

BEYOND TODAY

Envisioning a Better World Tomorrow

THE UN AT 80: IS WORLD PEACE A LOST CAUSE?

10

7 Ways Christ's Rule
on Earth Will Be So
Wonderfully Different

Has the Kingdom of God
Been Set Up on Earth Now?

14

17

Is Today the Only
Day of Salvation?

Understanding Real Hope
*More Than Just
Wishful Thinking*

20

CONTENTS

September–October 2025

Cover articles ▾

The UN at 80: Is World Peace a Lost Cause?

The United Nations turns 80 this year—its hopes for ending war colliding with ongoing armed conflicts around the globe and its own problems adding to the overall dilemma. Is the dream dead—or will the world yet see an age of peace?

by Tom Robinson



Articles & Columns ▾

10

7 Ways Christ's Rule on Earth Will Be So Wonderfully Different

God intended governments to promote good and restrain evil, and maintain order in society. We don't see a lot of that today, but we will once Jesus Christ establishes the Kingdom of God over all nations. Here are seven ways His administration will improve people's lives.

by Becky Sweat

14

Has the Kingdom of God Been Set Up on Earth Now?

Many who believe in Jesus Christ think the Kingdom of God has been established on the earth since His first coming. But what does the Bible actually reveal?

by John Labissoniere

17

Is Today the Only Day of Salvation?

Many believe that all who die without accepting Jesus Christ as Savior are forever condemned. But is that so? What about those who never heard about Him or His teachings? Are there other ways to be saved? What is the truth?

by Dan Dowd

20

Understanding Real Hope More Than Wishful Thinking

Genuine biblical hope is far more than a desire for things to go a certain way. It rests on a sure confidence in what God has promised. What are we anticipating, and how does this impact our life?

by Ken Loucks

4–5

Letters From Our Readers & Editorial

22

Current Events & Trends

A critical eye on current world conditions from a biblical worldview.

24

Strikes on Iran The Reality of the Moment

The United States and Israeli action to take out Iran's nuclear program demonstrated that America's preeminence in the world continues despite challengers. What's ultimately behind that preeminence—and the desire of others to destroy these nations?

by Darris McNeely

26 Follow Me . . .

Waiting on the Lord

Are you frustrated that God has not yet resolved the problems in your life and the world around you? We all need to persist in seeking, obeying and trusting Him.

by Robin Webber

28 Compass Check

Don't Like Conflict? Master Disagreement!

Conflict is inevitable, but it doesn't have to result in broken relationships and unresolved feelings of bitterness.

by David Cobb

30 Questions & Answers

Didn't the apostle Paul present the weekly Sabbath and Old Testament Holy Days as done away for Christians? Shouldn't we embrace new Christian holidays instead?

31 How to watch Beyond Today

Discover much more content on our website

- Every digital back issue of *Beyond Today* magazine
- Every streaming episode of *Beyond Today* television
- All our apps—iOS, Android, AppleTV, Roku and more
- Children's content—fun Bible lessons, stories and activities
- Weekly live-streamed worship services
- Content in French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and more



Find it all at
beyondtoday.org

BEYOND TODAY

Volume 30, Number 5

Circulation: 378,893

Publisher: United Church of God,
an International Association

Council of Elders: Scott Ashley, Jorge de Campos,
Aaron Dean, Dan Dowd, Peter Eddington, Victor Kubik,
Len Martin, Darris McNeely, Tim Pebworth (chairman),
Gary Petty, Rex Sexton, Paul Wasilkoff

Church president: John Elliott

Media & Communications interim manager: Peter Eddington

Managing editor: Tom Robinson

Senior writers: Peter Eddington, Don Hooser,
John LaBissoniere, Darris McNeely, Tom Robinson,
Mario Seiglie, Becky Sweat, Robin Webber

Proofreader: Robert Curry

Design production manager: Mitchell Moss

Senior graphic designer & illustrator: Matt Hernandez

Beyond Today (ISSN: 1086-9514) is published by the United Church of God, *an International Association*, 555 Technecenter Dr., Milford, OH 45150. © 2025 United Church of God, *an International Association*. *Beyond Today* and the *Beyond Today* logo is a registered trademark. Printed in the U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Milford, Ohio 45150, and at additional mailing offices. Scriptural references are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

To request a free subscription, visit our website at beyondtoday.org or contact the office nearest you from the list on page 31. *Beyond Today* is sent free to all who request it.

Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, *an International Association*, and others.

Personal contact: The United Church of God has congregations and ministers throughout the United States and many other countries. To contact a minister or to find locations and times of services, contact our office nearest you or visit our website at ucg.org/churches.

Unsolicited materials: Due to staffing limitations, unsolicited materials sent to *Beyond Today* will not be critiqued or returned. By their submission authors agree that submitted materials become the property of the United Church of God, *an International Association*, to use as it sees fit. This agreement is controlled by California law.

HOW *Beyond Today* MAGAZINE IS PAID FOR

Beyond Today is dedicated to proclaiming the true good news of Jesus Christ. It is sent free of charge to all who request it through the voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, *an International Association*, and our extended worldwide family of donors. We are grateful for these generous donations.

While we do not solicit the general public for funds, we welcome contributions to help us share this message of truth and hope with others. You can make a donation at donate.ucg.org, or by contacting our office nearest you on page 31. Contributions are tax deductible where permissible by law.

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



Winds of Change in Europe

In our May-June 2025 issue, Europe's change in diplomatic posture amid war in Ukraine and a new administration in the United States put a spotlight on the global political landscape the Bible reveals will exist at the time of Jesus Christ's return.

I feel some pushback is called for when Paul Kieffer claims that Europeans are dismayed that America is "defaulting" on its commitments to defend Europe. Since the Second World War has been over for 80 years and Europe has recovered and rebuilt its industrial and economic systems, it's high time they stop relying on someone else to protect them. The U.S. supplied the money for the Marshall Plan and, ever since 1945, the military umbrella that allowed Europe to thrive. Few if any European nations have paid the agreed-upon amount to support NATO and for the past 80 years have placed steep tariffs on U.S. goods. To claim that it's the U.S. that is defaulting is to ignore reality. It's Europe that is defaulting on its responsibilities. Europe needs to take down its tariffs on U.S. goods since there is no longer any need for them.

From the Internet

From author Paul Kieffer: Thank you for your comments. My article does state, "The sentiment of many Europeans is that America has now defaulted on its position as long-recognized leader of the free world." However, it does not address NATO spending imbalances. European leaders like French President Macron and previous German Chancellor Scholz have acknowledged the need for Europe to increase defense spending. Nowhere does the article claim Europeans are "dismayed" by U.S. NATO commitments. It notes Ukraine is not a NATO member so that any European peacekeeping force would lack NATO protection—fueling Europe's growing desire for defense independence.

I stand by the assessment that the current Trump administration has intensified Europe's drive for unity and self-reliance more than any situation has since World War II (from the vantage point of an American living in Europe since 1971). With that trend escalating, my article addresses our beliefs on prophecy regarding the future course of U.S.-European relations.

"How 8 False Feasts Supplanted God's True Feasts"

The article states, "In fact Sunday is never mentioned in Scripture as being a weekly holy day or one of God's feasts." What about Pentecost, which is always on Sunday? Also, it says, "The Feast of Tabernacles of late fall looks ahead to the time when Christ will rule . . ." The Feast of Tabernacles always falls in early fall, not late fall.

From the Internet

The Day of Pentecost does always fall on the first day of the week, Saturday sunset to Sunday sunset. However, that is once a year. It is not "a weekly holy day." It is the Feast of Pentecost that is holy, not the day of the week in that case. The point is that God did not command Sunday to be observed as a weekly Sabbath or festival day. God commands us to keep every seventh day of the week, Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, as His Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:1-3), and He commands us to keep seven annual feasts (Leviticus 23:4-37). Sunday is not on the list of days to be observed and kept holy.

Regarding the Feast of Tabernacles being in late fall, that was inadvertent, the intent having been to note that it comes late in the fall feast season—it and the Eighth Day concluding the annual festival cycle. The Feast of Tabernacles actually comes in the first half of autumn in the Northern Hemisphere. It's often in October, which is commonly regarded as mid fall, yet still before the midpoint of early November. In 2027, for instance, the Feast will end on October 22. Thanks for the catch.

Feedback from readers on our magazine, study resources and video productions

I have never been given so much pertinent information about Christianity and about biblical truth in the last 68 years than I have from the United Church of God and *Beyond Today* literature! This organization is truly

an angel sent from God for providing the literature and information to so many. I want to express my gratitude for the sincere faith you have provided.

From the Internet

I have mailed you a money order as a donation for your magazine. Our small group meets monthly and enjoys reading and discussing its content. Our Christian group is encouraged to share the gospel message, and we feel uplifted in these troublesome times. Once again thanks for sending the magazine. May God bless you in your work.

Subscriber in Western Australia

Just a short note to thank you for your TV programs and magazines. Please keep sending them. We are sending a small donation to help with your great work for our Creator God in these last days to be used for distribution of your magazines. Thank you. It is great to be another year closer to the return of Jesus Christ.

Subscriber in Australia

I would like to thank you for your work and your brochures. They have accompanied me through good times and bad for many years and have become a valuable source of support for me, which I always pass on after reading.

Subscriber in Germany

Thank you so, so much for all the *Beyond Today* booklets you have sent to me. I read them all, and learn so much from the Bible. I can't get enough knowledge from it.

Viewer in Australia

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to Beyond Today, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or email btinfo@ucg.org (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).



Honest Truth About Peace

Our world is caught in a cycle of conflict, division and despair. Turn on the news or scroll through social media, and you'll see humanity's attempts at peace—often through violent conflict. Nations wage war in pursuit of security. Politicians pledge unity while sowing discord. People fracture while yearning for meaningful relationships. Institutions try to prevent conflict but to no lasting avail—as we see at this 80th anniversary of the United Nations.

The question that haunts us is simple yet profound: Why can't humanity achieve the peaceful harmony we desperately desire?

The answer lies not in collective rationale, but in truths beyond human understanding. True, lasting peace cannot be manufactured, negotiated or legislated. After World War II, Gen. Douglas MacArthur stated the problem is fundamentally “theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence [or revival] and improvement of human character . . . It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh.” True peace can come only through divine intervention. Thankfully, Scripture promises that real peace is not just possible—it is certain.

God has promised to send Jesus Christ as the conquering King who will establish His Kingdom and bring the peace that has eluded humanity for millennia. He will establish something new—the Kingdom (or rule) of God over the earth. The prophet Isaiah foretold the resulting peace when all nations will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks,” and “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4).

A sculpture at the U.N. portrays that passage (see page 7), but the process for achieving it surpasses human know-how. “Just and true are *your* ways, O King of the nations” (Revelation 15:3, English Standard Version, emphasis added). It is when people give “glory to God in the highest” that there can be “on earth peace, goodwill toward men” (Luke 2:14).

The future age of peace and joy is the focus of our magazine's name *Beyond Today*. That age will yet dawn, as laid out in our cover story, with a companion piece on how Christ's reign will differ from what we see today. Another article explains how the opportunity to live under God's rule will ultimately encompass all who have ever lived.

Yet we're not just waiting for the future. We're to live it now. The gospel contains a present invitation, as I explore further in “Living Under Jesus' Reign Today” beginning on page 15. The same King who will rule the earth with justice is the living Jesus who calls us to observe all He commanded His disciples (Matthew 28:19-20)—becoming advance citizens of God's Kingdom of peace. We're called not just to believe intellectually but to surrender completely to the lordship of Jesus Christ and

live His laws of outgoing concern that result in true peace.

Here's a truth many miss—hearing the gospel requires a response. We must “obey the gospel” (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17; Romans 10:16). Jesus said, “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17). These aren't mere suggestions—they're requirements for being in the Body of Christ and for citizenship in His coming Kingdom.

Religious teachers often preach about “heaven” while excusing living by its rules. We're comfortable discussing eternal rewards but avoid present requirements. We love God's grace but resist His governance. We celebrate future glory while neglecting godliness now. This selective faith is what Jesus warned against when He said, “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” (Matthew 7:21).

This obedience isn't about earning salvation through works. It's about living as citizens of the Kingdom we claim to serve. When we understand Jesus is King, our natural response is to align our lives with His commands. Our obedience to the gospel is our testimony to the reality of God's Kingdom.

Those who submit to Christ's rule begin to experience a foretaste of His peace that will one day fill the earth. That reality is experienced annually through God's Feast of Tabernacles. This commanded, weeklong festival is filled with blessings, harmonious relationships, spiritual nourishment and physical enjoyment that not only portray His coming reign but provide a living foretaste today.

As we anticipate Christ's return and the establishment of His perfect Kingdom, we are called to live as Kingdom citizens now. This means letting His peace rule in our hearts when circumstances threaten our joy. It means extending His forgiveness when wronged. It means promoting His laws of love to a world desperate for authentic peace.

The same God who will send Jesus Christ to establish perfect peace on earth is offering His Spirit to establish that peace in our hearts. But we must choose to repent of lawlessness, submit to His rule, receive His forgiveness, obey His commands and live beyond today's temporary troubles by focusing on tomorrow's eternal promises.

The Kingdom is coming. The King is returning. The question before you and me now is whether we will live as faithful subjects of the King who already reigns over His Church (Ephesians 1:22, Colossians 1:18).

May you experience the peace that comes from complete surrender to Christ's reign both now and beyond today!

John Elliott, President
United Church of God

A painting of a sunlit forest path. The sun is low in the sky, casting a warm glow over the trees and grass. In the foreground, a blue UN helmet with the letters 'UN' is visible, partially obscured by grass. The title 'THE UN AT 80: IS WORLD PEACE A LOST CAUSE?' is written in large, white, serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

THE UN AT 80: IS WORLD PEACE A LOST CAUSE?

