

BEYOND TODAY

A Magazine of Understanding

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When **God** Became
Man
So **Man** Could
Become **God**

Christ the King 8 • Good Friday–Easter Sunday: It Just Doesn't Add Up 10
What's Holding America Together? 16 • Are You Being Manipulated? 22

BEYOND TODAY

FEATURE ARTICLES

4 When God Became Man So Man Could Become God

Who exactly was Jesus Christ? What was His mission and purpose in coming to earth? Nothing could be more important in your life than understanding the astounding answer to these questions!

8 Christ the King

Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God is what He lived for. But it's also what He died for, having revealed Himself as King who will reign!

10 Good Friday–Easter Sunday: It Just Doesn't Add Up

Jesus Christ said He would be entombed for three days and three nights. Can this be reconciled with a "Good Friday" crucifixion and burial and an "Easter Sunday" resurrection?

13 How Much Do You Know About the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

Jesus never observed Easter, but He did celebrate the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. What relevance do these have for Christians?

16 What's Holding America Together?

The world's leading nation is in mortal danger. Still powerful, still capable of great and noble deeds—its future in question. What should you understand about the future of the United States?

22 Are You Being Manipulated?

Few people are aware of the great unseen spiritual battle taking place throughout the world. Fewer still realize that the main battlefield is within their minds!

26 Jesus' Sacrifice and the Need for New Government

The world is broken. The system doesn't work. We're in trouble. Big change is needed at the top and within. The annual biblical Passover observance reminds us that Jesus gave His life for this purpose, looking forward to the world's deliverance through the Kingdom He will bring.

28 Knock, Knock! Will You Answer?

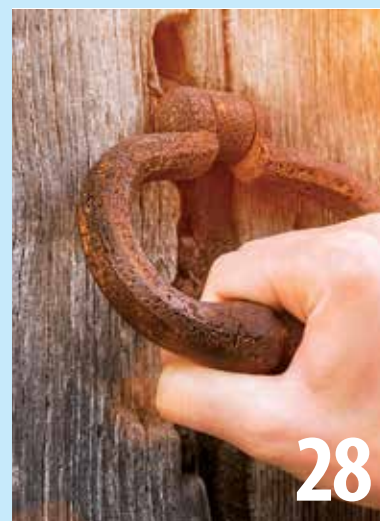
Will you answer Jesus Christ's knock at the door?



4



22



28

DEPARTMENTS

20 Current Events and Trends

An overview of events and conditions around the world

30 Letters From Our Readers

Readers of *Beyond Today* magazine share their thoughts

31 *Beyond Today* Television Log

A listing of stations and times for the *Beyond Today* TV program



Scott Ashley
Managing editor

What Is God's Plan for You?

“Why am I here?” This is the question of the ages, the great mystery of life. Why were you born? Why do you exist? What is the purpose of your life?

What is God's plan for you? Many believe they will spend eternity in heaven—but *doing what*? Playing harps and comparing halos? I've never heard a good explanation that makes sense. Such a future seems quite *dissatisfying*. Due to Covid-19, millions of people have spent the last year bored, shut up in their homes doing little or nothing. Do we really want an eternity of that?

If heaven really is the future of much of the human race, the Bible says very little about it. In fact, I've searched the Scriptures repeatedly and can find *nothing* about what believers will do during a supposed eternity in heaven. And for that matter, the common ideas of halos and feathered wings are nowhere to be found either. (To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

So, what is God's plan for His faithful believers? What does He have in store?

What the Bible actually reveals is something far greater than going to heaven to do virtually nothing for eternity. It tells us we can become *the literal children of God*.

That may sound outlandish to you. But don't take my word for it. Take the word of the apostle Paul, quoting God in 2 Corinthians 6:18: “*I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters*, says the Lord Almighty” (emphasis added throughout).

How did Jesus Christ, who came to reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:18), present Their relationship? As a *family*—God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

God is in the process of creating a family—His own *divine* family, the *God family*. And as a God whose nature and character are summed up as “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16), He wants to see us become part of

that family—that means *you and me*.

What will existence in God's family be like? Notice the apostle John's description of Jesus Christ as he saw Him in vision in Revelation 1:12-18 (New Living Translation): “When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. And standing in the middle of the lampstands was the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were bright like flames of fire.


“His feet were as bright as bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean

waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth [evidently figurative of His speaking the Word of God—Hebrews 4:12]. And his face was as bright as the sun in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, ‘Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one who died. Look, I am alive forever and ever!’”

This same John tells us in 1 John 3:2 that the glorified children of God

will also appear as Christ does when they are resurrected and given eternal life in the family and Kingdom of God! He states, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as he is.”

This is the kind of glorified existence God promises to His children in the resurrection of the dead to immortal spirit at Christ's return as described in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54. The ultimate purpose of human beings is to become part of the family of God—so Jesus can be “the firstborn among *many brethren*,” those raised to glory as He is glorified now (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:10).

That is a future we can believe in and build our lives around! Learn more about it in this issue. 



When God Became Man So Man Could Become God

Who exactly was Jesus Christ? What was His mission and purpose in coming to earth? Nothing could be more important in your life than understanding the astounding answer to these questions!

by Scott Ashley

How much do you understand about Jesus Christ? Who and what was He, exactly? What was His mission, His purpose here on earth? Millions of people assume they know the answers.

These are critical questions—not just from a knowledge standpoint, but from the crucial impact they should have on your life!

The fact is, knowing the answers to these questions has everything to do with not only how you live every day of your life now, but also how you will spend eternity! Are you ready to discover the true biblical answers to these questions? Let's dig into the Scriptures to find out!

This time of year is important to Christians because it reminds us of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, His death and His resurrection to ascend to His Father in heaven. Well and good, and most people know about that. But to dig a little deeper, *why* did He have to die? *Why* did He give His life as a sacrifice? And as a sacrifice for *what*? And *why* was He resurrected to life again?

To begin to understand, we must first grasp Jesus Christ's true identity—to go much further back in time to grasp who and what He was before His human birth.

You might remember the story in Luke 1 of the angel appearing to Mary, a young Jewish virgin, and telling her that she would miraculously conceive through the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1 records how her husband-to-be Joseph received a similar announcement in which an angel told him: “Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Matthew then explains, “This was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘*God with us*’” (verses 20-23, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus, we see here, though fully human was also someone and something far more. He was “*God with us*”!

The Word who was with God and was God

But what does that actually mean? We find the answer beginning in John 1:1-2: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. He was in the beginning *with* God.”

The apostle John tells us here that “in the beginning”—a time before the creation of the universe recorded in Genesis 1—two divine Beings existed—one referred to as “God” and the other as “*the Word*” who *also “was God”* and existed “in the beginning *with God*.”

Then in verse 14 John tells us something astounding about this Word who was God: “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .*” This Being whom John calls “the Word,” who both “*was God*” and existed “*with God*,” then “*became flesh and dwelt among us*” as a human being—the One we know as Jesus Christ!

Looking back at John 1:1 in light of these statements, it’s obvious that “the Word” mentioned here is the One we know as Jesus Christ and that “God” is the One who would later be revealed as God the Father. Both were divine and uncreated. Both were unlike any other beings—they were *God Beings*.

John then explains in verse 18: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom

had seen *God the Father* at any time.

And if they weren’t seeing God the Father, the Being they saw as recorded in these passages (and at other times when God appeared to individuals) was *the Word who was God* (John 1:1), the One whom John tells us was later born in the flesh as Jesus of Nazareth.

Putting this together, what Scripture reveals is that the One who was born as Jesus of Nazareth was the One who interacted with the patriarchs, leaders, prophets and people of Israel as the LORD or God on behalf of God the Father. They never saw the Father, only the Word or representative of God, who came to reveal the Father (John 1:18).

The implications of this are huge.

The Creator of all things

Continuing in the first chapter of his Gospel, John tells us another amazing fact about this divine Being he knew as Jesus Christ: “He was in the world, *and the world was made through Him*, and the world did not know Him.”

So not only was the One who became Jesus Christ God alongside the One to become known as God the

The One who was born Jesus of Nazareth was the One who interacted with the patriarchs, prophets and people of Israel as the LORD or God on behalf of God the Father.

of the Father [i.e., in a very close and loving relationship], He has declared Him.”

John had just explained (verse 14) that he was a personal eyewitness of “the Word” who became flesh as Jesus Christ, so the “God” mentioned here as never having been seen cannot refer to Jesus. This had to mean God the Father.

John repeats this exact same statement in 1 John 4:12. And Jesus Christ Himself makes two such explicit statements in John 5:37 and 6:46, telling us that *He alone* among human beings has seen God the Father.

Who did those who “saw God” really see?

In earlier biblical books we read that various people in the Bible *did* see God. They include the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 12:7; 15:1; 18:1), his son Isaac (Genesis 26:2, 24), his grandson Jacob (Genesis 28:13; 32:30; 35:9-10), Moses (Exodus 3:6; 33:11, 21-23), Moses’ brother Aaron along with 70 leading men of Israel (Exodus 24:9-11), Moses’ successor Joshua (Joshua 6:2) and Gideon (Judges 6:14).

The biblical accounts describe most of these as face-to-face encounters. Two involved eating a meal with God. In one incident, Jacob literally wrestled with God. These were clearly *personal encounters* and not dreams or visions.

So how do we explain this? Whom did these individuals see when Scripture tells us that they saw God? The only way we can make sense of this is to understand that the words of Jesus and John are telling us that no man

had seen God the Father, both of Them having existed as God before the creation of the world, but “*the world was made through Him*”—through the One who later became Jesus Christ.

Astonishingly, the world in which we live was created by the One we know as Jesus Christ!

This same fact is repeated in Hebrews 1:1-2: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, . . . *through whom also He made the worlds . . .*” Yes, God “made the worlds,” but He did it *through* the One we know as Jesus Christ as the “hands-on” Creator!

Notice also Colossians 1:16, speaking about Jesus Christ: “*For by Him all things were created* that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible . . . *All things were created through Him and for Him.*”

He created the physical universe that astounds us with its magnificence and complexity. But that’s not all. The apostle Paul also tells us here that He created “all things . . . visible and invisible”—apparently indicating not just the physical universe that we *can* see, but also the unseen spirit world of angels that we *cannot* see!

The Creator came to die for those He created

These passages add a great deal to our understanding of who and what Jesus Christ was. But there is still more!

Let’s notice a revealing passage in Philippians 2:5-8, where Paul stressed what Christ did as the ultimate example of humility and giving for us all:

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. *Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross*” (New Living Translation).

What is revealed here is profound. This same divine Being who had been with God the Father willingly “gave up his divine privileges”—the power, splendor and majesty He shared with the Father—to become a flesh-and-blood human being conceived in the womb of Mary. He went from a supremely glorious spirit powerful enough to create a universe to becoming a tiny, helpless infant wholly dependent on His mother and adoptive father!

Throughout this *His identity didn’t change*—He was still God—but now He was a physical, mortal human being subject to pain, suffering, exhaustion, hunger, thirst and all the other feelings and experiences common to human existence (other than personal sin—Hebrews 4:15).

