

BEYOND TODAY

Envisioning a Better World Tomorrow

A Biblical Worldview *IN A DARKENING ERA*

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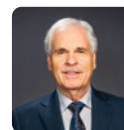
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A New Era

With this issue of *Beyond Today*, the calendar has turned to a new year. And with that turn comes hope of a brighter tomorrow, hope for a future that will bring peace to the world, and hope that all men will show good will toward each other.

Hope springs eternal in the human spirit. We look for the brighter day, even when the world around us grows dark and grim, with evil taking hold of more and more of society. We may want to shield our eyes from the reality of what's happening, but it's happening nonetheless.

When we realistically take stock of today's world, with its wars and conflicts between nations and between groups within nations, an uncertain global economy, violent protests amid populations changing through mixed ideologies, and quickly shifting attitudes about morality and governance, we may wonder where this world is headed.

The fact is, the world is headed into a darker future, just as the Bible has foretold. But there is hope beyond today.

With the current issue, we present a new look and feel to *Beyond Today* magazine. Since its inception as *The Good News* magazine decades ago, *Beyond Today*, flagship publication of the United Church of God, an International Association, continues in its mission of bringing you the truth of the Bible—giving the principles we must live by to please God, and showing how to apply those principles in your life. That springs from a biblical worldview.

With that biblical worldview, we also bring you the news of today, showing how it relates to the Bible's prophecies of the end time.

Make no mistake—the Bible is God's infallible Word of truth that not only shows us how to live our lives in a way that leads to peace, joy, harmony and abundance for everyone around the world, but it also shows us the suffering and pain that results from man's doing things "his own way" and why God allows that.

The "good news" is that "beyond today" a better

world is coming. You may have noticed the new tagline on the front cover, "Envisioning a Better World Tomorrow." We need that future before us to motivate us onward.

While the global society around us is plunging into a darkening "new era" of growing dangers, as Jesus Christ foretold of the end time, we here at *Beyond Today* are entering a new era in the history of the magazine.

With this issue comes a transfer of editorial responsibility. We want to thank managing editor Scott Ashley for his 27 fine years of service and tireless effort in directing the publication of the magazine and our many study guides and other literature. Scott retired a few months back, and we wish him and his wife many years of happiness and joy as they continue to serve God, in His Church, during their retirement.

We welcome Tom Robinson, Mitchell Moss and Matt Hernandez to their new, expanded roles in the editorial, layout, and art direction of the publication.

Going forward, you can count on *Beyond Today* continuing to bring you the unfiltered, plain truth of God's written Word, the Bible, in our content. We are here to bring you the truth Jesus Christ brought, as inspired by God the Father. God's Word gives us direction, guidance, comfort, peace, hope and so much more. The world needs the truth and the hope God has revealed to us through Scripture.

We'll likewise continue in the same vein on our television program, available at beyondtoday.tv and on YouTube at BeyondTodayTV (and see local listings in our TV log on page 31).

We hope that you enjoy and profit from the articles you read and the programs you watch and that you'll dedicate yourself to learning and living with a biblical worldview, the focus of our cover story.

And please, as we continue to develop this publication and our TV program into tools useful to you in learning the truths of the Bible, feel free to write and give us your comments, suggestions and questions. We are here to serve you.

Rick Shabi, President
United Church of God

Imagine Such a World . . .

The cover article in our September-October 2023 issue painted a picture of the vision we hold of Jesus' future reign on earth and how it transforms our lives in this age.

Letters in response to the September-October 2023 issue of *Beyond Today*

I'm reading the September-October 2023 issue. This is amazing! I am 58 years old. I've studied with many faiths. They all have some truth, and some have more truth than others. What it all boils down to is that I believe you guys at *Beyond Today* have more truth than the ones I mentioned, especially concerning the end times and the Kingdom of God. The others I studied have little to no insight on the subject at all. Some of them believe we die and either float off to heaven as a spirit or get sent straight to hell for eternal torment in fire. I am, at this point, ready to learn more and follow the truth.

From the Internet

Thanks for your continuing study. For others who are interested, send for or download our free study guide Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach? at ucg.org/jf24.

Hello! I am a subscriber to *Beyond Today* magazine, and I love it! I've learned so much by reading it. I would like to have it sent to my adult children. Also, I would like to watch live services on my computer, as there are no churches near me. Again, thank you so much for such an informative and enlightening magazine! God bless.

From the Internet

We are happy to provide the magazine. A gift copy may be requested for friends and family. And for live services, see ucg.org/webcast.

Good afternoon, I always look forward to receiving the latest issue of your magazine *Gute Nachrichten* (the German language version of *Beyond Today* magazine). Everything is very clear and obvious and always true. Best wishes and stay well.

Subscriber in Germany

Letters in response to previous issues and other literature

Thanks so much for sending the July-August issue. The section on archaeology and the Bible was so interesting.

From the Internet

I would like to thank you for all the information that we receive by mail about all the feast days and the Sabbath. It has greatly broadened my horizon. I happen to live in an area where you do not have a Church of God location. Thanks for the information.

Reader in Australia

I am enclosing part of my tithe to help support your work of providing free literature to anyone who requests it. I especially appreciate that the booklets are backed up by Scripture from the Bible. As I read them, I have been gaining wisdom and knowledge about past, present and future history, as well as God's love for mankind. What a destiny—to be sons and daughters in God's eternal Kingdom! God bless you all.

Reader in Canada

Today I heard your message that Jesus made them man and woman to unite in marriage. No one should interpret that in any other way, shape or form. Thank you for speaking up like a true disciple of Jesus. I can't wait to meet you face to face in the new world.

Viewer in Australia

Thank you for having sermons on Halloween. I have been anti-Halloween for years. It is nice to watch sermons explaining why Halloween is wrong. As a kid I celebrated, but once I learned what Halloween was, I became anti-Halloween. I have watched or listened to a few

sermons on your site (not just about Halloween). Thank you for making sermons available for me to listen to. I have a lot to learn and want to keep learning.

From the Internet

Reader looking for a church congregation


I hope this message finds you well. I have been following the teachings and values of the United Church of God for some time now, and I feel a strong connection to the faith and principles it represents. While I am unable to attend a local congregation since the closest one is too far away, I am eager to formally commit to UCG and become an official member. Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Reader in Brazil

Thanks for your letter, and we're glad to hear of your faith and desire to join a local congregation of like-minded disciples. If the congregation closest to you is still too far away to be able to attend regularly, please reach out to the pastor of that congregation. Let him know who you are and your situation, and he can give you guidance on how best to participate.

To find the full list of congregations, head to ucg.org/congregations. Or look up the contact info for your country or region on page 31 of this magazine. Thanks again for reaching out!

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



A Biblical Worldview IN A DARKENING ERA

We need a proper lens to filter the input we receive. Where can we find a reliable frame of reference through which to see the world?

by Darris McNeely

In October the U.S. House of Representatives elected Rep. Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) as its new Speaker of the House. He immediately came under fire for his stance on some of the most controversial issues of the day. His time defending the traditional teaching and sanctity of marriage was unearthed. His opposition to gay marriage and homosexuality was also cited.

Speaker Johnson responded with a statement that should challenge all of us. “I also genuinely love all people regardless of their lifestyle choices. This is not about the people themselves. I am a Bible-believing Christian,” he declared. “Someone asked me today in the media . . . ‘What does Mike Johnson think about any issue under the sun?’ I said, ‘Well, go pick up a Bible off your shelf and read it—that’s my worldview.’ That’s what I believe, and so I make no apologies for it.”

What a brave, candid and refreshing declaration to hear from a leading American politician. His view of culture, politics and “any issue” is influenced by his reading of the Bible. Howls of protest came from those who fear anyone quoting the Bible.

Today’s rapidly changing values, morals and cultural beliefs are creating a new era. Gone are the traditional teachings of marriage as a biblical institution between a man and a woman. The arc of popular culture seeks to dismantle and overturn the natural order of the sexes. Language is being used to redefine right and wrong, good and evil. You could pay a steep price for holding to what you’ve always believed.

So, just what is *your* worldview? Is it based on absolute

truth? As world events spiral into increasingly perilous times, you need the right filter to effectively understand what is happening and why. You need a *biblical worldview*.

Elements of a worldview

People develop a worldview at a young age. Religious pollster and market researcher George Barna writes about teaching values: “By the age of thirteen, most people’s worldview is so deeply formed that it rarely endures significant change . . . A person’s worldview starts developing in the fifteen-month to eighteen-month age range and is largely in place by the age of thirteen. That’s the prime window of opportunity for discipleship” (*Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child’s Heart, Mind and Spirit*, 2023, p. 18).

What shapes a worldview? Parents, ethnicity, nationality, religion, education, peers and popular culture are among the main factors. I grew up in a middle-class American home. My parents were Caucasian with roots in the deep South. Both had their lives formed by the Great Depression and World War II. That affected my young

All of us form a worldview early in life. What if the way you view the world is wrong?

world along with my mother’s deep religious faith. How I viewed other people, social issues, my potential future and even sports was shaped very early. This is repeated across the world and shapes the major nations, regions,

races and religious movements. History and events at any point in time are shaped by people with strong prejudices, ambitions, fears and hopes.

A class I teach called World News and Prophecy includes an orientation on what a worldview is. In it I've used a standard work by the late InterVarsity Press (IVP) editor James Sire titled *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*. It offers a succinct definition: "A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being" (2020, p. 20).

Helping us to unpack this definition, Sire has shown eight questions a worldview answers:

1. What is prime reality? Is it God or a meaningless cosmos?
2. What is the nature of external reality, the world around us? Is there design or random disorder?
3. What is a human being? Is he descended from lower life forms or a unique creation in the image of God?
4. What happens to a person at death? Heaven or hell, or something else?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all? Is a conscious rationality by design or evolutionary development?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong? Is good a social construct or based on absolute truth?
7. What is the meaning of human history? Is there a divine purpose, or is it only insane human events and untold suffering?
8. What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

Various faiths, religious traditions, philosophies and ideologies have attempted to answer these basic worldview questions. Most people go through life without even thinking about the concept. But as research shows, all of us form a worldview early in life, and without any effort or desire to change it we will carry it with us till we die.

That's something you should think about. What if the way you view the world is wrong? If you question the existence of God, have you had that challenged? The reality of life points to design that points to a Supreme Being revealed in the Bible as God.

Does your worldview tell you that heaven awaits a good person at death and ever-burning hell awaits the unrepentant sinner? You might be surprised to find that the Bible presents neither outcome—and that even many who claim to have a biblical worldview really don't. A truly biblical worldview is based on what the Bible actually teaches.

Consider how the biblical teaching of man's having been created in the image of God as male and female holds the key to understanding how to view the great cultural and sexual upheaval we are seeing. Same-sex marriage, transgender matters and all aspects of the LGBTQ+ movement are clarified here.

If the massive propaganda push behind these changes has left you confused, then take a step back and investigate the Bible to see what it says. It doesn't take a theologian to see that, according to the Bible, marriage is meant to be between a man and woman in a lifelong relationship of fidelity.

Marriage and family are to mirror, on a physical level, spiritual relationships in the God family—between God the Father, Christ the Son and all who are being made part of that family. Any behavior contrary to what Scripture presents is against the natural order and is sin. A biblical worldview recognizes the truth about this issue. It's not merely a political or social issue with no relevance to our relationship with God. It concerns our having been created in God's image to share in His glory.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in perspective

Since the terror attack by Hamas militants against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, we again have this major world crisis in the headlines. More than any past war between Israel and its Arab foes or any other flare-up of terrorism, this present crisis has deepened the divide between those who support the Jewish state of Israel and those who sympathize with the Palestinians. Street protests are bigger and more violent. Emboldened by the support of governments, academia, media and even law enforcement authorities, supporters of Hamas have stepped up protests.

