



COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

THE FESTIVALS OF

GOOD



The Universe
Cradle for Life, Part 2

5 Ways to Win at School

Understanding Prophecy
Where Do I Begin?

Where Does Racism Come From?

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FOLLOW THE LIGHT

Dear Compass Checkers,

While on vacation years ago, my wife and I and our three children visited Craters of the Moon National Monument in central Idaho. We were eager to do some spelunking. I had only one small flashlight among the five of us, but off we went into the cave. We carefully picked our way walking on uneven volcanic rock and fine volcanic soil. With the light shining onto the floor of the cave from the cave opening, we had no problem seeing. Our children were enjoying the cool air inside the cave, even though outside it was close to a blazing 100 degrees. But within minutes the ambient light from the cave opening diminished when the cave took a turn. We soon found ourselves in total blackness.

Have you ever been somewhere (other than your bedroom at night—that does not count!) and found yourself in total darkness? It's pretty eerie, right?

I turned on my small flashlight and told my family to bunch up directly behind me and to literally “follow the light.” A bit unnerved, our young children did not have to be told a second time! Talk about family closeness. Step by step we walked—I was in front with the flashlight, followed by our three children and my wife. I could see maybe 10 feet ahead, but to the side of us, much less behind us, there was nothing but inky blackness.

To have a little fun, I suddenly turned off the flashlight and we all stood in eerie silence as the darkness wrapped around us. Total blackness does funny things to your thinking. Even your sense of balance is affected, and the walls seem to close in on you. The air becomes heavy, you breathe harder, your pulse quickens and then someone cries out—turn the flashlight back on now! We were all relieved to see that tiny light pierce a small hole in the blackness again, and we all rejoiced in the beauty of light overcoming darkness.

At last we turned around and it was “follow the light” all the way back to the entrance of the cave. We rushed outside into the brilliant sunshine and drank in of its delightful warmth. Sunshine never looked or felt so good!

The five of us talked about what we had just learned. What if one of us had wandered off on their own? What if the battery failed or what if someone

COMPASS CHECK

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stumbled and got hurt? But the biggest lesson we learned as a family was the importance of “follow the light.” It may sound trite in our well-lit world, but if you have ever been in any circumstance like this, then you know the importance of following the light.

Our family drew from the biblical analogy about how vital it is to “follow the light” and what that means spiritually.

In Psalm 119:105, King David describes how the Bible and God’s instructions (“Your word”) act like a light to illuminate the right path through our lives: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Just as our small flashlight blazed our trail in the dark recesses of a volcanic cave, the Bible illuminates where we should walk or not walk in our daily lives. This is a fantastic analogy for us. How else can we know what path in our lives to walk unless God lights the path for us?

The point here is to ask God to “light” the way in your life. Be specific when asking God for answers in your prayers.

Also, when you make God the light in your life, it gives you confidence, faith, and it therefore diminishes your human fears as you turn your life over to Him. Notice this in Psalm 27:1: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

Have you ever thought of yourself as a light to your friends, family and others? We find this in Matthew 5:14-16: “You are the light of the

world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Why should we all be an example to others? Because we can encourage and help others by our positive and caring example. We all need positive “lights” to follow.

Jesus Christ is called the light of the world in John 12:46 (New International Version): “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” We should follow the example of Jesus Christ in our own lives. We should love as Christ loved, forgive as Christ forgave, observe the Sabbath and Feast days as He did and live a life of service today to others. Jesus Christ is the Savior, the Light, to the world.

And notice in 1 Thessalonians 5:5 that God has blessed us by calling us out of spiritual darkness and into His wonderful light: “You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.” What does darkness mean? It means living as the world lives—ignoring how much God cares for us and “doing our own thing.” The world is in darkness at the present time, but when Jesus Christ returns, He will bring light to this earth and set up the Kingdom of God so all of humanity can live in the light. It is Satan who is the dark and evil god of this world, yet he appears to be an angel of life in order to trip up humanity into doing evil (2 Corinthians 11:14). We all need to be extra careful in making sure we follow the true Light, Jesus Christ.

When spelunking you need light. When living in this dark world of ours, we need the spiritual light from God to light up our way. Thankfully, we can turn to God and His Bible to give us that spiritual light in our daily trek toward the coming Kingdom of God. Follow the Light!



Steve Nutzman

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Is Racism a Sin?

Race: It's a subject that has caused issues for millennia. From ancient Israel to modern-day America, and around the world, division among races has caused hurt and hate. While it is true that God told the ancient nation of Israel not to intermarry with other nations, notice the reason why: "Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly" (Deuteronomy 7:3-4; compare 1 Kings 11:2). The command has to do with the idea that other nations worshiped idols and not the true God. It had to do with how the other nations thought, and the negative influence they would have on those who do worship the true God, not the color of their skin.

A NEW TEACHING

In the New Testament, we see a similar warning, to not think like other nations. For instance, Paul writes, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of



their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephesians 4:17-19). Again, Paul condemns the Gentile (non-Israelite) way of thinking, not their specific race.