The United Nations turns 80 this year—its hopes for ending war colliding with ongoing armed conflicts around the globe and its own problems adding to the overall dilemma.

Is the dream dead—or will the world yet see an age of peace?

by Tom Robinson

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. Out of the ashes of World War II, the charter of this global dream of international collaboration was signed on June 26, 1945, but the organization did not officially come into existence until Oct. 24, 1945, after ratification of the five permanent members of the Security Council and a majority of the other signatories. The October date is marked annually as United Nations Day.

But as a recent Associated Press article assessed about the U.N. anniversary: “There’s little to celebrate. Its clout on the world stage is diminished. Facing major funding cuts from the United States and others, it has been forced to shed jobs and start tackling long-delayed reforms. Its longtime credo of ‘multilateralism’

is under siege. Its most powerful body, the Security Council, has been blocked from taking action to end the two major wars in Ukraine and Gaza. And as the latest conflict between Israel, Iran and the United States flared, it watched from the sidelines.

“Four generations after its founding, as it tries to chart a new path for its future, a question hangs over the institution and the nearly 150,000 people it employs and oversees: Can the United Nations remain relevant in an increasingly contentious and fragmented world? With its dream of collaboration drifting, can it even survive?” (Edith Lederer, “As It Turns 80 and Faces Dwindling Global Clout, Can the UN Survive?” June 25, 2025).

The overriding goal per the 1945

charter was “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” We have thankfully not yet seen a third world war. But wars still rage. And as the terrible war in Ukraine and other globally significant conflicts are being directly handled by the major powers of the world, the United Nations has seemed increasingly irrelevant. We saw its International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) repeatedly flouted in Iran. Worse still, we often sadly find the U.N.’s blue helmet “peacekeeping forces” not bringing peace but acting corruptly and abusively among populations meant to be helped. The U.N. does play a significant role in attempts to implement global governance, but that is beyond its purview and will only worsen the human condition.

These days, the United Nations appears to have devolved into a forum for issuing gripes against the state of Israel. Its International Court of Justice has even issued arrest warrants for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Sadly, the U.N. General Assembly is packed with enemies of Israel, including numerous human rights violators that have ironically sat on the U.N. Human Rights Council in judgment over others.

We should ask at this juncture: Given the corruption and failures of the United Nations over its history, is the hope of world peace on which it was founded ultimately revealed to be a pipe dream—one that could never really come to be? Or, despite fallible human institutions, can the world at last find true peace?

Swords to plowshares?

Outside the U.N. headquarters in New York, next to the East River, stands a famous bronze statue of a man beating his sword into a plowshare—a biblical, prophetic image from the books of Isaiah and Micah. Ironically, this statue was a gift from the totalitarian Soviet Union in 1959—an atheistic power that consequently put little stock in the Scriptures. There's a hint in that of the way many have imagined peace can come—through human efforts. Worse still, the Soviet idea was that “peace” would come by the spread of communism throughout the world to bring everyone under the same totalitarian regime.

Across the street from the U.N. headquarters, on the city side, is the Isaiah Wall, in which the quote from Isaiah 2 is engraved. The dream here, as we'll note shortly, is truly beyond mere human endeavor and remains unrealized. While “Swords to plowshares” has been a popular motto of the United Nations, has the organization even begun to recast the world's implements of war into farming tools or other peaceful equipment? Is the world even *close* to peace? Sadly, no.

Again, while we've not yet seen a third world war, there have been many

regional conflicts over the 80 years since the U.N. was founded—many with global consequences. The war in Ukraine alone has been devastating, with nearly 1.4 million casualties, including more than 300,000 deaths.

A Heritage Foundation commentary a few years ago began: “Former U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld once observed, ‘The United



Nations was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell.' Unfortunately, recent events have shown that neither goal is within its grasp” (Brett Schaefer, “Is the United Nations a Failure?” Sept. 20, 2022).

Sadly, this has long been the case. Jeane Kirkpatrick, who served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations during the Reagan administration, later lamented over the Balkan debacle of the mid 1990s regarding NATO and the U.N., stating that “a military alliance that serves no function will not survive for long, nor will a world organization that cannot protect peace” (“The U.N. Emasculation of NATO,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, July 14, 1995).

Answers in global governance?

The general consensus still seems to be that, as in past assessment, “for all its weaknesses and chronic financial problems, the United Nations remains the only—and so the essential—global forum where many of the world's gravest problems can be discussed and efforts made to manage them” (“Troubled Organization at the Age of 50,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1995).

The answer many people would seek is major reform. Yet what form would that take? What is basically *wrong* with the organization?

Many in the past have pointed to the problem of the U.N. being stymied by the will of member states. At the organization's 50th anniversary 30 years ago, the *Geneva Post* noted that the U.N.'s failure in the Balkan crisis was “hardly surprising considering the fact that the drafters *never worked out the paradox between collective security and individual state sovereignty*” (reprinted in *World Press Review*, June 1995, emphasis added throughout).

According to the co-chairman of a congressionally appointed commission at that time on improving the U.N.'s effectiveness: “The initial concept was terribly, terribly flawed. It is, *I suppose, theoretically possible to set up an institution that is somehow or other going to be better than the people who set it up . . .*” (Charles Lichenstein, “U.N. Finds That Its Reputation Has Slumped,” *The New York Times*, June 25, 1995).

For such reasons, many seem to think the answers lie in stronger centralized world government. The U.N. even aspires to such a role in various ways. “Transforming global governance” is one of the areas it identifies as needing reform in its recent *Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declarations on Future Generations* (September 2024).

We saw previews in the U.N.'s World Health Organization (WHO) making bold forays into directing the response of many nations to the Covid pandemic—yet discovered that it was in various ways bowing to the

manipulation of China. There are still attempts to gain control over other nations' policies through agreements to WHO regulations, though the United States has withdrawn for now.

There have also been attempts through UNESCO (the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) to implement media and online communication regulations to combat "misinformation" in building an "Internet of Trust"—a plan for global censorship. We see attempts to regulate national economies and conduct massive wealth transfer under the umbrella of U.N. climate change agreements—even imposing rules over the foods people eat. But still, compliance will fall to individual national enforcement.

There are, of course, more serious pushes for one-world government—as there have been for some time. The semblance of such a government *is* going to emerge at some point, and Bible prophecy reveals that it will be through the economic and religious might of the final European-centered revival of the Holy Roman Empire (Revelation 17)—though not every country on earth will be directly controlled by it politically.

Sadly, your Bible reveals that man's last attempt at global government will be the cruelest and most totalitarian ever experienced—even worse than Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler. *Human-led* world government will never really work. Why? Essentially for the same reason the U.N. doesn't work: people cannot construct an institution superior to themselves—and people have problems!

The ultimate solution

What is the true root cause of human conflicts? Jeane Kirkpatrick stated that "what is always lacking is *a will to peace*."

For thousands of years, people have been saying, "Peace, peace!" when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). In the end time, the Bible reveals, "Surely their valiant ones shall cry outside, the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly" (Isaiah 33:7). That has often been true already, but later it is going to get *far worse!* Why?

God answers, "*The way of peace they have not known*, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace" (Isaiah 59:8).

Why do wars happen? The apostle James asked—and answered—the same question: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war" (James 4:1-2).

The real cause of human conflict is the lack of submission and obedience to the Great God of the universe and His supreme law: "The mindset of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so" (Romans 8:7, Christian Standard Bible). It is impossible to obey God with a selfish mind. To find real peace, our attitude of mind must be drastically changed.

This important fact is even recognized in UNESCO's constitution of 1945: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." But only God has the power to transform the human mind through the giving of His own Holy Spirit. Only by His Spirit can we be enabled to think like the loving Creator of all humanity and come to truly obey Him from the heart.

Swords into plowshares? Again, so many think that *we* are somehow going to bring this about by ourselves. Is this what the Bible teaches? Let's look at the actual words of 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 shall be exalted above the hills [referring to God's Kingdom centered at Jerusalem then exalted above all nations, great and small]; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.'

"For out of Zion shall go forth the

law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; *they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore*" (verses 2-4; compare Micah 4:1-3).

When Jesus Christ returns, He is going to educate the world in His perfect law—the way of peace—and directly judge international disputes. There will be no war! "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).

At Christ's first coming, He came as a human being preaching the true gospel or "good news" message of ultimate peace in the coming Kingdom of God. Indeed, "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14) is also called "the gospel of peace" (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15). With Christ's rule over our lives today we must be striving toward that peace as much as depends on us (Romans 12:18). But we are not yet perfect, and we contend with others who do not strive for peace. In the words of Psalm 120:7, "I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war." Yet things *will ultimately change*.

At Christ's second coming, He will return in all the power of the infinite God to establish His Kingdom forever: "For unto us a Child is born [Jesus at His first coming], unto us a Son is given; and [at His second coming] the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called . . . Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Yes, we will not bring this about ourselves! As Isaiah 26:12 says, "LORD, *You* will establish peace *for us*." Nevertheless, we will have a part to play in submitting to God's way by the power of His Holy

God's Feasts: Commemorations of Future Events

As people around the world commemorate anniversaries like United Nations Day, so God's people also commemorate significant events, yet ones that are far more important—the major steps in the Creator's great plan. As *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* records: "The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals [actually, *God's* festivals, Leviticus 23:1-2], though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed" (11th edition, Vol. 8, p. 828). Leviticus 23 lists the enduring festivals of God—the weekly Sabbath and the annual festivals with God's Holy Days.

The seventh-day Sabbath, each week from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, is a memorial of creation as well as a commemoration of the future world to come of peace and happiness. As the first six days of the week represent 6,000 years of man's civilization, the seventh-day rest symbolizes the coming 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ, also called the Millennium, when His followers from this age will be raised to reign with Him (compare Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Hebrews 3-4; Revelation 20:4-6; and read our free study guide *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest* to learn more).

Furthermore, each year we observe God's annual festivals—those of late summer and fall in the northern hemisphere picturing the events surrounding the second coming of Christ. The Feast of Trumpets, called *Rosh Hashanah* by the Jews (Sept. 23 this year) represents the awesome return of Jesus Christ to the earth in power and glory at the culmination of a series of angelic trumpet blasts. At the seventh and last trumpet the dead in Christ will be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:50-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) and loud voices will declare, "The kingdom [or rule] of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15, CSB).

This is followed by the Day of Atonement (Hebrew *Yom Kippur*, this year Oct. 2), which signifies the time that Satan the devil, the evil being who influences humanity against God and into war and conflict, will be banished and the world will begin to find peace and harmony through Christ.

We then move into the great celebration of the weeklong Feast of Tabernacles and the important Eighth Day that follows (Oct 7-14 this year). This festival period represents the time of abundant blessing, spiritual harvest and world peace of the millennial reign of Christ and beyond. The joyous observance of these wonderful feast days affords a small foretaste of what's to come.

The Bible explicitly states that all nations will keep the Feast of Tabernacles in that future age, even initially facing divine judgment for refusing to do so (Zechariah 14:16-19). Christ's coming will not at first be peaceable, for He will be putting down the forces of the nations that make war with Him at His return and contending with stubborn resistance, taking firm control of the world for the good of all.

But soon after, the world will at last know peace.

For more about God's commanded festivals, request or download our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

Spirit. Peace, in fact, will not come "until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high . . . Then justice will dwell in the wilderness . . . The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Isaiah 32:15-18). What an incredible and wonderful world to come!

No, the present United Nations with all its terrible problems is *not* the way to world peace. In fact, it may yet be used in waging *war* in collaboration with a future superpower that will make a grab at world domination (compare references to "all nations" in Revelation 14:8 and 18:3, 23). Bible prophecy states that "all nations" will actually attempt to stop the establishment of God's Kingdom, fighting against Christ at His return (Joel 3:2). Thankfully, this joint human military effort will be thwarted. God's Kingdom *will* come. *Nothing* can stop it!

(To learn more about the wonderful world that it will bring, be sure to read "7 Ways Christ's Rule Will Be So Wonderfully Different," beginning on page 10. And for a look at the observances God has instituted to preview what's coming, read "God's Feasts: Commemorations of Future Events" on this page.)

A hope that endures

In all this, while man's efforts to bring peace will collapse into total catastrophe, world peace is by no means a lost cause. In many ways, the United Nations has failed and will ultimately be left behind, but the dream of world peace it was intended to bring is not dead. The dream is not dead because the promises of God yet live. And these promises are of so much greater peace and joy than people have ever imagined (1 Corinthians 2:9; Romans 11:33).

The Hebrew *shalom* (peace) is more than just the absence of war. It entails being filled with something else—wholeness and contentment and assurance that all is well. And so it will be for the world at large.

It is upon the shoulders of Jesus Christ that successful world government will at last be established. He will never lack a will for peace. And since He is perfect, without sin and corruption, the governing institution that He establishes—the Kingdom of God—will shine with justice, equity, truth and peace.

Why not submit to the rule of that Kingdom now, so that "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"? (Philippians 4:7). May His Kingdom come soon, and may it rule in your life today! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



To learn more about the gospel message Jesus Christ and His apostles proclaimed, including its vital focus on the Kingdom of God, be sure to request or download our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so25 to find it.



7 Ways Christ's Rule Will Be So Wonderfully Different

God intended governments to promote good and restrain evil, and maintain order in society. We don't see a lot of that today, but we will once Jesus Christ establishes the Kingdom of God over all nations. Here are seven ways His administration will improve people's lives.

by Becky Sweat

In early 1776, writer and philosopher Thomas Paine penned these words in his influential pamphlet *Common Sense*: "Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one." He believed that while government is essential for order and protection, it is inherently flawed and can easily become corrupt.