Calls for ongoing Israeli ceasefire before the elimination of the Hamas threat have been consistent and strong. The United Nations, no supporter of Israel in recent years, has moved to end Israel's attacks on Gaza. More sympathy for the Palestinians' cause seems to be the norm in this war.

Here at *Beyond Today* we have consistently presented the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and surrounding Arab nations in the context of the biblical story of God's promises to Abraham's descendants. The Jewish claim to the land flows from God's ownership of the land. God promised it to Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob—the Israelites, including the Jews—with the stipulation they obey His laws, commandments and statutes. They failed.

History records three distinct episodes where the people of Israel and Judah sinned grievously and were removed by God from the land. The recent history of the state of Israel from 1948 is but the latest chapter of times of restoration to the land. It's an important one because key end-time prophecies tell us there must be a Jewish/

Israelite presence here. Sacrifices will again be performed at a restored temple area, signaling Christ's coming is near.

The Jews are in their land because of God's purpose and plan, not some innate superiority. They hold the land by God's design to advance His plan of salvation for all peoples, including the Arabs! This is the biblical lens through which to view the current war and the whole story of the state of Israel. It's far more than a political dispute born in modern times between Jewish emigrants from Europe and other lands to the Holy Land and their displacement of the Arab people, who only in recent decades took on the name of Palestinians.

It's about God and His plan, as revealed in Scripture. That's the needed perspective for understanding the Middle East struggle and world news in general. Indeed, a biblical worldview can open new vistas of understanding—including the fact that the best possible solution is coming.

A basis for hope amid the gloom

A true biblical worldview offers hope for the future rather than fear and uncertainty. A biblical worldview is a blueprint for a productive and successful life today of freedom, productivity and contentment. Any other worldview falls far short.

In 1947, soon after the nuclear arms race between America and the Soviet Union commenced at the end of World War II, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* first published its Doomsday Clock—an imaginary clock ticking away the minutes until nuclear devastation of civilization. Through the Cold War, the world lived under the cloud of fear of a nuclear winter and all life being erased from the earth.

Today, the Doomsday Clock is still with us. It was reset in January 2023 to 90 seconds to midnight, the closest it's ever been to the hour of global catastrophe. And the *Bulletin* recently said it would be reset again in late January 2024, noting:

"The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*' Science and Security Board is reviewing multiple global threats, including the Israel-Hamas war, Ukraine-Russia war, the continued climate crisis, AI, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns, disruptive technologies, biothreats, and the intensification of nuclear weapons programs worldwide."

Imagine that framework as your only worldview. Frightening, isn't it? A purely secular worldview offers only a cold, bleak future. A worldview based on false religious or philosophical ideas cannot bring true solace and peace of mind.

But a biblical worldview based on the truth of the Bible



A biblical worldview based on the truth of the Bible offers hope.

offers hope. Jesus Christ faced down this false worldview when He said of the times of trouble ahead: "It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible).

The earth will not be destroyed by nuclear war or human-induced climate change. AI will not seize control of human destiny and create a machine-ruled world. Yes, there will be a time of trouble unlike any since the world began. But a true biblical worldview shows that Jesus Christ intervenes at the critical moment. He will bring a new order to the world and restore the right spiritual focus and direction the world has been missing.

Scripture proclaims these words of the apostle Peter: "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).

Examine your cherished beliefs and views of world events, religion and where you fit in the world. The apostle Paul upended the worldview of the Athenian elite by revealing to them "the unknown God" (Acts 17:22-23). He said, "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (verse 28).

This is the one worldview that counts! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



For help in seeing what's happening in the world through the frame of what God says is going to happen, send for or download our study guide *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. And for wider grasp, also request *How to Understand the Bible*. Both are yours free.

Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf24 to find it.



Hell Unleashed

The Spirit Behind the Hamas Attack on Israel

The viciousness of the recent Hamas attack on Israel and its occurrence on a biblical Holy Day, like an invasion 50 years before, have biblical significance, pointing to the devil's rage.

by Darris McNeely

When Hamas militants crossing from Gaza descended on Israeli settlements on Oct. 7, 2023, it was hell unleashed. More than a thousand Israeli men, women and children, along with many foreigners, were slaughtered in what was called the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust of World War II.

Violent death descended on men, women, children and the elderly. Mass butchery, rape, beheadings, incineration of babies—the stories are too horrible to imagine. No reasonable human court of opinion could label this as anything but pure evil.

Sadly, the world is not reasonable, being under the overarching influence of Satan the devil (Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19). Many in the West are now denying what Hamas perpetrated, but the terror group itself promoted what it did as a recruiting tool for holy jihad against the Jews—and many around the world gleefully celebrated the heinous attacks.

The attack was timed to occur on a biblical Holy Day the Jews call Shemini Atzeret, the Eighth Day following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles. (In Israel this day is combined with another celebration called Simchat Torah, rejoicing in the completion and restarting of the annual Torah reading cycle.) This was 50 years after an earlier surprise attack by Arab neighbors on another fall Holy Day called Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement, which fell on Oct. 6 in 1973.

It was no coincidence these attacks occurred on God's Holy Days. On one level these were chosen as days the Jewish people were more focused on spiritual observance and less alert to military invasion. They were also likely meant to portray Islam victorious over Jewish religious practice.

But beyond that, these attacks were demonic, instigated by Satan. He hates these festival days that lay out the purpose and plan of God, including Satan's ultimate defeat, and he wants to destroy the people and land that are a major focus of God's plan for history. Indeed, the evil that erupted on God's sacred feast day this past fall, like

that of 50 years ago, can only be understood through the lens of a biblical worldview.

A history of conflict

The roots of today's conflict go back to biblical times, with seemingly intractable hatred and division (see our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*). And its current phase has been developing since early in the last century. During World War I the British government, and later the League of Nations, approved a plan for the settlement of Jews in the land of Palestine, then a part of the Ottoman Empire of the Turks. After the war, immigration of Jews to their ancient homeland began in earnest. Thousands of them came in from Europe, Asia, America and other parts of the world. The Arab population there was also increasing due to immigration.

At the same time, the world's great powers were redrawing the lines of the Middle East in a diplomatic folly perhaps best summarized by a book on the subject titled *A Peace to End All Peace* (David Fromkin, 1989).

After World War II, the Nazi Holocaust in Europe increased pressure for a Jewish state in the Holy Land. And on May 14, 1948, the state of Israel was declared. Immediately the young nation was attacked by Jordan, Syria and Egypt in a bid to destroy it. Israel held its ground. The largely Arab denizens in the land who supported the invasion became displaced by the war, with some fleeing to neighboring Arab states as refugees. These would later be known as the Palestinians. Subsequent wars, such as the 1967 Six-Day War, created more displaced peoples as the Jewish state defeated attacking enemies and expanded its borders in captured territories.

From these refugees, motivated by an Islamist view that does not tolerate lands conquered by Islam falling back into infidel hands and that came to see the Jews as subhuman, have come different terrorist groups whose main purpose is to destroy the state of Israel, with many others urging them on. The terror group Hamas was the elected government in Gaza (which then abolished



On a sacred Holy Day showing the mercy and compassion of God, Satan unleashed an attack upon the unsuspecting towns of Israel.

elections once it gained power).

Along with Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas is largely funded and often directed by the biggest state supporter of terrorism in the Middle East—Iran. The Iranian leaders have long declared their goal is to wipe Israel from the map, even as they near development of nuclear capability. Iran and its terror proxies clearly state their intent to use whatever means necessary to destroy the Jews. And we can expect that continued escalation will occur.

The secular godless mindset can't see that what's going on has its basis in the Bible and God's great purpose for human life and the nation of Israel—and the opposition of wicked spiritual forces (see Ephesians 6:12).

With that in mind, we return to the timing of the two attacks, 50 years apart, the latest on the Eighth Day, the last of God's listed annual festivals, and the earlier one on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. What these days symbolize gives us biblical perspective of what is ultimately happening in the Middle East conflict.

When Satan is banished

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32), is a day so solemn that God tells His people to afflict themselves through fasting to achieve a greater clarity of what makes the world work.

In a special ceremony on this Holy Day, two goats were selected by lot, one to be killed as a sin offering and the other to figuratively bear sin and be banished into the desert (Leviticus 16). The first goat symbolized the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in dying for our sins. The other is fulfilled in the prophetic scene of an angel coming down from heaven, after the second coming of Christ, to bind Satan, the instigator of sin, away into a bottomless pit for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1).

There will come a time when the source of evil in this world will be removed. That source of evil is Satan. The Bible presents him as the great deceiver and tempter (Revelation 12:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). Jesus labeled him a murderer and the very father of lies, leading people into his ways (John 8:44).

We should not casually dismiss the coincidence of a war against the Jewish state of Israel beginning on the Day

of Atonement in 1973. It was more than a strategic move by Arab leaders to catch the Jews asleep. Satan's rage was targeted against the people representing a remnant of the ancient nation of Israel, descendants of Abraham to whom the land of Israel was promised as a place of residence for specific purposes within the larger purpose of God for the nations.

And Satan hates God. He hates human beings created in the *image* of God. He despises the design and plan of God to bring people into divine glory. Through human instruments he has worked against God's purpose throughout time.

Jesus even referred to Satan as the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He and his spiritual henchmen, known in the Bible as demons, influence the world's leaders to fight among themselves and to oppose the people of God, whether it be the literal descendants of Jacob or the spiritual Church of God. He uses the armies of religious orders and state organizations alike to relentlessly pursue those who keep God's commandments and follow the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:15-17).

Would Satan move nations to attack the Jewish state of Israel on the Day of Atonement? Should that not be a lesson writ large before the world, signifying the rage this demon has against the God who will one day cause him to be bound and cast into a bottomless pit, as symbolized by this very day? There are times when history is more than coincidence.

Satan's influence ultimately no more

We should also look deeper into the Holy Day the recent Hamas attack occurred on, the Eighth Day, the day immediately following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23:33-36, 39). What does this sacred festival of God teach us?

God's holy festivals reveal a progression of steps in His plan to save humanity, all people who are ultimately willing. Christ is at the center of each of these steps. Beginning with His sacrifice and resurrection, the spring festivals (per Holy Land seasons) show how sin is removed and how His life can be within us as our hope of eternal life.

The fall festivals point to Christ's return to lead the world into righteousness and peace. As noted, the

Day of Atonement shows Satan bound away. The Feast of Tabernacles, which all nations will observe at that time (Zechariah 14:16-19), pictures the 1,000-year reign of Christ and His followers of this age, known as the Millennium.

The Eighth Day, a solemn final assembly, is understood by very few. Jews don't understand because they reject the New Testament. Christians don't understand because they overlook the Old Testament festivals and what Scripture actually reveals about life after death—that there will be a resurrection of Christ's followers at His return, with all others who have died being raised to life after the 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4-6).

The final Eighth Day festival holds the comforting and encouraging truth that God is just and fair. In the resurrection after the Millennium, He will offer salvation to all those who in this life never had a real opportunity to accept Christ as Savior nor knew His true teachings, being subject to Satan's deceptions (verses 11-12; and see "The Eighth Day: Eternal Life Offered to All" in our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*).

Just before this, at the end of the Millennium, Satan will be released from his prison and will again lead great numbers of people to battle against God, surrounding God's people encamped at Jerusalem. Yet these forces will meet with fiery destruction from God, with Satan now gone for good (verses 7-10).

