

BEYOND TODAY

Envisioning a Better World Tomorrow



IS THIS HOW WE LIVE FOREVER?

WHAT TECH DOESN'T FATHOM ABOUT
THE SPIRIT OF THE HUMAN MIND

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Have an
Immortal Soul

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Missing From Science: The Spiritual Element in Man

The mind of man is an amazing, fascinating, yet perplexing thing. Why is it so far above the capabilities of other earthly creatures?

We marvel at human accomplishment beyond anything animals could conceive of. More than 50 years ago, human beings walked on the moon. Even in ancient times, man studied the movements of the heavenly bodies to calculate their positions in advance. Tall buildings of city skylines around the world, engineering marvels, are now taken for granted. Man has developed computer technology to aid in this, but great building has been going on since early in civilization.

The ancient Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 was a project of wrong motivation that God put a stop to lest technological development proceed too rapidly. He stated, “This they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do” (verse 6, King James Version).

Now, thousands of years later, we live in a world of automobiles, airplanes, electricity, television, space travel, the Internet, all types of social media allowing instant global communication, medical advancements, and on it goes—again taken for granted in much of the world as part of people’s everyday lives.

We are at the cusp now of leaps in artificial intelligence—with developers trying to create genuine minds in machines. Others would have our brains implanted with links to the Internet world, attempting to advance humanity into cybernetic beings on the way to eventually leaving biology behind to live in electronic immortality.

It won’t happen. For science is missing something fundamental to the human mind, which science can’t replicate. It’s the very thing that makes science possible.

In this issue of *Beyond Today*, we present what the Bible explains about the “spirit” in man, which is given by the Creator God. In 1 Corinthians 2:11 the apostle Paul writes, “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? . . .” This spiritual component is what gives people human understanding. On the physical level, man has the same kind of existence as animals. It’s the human spirit that makes the difference.

What is the nature of this spirit? In search of immortal life, cultures have devised all sorts of ideas and beliefs, but are they really of God? In this issue, we’ll shed light on

one such common and popular belief that simply isn’t in the Bible.

Beyond the human spirit, Scripture also tells us that we need something more. I’ve left the verse above from Paul unfinished, just as a man with a spirit to understand the universe and make moral decisions is unfinished. To become the complete man, God must supply something else, which human beings must properly choose to receive.

While man has made great advancements, enabled through the abilities God has granted, man has also made many poor choices regarding good and evil—turning aside from God and His right ways.

People have wreaked horrible suffering and misery on each other. The first family on earth was the first family to understand the pain of murder when Cain killed his brother Abel. And the torment continues. Wars rage, violence is rampant, people take from others, and hate and lying are everywhere. And even in times of relative peace, many are gripped by negative, destructive thinking.

Many today waste their mental energies on endless scrolling through social media or bingeing entertainment and do not allow their minds to think, create, devise and understand. A lack of purpose and satisfaction in life drives some into hopelessness and despair, sometimes leading to catastrophic results. The problem is growing among teens, highlighted in one of this issue’s articles, which also points to constructive help, especially from God.

The spirit of the human mind is a wonderful thing. It gives us understanding, purpose and a way to connect with God. Thank God for that gift. And we further thank God for this season of the Passover, when our Savior Jesus Christ was sacrificed so that our sins and the sins of all humankind throughout history could be forgiven when we truly repent.

All glory and all thanks go to God and Jesus Christ, our Savior!

At *Beyond Today*, it’s our hope that the articles you read here will enrich you and lead you to a deeper understanding and commitment to draw closer to God and, with His help, become like Him.

Rick Shabi, President
United Church of God

The Devil Goes to Church

The cover article in our November-December 2023 issue explored how Satan the devil has deceived the entire world, including those professing Christianity.

Letters in response to the November-December 2023 issue of *Beyond Today*

I was a little surprised to read of the retirement of Scott Ashley. I'd built a connection with him so I feel sad that he's leaving, but I'm thankful for his talent and work of sharing the good news. I've been a subscriber of your magazine since 2006 when I was a college student. I was searching for the truth on the Internet, which led me to the United Church of God's website. The next thing I knew I was receiving your magazines regularly. I lost track of my magazine subscription after college, but I knew in my heart I was commanded to live by every word of God, so years later I searched your website again, and this time I contacted the local pastor. I've always prayed to God to give me wisdom in understanding his words, and your magazines have been instrumental in sharing that light. I thought of writing this letter to show appreciation to all the staff and writers behind *Beyond Today* magazine. May God continue to protect our works to prepare people for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Subscriber in the Philippines

I have been a subscriber of *A Boa Nova* [Portuguese-language version of *Beyond Today*] magazine for a long time. I am very thankful to receive this magazine for free. Thanks for the teachings! I read this latest issue of November-December 2023, and noticed that managing editor Scott Ashley is retiring, and that this is his last issue. I want to say that I really appreciate the articles and I am very grateful for the teachings directly from the Word of God. God bless you all. Thanks!

Subscriber in Brazil

We received many notes expressing gratitude and congratulations to Scott Ashley

on his many years of service and now his retirement. We wholeheartedly agree with all the praise and well wishes received on his behalf. We are working to continue that legacy in sharing the truth, in love, of the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

"Israel's 9/11: What's Behind Hamas' Brutal Bloodbath?"

I'm really grateful to see your comprehensive article on this latest Hamas atrocity. I am especially appreciative of your focus: When they tell us who they are, we should believe them. We Westerners tend to be naive when it comes to terrorism. It is just so difficult to understand that bloody mindset. We will continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for that glorious day to come soon.

From the Internet

More comments from readers and viewers

I finally have found some answers to my many questions through your magazine *Beyond Today*. Everything is now making sense. Even what's happening with Israel and Hamas. Could I please request the September-October edition be sent to my postal address? I would like to start collecting copies to look back over from time to time. I thank God for leading me to deeper understanding through your literature.

Reader in Australia

Thank you so much for sending me *Beyond Today*. It is a wonderful magazine and such an inspiring one too, offering support and hope. I would like to send a contribution but at this time am unable and hope in the near future to be able to do so.

Subscriber in Queensland, Australia

Dear friends in Christ, I truly enjoy your magazine and literature. It is so very helpful, and it means so much to me to have things explained so I understand them. Thanks so much for your booklets as well. God bless you all as you continue to serve Him. Love and prayers.

Subscriber in Canada

Thank you for another great year of TV programming, your magazine and of course your ministry. Well done. I hope this donation helps you continue your good work and service to God and Christ. Thank you.

Subscriber in Canada

Thank you so, so much for each *Beyond Today* you send, as I read all of it every time. It takes time to read each issue all the way through, and I learn so much. I would like the booklets in the last issue as they interest me so much and I want to learn more. I will appreciate it so much. All your literature is so knowledgeable. Thank you, thank you, thank you, so much.

Subscriber in South Australia

I'm not necessarily one to write in or comment, but I felt the need to do so, especially in these times. May the Lord protect us all.

From the Internet

Thank you for your great work. All you do is so good and I enjoy it. I pray for God's Kingdom to come.

Subscriber in Australia

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).

IS THIS HOW WE LIVE FOREVER?

WHAT TECH DOESN'T FATHOM ABOUT
THE SPIRIT OF THE HUMAN MIND

by Darris McNeely



What is the secret of human consciousness and intellect?

Is it purely materialistic—a matter of biochemical programming science can duplicate?

Or is there a nonphysical, spiritual element in the mind? Is it what many call the soul—or something else?

And what does it mean for life beyond death?

With increasing advances in artificial intelligence come renewed hopes of some that human life can be extended by digital means, with people having their conscious mind and memory “uploaded” into a computer and continuing to exist as sentient beings apart from the confines of the physical human body. It’s the stuff of science fiction, but more are accepting the possibility and seeking it.

Wesley Smith, senior fellow at the Center for Human Exceptionalism, part of the intelligent design think tank Discovery Institute, has pointed out: “Transhumanists, as they are often called, pursue several approaches to attaining, if not exactly eternal life, then *an indefinite existence*. Some aim at radically extending life expectancy through biotechnology, such as by overcoming cellular aging, manufacturing cloned organs to replace worn-out body parts, and using stem cell therapies.

“But the most prominent transhumanist immortality proposal these days aims to *upload our minds into computers, enhanced with artificial intelligence capabilities, whence we can ‘live’ in the Cloud or as cyberbeings*. The resulting computer program of this ‘mind uploading’ would theoretically be a mental clone of the human being from which it was derived—displaying the same personality, long-term memory, likes, dislikes, and so on. Some world-renowned scientists and futurists fully expect researchers to develop the technology to accomplish this feat *in the first half of this century*” (“Your Mind Uploaded in a Computer Would Not Be You,” *First Things*, March 2, 2018, emphasis added throughout). And read “The Race for Immortality” in our July-August 2018 issue for more on this (linked on the Dive Deeper page found at the end of this article).

Such thinking assumes people are purely biological machines, with human thought, consciousness and emotions no more than computational processes of neurological systems—systems that

evolved through a “fortuitous course of atoms.” But even beyond the Disney-like “imagineering” of future animatronic existence, the whole basis for this thinking is nothing more than fantasy.

Man and the human mind are not accidents of chance. They are products of design by a Creator God with a remarkable purpose. And they are not purely physical and biochemical in how they operate. There is far more to human existence than meets the eye—or that can be handled by data transfer technology.

But just what is man? To what do we attribute the amazing ingenuity and technology of human civilization? It goes beyond merely having a more advanced physical brain than that of animals. Many credit a spiritual “immortal soul” independent of the body, and it’s commonly thought that this idea is taught in the Bible. Yet it’s actually not.

What, then, is the basis of the human mind? And what does it mean for the age-old human longing of living beyond death into immortality? Is that really possible?

A spirit in man that gives understanding

The Bible does refer to a “spirit” that is part of man’s makeup. It presents man’s creation in these terms: “Thus says the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, *and forms the spirit of man within him*” (Zechariah 12:1). Job 32:8 says, “*There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.*”

The Hebrew word for “spirit” here, *ruach*, literally refers to a wind or breath, an exhalation of air—note the parallel use of “breath” (*neshamah*) in the verse in Job. Behind this terminology is the idea of an invisible force, paralleling the usage of the New Testament Greek word *pneuma*. Both *ruach* and *pneuma* are used of the existence and power of God, as well as that of angels and demons—all nonmaterial beings, beings of spirit or spirit beings (see John 4:24; Psalm 104:4).

Man, however, was not formed as a spirit being but as a physical being of flesh and blood. Genesis 2:7 says that God breathed into the first man the breath of life and man “became a living being.” The Hebrew word *nephesh* here, sometimes translated soul, refers to a flesh-and-blood being like the animals. But man is unique, with God having specially breathed in life, unlike what is stated of the animals.

There was a more personal connection here for a higher purpose. And it parallels the mention in Job of a spirit and breath giving understanding. The term *ruach* thus refers not only to an invisible force of power, but an unseen component giving life and intelligence—in this case, special human intelligence. It’s also stated in Genesis 1:26-27 that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God.

God put into mankind a spirit that sets us apart from the animal creation. God brought to Adam the animals, which he named. God told the man to “tend and keep” the creation (Genesis 2:15). Man is over the creation and is superior in mind and being to animals. We are not of the animal kind. And we are not beings who rose above the rest of creation by some random evolutionary process. Mankind is specially created *in the image of God* with the ability to *relate to God*.

While we are physical beings, we have a *spiritual* component to our existence. The apostle Paul mentions this directly, rhetorically asking, “For what man knows the things of a man except *the spirit of the man* which is in him?” (1 Corinthians 2:11). So human self-awareness and intellect come through the unseen presence of the human spirit.

