken away.
- 2) He would leave a gift He called “My peace.”
- 3) He is coming back!

And in between all of these scriptural dynamics, He offered a specific reassurance: “Let not your heart be troubled.”

The peace that Christ mentions is something He owns by experience and shares with those who respond to His call of “Follow Me.” Such peace is a direct gift from God to those who focus on and truly believe in His promises and reach for them even in their very real moments of despair.

It’s been said that “courage is fear holding on a minute longer.” As we take that brief time longer with focus on God’s promises rather than our human premises, our

knees may still be knocking together, but the shaky walls of our heart can begin to firm up. Let’s consider a few of those promises to enable you to “let not let your heart be troubled.”

### The big headlines made in heaven

First of all, we need to continually remember that the really big headlines are being made above, not down here below. We don’t have to let the latest news leave us even more depressed, but can rather be fortified with the promising reality of God’s assuring words in Isaiah 46:9-10: “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 not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel

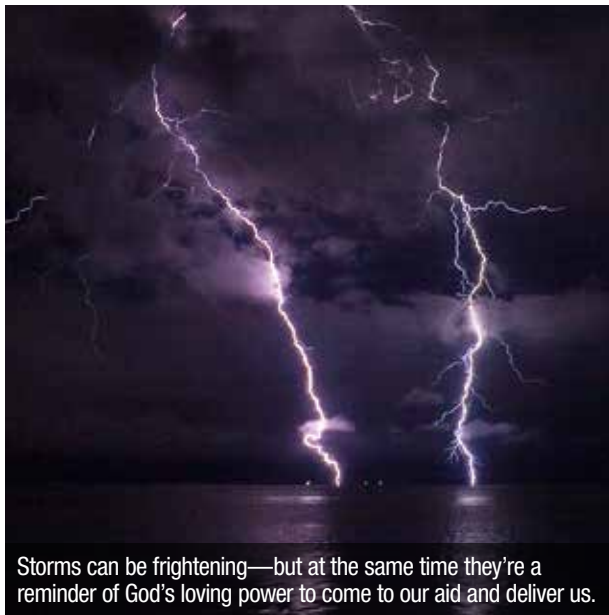
shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (English Standard Version).

Yes, God is our ultimate inside Source of information and not some unnamed advisor quoted anonymously in an article that evokes further personal misgivings in us. Beyond that, God gives context and purpose not shaded by political bias—just godliness.

Imagine a big, bold, front-page headline in your local newspaper blaring, “Archangel Michael’s Forces Poised for Action!” This is huge news that you won’t really see in the headlines. But it’s happening around us every day in every way.

God offers an incredible promise to His faithful ones in these troubling times that He is not a distant, absentee cosmic landlord. And it’s a promise you can hold on to in times of trouble!

Consider these words in Daniel 12:1: “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,*



Storms can be frightening—but at the same time they're a reminder of God's loving power to come to our aid and deliver us.

every one who is found written in the book” (emphasis added).

Yes, God has appointed a great angelic being and his supporting forces to protect His people down here below!

#### “What shall we do?”

Perhaps we can gain insight to what is presently possible for us with hindsight from an event found in 2 Kings 6:15-17 regarding the prophet Elisha's servant, who felt himself overwhelmed by events swirling around him.

The passage reads: “And when the servant of [Elisha] the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’ So he answered, ‘Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than are those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed, and said, ‘LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

Just like the shocked servant, we too can so naturally stay focused on modern-day enemy armies rather than the reassuring promises of God. And yes, our modern-day enemies are just as numerous and real as in Elisha's day. Only the names have changed, and we can fill in the blanks. But remember, Christ gave a gift He called “My peace.”

This peace, His peace, can only abide in us when our eyes stay opened to the promises of God. Those of us who write for *The Good News* magazine take seri-

ously the biblical injunction to not just point out the modern-day enemies that threaten you and the rest of our reading audience, but more importantly to expand and enhance your spiritual perspective that you might realize the incredible forces engaged in God's great abiding plan of rescue.

More than ever, it's time to pray the prayer of Elisha that God might not only open all our eyes, but also give us insight beyond the moment to strengthen our unsteady hearts!

One such promise is found in Matthew 24:21-22. Here Jesus Christ assures us

that help is on the way: “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.”

Here Jesus Christ states three specific promises:

- 1) Time will not come to an end!
- 2) Humanity will not annihilate itself!
- 3) God specifically looks after those who have been chosen or selected by Him—“the elect”—and who in turn have committed their lives to Him!