It doesn't matter what part of the world we live in or which country we're referring to, we can see shortcomings in our local and national governments. Administrations are often rife with inefficiency, bureaucracy, abuse of power, corruption and blatant disregard for the well-being of citizenry.

Of course, this is nothing new. History is filled with examples of ineffective government leaders who didn't do what they said they would or what they should have done, or misused their positions for personal gain.

Yet government in and of itself isn't bad. It was originally instituted by God.

For humanity, He intended it to oversee the functioning of society, directing people's lives in the right way, and to provide justice and protection. It was meant for peace, safety and prosperity for all.

Thomas Paine was correct when he said that government is necessary, yet it's not inherently an evil. The truth is, government *can* and *should* be something very good. We just need a different kind of rulership here on earth. And thankfully that is coming.

Before human misrule goes too far, Jesus Christ will return as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16; 11:15; Zechariah 14:9) to establish God's government, the Kingdom of God, on earth. He will be assisted by the resurrected saints—those who have faithfully submitted to God during their physical lifetimes in this age—who will serve as kings and priests in administering God's rule and teaching people about God and His ways (Revelation 5:10; 20:4-6).

At last the people of the world will

come under righteous rule! Christ's administration will be wonderfully different from man's governments during the previous six millennia. Here are seven major distinctions, just for starters:

1 God's perfect laws will become the law for everyone.

Since human beings are flawed, it follows that the laws they devise will be flawed too. However, when Christ sets up His government on earth, He won't be governing by faulty regulations. He'll be establishing God's perfect laws, outlined in the Bible, as the prescribed rule of conduct and moral code for all people on earth. Humanity will be taught directly by Christ and His ruling saints and will reap the blessings that come from living God's way of life.

One of the features that set God's laws apart is *they always benefit us*. When we obey them, they liberate and guard us from our destructive human ways. Psalm 19:7-9 describes the laws

of the Lord as perfect, sure, right and pure—and says they convert the soul, make the simple wise and endure forever. God's laws don't ever need to be modified or require amendments, as God's character and standards do not change (Numbers 23:19). We're further told in 1 John 5:3 that God's commandments are *not* burdensome.

Laws of human devising, on the other hand, can often seem onerous, oppressive and confusing. Accompanying the global development and reshaping of government bureaucracy, infrastructure, industries, technologies, manufacturing, commerce, finance, education, employment, transportation, travel, international relations, migration, etc., have been an avalanche of associated laws. And all these laws have created a massive burden of changing regulations that citizens must gain awareness of, navigate through and then try to understand how to comply with. (See “Man-made laws and regulations out of control” on page 22 as an illustration of the problem.)

In contrast, God's instructions for living are concise—spelled out in a single volume, the Bible. During the Millennium, people will easily grasp what God expects from them. They won't struggle with confusing laws that are continually in flux. Also, because God's ways are not burdensome, it's doubtful that people will be subjected to a lot of bureaucratic controls (such as having to pay for numerous permits and licenses just to do a home remodel or start a business), as is often the case in modern societies.

2 Civil and religious rule will be united under Christ.

Christ's administration will be a true *theocracy*, which literally means having God as King—then over the whole world. Historically, theocracies have typically been mere rule by religious leaders. Ancient rulers of Mesopotamia, Egypt and China were installed by priests and ruled as

priest-kings and even demigods, part of pagan mass deception.

Only one ancient nation had a true theocracy—ancient Israel, wherein the true God was actually King and ruled through a system of judges, priests and prophets, until the people asked for rule by a human king (see 1 Samuel 8:7; 12:12). Even then there was still acknowledgment of God as the true King. Yet during all this period, the wayward hearts of the people prevented widespread submission to the rule of God.

In our modern age, the nations considered to be theocracies are pri-

marily Islamic states. Among these are the governments of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Vatican City is a Catholic theocracy with the pope as the head of its government.

False theocracies have often been characterized by tyranny. And modern nations have typically sought for more secular rule to allow for personal religious freedom. That will no longer be necessary when Christ's government is established on earth, as its rulers will also be the spiritual leaders, who will administer God's perfect laws.

There will be one religion and one belief system. Everyone will be taught to live by the same core spiritual principles. Allowances won't need to be made for those who “believe differently.” All will understand the truth (Isaiah 11:9; Hebrews 8:11). There won't be some people keeping the Sabbath and others going to church on Sunday, for instance. God's Spirit will be poured out on people everywhere to help them all follow God (Joel 2:28). This will help bring about true harmony, in a way the world has never seen.

3 It will be a government that leads the people without being controlling or abusive.

In Mark 10:42, Jesus summed up the tendency of human leaders by telling His disciples: “You know that in this world kings are *tyrants*, and officials *lord it over* the people beneath them” (New Living Translation 1996, emphasis added). The rulers of that time often manipulated, dominated or bullied their subjects.

To “lord it over” means that the rulers were subjecting the populace to their power, explains Gene Wilkes in *Jesus*

Government can and should be something very good. We just need a different kind of rulership here on earth. And thankfully that is coming.

on Leadership: “It implies that someone is the master and someone else is the subject . . . The concept of *lord* implies absolute power over another. You don't have to deal with questions or dissension. You herd people together and tell them what to do. If they disagree, you eliminate them” (1998, p. 106).

A form of “lording it over” today is often termed *government overreach*, which encompasses actions taken by public officials or agencies that infringe on personal freedoms. This might include intrusive surveillance measures in community venues (often using facial recognition technology), Internet censorship to control the flow of information or prevent political dissent, prohibitions on private gatherings, and social credit scoring systems, allowing a government to remove what it considers “privileges” if individuals say or do something deemed subversive—all of which can be very troubling when that government does not support biblical truths.

Christ's administration will be a stark contrast to this type of rule. Those in government positions will seek to

lead and guide the people through education and coaching, not coercion or control. Isaiah 40:11 says Christ will “feed His flock like a shepherd” and “gently lead.” The primary “feeding” will be spiritual—teaching humanity about God’s way of life. The people will be taught, “This is the way, walk in it” (Isaiah 30:21). If they do something that goes against biblical principles, they will be given an explanation for why God’s laws are better and how they work (rather than simply be told to *do it or else*).

This is not to say that Christ and those ruling under Him will not exercise firm power when needed. At times it will be necessary to maintain harmony and prevent individuals from hurting themselves or each other. Isaiah 2:4 indicates some people will require rebuke and discipline. However, any correction will not be abusive, and will always be for the good of those being governed.

4 Government leaders will put the needs of the people first, not themselves.

Those assisting Christ as rulers in God’s Kingdom won’t misuse their positions, as has often been the case with mankind’s governments. Rulers won’t take bribes to influence legislation, accept laundered funds or insider stock information, make promises they don’t intend to keep to garner support, or in any way abuse their positions for personal gain or aggrandizement.

Instead, Christ and those who assist Him will use their positions to *serve* those they govern. Christ told His disciples: “Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And



There won’t be a two-tiered system of justice where different ethnic or social groups receive unequal or unfair treatment. The people will be able to trust those who are judging them and enforcing the laws.

whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28). This is how rulers will lead in God’s coming Kingdom. They will exhibit an outgoing concern towards others, rather than self-centeredness.

Christ said in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” And so will it be for everyone in Christ’s administration. These servant leaders will use their positions to benefit the people living in their jurisdictions. No longer will citizens be concerned that their public officials might be on a power trip or push their own selfish agendas. People will know that their leaders have their backs.

5 Private property rights will be respected.

The Bible supports the private ownership of property. Two of the Ten

Commandments address the matter, prohibiting stealing and the covetous desire to steal (Exodus 20:15, 17). Restitution of property rights (after a violation) is covered in Exodus 22:1-15. The passing down of property from one generation to the next is spelled out in Deuteronomy 21:15-17 and Numbers 27:8-11.

The Jubilee law mandates as liberty (Leviticus 25:10) that debts be canceled and lands be returned to original owners every 50th year. Prohibitions against moving boundary markers are listed in Deuteronomy 19:14 and 27:17, acknowledging God’s approval of private property.

The same directives will apply once Christ establishes His rule on earth.

All this will be another much-needed improvement! History is replete with examples of governments blatantly stealing from private citizens by seizing real property or other assets without any due process or judicial oversight. An infamous example from the Bible is when King Ahab accepted the help of his queen, Jezebel, in seizing a vineyard by having its owner, Naboth, murdered (1 Kings 21). Of course, theft sometimes happens more subtly. Today, for instance, budget-strapped retired adults sometimes lose their homes because they cannot afford to pay their ever-increasing property taxes.

During Christ’s reign, private property rights will be upheld, and people will not fear their homes or any other possessions being taken from them—by the government or anyone else (Micah 4:4). Everyone will know stealing is a sin and that they will be held accountable for their actions. God knows that

protecting private ownership ultimately leads to economic growth in a nation, and overall satisfaction for its people.

6 Christ's government will be fiscally responsible.

National debt is a growing concern for countries around the globe. Stated simply, national debt is money a national government owes to creditors, including foreign governments, domestic lenders and private individuals (holders of treasury bonds). Governments go into debt when irresponsible spending that exceeds what they take in via tax revenues leads to excessive borrowing to finance deficits.

In terms of raw dollars, the United States is unquestionably the most indebted nation in the world, with an unprecedented \$37 trillion national debt as of June 2025. China, Japan, the United Kingdom and France round out the list of the nations with the largest debts.

Proverbs 22:7 states, "The borrower is servant to the lender." Nations burdened by debt do not have much freedom to decide how to use what they collect in taxes because they're obligated to servicing their debts. Overextended, they can't finance public services and infrastructure to meet the people's needs.

Amid such circumstances, governments today might resort to *quantitative easing* or printing additional money, devaluing the currency—a form of theft, as it fuels inflation and reduces citizens' purchasing power. Or the governments might raise income taxes. Either way, the citizenry won't be able to fully enjoy the fruit of their labor (see Psalm 128:2), being forced to finance their governments' debts.

This won't happen under Christ's rule. Government won't spend more than what is collected in revenue (via tithes and offerings), nor will it be wasteful or fraudulent. Enjoying a stable and free economy, citizens will no longer worry about whether they'll be able to afford groceries or a home, or have to

work multiple jobs just to get by.

7 Perfect justice will be administered.

One of Christ's tasks will be what's addressed in Romans 13:3-4, and that is to punish wrongdoing and reward good behavior. He will do so fairly, without any favoritism. Isaiah 11:3-4 says, "He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth." Deuteronomy 10:17 says God "shows no partiality nor takes a bribe."

No longer will citizens be concerned that their public officials might be on a power trip or push their own selfish agendas. People will know that their leaders have their backs.

There won't be a two-tiered system of justice where different ethnic or social groups receive unequal or unfair treatment. Christ's "leadership team" will not resort to tactics like false charges, arbitrary arrests or staging unfair trials to make life "extra tough" for any perceived opponents to His administration. When someone has indeed sinned, there will be room for forgiveness (and withholding deserved punishment), as God is merciful (Luke 6:36)—something not always seen in mankind's judicial systems.

Christ will base His judgments and decisions on God's perfect, righteous laws, which benefit all involved (Deuteronomy 6:24-25). He won't allow any wrong influences to sway His decisions. Today, political parties, special interest groups and other

lobbyists are quite adept at influencing the legislative and judicial branches of government. There have also been instances of judicial manipulation—where political leaders appoint judges who will benefit their personal interests. These kinds of infractions won't happen in Christ's administration.

Those in leadership positions will judge and lead with integrity, meaning they will always interact with others ethically, honestly and honorably. There will be no lies, deceit or double-talk. The people will be able to trust those who are judging them and enforcing the laws. Having just leadership will bring

stability and social order to the nations (Proverbs 29:2, 4).

In closing, when Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God, He will make a lot of necessary changes. His rule will truly be for the good of the governed. Earth's inhabitants will experience lasting peace and prosperity (Isaiah 9:6-7).

We certainly don't have that now. While there may be human leaders who are sincerely trying to help their constituencies, they can only do so much. Many of the challenges in this world are far bigger than any human being can fix. It will take Christ's future rule to bring the needed changes. He will solve the problems and injustices we see in our societies today and finally bring righteous governance to this world. God speed that day! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



This article has only scratched the surface of the monumental changes that will happen in the world when Jesus Christ rules over all nations. To learn more about what that time will bring, request or download our free study guide *Christ's Reign on Earth: What It Will Be Like*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so25 to find it.



Has the KINGDOM OF GOD Been Set Up on Earth NOW?



Many who believe in Jesus Christ think the Kingdom of God has been established on the earth since His first coming. But what does the Bible actually reveal?

by John LaBissoniere

The evangelist Mark wrote: “Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel!’” (Mark 1:14-15). What did Jesus Christ mean by saying the Kingdom is at hand? Was He setting up the Kingdom at that time so that repentant believers could enter it immediately? Was He referring to setting up His Church, the spiritual organization of believers, as the Kingdom?

The phrase “at hand” is translated from a Greek word meaning “brought near,” and from a root meaning to “squeeze,” implying the Kingdom was within grasp or reach. So did the Kingdom come at that time? Did true believers then enter the Kingdom of God?

Faithful followers heirs, not yet inheritors

Consider the words of the apostle James: “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and *heirs of the kingdom* which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5, emphasis added throughout). An “heir” is someone who has *not yet* inherited something but will do so at a future date. Regarding the members of God’s Church, they are now heirs who, if they remain faithful, will *inherit* their glorious reward of salvation and eternal life in the Kingdom of God at Jesus Christ’s second coming.