In Acts 10, we see the story of Peter taking the gospel to Cornelius, a Roman soldier and Gentile. This caused quite a stir among the Jews of the day who were still of a mindset that God favored and loved only them. Peter broke that way of thinking down with a powerful statement: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (verses 34-35, NIV throughout).

Here we see in God's Holy Word—the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16)—that God does not play favorites among nations, and by extension, races. Paul spells this out very

clearly: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU AND ME?

Certainly, we can be thankful that God shows no partiality toward race or nation. But more than that, what does it say to us about how we should think? Is it okay for us to show bias for or against anyone because of their race or nationality?

It is clear in the pages of the Bible that God makes no distinction between races. As followers of Christ, we shouldn't either. Jesus modeled a different attitude for us. He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Racism does not promote peace. It promotes division and hatred without cause. Later in the same chapter, Jesus goes on to say, "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:22).

The Bible does not teach racism. The life that Jesus Christ modeled does not teach an attitude of hate or intolerance toward people. Instead, He taught an attitude of peace toward fellow man. Make no mistake: Racism is a sin. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and His expectation is that we live a life based on love and peace toward our fellow man! **CC** Edited from the Bible Q&A "Is Racism a Sin?" at ucg.org.

Where Does Racism Come From?

As racial violence remains a present evil in our world, have you ever wondered: where does racism come from?

Racist thought and racially motivated hatred are deeply rooted in ideology, or how people think about themselves and others. As defined by Merriam Webster, racism is “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.”

Perhaps at no time in modern memory did the evil of racism manifest itself worse than in Nazi Germany’s “Final Solution.” After Hitler and the Nazis came to power in 1933, Aryan racial superiority became German government ideology. Such racist thought culminated in the deaths of some six million Jews, not to mention other ethnic groups.

More recently, terms like “genocide” or “ethnic cleansing” have been used to describe the racially motivated slaughter of population segments considered inferior. This was the case in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s and in other human tragedies since. Even in places where these mass killings are not currently taking place, there are still problems caused by racism. Today in America, racism explodes in violent street clashes in cities like Ferguson, Missouri, and Charlottesville, Virginia.

God shows us clearly in the Bible where racism comes from and why it continues to be a problem. Racism comes out of human nature, or the heart of man as it is without God’s influence. And the end of racism will only come from the purification of the heart of man.

The way we think on our own is much different from how God thinks

(Isaiah 55:8-9), and when we begin to use our own way of thinking instead of God’s, we can quickly get into trouble. One simple test to figure out if our way of thinking is in line with God’s is to ask ourselves, “Does what I am about to do or say reflect the fruit of God’s spirit?” (Galatians 5:22-23).

In the Bible, the “heart” is used to refer to the core of someone’s being, including thoughts and beliefs as well as feelings. One example is when Jesus Christ says, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19). Here, He summarizes the kind of thinking that can come from the heart if we are not careful to follow God’s will and way. Racism is an extreme wrong way of thinking when mankind tries to figure things out without God.

Racism does not come from a system of economics that supports slavery, such as in the days of the Roman Empire or in early American history. It does not originate from societal structures that support class distinctions. These things have helped racism continue on, but they are not where racism comes from. The Bible is clear: At the deepest level, the evil of racism comes out of the heart of man.

An attitude like racism was even addressed in the New Testament Church. The apostle James warns believers not to “hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality” (James 2:1). The word “partiality” seems less serious than racism, but it means nearly the same thing. Partiality means showing favoritism—that is, thinking one person is better than another—due to social class, wealth, appearance or race.

If the believers were doing this, James asks them, “Have you not shown

partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” (James 2:4). Scripture makes it clear that God does not show favoritism: “There is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:11).

The Bible says, “God created man in His own image” (Genesis 1:27), which includes men and women of all races. Further, it says, God “made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26).

If we treat a person with contempt for their race, religion, social status or any other reason, we have “become judges with evil thoughts.” Harboring such thoughts in the heart is to hate another person made in the image of God. Scripture says, “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15).

Such evil in a person’s heart—evil like racism—influences all attempts to justify his supposed superiority on his brother. According to God’s Word, this is a spirit of murder.

Racism has been and will continue to be a scourge on mankind. To eradicate it, this ingrained and evil way of thinking needs to be cleansed from man’s heart. Thanks to God and His mercies, there is such a plan in the works. To anyone who draws near to God in true repentance and cleanses himself from such evil, God will draw near to him and purify his heart (James 4:8).

When God brings His Kingdom to earth, racism and all evil in man’s heart will be exposed globally. God will show mankind a better way: “I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them” (Hebrews 10:16). God will begin to change the heart of man and cleanse the evil that comes from it, thus ending the scourge of racism forever. **CC**

Edited from the Bible Q&A “Where Does Racism Come From?” at ucg.org.



THE UNIVERSE

CRADLE FOR LIFE | PART 2

by Mario Seiglie

In our Summer 2019 issue, Part 1 of this article discussed the first two critical elements of light and water. Let's continue with our exploration of what surrounds us and marvel at all of God's intricate designs to make our existence possible in this "cradle for life." It will help us understand that nothing was left to chance and that there was a loving and all-powerful Designer behind the scenes.

