

# BEYOND TODAY

*Envisioning a Better World Tomorrow*



## THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH

13

The Biblical Alternative  
to Easter

20

Review of Charlie Kirk's book  
*Stop, in the Name of God*

Drop the Act  
*Eliminating Hypocrisy*

16

Eternal Hellfire  
*The Question That  
Will Not Die*

24

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March-April 2026

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# CONTENTS

March–April 2026

## Cover article ▾

### The Ultimate Triumph

The terrible suffering and death of Jesus Christ was not a loss and defeat for Him and God the Father. It was the ultimate victory! The biblical authors draw some comparison with the Roman imperial triumph of that era—turning worldly pomp and vainglory on its head.

by Tom Robinson



## Articles & Columns ▾

4–5

### Comments From Our Readers & Editorial

13

### The Biblical Alternative to Easter

Are you letting religious traditions get in the way of a real, authentic relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ? There's an answer to this problem, and it lies in the biblical festivals observed and taught by Jesus Himself.

by Gary Petty

16

### Drop the Act *Eliminating Hypocrisy*

Putting on a false face may gain some points with other people for a time. But we all stand on a larger stage before the God who hates lies—who calls us to a life of authenticity.

by Don Hooser

20

### Stop, in the Name of God *A Review*

Charlie Kirk's best-selling book has much to commend it, bringing deep personal focus on the needed blessings of honoring the Sabbath. Yet it is sadly flawed, veering in vital respects from the Bible. Still, it's good to see widespread attention directed to God's sorely neglected commandment.

by Tom Robinson

23

### Current Events & Trends

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

24

### Eternal Hellfire *The Question That Will Not Die*

A shift of some among the evangelical Christian community away from the traditional view of hell to belief in the total destruction of the wicked is causing a stir. What does the Bible actually teach?

by Ken Loucks

27

### Have You Ever Prayed a Michtam?

Six of the Psalms bear this label. What is special about them? And how do they fit with our circumstances today?

by Rex Sexton

28 Follow Me . . .

### “I Know That My Redeemer Liveth”

Far more than a musical refrain, these words from Handel's *Messiah* assure us of God's abiding care and rescue through His Son, helping us to endure suffering and death with hope and faith for the future.

by Robin Webber

30 Questions & Answers

Should Christians partake of the bread and wine of communion any time they want to? What did early New Testament believers do, and why?

31 How to watch  
*Beyond Today*

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### *The Rise of AI: Is There Hope for Mankind?*

Our November–December 2025 issue explored how artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping life, work and belief—offering both promise and peril—and calls us to discernment, highlighting true hope in Christ’s return amid a troubled world.

#### Currency of content

Peace be with you. Your magazines have been covering excellent and very up-to-date topics. Thank you for the content, which has cleared up many doubts and been very enlightening.

*Reader in Portugal*

#### Response to Q&A about heaven and hell

In regard to your Questions & Answers page in the November–December issue about what happens when we die, I was disturbed by your answer. I have always believed that upon death my soul would rise and be received in heaven.

Evidently, I am wrong, and I do appreciate the clarification of what happens upon death. Yet I have to admit a newfound fear of dying. I have tried to live a good, Christian life in hopes of an everlasting reward. To know that I *may be* rewarded someday after my death—but only “may be”—is now distressing to me, and am now more afraid of death than ever before.

*Reader in Florida*

*An everlasting reward still awaits us! The Bible offers a very real hope of eternal life that will be offered to all people. There is no need to fear death. It is only temporary and will be followed by a resurrection to eternal life for those who choose to accept Jesus Christ and live God’s way!*

*The fact that we sleep in death until the time of the resurrection should not frighten us. When we go to sleep each night, we fully expect to wake up the next morning. And while we sleep, we are unaware of the passing hours. The same holds true for death. When Christ awakens us from death, it will seem to us as if no time has passed.*

*Rest assured that if we are willing to take the necessary steps, God promises to grant us immortality. Jesus tells us, “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to*

*give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). We cover this subject and related scriptures in our free study guide, *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, which you can find at [ucg.org/ma26](http://ucg.org/ma26). We hope this is a helpful resource to assuage your fears.*

#### Readers thankful for video studies and magazine

I just wanted to drop a note and say how much I have been enjoying the video studies, including the Ambassador Bible College courses. They are a part of my morning study every day, and I have learned so much. I look forward to getting out of bed each day with my cup of coffee, Bible and UCG. Again thank you so much for the knowledge, background and resources you give. It makes the Bible come alive to me so much more. I also enjoy listening to your radio station. With love and prayers for your continued work.

*From the Internet*

*We’re glad you’re finding the video Bible study courses helpful. We have so far produced three courses: the *Book of Acts*, the *Epistles of Paul* and *World News & Prophecy*, covering current events and history through the lens of *Daniel* and *Revelation*. More courses are in the works, and all of them can be found through links at [ucg.org/ma26](http://ucg.org/ma26).*

Thank you all so very much for always sending me my *Beyond Today* magazines and for anything else I may request. I have enclosed a donation to help you with your printing costs. My sincere best wishes to you all. Thank you for the good work for the glory of God.

*Subscriber in Australia*

Thank you so much for *Beyond Today* magazine. It is the only thing sane I get in my letterbox these days, and it is free.

*Subscriber in Australia*

Thank you for your wonderful magazine, it is always passed on to other believers. May God bless you in the work you do. Please find an offering to help with postage.

*Subscriber in Australia*

#### Readers looking for a congregation

I saw your program for many years on television and have ordered your study aids. I would like to come visit a service.

*From the Internet*

Good afternoon, dear friends, please let us know if you have a congregation in Lima, Peru, so that we can gather on the Sabbath.

*From the Internet*

My family and I are looking for a congregation and fellowship to be a part of and were wondering if you could help us. Our family are Sabbath-keepers, we keep to traditional faith values and to the Old and New Testaments and avoid any new age religious practices. We are seeking Bible study classes to help us grow in our faith, and as we are also looking for fellowship we need to find a place to learn, study and worship as soon as possible.

*From the Internet*

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## Jesus Christ the Victor, Not Helpless Victim

**A**t this time of year we reflect on events from nearly 2,000 years ago that changed the world—the suffering and death of Jesus of Nazareth at the Passover festival followed by His resurrection and ascension into heaven. The Jewish religious leadership, declaring Him a blasphemer, pressed the Roman state into condemning Him as a criminal insurrectionist, resulting in His beating, scourging and crucifixion.

Just days before, the Jewish crowds had celebrated what's often called His triumphal entry into Jerusalem as the descendant of David who would save them—the Messiah or Christ. They had been awaiting a military leader who would overthrow the Roman occupiers and sit on the throne of David as conquering King, ruling over all nations. But their hopes were dashed. How could this man who died in ignominious defeat and total humiliation at the hands of the Romans be the Messiah?

This shameful horror made it very difficult for many Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah even after news later spread of His resurrection, with most unwilling to believe. Likewise, to the Greco-Roman world, the notion of a crucified criminal somehow being the divine Lord to worship and follow was deemed absurd and scandalous. As the apostle Paul later stated, “But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

But God often does things rather differently from what people would expect: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (verses 18, 21).

What people had a hard time grasping was that Jesus' crucifixion and death was not defeat at all. Rather, Jesus had told His disciples regarding His life being given in sacrifice, “No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself” (John 10:18). Coming to suffer and die was His mission—and accomplishing it as He did was a total victory!

Indeed, He drove things along to make it happen as it did. He was not a passive victim. He was pressing events forward. There were a few times where Jesus might have been freed—such as when false witnesses did not agree. But He made sure He was *not* freed. He spoke the words that incensed the leaders to have Him executed. Or He refrained from speaking when He could have possibly avoided crucifixion, as with Pilate.

Those who killed Jesus were not in charge. *He* was—every step of the way. His life was not taken—He gave it. And in so doing He was the victor—along with His Father who

orchestrated what happened to fulfill Their plan. The Gospel writers related the details—but they didn't invent them. They testify to God working masterfully behind the scenes.

The Jewish leadership and the Roman state did not win the day at Christ's death. *He* did. Satan did not win. *He* did. Satan tried to tempt Jesus out of His mission—to get Him to run and forsake humanity. But Jesus would not fail! He succeeded. He ordered Satan through Judas to carry out his betrayal quickly. He came to die on the Passover day as the true Passover Lamb sacrifice—and that's exactly what He did. He lasted through horrible suffering to the moment of death without ever giving into sin. That is truly ultimate victory—ultimate triumph.

Our cover story in this issue, “The Ultimate Triumph,” traces the path of Jesus to His execution in light of the highest honor and exaltation celebrated in the Roman Empire—the Roman triumph, a victory procession meant to usher the honoree into royal divine glory. Some correspondence between these shows Jesus to be the true and greatest victor—putting to shame the megalomaniacal imaginings of earthly Caesars and the demonic forces driving them on. And in Jesus' victory is our victory. We are not helpless victims of circumstance either—if *He* is leading our life.

We further delve into the biblical spring festivals of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, which are not just Jewish observances but Christian celebrations of the redeeming and delivering work of Jesus Christ. The mainstream Christian world has supplanted these festivals with the Easter tradition, rooted in pagan worship and falsehood. It's important that we return to what God teaches in His Word. Along these lines, we are encouraged to remove sin and hypocrisy from our lives, embracing instead godly sincerity and truth.

We also take a look at a popular new book on the Sabbath by the late Charlie Kirk. And in the face of some recent debate in the mainstream Christian world over the topic of eternal hellfire, we consider what the Bible actually says.

Above all we look to the work of God through Jesus Christ—in what He has done in securing our redemption, in what He continues to do in leading us to be like Him, and what He will yet do in transforming us to glory to be part of His awesome coming reign over the world. Jesus is the mighty Lord who reigns in victory. Accept His reign and victory in your life today!

**Tom Robinson**, Managing Editor



# THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH

The terrible suffering and death of Jesus Christ was not a loss and defeat for Him and God the Father. It was the ultimate victory! The biblical authors draw some comparison with the Roman imperial triumph of that era—turning worldly pomp and vainglory on its head.

*by Tom Robinson*

**S**ometimes it's thought that the suffering and death of Jesus Christ was a defeat that God then overturned in His resurrection. But that is not the case. Jesus was not defeated in His death. He won! The resurrection continued and magnified the victory. But Christ's anguish and death preceding it were vital components of that victory—coming exactly as He and the Father had planned, on the exact day, and with Him succeeding in resisting sin until the moment He died, overcoming the devil, so that He could be

the perfect sacrificial Lamb of God to redeem humanity from sin and death.

(Be sure to read the editorial "Jesus Christ the Victor, Not Helpless Victim" on page 5.)

Moreover, something else to examine more closely is that the portrayal of Jesus' suffering and death in the Gospels shows the Roman soldiers mocking Jesus in what many now understand to be a reversal of their greatest honor bestowed on high generals and during the empire only emperors—the Roman triumph ("triumph" here referring to a

specific Roman processional ceremony rather than the modern generic usage of a big win or celebration of victory).

Indeed, while Roman emperors declared their lordship and divinity in various ways, none was more dramatic and direct than the imperial triumph. Yet God was turning the soldiers' mockery on its head. For, as we will see, the New Testament presents Jesus' path to His crucifixion as a far greater triumph than imperial glory—the ultimate exaltation that put to shame earthly powers and the demonic forces behind them!

# Clashing Gospels of the Divine King

## The rise of the imperial triumph

The Roman triumph was a massive victory parade presenting spoils of conquest with key steps that honored and recognized the raising of the one being honored to divine glory or godhood. It developed from earlier Etruscan and Greek ceremonies calling for a manifestation of Dionysus, the supposed dying and rising god triumphant over men (a corrupt element of ancient false religion that, through demonic influence, counterfeited the foretold death and resurrection of the true Messiah).

In the original ceremonies, the king appeared in costume as Dionysus, with both him and a bull accompanying him for sacrifice seen to represent the god in both his dying and resurrected phases. Similar ceremonies took place in other ancient cultures. In Greece, Dionysus was eventually supplanted in the role by Zeus, as king of the gods—while for the Romans this became the equivalent Jupiter.

During the Roman Republic, the triumphal honor passed to victorious generals. But with the beginning of the Empire under Augustus, the triumph became the exclusive privilege of the emperors—seen as the divine embodiment of Roman victory and power (see “Clashing Gospels of the Divine King” at right). Imperial triumphs were often commemorated with the building of triumphal arches, with the processions passing near and through these great monuments, some of which still stand.