Underscoring this crucial point, the apostle Paul wrote: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood *cannot inherit* the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Corinthians 15:50). So people cannot inherit the Kingdom while they are still physical human beings.

This inheritance can only be procured *after* a momentous change—when God gives His followers new *spiritual* bodies at Christ’s return. Paul continued: “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” (verses 51-53; see Philipians 3:20-21).

The apostle Paul reiterated this by stating that the members of God’s Church are presently “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). However, at the time of the resurrection they will “*inherit* eternal life” in God’s Kingdom (Matthew 19:29; 1 Corinthians 15:42). Furthermore, Paul recognized that he personally did not *yet* have his “crown of righteousness,” but that it was “*laid up*” for him and for “all who have loved His [Jesus] appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). Paul also wrote, “The Lord *will . . . preserve me* for His heavenly kingdom” (verse 18), meaning his reward is safeguarded and will be presented to him when he arises in the resurrection (see John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

These passages provide crucial understanding that the Kingdom of God—His perfect government and rule over the nations, in which His followers of this age will play important roles—is not yet set up on the earth. This fact is obvious to anyone today in witnessing the lawless state of human society. Christ taught in His “model prayer” that His disciples should pray, “*Your kingdom come*” (Matthew 6:10). It was yet to arrive (compare Luke 22:16, 18).

Moreover, He said that when He returns to earth He

“will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, *inherit* the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matthew 25:34). That magnificent time lies ahead for all of God’s faithful saints (Romans 2:7; Colossians 3:24).

Furthermore, Jesus told His disciples He was bestowing His Kingdom on them, that they would “eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29-30). Did the twelve apostles judge the tribes of Israel during their lifetimes? No. Instead, they were persecuted and, except for the apostle John, likely martyred.

This passage plainly refers to a *future time* when God’s Kingdom of perfect global peace and prosperity for all people will be established on earth. Moreover, *if* the Kingdom is now on earth and *if* the Church is the Kingdom, as many traditional Christians believe, why did Paul tell the disciples, “We must through many tribulations *enter* the kingdom of God”? (Acts 14:22). Why did the apostle Peter *also* say that our entrance into the Kingdom is yet future? (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Misconceptions about when the Kingdom is established

Just as people today have misconceptions about when God’s Kingdom commences, those in Christ’s day did as well. Jesus even delivered a parable to correct this error. He began, “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return” (Luke 19:12). The nobleman symbolized Jesus, who after His resurrection from the dead ascended to His Father in heaven.

Jesus further stated that prior to the nobleman’s journey, he called together 10 of his servants and gave each of them 10 units of money, telling them, “Do business till I come.” These servants represent Christ’s followers, who must use and develop the abilities and spiritual resources they have been given while He is away in heaven. Then, on His return, He will reward all His dedicated disciples with great power and responsibility according to what they accomplished during their lives. That will be when the Kingdom is established over the nations.

Now, what about some passages that appear to say that the Kingdom has been set up on earth in this present age? For instance, some of the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom would come. He told them, as often translated, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21).

Some say this proves the Kingdom is here on earth now. However, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* notes that the phrase “‘within’ you is a questionable translation. Jesus would hardly tell Pharisees, most of whom were unbelievers, that the Kingdom was within them” (Vol. 8, p. 997). In context, the phrase is better translated “*among you*” or “*in your*

Living Under Jesus’ Reign Today

The central message of Jesus Christ was not only about securing a future destination but involved a personal relationship with Him and the Kingdom of God we can participate in today. Jesus said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). Understanding Jesus as our ruling King today transforms how we approach our daily lives, moving from passive waiting to active citizenship under divine reign.

The word “kingdom” (translated from the Greek *basileia*) permeates the New Testament writings and carried profound political and social implications modern readers often miss. The term denoted the active exercise of royal authority, the dynamic rule of a king and the sphere of influence where that authority is acknowledged and obeyed. It also spoke of the coming Kingdom from heaven that transformed converts will one day enter.

When Jesus and His apostles proclaimed the *basileia* of God, this was a declaration of divine governance—God’s sovereign rule being announced to the hearers and offered to them. This was revolutionary language in a world dominated by Caesar’s empire. Far above, there existed supreme kingship, ultimate authority, heavenly government that transcends earthly powers and human-devised ethics.

Jesus’ gospel invites people to come under His divine rule as their King even now. When He declared, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom [or reign] of God is at hand,” and to “repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15), the prophesied Messiah was present in person and people were invited to repent of not submitting to God and to turn to live His way under Jesus’ direction.

This repentance was a complete reorientation of allegiance from humanism to theism. It meant recognizing Jesus as God’s anointed authority over mankind. The gospel invitation was and is essentially a call to citizenship transfer from allegiance to the fleeting human kingdoms of this world to citizenship with the everlasting Kingdom of God. Jesus presented Himself as Savior from darkness leading to death and as sovereign Ruler of light leading to life. In the words of Colossians 1:13 (English Standard Version), God “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom [or “reign,” Young’s Literal Translation] of his beloved Son.”

Throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrated His divine royal authority through healing the sick, forgiving sins, calming storms and teaching with unprecedented authority. These were manifestations of kingly power, evidence that God’s rule was present through His anointed King.

The apostle Paul expressed the present reality in these terms: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:20-21). The citizenship here is not stated in *future* tense—it is a *present reality* for truly repentant, baptized followers of Christ who are led by His Spirit

(continued on next page)

(Romans 8:14-17). Subjects loyal to the Father and Christ are considered to be current citizens of a heavenly country, living as representatives of God's Kingdom while temporarily residing on earth (see Hebrews 11:13-16).

This citizenship comes with both privileges and responsibilities. We have access to the resources of God's Holy Spirit—love, peace, joy, righteousness and self-control—which Scripture calls tasting of “the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5). We also have obligations to live according to the laws and values of our future homeland. Our primary allegiance, then, is not to earthly governments, cultures or ideologies, but to the Kingdom of God, its government and laws.

Living as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven today means that our identity, values and purposes are shaped by divine standards rather than societal norms. We operate according to Kingdom rules and godly principles: obeying God's laws, love for enemies, forgiveness of wrongs, generosity toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. These aren't merely nice ideals—they're constitutional requirements of citizens of God's Kingdom.

God's commandments and principles of outgoing love create flourishing communities where people experience genuine happiness, meaningful relationships and spiritual abundance. When humanity rejects these divine laws and chooses to live outside of God's loving rule, dire consequences inevitably follow—broken relationships, social injustices, personal emptiness and spiritual death.

Scripture presents Jesus as “the ruler over the kings of the earth” and “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Revelation 1:5; 19:16). Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is acknowledged as the “King of Israel” (John 1:49) and “King of the nations” (Revelation 15:3, ESV). He Himself acknowledged: “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world” (John 18:37).

Jesus is right now the sovereign Ruler over all believers who together form His Church, as God “put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Ephesians 1:22-23)—“that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). Those who are His people, His subjects, have voluntarily submitted to His authority. This submission isn't oppressive but liberating—we find our truest freedom under the rule of the One who loves us perfectly. Coming under the rule of this King means acknowledging His absolute authority over every aspect of our lives.

Biblical teaching presents the Kingdom of God in two stages: a present authority converting people to submission to His reign, and a future entry into His heavenly Kingdom of glory. We are currently invited to come under the authority of the Kingdom of God, experiencing its blessings and living by its principles. This present experience is genuine godly minded life.

Yet we also anticipate the fuller manifestation of God's Kingdom with Jesus' second coming—when “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). Then Christ's rulership will be universally acknowledged. And those who have submitted to God's authority now will enter His eternal Kingdom and reign with Christ (2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 20:4, 6).

This two-stage reality means that Kingdom living is both a present privilege and our future hope. We taste now what we will enjoy eternally. The invitation is clear: Come under God's rule *today* and inherit His Kingdom *tomorrow*. **BT**

—John Elliott

midst.” Christ, as the future King of the Kingdom, was standing amid the Pharisees as He spoke those words! And He was teaching and performing miracles as foretold of the age to come. Moreover, He was calling people to submit to His reign now. We can come under the rule of the King and His Kingdom today, but we cannot inherit or enter it yet, as we've seen.

Yet what about Paul's stating in Colossians 1:13 that God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of his love”? This is about an authority transfer—from Satan's dark dominion over to (or “unto,” the Greek word *eis* not always meaning “into”) the reign or rule of Christ—as the word for Kingdom here can mean. It can't mean believers have already entered the Kingdom. The people of God's Church have submitted to Christ's authority as King of the Kingdom, and they experience His power now through the Holy Spirit working in and through them. But, again, they have yet to enter and inherit the Kingdom.

Don't wait to submit

Other scriptures such as Matthew 12:28 (“the kingdom of God has come upon you”) and Mark 12:34 (“you are not far from the kingdom of God”) can also seem to say the establishment of the Kingdom was imminent. But when carefully examined, these passages also do not mean that. Rather, the former again concerned the presence of Jesus as the King. The latter concerned spiritual understanding and right priorities under the rule of the Kingdom.

When Jesus sent His disciples to various cities to preach the gospel, they told listeners that “the kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10:9). By this they meant what Jesus meant in saying the Kingdom was at hand. The future Kingdom was breaking through in the person and work of the King at that time. Its power was displayed through Christ's miracles and teachings. And the opportunity to submit to the rule of the Kingdom was before them—as it is before us today as a present reality (see “Living Under Jesus' Reign Today” beginning on page 15).

The Kingdom of God—His government of true peace and prosperity for all people—will be established throughout the earth at Christ's second coming. But we can live under the rule of that Kingdom now—and we must live under that rule now if we want to inherit and enter the Kingdom when He returns! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



Many believe the gospel is just a message about receiving Jesus today to be saved. But it's much more than that. It concerns a vision of the future, God's ultimate purpose for humanity, as well as the means to inheriting what God has in store. Be sure to request or download our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so25 to find it.



Is Today the Only Day of Salvation?



Many believe that all who die without accepting Jesus Christ as Savior are forever condemned. But is that so? What about those who never heard about Him or His teachings? Are there other ways to be saved? What is the truth?

by Dan Dowd

It's widely believed that if people do not become truly converted Christians in this lifetime before the return of Jesus Christ, then they are utterly lost. But what does the Bible actually teach?

The largely unrecognized truth is that this is not the age in which God is trying to save all the world! It is not the only day (or time) of salvation. A time is coming when all who've ever lived will be given an opportunity to repent and receive eternal life. And this is directly related to the fall festivals God has given in Scripture.

Satan's rule in the present age

Scripture plainly reveals Satan the devil as the god of this world (or this age), that he is the prince of the power of the air, and that he is the actual spirit ruler of this present world (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2-3; John 12:31). He is in power! He offered to give this power to Jesus if He would only worship him (Matthew 4:9). Yet it was through resisting Satan's temptations that Jesus

received from God the Father the right to that power—to dethrone and replace Satan. When Christ comes to rule, Satan will be utterly stripped of power. But he has power for now!

Satan retains his power only by God's express permission. God has allowed Satan to rule over mankind since the decision in the Garden of Eden to follow him instead of submitting to God's rule. And during this time of his reign, it is simply not given to everyone to understand God's truth (see Luke 8:10).

Satan's work is a labor of deceiving mankind, of turning God's truth upside down, and of causing sincere people to accept a counterfeit for the genuine, thereby deceiving people into sin. Sadly, he has been very successful (Revelation 12:9).

We are now nearing the end of Satan's rule over mankind. The millennial reign of Jesus Christ is coming, and rulership will belong to Him (Revelation 11:15; 20:4, 6). Satan will then be chained, restrained and thrown into

the symbolic "bottomless pit" (verses 1-4)—he will not then deceive a single person. That time will not belong to him. Rather it will belong to God, who will rule through Christ, with salvation offered to all humanity!

All unsaved not forever lost

Traditional Christianity has historically taught that at the end of their physical lives in this age, all people are either "saved" (blessed with eternity with God) or "lost" (condemned to hell). This is a misunderstanding that has led to untold suffering and unnecessary grief.

It's based on the notion that this is the one and only age and time when God is trying desperately to save the world—that the mission of the Church is to save the world while there's still time.

If this is true, then what about those who lived and died before the birth of Jesus? What about those who lived in lands who never heard or knew Jesus Christ's gospel message? What about those who grew up in other religions or

those who never stepped inside a church door?

The Bible plainly says there is but one name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved—the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). There is no other way to God except through Him (John 14:6). Yet there have been vast multitudes of people who never heard of Christ or what He taught before they died. According to typical Christian teaching, those people are forever lost. They were unaware of repentance from sin as necessary for forgiveness and salvation. They probably didn't even know what sin is, much less its consequence. They were never taught the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Is it reasonable to believe that a God of love brought these individuals into the world without their knowledge or consent, permitted them to live and die without ever having heard the gospel, and so has simply consigned them to eternal punishment without ever having a chance to be saved?

God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). And Jesus stated that ancient pagans would have repented if they had experienced His miracles and teachings (Luke 10:13).

So will God save them by some other means—perhaps if they lived up to the best they knew, without having known and accepted Christ? We can find no such teaching in the Bible, and we've already seen that there is no other way to God.

Misunderstood scripture

Some have been confused by 2 Corinthians 6:2, which says that “now is the day of salvation.” Note that it doesn't say “the *only* day.” Moreover, in this passage the apostle Paul quoted from

God will deny no one an opportunity for salvation. The overwhelming majority of mankind is simply not called now in this time of Satan's rule.



Isaiah 49:8, but the Hebrew text there does not have a definite article (“the” in English). Neither does the Greek text of 2 Corinthians 6:2. So it's “A day of salvation”—A time of deliverance. Even if a “the” were implied, it would only mean it's the time of salvation for God's followers in this age.