The Creator of all things, including mankind, came to His creation—including human beings—as a mortal human being who was Himself subject to death. He did this to carry out the plan that the Father and He had worked out “before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9)—before the universe was created.

The need for a sacrifice for all sins for all time

That plan was for the Creator of all things to give His life for all human beings who had ever lived or would yet live—all of whose lives sprang from Him.

Jesus was not forced into this decision. His words in John 10:15-18 (NLT) emphasize that this was His voluntary choice: “*I sacrifice my life for the sheep . . . I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily.*”

Why was this sacrifice necessary?

God’s Word tells us in Romans 3:23 that “all have sinned”—have disobeyed God’s commandments and laws. In doing so we earned the death penalty, for “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). This means that we die, and that would be the end of the story—our bodies would decay,

and we would disappear into oblivion, with no conscious bodiless existence as some imagine.

However, since “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16), and in His love He is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9), He provides a way for us to be freed from the judgment of eternal death.

John 3:16, perhaps the most well-known passage of the Bible, tells us, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

God’s plan, then, is that Jesus Christ came into the world to take on Himself the death penalty we have deserved so that we might receive everlasting life. Many Bible verses describe the importance of this sacrifice and why it had to take place. Let’s notice a few:

“For you know that *God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver . . . It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God*” (1 Peter 1:18-19, NLT).

“*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin*” (Romans 3:23-25, NLT).

“And he [Jesus] took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, ‘Each of you drink from it, for *this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many*’” (Matthew 26:27-28, NLT).

These and other verses tell us that Jesus had to die in our place so our sins could be forgiven. He willingly suffered the death penalty we have deserved. As Hebrews 9:22 (NLT) tells us, “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” Had Christ not died in our place, we would all die *guilty of our sins. We would be forever cut off from God and any hope of life beyond this one.*

And this is why understanding Jesus Christ’s true identity is so important. *It took the life of the Creator of all human life to pay the immense penalty for the sins of all mankind for all time.* That includes *my sins, your sins*, and the sins of all who have ever lived!

Theologians’ Statements on Our Becoming Divine

God’s intention that we as His children become the same kind of beings He is will surprise many. Yet it’s clear that early “church fathers”—not so far removed in time from Jesus Christ and the apostles—*did understand* this truth. Notice the remarkable explanation of the early Catholic theologian Tertullian, writing around A.D. 200:

“For we will be even gods, if we deserve to be among those of whom He declared, ‘I have said, “You are gods,” and ‘God stands in the congregation of the gods.’ But this comes of His own grace, not from any property in us. For it is He alone who can make gods” (*Against Hermogenes*, chap. 5).

More recent authors have also grasped this biblical truth. C.S. Lewis, perhaps the most pop-

ular Christian writer of the last century, wrote: “He said (in the Bible) that we were ‘gods’ and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature . . . The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said” (*Mere Christianity*, 1996, p. 176).

The astounding goal of God's plan

Why did Jesus give His life? To give *us* life. And not just any life, but *eternal* life. And not just eternal life, but eternal life as *God's own children*, part of His glorified spirit family!

This is what so few understand. Crucial though it is, Jesus didn't give His life just so we can be forgiven. Forgiveness is only *part* of God's great purpose. And that great purpose is to "*bring many children into glory*" so you and I can be part of His eternal spirit family!

This is clearly spelled out for us in Hebrews 2:9-12 (NLT): "And because he suffered death for us, he [Jesus Christ] is now 'crowned with glory and honor.' Yes, by God's grace, *Jesus tasted death for everyone*. God, for whom and through whom everything was made, *chose to bring many children into glory*. And it was only right that he should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, *fit to bring them into their salvation*."

"So now *Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father*. That is why *Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters*. For he said to God, 'I will proclaim your name to *my brothers and sisters*. I will praise you among your assembled people.'"

This is why Paul calls Jesus "*the firstborn among many brothers and sisters*" (Romans 8:29, NLT). Paul similarly writes of God the Father telling His people in 2 Corinthians 6:18, "*I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters*, says the LORD Almighty."

"You are gods"

If this sounds unbelievable to you, let's get to the heart of the matter and see what Jesus Himself said. As recorded in John 10:33, the Jews of His day accused Him of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God: "Because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

Notice His surprising response: "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law [in Psalm 82:6], 'I said, 'You are gods'? If He [God] called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?'" (John 10:34-36).

In other words, said Christ, "if Scripture outright called human beings *gods*, why are you angry when I merely state that I am God's *Son*?"

But what did He mean? Are human beings actually to become gods?

In Psalm 82:6, from which Jesus quoted, God says to human beings, "I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.'" The key here is the word *children*, just as we've seen in other verses. We must understand that God is a family—a divine family now comprising God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son, but a family into which others will be added!

This is the astonishing purpose of God's plan. This is why Jesus Christ emptied Himself of the glory He shared with the Father as God in heaven. This is why He voluntarily came to earth to live as a flesh-and-blood human being—and to give His life as a sacrifice in our place to pay for our sins. And this is why He was resurrected to return to His previous glorified state, now as "*the first-born among many brothers and sisters*"—those destined to be the very sons and daughters of God!

Will you act on God's purpose for you?

Jesus Christ, although God, became a man for an astounding purpose. He exchanged His life for yours and mine. He became man so that man—all who are willing to surrender their lives to Him as He surrendered His life for us—could *become the immortal children of God*, as part of that divine spirit family. (For more proof of this amazing truth, see the study guide offered below.)

God the Father and Jesus Christ, who alone are uncreated and ever-living, will always reign supreme. But at the same time we have the astounding promise that "*we shall be like Him* for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:3).

Your life isn't intended to be empty and meaningless, but to be lived for the greatest purpose imaginable—to become one of *God's own children*, living forever as part of His family! God's plan to "*bring many children to glory*" includes *you*!

As the many scriptures in this article show, Jesus Christ became man for a specific reason—so *you could become as He is*, part of His family forever! As John 1:12 tells us, "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to *become children of God*, to those who believe in His name . . ."

This isn't just some feel-good sentiment, but a promise that we will become divine, immortal spirit beings as God the Father and Jesus Christ are divine immortal spirit. As the apostle Peter tells us: "Because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to *share his divine nature* . . ." (2 Peter 1:4, NLT).

Will you make God's purpose for you a reality? Now that you're starting to grasp the purpose for Jesus Christ's coming to earth as a man and giving His life for you, will you give your life to Him and begin fulfilling God's astounding purpose for you? **BT**



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Few people really understand the purpose for their lives. Yet that purpose is clearly spelled out in the pages of the Bible. How much do you understand about it? You need to read *Why Were You Born?* Download or request your free copy today!

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Christ the King

Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God is what He lived for. But it's also what He died for, having revealed Himself as King—a King who will reign!

by Victor Kubik

On what charges was Jesus Christ crucified? Was it that He was a prophet or teacher? Was it that He fed the masses, healed the sick, comforted the discouraged? No. The Jewish religious establishment opposed various aspects of His teaching and claims and was jealous of Him. Many even hated Him. But His laudable duties and acts could not be used to sentence Him to death. The Jewish leaders did not have the authority to impose capital punishment at this time. What, then, could they do?

In the final hours of His earthly life, a harassed and brutalized Jesus was taken by the Jews to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. They sought to have Jesus killed by the occupying power.

On what basis? "And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar [which was a lie], saying that He Himself is Christ, a King' (Luke 23:2). The word *Christ* here means the same as the Hebraic term *Messiah*, the Anointed One—a reference to a coming King of the line of King David.

They knew this accusation would get Pilate's attention. Continuing in John 18, Jesus stood before Pilate. In this momentous confrontation, Pilate asked Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus didn't deny it, but He stated that His Kingdom was not of the present world order. Pilate again asked, "Are you a king then?" (verses 33-37).

Jesus responded: "*You say rightly that I am a king. For*

this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (verse 37, emphasis added throughout). This powerful answer encapsulated Christ's role, purpose and gospel message—and it places on us who aspire to the truth the need to grasp this! What was Jesus saying?

"Behold your King!"

Pilate didn't get it. But he didn't see Jesus as an insurrectionist. Taunting the Jewish leadership, he asked the crowd, "Do you therefore want me to release to you *the King of the Jews?*" (verse 39). But those gathered refused. In John 19 Pilate had Jesus scourged, and the Roman soldiers mocked Him as King of the Jews (verse 3).

Seeing Him further brutalized, those gathered still called out for His crucifixion. When Pilate said, "Behold your King!" (verse 14), they cried out the more. Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your King?" And "the chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!'" (verse 15). Jesus was then led away to be crucified.

In that crucifixion a signboard was hung above His head giving notice of His crime. Pilate had not found Him guilty but gave in to pressure to punish the political offense. Pilate ordered that the placard say, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (verse 19). The chief priests complained that it should not declare Him King of the Jews but that He merely *claimed* to be—yet Pilate said it would remain as

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written (verses 21-22). Again, the listed offense for which Jesus died was a political one—that *He was King*.

But just what kind of king was Christ intended to be? Is this just a symbolic title for His preeminent position? Or does it relate to the actual duty of ruling over nations, directing governmental affairs?

Born to be King

Remarkably, Jesus was proclaimed King not only at the end of His human life, but also at its beginning and long before. As He told Pilate, this was why He was born. Announcing the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:26-31), the angel Gabriel told her: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (verses 32-33).



The only hope for humanity is the establishment of the Kingdom of God as **a real Kingdom on earth with Jesus Christ as a real King.**

This echoed a prophecy given centuries earlier: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince [or Ruler] of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Both of these passages speak of literal government over people on earth. The world of Jesus’ time was waiting for a Messiah to bring far more than a spiritual revival. They were waiting for the One called “the Desire of All Nations” (Haggai 2:7) to arrive to bring about ultimate regime change. They yearned for freedom from Roman oppression.

When the wise men from the East came to pay respects to the young Jesus, they inquired: “Where is He who has been born *King of the Jews*? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2). They learned from the prophecy of Micah 5:2 that the Messianic Ruler and Shepherd of Israel would be born in Bethlehem. So threatened was the Judean King Herod that he ordered the massacre of all children under two years old there to prevent this challenge to his own rule.

The Kingdom to come—a consistent message

Yet as Jesus said, His Kingdom was not of the present order. It would come in the future—and not over just Israel and Judah but the whole world. As the prophet

Daniel had seen in vision: “Behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! . . . *Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed*” (Daniel 7:13-14).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus proclaimed the coming of this Kingdom over which He would rule on behalf of God the Father and called on people to repent and trust in this message (see Mark 1:14-15). He emphasized what it would take to be part of that Kingdom. It required His sacrificial role, but also His rule in our lives today. He taught the kind of attitudes and behavior needed for the Kingdom of God—the way of life absent from the kingdoms of men, which has resulted in all the misery we have in the world. And He sent His disciples

out to preach the same message.

It’s interesting that just before He returned to heaven, they asked Him this last question: “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom

to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). They still firmly believed in the promise of an actual ruling government. Christ did not contradict their understanding. He responded merely that it was not for them to know the timing, and that they should continue their proclamation work until then (verses 7-8).