The details of the triumph have been pieced together from various historical accounts. They were not always the same, with the various triumphators (those being honored with the triumph) attempting to exalt themselves and their accomplishments in unique ways. But there were many common elements in a general order—and we find remarkable parallels for these in what happened with Jesus. (See “Selected Resources” on page 10 for more details.)

In this we’ll see that Jesus’ walk to His crucifixion was not a mere dragging

The biblical book of Mark opens with the words “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). The word “gospel” here is a translation of the Greek term *euangelion*, meaning “good message” or “good news”—a term that emerged from the Greek translation of the Old Testament but also had special use within the prevailing Greco-Roman culture of the Roman Empire as a political announcement.

And in that broader culture we also find the Roman state and its emperor heralded as divine. For instance, the famous Priene Calendar Inscription from around 9 B.C. in what is now western Turkey recorded a recommendation to move the new year to the birthday of Caesar Octavian Augustus in September, stating that “the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good news [*euangelion*] for the world that came by reason of him.” The opening of Mark’s Gospel reads as a direct counter to this narrative. Jesus, not Augustus, was the true divine Son whose life and message meant good news for the world.

Octavian, the first Roman emperor, was nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar, who had been proclaimed ruler for life shortly before his assassination. A comet appeared after Julius’ death that was promoted as a sign he was received into divine glory as a god, which the Roman Senate later recognized by declaring his deification. Augustus issued coins depicting this comet with the inscription Divine Julius, with himself as the august or venerated one, the son of the god.

Two years before Julius Caesar died, he held four consecutive triumphs for his major military victories, cementing his position as dictator—the triumph seen as the pathway to divine glory. This false exaltation of human rule established the pattern of emperor worship going forward—which would bring direct conflict with the faith of Jesus Christ, who was born to be King yet whose Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36-37). As a number of prophecies declared, His Kingdom would ultimately shatter and replace the Roman kingdom to reign forever.



A silver comet denarius of Augustus showing star or comet of the Divine Julius (Caesar)—with Augustus himself depicted as son of the divine.



Statue of Augustus Caesar at the Vatican Museum.

of a condemned criminal to execution, but the procession of a divine King to His seat of ultimate honor before being received into immortal glory.

## Triumphal elements and Jesus’ steps to crucifixion in parallel

We’ll mainly proceed through Mark’s Gospel. From its use of some Latin words and other internal

evidence, it appears to have been written primarily to a Roman audience who would have understood the parallels to the Roman triumph. But we find these elements in other Gospel accounts as well. Mark 15:15 records Pilate handing Jesus over to scourging and crucifixion. Continuing, we proceed into the parallels between the triumph and what Jesus experienced:

## 1 A triumph began at Rome’s military quarters with the gathering of the Praetorian guard, the large elite force of the emperor.

Mark 15:16: “Then the soldiers led Him [Jesus] away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison [or cohort].” Such a large gathering of imperial troops was unusual for beating and crucifying a single prisoner, though perhaps there were concerns of citywide rioting breaking out.



## 2 The one being honored was clothed in a purple robe with a laurel crown placed on his head.

Verse 17: “And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head . . .”

The robe is also said to be purple in John 19 (verses 2, 5). Yet Matthew 27:28 says it was scarlet. Which was it? Purple garments were highly expensive and could only be worn by members of the Roman nobility. So a scarlet robe, as Roman officers had, seems more likely. Some have suggested blended threading of blue and scarlet that appeared purple. Others suspect that, in this military setting, soldiers used a worn-out scarlet robe that was now faded to a dull and dingy color closer to mauve. Whatever the case, referring to it as purple was meant to portray it as a kingly robe—in line with a triumph.

With the robe and thorny crown, the soldiers were intending to mock Jesus for His supposed presumption of royalty. Put together with the other steps here, they may even have intended a sort of anti-triumph as derision. Even if they didn’t, it effectively was that—but ultimately, as it turns out, with the Romans and their worldly system as the ones being mocked by God.

## 3 The soldiers proclaimed the one being honored as king and lord.

Mark 15:18-19: “. . . and [they] began to salute Him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ Then they struck Him on the head with a reed [or rod] and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him.”

The mockery continued with false obeisance—yet ironically they proclaimed what was actually true about Jesus! (Note more about this treatment in the next element.)

John 19 shows the Roman governor Pontius Pilate presenting Jesus in the mock royal regalia and stating to the Jews who were gathered, “Behold your King!” (verse 14). Yet the crowd present claimed only Caesar as king (verse 15). Still, Pilate ordered that the sign displaying Jesus’ criminal charge label Him “the King of the Jews” (verses 17-22; Mark 15:26).

## 4 The honored leader’s face was painted red, with the Roman lictors lining up in red war dress before him for the procession.

The painting of the face was in imitation of painting the statue of Jupiter in the temple on the Capitoline Hill red at Roman festivals to symbolize military conquest.

“Lictors” were military officials that accompanied the magistrate, bearing rods to symbolize their dealing out of corporal punishment. They were charged with scourging prisoners.

Though not stated specifically in Mark and the other Gospels, it is obvious from the beating with rods just mentioned and the scourging Jesus went through that the battering and lacerations left Him terribly bloodied. The crown of thorns pressed down on His head would have caused blood to run down all over His face.

Also, the soldiers spitting on Him might have included spitting wine, as that would have been part of their rations and we see wine mentioned a few verses later.

Isaiah 52:14 had foretold centuries earlier that Jesus’ face and whole appearance would be marred to the point of not looking human. Of course, Jesus was not pretending divinity by having His face painted red. He was exhibiting divine love in allowing Himself to be beaten and disfigured in shedding His own blood for the sins of the world.





This painting, "The Triumph of Aemilius Paullus" by Carle Vernet, 1789, hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

**5** The procession, led by the military officials and displaying spoils of victory, including chained and condemned prisoners, commenced and moved through the city, with the army and populace gathered to watch and receive gifts distributed from the leader.

Verse 20: "And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him."

Jesus was led out in procession by Roman military officials and soldiers through Jerusalem to the place of crucifixion. Taking back the robe and returning His clothes was not a part of the Roman triumph, but fit with the mockery and was necessary to the fulfillment of prophecy that Christ's garments would be divided (verse 24; Matthew 27:35; John 19:23-24).

Luke 23:27 mentions the crowds of onlookers: "And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him."

Jesus Himself was the bound prisoner on parade—slated for death. Again, though, He was not captured but gave Himself up willingly. Moreover, this was truly His victory march as the triumphant One, advancing to complete the mission He came for—to win the war against Satan, sin and death.

His giving up of the clothes He wore symbolized giving up everything. The Creator of the world gave up His heavenly glory to become a man to suffer and die a horrific death (Philippians 2:5-9). And this was for all of us: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

Jesus did not toss out silver coins and trinkets as the emperors did in their triumphs. What He gave was far more valuable—His very life and well-being, and He did so to give us the gifts of forgiveness, healing, freedom from sin and death, and empowerment for life in His service. Jesus in His ongoing victory would ultimately capture those held captive to the devil—granting them the blessings of life with Him: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men" (Ephesians 4:8).

**6** Prominent in the procession was a sacrificial animal identified with the person being honored and a man alongside carrying the instrument for killing the sacrifice.

As earlier mentioned, in the origins of this ceremony the death of the sacrifice depicted the death of the god that supposedly rose to new life in the person of the leader being honored. Carved reliefs from triumphal monuments of this time typically show a bull festooned with a garland to identify it with the honored leader, and alongside a man bearing an ax for slaying the bull.



Bull for triumphal sacrifice with ax-bearer—Roman relief, Antiques Museum, Royal Palace, Stockholm.

Mark 15:21: "Then they [the Roman soldiers] compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross."

Jesus, in His terrible weakened condition, was stumbling in the procession, and this man, whose sons were evidently later church members known to Mark's audience, just "happened" to be there to be pressed into this special service—one that enabled Christ's sacrifice to proceed on schedule and that filled out the picture of an official bearer of the death instrument in what would be a Roman triumph turned on its head. And the mention of head brings us to the next element.

## 7 The procession reaching its destination, the Capitoline Hill, prisoners were cruelly executed, and the person being honored ascended the Capitoline, “the place of the head.”

Arriving at the focal point of the Roman triumph, high-ranking enemy prisoners were tormented and slain before the crowds. The triumphator made his way up the steps of the Capitoline Hill, the place of sacrifice overlooking the Roman Forum.

This famed hill, dominated by the Capitolium, the temple of the chief Roman god Jupiter, gives us the English word *capitol*. The hill’s name derives from Latin *caput* or *capita*, referring to the head. Roman historians said that in early temple foundation work there, a human head was discovered with features intact, with soothsayers reportedly proclaiming that this place where the head was found would be the head of all Italy.

Mark 15:22: “And they brought Him [Jesus] to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.” Matthew 27:33 and John 19:17 also give this translation. Yet the word here could denote the head more generally and not just an empty skull. Some think that the place of Christ’s crucifixion was above a rocky cliff with features like those of a skull, while others believe that the name may denote the place outside Jerusalem where David brought the head of Goliath (1 Samuel 17:54).

In any case, it’s not normal for place names to be translated in the Gospels, so there appears to be emphasis and significance here. It seems likely that a connection was being drawn between the place of Christ’s sacrifice and the place of sacrifice and exaltation in the Roman triumph at its “Head Hill”—either intentionally by the Gospel writers or by God who orchestrated these events to demonstrate the upending of worldly power and who inspired the accounts.

Jesus arrived at this place of His crucifixion to give His life for the sins of the world, taking the place of the condemned.



The Arch of Titus in Rome, showing images of his triumph with the spoils of Jerusalem and procession (at right).



## 8 Just before the sacrifice was killed, the person honored was offered wine, which he poured out.

The refusal and pouring out of the wine in the triumphal ceremony represented the honored ruler’s own sacrifice in identifying with the sacrificial animal that was about to have its lifeblood poured out.

Mark 15:23: “Then they gave Him [Jesus] wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.” It has been noted that this would have been an expensive concoction to give to a condemned prisoner. Some surmise it would have helped to deaden pain. Perhaps it was even arranged by Pilate.

Jesus would not accept it. He was committed to experiencing the agony of His ordeal in taking on the world’s sufferings. And it further shamed the Roman triumph. Christ’s refusal of the wine was a genuine and noble act of true sacrifice instead of the false pretense of the Roman leader supposedly sacrificing of himself in a ceremony of boundless self-promotion in which he really gave up nothing.

Jesus did later in His final moments, after hours of agony and His throat dry, receive a sponge of sour wine to be able to speak His last words, completing the fulfillment of the Passover service of that day (John 19:28-30).



Marcus Aurelius pouring out wine before a triumphal sacrifice—relief in Capitoline Museums.

### Selected Resources (not endorsing all that’s said in these)

On the gospel announcement in the first-century world:

- Craig Evans, “Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, 2000, pp. 67-81.
- Adam Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology Under Caesar: Jesus and the Roman Imperial Ideology*, [IVP Academic] 2018 (also below).

On the nature of development of the triumph in Greek and Roman practice:

- H.S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry Into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph*, [Brill] 1970.
- Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, [Harvard University Press] 2007.

On Jesus’ crucifixion in the context of a Roman Triumph:

- Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, [Eerdmans] 1993.

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## 9 The sacrifice was carried out.

The sacrificial animal was killed, representing the triumphant leader's association with the dying god to rise with him in glory. It also marked a thanksgiving—for the past victories to this point but also the future victory and blessings that would assumedly come on Rome and its people through the honored ruler.

After reference to the division of Christ's garments as He was crucified (Mark 15:24), the next verse notes: "Now it was the third hour [9 a.m.], and they crucified Him" (verse 25). As the account continues, we learn that Jesus suffered until His death at the ninth hour (3 p.m.)—six hours later. This lengthy suffering was all part of Christ's sacrifice.

The Roman triumph itself was an all-day affair, but the sacrifice of the bull happened quite quickly, just as did the animal sacrifices that God gave in His true worship system, which Christ came in actual fulfillment of.

It should be stressed that Jesus' suffering and death were not in fulfillment of the Roman triumph, but stood in contradistinction to it—effectively overturning it element by element.

Christ's was the true sacrifice. We give thanks for the unparalleled victory He won through it—and for the future blessings and victory that flow from that and all that He is yet to accomplish.

## 10 The leader was in a visible, exalted position on the hill, commonly flanked by two officials.

Jesus had earlier spoken of Himself being "lifted up," speaking not of worldly glory but His crucifixion (John 3:14; 12:32-33). Yet through it would come high honor and exaltation.