This is the day of salvation for those who have been called and have had their minds opened to the truth by God. Now is their opportunity to repent and overcome to be part of God's Kingdom. But it is not the day of salvation for the vast majority of people, who will receive their first and only opportunity at a later time.

Consider also that if it were the only day of salvation back in Paul's lifetime, we would be cut off today. But Paul was quoting a scripture hundreds of years older. Was that time in the days of Isaiah the only day of salvation? Obviously not. Today, as in the time of Paul, it was A time of deliverance—among others.

Not all are called now

God will deny no one an opportunity for salvation. The overwhelming

majority of mankind is simply not called now in this time of Satan's rule. The devil is working to draw people away from being saved, but this is also simply not the time when God is trying to save everyone.

If He were, then clearly Satan would be winning the contest—as most of the world has not even been Christian in name. But in reality, there is no contest between God and Satan. God rules over all creation. He allows Satan's dominion to continue for now, as this serves God's wise purposes—for example, helping mankind to see from experience the terrible results of Satan's lies and deception.

Realize also that God does things His way and in His time, and in His plan all are not being called now. Billions who have died without an opportunity to receive salvation will be resurrected and given their full opportunity—and without Satan around to tempt them. The Bible speaks of this second or general resurrection after 1,000 years of Christ's reign in Revelation 20:5 and verses 11-12, among other passages.

Those in the first resurrection (see verses 4-6) are Christ's faithful followers from this age, striving to endure in God's ways to the end. They will be changed into immortal spirit beings at Christ's return to inherit the Kingdom (see 1 Corinthians 15:45, 49-54). They will then rule with Christ and teach the nations (Revelation 2:27; 3:21).

They are now just the beginning.

Even most who have professed to follow Christ in this age have not really understood the truth. God will give them and all people a real opportunity to repent and follow Him in the future.

Not a second chance

But, some will say, is not this the doctrine of a second chance? No, it is not.

Hebrews 6 and 10 make this very plain. Those not called now have not received the knowledge of the truth. Therefore, they have not been ultimately judged for salvation.

Most do not really grasp this. The truth is spiritual knowledge, and spiritual knowledge cannot be transmitted naturally to a mortal human mind. Spiritual truth is revealed (1 Corinthians 2:14). No one truly understands except as God opens their understanding, and by His Spirit reveals to them the truth.

But if one has been truly called of God, convicted by God's Spirit, his mind opened to the precious spiritual knowledge of the truth, then if that man sins willfully, deliberately, rejecting God, that man is condemned to eternal death (Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-27; Galatians 5:19-21). Such a person has had his opportunity.

Those who shall then be called to salvation are those who have not, until then, been called. They are those who never had an opportunity. In God's own time, according to His plan, all will have their opportunity.

The great fall harvest

When Jesus Christ returns in power and glory, the dead in Christ (those who accepted His call and have been finally saved) will be resurrected immortal, and His followers still living will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

They will meet Jesus Christ in the clouds—and will then come to reign with Him on the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Revelation 5:10). Christ's throne will then be established on the earth—the throne of His ancestor David (Luke 1:32). That is the throne on which the saints made immortal shall sit with Him (Revelation 3:21). And He will rule over the nations for the 1,000 years.

Over that time, there will be a process of separating between those who respond to God's calling and those who don't (Matthew 25:31-34, 41). Note

that all those called and saved prior to Christ's second appearing on earth are separated from the unsaved before He descends to the earth and sits on the throne of His glory. Thus, the separation going on after He sits on that throne ruling over the nations is a new phase in the process.

The people of the world will then go through an evaluation process over their lifetime according to the decisions they make and the actions they take then. Those who turn to a life of righteousness are set on the right hand. They are converted and given immortality, for Christ says to them, along with His followers of this age, "Inherit the kingdom"—and mortal flesh and blood cannot inherit that Kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50).

Those who do evil then receive the penalty of the law—death (Romans 6:23). They are sentenced to destruction in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

These passages, then, picture a process of salvation continuing after Christ's return and during His millennial reign and beyond. That is the great "fall harvest of people" celebrated in the fall Holy Days (see Leviticus 23:23-41). The Feast of Trumpets pictures the return of Jesus Christ. The Day of Atonement pictures the banishment of Satan and of mankind coming to receive Christ. The great seven-day Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes Christ's reign over the world. And the concluding "Eighth Day" looks beyond to salvation being offered to those of past ages resurrected together.

The astonishing fact is that the present human harvest (compare Matthew 9:36-38; John 4:34-36) corresponds to the late spring grain harvest in the Holy Land, which was celebrated at the Feast of Pentecost. It is so pictured in the annual round of festivals God gave to

Israel to keep His people continually in the understanding of His plan.

This age is the preliminary harvest of human beings. During this time of Satan's dominion, God is calling out of it a people for His name, that through His mercy on those who now are called, the great majority not now called may then obtain mercy. Those called to salvation now are the "firstfruits" of God's salvation (James 1:18). They are called now to prepare to become kings and priests, the instrumentality through which Christ will really save the world when His time for that comes. What a glorious plan and gospel!

Those who died unsaved

And so it follows that most of our loved ones who have died unsaved did not die lost if they were not called during this age. Their call is coming later. They will be brought back to life and given their fair opportunity. And you, if you are being called, with God revealing this wonderful truth to your mind and giving you conviction of heart to act on it, are having your one and only opportunity now—your opportunity to prepare yourself to be used of Christ in the loving labor of helping to save the rest of mankind!

What great meaning we begin to see in the call to be followers of Christ. This understanding shows the purpose of our life, why we were born, and what our lives after death can be. Will you, in the words of 2 Peter 1:10, "make your call and election sure"?

Again, today is not the only day of salvation. The present age is not a time of Jesus Christ desperately contesting with Satan over whether humanity will be saved or lost. Christ will return to rule, to teach and to offer salvation to all! But that offer to you may well be right now. **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



To more deeply understand God's plan for saving humanity as revealed in the festivals He gave to ancient Israel, request or download our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Be sure to especially read the chapter "The Eighth Day: Eternal Life Offered to All" for more on the topic explored in this article.

Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so25 to find it.





Understanding **REAL HOPE** More Than Wishful Thinking

Genuine biblical hope is far more than a desire for things to go a certain way. It rests on a sure confidence in what God has promised. What are we anticipating, and how does this impact our life?

by Ken Loucks

Living in today's world can feel overwhelming at times. We face personal struggles, global challenges and uncertainty about the future. But there's a special kind of hope described in the Bible that goes far beyond mere wishful thinking or temporary optimism. This hope has the power to transform our lives and give us an unshakable anchor.

When we talk about hope in everyday conversation, we often mean something like "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow" or "I hope my team wins the game" or "I hope the situation works out." This is nothing more than expressing a desire for a preferred outcome, with no real certainty of it happening. But biblical hope is different. It's not just wishful thinking. It's a confident expectation based on God's promises.

The book of Hebrews tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). This scripture connects faith and hope in a powerful way. Our faith—shown through our actions—is the tangible proof of what we hope for. But what exactly are we hoping for? And what effect does it have on our life?

Hope leads to transformation

The apostle Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 15 that our ultimate hope extends far beyond our current physical life, pointing out that if our hope in Christ is for this life only, "we are of all men the most pitiable" (verse 19). As he further explained, our hope is in the resurrection from the dead and the coming Kingdom of God.

This hope isn't passive. It's an *active* force that should change how we live. When God begins calling someone, He

opens the person's mind to understand His truth and gives hope that obedience to His way of life will bring eternal rewards. This hope leads to transformation, as Paul elsewhere urged: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Consider how this hope has already changed the lives of those God has called out of this world. They have changed their weekly schedule to keep the seventh-day Sabbath, modified their spending habits to include tithing, and begun observing God's annual Holy Days instead of traditional holidays. These aren't small adjustments—they're radical changes that demonstrate real faith based on genuine hope. (To learn more, read our free study guides *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest, What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?* and *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*)

The heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 exemplified this transformative hope. We read that "these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (verse 13). These faithful servants were so convinced of their future hope that they lived as temporary residents in this world, looking forward to something far better.

Their example shows us what real, living hope looks like in action. They didn't just believe in God's promises—they acted on that belief in dramatic ways. Abraham left his homeland, Moses forsook the pleasures of Egypt, and others endured great trials, all because they were fully convinced of their

The hope of God's Kingdom is not just a distant dream to passively wait for. It's a powerful force that should be reshaping our lives today.

future hope. This same transformative hope should motivate us to grow beyond just the basics of Christian living.

Vital perspective to press onward and grow

Jesus illustrated this principle of growth and transformation in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The servant who received one talent (a large amount of money representing God-given means or ability) and simply buried that talent—doing nothing more than preserving what he was given—was called “wicked and lazy” and cast into outer darkness. Unlike the heroes of faith who actively pursued God's way of life, this servant only tried to maintain what he had.

Christ further emphasized this principle in His interaction with a rich young ruler in Matthew 19, who asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus first told him to keep the commandments. The young man replied that he had done this since his youth. But Jesus then challenged him on a matter that was particularly difficult for him: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (verse 21).

Like the heroes of faith before him, this young man was being offered the opportunity to demonstrate transformative hope through his actions. Sadly, he went away sorrowful, unable to take that extra step of commitment—and revealing that he was not as obedient as he had assumed.

The apostle Peter provides a beautiful description of the living hope we have through Jesus Christ. He writes that God “has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4). This hope is living because it leads to eternal life, and it should be evident in how we live our lives today.

Our hope isn't about just our final destination. It's about the *journey* of transformation. When we truly grasp what God is offering us, it should motivate us to full commitment. We should be growing in God's character, developing the fruit of His Spirit and actively serving others. This hope should be visible in our relationships, our work ethic, our speech and our priorities.

Think about how this hope affects our response to trials. Peter encourages us that even though we may be “grieved by various trials,” these challenges serve a purpose: “that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise,

honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7). Our hope gives us perspective to see trials as opportunities for growth rather than just difficulties to endure.

This hope also affects how we view material possessions and worldly success. When we truly believe in the inheritance God has promised us, we can hold earthly things loosely. We understand that our true treasure isn't in bank accounts or possessions, but in the coming Kingdom of God. This doesn't mean we neglect our responsibilities, but rather we keep them in proper perspective.

Moreover, this hope should impact how we treat others. If we truly believe God is offering humanity the opportunity to become part of His family, it should change how we view and interact with everyone we meet. They are potential children of God, regardless of their current circumstances or choices.

A new creation—to last

Real hope is transformative. It's not just about believing certain truths or following certain rules. It's about *becoming a new creation* in Christ. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

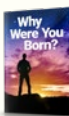
What makes this hope so powerful is its foundation—the unchangeable promises of God. Unlike worldly hopes that can disappoint, this hope is based on the character and faithfulness of God Himself. As stated in Hebrews 6:19, “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.”

The challenges and difficulties of this life can sometimes seem overwhelming, but this ultimate hope gives us the strength to persevere. It reminds us that our current struggles are temporary, but our future inheritance is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). As Paul wrote, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

The hope of God's Kingdom is not just a distant dream to passively wait for. It's a powerful force that should be reshaping our lives today. When we truly grasp that we are being prepared for an eternal inheritance as the divine children of God, it changes everything about how we live.

As Paul assured us, our efforts to grow in God's way of life are not wasted: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). This living hope gives purpose to every aspect of our Christian life, energizing us to press forward toward the high calling we've been given in Christ Jesus! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



Paul explained that we receive Jesus Christ into our lives as “the hope of glory.” Just what is this coming glory in which we hope? The answer reveals the very meaning of your existence. To help grasp the Bible's stunning answer, be sure to request or download your copy of our free study guide *Why Were You Born?*



Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so25 to find it.

New calls for Palestinian state, as Israel blamed for starving Gazans

Israel has taken a lot of blame for not feeding the people of Gaza even though they've brought in much food and aid. A major problem is that Hamas is still very active in the territory:

"Continual interference by Hamas, with soldiers embedded among the civilians seeking help, complicates the distribution of critically needed food. Worse yet, as Jed Babbin explained in the *Washington Times*, 'Food is being withheld from Gaza because the United Nations insists that Hamas participate in the distribution of it, rather than legitimate US aid groups or any independent agency. Hamas has threatened the lives of anyone who distributes food without its participation.' If Hamas is involved, it is stealing the food and selling it back to the Palestinians at exorbitant prices" (Dave Patterson, "Israel, Gaza, and the US—Is There an End Game?" Liberty Nation News, Aug. 11, 2025).

Hamas is even taking much of the food for its own operatives in well-stocked underground tunnels ("Hamas Terrorists Caught Feasting Underground on Lavish Meals While Exploiting Gaza Civilians Suffering Above," Breitbart, July 23). If Palestinians are starving here, Hamas is largely responsible.

But in fact, "dramatic evidence was produced . . . to illustrate the hijacking of the Western media by Hamas in its attempt to turn Israel into the pariah of the world and accelerate the destruction of the Jewish state. The German publications *Bild* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* revealed that Western media outlets had been publishing images purporting to be of starving Gazans but which were in fact staged and manipulated by Hamas as part of its propaganda offensive" (Melanie Phillips, "The Media Front in the



War on Civilisation," Substack, Aug. 8, 2025).

"Images of skeletal children published by *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and other media outlets were fraudulent. These children weren't skeletal because they were being starved in Gaza. They were either suffering from dreadful congenital diseases, or the pictures had been taken in Yemen. The giveaway was that adults and other children in the pictures were obviously well-fed" (Melanie Phillips, "Gaslighting Is Not a Jewish Value," Substack, Aug. 1).