As the dead of past ages are then brought to life, they will live without the deceiving influence of Satan. God will remove the veil of deception. Buddhists will learn there is a personal God. Hindus will learn there is one cycle of life that counts. Muslims will learn of the one true God revealed in the Bible, including the fact that Jesus is the Son sent by the Father for the salvation of the world. The Jews will recognize Jesus as their prophesied Savior who died for their sins. And those who assumed they were Christians but didn't really understand the truth of God will come to worship Him in Spirit and truth (John 4:24).

Ezekiel 37 portrays the resurrection to fleshly existence of the Israelites from all history at that future time—then restored to the land of Israel and given God's Holy Spirit to be the exemplary nation God intended them to be (verses 11-14). At that time, all people will be able to learn and live in God's ways. Then, with a changed heart and healed minds, Satan's nature will start disappearing from human character. In the end, there will still be some who stubbornly refuse to follow God, but they will be burned up in a final destruction (Revelation 20:14-15). The masses of humanity who ultimately continue to follow God will receive divine glory with Him—to live in a New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven (Revelation 21-22).

This is the deep meaning of the Eighth Day festival. This is the day many were observing, though most not

understanding why, when they heard the news of another war breaking over Israel. The day hell was unleashed, and a demonic massacre occurred.

Could it be that Satan, howling with intensified rage, knowing his time to work grows shorter, maneuvered the forces of terror to attack at this moment? On a sacred Holy Day showing the mercy and compassion of the God who wants to share eternal glory with mankind, Satan unleashed an attack upon the unsuspecting towns of Israel, his forces surrounding them and pouring fire on people and homes—here in this place where Satan will ultimately be defeated and Israel will be restored.

More lashing out to come

These wars, the Yom Kippur War of 50 years ago and this latest Israel-Hamas war starting on the Eighth Day, should be understood from the perspective of these truths. The lens of the Bible can give deeper insight into what's happening.

Bible prophecy shows us a number of other events along the end-time path to Christ's return that must yet occur. In Arab nations galvanizing against Israel we could be seeing an alignment that could lead to or be a foretaste of an even bigger attack brought by what the book of Daniel calls the King of the South on an opposing power called the King of the North (Daniel 11:44). This King of the South will evidently be an Arab Islamic power emboldened to launch an attack on the North, here signifying Europe.

The northern power, called the Beast and Babylon in Revelation, will retaliate in massive force, invading and occupying much of the Middle East, and then coming into the Holy Land. This will lead into what Scripture calls the Great Tribulation. That will come after Satan, following another attempt to assault heaven, is cast down. He will then come against people in great wrath, knowing his time is short (Revelation 12:12-14).

Thankfully, all of Satan's lashing out will not stop the plan of God. In the end, the devil will be vanquished, and God will reign supreme—to set all things right. Thankfully, the victims of the Eighth Day Hamas attacks will later be resurrected on the fulfillment of that Eighth Day to live a joyful new life.

God's promises are certain. Look to His Word for how it will all work out. And trust in Him to see us through! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



God gave His people seven annual festivals, listed together in Leviticus 23. For help in seeing how these represent steps in God's plan to save humanity, be sure to send for or download our study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. And for a broader overview of Mideast history and where events are headed, also request *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. Both are yours free for the asking. **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf24 to find it.**



Jesus Christ's Wonderful Advance News!

Through God's Word, the Bible, Jesus Christ conveyed a momentous announcement about the future of the world that you and all people need to hear!

by John LaBissoniere

Millions of people today are severely affected by war, lawlessness, crime, financial distresses, disease, failing health and many other dilemmas. What needs to happen so that *everyone* in every nation can experience lasting joy, true fulfillment and genuine peace?

Some people believe it could result from a new system of governance proposed by such global organizations as the World Economic Forum or the World Government Summit. However, considering how humanity has proved repeatedly that it's incapable of governing itself competently, should people *really* believe that *another* methodology fashioned by human beings will bring about real peace, prosperity and security?

Is the world therefore destined to remain shackled to ruling systems that lead to frustration, contention and failure? Must people continue placing their hopes and dreams in fallible and often corrupt political leaders who make promises and then fail to carry them out? Or is something much better on the horizon?

The answer to this latter question is absolutely yes! And in what may seem astounding to most people, this *stun-dou-sly better way* is revealed prophetically in the pages of the Holy Bible.

Indeed, Jesus Christ provided *wonderful advance news* of a 1,000-year age of universal tranquility, prosperity and happiness that will reach around the globe (Matthew 4:23; 24:14; Revelation 20:6). This was His gospel, or good news message, of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14).

An awesome transformation is coming

One of the remarkable things about this prophesied magnificent era is that it will *not* depend on the ideas, plans or efforts of human beings. Rather, the Eternal

Creator will bring this electrifying turning point in human existence to fruition. It will be launched by Jesus Christ at His glorious second coming when He installs His Father's flawless global government, the Kingdom of God, on the earth (Revelation 11:15; Daniel 2:44).

At that momentous time, Christ will first rescue humanity from horrifying global warfare by saving it from utter self-annihilation (Matthew 24:22). And He will then make known to all people God's pathway toward genuine truth and righteousness, which is designed for everyone's benefit (John 14:6; Psalm 119:30; Proverbs 12:28).

A stunning transformation will be set in motion the world over when Jesus and His saints, His faithful followers of this age who are then resurrected, begin instructing people in God's way of life (Daniel 12:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). With society directly guided and governed by Jesus Christ, the result will be breathtaking peace and prosperity previously unknown to humanity (Psalms 119:165). All of this will bequeath overwhelming goodness, joy, peace and well-being to every individual, family, race and nation (Isaiah 54:13).

Contributing to this wondrous condition will be the fact that warfare, the scourge of humanity, will be completely abolished (Psalm 46:9-10; Micah 4:3). "Violence will disappear from your land; the desolation and destruction of war will end" (Isaiah 60:18, New Living Translation). Training in warfare and the production of military weapons will totally cease as people's energies will be directed exclusively toward peaceful purposes.

Conflict between nations will be eliminated as former enemies are led to work harmoniously with one another (Isaiah 19:24-25). "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain [meaning God's Kingdom], for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters

As a result of God's coming intervention, righteousness, peacefulness and cooperation will be the manner of living for all people in every nation.

cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). People will never again live in fear or experience anxiety (Isaiah 54:14).

Amazing peace and prosperity are coming

Throughout the 1,000-year period, the Millennium, people will live in safety and raise their children in fine houses on beautiful, well-tended, highly productive land. Food will be plentiful, peace will prevail and everyone will be prosperous. "My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Isaiah 32:18).

Just how amazing will life be during that wonderful future time? "Everyone will live in peace and prosperity, enjoying their own grapevines and fig trees, for there will be nothing to fear"! (Micah 4:4, NLT). "In those days people will live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of their own vineyards" (Isaiah 65:21, NLT). "You will have such a harvest that you won't be able to bring in all of your wheat before plowing time. You will have grapes left over from season to season; your fruitful vineyards will cover the mountains" (Amos 9:13, Contemporary English Version).

Think about what this all means for the people living during that inspiring millennial period! There will be no government spending on frivolous and wasteful programs. Instead, Jesus Christ will direct all of His efforts and those of His immortal, spirit-born saints toward caring for people's physical and spiritual needs.

As a result, every person will be exceedingly joyful, optimistic and confident. "And I will always guide you and satisfy you with good things. I will keep you strong and well. You will be like a garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water that never goes dry" (Isaiah 58:11, Good News Translation). People will have everything they need and will rejoice in Almighty God and what He has done for them. They will be happy, content, productive and fully energized to build, learn and grow.

While the physical aspects of God's plan are truly amazing, there is something *even more magnificent* to take place involving the *spiritual transformation* of humanity. Jesus Christ and His resurrected saints will teach all people God's perfect way of life. "None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (Hebrews 8:11). "Your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it'" (Isaiah 30:20-21).

A marvelous spiritual gift will be given to all

For everyone to understand the depth of God's teachings and live in accordance with them, He will provide them with a marvelous spiritual gift: "I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations" (Ezekiel 36:26-27, NLT).

For people to accomplish this, He will grant them repentance and forgiveness of sin, paving the way for them to receive divine salvation and everlasting life in God's family (2 Timothy 2:25; Acts 11:18; Ephesians 2:19).

Throughout the coming 1,000-year age, people will learn that the knowledge and application of God's commandments will result in wonderful blessings and marvelous peace of mind. By applying the love and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, everyone will be motivated by a sincere desire to deeply honor, respect and obey God while genuinely caring for the needs of others (Mark 12:30-31; Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4:13).

Everyone needs to hear this wonderful advance news!

As a result of God's coming intervention, righteousness, peacefulness and cooperation will be the manner of living for all people in every nation. Furthermore, awesome changes will take place in animals since God will alter their very nature so they become gentle and friendly. As Isaiah 11:6 reveals, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them." Parents will be completely secure in knowing that their children will be safe no matter where they are.

All of this and more describes the awe-inspiring future that lies ahead for humanity. The perfect global government, the Kingdom of God, is coming! It's made plain in Jesus Christ's wonderful advance news that all people everywhere need to hear! And, importantly, you can have a part of spreading this marvelous announcement by turning humbly to God and supporting His great work on earth today. We hope you will join with us in this great cause! **BT**

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To see more about the amazing changes the Kingdom of God will bring to the world, be sure to download or request our free study guide *Christ's Reign on Earth: What It Will Be Like*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf24 to find it.



Three Dangerous Worldviews *Permeating Modern Society*

We see what happens in society and the various notions and ideologies out there through the lens of our worldview. And that should be based on actual truth found in Scripture. Yet there are widespread viewpoints that would dismiss the Bible. We need awareness of these to combat them.

by Becky Sweat

Think about how you would answer these questions: Can “white lies” or “situational ethics” ever be justified? Are you for or against abortion? What about same-sex marriage? When you take a walk in nature, do you reflect on God’s creative abilities, or does it make you feel “at one” with Mother Earth? Do you routinely check your horoscope? What gives you more hope—scientific advances or the Bible? How you respond to these questions depends largely on your worldview.

Simply put, a *worldview* is how a person perceives reality and the world. It’s a set of foundational beliefs about life that helps you determine how to think and behave, governs how you treat other people and provides a sense of direction and purpose. Everyone has a worldview, whether we know it or identify it as such or not.

Your worldview acts as a filter through which you process the information you take in. What you think about the transgender movement, artificial intelligence, genetic enhancement, claims of alien encounters, euthanasia, prayer in public schools, the use of fossil fuels, carbon footprints or any other topic in the news is shaped by your worldview more than anything else.

Traditionally, most Americans have held, at least loosely, to what’s known as a *biblical worldview*—seeing life through the lens of the Bible as it’s understood. Reverence for God and His truths is viewed as the starting point for all knowledge and understanding, as we’re told in Proverbs 1:7. While there are differences in interpreting Scripture, those who claim a biblical worldview generally agree that God is Creator of the universe, that the Bible is His inspired and infallible Word, and that absolute moral standards exist, being spelled out in Scripture.

But in recent decades, increasingly fewer people are professing belief in God, and consequently the biblical worldview has been declining in acceptance. Other worldviews are filling the vacuum and becoming more dominant.

The alternative worldviews many are turning to are in direct opposition to the true God and biblical teachings. What follows are three of the most prevalent. Even if you aren’t familiar with terms for these worldviews, you are probably aware of the ideas associated with them, as they

are increasingly being promulgated by the media, educational institutions, corporations and governments.

1. Secular humanism

Secular humanism is a belief system seeking to advance society solely through human reasoning and intellect. It’s built on the acceptance of *evolution*—the theory that mankind and all other life forms emerged through random chance and natural selection—and *materialism*, a philosophical stance maintaining that everything that exists is ultimately only physical in origin and nature. This leads to secular humanism rejecting the existence of God, a spirit realm and the hope of an afterlife.

