

# BEYOND TODAY

*Envisioning a Better World Tomorrow*

AMERICA AT



250



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## The Ultimate Triumph

In our March–April 2026 issue, we showed how Jesus Christ’s suffering and death were not a tragic defeat but a divinely planned victory revealing Him as the true King. We also focused on His ongoing work—redeeming, transforming and preparing believers to share in His coming reign.

### Readers respond to the articles in our March–April issue

I was *not* going to renew my subscription because I get so many magazines such as yours but I want you to know that after reading “The Ultimate Triumph” by Tom Robinson, I just had to renew. What an elucidation! I had no idea of the correlations that existed as laid out in this article. What an eye-opener! As I was reading the #10 section, I was reminded of how His disciples asked Him to grant them the right and left positions beside Him and His reply, not just that they didn’t understand what they were asking, *and* that it wasn’t His to grant, but that it shall not be so among them! (Mark 10:43) which was not mentioned in the article and so served as a reminder to go look it up! I love it when that happens, so kudos to Mr. Robinson and to the publishers and followers of the Messiah.

*From the Internet*

I wanted to express my greatest appreciation for [“The Ultimate Triumph”]. I had never before seen the deep parallel between the “Via Crucis” and the emperor’s triumphal procession ceremony. I am Italian and very aware of the great influence the Imperial cult had on early Christianity; this article is valuably contributing to my Passover preparation, and I enthusiastically wanted to thank Mr. Robinson and the entire editorial team for the fine work. When I’m back in Rome, I will surely walk that route with different eyes thanks to you.

*Reader from Italy*

I am a *Beyond Today* subscriber and enjoy your content because it is practical and to the point. However, some content doesn’t

go far enough to indicate that the choices people make start with whose spirit has ownership of the mind, then come the physical consequences based on the choice that the person makes, whether good or bad. There should be more emphasis on the spiritual side of Scripture, being that God’s laws are spiritual.

*From the Internet*

*Thank you for your thoughtful feedback. Choices do have consequences, and it is our aim to help people make decisions based on scriptural guidance.*

I read with trepidation and prejudice the article titled “Stop, in the Name of God,” by Tom Robinson, regarding the late Charlie Kirk’s posthumously published book. I’m a newbie, and it’s taken several years to be able to somewhat discern what’s in line with God’s Word and what is made up by man. Simply put and somewhat unfairly, I’m anti-Charlie Kirk, but Tom eloquently points out the pros and cons of the book and shows readers what is Scripture-aligned and what is manmade regulation. Thank you, Tom, for pointing out the gray areas I’d been walking in through my journey.

*From the Internet*

### Readers looking for guidance

I started getting your booklets about 2 months ago and was raised Christian, or so I thought. Now I learn I’m not properly observing the Holy Days, including the weekly Sabbath. I am 54 years old and now I am questioning if I am even saved and going to heaven. Please help.

*From the Internet*

*Thank you for reaching out. Discovering biblical truths you were previously unaware of can be overwhelming, especially when*

*they challenge lifelong beliefs. Thankfully, God is compassionate, long-suffering and merciful toward us as we seek His guidance. Understanding these truths is a process, and it is a blessing to grow in that understanding now. We encourage you to continue seeking God through prayer and Bible study. Our 12-lesson Bible study course and library of Bible study aids can help you continue building a stronger foundation in God’s Word. Find it at [ucg.org/js26](http://ucg.org/js26).*

I am writing to ask if you could please send me a brochure about the holy feasts of God. That brochure, which explains the feasts in detail, is very interesting to me. You may also send me any other brochures. I am a faithful follower of your church and send many blessings to all of you.

*Reader from Chile*

*Thank you for your interest in this Bible study aid! You can read it online or request a physical copy at [ucg.org/js26](http://ucg.org/js26). You may also browse our library of other study aids at [ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-study-aids](http://ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-study-aids).*

### Grateful for free material

You always send me the information I request for free. So, I want to send a donation. Thank you.

*From the Internet*

*We appreciate your support of the work! Our resources are always free and available to anyone, but such help makes this possible.*

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# Let Freedom Ring

As countries go, the United States of America has ascended higher than any nation ever has. It's also quite unique. Americans, for better or worse, have a certain nature about them. We tend to have an intense love of loud and brash things: fast cars, rock 'n' roll, fireworks. All things likely seen around the current Fourth of July celebrations.

While I personally have looked forward to all the parades, firework displays and cookouts accompanying it, there's one thing that stands out which I cherish more than all of that.

Freedom.

Freedom is a large concept and takes on many forms. Here in the United States, it means the ability to say and think as we wish, when we wish and how we wish. On a more fundamental level, it means having a voice in one's governance and not being bound under oppression and tyranny.

Freedom is an awesome virtue and one I am personally very thankful for. But what really is freedom, and why is it so near and dear to humanity across the globe?

According to singer-songwriter Kris Kristofferson in his 1971 hit song "Me and Bobby McGee," freedom is simply what we have when we have nothing left to lose. In one sense, when the tyranny of oppression became so great, the founding fathers of the United States were willing to risk their lives for freedom. They had nothing left to lose. When soldiers give their lives—all that they have—they quite literally have nothing left to lose.

While that sounds like a good definition, it has a major flaw. Freedom is too often confused with just being able to do what you want, when you want, for any reason you want. It lacks any sort of connection to responsibility. Genuine freedom, or true liberty, carries with it the idea of something bigger—being able to say and do as you choose, but with a certain sense of responsibility. It

is the idea that we are free from something we might otherwise be beholden to—liberated not to just do as we please, but to do as we ought to.

As Christians, this concept should ring loudly through the freedom from sin that is offered through baptism into Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul speaks boldly about this new life in Christ: "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin" (Romans 6:6-7).

Regardless of where you live, you can be freed from sin through the blood and life of Jesus Christ. We are no longer indebted to the wages of sin, which are death, when we repent and accept His sacrifice (verse 23).

This freedom carries with it a responsibility. In verse 12 of this same passage, we are reminded, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts." Along with freedom from sin and death comes the requirement of obedience to God's law.

Our aim here at *Beyond Today* is to help you in your journey to the Kingdom of God. We strive to do that by preaching the gospel or good news that Jesus shared, as well as by expounding on how God's Word outlines how we are to live, both now and beyond today.

The freedoms citizens of the United States and various other countries enjoy are of great value. The freedom from sin and death that God provides through Jesus Christ is *priceless*.

Let *this* freedom ring.

Dan Preston, Senior editor



Regardless of where you live,  
you can be freed from sin  
through the blood and life of  
Jesus Christ.

# AMERICA AT

# 250

## HER RISE AND RESTORATION

As the United States celebrates its 250th birthday, we consider what's ultimately behind the rise of this great nation and what the future holds. The story begins and ends with the promises and prophecies of the Bible.

by Dan Preston

If you were to ask any American what made their country rise to greatness, the answer might revolve around the blessing of freedom in some way: Democratic elections, the Bill of Rights, the ability to choose where you live and what you do with your life. These are all elements of freedom.

But if you were to ask the same people to explain *how* America came to enjoy these blessings, they might hesitate in an effort to pin down an exact cause. Some might cite the natural resources of her land, such as rich soil and various mineral deposits. Others might consider her navigable waterways and natural borders key factors in defending freedom.

These things certainly helped build America and allowed industrialists such as Vanderbilt, Carnegie and Rockefeller to create and expand physical infrastructure to support a nation. But how did these things culminate to make America what it is today? Was it just time and chance?

Historians would tell you that overtaxation by the British on the Colonies and the Revolutionary War and

the Declaration of Independence that followed are all major factors that made the United States what it is today. While that is all very true, is that the real source of the freedom and blessings that made America so powerful?

### An ancient story

The real answer goes back millennia before the country was founded.

Believe it or not, this story starts in Genesis 12:1-3 when the Lord told Abram:

“Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

America’s rise to greatness *started* with promises that were made to Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham.

While Scripture does not directly state this, it does reveal *what* blessings were granted to Abraham and his

descendants. By comparing these prophesied blessings to the historical record, the connection between Abraham and America becomes clear.

## Blessings handed down

The immediate family tree of Abraham is clearly laid out in the Bible.

While Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, it was to Isaac that Abraham's blessings passed (Genesis 26:24). From there, the blessing was given to Isaac's son, Jacob. Although his older brother Esau would have tra-

While critics might argue the point, they would be hard-pressed to show any other nations that carry these birthright blessings from Abraham today.

ditionally received the birthright blessing, God told the boys' mother, Rebekah, that the younger would achieve prominence over the older (Genesis 25:23). The Bible records that those blessings indeed passed on to Jacob (Genesis 27:21-29; 28:3-4).

While Jacob led a rather unique and, at times, challenging life, God maintained His promise to Abraham through Jacob.

"Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.' So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: 'I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land'" (Genesis 35:9-12).

Later, Jacob (renamed Israel), passed on these blessings to his 12 sons. However, the vast majority of the material blessings he passed on to *one* son, Joseph, and more specifically Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh:

"Then Israel [Jacob] stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said: 'God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon

them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth'" (Genesis 48:14-16).

## Where do these blessings reside today?

God's blessings are then woven into the stories of these two sons of Joseph. Jacob later foretold in Genesis 49, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall" (verse 22).

To identify the modern descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh, consider: Which nations do we see on earth today that have rich, material blessings that extend far and wide?

Material or financial blessings were only part of the promises that passed down. Strength and might were foretold as well. Verses 23-24 read: "The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob . . ."

Loved or hated, there's no denying that it was through British rule and colonialism that much of our modern world was shaped. While human beings often fall short and inflict terrible abuses on one another, God saw to it His blessings were spread.

Respected historian Fritz Blackwell in his article "The British Impact on India, 1700-1900," notes an interesting connection about the decision to make English the official language of India: "That decision opened a can of worms: men educated in English law saw the possibilities of constitutional democracy. No one Indian language could claim the majority of speakers, and English provided the bridge that made communication possible between the educated from different parts of India. The importance of this development cannot be overemphasized" (*Education About Asia*, Fall 2008). He goes on to write about both negative and positive impacts of British rule, "The British engaged in racism and exploitation, and they also provided the doors that would lead to Indian democracy and nationhood."

Genesis 49:26 makes it even clearer that these God-ordained gifts would pass on through the descendants of Joseph. Here Jacob (Israel) foretells what would happen to his sons: "The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers."

This blessing is the same one passed from Abraham on

down to Isaac, who bestowed it on Jacob—a God-given family inheritance. The other brothers' blessings were much smaller. No other descendants were promised anything close to what Joseph was, with the notable exception of the tribe of Judah, which was to have the lineage of kingship leading to the Messiah (verses 8-12). While that in and of itself is a tremendous blessing, the material blessings promised to Joseph rest soundly in the English-speaking nations of the world today.

In his book, *The "Lost" Ten Tribes of Israel . . . Found!*, researcher Steven Collins comes to the same conclusion:

"The modern nations which descended from an Anglo-Saxon heritage are England, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These nations have perfectly fulfilled all prophecies about the birthright tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh" (1992, p. 383).