3. CARBON—THE MATRIX FOR LIFE

When we think of carbon, maybe the first thing that comes to mind is coal, which is made mostly of carbon and some hydrogen, sulfur, oxygen and nitrogen. Yet carbon is an amazing element that forms the chemical backbone for all living things. Scientists use the term *carbon-based life* to emphasize the importance of this substance in living things. It is another marvel of design.

“A house is built up from wood, brick, stone, and metal components,” explains biochemist Michael Denton. “In the case of living organisms, the basic chemical building blocks utilized in their construction are organic compounds—molecules composed of the atom *carbon* (C), in combination with a handful of other atoms . . . The world of *life* is very much *the product of the compounds of carbon*. All the machinery of the cell—and all the vital structures of living organisms from the molecular to the morphological level—are constructed from the compounds of carbon . . .”

“Carbon is so uniquely fit for its biological role, its various compounds so vital to the existence of life, that we may repeat the aphorism, ‘If carbon did not exist, it would have to be invented’” (*Nature’s Destiny*, 1998, pp. 104, 116).

Some writers have envisioned life on other planets having another chemical basis, such as silicon. Yet the more that is discovered about other possible substances as the foundation of life, the more carbon is found to be the *only* element that fulfills those requirements.

As astronomer Hugh Ross mentions about carbon and just the right amount of it in the universe: “Without carbon, *physical life is impossible*. No other element displays the rich chemical behavior needed to form the range of complex molecular structures life requires. Given that physical life must be carbon-based, why would God make a



universe with so little carbon?

“Researchers have found that the quantity of carbon must be carefully balanced between just enough and not too much because carbon, though essential for life, can also be destructive to life. Too much carbon translates into too much carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and methane. In large quantities, these gases are poisonous. In modest quantities, their greenhouse properties keep the planet sufficiently warm for life. In larger quantities, they can heat a planet’s surface beyond what physical life can tolerate” (*Why the Universe Is the Way It Is*, 2008, p. 28).

Notice how the Bible mentions life came from the very compounds of the earth made by God, which include this vital element, carbon: “Then God said, ‘Let the *earth* bring forth the *living creatures* according to its kind, cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind’; *and it was so*” (Genesis 1:24, emphasis mine throughout).

4. THE SIZE OF LIVING THINGS—NOT AN ACCIDENT

We take for granted the size of living things we see around us, but as scientists have discovered, these have been carefully created with the optimal dimensions given their different functions.

“The physiologist Knut Schmidt-Nielsen considered the question,” writes Dr. Denton, “of whether or not the blue whale weighing 100 million grams (110 tons), the giant redwoods (1 billion grams or 1,100 tons), and the smallest existing organism, the mycoplasma, are close to the actual limits on what is possible and concluded, ‘There are cogent reasons to believe that the smallest and the largest organisms represent approximate limits to the possible size of animals under the conditions that prevail on our planet’” (ibid., p. 309).

Scientists often talk about constraints—those conditions that limit what is within the range of possibility. If a biological structure exceeds or falls short of the range set by the physical laws that govern it, it simply will not work.

Take for instance the method of delivery of oxygen to animals and insects. This falls into two categories—the circulatory system for vertebrates and the tracheal system for invertebrates such as insects and spiders.

“There are also firm grounds for believing,” adds Denton, “that in the case of certain basic structural and physiological systems, such as oxygen delivery systems, skeletal systems, and excretory systems, *all* design possibilities have been exhaustively exploited . . . There is nothing in the slightest ‘accidental’ about the fact that it is the larger vertebrates that use the circulatory system, while the tracheal system is utilized by the much smaller



arthropods . . . The largest insects are in fact close to the maximum size possible for an organism obtaining oxygen via a tracheal system . . .”

Denton concludes by marveling at such creative variety: “It is impossible not to be struck by the enormous functional, structural, and behavioral diversity manifested by life on earth. Is it conceivable that there could be a world of life more varied . . . than the one existing on our watery planet? From the tiniest bacterial cell to the immensity of the blue whale . . . our senses reel before the fantastic panoply [variety] of carbon-based life forms which clothes the earth” (ibid., pp. 302, 311).

Yes, virtually every square inch of this earth is teeming with life. Yet all the world’s laboratories have not been able to create a single human hair!