One genuine horrible image of a starving, emaciated person is that of Evyatar David, an Israeli hostage still held by Hamas—a recent propaganda video showing him as a "living skeleton" digging his own grave.

"Hamas has only one bargaining chip—the hostages. Reports claim that only 20 of the 50 held by the terrorists are thought to be alive . . . Hamas will continue to try to use the hostages as leverage . . . They believe that if they hold out, world public opinion will force Israel to agree to its demands . . . Hamas wants all of the Palestinians held in prison by Israel to be released and for the IDF to withdraw

entirely from Gaza. They will then release the remaining hostages. That leaves Hamas with some level of control over Gaza. That is not going to happen" (Patterson, Aug. 11).

But world opinion has turned decidedly against Israel—and various Western leaders are issuing calls for Israel to stand down and for the creation of a Palestinian state. Israeli officials and supporters of Israel have decried these leaders as effectively rewarding and emboldening terrorists. Some of these leaders maintain that Hamas can have no part in such a state, but they can't answer who will get rid of Hamas.

And the Palestinians don't want to get rid of Hamas: "According to the latest public opinion poll from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 64% of Gazans and 85% of West Bank residents oppose disarming Hamas. A staggering 73% overall reject the idea that the war would end even if Hamas released Israeli hostages. In other words, most Palestinians appear more committed to the continuation of armed resistance than to securing an immediate ceasefire . . .

"Support for a two-state solution remains weak at just 40% overall . . . Only 12% of Gazans blame Hamas for the humanitarian crisis. The majority blames Israel or the United States . . . These findings complicate the widespread narrative that Palestinians are simply victims of Hamas rule" ("Poll: Most Palestinians Say No to Peace If It Means Weakening Hamas," Legal Insurrection, Aug. 3, 2025).

God says He will bring judgment on the nations for scattering His people of Israel and because "they have also divided up Myland" (Joel 3:2). Something to ponder.

To better understand the situation in this war-torn area, read our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

Man-made laws and regulations out of control

A major problem with human legal systems is a vast proliferation of rules that are hard to keep track of. We find this throughout the nations of the world, but we note here observations concerning the growing breadth and complexity of American law as a prime example.

In a recent book titled *Over Ruled: The Human Toll of Too Much Law*, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, writing with coauthor Janie Nitze, observes that law is multiplying in the United States, and "its demands are growing increasingly complex . . . Less than a hundred years ago, all of the federal

government's statutes fit into a single volume. By 2018, the U.S. Code encompassed 54 volumes and approximately 60,000 pages. Over the last decade, Congress has adopted an average of 344 new pieces of legislation each session" (2024, p. 14).

All these laws have created a massive burden for citizens, who collectively spend 9.78 billion hours a year completing federal paperwork, according to Gorsuch's book, "making it difficult for people to enjoy fundamental rights . . . to obtain licenses and permits, to obtain life-changing benefits, or to avoid crushing hardship." Not only that, but "just finding the

relevant law, regulation, guidance or form can pose a serious challenge . . . Anyone wanting to find the federal laws and rules that govern them must consult (at a minimum) the U.S. Code and the Code of Federal Regulations. Both sets of books are behemoths, unmanageable for any single person to read" (p. 141).

Thankfully, things will not be this way when Jesus Christ returns to set up the Kingdom of God over the nations. To learn about some of the changes He'll bring, be sure to read "7 Ways Christ's Rule Will Be So Wonderfully Different," beginning on page 10 of this issue.

Iran has remained defiant with its nuclear program

The United States and Israel dealt a devastating blow to Iran in taking out nuclear enrichment facilities on June 22, 2025 (see “Strikes on Iran: The Reality of the Moment,” beginning on page 24). Nevertheless, Iran has remained recalcitrant, saying it would continue its nuclear program.

Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reemerged in July with renewed threats against Israel (“Khamenei: ‘Israel Is a Cancerous Tumor, America’s Dog—We Can Hit Back Even Harder,’” *Ynet News*, July 16, 2025).



Iran’s leader Khamenei speaking in July 2025.

Furthermore, “in an unprecedented and chilling escalation, Iran’s theocratic regime has issued a religious decree—an official fatwa—calling for the assassination of President Donald J. Trump, marking the first time in modern history that a sovereign state has openly called for the murder of a sitting or former U.S. president” (“Iran Issues Call for Trump Assassination, Offers \$1 Million Bounty: A State-Sanctioned Threat of War,” *Harbinger’s Daily*, July 28, 2025).

As of the time of this writing in mid-August, Iran was still not permitting a delegation from the U.N.’s International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to visit any of its nuclear facilities (“Iran Refuses to Allow Inspectors Into Nuclear Facilities,” *Israel National News*, Aug. 4). There are hopes a deal can be reached in negotiations by late August, a deadline set by the United States and European allies that will have passed by the time you read this.

Writing at RealClear Energy, Ali Safavi of a Paris-based committee of Iranian resistance comments: “For over thirty years, the

Iranian regime has operated on three pillars: denial, deception, and duplicity . . . Since the early 2000s, Iran has used negotiations not to resolve tensions, but to buy time. Time to enrich uranium. Time to build secret facilities. Time to advance a nuclear weapons program under the cover of diplomacy . . . This is not speculation. It’s documented fact . . .

“The regime’s intent is survival—not peace. And nuclear capability is its insurance policy . . . Regime Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi declared, ‘We cannot give up enrichment. It’s an achievement of our scientists. And now, more than that, it is a question of national pride.’ Let’s be clear: this is not national pride. It’s regime survival—at any cost” (“Iran’s Nuclear Deception: The World Must Stop Playing Along,” Aug. 7).

Safavi and others believe only regime change by a popular uprising could change things there. For further background on the Iranian situation, search at our website for a July 10 article “Iran: How Did We Get to This Point?” And for broader understanding of the region and where things are ultimately headed, request or download our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

Bold acknowledgment of God at the U.S. Capitol

On the eve of the July 4, 2025 celebration of America’s founding, some remarkable comments were offered on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives by House Speaker Mike Johnson after the passage of some major legislation. He said this:

“As friends and colleagues . . . let’s put the politics aside for a minute, and let’s reflect on our blessings—no kidding, really. Tomorrow is the 249th birthday of our nation . . . We are so blessed. We should not take it for granted . . . We live in the most free, the most successful, the most powerful, the most benevolent nation that has ever been on the face of the earth. And there’s a reason for that.

“The reason we are the greatest nation is because we are built on the ultimate foundation . . . We unite under that—the bold declaration that we do ‘hold these truths to be self-evident . . . that all men are created equal.’ It does not say, ‘born equal.’ It says, ‘created equal.’ And . . . it is our Creator that gives us our rights.

“See, the powerful thing about that is, we’re the first nation in the history of the world that acknowledged that our rights do not derive from government. They come from God Himself.” At this

there was great applause. Then pointing to the focal point of the chamber he continued:

“You see . . . those words up there, that motto, it says, ‘In God we trust,’ right above the Speaker’s Rostrum. You know, a previous Congress put that there in the early 60s in the height of the Cold War. There’s a little visitor’s guide that . . . explains why that’s there. And it says Congress voted to put that there as a rebuke to the Soviets’ worldview at the height of the Cold War. Why? Because communism, socialism find their root in Marxism. And Marxism begins with the belief that there is no God. It’s wrong. And this Congress made a stand those many years ago, and we should do it again: We’re different, we’re distinct, we’re exceptional because we acknowledge that right there, our motto.”

Following further applause he went on: “It doesn’t say, ‘In government we trust.’ It says, ‘In God we trust.’ And we better remember that.”

Some would mock such sentiments as empty pretense—and perhaps it is for some. But there is a world of difference between publicly acknowledging God with a semblance of following Him and just speaking and acting as if there is no God or as if God is irrelevant. A vital principle for any nation

to remember is God’s declaration in 1 Samuel 2:30: “Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.”

God has indeed blessed the United States—even far beyond what people generally understand. To discover the amazing roots of this story and where things will proceed, request or download our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Sadly, failure to live up to the national motto of trusting in God will ultimately lead to some terrible times. Yet God remains merciful, and will ultimately intervene.

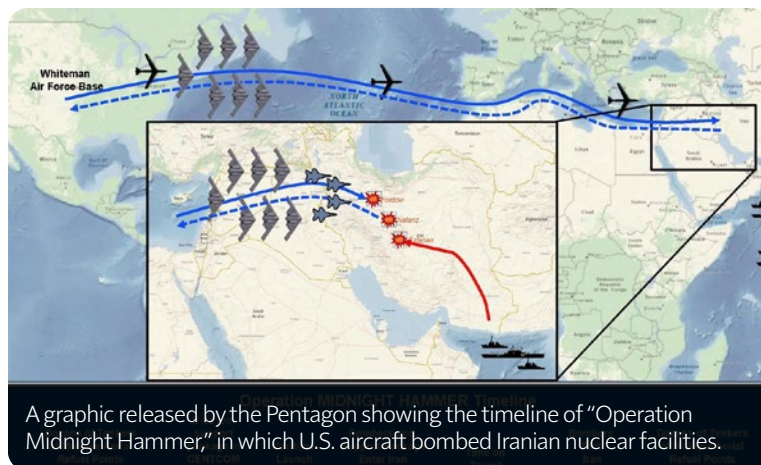


Strikes on Iran

> *The Reality of the Moment*

The United States and Israeli action to take out Iran's nuclear program demonstrated that America's preeminence in the world continues despite challengers. What's ultimately behind that preeminence—and the desire of others to destroy these nations?

by Darris McNeely



The American bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities on June 22, 2025 is perhaps the most significant military action mounted since the D-Day invasion of France in June 1944. B-2 Spirit stealth bombers flew from America to Iran, dropped bunker buster bombs on key targets and returned with no loss of personnel or planes. No other current world power can mount such an attack, this one setting back a clear and present danger to Israel and the United States—and world security.

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979 the Islamic regime has consistently proclaimed "death to America," calling it "the great Satan." Leader after leader has clearly stated the aim to push the Jewish state of Israel off its land and into the sea. Iran developed long-range missiles to deliver nuclear payloads to far targets. Iran and its proxies abroad have shouted the most public, virulent statements of antisemitism since the Nazi Holocaust.

The aim of such attack is theologically based in the belief among Iran's theocratic leadership that global conflagration will trigger the appearance of the mysterious hidden 12th imam of Shiite Muslim tradition as the Mahdi,

who will unite Muslims and impose Islamic order on the entire world. No treaty or agreement on nuclear development will stop Iran's ruling clerics from this mission. Clear-eyed observers understand the grave threat Iran poses to world peace and order.

Iran is linked with Russia and China in seeking to replace America's position as the top world power. Some observers have referred to the last few years of world conflict as "World War III." It's certainly a period of major consequences. America's position is being tested. For the moment its power holds. Are we viewing a resurgence of the Pax Americana, or is U.S. preeminence over? Such matters should draw our attention.

Russia's threat

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war have tested Europe and America's commitment to the NATO pact. President Donald Trump, critical of European nations relying on America's power to keep the peace, has pushed them to increase defense spending, which they are slowly beginning to do. At current rates they are years away from standing on their own. Russia's threat is a wake-up call.

America will not abandon Europe in this battle. Too much is at stake.

Russia's efforts to become the preeminent world power will fail, as it runs counter to what God reveals in Bible prophecy. But the push to rearm Europe could well have unintended consequences in line with end-time Bible prophecy. It shows that a revived Roman Empire will remarkably emerge as the dominant power: "And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'" (Revelation 13:3-4).

Europe is not there yet. But history has a way of speeding up when God's timing is involved.

Where's China?

China is the other part of the current equation. It has been cautiously eyeing the outcome of the Middle East and European conflicts. Are China's interests not fully aligned with their so-called partners? Are they waiting for their moment to strike and test America's will and commitment? China has the world's largest military, and its

threat to take Taiwan and assert control over the Pacific region is well known. China is America's biggest rival in virtually every category of power.

China has its own internal challenges, even as it asserts itself militarily. Some feel the communist hold on the people is always tenuous, tied to economic performance. The tense battle of tariffs with Washington could trigger domestic problems that divert its attention from world conquest. China, despite its size and long history, has never gained global preeminence. Its language, religion and culture have not shaped the modern world in the wake of influencing whole periods of history. Its Great Wall, built to keep out its enemies, is a symbol of a closeted culture.

China will be among those peoples the Bible foretells will come against the unwallled cities of Israel (as explained in our free study guide *Russia and Bible Prophecy*). But for now it looms as a giant power, uncertain how to act with its chosen allies.

Understanding events through a biblical lens

The world is being reshaped through large and dramatic actions by the United States and the state of Israel. The Middle East has been reset for the time being. World leaders are recalibrating their approach to America. The world has been made safer by this action. Of course, danger remains for these two nations—especially on their domestic fronts. But no one else can do what they have recently done to reshape an entire region.

How should we understand this moment? How does it fit with what the Bible tells us about prophecy and the course of great powers? Such defining events transcend politics and personalities. They are connected to biblical markers given by God to guide us to faith in Him as the sovereign God of nations who guides history to His purpose.

We have been watching the themes of the prophetic book of Daniel take shape in a modern setting. God here

touches on the Israelites in national captivity. The Babylonian captivity of Daniel's time was the result of great national sins. The people of Judah, the last remaining Israelites in the Promised Land at that time, were enslaved.

God reveals in Scripture what's behind the ages-long violence against the people He has called into covenant with Him. The descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob are targeted for attack by Satan and the world powers he uses to counter the purpose of God.

Daniel 11 is a minutely detailed prophecy laying out not only events in the ancient world—the struggle between the Greek-ruled Syrian and Egyptian kingdoms known as the king of the North and king of the South—but also the spiritual hatred toward the people God chose to bear a promise based on a covenant made with Abraham and his descendants through Jacob. These powers sought to harm and destroy the remnant Jewish state in the land (verses 27-28), as their successors will later do.