While the United States currently seems more prominent and powerful, it was only following the expansion of the British Empire that its strength and might grew. This aligns with what Jacob told Joseph regarding his sons:

"So he blessed them that day, saying, 'By you Israel will bless, saying, "May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!"' And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh" (Genesis 48:20). Through this and the prophecy that Ephraim was to become a multitude of nations while Manasseh was to become a great single nation (verse 19), it's understood that the nations of Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are, in large measure, the modern descendants of Ephraim, while the people of the United States are largely of Manasseh.

While critics might argue the point, they would be hard-pressed to show any other nations that carry these birthright blessings from Abraham today. (For more on this topic, please download or request a free copy of our Bible study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

### God requires responsibility

While the Spider-Man comic series made popular the phrase, "With great power comes great responsibility," this concept can be traced to the Bible. Jesus Christ tells us, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

In many ways, the United States has done this well. In his article, "Our Ten Contributions to Civilization," historian Arthur Schlesinger Sr. remarked: "Viewed as a whole, the contributions of America to civilization will be seen to have been for the most part in the nature of methods or processes. They have aimed to release men from political and religious disabilities, from ignorance and poverty,

from backbreaking toil" (*The Atlantic*, March 1959).

Of course, some would disagree. They might say America's example and intervention throughout the world were for her own selfish interests. Specific instances and motives could certainly be examined, but the fact remains that the United States has far exceeded any other nations' contributions to help other nations in terms of both financial aid and human lives.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United States has pledged more than \$1.8 billion in global humanitarian aid this year alone, nearly twice that of the next closest contributor, the European Commission.

Calculating the number of lives lost fighting to liberate the oppressed is difficult. Perhaps a more sobering way to consider this factor can be found in the words of U.S. Army Gen. Mark Clark about American military cemeteries: "If ever proof were needed that we fought for a cause and not for conquest, it could be found in these cemeteries. Here was our only conquest: all we asked of Italy [along with other nations] was enough of her soil in which to bury our gallant dead" (*Calculated Risk*, 1950).

Regrettably, while the United States might still lead in financial and military might, it has fallen short elsewhere.

### A foundational principle laid aside

When the United States began its independence from British rule, the people weren't ignorant of who endowed them with basic rights. In the Declaration of Independence, the founders noted they were "appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude [rightness] of our intentions." They understood that it was God alone who had authority over man and that He would ultimately judge their actions. (See the article "The Declaration of Independence and Intelligent Design" in this issue beginning on page 28.)

Likewise, those founding fathers understood where their blessings came from. In instituting a national Thanksgiving in 1789, George Washington wrote that the day should be "devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be."

Many, perhaps yourself included, still look to God as the Supreme Judge and the Being who is the Author of all our blessings. If so, you've likely noticed the moral decay of the nation. While acts such as abortion, homosexuality and political corruption were hardly invented in the United States, they've certainly been celebrated and advanced here.



America's worldly preeminence originates from the promises God made to faithful Abraham thousands of years ago.

## Coming fall and restoration

So why does any of this matter? Just as the United States was given divine distinction through God's promises, we must acknowledge that those blessings can be taken away.

And they will.

As we believe Scripture shows us America's roots, we must also accept Scripture shows us America's future.

It tells us: "Now these are the words that the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah. 'For thus says the LORD: "We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it'" (Jeremiah 30:4-7).

The modern-day descendants of Jacob, including the United States and other nations of British heritage, are in for a difficult time, and not without reason. Continuing in verse 14, "All your lovers [or allies] have forgotten you; they do not seek you; for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins have increased."

Looking at the cultural norms of Western society today, is there any doubt of the retreat from biblical values? From modern-day forms of child sacrifice, such as abortion, to rampant crimes of murder, robbery and sexual assault, to economic oppression of the poor, to the all-out assault on biblical marriage, the modern descendants of Israel have strayed far from their God.

## Redemption and another promise

America's worldly preeminence originates from the promises God made to faithful Abraham thousands of years ago. While those blessings will vanish in the years preceding a terrible time of calamity, a far greater blessing will take their place after that.

Remember the original promise made to Abraham in

Genesis 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you *all* the families of the earth shall be blessed" (emphasis added). God said that *all* families of the earth will be blessed. That blessing was fulfilled to a vital degree through the coming of Jesus Christ, a descendant of the tribe of Judah.

Genesis 49:10 tells us, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [the Sent One] comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people." This is a prophecy of Jesus Christ. It is through Him that salvation comes (Acts 4:10-12).

While the physical blessings passed to Ephraim and Manasseh are wonderful, they are worthless compared to this spiritual "scepter promise" through Judah.

Galatians 3:28-29 further explains: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." It could be said today that in Christ there is neither American nor European, African nor Asian. No matter what nation we hail from or where we trace our ancestry, this scepter promise passes to those in whom Christ lives (compare also Romans 15:8-13).

This isn't just some theological concept. It will take shape as the coming Kingdom of God, which Jesus Christ will establish over all nations at His return. Revelation 11:15 tells us, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" As strong and independent as it has been, America will someday be under the direct rule of Jesus Christ—as will all countries (see "Living the Kingdom Today" beginning on page 14).

The day is coming when the blessings experienced in America over the last 250 years will be ancient history. Far greater will be the glorious blessing of inheriting with Christ the eternal Kingdom of God. May God speed that day! **BT**

## DIVE DEEPER



If you would like to learn more about this fascinating topic, request or download our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

Scan the code or visit [ucg.org/js26](http://ucg.org/js26) to find it.





# Mother of Exiles

**Most Christians today have not lived beyond the borders of their homeland, struggled with language barriers or felt the quiet exhaustion of being a different nationality from those they live among. Yet Scripture describes God’s people as strangers, foreigners and pilgrims. To understand why, we may first need to step outside the comfort of feeling at home.**

*by Scott Delamater*

**A**s the United States of America approached its 100th anniversary in 1876, the people of France were preparing an unprecedented gift for their American cousins. The French political thinker Edouard Rene de Laboulaye and sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi had conceived a colossal statue they named *Liberty Enlightening the World*. Upon its completion, it would be the tallest structure in Manhattan, towering over New York Harbor as a symbol of the political ideals they believed America embodied.

Private donations in France funded the statue; Americans were to fund the construction of the pedestal. But donations on both sides of the Atlantic lagged behind targets, and by the early 1880s, the project was stalled.

Fundraising efforts in the United States included the tediously named “Art Loan Fund Exhibition in Aid of the

Bartholdi Pedestal Fund” in 1883. The exhibition catalog opened with a sonnet by Emma Lazarus that would, in time, alter the symbolic meaning of the statue. The most famous lines of “The New Colossus”—the poem now engraved on a plaque within the pedestal—invite the tired, poor, huddled masses of the Old World to take refuge in the New.

Lazarus was herself a descendant of Jewish immigrants. In 1882, after learning of waves of anti-Jewish violence in the Russian empire, she became deeply involved in aiding the Jewish refugees flooding into the United States. Their plight “gradually absorbed more & more of my mind & heart,” she wrote in a letter to a friend. “It has about driven out of my thought all other subjects.”

Her passion for their plight and some persuasion from a friend compelled her to contribute her writing talents

## This mindset of identifying as strangers and foreigners is one God has tried to cultivate in His people for thousands of years.

to the fundraising effort. In lesser-known lines of “The New Colossus,” she gave the statue a name that likely reflected her concern for those refugees: *Mother of Exiles*. Conscious of it or not, the sentiment of the poem taps into the Bible’s recurring imagery of a displaced people searching for a homeland.

Long before the Statue of Liberty was conceived, or before the United States was a country, settlers in the New World borrowed heavily from the pilgrim, sojourner and exile imagery of the Bible. Writing in the mid-1600s of the early Massachusetts settlers, Governor William Bradford describes a people who “left that goodly and pleasant city . . . but they knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country . . .”

His words echo Hebrews 11:13-16, which describes the biblical heroes of faith—our spiritual forefathers who “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth . . . [Having not] called to mind that country from which they had come out . . . they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.”

By the early 1800s, it became common to refer to the early waves of immigrants in biblical terms.

In 1821, John Quincy Adams described them as “willing exiles from a country dearer to them than life . . . exiles of liberty and of conscience.”

In 1830, Daniel Webster described the “Pilgrim Fathers” who had landed at Plymouth Rock 200 years prior as those who “sought to enjoy a higher degree of religious freedom.” Today, Americans are more likely to associate pilgrims with early Colonial times than biblical ones.

But those early pilgrims were not the first or last Christians to see the biblical pilgrim and sojourner themes in their own stories. Exiled Christians have long found companions in the book of Hebrews. Even in less extreme circumstances, Christians in unfamiliar places identify with these heroes and the longing that motivated them.

### Modern sojourners

Most of us spend our whole lives as residents of the country where we were born. When the Bible speaks of strangers and foreigners, our first thoughts are probably of others—immigrants to our homeland. By contrast, Christians who emigrate to other lands understand this imagery firsthand.

Nicole Roig Espinoza immigrated to the United States from Chile in 2017, shortly before marrying her husband, Garrett Fenchel. The two met in Chile in 2010 and reconnected while serving together on a United Youth Corps project in Guatemala in 2015. After living in the United States for several years, Nicole’s father was diagnosed with a rare degenerative neurological disorder, and they moved to Chile to be near him in his final months.

They stayed in Chile for five years before returning to the United States.

Living as immigrants in each other’s homelands gave Garrett and Nicole a shared understanding of life as strangers and pilgrims.

“Part of your identity is the fact that you’re an immigrant,” Garrett reflected. “Coming home, you expect it to feel a lot better than it ends up feeling. You think it should be elation or relaxation, and I ended up feeling a lot more conflicted.”



Garrett and Nicole Fenchel

Nicole echoed similar sentiment.

“When I went back to Chile, it was like I lost something,” she said.

This mindset of identifying as strangers and foreigners is one God has tried to cultivate in His people for thousands of years.

God’s first recorded words to Abraham in the book of Genesis are, “Get out of your country” (Genesis 12:1). He showed Abraham that his descendants would be “strangers in a land that is not theirs” (Genesis 15:13). And they were. First as nomads, but eventually as slaves of the ancient Egyptians. Their identity as foreigners was brutally driven home before God miraculously rescued them.

As they traveled toward their Promised Land, God gave them laws on the treatment of foreigners that were unparalleled in ancient cultures. “You shall neither

mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:21). He called to mind their ancestral identity as a motivator.

When you embrace your identity as a stranger in this world, the notion of *home* becomes a bit elusive.

“After you’ve lived outside [your native country] long enough, if you go back and forth, what is your true home?” Garrett asked.

Nicole said that, for her, home isn’t a place at all.

“You’re in between,” she said. “I don’t feel that my home is in Chile. I don’t feel my home is here. My home is with my family.”

## No home to return to

The Fenchel Roig family’s back-and-forth is labeled by some agencies as “return migration,” which reflects the freedom of movement that some migrants have. But for others, the movement is one way.

Natallia Teague immigrated to the United States from Belarus by way of Barbados. She grew up in the Soviet Union in an atheist society where she was taught that believers were uneducated. It was not fertile ground for Christian efforts, but Natallia was drawn to Christianity despite the general absence of religion.



Natallia Teague with her husband, David

“I didn’t go looking—God took me,” she said.