What about the brain? Research shows it contains memory storage and functions as a biological computer in various respects. However, physical brain function is not enough to explain the heights of human thought and genius, especially compared to animals. The difference is *the spirit in man*, which imparts the complexity and

depth of human thought and feeling to the brain—with the human brain and human spirit functioning together, producing the human mind.

By the spirit in man, people have formed cultures and civilizations. By the spirit in man, great discoveries have been made and engineering technology has advanced to create our modern world. Animals do not compose symphonies or send rockets to the moon! Human beings are clearly and vastly different.

By the human spirit man makes moral determinations. Sadly, mankind has made many poor choices in this arena—abusing the potential given through the human spirit. Yet God intends that man learn important lessons here, especially the need for full reliance on and help from *Him*.

The means to future life beyond the grave

It's important to understand that the human spirit is *not* the same as what many have been taught falsely about an immortal soul. The idea that man is born with a soul of conscious identity that continues after death is not taught in Scripture. This concept was absorbed in corruptions of early Christianity and Judaism from Greek religion and philosophy. (See “Why You Don’t Have an Immortal Soul” starting on page 10.)

The spirit in a person is not the person. It is not alive and conscious of itself, independent of the body, and it does not live on in a disembodied afterlife following death. When a person dies, there is no awareness of anything at all. As Israel’s King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 9:5, “The dead know nothing” (see also verse 10). There is no consciousness after death until a future resurrection (download or request our free study guide *What Happens After Death?* to learn more).

The apostle Paul was a highly educated Jew. He was schooled in the Pharisaic tradition at the feet of the renowned first-century teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3; see 5:34). Yet Paul was also a student of the Greek world. Being from Tarsus, a center of Greek learning, he would have been well acquainted with Greek philosophic thought. In Acts 17 Paul quoted Greek poets in presenting to Athenian philosophers the true God, honored on their monuments as “the Unknown God.” It’s certain he knew the Platonic ideas of the immortality of the soul. And being a Jew schooled in the Scriptures, he also knew this was not what God revealed about the nature of man.

When writing his two letters to the church at the Greek city of Corinth, Paul had a perfect opportunity to affirm the Greek ideas of immortality. But his focus in 1 Corinthians 15 was on the *future resurrection of the dead* in a body yet to come—and he referred to death

What Is the “Spirit in Man”?

What is the difference between an animal brain and a human brain of comparable size? Science hasn’t been able to explain the vast difference in thinking ability between the animal brain and the human mind. But the Bible reveals a *spiritual* component God gives to every person (Zechariah 12:1). The Bible teaches that this spirit in man imparts aspects of the human mind, including self-awareness, intellect, creativity, personality and temperament—everything that enables human accomplishment and knowledge short of true spiritual understanding (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Ecclesiastes 12:7 mentions this spirit, saying that the spirit of man returns to God when we die. Some erroneously interpret this as a reference to righteous souls going to heaven. However, the context shows this interpretation is wrong. For one thing, it says that the spirit of *everyone* who dies, not just the righteous, goes back to God who gave it. The preceding verses speak of aging and death taking their natural course in *every* person.

As our study guide *What Happens After Death?* explains, Paul wrote that the righteous dead wait in their graves until the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18). And since Christ comes to the earth to reign, the resurrected saints will also be on the earth. Going to heaven at death isn’t the reward of Christians. (See also our study guide *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

Returning to Ecclesiastes 12:7, it closes a passage on aging and dying. In its entirety, the verse reads, “Then the dust [our physical human bodies] will return to the earth as it was, and *the spirit* will return to God who gave it.” Upon death, the human body decomposes into the dust from which it was created and the spirit in man goes back to God.

What is the spirit in man? Is it the man himself? If that were the case, Ecclesiastes 12:7 would not make sense. It plainly says that the body decomposes. Is the spirit in man an immortal soul? Much of mainstream Christianity has adopted the idea of an immortal soul from ancient pagan religion, not from what is taught in the Scriptures.

Why would the spirit of man return to God at death? Consider how God will resurrect the dead. He will not simply put life back into dead bodies. For even if the body remains intact at death, it will eventually decompose, just as Ecclesiastes 12:7 stated. That is, the bodies of most people will no longer exist by the time of the resurrections. They will break down into non-living atoms and molecules.

It is likely, therefore, that the spirit in man serves as the permanent record of every human being, by which God will resurrect him or her at the appointed time (1 Corinthians 15:23). By way of analogy, it’s possible to recreate a destroyed building if one has the blueprints of the original. Similarly, God is able to recreate a person by the record preserved in the spirit in man.

Paul explains that it is the Spirit of God joining with the spirit in man that enables man to take part in the divine nature as God's children.



as being like sleep, without awareness. He also, as we earlier saw, mentioned the human spirit in chapter 2 as the means to human knowledge. So it should be clear that he did not view this spirit as conscious apart from the body.

But evidently the human spirit is involved in the future resurrection.

Consider something further Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes about the conclusion of physical life. He relates a series of images showing life wears down, the body ages and death comes—but he counsels us to consider there is more: “Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps and the golden bowl is broken. Don’t wait until the water jar is smashed at the spring and the pulley is broken at the well. For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:6-7, New Living Translation).

At death the spirit returns to God who gave it. This is not speaking of a conscious immortal soul floating away to heaven, but to the spiritual component of man’s mind, not thinking or conscious of itself, being received back into God’s keeping. For what purpose? Apparently, it is to preserve what the person is so as to reconstitute the person, with individual thoughts and personality restored, at the future resurrection of the dead (see “What Is the ‘Spirit in Man?’” on page 9).

So in some way, known to God, a person’s mind is effectively “uploaded” into God’s keeping and later “downloaded” into a future resurrected body—with no consciousness in between—though this occurs in the spirit realm through the omnipotent power of God, far outside the scope and ability of any technology of man.

Yet there is still a missing element here.

Connecting with God for eternity

Human life works at its highest and best in a relationship with God, the Creator of life, based on the revealed teachings of His Word, the Bible. Indeed, we are created as relational beings. And God put into man a spirit, a part of the eternal realm, which allows a connection—a relationship between the two.

But this human spirit is insufficient for the relationship God ultimately desires to have with us in making us into His true spiritual children. God wants to imbue us with *His own Spirit*—the Holy Spirit—the only means to ultimately pursuing God’s ways and transformation to eternal life.

Note the context of Paul’s statement about the human

spirit in 1 Corinthians 2. He says God has revealed His truth and plans for us “through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? *Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.* Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit [that] is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (verses 10-12).

The depth of understanding we need is not available *through the human spirit alone*. We need *God’s Spirit* to reveal it.

And in Romans 8 Paul adds the final dimension to this picture. He shows that we need God’s Spirit to overcome the ingrained resistance to God in our corrupted human nature (verses 5-10). Moreover, he explains that it is the Spirit of God joining with the spirit in man that enables man to take part in the divine nature as God’s children: “The Holy Spirit you have received does not make you a slave again so that you are afraid. But the Spirit you have received makes you sons of God” (verse 15, Bible in Worldwide English). It is this Spirit “whereby we cry, Abba, Father. *The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:* and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, *that we may be also glorified together*” (verses 16-17, American King James Version).

Man, then, is created in the image of God. We have a unique spirit imparting human thinking to the human brain—forming the human mind, which cannot be duplicated by human technology. Through that unique spirit within us, we have the capacity to connect with God, responding to His teaching. But that’s not all. In a biblically defined process we can receive the gift of God’s Holy Spirit, and through it we can attain our ultimate potential of inheriting eternal life as part of the family of God.

Only in this way can we human beings transcend our mortal existence to realize our awesome destiny with God forever. Truly, the future God has planned for us is greater than any advancements modern technology could produce! Don’t settle for false hopes. Trust in God and His ultimate purpose for your life! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



The truth about man’s destiny of becoming part of God’s own family as His children is astounding. To learn more, be sure to download or request our free study guide *Why Were You Born?*

Scan the code or visit ucg.org/ma24 to find it.





WHY YOU DON'T HAVE AN IMMORTAL SOUL

One of the most prevalent beliefs of traditional Christianity is that people have immortal souls which, at death, leave the body and go to heaven or hell.

But, surprising as it may be, the Bible teaches no such concept!

by John LaBissoniere

God told the first human beings, Adam and Eve, that if they sinned, they would die and return to the dust from which they came (Genesis 2:17; 3:19). But Satan craftily influenced Eve to believe that God was lying and that she and Adam would not die (Genesis 3:4). It was from this starting point that the devil launched a nefarious campaign to deceive all future generations on this and many other subjects. His intent was to blind them from knowing their awesome destiny in God's Kingdom (Revelation 12:9; Matthew 6:33). As a result, billions of people of various religions, including most professing Christians, have been convinced that they have immortal souls.

Famous Greek philosophers expressed this belief in their writings. For example, Plato (ca. 428-347 B.C.) argued in his book *Phaedo* that the soul is indestructible: "The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal . . . whereas the body is most like that which is human, mortal [and] dissoluble" (quoted by David Tatum, "The

Historical Development of the Immortal Soul," Afterlife.co.nz, Aug. 9, 2019).

Such erroneous ideas had an impact on the early leaders of the Catholic Church. For instance, Augustine (A.D. 354-430) wrote in his work *City of God*, "But because the soul from its very nature, being created immortal, cannot be without some kind of life, its utmost death is alienation from the life of God in an eternity of punishment."

Hundreds of years later another influential Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225-1274), taught in his *Summa Theologica* that the soul is a separate entity that cannot be destroyed. And as the Protestant Reformation took root in the 1500s and began spreading, most of its leaders continued to embrace the erroneous concept of the soul's immortality.

What do the Hebrew Scriptures teach about the soul?

In Western philosophy, the notion that people have immortal souls has been commonly accepted, with the accompanying idea of going to heaven or hell at death hinging on this belief. But what does the Bible say? The phrase "immortal soul" is found nowhere within its pages! Even the concept is not there. Neither is the teaching that death is merely the separation of body and soul, with the soul continuing on.

The Hebrew word translated "soul" in Scripture, *nephesh*, basically means

"a breathing creature." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* explains that *nephesh* "... never means the immortal soul, but it is essentially the life principle or the living being" (Vol. 4, 1962, "Soul," emphasis added throughout). This can be seen in the way the Bible employs the term. The word *nephesh* is used of animals, fish and insects before its first reference to human beings.

For example, Genesis 1:20 states, "Then God said, 'Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures [*nepheshim*, plural form of *nephesh*], and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.'" Also, in Genesis 1:25 we read, "And God made the beast [*nephesh*] of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind."

So *nephesh* is used in Scripture when referring to the physical life of flesh-and-blood creatures—including that of humankind. For example, we read, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul [*a nephesh*]" (Genesis 2:7, King James Version). A living soul here is what Adam *was*, not something he *had*. The New King James renders this "living being."

Consider that the word "soul" is used four times in Ezekiel 18:4, all translated from the word *nephesh*, referred to as something that can die: "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as

well as the soul of the son is Mine; *the soul who sins shall die.*" Clearly the soul is not immortal!

The word "soul" in the writings of the apostles

Just as the Hebrew word *nephesh* refers to only physical, mortal life, which can perish, the Greek word *psuche* does the same. It's the only word translated "soul" in the New Testament. Found 105 times, it's translated "soul" 58 times, and in other instances it's rendered with such terms as life, heart, heartily and mind, the latter in terms of physical, conscious being.

For example, Acts 3:23 says, "And it shall be that every soul [*psuche*] who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." Also, as James 5:20 says, "Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul [*psuche*] from death and cover a multitude of sins." In these cases, the word just means a person—a person *who can die*. Thus, souls are mortal, not immortal. They can and do *die*.