Moreover, placement at the right and left hand of an elevated person denoted positions of high honor in ancient society (see Matthew 20:21, 23). Roman historians note emperors being flanked by two high officials called consuls in overseeing state affairs. And we see further examples of such exaltation in the triumph.

In a triumph of Tiberius before he was emperor, he was seated next to his adoptive father Augustus between the two consuls. Later in a triumph of Emperor Claudius, he ascended the Capitoline steps on his knees with his two sons-in-law supporting him on each side. Vespasian later celebrated his triumph with his sons Titus and Domitian at his side.

Mark 15, after noting the accusation inscription "The King of the Jews" (verse 26), states, "With Him [Jesus] they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And He was numbered with the transgressors'" (verses 27-28).

Perhaps the soldiers chose the arrangement here as a continued mockery and even a mockery of the Jewish nation, with Jesus their supposed king ruling over nothing, with powerless dying criminals as vice regents. His subjects sadly turn to taunting and jeering at Him (verses 29-32).

## 11 The people waited for a sign from the gods.

The Romans were very superstitious. Official augurs discerned the approval or disapproval of the gods through observation of natural phenomena as signs or omens.

They examined sacrificial entrails for symmetry or deformities. They watched for things like lightning, thunder, and bird flights and cries. On the minor side were things like appearances of animals sacred to particular gods or even spills, sneezes and stumbles. Of course there were never such signs as the astounding miracles that took place with Jesus!

Verse 33: "Now when the sixth hour [12 noon] had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour [3 p.m.]"—so for three hours.

Then the final moments. Verses 37-38: "And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Matthew 27:51-52 adds that the earth quaked, rocks split and graves were opened.

These were massive, miraculous signs from the true God!

## 12 At the culmination of the triumph, the one being honored was declared to be divine.

The final step in the triumph was the declaration of the ruler as divine—a god. He joined the pagan god-emperors of the ancient past in supposedly being a manifestation of the god on earth. The Roman emperors were considered divine embodiments of the deified Roman state. People burned incense to them as an act of worship—which Christians could not do.

At death the emperors were assumed to rise to full divinity. The ceiling of the Arch of Titus in Rome shows the deified emperor carried to heaven by a giant eagle symbolizing his apotheosis or becoming a god.

Note the exclamation at the conclusion of Jesus' suffering and death on Golgotha from a Roman military official, after witnessing all Jesus went through, His composure, His request that God forgive those who killed

*(continued on next page)*

Him, and the momentous signs that came.

Mark 15:39: “So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!””

This is the culminating statement in Mark’s book. He began in Mark 1:1 presenting “the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” And now at the end, this military officer declares that *yes, He really was the Son of God!* It is a profound wrap-up to the anti-triumph presented in the accounts of Jesus’ death.

Far above His earlier triumphal entry into Jerusalem, this was His true triumph—proceeding in victory into death and then eternity beyond. None of the generals and emperors proclaiming their great triumphs were ever received into immortal glory. *But Jesus Christ was.* He rose again. He truly ascended on high, and He lives today with the Father in heaven—from where He will one day return to rule over all nations.

## Overcoming to overturn the world order

Again, though, it’s important that we recognize that Jesus’ death was itself a great victory. Jesus did not come to live a life of self-preservation. *He came to die.* That was His mission (again, see the editorial on page 5).

Jesus went to His death “that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Jesus in His suffering and death made a full mockery of the enemy. The Roman soldiers mocked Jesus with the fake crowning, enrobing and feigned worship as they struck and tormented Him. But no doubt it wasn’t just them. They were being goaded on through evil spiritual forces—demonic spirits from the devil. The Bible tells us that they are the powers behind worldly governments and false religion.

Yet as it ends up, the whole thing was turned upside down—with Satan and his demons, the real powers behind the Roman state and its pagan triumph, overcome and made the fools. The apostle Paul refers to this after explaining

that Jesus in His death nailed our record of guilt to His cross: “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, *triumphing* over them in it” (Colossians 2:15, emphasis added throughout). Here is direct evidence for the reverse triumph masterminded by God.

We should consider that the same thing happened when God introduced the Passover to the Israelites in ancient Egypt. Back then, God’s plagues and actions to free His people upended Egyptian religion, showing their demon-inspired gods powerless. As He had stated, “Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment” (Exodus 12:12; compare Numbers 33:4). Hearing the news of what happened, Moses’ father-in-law Jethro remarked, “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them” (Exodus 18:11).

And now later when Christ came in *fulfillment* of the Passover the same thing happened. God through Christ turned demon-inspired Roman worship on its head, mocking its pagan, vainglorious triumph with the far greater triumph of Jesus remaining faithful and dying just as planned.

## We are led in triumph in Christ

Those who were bound under the devil He freed, leading captivity captive, as we saw (Ephesians 4:8). And we are part of His victory parade—having been conquered by Him, now dead to who we were but free and alive in Him. As Paul writes

in 2 Corinthians 2:14: “Now thanks be to God who always leads us *in triumph* in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance [this referring to expensive clouds of incense and perfumes in the Roman triumphal processions] of His knowledge in every place.”

Note that He leads us in His triumph—to represent Him and live in triumph ourselves.

Jesus’ triumph came not in hoarding power and majesty to Himself, but in giving His life away in love and sacrifice to others. And He leads us in the same way, directing us not to self-promotion but to laying down our lives in service to Him and others as the path to true victory and glory.

Jesus’ ultimate triumph is the basis for our own peace and success. As He said, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

His victory empowers our victory. John wrote: “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them [wrong spirits and false teachers], because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

And so we may say with Paul, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the *victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

The victory is certain. Jesus has triumphed—in death, in resurrection, in delivering us, in living in us and in coming again to reign, then to remove Satan, end tyranny and save the world at large. What an awesome triumph it all is! Live in the true gospel of Jesus Christ, following Him in triumph into unending glory! **BT**

## DIVE DEEPER



To better understand just who Jesus was, the way of life He exemplified and taught, the awesome sacrifice He made and the power of His ongoing life and victory, be sure to request or download our free study guide *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. Scan the code or visit [ucg.org/ma26](http://ucg.org/ma26) to find it.





# The Biblical *Alternative* to Easter

Are you letting religious traditions get in the way of a real, authentic relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ? There's an answer to this problem, and it lies in the biblical festivals observed and taught by Jesus Himself.

by Gary Petty

**A** story has been told about a Russian czar who was strolling around the palace grounds and saw a guard standing in a neglected, barren patch of dirt. He approached the guard and asked him why he was standing alone in this spot. The guard said he had orders to do so.

The czar called the captain of the guard, and the captain said that there had always been orders to post a guard there. No one knew why. A search of the archives showed that at the time of Catherine the Great a prized rose bush grew in that part of the palace grounds. A guard had been posted to keep people from picking the roses.

The problem was that Catherine the Great—and the prized rose bush—had died many decades before. Year after year a guard was posted in a meaningless spot, and no one knew why. It had become *tradition*.

Traditions can be good, and traditions can be bad. Do you practice some religious traditions that may be

diverting you from what God actually wants in your life?

## Traditions can get in the way of authentic Christianity

Like the sentry in the story of the czar and the rose bush, could you be diligently standing guard over religious traditions that have no real spiritual meaning?

Traditions can be a very beneficial part of life. We have meaningful family traditions, community traditions and religious traditions. Traditions can create a sense of belonging and bring people together. They can remind us of what is really important amid the clutter of daily life.

Traditions can also trap us into a wrong way of thinking that simply accepts that “we don’t know why we do it this way; it’s just the way it’s always been done”—like the guard and the rose bush.

Some religious leaders came to Jesus and asked Him, “Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?

For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread” (Matthew 15:1-2).

This tradition of the Jewish elders had nothing to do with hygiene. It was a religious ceremony concerning ritual purification. It was a ritual designed to help people remember their need to be good and pure before God.

How do you think Jesus would answer such a question?

He said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God *because of your tradition?*” (verse 3, emphasis added throughout).

Think about what Jesus said. He said that it’s possible for religious traditions—no matter how well meaning—to lead people *to disobey God*. This is why it’s important for all of us to examine our religious traditions to see if they are in accordance with what the Bible teaches!

Jesus was quite direct in condemning the approach of the religious leaders: “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to me with their mouth, and

honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, *teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (verses 7-9).

What Jesus clearly teaches is that it’s possible for a religious tradition, even one that seems to honor God, to actually *separate us* from God!

### What about Easter traditions?

Let’s go a little deeper and compare one traditional religious holiday with a biblical festival. The first is a tradition that most people observe without much thought—like the sentry standing guard in the story from Russia. The second is one observed by the earliest Christians as recorded in the pages of the Bible.

Have you ever wondered about the Easter tradition?

The reality of Jesus Christ’s death and His resurrection three days and nights later is *central* to Christianity. Without those events there is no Christianity.

Jesus shared the very sign that He was Messiah: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be *three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*” (Matthew 12:40).

The Easter tradition is supposedly based in Christ’s prophetic sign that He would be in the grave three days and three nights. So He died on Good Friday and was resurrected on Sunday morning, right?

Here’s the truth: The Good Friday–Easter Sunday tradition doesn’t fit the very sign Jesus gave that He is the prophesied Messiah!

Try as you might, *there’s simply no way to fit three days and three nights between a Good Friday burial and a Sunday morning resurrection*. The most you can squeeze in is only one full day and maybe small parts of two others, plus only two nights. You can do the math yourself—the time frame just doesn’t work!

There *is* a clear biblical solution that fits Jesus’ words perfectly, but it in no way fits the Good Friday–Easter

Sunday tradition. However, that’s another story we don’t have space to cover here (download or request our free study guide *Easter: The Rest of the Story* to learn more).

The Gospels describe the death and resurrection of Jesus in detail. The rest of the New Testament records the story of His followers over the next 60 years or so. The apostle’s letters give us insight into churches that were raised up in Judea, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome.

In all of these accounts there are no examples of *any* Christian congregation observing the Easter tradition. Among those earliest Christians there was no tradition that tried to fit Jesus’ sign of three days and three nights in the tomb into an impossible Good Friday–Easter Sunday timetable.



### Observing the Passover and Festival of Unleavened Bread

But we do know of a festival period observed by the earliest Christians that commemorated Jesus Christ’s death and being raised to lead their lives. It was a festival period—actually two festivals right next to one another—that provided a profound connection between much earlier commanded observances and the Messiah. And most importantly, these observances were *biblical*—not mere human tradition.

One of the places we find this festival period mentioned is in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

We know that the Corinthians were primarily Greeks who had converted to Christianity. For example, Paul tells

them to stop being involved in traditional pagan practices that Jewish Christians would not have observed.

Again, there is one spring-season festival period that Paul *does* tell this non-Jewish congregation to observe in 1 Corinthians 5:6—and it’s not Easter. To put Paul’s words in context, let’s begin with verse 6: “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?” (New International Version).

This statement may seem a little strange to us, but in a world where baking bread was a common activity it made perfect sense. A person would make dough and bake it into bread. Adding yeast, a leavening agent, to the dough would cause it to rise—become fluffy or puffed up. A small amount of yeast would work its way through the entire batch of dough until it was completely leavened.

Here Paul used yeast in bread as an analogy of how pride and boasting makes us puffed up or full of hot air.

Now let’s read what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:7: “Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For *Christ, our Passover lamb*, has been sacrificed” (NIV). Paul expected his non-Jewish converts to know a lot about the Hebrew Scriptures—what we call the Old Testament. His statement about Jesus being the Passover Lamb would have had little meaning if they didn’t know about the events surrounding ancient Israel’s Exodus from Egypt.

Paul then explains, “Therefore *let us keep the Festival*, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8, NIV 1984).

### Biblical festivals holy for Christians today

Paul expected these gentile (non-Jewish) Christians to *observe these festivals*—not the Easter tradition.

In referring to yeast, unleavened



## Paul instructs the gentile Corinthians to participate in holy religious festivals based in biblical instruction, not human imagination and traditions.

bread, and Jesus being sacrificed as the Passover Lamb, Paul is clearly talking about the biblical observances of Passover and the Festival or Feast of Unleavened Bread given to ancient Israel by God and observed by Jesus. These occasions Paul mentions here are the correct, Bible-based festivals that God wants Christians to keep!

Paul instructs the gentile Corinthians to participate in holy religious festivals *based in biblical instruction*, not human imagination and traditions. This doesn't mean that the early Christians observed these festivals in the exact same manner as the Jews. As Paul's words show, both Passover and the Christian Festival of Unleavened Bread were imbued with new spiritual understanding about Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Paul's declaration of Jesus as God's Passover Lamb sent to redeem people from death was unfathomable to many first-century Jews, as it is today. But for Christians, it should infuse the Passover with a spiritual depth and understanding of God that transcends even the wonderful and miraculous events of the Exodus.