She learned of God’s festivals (listed in Leviticus 23) and met with a small group in Estonia for the Feast of Tabernacles.

“There was a different spirit there. You may get used to it if you’re around it every week, but the first time you experience it, it is *extraordinarily* different,” she said. “People were so polite, kind to each other. They would take toys to children in need and visit people in homes. You could see in their eyes that they care. They were like . . . people not from this earth.”

After moving to Barbados, life took some unexpected turns. She wanted to leave, but there was no going back to Belarus for the simple reason that there was no church there. She volunteered for the United Church of God, helping edit literature in Russian. The church invited her to work from its home office in Ohio in 2010. She met her husband David within weeks of arriving, and they were married a year and a half later.

In recounting all this, Natallia provided a virtual tour of the city in Belarus where she spent much of her life as a young adult, pointing out the museums and the theater near the home she lived in.

“It’s a beautiful city,” she reminisced. “I miss it, but it is not mine.”

In her way, she joins those who, “if they had been thinking of the land that they had left . . . would have had opportunity to return” (Hebrews 11:15, New English Translation). Instead, she chose her spiritual family over what had once been familiar. Hebrews goes on to describe God as a Father who is “not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:16, NET).

## God’s mercy on the foreigner

Short of living as foreigners, most of us have some firsthand experiences of feeling out of place—whether

moving to a new city, starting at a new school or simply visiting an unfamiliar location. Those moments provide a glimpse of the discomfort of strangeness that God wants us to be able to tap into—in both thinking of ourselves as Christians and guiding our interactions with others.

Werner Solorzano was born and raised in Guatemala City, immigrating to the United States in 2024 to work for the United Church of God’s media team. He is no stranger to this discomfort.

“Living as a foreigner, you feel uncomfortable. There’s a constant feeling of not belonging, of not being part of the society in which you live,” he said. Looking to his wife, Stephanie, he asked, “Was it uncomfortable for you in Guatemala?”

Stephanie Rorem grew up in Pacifica, California. Her dad spoke Spanish fluently, and the Rorem family traveled to Central and South America regularly to serve congregations there. Stephanie met Werner on one of those trips. The two were married in 2018, living in Guatemala City for six years before moving to the United States.

“Uncomfortable? A little bit. I obviously stick out,” she laughed. Sandy-haired and pale, she was an uncommon sight in Guatemala City.

“That [discomfort] was more of a personal thing than any treatment I was receiving,” she said. Even apart from how others treated them, both experienced a quiet uneasiness in these respective places simply knowing they were different.

“There’s a scripture that says not to oppress the foreigner, because you know the heart of a foreigner,” Werner said, recalling Exodus 23:9. Like generations of



Werner and Stephanie Solorzano

Israelites that did not know slavery or wandering, modern Christians who never live as foreigners must cultivate a foreigner's heart.

We have to recall our own discomfort from whatever

firsthand experiences we may have. Without it, we're missing opportunities to connect.

"I don't think I ever hear much about what it's like to feel like a foreigner," Werner said of modern Christian messaging. "Some people just can't relate."

When you're able to tap into your own experience as a stranger, you understand the needs of those who live on the margins in some way, who depend on the kindness of the majority—and whom God Himself looks after.

"The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:17-18).

The Old Testament often speaks of the stranger in the same breath as other powerless and marginalized individuals, noting that God takes special interest in them.

Jesus Christ used similar depictions of the powerless to illustrate the care He expected His disciples to show.

"For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in" (Matthew 25:35). Christians who understand their identity as strangers and pilgrims turn that discomfort into care for others.

Garrett and Nicole experienced this on their return to the United States. While waiting to pick up their children from school, parents of one of their daughter's classmates approached them.

"They came out of nowhere and [the mom] says, 'Hey, I know it's a hard time for you to be here. And I just wanted to let you know that I'm thinking about you,'" Nicole said. "It makes a huge impact. It was like fresh air."

When we can tap into our own experience as foreigners, strangeness becomes common ground.

"Maybe that's the connection," Werner said, "where they can look past your foreignness and just see another guy who lives here."

## Living as strangers

Embracing our Christian identity as strangers and pilgrims does more than just connect us to the people around us. It connects us with God Himself.

The apostle John describes Jesus as One who "became flesh and took up residence among us" (John 1:14, NET). He lived as a stranger and a pilgrim in a hostile world. He wasn't aligned with the movements or governments of His time, but with the purpose of the One who sent Him. He lived among passionate Jewish nationalists, Roman conquerors and religious zealots—not as one of them, but as the *other*, a true alien.

Jesus isn't asking anything of His disciples that He hasn't lived. This is a great comfort to Nicole.

"I can see that God is seeing what I'm going through," Nicole said. "I feel like there's someone up there who understands me."

To live as Christians is to recognize how alien we are to the governments and systems erected around us and to live as representatives of a different Kingdom, just as Jesus did.

Like the heroes of Hebrews 11, Christians today seek a homeland. Paul reminded the church in Philippi that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). That doesn't mean we have no earthly citizenship or responsibilities, but they are subject to this greater reality.

Paul repeats this theme of where our citizenship lies by defining the limits of our strangeness: "You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). He combines the ideas of citizenship and family into a complete vision of belonging.

This isn't flowery language. There is a real Kingdom that Christians already belong to—a government that will be established on earth that will have no end.

It's just not here yet.

It is found in the "city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10), the "city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (verse 22), the same city that John describes as "the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven" (Revelation 21:2) to a new earth. It is more than a hopeful monument, a beacon of liberty or a symbolic Mother of Exiles, but "the mother of us all" (Galatians 4:26).

For the Christian, *it is home*. **BT**

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# Living the Kingdom

## Today

**Jesus Christ's coming reign over the nations will bring vital transformation for the world. But while we wait for that wonderful time, we can experience and exhibit a measure of that change now.**

*by Emma Cortelyou*

**O**ne day, this world will fade away. This might not sound uplifting at first, but the reality of that statement holds so much hope for all of humanity, and that includes you.

Bible prophecy reveals that at the end of this age the world will be afflicted by “famines, pestilences, and earthquakes” (Matthew 24:7). Worldwide war will take over humanity, and these are just “the beginning of sorrows” (verse 8).

Mercifully, this is not the ultimate fate of the world and its 8 billion inhabitants. What will follow this tumultuous time will be a new age of peace, prosperity and change that the world has never experienced. The return of Jesus Christ will bring about this dramatic change that the world so desperately needs. At that point, Christ will claim dominion over the world and begin His reign on earth (Revelation 11:15).

Followers of Christ are instructed to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in their everyday lives (Matthew 6:33).

There's even a seven-day festival in the Bible called the Feast of Tabernacles that foreshadows the Millennium—the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ on earth at the end of this age. We follow Christ's and the apostles' example in keeping this festival and look forward to the future age when the broken society we know will fade away and be replaced by God's perfect rule. Keeping the Feast is about working toward the same goal of the Kingdom and rejoicing in the plan that God has for us.

The word “Kingdom” is translated from the Greek word *basileia*, which refers to the concept of royal power, kingship, dominion and rule. The word describes the right or authority to rule over a kingdom more than designating its territory. At Christ's first coming as Messiah, He preached the gospel (good news) of the Kingdom with a simple message, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). His command for human beings to repent and obey God is a core message that permeates Scripture.

You can live a Kingdom-centered life today by

following Jesus Christ, who currently reigns in His Church as its Head (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23). If God is calling you, it is an advance opportunity to change to His mindset and revere Him as your Lord, Master, High Priest and King. Why wait to become a citizen in the household of God? (See Ephesians 2:19-20.) Respond with reverence and begin receiving His blessings by living His way today (Luke 11:28), culminating in the gift of eternal life at His return (1 Corinthians 15:22-23).

Let's look at three ways that Christ's reign will change the world and how we can be emulating those aspects now as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

### Practice and live peace

The first major change that will be brought about by Christ's reign is that of peace.

The world, in this present age, is unfamiliar with the concept of peace, despite governments' best efforts to find solutions that lead to it.

But Christ will bring true, lasting and personal peace when He comes to reign. No longer will the world be

While we may not be in positions of authority now, we can still practice the humility of servant leadership through our interactions with others.

characterized by "wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:6). Instead of nations rising against one another for war, weapons will be molded into tools for farming (Isaiah 2:4). War won't even be thought of anymore.

This peace won't be merely a concept sometimes pursued in small communities but will be ingrained in the heart of humanity and serve as the standard of how to live. It will even affect the nature of animals. Predators won't think of killing vulnerable prey but instead eat only vegetation. Wolves will dwell with lambs, and little children will play near a viper's den without fear of being bitten (Isaiah 11:6-9). It will be a society completely free of violence, fear and confusion.

As Christians seeking the Kingdom in this life, we can—and should—practice peace today.

Christ blesses peacemakers in the Beatitudes or list of blessed attitudes and behavior in Matthew 5, calling those who practice peace sons of God (verse 9).

Although the world isn't in a state of peace now, that doesn't free us from the responsibility of living out this Kingdom principle now. One way to do that is to speak edifying words (Ephesians 4:29).

Social media and news outlets offer limitless opportunities to speak words of hate and division. You can choose to feed into the negativity by getting involved in arguments that polarize or speak peace into every interaction. It is our responsibility as Christians to "live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).

Sometimes being a peacemaker means avoiding the comment section of a controversial post to prevent even the thought of needless contention.

Another way to practice peace is to *study* peace. A study of where and how the word peace is used in the Bible can reveal a lot of how other people embodied it in their lives.

Beyond that, to be a peacemaker, we not only have to study peace; we must spread it.

### Government that truly serves

At the return of Christ there will be a dramatic shift in the way the world is governed.

In the world today, we see many competing conceptions of what a just form of government should look like.

Countless leaders around the world have aimed to get it right, but human nature always gets in the way of a just system for all its inhabitants.

Micah 3:2 talks of wicked rulers as those who "hate good

and love evil" and oppress the people they should be serving. It's clear that humanity can't solve the problems the world is facing. At Christ's return, He will establish a just and efficient form of government that no one has ever experienced before.

In His first coming, Christ flipped the concept of leadership on its head. He did not come to oppress or practice lordship over people like the kings of the day, but rather to serve (Luke 22:25-27). Christ didn't show partiality or favoritism toward the richer or more powerful figures, as many leaders did at the time. Instead, He dedicated Himself to ministering to those who were considered the lowest of the low—tax collectors, the poor, the sick and the sinners. His reign in the Kingdom of God will continue that way.

Christ and His faithful followers will rule together with the common goal of serving and healing the nations. No more will it be the norm for those less fortunate to suffer at the hands of selfish rulers. Instead, Christ's government will execute justice fairly and generously: "He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break

in pieces the oppressor” (Psalm 72:4). All humanity will finally get to experience a government based on love and service toward its citizens.

As we wait for the return of Christ and the fulfillment of this perfect form of government, we can take active steps now to practice that government. Namely, we can live in total submission and loyalty to Jesus as our King today.

Christ encouraged His disciples to serve others, and we should follow His example: “Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).

While we may not be in positions of authority now, we can still practice the humility of servant leadership through our interactions with others. Christ revealed to His disciples the ultimate act of love—the laying down of one’s life for another (John 15:13).