One king, Antiochus Epiphanes, rose in fury to defile the Jerusalem temple with what Scripture calls an “abomination of desolation” (verse 31). History shows this involved pagan defilement and the sacrifice of pigs, unclean animals forbidden in God's sacrificial system, on the holy altar. This wicked ruler raged against the “holy covenant” (verse 30). This was all predecessor to a future abomination of desolation leading into the Great Tribulation of the last days (Matthew 24:15, 21-22).

A key takeaway from this is the enduring hostility toward the people given the covenant of God. Satan knows where and how God works among the nations. He hates that work. When today we see a major power like

Iran arise and for more than four decades scream “death to America and the Jews,” we should ask just exactly what that means. What's behind it, and why do we see such hatred and animosity against these peoples?

The answer is that both America and the state of Israel are visible evidence of the promises of the God of the Bible and His faithfulness through the ages. These nations in the modern world are signs of God's enduring faithfulness. There are signs telling us God will give to all nations the ultimate promise of spiritual salvation through Jesus Christ. That truth is, and always has been, hated among nations, and we see it being acted out in world events today.

God chose a man named Abraham to become the father of many nations, by which God's eternal purpose would be carried among the nations through time. His grandson Jacob was given the name Israel, meaning “prevailer with God.” This name, which passed to his descendants as the nation of Israel, will persist ultimately in the truth that man will prevail with God and live with Him forever in a city with gates named after the tribes of Israel (Revelation 21:10-12, 22-27).

Israel is a name that tells the story of God and His purpose.

We see in the calls of “death to America” and “death to the Jews” the ancient hatred for God and His rule over man. We are seeing a spiritual battle of the ages before our eyes. For a moment, at this time, the powers of Israel have asserted their will against this hatred.

Is this part of God's providential design? We should not dismiss this lightly. We should not relegate it to the realm of “politics” and discount it as having no part in the gospel of God. It matters, and we need to keep it in focus! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



The role of Israel in world history and the years ahead of us is important to understand.

It concerns the Jewish people and the modern state of Israel. But it also includes the English-speaking nations. Be sure to request or download our informative study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* for details. And to better understand the situation in the Middle East and what's coming, also obtain *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. Both are available free. **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so25 to find them.**





Waiting on the Lord

Are you frustrated that God has not yet resolved the problems in your life and the world around you? We all need to persist in seeking, obeying and trusting Him.

by Robin Webber

An old saying goes, “A watched pot never boils.” It can seem that way if we just stare and wait.

This serves as a metaphor for greater life issues in which we wait patiently until our patience wears out and we walk away. We are done! Perhaps in so doing, even turning our backs on God.

Here’s another parallel concerning our spiritual journey with Jesus Christ as our guide. A young boy asked God, “What is 1,000 years like to you?” God replied, “It’s like a second in time.” The youth then asked, “What is 1,000 dollars like to you?” God patiently replied, “My son, it’s but like a penny.” The child thought he had put 2+2 together and went for the big question: “God, can I have one of your pennies?” God knowingly replied, “Absolutely, My son, but you will have to wait a second.”

This cute but poignant analogy helps in understanding what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ as we take up His invitation of “*Follow Me*” (Matthew 4:19; John 21:22). It illustrates the reality that our thoughts and ways are far different from our Creator’s (Isaiah 55:8-9). He operates in a totally different sphere from us yet knows the sparrow that

falls to the ground—and still focuses so much more on those being molded in His image (Matthew 10:29-31).

A major undergirding of that spiritual development is coming to recognize and embrace that “*waiting on the Lord*” is not an elective but a main course in maturing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This patient waiting is a spiritual exercise directly opposed to a world that wants everything right now. And it may be the greatest witness to others of our faithful surrender to our Master as we flex the spiritual muscle of patience beyond the moment that can seem unending.

“I will come to you”

Before going further, let’s note a twofold, rock-solid promise from Jesus to enable us to exercise the muscle of patience. It was made not only to His disciples on the night of His betrayal but for us today. John 14:18: “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” Immediately? No! It would take time, obedience and patience to personally grasp.

Jesus’ friends who would abandon Him that night had no glimmer of what would take place over the days and

weeks to come. Imagine—His terrible death and then a resurrection, meeting them by appearing suddenly in a locked room and later seeing Him ascend to heaven—much less experiencing the unfathomable reality of having Him come to literally dwell within them as a “Helper” through the Holy Spirit (see John 14:26; 2 Corinthians 13:5). I would suggest they were humanly counting “seconds” rather than grasping what God’s perfection had in store.

This was further manifested just prior to Jesus’ ascension. The disciples were eager to hear that the restoration of the kingdom of Israel was imminent. The risen Christ replied, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7). That is: *Forget your personal time device. Get ready for “God’s seconds.”* For now, they needed to “tarry [or wait] in . . . Jerusalem until . . . endued with power from on high”—or, as He told them here, “to wait for the Promise of the Father,” the gift of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). Imagine their inner angst about remaining in this dangerous place and world without Christ’s bodily presence among them.

Yet they pressed past any reservations and did as Jesus told them. Acts 1:12-13 places them in Jerusalem waiting in the upper room—praying together. No longer running for their lives as they had done weeks before in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had stated, “You shall be witnesses to Me,” starting here in Jerusalem (verse 8). Their witness was not only a spoken message but a *lived*

in the right way, His way, and never be late. That ultimately, in “God’s seconds,” includes the period of waiting for the future coming of the Kingdom—with many of God’s faithful followers in the grave until then.

Isaiah 30:18 reveals: “Therefore the LORD will wait [He is waiting too!], that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may

How might we define diligently seeking after God and His ways while waiting on Him? It means spending time in His Word in serious heartfelt thirst *for direction for our lives* from Above, and not staring alone in futility at life’s heating pots that never come to a simmer. It means earnestly seeking Him in prayer to hear a voice other than our own. It requires “calling time out” to examine and evaluate our priorities, values, motives and attitudes in life. Are they or are they not in alignment with God? Now that is worth your precious time to stare at while asking God to light His fire within you!

3. Waiting involves surrendering to God and committing ourselves with patient but vibrant expectancy regarding His timing. Again, think of the disciples in Jerusalem.

Let’s conclude for now by contemplating the opening of Psalm 40—wisdom shared by an ancestor of the One who bids us, “Follow Me”:

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD” (verses 1-3).

David by *waiting on God* was delivered. As the *Life Application Study Bible* notes on these verses, God lifted him from despair, placed him on solid ground, steadied him so as to move forward and inspired him with a new song of praise. Imagine: A new way (“new song”) of moving beyond the frustrations of the moment—no longer bitter but better—as we embrace the process of waiting on a God who, after all, is waiting for us.

I appreciate you taking a *moment of your time* to consider embracing “God’s seconds.” **BT**

Remember that there is nothing passive about waiting on God. Waiting and seeking Him go heart in hand. Note Proverbs 8:17: “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me.”

one in their practice of *waiting on the Lord* without looking to their self-made time devices. Rather than walking away from God, they stood fast!

The book of Acts presents them as faithful and expectant while patiently obedient in waiting on the Lord’s promises. Clearly, obedience and faith in “God’s seconds” would be the pathway to usefulness to our Master in gathering people, then and now, that would ultimately turn “*the world upside down*” (Acts 17:6). Yet they first needed to submit to God’s guidance towards turning *themselves* upside down and inside out before witnessing to others. Bottom line from the start: God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

Keys towards embracing God’s timing

So allow me to offer three keys to stop anxiously watching for life’s pots to boil and to instead focus our attention upward to “the Master of the seconds of eternity.”

1. Waiting involves knowing, trusting in and committing to a loving God who will answer at the right time and

have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him.”

Jeremiah 29:11-13 further defines God’s active graciousness: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”

2. Waiting involves committing yourself to actively seeking God. For every cause, there is an effect, and God does not operate in a vacuum (while Satan and self-will do).

Remember that there is nothing passive about waiting on God. Waiting and seeking Him go heart in hand. Note Proverbs 8:17, where the personification of godly wisdom declares, “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me.”

DIVE DEEPER



Our important task of waiting for God is a matter of living our lives with complete trust in His promises and that He knows best how to work everything out in the world and in our own lives. To learn more, request or download our free study guide *You Can Have Living Faith*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/s025 to find it.





DON'T LIKE CONFLICT? MASTER DISAGREEMENT!

by David Cobb

M

ost of us prefer to avoid thinking about it, but the reality is unavoidable—life is *full* of conflict. Regardless of your personality or circumstances, relationships present endless opportunities for every imaginable type of disagreement. Relationship disharmony can manifest in many ways, including misunderstandings, hurt feelings and unfulfilled hopes or expectations.

These early manifestations of conflict can result in a few different outcomes. Ideally, they are recognized, proactively addressed and resolved. Sadly, this is often not the case, and the conflict deepens over time with words and actions that are directly or passively aggressive. Eventually, unresolved conflict leads either to toxic and unhealthy interactions or to a separation that ends the relationship. In either case, broken relationships bring tremendous difficulty and pain, both physically and emotionally.

Before we examine a critical key to mitigating life's constant conflicts, let's understand where it comes from. Why do we have so much trouble getting along?

BOMBARDED FROM OUTSIDE AND WITHIN

The Bible reveals that Satan is our adversary (1 Peter 5:8). He has chosen to be an opponent and enemy of both God and mankind. As human beings created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), we are the targets of Satan's constant attacks and accusations (Revelation 12:9-10). These antagonistic moods,

attitudes and emotions are broadcast throughout the physical and spiritual atmosphere that we live within (Ephesians 2:1-2). That's right—conflict pervades the very air around us!

Based on those factors alone, it's little wonder that we struggle to live in harmony with one another. Unfortunately, those aren't the only factors. In addition to Satan continually pushing us toward conflict from the outside, our own human nature pushes us toward it from within. We are inherently self-focused, and pursuing our own desires continually places us at odds with the other people around us who are busy pursuing theirs.

What happens when the external and internal forces pushing us toward conflict combine? The result is the world that we live in now—a world saturated with *perpetual strife*. Does ongoing conflict solve the problems we experience? No, not really. As the folk rock band the Avett Brothers describe it in their song "I and Love and You": "When at first I learned to speak, I used all my words to fight, with him and her and you and me . . . ah, but it's just a waste of time . . ."

That's the bad news, but there's plenty of counteracting good news too! Like so many aspects of this life that are difficult, God's way of life provides hopeful alternatives. We gain many benefits from pursuing them in this life. Beyond that, we have the promise of an ultimate life transformation in God's Kingdom to come! Let's review some principles from God's way of life that can help with avoiding conflict—especially through properly handling disagreement.

SOCIETY AROUND US IS FILLED WITH CONFLICT AT EVERY LEVEL. WE CAN REDUCE THE LEVEL OF CONFLICT IN OUR OWN LIVES BY MANAGING THE INEVITABLE DISAGREEMENTS IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH CIVILITY AND GRACE.



THE ANSWER IS IN THE MIRROR

There is a key lesson concerning conflict that we must all internalize. Our natural reaction is often to try to change or control something about the people we disagree with. The truth is that we can only change and exercise control over *ourselves*.

The last half of Romans 12 contains some of the Bible's clearest teaching on what it means to think and behave as a Christian. It includes this profound instruction on how to approach conflict in relationships: "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, *so far as it depends on you*, live peaceably with all" (verses 17-18, English Standard Version, emphasis added throughout).

When avoiding or addressing conflict, our focus must be on the things that we can personally change and grow in—not on the things that we think others need to change.

There is one area of relationship management with positive impact that is regrettably very underused in our society.

CIVIL DISAGREEMENT

Reaching agreement with others is a noble and worthwhile goal. However, it isn't always possible. There are many benefits to gain from learning to disagree without being disagreeable! Most people have a wide range of relationships in life. These include a broad spectrum of differences in personality, preferences, values and life choices. An average person will disagree about many things with many of the people in his or her life.

Disagreeing about things is a normal aspect of all relationships. In healthy relationships, working through disagreement strengthens the relational bonds between individuals. Even in more difficult relationships, disagreement can be properly managed. Careful and care-filled communication is a major element of not letting disagreement escalate to conflict.

The Bible records a critical and timeless key for communicating in this way: "Let your speech *always be gracious*, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (Colossians 4:6, ESV). This passage tells us to make every effort to extend the benefit of gracious communication to others, regardless of whether they deserve it or not! This is especially true when we disagree with someone.

There are many ways to put this into practice. When a topic of disagreement arises, start by asking questions about the other's thoughts or feelings to better understand what the person is saying—and just as importantly, what he or she is *not* saying. Try to wait to be asked what your views are before stating them. If you're not asked about your thoughts, it may be best to just remain quiet on that subject (Proverbs 11:12; 17:28; 29:9).

When someone does ask about your views, respond with the simplest answer that is truthful and kind. Wait to see if additional questions come. If the person is interested in hearing more, the questions will provide context that helps with determining how to best respond. Or, in some cases, whether

to not respond and change the subject or excuse yourself from the conversation.

If conditions seem right for an open conversation, state your beliefs and the reasons for them honestly and clearly. Try to ask questions about why the person believes or acts the way he or she does, and ask for more explanation when something isn't clear. Listen to the answers, and ask God to help you respond in a way that avoids confrontation and provides the best outcome.

The old saying "calm is contagious" is true! Use a gentle and respectful tone of voice. Identify areas of common ground and use them as reference points in your responses when possible. Look for opportunities to share kind or encouraging words.