A major tenet of secular humanism is that humanity is capable of solving its own problems through science, without any help from a divine being. This is clearly seen in *Humanist Manifesto II* (published in 1973 by the American Humanist Association), which reads: “Using technology wisely, we can control our environment, conquer poverty, markedly reduce disease, extend our lifespan, significantly modify our behavior, alter the course of human evolution and cultural development, unlock vast new powers, and provide humankind with unparalleled opportunity for achieving an abundant and meaningful life.”

The secular humanist movement also advocates “freedom” for people to “make their own rules” for how to live. *Humanist Manifesto II* boldly asserts: “We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of survival and fulfillment of the human race . . . There is no accountability to God and no fear of judgment from Him . . . Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction.” If this life is all there is and there’s no Creator to obey, secularists see no reason to abide by biblical precepts and every reason to decide for themselves what’s right.

Advocates of secular humanism want to completely remove religion from the public sphere. The same manifesto states, “The separation of church and state and the separation of ideology and state are imperatives.” In the

United States, “the separation of church and state”—a phrase not found in the U.S. Constitution but that has become part of Constitutional debate—was historically understood to mean that religious belief and practice should be protected from government interference. Secularists invoke the phrase to argue there should be “no references to God in government venues” and “no public displays of faith.”

Another one of their goals has been to push for the replacement of the “traditional values” long held by society with “alternative lifestyles.” The manifesto further states, “Individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles as they desire.” Very often, those who accept or promote unbiblical, ungodly practices—like gay relationships, gender reassignment, adultery, abortion, pornography, pedophilia, recreational drug use and the legalization of assisted suicide—espouse a secular humanist worldview.

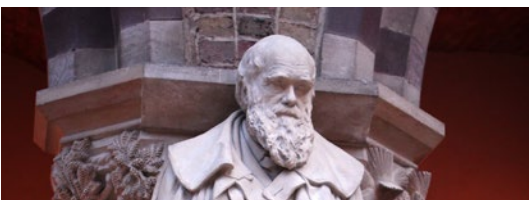
This ideology has its roots in the Enlightenment—the intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries

but in man himself—in the sovereign, autonomous individual. ‘Truth’ is now internal, personal and subjective—a product of human imagination” (2020, p. 45).

Postmodern “truth claims” deal with ethics, morality and the nature of reality. Postmodernism asserts that because each person or social group has a unique way of perceiving and interpreting the world, individuals and cultures should be able to construct their own “truths.” This is exemplified in the “What’s right for you is not right for me” mindset that has become common today.

The idea is that all ethical standpoints are equally valid, except for an absolutist viewpoint, and no behavior can be labeled as “sinful” or “unacceptable.” Viewing pornography, for instance, could never be deemed wrong; the strongest statement that could be made about it is, “I personally don’t like it.” The same thinking rejects calling adultery wrong. Postmodernism would claim that such a perspective might pertain to Christians but not to those who don’t believe in the Bible.

One other major tenet of postmodernism is “The end



when Western societies began to prioritize science and materialism over religion and faith. Still, secular humanism did not really start gaining widespread acceptance until the radical political and social change of the 1960s. And today, secular humanism continues to spread in American culture, likely leading to further decline in morality.

2. Postmodernism

While secular humanism rejects the Bible as a source of truth, postmodernism balks at both the Bible and scientific teachings, claiming that objective, timeless or universal truths do not exist. Postmodernists argue there are only “relative truths” that apply to some individuals and cultures or in certain situations, but not others, and these are subject to change over time.

In *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice*, Scott David Allen explains that postmodernism emerged in the mid-20th century as a reaction against the “grand narratives” of modernism (the system of thought that arose during the Enlightenment, which downplayed belief in God and saw science as the only path to truth). Some people were now seeing limits to the insights science could provide. The postmodern worldview that emerged, Allen writes, grounds “reality not in God or in the material universe,

justifies the means.” In *The Truth About Worldviews*, James Eckman explains that from a postmodernist standpoint, “morality comes from the needs of society . . . Since there are no absolutes and every decision is based on the moment, whatever works becomes ‘the new truth’” (2006, p. 5). He gives two examples of this kind of thinking: deeming an unethical politician a “good leader” as long as he keeps the economy going, and justifying the destruction of human embryos as a source for stem cells in medical research.

In contrast, the Bible clearly states that God is the one source of absolute ethical truth (see John 17:17), and it delineates what behaviors are right and wrong. There are no exceptions—even if doing something immoral would bring about desired results from a human perspective.

3. Cosmic humanism

Also known as the *New Age* movement or *New Spirituality*, cosmic humanism is a conglomeration of extra-biblical and pagan religious beliefs and practices rooted in Eastern mysticism (notably Buddhism and Hinduism), Gnosticism (the teaching that physical matter is evil) and occultism (astrology, channeling, numerology, divination, witchcraft, etc.). While these ideologies have been around for millennia, they became packaged together when the

New Age movement emerged in the 1970s.

Adherents of cosmic humanism (commonly known as *New Agers*) believe in a higher power and an afterlife, but not the kind the Bible teaches. The movement downplays the Bible. Some New Agers may use it in limited fashion but typically take it metaphorically and not literally. Much of what's taught comes from self-appointed New Age gurus—who promote their ideas through books, websites, seminars, etc. Even then, New Agers are typically encouraged to listen to their “inner voice” and come up with their own “truths.”

That said, there are core ideas that New Agers embrace. God, the universe and everything that exists are thought to consist of one fundamental essence or spiritual energy. Usually New Agers adhere to either *pantheism* (meaning everything is God) or *panentheism* (meaning God pervades everything that exists). Either way, these ideologies assert that the universe and all that's in it collectively constitute God. Thus, human beings as part of the universe are considered presently divine, explaining why some New Agers declare, “I am god.” Nature, too, is typically considered sacred, which is why New Agers often practice earth worship.

God is regarded as the “Ultimate Reality,” or “Universal Energy”—a cosmic force from which all living beings originate and into which all living beings will eventually be absorbed. In other words, the ultimate destiny for human beings is believed to be the return of their “life energy” back into the collective cosmic consciousness that is God, and become engulfed in it.

New Agers view the world's problems as a reflection of human beings suppressing or forgetting their own divinity. Therefore, the New Age solution is for people to cultivate self-realization, experience enlightenment and awaken “the God within.” They pursue this through such practices as transcendental meditation, hypnosis, attempting astral projection (an out-of-body experience, reaching beyond the physical realm into a spiritual dimension), chanting, aura cleansings (to clear away negative energy) and crystals (to achieve “harmony” with the universe).

They might also engage in occult practices (like using spirit mediums, consulting with astrologers and psychics, and having tarot card and palm readings) to make contact with “spirit guides” and “ascended masters”—spirit entities (which when real are actually demons) who they believe will assist them with their spiritual growth. They may also seek alien encounters, as they believe extraterrestrials can be spirit guides.

A very real danger is that the blatantly supernatural practices used in New Age spirituality (like consulting spirit mediums, attempting astral projection and transcendental meditation) put participants in direct contact with evil spirits, which could result in demonic influence

or possession. Scripture explicitly forbids these kinds of practices (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:10-14).

Another serious concern with cosmic humanism is that it obscures the true God, as He is regarded not as our Father, but merely an impersonal force, explain Steven Bancarz and Josh Peck in *The Second Coming of the New Age*: “A personal relationship with this force is impossible because it is not a person, meaning it has no awareness, free will, rationality, etc. It cannot reciprocate or interact with you and your intentions. It is like turning on a microwave and trying to have a relationship with the frequencies it emits” (2018, p. 130).

The identity of Jesus Christ is also dismissed, note the authors, as he is viewed as “either merely a wise, human teacher or something quasi-divine, such as an Ascended Master, spirit guide, or even an extraterrestrial being who came here to teach us how we can ascend and reach the same level of consciousness” (p. 6). The bottom line is that cosmic humanism steers people towards the demonic realm when what humanity really needs is a connection with God.

We must be on guard

The philosophies behind each of these three worldviews might vary, but the end goal for each is the same: to remove God and His laws and truths from people's lives, so they can feel justified thinking and doing whatever they want.

Undoubtedly, Satan is behind these belief systems. The Bible tells us that he “deceives the whole world” and refers to him as “the god of this age,” “the prince of the power of the air,” and “the ruler of this world” (Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; John 12:31). Satan knows how to make his twisted ideas look true or good though they are in fact very destructive.

We need to be aware of Satan's ploys so we don't get taken in by hollow and deceptive philosophies (2 Corinthians 2:11; Colossians 2:8). It's not that we need to become experts in all the false worldviews that are out there, but we do need to know something about them so we can better combat them. We also need to work hard to maintain a true biblical worldview—and we achieve this by making time for regular Bible study, meditation, prayer and even having “iron sharpens iron” conversations with fellow believers (Proverbs 27:17). Only then will we be ready to confront all the unbiblical messages coming at us on a daily basis! [BT](#)

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The Bible is meant to be our guide through the confusion of this world. But how do we study it and make good use of it? To help, we've prepared a study guide titled *How to Understand the Bible*. Download or request your free copy today. [Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf24](http://ucg.org/jf24) to find it.



Before You Ask Someone to Be Your *Valentine...*

Millions send Valentine's Day cards to express their affection for someone special. But how did this holiday originate? And does Valentine's Day represent what true love is all about?

by Jerold Aust

Every year, more than a billion Valentine cards are bought and sent throughout the world. The act of sending a nice card seems to fill a natural yearning to express how much we care for someone.

But does Valentine's Day really celebrate true, caring love? Or does this popular holiday actually promote something else?

Origins of Valentine's Day

When we think of Valentine's Day, we call to mind hearts, chocolates, flowers and expressions of love. Yet before joining in the fun, wouldn't it be wise to know where this tradition came from?

First, we should understand that Valentine's Day began when the early Roman Catholic Church tried to Christianize an ancient pagan Roman holiday called *Lupercalia*. That celebration was a licentious festival that honored Lupercus, the hero-hunter of wolves. This festival was so immensely popular among the Roman people that church leaders included it in their calendar, hoping to retain their new parishioners and turn them from sexual licentiousness to morality by linking it to a saint.

The saint they chose for this mid-February Roman festival was St. Valentine. One source explains:

"St. Valentine is believed to have been a Roman priest who was martyred on this day [February 14] around [A.D.] 270. How he became the patron saint of lovers remains a mystery, but one theory is that the Church used the day of St. Valentine's martyrdom

in an attempt to Christianize the old Roman Lupercalia, a pagan festival held around the middle of February.

"Part of the ancient ceremony entailed putting girls' names in a box and letting the boys draw them out. Couples would thus be paired off until the following year. The Church substituted saints' names for girls' names, in the hope that the participant would model his life after the saint whose name he drew.

"But by the 16th century, it was once again girls' names that ended up in the box. Eventually the custom of sending anonymous cards or messages to those one admired became the accepted way of celebrating St. Valentine's Day" (Helene Henderson and Sue Ellen Thompson, editors, *Holidays, Festivals, and Celebrations of the World Dictionary*, "Valentine's Day," 2005, p. 576).

Although most historical sources contain some of the same notions about how Valentine's Day developed, each one highlights another facet of the story. Another states:

"Some people have tried to connect the historical Saint Valentine with the later practices of Valentine's Day by saying that the saint married couples despite the emperor's prohibition, or that he sent a note signed 'from your Valentine' to the daughter of his jailer.

"However, the early Christian saint Valentine probably had nothing to do with the traditions later celebrated on his feast day; it is simply by his placement in the Christian calendar that his name became associated with it. Later, the word *valentine* may have been confused with the Norman French word *galant*, meaning lover of women, as the *g* and *v* were often interchangeable in common pronunciation.