We likely won’t have an opportunity to actually give up our physical life for another person, but Christ’s teaching points to the kind of selfless love that puts another’s needs before our own. This can look like a lot of things. It could mean showing patience and kindness to a coworker who needs a little extra help with a project. Use that opportunity to gently guide as a servant leader would, without guilt-tripping or resentment.

Maybe you could give a little bit of your time to a friend who is going through something difficult, even though you’re very busy and have other plans.

Live out the Kingdom now by searching for ways to set aside selfish ambition and edify others, esteeming them greater than yourself (Philippians 2:3-4). Following Christ’s example of servant leadership now will prepare us to rule alongside Him when He returns.

## A transformed heart

Christ’s return to earth will bring another important transformation. This will be in the *changing of the hearts and minds* of humanity.

In Hosea 4:6, God mourns the state of His people who had fallen away from His ways: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”

It’s abundantly clear in the world today that many

people have lost sight of God. In large part, this is due to the fact that Satan has blinded people (2 Corinthians 4:4). They are searching for answers and purpose in their lives but are unable to find them at this point.

Thankfully, God has a plan for everyone. The prophet Ezekiel foretells this future time when Christ will return and change the heart of man: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

This is a tremendous internal change!

The challenges of human nature, such as stubbornness



and the struggle to change for good, will be replaced with God’s Spirit—His power and His very essence—enabling all people to walk in His ways in a meaningful, lasting way.

Not only that, but the knowledge of God will cover the whole earth, and all nations will eagerly go up to the mountain of God (symbolizing Christ’s throne) to learn His ways (Isaiah 2:2-3, 11:9). It will be a society full of the Word of God and His blessings poured out on humanity.

There are a few ways we can live this aspect of the Kingdom today. While God promises to pour out His Spirit on humanity in the latter days, this gift is available to those called to understand His truth today.

Acts 2 documents the giving of the Holy Spirit to the New Testament Church, and the promise of receiving the Spirit remains the same today (Acts 2:38-39).

Being baptized is a powerful step in turning one’s heart toward God. Receiving His Holy Spirit enables us to grow in God’s character and way of thinking. It helps guide us in our walk with Him.

We can also turn to God now and enact true change through the help of the Holy Spirit.

While the rest of the world will receive the Spirit later and learn to love God's ways, those who are called in this life have the opportunity to seek Him now: "'Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.' So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm" (Joel 2:12-13).

God wants His people to return to Him, and He helps those who take those first steps toward Him. You can start today!

God lays out His plan for humanity through His annual festivals listed in Leviticus 23. Each of these days, from the Passover to the Eighth Day, reveals a different

Being baptized is a powerful step in turning one's heart toward God. Receiving His Holy Spirit is receiving a little bit of God's nature and character, and it helps guide us in our walk with Him.

aspect of how He is working with human beings to save them. God commands His people to observe His feasts and invites us to partake of the vision that each of these days represents.

For the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day (or Last Great Day) festival that immediately follows it (usually falling around late September to early October), God tells us to observe them, spending each of those days learning about His coming Kingdom and worshiping and praising Him. It is a time to rejoice before God and to enjoy fellowship with those who share the same vision. The command to live in temporary dwellings (Leviticus 23:40-43; Nehemiah 8:13-17)—created from leafy boughs in ancient times and now typically observed by staying in a hotel or other temporary housing—reminds us on one level of the fleeting nature of this world and our need for Christ's return.

Keeping the Feast helps us learn to become kings and priests in the Millennium. At that time, He will draw His followers to Him—those with the Holy Spirit who remained faithful to the end—and transform them into spirit beings, making them part of His royal priesthood (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Peter 2:9).

Our life today is the training ground for becoming a faithful priesthood, ready to teach all people God's ways and lead them to eternal life.

Society will seek the truth from the priesthood, which makes it necessary to prepare now to fulfill the role prepared for us: "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 2:7).

Keeping God's sacred feast days is a special blessing and privilege that allows us to grow closer to God and become the people He wants us to become. To learn more about the Feast of Tabernacles and His other holy times, check out our free Bible study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

Humanity doesn't have the solution for a peaceful and just world. Society as we know it is careening closer to chaos and destruction.

True peace, justice and change aren't possible through any kind of human government or action.

Despite the darkness of the world around us and the volatile nature of current events, we can take great comfort in the promise of Christ's return to earth. When all nations finally yield to His rule, peace will abound. War and violence will end, and even the nature of animals

will be transformed from violence to peace between predators and prey. Christ's government will be characterized by true servant leadership, and His citizens will experience healing and guidance in love. Finally, God will change the hearts and minds of humanity, enabling people to enact true change through the Holy Spirit and to grow in zeal for His way of life.

While we eagerly await the fulfillment of these promises, we should be seeking first the Kingdom by living out its attributes in our daily lives.

Strive to be a peacemaker by speaking edifying words and studying peace through the Bible and Christ's example. Practice servant leadership through interactions with others, gently guiding and esteeming others better than yourself. Pursue a transformed heart.


With the help of God's Spirit, you can seek God's ways daily and work toward true, lasting change. As we wait for the Kingdom, let's strive to live it today! **BT**

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# Preaching From Gloom to Glory

*Hope in the  
Footsteps of Jeremiah*

As nations drift further from God, the warnings of Jeremiah take on renewed urgency. Yet beyond warning of national decline and judgment, a powerful message of hope rings out—the hope of God’s Kingdom. Walking in Jeremiah’s footsteps, God’s people today proclaim not only impending calamity, but ultimate restoration, redemption and glory ahead.

*by Peter Eddington*

**T**he United States of America is celebrating its 250th anniversary. The nation remains one of the world’s dominant military powers, but Bible prophecy tells us things will not stay this way. Sin and immorality are set to bring the nation down as it did with ancient Israel and Judah.

The nation of Judah had the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel as contemporaries. Jeremiah and Ezekiel were also priests. And Daniel—of the royal family of the tribe of Judah—was in significant measure practically running the Chaldean (Babylonian) empire during Jeremiah’s time.

These spiritual giants helped to keep the people—to some degree—sufficiently on track so there could be a repentance, a restoration and a return to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

*Artist illustration of the prophet Jeremiah breaking a pottery vessel, as recorded in Jeremiah 19.*

Let's take a look at how Jeremiah's life parallels the role of the Church of God in the end time. It seems likely things will come to a stunning conclusion with Jesus' return before much longer.

### Jeremiah's calling

Jeremiah is often referred to as the weeping prophet. Many talk about the doom and gloom that he preached, but he was also a prophet of hope. He was a prophet of encouragement, leading God's people to *eventual glory*. He warned his people of a coming catastrophe, but he also had a hand in rebuilding and restoring the nation.

Jeremiah is the prophet of the New Covenant, foretold in chapter 31 of the book that bears his name. The prophecy is repeated in the book of Hebrews. Yes, Jeremiah did prophesy of *punishment and gloom*, but also of *hope and glory* with the good news about the Messiah and the ultimate restoration He will bring.

Jeremiah's work spanned the reign of many Jewish kings. One of them was the great and righteous leader Josiah, who led a renewal in Judah. Because of the nation's sins, King Josiah needed guidance on what to do, so he sent his advisers to Huldah the prophetess, asking for guidance from the Lord (2 Chronicles 34:21-28).

Huldah gave the king's men a message: Disaster would strike the nation because the people had forgotten God and were worshiping idols. Thankfully, King Josiah tore down idolatrous shrines in Jerusalem and throughout Judah. Because of this, the destruction of Judah would not occur during his lifetime (2 Chronicles 34:28).

Jeremiah mourned Josiah's death (2 Chronicles 35:25) and the punishment his people would incur for their sins. The book of Lamentations, which he evidently wrote, gives added testimony to that. In addition to the book that bears his name, he is traditionally identified as an author of the books of Kings as well.

Jeremiah had a long work in Judah spanning around half a century. He was ultimately imprisoned by his own people because of his preaching. He was persecuted and almost killed. Strangely enough, he was finally released by his nation's enemy, the Chaldeans!

### Jeremiah's mission

Jeremiah may have been in his mid- to late-teen years when God first called him to his mission (Jeremiah 1:4-6).

Even from his mother's womb, God had an important job in mind for Jeremiah:

"But the LORD said to me: 'Do not say, "I am a youth," for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,' says the LORD . . . 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to *pull down*, to destroy and to throw down, to *build* and to plant'" (verses 7-10, emphasis added throughout).

God told Jeremiah that he was going to face great opposition in his work, and he surely did. He had a very difficult life as a prophet. Jeremiah saw the kingdom torn down. And yet he was

commissioned to be part of raising it back up again.

In Jeremiah 7, we see a very serious condemnation of the nation. It's exactly what is happening among our nations today. God warned Judah:

"Yet they [Judah] did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. Therefore you shall speak all these words to them, but *they will not obey you*. You shall also call to them, but *they will not answer you*" (verses 26-27).

We have a similar situation today, where efforts to proclaim the gospel and a call to repentance fall on deaf ears. Most people don't want to hear it, and they go on with their lives. In Jeremiah's time, this brought destruction and punishment on the nation for its sins.

"So you shall say to them, "This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. *Truth has perished* and has been cut off from their mouth . . . For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight,' says the LORD . . . 'And they have built the high places . . . to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire . . . I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. For the land shall be desolate'" (verses 28-34).

It sounds like a dead-end job given to Jeremiah, doesn't it? Jeremiah is told his words will fall on deaf ears, with a very tragic end prophesied for Judah.

This mirrors society today! We essentially allow child sacrifice for personal convenience. We promote lifestyle abominations throughout our land—even in churches that should know better. Truth has perished. Jeremiah's

Many talk about the doom and gloom that Jeremiah preached, but he was also a prophet of hope.

mission seems to have been a hopeless one, as does the mission of God's Church today. Yet God's directive to continue the mission persists.

### Imprisonment and eventual release

As we read in Jeremiah 38, he wound up being imprisoned by his own people, who didn't want to hear what God was telling them. They didn't want to change their ways or repent of their sins.

Leaders of the people pressed the king, "Please, let this man be put to death" (verse 4). While he didn't die then, he was made to suffer: "So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon . . . And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire" (verse 6).

King Zedekiah finally brought Jeremiah out and asked him to tell all that God had prophesied. Jeremiah told the king about the Chaldeans being the ones who would attack and destroy Jerusalem because of Judah's terrible sin. Zedekiah then imprisoned Jeremiah again! (verse 28).

As foretold, the country was soon conquered. You can imagine the scene. In today's setting, it would be like a weakened United States of America overrun by China or Russia while you, having warned of the calamity, languish in jail.

A commander of the Chaldeans then spoke to Jeremiah: "The LORD your God has pronounced this doom on this place. Now the LORD has brought it, and has done just as He said. Because you people have sinned against the LORD, and not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing has come upon you" (Jeremiah 40:2-3).

This Chaldean captain knew exactly why Judah was being conquered. He knew it was a punishment on Judah for their idolatry and sin. He knew it better than the Jewish nation did!

The captain then freed Jeremiah and said he could live anywhere he chose—either move to Babylon or stay in Judah. He was free, but he still mourned for his people.