So Denton describes the *effect* of the variety on this vibrant world, but we read of the *cause* of this in Genesis 1:21-22: “So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’”

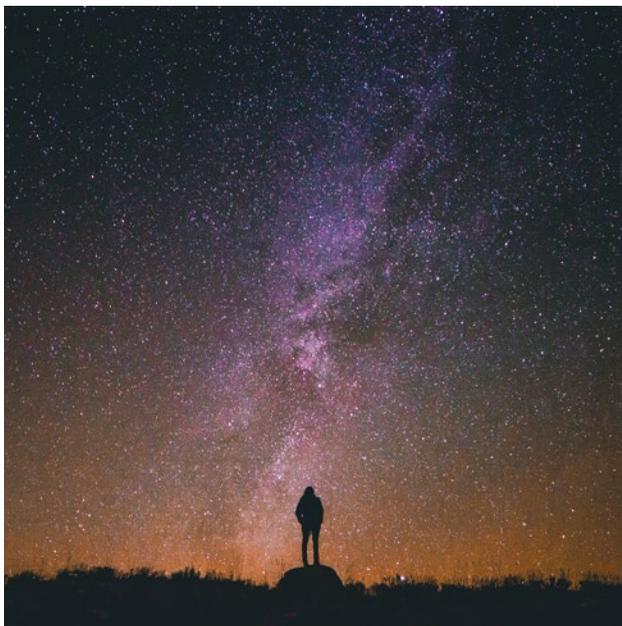
5. FORESIGHT—THE CREATION OF ORGANIC BACKUP SYSTEMS

Some people fear flying in a plane. The idea of being up thousands of feet above the ground can send shivers down their spines. Yet there are about 4 million people around the world who take flights every day, and rarely does something go wrong. Why?

Two of the reasons are: (1) man has been able to harness the physical laws of flight, and (2) humans have carefully built back-up systems so if one device fails, there is another to take its place. Engineers call it *redundancy*. For instance, the space shuttle Atlantis on its last mission in 2011 had five backup computers to ensure the consistent performance of its navigational system.

Similarly, the more we know about life, the more redundant systems are found to protect organisms from minor errors that could destroy them. It throws a real monkey wrench into the idea of evolution.

Denton notes, “And it seems increasingly that it is not only individual genes that are redundant, but rather that the phenomenon may be *all-pervasive* in the development of higher organisms, existing at *every level* from individual genes to the most complex developmental processes . . . Now this phenomenon poses an additional challenge to the idea that organisms can be



radically transformed as a result of a succession of small independent changes, as Darwinian theory supposes . . .

“In other words, the greater the degree of redundancy, the greater the need for *simultaneous* mutation to effect evolutionary change and the more *difficult* it is to believe that evolutionary change could have been engineered without intelligent direction. Redundancy also increases the difficulty of genetic engineering, as it means that the *compensatory changes* that must inevitably accompany any desired change must be necessarily increased” (ibid., pp. 338-339).

The bountiful and carefully designed life on earth is described in these verses: “So God *created* great sea creatures and *every* living thing that moves, with which the waters *abounded, according to their kind*, and *every* winged bird according to its kind. And God *saw that it was good*. And God *blessed* them, saying, ‘*Be fruitful and multiply*, and *fill* the waters in the seas, and let birds *multiply* on the earth . . . And God *made* the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was good*” (Genesis 1:21-22, 25).

WEALTH OF EVIDENCE

From the many striking examples of carefully fine-tuned physical properties that are all around us, we can conclude God did prepare the universe and the earth, just as the Bible described, as a “cradle for life” especially for mankind. How many thanks should we give to our Heavenly Father and His Son for all of this!

With the wealth of evidence we have seen, we can better understand why Psalm 14:1 simply declares, “Only a fool would say, “There is no God!”” (*Contemporary English Version*). **CC**



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THE FESTIVALS OF GOD





Why do we keep the festivals that are in the Bible instead of the more common holidays? What do these festivals mean and symbolize, and why were they so important to God?

When God delivered the nation of Israel from captivity in Egypt, He commanded the nation to participate in periods of special worship during the harvest seasons of the year (Exodus 23:14-16; Deuteronomy 16:1-17). You can read the full instructions in Leviticus 23, where they are referred to in many translations as “the feasts of the Lord.”

“Feast” is used here in the sense of festival or celebration. That is certainly a valid description, with four examples named in the original Hebrew with the word *chag* or *hag*, meaning “festival.” But the Hebrew word used in the intro verses (2-4) for all the occasions is *mo’edim*, meaning “appointed times.”

That means these occasions are special appointments God has made with His people—appointments He wants us to keep.

Our understanding of God’s plan is deepened by realizing that God uses the physical harvests of food crops to symbolize the spiritual harvest of human beings (Matthew 9:37-38; John 4:35; John 15:1-8; Colossians 2:16-17).

The first three festivals are associated with the spring harvests in the land of Israel, while the last four are related to the harvest of late summer and fall, making a total of seven.

Within these seven festivals are seven annual Holy Days. These (along with God’s weekly Sabbath) are holy convocations, or commanded assemblies, of God’s people. Holy means set apart, chosen as special, by God. He commands His people to get together on these days for worship and to learn about Him and His plan, as well as for

fellowshipping, developing relationships and rejoicing together (Leviticus 23:1-4; Deuteronomy 14:23-26; Nehemiah 8:1-12).

The New Testament record shows that the first-century Christian Church continued to observe these biblical festivals. Jesus Christ Himself observed these festivals, and we as His followers are told to walk as He walked (John 7:8-14; 1 John 2:6).

The New Testament Church miraculously began on one of these annual festivals—the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

The apostles and disciples of the early Church continued to observe these festivals long after Jesus’ death and resurrection (Acts 18:21; 20:16; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 5:8).