Furthermore, the apostle Paul told the members of the congregation in Rome to *pursue* immortality, writing, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing *seek* for glory and honor and *immortality, eternal life*" (Romans 2:7, KJV). Paul never taught Christians that they *already had* immortality but that it needed to be "*put on*" (1 Corinthians 15:53-55). He also said that only God possesses immortality and that eternal life is a *gift* from God (1 Timothy 6:16; Romans 6:23), not something we inherently have from the start.

Since people are "living souls," as we've seen, what happens when they die? The Bible presents the dead going into *sheol*, which means the "pit" or "grave." King David stated that through death, a person's relationship with God ceases completely: "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave [*sheol*] who will give You thanks?" (Psalm 6:5).

What's more, those who die have no consciousness of anything. King Solomon wrote, "For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten" (Ecclesiastes 9:5). And he further wrote, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave [*sheol*] where you are going" (verse 10).

The wonderful truth about the resurrection

Although what has been covered above may appear troubling, it is emphatically not the whole picture or the end of the story! There is a spiritual component to man, though not conscious of itself apart from the body (see "Is This How We Live Forever? What Tech Doesn't Fathom About the Spirit of the Human Mind" beginning on page 6). And while human beings are physical and subject to death, the good news is that God promises that there will be life after death. Psalm 49:15 declares, "But God will redeem my soul [*nephesh*] from the



While human beings are physical and subject to death, the good news is that God promises that there will be life after death.

power of the grave: for He shall receive me." The Bible reveals that repentant, obedient individuals will be resurrected from the grave and given perpetual spirit life (see 1 Corinthians 15:52).

Jesus Christ was the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). The resurrection of His followers to immortality will take place at His second coming when He establishes God's Kingdom on earth. Later will come another resurrection, to physical life, for all the people who never had a relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ. Following that, they too will be given the opportunity to enjoy everlasting life (Revelation 20; and see the study guide offered below).

The Satan-generated fiction about the immortal soul enshrouds the crucial and wonderful truth about the amazing future God has in store for humanity. Indeed, people do not have immortal souls. But everyone who truly repents, obeys and worships God through Christ is promised a resurrection from death to eternal life. Let us therefore give tremendous honor to God for the magnificent truth He reveals in the Bible. And importantly, let's make sure we are, as James 1:22 exhorts us, personally doers of God's Word and not hearers only! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



We've only scratched the surface of the biblical truth about man's nature and future life through a resurrection from the dead. To learn more, be sure to download or request our free study guide *What Happens After Death?*

Scan the code or visit ucg.org/maz4 to find it.



ADAPTATION

Designed by God, Not From Evolution

Genetic adaptation to environment has been attributed to natural selection for advantageous mutations. But scientists have recently learned that adaptations come mostly from genetic switches responding to circumstances—proof of design, as attested by the Bible.

by Mario Seiglie

Naturalist Charles Darwin, on his five-year voyage around the world back in the 1830s, observed that species adapted to their environments. He came to believe that, over sufficient time, all living creatures developed through a process of variation and natural selection (or forces of nature working on them).

Yet he was not aware of the mind-boggling complexity of the cell known today. A human cell has an exquisitely written *genetic code* making up a digital instruction manual that, according to *Wired* magazine, is comparable to “4,200 average-sized books” (Rachael Pells, “Everything You Need to Know About Getting Your Genome Sequenced,” Sept. 21, 2023, emphasis added throughout).

In fact, if you put the 4,200 volumes of this “genetic manual” end to end, it would span around 116 yards, longer than a football field! Scientists are stumped at how such a precise and extensive code, written in a four-letter chemical “alphabet,” could have “evolved” on its own. And they’re further stunned at discovering that embedded in life, from the humble bacteria to human beings, are layers of complex *systems within systems*—including built-in adaptations for changing environments.

Preset adaptation within species validates the biblical witness of divine creation.

Two great biological principles in Genesis 1

Darwin in his day concluded that if lifeforms were produced by a Creator, they would remain fixed and unable to vary to adapt. He disparaged the Bible for apparently not being able to explain the teeming variety of life around the world.

Yet Darwinian evolution has not been able to explain many basic aspects of life—such as the *origin* of life, the origin of *self-replication*, or, as already noted, the origin of

the *genetic code*, a complex language that even includes punctuation! Moreover, it has not presented *fossil evidence* of plants or animals gradually transforming from one “kind” or species type into another. Scientists have instead discovered *genetic barriers* in each cell that ensure living organisms replicate *only according to their own kind*.

Regrettably, Darwin did not consider what the Bible reveals regarding explanations of biological features. For example, he was not aware of *the two great biological principles laid down in Genesis 1* that still govern the basic rules of the animal and plant kingdoms.

The first is found in Genesis 1:11-12: “Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit *according to its kind*, whose seed is in itself, on the earth’; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed *according to its kind*, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself *according to its kind*. And God saw that it was good.”

So God here at the beginning introduces the *first great biological law* (repeated here 10 times!)—that *living things reproduce according to their own kind*. All plants and animals, from bacteria to human beings, have a *specific body plan*, a strictly followed *blueprint* programmed into their genes.

Scientists have learned that living things don’t engender offspring of different body plans and development (unless something goes terribly wrong in the genetic code, creating inferior mutated creatures). For instance, have you ever seen a dog reproduce into anything but a dog? What about a cat? A bird? In fact, the fossil record, the historical registry of life on earth from the beginning to now, *does not show* plants or animals transforming generationally into other body types. They have the capacity to vary somewhat, but only *within* their own body plan.

And that capacity for variance brings us to the *second*



Adaptation comes mostly from preexisting *genetic switches* in the cell—demonstrating *design*, not evolution.

great biological principle in Genesis 1—that *life has the means to adapt to its environment*. God said He would create living things to *completely fill* the earth. We read: “So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, ‘*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth*’” (Genesis 1:21-22).

Here we see that life was given the capacity from the start to not only reproduce according to its kind, but also to “multiply” and totally “fill” the earth, which means giving various species the adaptability to occupy every nook and cranny of it. This is what has happened—even inside the famous and boiling-hot Yellowstone geysers, bacteria, viruses, and fungi have the means to adapt to the extreme environment.

Millions of genetic switches in once-dismissed “junk” DNA

Surprisingly, biologists and geneticists have discovered that adaptation comes mostly from preexisting *genetic switches* in the cell rather than minor changes from natural selection working on mutated cells—demonstrating *design*, not evolution.

As *The New York Times* has reported: “The *human genome* is packed with at least *four million gene switches* that reside in bits of DNA that once were dismissed as ‘junk’ but that turn out to play *critical roles in controlling how cells, organs and other tissues behave* . . . It includes the system of switches that, acting like dimmer switches for lights, control *which genes*

are used in a cell and *when* they are used, and determine, for instance, *whether* a cell becomes a liver cell or a neuron . . .

“The system . . . is *stunningly complex*, with many *redundancies* [backup systems]. Just the idea of so many switches was almost incomprehensible, Dr. [Bradley] Bernstein [Encyclopedia of DNA Elements (Encode) project researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital] said. There also is a sort of DNA *wiring system* that is almost inconceivably intricate. ‘It is like opening a wiring closet and seeing a *hairball of wires*,’ said Mark Gerstein, an Encode researcher from Yale” (Gina Kolata, “Bits of Mystery DNA, Far From ‘Junk,’ Play Crucial Role,” Sept. 5, 2012).

So Darwin was wrong when he supposed that adaptation from undirected variation (now called mutations) and natural selection could create and change body plans. Mutations—the equivalent of typos or errors in the genetic code—are either neutral or degenerative in effect, *not beneficial*.

The set of genetic switches in the cell enabling adaptation is called the *epigenome*—found *not only in the DNA* but also in areas *outside* of it. In *The Mysterious Epigenome: What Lies Beyond DNA*, authors Thomas Woodward and James Gills state: “This strange new realm of functional information, written into parts of our cells that are distant from DNA, can be startling . . . It’s a bit like discovering that the digital memory in a computer is not confined to the hard drive, but that millions of bits of vital data are inscribed in other specialized languages and codes which are embedded in the keyboard, screen, outer casing, and many other parts of the computer” (2012, pp. 16-17).

Why is this discovery not better known? The short answer is that it would undermine evolution and atheism, hampering people’s freedom to live as they wish. Aldous Huxley, best known for his 1932 dystopian novel *Brave New World*, admitted why he and others embraced atheism and evolution with such fervor: “I had motives for not wanting the world to *have a meaning* . . . The *liberation* we desired was . . . from a certain system of *morality*. We objected to the morality because it *interfered* with our *sexual freedom*” (*Ends and Means*, 1946, p. 70).

Neurosurgeon Michael Egnor, an intelligent design advocate, points out the scope of the problem: “To understand the stranglehold that blind recalcitrant atheism has on many modern scientists, consider that with the discovery of the genetic code in DNA, scientists didn’t immediately acknowledge the evidence for intelligent design . . . It is a *scandal* that atheism has such an emotional and intellectual hold on so many scientists that it *corrupts* their science and leads them to deny what is obvious to any objective scientist” (“The God Hypothesis Versus Atheist Science Denial,” *Evolution News*, April 5, 2021).

Adaptation in action—blind cavefish

Let's note a case of adaptation through such genetic switches.

One of the most difficult places for fish to live is a deep subterranean cave—but we find them there, such as the blind cavefish of the Mexican tetra variety. What scientists have discovered is astounding! It adapts through genetic switches that turn on or off to promote survival.

A normal tetra fish might end up in such a cave, with its sensors then triggering gene switches to gradually adapt to the new environment. The fish doesn't need eyes or pigmentation in the pitch-dark caverns, and within a month, as lab experiments have shown, it adapts. Some features get turned off and others turned on, such as activating lateral line sensors (a type of radar) and heightened smell and taste to detect food sources in the dark.

A *New Scientist* article explained:

"We've found out why a Mexican cavefish has no eyes—and the surprising answer is likely to be seized upon by those who think the standard view of evolution needs revising . . . It was assumed that these fish became blind because mutations disabled key genes involved in eye development . . . But Aniket Gore of the US's National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and colleagues haven't found any disabling changes in the DNA sequences of eye development genes in cavefish. Instead, *the genes have been switched off* by the addition of chemical tags called methyl groups. This is what is known as *epigenetic*, rather than *genetic*, change" (Michael Le Page, "Blind Cave Fish Lost Eyes by Unexpected Evolutionary Process," *New Scientist*, Oct. 12, 2017).

As a result, the blind fish ends up adapting admirably well to its hostile dark environment—just as God had designed it to do.

It's the same with creatures all around the world, which possess these genetic switches that help them adapt to new environments. Even human beings are able to adapt to extreme climate conditions, such as the Eskimos in the

frozen Arctic tundra or the Bedouins in the searing desert.

Facing the evidence

Darwin, then, was ultimately wrong about the cause of adaptation, only discovering insignificant changes within species, such as beak sizes and shapes in various birds. Yet, scientists now have to explain the increasingly daunting

complexity of living things, and their silence about how the evidence points to an intelligent Designer is deafening.

The Bible warned us about such denial of the evidence about nature and creation in Romans 1:18-21: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, *who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the*

creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are *without excuse*. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. *Claiming to be wise, they became fools* . . ." (English Standard Version).

Yes, mankind as a whole, with its pride, vanity and lusts, has suppressed the truth about the origins and development of life and has ended up worshiping *the creation* instead of *the Creator!* (verse 25). Let's not ever fall into that trap! Adaptation should never be credited to evolution. Let's instead give the credit to our wondrous and loving Creator God—just as Genesis 1 reveals. **BT**



The blind Mexican tetra fish lives in the inhospitable environment of subterranean caves. Scientists have discovered that the fish can adapt through genetic switches that turn on or off to promote survival.