### Sincerity and truth

The Festival of Unleavened Bread involves the removal of yeast and foods containing leavening agents from the home and eating unleavened bread for seven days (Exodus 12:15-20; Leviticus 23:6). In 1 Corinthians we have insight into how this was symbolic of our spiritual life.

Paul knew that, physically, a small amount of leavening affected the entire lump of dough. He refers to the *spiritual* leavening of "malice and wickedness." Malice involves underlying wrong attitudes, thoughts and emotions, while

wickedness includes actions. Both constitute *sin*.

You will never be a true follower of Jesus Christ until you understand malice and wickedness, until you repent of the influence of spiritual leavening, and until you allow God to replace sin in your life with His "unleavened" ways of "sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Paul's use of the symbols of the Festival of Unleavened Bread to teach about God's work in His followers is profound. And this is in the context of telling them, "Therefore *let us keep the feast . . .*" (verse 8).

Sin separates you from God (Isaiah 59:2). It permeates every aspect of your life, just as leavening changes every particle of dough until it is puffed up with gas bubbles.

Let's be honest: When you refuse to face the reality and consequences of sin, you effectively either believe God doesn't care so much about your actions or you believe that He has no right to tell you what to do.

I know this can be difficult to hear, but to have God change your life, you must first understand the hidden work of spiritual leavening.

God wants to perform a miracle in your life. When you add yeast into dough, you can't stop the process. You can't de-leaven leavened bread. Paul uses leavening as a symbol for sinful thoughts and behavior permeating our lives. God wants your life to be filled

with sincerity and truth. God wants more than just a profession of belief and some human traditions. *He wants to spiritually de-leaven your life and give you new, unleavened life.*

### Replace the Easter tradition with biblical truth

Easter can feel like a wonderful tradition—a time of baskets filled with candy and colored eggs, a time for friends and family, a time to attend a special religious service. But understand this: It is a *non-biblical tradition* that actually comes from ancient paganism, from the worship of false gods, including the fertility goddess Ishtar (Ashtoreth in the Bible). This is why Easter's most popular symbols are eggs and rabbits—they're ancient fertility symbols!

The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the other hand, are biblical observances ordained by God, observed by Jesus, taught to gentiles in the early Church and imbued with the Christian gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ.

This festival period is the *biblical* alternative to Easter—the right observance to choose. The Christian Passover and Festival of Unleavened Bread are filled with rich and meaningful symbols of Christ's death, resurrection and present work to spiritually de-leaven—to spiritually cleanse and heal—those who turn to God. It's more than human tradition. It is God's revelation to humanity! **BT**

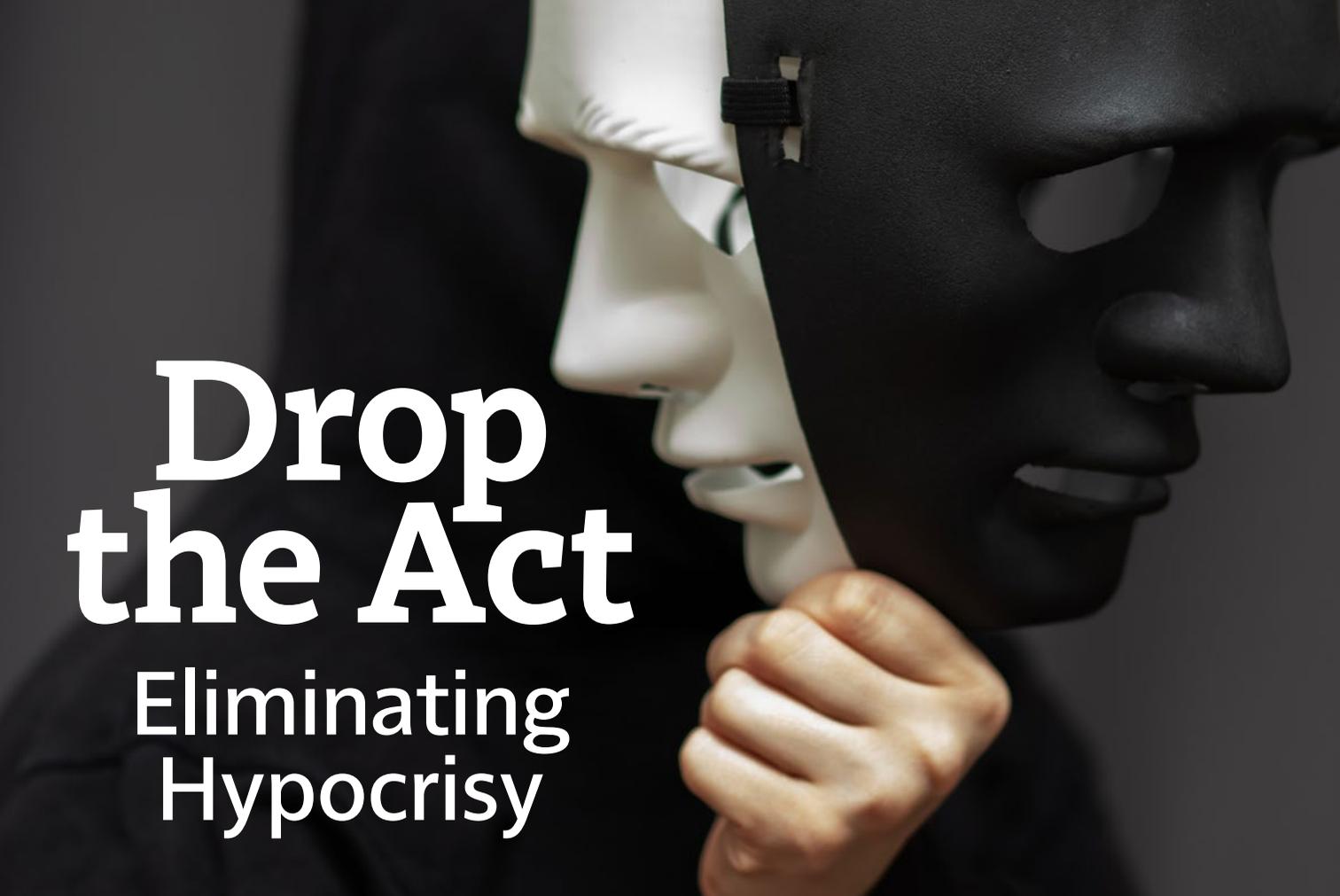
### DIVE DEEPER



The biblical feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread point to Christ's role in God's plan of salvation. To learn more, download or request our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. To understand the real origins of Easter, read *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

Scan the code or visit [ucg.org/maz6](http://ucg.org/maz6) to find them.





# Drop the Act

## Eliminating Hypocrisy

Putting on a false face may gain some points with other people for a time. But we all stand on a larger stage before the God who hates lies—who calls us to a life of authenticity.

*by Don Hooser*

**G**rowing up in a Christian home, I heard about scandals of famous religious leaders being exposed for terrible sins, sometimes the very type these preachers had publicly condemned! Such examples of rank hypocrisy obviously do great harm, giving people a bad impression of the religion being professed.

News of such blatant hypocrisy shocked, disgusted and repulsed me. I thought, “I would never want to be a hypocrite!” Looking back, though, I’m ashamed that as a teenager I did not recognize my own hypocrisy in doing things I knew were unchristian. Soon after in college I had a wake-up moment in an argument with my best friend. He said he didn’t believe in God, and I was indignantly trying to convince him this was wrong and stupid. Then he pointed out: “Don, it doesn’t seem to make any difference. You and I are living our lives with the same actions.”

That hit me like a ton of bricks. I realized my life was hypocritical! And it had a profound effect on me. I later came to see that it was part of God’s intervention in my life to draw me

into being a sincere and devoted follower of Jesus Christ (see John 6:44, 65). Shortly after that incident, I decided to sincerely strive to live the rest of my life as a true Christian. It was a real turning point.

Of course, all of us have to keep examining ourselves to make sure hypocrisy has not crept back into our lives in some fashion. We need to understand this tendency of our corrupted human nature, recognize what’s wrong with it, and continue to resist it, putting it out of our lives.

### **A mask of deception condemned in Scripture**

Hypocrisy is projecting a certain morality or code of conduct while personally disregarding or trampling over that. The word itself comes from Greek terminology actually used in the New Testament—“hypocrisy” originally referring to acting in a play, with “hypocrite” meaning an actor playing a part. The root meaning was literally about deciding from under—that is, from under a mask, in reference to the stage masks used in Greek theater. It didn’t mean something

nefarious when first used, but it became a metaphor for pretending to be what one is not in a negative sense—referring to pretense and deception.

We see similar imagery in putting on a false face or a false front—being *two*-faced, creating a façade for others that hides one’s true character and motives. This is also called duplicity and practicing double-talk, having a hidden agenda. We further see it in having a double standard to judge people by—often exempting self and allies from guilt.

Hypocrisy is sinful, as it’s a form of lying—being dishonest and deceiving with words and actions.

God’s law forbids giving false testimony as well as dealing falsely and lying to others (Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11). In fact, God hates lying! Proverbs 6:16-19 says that among seven things God hates are “a lying tongue” and “a false witness who breathes out lies” (English Standard Version).

People lie with their words and with their actions. And when words and actions don’t match, that’s insincerity and hypocrisy. Often people “talk the talk” but don’t “walk the walk.” They proclaim one thing but don’t “practice what they preach.” A person might act like a friend while planning to “stab you in the back.” There were people who said flattering words to Jesus while plotting to get Him killed.

Hypocrisy is sometimes wryly comical—as when Jesus referred to a person supposedly helping with a speck in another person’s eye while having a log in his own, or to false teachers as “blind guides” leading others into a ditch (Matthew 7:3-5; 15:14). Yet as a sin it’s a gravely serious matter. In fact, during the ministry of Jesus Christ, His strongest display of anger was directed at the religious hypocrisy plaguing the society of that day.

He decried charitable deeds, prayers and fasting being done for show (Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18). And He excoriated the religious leaders in Matthew 23. Read this chapter and you will gain a good understanding of many forms and effects of the hypocrisy prevalent then—particularly these leaders binding countless rules and traditions on people while excusing themselves from these unless they were trying to be seen and admired as righteous.

They were meticulous with minor time-consuming procedures while neglecting “justice and mercy and faith” (verses 23-24). They were obsessed with their appearance, striving to look saintly, but Jesus compared them with “whitewashed tombs,” which looked good on the outside but were inwardly full of filth and decay (verse 27). Jesus summarized the condition of these leaders and the nation at large in Mark 7:6: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

The Bible warns us to never add to or take away from God’s revelation to humanity (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Revelation

22:18-19). So it’s no wonder Jesus was infuriated at how the domineering religious leadership—especially the hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees—had been guilty of violating that in countless ways, even *replacing* God’s commandments with their *traditions* (see Mark 7:9). They used their authoritative positions to promote their counterfeit legalistic religion while sanctimoniously exalting themselves. That confused and

discouraged the people, as it increasingly gave people a bad overall impression of God’s true religion.

Because the Pharisees were those most notoriously guilty of hypocrisy in imposed legalism, the English language has

adopted the noun *Pharisaism* and the adjective *Pharisaic* to describe such religious hypocrisy.

### A problem all must deal with

Yet hypocrisy is not just a problem of false religious teachers or “bad” people. Because of the pride and selfishness of human nature, we *all* are tempted to be hypocritical at times. One time, even the apostle Peter acted hypocritically, influencing Barnabas and other Jews present to follow that example! The apostle Paul had to openly rebuke them! (See Galatians 2:11-14.)

All of us must focus on pleasing God rather than impressing people. Jesus lauded having no guile or deceit (John 1:47).

Many people will knowingly put on a false face before others whether or not they think of the word “hypocrite.” They might do it to look good, gain favors, make more money, cheat, steal, commit a crime, seduce someone, escape a punishment, and so on. There might even be no overt ill intent. Maybe it’s just to make a good impression or keep a good reputation or to avoid embarrassment or other consequences—which comes all too easily and naturally.

This illustrates the truth of Jeremiah 17:9: “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*” (English Standard Version, emphasis added throughout). Because our hearts are so deceitful, it’s difficult to understand ourselves! We tend to be nearsighted and blind to our personal faults and sins.