As they recognized, the only hope for the world is the establishment of the Kingdom of God as a real Kingdom on earth with Jesus Christ as a real King.

The closing chapters of the Bible’s last book show this actually happening. After smiting the national forces arrayed against Him at His return (Revelation 19:14), Jesus “will rule them with an iron scepter” (verse 15, New International Version), the nations now as sheep under a protective shepherd of unbreakable power. He will bear the name “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (verse 16).

Jesus will finally replace this world’s corrupt, lawless rule that has inflicted untold misery on humankind. Then the time of true and lasting justice will begin—the time of the reign of Christ the King! **BT**

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Good Friday–Easter Sunday: It Just Doesn't Add Up!

Jesus Christ said He would be entombed for three days and three nights. Can this be reconciled with a “Good Friday” crucifixion and burial and an “Easter Sunday” resurrection? Or do the Gospels spell out a surprising, simpler solution that fits perfectly with what Jesus foretold?

by Scott Ashley

In Matthew 12:38, we read where some of the Jewish religious leaders asked Jesus for a sign to prove He was the Messiah. “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you,” they challenged Him (New International Version).

But Jesus responded that the only sign He would give was that of the prophet Jonah: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (verse 40, NIV).

Traditional view doesn't fit

But how can we fit “three days and three nights” between a Friday crucifixion, with entombment just before sundown, and a Sunday morning resurrection at sunrise? This traditional view allows for Jesus to have been in the tomb for only one 24-hour day and parts of two others!

Some believe that Christ's statement that He would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” does not require a literal span of three 24-hour days (72 hours total) or even close to that. They reason that any part of a day, even just a few minutes, can be reckoned as a whole day.

Thus, since Jesus died in the afternoon and was entombed just before sunset, they think that the closing few minutes of Friday constituted the first day, that Friday night was the first night, that Saturday was the second day, that Saturday night was the second night, and that a few minutes at dawn on Sunday morning made up the third day.

But where, then, is the third night? Even if a few minutes of daylight late on Friday and another few on Sunday morning constitute “days,” this interpretation fails to explain how only *two* nights—Friday night and Saturday night—can somehow be the *three* nights of which Jesus spoke.

Moreover, Scripture is plain that Jesus *had already risen* before Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early Sunday morning, arriving “while it was still dark” (John 20:1-2). So in reality, *no* parts of daytime on Sunday could be counted as a day, as Jesus was *already resurrected* well before the

break of dawn. Clearly it just doesn't add up!

Jonah 1:17, to which Jesus referred, states specifically that “Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” We have no biblical basis for thinking that Jesus meant only two nights and one day, plus part of another day. If Jesus were in the tomb only from late Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning, then the sign He gave that He was the prophesied Messiah *was not fulfilled*.

So was Jesus Christ wrong? Or is something wrong with the traditional view of when and how long He was in the tomb? Let's carefully examine the details from the Gospels. When we do, we uncover the real story of how Jesus' words were fulfilled *exactly as He said!*

Two Sabbaths mentioned

Notice the sequence of events outlined in Luke 23. Jesus' moment of death and hasty burial because of the oncoming Sabbath that would begin at sundown, is narrated in verses 46-53. Verse 54 states of this particular afternoon, “That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.”

In Jewish society of that time, extra cooking and housecleaning were done on the day before a Sabbath in preparation for it (see Exodus 16:23). Thus the day before the weekly Sabbath was a time of preparation. The biblical Sabbath falls on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. According to Bible reckoning, days begin at sunset (Leviticus 23:32; compare Genesis 1:5, 8, 13), so all weekly Sabbaths start Friday evening at sundown.

Based on these facts, many people have assumed that it is the weekly Sabbath mentioned here, and that Jesus was therefore crucified on a Friday. But *two* types of “Sabbaths” or sacred rest days are mentioned in the Scriptures—the regular weekly Sabbath day, which fell on the seventh day of the week, and seven annual Holy Days (listed in Leviticus 23), which were also Sabbaths that could—and usually did—fall on days of the week *other* than the regular weekly Sabbath day.

Was the day after Jesus was crucified a *weekly* Sabbath or

The Biblical Chronology of Jesus Christ's Burial and Resurrection



one of these annual Holy Days? Is there a way to know?

John 19:31 clearly states that this approaching Sabbath "was a *high day*." This term does not refer to the weekly Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset), but in this context to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, one of God's annual Holy Days (Exodus 12:16-17; Leviticus 23:6-7). A number of Bible commentaries, encyclopedias and dictionaries will confirm that John is not referring to the weekly Sabbath here, but rather to one of the annual Sabbaths—a "*high day*."

In that year the high day or annual Sabbath mentioned here fell on a Thursday (meaning it began Wednesday evening at sunset). We can confirm this by looking at the details in the Gospel accounts, which show us that *two* separate Sabbath days—one the "high day" and the other the weekly Sabbath—are mentioned. You can follow along in the chart above.

Luke 23:55-56 tells us that the women, after seeing Christ's body being laid in the tomb just before sundown, "returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils" for the final preparation of the body. They would not have done such work on a Sabbath day, weekly or annual, since it would have been considered a Sabbath violation. This is

verified by Mark's account, which states, "Now *when the Sabbath was past*, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices [which they could not have purchased on a Sabbath day], that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 16:1).

The women had to wait *until this Sabbath was over* before they could buy and prepare the spices to be used for anointing Jesus' body. Then, Luke 23:56 tells us that, after preparing the spices and oils on Friday, "they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment"—which means they had to have also purchased the spices *before* that Sabbath on which they rested. This *second* Sabbath mentioned in the Gospel accounts is the regular weekly Sabbath, observed from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

By comparing details in both Gospels—where Mark tells us the women bought spices *after* the Sabbath and Luke relates that they prepared the spices *before* resting on the Sabbath—we can clearly see that *two different Sabbaths* are being discussed here.

The first, as John 19:31 tells us, was a "high day"—the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—which fell on a Thursday that year. The second was the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. Again, see these events spelled

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out day by day in the chart on page 11.

Sign of the Messiah

After the women rested on the regular weekly Sabbath, they went to Jesus' tomb early on the first day of the week (Sunday), "while it was still dark" (John 20:1), and found that He had *already* been resurrected (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:1-3). We should note that the word "day" in John 20:1 is not in the Greek manuscripts but was added by translators. Hence it should read, "Now, the first of the week . . ." Using the Hebrew method of reckoning time, no part of what we understand as Sunday daylight enters into the timing in John's account.

So Jesus was not resurrected at sunrise on Sunday morning. When Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb while it was "dark," she found the stone rolled away and the tomb already empty!

When we consider the details in all four Gospel accounts, the picture is clear. The preparation day on which Jesus was crucified was Wednesday. And He was entombed late that afternoon, just before a Sabbath began at sunset. However, that was a "high day" Sabbath, lasting from Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset that week, rather than the regular weekly Sabbath that lasted from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

While no one witnessed the moment of Jesus' resurrection (as it took place inside a sealed tomb), to fit His words and the biblical evidence it had to have happened three days and three nights from Wednesday afternoon—that is, on Saturday, with Jesus leaving His tomb as the weekly Sabbath was ending at sunset.

This time line perfectly accommodates three nights (Wednesday night, Thursday night and Friday night) and three daylight periods (of Thursday, Friday and Saturday). This is the *only* time that fits Jesus' own prophecy of how long He would be in the tomb. And, as we've seen, it fits perfectly with all the details recorded in the Gospels.

We can be assured that the entombment period Jesus gave as proof He was the Messiah was the very duration He foretold.

Because most people do not understand the biblical Holy Days Jesus Christ and His followers observed, they fail to understand the chronological details so accurately preserved for us in the Gospels! **BT**

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There's much more to the story of how the biblical Holy Days were replaced with Easter, Christmas and other celebrations. You need to read our study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* A free copy is waiting for you!

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How Much Do You Know About **The Biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread?**

Millions of people celebrate Easter in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus never observed Easter, but He did celebrate the biblical Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. What relevance do these days have for Christians today!

by Gary Petty

For most of us bread is an unheralded side dish in our everyday diet. In much of the Western world meals are centered around meat, pasta or casseroles, and unless we're eating a sandwich, bread is an afterthought. That wasn't true of the Middle Eastern cultures of biblical times.

In ancient Israel eating meals was a communal affair. Family and friends gathered to eat a meal while reclining on a floor mat. Each person would tear a piece of bread from a small loaf or thin round chunk and use it as a sort of spoon to scoop food from the various dishes offered at mealtime. This is why the Bible speaks of people eating a meal as "breaking bread."

During Roman times couches and a low table replaced the mats, but the meal was eaten in basically the same manner.

Bread was made from different grains, including wheat, barley and millet, or even beans and lentils. Loaves were prepared by mixing flour with water and kneading it in troughs or bowls. Depending on where families lived or how wealthy they were, bread was baked on hot sand or flat stones over a fire, on a griddle or in an oven made of bronze, iron or, more commonly, clay.

The leavening process—the process for making bread dough to rise—is fascinating. A leavening agent, which causes tiny gas bubbles to form, is introduced into a batch of dough. This leavening agent permeates every part of the dough until the entire batch is leavened. A small amount can leaven a large amount of dough. The heat of baking causes the bubbles to further expand.

Today we commonly use store-bought baking soda or yeast, but that wasn't the case then. Since bread was made daily, the easiest way to leaven it was to save a lump of

yeast-leavened dough from the previous day. This lump would be added to the dough and left to stand until the yeast had permeated the entire batch.

Every spring ancient Israel observed the biblical festival of Passover and another festival over the following seven days called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Just before the Israelites were delivered from their slavery in Egypt by great miracles, they were commanded by God not to eat leavened bread during this week-long period (Exodus 13:3-10).

Do these ancient observances have any meaning for Christians today?

"Let us keep the feast"

Many say that Christians are to live by the teachings of the New Testament and not by laws given in the Hebrew Scriptures.

They forget that the only Scriptures available to the

Every spring ancient Israel observed the festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Do these ancient observances have any meaning for Christians today?

apostles and Church of the first century were what we call the Old Testament. As the apostle Paul told Timothy of these books: "... From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Paul was reminding Timothy to remember what he had been taught as a child from the Old Testament. In this context it's not difficult to understand why the early New Testament Church observed the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. God's inspired Word told them to!

Notice what Paul wrote to a predominately non-Jewish church congregation in 1 Corinthians 5: "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (verses 6-7).

In the context of what he wrote, Paul uses leavening as a symbol of human pride and vanity. He understood the leavening process and applied it to the human condition.

In verse 2 he told the Corinthians that they were "puffed up." Remember, leavening fills dough with air bubbles to make it

"puffed up." Even today, we refer to someone preoccupied with self-importance as being "full of hot air."

Now notice verse 8: "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (emphasis added throughout). What feast is Paul speaking of? Obviously he's talking about the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which these gentile Christians were observing (verses 7-8).

Jesus' references concerning bread

Jesus Christ used leavening as a symbol of false teachings. Notice what He said to His disciples: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees . . . How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:6, 11). Then they realized He meant the teachings of these religious groups (verse 12).