DIVE DEEPER



The evidence of design in the natural world by an all-powerful Creator is overwhelming. To see more proof, download or request our free study guides *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* Scan the code or visit ucg.org/ma24 to find it.



FALSE RELIGION VS THE WAY

Paganism is inclusive. True Christianity, once called the Way, is not. Its original followers passionately rejected the concepts and practices of religions not based on the Bible. What does that mean for you?

by Gary Petty

Are you willing to sort through all the clutter in today's fragmented Christian message? There's the popular health-and-wealth gospel. The LGBTQ gospel of acceptance of what the Bible forbids is spreading. How about the all-roads-lead-to-God gospel or the entertainment gospel, which is sparse on teaching? Sadly, even what's considered traditional Christianity has been corrupted by wrong ideas and practices since early times.

The message of the first Christians was so different from the beliefs of the society around them that they were accused of turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). We'll see in one story that the Christian message caused people in a major ancient city to burn books about practicing magic and almost started a riot.

True Christianity, then called the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14), was quite distinct from the surrounding culture. To the first Christians, there were only two kinds of religion—either worshipping the God of the Hebrew Scriptures (often labeled Judaism) or all other religion, viewed as idolatry and demonic. The earliest Christians were considered a Jewish sect. But most Jews resisted them, refusing to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

The wider world embraced paganism, a general term for religions that don't accept the God of the Bible. The worldview of the first-century Roman culture was inclusive, embracing all gods and goddesses. With emphasis on elaborate rituals and exotic temples, participants felt very spiritual. The spirit world for them was everywhere and in everything. Life was guided by the stars. The home was decorated with statues of dead relatives and gods and goddesses for seeking their help. And ritualistic magic was the key to contacting the gods and goddesses and all spirits.

Yet while paganism is generally inclusive, it cannot abide the Way, which is not, rejecting paganism outright—setting up a major cultural clash.

Are you willing to discover the Way? You can experience the same transformation the early Christian believers experienced, finding God's purpose for your life. But know that it comes at a cost, because the original Way challenges many common and cherished Christian beliefs.

Burning bridges in Ephesus

Let's observe what happened in the story mentioned above, as recorded in Acts 19. The apostle Paul, responsible for spreading Christianity through many areas of the Roman Empire, traveled to the city of Ephesus in what's now western Turkey. This large and influential city was a provincial capital, a major seaport, a trade center where the cultures and wonders of the European and Asian continents met and mingled together. And it was home to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—the temple of Artemis (called Diana by the Romans)—accumulating great wealth from those making pilgrimages here.

When Paul first came, he began to teach the Way, Christian faith and practice, in the Jewish synagogue. But resistance there led to a rift. After three months, he left the synagogue and established a teaching center for both Jews and non-Jews. Some of the pagans began to accept and respond, believing Jesus to be the only way to the true God.

The account records that “many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and

it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver [a fortune!]. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (verses 18-20). Notice how the Way changed their lives. The pagans who believed enthusiastically burned their books containing incantations to the spirits and magic spells and rituals.

They were effectively “burning their bridges behind them”—removing the way back to false religion now that they had started on the Way. Note that these early Christians didn’t burn their neighbor’s books or attack libraries. They burned their own books. Considering them worthless and evil, they destroyed them. The point here is that those who followed the Way, accepting Jesus as the biblical Messiah, passionately rejected the concepts and practices of religion not based on the Bible.

Let’s engage in a mental exercise here. Try to imagine yourself having grown up in the ancient world of Ephesus, with temples all over the place to gods and goddesses and you having worshiped Zeus and Artemis or Diana. You were very superstitious and worried about evil spirits all the time. You sought help from magic spells and temple priests, who would examine the entrails of animal sacrifices to interpret for you the message from the gods.

Think of being a person in that environment who has turned to the God of the Bible and accepted Jesus. You’ve left paganism behind, burned your bridges, rejecting it as false and evil. Your life is profoundly changed, your world turned upside down. You’ve since lost friends, business contacts, maybe a job. And you’re persecuted for following the Way.

Pause now and consider your own life today. Are you as committed? You’re a Christian, right? You don’t participate in paganism. Are you sure? Let’s look at one example. How about Halloween? It’s just a harmless children’s party, right? Is it? Halloween’s origins can be traced to ancient pagan rites associated with evil spirits, which later morphed into All Saints Day and All Souls Day, medieval Catholic days honoring the dead. In many churches today, these are still considered religious holidays. They’re tied to the practice of praying to saints in heaven, a custom also derived from paganism that denigrates the biblical teaching that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between us and God.

Let’s return to our mental exercise. Imagine that, as one of those early Christian converts having left paganism to follow the Way, you are now brought forward into our world and seeing Christian life today. How would you respond to dressing up a child as a zombie or a witch, going trick-or-treating, a remnant of pagan superstition, at a time many still go to church to somehow honor God and Jesus Christ? Halloween may now seem trivial, but the earliest Christians, because of what Jesus and the apostles taught, would not accept pagan worship customs. And every aspect of Halloween is rooted in paganism. There’s no connection to true Christianity because



An idol of Artemis, similar to what local craftsmen in Ephesus would have made. They feared Christianity would drive them out of business.

those who followed the Way left paganism. Today’s Halloween would be absolutely intolerable to them.

So how can Christians today tolerate bringing paganism back into the Way? The truth is that the most cherished holidays, Easter and Christmas, though given a biblical veneer, are also rooted in paganism. Jesus wasn’t born in December. The date of celebrating His birth is based more on the ancient Roman Saturnalia and winter solstice than the Gospels. Many Christian traditions like the Christmas tree, Easter eggs and bunnies come from pagan customs. The name Easter comes from an Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring. Christians who followed the Way rejected those kinds of customs in the worship of God. By accepting these customs, Christianity is guilty of returning to the practices the original Christians rejected.

True Christian worship and paganism don’t mix

Now let’s go back to the story in Ephesians. How did the message of the new Christian way, amplified by those burning their books, impact Ephesian society? How was the world turned upside down? Well, it was pretty dramatic, affecting an entire industry dedicated to making statues of the city’s patron goddess.

Note what happened, continuing in Acts 19: “And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana [Artemis in Greek], brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said, ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover, you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia [western Turkey], this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship’” (verses 23-27). Paul’s success at turning people from their worship of this pagan goddess was cutting

Those who followed the Way, accepting Jesus as the biblical Messiah, passionately rejected the concepts and practices of religion not based on the Bible.

into their own livelihoods and the city's economy!

"When they had heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed to the theater with one accord" (verses 28-29). Many thousands were worked into a frenzy. City officials eventually did get control of the crowd before it turned into a riotous mob trying to kill all the Christians. It's hard to imagine the impact this small group of people had in turning their world upside down simply because they told others about the Way.

Most Christians today don't grasp the modern relevance of the conflict here. Consider that the foundation of the Christian Church, accepting Jesus as the promised Messiah or Christ, rested on its dedication to Scripture—which was then what is commonly known as the Old Testament—including its outright rejection of paganism. Here we are, almost 2,000 years since the book burning and riot in Ephesus, and where is the faithfulness and dedication of those ancient people today?

The message of those now purported to be the Church, the followers of the Way, has become what? Clouded, confused, fundamentally changed. The enthusiastic rejection of paganism has been replaced with a comfortable compromise with paganism. Why do Christians pretend that a jolly old man in a red suit drops down chimneys to leave toys to good children on Christmas Eve? Why do they pretend that rabbits lay brightly colored eggs?

Remember what I said earlier, that for the first Christians there were only two kinds of religion—belief in the God of the Hebrew Scriptures and every other religion, considered idolatry and demonic. While Judaism rejected Christians over their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, early Christian rejection of paganism remained just as vehement as in the Jewish community.

In a letter to the church in the Greek city of Corinth, Paul addressed certain compromise with pagan ceremony, noting that while idols of wood and stone are powerless of themselves (see 1 Corinthians 10:18-19), they are part of a darker reality: "Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons" (verse 20). Think about that.

In referencing the bread and wine symbolizing Christ's sacrifice at Passover, he continues: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the

Lord's table and the table of demons" (verses 21-22). Thus, you cannot mix the Christian Passover with pagan Easter—or any pagan worship practice. Those who followed the Way knew that there was a power in paganism. They understood the reality that Satan and his demons are fallen angels bent on wrecking God's creation and keeping people from following the Way. You see, paganism isn't just another way to the true God. It is a counterfeit spiritual belief system promoted by the devil to *lead people away* from the true God!

Proceeding in the Way

Now you can understand why the Ephesians burned their books and why the silver craftsmen didn't want them around and sought to drive them out. If Christmas, Easter and Halloween are derived from paganism, are there any special days Christians *should* observe in their worship of God and Christ? This is another step in discovering the true Way.

It starts with the weekly Sabbath, not Sunday. And there is a yearly biblical Christian calendar that has nothing to do with paganism. This calendar includes: the Passover, a memorial service of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a time to celebrate the work of Christ in leading us from sin to salvation; Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit was given to the Church (see Acts 2); the Feast of Trumpets, a day to celebrate the future hope of Christ's return; the Day of Atonement, a time to be reconciled to God without the influences of the devil; and the Feast of Tabernacles and final Eighth Day, a time to celebrate the future rule of God's Kingdom, with the opportunity for salvation extended to all.

These biblical celebrations reveal the authentic gospel, God's plan to draw wayward humanity back to Him so we can become His children.

In closing, here are three lessons to ponder from the Christian experience in Ephesus. First, Paul and the Ephesians didn't teach *many* ways, but *one* way. The popular idea that all religions lead to the same God is a false gospel. Second, Jesus as the Son of God is central to the Way. He declared, "I am the Way" (John 14:6). He defines what it means to follow Him, and that includes obeying the Scriptures. And third, the earliest Christians rejected any form of paganism in their worship of the true God. They didn't go out and try to force conversion on people, but they shared their message loud and clear. It's the same message presented here in *Beyond Today*.

Are you ready to live according to the Way? **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



For further help on this spiritual journey, download or request our free study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* And if you'd like to attend worship services with us at God's appointed times, see our website to find a congregation near you.

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Three Levels of Jesus Christ's Great Sacrifice

Jesus died to redeem us from sin and its penalties.
However, the laying down of His life in sacrifice started
long before that. Let's zoom out to a
broader perspective.

by Don Hooser

This time of year, spring in the northern hemisphere, including the land of Israel, we give special remembrance to the monumental sacrifice of Jesus Christ—as He died on the day of the biblical Passover as the true fulfillment of the Passover lamb sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Jesus laid down His life willingly (John 10:15, 18) to deliver from death and destruction all mankind who are ultimately willing to follow Him. His sacrifice offers everyone the opportunity to have everlasting life in the glorious Kingdom of God.

And we must not forget that this was an offering made by God the Father as well, who “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

Christ's sacrifice to pay the penalty of sin for all humanity concluded in His painful death by crucifixion. But it involved far more than that. As we'll see, a series of sacrifices led up to this point, the whole of what He willingly gave up and submitted to in His human lifetime being truly mind-boggling in scope. All these elements can be considered aspects of the greatest sacrifice ever made.

We'll look here at three aspects or levels of the immensity of that sacrifice, standing in awe of what was done to secure our redemption.

The sacrifice of God becoming man

An utterly astounding aspect of Christ's sacrifice preceded His physical life. It begins with the fact that before anything else existed there were two who existed together as God—the One who became God the Father along with the Word, through whom all things were made, who was made flesh, becoming the Man Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14).