A famous saying goes, “Oh, for the gift to see ourselves as others see us!” Yet more important is the gift to see ourselves as *God* sees us! Jeremiah 10:23 says, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” Proverbs 16:25 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

Since people tend to be spiritually blind, we should regularly ask God to hold up a spiritual mirror to enable us to truly see ourselves. Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV) says: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see

## Because of the pride and selfishness of human nature, we all are tempted to be hypocritical at times.

if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

When we realize we’ve been hypocritical, we should feel guilty and ashamed. When we don’t, it’s a danger sign that our consciences are not functioning well. Paul wrote of those “speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2).

People can feel justified because they have a false idea of God’s justice. Their idea is illustrated by the image of the blindfolded “lady justice” holding a balance scale. They reason that if their good works outweigh their bad deeds, then God is pleased with them. For example, a person can be lying and cheating others, but because he serves at his church and gives generous donations he thinks he’s a “good Christian.” Doing good does not cover over the bad!

Please know that we can’t fool God! He knows every one of our actions, words and even our thoughts!

### **Bearing God’s name in vain**

The third of the Ten Commandments, to not take God’s name in vain, is not well-understood. Its focus is not merely about uttering a name of God disrespectfully. The sense is more that we not “carry” God’s name or identify ourselves as a person of God in doing or espousing what He opposes. In other words, we must be very careful to not tarnish God’s name and identity by our words and deeds.

For example, doing something bad while being identified as a “Christian” obviously gives people a bad impression of Christianity. A major example is the scandalous conduct of some “Christian” evangelists.



## **Jesus’ strongest display of anger was directed at the religious hypocrisy of that day. He decried charitable deeds, prayers and fasting being done for show.**

Isn’t it obvious that such hypocrisy by supposed “people of God” puts God and His teachings in a shameful light? That’s why the Third Commandment is so important. The hypocrisy of identifying oneself with God while doing evil is a great sin! It does much greater spiritual harm than if the sinful action was done by someone with no professed connection with God.

In Romans 2, Paul warned Jewish people who were supposed to be representing God against setting a bad example: “You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? . . . You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles [other nations] because of you,’ as it is written” (verses 21-24). God wants sincere obedience from the heart—“whose praise is not from men but from God” (verse 29).

### **The leaven of hypocrisy**

Again, the Pharisees and other religious leaders of Jesus’ day were extremely hypocritical. They craved

their religious and political power, positions, preeminence and perks. They gloried in their titles and lording it over the people. They feared and hated Jesus because they saw how His influence was increasingly exposing their hypocrisy and lack of legitimacy.

By the time of Jesus’ ministry, this hypocritical and malignant Pharisaism had deeply infected and polluted much of the populace of that day. However, Jesus Christ came to earth to begin turning it right side up!

Jesus warned His own disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6). Confused at first, they soon realized He was referring to the *doctrine* or *teachings* of these groups (verse 12). He further stated that “the leaven of the Pharisees . . . is *hypocrisy*” (Luke 12:1).

What is “leaven”? It’s a substance put into bread dough to cause it to rise during baking—to puff up and become softer. In that day, the leavening agent was yeast, which gives off bubbles as it ferments in bread dough—a lump of fermented dough having been added from a previous baking.

A major characteristic of leavening with yeast is that it *rapidly spreads* throughout a piece of warm dough. Leaven was not allowed in grain offerings burned on God’s altar or in the biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed the Passover (Leviticus 2:11; Exodus 12:15-19), the spreading fermentation in those contexts symbolizing corruption and sin. It pictured well the highly contagious nature of hypocrisy and false teachings and conduct. Those influences and their effects easily spread and infect others.

We can see, then, why Jesus

compared the hypocritical teachings and actions of the Pharisees and other religious sects to leaven. Many of their teachings were just “hot air” not based on the substantive truth of God’s revelation in Scripture, just as a loaf of bread doesn’t have as much dough as it appears to have.

In the context of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Paul decried Christian believers who were “puffed up” with pride like a loaf of bread is puffed up (1 Corinthians 4:18-19; 5:2, 6-8). In Galatians 5, Paul warns of false teachings that were being circulated and compares them with leaven, noting that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (verse 9). He says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 5:6 about tolerance of egregious sin in the Church. All these passages of Scripture are important warnings for God’s people today.

### Out with the bad, in with the good

The Bible reveals God’s beautiful plan for transforming human beings from sinners and hypocrites to forgiven and humble saints. God’s process of conversion begins when He chooses and draws someone to be a true follower and disciple (John 6:44, 65). The apostle Peter said, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Peter said what a person must do to be forgiven: “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Then Christ’s followers—called the “saints” because they have been sanctified or set apart for God—must faithfully live as God’s obedient children to the end of our lives in order to receive the reward of eternal life in His Kingdom. Jesus said, “He who endures to the end

shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

Of course, no one is immediately perfect but must live a life of growing and overcoming sin. In fact, it should be noted that all Christians could be accused of being hypocrites since they don’t live up to their profession. Even the apostle Paul spoke of his continuing struggle against sin in his life (see Romans 7). But there is a big difference

If we want to please God, we must stop pretending and be real. Put out the leaven of hypocrisy and all sins, and instead pursue and practice authentic heavenly wisdom!

between striving to obey God but failing and just pretending to obey God with no intention of actually doing so. Those who continue to try to follow God but stumble and keep repenting should not be viewed as hypocrites, though they may fall into hypocrisy at times.

God’s plan to save mankind is portrayed in His seven annual festivals listed in Leviticus 23. These start with the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, which Paul encouraged Christians to observe in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, with the symbolism of Christ as our Passover and leavened bread signifying sin for that week. (Be sure to read “The Biblical Alternative to Easter” starting on page 13.)

But Paul stressed that our physical observance of purging out leaven should be accompanied by the more important removal of sinful malice and wickedness, including hypocrisy, while taking in of “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (verse 8). Notice again, “sincerity and truth”—the exact opposite of hypocrisy. And this bread is

a representation of taking in of Christ Himself, the very Bread of Life (John 6:32-51), in whom there was and is no sin.

The empty, puffed-up pride and hypocrisy of our human nature must be replaced by the nature of Jesus Christ—our old self dying with Him so that we may be raised with Him into newness of life (see Romans 6).

What God lamented of His ancient

people in Jeremiah 4:22 is true of all people outside of His spiritual help: “For My people are foolish . . . They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”

Yes, there is a kind of wisdom in using deception

and hypocrisy to obtain the things that people lust for. The apostle James calls it an “earthly, sensual, demonic wisdom”—a path of self-seeking and boastful lying against the truth leading to “confusion and every evil thing” (James 3:14-15). But those who continue to pursue that kind of wisdom will not inherit eternal life!

In contrast, he told us to seek “the meekness of wisdom” (verse 13)—that is, the true wisdom from God: “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and *without hypocrisy*” (verse 17).

If we want to please God, we must stop pretending and be real. Put out the leaven of hypocrisy and all sins, and instead pursue and practice authentic heavenly wisdom! It comes only through Christ, “who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Through Him alone is sincerity and truth. **BT**

### DIVE DEEPER



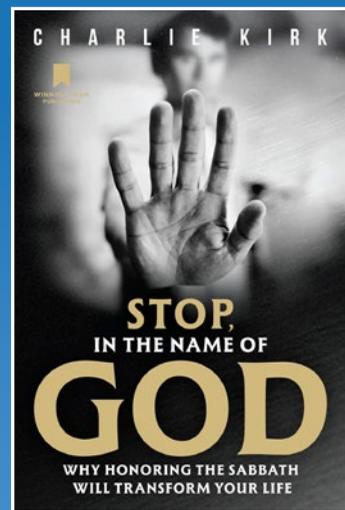
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# Stop, in the Name of God

## A Review



Charlie Kirk's best-selling book has much to commend it, bringing deep personal focus on the needed blessings of honoring the Sabbath. Yet it is sadly flawed, veering in vital respects from the Bible. Still, it's good to see widespread attention directed to God's sorely neglected commandment.

by Tom Robinson

Prior to his assassination in September 2025, famed conservative Christian and political speaker and organizer Charlie Kirk had said he wanted most of all to be remembered for courage for his faith. In line with that came his remarkable final legacy, a book he'd been working on about a life discovery he wanted to share with the world—titled *Stop, in the Name of God: Why Honoring the Sabbath Will Transform Your Life*. Published a few months after he died, it quickly became a best seller.

Against the idea of the Sabbath as something quaint, old-fashioned and unnecessary, he counters that “the Sabbath is not the fringe—it is the frame. It holds life together” (p. xiv). He shows how God's gift of the Sabbath in its context relates to many aspects of life and keeps us focused on what's important.

The book is eminently quotable, filled with one profound declaration after another. Yet while there is much to appreciate and take to heart, there are some distracting elements that will put some readers off. There are also

contrary positions in tension. And there are in some cases significant misunderstandings about what is forbidden and allowed on the Sabbath.

While the book is helpful in showing the comprehensive nature of God's Sabbath command and the need to align our lives with this divinely established pattern, it ends up adding some unnecessary restrictions and, more broadly, compromising on biblical teaching. Yet it's hoped that many being introduced to the Sabbath through the book will pursue the matter further in Scripture.

### The need to stop and worship through history

The book's prologue notes that “the Sabbath is not man made—it is God breathed. It is not legalism—it is liberation. And in rejecting it, we have not just dismissed a day—we have denied a pattern, and we are now reaping the consequences . . . We are, in many ways, a Sabbathless people: wandering, overworked, and longing—without even knowing for what” (ibid.).

Initial chapters of the book focus on the context of creation when the Sabbath was first given, presenting proofs of God as the Creator. Contrast is shown with nature worship and the extremes of the environmental movement springing from it. The absurdity of atheism is presented well.

It's pointed out that the Sabbath appears more than 100 times in the Hebrew Bible. God Himself set the example in observing it, and it's commanded to all creation. The Sabbath command is the longest of the Ten Commandments, its placement here showing “that the sanctification of time is not ancillary to moral life, but essential to it” (pp. 60-61).

Kirk later notes that “the gravity of the Sabbath in ancient Israel is hard to overstate . . . To violate the Sabbath wasn't a casual mistake—it was a capital crime. This wasn't just about taking a break; it was about allegiance, about covenant, about who ruled time itself” (p. 188).

For the Jewish people, the Sabbath is shown to be “more than a day; it is

an act of covenantal continuity. It has been the spiritual glue that held the people together when everything else fell apart” (p. 66). A fair amount is said about Jewish traditional observance, yet the addition of many meticulous rules made it burdensome in respects. Jesus, it’s explained, “did not discard the Sabbath, but stripped it of human legalism to recover divine intent” (p. 67).

Lamentably, the book errs in saying that the early Christians began observing Sunday as a day of assembly in honor of Jesus’ resurrection, though not for a while as a day of rest—but that imperial and church rulings eventually led to Sunday becoming the rest day. While the latter is true, the early Church did not observe Sunday as a worship day. It continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath.

Later Christendom did wrongly embrace Sunday observance in place of the Sabbath. As the book lays out, with the emergence of Protestantism, Sunday was not considered to be the Sabbath—as leaders like Luther and Calvin saw that as legalistic in perspective, but accepted it as meeting a practical need of regular worship. Yet among many Protestants, especially the Puritans, it was thought that Sunday should take on characteristics of former Sabbath observance.

Kirk’s book treats this as Sabbath-keeping, though it actually isn’t. Yet it should be noted that even though Sunday is the wrong day for worship, the general cultural practice of Sunday observance in the Western world, with “blue laws” prohibiting business on that day, brought people weekly Bible instruction and moral peer pressure. As that has faded, so has societal morality.

A couple of chapters follow on the matter of what we worship. Counterfeit gods are explored—earth worship as climate justice, self and narcissism, scientism, materialism and accumulation, human government. There are

several excursions here into what many will deem politically partisan, especially with recent history used to illustrate some of the issues.

Kirk makes the important point, “If you wonder what you worship, look at what you sacrifice for,” noting that people sacrifice the Sabbath for extra work and shopping, sacrificing time with family for promotions and higher status. “Many sacrifice their financial peace to purchase things they don’t need to impress people they don’t even like . . . A true Sabbath . . . stands as a bold rebuke to the worship of stuff. It

“The commandment is not simply about ceasing from labor. It is about ordering one’s entire life around the rhythm of creation, justice, humility, and reverence.”

interrupts the machine. It says no to the unrelenting demands of the marketplace” (p. 107).

A lot of space is given to the topic of Sabbath rejuvenation being great for human health—physically and mentally, as backed up by medical studies. And there’s also a chapter on the need for regular sleep.