We see from the words of Paul and Jesus that leavening can serve as a symbol of spreading corruption and pride leading to false teachings and sins—the malice and wickedness Paul referred to.

On another occasion a group of Jewish religious leaders approached Jesus and asked Him to perform a sign to prove that He was sent from God. They referred to the time God provided ancient Israel with food called manna, which God had referred to as "bread from heaven" (Exodus 16:4).

Jesus explained the spiritual reality the manna foreshadowed: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from



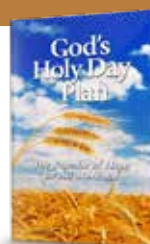
Why do so many in the Christian community have no knowledge of the biblical Holy Days, the same Holy Days observed by Jesus and the apostles?

heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.' And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst'" (John 6:32-35).

Jesus made the remarkable statement that He is the "bread of life." He said that if you eat of this bread you will live forever (verses 50-51, 58). As we saw above, the apostle Paul also linked the Passover observance with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus Christ was offered as the New Testament Passover sacrifice, and He called Himself the bread of life.

Feeding on Christ's flesh and blood?

Jesus then made the following perplexing statement: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.



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This article is only a brief summary of what God's Word reveals about the biblical festivals God commands us to keep. You need to get the whole picture! Download or request our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

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“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:53-56).

What did Jesus mean by these statements? Did He really intend that a person eat His body and drink His blood to receive eternal life? This statement offended many people (verses 60-61, 66), yet Jesus didn’t attempt to explain Himself at that time except to say that His words were spirit and life (verse 63). But He would reveal more the night before His death.

Jesus at this later time assembled with the 12 disciples to observe what’s commonly referred to as the Last Supper. It was in fact the Passover, on which Jesus was about to suffer and die. During this meal He explained more of what He meant in His earlier statements about eating His body and drinking His blood:

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’” (Matthew 26:26-28).

Thus we must receive Jesus’ sacrifice—His suffering and death in our place. And recall that Paul said that unleavened bread represented sincerity and truth. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). He was the Word of God made flesh. To *feed on Him* means internalizing His sacrifice along with His teachings and way of life as expressed through the whole of Scripture.

Which religious days should we observe?

As we have seen, the New Testament reveals that Jesus is the true Passover Lamb of God (1 Corinthians 5:7). So why do so few Christians actually observe the Passover and the accompanying Feast of Unleavened Bread?

Just where did the Western world get its present religious calendar? The New Testament Church didn’t observe Easter. Even the name Easter comes from an ancient pagan goddess, as almost any good encyclopedia will show. The Easter bunny and colored eggs have origins in fertility rites of antiquity and have nothing to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus the Son of God.

Why is it that so many in the Christian community ignore, or have no knowledge of, the Holy Days described in the Bible, the same Holy Days observed by Jesus and the apostles and observed by the early Church?

Why have so many ignored or abandoned these scriptural festivals and replaced them with holidays whose origins lie in dark, non-biblical antiquity? Let us keep the feasts God has given us in His Word! **BT**

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Who’s behind the *Beyond Today* magazine and television program? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *Beyond Today* free to all who request it. Simply put, *Beyond Today* is provided by people—people from all walks of life, from all over the world, as enabled by God.



These people have a common goal—to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).



We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful good news of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind.

Through the pages of this magazine, on the airwaves of our TV show, and in dozens of helpful study guides (also free), we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God’s purpose as taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles.

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What's Holding America Together?

It's the critical question of the moment. The world's leading nation is in mortal danger. Still powerful, still capable of great and noble deeds, but under attack—its future in question. The handwriting is on the wall. What should you understand about the future of the United States?

by Darris McNeely

Looking back over the past year, it's not unreasonable to ask, *What is holding the United States of America together?* The year 2020 began with an unsuccessful attempt to oust the nation's president through impeachment—a preview of more to come. Soon after, severe societal lockdowns were imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. America took a particularly hard economic hit, with millions of people sent into unemployment and massive debt racked up as the government pumped money into the economy and people's wallets, along with a host of special interests.

The U.S. economy had been booming before this happened, with near full employment and the stock market hitting one record high after another. Yet it all tumbled within a month. Entertainment, sports, business, schools and much of the economy closed. The nation has struggled to recover, and it is greatly divided over how to respond to the pandemic. America's economy remains on top, but the hounds are at her heels.

Making matters worse were months of rioting in major cities. Incidents of black citizens dying in police actions were argued by many to be the result of systemic racism. Riots, arson and looting not seen since the 1960s

followed, leaving sections of Minneapolis, Portland, Chicago and Seattle scarred like battle zones. The debate over racism is more heated and divisive than it's been in decades. What's missing are enough voices of reason seeking peace, understanding and needed solutions. Like other segments of American culture, wisdom and sound leadership are sadly lacking.

Then of course came the presidential election. On top of mainstream media and big tech companies heavily controlling what the public was permitted to see beforehand, voting irregularities created questionable scenarios in six key states that led scores of millions of Americans to conclude the election was fraudulent. To get to the truth will take months or years, if ever. It now seems the uncomfortable questions and evidence will likely be buried.

The U.S. Capitol violated

Next we saw the tragic events of Jan. 6, 2021, the day Congress met to confirm the vote of the Electoral College. President Donald Trump addressed a huge rally of perhaps hundreds of thousands gathered to show support for lawful challenges in Congress to the election results.



While America is still strong and still a force for good in the world, its days are numbered. The handwriting of judgment is on the wall. **God will not be mocked.**

Yet before he was finished speaking at the Ellipse near the White House, groups of protestors entered and occupied parts of the U.S. Capitol Building—some breaking in and others permitted to walk in freely.

As many wandered about, some barged into congressional offices and chambers while certain ones broke windows and caused other damage while trying to press into more guarded areas. Lawmakers hid and were evacuated. One protester was shot and killed by police. Outside some harassed police and pressed in on the Capitol.

Though only a small few participated in the assault on the Capitol in comparison to the many thousands of peaceful rallygoers, it was a dark and ugly moment, creating a backlash pounced on by the media to paint Trump supporters as violent terrorists.

It was not reassuring to the nation and the world to see the world's largest constitutional republic reeling over first the division about whether the election was fair, second the assault on the Capitol Building and third yet another impeachment that swiftly followed.

America has long prided itself on peaceful transitions of executive power. The prestige of the United States has taken a major hit. The nation's enemies, no doubt perceiving weakness, are watching to see how to exploit this time of upheaval.

The U.S. Capitol is a symbol of the republic. Its classical architecture and soaring rotunda and statuary evoke a secular cathedral. While not a religious temple, it is in a sense a secular temple to the virtues and ideals enshrined

in the Constitution. Angry protestors tramping through its halls created a symbolic and actual desecration. It was a stunning scene in a building that represents the highest ideals of the nation's Founding Fathers.

While America is still strong and still a force for good in the world, its days are numbered. The handwriting of judgment is on the wall. God, who made America great, will not be mocked. Has the nation reached a point of no return?

A tale of two gatherings

We need to realize that the roots of what's happened are spiritual. A *spiritual battle* rages over America.

As I watched the news reports of the crowds at the Ellipse and around the National Mall on Jan. 6, I was reminded of another group that gathered at the same spot a few months earlier on Sept. 26. I was an observer among that group that gathered to pray for the spiritual renewal of the country.

On that day tens of thousands had answered a call to come to Washington to pray for the nation at a time of great peril. It was a peaceful day. Many people offered prayers, both public and private. Some speakers called for the nation to

repent while there is still time. I wrote about that event in the January-February issue of *Beyond Today*. There were no riots or riot instigators then, and many were still hopeful of an election outcome that would not lead the nation further into moral degradation.

The gathering on Jan. 6 had significant differences. Yes, there were prayers and hymns. Many devoted religious believers were present. And the vast majority of attendees were peaceful—as they had also been in huge post-election rallies in November and December. But this time there was also among some a marked anger and fervent desire for the people—and the president—to be heard.

Most felt any discussion of vote-counting irregularities in the 2020 election had been constantly dismissed without any fair hearing. There was also great upset over where Congress and other officials were allowing the country to be led.

The president called on people to remain peaceful. But this time, unlike before, a few extremists, equipped with chemical spray, crowbars, gas masks and helmets, came clearly prepared to fight. And, sadly, a number of others in the crowd were swept up into joining in the rioting—though at the same time many others tried to stop them.

Looking at the footage of the scenes was sickening to any who respect the country, the Constitution, and law and order. Such violent protest resulting in destruction and even death is utterly inexcusable.

But such lawlessness and violence has shamefully become



more normalized through media and officials declaring many months of far worse riots in major cities to be acceptable. Police in Minneapolis had to evacuate a police station when an angry mob attacked and set fire to the building. A federal building in Portland was besieged for many days with law enforcement officers barricaded inside. An entire section of Seattle was seized, occupied and even declared a “sovereign” territory with no police allowed.

Many forget that major rioting broke out back in 2017 in Washington, D.C., on the day of President Trump’s inauguration. Of course, none of it is acceptable.

When people gather in prayer to repent and seek God’s will, there is of course a different spirit. On Sept. 26 thousands of Americans prayed to the God of Abraham with focus on the nation’s need to return to Him and follow His ways and not on the national election directly. While much was lacking in that call for repentance, the sincerity and humility in prayer set a high tone, mood and atmosphere for that event.

Much more of that kind of focus was needed on Jan. 6.

Opening the door to dark forces

Three days before the terrible scene at the Capitol something happened that is little understood. Largely ignored at the time, it was quickly forgotten in the dramatic events that followed.

As is traditional, the newly elected Congress was convened on Jan. 3 and opened with prayer. The prayer was delivered by Rep. Emmanuel Cleaver (D-MO), an ordained minister. He asked, “May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us and give us peace, peace in our families, peace across this land and, dare I ask, O Lord, peace even in this chamber.” So far, so good.

But he then concluded with this: “We ask it in the name of the monotheistic God, Brahma, and ‘God’ known by many names by many different faiths. Amen and awoman.” His “awoman” comment garnered some attention and rightly-deserved ridicule. The Hebrew term “Amen” means “truly” or “so be it” and has nothing to do with male or female, as if it needed balancing out.

Note again, though what came before. The “Brahma” he called on is the chief Hindu creator deity. And the further reference to “‘God’ known by many names” includes any other god from any other belief system among mankind. This congressman invoked the name of a pagan deity and inferred any other pagan god or goddess one chooses to believe in. This was a desecrating sacrilege against the God of Abraham, the God of the Bible invoked by the Founding Fathers.

The God of Abraham, the God of the Bible, is the God intended in the national motto “In God We Trust.” He is the same God meant in the Pledge of Allegiance declaring the United States “one nation under God.” Scripture warns us that God will not be mocked—that all will reap

consequences for what we do and say (see Galatians 1:7-8; Matthew 12:36).

Pagan gods cannot be lumped in with the true God as though they are the same. The apostle Paul explained that those who worship pagan idols actually worship demons: “What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:19-21; compare Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:16-18; Psalm 106:35-37).

To be clear, a demonic force was invoked in the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives on that day.