“Before time began” They understood that human beings,

yet to be created, would need grace through Christ to redeem them from sin and death upon their choosing to go the wrong way (2 Timothy 1:9; compare 1 Peter 1:20).

So the first level of Jesus' sacrifice was His willingness to let go of His sublime level of existence to live life in physical flesh. Amazingly, the Word, the Creator of all things, was willing to become a mortal human being.

The Word left behind the spectacular beauty and power of the throne in heaven with God the Father—millions of angels there praising before Them! (see Revelation 4:1-11; 5:11; John 1:1-5, 29). He left that awesome paradise to live as a human being in a small part of one of His small planets for more than 30 years, putting all on the line to save humanity.

He exchanged immortality for mortality. He gave up infinite glory and might for an inglorious life as an earthling. He began a human life as a baby in His mother's womb. His transition was the ultimate humbling experience.

Philippians 2:5-8 tells us that Jesus very willingly made this ultimate sacrifice!

Once Jesus became a human being, He had to be sustained with water and food. He experienced thirst and hunger, so He had to drink and eat. He felt tiredness and fatigue, so He needed to have regular rest and sleep. He experienced normal pains, soreness, itching and sweating. At times He was uncomfortably hot and at times uncomfortably cold.

During Jesus' earthly life, no one had the level of modern conveniences so many enjoy today. No indoor plumbing with instant cold and hot running water. None of our modern appliances. No electricity or natural gas. No central heating and air conditioning. No luxurious mattresses. No cars, buses and trains. No supermarkets. No mass-produced inexpensive clothing and shoes. No computers and no phones.



A series of sacrifices led up to this point, the whole of what Jesus submitted to being truly mind-boggling in scope.

Jesus evidently had a home or residence during His ministry, as we're told He "dwelt in Capernaum" (Matthew 4:13). This served as a base of operations, but He spent much of His time on the road. He and His disciples traveled mostly by foot—not easy, comfortable or always safe. For example, the distance between Capernaum and Jerusalem

was about 85 miles. Jesus referred to the itinerant nature of His work in stating, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). We wonder about the lives of Jesus and His disciples—about their long treks with camping, cooking, conversations and crises.

Jesus was exposed to dangers of robbers and other criminals. He was exposed to pollutions, foul smells and other objectionable circumstances—a far cry from His former life on the divine plane of existence.

Jesus' incarnation—becoming mortal human flesh—was the ultimate demotion. He left the glorious spirit life of heaven to live as a vulnerable physical being exposed to all kinds of human suffering.

Furthermore, He came to live in the world that was and is under the powerful influences of the "ruler of this world," Satan the devil (John 12:31). As a result, He was exposed to the devil's efforts to influence Him into wrong attitudes and actions (Matthew 4:1-11; Ephesians 2:1-3), being "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). This experience was essential for Jesus to become our sympathizing High Priest and Savior (same verse; see 2:17-18).

The sacrifice of suffering humiliation and animosity

Another level of Jesus' great sacrifice was the malicious opposition He increasingly had to endure during His ministry. Behind the scenes was Satan, "the god of this age," constantly fueling the growing hatred (2 Corinthians 4:4).

After Jesus began preaching His wonderful messages and performing miracles, including divine healings, reactions varied. A controversial teacher, He became loved and adored by

many while increasingly hated and opposed by others, especially the Jewish religious leadership. And still many others were simply onlookers unwilling to accept Him and His teachings for various reasons, including fears (see John 7:5-15).

Even most of His admirers didn't become true followers. As others, they did not yet comprehend Jesus' mission and messages. "He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him" (John 1:10-11, New Living Translation). Coping through His and others' troubles, He was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3)—though He also had great joy in life (Hebrews 1:9).

Jesus' popularity resulted in envy among many of the Jewish religious leaders and teachers—the scribes and Pharisees, as well as the Sadducees and priesthood. Corrupt human nature lusts for power and prestige, and the Jewish bigwigs were angered that they were losing people's respect as the supreme religious authorities (compare Mark 1:22; 15:10).

Jesus was increasingly bombarded directly with insults and accusations and indirectly with malicious slander in efforts to damage His reputation and credibility. It's important to understand why there were so many conflicts between Jesus' teachings and the teachings of the dominant sects of Judaism. Jesus' teachings never contradicted Scripture (see Matthew 5:17-20). But Judaism had become a religion exalting manmade traditions *above* Scripture.

In fact, some of their customs even *contradicted* Scripture! God had said, "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32). The Pharisees and scribes flagrantly violated that command, and Jesus denounced them powerfully and angrily, calling them hypocrites (see Matthew 15:1-13; Mark 7:1-13). Hence, many of them despised Him.

It's significant that Jesus waited until just before it was time for Him to be executed before delivering His fiery public condemnation of the Jewish leaders (see Matthew 23:1-39). Strongly confronting them sooner might have provoked them into more forcefully attempting to have Him killed before the preordained time.

Jesus' enemies hatched several plots to get Him in trouble with the Jewish hierarchy and Roman authorities, seeking to have Him discredited, silenced and even sentenced to death! They confronted Him with trick questions in efforts to entrap Him. He had to choose His words very carefully. There were times when He planned His travel and whereabouts to avoid



The first level of Jesus' sacrifice was His willingness to let go of His sublime level of existence to live life in physical flesh. Amazingly, the Word, the Creator of all things, was willing to become a mortal human being.

being arrested prematurely (see John 7:1; 11:53-54). This helps explain why Jesus often asked a person He had just healed to not tell others about it. He knew that when His enemies heard about His miracles, they would become even more determined to destroy Him.

Of course, Jesus also had miraculous protection from the Father to ensure He was not killed before the time it was supposed to happen—at the Passover at the end of His ministry.

Jesus had a very close relationship with the Father, and He enjoyed companionship with other people, especially His followers. But in important respects Jesus lived a somewhat lonely life, humanly speaking, since no one else yet had the Holy Spirit in them and the deep spiritual comprehension that comes with that.

Plus, one can only imagine the constant stress and emotional strain Jesus must have felt because of the increasing animosity, confrontations, threats and dangers from those who became His enemies—especially knowing what was yet to come.

The sacrifice of suffering torture and death

The final level of Jesus' great sacrifice came at the end of His human life with His traumatic suffering and death. This was necessary to maintain divine justice while also showing unfathomable mercy. It demonstrated both the gravity of sin and the awesome love of the Father and Christ.

The Bible reveals that the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). But that is the ultimate penalty. Sin also brings the lesser but still serious consequences of untold miseries of terrible suffering and pain. Christ would thus go through not only death, but also intense suffering leading up to it. For only this great sacrifice of the Creator could atone for all sin for all time.

In choosing the way of sin, disobedience to God's laws, human beings have come under subjection to the lord of sin and death, the tempter and deceiver, Satan. This evil being was

formerly an angel of God who came to hate God and His ways and led many other angels in rebellion against God, these now known as evil spirits or demons (to learn more, download or request our free study guide *Is There Really a Devil?*).

When the divine Word became a physically vulnerable human being, Satan viewed that as his golden opportunity to inflict terrible torment on Him and to try to overthrow God's plan to save mankind. He influenced King Herod to try to kill the infant Jesus. He presented Jesus with major temptations to sin (Matthew 4:1-11) so that Christ would not be the perfect sinless sacrifice He was meant to be. He repeatedly influenced religious leaders to try to get Jesus killed (John 8:37, 40).

Satan poisoned the minds of the hostile religious leaders and eventually led one of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot, to betray Him. In fact, at Jesus' last Passover with the disciples, "Satan entered" Judas, and Jesus Himself told him to act quickly (John 13:27). During that night, Judas led the hostile band to where they could arrest Jesus—leading to His unjust trials and execution.

Jesus gave Himself up to be killed by these forces directed by Satan—the Father likewise giving His Son over to that. But for Satan it was not enough to kill Jesus. He wanted to horribly hurt Him, to break Him, to cause Him to fail in the most critically important mission of all time.

Evil people have devised all kinds of horrendously sadistic methods of torture, but crucifixion is one of the cruelest methods for public execution—utterly satanic! For the worst types of pain, people have coined the word "excruciating," meaning pain that is compared with that of crucifixion—being nailed to a cross to slowly, torturously die. It is horrific to imagine.

God and the Word had for untold eons carried the suffering anticipation of the Word becoming flesh and ultimately sacrificing His life for the sins of mankind. Finally, the time had come. And in the hours just prior to Jesus' arrest, the agonizing dread of all that He was about to go through bore down heavily on Him.

Satan wanted Jesus to focus on His own well-being and try to flee, to think the divine plan and its necessary suffering and death weren't worth it, but Jesus committed Himself to His Father's will (see "The Great Decision" beginning on page 28).

Jesus then suffered the humiliation of being arrested as if

He were a criminal. His disciples fled in fear, magnifying His grief. Soon Jesus was being “tried” before a corrupt, kangaroo court where His sentence had already been decided. The religious leaders had become so full of hate that they were willing to break their own laws and rules to have Him quickly condemned.

We can only imagine how Jesus suffered with each successive sadistic cruelty. He was publicly ridiculed, mocked and spat on. He was punched while blindfolded. Patches of His beard were ripped out. He was stripped of His clothing and severely scourged with whips of cords imbedded with pieces of bone and metal so that each blow ripped away flesh to expose His bones. The mutilation was so bad He became almost unrecognizable. A crown of thorns was pressed down on His head, tearing into His skin. Nails were driven through His wrists and feet. He hung on the cross in agony for six long hours, experiencing stinging pain all over His body, terrible thirst and extreme weakness, constantly struggling to breathe.

Satan may well have relished in the awful torment as He sought to get Jesus to be vengeful in His thoughts against mankind and against His Father. But Jesus never caved. When He was nailed to the cross, He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). What awesome depth of mercy!

Bringing the immense struggle to an end, Jesus was pierced with a spear. He cried out and committed His spirit to God.

Then, *Jesus Christ died!* The One through whom the universe was made was dead.

Yet there was no victory here for the devil. His efforts to tempt Jesus into sinning or giving up had failed. Jesus died on the Passover as the perfect sinless sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. Yet that was thankfully not the end of the story, for three days after His body was laid in the tomb He would rise again, just as He said He would.

There is so much here to take in—yet not room enough to cover it here. We recommend that you review the detailed prophecies of Christ’s sufferings in Isaiah 52 and 53 and Psalm 22 as well as the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ last week ending in His torture and crucifixion. And truly give thanks.

The magnitude of Jesus’ sacrifice, on its multiple levels, is astounding to contemplate—considering who He was, what He gave up and what He endured. And remember that *He suffered all that He went through for each and every one of us* who have ever lived or will ever live!

He “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5). Amazing sacrifice! Amazing love! Amazing grace!

As the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:18 (Easy-to-Read Version), “I pray that you and all God’s holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ’s love—how wide, how long, how high, and how deep that love is.” **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



To more fully grasp who Jesus Christ was and the magnitude of what He endured in His awesome sacrifice, be sure to download or request our free study guide *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

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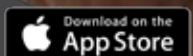
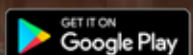
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First human implant of Neuralink brain chip and singularity predictions

Earlier this year it was reported that “the first human patient has received an implant from brain-chip startup Neuralink . . . the company’s billionaire founder Elon Musk said” (“Elon Musk’s Neuralink Implants Brain Chip in First Human,” Reuters, Jan. 29, 2024). Musk stated that the first Neuralink product is called Telepathy and explained its intention: “‘Enables control of your phone or computer, and through them almost any device, just by thinking,’ he wrote. ‘Initial users will be those who have lost the use of their limbs. Imagine if Stephen Hawking could communicate faster than a speed typist or auctioneer. That is the goal’—along with ‘a vision to ‘unlock human potential’ in the future,” which some see as hopeful while others view as foreboding (“Mind and Machine: First human has received Elon Musk’s Neuralink brain chip implant with ‘terrified’ fans warning ‘first cyborg is born,’” *The U.S. Sun*, Jan. 29).