### **The substance of the command, and if Christians must obey**

In terms of the Sabbath command itself, it’s noted that “the commandment is not simply about ceasing from labor. It is about ordering one’s entire life around the rhythm of creation, justice, humility, and reverence” (p. 158).

God’s command includes working during the week and then resting at the end. It’s a “rebuke to both laziness and idolatrous overwork” (ibid.). It’s further pointed out how the Sabbath command includes the resting of work animals and all within one’s area of control, including servants—which was revolutionary in the ancient world. The expression of the commandment in Deuteronomy 5

presents freedom from slavery as a reason for Sabbath observance.

“When we Sabbath, we remember who God is: not a taskmaster, but the Redeemer. We remember who we are: not commodities, but covenant people. We remember where we came from: a land of slavery. And we remember where we are going: a land of promise, where all things are made new. That is why Sabbath matters. That is why it is not optional” (p. 139).

Yet that last statement, made in various ways in the book, is not sufficiently defended. Two chapters are devoted to the question of whether Christians are bound to observe the Sabbath, with Kirk admitting he had struggled with the issue. The first of these chapters gives 10 reasons Christians should be obeying the Sabbath command. The second

gives 10 reasons Christians don’t really need to do that since, in the mainstream Christian conception, the Sabbath is fulfilled in our new life in Jesus.

Kirk himself saw the requirement for weekly observance, but made this statement: “As someone who now observes a Saturday Sabbath, I want to be clear: I don’t think the specific day—Saturday or Sunday—is of primary importance. Paul himself says, ‘One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike’ (Romans 14:5). I grant that. The heart behind the day matters more than the day itself” (p. 194).

But this is totally wrong. Romans 14, which he quotes, is not talking about the Sabbath at all, as our study guide offered after this review explains. If God has established the day, where is the authority to choose another day instead? Kirk himself seems to make this point later in stating that God “blessed the seventh day—not the first, not the sixth—the seventh” (p. 249).

The 10 reasons he gives for observing the Sabbath are all very strong. And

much more biblical evidence can be marshaled. The 10 points for not needing to observe the Sabbath all have easy answers—but Kirk does not push back on any of them. It appears he may have been compromising here to not antagonize the broader evangelical community. Or perhaps he just thought he was opening a pathway to further dialogue—which sadly never came about, since he was killed.

It's also sad to see him, in brief mention, group the biblical festivals with ceremonial laws of Israel as having been rendered obsolete. Like the weekly Sabbath, these feasts look back as well as forward to future fulfillment and have great meaning for Christians, teaching about Christ's role in salvation.

He closes this section by returning to the question of whether Christians are bound to keep the Sabbath and comes very close to saying yes, though not regarding disobeying the Sabbath command as a sin—even though disobeying God's law is the very definition of sin (1 John 3:4). He says that “to live without Sabbath is not neutral—it's dangerous” (p. 223). He further says that “working for seven days a week without pause is not just unhealthy—it is an act of spiritual arrogance. It says, ‘I don't need the rhythm God created. I'll make my own.’ But we are not our own” (p. 224).

## Adding to what's required, and final challenge

Charlie Kirk was very focused on safeguarding his Sabbath observance on Friday night and Saturday. For him this entailed disconnecting from his phone and computer, more time with family, personal time studying and enjoying nature, and just experiencing peace. It appears that he and his family continued to attend church on Sundays—dissociating congregational worship from the Sabbath. Yet God gave the Sabbath as a time for congregational worship—it being a holy convocation or commanded assembly (Leviticus 23:3). The book does acknowledge that as Jewish practice and for those who regarded

Sunday as a Christian Sabbath.

It's further noted that in the few times a year major event work cut into his Sabbath, Kirk would instead take Sunday as his Sabbath or take extra time the next week. But the Sabbath does not work that way. People should not be doing regular work on it unless there is a legitimate emergency situation.

On the issue of phones, TVs and other electronic devices, the book devotes a lot of space to the need to unplug from technology on the Sabbath—and having visitors for Sabbath meals drop their phones in a basket. Yet that is not a biblical requirement. It's a man-made regulation. This idea initially sprang from the Jewish regulation of not using electricity on the Sabbath—part of the categories of work seen as forbidden on the day. This one was reasoned from the law about not building a fire on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:3)—though that was in the context of tabernacle construction and evidently concerned industrial fires.

It's true that people spend far too much time on electronic devices, as the book details. Many people are addicted to phone apps and social media, gaining dopamine hits from them. This is all indeed a problem, and it would be wise to cut down—especially on the Sabbath, and especially if the person has a problem. But we don't need to completely unplug from electronics on the Sabbath.

Missed in all this is talking to distant friends on the phone, writing an encouraging email letter, reading the Bible on an app, or watching a Bible or nature program on TV. These can all be time well spent on the Sabbath.

On the opposite end is what Kirk pronounced as allowable. For those with the excuse of not being able to keep the Sabbath because of their kids' sports tournaments, he said there is no conflict—that attending kids' league sports games and not scrolling on one's phone there is a good use of the Sabbath. For all the discussion of peace and calm and focus, this is rather incongruous. Missing is discussion

about Isaiah 58:13-14, where God tells us not to be seeking our own ways or doing as we please on His holy day.

More legitimate is the response to the excuse of some that they will start considering Sabbath observance when things calm down—when they're not so busy. “Sabbath is not about having time; it's about making a decision to stop even when everything else tells you to keep going . . . You will never not be busy . . . The work doesn't stop, but you can” (p. 229).

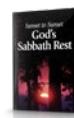
The concluding pages give a picture of a whole culture reoriented to the Sabbath as a means of national healing. It's pointed out that “we are not designed to operate at the pace we're currently going . . . It's only going to get worse . . . The Sabbath is God's answer to a culture spinning out of control . . . On the seventh day, we stop . . . We rest because we're obedient” (pp. 261-262).

And that's also as a witness. “Remember,” it was earlier stated, “your Sabbath is not just about you. It is not a private act of self-care, but a public declaration of allegiance to another kingdom” (p. 236). Indeed!

The book's closing words make a final appeal: “Let the people of God be the ones who pause. Who breathe. Who say, ‘This day belongs to the Lord’ . . . Failing to honor the Sabbath is, quietly, to wage war on your own design—and the consequences of that are all around us . . . Stop, in God's name” (p. 265).

There are so many positive exhortations here—among significant error. It's hoped that those introduced to the Sabbath through this book will study further and come to a fuller biblical perspective—to experience the great blessings that true obedience to God's command brings! [BT](#)

## DIVE DEEPER



To help direct you to see what the Bible truly reveals about God's Sabbath and our responsibility to keep it holy, be sure to request or download our free study



guide *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*. Scan the code or visit [ucg.org/maz6](http://ucg.org/maz6) to find it.

## The geostrategic value of Greenland

The moves under U.S. President Donald Trump to press for control over Greenland, now an autonomous territory of Denmark, have been met with antagonism from European nations. What's behind the U.S. policy?

Some chalk it up to swagger and self-aggrandizement. Others think it's about acquiring rare earth minerals to compete with China. Yet, as analysts point out, China controls 90 percent of rare earth processing, so that Western ore will be flowing through Chinese refineries for a good while to come. As one report explained: "You do not solve a processing monopoly by acquiring unprocessed rock on the other side of the planet. . . [So] what is Greenland actually about?" ("The Real Reason the US Wants to Take Over Greenland," The Minority Report, Jan. 15, 2026).

The report lists three things. The first concerns military positioning guarding the GUIK Gap (Greenland-Iceland-UK) naval chokepoint, which includes early warning against Russian ballistic missiles coming over the Arctic. While there has already been a defense agreement between America and Denmark for this purpose, outright control would hedge against shifts in international alignments and the European security structure.

Second is control over emerging sea routes as Arctic ice melts, reducing Asia-Europe travel time by up to 40 percent compared to the Suez Canal, being gatekeeper and toll collector rather than toll payer (though it would still cost to hold).

Third, perhaps most important, is denying strategic

positioning to China, which has declared itself a "near-Arctic state" and is pursuing a "Polar Silk Road." If Greenland ever aligned with or gave access to China, it would be within striking distance of America, would have access to Arctic shipping chokepoints and would have a foothold in NATO's traditional sphere of influence.

Geostrategic chokepoints, such as vital sea lanes, are relevant to understanding Bible prophecy. God foretold future national greatness for the descendants of Israel, foremost among them the tribes of Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasse—largely represented today among the people of Britain and America (as explained in our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*). And a major factor in their international dominance was to be the possession of the gates of their enemies (Genesis 22:17; 24:60; compare Nahum 3:13). It's not coincidental that Britain and America have possessed and controlled many of the vital land and sea gates in modern history.

What will happen with Greenland is unclear. Is this a time of gaining yet more geopolitical gates—or seeing these chokepoints continue to slip away? Time will tell, but the United States still has a significant measure of control here for the near future. Some think President Trump is not really trying to acquire Greenland—that this is more about ensuring long-term guarantees and leverage in other negotiations with Europe. Yet that may also serve to further divide America from its NATO partners—another factor that may bear on prophesied events.



## 27 percent of U.S. self-checkout shoppers admit stealing

A Lending Tree survey in October 2025 found that 27 percent of American shoppers using self-checkout machines have deliberately taken items without scanning them ("More Than 1 in 4 Self-Checkout Shoppers Admit They've Stolen: Survey," The Hill, Dec. 6, 2025). For Millennials and Gen Z adults the figure is around 40 percent! For older people of the baby boom generation the figure is much less—only 2 percent.

A third of those who've stolen say they feel no remorse, while more than half feel they'll do it again. People excuse themselves by saying higher prices are "unfair" or "too high." Many even see self-checkout as "unpaid work" and taking small items as "compensation." Strangely, those making over \$100,000 were the most likely to take without scanning—40 percent, versus 17 percent of those making less than \$30,000. Maybe there is some sense of entitlement in that or less fear among wealthier people of any consequences for being caught.

God's Word thunders, "You shall not steal!" (Exodus 20:15). But clearly morality has plummeted. Many stores are now rethinking self-checkout, and some are pulling back. (For more on what God says about this matter, request or download our free study guide *The Ten Commandments*.)

## Is an "Islamic NATO" coming together?

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement this past September. Then in January reports began circulating that Turkey was seeking to join the defense alliance. An article in *The Times of India* was titled "Islamic Nato in making? How Turkish arms, Saudi cash and Pakistan nukes could align—all about the defence pact" (Jan. 14, 2026).

The pact "states that 'any aggression' against one member would be treated as an attack on all—a provision that mirrors Article 5 of Nato, of which Turkey is a member and fields the second-largest military after the US. . . If Turkey formally joins the pact, it would highlight a new phase in relations with Saudi Arabia, once rivals for leadership of the Sunni Muslim world" (ibid.).

Then Qatar's royal family member Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, a former prime minister, "proposed including Egypt and presumably his own country too. Bloomberg reported right after that Saudi Arabia is finalizing a military pact with Turkish-allied Somalia and Egypt for curtailing the [United Arab Emirates' or] UAE's influence in Africa. . . [And] Pakistan cinched its own security pact with Somalia over the summer" and had talks with Egypt (Andrew Korybko, "The Nascent

'Islamic NATO' Might Soon Set Its Sights on Somaliland," Substack, Jan. 17, 2026).

"The members of this emerging Saudi-centric coalition all oppose Somaliland's 1991 redeclaration of independence [from Somalia], which was recently recognized by Israel. Somaliland also has close ties with the UAE and Ethiopia" (ibid).

This merits attention going forward. The Bible speaks in Psalm 83 of a large confederacy arrayed against Israel made up of surrounding peoples that are today Muslim. Daniel 11 foretells an end-time power bloc under a "king of the South," with ancient roots in Egypt—which will at some point attack the "king of the North," an end-time revival of the Roman Empire centered in Europe. A fledgling Islamic alliance could eventually develop into the end-time southern power. (To learn more, request or download our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.)



# Eternal Hellfire

## The Question That Will Not Die

A shift of some among the evangelical Christian community away from the traditional view of hell to belief in the total destruction of the wicked is causing a stir. What does the Bible actually teach?

by Ken Loucks

**W**hat is the fate of those who in the end ultimately reject God and refuse to repent of their sins? The traditional view of mainstream Christianity is that they will burn in unquenchable hellfire for all eternity. Many who are uncomfortable with that idea, who see it as inconsistent with God's love and mercy, have embraced other ideas. Some think burning in hell is just figurative language for suffering in this life. Others have taken a position of universal salvation—that ultimately all will be saved, with none lost. Yet that's not what the Bible says. Of course, what the Bible says is what we need to know and understand.