### End of exile

But this was not the end. Jeremiah was yet a prophet of hope, and there are words he wrote for us to consider today—which apply to us in preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. It's a story of *preaching from gloom to glory*.

"Thus says the LORD: 'Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the LORD, that your children shall come back to their own border'" (Jeremiah 31:16-17).

Jeremiah is ultimately a prophet of *hope*. And we, too,

ultimately preach and announce the gospel of the Kingdom of God—a message of hope for our world today.

In Jeremiah 33, we read: "Again there shall be heard in this place . . . the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say: 'Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His mercy endures forever'" (verses 10-11).

There was indeed a partial restoration of Jerusalem in the days of the Persian ruler Cyrus. A portion of the nation of Judah returned and remained in the Holy Land for quite some time, and the covenant was renewed under Ezra and Nehemiah.

Sadly, the renewed commitment did not last. Thankfully, there is coming an ultimate redemption for Israel and Judah. Jeremiah 33 is also an end-time prophecy. The message of gloom eventually led to a message of future glory.

### When 70 years are completed

The prophet Daniel was a Jewish captive taken to Babylon while Jeremiah was imprisoned in Jerusalem. Jeremiah 25 is a chapter that encouraged Daniel greatly. "'Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,' says the LORD; 'and I will make it a perpetual desolation'" (verse 12).

You see, the Chaldeans were not righteous either. Their empire would only last 70 years. Daniel was there for the fulfillment of the Jewish return to follow. Jeremiah himself didn't get to see it happen, this being after his time there.

Daniel read Jeremiah's words and recognized his people might have an opportunity to go home after all! He prayed deeply about it (Daniel 9:2-19), and eventually God inspired the Persian King Cyrus to allow the Jews the opportunity to go back and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

Just like Daniel, we too should pray for our nations to repent. The rest of Daniel 9 talks about the eventual time of the Messiah to save the whole world. This is the ultimate message of hope—from gloom to glory.

### Preaching gloom to glory in the last days

In keeping with the spirit of Jeremiah's prophecies, let's examine a comparison of Jeremiah's role with that of the New Testament Church of God. We will particularly consider how similar it is to what Jeremiah experienced. In many ways, we walk in similar footsteps to Jeremiah, preaching from gloom to glory.



Just like Daniel, we too should pray for our nations to repent.

The time is soon coming when there will be a *very powerful* message from God, an indictment against our world (Revelation 11:1-11). This message will be particularly powerful right before the second coming of Jesus Christ (as pictured by God’s annual festival, the Feast of Trumpets). At that time, the sins of the world are going to be exposed. Humanity is going to be condemned, and the right way of life will be expounded.

As with Judah, the consequences for sin will be revealed. Yes, we have the *good* news of God’s Kingdom, but the fulfillment of this good news will be preceded by some terrible events. Because of sin, the world is going to go through a great cataclysm and time of punishment. God will finally intervene in the most powerful way ever to judge this world and our civilization. That time is coming, but beyond it is coming a wonderful world tomorrow (as pictured by God’s annual festival, the Feast of Tabernacles).

Jeremiah was left to die in prison for bringing God’s warning message to his nation. The people and the king did not want to hear it. Likewise, Christ prophesied hardship would come on His Church in the end time, as its message is not popular either.

Just like Jeremiah, the Church has a responsibility to preach God’s message. What is the gospel message? It includes proclaiming the need to repent from sin, accompanied by a warning of consequences. But it is foremost a message of hope—announcing the Kingdom of God, with a wonderful world tomorrow and ultimate destiny beyond. Each of us must pray each day for the gospel to be preached successfully around the world to all nations.

With the Church’s responsibility to carry out this mission, persecution will come. Jeremiah survived. The Church will survive as well.

Jesus Christ proclaimed: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

This tells us there’s going to be a very powerful *witness* to *all nations*. Not just to Judah as done by Jeremiah, but to all of humanity through God’s Church in the last days.

The gospel is to be preached throughout all the world—to all people God has created (Mark 16:15). It’s to be a Jeremiah-like work. The unpopularity Jeremiah’s preaching resulted in will be similar for the Church. Christ said if they hated Him, they would hate His followers.

It’s going to come to the point outlined in Revelation 12 where a great persecution will come on the Church. Christ’s followers will have to flee to a “place prepared by God” (verse 6). At the same time, God will send two witnesses to proclaim His message (Revelation 11), and they’ll be protected as Jeremiah was. Through their work, many will turn to God.

### Jeremiah and God’s Church today

Jeremiah was one who restored the confidence of the people through his encouraging prophecies of a better time to come. He inspired Ezekiel and Daniel in their work. Through their words, God gives us a view of what He will ultimately do in a better world to come.

Just as Jeremiah survived on the other side of the destruction of Jerusalem, as disciples today, we can be encouraged that not only will we continue to keep the truth alive, but we will have the opportunity to literally be part of the solution when Jesus Christ returns.

Together with Jeremiah and all of those God has used over time, we can do even more than Jeremiah did in his time. We have the opportunity of serving with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords—Jesus Christ—as we walk in the footsteps of Jeremiah when humanity is delivered from *gloom to glory*. **BT**

### DIVE DEEPER



To help make sense of the prophecies of the Bible and grasp events that are yet ahead, request or download our free study guide *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. To learn more about the message Jesus Christ gave His Church to proclaim, also request or download *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Scan the code or visit [ucg.org/js26](http://ucg.org/js26) to find it.





# Courtesy

## *Small Acts, Priceless Results*

Modern society is steadily drifting away from courteous behavior. But what's behind this trend? Explore the causes—and uncover what courtesy truly is, how to exhibit it in your life, instill it in your children and handle discourtesy you may encounter.

by John LaBissoniere

**A** young mother got on a municipal bus with her little daughter and stroller. After they were seated, she noticed a young man dressed in black, who seemed tense and glanced repeatedly across the aisle toward her. This made her feel uneasy and even somewhat threatened. When the bus reached her destination and the door opened, she picked up her daughter and the stroller to leave. As she did, the young man jumped up and exited before her. But to her surprise, he turned around, reached out to help her off the bus and then immediately got back aboard. As the door began to close, she shouted a hasty “thank you” to the young man who gave her a nod and a quick smile. In seeing how courteous he was, she realized how she had terribly misjudged him.

This story prompts a key question: Just what is courtesy, and why does it always matter in every human relationship?

The terms “courtesy” and “courteous” originate from the Old French word *curtesie*, which refers to the manners and etiquette prevailing in the courts or palaces of nobles and kings. This included, for instance, saying “please” and “thank you,” avoiding crude and offensive language and observing other civilities. While being courteous certainly *includes* such demeanor, its definition goes much deeper since it encompasses thoughtful,

gracious and respectful conduct, which acknowledges the intrinsic value and dignity of every human being—having been made in the very image of God (see Genesis 1:26). While courteous behavior often comes through small acts, it can have priceless results.

### **Courteous conduct declining**

Despite its significance, courtesy is on the decline.

A 2023 civic literacy survey found that 85 percent of Americans believe civility in society has worsened over the past decade (*ABA Civic Literacy 2023*, American Bar Association, p. 1).

Why is this happening? The Bible offers critical insight.

The apostle Paul wrote that “in the last days” many people would become self-absorbed, ungrateful and have little self-control—traits leading to disrespect and a lack of decorum (2 Timothy 3:1-4). But how *should* people act toward one another? Paul also wrote, “Let each esteem *others* better than himself” (Philippians 2:3), and he said we must “*show perfect courtesy* toward all people” (Titus 3:2, English Standard Version, emphasis added throughout).

The ultimate example of courtesy was Jesus Christ. While societal leaders and rulers of His day showed little or no interest in the lives of distressed, afflicted individuals, Jesus was “moved with compassion” for them

(Matthew 14:14). He was courteous to *everyone*—the poor and rich; the faithful and faithless and the respectful and ill-mannered. By His words and conduct, He revealed that courtesy must be an integral component of everyone’s conduct (Luke 6:31). It is an outward-focused action springing from the inner bearing of mind and heart—further energized by God’s Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16-17). It encompasses sincere expressions of genuine love for others, displayed by means of friendly, caring and considerate actions.

As society continues its downward spiral into self-preoccupation and discourteous conduct, our Creator expects us to journey in the opposite direction by exercising godly love and graciousness toward all others. This is vital within our own families and *especially* in how we care for and guide our children.

### Parents: Teach and model courteous conduct

Although children are born with several inherent abilities, behaving courteously is not generally one of them. Parents have the critical responsibility to teach their offspring courteous behavior and model

By His words and conduct, Jesus revealed that courtesy must be an integral component of everyone’s conduct.

it, so it becomes nearly an automatic bearing.

Early childhood educator Donohue Shortridge wrote about a situation she experienced:

“A few weeks ago, I arrived at a hotel to check in, only to find that my room would not be ready for quite some time. There had been a pop concert nearby the night before, attended mostly by moms and their teenage daughters. Apparently, the moms spent their after-event time at the bar, while their teens proceeded to trash their hotel rooms, blast loud music and run wild in the hallways until 3 a.m. The next morning, housekeepers were overwhelmed by a tsunami of debris: lipstick on mirrors and wet trash everywhere. As I sat in the lobby contemplating this uncivilized behavior, I asked myself, how does this happen?” (“Grace and Courtesy Beyond Please and Thank You,” *Montessori Life*, Summer 2017).

Professor Shortridge continued by saying, “So if there is anything you want your child to know how to do, or a way you want him or her to behave, you should first *model* it, then show him or her how to do it [and] *offer lots of opportunities for practice*.”

Noted early 20th-century educator Dr. Maria Montessori wrote: “A child is an eager observer and is particularly

attracted by the actions of the adults and wants to imitate them. In this regard, *an adult can have a kind of mission*. He can be an inspiration for the child’s actions, a kind of open book, wherein a child can learn how to direct his own movements” (quoted in “Modeling Grace and Courtesy,” Greenspring Montessori School, April 6, 2017).

One Montessori school website notes, “Children soak up knowledge and experiences from their environment. Unlike adults, who learn through conscious effort, children in their early years absorb information effortlessly and unconsciously, much like a sponge soaking up water” (“The Absorbent Mind: Unlocking Your Child’s Potential in Montessori Casa,” NorthStarMontessori.ca, Sept. 4, 2024).

Children are born with an amazing ability to absorb information. For better or worse, they are soaking up everything they see, feel and hear. Teaching your child good behavior really comes down to what you, the parent or guardian, are modeling with your own behavior. Therefore, it’s essential that parents continually demonstrate proper conduct until their children routinely repeat those skills when interacting with others.

Whether good or bad, children will often act out what they see at home.

Teaching and modeling courteous behavior to children extends to modesty in dress, respectful language, good table manners, appropriate cell phone use and other forms of etiquette. In addition, parents need to educate their children consistently from the Bible about morality, ethics and personal integrity (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

In this regard, I would like to give you a brief example from my youth. I grew up in a large family that included my parents, three brothers and four sisters. At dinner-time every evening all 10 of us sat down at the table in our assigned seats. My parents served portions on our plates, and everyone waited to begin eating until after everyone had been served and after my father had led a short prayer of thanks in which we all participated.