Musk had earlier explained that this could be a way to save people’s minds and avoid extinction:



Neuralink’s implant promises to allow a digital interface for human brain activity.

“‘You could probably save state in the brain. So if you were to die your state could be returned in the form of another human body or a robot body,’ he said . . . [and] compared this saving process to backing up a video game . . . It’s also hoped the Neuralink brain chip will be able to help humans compete with artificial intelligence” (“Brain Games: ‘Save your brain like a game’ says Elon Musk as Neuralink plan promises to prevent ‘AI extinction’

wiping out humanity,” *The U.S. Sun*, Jan. 30).

Last year, famed futurist Ray Kurzweil, who has made many accurate technological predictions, generated a lot of excitement in predicting that people would achieve immortality with the help of age-reversing nanotechnology around 2030 and would completely merge with machines in what’s called the singularity around 2045 (“Humans Will Achieve Immortality in Eight Years, says former Google engineer who has predicted the future with 86% accuracy,” *Daily Mail*, March 28, 2023; “Futurist Predicts Humans Will Be Immortal, Identical to AI by 2045,” *The Jerusalem Post*, March 30, 2023).

Yet technology has its limits. The dream of uploading human consciousness into electronic brains of android bodies will not happen, as it leaves out the non-physical component of the human mind—the human spirit—and ignores God’s ultimate plan for man’s future. For more on this, be sure to read “What Tech Doesn’t Fathom About the Spirit of the Human Mind” beginning on page 6.

The anti-natalist movement pushing declining birthrates

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un recently called on his country’s women to have more children (Dec. 3, 2023). China is likewise trying to reverse its declining birthrate, which its longstanding one-child policy contributed to. Much of the Western world is seeing a declining birthrate, but some want to drive the population far lower.

Psychology Today recently reported: “Some people, who call themselves ‘anti-natalists,’ hold the view that life is neither a gift nor a miracle, but instead a bad idea because of its inevitable suffering. Some climate activists are sympathetic to this perspective because of potential climate catastrophes” (“Why Some Women Don’t Want Children,” June 19, 2023).

Not too long ago, NBC News posted a “thought experiment” titled “Science proves kids are bad for Earth. Morality suggests we stop having them” (Nov. 17, 2017). The author, bioethics professor Travis Rieder, continued: “Having many children is wrong, or at least morally suspect, for standard environmental reasons . . . Several years ago, scientists showed that having a child, especially for the world’s wealthy, is one of the worst things you can do for the environment.”

Population Matters declares at its website: “Our population has become so large that the Earth

cannot cope.” Stop Having Kids proclaims, “We Can Choose to End the Cycle of Needless Suffering + Help Those Who Already Exist.” It justifies its anti-natalist position by arguing, “We know there’s no deprivation, harm, or unfairness in never existing. If any of us were never born we wouldn’t even know the difference.” Of course, few of them would choose to not exist.

Econofact says that America’s declining birthright is a mystery: “The U.S. birth rate has fallen by 20% since 2007. This decline cannot be explained by demographic, economic, or policy changes” (“The Mystery of the Declining Birthrate,” Feb. 15, 2022). Nearly a third of young women recently surveyed reported that they did not want to have children. Why? Most stated reasons of inconvenience or career. How could we have come to this level of self-absorption?

The cause of low birth rates is more likely the result of the breakdown of the family, acceptance of immorality and perversion in society in general, and the abortion industry. We see the same in other countries. The Bible in its listings of blessings for obeying God and curses for disobedience presents children and increased population as a blessing, and decreased birthrate and population as a curse (see Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). Yet such a

curse may be self-inflicted. In any case, the anti-natalist movement is growing.

The fact is, the belief that human life is an accident and a bad idea comes from Satan the devil. Jesus called him “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). As “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31), he uses people to do his dirty work—including destroying people who exist and impeding the existence of more, as he hates their potential of living forever in God’s family.

Thankfully, not everyone is caught up in the anti-baby hype. In 2022, tech entrepreneur Elon Musk said in an interview: “Most people in the world are operating under the false impression that we’ve got too many people. This is not true. Earth could maintain a population many times the current level. The birth rate has been dropping like crazy.” He also blamed the United Nations’ “ridiculous” birthrate population estimates for providing a false narrative that the earth is overpopulated (“Elon Musk Reckons Earth Can Sustain a Population Far Higher Than the Current 8 Billion,” *LAD Bible*, April 22, 2022).

Psalms 127:3 says, “Children are a blessing and a gift from the LORD” (Contemporary English Version). Let’s treasure this wonderful, priceless joy from God.

Marijuana leading to psychosis and other problems

The *Wall Street Journal* reports: "Thousands of teenagers and young adults . . . have developed delusions and paranoia after using cannabis. Legalization [leading to] . . . more frequent use of marijuana that is many times as potent as strains common three decades ago is leading to more psychotic episodes, according to doctors and recent research" ("More Teens Who Use Marijuana Are Suffering From Psychosis," Jan. 10, 2024).

Continuing: "'This isn't the cannabis of 20, 30 years ago,' said Dr. Deepali Gershan, an addiction psychiatrist at Compass Health Center in Northbrook, Ill. Up to 20% of her caseload is patients for whom she suspects cannabis use triggered a psychotic episode. Rates of diagnoses for cannabis-induced disorders were more than

50% higher at the end of November [2023] than in 2019 . . .

"Large studies show a clear link between frequent and more potent cannabis use and higher rates of psychosis, particularly in young users, said Dr. Deepak D'Souza, professor of psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine . . . At Boston Children's Hospital, doctors are treating more children developing psychotic disorders from cannabis use. Nearly a third of adolescents they see for checkups say they are using cannabis. About a third of children using cannabis report experiencing hallucinations or paranoia . . .

"'This is attacking young brains,' said Dr. Roneet Lev, an emergency room physician at Scripps Mercy Hospital in San Diego . . . Dr. Karen Randall [in Pueblo, Colo. said] . . . 'We're just making this

huge population of people who we can no longer fix.' She is considering quitting medicine."

This is a terribly serious problem. It comes on the heels of a headline from last year stating, "Cannabis users are up to a *third* more likely to develop heart disease, major study warns" (*Daily Mail*, Feb. 24, 2023). And now we're told, "Fentanyl-laced marijuana is spreading rapidly," many unaware they're using the deadly opioid ("Now Weed Has Fentanyl In It," *The National Pulse*, Feb. 11).

Avoid this problem with everything you've got. And if you've already fallen into it, do everything you can to quit, praying to God for deliverance and looking to others for help. You can search for other articles on marijuana and addiction at our website.

1 in 5 young Americans thinks the Holocaust a myth, has a positive view of Bin Laden

The minds of young people in Western nations are being severely corrupted. According to a recent poll from *The Economist* and YouGov, one-fifth (20 percent) of U.S. citizens between ages 18 and 29 believe the Holocaust is a myth, while an additional 30 percent said they did not agree or disagree with this ("One in Five Young Americans Believes the Holocaust Is a Myth, Poll Finds," *The Times of Israel*, Dec. 11, 2023).

This came in the wake of a shocking level of support for Hamas following its Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

Moreover, the poll was followed by another disturbing poll by the *Daily Mail*: "One in Five Young Americans Has a Positive View of Osama Bin Laden: Disturbing Daily Mail Poll Results Also Reveal Three in 10 Gen-Zers Think the Views of the 9/11 Mastermind Were a 'Force for Good'" (*Daily Mail*, Dec. 27, 2023). Again, utterly shocking. "Family members of 9/11 victims said the findings are 'horrifying' and proof of a startling trend suggesting some in the younger generation are growing sympathetic to terrorists" (ibid).

Favorable assessment of Bin Laden's manifesto was also recently spread around on TikTok, garnering huge numbers of views.

The figures here are utterly disturbing. The miseducation of young people, really leftist indoctrination, is at unprecedented levels.

Study finds regular social media use linked to more dangerous choices

A new study published in *The BMJ* (British Medical Journal) has revealed a link between youths who use social media frequently and risky decision-making ("Kids Who Use Social Media More Prone to Making Dangerous Decisions," *StudyFinds*, Nov. 29, 2023).

While it can be useful for staying connected and informed, researchers from the University of Glasgow found strong correlation between regular social media use and significantly increased risky behaviors among young children and teens. "These include increased underage drinking, drug use, and smoking, as well as antisocial behavior, such as unsafe sexual activity and gambling" (ibid).

The study points to several reasons for this: peer pressure amplified; screen time replacing physical activity; online content like ads and user posts glamorizing unhealthy and unsafe practices like excessive drinking and poor diet; long-term impact

of forming bad habits, leading eventually to issues like substance dependency, depression or chronic health problems.

Spending more than two hours on social media doubled the likelihood of alcohol consumption compared to those spending less than two. Even more moderate regular use was associated with major increases in dangerous behavior—such as around a 75 percent increase in risky sexual behaviors and antisocial activities like bullying, aggression and delinquency.

This is quite concerning, as a recent Gallup poll shows that "just over half of U.S. teenagers (51%) report spending at least four hours per day using a variety of social media apps such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter)," the average being 4.8 hours, with girls averaging an hour more than boys ("Teens Spend Average of 4.8 Hours on Social Media Per Day," Gallup, Oct. 13, 2023).

While acknowledging it has some



upside, Cornell law professor Bill Jacobson warns: "Social media is destroying us, particularly the youth. There are multiple lawsuits against social media big tech companies for designing manipulative platforms that are deceptively addictive . . . TikTok seems like the crack cocaine of the internet" ("Social Media Is 'One of the Worst Things That Ever Happened to Our Society,'" *Legal Insurrection*, Aug. 30, 2023).

We must all be personally on guard against inundation from societal influences and protect our children. Be sure to read "Teen Mental Health: Light at the End of the Tunnel," beginning on page 24).

Teen Mental Health

Light at the End of the Tunnel

The minds of young people are being pummeled every day by an increasingly wayward culture and time spent plugged into social media. Let's look at the broadening scope of the crisis—and explore realistic solutions.

by Michael Kelley

It's the first day of school, but for 13-year-old Kari it's a day to dread. As she fills her backpack, she thinks about that group of girls who tormented her last year. They hang out in a part of school she cannot avoid, and she prays that none of them will be in her class.

Kari quickly downs her glass of orange juice before telling her mother goodbye. Her mother only grunts in reply. She's an alcoholic, and Kari knows her drinking is getting worse since her parents divorced two years earlier.

Her route to the bus stop takes her several hundred yards down a four-lane highway with heavy traffic. She sees an 18-wheeler speeding along at more than 65 miles per hour. Kari knows of other kids who committed suicide, and she thinks again, as she has many times before, how quick it would be if she just stepped in front of one of those trucks.

Kari is not living. She is only existing, every day a living hell. But tragically, her situation is repeated, with many variations, in the lives of millions. It's important that we assess some of the challenges facing young people today—and turn in hope to the means of escaping the darkness.

Under assault from many directions

A supreme irony of modern life is that so many teens live lives of material abundance but are drowning in mental and emotional chaos. They suffer from a litany of problems: clinical depression, broken homes, bullying, peer pressure, poor self-image. And today they do battle with a host of new problems almost unknown to their grandparents' generation: drug use, often crushing academic pressure and what is today termed "gender dysphoria."