We might ask ourselves whether and how God responded to this blasphemous prayer. Is there a connection between this sacrilege and a mob storming through the Capitol three days later, sending these same representatives running and cowering in fear?

It’s a question worth asking. And while some instigators may have already been planning the attack at the Capitol, God could certainly have prevented it—yet He didn’t. We don’t know all of His purposes in this, nor can we know whether this was His answer or whether He is simply letting us make our foolish decisions and reap the consequences.

But we should understand that prayers matter—and that sin reaps the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). Are we looking at God perhaps lifting His hand, His protective presence, from America after years of growing rebellion against Him?

There is nothing logical or rational about what has happened in recent months. So many have suffered under lockdown restrictions and economic toil. We have watched widespread mockery of the rule of law. Officials excused months of rioting, looting and destruction in many cities. As candidate for the office she now holds, Vice President Kamala Harris said that riots and protests not only *would not* stop in American cities past the 2020 election, but also that they *should not* stop.

No effective remedy was taken to restore order or administer justice for months, as actions designed to alter the traditional fabric of American life erupted across the land. No wonder the nation is divided to a point unseen since it experienced civil war more than a century and a half ago!

What is really happening? Beyond the wrongs and errors of human beings, we are seeing the work of spiritual wickedness in high places. The Bible tells us how the world really works, encouraging us “to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness” (Ephesians 6:11-12).

The Bible reveals the leader of these unseen evil spiritual

forces, Satan the devil, to be “the god of this age” and “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). He dominates an evil spirit realm working to thwart God’s plan for humanity.

God has previously used the United States of America to impede totalitarianism. We saw this during World War II and the Cold War. And ongoing promotion of freedom is vital, as the Bible reveals that a coming totalitarian power will dominate the world before Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. America and the other English-speaking peoples bear the blessing and responsibility of the tremendous national wealth and power God long ago promised to Abraham and his descendants in the last days (see our study guide offered at the end). That’s a big reason the evil spirit forces under Satan are bent on destroying these nations.

National downfall looming

What then, as asked at the outset, is holding America together? *God is*. The enduring promise God made to Abraham is what stands between America’s continued place atop the present world order and what is still kept at bay—a plunge into devastation and servitude in a new geopolitical order dominated by transnational powers yet to arise. These powers are characterized in the Bible as like a ravenous “beast” (Revelation 13; 17; 18) that deceives, devours and trades in “the bodies and souls of men” (verses 11-13).

Are we at a tipping point in America’s long story?

Many centuries ago, the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of God’s presence rise up and depart from the Jerusalem temple (Ezekiel 10:18). The nation’s sins filled the land. The cities were full of injustice. Idolatry had created an empty culture where people desperately sought truth and righteousness but found only false and empty ritual that robbed them of purpose and understanding.

Israel and Judah had long ago lost sight of their mission to be a light to the other nations. They assumed God paid them no attention and would let them continue to get away with their evils—but He warned they would pay for their actions (Ezekiel 9:9-10). A great many today make the same mistake.

As we look at America and other nations heading into the 2020s, we see events happening at a rapid pace. We wonder what the cumulative effect of the momentous events of the last year will be and where it will all lead. I find little comfort in those voices saying we’ve been here before and that events will return to normal. A biblical worldview shows me the events we’ve been going through could well be the precursor to larger prophetic turnings. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I have to take my wisdom from His words and “know how to interpret this present time” (Luke 12:56, New International Version).

Again, Ezekiel saw in vision the presence of God hover over the temple and depart, representing His leaving the nation to what it has brought on itself. What a tragic reality! Their sins had reached a tipping point. They worshipped pagan gods and goddesses in God’s own temple. A building once dedicated to the God of Abraham, whose glory had dwelt in it, was now effectively an empty and meaningless shell. The mission of the Israelites as a light to the nations was forgotten. God removed His blessing and His presence, and the nation was doomed.


The Angel in the storm

Just over 20 years ago on a dark, cold and rainy day, George W. Bush stood on the west side of the Capitol and gave his first inaugural address. Near the end he quoted the words of Virginia statesman John Page to Thomas Jefferson soon after the signing of the Declaration of Independence: “We know the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm?” President Bush concluded: “This work continues. This story goes on. And an angel still rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm.”

Page’s reference was to Ezekiel’s vision of God’s protective hand watching over Israel. In the nearly 245 years since the Declaration, America has been blessed by God watching over its growth into the most powerful and prosperous single nation in world history—exactly as God had promised to Abraham and his descendants.

We might well ask if that Angel of God’s presence is, in a figurative sense, now hovering above America and about to leave the nation to doom that awaits at the hands of other powers rising out of the world’s people? Arrival of that time may be evident in the nation tearing itself apart from within. As Abraham Lincoln said of national destruction: “. . . If it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us . . . If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”

What is holding America together now? For the moment, the hand of God is—but for how long? While there is time, you can *give thanks* for that and *turn to God*. You can understand His guiding hand in your life. You can understand how God’s enduring promise has upheld this nation and will yet lead it and all peoples to the end of the raging storm! **BT**

**LEARN MORE**

Believe it or not, God spells out the future of the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in Bible prophecy. It’s a story you need to understand! Download or request our free study guide [The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy](#).

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Iran nuclear deal: Will it sink Mideast peace efforts?

Israeli-Arab peace negotiations conducted by the U.S. presidential administration of Donald Trump achieved some remarkable results. In listing a number of his successes, the Investor's Business Daily editorial board noted that "thanks almost entirely to Trump's efforts under the 'Abraham Accords,' Israel has normalized diplomatic ties with four Arab League members: Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and Morocco. Jordan and Egypt already have ties.

"Terrorist sponsor Iran, meanwhile, has never been more isolated and on the defensive than it is now, thanks to Trump's pulling out of President Barack Obama's phony 'nuclear deal' with Tehran's mullahs ["phony" in the sense of still allowing Iran to develop nuclear weapons while accessing immense funding, placing America and Israel under grave threat]. And while the terrorist group ISIS still exists, it has effectively been neutered, a shell of its former self, pushed out of nearly all its strongholds in Syria and Iraq" (Issues & Insights, Jan. 21, 2021). ISIS did manage its deadliest suicide bombing in three years in Baghdad just as the new U.S. president, Joe Biden, took office (Reuters, Jan. 21), but it remains a shadow of what it was.

The 2015 nuclear deal had "put curbs on Iran's

nuclear program in exchange for the easing of crippling economic sanctions. Israel strongly opposed the deal, saying it did not include sufficient safeguards to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. It welcomed the Trump administration's withdrawal from the agreement in 2018"—and it has warned Biden against rejoining the former deal even with some changes, as he has said he would seek to do with certain conditions (Associated Press, Jan. 26, 2021).

On Jan. 31, Secretary of State Antony Blinken acknowledged to NBC News it could be only "a matter of weeks" before Iran has sufficient fissile material to produce a nuclear weapon, echoing reports from Israel. The previous week "Israel's chief of staff met with U.S. Central Command leaders and warned that Israel was preparing operational plans for dealing with Iran's nuclear enrichment program . . . Attempting to stop Iran, however, would entail an extremely high-risk operation—even if the U.S. were on board" (Geopolitical Futures, Feb. 1).

It should be realized that the Trump administration's strong stance of "maximum pressure" against the Iranian government and its nuclear program was a major factor in drawing Arab countries to seek and build up ties with Israel.

These Arab countries, which are predominantly Sunni Muslim, do not want to see a rival nuclear-armed Shiite Muslim Iran dominating the region. If the United States fails to keep Iranian power from expanding—especially in term of nuclear weapons—the peace ties achieved could fall apart, and others who were ready to join in the accords may decide to refrain.

A Heritage Foundation posting of a commentary that originally appeared in *The Washington Times* gave these key takeaways: "1. If America rejoined the Iran deal as is, Iran would not be held accountable for past cheating and blatant violations of the deal. 2. The process of normalization between the Arab nations and Israel, without the guarantor of U.S. engagement and support in pushing back against Iran, could well die. 3. The Arab nations will likely start hedging against the declining influence of Washington. They will increasingly look to cut deals with China and Russia" (James Carafano and Adam Milstein, "Why Going Back to Iran Nuclear Deal Is Folly," Jan. 6, 2021).

For a fuller perspective of the underlying problems in the Middle East and where things are eventually headed, be sure to read our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* (available at ucg.org/booklets).

Searching for life on Mars

If all has gone according to plan, three spacecraft that launched in July 2020 will have reached Mars by the time you're reading this. The missions, from the United States, China and the United Arab Emirates, were all scheduled to arrive at the red planet in February 2021. Two were to land.

The Arab world's first mission to Mars, to arrive on Feb. 9, "aims to chart a global map of the planet's climate" across about two years. "It would be humanity's first such picture of Mars' atmosphere" (Business Insider, Jan. 27).

Set to arrive the next day was Tianwen-1, China's first interplanetary mission. It's intended to be "the first Mars mission to send a spacecraft into orbit, drop a landing platform, and deploy a rover all in one expedition." The landing is scheduled for May.

America's spacecraft was to descend through the Martian atmosphere on Feb. 18, landing and deploying NASA's newest rover, Perseverance. After 30 days the rover is to release the first interplanetary drone, a helicopter called Ingenuity.

Setting down in a crater with an ancient river bed, Perseverance has been tasked with drilling into the Martian soil for signs of alien life. "This is the first time in history when NASA has dedicated a mission to what we call astrobiology: the search for life—either maybe now, or ancient life—on another world," Jim Bridenstine, who served as the NASA Admin-

istrator during the Trump administration, said ahead of the rover's launch.

The Chinese rover "is equipped with a radar system that can detect underground pockets of water. It aims to sniff out ancient reservoirs that could harbor life."

These technological achievements are astounding—yet ignore fundamental wisdom. Scientists are enthusiastic to find any signs of even microbial life beyond the earth to confirm their notion that life is the result of undirected natural processes without the need for intelligent design and creation. They are sorely misguided in this.

It does appear that liquid water once flowed across the Martian surface, but having some suitable conditions for biological life does not mean such life was ever there. There is no reason to believe life will be found on Mars.

On the other hand, what if evidence of microbial life were found? If proven to have not come from the earth, that would certainly be a remarkable discovery. Yet it would say nothing about how such life came to be. It would not prove life arising spontaneously from non-life or evolutionary development. All it would mean is that God created physical life beyond the earth. Of course, we still have no reason to think that He's done so.

For more on the impossibility of life arising on its own, and the uniqueness of the earth as a habitation for life, request or download our free study guides *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* at ucg.org/booklets.

Biden administration pushes abortion, LGBTQ agenda

With dozens of executive orders and other declarations the new U.S. president, Joe Biden, and his administration are taking the country in a significantly shifted direction—moving farther down the path of immorality and defiance of God.

On Jan. 18, 2021, two days before leaving office, President Donald Trump issued a proclamation concerning the anniversary of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion (Jan. 22, 1973). Declaring a National Sanctity of Human Life Day, his statement began: “Every human life is a gift to the world. Whether born or unborn, young or old, healthy or sick, every person is made in the holy image of God. The Almighty Creator gives unique talents, beautiful dreams, and a great purpose to every person.” It went on to support awakening America’s conscience, restoring a culture of respect for the sacredness of life and defending the lives of every innocent and unborn child, listing a number of steps that had been taken by the Trump administration to these ends.