"In any case, February 14 gradually became a



traditional date for exchanging love messages, and Saint Valentine became the patron saint of lovers” (*Macmillan Profiles: Festivals and Holidays*, 1999, p. 363).

Theories differ as to how a holiday for lovers developed in February. Some think the mating of birds at that time of year is connected with the tradition:

“One is based on the belief throughout rural Europe during the Middle Ages that the birds began to mate on February 14. Chaucer, in his ‘Parliament of Fowles,’ refers to the belief in this way: For this was Seynt Valentyne’s day. When every foul cometh ther to choose his mate” (Stephen Christianson, *The American Book of Days*, 2000, p. 139).

Regardless of the varied sources and ambiguous history of Valentine’s Day, a few identifiable points continue to surface: Valentine’s Day originated with an ancient pagan Roman feast called Lupercalia. That festival was based on fertility and sexual licentiousness. In the third century, the Roman Catholic Church attempted to Christianize the ancient festival practice by naming it after a martyr.

The hope was that the festival adherents would thereafter follow the examples of church saints, no longer engaging in the ancient practice of free sex while honoring an ancient god. Despite some success, the holiday still contributes to immorality among many and promotes a wrong view of love.

A counterfeit holiday

Something that is counterfeit always indicates there is something real that it stands in place of, the genuine article. Could the same be true of a holiday? The roots of Valentine’s Day lie in a pagan festival, not in the Bible. In the Catholic Church’s efforts to “Christianize” a pagan festival to gain adherents, did it overlook the real thing—holidays that reflect God’s perspective on love and giving?

In fact, what was overlooked in the adoption of pagan holidays was God’s true Holy Days and what they mean. We can find all of God’s Holy Days or festivals listed in Leviticus 23. And you can also find in the New Testament that Jesus Christ, the apostles and the entire early Church all kept those exact same festivals. Jude is apparently referring to these when he writes to early Christians of “your love feasts” in Jude 12.

In contrast, the holidays that are widely celebrated in modern Christendom, including Valentine’s Day, are not found in the Bible. Instead, they are largely rooted in ancient pagan holidays that have been given a veneer of Christianity. (If you want to know more about God’s festivals, please request or download our free study guide *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

Where does God stand on Valentine’s Day?

We learn from the Bible that God is strictly opposed to any religious or secular holiday that keeps humankind

blinded from His precious truth. Jesus said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). God wants people to be truly free, not held captive by false beliefs and ideas.

The Bible reveals God’s Holy Days and festivals. Each one illustrates a significant part of His ultimate love for humanity and His plan to save mankind—a love that led Jesus Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners. Valentine’s Day has no part in the salvation of humanity. In fact, it stands in contradiction to it—originating as it does in sinful, pagan worship.

Valentine’s Day may be acceptable to millions of people, but not to God. It substitutes human reasoning for God’s truth. It focuses the attention of people on infatuation, not a deep abiding love, on “getting love,” not giving or sacrificing for others.

God warns all who claim to represent Him, who claim to be Christians, to avoid the ways of the ancient pagans and their counterfeit holidays and feasts:

“Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.

“When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’

“*You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods . . . Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it*” (Deuteronomy 12:28-32, emphasis added).

In fact, God told the Israelites to eradicate all elements of pagan worship among them (Deuteronomy 12:1-4).

God is keenly interested in our welfare. He created us and gave us His manual, the Bible, to follow so we can get the most out of this life and that He might give us eternal life forever.

Valentine’s Day is rooted not in God’s Word, but in ancient paganism. It is not from the true God but from this world and its false god, Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4).

So to return to the issue raised up front: Should you ask someone to be your Valentine? Not if you care more about true love and about what God thinks. **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



Besides Valentine’s Day, other holidays regarded as Christian actually aren’t. For help in sorting it out, download or request our free study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jfz4 to find it.



What's Behind the Scourge of Human Trafficking?

What is human trafficking? What instigates and drives it?
Who are its victims? How will it come to an end?

by John LaBissoniere

While slavery has long been banned by most governments, the despicable practice continues today along with a form of the slave trade—the heinous crime of human trafficking. It involves the recruitment or capture, as well as harboring or transporting, of people into a condition of crushing control, abuse and exploitation—with victims often literally being bought and sold.

Today's practice of heartless human bondage is a transnational criminal enterprise fueled by demand for cheap labor and commercial sex. Generating more than \$150 billion profit annually, it's a low-risk scheme for slavers and slaveholders due to minimal public concern, ineffective laws and social blame often directed towards the trafficked victims themselves. Such slavery is even *advocated* among Islamist extremists, and ISIS and Boko Haram have become notorious in recent years for enslaving women and girls.

In July 2023 the media company Angel Studios released the motion picture *Sound of Freedom*—based on a true story about a former U.S. government agent rescuing children from ruthless child traffickers. The film has heightened the public's awareness of the worldwide impact of child sex slavery, even as the mainstream media maintains virtual silence on the topic and its evils.

Kevin Bales, a professor of Contemporary Slavery at the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation at the University of Hull in the United Kingdom, has authored 13 books on the subject.

In his first, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, Prof. Bales made this shocking statement: “Slavery is a booming business and the number of slaves is increasing. People get rich by using slaves. And when they’ve finished with their slaves, they just *throw these people away*. This is the new slavery, which focuses on big profits and cheap lives. It is not about owning people in the traditional sense of the old slavery, but about controlling them completely. People become *completely disposable tools* for making money” (2004, p. 4, emphasis added throughout).

The theft of an entire life

Trafficked individuals are often coerced to work for little or no financial compensation and are under constant



threat of punishment. Bales made this significant point: “Slavery is an obscenity. It is not just stealing someone’s labor; *it is the theft of an entire life*. It is more closely related to the concentration camp than to questions of bad working conditions” (p. 7).

Whether hidden away or even working in plain sight, most subjugated victims cannot find a way to escape their captivity. They may be forced to work in agricultural jobs, in garment and textile factories, on construction sites and in domestic service in private homes under abusive conditions.

Many trafficking victims, both adults and children, suffer the horrors of sexual exploitation in prostitution businesses and forced marriage. For some, there might even be nightmarish compulsory organ removal in make-shift operating rooms in residences.

Human traffickers typically, though not exclusively, target people of low socioeconomic status—those with little income, wealth or opportunity. This includes people of cultural or ethnic minorities, those who are homeless, are immigrants, have suffered domestic violence or sexual abuse or have been subject to political or economic turmoil or armed conflict.

Traffickers may operate independently but are often part of criminal networks, such as smugglers, gangs and even seemingly legitimate business operators providing a front. Those involved in recruiting prey on unwary targets with bogus promises of lucrative employment, educational opportunities or even romance. Anti-Slavery International, the world’s oldest human rights

organization, states on its website:

“Many people who fall victim of trafficking want to escape poverty, improve their lives, and support their families. Often they get an offer of a well-paid job abroad or in another region. Often they borrow money from their traffickers in advance to pay for arranging the job, travel and accommodation. When they arrive they find that the work they applied for does not exist, or the conditions are completely different. But it’s too late, their documents are often taken away and they are forced to work until their debt is paid off.”

According to a September 2017 report, *Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking*, the Geneva-based International Labor Organization (ILO) explained that “an estimated 40.3 million people were victims of modern slavery in 2016 . . . One in four victims of modern slavery were children . . . Children represented 18 per cent of those subjected to forced labour exploitation” (pp. 9-10).

Further: “Women and girls are disproportionately affected by modern slavery, accounting for 28.7 million, or 71 per cent of the overall total. More precisely, women and girls represent 99 per cent of victims of forced labour in the commercial sex industry and 58 per cent in other sectors” (p. 10).

Victims of sex trafficking

A Focus on the Family website article, “How to Identify the Victims and Perpetrators of Sex Trafficking,” states: “Victims of sex trafficking are often young girls who have run away from abusive situations at home and are quickly picked up by traffickers who coerce them into prostitution by promising food, shelter or clothing. Other recruiting methods include befriending vulnerable-looking girls at malls, movie theaters and even schools.

“The recruiter could be a young man posing as a dot-ing boyfriend or another girl who appears to be friendly. According to the FBI, traffickers use force, drugs, emotional tactics, and financial methods to control their victims. Often, recruiters may find ways to form a strong bond with young girls—for instance, they may promise marriage or a lifestyle the girls have not had in their families of origin” (Dawn McBane, Jan. 1, 2014).

While people often think of human trafficking in terms of victims being kidnapped and transported across state or national borders, as does happen, many victims remain in their home areas. Says Dr. Megan Letson, program director for the Child Abuse Pediatrics Fellowship at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio:

“Victims of trafficking don’t always look, act or think as you would expect. Not all victims of human sex trafficking are kidnapped and locked away. Many attend school but may have frequent absences. They may fear or ‘love’ their trafficker. And finally, they may feel shame. The shame is

very powerful in keeping them quiet and preventing them from asking for help” (“Human Trafficking: What Parents Need to Know,” NationwideChildrens.org, Oct. 23, 2017).

In this regard, all parents need to cultivate a loving relationship with their adolescent children while educating and cautioning about these dangers. This is because traffickers can entice them via the Internet through social media and eventually move on to meeting them in person. Young people from *any* socioeconomic group in *any* country can be targets of these and other entrapment schemes. In fact, police raids of sex trafficking operations have rescued adolescent girls from affluent homes in supposedly “safe” neighborhoods.

A helpful article well worth reading is “How to Talk About Human Trafficking With Children and Adolescents,” available on the Baylor University School of Education’s online doctorate of education program website (just google the title).

There are organizations in many countries that inform citizens about the evils of human trafficking and actively work with law-enforcement agencies to combat it. In the United States these groups encourage anyone who suspects this is occurring among people they are aware of to call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or their local police. In Canada the hotline number is 1-833-900-1010. For many other countries, hotline phone numbers are available at the European Commission’s *Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings* website.

A world held captive

Through the evil of human trafficking, many people are callously brought to ruin and then discarded like useless trash. However, the absolute truth is that no human being is disposable! In the Bible, the Creator makes it abundantly clear that all people are precious since He made them *in His own image and likeness* (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-2). As a result, He commands everyone to love their neighbors as themselves (Leviticus 19:18) and to treat others as they themselves would like to be treated (Luke 6:31).

So why don’t people behave this way? Why is the world experiencing not only the criminal behavior of human trafficking but countless other forms of evil? What’s wrong with our world?

Part of the answer involves the fact that God created human beings with free will. Each person is granted moral liberty, which is the option to choose between good and evil. But it’s also critical to understand the sinister and yet unseen influence of Satan the devil, the powerful spirit being described in Scripture as “the ruler of this world” and “the god of this age” (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4). (For more on this important subject, download or request our free study guide *Is There Really a Devil?*)

The evil we witness in society is the result of Satan’s

Through the evil of human trafficking, many people are callously brought to ruin and then discarded like trash. **But no human being is disposable!**

direct impact on the minds of human beings—on their thoughts, emotions and desires. The result of this constant influence is that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).

Simply put, human society is *enslaved* to the devil. He has effectively *kidnapped* mankind, the world having fallen into “the snare of the devil, having been *taken captive* by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:26).

This is why the world is filled with so much iniquity, including that of human trafficking.

The influence of the slave master

Satan’s goal is to keep human beings separated from God in order to prevent them from developing a close relationship with Him and ultimately achieving their spiritual destiny of becoming divine children in His Kingdom (2 Corinthians 6:18). Satan also advances the erroneous notion that self-promotion, rivalry and retaliation against others are good and smart and should be pursued. He coaxes them to put satisfying *their own needs and wants* well above humbly caring about and helping others (Galatians 5:13; 6:2; Philippians 2:3).