It's generally recognized among Christian believers that God will judge the living and the dead, that every person will give account before Jesus Christ, and that rejecting God has devastating consequences. The fact is, hellfire is presented in Scripture as a serious warning, not a metaphor to be dismissed. Indeed, there certainly will be judgment. The question before us is how Scripture describes the *final outcome* of that judgment.

In recent months, renewed attention has been drawn to this subject following published video from famous actor and now evangelical teacher Kirk Cameron, in which he raises a question many believers quietly wrestle with but rarely voice: “*Are We Wrong About Hell?*” As he further asks, what does the Bible actually say happens to the wicked in the end? Are they preserved forever in conscious torment, or does Scripture describe a different conclusion—one that culminates in a final destruction the Bible calls “the second death”?

Cameron surprised many evangelical teachers by coming

down on the side of what is often termed *conditional immortality* or *conditionalism* (counter to the immortal soul, believing eternal life is given only to the saved) and *annihilationism*—belief in the utter destruction of the unrepentant.

The strong reactions to Cameron's comments and to people being receptive to them reveal how deeply assumptions about hell are woven into mainstream religious thought. Some welcomed the discussion; others feared that questioning traditional formulations threatens core doctrine, especially as the teaching of conditionalism is gaining some ground among evangelicals. Yet the question itself is not new, nor is it frivolous. It is a question about what the Bible actually says on this matter—and more broadly about the nature of God.

### Eternal life vs. death through fiery destruction

The Bible consistently presents eternal life as something granted, not assumed. Paul writes plainly, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Two outcomes are contrasted—death and life—not two different forms of immortal existence.

Ezekiel records God's declaration, “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). Jesus warned that God is able to “destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matthew 10:28, New American Bible)—the term here, sometimes translated “hell,” denoting the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem as a place of burning refuse. Ultimate destruction of both body and soul (or conscious existence) is not the language of unending anguish; it is the language of final loss.

Throughout the Old Testament, the fate of the wicked is described with striking consistency. “The wicked will perish,” King David wrote, adding that “they vanish—*like smoke they vanish away*” (Psalm 37:20, English Standard Version, emphasis added throughout). Malachi foretold a day when the wicked would be burned up like chaff, leaving them “neither root nor branch,” becoming “*ashes under the soles of your feet*” (Malachi 4:1-3).

What Scripture repeatedly emphasizes is not unending conscious existence under judgment, but irreversible destruction—incineration into smoke and ashes.

At the same time, we need to take seriously Jesus’ warnings of “unquenchable fire,” “outer darkness” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” These were not figurative of just peacefully going to sleep and never waking up. Jesus intended His words to shock, warn and awaken—of the terrible end awaiting those who ultimately refuse to follow Him.

The question, however, is the nature of this ending. Would it end in destruction, or would it go on forever? Realize that “unquenchable fire” does not mean a fire that burns forever. It means a fire that *can’t be extinguished before it finishes its work* (Mark 9:43)—burning until there is nothing left to consume. The chaff burned in Matthew 3:12 is *destroyed* by unquenchable fire; it does not burn forever.

Biblical imagery of ultimate punishment often conveys certainty and severity rather than duration. Fire consumes, darkness excludes from the light of life, and destruction ends what existed before. These images communicate the seriousness and finality of judgment without requiring perpetual conscious existence of those being punished.

Those who finally reject God await the judgment of “fiery indignation which will *devour* the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:27)—that is, completely consume them.

Now, Jesus did say the wicked would go away into “everlasting punishment,” while the righteous enter “eternal life” (Matthew 25:46). The parallel is often taken to mean identical duration of conscious experience. Yet Scripture frequently uses “eternal” to describe *results*, not ongoing processes. It is not everlasting punishing, but everlasting punishment—a final result from which there is no coming back.

Similarly, Hebrews speaks of “eternal judgment” (Hebrews 6:2), though judgment is not an action that continues forever. It is a verdict with permanent effect. Likewise, “eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12) does not mean Christ is eternally redeeming us, but that the redemption accomplished by Him *never expires*.

Paul’s phrase “everlasting destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9) reinforces this understanding. Destruction that lasts forever does not require an eternally ongoing act of destroying; it requires that what is destroyed is never restored.

## Divine justice and human reasoning

God gave the Israelites the justice principle of an eye for an eye—meaning not merely that punishment should fit the

crime but that punishment should not exceed the crime. Indeed, our very sense of justice in such regards comes from God—the true arbiter of justice. Consider, then: Those committing a mere human lifetime of sin will burn forever and ever? As Cameron questions in his video, “After a billion years, you’re not one second closer to the end?”

Many defenses of eternal conscious torment rely on philosophical reasoning rather than direct biblical statements. One of the most common arguments asserts that in God’s perfect justice, all sins, finite though they may, are committed against an infinite God and thus require infinite punishment.

But that’s just an idea dreamt up without proof. Nowhere does the Bible explicitly say that sins are punished eternally *because* God is infinite. And the idea is in fact illogical. For it would mean that divine justice can *never* be satisfied—not ever. Yes, it would be satisfied through Christ’s death for those who receive it. But since some will not, there is never an end point for those that will satisfy justice. God, in this picture, is “forced” by His own justice to keep people in the torment of hell without end—even though it does not satisfy that justice!

And after a billion, a trillion, a quadrillion years of burning there, those suffering would be no closer to relief—for relief will never, ever come.

Does this make sense? Does it make sense that God created people knowing that He would have to send many of them into eternal torture? Meanwhile God and the redeemed will be rejoicing through that same eternity.

Does this not seem a very dark picture of God? If you are disturbed by this, you are right to be! Again, our whole concept of proper justice comes from God. Moreover, the Bible tells us that *God is love* (1 John 4:8, 16)—outflowing concern for others. And it further tells us that His “mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). Yes, that would apply to Christ bearing judgment on our behalf. But is there not even the mercy of final death for the others? Again, the Bible declares *death*, not conscious torment, to be the wages of sin.

## Wrong assumptions about an immortal soul

The problem here for theologians defending eternal torment, who may well be motivated by a sincere desire to uphold God’s holiness and justice, is a misunderstanding of the nature of man—thinking God made us with immortal souls that cannot die. Once immortality is assumed, eternal torment must be accommodated for those who don’t repent. Yet Scripture teaches something quite different.

Paul states explicitly that God “alone has immortality” (1 Timothy 6:16). Immortality is not an inherent human trait; it belongs to God. Believers are told they will “put on immortality” at the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:53). You don’t put on something you’re already wearing.

Eternal life is consistently presented as a *gift*. Jesus said that whoever believes in Him “should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The word *perish* means to be utterly

destroyed or annihilated—not continuing to live in another form. If the wicked live forever, even in misery, then perishing loses its meaning.

On this point, Cameron’s observation aligns closely with Scripture. He noted that when immortality is assumed rather than demonstrated from the Bible, conclusions about hell are crafted more by philosophy than by biblical teaching. This concern was explored in depth by another Christian teacher Cameron referenced, Edward Fudge, who argued in his book *The Fire That Consumes* that immortality is conditional—granted only through Christ—and that the Bible never teaches the eternal existence of the wicked.

A common emotional objection is that conditional immortality is “watering down hell” and that it lets sinners “off the hook.” There is no “watering down” in simply conveying what the Bible actually says! And in what it says, sinners who ultimately refuse to repent do not get a pass. The permanent loss of life—the irreversible erasure of existence, relationship and future—is not leniency. It is the most absolute judgment Scripture can describe. Nothing could be more final!

As conditionalist researcher Joseph Dear argues at his website [RethinkingHell.com](http://RethinkingHell.com), annihilation results in infinite loss—the loss of eternal life itself. The punishment is not light; *it is total*.

If anything, the final loss of life underscores the urgency of the need for repentance. What is at stake is not merely comfort or condition, but existence itself—life that can only be received through Jesus Christ.

Scripture also affirms degrees of punishment. Jesus said it would be “more tolerable” for some than others in the day of judgment (Matthew 11:22; compare Luke 12:47-48). Conditional immortality fully allows for proportional judgment prior to a final destruction.

And what very few engaged in this debate understand is that there is far more to this last judgment period than immediate sentencing. God wants all people to receive the opportunity for redemption and salvation (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4). Yet all have not had that opportunity in this life. What happens to them?

### Tradition, sincerity and the need for reexamination

Many sincere believers have assumed interpretive frameworks about hell and the afterlife without realizing their unbiblical origins. This is not an accusation of bad faith. Throughout church history, sincere people have held

The Bible does not teach eternal conscious torment—it teaches instead a final, irreversible destruction.



differing views while seeking to honor Scripture. The question is not whether tradition is worthless, but whether it must always be reexamined in light of Scripture. The Bereans were praised for testing what they were taught against God’s Word (Acts 17:11).

This article is not denying fiery judgment as the ultimate punishment or the seriousness of sin. It is not teaching universal salvation, temporary judgment or second chances beyond what Scripture describes. It is not minimizing Jesus’ warnings or God’s justice. What it *is* saying is that the Bible does not teach eternal conscious torment—that it teaches instead

a final, irreversible destruction in a “lake of fire” called “the second death” (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8), from which the saved are free.

Some would argue that rejecting the teaching of eternal conscious torment is just going with what feels more comfortable instead of what the Bible says. And there are some for whom that is probably true—especially those espousing universal salvation. But the Bible does not teach eternal conscious torment as assumed—just as it does not teach the automatic immortality of the soul. Moreover, there is a proper circumstance for considering whether we are comfortable with a teaching or not—and that is how well it accords with our understanding of the whole of Scripture and the nature of God as revealed in it.

It’s vital that we learn what the Bible truly says. Indeed, there is far more to this matter than what mainstream Christians and most conditionalists understand—the Bible revealing much more about the last judgment period. This is a big subject, and we invite our readers to request our free study guide *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* It answers many issues that have been raised to support the traditional view and presents much more about what the Bible says about life after death.

Let it be said for now that the Bible does not teach that people will burn forever in eternal hellfire. The wicked will be burned up. But that is not a fate to desire—for it is indeed infinite loss. Receive instead the gift that God is offering—“eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” **BT**

### DIVE DEEPER



The idea that people will burn in agony forever is a myth that did not come from the Bible. To better see what Scripture teaches on this greatly misunderstood subject, be sure to request or download our free study guide *Heaven & Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Scan the code or visit [ucg.org/ma26](http://ucg.org/ma26) to find it.



# Have You Ever Prayed a *Michtam*?



**Six of the Psalms bear this label in their headings. What is special about them? And how do they fit with our circumstances today?**

by Rex Sexton

**D**avid was on the run. King Saul had sworn to kill him and had sent men to hunt for him. Heading to the neighboring land of the Philistines, historical enemies of Israel, David sought refuge with Achish, the king of Gath (1 Samuel 21:10). That seems an odd choice, since David had killed the giant Goliath, the Philistine champion from this city, and many other Philistines. Perhaps David felt Achish might respect his daring or possible usefulness against Saul. Maybe some earlier offer had been extended. At least he was out of Saul's reach.

The officials of Achish warned that David was regarded as a king in Israel and recalled his past victories against them, mentioning the Israelites singing in celebration, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (verses 11-12). On hearing this, David became afraid and acted insane. He "pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard" (verse 13). Disturbed, the Philistine ruler wanted him out of his presence, but he didn't have him killed, perhaps because insane people were regarded as touched by the gods, and maybe he thought David could still be of use for leverage with Saul.

Soon after, David escaped from custody in Gath, fleeing to a cave in the lowlands between Judah and the Philistines (1 Samuel 22:1). While he was held in Gath, in fear of losing his life, David wrote Psalm 56. The danger he faced was to some degree the result of his own unwise decisions, which he couldn't undo. He knew that a miracle from God was his only hope. David passed on an important faith lesson in verse 11: "In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Psalm 56 is one of six psalms labeled "A Michtam of David." Situated apart from the others is Psalm 16, while Psalm 56 begins a sequence of five ending with Psalm 60. These latter five are set to music, the words fit to well-known songs of the time, enabling easier memorization.

What is a michtam? And how might this psalm form apply in our lives?

The word *michtam* (sometimes written as *mikhtam* or *miktam*) is of uncertain definition. It's often thought to mean an engraving or inscription, though some related it to a root translated as fine gold—perhaps stamped or as an inlay. Some suggest composition as a written work not originally set to music—or that these words were later actually engraved. The meaning could be figurative, relating to golden value or words to be inscribed to remember for all time.