Paul upheld their observance and spoke about them as continuing “shadows,” like foreshadowing, of the great future events in God’s plan of salvation (Colossians 2:16-17). He also instructed the gentile (non-Israelite) congregation in Corinth regarding the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so we know they were for everyone, not just for one nation or nationality (again, see 1 Corinthians 5:8).

Through the observance of these feasts, we focus on and are reminded, throughout the year, of the work of Jesus the Messiah in fulfilling God’s plan.

His work involves different phases:

1. First coming to take the punishment of sin for humanity
 2. Now serving as Advocate and High Priest for His people and living within them to help them overcome sin
 3. Ultimately returning in power and glory to establish the reign of the Kingdom of God over all nations.
- All of this and more is pictured in the annual festivals:

1. PASSOVER



The Passover is the first festival of the year. It teaches us that Jesus Christ was sinless and, as the

sacrificial “Lamb of God,” gave His life so that the sins of humanity could be forgiven and the death penalty removed. Its observance includes foot-washing and the partaking of unleavened bread and wine, symbolizing Christ’s body and shed blood offered in sacrifice. (See 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Romans 3:25; John 13:4-17; Luke 22:17-20.)

2. THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

The Feast of Unleavened



Bread, starting the day after Passover and continuing for seven days, teaches us that Jesus

Christ leads us to repent of sin and live by every word of God. During this festival, leaven—yeast that causes bread dough to rise during baking—symbolizes sin and is therefore removed from our homes and not eaten. By instead eating unleavened bread during this time, we picture living a life of sincerity and truth, free from sin. (See 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Matthew 4:4; Exodus 12:19.)

3. THE FEAST OF PENTECOST



The Feast of Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks or the Feast of Harvest or Firstfruits. It teaches that Jesus Christ is now building His Church with those who are a “kind of firstfruits” in the spiritual harvest of mankind, having the “firstfruits of the Spirit.” Those who are called now have been empowered with the Holy Spirit, which helps us live God’s way. Jesus Himself is the first of the firstfruits. (See Exodus 23:16; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 2:37-39; James 1:18; Romans 8:23; Leviticus 23:9-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23.)



4. THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

The Feast of Trumpets, the next festival, teaches us that Jesus Christ will return to earth at the end of this age. At that time He will resurrect God’s faithful servants who are no longer living and instantly change His saints who are still alive into immortal spirit beings. This festival commemorates the blowing of the trumpets that will precede and herald His return. (See Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Revelation 11:15.)

5. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT



The Day of Atonement, an annual Sabbath following shortly after Trumpets, points to the time when Satan the devil will be bound for 1,000 years. It pictures the removal of the primary cause of sin—Satan and his demons. Until God removes the original instigator of sin, mankind will continue to be led into disobedience and suffering. This day also pictures how Jesus Christ made atonement for the sins of all mankind. By taking the punishment for our sins, He allowed us to be reconciled (at one) with God and have direct access to Him. By fasting on this day, we draw closer to God and picture the time when all mankind will get to experience this reconciliation with God following Christ’s return. (See Leviticus 16: 20-22, 29-30; Revelation 20:1-3; Hebrews 9:8-14; Hebrews 10:19-20.)

6. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES



The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Ingathering, comes a few days after the previous Holy Day and lasts for seven days. This festival teaches us that when Jesus Christ returns, He will begin the ingathering or harvest of the greater part of mankind and establish a new society with Himself as King of Kings and Lord of Lords under God the Father.

Christ, assisted by the resurrected saints, will set up His government on the earth for 1,000 years. Rule under His laws will spread from Jerusalem throughout the world to usher in an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity. This festival is observed today with Church members living in temporary dwellings for the entire period, in line with the Bible’s instructions. (Revelation 19:11-16; Revelation 20:4; Leviticus 23:33-43; Hebrews 11:8-9; Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:35, 44; Daniel 7:13-14.)

7. THE EIGHTH DAY



The Eighth Day, the last annual Sabbath, immediately following the Feast of Tabernacles, is known to some as the Last Great Day. This day teaches us that Jesus Christ will complete His plan by resurrecting all who have ever lived and offering salvation to those who have never before been given an opportunity to be saved. (See Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 11:25-27; Luke 11:31-32; Revelation 20:11-13.) Thus, the annual cycle of celebration, God’s festivals and Holy Days, reminds Christ’s disciples continually that God is working out a plan of salvation from sin and death and offering the gift of eternal life in the family of God to all humanity—past, present and future. **CC**

Edited from the booklet Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God.

ΔΙΔΑΧΑΙΣΤΟΙΚΙ
UNDERSTANDING
ΠΑΡΑΦΕΡΕΣΘΕΚΑ
PROPHECY
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ΕΝΟΙΣΟΥΚΩΦΕ
ΛΗΘΗΣΑΝΟΙΠΕΡΙ
ΠΑΤΟΥΝΤΕΣ

Where Do I Begin?

by Rex Sexton

IN

the series of books and movies *The Hunger Games*, a trilogy of novels written by American novelist Suzanne Collins, the action takes place in an unspecified future time, in the dystopian, post-apocalyptic nation of Panem, located in North America. Although captivating, these books are quite fictional—a story developed purely for entertainment.