You might be saying, “Well, that's great news for humanity as a whole in the future, but my world is crashing all around me right now!” Such a state of mind is certainly understandable.

In a world of 7 billion people, we can seem increasingly isolated and lost in a crowd—crowded with bad news, crowded with rumors of wars, so crowded we can't put one thought together with another. We can crawl into a cave with the prophet Elijah, who became terribly discouraged, and say as he effectively did, “Nobody loves me; nobody cares; look what's become of me” (compare 1 Kings 19).

As Christians, we need to embrace the spiritual reality that Christ never said our lives would be trouble-free, but did say that He would provide His followers with the means to rise above whatever comes our way.

His peace is constructed not on the premise of a conflict-free zone but of maintained proper focus. As our mind remains fixed on Him, our Heavenly Father “shall supply all

your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

#### God is in the storm

I remember many years ago when a storm rumbled through the mountains surrounding Los Angeles where I lived. I went to the back door to watch and hear the lightening and thunder display. I called out to our granddaughters, Meghan and Kailyn, to come to the door with grandpa to watch.

I could hear their little feet scurrying my way. Suddenly thunder shook the entire house. Saucer-eyed Kailyn, all of 3, said in her own inimitable style, “I'm scared!” and turned around in her tracks to run into grandma's arms.

Her grandma, my wife Susan, gently told her that God's voice could sound like thunder when He wanted it to, and that He gave us this element of nature to remind us of His loving power. I watched Kailyn's body language immediately return to normal.

She relaxed knowing that there wasn't only a lot of flashing light and scary noise outside, but that God was here inside the storm with her. Her precious little heart quickly grew untroubled. We all then stood there as a family watching and hearing God at work not only in the wonders of nature, but in the heart of a child.

As the storms of life approach and swirl around us, let's focus on and seize on the promises of God. When we utter, “It's impossible!” let's remember Jesus' words, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

When we moan “I'm too tired,” let's stand on the promise given by Christ—“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

When we say, “I'm not smart enough,” let's recall the apostle Paul's message that Christ is wisdom personified (1 Corinthians 1:30) and that this is there for us to receive.

When we're feeling utterly alone, let's have that courage that holds on through fear a minute longer and remember the Master's last words heard by His disciples before He ascended to heaven—“I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

It's time to return to Jesus' loving admonition, “Let not your heart be troubled.” And when *your* heart has been stilled, then pray that God will guide you to someone else's heartbeat that's racing even faster—so that you can let him or her know that it's all right, that God is in the storm with us! **GN**

# Lessons From the Parables

## Why Christ Spoke in Parables

Many people would be surprised to learn that Jesus Christ spoke in parables to hide His message from the masses. Why did He do this? And how can you understand the deepest meaning of the parables of the Kingdom? *by Darris McNeely*

**M**y editor suggested the next parable I write about should be the parable of the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31-32. While looking at it I realized this small parable is set within some of the deepest and most profound parables Christ spoke. The parable of the sower and the seed and of the wheat and tares are just two in this chapter. Matthew collects them at this point in his narrative and lays them together to form the heart of his picture of Jesus Christ's life and message.

Why not, I thought, take a pause here and consider Christ's reasons for teaching in parables? There are lessons to learn from these reasons as much as there are lessons to learn from each of the parables He gives. Let's look at what Jesus Himself said about His method of teaching in parables—you might find it surprising!

### Why parables?

Christ was asked, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" (Matthew 13:10). He had begun to teach the lessons of the man who had gone into his field to sow seed. After telling them the initial idea, Jesus paused to answer this question.

The question is posed by the disciples. This is likely the 12 He initially chose, and could have contained others who were following Him. But if we assume it to be only the 12 core men we at least begin to understand that Christ is here revealing the reason He cloaked His message around the parable form of teaching.

Christ's answer to the question "Why do You speak to them in parables?" is profound: "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, *but to them it has not been given*" (verse 11, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus did not intend the many to under-

stand the full meaning of His teachings! Here is one of His hard sayings that so many can read over and not understand. And it is as applicable today as it was then. Christ knew the ears, eyes and hearts of the masses could not grasp the deep meaning of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. He deliberately cloaked His message!

Let's think about this for a moment. Jesus' Jewish audience looked for the coming of a promised kingdom. The restoration of the house of David and Israel's glory had been foretold by the prophets. These men and women listening to Jesus expected

**Jesus didn't intend the many to understand His teachings!  
And this is as applicable today as it was then.**

something to happen in their day. Often they eagerly gathered around Him because they thought He might be the expected Messiah. The message of the Kingdom spoke to something they were looking for. It was not an abstract idea. It was an expected reality! That is why many came to hear Jesus teach.