The same day a LifeNews story related that Joe Biden would “make abortion a priority on his first day in office. Backed by the pro-abortion lobby, Biden supports killing unborn babies in abortions without restriction and wants to force taxpayers to fund their deaths. Among his first actions . . . Biden will overturn [as he then did] the Mexico City Policy and President Donald Trump’s Protect Life Rule, both of which defunded the abortion chain Planned Parenthood of millions of dollars. The Mexico City Policy, established by President Ronald Reagan, traditionally gets repealed by Democrat presidents and reinstated by Republican presidents. It prohibits taxpayer funding to international aid groups that promote and/or do abortions, including Planned Parenthood’s international arm” (“Joe Biden Will Sign Executive Order on Day 1 Forcing Americans to Fund Planned Parenthood,” Jan. 18). Biden followed through, as expected.

Trump’s proclamation for the *Roe v. Wade* anniversary was removed and replaced by one

declaring, “The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to codifying *Roe v. Wade* and appointing judges that respect foundational precedents like *Roe*.” It avoids specific mention of abortion, instead using code phrases “right to choose” and “reproductive health”—although even in this contorted redefinition of words it’s hard to equate



the murder of unborn infants as anything remotely resembling “health.”

It was also announced before the inauguration that “on day one of his presidency, President-elect Joe Biden plans to reinstate Obama-era Title IX regulations ensuring that transgender students are allowed to use the bathroom or locker room that aligns with their gender identity,” which can be whatever a person claims to feel at the moment (The Blaze, Jan. 19).

In aiming to remove legal recognition of the two sexes, this will also allow biological males referring to themselves as women to compete in women’s sports, knocking actual women out of the competition. Gary Bauer, of the Campaign for Working Families, remarked: “So, the president who is in office largely because he won the women’s vote has just created a regime where your 17-year-old daughter may have to compete against a 17-year-old boy in track and other sports . . . When she loses the competition, she may have to take a shower with him when it’s all over” (“Left Joins Conservatives in Uproar Over

Joe Biden’s ‘War on Women,’” Breitbart, Jan. 26).

Biden furthermore removed Trump’s ban on transgender persons from serving in the military. “Ecstatic LGBT activists insist that all government agencies must deny the science of DNA, human genetics, and physiology . . . Military women and athletes deserve respect and fair treatment, but medical issues that detract from deployability and combat readiness are even more important” in terms of military service (“To Insult of U.S. Troops, Biden Administration Adds Forcing Female Soldiers to Shower With Men,” The Federalist, Jan. 26).

In addition, Biden has selected Pennsylvania’s transgender health secretary to, if confirmed by the Senate, become federal assistant secretary of health—as if this is in any way “healthy”!

As part of the direction change, the new president also announced that he was abolishing the Trump administration’s 1776 Commission, which was set up to counter deficient and deceptive education about the history and founding principles of the United States. In losing knowledge of the reasons and circumstances of their nation’s founding, Americans are losing their country and becoming something else—which is the intent.

Adding further insult to the nation’s founding in biblical values, we note that while rioters have been burning the American flag, “LGBT activists are cheering Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s announcement that he will reverse an order from President Donald Trump and put up ‘pride’ flags at U.S. Embassies around the world” (Breitbart, Feb. 1). Blinken, who also plans to name a special envoy for gay rights, said, “Raising the pride flag is one way to outright show LGBTQ solidarity.” In the words of the pro-homosexuality *Outfront* magazine, “Biden is the first U.S. president to openly embrace a full range of queer rights, including transgender equality.”

For the underlying truth and biblical perspective on these core matters of life, be sure to read our free study guide *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*. Download or request it at ucg.org/booklets.

How can you make sense of the news?

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





Are You Being Manipulated?

Few people are aware of the great unseen spiritual battle taking place throughout the world. Fewer still realize that the main battlefield is within their minds!

by Mike Kelley

As Americans closed the books on a turbulent 2020, many hoped for a better 2021. But as things look early in the year, that doesn't seem likely. All around us we see chaos, confusion, strife, animosity, hatred and violence. The nation seems to be spinning out of control, disrupting the lives of people who want nothing more than to live peacefully, enjoy their families and savor what good our lives have to offer.

The chaos is nearly impossible to escape in our interconnected world. One would almost have to hide out in a cabin in the mountains to shut out the noise.

But millions who've been told for a year to stay home and avoid outside human contact over Covid-19 concerns are hungry for contact with others and the outside world. Those stuck inside find TV, the Internet, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and other media their only companions in a world seemingly gone mad.

Perhaps you've wondered, *What's really going on here?* Is it just coincidence that America, the greatest nation on earth, is wracked by all this turmoil? Everything seemed normal until just recently. What, or who, is behind it all?

The fact of the matter is that an extremely powerful instigator is stirring the chaos, confusion, hatred and division between peoples. He is a thoroughly evil spirit being who's lived for eons—since before the world existed.

The Bible refers to him as *Satan* and *the devil*, along with other descriptions.

While many think the devil is a myth, he is very much a force to be reckoned with. Satan's very name means *adversary* or *enemy*. He is at war with us and out to defeat us. He works invisibly to influence the thoughts and attitudes of billions of human beings.

Most scoff at Satan's influence

Satan's greatest weapon may be the fact that most people either don't believe he exists or don't believe he has a great impact on society. (If you doubt his existence and influence, download or request our study guide *Is There Really a Devil?* to learn more.)

Your Bible reveals that Satan has throughout time been the author of confusion, hatred and all the evils that plague mankind. Every day he targets human minds with a coordinated attack on our understanding, thoughts and attitudes. A master of thought influence and control, he spiritually "broadcasts" his own influence while also working through influential people in society, with millions following their lead.

To begin to understand his influence over mankind we must realize that this world, this modern society, is under his control for the time being. Your Bible describes Satan as the "*prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience*" and "*the god of this age*" (Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4, emphasis added throughout). Invisible and undetected, Satan manipulates and controls much of mankind's thinking.

He is principally responsible for the racial strife, competing ideologies, hatred and animosity we see in America and the world today.

This tremendously powerful being has deceived the entire world. The apostle John says of Satan, “*The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*” (1 John 5:19). God’s admonition to “be not deceived” can be found throughout the Bible (see Deuteronomy 11:16; Luke 21:8; 1 Corinthians 6:9). The apostle John, in the Bible’s closing book, wrote that Satan “deceives the whole world” and will do so until Christ returns (Revelation 12:9; 20:2-3).

How has Satan accomplished this? Paul warned the Corinthians not to be “ignorant of his devices”—or, as variously translated, his schemes, intentions, designs or plans (2 Corinthians 2:11). Satan employs numerous methods and tools in carrying out his plans to corrupt and destroy mankind. Let’s look at three powerful forces of societal influence Satan harnesses to delude and control the thinking of billions today.

Education—indoctrinating the young

When it comes to indoctrination, totalitarian leaders have long recognized the importance of starting with the minds of the children. The founder of the Soviet communist state, Vladimir Lenin, told the Russian Communist

generations were brought up in are systematically replaced with a value structure that eliminates God from the picture in favor of humanistic and even nihilistic views.

It follows, of course, that if there is no God, no absolute source of law, ethics or morals, that human beings must decide for themselves what is legal, ethical or moral. Modern education then goes on to teach that religious-based value systems are archaic at best and evil at worst. The 19th-century father of communism, Karl Marx, famously said that “*religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature . . . it is the opiate of the masses.*” Denying the existence of an all-powerful creator God, humanism ends up with man—not God—at the center of all thinking.

(Against such godless philosophy, the existence of God can be soundly proven. We invite you to download or request our free study guide *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*)

Proclaiming no meaning and rewriting history

Denial of the existence of an all-powerful God presents a host of opportunities to the world’s educators. They thereby deny the law of God, which defines right and wrong, leaving people without moral constraints. In denying that life has any real purpose or meaning, they leave people to decide on their own meaning, however destructive that is to themselves and others.

In his book *Ends and Means: An Inquiry into the Nature of Ideals*, English atheist and philosopher Aldous Huxley, who could

be considered a humanist hero, spoke of this philosophy of meaninglessness and how it affected his personal morality:

“For myself, as no doubt for most of my friends, the philosophy of meaninglessness *was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom . . .* There was one admirably simple method of confuting [religious] people and justifying ourselves in our erotic revolt: *we would deny that the world had any meaning whatever.*”

In a world of people choosing their own meaning or no meaning, all lifestyles are equally valid—except those choosing to declare that isn’t so. Because humanism promotes free thinking and no set rules, a fundamental tenet is to not judge or condemn any lifestyle or sexual preference. Thus adultery, homosexuality, transgenerism, bestiality or other things God condemns are viewed as acceptable and even laudable.

In recent decades American children have been increasingly taught a different perspective on the nation’s history—that America is an inherently evil society where greatness and wealth were achieved only by the rich

If there is no God, no absolute source of law, ethics or morals, then human beings must decide for themselves what is legal, ethical or moral.

Party, “Give me four years to teach the children, and the seed I have sown will never be uprooted.” The Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler reputedly said, “Whoever has the youth has the future.”

In like manner Satan holds great sway over mankind through educational systems. One of his main goals is to eliminate belief in God or make it of no effect. A major way he does this today is by indoctrinating generations of young people into a humanistic, evolution-based way of thinking that denies God and divine revelation.

This philosophy guides the institutions and organizations that direct Western education today. Over the past two or three generations modern education has been incredibly successful in indoctrinating young people. The warped ideas they’ve been fed have led to the culture war taking place within the United States and many other Western nations.

Institutional humanist indoctrination begins as early as preschool public TV programming and then elementary school, when children are led to embrace a worldview totally unlike that taught just a few generations ago. The traditional values their parents, grandparents and previous



exploiting the poor. In this worldview, white Americans, especially white males over 50, are seen as oppressors.

These views are precisely those of the National Education Association, the national teachers' union that represents most of America's more than 3 million kindergarten to grade 12 and college educators. Through the indoctrination of America's youth, they actively deny America's greatness and goodness.

Traditionally, Americans believed that freedom, liberty and the free enterprise system helped create a nation with the highest living standards in human history. Yet American children today are being taught that an economic system that has brought prosperity to hundreds of millions is evil because inequality exists. Thousands of educators fervently believe in and teach identity politics, "class warfare" and the false claim that America is a land of "systemic racism" in their efforts to pit Americans against each other.

On top of all this, perhaps the greatest damage from America's educational shift to progressivism is the growing movement in the classroom to shut down all dissent from the politically correct "accepted" view. With parents largely deprived of their rights to monitor what is being taught to their children, students are generally subjected to only the "accepted" amoral and socialist perspective on history, science, sociology, government and economics. Regrettably, such silencing of dissent is moving beyond the classroom and swiftly spreading through all of society. (For more on where things are headed, read "America's Looming Lurch Into Socialist Progressivism" in our previous issue.)