Have you ever wondered what the *actual* future will be like? God reveals this through prophecy in His Word, the Holy Bible. While various books and movies give their interpretation of what the future might be like, God's Word is the *only* factual source of what lies ahead for us in this age and for the world to come.

When it comes to the subject of Bible prophecy, there is a lot to consider. Perhaps the first thing to ask is, "Where do I begin?" We all want to understand what is going to happen in the future, and Bible prophecy is "history written in advance." For years you have probably heard about symbols, beasts, plagues, church eras, a place of safety and many other intriguing or puzzling subjects discussed in sermons or Bible studies. How can you sort them all out?

LAY THE FOUNDATION

When rightly understood, Bible prophecy is a wonderful and accurate guide to the future. The place to begin is to truly believe that "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16) and that "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

Prophecy is a direct message from God to those who serve Him. "Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Bible prophecy reveals what is going to happen in the future to those who work to seek God's will and understand His Word—that's you! More than one third of God's Word is prophetic, and much of that deals with upheaval and difficult times that are going to happen in the near future. If you look at the events in the news today, it is becoming obvious that this world is hurtling

toward a horrible catastrophe. Unfortunately, many are blissfully unaware of what lies ahead.

THREE CENTRAL THEMES

There are three main themes or subjects of prophecy in God's Word:

1. What will happen to the nations of the earth?
2. God dealing with Israel in the past and future
3. God's process of building a family

Once we understand these concepts, virtually every sentence about the future in Scripture fits into this framework. In this series of articles, we will explain each of these themes so that you can build a basic comprehension of what God wants you to know about the events and times ahead.

FIRST THEME: WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH?

One of the key foundational chapters concerning God dealing with the nations of the world is Daniel 2. God chose to reveal the framework of *future history* or "prophecy" to the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. This was done through a strange dream. In the dream he saw a large statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet made of a mix of iron and clay. An odd statue indeed! Perhaps even more interesting is that we read that this statue is destroyed by a supernatural stone "cut out without hands." The king was unable to figure out what he had seen, but God revealed both the vision and the interpretation of it to Daniel, one of the king's young wise men and a prophet of God. This took place about the year 603 B.C. when Daniel was perhaps 17 years old.

Daniel explained to King Nebuchadnezzar the purpose for the vision: "But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Daniel 2:28). Daniel added, "As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be" (verse 29). So, the vision of the statue was to reveal the future from the time of this king until the last days!

The five different parts of this statue are



used to describe five ruling empires that would play a major role in the future. Four of them have already come and gone, and the fifth will soon appear!

1 HEAD OF GOLD

In verses 36-45, Daniel explains the vision to the king. Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, “You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory” (verse 37). Historically, Babylon was the first kingdom to rule all the known world. There had been powerful nations before this time—such as Egypt, the Hittites and Assyria—but never before had one nation conquered and ruled so much of the earth. The head of gold symbolized Babylon. Daniel plainly told Nebuchadnezzar, “you are this head of gold” (verse 38).

In addition to this vision revealing that the head of gold was the Babylonian empire, it also revealed that the empire of Babylon would not continue indefinitely. There would be successive empires following Babylon that would exist until the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the government of God on earth.

2 CHEST AND ARMS OF SILVER

The chest and arms of silver pictured the Medo-Persian Empire. In 539 B.C., the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylon exactly as was foretold by God’s prophet Isaiah 200 years earlier (Isaiah 45:1-2). The Medo-Persian Empire was the second imperial power to rule the known world and lasted over 200 years. Daniel continued to serve the king of Persia and much of what

he wrote in his book was during this time. The book of Esther also took place during the rule of the kingdom of Persia.

3 BELLY AND THIGHS OF BRASS

In 334 B.C., an army under the Greek King Alexander the Great invaded Persia, defeating the Persians in 331 B.C. The Greek Empire was even larger than Persia, extending from Egypt and Southern Europe all the way to India. Greek culture, art and religion were infused throughout the Middle East.

4 LEGS OF IRON

The fourth kingdom, centered in the city of Rome on the Tiber river in Italy, grew quickly, became powerful and conquered most of the territory of the previous three empires. By 31 B.C. Rome ruled over all the

Mediterranean, the Iberian Peninsula, much of Europe, plus Southern Britain and the entire coast of North Africa. Rome had a powerful army and a fierceness that had not been seen before.

The Roman Empire grew so large that it was divided into two parts—East and West—in A.D. 284 by the emperor Diocletian. The “two legs of iron” in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision represent this time in the Roman Empire.

5 FEET AND TOES OF IRON AND CLAY

This is the fifth kingdom that has not yet fully developed and will be a “revival” of the fourth empire, Rome. The fourth kingdom—Rome—was predicted to be strong as iron, the strongest metal known at the time, and would “crush all the others” (verse 40). But the kingdom

would be divided and weakened over time, as symbolized by the feet and toes. It would still have military power, even though it would no longer be a unified nation (verses 41-42).