These things are simple to say, but hard to do. When we put in the effort to practice them, especially with God's help, they will become habits that result in immeasurable blessings!

It's good to be realistic in our expectations and acknowledge that these habits won't avoid all disagreements. But with God's blessing, they can mitigate many levels of conflict and enable healthy and functional relationships between people who are very different from one another.

Society around us is and will continue to be filled with conflict at every level. We can reduce the level of conflict in our own lives by managing the inevitable disagreements in our relationships with civility and grace. To the extent that we do, we can fulfill this inspirational admonition in Philippians 2:14-15 (New American Standard Bible): "Do all things *without complaining or arguments*, so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, *among whom you appear as lights in the world.*" **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



Having the right attitude and approach is vital to success in our relationships with others. For more principles and practical guidance in successful living, request or download our free study guide *Making Life Work*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so25 to find it.



Q: Didn't the apostle Paul present the weekly Sabbath and Old Testament Holy Days as done away for Christians? Shouldn't we embrace new Christian holidays instead?

A: Many of Paul's writings have been misunderstood, as was the case even in his own day. The apostle Peter stated that in Paul's epistles "are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16). So we should delve into what Paul wrote very carefully, making sure we understand the context and the general record of his life and practice.

Before his conversion, Paul had been a strict adherent of the Jewish sect of the Pharisees (Acts 22:3). Following the dramatic events on the road to Damascus, Paul became a true Christian. Contrary to what many have believed, he continued to observe the biblical festival days the Jewish people observed.

As a Christian apostle, he taught regularly on the weekly Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset), as was his custom (Acts 17:2). When asked by gentiles to teach again the next Sabbath, he did not tell them that they should just meet the next day on Sunday—He returned to teach the next Sabbath (Acts 13:42-44).

While some of Paul's contemporaries accused him of teaching fellow Jews to "forsake Moses," Paul repeatedly refuted this contention (Acts 21:20-21; 24:14; 28:17). Perhaps his commitment toward the biblical festivals could best be summed up by Acts 18:21: "*I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem*" (emphasis added throughout).

In addition, Acts 20:16 mentions Paul's determination to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost. He had intended to be there for the biblical Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, but circumstances required him to observe them en route in the Greek city of Philippi (verses 1-6)—leaving him even more determined to be in Jerusalem for the next festival.

Paul wrote his epistle 1 Corinthians to the predominately gentile church congregation in the Greek city of Corinth during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Many scholars acknowledge this timing based on the letter's internal evidence, especially chapter 5, where Paul uses the analogy of leaven to make important spiritual points about sin.

Analogies and metaphors are effective only if the audience is familiar with the illustration. Paul's mention of leaven without explanation clearly implies the congregation understood the process of putting out leavening during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, an annual biblical festival.

In their classic work *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson conclude: "There seems no difficulty in supposing that the Gentile Christians joined with the Jewish Christians in celebrating the Paschal [Passover] feast after the Jewish manner, at least to the extent of abstaining from leaven at the love feasts. And we see that Paul still observed the 'days of unleavened bread' at this period of his life" (1974, p. 390).

Paul also gives a command regarding the mindset we should have in observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread: "Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8). In the construction of the original Greek here, the verb translated "let us keep the feast" is used "to urge someone to unite with the speaker in a course of action upon which he has already decided" (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 1997, p. 464).

What about the other festivals listed in Leviticus 23? Did Paul observe only those specifically reaffirmed in the New Testament? A similar line of reasoning asserts that only those Old Testament commandments repeated in the New Testament are still valid. This careless assumption is based on an argument from silence. Do widely known and practiced truths need to be repeated? The Hebrew scholar David Stern asserts that in most cases "the New Testament does

not repeat truths already evident from the Tanakh [the Old Testament]; it assumes them. Sha'ul [or Saul, that is, Paul] assumed them, too" (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 1992, p. 303).

In fact, Jesus Christ Himself observed the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2, 10, 14, 37). Would we not expect the same of Paul? The feast Paul wanted to attend in Acts 18:21 may well have been the Feast of Tabernacles. We also see reference to "the Fast" in Acts 27:9, commonly understood to mean the Day of Atonement, which implies that Paul and other Christians were still observing this Holy Day with fasting.

In Colossians 2:16-17 Paul upholds the biblical festivals as "a shadow of things to come." Yet in Galatians 4:10 he condemns pagan, astrological superstitions, which are also condemned in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 18:10-14). Supposed Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter were not observed by Paul or other Christians of apostolic times but were later adoptions from pagan religion.

The evidence of the scriptural record leaves two basic questions for those who consider the Bible's Holy Days obsolete: 1) Why would Paul teach against observing the festivals God gave in the Old Testament when he himself devotedly kept them? 2) Where does the Bible tell us to discard them?

Today people seldom question how biblical injunctions have been replaced with customs from other religions. Long ago, God inspired Moses to command the nation of Israel not to adopt the religious customs of other nations in their worship of God (Deuteronomy 12:29-32). Jesus similarly warned that it's possible to worship God in vain by following humanly devised traditions (Matthew 15:9). The clear record of Scripture is that Paul and the apostolic Church continued to observe the festivals of the Bible—and so should we. **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



For a broader look at this subject, with various counter-arguments addressed, please request or download our free study guides *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* and *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so25 to find them.



Watch BEYOND TODAY

on streaming and broadcast

STREAMING PLATFORMS



Stream *Beyond Today* content with our streaming box apps and on YouTube @beyondtodaytv



BROADCAST CHANNELS

Nationwide, U.S.A. — THE WORD Network

Sunday 3 p.m. ET, 2 p.m. CT, 1 p.m. MT, 12 p.m. PT and

Sunday 6 p.m. ET, 5 p.m. CT, 4 p.m. MT, 3 p.m. PT and

Wednesday 2 a.m. ET, 1 a.m. CT, 12 a.m. MT, Tuesday 11 p.m. PT. and

Saturday 9 a.m. ET, 8 a.m. CT, 7 a.m. MT, 6 a.m. PT and

Saturday 11:30 p.m. ET, 10:30 p.m. CT, 9:30 p.m. MT, 8:30 p.m. PT

Regional Cable & Broadcast TV — U.S.A.

California

Petaluma - *Channel 26*—Sun.-Sat., 6 & 6:30 a.m.;

Mon.-Fri. 11 & 11:30 p.m.

San Diego - *Channels 18, 19 & 23*—Mon., 5 p.m.

San Francisco - *Channel 29*—Sun., 6:30 p.m.

Michigan

Detroit WADL - *Channel My38*—Sun., 12 p.m.

Ohio

Toledo - *Channel 69*—Sun., 6 p.m.

Oregon

Milwaukee - *Channel 23*—Sun., 6 a.m.; Mon., 11:30 p.m.;

Wed., 4:30 p.m.; Thurs., 7 a.m.; Fri., 5:30 a.m.;

Sat., 8:30 a.m. & 4:30 p.m.

Oregon City - *Channel 23*—Sun., 2:30 p.m.; Thurs., 10:30 a.m.

& 2:30 p.m.; Fri., 4:30 a.m.; Sat., 3 a.m. & 4 a.m.

Gresham/East Portland - *Channel 22/23*—Sun., 7:30 p.m.

Virginia

Fairfax - *Channel 36*—Mon., 5:30 p.m.; Fri., 1 a.m.; Sat. 10 a.m.

Washington

Everett - *Channel 77*—Wed., 5 p.m.

Europe

Faith World Television on SKY TV channel 588—

Sat., 12:30 p.m. & 17:00 GMT; Sun., 06:30 & 11:00 GMT.

Canada

Vision TV—Sun. 6 p.m. ET & Sat. 5 a.m. ET

Faith TV—Sun. 1 p.m. ET

Australia

9Gem Network—Sun., 8 a.m.

New Zealand

Sky Open—Sun., 8:30 a.m. (simulcast on Sky satellite platform)

Zambia

Chipata - 90.0 Feel Free Radio FM—Sun., 06:30

Mufulira, Mafken Radio 97.7 FM—Sat., 18:15

Solwezi, FCC Radio 89.7 FM—Mon., 20:30

UNITED CHURCH of GOD

an International Association

To request a free subscription, or to request the free study guides offered in this issue, visit beyondtoday.org or contact the office nearest you from the list below

NORTH, SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

United States: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

Phone: (513) 576-9796 | Fax (513) 576-9795 | Website: beyondtoday.org | info@ucg.org

Canada: United Church of God—Canada, Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada

Phone: (905) 614-1234, (800) 338-7779 | Fax: (905) 614-1749 | Website: ucg.ca

Caribbean islands: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

Phone: (513) 576-9796 | Fax (513) 576-9795 | Website: beyondtoday.org | info@ucg.org

Spanish-speaking areas: Iglesia de Dios Unida, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A.

Phone: (513) 576-9796 | Fax (513) 576-9795 | Website: ucg.org/espanol | info@ucg.org

EUROPE

Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg: P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, Netherlands

British Isles: United Church of God, P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts, WD19 6FZ, England

Phone: 020-8386-8467 | Fax: 020-8386-1999 | Website: goodnews.org.uk

Eastern Europe and Baltic states: Head Sõnunid, Pk. 62, 50002 Tartu Postkontor, Estonia

France: Église de Dieu Unie—France, 24 avenue Descartes, 33160 Saint-Médard-en-Jalles, France

Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten, Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany

Phone: 0228-9454636 | Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy: Via Federico Faruffini, 20 – 20149 Milan (MI)—ITALY | Website: ucgitaly.org | info@ucgitaly.org

Scandinavia: Guds Enade Kyrka, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027 | norden@ucg.org

AFRICA

Cameroon: United Church of God Cameroon, BP 10322 Bessengue, Douala, Cameroon

East Africa, Madagascar and Mauritius: United Church of God—East Africa

P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi | 00200, Kenya | kenya@ucg.org | Website: ucgeastafrica.org

Ghana: P.O. Box AF 75, Adenta, Accra, Ghana | ghana@ucg.org

Malawi: P.O. Box 32257, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi | Phone: +265 (0) 999 823 523 |

malawi@ucg.org

Nigeria: United Church of God—Nigeria, P.O. Box 2265 Somolu, Lagos, Nigeria |

Phone: 8033233193 | Website: ucgnigeria.org | nigeria@ucg.org

South Africa: United Church of God—Southern Africa | Postnetnet Suite#28, Private Bag X025,

Lynwood Ridge, 0040, South Africa | Phone: +27 (0) 797259453 | Fax: +27 (0) 865727437

Website: south-africa.ucg.org | UnitedChurchofGod.SA@gmail.com

Zambia: P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia Phone: (0026)0966925840 | zambia@ucg.org

Zimbabwe: United Church of God—Zimbabwe, c/o M. Chichaya, No 15 Mukwa Street, Eiffel Flats,

Kadoma, Zimbabwe | Phone: +263 772 922 362 | zimbabwe@ucg.org

PACIFIC REGION

Australia and all other South Pacific regions not listed: United Church of God—Australia

GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia | Free call: 1800 356 202 | Phone: 07 5630 3774

Fax: 07 55 202 122 | Website: ucg.org.au | info@ucg.org.au

New Zealand: United Church of God, P.O. Box 10468, Te Rapa, Hamilton 3241, New Zealand

Phone: Toll-free 0508-463-763 | Website: ucg.org.nz | info@ucg.org.nz

Tonga: United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 518, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

ASIA

All except Philippines and Singapore: United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH

45254-1027, U.S.A. | Phone: (513) 576-9796 | Fax (513) 576-9795 | info@ucg.org

Philippines: P.O. Box 1474, MCPO, 1254 Makati City, Philippines | Cell/text: +63 918-904-4444

Website: ucg.org.ph | info@ucg.org.ph

Singapore: United Church of God, GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia

Website: ucg-singapore.org | info@ucg.org.au

ALL AREAS AND NATIONS NOT LISTED

United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

Phone: (513) 576-9796 | Fax (513) 576-9795 | Website: beyondtoday.org | info@ucg.org

Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 40026236.

Canada return address: *Beyond Today*, 2835 Kew Drive, Windsor, ON N8T 3B7.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to: *Beyond Today*, Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

Watch Beyond Today



On cable: THE WORD Network, **Sunday** 3 p.m. ET & 6 p.m. ET
Wednesday 2 a.m. ET | **Saturday** 9:00 a.m. ET & 11:30 p.m. ET

The Word Network is available in over 200 countries, reaching viewers in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas. It reaches homes in the U.S. through DirecTV, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, Bright House Networks, Cox, Cablevision, Charter and other cable operators—and homes on Sky TV in the U.K.

Streaming: Our app on Roku, AppleTV, FireTV, Samsung SmartTV, or on YouTube @BeyondTodayTV.

Printed in the U.S.A.
Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 40026236

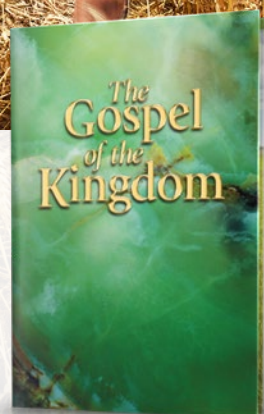
The Good News? Heaven Is Coming Here, *to Earth.*



From left: U.S. Department of Energy and Department of Defense;
cscsfeine/iStockphoto/Thinkstock

Suffering, disease, war and famine will end when
God brings heaven to earth. Now that's good news.
Learn all about it with our **FREE** Bible study guide,

The Gospel of the Kingdom. ►



Scan the code to request or download your copy
Or visit UCG.org/so25

No Internet access?

Contact any of our offices listed on page 31.

EMAIL NEWSLETTER:

Go to ucg.org/btupdate to sign up for the latest from the publishers
of *Beyond Today*, straight to your email inbox.