Today's media another of Satan's major tools

Satan, the master deceiver (John 8:44; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10), understands the value of a coordinated attack. While he uses false education to attack the minds of America's youth, he attacks all of society on a broader front through the mass media and mass culture. For years we have seen a determined shift to the liberal values in major print and broadcast media. More recently we've witnessed this shift in the newer vehicle of social media. Since the run-up to the 2020 U.S. election we have witnessed the sad spectacle of Twitter, Facebook and Google's YouTube, social media used by millions, openly stifling and censoring conservative viewpoints and voices—even burying key news stories.

It is no secret that American print journalism has been on the decline since the beginning of the 2000s, with the total number of daily newspapers declining by nearly half since 1990. What has occurred during this period, however, is the rising influence, especially on the Internet, of major market papers such as *The New York Times*, *The*

Washington Post, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times*, papers that advocate and amplify the liberal line in politics, education and mass culture.

But just as military forces sometime change tactics during a battle, Satan is also not above shifting tactics to increasing use of cable TV news or social media, which today are the most-used sources to find out what's happening in the nation and the world. This shift, underway for years, accelerated in 2020 as the coronavirus epidemic gave state after state power to enact and enforce stay-at-home orders.

It's truly frightening to realize the mental hammerlock these media giants have on so many. With the exception of a handful of radio and TV networks, the majority of the electronic media merely parrot the liberal line. What happened to at least having a modicum of reporting both sides, as was the expected standard for decades?

Unbiased reporting out the window

As recently as the 1980s many journalism students were still being taught to report the news in a clear, unbiased, straightforward manner. Where I began my career reporting for a daily newspaper, reporters were supposed to bring out both sides of an issue and to leave out our personal opinions. *Opinions* were supposed to be reserved for the *opinion pages*, not the news pages. There was still press bias then, but nothing like what we see now.

The past quarter-century has seen massive changes to journalistic approaches, ethics and standards. Today many journalists, especially younger ones indoctrinated

Satan's influence on the thinking of humanity is clear. **Mankind's adversary has honed his strategies and tactics for maximum success.**

by a more left-leaning educational system, freely inject their biases, personal belief systems and political views into their reporting. Budding young journalists graduate with a secular humanist worldview, which colors how they report events. Personally, I was shocked a few years back to learn the school of journalism where I got my degree was patting itself on the back for having students work on a project to promote LGBTQ lifestyles.

That a bias exists among the mainstream media is now obvious. It's also well documented, even by the news industry itself. (For more about this, see "The Battle Over What You Think" and "What's Behind the Growing Culture War?"—both in our January-February 2019 issue.)

In academia, politics, business and entertainment, the concept of "thought leadership" has become very prominent. Every day, millions look to "thought leaders" as guides to how they should think and act. And what molds *their* opinions? Just look at the media

these thought leaders read, watch or listen to.

Corrupting ideology and elitism

The connection between Satan's influence on education and the media should be obvious. Nearly all of today's journalists and commentators (and the distinction has become largely blurred) are products of the left-leaning educational establishment. Senior journalists and editors, those who run America's newsrooms and hold sway over *what* gets reported and *how* it gets reported, went to college during the turbulent times of the 1960s and 70s, when many got caught up in antiestablishment causes popular at the time.

Consider also that nearly all major U.S. news organizations are concentrated on the East Coast and West Coast, the strongholds of American progressive thought. A 2016 article in *The Atlantic* included a map showing that fully half of today's journalists live and work in the Washington, D.C.-to-Boston corridor ("U.S. Media's Real Elitism Problem," Nov. 19, 2016).

Shortly before the 2016 election that put Donald Trump in the White House, *New York Times* columnist Jim Rutenberg predicted increasing shedding of objectivity in the face of Trump's possible win: "If you view a Trump presidency as something that's potentially dangerous, *then your reporting is going to reflect that. You would move closer than you've ever been to being oppositional.* That's uncomfortable and uncharted territory for every mainstream, non-opinion journalist I've ever known . . ." ("Trump Is Testing the Norms of Objectivity in Journalism," Aug. 7, 2016).

Concentrated in the areas of America's entertainment, business and media elites, and with a realization of their growing influence on public opinion, many American journalists have become elites themselves. Seemingly well-educated, prideful and often self-righteous, many of today's journalists consider it their duty to *shape* opinion according to the viewpoints they share with their peers and fellow elites as to what is acceptable and politically correct. Such types populate the evening cable TV channels.

Those at the top of the journalism field, if it can still be called that, have been propelled to celebrity status. Many become immensely wealthy through TV contracts and book deals. Their star power allows them to mix and mingle with popular entertainment figures, who embrace those with liberal leanings. Magazines such as *People*, tabloids and gossip columnists gush over these news celebrities rubbing shoulders at top parties, fundraisers and other social events with the elites of Hollywood, television and the sports world.

That brings us to a further means of the devil's influence.

Pop culture—the ultimate siren song

That Hollywood and those in entertainment regularly

mock, belittle and denigrate traditional morality has been widely established for decades. Few are the movies lauded within the film industry that aren't steeped in immorality. Actors and musicians take the stage at annual award shows celebrating what is often filth. Many go on to spew leftist political and social commentary—increasingly considered cool and chic. Millions of ordinary citizens find these people dazzling, captivating and persuasive.

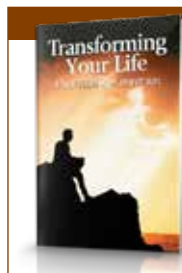
They, too, join the ranks of *thought leaders*. But really though, why should we care what entertainers think about politics or world events? Still, many do care what they think. Again, Satan uses the famous, wealthy, powerful and highly visible of this world to spread his lies and deceptive propaganda to millions of people.

The late-night talk and entertainment shows of the major TV networks have become icons of American television, drawing huge audiences. Many can remember when they were genuinely entertaining. But they have degenerated into showplaces where comedians trash and lampoon morality and public figures who don't share their liberal values. This is evidently popular enough to keep them going, though it sometimes seems the entertainment industry is more concerned with pushing a social agenda than with earnings.

In any case, there is little doubt about Satan's siren song influence on the thinking of masses of people. The adversary of God and mankind has honed his strategies and tactics to achieve maximum success. As society seems to spiral downward at a faster and faster pace, it takes courage and conviction to swim against the tide. Will you be one who's aware the enemy is real and that he's out to control your thinking and ultimately destroy you?

Nearly 2,000 years ago the apostle Peter recognized Satan's threat and warned Christians then, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Peter 5:8). But, as the apostle James adds, if you "submit to God," you can "resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7; see also Ephesians 6:11).

The choice is stark: Be sober and diligent and with God's help resist, or be devoured by mankind's powerful spiritual enemy! Submit to God and resist the devil, choosing true wisdom and life! **BT**



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Jesus' Sacrifice and the Need for New Government

The world is broken. The system doesn't work. We're in trouble. Big change is needed at the top and within. The annual biblical Passover observance reminds us that Jesus gave His life for this purpose, looking forward to the world's deliverance through the Kingdom He will bring.

by Tom Robinson

After a turbulent year of curtailed freedoms and riotous mayhem around the world, a disputed U.S. election, another divisive second impeachment, and aggressive silencing of political and ideological opponents, a great many are waking up to the failure of human government. The depth of corruption, hypocrisy, lying and injustice across the political spectrum is profoundly frustrating and almost defies comprehension.

If we could only fix these problems! But *we can't*. Political leaders and intelligentsia at all levels share the delusion they can save us from our own foolish ignorance, and we all suffer for it. Power corrupts. Even what seem to be caring intentions, whether sincere or subterfuge, can end in totalitarian nightmares.

Representative government too often has become a mirage, beset with so much cronyism, graft and pernicious conformity and groupthink. Some officials of integrity still try to stand up for what's right—but they too are flawed and too few. Efforts to “drain the swamp” are doomed from the start—for the swamp, as events of the last few years have shown, is everywhere.

All this has demonstrated once again that mankind is incapable of sustained governance for the good of the governed. Why? There are two big reasons for our dilemma that go together—people are not right in the heart, and the world is led by Satan the devil.

At this time of year, the biblical festivals of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are powerful reminders of these factors. They also point to the *solution*. Jesus Christ died for the problem at Passover. And He did so looking ahead to the answer that would spring from that moment and vital steps to follow, coming to full fruition in the future. Jesus at His return will take over the reins of world government. Yet the real conquest to save us must and will occur on the *inside* of people everywhere.

Wayward hearts held captive

The formation of the United States as a constitutionally limited republic has been of great blessing to the world.

Yet its promotion of liberty and justice has been dependent on the character of the citizenry. As founding father and second president John Adams said: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

As morality has waned, so has the government. With wayward people accepting worsening representation, the checks on abuses of power matter less and less. Corrupt leaders promote further corruption of the people, who accept greater evil.

This vicious cycle happens everywhere to varying degrees. Governments in nations of high morality have been the most beneficial. But the reality is that no nations have been of high enough and lasting morality to persist in what's right and endure.

Consider even the nation that God Himself set up, ancient Israel. Greatly blessed and directed by God, it was to serve as a model nation of law and wisdom in following His ways (see Deuteronomy 4:5-8). He warned the people repeatedly not to turn from that, yet they still did. They broke their covenant relationship with God, making a new covenant necessary (Jeremiah 31:31-32). The problem was not the Old Covenant *but the people*, God explained (Hebrews 8:8). He knew they did not have a heart to faithfully obey Him (see Deuteronomy 5:29).

Scripture further tells us that all mankind has a corrupt nature and that the human heart is desperately wicked and incapable of remaining subject to God's law (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 8:7). None is truly righteous (Romans 3:10-12, 23).

Of course, the more righteous people are, the better the outcome for them and others will be. Righteousness in governance is a cause of rejoicing (Proverbs 29:2). But there's no guarantee of earthly rulers continuing in what's right.

As mentioned, a big part of human waywardness is the influence of Satan the devil, along with his demonic minions—angels who rebelled against God, having been corrupted into evil. Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has roped humanity into their rebellion. Now, “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).

The devil is the unseen ruler of this world, the spirit at work in disobedient mankind (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2-3). His demons occupy positions of power behind the scenes (Ephesians 6:12). They are active in so much of the evil we see in man's governments—and in the broken lives of people everywhere.

Thankfully, God intends to ultimately break Satan's iron grip on human society through a change of rule and a change of heart—as, again, these go hand in hand.

Change of rule through change of heart—now and in the future

To free us from the tyranny of Satan and sin with its penalty of suffering and ultimately death, Jesus first had to die in our place—“that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). He died in our place on the Passover day as the fulfillment of the symbolism of the Passover lamb sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7; John 1:29).

He then rose from the dead to lead us out of sin, as pictured in the Feast of Unleavened Bread that follows. In receiving Christ's sacrificial death in repentance, our slavery to sin is broken, as we instead give our lives into God's dominion (see Romans 6:1-23).

Jesus becomes our Lord and Master—our King on behalf of God the Father. “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13, New American Standard Bible). We are now subject to the rule of that Kingdom even though it is not yet established throughout the earth, as it will be.