Adolescence should be a time when young people develop social and other skills based on sound mental health. It should be a time of exploration and discovery, of becoming aware of the world, of learning how to deal with problems and coping with life in a positive way. Teens should have the benefit of sound, loving home environments where they can go to parents and others for help with the stresses of transitioning from children to adults.

Yet for many, life is a daily struggle against loneliness, depression and misery. Home life, which should be a source

of love and support, is instead filled with strife. School only makes the problems worse when teachers indoctrinate students with false values and teach young people to question even their biological sexual identity.

These challenges are confronting many nations around the world. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has for more than a decade tracked the country's growing mental health crisis among teens, with disturbing findings. Overwhelming numbers of young people experience feelings of hopelessness and depression. Girls fare worse than boys, with 57 percent of teenage girls experiencing these feelings. About 30 percent seriously consider suicide, and tragically, many carry through on these feelings. And similar trends are found in other Western nations.

It's worse for teens confused about gender identity. In many school districts children are told to question whether the sex they were born as is the right one for them. For many sensitive or easily swayed children, this becomes a source of tremendous mental turmoil. Those who begin to consider themselves a boy in a girl's body, or vice versa, face even higher rates of mental illness that can drive them to the edge emotionally, even to suicide.

Glued to social media

Like most teens she knows, Kari is addicted to her smartphone, staring at its tiny screen almost constantly. It's her most valuable possession, giving her contact—and context—to the world around her. She has few friends, but Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are her constant companions. More than anything else, these form Kari's self-image, and she doesn't like what they tell her—that she doesn't measure up to those girls she sees online. She knows she's a little overweight. She thinks she's not as pretty. As she flicks from one image to another, her sense of depression only deepens.

Several years ago, the respected Pew Research Center started conducting yearly studies on teens and social media. Its 2023 survey of more than 1,450 teens aged 13 to 17 found that 95 percent of teenagers own or have ready access to a smartphone, and 46 percent report they use them constantly. About 65 percent use Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube or

TikTok every day, with 1 in 5 telling researchers they use these platforms “almost constantly” (“Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023,” PewResearch.org, Dec. 11, 2023).

Although the debate over social media and its effects on teens will likely rage for years, the overwhelming evidence of the harm of social media addiction cannot be ignored. Dozens of studies in recent years have documented this harm:

- “There are ample indicators that social media can also have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents” (U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, reported in *The New York Times*, May 23, 2023).
- “Since social media took off as a popular phenomenon in the early 2000s, the rate of adolescent depression has significantly spiked. Between 2005 and 2017, depression among young people reportedly went up 52%” (“Is Social Media Causing Psychological Harm to Youth and Young Adults?” UCLA Health, Jan. 18, 2023).
- “Social Media is designed to hook our brains, and teens are especially susceptible to its addictiveness” (Nancy DeAngelis, a Pennsylvania hospital behavioral health director, quoted in “The Addictiveness of Social Media: How Teens Get Hooked,” Jefferson Health, June 2, 2022).

That last point is especially telling. In a truly diabolical marriage of marketing and psychology, the creators of these platforms have discovered how to design algorithms that hook the still-developing brains of young teens. Quoting Dr. DeAngelis again: “Social media platforms drive surges of dopamine to the brain to keep consumers coming back over and over again. The shares, likes and comments on these platforms trigger the brain’s reward center, resulting in a high similar to the one people feel when gambling or using drugs. The overuse of social media can actually rewire a child or teen’s brain to constantly seek out immediate gratification, leading to obsessive, compulsive and addictive behaviors.”

A 2022 study by the Mayo Clinic found that, while social media can have some beneficial effects such as providing companionship and entertainment, the damaging effects outweigh those benefits. The study pointed out that social media distracts teens, disrupts their sleep, and exposes them to bullying, rumors, peer pressure and unrealistic views of other people’s lives. Its conclusions linked high social media use with high levels of anxiety and depression.

There is also increased danger of exposure to sexually oriented communication and material, predatory behavior and other negative or corrupting influences.

From the depths of despair to hope through God and His Word

Kari’s thoughts of suicide are shared by millions of teens today, with suicide growing among U.S. teens at a far faster rate than among any other age group. A 2022 study by the North Carolina Dept. of Health Services revealed the shocking



The overwhelming evidence of the harm of social media addiction cannot be ignored.

truth: Among U.S. children and young people aged 10 to 17, suicide rates more than doubled from 2007 to 2018. Those in the 10-14 range showed the greatest increase, tripling from 0.9 to 2.9 per 100,000 population. This does not include figures since the Covid lockdowns.

Clearly, the mental health of America’s young people is under assault in ways the nation has never experienced—and the same is true for many other countries. Yet there are ways that teens and their parents can fight back, seeking help and learning to take control of their own mental health.

Struggling teens like Kari need to know that there is hope—that there are people who care. And they need to actually be shown kindness and listened to. Most importantly, they need to come to see that there is a God who loves them and has a plan for them and all humanity. People are lost without a sense of purpose and reason for existing.

God’s Word, the Bible, is a source of great encouragement, showing that God is full of compassion and abundant in mercy, giving help and comfort, granting forgiveness, healing and redemption (Psalm 86:16-17; Matthew 14:14; James 5:11).

Looking to God first is a big step in finding the way out of darkness and trouble (Matthew 6:33-34). As Jesus Christ said in Matthew 11:28: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The apostle Peter affirmed: “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God . . . casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Parents in trying to help their children cope need to start here as well. God has given them the responsibility to guide



Our Creator wants us to
be happy in right living and
sound thinking.

and intervene in their children's lives to protect them and help them navigate through our Satan-influenced society (see Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Ephesians 6:4). And for those who turn to Him, He will direct them in that (compare Jeremiah 29:13).

Developing a strong, secure environment

Effort to rescue our young people may require, in the words of Winston Churchill near the beginning of World War II, "many, many long months of struggle and of suffering." However, we have help to fight these battles—help from a very powerful Source. Our Creator wants us to be happy in right living and sound thinking. He wants us to have strong, healthy families, where children can grow from childhood to young adulthood in loving and nurturing environments.

Strong, secure home environments depend on parents being as concerned about their children's *mental*, *emotional* and *spiritual* health as they are about their *physical* health. Such parents will strive to set good examples themselves and lead their homes well.

Notice the apostle Paul's instructions to Timothy about the qualifications for church elders: "A bishop [overseer] must be blameless, temperate, sober-minded . . . gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence" (1 Timothy 3:2-4). All parents should aspire to such loving leadership. A sound home environment, where children know they are loved and can always come to parents (or grandparents) with any problems they face, is the starting point.

Our teens and preteens need to see that God is first in our lives. Just as we find purpose and protection in His law, our teens and preteens should find protection in their homes. Just as we can talk to our Heavenly Father about our problems, our young people should be able to talk to their physical parents about the problems they face.

When our young people face online or actual bullying, when they feel targeted by online predators, when they feel inadequate due to images they see on social media (selectively presented and often altered), they need to feel comfortable talking to Dad and Mom about these concerns.

Other caring people can also be of great help. Those of us

who attend a local church with young people should try to get to know them and reach out to them, especially those we learn are suffering from depression, bipolar disorders and loneliness. It may take special effort reaching out, as they may tend to be unresponsive, but sometimes just a short conversation to show that someone takes an interest can make a world of difference.

Paul exhorts us, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4). The admonition is not to be prying busybodies, as we are told not to be (1 Thessalonians 4:11; 1 Timothy 5:13), but to take a sincere interest in others' well-being to comfort and edify them (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Take control of your teen's social media usage

In much of the Western world, parents have largely abdicated their responsibility to monitor children's social media usage. It's time to take control, and it can mean the difference between a socially healthy teen and one headed down a slippery slope to depression, becoming the target of sexual predators, or worse.

This also means facing the fact that some of our teenage or preteen children may be addicted to social media. In that case, what are we as parents willing to do about it?

For many parents, taking control can be a daunting challenge. We're probably aware of accounts of some teens throwing violent tantrums at the very suggestion that their smartphone usage be curtailed. Telling them to avoid Snapchat or TikTok will send some teens into screaming fury.

Again, there can be a real addiction here. Sean Parker, one of the founders of Facebook, explained several years ago how it and other social media platforms are *deliberately designed* to be addictive and steal users' time:

"The thought process that went into the building of these processes, Facebook being the first of them, was all about 'How do we consume as much of your time and attention as possible?' And that means we have to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or post or whatever . . . It's a social validation feedback loop . . . because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology. The inventors . . . understood this consciously. And we did it anyway" ("Sean Parker Unloads on Facebook: 'God Only Knows What It Is Doing to Our Children's Brains,'" Axios.com, Nov. 9, 2017).

The apostle Paul realized the danger of becoming dominated by certain behaviors. He knew that just because an activity might of itself be acceptable, it was wrong to let it gain control over him (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Today's teens have long since moved beyond Facebook to other platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. Is it unrealistic to think these might now be even more addictive, given what their creators have learned from almost two decades of Facebook? Remember, these companies make their billions by adding millions more addicted users for the benefit of advertisers.

Many of us do not relish the idea of a knock-down, drag-out fight with our teens over how much they use their smartphones or tablets, but it's a battle worth fighting. Here are a few simple suggestions to get started.

- Set limits on how much time each day your teens or pre-teens can spend on social media.
- Make some family time, for example mealtimes, off limits for smartphone usage.
- Impress on teenage drivers the dangers of texting while driving.
- Designate one evening a week as family time devoted to activities that do not include smartphone usage.
- Make sure your teens receive positive feedback in their life outside of social media.

Seek competent help

It's tough for parents or teens to fight these battles alone. However, in light of the growing severity of the teen mental health crisis, many groups have sprung up to help parents and teens cope with these issues. Throughout many nations, trained mental health counselors are available, many of which offer services free of charge or at very low cost. Christian-based counseling is best, promoting Christian-living principles. (See "Sources of Professional Help" at right for a partial listing of mental health counseling services in the United States.)

There may even be some cases of clinical depression that require some sort of nutritional or medical treatment. Be sure to consult your or your child's doctor about these matters—and don't be afraid to do your own research and get a second opinion.

Of course, the greatest help remains with God and His Word. We have many resources providing guidance in that regard. Do a search at ucg.org for coping, discouragement, hope, bullying, social media, suicide, suffering or any number of such topics and you'll find articles and sermons that address them. (And download or request our free study guides *Why Am I Suffering?* and *Suicide: Understanding and Preventing It*.)

We also have ministers around the world who can offer biblical counsel (see our contact listing on page 31 or find a local congregation on our website).

Our young people are a precious heritage, but they are under assault today as never before in history. It's time we tackled head-on the growing problem of teen depression, anxiety, suicide and other miseries that come from strained mental health. Let's face the problem and take positive action. **BT**

Sources of Professional Help

Following are some sources of professional counseling in the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Those in other parts of the world can also find help at some of these, though local help is available in many countries. Many communities also have local resources for mental health counseling.

UNITED STATES

- **Focus on the Family**, focusonthefamily.com/get-help or 800-232-6459, offers trained counselors who can help with mental health issues from a Christian-oriented perspective.
- **Anxiety and Depression Association of America**, findyourtherapist.adaa.com, a directory of licensed mental health professionals, also offering other resources.
- **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**, 988lifeline.org, a 24/7 confidential support service to anyone suffering from severe emotional distress or in a suicidal crisis. Call or text 988 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.
- **Social Media Safety Teams**. For more than 10 years the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (above) has been connecting people suffering from trauma on social media to counseling teams. Available for Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and TikTok.