No loud talking was permitted during the meal, nor was getting out of our chairs without permission. If we wanted more of a particular food item or perhaps the salt or pepper shaker, we needed to address the person nearest that item by name and say, “Please pass the [particular item].” After the main portion of the meal was complete, the two children whose assignment it was

# MORE COURTESY



Our Creator expects you and me to exercise godly love and graciousness toward all others.

a manner. Could he or she be simply having a bad day and allowing a particular situation to get the better of him or her? Whatever the reason, responding with courtesy and patience could very well de-escalate the situation.

In an article titled *Gracefully Dealing with Disrespect*, author Sandy Geroux described her reaction to an incident, writing: “I was once disrespected while presiding over a board meeting. A board member disagreed with my plans to fix a situation, actually making disrespectful faces and gestures and causing extreme discomfort for the rest of the board. Not wanting to cause any more disruption than necessary by engaging the person at that time, I reiterated my plan and moved on, rather than ‘defending’ myself.

“After the meeting, I began second-guessing my decision not to say anything, thinking I must have handled the situation ‘badly.’ As I wondered if I actually deserved to be a leader at all, another board member approached me and said, ‘[That person] may have taken condescension to a new low today, but *you took integrity to a new high.*’

“Her comment showed me that people recognized who was behaving badly (and who wasn’t), and let me know that the board was grateful that I handled it gracefully and moved on” (*Executive Support Magazine*, May/June 2015).

## Courtesy matters

That story offers us a powerful illustration. What better test of courtesy than by responding to unkind or hostile behavior with patience and decency?

The apostle Peter recounted the example of Jesus Christ dealing with people who were appallingly discourteous to Him: “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

Jesus Himself said, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7:12). This is exceptional advice for you and me when we encounter ungracious situations.

With this in mind, let’s remember that while acts of courtesy may seem small, they can have priceless results! **BT**

for that specific week would help my mother clear the table and serve the dessert. Again, we were all expected to wait until everyone was served before eating the dessert. At the conclusion of the meal, we were not permitted to leave the table without asking, “May I please be excused?”

There were other dinner rules too. Everyone needed to wash their hands before sitting down, no books or other reading material were allowed and the television was not on. If the phone rang, it was answered, but the party was politely asked to call back a short time later.

The etiquette and courtesy we were taught as children brought peace and order to our lives and gave us a good foundation on which to build for the future.

## Dealing with people who act discourteously

Since courteous conduct is indispensable, how should you and I behave towards people who treat us discourteously?

It would be easy to assume the worst about an ill-mannered individual and become offended and defensive. However, if discourtesy is shown in return, it only lowers us to that person’s level and encourages continued impolite conduct.

The apostle Paul wrote that love “does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil” (1 Corinthians 13:5). To handle an ungracious circumstance, it would be important first to consider *why* the person is acting in such

## DIVE DEEPER



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# Vision

## Beyond the Moment

As we reflect on the freedom sought at America's beginning 250 years ago, we also focus on a far greater revolution to bring ultimate freedom to all humanity—through the ultimate indispensable Man.

by Robin Webber

**T**his year's Fourth of July marks the 250th anniversary of the official founding of the United States of America. The commemorated event remains one of the greatest geopolitical interruptions in human history, and its aftershocks of liberty continue to influence the entire globe to this day.

Representatives of 13 colonies of the British Empire collectively signed a point-by-point divorce paper from the throne of Great Britain—the Declaration of Independence. This is when most folks in America and people abroad assume “the fireworks of war” commenced, but they would be mistaken.

The conflict actually began more than a year earlier at Lexington Green and Concord Bridge in Massachusetts on April 19, 1775. Ralph Waldo Emerson would colorfully frame it 62 years later as “the shot heard round the world” (“Concord Hymn,” 1837). The American men on the battlefield had been separated for more than a

year from their wives, families, small business needs and crop harvesting. Their heartbeats echoed with questions: *Is my presence in this hardship really worth it? And why should I remain engaged against the trained soldiers of the greatest military of the Old World?*

The Declaration of Independence was not just for the British monarch and Parliament and for the leaders of other countries. These men on the battlefield desperately needed to hear it. And on its approval, General George Washington immediately ordered it to be read to all troops under his command. His order fit with the biblical principle in Proverbs 29:18: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (King James Version).

Let's note a few excerpts from this famous document in its context and then ask ourselves what we might learn and internalize in our ongoing quest to heed the invitation from Jesus Christ of “Follow Me” (Mark 8:34).

Jesus Christ declared that a new world order is at hand—and that we must seek after and receive a mind and heart that fits it.

### Words of commitment and consequence

Following the heading “In Congress, July 4, 1776 The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,” it opens: “When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness . . .”

At the conclusion, the soldiers would have heard this committed intention of the representatives who signed it: “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”

Words and pledges have meaning. A number of the signatories would personally face struggle and loss of everything over the course of the American Revolution.



## When “No More” Will Be Forever

**W**hat declarative statements does Holy Scripture offer to us as disciples of Christ that we might heed His invitation of “*Follow Me*,” even as we endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ? (See 2 Timothy 2:3.)

Below is a brief list, giving only the beginning of an extensive roll call of the differences between the age of human misrule and the eternal realm of God the Father and Jesus Christ to come, when these “no more” statements will become reality. Let’s check them off one by one as we ponder this future for not only us, but all of God’s creation.

- No more *tears!* (Revelation 21:4). With one exception—tears of joy!
- No more *war!* (Isaiah 2:4).
- No more *death!* (Revelation 21:4, 1 Corinthians 15:24-27).
- No more *sorrow!* (Revelation 21:4).
- No more *pain!* (Revelation 21:4). Be it physical, mental or emotional.
- No more *night!* (Revelation 21:23; 22:5). Exterior and interior darkness will be extinct! There will be no dread. The glory of God will give light to all!
- No more *shut gates!* (Revelation 21:25). Remember the closed-up Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned? Now the obedient will be given the right to the tree of life, as the invitation goes out to “*Come . . . Come . . . come!*” (Revelation 22:14, 17).

## The greater revolution from Above

The revolution that gave birth to the United States pales beside the greatest interruption so far in human history. Beyond a revolution from the norms here on earth, it is far more directly connected with revelation from Above. It begins with a plain-stated declaration in Mark 1:14-15, describing One named Jesus, who “came to Galilee, preaching the gospel [or good news] of the kingdom of God, and saying [declaring!], “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Jesus Christ declared that a new world order is at hand—and that we must seek after and receive a mind and heart that fits it. The Kingdom is the reign of God, His sovereignty over mind and heart and will, and over creation. It involves sonship to God and brotherly relations with man. In its fullness, it will encompass all nations. *It is the future!*

But whenever a human life is brought into harmony with the Father’s purpose *it is the present*. Having the opportunity of accepting, receiving and reflecting God’s love in return to Him, His Son and all humanity is good news, even in times of trial and challenge.

This focus on the Kingdom of God is beyond all question the main subject of Jesus’ teaching (see our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*).

The framers of the Declaration of Independence spoke of “Nature’s God” and the “Creator,” and the Bible reveals that this God is both the Father and the One through whom the Father created everything, the Word who became Jesus Christ: “. . . The Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4). And yet from those heavenly heights “. . . the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (verse 14).

## Sacrifice for freedom

Speaking frankly, in becoming flesh Jesus had “skin in the game” for you, me and all humanity. He gave His life to be put to death by those He created. The only perfect human being ever to live would become “despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him” (Isaiah 53:3).

How could He forgive the unforgivable? What did “the captain of [our] salvation” (Hebrews 2:10) envision beyond this lonely moment of earthly rejection?

Consider in John 1:14 where we read that the Word “dwelt among us.” The word “dwelt” has its roots in the Greek word *skenoō*, the verb form of the word meaning “tabernacle” or “tent.” In essence, He “tented” or “camped” on earth far from His heavenly home to give His all for our cause—freedom from sin’s woes to live in eternity with Him (see “When ‘No More’ Will Be Forever” on previous page).

## The indispensable Man

More than 50 years ago, author James Flexner wrote a biography on George Washington subtitled *The Indispensable Man*. It was this man who wanted

his troops informed of the “what and why” they needed to sacrifice for something greater than themselves. This same man from Virginia was

the linchpin that kept the newly formed republic intact during eight years of warfare. He was the same one who formed the mold of the U.S. presidency when he stepped away from power and went back home. Of course, this man, though deemed indispensable, had human frailties just like us.

In fact, there is only one truly indispensable man ever to live in human flesh. One who left His home, stepped away from all power, came below and started a sacred revolution based on divine revelation. One who is God, who became a man. His name, a name above all names, is the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:9-11). The Son of Man, the Son of God, continues to bid us welcome with the words “*Follow Me*”—the One who, as He said in John 14:6, is the way, the truth and the life! **BT**

The revolution that gave birth to the United States pales beside the greatest interruption so far in human history.

## DIVE DEEPER



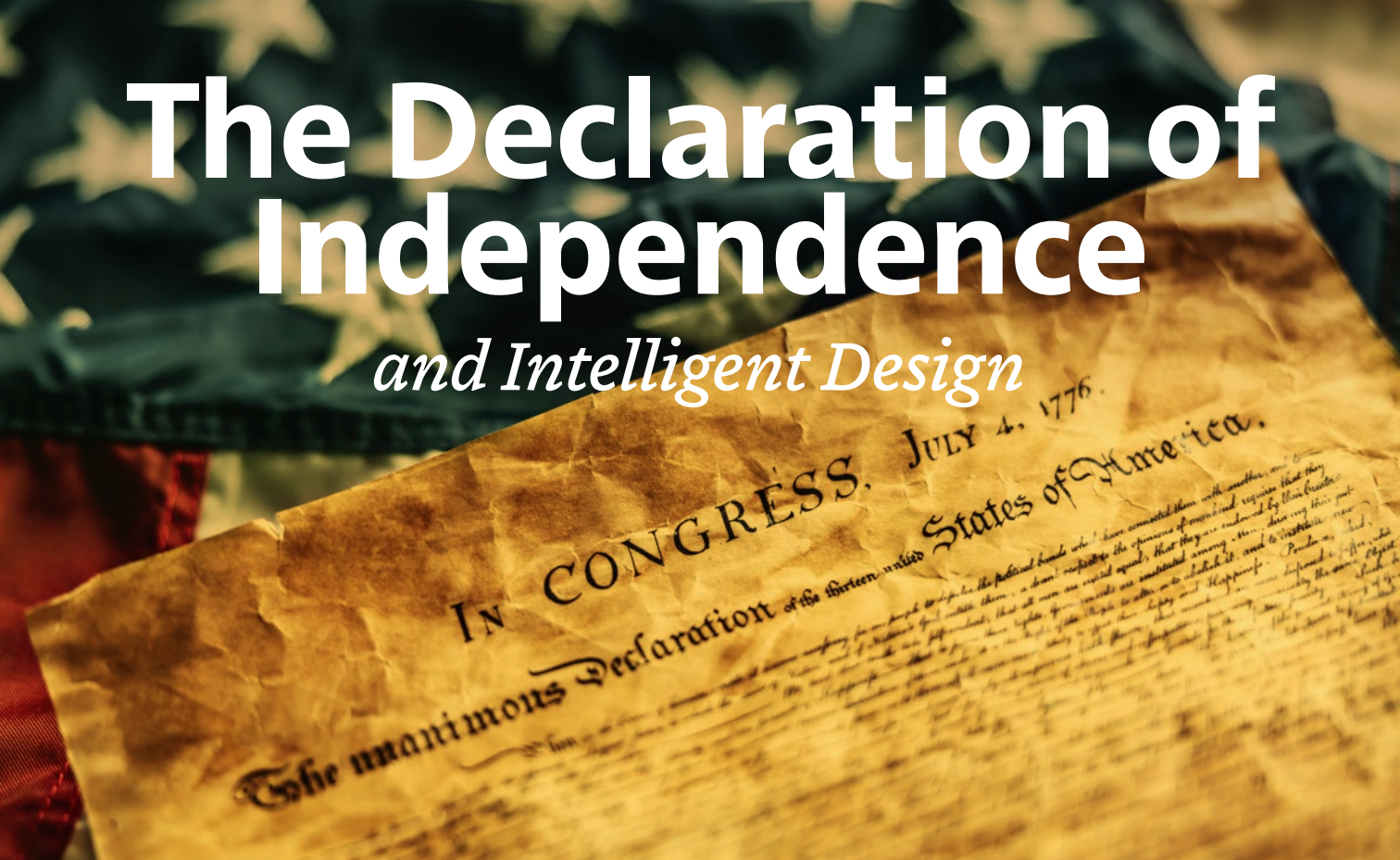
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# The Declaration of Independence