But human nature had not changed through the centuries. Israel rejected the same message given by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and the other prophets. The first-century Jews of Jesus' day would not, for the most part, fully perceive the message Christ brought. There was a reason.

Notice that Jesus offered additional explanation: "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him" (verse 12).

This was a way of telling them to be careful how they handled spiritual truth about the Kingdom. Those listening thought they had certain knowledge—as part of the chosen people they thought they had an inside

track—yet it was incomplete. Jesus was opening deeper understanding of the law, the nature of God and the Kingdom of God.

It was possible for them to receive *more*—more understanding of these matters that would broaden their limited knowledge. But it was also possible they would not hear. Hence the reason to speak in parables. Not everyone was going to understand His message. The parables would help to reveal people's thinking and whether or not God was calling them to His truth.

### God is not calling all today

Here is the point: *God was not calling all to understand the gospel of the Kingdom then, nor is He today.* Jesus would later explain that only God the Father can call a person to understand the truth of that Kingdom (John 6:44, 65).

God's plan to bring knowledge of salva-

tion to all of mankind is being done *in stages* according to a well-defined purpose and plan. This is the only way you can understand what Jesus is saying here. He hid the full message in parables—illustrative stories with lessons—knowing that only a few would understand and heed the calling. Remember He said, "*It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.*"

Even today this is not well understood. Well-meaning and sincere efforts are made to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. Yet look around. Religions are divided. Religious messages are mixed. The conditions of the Kingdom of God are not yet on this earth. Could it be that what Christ said about hearing and understanding His message is true? Let's read on to understand more.

"Therefore I speak to them in parables, *because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand*" (verse 13). Teaching in parables was



Why did Jesus speak in parables? Surprisingly, His own answer is that He did so to hide the meaning from many in His audience.

intended to not only hide the message, but came as a result of the spiritual condition of the nations. This was shown by His next statement—a quote from the prophet Isaiah.

Christ reached back to a scene where Isaiah recorded a vision of God’s throne. A question is asked by the Lord, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” The prophet volunteers and is told, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive’” (Isaiah 6:8-9).

This passage shows us that God’s intent has been to *keep hidden* the deepest aspects of His purpose among man. Not all have understood the details—not even those whom He worked with intimately, such as Israel.

Going back to Christ’s parable we see that He quotes this Isaiah passage and applies it to His ministry: “And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them’” (Matthew 13:14-15).

This is a profound passage. Christ is showing that for the most part people have chosen to allow their hearts to grow dull to where they cannot see or hear or come to know the holy God enthroned in the heavens!

The message from God cannot get through. Even Jesus, as God in the flesh, could not reach many of the people. He was even killed for what He taught!

God, then, deliberately cloaks His message in parables until the time is ready for the veil to be lifted. By saying, “. . . lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them,” Christ is speaking of understanding and healing that follow the choice of hearing and responding in the first place.

### Blessed are your eyes!

Jesus then addressed the disciples directly, telling them: “But

blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (verses 16-17).

Those closest to Jesus, His disciples who had chosen to receive His mentoring and teaching and committed themselves to becoming like Him in every way as their Master and Teacher, were blessed to “see and hear.” They had been healed spiritually and could understand Christ’s teaching about the Kingdom. What had not been understood by so many good men and women and prophets and kings who had gone before was now open to these disciples.

If God is calling you, this same priceless understanding can be yours. You can have the healing that comes from a true knowledge and understanding of the coming Kingdom of God to earth and submitting to the King of that Kingdom now. You need not be like so many today who don’t understand the hope of that Kingdom. This hope can be a part of your life, adding the depth of meaning and purpose that no other knowledge can give!

This chapter, Matthew 13, contains specific parables that teach us many aspects about the Kingdom of God. When they are unlocked and understood, we see revealed many details about God’s Kingdom and how it is being prepared in its fullness. When we understand these parables, no longer is it a secret or a mystery! God intends to bring this Kingdom to earth, and you can prepare today to be a part of that realm!

Where do you begin? *By becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ!* By obeying His

teaching and submitting yourself to the way of this Kingdom in your life today!

A disciple is a lifelong spiritual student, always learning but never in this life having arrived at the final goal, which is to become like the Teacher in every way. It begins with a first step toward God in submission of our will to His. That is the common attribute of these disciples as Christ called them to training and service.