The result of following the devil’s sinister campaign of elevating self-centeredness over self-sacrifice is that society has unceasingly experienced horrendous and monumental evils. These involve chronic poverty, war, chaos, immorality, disease and countless other dreadful traumas, including that of human trafficking (Isaiah 59:7-8).

Indeed, under the constant, dissolute influence of the devil as slave master, people are locked up in a barren, unfruitful, spiritual condition (Romans 3:10-13).

What does all this say about human beings as they try to determine how to live without the guidance of their Creator? The prophet Jeremiah explained that “it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Generation after generation, humanity has demonstrated the stark impact of those powerful words through crushing and unrelenting suffering and heartache.

The path to freedom

Is there a solution to this seemingly intractable situation? Yes, and interestingly Paul provides the answer by employing the analogy of slavery.

He writes: “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin [disobedience to God’s law] leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But

God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you

became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18).

To be liberated from the devil’s captivity to evil and corruption, people must effectively become—in a different, positive way—slaves to “holy conduct and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11). This is the *one and only* way forward.

Those God calls out of this subjugated, despoiled society have the marvelous opportunity to escape the bondage to Satan’s enticement toward sin and rebellion. Although God is not calling everyone out of the devil’s captivity at this time, He may be calling *you*.

If so, what should you do? The first step in responding positively to God’s invitation is to allow Him to wash Satan’s influence from your mind and heart by recognizing and acknowledging your sins, repenting of them and striving diligently to obey His commandments.

When you surrender your life to God, exercising faith in Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins and then receiving God’s gift of His Holy Spirit, you begin the spiritually enlightening process of conversion. (To learn much more, download or request our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.)

While some people will turn to God now, many others will not, since Satan’s deception is so dominant—being demonstrated by all the malevolent conduct plaguing society, including that of human trafficking.

Despite the best efforts of today’s governments and organizations to combat modern slavery, it will not only continue but actually grow worse in the years ahead. Bible prophecy warns that a powerful global empire will arise in the future that will utilize human bondage as one of various methods to maintain its supremacy. As Revelation 18:13 explains, it will traffic in the “bodies and souls of men.”

But we can be thankful that this evil, Satan-dominated empire will be short-lived since it will be utterly destroyed by Jesus Christ at His second coming when He installs the Kingdom of God on earth (see Revelation 11:15). Christ will then terminate the reprehensible influence of Satan and the demons, who will be banished.

After that great event occurs, the terrible scourge of human trafficking and all other evils will finally come to an end. May God bring about that awesome, spectacular day very soon! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



It’s awful to contemplate some things people go through. Why does God allow suffering? To help make sense of it, read our Bible study aid *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf24 to find it.



More Archaeological Finds Support the Biblical Record

Archaeological discoveries in and about the Holy Land often relate to the Bible. Following is an annotated list of recent finds.

by Tom Robinson



Recently found ivory furniture inlays from the 8th-7th centuries B.C. indicate Jerusalem's ancient wealth, as the Bible describes.

Ivory plaques show the opulence of Jerusalem in the kingdom era (Sept. 5, 2022). A trove of 1,500 ivory fragments from the remains of a monumental building being excavated alongside Jerusalem's City of David area was discovered through the process of wet sifting. These were determined to be the remnants of at least 12 two-inch square plaques—with geometric shapes, lotuses, trees and rosettes carved into them—that were likely decorative inlays for wooden furniture.

The building, perhaps the home of Jewish elites or royalty, was apparently destroyed when the city fell to the Babylonians in the 6th century B.C. Other luxury goods were also found in it—vanilla-spiced wine, special serving dishes and a rare agate seal.

Ivory has been found at other ancient capital cities, such as Nimrud and Samaria, being linked to wealth and royalty. The plaques give evidence of Iron Age Jerusalem having such prosperity and prominence, as the Bible describes. They also help illustrate what ivory-inlaid furniture described in Scripture may have looked like, such as Solomon's ivory throne, Ahab's palace adorned with ivory and the beds of ivory of the nobility (1 Kings 10:18; 22:39; Amos 6:4).

Affirming biblical events with geomagnetic field data (Oct. 24, 2022). Destruction dates at various Iron Age sites in Israel have been clarified through a recent study using archaeomagnetism, concerning tiny ferromagnetic particles in material heated at high temperatures, such as pottery kiln objects or fire debris, acting like a compass in aligning with the earth's magnetosphere, which fluctuates over time.

Analyzing the residual magnetic signature of hundreds of objects of known dates has revealed the earth's magnetic field intensity and direction through different periods. This is especially helpful for dating remains from around 1000-500 B.C., when radiocarbon dating does not provide sufficiently detailed date ranges.

A question about whether Beth Shean was destroyed by the Egyptian invasion in the 10th century B.C. or by Syria in the 9th has been answered—it was in the 9th. Beth Shemesh is shown to have been destroyed at the beginning of the 8th century B.C., which does not fit with any known foreign invasion but supports the Bible, which refers to a battle at Beth Shemesh between Judah and Israel at that time (2 Kings 14:11-12).

It's also been shown that many cities in southern Judah were not destroyed in the final Babylonian invasion but suffered destruction a while later—likely at the hands of the neighboring Edomites, matching with what the Bible recorded and foretold about the Edomites supporting and piling on Judah's destruction (Psalm 137:7-8; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15).

Reexamination of stone fragment reveals monumental inscription of Hezekiah (Oct. 26, 2022). A hand-sized limestone fragment was discovered in 2007 in excavations around ancient Jerusalem's Gihon Spring by archaeologists Eli Shukron and Ronny Reich. It contains two lines of ancient Hebrew text that were published, but the full potential now brought out by Shukron and epigrapher Gershon Galil was not then recognized.

The first line was read as *zqyh* or *zekiah* and reconstructed as Hezekiah, who was king of Judah at the end of the 8th century B.C. A new technique called Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI)—with numerous digital images from different angles combined to form a sharper 3-D rendering—has now confirmed the initial H or *heh*. In the second line is reconstructed the word *bricha*, meaning “pool,” though with the first letter broken off. This matches with Hezekiah being connected to the construction of pools and water works and the fact that this fragment was found at such a pool location.

While Hezekiah's existence has been well attested in archaeology, such as on the prisms of King Sennacherib of Assyria and on several bullae or clay seal impressions, there were heretofore no Israelite monument-style inscriptions, such as stelae, mentioning him or any other kings of ancient Israel and Judah, such as is found in Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. Yet Shukron and Galil believe this fragment to be part of one.

A stone of the same type and lettering was found a bit farther south of the Gihon Spring in 1978 with the word “seventeenth” or “seventeen,”

which might refer to the 17th year of Hezekiah's reign. Together, these seem to be part of a monumental inscription commemorating Hezekiah's construction, perhaps similar to the memorial summation in 2 Kings 20:20: "Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah—all his might, and how he made a pool and a tunnel and brought water into the city . . ."

Some scholars have objected to these conclusions and other findings of Galil based on antibiblical academic theories about the origin and development of the Israelite nation, the alphabet and Hebrew language.

New study of Mesha Stele said to confirm "House of David" reference (Jan. 12, 2023).



New imaging of the Mesha Stele, or Moabite Stone, supports reading of "house of David."

The Mesha Stele or Moabite Stone, a basalt upright slab dated to around 840 B.C. that was discovered east of the Dead Sea in 1868 and sits in the Louvre Museum in Paris, bears an inscription in Moabite writing, very close to paleo-Hebrew, that has many points of contact with biblical references.

Before it suffered further damage, a paper-mache impression was made of the inscription in 1869. Most famously, it has been read to refer

to the "house of David" (*btdwd*) though that has been contested. Some biblical minimalists who famously deny a Davidic kingdom had suggested the name should read Balak, a much earlier Moabite king also mentioned in the Bible, though it's unclear why he would be named in the account.

Using new RTI imaging (mentioned earlier) on both the etched stone and the paper impression, respected epigrapher Andre Lemaire and Jean-Philippe Delorme recently declared the reading to be confirmed as David. But their conclusions were challenged in a subsequent article in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, its authors maintaining that while the inscription could perhaps read "house of David," two letters are still question marks and more letters might have followed—that is, "*b??wd* . . ." Disagreements will likely continue.

In any case, the Moabite Stone's inscription bears other clear connections to the Bible in the early monarchy period—the divine name YHWH, Israel six times, Omri the king of Israel, the men of Gad (this Israelite tribe having settled east of the Jordan, north of Moab), and the

Moabite king Mesha.

In fact, the inscription gives a lengthy account of the latter going to war against Israel, corresponding, though not precisely, with a similar account in 2 Kings 3. This chapter says Judah and Edom were allied together with Israel against Moab, giving context for mentioning the house of David in the stone. Furthermore, another inscription from earlier in the 800s B.C., the Tel Dan Stele, mentions the "house of David."

New translation of jar inscription ties Solomon's Jerusalem to incense from Sheba (March 25, 2023).

An inscription on a 10th-century-B.C. pithos or large pottery storage jar found in 2012 in the Ophel excavations between Jerusalem's City of David and the Temple Mount proved difficult for translators who had assumed it's in ancient Canaanite script.

But epigrapher Daniel Vainstub has realized it's actually from the related Sabaean alphabet of Sheba in southern Arabia. He thus translates the inscription as referring to *ladanum*, a brown aromatic resin from Sheba that was an ingredient in the incense used in Israel's worship (Exodus 30:34-38). It was found among the fragments of six other large jars, showing high usage at this time in the 900s B.C., when Solomon reigned as king. So, it's reasoned, this must have been mainly for Solomon's temple.

While the jars were manufactured from clay in Israel, the script flows naturally as from a native Sabaean writer who wrote on the jar before it was fired. This suggests that a scribe from Sheba was involved in the industry of these jars for resin imports from Sheba. The link here between Israel and Sheba gives strong support to the biblical story of the Queen of Sheba visiting Jerusalem at the time of Solomon (1 Kings 10).

As we see time and again, such finds help to demonstrate that the Bible is not a record of myth but of true history! For more corroboration of the biblical record, be sure to send for or download our free study guide *Is the Bible True?* [BT](#)



One of six large jars excavated in Jerusalem bore a Sabaean inscription for an aromatic resin *ladanum*, used in Israelite temple worship, tying Israel to Sheba at the time of Solomon, as the Bible shows.

Plans advanced for a European superstate

Late October saw European militaries for the first time operating under a single flag in conducting a joint drill. “They were welcomed by the head of the EU’s foreign policy wing Josep Borrell, who subsequently emphasised the need to accelerate the creation of an EU army in the face of geopolitical insecurity” (“EU Army Debuts During Spanish Naval Exercises,” *The European Conservative*, Oct. 24, 2023).

In November, a call to reform the European Union treaty agreements in convention narrowly passed by less than half the members of the European Parliament due to many abstentions (“The Little-Noticed Vote to Change the EU Treaties,” *Euractiv*, Nov. 23). This approved plans “to remove the national veto for EU member states in the latest attempted power grab by Brussels to wrestle control away from national governments” (“European Lawmakers Vote for Abolition of Member State Vetoes in Latest EU Power Grab,” *Remix News*, Nov. 22).

When the plan emerged from committee the month before, there were some dissenting voices. An MEP from Poland, one of the main negotiators for Poland’s EU membership, said the public was not supposed to notice that a silent putsch with communist roots was



European Parliament building in Strasbourg, France.

underway, warning that the European Union is being transformed into an undemocratic superstate (“A Superstate Is Being Created Without Any Consent of the People, Warns Polish MEP Jacek Saryusz-Wolski,” *Remix News*, Oct. 27).