## *and Intelligent Design*



IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.  
The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

As America celebrates its 250th birthday, we consider the focus of its founding document on God as Creator of the world and of its underlying laws.

by Mario Seiglie

July 4, 2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, beginning what is now the United States of America. The “founding fathers” who signed it were 56 delegates from the 13 original colonies who came to the Continental Congress seeking freedom from tyranny.

These founding fathers believed in God and His laws of both nature and Scripture. In the Declaration, they appealed to the “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” for their right to establish a new nation based on those principles. In fact, God is emphasized four times in this relatively brief document of 1,320 words.

At America’s founding, “intelligent design” wasn’t a common term of the day, but the principle was regarded as scientific fact among the nation’s founders. The standard definition of “intelligent design” is “a scientific theory that holds that the emergence of some features of the universe and living things is best explained by an intelligent cause rather than an undirected process such as natural selection” (Casey Luskin, “An Introduction to Intelligent Design,” Discovery Institute, 2015).

Let’s examine four passages of the Declaration where the concept of God and His laws of nature are used and point to the principles of what is now called “intelligent design.”

### 1. “The Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God”

The first sentence of the Declaration of Independence says, “When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which *the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them*, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation” (emphasis added throughout).

Notice the reason for seeking independence was based on “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” These laws were principles that could be discovered and were evident by means of physical observation, mental reasoning and human conscience. They included physical laws, the tenets of morality and biblical revelation—all from God.

As one of the signers of both the Declaration and the Constitution of the United States, James Wilson, who became a U.S. Supreme Court justice, explained, “That law, which God has made for man in his present state . . . which is communicated to us *by reason and conscience*, the divine monitors *within* us, and by *the sacred oracles* [the Bible], the divine monitors *without* [or outside] us” (Introductory Lecture: “Of the Study of the Law in the United States,” ca. 1790-91.)

Wilson also defined the “Laws of Nature” in terms similar to the principles of intelligent design. He spoke in reference to “that law, by which the irrational and inanimate parts of the creation are governed,” adding that “the great Creator of all things has established *general and fixed rules*, according to which *all the phenomena of the material universe are produced and regulated*. These rules are usually denominated *laws of nature*.”

Not only are the “Laws of Nature” mentioned in the Declaration, but also “of Nature’s God.” The founding fathers wanted to clearly acknowledge the Author of these laws, which are the rule of life for all humankind. They also stressed that these principles—which were found through scientific observation, the laws of logic and the dictates of the human conscience—ultimately point to the Creator of all things, God.

## 2. “Endowed by their Creator”

Another key line of the Declaration reads, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, *that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator* with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

In addition to the laws already noted, we see there are certain “self-evident” truths that can be derived through careful analysis, rigorous logic and divine revelation. They were, in a sense, saying you can find evidence for these principles in the “book of nature” as well as in Scripture.

As John West points out in his 2026 book *Endowed by Our Creator: The Bible, Science, and the Battle for America’s Soul*: “Reason and revelation were not antagonists in the view of America’s founding generation. They were equally given to us by God, and when properly used, they both pointed to the same truths. The Declaration does not claim otherwise. Instead, it proclaims that America’s political system will be based on key truths about human

nature that it goes on to identify, and that regardless of how those truths are ascertained (whether through reason or revelation), they are to be held by Americans as ‘self-evident’—that is, they are to be regarded as foundational principles on which our government rests . . . This view that reason and conscience as well as the Bible point in the same direction was not the invention of a

secular age of ‘Enlightenment.’ It had deep roots in both the Bible and Christian theology.”

These delegates believed—although

did not perfectly exhibit this belief—that God endowed human beings with “unalienable” (or permanent) equal rights, where no person is born superior to another and human life should be respected. This is a foundational principle in the Bible.

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; *male and female He created them*” (Genesis 1:27, emphasis added). This statement is fundamental to the laws about respecting human life. We also find this high value of human life in the Sixth Commandment, which forbids murder. Further support for the intrinsic value of life is spelled out in the consequences of violating this command.

Genesis 9:6 states, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; *for in the image of God He made man*.” The dignity of life is given by the Creator God—not by a government or from a source like blind evolution. It should be held as sacred.

West further brings out that Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration’s main writer, used the principle of intelligent design to prove the equal rights of humankind—that no one had an inherent right to rule over others.

As West states: “The Founders did not think that the truths of human equality could be known only through the Bible. Nature itself proclaimed the ways in which men were equal, and we could ascertain these truths through our observation of the world around us. A few weeks before his death, Jefferson wrote a correspondent: “The *general spread of the light of science* has already laid open to every view *the palpable truth*, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, *by the grace of God*.””

Following life, liberty is another right the founding fathers thought was self-evident through observation, critical thinking and the Bible.

## These “Laws of Nature” dealt with the physical laws, the tenets of morality and biblical revelation.

John Trumbull (1819)  
*Declaration of Independence* [oil on canvas].  
National Portrait Gallery.



God did not create *slaves* in the Garden of Eden, but instead *free* human beings capable of independent thought. The Bible calls God’s law “the perfect law of liberty.” As James writes, “But he who looks into *the perfect law of liberty* and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25).

While the founding fathers supported the biblical premise of human freedom in word, it’s important to acknowledge that some did own slaves in their personal lives. Yet the Declaration’s principles helped pave the way for the abolition of slavery later on.

The last part of the phrase in this portion of the Declaration is “the pursuit of happiness.” This is also a biblical principle, with happiness as a desired outcome in Ecclesiastes 2:26: “God gives wisdom, knowledge and *happiness* to the person who pleases Him” (New International Reader’s Version). As we see here, true happiness comes only through following God.

### 3. “The Supreme Judge of the World”

The Declaration of Independence further states, “We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, *appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions*, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States . . .”

Here, the founding fathers appealed to *the Supreme Judge of the world* for support of their just cause. They recognized what the prophet Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar about *who really* oversees the affairs of the world—God Almighty. The same king was later told in a dream, “This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that *the Most High rules in the kingdom of men*, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men” (Daniel 4:17, emphasis added).

### 4. “Firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence”

This founding document of the United States of America concludes, “And for the support of this Declaration,

*with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”*

The beginning of the declaration invokes God as the divine lawmaker and Creator. It ends by beseeching His protection in the terrible ordeal ahead for the people of the new nation—several grueling years of incessant battles and many setbacks. They persevered with great courage and faith in God and prevailed. George Washington, commander of American forces at the time and later the country’s first president, fervently believed in the God of Scripture and the God of nature. Adapted from his *Circular Letter to the States* of June 8, 1783, “Washington’s Prayer for the United States of America” states:

“I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have the United States in his holy protection, that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government, to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the Field, and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristicks of the Devine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation. Amen” (original spelling throughout).

Indeed, may that same Divine Author and evident Ruler of the world acknowledged by the signers of the Declaration of Independence continue to provide His holy protection. **BT**

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# GENDER IDENTITY QUESTIONS

*by David Cobb*

**G**od designed two distinct but complementary sexes within the human family. The creation account in Genesis clearly designates human beings as “male and female” (Genesis 1:26-27). Both sexes are created in the image and likeness of God. Jesus Christ affirmed this fundamental aspect of the creation (Matthew 19:4). The Bible presents this as foundational information that communicates God’s purpose and consistent intent for humanity.

Our Creator designed men and women with many inherent differences that express mutually beneficial elements of God’s own character and personality. Within proper relationships, and especially within the union of one man and one woman in marriage as God intended (Genesis 2:18-25), these physical and emotional differences between the sexes teach us a great deal about who God is and what He expects from us.

The Bible clearly communicates that God does not approve of improper relationships such as premarital sex, adultery and homosexuality, which help cause confusion over gender identity. Based on this, choosing to adopt an identity of the opposite sex is a sin because it goes against God’s will for us collectively and

individually. (See the related Q&A on page 34.)

It is important to acknowledge that gender identity issues profoundly impact those who experience them. In addition, many people have sincere questions about why God allows such conditions to exist, if living in this way isn’t something He intended or approves of.

At this stage in God’s plan for humanity, His physical creation is both temporary and imperfect. Our lives are often impacted by a wide variety of challenges. Some of these are within our control, and some are not. Human imperfections also result in mistakes and sins that have all kinds of undesirable consequences. Moreover, the world is currently ruled by Satan the devil, who has chosen to make himself an enemy of God and His creation, especially His design and purpose for human beings.

These conditions result in numerous physical, emotional and spiritual problems for all humanity. Among these problems are deviations from God’s original design and intent for human sexuality. Despite these difficult realities, it is important to understand that God created humanity for an amazing purpose. His ultimate desire is for us to succeed in that purpose and become members of His family! (Jeremiah 29:11; Hebrews 2:10)

However, this awesome desire and purpose can only be fulfilled when we choose to follow His way of life, rather than deciding what is right and wrong on our own (Proverbs 3:5-6; Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

God has love and compassion for those who struggle with gender identity issues. When an individual is struggling to live as God intended, Christians should view the person with the same love and compassion God does. This will naturally result in feeling and expressing godly empathy for the genuine difficulties of those facing these challenges.

In conjunction with this, we must also remain committed to God's boundaries and His way of life. Love, compassion and empathy should not change our belief in the Bible's clear teaching. As author Kevin DeYoung states in his defense of the Bible's teaching on sexuality, "As painful as it can be, we must reinterpret our experiences through the Word of God, rather than let our experiences dictate what the Bible can and cannot mean" (*What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* 2015, p. 27).

God will ultimately bring help and healing for these difficulties—just as He will for all human problems (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9). The challenges of this life have a specific purpose within God's overall plan to bring us into His family. His plan does include solutions, whether now or in the future.