Through our receiving the Holy Spirit of God, Jesus then lives His life in us to help us live in accordance with God's will (Acts 2:38; Galatians 2:20). As part of the terms of the New Covenant Jesus initiated with His disciples at His final Passover meal with them, God begins writing His laws in their hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10). Thus, those individuals who respond to God's calling in this age experience the needed change of rule and change of heart. It is this changed heart that enables us to continue in following God as our Ruler—and His reign in our lives helps us to continue submitting our hearts. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Today only a few experience this process, not the world at large. These few make an impact, but not enough to fundamentally change the world. In fact, they are often *persecuted* by the world. Yet they are the ones who will be given immortality and power at Christ's return to help Him in establishing and ruling the Kingdom of God on earth (Daniel 7:13-14, 27; Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6).

For indeed Jesus will come back and take over the rule of all nations (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 11:15). “The government will be upon His shoulder” (Isaiah 9:6). Satan

will be ousted from rule and banished (Revelation 20:1-3). Many prophecies describe the wonderful changes that will come throughout the world. Under Christ's rule, the transformative process will expand rapidly. God will pour out His Spirit the world over (Joel 2:28), and all will come to know God and His ways (Isaiah 11:9; Hebrews 8:11).

Under the perfect righteous rule of Christ and His glorified followers of this age, the world will at last know true peace, justice, joy and love—as He transforms people's hearts to receive His rule *within* them, not just over them.

Enduring the cross for the joy to come

At the end of His human life on the eve and day of Passover, Jesus was looking toward the future. When He sat down with His disciples for that last Passover meal together, He told them it would be fulfilled in the Kingdom to come (Luke 22:14-18).

He told them He would be going away to prepare a place for them in His Father's house, referring to their becoming part of God's family and Kingdom through Him (John 14:1-6). He prayed to be restored to divine glory with the Father, joined ultimately by all His followers (John 17).

Holding on to this wonderful hope of the coming Kingdom brought Jesus through the horrible suffering of the hours that followed: “. . . who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2, New Revised Standard Version).

What was He going through all this for? For the joy yet to come. To free us from sin and death and lead us in transformation for what will follow. For His return to save the world and set everything right. For us to be part of His divine family and the new government He will bring.

In the annual Passover service, we remember not only that Jesus died, but that *He is coming again*: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *till He comes*” (1 Corinthians 11:26, emphasis added).

As we recall what Jesus did for us in His great sacrifice, let's also remember *why*—for the future He will bring for us all. For a transformed world. For the Kingdom of God through a change of rule and a change of heart—both now in preparation and ultimately at Christ's return. That's the new government we all need! **BT**



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What is the coming Kingdom of God all about? How will it be brought? What will it be like? What does it mean for you and your loved ones? To learn more, download or request our helpful study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. It's yours free for the asking!

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KNOCK, KNOCK!

Will You Answer?

Will you answer the knock at the door of your heart? An early disciple took a momentous step in responding to who's there.

by Robin Webber

On hearing someone say “Knock, knock,” we know to reply, “Who’s there?” as the setup for a joke. While all in fun, the interchange reflects social expectation of answering the door when someone knocks. But there’s a far more profound knocking on a door that calls for utmost response.

I speak of a life-changing knock on the door of our hearts, which can only be opened by our inner awareness and willingness to allow *God* to enter when *He* comes knocking—and He will! This is an essential step forward if we are to, as the apostle Peter admonished, “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Peter himself had learned that growing in grace and knowledge is not an event, but an ongoing developmental experience in our ability to respond to Christ’s great invitation of “*Follow Me*.”

Many of you as readers of *Beyond Today* magazine believe there is an intervening God who not only acted as Creator or First Cause but has interrupted time and space repeatedly through history in working out His plan to ultimately establish His coming Kingdom on earth. You trust that this same God interrupts our personal lives in calling us to a saving relationship with Him. But with all this understood, are you ready today or tomorrow for God to interrupt your life yet again?

The two-way knocking in Scripture

Many a sincere follower of Jesus Christ is familiar with His promising, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). We are further assured by Him, “Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13). So we take up the invitation to “knock” on *God’s* door, expectant of His response.

But what happens when Christ comes knocking at *our* door at unexpected times with previously

unknown directives to take us through the next steps of “growing in grace and knowledge”? In His message to His followers through the ages He states: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).

Here is the key to progress on the narrow way less traveled (see Matthew 7:13-14)—to growing in our relationship with God through Christ. The knocking, we see, goes both ways. We knock on God’s door, and in turn He knocks on ours—on our hearts. The question in the latter case is not whether He will knock, as He certainly will. The real question, rather, is whether we will open the door and respond to Who’s there.

Opening doors at Joppa

Consider the illustrative event in Acts 10 with two men actively knocking on God’s door in prayer and God knocking on *their* doors. One was the God-fearing Roman centurion Cornelius, and the other was the apostle Peter. God gave each man a special vision, the divine knocking asking them to do the unthinkable. The man of conquering Rome was to seek out a member of a conquered people and learn about Jesus. And Peter, a Jewish man of that conquered people, was to accept invitation into the gentile’s home and share the fullness of the gospel with him and his household. Again, this was unimaginable in that day!

Peter and his fellow Jewish Christians had a narrow read on Scripture declaring that through Abraham—ultimately through Abraham’s descendant Jesus—“all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). Peter was about to find out the big meaning of the small words *all* and *blessed*. When reading the full story in Acts 10, we discover it took a little longer for him to respond to the knocking from above than Cornelius, but he did. And as God was with Peter, so is He persistent but patient



master of timing. He made the sun, the moon and the stars, and He is still actively creating something special in you. As Isaiah acknowledged to God, “We are the clay, and You are our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8). He is the One who turns the wheel His way to mold us in His image and not ours. And He’s not finished with us. He will keep knocking on our door to invite us to experience the next step of the molding process.

Further, recognize that while God’s great purpose for humanity and ourselves never changes (Isaiah 46:9-11), He reveals more detail to us along the way, filling us in when He’s ready to take us to the next level of understanding. This is the same God who

The question is not whether He will knock, as He certainly will. The real question is whether we will open the door and respond.

with us in our responding to Him.

Yet there’s more to this account. The launch pad for God’s work here, the place where God knocked on the door of Peter’s heart to enable this disciple to spiritually develop and welcome gentiles into God’s family, is telling. His lodging at the time was at the seaport of Joppa (Acts 10:5). What’s significant about that? It recalls the story of the prophet Jonah, who received a knock on the door of his heart to preach a message of repentance to gentiles. It was by way of Joppa that Jonah slammed the door on God and fled the scene (Jonah 1:1-3).

But around 800 years later another servant of God, one heeding Christ’s invitation of “Follow Me,” would go from Joppa *toward* where God led him, not running *from* God’s lead. Why? Peter came to a moment like that of the patriarch Job who declared to God, “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You” (Job 42:5). God was interrupting this disciple’s life for a great purpose, leading him into a new chapter.

When the knocking is for us

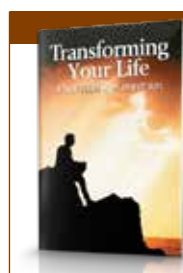
How about you and me? How do we open the door of our heart when Christ comes knocking and in turn walk through the doors our Heavenly Father opens for us to grow in grace and knowledge? You may not experience a vision, but God has His ways. Perhaps this column is such a knocking for you. Allow me in conclusion to share some thoughts to keep in mind for whenever the knocking from above comes our way. Realize that God not only created time but is the

informs us, “Behold, I will do a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19). His revelation also declares, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

That newness can at times be a hurdle for us, perhaps hindering us from opening the door God is knocking on right now. Change does not come easily. It may be so strangely new, even scary, that we miss or run away from what God is doing. We won’t always grasp His purposes: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8). Simply put, we must come to expect the unexpected from God in timing and manner.

Finally, remember Peter in Joppa and the Jonah connection? God will at times take His covenant people and individual believers back to related circumstances to finish “unfinished business.” Life is often a circle with renewed opportunities to go forward in heeding the invitation of “Follow Me.”

Knock, knock? We know who’s there—who’s *always* there. Let’s be always attentive and responsive in opening the door! **BT**



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“How You Can Help Those Worn Down by Weariness”

Thank you for the article in the Jan.-Feb. 2021 issue of *Beyond Today* about supporting those who are weary. It takes courage to share and to reach out to others. We have found through our journey that practical support isn't a well-known thing! Some have it in spades, which is so very special to see. It was a very practical article, which I very much appreciated.

From the Internet

Thank you for the weariness article and for being a voice for those in despair. If only more people would understand. Thank you for such a much-needed and high-quality article.

From the Internet

“Is Your Life ‘Good Enough’ for God?”

Thank you for your editorial in the Jan.-Feb. 2021 issue. I think this is a wake-up call to many Christians who are thinking about their part in God's Kingdom in light of all the global events we have experienced this past year. I agree that submission is required not only for initially repenting and putting our trust and faith in Christ, but also for acting in accordance with His Word as you pointed out in several biblical references. Thank you for your ministry and work writing such articles of encouragement.

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We are disappointed that you are leaving Newsmax. We won't watch anything on YouTube.

From the Internet

Thank you for checking with us. Newsmax has decided to focus strictly on news commentary and canceled all religious programming. Please note that all of our programs, current and archived, are posted on our webpage at ucg.org/beyond-today/television. A program schedule for television airing times and locations can be found at ucg.org/beyond-today/station-listing.

Readers and viewers sending their thanks for *Beyond Today*

We are very grateful to our God and to you for the help that you have given us through your literature. We have greatly increased our knowledge about the Holy Scriptures. We already received the booklets we requested;

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I really enjoy Beyond Today magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

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they are very good and instructive. Thanks again, and God bless you.

Readers in Mexico

I am from India, and I find all your messages very inspiring and empowering. I have followed the same doctrines since childhood, but my faith has dwindled as I see the Christians around me. All of your messages teach the truth in depth and my soul gets renewed. It would be very helpful if I could have all the copies of the booklets you advertise on your television program, so I can read whenever I can.

Viewer in India

I watched *Beyond Today* television this morning for the first time and I bawled like a baby. I need more of what my heart was feeling. I couldn't sleep like every other night for the last nine months, so I turned on the TV and I saw your program for the first time. It felt like a sign! I want to know more and want your Bible study aid about the Antichrist.

From the Internet

I live in Pakistan and watch *Beyond Today* on YouTube. I have not celebrated Christmas on Dec. 25 for the last five years, but I did not understand the true story of the birth of Jesus Christ from the Bible. I downloaded your study guide *Holidays or Holy Days* and translated it into my native Urdu language so that I can tell other people about it. Please pray for me and my family and all of those people who are connected with us. God bless you.

From the Internet

I am requesting your free Bible study guides. I am a resident at an assisted living facility and we are intending to start a non-denominational Bible study. We all have questions concerning parts of the Bible we are not sure about the meaning of. Thank you for your kindness and attention.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

email: malawi@ucg.org

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

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

South Africa: United Church of God—Southern Africa

P.O. Box 73606, Lynnwood Ridge 0040, South Africa Phone: +27 79 725 9453

Fax: +27 (0)86 572 7437 Website: south-africa.ucg.org email: UnitedChurchofGod.SA@gmail.com

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

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