6 THE STONE “CUT OUT WITHOUT HANDS”

The last part of King Nebuchadnezzar’s vision was of a supernatural stone coming out of the sky and striking the statue on its feet (Daniel 2:34). The feet and toes are broken into pieces, become like straw and are blown away in the wind. The stone then becomes a great mountain that fills the entire earth!

The stone that came from heaven and struck the toes symbolizes Jesus Christ returning to earth as the real King of Kings. The Bible uses the term “rock” or “stone” several times as a representation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4 states, “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious.” In 1 Corinthians 10:4, we read, “For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”

You can read other accounts of the return of Jesus to this earth in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, Zechariah 14:1-4 and many other places in God’s Word.

To recap, during the days of the 10 kings symbolized by the 10 toes on the statue, the God of Heaven will set up a kingdom on earth that shall never be destroyed. It will break in pieces all other nations and take over all the earth and shall exist forever!

A GOOD OVERVIEW—BUT MISSING DETAILS

The vision given to King Nebuchadnezzar is an incredible panorama of the history of man’s governments until the return of Jesus, the Messiah, but much is left out. Thankfully, God reveals more details later, starting in Daniel 7.

*Often we hear people say something like,
“The world is falling apart.”
In reality, everything is coming together
just as God planned and revealed
to His servants!*

Here instead of interpreting the vision of a king, Daniel records one of several visions given to him by God that covers events that will happen to future nations. To provide us a different perspective, this vision represents the four world-ruling empires described above as animals. Instead of parts of a statue, these four empires are now described as animals—predatory meat eaters!

In Daniel 7:4, Babylon, the head of gold, is described as a lion with eagle’s wings. The king of Babylon is compared to a lion in several scriptures (Jeremiah 50:17; 4:7). The Ishtar Gate of Babylon, which was excavated between 1902 to 1914, has numerous lions depicted on it. It has been restored and is on display today at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany. The wings on the lions denote the swiftness of the conquests of Nebuchadnezzar.

The next empire revealed in Daniel 7:5 is Medo-Persia and is described “like a bear.” This is the empire that was previously described as the chest and arms of silver. Described as having three ribs in its mouth, these three ribs represent Babylon, Lydia and Egypt, which were all conquered by the Persians.

Continuing in Daniel 7:6, the leopard is used as a symbol of the Greek Empire, previously described as the belly and thighs of brass. A leopard is no doubt used because of the great swiftness with which Alexander’s army moved and conquered nations. He took over all the known world in barely 12 years and pushed the boundaries farther out, but then died in 323 B.C. at the age of 33 in Babylon. His kingdom was divided into four parts by his generals and continued, as the vision predicted: “The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it” (Daniel 7:6).

The fourth beast, described in Daniel 7:7-8, Rome, is not an animal we recognize. It is described in the vision as “dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth.” It also devours and breaks other nations into smaller pieces, plus has 10 horns. When this fourth beast is explained to Daniel by an angel in verse 23, he is told that this final beast “shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces.” Then the angel says, “The ten horns are ten kings Who shall arise from this kingdom . . .” (verse 24).



These 10 horns represent the continuation or “revival” of the rulership of the system of the fourth beast after the original empire collapsed. In the vision of the statue, these were represented by the feet and 10 toes made of iron mixed with clay. These kings are to reign in succession until the return of Jesus Christ to replace them and rule the earth (the stone cut out without hands in the vision of the statue). Their story is foretold in the 13th chapter of Revelation. The apostle John saw a vision depicting the same empires that God revealed to Daniel, symbolized by a strange animal that he called a “beast.” In Revelation 13:3 we read, “And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.”

When Rome was finally defeated in A.D. 476, it was only a wound. The Roman Empire did not die completely, but was significantly weakened. It lived on in the Eastern capital city of Byzantium, later called Constantinople, and currently known as the city of Istanbul in Turkey.

The deadly wound was healed in A.D. 554 by the Eastern Roman emperor Justinian when he restored the empire in the West. While this kept the Roman Empire alive, it has not yet achieved the world ruling power it once had.

The full revival of the Roman Empire is revealed beginning in Revelation 17:3, “So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.” This scarlet beast pictures the fully revived Roman Empire that will be in place at the return of Jesus Christ!

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Often we hear people say something like, “The world is falling apart.” In reality, everything is coming together just as God planned and revealed to His servants! Although these images of statues and beasts can be frightening, we can take great comfort in what is recorded in Daniel 2:44, “*In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and*

consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

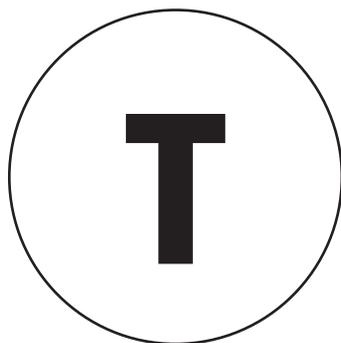
The Kingdom of God has not yet been established on earth. And while we are not yet fully into the days of “these kings,” they are coming, and we must be making ourselves ready (Revelation 19:7). For a few more years, man will continue to misrule and hurt his fellow man, still writing the sad lessons of human history. Understanding Bible prophecy can give us hope for a bright and wonderful future!