## WHAT ARE GENDER IDENTITY ISSUES, AND WHAT CAUSES THEM?

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines gender identity as "a person's internal sense of being male, female, some combination of male and female, or neither male nor female." The term "transgender" is primarily used to describe individuals who experience gender identity issues based on their personal feelings rather than their biological sex. It's an umbrella term for those who feel that their gender identity differs from their biological sex at birth.

There are many different societal views on the source of an individual's gender identity. Some believe that both gender identity and sexual orientation are innate characteristics, meaning that they are fixed at birth and do not change. Others believe that gender identity and sexual orientation are determined by a person's internal feelings and therefore can change. In this view, it is common to question one's personal identity and

sexual or gender-related attractions.

The belief that people identifying as transgender are born with this characteristic has gained much acceptance within our increasingly liberal society in recent years. This view has been popularized by advocates for sexual and gender identity issues such as celebrity artist Lady Gaga, whose 2011 hit song "Born This Way" has become an anthem for this community ("LGBT Anthem: Lady Gaga's 'Born This Way,'" Morning Edition, National Public Radio, May 20, 2019).

In the case of same-sex orientation, scientific research does not support the claim that people are born with this characteristic. As stated in a *Scientific American* article summarizing the findings of a large study published in 2019, "genetic links do not predict [sexual] orientation" ("Massive Study Finds No Single Genetic Cause of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior," Aug. 29, 2019).

Similarly, one journal review of multiple studies presents compelling arguments that there is "little scientific evidence that gender identity is fixed at birth or at an early age" (Lawrence Mayer and Paul McHugh, "Special Report on Sexuality and Gender," *The New Atlantis*, Fall 2016).

This review also shows that despite the obvious contradiction, the belief that gender identity is fluid, meaning it can change in response to what the person feels over time, has also "become more prominent in popular culture." As an example, the authors cite the many options provided for Facebook users to describe their gender.

It is important to realize that media reports primarily focus on gender identity issues where the person experiences emotions and feelings that do not have a discernible biological cause. The same review states: "In reviewing the scientific literature, we find that almost nothing is well understood when we seek biological explanations for what causes some individuals to state that their gender does not match their biological sex."

The causes for a specific individual's transgender feelings are often unclear. Some who experience them describe feeling like they are a man trapped in a woman's body, or vice versa. This mental state of gender confusion often leads to inner conflict related to gender identity. Others who say they feel no sense of inner conflict confidently self-identify as something differing from their biological sex at birth.

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE THESE ISSUES?

The main problem with a transgender lifestyle is that it is not aligned with God's revealed intent for His creation. This can only result in separation from Him. Rejecting God's ways leads us farther and farther away from what is right and what is best for us over time.

Romans 1:22-28 is a passage that addresses turning away from God's instructions on sexuality. Notice especially verse 28: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting." A

*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* shows that the word "debased" carries the meaning of "not standing the test," with the implication of accepting what is untested and unproven. A mindset based on these approaches that deviate from God's intent will naturally result in misdirection and misuse of His creation.

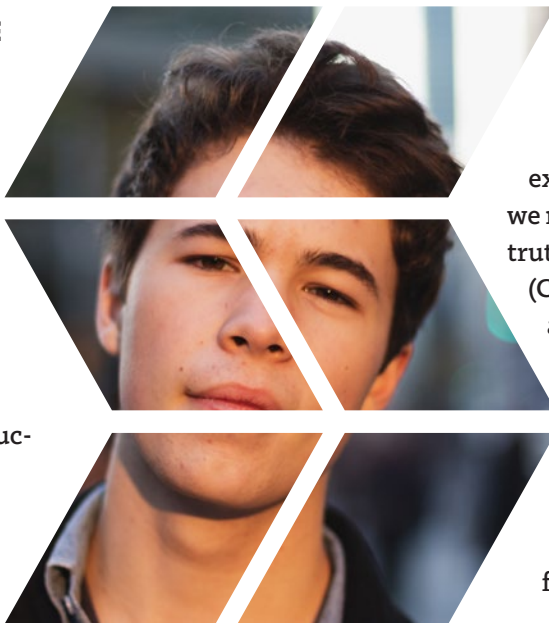
These problems become evident in the practical challenges associated with attempting to change one's gender—a goal that is ultimately not aligned with the physical and biological reality of the individual. Identifying as the opposite sex does not change a person's inherent biological makeup. Physically altering the bodies of individuals with transition therapies such as hormone injections and sex-change surgery has become more common. However, these therapies do not fundamentally change who the person is or give them mental peace with their chosen identity.

A study published in 2025 in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* found that those who underwent gender reassignment surgery were at a higher risk for depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, body-dysmorphic disorder and substance use disorder post-surgery.

## HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS RESPOND?

With many differing and conflicting societal views on this subject (especially as our societies move increasingly away from respect for God and biblical values), the topics discussed often lead to another very important question: How should Christians interact with those who identify as transgender or support transgender rights?

Although it is natural to feel defensive when



discussing tough subjects, Christians should not be dismissive or rude to people with different beliefs and experiences. Rather, we must learn to speak with truthful discernment and grace (Colossians 4:5-6), and with an approach that shows the genuine care and concern that God has for all people. Within those guidelines we should stand firm in the divinely revealed understanding of God's design for humanity.

Sadly, many in our society believe that people's feelings are the most reliable indicator of who they are and how they should live their life. This is simply not true. In contrast, the reality is well stated in Jeremiah 10:23—that "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps."

While feelings are an important element of our God-given human abilities, they only contribute to beneficial outcomes when we are embracing God's Word, obeying His laws and led by His Holy Spirit (Psalm 119:160; Romans 8:4-6). Outside of those parameters, our feelings will lead us in the wrong direction and influence us to think and do things that are not good. As described in Proverbs 16:25, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Help for any condition that results in conflict between an individual's feelings of personal identity and physical reality should focus on identifying and addressing the source of the feelings. This is true for gender identity issues. Embracing a false reality does not make it true. Attempting to change one's physical reality to match personal feelings causes additional problems without really resolving the core issues.

However, there is hope as we look forward to the coming Kingdom of God, when the many challenges experienced in this life will be truly resolved. At that time, all people will have a full opportunity to understand and live according to God's great plan for humanity! **BT**

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**Q: What should Christians think about gender identity issues?**

**A:** “Transgender” is an umbrella term for the many ways people experience a mismatch between their biological sex and their feelings of sexual identity. This is a complex and wide-ranging subject—physically, mentally and spiritually—that can’t be explained thoroughly in a short response. But there are some biblical principles to keep in mind.

What does the Bible say?

“God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27). Two distinct genders is a fundamental and beautiful aspect of God’s creation. One’s chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs positively identify gender in most cases. (However, there are rare cases of physiological disorders and syndromes that occur during fetal development that create confusion in gender identity.) It’s impossible to change one’s true identity with surgery and hormone injections (although surgery can be beneficial in some cases, such as when a person is born with both male and female sexual organs).

God’s will is for each person to appreciate and embrace his or her gender and to glorify God as a male or as a female. From observing God’s creation, He obviously loves variety, and He created human males and females to have a great variety of personalities, interests, aptitudes, talents, appearances, voices, body shapes, etc.

In the Bible, God forbids all sexual relations except those that are between a husband and wife who are married to each other. That rules out all immoral heterosexual acts (adultery and fornication) and homosexual acts (Leviticus 20:10-21; Romans 1:22-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-11). This is not the same subject as gender identity, but it often is related.

The Bible also forbids cross-dressing, which implies that God is highly displeased with deliberate efforts to be “transgender.” Deuteronomy 22:5 says, “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God.” Although what is considered menswear and womenswear is determined by each culture, this scripture is forbidding deliberate attempts to appear as one of the opposite sex. And 1 Corinthians 11:4-15 tells us that it is a shame for a woman’s hair to be short like a man’s and for a man’s hair to be long like a woman’s.

The overall point is this: God wants His people to do their best to avoid any confusion over gender identity.

If a person is feeling confusion and inner conflicts over their gender identity, that person should seek wise, loving, encouraging counsel and guidance with the goal of mental,

emotional and spiritual healing. If the conflict is serious enough to seek the help of a professional therapist, one should choose one who respects and believes the Bible. Even more valuable is a close relationship with God.

The ultimate source of all evil and destructive influences is Satan the devil and the demons. Satan is “the ruler of this world” and the “god of this age” who “deceives the whole world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Revelation 12:9). The world is in spiritual darkness because “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 5:19). Significantly, when Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan’s deception, one of the immediate effects was their shame over their sexuality.

Satan hates God and hates all things godly, including the healthy sexuality of human beings that fosters marital love and produces children who can eventually be in God’s eternal family. The marriage relationship between a man and a woman ultimately pictures the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church. This is a powerful concept to consider.

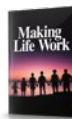
The Bible clearly differentiates between temptations to sin and the committing of sins (James 1:12-16). To have “feelings” of confusion and to experience temptations to adopt a lifestyle of the opposite sex (either temporarily or permanently) is not sinful. But when one gives in to temptation and dwells on or does anything contrary to God’s will, it is sinful.

God’s people must follow the example of God to “hate sin but love the sinners.” While He was here on earth, Jesus was the perfect role model who never condoned sin but showed mercy and compassion toward everyone. He was especially loving toward anyone who was humble and teachable—anyone who was willing to learn and live by His teachings.

Christians must be warm and welcoming to anyone whom God is calling to be His son or daughter, anyone who is sincerely seeking to learn and obey God’s truth (John 6:44; 6:63; Matthew 11:28-30; Romans 14:1). All of us have been guilty of many sins, and we must extend grace to others—no matter what type of sin—as God has extended grace to us. And there must absolutely be no gossip.

For anyone who has been confused about his or her sexual identity, the church community will guide the person to embrace and nurture the gender with which he or she was born. If someone has already done things that are irreversible, such as going through a sex change operation, the person must not be condemned or shunned. The church will try to help the person figure out how to best live a life pleasing to God. And it will also teach how to set the best possible example for others. **BT**

**DIVE DEEPER**



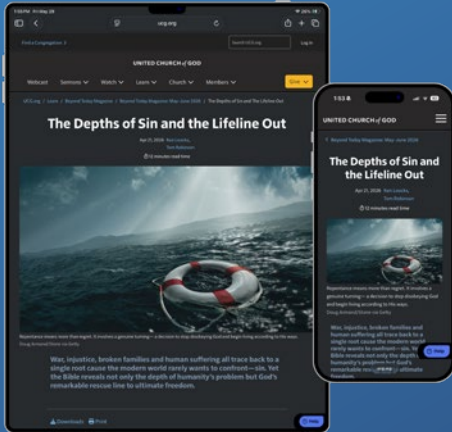
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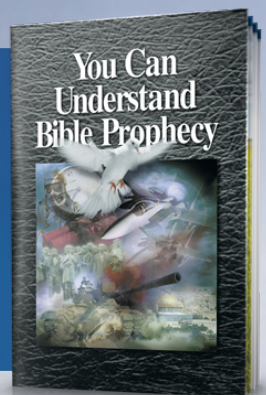
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