The plan reduces the role of member nations to that of regional states within a federal country. Subsequent treaties would be adopted by a 4/5 majority of member states, instead of requiring unanimity. And if you go through all the jurisdiction “the EU would get—environment, climate, forestry, public health, cross-border transport infrastructure, external border policy, foreign affairs, internal security affairs, defense affairs, civil defense, industry, education . . . there is not much left to the member states” (*ibid.*).

The co-chairman of the European Conservatives and Reformists said this is “. . . living proof of how dangerous the EU has become.” He warned that “. . . the EU would have institutions that could impose moral and philosophical issues on its citizens, and will have instruments to punish those who have different views” (“EU Parliament to Vote on ‘Dystopian Superstate’ Proposal,” *The European Conservative*, Nov. 22, 2023). Indeed, that was already underway before this vote (“EU’s Draconian Social Media Censorship Laws Are Now Officially Enforceable,” *ZeroHedge*, Aug. 28).

In the words of the Polish MEP, “Do you want a superstate where a caste of Eurocrats will rule without control of the citizens? . . . The problem is that Europe has been hijacked, it has been stolen. Just as Zeus, in the form of a bull, abducted Europa . . .”

Bible prophecy reveals the rise of a tyrannical revival of the Roman Empire in the end time called the Beast—yet it is a union that will be partly brittle and partly strong. Further efforts toward European integration and centralization bring us closer to the appearance of this final Roman revival. To learn more, send for or download our free study guide *The Final Superpower*.

Europe looks to internationalize Gaza, while Vatican seeks that for Jerusalem

The fighting between Israel and Hamas could have far-reaching implications involving Europe. As reported at EUObserver: “Gaza might become an international protectorate after the war, the EU has said, adding that neither Palestinian group Hamas nor Israel should ever rule there again . . . Said European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen . . . ‘There can be no long-term Israeli security presence in Gaza. Gaza is an essential part of any future Palestinian state’” (“Neither Hamas Nor Israel Should Rule Gaza in Future, EU Says,” Nov. 6, 2023).

A few days before, Reuters reported: “Pope Francis said [Nov. 1] . . . a two-state solution was needed for Israel and Palestine in order to put an end to wars such as the current one and called for a special status for Jerusalem . . . Israel captured Arab East Jerusalem in 1967 and in 1980 declared the entire city its ‘united and eternal



capital.’ Palestinians see the eastern part of the city as the capital of an eventual future state. Israel has consistently rejected suggestions that the city, which is sacred to Christians, Muslims and Jews, could have a special, or international, status” (“Pope Says Two-State Solution Needed for Israel-Palestine,” Nov. 6, 2023).

Could the European position on the status of Gaza be a precursor to an eventual mandated international “peacekeeping force” to be in

control of Jerusalem? That could lead into end-time events.

Putting together various prophecies in the Bible, it is evident that the leader of a power to the north of the Holy Land (a European revival of the Roman Empire) and his forces will occupy much of the Middle East, later entering the Holy Land, even moving his seat of government there (see Daniel 11:40-45). Jesus mentioned Jerusalem being surrounded by armies and the defiling of the holy place as signs to watch for of a coming time of great tribulation (Matthew 24:15-22; Luke 21:20-24). In conjunction with that, the apostle Paul also foretold the coming of an apostate religious leader who would seat himself at the temple before being destroyed at Christ’s return (2 Thessalonians 2:3-9).

For more on where events are ultimately headed, send for or download our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

Shock finding: Nearly half of Israeli Jews no longer believe in a coming Messiah

According to a recent survey designed by two U.S. Jewish professors and conducted by the Geocartography Knowledge Group, “nearly half of all Israeli Jews have given up believing that the Messiah is real and coming at any time in the future. When asked by researchers, ‘Do you believe the Messiah is coming?’ . . . a mere 54.9% of Israeli Jews say ‘yes.’ Fully 45.1% say ‘no.’ No one [in the survey group] said, ‘I don’t know’” (Joel Rosenberg, “Giving Up on Messiah? Shocking New Survey Finds Nearly Half of Israeli Jews Don’t Believe Messiah Will Ever Really Come to Earth,” All Israel News, May 21, 2023).

There is a huge chasm between right- and left-wing voters on the matter. Among supporters of Orthodox political parties, 93.8 percent still believe the Messiah will come. Yet among those voting for left-wing parties, only 15 percent accept a coming Messiah. Of those voting for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party, 54.9 percent believe in a coming Messiah—mirroring the overall view of the country.

The survey didn’t ask why belief in a Messiah has plummeted. But the sad fact is that “large numbers of Israelis have stopped reading the Jewish scriptures. They might

have grown up hearing the Bible read in the synagogue. But they are not reading the Torah or the prophets for themselves. So, they’re not focusing on the specific prophecies that describe who the coming Messiah will be, much less taking those prophecies to heart” (ibid.).

Of course we recognize that the Messiah, the divine King of the line of David who will deliver the Jews and the whole world, has already come. His name was Jesus—Yeshua in Hebrew, as He was a Jew. Many Jews became His followers—along with people of other nations. But the vast majority of the Jewish people did not—and they have sorely

missed out on so many blessings in that regard for now.

Sadly, the waywardness of the Jewish people in turning from even what they have known of God will bring terrible judgment in the calamities soon to come upon the world, as other nations will also experience. But beyond that, the same Messiah who has already come will come again—and this time He will be revealed to the Jewish people, who will deeply repent and receive Him at last, along with all the Israelite peoples and the world at large (see Zechariah 12:7–13:1; Romans 11:25–27). May God speed that wonderful day.

Shocking reactions to Israel-Hamas conflict, rising antisemitism

Here are some surprising statistics and developments in the wake of Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023 terror attacks on Israel and Israel’s military response.

- “A public opinion poll published on November 14 showed that 75% of Palestinians support Hamas’s murder spree, including rape and beheadings, as opposed to only 13% who disapprove . . . Support . . . is even higher in the West Bank [under the Palestinian Authority],” per Arab World for Research and Development (Gatestone Institute, Nov. 20).

- “80% of the Palestinians reject both the ‘one-state’ and ‘two-state’ solutions, and instead demand *all* the territory . . . the entire State of Israel within *any* borders” (ibid.).

- “57% of US Muslims believe Hamas atrocities justified,” per Cygnal poll (FrontPage Magazine, Oct. 22, 2023).

- “Shock poll: Majority of American 18-24 year olds think Hamas

slaughter of 1,200 Israeli civilians justified,” Harvard CAPS Harris Poll (Revolver.news, Oct. 22).

- “After failing to condemn Hamas terror group, UN adopts eight resolutions condemning Jewish state” (Fox News, Nov. 10).



- “Antisemitic crimes up by over 1,350 per cent in London amid Israel war” (Breitbart, Oct. 21).

- “Anti-Semitism resurges in Germany [much of it from Muslims] . . . Some 2,000 cases linked to the Israel-Hamas conflict have been reported so far [in November]” (AFP, Nov. 7).

Sense of purpose promotes brain function amid aging and difficulty

According to recent research published in the journal *Alzheimer’s Research & Therapy*, having a stronger sense of purpose in life may promote “the capacity of the brain to cope with stressors, injuries and pathology, and resist the development of symptoms or disabilities” as people age—with “one specific brain network, the dorsal Default Mode Network, showing greater functional connections within its components and with other brain areas,” correlating with cognitive performance (“Study Suggests Strong Sense of Purpose in Life Promotes Cognitive Resilience Among Middle-Aged Adults,” April 19, 2023).

Harvard neurologist Dr. Alvaro Pascual-Leone, memory health center director at Hebrew SeniorLife, concludes, “What is also exciting is that each of us, with appropriate guidance and support, can develop and sustain a robust sense of purpose and thus contribute to



our brain health and well-being” (ibid.).

Of course, the ultimate support and guidance come from our Creator, Almighty God, through His Word, the Bible. And it’s here that we find the ultimate purpose for our lives—the greatest purpose one could ever imagine. To help you see that purpose spelled out in the Bible, be sure to download or request our free study guide *Why Were You Born?* It will help to arm your mind with the greatest protection against the confusions and troubles of this world, giving liberty and strength to live a more fruitful and fulfilling life.

They Shall Learn War No More!

As threats of catastrophic warfare loom over the world scene, we should focus on God's promises to bring lasting peace and our need to live His way of peace today.

by Robin Webber

Writing this column around Armistice Day this past November (now called Veterans Day in America), my thoughts were on the day's commemoration of the end of World War I. On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, the weapons of war stopped their roar, church bells rang in jubilation, and birds could again be heard on the fields of Europe. By the *armistice* (a term derived from roots meaning "armaments stilled"), the so-called "Great War" or "War to End All Wars" concluded.

Naivete over social progress assumed people had advanced beyond the savagery of our ancestors, but they clearly had not! Ultimately, around 20 million people died. Then just 21 years later came World War II, which by conservative estimates consumed 40 to 50 million lives and displaced millions of others. And wars have continued to be waged since it ended in 1945.

If you're reading this column in early 2024, the Russia-Ukraine war and the widening Middle East crisis (again!) are likely still proceeding. And red flags of concern are raised by various voices regarding possible unintended consequences ushering in World War III!

Let's face it: Escalating global conflict alongside the tsunami of ungodly and immoral societal challenges can paralyze even the hearts of Jesus Christ's disciples. It's time, then, to settle our hearts as we heed Jesus' personal invitation of "*Follow Me*" (Luke 9:23; John 10:27), carefully reading and absorbing the hope-filled promises in Scripture regarding His dynamic intervention coming to full fruition.

Rescuing humanity from itself

Let's start with a bullhorn-scale announcement of both warning and comfort Jesus gave in a prophecy of end-time events: "*It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again.* If that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive*; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus does *not* promise His followers that it will be a time of ease. People will be at their wits' end. Satan, the archenemy of all made in God's image, will seemingly have

victory at hand. Jesus' own devoted followers will cry out, "How long, O Lord . . . ?" (Revelation 6:10). Perhaps you're already at that point.

However, our Heavenly Father is sending His Son, our champion, to interrupt human history to change things forever. The One who created time is the Master of timing and will know precisely when to intervene to save humanity from itself. If too soon, many might think, *We just need more time to do it our way*. Yet if too late, there would be no one left alive!

Let's turn down the "noise machine" of this age and hear the clear instruction of the *I AM*: "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalm 46:10-11). Again, does that mean times ahead are going to be easy? No! Jesus is brutally honest in His description. Nevertheless, He promised, loud and clear, there would be a sunrise beyond humanity's self-made storm.

Why does Jesus need to interrupt history to rescue humanity? Scripture explains: "*The way of peace they have not known*, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; *whoever takes that way shall not know peace*" (Isaiah 59:8). Mankind rejected our Creator's roadmap to abundant life in the Garden of Eden. Is it any wonder that in thousands of years of known history, there have been only about 300 to 400 years of relative peace?

In his famous novel *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy hit the nail on the head in having a character say, "Drain the blood from men's veins and put in water instead, then there will be no more war." In saying essentially that war is in the blood, he meant it's ingrained in what we are. James 4:1-2 confirms that wars and fights come from wayward desires in our corrupted fleshly nature.

The ultimate war to end all wars

A vision of the great heavenly interruption revealed in Daniel 2 is explained in these terms: "And in the days of these kings [a group of end-time rulers] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall



Are you pursuing the ingrained way of war, or receiving Christ's forgiveness and extending forgiveness to others?

stand forever" (verse 44).

Symbolizing this Kingdom and its King is a stone cut out without hands that smashes the world's governments and takes over (verse 45). The King is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the stone rejected by people but chosen of God (Psalm 118:22; 1 Peter 2:4; Matthew 3:17). And the Kingdom He brings will rule forever.

With the coming of that Kingdom the world will undergo fundamental change. Isaiah 2:4 says of people then, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." Instead, they will learn a different way to live, going to God to be taught His ways from His Word (verse 3).