Christ begins each of the parables in this chapter by stating, “The kingdom of heaven is like . . .” He then uses examples from everyday life from that time, like the sowing of seed, or a mustard seed or a pearl of great price, to explain the multidimensional vision of the Kingdom of God. These parables hold so much of the details of how we become a part of that Kingdom!

### That Kingdom is coming!

Look at today’s world. Its many problems and crises cry out for the Kingdom of God. Revolutions in the Middle East produce ominous shadows of terror and uncertainty in the world. In Iraq and Syria we see the rise of a terrorist state with zero regard for human life, its supporters willing to murder anyone who stands in their way. Scenes of horror not seen for centuries are spreading around the globe.

Our world is a changing tapestry of values and morals that are leading many to look for answers in religion. This magazine and this work offer you a refreshing glimpse of *a way of life that works*. Its teaching is rooted in Christ’s transforming message of the coming Kingdom of God.

We’ll begin our next study in the parables of Christ by focusing on the one that teaches us what the Kingdom of God is about. We will study truths that had been “kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 13:35). It will be a fascinating study! **GN**

### Learn More

Jesus Christ’s message revolved around the gospel, or “good news.” But the good news of what? And why is it good news? Many fail to grasp exactly what that good news is all about! Be sure to read our eye-opening study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. A free copy is waiting for you!



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# What I Learned From Talking With Teens About Death

In a discussion with a group of teens who wanted to talk about death and suicide, what could I say that would give them comfort and hope? *by Darris McNeely*

When fully understood, this passage helps us deal with feelings of fear and loss at the death of those we love.

## Getting to the heart

I explained this key verse to help them see that God is compassionate and understanding of our fears concerning death. But after another round of comments by these teens, who agreed with and understood this biblical truth of the resurrection, I could see that something wasn't resonating with them. They weren't to the point where this knowledge could help them move on.

So I decided to take it in a different direction. "What is really on your hearts?" I asked. I realized we were dealing with emotions at the most fundamental level of

I knew it would be a bumpy ride when I read the question submitted by a teen for a group discussion at summer camp concerning the fear of death.

I settled into my chair and looked around the group of teenage boys and girls with their counselors. One had just recently experienced a suicide in her family. I recognized another teen who a few years earlier had lost a family member in a tragic auto accident. I didn't know the other kids, but I could see they wanted to talk.

So I opened it up for discussion. "What do you understand about death?" I asked. These teens were attending a church camp and came from families who lived their lives according to Scripture, so their answers weren't surprising. They were familiar with what the Bible teaches about what happens at death, understanding that the dead are not disembodied souls in heaven or hell and that they have no conscious awareness at all (see the study guide offered at the end of this article to learn more).

This and other thoughts came out as we went around the room. They understood what the Bible says about death, and this became evident as several of them talked.

## From sorrow to hope

After several comments I opened my Bible and turned to 1 Thessalonians 4 and began reading the apostle Paul's encouragement to a group of Church members who had experienced the tragic loss of close friends back then in the first century. Paul wanted to calm their fears and chose his words carefully: "But I do not want you to be ignorant brethren, concerning those who

have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope" (verse 13).

Three words jump out in this passage. They are *ignorant*, *sorrow* and *hope*. Misunderstanding about what happens at death creates a knowledge gap that leaves one grasping for something to believe during the period of shock and grief that follows the death of someone close. Paul knew these people were in grief, and he didn't say anything to indicate this sorrow was wrong. He knew they would grieve, but his

**When fully understood, the biblical teaching about what happens after death helps us deal with feelings of fear and loss at the death of those we love.**

emphasis was on giving them *hope*.

He then went on to give that hope: "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (verses 15-18).

Here Paul lays out the truth about what happens at death, it being compared to sleep, and how the resurrection of the dead and bodily transformation of believers still living at Christ's return will take place.

the heart. After some discussion I caught the eye of a young girl across from me who obviously had something to say. Through sobs and tears with a halting voice she revealed to us her guilt from not doing more for a friend who had committed suicide.

"If only . . ." is a mantra for us when we're left with regret and broken feelings that have to be mended. Friends and family can take steps to help a young person pull back from the abyss of death. However, there are also times when nothing we do will prevent someone from taking that step off into darkness. Life becomes so painful that in their minds the only solution is to end it.