To gain a better understanding of what God foretells about the nations, we suggest that you read our booklet, *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. In the next issue, we will cover the second major theme: God’s choosing of Abraham’s family and the prophecies about Israel—past and future. **CC**



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5 WAYS TO WIN AT SCHOOL



ired of feeling behind where you ought to be in school? It's time to take action!

Do you scramble to produce a five-page English literature paper? Are your grades not what they should be?

Many students find themselves overstretched and overwhelmed by school. Often this is because there's a lot of pressure around looking, acting or being a certain way to feel like you fit in. But, according to the experts, the key principle to keep in mind is that you succeed *in what you do*—not by who you

are or how you look.

Let's examine five traits all successful students share—traits we should all strive to develop.

1. ORGANIZATION

Sixteen years of teaching in public and private schools has shown me that many students struggle with being organized. I've witnessed countless students open lockers to reveal a stack of papers, lunch bags, gym shoes and mystery food items all jumbled together in a compacted pile that would rival a local landfill. After offering my "cleaning" services to help tidy up, we often found, at the very bottom of the pile, that science paper that had been due two weeks earlier! Situations like these can be easily avoided by simply setting up a folder for every class and taking unnecessary items home.

Having folders or binders for each class is a simple way to keep papers in order so that you can grab them at a moment's notice. And if you type papers on a computer, setting up a digital folder for each class is just as useful. Maintaining a basic filing system not only helps you keep organized, but also develops useful skills that will serve you when you enter the professional workforce.

Additionally, a daily or weekly planner is a valuable tool for recording due dates for exams, projects or events. You probably have a planner app on your phone that could be an easy way to keep track of everything. Plus, many schools now provide access to grades online where you and your parents can easily check to see how you're doing on a regular basis. Your grades shouldn't be a surprise!

2. TIME MANAGEMENT

There are only so many hours in a day, and many students have to juggle their studies, extracurricular activities and even part-time jobs. To make the most of your study time, set aside some of it every day to go over notes or readings from each class. Studying or reviewing class material a bit at a time helps you better retain the information needed for an upcoming exam or project.

Compare this to pulling an all-night cram session in which the information only makes it tenuously into your short-term memory.

Another good time-saving study habit is to develop short mnemonic devices or lists of phrases that help you to remember important concepts from a particular subject. For example, to remember the name of the Great Lakes, you could remember “Super Man Helps Everyone” (Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, Ontario).

3. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

I enjoy teaching most when my students take an active role in the learning process. I can safely say that almost every other teacher feels the same. So don't be afraid to ask questions! Good teachers welcome questions from their students and want to provide the right answers.

By taking an active role in class, you will help clear up any concerns you might have about the content or gaps in your understanding—and it will also help class time fly by. If a teacher's answers still leave you without a clear understanding of a concept, then take the initiative to ask for extra tutoring from him or her or another student.

4. GRIT AND DETERMINATION

There's a poster in my classroom that says, “You are responsible for you!” This is absolutely true. If you are struggling to understand the material and the teacher isn't aware of it, then the

teacher can't help you.

You have to have the grit or determination to dig in your heels and not wait until the last minute to ask for help. Talk to your teacher privately to explain your situation. Then make a commitment to do extra work if necessary to master the material. Going the extra mile and making the effort to get help will show your instructor that you're serious about the class. This may enable you to get extra tutoring from

And, of course, you can ask God for help, even about little things like an upcoming test or challenges you're having with a certain assignment. God cares about you and wants to help you.

the teacher or from his or her assistant. Of course, extra help will only matter if you are making your own best effort. Put in the extra time and don't give up!

Grit played a valuable role for me in my final semester of college. I was enrolled in a probability and statistics course and was not doing well. In fact, I failed the first test! I wasn't grasping the concepts, so I went to the professor, explained my problems and asked for help. I needed to pass this course at least with a “C” in order to graduate!

As a result of meeting privately with the professor, she offered to give me extra one-on-one tutoring sessions. I went to those sessions and studied daily, and finally began to understand the content. I didn't give up. Because I persevered—used grit—I began to improve my test scores and daily work, which resulted in a “B” on the final exam! And yes, I passed the course and received my education degree!

5. SELF-DISCIPLINE

Finally, no amount of organization, time management, participation or grit will matter one bit if you don't exercise self-discipline and implement these strategies. As a student you will have to be dedicated and diligent about reaching your goals. You will simply have to make yourself do things that may not come naturally—and often it won't be fun. Taking steps to be more self-disciplined probably won't come easily at

first, but if you introduce just a little of the above strategies into your academic life each day, you will be well on your way to becoming a successful student!

And, of course, you can ask God for help, even about little things like an upcoming test or challenges you're having with a certain assignment. God cares about you and wants to help you. Plus, bringing your struggles to Him is a great way to lessen any anxiety you might be feeling. Psalm 55:22 says, “Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you” (New Living Translation). **CC**



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