What's clear is that each of the psalms labeled a michtam is an extremely intense prayer during a time of extreme danger or need. They all involve life-threatening situations that can't be solved by human effort—where God is the only answer. David in them acknowledges God's power and sovereignty and asks for deliverance. And the prayers end with assurance and conviction of faith in God's deliverance and help.

Perhaps best known of the michtam prayers is the first one, Psalm 16, recognized as prophetic. Verse 10, "For You will not leave My soul in Sheol [the grave], nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption," is quoted by the apostles Peter and Paul as referring to Jesus Christ (Acts 2:27; 13:35). This psalm was no doubt on Jesus' mind as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before He was arrested and put on trial—and many believe He would have been praying its words.

Have you ever prayed a michtam? If you are a Christian, there will be a time in your life when you will. God allows challenges and difficulties to test our character (Deuteronomy 8:2-3; 1 Peter 1:7). We will all come to a point where we will have exhausted every effort to solve a challenge to no avail. Perhaps it will be a disease or other physical malady we've tried every medical option to cure, only to find that nothing we are doing is working. Our only course is to look to our Creator to heal us and trust His will. Other challenges can also bring us to the point of praying a michtam. Employment problems, family issues or financial problems can be very serious.

Every Christian needs to learn the same lessons that David did, and thankfully these are recorded for us. The apostle James pointed out that "the testing of your faith produces patience [or endurance]" (James 1:3). The times when we must pray an intense, fervent prayer—a michtam—result in stronger character. Paul wrote, "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-5).

The lessons recorded for us in the michtams are simple and direct.

- *Trust in divine protection:* "Preserve me, O God, for in You I take refuge" (Psalm 16:1, English Standard Version).
- *Faith in the midst of fear:* "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You" (Psalm 56:3).
- *Faith during persecution:* "My soul is among lions . . . My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast" (Psalm 57: 4, 7).
- *Confidence in God's defense:* "I will wait for You, O You his Strength; for God is my defense" (Psalm 59:9).

The day will come when we will face a serious situation. We will realize that our God and Savior are the only answer. As David did when his life was in danger, we will pray our own michtam—an intense pleading prayer of precious value engraved on our minds for remembrance. Our God will hear those prayers. **BT**

## DIVE DEEPER



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# “I Know That My Redeemer Liveth”

Far more than a musical refrain, these words from Handel’s *Messiah* assure us of God’s abiding care and rescue through His Son, helping us to endure suffering and death with hope and faith for the future.

by Robin Webber

**A** story has it that when the noted conductor Reichel was guiding musicians through rehearsal of Handel’s inspiring oratorio *Messiah*, a soprano soloist sang with flawless technique the famous refrain “*I know that My Redeemer liveth.*” Everyone expected an approving response, but the conductor motioned for silence, walked over and asked almost sorrowfully, “My daughter, you do not really know that your Redeemer lives, do you?” Embarrassed, she answered, “Yes, I think I do.” “Then sing it!” he cried. “Tell me so that I’ll know you have experienced the joy and power of it.” She repeated her part with fervency that testified to her belief in the risen Lord. Listeners wept, and the conductor with tears in his eyes proclaimed, “You *do* know, for this time you have told me!”

As disciples of Jesus Christ, what may we bring forward from this account into our lives as we embrace what it means to yield ourselves to His invitation of “*Follow Me*”? (See Mark 8:34, emphasis added throughout.) Are we reticent and shy like the soloist regarding our personal belief in Jesus and His resurrection? Do we realize the world is a stage we enter each day as life comes at us and plays out in ways we never expected, testing us in this regard?

## Beyond just knowing *about* Christ

Do we grasp that genuine discipleship is more than knowing the right words and moving our lips, but centering and

solidifying hearts that are moved upward toward One who lived, died, was resurrected to life, ascended to heaven, and is forever exalted at the right hand of our Heavenly Father? Beyond knowing *about* Christ, we must come to *truly know Him*—and *grow in Him*. That’s not simply a mental attribute. It involves deep-seated spiritual roots that prepare us for not just today, but *forever* by God’s grace. It means knowingly embracing our human end—“It is appointed for men once to die” (Hebrews 9:27)—as but the beginning of God’s ultimate reality for each of us.

Note how Jesus raises our awareness level through what He told the original disciples on the last evening of His humanity: “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in Me. There is more than enough room in My Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way where I am going” (John 14:1-4, New Living Translation).

His disciple Thomas was blunt in his response. “No, we *don’t* know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me” (verses 5-6, NLT). And He further said that to really know Him was to know the Father (verse 7).

Thinking of Thomas, who was on the main stage of that

Passover evening with Jesus, shows us that even being close is not enough. It must go deeper! Jesus would gently be straightforward with Thomas then and later (John 20:24-29), as He is with us now—helping us to allow the living Redeemer to grow in us.

### The ageless echo that comes to us

But where does this famous phrase “I know that my Redeemer liveth” (in the King James Version) come from? The Gospels? Perhaps Paul’s epistles? No, it comes from the Old Testament—from the middle of the book of Job. Satan was

Beyond knowing *about* Christ, we must come to *truly know Him*—and *grow in Him*. That’s not simply a mental attribute. It involves deep-seated spiritual roots that prepare us for not just today, but forever by God’s grace.

sorely testing this follower of the one true God before Israel became a nation. He suffered the loss of nearly everything in terms of his family, property and health. God allowed it for a purpose beyond mere human endurance, as this saga extends for 42 chapters.

Early on, when unbelievable tragedy struck, Job’s words revealed that what lodged in his heart was bigger than the storms of life: “Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong” (Job 1:20-22).

As matters escalated with Job covered in painful boils, Mrs. Job had enough and laid down the gauntlet: “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:9-10).

What held Job together at human wits’ end from *knowing God* to 40 chapters later further *growing in God* when he uttered, “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You”? (Job 42:5). The tight knot binding the bow and keeping God’s wrapping on Him is discovered in Job 19: “Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book! [Little did he know!] That they were engraved on a rock with an iron pen and lead, forever! For *I know that my Redeemer lives*, and He shall stand at last on the earth” (verses 23-25). And he further declared his deep yearning to see God (verses 26-27), having earlier stated that he knew he would be resurrected after his death (Job 14:10-15).

How can we better understand the role of a redeemer? In ancient Israel, a redeemer was someone who bought a slave’s way to freedom or an attentive near relative who stepped in to restore and secure family interests amid difficulties, such as happened in the book of Ruth when Boaz restored the property of the widowed Naomi and married her daughter-in-law to continue the family line of Naomi’s former husband and her deceased son (in line with rules in Deuteronomy 25:5-10). The redeemer embodied hope for those in despair over inability to create a future on their own. Rescue had to come from elsewhere! The patriarch Jacob spoke of being divinely redeemed in Genesis 48:16.

This aspect of God’s work was later crystallized in the apostle Paul’s identifying words about the Redeemer in Titus 2:13-14: “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our

great God and Savior Jesus Christ [our Elder Brother, Hebrews 2:11-12], who gave Himself for us, that *He might redeem us* from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

### The Redeemer’s touch

As we conclude, let us consider another apostle’s words. John outlived all of his colleagues, but he too would ultimately die. Yet not long before that, Christ came to Him through a vision recorded for us: “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. *But He laid His right hand on me*, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades [the grave] and of Death’” (Revelation 1:17-18).

Our Heavenly Father and His Christ understood that John needed to fully know that His Redeemer lived—that he needed this “hands-on” moment from the Risen One as the humanly challenging roll-out of God’s future plan to bring redemption to the world was revealed.

Perhaps *for such a time as now* (compare Esther 4:14) you are reading this column, and like the soloist of long ago you have needed a time-out on the stage of life to be refreshed, encouraged and emboldened. So then, “Sing it!” Live it! And feel the touch of our Redeemer on your heart. **BT**

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**Q: Doesn't 1 Corinthians 11:26 say we can partake of the bread and wine of communion as often as we choose to?**

**A:** Many assume so, but no, that's not what it says. Paul is speaking in 1 Corinthians 11 of the specific observance Jesus instituted on "the night in which He was betrayed" (verse 23).

The Gospel accounts make clear that this was the Passover (Luke 22:8, 11, 15)—with Jesus revealing new significance to the occasion, the partaking of the bread and wine signifying the acceptance of His sacrificial death. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Paul refers to the church partaking together of these symbols as the "communion" or sharing of the body and blood of Christ in a figurative sense. Again, this was the Passover. In fact, Paul earlier in 1 Corinthians 5:7 says that "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."

Passover was an *annual* occasion, coming on the 14th day of the first month on the Hebrew calendar in the spring (Leviticus 23:5). As a youth, Jesus Himself observed the Passover with His family at the specified time each year (Luke 2:41). And He continued this yearly practice with His disciples, ending with the last one, the night of His betrayal before He was

killed. After Christ's death and resurrection, the early Church continued to observe the annual festivals listed in Leviticus 23. For example, Luke records that Jesus' followers met to observe the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

The Passover was likewise still observed, but now as a memorial to Christ's death—He being the true Passover Lamb. Even in secular society, it's customary to observe memorials on an annual basis. And being the Passover, it was already an annual occasion observed on the same day each year on the Hebrew calendar.

There is nothing to indicate that Christians might arbitrarily choose to partake of the bread and wine representing Christ's sacrifice at some time other than the time decreed in the Bible—the time of Passover at the beginning (that is, in the evening) of the 14th day of the first month on the Hebrew calendar.

When Paul said "as often as" you partake of the bread and wine, he did not mean *as often as you choose to of yourself*, as many think. He simply meant *whenever* or *every time* Christ's followers actually *did* partake of them as part of the Passover service—which was once a year on the night Christ was betrayed. The New Living Translation says, "every time you eat this bread and drink this cup" (emphasis added).

This was not promoting some daily or weekly or quarterly "communion" service—or even an annual communion service disconnected from the biblical Passover, such as on supposed "Good Friday." It was simply talking about the observance of the Passover each year.



**Q: Was "breaking bread from house to house" in Acts 2:46 an example of a daily communion ceremony?**

**A:** No, the verse just means that Christians were sharing meals in each other's homes. Even today, the expression "break bread" simply means to eat a meal.

Bread is often synonymous in Scripture with food in general, as it has historically been the principal sustenance and a common feature at meals. And with bread in particular the custom until more recent times was to tear a loaf into smaller portions for all to eat. We see this in the Bible, with scriptures such as Luke 9:16-17, where Jesus in feeding the five thousand broke loaves of bread into pieces—with "broken pieces" left over.

Furthermore, Jewish meals of Christ's day customarily began with a blessing over bread followed by breaking apart that bread for distribution. As *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* states of the breaking of bread in Acts 2:42 and 2:46: "It would rather seem to be implied that this referred to the participation of their ordinary meals. The action of breaking bread was commonly performed by the master or head of a family immediately after asking a blessing" (note on Acts 2:42).

Also read Acts 27:33-38, where bread was broken after Paul gave thanks in a meal for nourishment, with non-Christian shipmates receiving enough to eat.

The meaning in Acts 2:46 is also regular food. The full verse states that believers attended the temple daily and then returned to private homes to share a meal. The New Century Version paraphrases this, "They ate together in their homes, happy to share their food with joyful hearts." The International Standard Version says they "ate at each other's homes, and shared their food with glad and humble hearts."

As with all Jewish meals, the Passover meal likewise included the blessing and breaking of bread—in this case, unleavened bread as a required part of the ceremony. During the Passover meal before His death, Jesus incorporated the blessing and breaking of bread into a new Christian observance of Passover. On this occasion, observed once each year on the same night, the breaking of unleavened bread symbolizes Christ's sinless body being broken as an important aspect of His sacrifice for our sins.

Yet the common phrase "breaking bread" still referred to eating meals generally, as it did in Acts 2:46. Interestingly, our modern words "company" and "companion" derive from Old French *cumpaignon*, "one who breaks bread with another," from the Latin *companis*, meaning "together with" (*com*) + "bread" (*panis*), or someone with whom you were sharing bread or meals. **BT**

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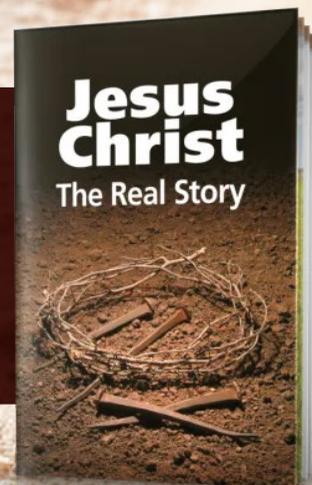
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