CANADA

- **Focus on the Family Canada**, focusonthefamily.ca/get-help or 1 800 661 9800, offers Christian-oriented professional counselors.
- **The Lifeline Canada Foundation** offers resources for teens and parents alike (thelifelinecanada.ca/teens-and-youth/).
- **CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association)** has branches across Canada and offers tips on how to talk to teens about mental health (cmha.ca/brochure/talking-to-teens-about-mental-health).
- **Youth Mental Health Canada**, ymhc.ngo, offers low-cost tools for wellness.
- **Kids Help Phone** has e-mental health services available 24/7 (kidshelpphone.ca/urgent-help).

UNITED KINGDOM

- **CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)**, part of the NHS for young people with emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties, offers local help around the U.K. (see nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/mental-health-support/mental-health-services and youngminds.org.uk/young-person/your-guide-to-support/guide-to-camhs).

AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND

- **Lifeline**, lifeline.org.au or tel. 13 11 14, is a national charity providing 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.
- **Kids Helpline**, kidshelpline.com.au or tel. 1800 55 1800, offers free, private counseling services for children and young adults ages 5-25. Carers and parents can also reach out here.
- **KidsHealth**, kidshealth.org.nz/helplines-mental-health-support-services or tel 0800 611 116, provides information on organizations children, parents and others in need can contact.

The Great Decision

The horror of what Jesus was facing drove Him to pray for another way, but He chose to submit to His Father's will—as we all must do in everything to be His followers.

by Robin Webber

It was the sacred season in Jerusalem as countless pilgrims of the Jewish diaspora were streaming into the city to observe the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. A small group of men departed late in the evening for the still and solitude of a nearby garden in the valley below. It's here in the quiet shelter of olive groves in the Garden of Gethsemane near the base of the Mount of Olives where the Great Decision would be rendered.

Eleven men followed behind their beloved rabbi, whom they believed was the prophesied Messiah come to restore in full the Kingdom of Israel. Earlier that night they experienced an observance of the Passover unlike any other, with Jesus washing their feet and presenting new symbolism regarding the bread and wine (John 13-17). They were still musing over His spoken words as if it might be His last encounter with them. For now, however, the Master desired more time alone with God to contemplate what the next part of His ministry would require. It was in this setting that Jesus would share the ultimate lesson for His disciples through all ages as to how to truly heed His invitation of “Follow Me” (Matthew 4:19; John 21:22).

Another way?

On entering this quiet spot, Jesus had most of the disciples sit and wait while He went to pray, but He asked James, John and Peter to come with Him. He then “became anguished and distressed” (Matthew 26:37, New English Translation). And He told them, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of

death: Remain here and stay awake with me” (verse 38, NET). They had seen their Master display many emotions in times of challenge, and He was always able to rise to any situation confronting Him. But this was different! What was happening?

Jesus would go alone a little farther and throw himself to the ground and pray “that if it were possible the hour would pass from him” (Mark 14:35, NET). He asked: “*Abba*, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (verse 36, NET).

Again, what is going on inside this *Son of Man*, of human life in the flesh? He knows what He's about to experience! Like other Jews of that day, He had seen the horror of crucifixion (our word *excruciating* coming from Latin meaning “out of the cross”). It was designed to thoroughly humiliate and make an example of anyone who opposed Rome. A further thought: What is going on inside the mind of this *Son of God*? It is He alone who is in seamless union of “being about His Father's business” (see Luke 2:49) and yet now contemplates the divine Sovereign's giving Him over to allow the created to torture and murder their Creator (see John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17).

Could there yet be another way to satisfy the sacrifice of redemption for a creation gone astray? After all, the hand of father Abraham had been stayed at the last moment from sacrificing Isaac. And Jesus earlier prayed to the Father: “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear me” (John 11:41-42). Thus, He pours out His reality in the moment.

What do we the living learn from a Man who died that we might live?

Measuring the moment

The Gospel writer Luke informs us that Jesus not only pours out His earnest supplication upward to God, but He pours out sweat mixed with His own blood here below (Luke 22:44). This describes a rare but very real medical condition called *hematidrosis*, brought on by extreme stress, in which small blood vessels underneath the skin rupture and blood oozes out through the sweat glands. God the Father, sensing the need for the moment, sent an angel to comfort Him (verse 43). Yes, His Father, our Heavenly Father, was stirred to compassion by His Son's anguish.

Jesus took time to check on His companions and found them asleep. He chided them: "Stay awake and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41, NET). As the *Son of Man* at this moment, oh how He knew that!

The human carpenter followed the rule in His trade of measuring twice (or more) before cutting once (compare Matthew 26:42, 44)—in the welcomed presence and guidance of His Father above. The Great Decision of faith, personal surrender and commitment made in this setting was so different from the decision of the "first Adam" (see 1 Corinthians 15:45-47) made another time in another garden.

Jesus would practice what He preached when He taught His disciples to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. *Your will be done* on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). With trembling knees but firm heart, He resolved to accept God's final will and embraced the reality later stated in Hebrews 2:10: "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Suddenly a noise from an approaching crowd of determined men shattered the quiet of the garden. It was time. God had answered. And yet, Jesus' heart had quieted. He got up from His knees and walked forward to meet the future in step with the rhythm of Psalm 23: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with Me" (verse 4).

What do we the living learn from a Man who died that we might live? It is noteworthy that He chided His disciples more than once that they could not even stay awake for one hour. When caught slumbering, they didn't know what to tell Him. They were answerless. He admonished them to stay alert

(Matthew 26:38; Luke 14:34). Jesus knew that this night was not only His moment of personal great decision, but that their moment of encounter would yet come—and that so too would ours.

How will we respond?

We may never carry a cross up to Golgotha. Thank God, and I say that quite sincerely, for the unblemished Lamb of God (1 Peter 1:19) has gone before us and done what we never could. Nevertheless, what about the *daily challenges* that confront us to take the course of least resistance rather than the "narrow gate" and "difficult way" leading to life that few find? (See Matthew 7:14.)

Let's consider four steps, one by one, as to how we might heed Jesus' call of "*Follow Me*."

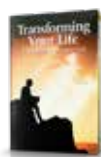
1. Seek quiet and solitude. Find time away from the roar of life and the crowd. After all, Scripture invites us, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). You and I know this can be the hardest thing to do humanly when challenge comes our way. But it's the starting blocks towards making the Great Decision. Do it!

2. Stay spiritually alert. Knowing and being near Christ are no substitute for *becoming like Him*. Think of His companions being just a stone's throw away—and yet? Jesus had told them to pray, to stay awake and alert. How about us? Perhaps this column can sound an alarm for all of us, like Ephesians 5:14: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you life."

3. Keep looking up. As Jesus knelt down on the ground, His needful heart looked *up*. Looking up rather than around is a tremendous step toward moving forward in the Kingdom life. As the psalmist would write: "I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2). Where the eyes of our heart focus is where we will cut through life's challenges to make the Great Decision.

4. Decide to follow. Remember: We do not find our values in trial—we take them into the fray with us. As the great challenges of life come on us, and they will, we have the moment between stimulus and response to address the situation. It's within that moment that we make a choice we bear the responsibility for, being once again confronted with the Great Decision. Let us all follow Christ in answering, "Not what I will, *but what You will*." BT

DIVE DEEPER



For biblical direction in the journey of surrender to God and following Christ, we've prepared a helpful study guide, *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. Download or request your free copy today. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/maz4 to find it.



Q: Should Christians observe Passover? Isn't it only Jewish, and not for Christians?

A: God commands that Christians observe this festival, which focuses on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. It's one of the seven annual festivals God revealed to ancient Israel to be *His* feasts (Leviticus 23:1-2, 4). The early Church continued to observe these, as will all nations in the future (see, for example, Zechariah 14:16-19; and read our study guide offered below for more on this).

Passover is the first of God's annual festivals (Leviticus 23:5). Coming in early spring in the Holy Land, it's a reminder, on one level, of how God spared His people from death in Egypt. As part of rescuing them from slavery there, God took the lives of all firstborn Egyptian males but passed over the Israelites' homes that had the blood of a sacrificed lamb on their door frames (Exodus 12:7, 26-29). The Israelites had been commanded to eat of the lamb sacrifice with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (verse 8). Afterward they were to observe this as an annual memorial, which also came to traditionally include wine, a usual drink at festival times.

The blood of the Passover lamb foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The apostle Paul directly states that "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). In observing His last Passover with His disciples, Jesus set an example in washing His disciples' feet, telling them they should also wash one another's feet (John 13:1-17). And He explained that the unleavened bread and wine were to be partaken of in remembrance of His body and blood offered by Him for the forgiveness of our sins, sparing us from the penalty of death (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Romans 6:23).

Christ's death came during the daylight hours following that evening—which was still the same date, the Passover, according to Hebrew sunset-to-sunset reckoning.

The New Testament Passover is a memorial of Jesus' suffering and death. It's a time for baptized members of God's Church to renew our agreement to follow Christ, recommitting to turn from sin, relying on His sacrifice for forgiveness. We should approach this period with deep spiritual introspection (1 Corinthians 11:28). Passover is properly observed on the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar with a service based on the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11:23-28 and the Gospel accounts of the Passover observance Christ instituted.

Many have mistakenly assumed Jesus was instituting a communion service for each week or whenever one decides, based on a misinterpretation of Paul's words: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). By "as often as," Paul simply meant "every time," not whenever we may determine. Jesus instituted this memorial *in observing Passover*, an *annual* occasion. Paul thus meant "every year you do this." Each time, we remember Christ's sacrificial death for us and that He will

return, recognizing eternal life is possible only through Him. Jesus' sacrifice is the starting point for salvation and the foundation of the feast days that follow.

Q: Why should Christians celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

A: Again, God directly commands that Christians also observe *this* festival, which represents the work of Jesus Christ in our lives. The seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread immediately follows the Passover (Leviticus 23:6-8). Historically it commemorated the ancient Israelites leaving Egyptian slavery in haste, not leavening their bread and giving it time to rise (Exodus 12:33-34).

God commanded the Israelites to keep this festival by removing leaven (a rising agent, which for them was yeast) out of their homes for seven days and to avoid eating leavened bread during this time. The first and last days of this weeklong festival are set apart as holy convocations, annual Sabbaths, days devoted to rest and meeting for worship and learning.

The early Christians continued to celebrate this festival by putting leaven out of their homes.

Leaven is banned during the festival and in cooked grain offerings (see Leviticus 2:11) as symbolic in those contexts of corruption and waywardness. Jesus Himself identified leaven as a symbol of sin (Matthew 16:6-12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1)—as did the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 5:2, 6-8).

The early Christians continued to celebrate this festival by putting leaven out of their homes for the week as a symbol of the sinless lives and attitudes God desires of His people. Paul, who was apostle to the gentiles, even exhorted Church members, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

While putting out leaven represents putting sin out of our lives, eating unleavened bread symbolizes taking in of Jesus Christ, the bread from heaven (John 6), and His righteous way of life. It was during the Feast of Unleavened Bread that Jesus was raised from the dead—a vital factor for us to be delivered out of sin (see 1 Corinthians 15:17). As Romans 6 explains, our old self is to have died with Christ and we must be raised with Him into new life—being delivered from sin to live in righteousness, on the path to eternal life. **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



To learn much more about these vital festivals and all of God's holy appointed times, be sure to download or request our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

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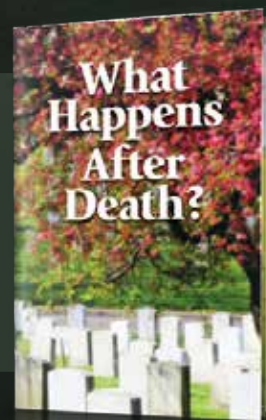
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