I told her that she cannot continue on with regret over what she thinks she could've or should've done. I explained that her life must go on and she has to move away from the tragedy and pull its tentacles

from off her mind. She needed to realize that she did what she could at the time and that she should learn from the event and move on with her life. “You’ll be in a wiser place next time you see similar signs in someone,” I said. “Then, because of what you’ve learned, you’ll be in a better position to help.”

Guilt over something you cannot go back and change is a useless emotion. Rather than being immobilized in the present by guilt, we must move on. The best response you can make in the wake of suicide is to make something of your life.

Live today with meaning and purpose. Choose to live out your life with God at its center. Live so that when you see your friend in his or her next waking moment in the future resurrection of those who have not yet really comprehended God’s truth (again, see the study guide offered below), you can extend the hand that will help your friend choose life instead of death.

In that room full of teens we had a big moment of concentrated focus going on. When an effort was made to move to a different topic, they made it known that they weren’t done talking about death and their feelings. So we continued on.

Story after story came out. At one point I asked for a show of hands: “How many of you have experienced the death of someone very close to you?” More than two-thirds of the hands went up. I was shocked! Perhaps I shouldn’t have been, but I was. It’s a sign of our times that death has become so commonplace to a group so young. Teens today live much closer to a culture of death than I did when I was growing up.

The session began to wind down. The tears dried up. Emotional exhaustion had set in. I could sense that we needed to close it out and move on. I summed up the main points of what we had discussed and again reminded them of the hope of the resurrection. But I also told them that they must

learn to deal with the here and now and walk away with understanding.

### What did I learn?

A few things became clearer to me through this session.

- I learned that young people who have experienced the untimely death of a friend have to talk about it. They need to process their grief with friends and understanding adults whom they trust.

- I learned that with young people, doctrinal truth is not enough. They live in the here and now, and when they face a death they hurt *now*. This really applies to all of us at a time of loss, but it is more acute with the young. While they have most of their lives stretching out ahead of them, it’s difficult for them to see beyond the moment—a contributing factor to so many taking their lives by their own hand. The rest of us need to understand this perspective and meet them where they are in the moment.

- I learned that it’s vital to young hearts to have a safe place to discuss their fears and feelings about death. Let them talk. Hear what they’re saying, and listen to what they’re feeling. That’s the only way they will process the grief and pain through to closure. Learn to recognize that moment and treat it very carefully.

- Reflecting back on the session, I further learned the deep meaning of Hebrews 2:14-15, which tells us that Jesus Christ shared in the fullness of the human experience. Through His death He destroyed “him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” so He could “release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

In this verse lies the answer to the issue that started our discussion. We can be released from the fear of death and not be held in the emotional chains that keep us from living. My final advice to the kids was to choose a culture of life over death.

It was a bumpy ride, but along the way we managed to smooth out some of the road. I closed with a line from a cowboy western. Stories of the Old West often deal with the subject of death, and one movie scene brought this to mind. While standing over the grave of a friend who died tragically while crossing the Rio Grande, one of the characters says, “The best way to deal with death is to ride away from it.”

It’s good advice. Ride away from death. Take hope and comfort in the words of Paul to the Thessalonians, and choose to move on with life and make yours count! **GN**

## Learn More

Do you understand what the Bible teaches about death? It may be quite different from what you think! Be sure to download or request our study guide *What Happens After Death?* A free copy is waiting for you!



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# What's the Real Truth About Christmas?

*I*s the season to be jolly—or is it? It may not be if you know the real truth about the holiday!

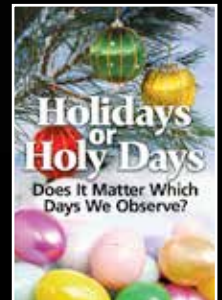
Millions of people continue the curious customs of Christmas, but few understand why they do so or what the customs and symbols are all about. After all, what does a jolly, plump man in a red suit (riding in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer!) have to do with the birth of the Son of God?

How did Dec. 25 come to be chosen as the date of the birth of Jesus Christ when the Bible nowhere tells us the exact date—and in fact shows that He *wasn't* born in winter? Have you ever heard the real story?

And what about decorating with holly wreaths, kissing under mistletoe, burning Yule logs and setting up colorfully ornamented Christmas trees? What's the origin of these odd practices, and how did they come to be associated with the birth of the Savior of mankind? They're not found in the Bible, so who started them and why?

You need to discover the facts about this popular holiday. And most importantly, since most people celebrate it to honor God, you need to understand what *He* thinks about it!

Our eye-opening free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* will give you the surprising (and sometimes shocking!) answers. For your free copy, visit our website or contact any of our offices listed on page 2.



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