During that future rule under our Master and Savior, people's inner hearts and minds will be changed as they are exposed to: 1) transformative life-giving "water" that flows from Christ, referring to the Holy Spirit (John 7:37); and 2) rather than shedding other people's blood, dying to self as they surrender to God's will, experiencing Christ's lifesaving and enduring sacrificial blood for the forgiveness of their sins (Romans 4:7).

Our Heavenly Father has sent and will send His beloved Son as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He sent Him as the Lamb of God to die in our place (John 1:29), and He

will send Him again, as the Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5), to wage the ultimate war to end all wars, not just in overpowering those arrayed against Him, but in melting the resistance to Him that resides in man's present nature (see Romans 8:7).

The big question for you

So a question for you today that only you can personally answer: *Whose blood are you living according to at this time*—that of your fleshly human nature or that of Jesus Christ? Are you pursuing the ingrained way of war, or receiving Christ's forgiveness and extending forgiveness to others?

The peace that God offers and requires is not devoid of effort but is transformative in every way in every chapter of life. After all, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers"—not merely the peace hoppers (Matthew 5:9). It begins with a thought expressed by the poet Robert Browning: "When the fight begins

within himself, a man's worth something."

The ongoing invitation from above of "*Follow Me*" challenges us to not only lay down our arms but to transform our personal swords into plowshares to lovingly till the soil of humanity within our sphere of influence. It further challenges us to transform our personal spears into pruning hooks to gather godly fruit and responsibly reach into other lives in helpful ways by not merely what we say but what we do.

Till next time: As we are confronted with today's new headlines, stop, turn down everyone else's voices—for there are many who want to live rent free in your mind—and look *up*, not around. And remember whom we follow, as He guides us to serve Him towards a new age of which God declares in Isaiah 11:9, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain [His Kingdom]." May that Kingdom come! And may we live according to that Kingdom even now! **BT**

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Many are unaware that the gospel Jesus brought was good news about the coming of world peace, offering the only hope of human survival. To help you understand this much-needed message, download or request our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf24 to find it.



Don't Quit

Keep Playing

In struggling through life's hardships, know that you are not alone. You have a Great Master who will see you through and help you succeed.

by Terri Eddington

A tale is told of a mother taking her young son to a renowned pianist's concert to inspire the boy regarding his piano lessons. Arriving early, the mother went to speak with nearby friends, leaving her son at their seats. The boy grew restless and wandered off to explore the concert hall. Soon the lights dimmed. The mother returned to discover her son missing right when the curtains parted. The spotlights focused on the magnificent Steinway piano and, to her horror, her son seated at it. He began an elementary, two-fingered pluck of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

The audience jeered, but the boy tinkered away. Before she could act, the great master appeared from behind the curtain and walked briskly to the keyboard. The crowd fell silent, anticipating a stern admonition. Instead, he leaned over the child's small frame and was heard whispering, "Don't quit, keep playing." His left hand reached down and accompanied on the bass. His right arm wrapped around the boy, and he added a running obbligato. Together, the great master and young novice mesmerized the crowd with their music.

Consider that however rudimentary we may feel at times in our *spiritual* pursuit, this anecdote is a poignant reminder of our Great Master's arms wrapped around each of us. He does not call the equipped, but He does equip the called, augmenting and supplementing to create a masterpiece within those He calls His own. Scripture relates how God personally engages in our development and success.

There have been times in my life when I denied myself the blessing of recognizing the Great Master working by my side. Instead of focusing on Him when difficulties fogged my view, I agonized over nuances and uncertainties over which I had no control, resulting in little more than anxiety and a floundering, murky perspective. On reflection, the search for equilibrium and clarity has brought several reorienting principles to the forefront.

Find your strength in God

Following God never "just happens." Being a disciple takes deliberate intention to give up our own will, pick up our cross and follow no matter the cost. There may be times in our discipleship when emotional or physical pain consumes us with such sorrow that it feels as though our innermost parts are unraveling. Or as Job experienced, loneliness, hurt and disappointment run deep when human encouragements seemingly evaporate. For some, pain from the past may linger into the present, or our own thoughts may hold us captive.

The truth is, our enemy has great power. But let us label him for what he ultimately is—a defeated foe. So why do we listen to the thoughts he puts in our head? Our Great Master is greater, and our strength must come from Him.

We cannot always control what happens to us, but we can be assured God does not randomly allow trials in our lives just to make us fearful. Nor are our lives simply an exercise in futile anxiety. He does not play with or experiment on our faith. When we love God and have His Spirit dwelling in us, He works to prepare us for His coming Kingdom. Everything we experience is to transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, and nothing is wasted.

Faith tells us that wherever we're going, He is already there—so we can find strength and hope by seeing that which is unseen. As His plan for us unfolds, we can trust that He is in control and that He will never leave us. Take time to see the unseen. Make a list of the ways God has actively worked in your life, and thank Him.

Read 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18, and identify the profoundly personal relationship God has with each of us. From these passages we can draw this hope:

- When I am anxious, He is my Rock.
- When I am defenseless, He is my Fortress.
- When I am distressed, He is my Deliverer.
- When I am weary, He is my Strength.
- When I am encircled with evil, He is my Shield.



However rudimentary we may feel, our Great Master is augmenting and supplementing to create a masterpiece within those He calls His own.

- When I am vulnerable, He is my Refuge.
- When I am in despair, He is my Support.
- When I am lost, He is my Lamp.

Isaiah puts it this way: “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31, New International Version).

Ask yourself: Have I ever been disappointed with someone for not being as supportive as I felt I needed? If so, have I contemplated that perhaps God wants me to find my strength in Him and not from reliance on others? Would I be willing to forgive those I believe failed me and consider what God really wants from me?

Understand the perspective of God's priorities

Significant difficulties leave us with significant questions. Before the long haul of troubles invaded our lives, perhaps we were content with our understanding of God's sovereignty and the way He works. However, when the issues are not just theoretical but very real, solace isn't found in religious platitudes. We want answers as we try to make sense of our infirmities and uncertainties. Sometimes there are no easy answers. Questioning God's whereabouts when we feel abandoned is a very human response, showing how desperately we need His mercy and grace.

Often the eternal reasons for our suffering are masked, and the truth is only discoverable as His Spirit illuminates our understanding to see that His utmost desire is for us

to grow into the likeness of His Son. There will always be trials unique to us, because they are a part of our preparation. Only when this understanding becomes ingrained in our thinking will we find the peace that transcends, releasing us from anger, disappointment or bitterness toward God.

In Matthew 6:8-10 Jesus shows us how to pray: “For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

We are told our Father already knows exactly what we need even before we ask. So there must be more to prayer than simply presenting our needs. For if He already knows them, then why ask? The prayer begins by recognizing God as our Father and us as His children. Then we are to honor Him and anticipate and welcome His Kingdom on earth, longing for the day when He reigns over the nations and seeking to be aligned with His will. Why? Because to pray in this way allows our mindset to transcend the physical.

Reflect on this: By praying in this prescribed way, I change *how I think*. It helps me recognize God's priorities, keep focused on the higher purpose and modify my outlook to be more aligned with His.

Irritation is a teacher

Consider the only gem produced by the stress and irritation of an undesired intrusion, the pearl. When an outsider intrudes into the home of an oyster, its defensive response is to secrete a blend of minerals creating nacre, encasing the irritant and keeping the oyster safe and comfortable. Nacre has extraordinary strength and resilience, being lighter yet stronger than concrete and as durable as silicone. Layer by layer over time, a gem of great beauty is produced through stress and irritation, without which there would be no pearl.

A helpful sermon I listened to made this point: “If we love God and are called according to His purpose, everything we experience, good and bad, helps to transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. When you are a child of

God, nothing is wasted. Even painful events and experiences are part of a grand purpose.”

God’s method of producing spiritual growth involves irritants intruding into our lives. These can include disappointments, relationship difficulties, anxiety, illness or other issues arising from our own imperfections. How we respond to these determines our closeness to God and development of spiritual maturity. Faith tells us God is working something out in our lives. This perspective is crucial to avoiding resentment and becoming disciples with mature character. When we respond to trials in faith, we build resilient endurance (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4).

Faith does not mean we are kept from trials but that we recognize *they serve a spiritual purpose*. Whenever I struggle to maintain this outlook, it’s helpful to say aloud to myself, “God’s plan for me is right on schedule.” If we find ourselves losing this perspective, we should, as James 1:5 tells us, ask God in faith for wisdom, and it will be given to us. Stop and ask Him to grant the wisdom and perspective we need to forge ahead.

Famed Christian author C.S. Lewis borrowed an analogy from author George MacDonald in writing: “Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense.

“What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself” (*Mere Christianity*, 1952, p. 205).

Consider: There will be heartaches, frustrations, regrets, physical and emotional obstacles that may succeed in sapping our resolve—but a hopeless response to suffering can become an impediment to our faith. So ask yourself: Will I tell my story from the perspective of a victim or as a hero, from despair or hope, woundedness or survival, fear or courage, emotional resentment or forgiveness, a physical mindset or a spiritual mindset?

Accepting the challenges God will not remove

A difficult aspect of the human struggle has been in reconciling a loving God who has the ability to eliminate sufferings, injustices and atrocities but chooses not to. How can we believe He shares in our sorrows, cares for us and loves us when He hears our cries yet allows us to endure hardship?

In this context, Hebrews 5:7-8 is a helpful meditation

passage. We see a glimpse into the very personal struggle the human Jesus Christ felt in anticipation of His intense suffering and torturous execution. Three times He petitioned with anxious cries and tears of blood to the One who could deliver Him from what was to unfold. He beseeched God to remove it and perhaps find another way. He wrestled in emotional and mental anguish (Luke 22:42; Matthew 26:38). But then, He showed His faithful acceptance and reverent submission to the perfect plan when it was not removed from before Him.

Hebrews 12:2-3 says He endured it all “for the joy that was set before Him,” meaning He kept His eyes on the higher purpose. His trial was temporary, but His reward was everlasting. It uniquely qualified Him to be our Advocate. His death bears truth to the fact that our pain, suffering and tears are never dismissed. He understands what it’s like to agonize and wrestle with looming challenges. He understands the sting of injustice, the depths of emotional and physical travail, and when it feels as though our pinnacle of human suffering has climaxed. He understands when we wrestle with God’s plan for our lives as we seek to submit ourselves to it.

In the midst of Christ’s prayer an angel appeared and attended to Him, providing strength to endure what was to come (Luke 22:43). Likewise, when we lay our fears and anxieties before the throne of God, our petitions enter His ears. He will provide the strength we need to bear what lies ahead. In the words of 2 Samuel 22:7, “In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry entered His ears.”

Some last thoughts to reflect on: Christ’s crucifixion is simultaneously the worst and best of all historical events. That empty tomb bore witness to the most amazing love story of all time. Knowing what awaited all humanity on the other side was a reason for Him to endure. Now we, too, have a reason to endure, knowing what lies ahead. He may not take our distresses away, but He knows our pain must be attended to. He will commune with us in our suffering as we are formed into holy people who depend on Him, knowing who we are and to whom we belong.

Remember the story of the great master and the young boy and “don’t quit, keep playing.” What we do in this life echoes forward into eternity. Let us keep our eyes on the higher purpose, knowing our Great Master is always with us. **BT**

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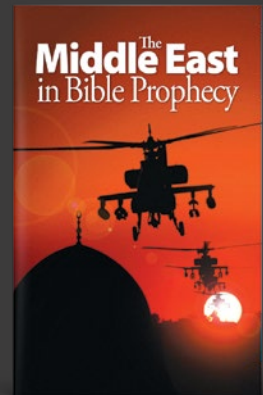
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